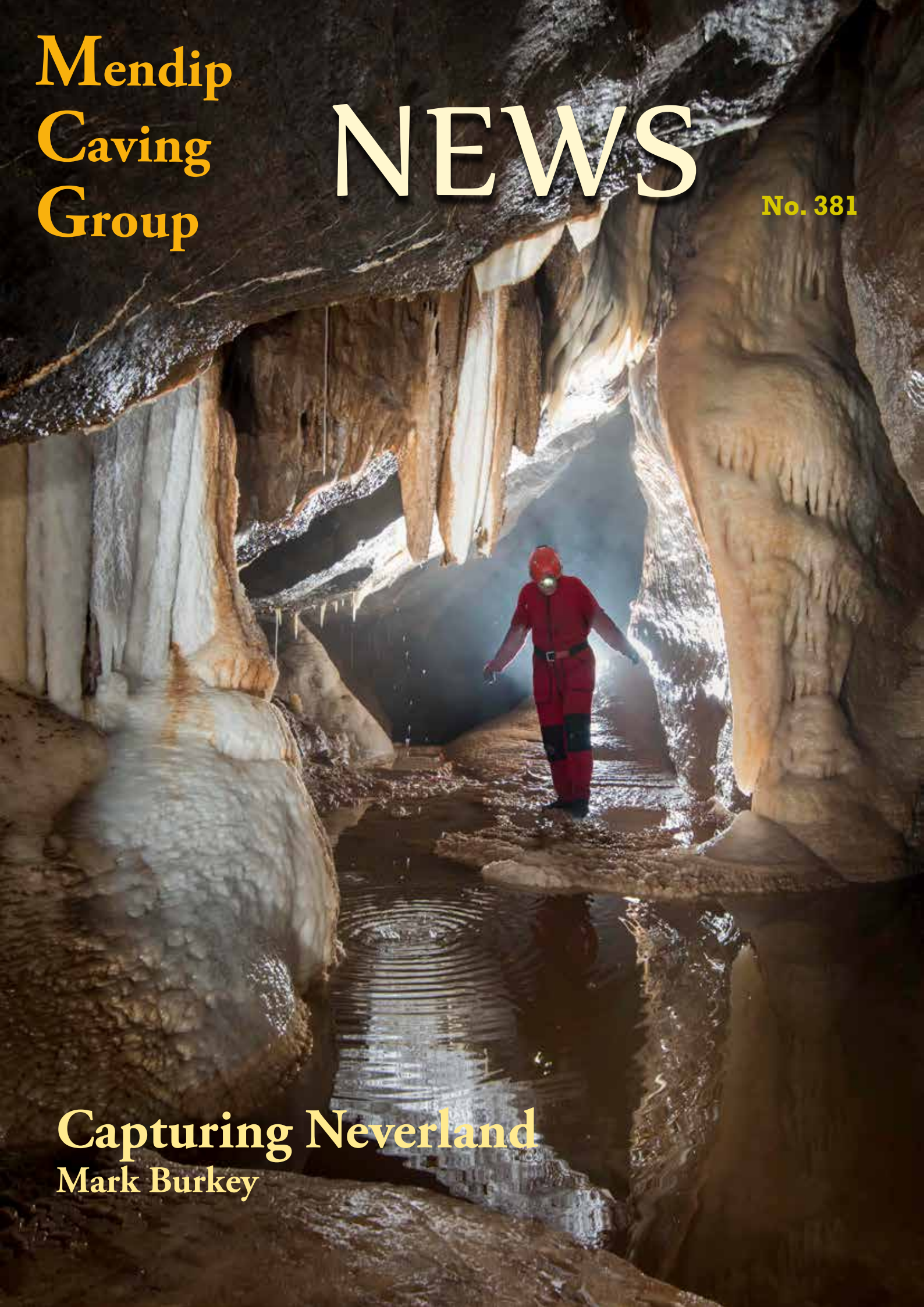


**Mendip
Caving
Group**

NEWS

No. 381

Capturing Neverland
Mark Burkey



MCG News is the Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group.

It is emailed free to all members of the group who have provided a working email address on their membership form. If you are not receiving the Newsletter then please contact the editor.

It is also sent to all those other caving clubs, groups and societies who the MCG have an active Newsletter exchange with. If you wish to join our exchange, then please get in touch.

The Newsletter is also made available online, approximately 1 year after publication. See www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

The newsletter is usually produced 3 or 4 times a year, but this is dependant on the amount of content the editor gets. All contributions are gratefully received.

