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P.C.G. Newsletter Feb 1998

A few words from the Editor:

Welcome to the latest Edition of the Above named and again apologies for delay. Reasons for delay :1) No articles (or very Few). 2)Health of Editor.
Does anyone else apart from a few who know who they are, write about their trips ? Let me have your articles please !!

Thanks again Ali for providing good copy (Whoops)

A.G.M 1998

This years Annual General Meeting will be held at Bob Cawthorne's House :
3 Valletort Road , Millbridge at 1930 on 26th February 1998. Any Items for the Agenda should be forwarded to the Secretary by Thursday 19th February.

Internet News:

The Internet is ever expanding , The Plymouth Caving Group Web site is now at the pre publishing stage , Due into Cyberspace in the next week in the meantime check out these sites (Please).

www.freeyellow.com/members2/graybags(My Gibraltar Underground site)
www.geocities.com/Yosemite/Gorge/1217/(My Cave Rescue Site)
If you have problems accessing please let me know.

You can Email me at : **Graybags@ Pemail.net**
or contact me at my terrestrial address :6 St George's Terrace Stoke, Plymouth PL2 1HR Tel : ***01752 509594.***

SECRETARY :
Pia Benson
7 Marchant's Way,Meavy , Yelverton PL20 6PW Tel:01822 855263

CUETO - COVENTOSA

The Sistema Cueto - Coventosa, on the west side of the Ason gorge near Arredondo (Cantabria, N. Spain), is one of the great caves of Europe. At the time of the connection of the two caves (1979) it became the deepest through-trip in the World (815m deep).

Cueva Coventosa, whose entrance is a short distance up the hillside from the roadside resurgence cave (Cueva Cuvera) was explored in the 1960's by French cavers, particularly the Speleo Club Dijon. Prospecting of the mountain ridge above led to the discovery of the small entrance of Sima del Cueto, in 1966. A short distance inside, the first pitch was not descended, but was measured at 193m. That summer a winch was used to descend the pitch, the 193m "bottom" proved to be a small ledge - the actual depth was 302m. The continuing series of shafts were explored over the following years, eventually reaching the main horizontal series of Cueto at a depth of 581m. The system has now been explored to a length of over 28km, and extends to close to Cueva Canuela near Bustablado.

