

WALTHAM, A.C., SIMMS, M.J., FARRANT, A.R. and GOLDIE, H.S. 1996. *Karst and Caves of Great Britain*. London, Chapman Hall. xv + 352 pp, numerous figures. Softbound £125 ISBN 0 412 78860 8

(reviewed by Graham Mullan)

This book has been produced as part of a series commissioned by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, comprising English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales, intended to document all the varied sites which have been designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest under their Geological Conservation Review (GCR), which was started in 1977.

Within this book all the cave and karst sites included on that list have been given their own self-contained account in a standard form consisting of highlights (a précis of the particular interest of the site), introduction (with a concise history of previous work), description, interpretation (assessing the site's scientific interest and importance), and conclusion. There are, in all, eighty-eight such accounts in this book, reflecting the importance of the karst landscape in Britain. All the accounts are freshly written for this volume, but draw on previously published research and include the results of ongoing research – although the authors have apologised for not being able to keep pace with discoveries in Ogof Draenen!

All the reports are clearly written and easy to follow. In the areas with which the reviewer is most familiar, they appear to be aware of the most up to date concepts and ideas but inevitably this will mean that some degree of controversy will creep in and some differences of opinion crop up. For example, it is not clear, on the basis of the evidence presented here, that the drainage in Slaughter Stream Cave is wholly guided by the Worcester Syncline nor is it clear whether a Triassic age is being claimed for clastic sediment in Flow Choke or Dog's Grave passages in that cave, as opposed to in the truncated cave segments in the sides of the Wye Valley. In similar vein, the explorers of the West End extensions to Eastwater Swallet will regard the statement that the cave "lacks significant speleothem development" as dubious.

The reviewer was pleased to see that his view of the development of the Little Neath River Cave, that its drainage is closely associated with the Little Neath River and has never been to the Mellte Valley appeared to take precedence over alternatives (page 234) but was then suprised to see the alternative reappear in the following paragraph and be stressed in the Conclusion. This somewhat muddled writing is unfortunately an important criticism of the structure of this book: each section is essentially a distillation of a great deal of previous research and each conclusion is an even more truncated summary. Thus any reader who relies wholly on the conclusions to give them a view of a given site can potentially be misled.

With any book of this nature, there are also going to be comments about what has been left out as well as with the treatment of what has been included. Other reviewers with their own particular interests will certainly have some comments to make here, but two will suffice for now: Hydrothermal karst seems only to be mentioned in passing with regard to a couple of the Peak District sites; anyone who has visited Pen Park Hole will be suprised that this site has not been included in the GCR. It is surely the finest example of a hydrothermal cave in the British Isles and has a geomorphic history unlike virtually any other cave in the country. My second query concerns Pseudokarst. Whilst it fair to say that Pseudokarst features, depending on which definition is preferred, would not fall within the strict remit of this volume, it is difficult to know how they have featured within the GCR. The only examples given in this volume are the

subsidence features of Moston Long Flash and Rostherne Mere, in the Cheshire salt karst. If these are worthy of mention then surely room could have been found for, for example, the gull caves of the Cotswolds or the Ryedale Windypits.

The production quality of the book seems to be to a reasonable standard, the text is clear and well laid out and the diagrams are both helpful and easy to understand and, most importantly, produced at a useful size. All of them have been redrawn specifically for this volume and having them in a standard format is a great aid to clarity. The photographs, too have reproduced well. One error noted here is that the survey of Longwood Swallet is credited to this Society when it was carried out by the Mendip Caving Group. As to be expected in a book of this size there are a number of typographical errors. These are not normally a serious problem except in the reference section and here the reviewer finds his own name spelt incorrectly and this Society's President's name is also wrongly given. Whilst this may be regarded as pure pique, it is this sort of error which casts doubt on the reliability of the section as a whole.

This book is an excellent summary of the state of knowledge of Britain's caves and karst features. It does not replace the old *Limestone and Caves* regional series produced by the B.C.R.A., except in that it is far more up to date than them, as it necessarily contains far less information. *Limestone and Caves of Wales*, for example is as long as this entire volume. In the same way, it will not be a substitute for the original papers on any given site, as far as serious research is concerned, although its reference section is a good starting point for further reading. It should be in every caving club library and on the shelf of every serious caver in the country. Sadly, at £125, it is unlikely to be so and given its very short print run it is not going to be found remaindered either. If you can afford it, buy it, in any event a copy will be available in the Society's library.

GEBAUER, H.D., MANSFIELD, R.E., CHABERT, C. and KUSCH, H. (1995). *Speleological Bibliography of South Asia*. Kathmandu, Armchair Adventure Press. 226 pp softback £30
ISBN 3 00 000133 6

(Reviewed by Jennifer Brooks)

This publication is a thorough and comprehensive guide to the many varied books, articles and other references to any aspect of speleological interest in South Asia. It is divided into seven sections, covering South Asia generally, then Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tibet in detail. Each section has an introduction, with a general geographical/geological/speleological background. The bibliographies for each of the sections follow, alphabetically listed with a concise narrative report for each entry.

Each section is exhaustively cross referenced according to a number of topics (geoscience, mines and mining, biospeleology, archaeology, culture, troglodytes, speleohistory and miscellaneous)so it is possible to pursue items according to a particular area of interest. Thus the book is of value not only to those wanting to find new caving areas in South Asia, but also to academics wanting information on specialised biological, geological, archaeological and anthropological interests.

The bibliography also contains several short contributions on relevant areas of interest including man made temples, rock art and two ancient ascetics who meditated in caves and,