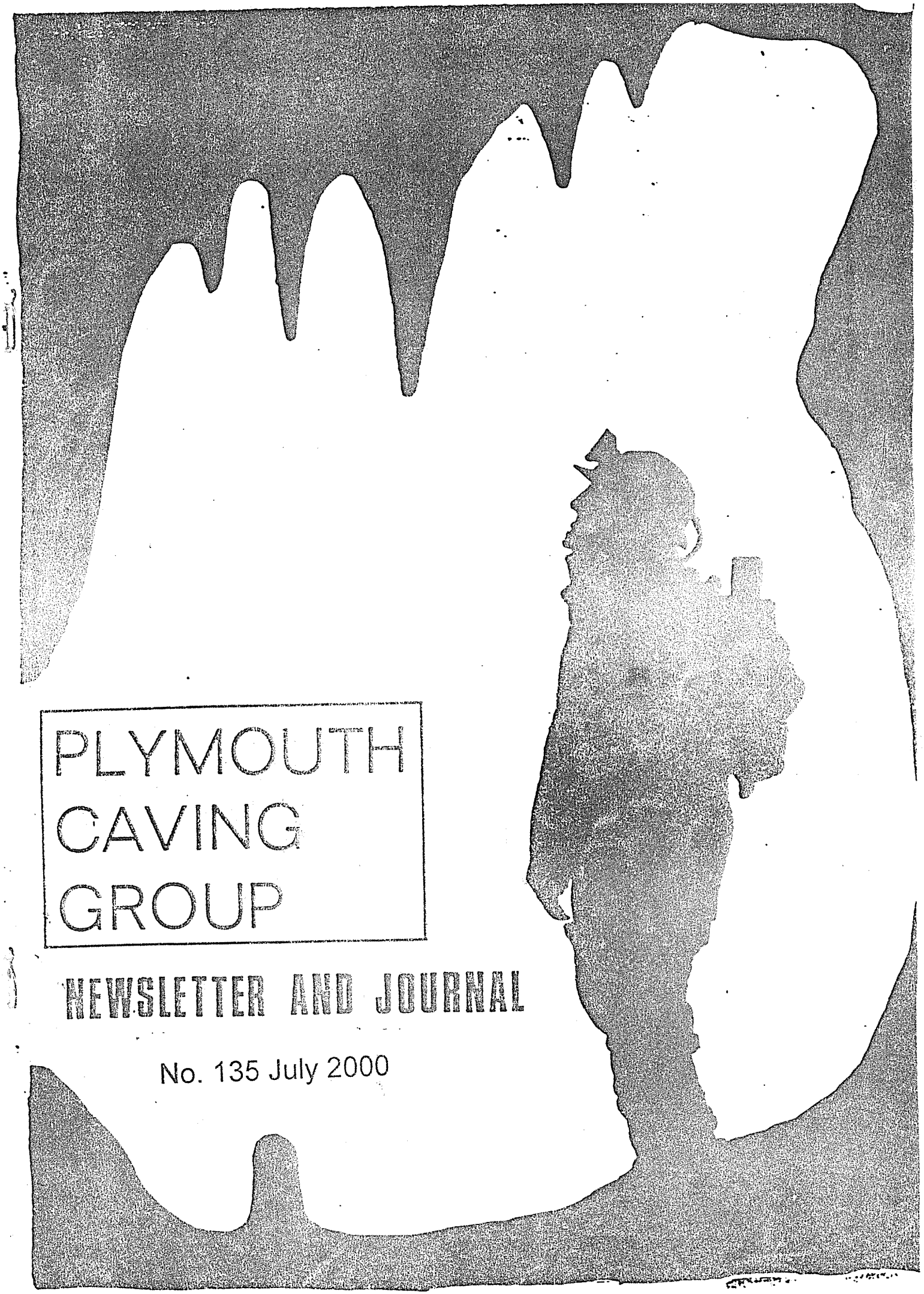


PLYMOUTH CAVING GROUP

NEWSLETTER AND JOURNAL

No. 135 July 2000

Plymouth Caving Group

Newsletter
No. 135

Contents

Editorial....2
Matienzo 1999....2
Caving in West Virginia....8
Matienzo, Easter 2000....9
DCRO Rescue Practice – Penrecca Mine 18/6/00 13
A Weekend with Dartmoor Rescue Group 14
Some Accounts of Some Recent Trips 18
The Great County Adit....18
Levant Man Engine Shaft 23
Club Information....24

Plymouth Caving Group Meets at the Thistle Park Tavern, Cattedown on the first Thursday of each month, when a Committee Meeting, open to all, commences at 8.00pm. On other Thursday evenings members meet at the Seymour Arms.

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Remember – no articles, no newsletter

Editorial

Welcome to another edition of the PCG Journal and we hope you enjoy the read. We need more articles as ever. The last journal was looking particularly thin and seemed to consist of little but the editorial!

Speaking of which, my rant over Bakers provoked no reaction whatsoever, so I concluded either it hit the spot exactly or people were indignant and chose to ignore it which is quite likely! Incidentally, the latest on Bakers is that English Nature posted the Management Plan to the landowner at the beginning of May. It has just been returned to them since they posted it to the wrong address so that is another wasted month gone by. It looks possible we may see the anniversary of the caves closure at this rate before any further developments.

Onto another hot topic. Three of the PCG committee happened to be in the pub recently in conversation with their DSS counterparts. The theme turned to the relative activities of our clubs whereupon we bemoaned the decline in PCG. A suggestion then was made by DSS that we should merge for the mutual benefit of both clubs and so we said that we would put this offer to the next PCG committee meeting. The outcome of this was a decision that there was no reason to act on this at present but it should be kept in mind for the future. Obviously such a proposal is not something to rush over and requires consent from the majority of PCG members. So to open a bit of a debate here are some pros and cons to such a merger.