The MCG Update is a separate publication to keep members up-to-date with news and events in between newsletters.

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The current MCG Committee is composed of the following members:

Secretary Brian Snell
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Librarian/Recorder Lisa Gibson
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The following MCG members fill the non-committee posts

Rescue Warden: Mike Moxon-
rescue@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Conservation & Access Officer: Dan Matthews
CSCC-representative- Dan Matthews
Accounts examiners: Sue Fennel and Linda Milne - examiners@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

New Members Welcome
For Joining Enquiries Please Contact
secretary@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

Front Desk

Welcome to the issue.

It's been a good few months since the last *MCG NEWS* and whilst the taking-over of the reins of editorship from Tom Harrison may be a paltry excuse for the delay, it's the only one I'm going to offer. Tom has been elevated to the lofty heights of club treasurer- a role that had been vacant for a little while. I'm hoping to preserve the quality of presentation and editorial content that he had established for the *NEWS*.



It has been a fairly busy period around Nordrach Cottage- the kitchen has been refitted (*article enclosed*), and the moving of the old drying room to the woodshed space has started, that will itself make space for the new, larger drying room.

The mid-week caving trips continue to flourish under Dave Lossl's guidance. Although primarily aimed at newer members, the range of locations visited represents a broad selection of Mendip Caves and all are welcome.

The summer season of social weekends, a busy cottage and emerging from caves into warm sunshine is upon us, but it has also been notable - with great sadness, for the passing of Biff Frith, who was - amongst his many attributes- a great practical can-do character, whose warmth, humour and knowledge about the place, as well as his general "I reckon we can fix that" approach, will be sorely missed.

Exploration continues apace in a number of locations - so successfully in fact, that a planned digging round-up for this issue has been postponed to the next, because events underground are advancing so rapidly...watch this space!

And as always - the editor welcomes photographs and write-ups from members' caving trips, digging reports and caving related articles. They don't have to be to the same quality as our cover shot this month, just send me a mail with an outline and we can take it from there.

Enjoy your caving summer.

Andrew.

(August 2nd 2017)



Cover photo:
Jess Burkey in Neverland,
Upper Flood Swallet- by
Mark Burkey.

MCG September Work Weekend 2017

As most of you know by now I had a heart attack the back-end of June and as a result have been out of touch with the club. I am OK now but need time to get back to some sort of fitness, before returning to Mendip.

I regret I have been unable to organise the annual cottage work weekend for September.

But I do have a request for you all.

Brian is planning to move the current store shed/drying room to the location vacated by the two little wood sheds.

This will involve in big handfuls -

1) Constructing concrete block supports. This is in progress

2) Building a new floor frame on the concrete blocks.

Planned completion before the September member's weekend.

3) September member's weekend. Separating the shed walls from the rotten base and moving the shed to the new frame.

Number 3) this is where Brian needs all the help he can get to physically move the shed across the car park. The more members who volunteer the easier the task will be. If it is possible to do it as a complete assembly then even better, but it is likely the roof will at least need to be removed and refitted.

With a little work this will then leave the concrete slab ready for the new shed/drying room construction which will commence within the following two months. Note the shed has to be well on the way to completion by the end of November or we lose the grant money.

One of the jobs we always do on the work weekend is a deep clean of the cottage so if anybody is at a loose end over that weekend feel free to grab a sponge and get cleaning. I plan to see you all in November all being well.

Your Armchair Cottage Warden,
Keith Knight



PHOTO: Tom Harrison

Snowdonia Weekend

On the 16th and 17th August, a number of MCG'ers will be heading up to North Wales for a long weekend in Snowdonia. Various subterranean activities are planned, as well as some on the mountain adventures to boot.

We are almost fully booked for this trip for beds, but camping is available nearby and i'm sure we can find space, should anyone else like to join us! Accommodation is less than £20 per person per night.

Links: <http://www.cwmorthin.org/>
<https://www.zipworld.co.uk/>

See Descent issue 249 for pictures and an article from Mark Burkey about the Croesor-Rhosydd Traverse

Underground

- *Cwmorthin Slate Quarry
- *Croesor-Rhosydd Through trip/traverse
- *Ogof Hesp Alyn
- *Parc and Hafna Lead Mines

Overground

- *Walk up Snowdon
- *Snowdon Horseshoe – Dare you do Crib Goch?
- *MCG Swimming Club - Wild Swimming! Llyn Cwm Bychan or Rhaeadr Mawddach
- *MCG Climbing Club – Tryfan
- *MCG Drinking Club...
- *Zipworld - Longest and Fastest Zipline in the World. (Separate charge for this and will need to be booked soon as availability goes quickly.)
- *And more!



