



CHILLAGOE CAVING CLUB

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NEWSLETTER

WWW.CHILLAGOECAVINGCLUB.ORG.AU

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The Mendip Rescue Organisation

Ray Deasy

The Mendip Hills area south west of Bristol (UK), contains many limestone caves and some small mines in addition to many complex underground stone workings. In May an opportunity arose to see the range of equipment stowed and ready for action at the H.Q. of the Mendip Rescue Organisation (MRO).

The MRO responds to emergency callouts involving caves and a significant number of mines in the surrounding caving area. The primary rescue area are the Mendip Hills and the stone mines around Bath and Corsham.

The MRO is quartered in a small (fire proof) stone building in the grounds of the headquarters of the Bristol Exploration Club (BEC) near Priddy (Somerset). The BEC HQ is known as 'The Belfrey' and the club motto is Everything to Excess. You have to know the locals to understand it's true meaning, needless to say the local pubs are well frequented.



© R. Deasy

Layout of equipment room

The emergency call is 999 and this goes to the regional police, it is essential the caller requests cave rescue. The MRO rescue warden responds to the caller whilst other wardens are contacted in a phone link. The police take overall control leaving the MRO to coordinate and action the rescue. Other services may be called (ie ambulances or fire rescue). Over lapping of surface duties may occur but the MRO deal only with the cave rescue.



© R. Deasy

Equipment bags set and ready to go!

MRO's stone building HQ provides surface and underground communications for the network of wardens, who also pick and distribute the required equipment. All the wardens are competent in cave craft and they mobilize as individuals to then arrive at the headquarters or rescue site.



© R. Deasy

Bag tag listing all the contents

Equipment and communications have to be dispersed to the rescue site on the surface. Equipment is chosen to suit the rescue. The kit is in double labelled bags for easily identification of it's contents. One label is kept on the surface to ensure a record of the kit is taken.

Down below the communication methods are via the use of the HEY phones, which are being replaced over time by the NICOLA system. A message system called CAVE TEXT is used to transmit and receive text messages that can be stored. This saves an operator being on call continuously and prevents nosey parkers from overhearing. This is all going to work like a precision operation, providing the critical intel is sourced and pro-actively sorted.



© R. Deasy

Cave text transceiver set up.

The MRO is likely to use man haulage in rescues rather than technical rigs due to the small nature of the cave passages in the Mendip Hills.

The easy access to the Mendip Hills is quite different to the mountains and moors of Wales and Yorkshire. An all-wheel drive rescue truck is used by the North Pennine Mine and Cave Rescue. Photos and descriptions are included for your interest.



© R. Deasy

A rig for a nylon stretcher or slick (UK term) - converts from vertical to horizontal without having to rehang it.

Keefs Cavern Extension

Peter Bannink

During the July club trip Max and Van spend some time around Ryan Imperial Tower counting swiftlets late in the evening. While climbing the tower near the main entrance to Keefs Cavern, three vertical entrances were located in quick succession. All appeared to be quite deep holes worthy of intensive investigation.

The next day Max and Van rigged the first option, a 4m deep entrance quite high up on the tower with one side against a high wall. Once rigged, you can step off and hang over the 2m wide slot and descended 26m straight down into Keefs cavern (just at the start to Gun-barrel passage). The link was no surprise, as the new entrances are in the same direction as cave, just way above it.

Max noticed on the first abseil down, that one could swing across and gain access to an upper ledge, 5m above the base of the pitch. A bit of exploration of this area lead to a very small slot at the top of a 5m chimney, a new section to explore. The new exploration targets for the August club event were set.

I arrived late on the Saturday August 12th, to find all three pitches already rigged for exploration. I first descended the pitch Van discovered, called Chock Snake (after he disturbed a Red Banded Tree Snake, while looking for a chock stone). The entrance is only half way up the tower but descends about 28m (possibly more) in three successive 10m pitches to a terminating sump. It's was quite difficult getting on the start of each pitch as the passage became very narrow where each pitch is rigged.



Max and Van at the Chock Snake Entrance

© S. Jenkins

After a brief look, Max and I ascended, but while de-rigging the bottom pitch I unfortunately I dropped one of Paul's slings and had to re-rig it to recover the sling from the bottom. This proved quite challenging while hanging off the safely line, taking off my backpacks and digging around for another (without dropping anything else). A lesson in patients and 40 min of stuffing around was enough for me not to want to revisit the place again. We still have to survey it though.