PCG has been in steady decline for many years in terms of membership and by other measures such as funds and trips. There seems little real motivation to turn this around and it will not be long before we lose critical mass and become unviable. Indeed, if it were not for the informal link with the University club, this may already have occurred. New members want to join a vibrant, active and buzzing club which, at present, we cannot offer. A link with DSS would open up many more opportunities to our members such as regular caving and indoor meets, use of a hut, regular (and full!) newsletters and a large number of other members to cave with. However, we would loose a degree of independence and there are issues such as what happens to kit, funds and the library to resolve. A possible halfway house solution is to become a semiautonomous branch of the DSS but if this is viable then one might ask the question of do we really need to merge? PCG was apparently a branch of the DSS some thirty or so years ago and there is some history here which I am not totally aware of. However, few of our members or DSS members were around then so this shouldn't unduly concern us.

So there you go, comments please .....

Keith Jackson

Matienzo 1999

This year Hugh and Trish Browning and Alasdair Neill represented the Club in Spain, while the Cawthornes paid a fleeting visit on their way to find a new home in the south of the country. The summer expedition saw about fifty people present, including the Catalans and some Swedish cavers who had also visited a few years previously. In all about 4km of new passage was discovered. This included at least two break-throughs in caves that had been looked at for years without much progress. These occurred right at the end of the expedition, leaving great scope for this year. Also, further discoveries

were made in the Four Valleys System on just a handful of trips – mostly at no great distance from the entrance. In fact no major system saw any pushing at the end of the cave.

Anyone wishing further information can visit the Matienzo website. Hopefully there will be members going out this summer.

Caves we visited during the expedition included:

37 Sima de la Cabritilla 27 July, A Neill, Paul Stacey

A fine 25m entrance shaft was rigged off naturals and a shaky tree (I forgot the hangers). From here we went to the end of this short cave, where a blowhole was described by previous visitors. This proved to be a 10cm diameter tube issuing an intermittent – at times strong – draught. This gave little prospect of extension, the draught probably being from a surface connection.

258 Torcon de la Calleja Rebollon (Toad in the Hole) 28 July, A Neill, Paul, Talking Terry, Jim Davis

Baz's (the discovery made at Easter 1998) was checked out, but nothing more was found.

29 July, A Neill, Paul, Jim

The First Return was a passage looked at in the explorations of the 1980's and left when the way on to the current end of the cave was discovered. We went to the final chamber, where the way on was up a slope to a chamber with two ways on. Straight ahead was a traverse to a drop left unexplored, while a bold step on the left led to a phreatic tube which we followed to a series of rifts. A climb up led to a 10m undescended pitch down a mud wall into a large chamber, while I traversed along a narrow, awkward rift covered with sharp calcite. This broke out into a larger cross rift, which one way was left at holes in boulders and the other had a pitch into a chamber with the sound of a waterfall.

Back at the start of the series, a large high level chamber was surveyed, containing an aven estimated at 100m plus high. In all we found 173m of new passage.

457 Hammered Hole 4 August, A Neill, Hugh and Trish Browning

Attempts to enlarge this. Need to return.

5 August, Hugh and Trish

The entrance was enlarged enough for normal sized people to enter, and the pitch (about 20m) descended. This is blind at the bottom.

6 August, Ali, Paul

Ali put in two rebelays near the top of the pitch to gain an area where the rotten calcite covering the walls was thin enough to be able to reach solid limestone beneath. A five-bolt traverse was achieved to a tottery buttress, where a short drop was required to regain sound rock. Ran out of bolts.

7 August, Hugh and Trish

Completed the traverse, to reach a choke, which gives the strong draught.

484 Torca del Zorro

2 August, Paul and Ali

This cave was looked at many years ago by Buddha, but there was no description and it was not even known if it had been descended. Being close to the Vaccinator (described later) the MNRC and Talking Terry had gone down the cave but were stopped at what was described as a very tight pitch head. We went down a few days later, sorting out the rigging and using the old bolts which they had totally failed to notice. Paul found the squeeze was no problem, descending a short pitch to a rift, which got too tight.

733 Cueva Valline

11 August, Hugh, Trish and Ali

Entering the cave to the partial eclipse (obscured by cloud at the last moment), we had a look at a pitch on the side of *Six Hundred Pesetas Passage*, on the suggestion of the Catalans. After initial problems locating the start of the passage, Hugh descended the pitch finding just a too tight slot at the bottom. Nearby Ali and Trish explored a draughting meander passage, as far as a constriction where the passage could be seen to continue beyond. This is near where *FN Passage* (the large passage before Double Dutch Pitches) chokes, but may by-pass this into a blank area.

1128 Torca de la Vacunacion

The first tight drop in the Vaccinator was explored by Ali to the head of a pitch last year. Despite the strong inward draught, no further progress was made due to the abundance of loose boulders in this area. Members of the MNRC subsequently removed many of these by probing with a scaffold pole, and descended the pitch. Beyond a narrow rift which ended at a tight drop (ladder useful for the return). Below this the second pitch was reached, while a passage beyond led to a further undescended pitch.

Any references to rum have nothing whatsoever to do with the Brugal rum promotion at the Bakers' Bar.

1 August, Jane and Tufty from the MNRC, Ali, Pete

Ali and Pete carried on rigging from the point left by the MNRC, while the others surveyed behind them. The second pitch of 6m was followed by *Rum Doodle* (16m). *Brugal Pot* (10m) required some hammering to reach the top of short drops and the *Do-Rum-Rum* (20m) were followed by a narrow rift and short climbs which broke into a roomy passage, *Jumping Mouse*.

