

# 1968

14<sup>th</sup> September Caving club meeting, Bristol

Nigel Burns had gone to a caving club meeting with a friend, John Keen; after only a week or two JK had stopped going. Tonight Nigel turned up and asked if I would accompany him to the groups meeting. We walked from Brislington, Bristol to 35 Lower Ashley Road, Montpelier, Bristol. In a large flat above a shop Terry Edwards lived with his wife Sylvia and their young family of five. Shown into the kitchen there were already three people there Ted Meek, Martin Waller and Sue Howard. Soon the place filled with Roger Marsh, Stuart MacManus, Rick Edwards, Ed Walcroft and eventually Jim Smart; all members of the Cotham Caving Group. The more active members Jim and Mac introduced Nigel and I to the pleasures of meeting cavers in other clubs, soon we were caving with those in the Axbridge, the Severn Valley and others. Jim's minivan was the group's main transport, with which regular trips happened after the Friday night meet.

15<sup>th</sup> September Sandford Levy

Ted Meek, Roger Marsh, Nigel Burns

Finding the mine took some time. It's a long passage with a 30 foot shaft to one side and high rifts. It was used by the Home Guard during the war, remains of old beds and bits are still there.

22<sup>nd</sup> September Goatchurch Cavern / Sidcot Swallet

Ted Meek, Roger Marsh Stuart Reid, Nigel Burns

An exciting trip guided by Ted who directed NB and PC to do the Drainpipe and return. Once out led to another cave nearby, lots of wriggling: sent down a hole which I couldn't climb out: Ted said it was character building.

29<sup>th</sup> September Lamb Leer

Ted Meek, Jim Smart, Tony Jarratt, Ed Walcroft, Stuart Reid, Nigel Burns, Mike Shapiro  
Everyone laddered down into the huge main chamber; some trouble with the double lifeline but sorted by Jim, sent up an iron ladder to a muddy slippery tube, SR became tired so returned to the chamber climbing up the ladder the lifeline was around the winch, which Mike operated pulling Ed off in the process.

5<sup>th</sup> October Nine Barrows Swallet

Bob Cross, Alan Mills, Jim Smart

A cave with a nice terminal chamber; mentioned my recent birthday, (15), so taken to the Hunters to celebrate. Looking over the bar Ben said to Alan, he's very short for eighteen.

22<sup>nd</sup> October Bitton Hole, Bristol

Mac, Jim, Terry, Roger, Terry Edwards, Martin Waller

This entrance was reported by Roger who saw it from his van travelling from Bitton to Keynsham. This cave turned out to be a manmade tunnel through which ran a huge pipe possible a sewer or storm drain.

27<sup>th</sup> October Sandford Dig

Ted Meek, Terry Edwards, Roger Marsh, NB

Taken up Sandford Hill to the Cotham Caving Groups dig, a thirty foot deep rift into a chamber from which they're lifting out the rock up the shaft by tying the rope around each other and running toward the trees. I'm expected to tie a bowline blindfolded for next week's trip down Swildons Hole.

3<sup>rd</sup> November Swildons Hole

Ted Meek, Ed Walcroft, Roger Marsh, NB

A long wet cave, down to the sump and through to the other side, then along a deep streamway to the next sump, brilliant trip but freezing cold. At the ladder pitch, under the stream, they put out my carbide lamp and told me to tie a bowline and then climb up.

3<sup>rd</sup> November Swildons Hole, First Cave Rescue

Just as we were changing Ted ran back up the stairs of the barn saying to put our kit back on and get ready for a callout in Swildons near Trat's Temple. Someone was cold and tired and had collapsed. Our group helped to carry kit following down four others, which included a Doctor. On arrival the guy wasn't well; as the phone line didn't work PC was asked to act as a runner to relay info to the surface, and return quickly. After two successive runs a weary PC was stood down when the phone lines were eventually got working. Need my own carbide light.

9<sup>th</sup> November Little Neath River Cave, South Wales

Jim Smart, Ted Meek, Roger Marsh

The entrance is in the side of the river bank. Soaking wet from the start a narrow passage met with a wider one, did a long loop where the water got so deep there was almost no air space. Coming out the stream seemed higher; loved it. Camped at Jim's farm owned by a friend of the Cotham's. Need my own tent and cap lamp.

10<sup>th</sup> November Bridge Cave

Ted Meek, Roger Marsh,

With Jim Smart suffering from the cider last night the others went underground. Another fine cave connecting to a big river passage The boulder ruckle made TM upset on account the shoring moved when RM fell against it.

24<sup>th</sup> November Primrose Pot, Eastwater Cavern

Alan Mills, Chris Harvey, Doug?, Sam Davies, Dave Edmonds, Bob Lewis,

Arrived at the Axbridge hut Friday night, didn't know any present, that didn't stop them taking me to the Hunters and returning to the hut much later filling me with more beer. Saturday morning, waiting for Jim and the others; advised you won't see "Jim Man" until much later, so was invited to join their trip. This cave is so awkward, had trouble staying above the traverse, but helped by the others. After a while came to a tiny hole sloping down, CH lifelined while the others rolled out the ladders. After several had disappeared in a mist of swearing; feeling a bit unsure slid down the hole. About ninety feet down met Dave who sent me on down again to the bottom where Alan was, who then sent me straight back up; a brilliant trip. Jim eventually arrived just before closing time.

