

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Ireland 1965

September 1965

On this occasion our maximum strength was eleven: Tratty, Dingle, Oliver Lloyd, Cliff Ollier, Dave Savage, Mike Garrett, Mike Statham, Gwynneth Green, Helen Donaghue, Graham Draper and Rodney Hills. Geoff Bond was in the neighbourhood for a few days but was not caving. Thus our party was unusually strong in geographers but could only muster one or two strong caving parties at a time. Nevertheless geographers and cavers frequently exchanged their roles.

The outstanding thing about the 1965 trip was the discovery of a further 4,800 ft. of cave passage, not all of which has yet been surveyed. Most of the pushing was done by Dave Savage, who had been noting some likely spots in previous years. The first and most interesting of these was a tight 200 ft. crawl from near the end of Cullaun I, leading into a further 3000 ft. of cave passage, which is the old abandoned stream passage of Cullaun Zero-I (Gaffer's Gulch). The approach is by the right hand bedding plane at the end of Bastard Crawl, down a narrow rift (Thrutch Pot) into a low nasty canal (Queer Street). After 200 ft. the canyon passage is reached (Gaffer's Gulch Old streamway). This was followed downstream for 200 ft., where it became impassable due to collapse. Upstream a blockage at 250 ft. was passed by a high level oxbow, and the passage continued for another 2500 ft.

Doolin Cave

Dave Savage's other big push was a tributary of the Arun View Passage. (The point where this joins the passage may be seen in the map in Lloyd's "Doolin-St. Catherine's Cave" monograph at E. 3060, N. 2240). This tributary has a small and uninviting entrance but quickly rises to 5 ft. in height and retains this for about half of its length. In many places it is partly blocked by flowstone, and the crawls in the stream which one has to do are quite adventurous. It was followed for 1430 ft. and a Grade 2 survey was done.

Cullaun 5

Our Geographical colleagues had a V-notch weir in Cullaun 5 and one morning when they were inspecting it, Dingle noticed a tributary passage to the right of the streamway between 5 and 5b. This he subsequently surveyed to Grade 4 and found that it went for 243 ft. It seems to come from a minor swallet about 50 yds. W of C.5. entrance. At this head it branches, and it ends in the main stream passage about 400ft. from C.5 entrance.

Lower St. Catherine's

Not to be outdone, and since nobody else seemed interested, Oliver Lloyd started to dig his way into the downstream mud choke from the St. Catherine's 2 swallet. After 5 hours he had made 30 ft. Others then became interested, and after another 8 ft. of digging the main cave was entered. On subsequent occasions Dave Savage and some Shepton lads pushed the cave even further and did a Grade 2 survey. The total length comes to about 870 ft. of cave, plus 80 ft. of side passages, not including ox-bows. This leaves only 430 ft. before the Doolin Dry Tributary Passage is joined. But there are two snags. One is a particularly dangerous mud duck, and beyond this the passage divides into three, each of which becomes impassable. The mud duck has an air space of about 6 ins., but this almost disappears when a wave of mud is pushed up in front of the advancing caver.

Surface work

The geographers were very active. Not only did they have lots of water samples to take and test, but they carefully examined the surface features and cave entrances, to see if they could find evidence of a pre-glacial origin for the caves. One evening we had a most interesting symposium on the subject, and the conclusion was reached that there was no good evidence available. It is a pity that Brian Collingridge was not there. One of us had a feeling that his case for a pre-glacial origin, so ably argued in the Poulmagollum-Poulelva paper, was being rather lightly dismissed. We still do not have the analysis of the mud samples collected in 1964, but there seems some doubt whether this would help.

Flooding again

We got a nasty shock on our first Monday. Both Messrs. Lloyd and

Savage were interested in diving the terminal sump in Coolagh River Cave. Oliver tried to persuade the Shepton lads, on this particular day, to help carry in diving gear. They replied quite firmly that they were in Ireland for a holiday, and that a rest day with Guinness was just as important as caving. At about noon we looked at Polldonagh with the geographers. The river was a high normal. Tratty indicated the danger mark, which was 3 ins. above the water. That afternoon, whilst studying the Burren at Rathborny, we were overtaken by a great thunderstorm. We returned to find School House Sink and Poll Clabber both overflowing, and a torrent going down to the Cragg Lodge Sink, as it did in 1963. At Polldonagh the trees gave us evidence that water had stood 10 ft. in the cave entrance. This means that the entire Coolagh River Cave had filled up to the roof. We did not go there again.

Oliver did however visit Faunarooska and inspected the sump at the foot of the Wet Pitch. This pitch is horrifyingly exciting and its descent makes worthwhile all the tedium of the long winding stream passage. The last three pitches totalling 70 ft. can be free-climbed, the standard of difficulty being about that of the rift to Swynne-Puke passage in Swildon's; but I preferred to use a ladder.