To the right this is choked with sand with a small air space, which we started to dig, this draughts strongly. To the left, a stomp down passage with a white calcite floor, just like the *Rio Blanco* stream passage in *Cueva Valline* (which it undoubtedly feeds to) ended at a small tube taking a strong draught. This would require much effort to enlarge. Opposite the entrance to Jumping Mouse, the calcite flow issued from a pool under flowstone. Bailing this revealed a passage with a strong draught soon building up waves through the tiny airspace.

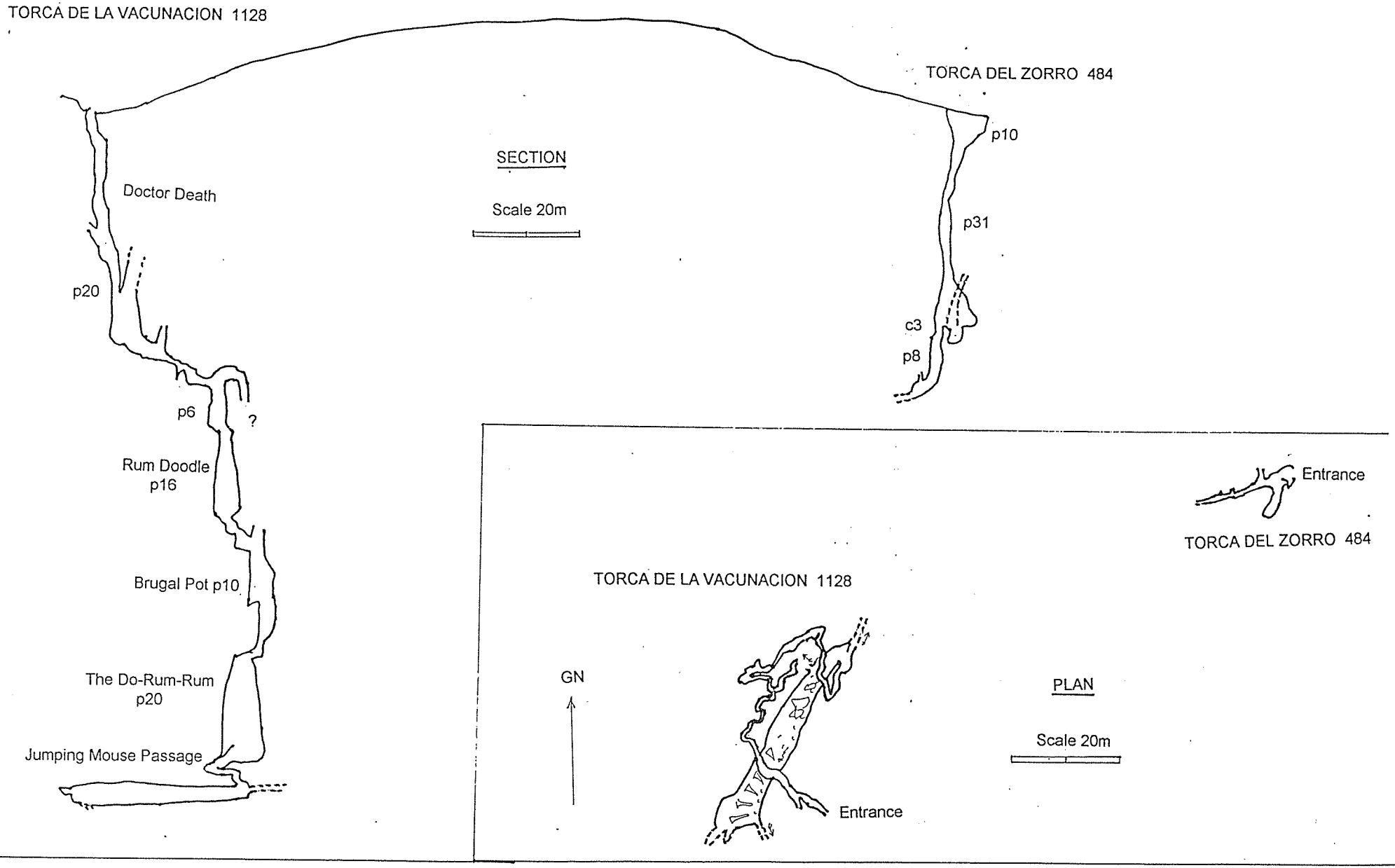
7 August, Ali, Dave and Helen (Liverpool Uni CC), Paul

The right hand end of Jumping Mouse was dug about 5m, draught continues as strong as ever, but no enlargement visible. At the other end, the draughting tube proved to be a long-term dig, while digs up slope to the right didn't go.

TORCA DE LA VACUNACION 1128 Length 251m Depth 130m

TORCA DEL ZORRO 484 Length 77m Depth 56m

Survey Matienzo Expeditions 1998-9, BCRA Grade 5c



The airspace in the flowstone passage was lowered sufficiently by trenching and bailing for Dave to push on for about 10m. Here a false floor prevented further progress, requiring a lump hammer to remove it.

It would seem well worth trying to push this cave further. It is in close proximity to areas in Valline which are about 140m lower and contain several stream passages not pushed to conclusion and some immense avens. The fact that there are three strong draughts at the bottom in a small area suggests this level of horizontal development could be quite extensive; there is known large passage at a similar height not so far away at Horse Trough Pot (explored by PCG some years ago). If so, this might prove to be the much sought after link between the South Vega and Valline systems – a link would give a system of, at the least, 55km length.