25<sup>th</sup> November Cuckoo Cleaves

Alan Mills, Chris Harvey,

Alan has a dig in the terminal rift so went down to help out; he got me to wriggle into reach the debris he's blown off using explosives. AM got me to shape the plastic charge by moulding it with my bare hands, within an hour I was crippled with a blinding headache. The lesson, this is what happens if you don't wear gloves.

1<sup>st</sup> December Foot and Crutch, Ubley Warren Pot

Alan Mills, Colin Priddle,

Some of the Axbridge broke into a new section of cave named partly after Mac's busted leg so AM took us on a tourist trip to see the superb decorations.

14<sup>th</sup> December Longwood-August Cave

Mike Shapiro, Chris, (Zot), Harvey, Paul Hyton, Greg Pickford,

A cracking trip down to Reynolds Passage, this is a superb system. The lads have a dig at the end of this awkward rift.

15<sup>th</sup> December St Cuthbert's Swallet

Bob Cross, Bob Lewis, Sam Davies, Andy?

Offered the place of a no show for a booked leader trip; asked age said eighteen. Taken on a long roundabout tourist trip to the sump, the place is vast. No fuel at the hut so sent over to steal coal from the MCG.

27<sup>th</sup> December Ubley Hill Pot

Alan Mills

Wanderlust: Terry Edwards has presented me a cardboard helmet, and I've bought a carbide lamp in Bryants. Hitched out to the Axbridge hut; AM eventually arrived. Went to the Castle, who wouldn't serve me so AM sent me drink outside while I waiting in his van. Two pints later went digging. Steady work produced about a foot of progress. Out to a light scattering of snow; had trouble starting the van. Got to the Hunters about nine o'clock; the place was packed. Told to stay away from the bar and out of Ben's sight, drink kept arriving. Passed out, found in toilets, and woke up next morning in the Axbridge.

28<sup>th</sup> December Lamb Leer

Sam Davies, Alan Mills, Smelly Alan,

After a lunchtime drink went down LL, shown how to abseil, though AM burnt his hand down the entrance pitch; used the ladder instead. Pressed into abseiling down into the chamber off the scaffolding; a slow scared, exhilarating descent; a cracking trip. Tried to nick more coal was almost caught by MCG as they came out to get some themselves, waited till they'd gone, managed a back full.

29<sup>th</sup> December Swildons Hole

Chris Hanham, Martin Webster, Martin Bishop

An early start 08:00. Had offered to assist carrying dive gear; told "not strong enough". Went along anyway, arrived at sump II to realise that all three were diving. Found way out and changed, (need a spare light). Got a lift to the BEC hut, there met Jock and others. Over a mug of tea were informed by Brian Woodward, the driver, of my exit. Several present then loudly pointed out my stupidity and how foolish the act of caving solo is, BW pointed out the events, but the ire was directed at me. It's easy for a group of overweight tea drinkers to bollock a four foot six inch individual: told them all to fuck off. Just like being bullied back at school. BW then very kindly offered me a lift back to the Axbridge hut, explaining that not all cavers are as active as they would like to be? Later in the Hunters words were exchanged between AM and an earlier encountered BEC member who quickly withdrew to the end of the bar to mutter and sulk.

30<sup>th</sup> December Swildons Hole

Martin Webster, Martin Bishop

Another early start, asked last night by MW to assist with the recovery of the remaining dive kit left at sump II: down and back by 11:30; need a wet suit.

30<sup>th</sup> December Pinetree Pot

Alan Mills, Jim Smart

AM also has a dig down here: a mud filled passage not too far from the entrance shaft. Wearing wet dry grots the only way to keep warm was to regularly take turns digging. The mud is thick and sticky, difficult to manage. Packed the spoil along the floor and dragged some back to the main chamber: out into a crystal clear starlit night. Arriving back at the hut we were met by some very unhappy MCG who demanded were the Axbridge stealing their coal? That night crept across to find they had painted the coal white, filled a fertilizer bag and dragged it back, hid the bag in AM's motor.

31<sup>st</sup> December    Acid Squeeze, Swildons Hole

Alan Mills

Had a roaring fire before others up for breakfast; a nice warm room causing a delay leaving to cave. Surprise early visit by the M.C.G. having seen the smoke entered demanding where we got the coal from, only fuel visible was wood. Taken to yet another AM dig. A climb directly above the entrance to Barne's Loop leads to a gap above a stalagmite boss, Acid Squeeze. AM regularly visits here to pour battery acid on the stal floor to dissolve it. Braced across the rift it's difficult to swing a hammer, or to work at all. Watching the process suggested a cloth spread over the area would better hold the liquid in place. AM then tore off the leg of my boiler suit and laid it in position. Arriving back at the Axbridge the New Year party was in full swing; then to the Hunters.