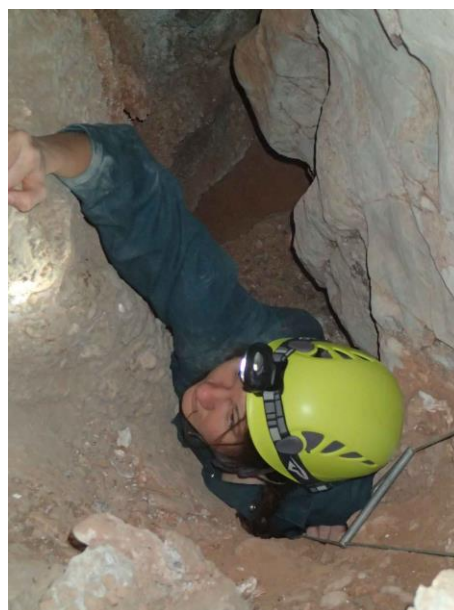


© P. Bannink

Some rope practice at the base of the new pitch

The afternoon was taken up watching the clubs new introductory cavers (6 in all) practice on the big pitch into Keefs Cavern. It was an ideal place to relax and discuss issues in the cool breezy passage.

On the Sunday Max, Sue and Deanne with Laura and Wuthipong, explored Max's major new lead in Keefs, while I started a new survey from the tag. The new section is just as challenging as everything else in Keefs cavern, with a small narrow slots to negotiate, followed by a steep 8m climb into a rift complex. Beyond this, a second deep 14m pitch down a long fissure, which ends suddenly. An upper branch, lead to another entrance (choked with small rocks) and a sliding horizontal slot which sits about 15m somewhere above Gun Barrel Passage. Needless to say it took the whole day to survey this area.

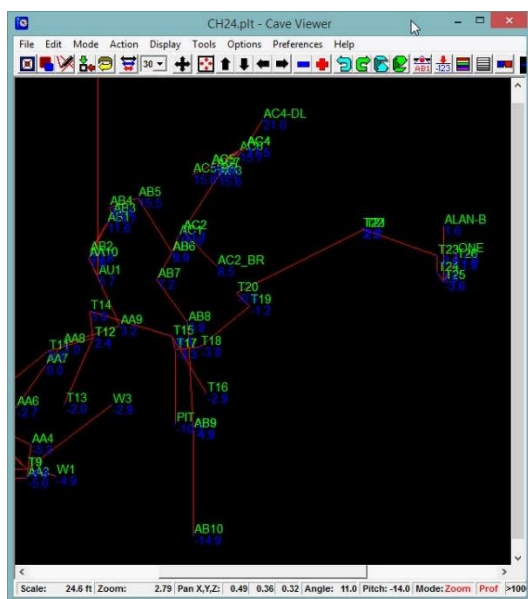


© S. Jenkins

Laura climbing the narrow slot into the new section

On the whole it was a fantastic weekend, with a bit of challenging caving thrown in for good measure. I hope our introductory cavers enjoyed it as much as I did.

Below is the survey of the new section in COMPASS. The survey line is in 3D with the 'T' stations being the main old survey of Keefs Cavern. AB section is aligned towards the viewer, T section (Gun-barrel Passage) is aligned away from the viewer towards the 'Gauge' and 'Pit', AB10 is the base of the new deep rift.



Farewell to Carol our Caretaker

Our long standing caretaker at Chillagoe has taken ill and due to unforeseen circumstances has had to resign her caretaker role at the clubhouse. Carol has been at the clubhouse for over 15 years looking after the property, collecting fee's and feeding cavers. I don't think we can thank Carol enough for her commitments to the club and helping run things out at the clubhouse.

This has been a fairly distressing for Carol (who has had to move back to Almaden) as you can imagine. Carol was also concerned about leaving the club (without a caretaker) and recommended a long time acquaintance Clare Mullins for the position. Two members of the executive met Clare in September and considered her well suited to take over Carols role. Clare has since moved into the caretakers residence, so please welcome Clare when you turn

up at the clubhouse. She does have a dog and some minor changes to fencing will need to be done on the care takers side of the property.

Clare's new phone number is **(07) 4094 7121**, and there is currently no internet connection. So please phone if you plan to head out for a weekend and introduce yourselves. Van and Peter will be out in early October to introduce Clare to the operations of the clubhouse, fortunately she is well known and has friends within the Chillagoe Community.

Up and Coming Events

September

- 12-13th - Club Caving Weekend at Chillagoe.

October

- 3 - 5th - Club Caving Weekend at Chillagoe.

November

- Still to be planned, last club event of the year.

Peter Bannink & Van Christensen (Secretary).



Max abseiling down from the upper section, of the new extension

© P. Bannink