1332 Juan Lombrero

The open entrance to this cave was discovered last year. The strongly draughting entrance dropped into roomy chambers, where a very tight draughting slot was enlarged sufficiently for Pete Eagen to squeeze through to the top of a pitch. After we left he descended this to a short passage and a further pitch. At Easter an alternate way to the top of the pitch was engineered, a short pitch up the wall of the final chamber leading to an awkward slot at the head of the pitch.

This summer the cave was further extended, the second pitch being descended into a length of large passage ending at a choke with a third pitch descending at the end.

3 August, Pete, John Dobson, Ali, Dave Rowe, Paul

Ali, Dave and Paul dropped the third pitch, which descends into a large chamber, *Down Under*. A huge block *(Australia)* lies over a fourth pitch, which we left for the next trip having no tackle. Exposed traverses and climbs led up to the right ending at a huge choke, pushed some way left and right under a hading roof.

Meanwhile Pete and John pushed over the top of the second pitch, to extensions which were pushed on a further trip.

5 August, Ali, Tim Allen

The Australia Pitch was descended into a further large chamber. Various routes down through boulders proved suicidal to go further, although these are very close to a choke in the *Breakdown Chamber* area of *Renada*. It is unlikely that the two caves can be connected by this route.

1338

A shaft found last year by Ali. A fence surrounds two openings, one containing a tree.

4 August, Ali, Hugh and Trish

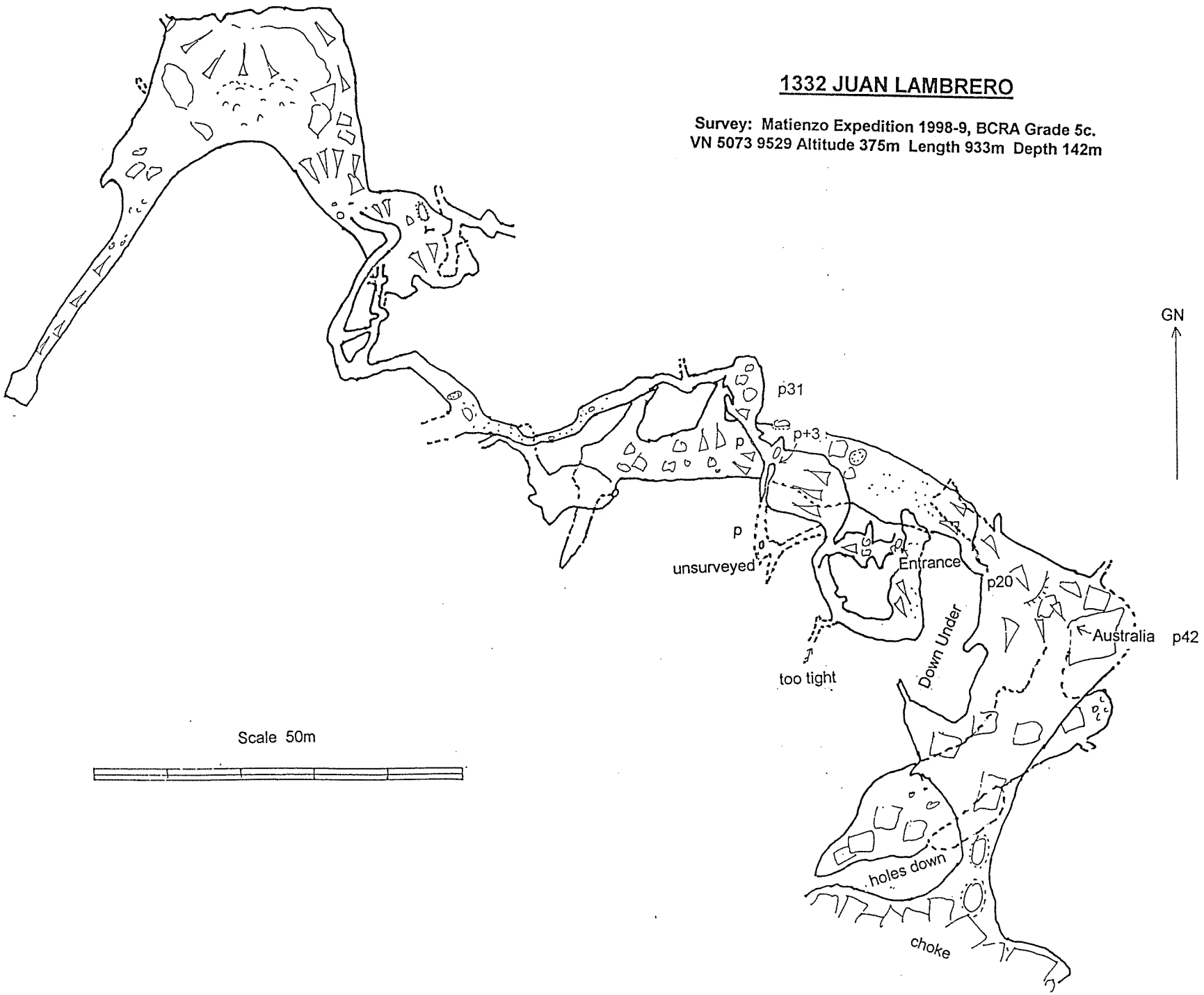
This was descended down a slope to the top of a short pitch.

5 August, Hugh and Trish

The pitch was descended to a slope and an eyehole into a further chamber. This contained a pitch 15 or 20m deep, undescended due to lack of tackle.

1332 JUAN LAMBRERO

Survey: Matienzo Expedition 1998-9, BCRA Grade 5c.
VN 5073 9529 Altitude 375m Length 933m Depth 142m



1440, 1441

Unexplored shafts found by Ali, Hugh and Trish on 4 August.