Ed carefully checks both ways before crossing the line. PHOTO: Tom Harrison.



The New Cottage Kitchen

Words and pictures- Brian Snell

The Team: *Brian Snell, Keith Knight, Russ Porter, Leon Lockyer, with help from Eileen Snell, Linda Milne and Joan Goddard.*

The whole thing started when Karen Fendley proposed the idea of a new kitchen at a committee meeting early in 2016. After managing a number of Christmas dinner evenings at the cottage, she felt it was challenging-to say the least, to cook a Christmas dinner for up to 30 people with the facilities at the time. My initial response was that it was a good idea but it wasn't going to happen for a while. This was because I figured that I was going to be the person who would have to volunteer for this and I had far too much on at the time. The end of the year approached and another successful Christmas dinner was achieved and it was clear that it was time to start seriously considering the kitchen refit. We discussed it again at a meeting and it was agreed to set a project start date for mid March 2017.

Keith and I then had numerous meetings to put together a project plan and design and cost the kitchen. We had decided early that only way that we were going to get this done in time was to take responsibility for the decision making between ourselves and Russ, who had agreed to help and provide his invaluable skills.

From the beginning the main constraint was that we needed to incorporate a double full-size oven assembly. Russ found one on the internet and after spending time looking for alternatives it soon became clear that this initial find was the solution. It had to be powered by electric rather than gas,

as Russ was concerned that with all the cooking facilities running at full, the gas demand would trip out a valve on the tank which is installed to detect a free flow of gas due to a leak and shut the gas off. It was then just a question of trying to maintain the original storage capacity in cupboards and keeping as much worktop available as possible but allowing a greater freedom of movement in the room.

With that in mind one of the first things we agreed upon was to move the peninsula section adjacent to the fridge. It was decided to move it out to create more floor area and increase the gap to allow people to pass each other more easily. By early February we started making the main purchases of cupboard units, oven, hobs and the worktop. We had agreed that a solid oak worktop was going to be the most robust material, balancing the costs. Stainless steel was discussed but it was considerably more expensive and it is not particularly attractive.



There's no stopping now- the job in progress.



Russ- fitting the pipework.

At the other end of the scale we could have gone for a cheap chipboard-based top, but I felt that once damaged it is not repairable and would have to be replaced. Whereas the oak top could be repaired and was *man-enough* to take the rough treatment of a caving hut. Time will answer whether that was the right decision.

Just as we were making the final preparations for the project we received the sad news that Tony Knibbs has passed away. Then, when the date was set for scattering his ashes on Mendip two weeks after the project start date, we were aware of just a little more pressure being applied.

With that in mind we got going on Monday 20th March, but unfortunately Keith couldn't join us for the first three days due to a family commitment. So I drove down on the Sunday afternoon with my wife Eileen, who was happy to lend a hand. Russ turned up with Leon Lockyer quite early on the Monday morning and we wasted no time in starting the dismantle process.

The remaining cupboard contents was emptied into boxes and the rest put onto *Biff mega-table* and the whole lot covered up with dust sheets. Linda turned up to help so progress was being made quite quickly and soon the area was cleared of the original units. The first thing to do was to sort out the ungainly mess of pipe work and re-plumb to cater for the new kitchen design. Russ and Leon got on with that whilst I continued with prep work for the new kitchen electrics and marking up the walls for the new unit positions.

The day ended with good progress made.

The next day we started fitting the cupboards. Joan turned up with some pasties at lunch time, which was very much appreciated. By the end of the day the base units were in and the oven unit temporarily fitted. Russ had client jobs pressing so he was not going to be available for the rest of the week.

On Wednesday Keith arrived and immediately got stuck into the wiring-up of the new electrical circuits: a new ring main for the kitchen and independent cabling for the ovens. I began working out the timber work and jointing for the food storage shelves which took a good couple of days to sort out.

By the Friday of the first week, a lot of the main work was done and we went home for the weekend.