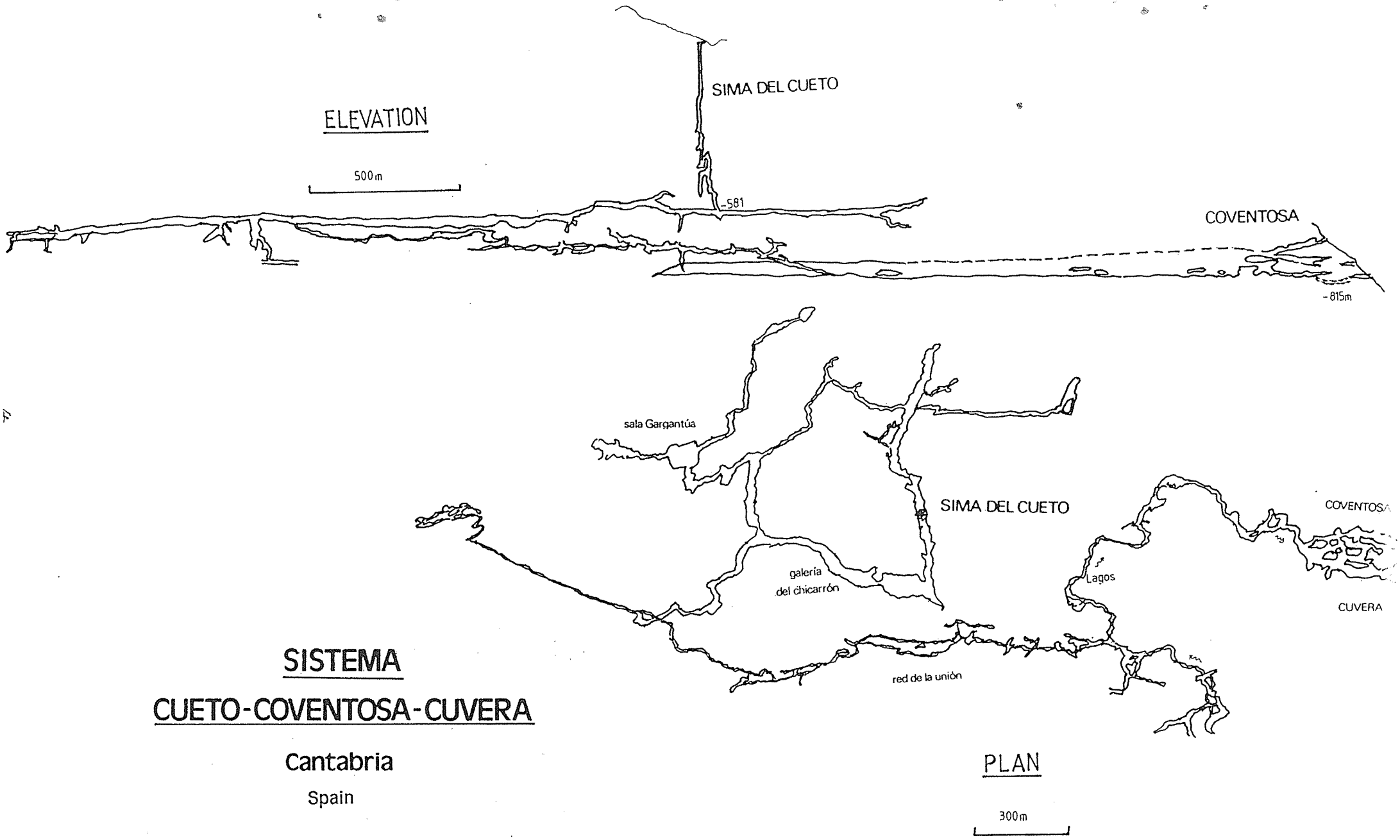
In the summer of 1996 a permit for the cave was obtained for a week by the Derbyshire Caving Club. Three teams were able to carry out the through trip, the last consisting of Phil Pappard, Steve Oppenshaw, and myself. We left a car near the resurgence, below Ason village, then were given a lift up to the settlement of Socueva. From here a mule path winds up through the cliffs on the western side of the gorge. After several attempts to find the correct route, and a slightly bizarre encounter with an elderly Asian gentleman from Epsom, we had a rest from the sun in the shade of a barn. From here a route through high pastures eventually leads to a vague track leading up through lapias on the ridge - highest point hereabouts is 1347m. The walk up takes about two hours - dependant on the heat and amount of gear to carry - we kept the latter to a minimum.

The insignificant looking entrance passage slopes down to the head of the Pozo de Juhue, the 302m pitch. This was rigged with a 9mm rope down to the ledge at -193m, then an 8mm rope to the bottom. We were to use the 8mm to pull-through on, leaving the 9mm to be pulled up the following day. The alternative is to use a rope of about 50m to pull-through from the top, using fixed chains at intervals down the shaft.

I volunteered to go first, to overcome last minute nerves, and clipped on to the in-situ traverse lines. Expecting that it would be quite hard to pull up enough of 200m of rope to clip on my Stop, it was a surprise to find this next to impossible. Cautiously peering over the edge, a tiny light could be seen far below. This turned out to be one of a group from Santander, pirating the system, using our ropes. They were doing the trip over two days, their amigos coming in the following day with a boat for the lakes.

The rope was soon free and Steve descended, followed by myself. At - 303m Steve came across a large and full DCC rope bag, which was to prove a great hindrance, as we really had to take it through as far as the lakes, rather than abandon it. Steve used this rope to descend the next pitch, Pozo del Algodon (55m), while waiting for Phil to descend from the ledge using the 8mm rope. This latter proved nearly disastrous, as this long rope proved very prone to tangling and catching. He nearly ended up totally stuck on one of the intermediate belay chains, with the rope snagged below. After over an hour he was able to reach the bottom with the rope safely retrieved.

After the second pitch, we found most pitches left permenantly rigged with ropes of variable condition and indeterminant age. Only one pitch, starting off after a pendulum of onto a bridge over a blind shaft, requiring a pull - through. At the bottom the way on is a few metres up the wall, over a large pile of old telephone cable. The last pitch, after a squeeze down through a chaos of house sized blocks held open by a grotty bit of rope, drops into a large well decorated passage, Galeria de Juhue, at -581m. This is unfortunatel marred by piles of spent carbide and



SISTEMA
CUETO-COVENTOSA-CUVERA

Cantabria

Spain

other rubbish. At this point I caught up with the Spanniards, who carried on into the distance while I waited for Steve and Phil.