Muela

8 August, Hugh, Trish, Ali, Paul

A walk up to the highest point in Matienzo, (Mullir, 839m) checking out known sites (many unexplored), and finding eight new caves.

TV Mast Area

1 August, Hugh and Trish

looked at *1240*, and found new caves *1235-1237*.

Alasdair Neill, Hugh and Trish Browning

Caving in West Virginia

While visiting a friend in Virginia in April this year I was fortunate to be invited along on a weekend caving in West Virginia at an annual caving meet. It was an interesting experience and highlighted a few differences in the way we do things. I'm happy to say that generally American cavers are in most respects similar to us (ie. Hairy, beer swilling and drive around in heaps). Consequently, they stick out from the general populous more than we do here.

My first trip was down a cave near Franklin called "Sites" (that's it, one word). It consists of a nice entrance pitch of some 50m and then extends in two directions for about 200m maybe each way. It's fairly uninspiring although there are a few nice formations but it was packed with bats, I probably saw several hundred all hanging from the roof. The first interesting difference between American cavers and us are their reaction to the presence of bats. We would probably creep around quietly at the other side of a chamber at the sight of a single bat. However, when they saw my excitement at great clumps of them on the roof I was made to stand with my head in them and have my photo taken!! Bats don't seem to be protected or particularly threatened over there and I was surprised to find they were completely unperturbed and remained in place even after we returned to the same place some time later. Another difference between them and us was their attitude to rope rub. Frankly this scared the living daylights out of me as we abseiled and ascended a rope that went over an edge in a manner which we would deem totally unacceptable. The rigger expected my reaction and so probably had experience of European cavers before but she insisted that American ropes were much more durable than ours. It looked just like a standard 10mm rope to me and felt like one!! Rope walking has often been the preferred over there as rig for ascending but Frog rig using Petzl gear is quite widespread and of my two companions one used each technique. Total trip underground was about two hours.

The second trip was through a big system called Bone-Norman (two separate caves with a very tight connection called the Devils Pinch). This is in the Greenbrier Valley where there are many big systems (>40km). This particular system is some 15km in total if my memory is correct and the trip was a through Bone and out through Norman on the other side of the hill. There were eight in the party, many of who were novices learning the system. Bone is situated in a huge quarry that reminded me of Mallam Cove. It is a lovely dry sandy-floored cave and a lot is walking passage. There were virtually no

formations but the passages themselves were nicely sculptured. After about two hours the pinch is reached. This is severe for most people and involves disrobing in many cases but needless to say I shot through it. The Norman system is more active and reminiscent of the horizontal stuff in Yorkshire. We followed the stream for a considerable time with regular deviations to get around collapses. A beautiful dead-end side passage called the Great White Road was explored for several hundred meters and in places was well decorated with what I assume was gypsum. The final part of the cave is a huge sloping chamber with tiny entrances visible at the top. It takes some fifteen minutes to reach this spot of light! The total trip was about six hours but it was very varied and while not technical was a very interesting trip. One aspect in which we again differ from the Americans is lights. The trip leaders were obviously well respected and hard cavers but to my amazement used carbide caplamps no different to the Premiers we get over here. I questioned them long about the virtues of this but they remained steady in their preference despite me extolling the virtues of electric lights. Mind you, those who did use electric lights were using Petzl Zooms. They would probably laugh at an Oldham at being ridiculously cumbersome. Anyway, these carbide caplamps were shining from careful maintenance and only two stops were needed in six hours to refill or fettle the lights and the level of illumination seemed as good as a Fisma carbide.

My hosts for the weekend were the Student Meet of the West Virginia Association of Cave Studies. As far as I can tell the association is equivalent to the Pengelly Trust. They maintain a fairly civilized hut which was swinging by the time 60 odd students arrived and got pissed.

As an area for an expedition it would be a good place for a British Group to visit. The local cavers seem keen to help and food and transport is ridiculously cheap. There are also plenty of campsites around and plenty of other things to do also such as canoeing (this is "Deliverance" Country!!), climbing and walking. The scenery is not spectacular but better described as impressively beautiful consisting of mile upon mile of rolling tree covered hills. Summer is ridiculously hot and so spring or autumn are good and flights are cheap to Washington. Car hire is also cheap but organize this before you go. Hiring at the airport when you arrive means you get a bit stung.

Keith Jackson

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Matienzo, Easter 2000

I spent nine days in Matienzo at Easter. A good crowd turned up, and found much new passage – at least 2.5km of new passage in the time I was there. Apart from one trip in Valline, all my caving was in an area on the hillside above the resurgence of Cueva del Comediante. This overlies the South Vega system which is over 25km long, in which the lower levels are probably fairly well explored but there appears to be much potential for discovering major cave passage at a higher level. Big passage at this level can be seen in *Torca de la Cabana*, in *1332 Juan Lombrero* (explored last year), and the higher levels in *Valline* are at a similar elevation.

