

# MEMOIRS

## 1968



Wilcock, J.D. 1968  
"Report of the 1968 Southern General Meeting of the  
Cave Research Group of Great Britain"  
Memoirs, NCMRS, pp.93-96

Published by the

THE NORTHERN CAVERN & MINE RESEARCH SOCIETY  
SKIPTON U.K.

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**REPORT OF THE 1968 SOUTHERN GENERAL MEETING OF THE  
CAVE RESEARCH GROUP OF GREAT BRITAIN**

by

J.D. WILCOCK

The formal meeting and dinner were held on Saturday 29th June in Crickhowell, and the meeting continued on the Sunday in the caves of Llangattock.

Opening the meeting in the Church Hall, Crickhowell, the Chairman, Dr. R.G. Picknett, introduced the first speaker Dr. George Black, geologist to the Nature Conservancy, and his subject 'Caves and the Nature Conservancy'.

As a Scotsman talking to a predominantly Anglo/Welsh audience, Dr. Black opened by claiming that the first known exponent of cave science was a Scot, Robert the Bruce. Much of his talk was interspersed with jokes of a similar nature, but the message was entirely serious and most opportune.

Caves must be made available to those requiring recreation, but cannot be increased in number as can football pitches, simply by officials writing minutes. Conservation is therefore required: Dr. Black defined conservation as 'the wisest use of what we've got'. Caves are a natural resource, and conservation of them is not purely preservation. Caves are regarded in a number of different ways by different groups of people: to the sporting caver they are a place of recreation; to the physical educationists a natural hazard over which man must triumph; to the show cave owners a natural museum and an economic resource; to the curio hunters a source of curios; to the scientists a natural laboratory to be protected from contamination; to the quarry managers a nuisance prejudicing the efficient extraction of rook; and finally to the public a cause of spectacular accidents (the generally distorted reports of the press are often their source of information). It is usual for caves to be used in many of these ways simultaneously, but scientific use often requires sole dedication, and quarrying causes destruction of the resource. Farmers are inclined to fill in potholes with boulders, or by dumping of refuse or tipping of earth. A practical example of the conservation of a cave resource is the part of the cave sediments left undisturbed by reputable archaeologists during their excavations for future archaeological studies employing much improved techniques.

Dr. Black continued with a description of the work of the Nature Conservancy. Founded in 1949 by Royal Charter to give advice on

flora. and fauna and to preserve natural features, it is now administered by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERG). The reserves are largely biological, e.g. the Craig y Cilau reserve was originally . founded to preserve White Beam trees. Disconcertingly to the Nature Conservancy, this particular reserve was found to contain within its boundaries the entrance to a major cave system, Agen Allwedd, and from this the field of cave conservation was entered. One way to preserve a cave from destruction is to schedule it as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Nature Conservancy are then bound to comment on planning permission for development of the site within the meaning of the Act.

Dr. Black concluded his remarks with some suggestions on what cavers can do towards conservation, e.g. obey the Caving Code, maintain cordial relationships with landowners, etc. Finally he presented a series of slides illustrating various conservation points.

A lively discussion followed. The size of cave parties in relation to cave damage received some attention.

At Fairy Holes SSSI in a Development Area, the limestone was claimed by the cement company to be the only one of the right chemical properties for cement making. Evidence could not be obtained to the contrary by the Nature Conservancy since the local specialist geologists were retained as consultants to the cement company.

It was queried whether the Law allowed access to a cave which was owned but not accessible because the entrance was in someone else's property.

The recent development of Giants Hole as a Show Cave was discussed. The Planning Authority did not regard development as a Show Cave as being a change of use. Show Caves have the merit that the cave is at least preserved, and providing cavers are afforded access the arrangement may not be detrimental.

The second speaker was Dr. Harold Lord, and his subject 'Making Cave Movies'. He commenced by describing the types of equipment needed for filming underground.

If the film is to be distributed for public viewing the camera must be of good quality. Dr. Lord exhibited a Bolex type with viewfinding through the main lens, and three different-focus lenses on a turret. Since the drive is by clockwork any form of sound recording at the same time is not practical.

The next item exhibited was a tripod with pan-and-tilt head on a

hydraulic bearing, fitted with a device for attaching the camera which can easily be used in a cave.

For lights Dr. Lord exhibited a 230 volt 1000 watt quartz-halogen lamp, which is best if a power supply is available, For close-ups he uses a soft spotlight.

For short caves the electricity supply can be by generator, but cable runs are limited to about half a mile. For greater distances from the entrance to a cave system, batteries must be used. Five scooter batteries give 30 volts at 250 watt, sufficient for five minutes shooting, but this is not recommended for colour work, because of the change in colour of the lamp filaments as the batteries run down.

Exposure meters are of course essential. Darkness is necessary on the completed film to give a 'cave effect', but light is needed for moving people. A compromise must be struck between these incompatible requirements. A normal type of exposure meter is useless in a cave; a special type of meter calibrated for white objects illuminated by the lights which are to be used must be employed. Exposure must be set only for the highlights, not for the shadows.

Ilford Mk 5 (400 ASA) or FP3 film is recommended by Dr. Lord for cave use. A black-and-white film was projected to illustrate various photographic points to note.

If synchronous sound recording is to be employed, the equipment becomes very expensive, e.g. £2000 is the usual price for a camera. A recorder is also necessary, e.g. the Uher Bosch recorder, which records Simultaneously on two tracks, the second track being a pulse train generated by the camera. A clapper board or a crack with the hands is used for the initial synchronisation.

The equipment for cave filming can be very expensive, and Dr. Lord has found that the best technique for ensuring that the equipment is carefully treated in a cave is for the porters to have some financial interest in the film. Some sample costs were given. The average loan charge for a complete film is £2.10.0. Raw film costs about £2.3.0. for 2¾ minutes of run. A complete, edited film will be about 900 ft long, cut down from between 2000 and 3000 feet of exposed film. Costs are between £150 and £300 for a black-and-white film, and between £400 and £600 for colour. Consequently the fees paid by such customers as the BBC are between £1000 and £1500 for one showing. Master films should never be projected, only copies.

Dr. Lord illustrated his remarks with an example of a colour film with sync sound on the subject of Magnetic Surveying, the sound of

which unfortunately could not be heard as the correct type of projector was unavailable.

Again the discussion produced many interesting points. Manufacturers' speed recommendations for films should not be trusted for cave use. The film can be tested by filming on the surface in the dark. If one can develop the film oneself experiments can be made with exposures.

The dangers of electricity in caves was discussed. The use of a protection relay was recommended.

Condensation on the lens of the camera can be a problem in cave filming. Underground filming should not be carried out in winter, since then the cave temperature is higher than the outside temperature, and the warm, moisture-laden atmosphere of the cave condenses on the cold lens. Avoid breathing on the lens - this can put the camera put of action for half an hour. Hermetically-sealed camera boxes packed with silica gel are partly successful.

Strobe light sources are not an advantage in cave work.

In colour work different colour temperatures of filaments give biased colours. Tungsten projector lamps have a lower colour temperature than quartz-iodine lamps.

At the conclusion of the formal papers Mr. C.L. Railton proposed a vote of thanks to the hosts Chelsea Speleological Society and the speakers. The meeting then adjourned to the Manor Hotel, Crickhowell for dinner.

Sunday caving trips were organised in Agen Allwedd. There were purely sporting trips as well as a trip to some of the most interesting features in the cave, and a photographic trip. We are grateful for the use of the Chelsea Speleological Society's cottage, White Walls.

Kidsgrove, Stoke-on-Trent.  
August 1968.

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