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REPORT OF THE SOUTHERN NATIONAL MEETING OF THE CAVE RESEARCH GROUP OF GREAT BRITAIN

by

John D. Wilcock, B.A., B.Sc., Grad.I.E.E.

The Southern National Meeting of the Cave Research Group of Great Britain took place during the second weekend in May, at and near Hereford. The formal part of the meeting was held in the Main Greenland Hall of the YMCA,, St. Owen's Street, beginning at 5.30 p.m.

The Chairman, Mr. David Cons, opened the meeting and welcomed members and visitors. Advance notice was given of an Extra-mural course in the Origin and Development of Caves in British Limestone, to be held at Bristol.

The first talk of the evening described the Belinka Pit Expedition, 1964, and was given by the Leader, Mr. Clive Jones, and the Deputy Leader, Mr. Bernard Woods. The walk was illustrated by admirable slides and novel tape recordings, which powerfully recreated the atmosphere of the local Yugoslav environment, the technicalities of the equipment, and the awesome depth of the enormous shaft.

Mr. C.L. Railton first led members of the South Wales Caving Club to Croasia and its Karst areas. There the Yugoslav speleos told them of a very deep pothole which had reportedly been descended 600 ft. by ladder, and then a further 300 ft. of rope had been lowered with a hurricane lamp on its end, without touching the bottom. The Belinka Pit, as the hole was named, was an object of veneration as Yugoslav National heroes were executed and thrown down the shaft during the last war. The South Wales members, on seeing this, dashed back to Penwyllt and embarked on a massive equipment-construction project, involving much heavy engineering. Members visiting Penwyllt during this period will have seen the vast scale of this project - as some indication of the resourcefulness of the South Wales members, an eighteen inch diameter aluminium wheel was made from scrap parts from a crashed Vampire jet, using an improvised forge.

The preparations completed, the party left for Yugoslavia, arriving at the base camp in 44 hours non-stop driving from Calais. Pack-horses were used to convey the equipment to the pit, Where the mammoth job of erection began.

The aerial runways across the top of the shaft were sited so as not to interfere with the many wreaths commemorating the dead heroes. Scaffolding supported the centre of the runways, on which was mounted the headgear for the hydraulic winch cables supporting the cage. A small generator was used to supply electricity to a ledge at 200 ft for the drilling of Rawlbolt mountings; the voltage indicator lamp was the constant wonder of the natives! A handline was rawlbolted to the wall and used for belays. Synthetic ropes of many different colours were used for convenience. A public address system on the surface was operated from the 200 ft. ledge, where booms for the cage guides were constructed.

After passing through a constriction, the cage finally landed at 650 ft. below ground level, and the pothole continues downwards with a 70 degree slope from there. The bodies of the dead heroes were not found.

Discussion of the organisation of the expedition raised some interesting points. The speed of descent of the cage was about one foot per second. Over-heating problems were encountered in the high ambient temperatures - air cooling has been proposed for the new hydraulic motor, together with a built-in speed control. The main suspension cable was anti-spin wound and the core was the telephone line. Stand-by communication was provided by an induction system. The administration of the expedition involved the writing of over 2000 letters. The next expedition will be organised by three groups - the heavy engineers (winch, etc.), the light engineers (telephones, generators, etc.) and the white-collar workers (transport, insurance, fundraising, etc.).

The second talk was given by Mr. Nicholas Schofield and described the new cave at Minera, Ogof Dydd Byraf (Shortest Day Cave), found on December 21st, 1964, by members of the Wrexham Caving Club. The talk was illustrated with slides.

Exploration of a mine shaft led to a rift, from which the cave system opens. The cave appears to have both vadose and phreatic features. Silt on the floor has become encrusted with stalagmite deposit, and forms broken ‘pie-crust’ edges at the sides of the passage.

The lower series consists of a maze of tubes, and has fine helictites. About eight beds of limestone are traversed by the cave.

A base camp and kitchen have now been established for use during the scientific survey of the cave. A chamber has been named Churchill chamber because it was found during the illness of Sir Winston Churchill.

Mr. A. Ashwell proposed a vote of thanks to the speakers, and the formal part of the meeting closed at 7.55 p.m. The assembled members then adjourned to the Cavid Garrick Steak Bar, Where the meeting continued informally. Some members took the opportunity to watch the transportation of a seventeenth-century four-storey building to another part of the town to save it from being demolished to make way for the building of a new

chain store.

On the Sunday Mr. D. Leitch led a surface party field trip to the Clydach Gorge area, where the complete local Namurian and Avonian succession in the north rim of the South Wales Coalfield Syncline can be seen. Members had opportunity to inspect the lithology and stratigraphy of this series, as well as to inspect the resurgences of the Agen Allwedd system.

The Hereford Caving Club must be congratulated on the very efficient organisation of the meeting.

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