733 Cueva Valline

18 April, Pete Eagen, Martin Holroyd, Paul Stacey, Gareth and Barry from Barnstaple, Ali, Santiago (Professor of Sociology at Bilbao University)

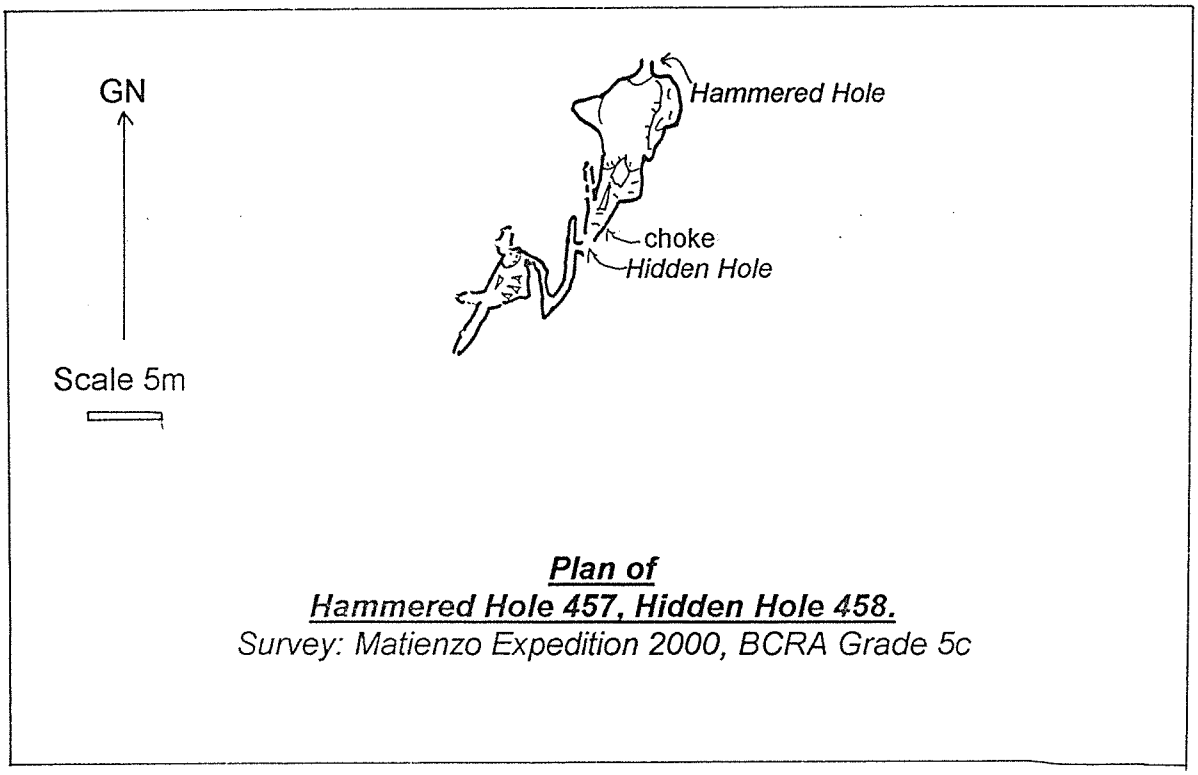
We carried in Martin's bottles to the upstream sumps in the *Rio Rioja*, to continue his explorations from 1998. A further 250m of line was laid on subsequent trips, the sump continuing at a depth of 6m.

457 Hammered Hole and 458 Hidden Hole

19 April, Pete, Paul, Ali, Santi

Ali and Santi rigged the traverse done last year in order to survey the cave and examine the choke at the end. Unfortunately the nuts on some of the stud anchors were found to be missing, so we could not achieve this. Meanwhile the others managed to get down the tight squeeze in Hidden Hole and tried to enlarge the head of a very tight pitch at the bottom. The sound of hammering could be very clearly heard in Hammered. Both these caves draught out strongly. More work is needed to get through here.

24 April. Nuts having eventually been found for the traverse, surveying was completed and the choke looked at. One block would need removing to get into passable passage in the choke.



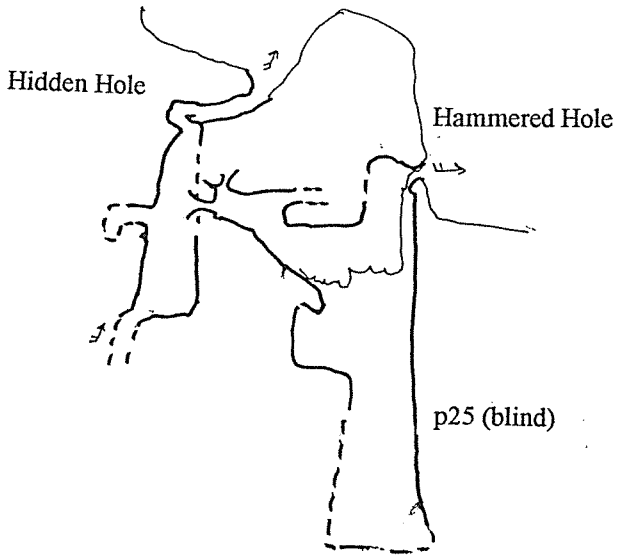
Plan of
Hammered Hole 457, Hidden Hole 458.
Survey: Matienzo Expedition 2000, BCRA Grade 5c

1338

This cave was found in 1998, and explored last year by Hugh and Trish to the top of a pitch.

19 April. Following the failure to get across Hammered Hole, Ali and Santi went up the hill to take another look at this cave. We found a low opening onto the second pitch, where a strong inward draught was detected. Paul and Pete brought the ladder from Hidden Hole, which enabled Paul to get down to a ledge part way down the pitch which drops into a fair sized chamber with a possible passage carrying on.

20 April. The pitch *(Centipede Pot)* was descended on ladders, and the draught followed down a crawl over soft moonmilk to where a narrow pitch head was reached. This soon opened into a fine 27m pitch *(Dog's Bollocks Pot)*. Carrying on down a high narrow rift, best followed by traversing above the stream, an aven was passed then a narrow rift dropped onto another large shaft. This was descended by Pete for about 20m where he ran out of rope.