The large passage is followed to Sala de las 11 Horas, where it turns west and enlarges for the next kilometre - Galeria del Chicarron. This is often up to 60 -80 m wide and high, even with a good T3 it was difficult to make out the walls and roof, total confusion only being avoided by strategically placed reflective markers. The going consists of endless scrambling up and down immense mountains of rubble. Towards the end is El Oasis - a quick stop for a drink at some drippy avens. Eventually we reached Pozo de las Navidades, a pitch down where we again met the Spanniards, who were having doubts over the condition of the in situ rigging.

From here the fun really starts - the next 3km consists of crawls, rifts, and numerous short pitches up and down, with many sections being exposed, awkward, loose, and confusing, often all combined. The sense of commitment certainly helps push one along through all of this. Towards the end the draft becomes concentrated into one passable route, eventually roaring down La Turbina, a short constricted pitch. This was tight enough for Phil that he had to remove his SRT kit half way down.

This really marked the end of the difficulties, but there are still several km to the end, and tiredness was beginning to tell. A short section of walking leads to bigger passage, and a descent through boulders to the Coventosa river passage. Following this downstream leads to the lakes, where great care is required - bouyancy of some sort, ideally a boat, is essential. My option of being towed through in dry gear, with a dry bag and a Daren drum for buoyancy, was only just sufficient, and the water is cold. After the lakes the entance series is eventually reached. In this area the river is left near some large gours. A series of short pitches and traverses on steel hausers are followed, in which area we could not locate the way on for about an hour, due to not being able to see a rope up, it being the same colour as the rock! Eventually the roar of the draft in the (quite large) entrance passage could be heard, and soon we were out, with rapidly failing lights all round, just in time to witness a beautiful sunrise over the mountains. We took 15 hours to do this trip; one of the other groups managed it in 8 hours (without having to derig in the entrance pitch), while another party a few weeks later took 25 hours, having major problems pulling through on the entrance shaft - caught ropes, a descender disintegrating, and other epics.

Alasdair Neill.

A *caver* is someone who explores caves. Organized cavers in the US, by which I mean those formally or loosely affiliated with the *National Speleological Society,* do not use the word `spelunker', which seems to cause them (us!) an enormous amount of discomfiture. The word `caver' is preferred and used virtually exclusively by `those in the know'. A recent bumper sticker even proclaims `Cavers rescue Spelunkers'.

Demographically, caving as an activity draws from nearly all walks of life, from professional and academic professions to any and all sorts of employment, or indeed unemployment. Hollywood movie starlets and `super-models', however, are conspicuous by their absence. The sport is dominated by white males, and the male/female ratio may approach 10 to 1 or better in some clubs.

Many cavers find the caving a life-long draw, describing their first cave trip as a conversion experience. Consequently, many local clubs are composed of small groups of cavers that have been caving together for many years, some pushing 30 years or more! Most people seriously interested in caves (cavers) maintain some sort of affiliation with the National Speleological Society (NSS) or one of the local chapters, called a `grotto'.

PLYMOUTH CAVING GROUP LIBRARY LIST
OCTOBER 1997

(a). PERIODICALS.

ASSOCIATION POUR LA RECHERCHE SPELEOLOGIQUE INTERNATIONALE A LA PIERRE- ST- MARTIN.
ARSIP. 16.

BIDEFORD COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAVING GROUP.
Report on building progress at the Pengelly Centre, 1980.

BORDER CAVING CLUB.
Publication 1: Introduction to the Research Laboratory and Museum.
NEWSLETTER. 1.15(1969), 2.4,6,7(1970)also three undated c.1971-2.
3.1-4,7(1972-3). 4.1,3(1973-4). 5.1,2(1975). 6.2,4, 5(1977-8). 7.4,5(1978-9). 8.2-4(1979-80). 9.1(1980). 11.3,4 (1982-3).

