

VENTURING UNDERGROUND, the new speleo's guide  
by BEN LYON

E.P. Publishing Ltd., 1983, 160 pages, profusely illustrated, £8.95.

This book is designed for "intelligent, highly motivated but inexperienced young people, who are venturing underground", particularly those "at colleges and universities".

It begins with a brief account of how caves are formed and where they may be found. This is followed by advice on what to wear and what to carry. There follows a long section on technique and equipment, in which 29 pages are devoted to single rope technique followed by only 6 on ladders and life lines. This probably reflects modern trends, particularly in the potholing north. On Mendip there are hardly any pitches worthy of SRT.

A section follows on how you can get yourself into trouble – and out of it. Ben Lyon is quite familiar with rescue techniques. Very short sections follow on finding and exploring caves, including inadequate accounts of cave surveying and photographic techniques. The photographs are mostly by Jerry Wooldridge, so that the reader does not need to be told that they are stunningly good. Moreover quite a few of them are relevant to the text.

We next ask ourselves the question, "Is this a book for our student members?" It has to be admitted that, with the exception of geographers, geologists and those who have caved at school, the first year students are only interested in the physical challenge of caving and the companionship which accompanies it. In the second year they may be expected to be come interested in cave formation, where to find caves, study of cave life, original work, surveying and photography. It is these things which turn a caver into a speleologist. How well are they catered for in this book? The answer is, moderately well as regards the first two, very well indeed as regards SRT, which is one of Ben Lyon's specialities, and rather poorly as regards the rest, for which more specialist books will still be required.

Is it then worth the money? Students are notoriously impecunious, but £8.95 is very little for a book of this size so well illustrated. I think on balance that it is worth it, but the student will soon want to get on to something more detailed.

O. C. Lloyd