Scale 5m

Elevation of
Hammered Hole 457, Hidden Hole 458.
Survey: Matienzo Expedition 2000, BCRA Grade 5c

21 April, Marcus, Kate (Liverpool University PC), Ian Lawton, Ali

The pitch *(The Spice Pot)* was descended, rapidly opening out into a large shaft with big openings going off. The pitch is 57m deep. At the foot an inlet passage was followed up to some climbs where a good draught was detected. Downstream an awkward rift was followed some way, but something big could be detected overhead but could not be reached.

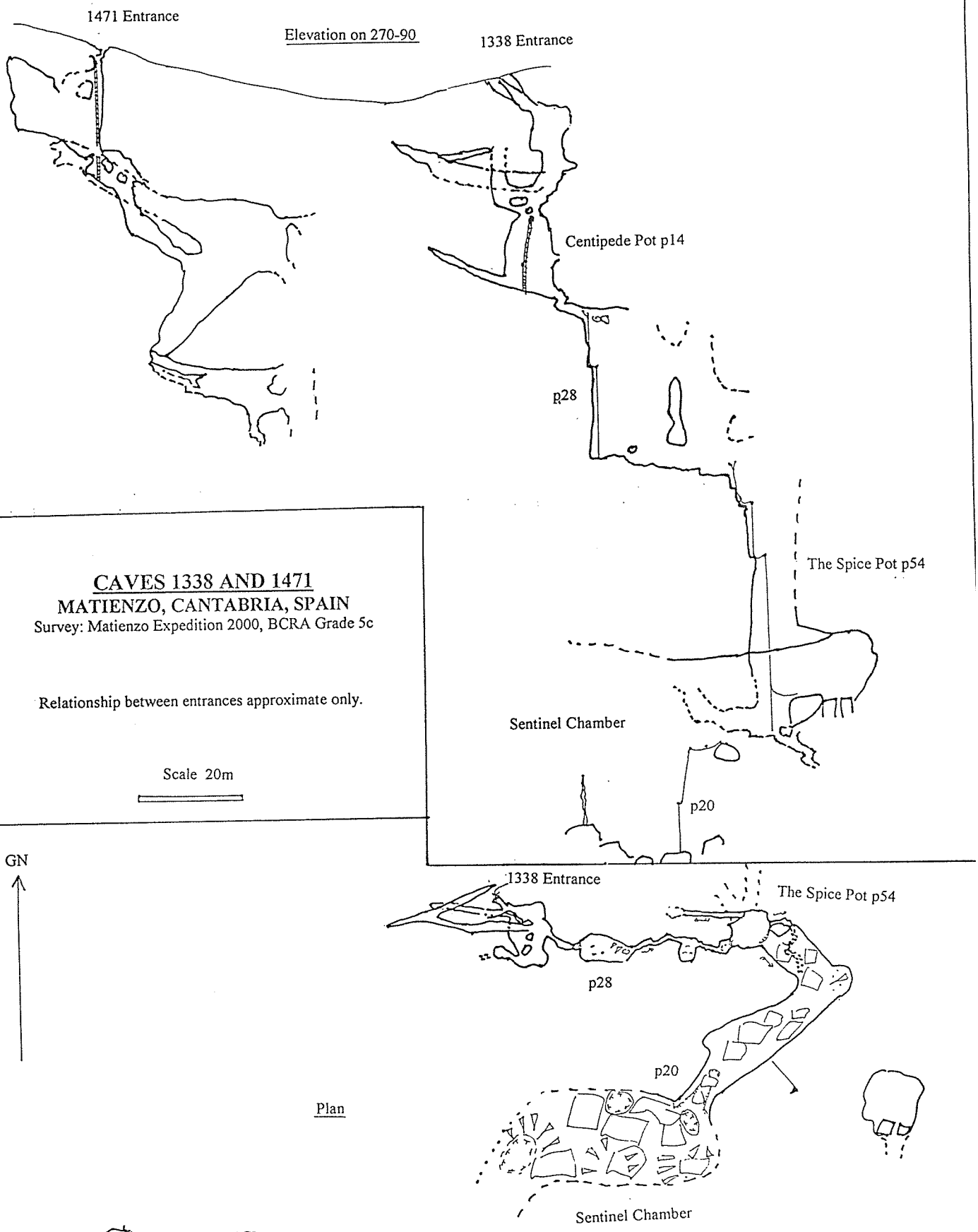
I then went 7m back up the pitch and managed to pendulum into a 5m square opening where a strong draught could be detected. Beyond, a very large passage carried on, but rope was required for getting across a hole.

22 April. The large passage was followed, sweeping round to the right to where a drop into a very large chamber was reached. A traverse along the right hand wall and a 20m pitch gained the floor of the chamber, which is formed of large blocks overlooking deep holes in the floor. These may connect to somewhere in the *Edge of the Universe* area of *Renada/Coteron.* The chamber is dominated by a huge stal, *The Sentinel.* The real aim here must be to keep up at the higher level, however. The cave is now 389m long and about 150m deep, but will doubtless prove much longer after the summer.

1471

25 April, Ali, Santi, Paul, Pete

Having surveyed Hammered Hole, we decided to look for new sites on the hillside around 1338. Seven new sites were located, one of which was a small shakehole floored with boulders. Santi pulled a rock out, showing a small cavity, which sucked in dried mud shaken off a boiler suit like a plug hole. Digging down through soil beside the boulders soon revealed a slot leading straight onto a shaft underneath the shakehole. This was descended on a ladder for about 4m to a ledge overlooking a rift dropping 14m into a chamber. It proved very difficult to find rock for bolting for SRT, so the pitch was not descended.



CAVES 1338 AND 1471

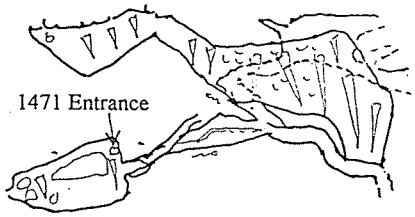
MATIENZO, CANTABRIA, SPAIN

Survey: Matienzo Expedition 2000, BCRA Grade 5c

Relationship between entrances approximate only.