Keith and I drove back down on the Sunday and we got straight back into the start of the second week. Keith carried on with the electrics and I permanently put the storage rack shelving together ready for the work tops to fitted the next day. In the process of completing the shelving I had left a little message placed under the base shelf for the next victim who takes on a complete kitchen rebuild to find - hopefully that won't be for at least another 30 years. Tuesday arrived and the worktops were fitted taking a good part of the day. It was a frustrating day because the rest of us couldn't get on with other work without getting in the way of the worktop fit process. By the end of the day I grabbed the opportunity to plaster the ceiling and back wall. The plaster took two days to dry off. We even managed to set the fire alarm system off when we put all the hob burners on to create some heat to get it to dry faster. The last days of the week were frantic, with lots of little but time-consuming jobs needing completing. On the Friday we got the floor tiles down where the peninsula unit had been moved, and all the up stand tiles fitted. We finished at 6.00pm- just as people were turning up to stay for Tony's wake the following day.



The way it used to look...

It had been a bit of gruelling two weeks with days starting around 8.00am and finishing around 7.00pm, so it was pleasing just to '*step away from the kitchen*'. So far all comments have been very positive.

Next project "The new drying room shed" uugggh!



Capturing Neverland

with Mark Burkey

Mark Burkey's photographs need little introduction- his work will be familiar to readers of *Descent* and other publications, showcasing the photographer's craft in underground locations.

Bill Chadwick recently guided a group including Mark and his partner Jess, into Upper Flood in order to capture a little of the magic of this beautiful place, so I asked Mark if he would be kind enough to describe a little of the creative process- the thoughts behind these images and a bit about the technical process of capturing them.

"The three chosen shots were, of course, all from the same area, between the wash off section and Curtain Climb. It was an area I remembered from a previous visit as being pretty and wanted to take a little time here as I hadn't seen much shot in this section of the cave.

Equipment wise I shoot with a big heavy DSLR, the Nikon D810 with a wide angle zoom lens (16-35mm), I carry this in a 1400 Peli case along with 5 flashguns).

"I often look for a shot with the headlamps of the cavers I am with. In this instance Bill and Duncan had helped with a quick photo at curtain climb and were heading back for Bill to take Duncan to see the Pork Pies. I sent Jess ahead in the passage and turned off my own light and got an idea of the shot I wanted to take by the resulting silhouette."

For the image above (*the cover of this newsletter*) and the frame overleaf- "I placed in some backlight. (For these shots I used two flashguns slightly angled away from each other to try for an even spread of backlight) I then take a test shot to see how they are lighting the passage and if they are burning out any area of the photo, you can then adjust power settings if needed or move them and re-test. Once happy with the backlight I then add in the front lights.

For these images I used 3 flashguns on low power: one to light the area I want the model and the other two cutting across the passage to cancel any unwanted dark areas. At this point once happy with the lighting I ask the caver/ model to just walk in to the passage and look at the formations etc and I shoot off a few shots as they go. I don't often bother with tripods which gives me more freedom to move to ensure the backlight isn't in view as the model moves through the scene.





“In these images Jess was finding the floor quite sharp and was watching her step.

For the portrait (*on the previous page*), I’d asked her to wash off her face ready for a close up shot.

I’ll often shoot in this way to try and stop the model from looking too staged, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t and staging the model works better. The other top tip is that after you’ve got the lighting right which is always the time consuming part then click off a few shots when the model isn’t ready and from different angles, often they turn out to be the more interesting photos.

The close-up portrait was however staged due to the delicate formations being in such close proximity. There is a single flashgun behind and to the right of Jess which is there to light up the curtain in the rear left of the shot.”

“She is holding a flashgun in her left hand and aimed straight up to try to light up half of her face (I wanted to try and shadow the other half so that the eye would be drawn up to the front curtain in the top right of the shot) Finally a flashgun which I am holding set at low power to fill in area’s that would otherwise be blackness.

The flashguns I am currently using are Yongnuo IV which I can control power setting and zoom from the camera and so if I don’t have people to hold them (Which I didn’t in this shot) it saves a lot of time walking back and forth changing settings.”

Many thanks for those words Mark- there are quite a few photographers in the group, who are always keen to hear from someone that clearly *gets it right* when the camera goes into the kitbag.



Philippino Night

The May members' weekend saw caving in Charterhouse Cave and Eastwater Cavern, as well as digging activities. On the Saturday evening, Dominic Woods' wife Jorin and her sister Divina cooked up a feast from the Philippines for the members to savour. This was followed by a Phillipines-themed quiz organised by Jackie.