BRADFORD POTHOLE CLUB.
BULLETIN. 3.3,5,7-10(1960-1961). 4.1-3.5-9(1963-1966). 5.2,5,6 (1967-1969). 1

BRISTOL EXPLORATION CLUB.
BELFRY BULLETIN. 1959:133,134,136,137,139. 1960:143.145-7 149 150-3. 1961:155-6,158-162,164-6. 1962:167-175. 1963:179,183-8,190. 1964:191-2 1965:202-212.1966:218. 1967:232,233. 968:238-9,241. 1970:271. 1971:288,290 1972:291 293-302. 1973:303-314. 1974:315-7.320.321-6. 1975:327-9,331,333-337. 1976:338,339. 1978:342,357-8,360-1,364,366,367. 1979:369,371, 375,376,7,378-380. 1980:381,383,388/9,390,391;2. 1981 :393/4, 395/6.397,398/9, 402/3.1982:404/5. 1983:419,421 1984:423,424 1985:428-431. 1986:434-438.440-1. 1987:438.441,443. 1988:444-446,448.1989:449-452. 1990:453-457. 1991:458-459., 461-2. 1992:463-464

CAVING REPORTS.
No.10. The BEC method of ladder construction 1962.
13. St. Cuthbert's Report.
Part E Rabbit Warren. 1970
F Gour Hall Area. 1969.
G Cerberus and Maypole series. 1982.
H Rabbit Warren Extension. 1970.
I September Series. 1982.
14. Balague '70. by RH Bennett, 1973.
21. Cave Notes 1975-1977
22. Belfry Bulletin Index 1947-1987.

BAKER'S PIT CAVE CONSERVATION.

Since the discovery of Bakers in the 1840s, the cave has suffered hugely from the hands of quarrymen, souvenir hunters, casual visitors, and general abuse from the hoards. The First Chamber, Maze and Boulder Hall area in particular shows widespread damage to formations and graffiti, although the latter is now of some historical interest. Everywhere shows a widespread covering of mud over everything within reach, over what was once an extremely beautiful cave.

However, anyone looking around in even the most accessible areas near the entrance can find many fascinating formations; and after the cave was closed for a lengthy period in the late 1970's, large areas of flowstone floor are said to have returned to white with newly deposited calcite. Various individuals have cleaned areas in the cave, but without taping these have rapidly been crossed and the mud distributed over them again. In the last few years, some taping done by the Rock Centre showed how areas remaining untouched can naturally regenerate themselves - although this will probably never happen in many places.

The Plymouth Caving Group "adopted" Bakers about 10 years ago, and at the time did some conservation work, including repair of broken stal, in the Plymouth Extension. However it has only been in the last year that any real efforts have been made by a few individuals.

The most effective method of cave conservation is taping, coupled with education both by leaders of groups and cavers in general, and by notices where necessary. Taping should restrict visitors to routes which will do the least damage to the cave, keeping them clear of any formations, mud banks, geological features and anything else of interest (in Ogof Draenen even bat shit is taped off.). The taped routes should be planned so as not to restrict anyone from routes they may wish to take - whether for formations or because it is nice and sporting - or runs the risk of being ignored.

The principals of tape laying were covered in an article by John Stevens published by the Chelsea Speleological Society, reproduced with permission in PCG Newsletter No. 126

Taping in Bakers has so far been carried out in the Maze and First Chamber areas, Old Entrance, Crystal Corridor, and Plymouth Extension. A minimal amount of cleaning has also been done, while many areas have started to clean up naturally. This has been done by PCG, Plymouth University C.C., Princes Trust Volunteers, Pengelly members, and some cleaning has been done by foreign students from the Battisborough Field Studies Centre.

There is a huge amount left to do - anyone going down Bakers should try to do their bit!. There are problems such as the difficulty of securing tape on flowstone floors, and a certain amount of criticism - mainly from members of non-caving groups about the proliferation of tape, such visitors should have it stressed to them the importance of cave conservation.

In the long term tapes must be checked and replaced where necessary. A start has been made also been made in Reed's Cave, where conservation work is now a condition of all access. Unfortunately the extensive taping required in Prid to satisfy English Nature, which DCUC undertook to do some years ago, has totally failed to appear.

Alasdair Neill.

To those P.C.G. Members who are Ex Pengelly members ,We heard in August of last year that George Black had passed away. May he rest in peace.

Graham Hart.

