

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETYCIRCULAR TO MEMBERS

(1966, No. 3 24th August)

CAVINGIreland, County Clare, July 1966.

The party (numbering 19 at one point) was blessed with dry though, on the whole, rather cool weather, although there were two very hot days when the sand at Doolin was too hot to walk on. Only on Sunday July 30th was there enough rain to make the caves impassable.

The swallet E17(now Poll-Killmoon East), which it had been hoped would provide, together with a neighbouring one, up to a mile of passage gave only about 500ft. The other swallet proved to be impenetratable, though our members successfully explored 200 ft. of man-made water conduit, leading from a ruined cottage down to the actual swallet! E17 may be the cave described some years ago by Mike Boon(S.W.C.C.) but we got a little further than he did.

Cave diving was done at the sumps of Poll-an-Ionain and the Coolagh River Cave with very little result. However, the large aven just before the sump in the C.R.C. was climbed. It was 110 ft. to just below the surface and connects to the opening just west of the ruin near Pollclabber farm house. Thus when this opening spouts water under flood conditions there is at least a head of 110 ft. behind it. A glance at the contours on the map, and the relationship of the cave to them, makes it abundantly clear that when this aven is active outwards then the whole cave is filled.

Kilcorney survey was completed except for the few feet at the bottom of the 60 ft. "pitch".

The major discoveries of new passages were in the Doolin Cave system. Several thousand feet have been found, but have not as yet been surveyed, so the estimate is subject to correction. Much of the new passages consist of the original high level series, with their own tributaries, stretching from the oxbows downstream of the Doolin Dry Tributary to the oxbow under the Aille. This is just another job to be completed in 1967. Exploration at the sump was carried another 160 ft. at low tide and under very low water conditions. The sump was at 19 ft. O.D. !

Poulnagollum was still closed to all parties, including U.B.S.S. A trip down Poulelva showed that the through way opened by S.W.C.C. was the way first found by U.B.S.S. but not passed by them, so why it has been called Merthyr Vale remains a mystery.

Direct measurements of the rate of limestone solution, using an apparatus designed by Kieth Hanna is in progress. It is hoped to include a brief note about this in the forthcoming issue of Proceedings. He also produced an apparatus for measuring drip rates at selected places. The recording can be done in a car at the roadside if the leads are long enough, just the job for armchair cavers.

Perhaps the two amusing highlights of the trip were the rescue of a goose, alive and with its feathers still intact, from Polldonough South, and the recovery, rescue is hardly the right term, of a party of another caving club which was unable to find its way up the Doolin cave from Fisherstreet Pot beyond the Aille Tributary, and had been wandering round the pool for three hours.

The mystery of the second set of sea caves described by E.A. Baker ("Adventures Underground") was solved. The caves lie in the shale cliffs stretching from Doolin Strand to the Cliffs of Moher.

There is, incidentally, a fine glacially eroded platform at 50ft. O.D. here. There are five caves, which could probably in most cases be explored using a rubber dinghy launched at the cave mouth on a calm day rather than by approach from the open sea.

Caves at Shallee Castle and at Pollnagalloor were examined. They are not extensive. A reputed cave near Kilshanny proved on investigation to be an unusual form of souterrain, or perhaps an unusual form of chambered tomb.

Pollnagollum. Forestry Commission works on the east flank of Slieve Elva, north of Cahir Bullog have produced conditions of rapid run off of rain water. As the swallets in the area feed either Upper Pollnagollum or Branch Passage Gallery West, this cave must be added to the list of those in which a rapid and potentially dangerous rise in water level will occur with comparatively little rain.

Cullaun 1. Gaffer's Gulch Old Streamway. The survey was completed. The north end point is approximately level with the southernmost point of Cullaun Zero and about 100 yds. west, where there are two large shakeholes. All are a short distance north of Cullaun Farm House.

E.K. Tratman

Manor Farm Swallet

At the beginning of summer camp week, 1966, after nearly four months of preparation (involving the laying of pipes to carry and direct the stream and digging out the previous winter's fill), the dig was at the near record depth of 48 ft. Work started on the second Thursday in June when Mike Norton, Chris Gilmore, Peter Kaye, and Ray Cleaver dug out about 80 buckets and uncovered a rock ledge. This forced us to dig up the valley for a few feet, and by the end of the day a strong draught had developed. The following day was spent in shoring, since we were now a good 6 ft. below the solid structures installed two years ago.