See images from the evening on the previous page- *all by Charlie Allison.*

Annual General Meeting

The 63rd AGM was held on April 8th at the Hunter's Lodge Inn. The following is a concise summary of the minutes of that meeting.

Chairman: Ed Waters
Minutes: Lisa Gibson
Attendees: 20.
Apologies: 5.

The minutes of the previous AGM were proposed as a true record, seconded and accepted by unanimous vote.

Actions from the previous meeting

Action 3.2.1, Ben Cooper to make investments from club funds in order to generate income was originally scaled-back in the light of club expenditure on equipment, now put on hold in the light of planned further expenditure.

Action 4.6.1- Library humidity (*mitigation of*), in order to reduce deterioration of contents. Use of de-humidifier has been trialled, with arrangement of stock to allow better airflow. Temperature and humidity measurements to take place and further reporting to follow- ongoing. Action: Lisa Gibson.

Matters arising from the minutes of the 62nd AGM:

62.1- The old PC to be used for the cottage access system, with a new PC being implemented for administration and as a backup. A number of options have been discussed- the matter is ongoing. Access to the novice helmets could be via a secure box requiring electronic access, to allow better accountability for users. The proposed new shed and tackle store will have direct impact on this. Ongoing. Action: Brian Snell and Russ Porter.

62.2- Publish reminders about the booking sheets for the cottage and payment envelopes. Action: Tom Harrison-complete.

62.3- New windows for upstairs dormitories. Action: Keith Knight, complete.

62.4- various actions - equipment- ladder marking, retirement of old ropes and possible purchase of replacements. Action: Dave Ball - now handed-over to Russ Porter as tackle master.

62.5- print on demand option for newsletter to be investigated. Action: Tom Harrison. was found to be impractical for MCG's purposes, matter closed- pending possible review by incoming editor.

62.7- The marking of Tony Knibbs' 80th birthday- overtaken by the event of his passing-away. Action: closed.

62.8- The marking of the 10th anniversary of the Upper Flood breakthrough. Presentation by Tim at a members' weekend. Action: complete.

62.9- Kitchen improvements in cottage. Action:complete.

62.10- Proposal to nominate persons for committee posts in advance, discussed and agreed that a change to the club constitution would be required- further investigation with custodians/trustees. Action: ongoing.

62.11- Christmas dinner limitations because of the size of the cottage as a venue. Discussed, accepted current first-come, first-served approach. Action: closed.

Officers' Reports

Reports were received from the following committee officers:

Hon. Secretary: Brian Snell.
Treasurer (acting treasurer): Tom Harrison.
Caving Secretary: Dave Lossl.
Cottage Warden: Keith Knight.
Tackle Master: Russ Porter.
Recorder/Librarian: Lisa Gibson.
Social Secretary: Hayley Clarke & Ed Waters
Newsletter Editor: Tom Harrison.
Trustees: Ben Cooper.

Reports were not received from Conservation and Access and Rescue Warden positions.

Election of Honorary Officers for 2017- 2018

Brian Snell – Secretary
Tom Harrison – Treasurer
David Lossl – Caving secretary
Keith Knight – Cottage warden
Russ Porter – Tackle master
Lisa Gibson – Librarian/recorder
NEW: Jackie Bishop – Social secretary (proposed by Jeremy, seconded by Bob, unanimous).
NEW: Andy Horecky – Editor (proposed by Peat, seconded by Tim, unanimous)
Tim proposed and Bill seconded for “vote on block”

Election of Non-Committee Posts

Rescue warden - Mike Moxon (proposed by Lisa, seconded by Ed, passed)

Conservation and access officer - Dan Matthews? (BS to ask Dan about this.)

Election of Examiners 2016- 2017

Sue Fennell and Linda Milne.

Motions

None received

Any other business**How should we commemorate Tony Knibbs in the group?**

Suggestion- An award given in his memory, once a year. Tony was a great “recorder”, so an award given for something that’s been published (in its loosest term, so could be writing, a photograph, film, etc), and presented at the AGM dinner. Action 63.5 for the whole committee.

A printed annual of MCG newsletters?

Would members be interested in purchasing an amalgamated print-out of the newsletter, annually, i.e. in the form of an annual? TH will look into and see what the new editor, AH, thinks. Action 63.6 Tom Harrison and Andy H.