Caving in Ireland is getting too popular. It is all right meeting one's other Mendip friends at MacCarthy's Cottage or O'Connor's Bar, but when one has to queue to go down Doolin, then it is a bit much. The congestion was occasioned by some Harrovians, calling themselves the Moles. Another disadvantage is that the other clubs get a kleptomaniac fascination for our flag. It was removed this year no less than twice from the top of the tower at Ballynalacken. Each time we replaced it with a new one. True, the second time it was returned, and the Hon. Treasurer was paid for it---in Guinness.

Age of the Clare Caves

As already stated, much time was spent on "surface work", with particular reference to the age of the caves. The final conclusion was that all the caves, originating round Knockaun's, Slieve Elva, Poulacapple and the Doolin Cave System were formed since the ice last left the area. There did not seem to be any exceptions.

Further prospects in Clare

Enough information was gathered, in the last two days of our stay, to more than justify our return next year.

MENDIP

Mañor Farm

The July floods have played havoc here with our dig, and the concrete foundations put in so laboriously just over two years ago, have been undermined. Consequently the shaft is now in a highly dangerous state. If the dig is to be continued, a fresh start, the fifth, will have to be made.

Picken's Hole

The fallen cemented breccia which may overlie a pre-glacial level and which may contain a Wurm climate fauna has proved a very tough proposition. Volunteers and our own members have so far gone down 10 ft. in a trial pit but have not yet got through the breccia, rather disappointing so far. A good many tons material have been removed. There is much sand in the lower parts.

SESSIONAL MEETINGS

Though the outline was agreed upon as long ago as last June, subsequent letters on the subject to those concerned have remained unanswered for many weeks.

However it is hoped to have two lectures by distinguished savants in conjunction with the Classics Dept., one in early November and one in January. In all, 6 lectures are intended.

The A.G.M. will be on Monday March 7 1966. The subject of the Presidential address will be "The 3rd. International Spelaeological Congress, Jugoslavia 1965".

In view of the course of "Cave Studies" no informal talks will be held this year on archaeological and spelaeological subjects.

PROCEEDINGS

The next issue is in the press. It will be an exceptionally large issue covering a variety of subjects. The main archeological paper will be the 'Report on the Roman Temple, Brean Down, Somerset' by Mr. A. M. Apsimon. This will also be available as an offprint. If you want one or more of these please complete the enclosed form. If you know of anyone interested forms can be sent to them. Printing is very costly and orders in advance allow a decision to be made as to the number of copies to be ordered.

If you like to send the Treasurer a donation, please do so.

REPORT on the EXCAVATION this Summer at PICKENS HOLE

The excavations in August lasted three weeks and were attended by a number of Old Members, Members, and outside volunteers including two from the U.S.A. We succeeded, with the help of explosives, in getting through the rockfall. As thought, this appeared to be a fallen cave roof, but unfortunately it rested almost directly on a sloping rock floor with only a little barren clay and sand in between. Presumably the cave had never been occupied, or had not been open before the roof fell. In either case the rock fall is such a tough proposition that further work in search of underlying deposits seems impractical.

Much work can still be done in digging the exposed remains of the Bear layer. Work against the cliff is likely to lead to the discovery of the entrance to a small cave used by bears, wolves, and hyaenas. Other than this, Pickens Hole has probably now given most of the evidence of Late Pleistocene climate and fauna that we can expect, and I doubt whether further large scale excavations, of the type of 1964 and 1965, is justified.

The main task now is the cleaning and marking of finds so that these can be given to Dr. Savage for identification. When this and the examination of soil samples is complete we should be able to prepare a report for Proceedings.

A. M. A. 10/10/65

LIST of SESSIONAL MEETINGS

Mon. Nov. 1st. Archeology Lecture in conjunction with Dept. of Classics.
Subject to be arranged.

Mon. Nov. 22nd. Film Evening. Recent film received from Czechoslovakia will be shown.

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Mon. Jan. 17th. Archeology Lecture in conjunction with Dept. of Classics
Subject to be arranged.

Mon. Feb. 14th. Lecture: Recent Excavations on Roman Sites in North Somerset. Barry Cunliffe, M.A.; F.S.A.

Mon. Mar. 7th. Annual General Meeting. Presidential Address by Dr. E. K. Tratman: 'Fourth International Speleological Conference, Jugoslavia, 1965'.

IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION from an Old Member.

On Monday 20th. Sept. 1965, David Patmore and I were sitting in a parking lot in Fairbanks, Alaska, when Frank Nicholson and Colin High poked their heads through the car windows. We all spent about a week in Alaska, including a drive of over 150 mls. on gravel roads to Mt. McKinley National Park, which we found to be closed. Colin has not been eaten by bears, but some of their notes have been stolen by Eskimos. Frank was last seen wearing a very fine fur hat, and David has a vast Chevrolet. David has also cunningly found a house in Edmonton, where about six female students live as well. Canada is poor caving country - the beer is foul - you have to put salt in it!

David P. S. Hobbs.

Mike Norton,
Malcolm Green, Secretaries.