The Saturday saw a good sized digging party; Dave Savage, Mike Norton, Kieth Hanna, Ian Standing, and Ray Cleaver. They were at the site reasonably early. The draught had completely disappeared and a lot of time was spent digging out the collapsed fill. We were now digging out a comparatively loose mixture of gravel and rocks, and were obviously following the route of the stream. Near the hundred buckets mark, D.S. rediscovered the draught and changed with M.G.N. at the face. After another ten buckets one could hear rocks falling beneath, and when the floor suddenly descended 2 or 3 ft. and settled it was fairly obvious that a breakthrough was imminent. Sure enough, the removal of a few large boulders left a hole large enough to enter. One dropped into a steeply descending passage with solid rock in the roof and to one's right, and very loose boulders on the floor which sloped downwards at about 40°. After some 20 ft. the boulders became more stable and the slope levelled out to approximately 20°. The passage was now around 15 ft. wide and 4 ft. high with a rift 10 to 12 ft. high running along the right hand wall. The tiny trickle of a stream ran along the left hand side of the passage and disappeared through a tiny hole between roof and floor 40 ft. or so farther on. At this point the whole passage was blocked as the boulder choked floor met the roof. As it was the end of the day, we left it at that, and celebrated with the farmer and a bottle of his sherry.

On the Sunday some of us set about attacking the choke, while others attempted some shoring. It was soon found that an upper series existed, as one could see a number of spaces between calcited boulders in the roof of the rift. However, the largest of them was still too tight to get through, so the boulders in the middle of the passage were attacked, since there was a gap of a few inches between roof and floor, through which came a draught. Progress was slow, and after about half an hour F.K.H.'s voice was heard, requesting us all to come out quickly lest we perish. A salvo of rocks came hurtling down the slope

from the breakthrough point to add a little weight to the request. We promptly made our way out, and it became obvious that the upstream fill wall would have to be supported before any more descents could be made. However, when M.G.N. was sawing some wood on the older shoring and caused a few dozen largish rocks to collapse around F.K.H., it was deemed advisable to retire for the day.

That night it rained continuously, and inspection of the dig the following day revealed that a three ton boulder was blocking the breakthrough hole, and that the lower sections of shoring had been ruined in its descent. The wet fill was in a state of continuous movement and was not safe much below where the water pipes end. It was obviously a complete waste of time to do anything to the shaft in this condition, so it was decided to sink a new shaft into the upper series some 40 ft. down the valley. The site was duly chosen and M.G.N. and R.L.C. dug the first few feet. During the rest of the week solid rock was reached and the use of explosives made the depth 8 ft., a winch making the hauling of buckets much easier.

Since then a fence has been put up around the dig, breeze blocks built around the upper, earthy section, and the depth increased to 12 ft.

This shaft has many advantages over the other.

- 1). It is well away from the stream, so is diggable all the year round by two or more people.
- 2). The shaft is through solid rock, so no shoring problems will be encountered.
- 3). The shaft, when completed, will be a permanent structure suitable for use by all cavers, while the old shaft was completely undermined, and would have had to be stabilized somehow before other clubs could descend.

The rate of progress is, however, very slow, and to make efficient use of explosives shot-holes have to be drilled at the rate of one every three quarters of an hour. It is proposed to hire a rock drill for weekends, and this will speed up the process tremendously. Unfortunately this costs money, and the Society has spent nearly all it can afford this year on blocks, digging tools, cement, etc. We would therefore be very grateful for any donations which members could offer towards the cost of the drill and accompanying equipment. If we do have this machinery, we should be through before next summer.

Please send any donations to Dr. E.K. Tratman, Penrose Cottage, Burrington, near Bristol.

G.B. Cave

An article on the new discoveries is in press. Unfortunately, the cost of printing colour illustrations proved to be far beyond our financial capacity, and only the black and white photographs will be published.

As from 1st September, the extensions are being opened to other clubs, subject to additional rules to safeguard the Series and its visitors.

The total length of the extension is over the 1400 ft. mark. The chamber over the boulder ruckle (Great Chamber) is here counted as 350 ft. as its dimensions are 200 ft. by 150 ft., and its area approaches an acre.