Recording honorary MCG members

Tim: no record of honorary MCG members – suggestion of a plaque in the cottage. Maybe a board, with a wooden caving-trip/call-out card, saying “gone caving” (just one idea). Action 63.7 Ben Cooper (report at next AGM on the recording of honorary members) and Andy H (look at engagement with older members through communication channels).

Website

Currently under way with Dave. Deadline of end of April for a new website for the committee to have a look at. Action 63.8 Dave Loss.

Date and venue of next AGM

Saturday 7th April (BS to check with the Hunters and book).

Wild Wookey

From the MCG's Special Correspondent - Kev Speight

Back in a previous life, when I had seemingly infinite hours to while away on idle pursuits, Chris 'Muscly Elbows' Binding and I used to spend together perhaps more time than was strictly healthy for a pair of red blooded chaps. Nothing dodgy or anything; just lots of deep exploration of wet and dirty holes...

Anyway, fast forward one child and a couple of years and it suddenly dawned on me that I really missed the carefree days of squalor, filth and death on a stick dangerous shenanigans (not that there would be too much of the latter on this occasion), and decided that it was past time that efforts were made to pick up where we left off and get the band back together.

Those in the know might be aware that Chris has been rather busy in Wookey Hole of late. With full support from the showcave management, he and his crack team have been beavering away to create the 'Wild Wookey' experience. Having seen some of his social media updates, I was highly intrigued to see what he'd been up to, so when he suggested that we have a little saunter around, taking in both the new Wild Wookey route and also some more 'off piste' areas, naturally I jumped at the chance.

photo: Mark Burkey.
copyright Wookey Hole Caves Ltd. 2017
reproduced with permission



photo: Andrew Horeckyj.
copyright Wookey Hole Caves Ltd. 2017
reproduced with permission

Despite having enjoyed plenty of trips in Wookey's numerous feeders, I've never been anywhere near the famous resurgence. Like most cavers, I'm aware of its significance as the home of cave diving and have always thought of it as being pretty much the exclusive preserve of those of a more amphibious persuasion if you wanted to see much more than just the showcave. I was also largely ignorant of Wookey Hole's importance as an archaeological site. This trip would open my eyes.

On arrival, I was shown to the 'Bat Cave'; the very civilised kit store and briefing facility which paying punters will visit before they head off for their adventure. Flatteringly, Chris considered me technically competent enough to forego the officialdom, merely swapping out my Cow's Tails for more appropriate, equidistant safety connectors.

We entered the cave via the same Cliff face entrance that customers will use, using the newly installed Via Ferrata style staples to clamber up. After a short crawl along East Passage into Sand Chamber, we reached the first of two abseils which plopped us neatly into The Witch's Kitchen next to the River Axe. Here, Chris pointed out numerous 'ritual protection marks' and explained a bit about the Romano-British burials in the cave. (Potentially sacrificial – hardcore!)

Next up was a saunter through the Kilmersdon Tunnel into chambers 7,8 and 9, before climbing up into 9(2). The Via Ferrata route takes you on quite a circuitous route, including a challenging but fun traverse along the waterline before the climb to 9(2), where we once again doffed harnesses and headed off route once more. 9(2) proved to be both pleasingly sporting due to the numerous climbs and also visually impressive, being generously adorned with formations including some brilliant calcite flows.

This area will rightly remain off the beaten track! As an unusual treat, we disturbed a number of spiders to briefly emerge on the sunny hillside via the 1974 surveyors entrance.

Descending once again into the darkness, we retraced our steps back to the end of the Wild Wookey route, which culminates in a final, very impressive, abseil into chamber 9. I think it's fair to say that the prospective clients will feel they've had quite an adventure after doing Wild Wookey. Hopefully, it will inspire at least some people to become cavers in their own right.

Paying clients will end their day here, but we had a final treat in store in the shape of Wookey 20 via the 2015 tunnel. Again, we departed from the showcave route and proceeded through some fabulous cave architecture to the very end, which could potentially connect one day to Wookey 24. Wookey 20 really is quite something and smacks of being very ancient fossil cave. Whilst there are plenty of very nice calcite formations, what really struck me was the scalloping, passage shapes and scale, which those of a more scholarly persuasion than I can decipher to tell the story of the cave's development.

Our exit via the showcave was undramatic and following a quick change out of surprisingly muddy kit, we hared off to the excellent Shahnaz curry house in Cheddar where I did yet more sweating after accepting Chris' main course recommendation. Much like the muscles on his elbows, I think his tastebuds are better developed than mine!