George Black

It was with great sadness that we heard of the death of George Black on 23 August. George served as President of the Pengelly Trust, and as Chairman of the Association which preceded it, starting in 1964, and only retiring this year because of ill-health. He was, by a big margin, the longest-serving officer of the Trust, and his impact on its work has been incalculable. It started well before the purchase of the Centre in 1962, when, as chief geologist with the Nature Conservancy, he played the major part in securing the site by scheduling it as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. His subsequent involvement and unfailing support will be greatly missed by everyone concerned with the organisation.

George's professional commitment was to geological conservation, to which he came as a geologist who had worked on volcanoes in Scotland (his book on Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh can still be located in libraries and bookshops) and had taught at Edinburgh University. His early commitment to Pengelly and his post with the Nature Conservancy resulted in many of our early meetings being held in its offices in London, and these were very exciting times, even though the Trust had very limited financial resources, and was often living well beyond its means. The protection offered to the caves at the Centre by the SSSI status was complemented by the support and interest from the then Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (its owner) and the Devon Trust for Nature Conservation (the local lessee). Linked to the active work of members of the Trust in conservation, education and scientific work, the Pengelly Centre provided, under George's leadership, a model of what could be done when enthusiastic volunteers were backed up by these larger and more powerful agencies. Of course, the work was by no means confined to Devon, with an extensive education programme in London, and many productive contacts with other speleological organisations in Britain and elsewhere.

It was at that time that some cavers in all parts of Britain began to take a much greater interest in cave conservation, and George provided Nature Conservancy support for this work, liaising with the newly formed National Caving Association. At that time I was conservation officer for the Association, as well as secretary of the Pengelly Trust, and I was very grateful for the degree of interest which he showed, linking our amateur efforts to the professional world of conservation at a time when there was far less public awareness of environmental matters, and we were learning about the issues as we went along. He was always easy to talk to, and his advice was always worth following.

The expansion of George's responsibilities within the Nature Conservancy made him head of the Geology and Physiography section, and was coupled to a re-location to Berkshire. By the early 1980s there was a major review of karst conservation sites in Britain, under Conservancy auspices, building on earlier work and putting into effect

some of the principles which he had spelled out in the first volume of the Trust's Journal, *Studies in Speleology*, in 1965. But the failure of government to recognise the importance of geological conservation in the reorganisation of the Nature Conservancy in 1986 led to his resignation, with considerable publicity, and his move to consultancy work in the fields of conservation and planning. Meetings of Trust committees followed him, and there have been 10 years during which we have met at his house in Newbury, and enjoyed his hospitality and that of his wife, Lesley.

The Pengelly Trust always benefited from his extensive knowledge of the law and practice of conservation, and his willingness to support the Trust's work. They have been times of great innovation, with many volunteers offering time, professional expertise and support, with George presiding over these efforts with enormous good humour and tact, even when the going was difficult. These attributes were the hallmark of his Presidency, even in recent years when severe eyesight problems made it much more difficult for him to fulfil an active role. I don't remember that he ever missed a Council meeting or an AGM and he was an unfailing supporter of *Studies in Speleology*, despite frequent difficulties in its production. In fact, over many years he was responsible for its printing and distribution, and Lesley linked this to her work as the Trust's membership secretary. They often had a house full of Journals, awaiting despatch, or in store, and George took pleasure in the contacts (especially the international ones) which the Journal generated.

It is hard to believe that he has gone, and the Pengelly Trust will not be the same again. We are deeply in his debt for what he did for us, and we shall honour him best by ensuring the continued pursuit of the very worthy and important purposes for which the Trust was established.

John Wilmut

"For the love of Subterranea"

At the end of last year there was a program on Channel Four entitled "For the love of .....Subterranea" it was on late at night so I thought it was bound to be about ghosts and ghoulies and things that went bump in the night. I was pleasantly surprised to find it was a discussion about Tunnels , Tombs and Tube Trains by the Founder of " Subterranea Brittanica " and other so called experts. I set the video to record and watched it the next day. The discussion was chaired by the founder and the rest of the panel consisted of the secretary of the aforementioned group plus four others including a mushroom "expert".For anyone who is interested I have it on video somewhere. The address of SUBTERRANEA BRITTANICA follows :

Malcolm and Barbara Tadd
65 Trindles Road
South Nutfield
Redhill
Surrey
RH1 4JL Tel: 01737 823456

Email address :101544.515@compuserve.com

Web Site : www.stonix.demon.co.uk/sub-brit/

The ED

PCG TACKLE.