N.G. Norton

Read's Grotto

For a long time Read's Grotto has been a neglected cave, probably because it consists of little more than a short nasty crawl leading into a small chamber. Earlier this year however the cave was entered with a view to assessing its digging potential.

One of the first things noted was the strong draught. Investigation of the boulder pile at the southern end of the chamber revealed that there was a fair possibility of finding a way on by digging through the boulders. This idea was shelved for the time being, however, due to the dangerous nature of these boulders. Eventually the most likely looking place to dig appeared to be amongst some calcite-cemented boulders on the west side of the chamber. After permission to dig was granted by the Charterhouse Caving Committee, these boulders were banged, and an opening was made which revealed a drop into a tight vadose passage through loose boulders. This was followed for about 50 ft. before it became finally blocked with boulders. The end of this passage was later estimated to be about 25 ft. beneath the southern end of the chamber. Considerable work has been done here over the last few months both by blasting and digging, though the latter was difficult due to inadequate space to put the spoil. In spite of the difficulties of digging at this place, there was considerable encouragement from the presence of a strong draught, and what appeared to be a small chamber beneath the boulders. Unfortunately work at this site was ended for the time being by a fall of about half a ton of boulders which narrowly missed the digger during digging operations.

Due to the danger of working at this site and the good prospects of discoveries in the cave, other places in the chamber are being examined and so far at least one very promising place has been found.

D.Savage

AWAY TRIPS

Yorkshire, July 4th and week following

The party arrived on Friday night and stayed at the Bolton Hut near Settle. On Saturday, all the party (Oliver Lloyd, Mike Norton, Dave Savage, Pete Standing, Peter Kaye, and Chris Gilmore), warmed up with a trip down Alum Pot, followed by a visit to the Lost John's Master Cave on Sunday.

After O.C.L. and M.G.N. had returned to Bristol, the others stayed on and did Penyghent, Meregill, Lancaster-Basegill, and looked at the newly discovered Swinsto Master Cave via Simpson's Pot. The general verdict was that Yorkshire's severe pots are vastly overrated, as the longest trip was Penyghent at 6½ hours, tackling and detackling.

While the Yorkshire trip was going on Ian Standing, Kit Eaton, and some others spent a few days in South Wales, during which they visited Agen Allwedd.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Hyaena Den, Wookey Hole

The major effort here has had to be postponed to next year. The original programme depended on a number of experts being available to take part. Minor soundings will be done, however, commencing at the week-end September 3rd to 6th, and continuing on September 11th to 12th. (September 10th is the day of the main session of the B.S.A. conference in Bristol.)

Picken's Hole

The entrance passage is yielding quite a number of remains but no human material. There is still some more work to be done, in particular to trace the "Bear Layer" into the cave. Work continues at most week-ends, especially on Sundays.

Stokeleigh Camp

It is intended to make a series of trial soundings in the interior of the camp with the object of obtaining dating material. Mr. Haldane will be in charge. The period will be the first two weeks of October. A major excavation is not intended.

PROCEEDINGS

The next issue is expected to be about 80 pages long, and it is hoped that it will be ready by the end of October, though it may well be later.

SESSIONAL MEETINGS 1966-67

ALL MEETINGS ARE HELD IN THE GEOGRAPHY LECTURE THEATRE ON MONDAYS AT 8.15 p.m.

Monday Oct. 10th	Film evening	
Monday Oct. 31st	Caving in Jamaica	Mr. Michael Boon
Monday Nov. 21st	Settlement Patterns in Iron Age and Roman Britain (In conjunction with Dept. of Classics)	Dr. P.R.Fowler
Monday Dec. 5th	Industrial Archaeology (In conjunction with Dept. of Classics)	Mr. Neil Cossens, B.A., A.M.A.

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Monday Jan. 17th	The Valley of the Assassins (In conjunction with Dept. of Classics)	Mr. Peter Willey, M.A.
Monday Feb. 13th	Dan-yr-Ogof	Mr. W.H.Little
Monday Mar. 6th	Annual General Meeting Presidential Address (commencing c. 9.00 p.m.) Carnac and Round About	Dr. E.K.Tratman, O.B.E. F.S.A.

M.G.Norton
T.Atkinson
Joint Hon. Secs.