Members wishing to borrow tackle may do so by contacting in the first instance Stuart Newall (01752 347086)
or Paul Smith (01752 342249) if not available then contact:
Martin Prince (01822 855263)
Neil Ingram (01752 667342)
or Alasdair Neill (01752 262206).

Tackle must be returned within THREE DAYS of return from the trip or a surcharge made. it must be clean and any damage or misuse must be reported to Paul or Stuart

TACKLE. FEES must be forwarded to Roger King , eg at Committee Meetings Members
5Op per trip
Non members £2.

PCG LIBRARY.

Items mav be borrowed by contacting Dave Jean or Alasdair Neill. Loan period is ONE MONTH- charges will be made for overdue items. The period can be extended arrangement with Ali. Library lists are available from Pia and should be sent to members.

KEYS FOR CAVES.

Keys for Bakers Pit, Afton, DGC, Bakers etc can be borrowed from Neil Ingram (01752 667342) or Martin Prince (01822 855263). These are for use by ~~non~~ members only - non members may however make a donation of at least 5Op per head sent to DCRO. Failure to do this will result in the culprit being refused the key in future. Otherwise Keith Pearson (DCRO Secretary) should be contacted for keys.

The PCG has a number of leaders for Reed's Cave. Buckfastleigh. A limited number of trips are allowed April to October, a condition being that conservation work or other similar projects are carried out. All trips MUST be co-ordinated through Charlie Bird. and what is done should be reported back him.

Please note that your membership money is now due for 1998

Members 1997			
BEESON	CALUM	5 SUNNYBANKS, HATT, SALTASH PL12 6SA	
BENNETT	MIKE & HAZEL	61 SEYMOUR RD, LIPSON, PLYMOUTH	01752 263701
BROWNING	HUGH & PAT	2 SANDY WAY WEST, TAVISTOCK	01822 616551
CAWTHORNE	BOB, JULIE &LLOYD	3 VALLETORT RD, STOKE, PLYMOUTH	01752 563568
GOULD	STEVE	19 ADELAIDE STREET,STONEHOUSE, PLYMOUTH	01752 672802
HART	LYNNE 7 GRAHAM	6 ST GEORGES TERRACE, STOKE, PLYMOUTH	01752 509594
HANLAN	JAMES	FLAT 4A, NEATH RD, ST JUDES, PLYMOUTH PL1 6TF	01752 220476
HAYES	ZYGIE	51 GREENBANK AVE, GREENBANK PLYMOUTH	
JACKSON	KEITH	4 TAMAR TERRACE, SALTASH	01752 845422
KING	ROGER, ANTHONY, DAMIAN & CELIA	OLD ORCHARD, SOUTH MILTON, KINGSBRIDGE. TQ7 3JZ	01548 560604
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NEILL	ALI	25 LIPSON RD, GREENBANK, PLYMOUTH	01752 262206
NEWALL	STUART	1 BARTON CLOSE, UPPER CHADDLEWOOD, PLYMPTON, PLYMOUTH	0589 332714/01752 347086
NEWMAN	PAUL(FERRET)	38 PRINCE MAURICE RD, PLYMOUTH	01752 669661
PALMER	JANE & CLIVE EDMUNDS	25 COLLEGE AVE, TAVISTOCK PL19 0HU	01822 615878
PHILLIPS	KELVIN	24 SERCOMBE GARDENS, STARCROSS, EXETER EX6 8SB	
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SANDERS	PHILIP	67 CITADEL ROAD, THE HOE, PLYMOUTH	WORK 01548 853791
SMITH	PAUL,JULIE, MARTIN & TERI	55 WENSUM CLOSE, REYNOLDS PARK, PLYMPTON. PLYMOUTH PL7 3YG	01752 342249
SMITH	PETER	69 EMBANKEMNT ROAD, PRINCEROCK, PLYMOUTH PL4 9JB	01752 269508
STIRZAKER	DAVID	1 KNAPP COTTAGES, KNAPP LANE, EAST COOMBE, SOMERSET TA4 3HT	