Scale 20m

Plan



25 April. The pitch was descended on ladders, into a chamber which slopes up towards the surface. Below this a broken pitch gained a steeply descending rift carrying a small stream into a chamber. Here a steep climb down over flowstone was followed by a low passage then by a short pitch into a roomy chamber. We had no tackle for this, but managed to find a bypass through a tight crawl and an awkward climb. The chamber contained several deep holes overlooking a large chamber, which the survey suggests may connect to *Sentinel Chamber* in *1338* (described above). If a direct connection exists it would be 80-90m deep.

Back at the flowstone climb, the chamber up was followed into further chambers with windows overlooking further chambers and pitches remaining unexplored.

Alasdair Neill.

DCRO Rescue Practice - Penrecca Mine 18/6/00

Twelve people attended this event which was just sufficient for a reasonable practice but was still a bit of a disappointing turnout. The scenario involved a fallen and unconscious caver with a hypothermic companion. It was decided to take the casualties up the shafts and out of the top entrance since a carry out of the bottom would not involve any great challenges. Both casualties were successfully hauled up the pitches, one on a stretcher.

Well done to all who attended for making it a successful day. This has been the first normal practice for some eighteen months and it was apparent that it was overdue. This is not to say any individual was seriously in error or any dangerous practices were taking place. However, much confusion over hauling systems, pitch communications and control seemed evident which are the sort of group skills which can only be refined with practices or specific group training activities. The next practice will be on 19 November. Will ALL members of DCRO please make a note of this now and ensure they try and attend.

If anyone turned up late and could not find the place despite following the signs then please accept our apologies on behalf of whoever the pratt was who turned them all around.

Thanks for Jim Hanlan for organizing the practice and to the attendees (Ali Neill, Trish and Hugh Browning, Jon Whiteley, Geoff Dommett, Mike Bond, Lee Knight, Alan Bradey, Simon Mullens, Patrick Hanlan, Elly?).

For information, the DCRO AGM held recently resulted in the following people taking committee posts for the year 2000.

Chairman	Patrick Hanlan
Secretary/Treasurer	Keith Pearson
Equipment Officer	James Hanlan
Training Officer	Jon Whiteley
Rescue Controller	Keith Jackson

Thanks should go to Pia Benson for her efforts as chairthing over the past few years.

Keith Jackson.

A Weekend with Dartmoor Recue Group or Not Without my Helicopter

This is a tale of what happened when two members of Devon Cave Rescue Organisation volunteered to attend a rescue practice one November weekend. All four sections of Dartmoor Rescue Group were there (Plymouth, Ashburton, Okehampton and Tavistock) along with Avon Cliff Rescue and, of course, us two representing Devon Cave Rescue Organisation. The intention of this practice was to get all the rescue groups working together to learn each others methods, skills and where these skills can be best employed. Hopefully after reading this account of our exploits you will attend this event next November.

Myself and Martin Kent sped our way across the open moors in search of Wilsworthy Camp. We were supposed to be there for 7pm but when you get back from work at 6.30 and live in darkest Cornwall this becomes unrealistic. At around 8 (or maybe much later) we rolled up to the main gate to the camp, perhaps we shouldn't have stopped at MacDonalds on the way. With the usual measure of luck I drag everywhere with me of course it was raining.... The gate was locked.... Unknown substances squelched underfoot. We tried an alternative route and eventually the warm glow of the camp shone out across the moors towards us.

Rather wet and bedraggled and with pungent smells emanating from the soles of my boots we strolled into the camp to make our introductions. We were greeted warmly and had soon sorted out food, drink and an area of floor to sleep on. The camp itself is warm and very new with a great kitchen, showers and bunkroom and only lacks beds. By cavers standards it is almost palatial. Warm and well fed we headed to the pub and after only a couple of drinks returned for an early night. Whilst tucked up cozily in my sleeping bag and wondering what the next day would bring, other than more rain, strange ripping noises started to emanate from Martin's bed. Surely the MacDonalds hadn't worked its way through already. Luckily for me (though not for him) it was only his camp bed giving way. Obviously my luck was wearing off on the people around me but after a bodged repair with a rucksack strap the bed was back in one piece and I drifted off to sleep with the forthcoming day still in my mind.

After several coffees and cigarettes I managed to prize my eyes open for long enough to see that the morning had brought much better weather and the clouds soon lifted to reveal a clear cold day. Perfect walking weather. One good greasy breakfast and some hurried packing later and I was ready to face the worse. The first of the days little problems occurred when it came to putting on my walking kit. To my surprise my trousers didn't want to go out on the moors and started to resist soon after passing my knees. The realization dawned that I had bought them while I was an underfed student for my field trips and images of all the burgers that had been consumed since flashed before my eyes. A quick glance at the label confirmed my suspicions, 28" waist. Since then my waist has passed 32" and is still accelerating. Still, what choice did I have. After much struggling and several octaves higher they were finally on. In less than a minute there was a ripping sound (MacDonald's at last?) followed by a gentle tinkling noise at the other end of the room. I hadn't remembered eating anything metallic so I looked down to find the zip torn asunder and the button nowhere to be seen. Time for plan B, jeans hidden under my waterproof trousers.

We assembled in the canteen to hear the days activities and to be split into groups. The scenario was that a hot air balloon had got into difficulties whilst traveling north across the moor. Two people had bailed out early and two remained with the balloon until it crashed. This information had been supplied by eyewitnesses so the route of the balloon was known. The plan was to split into search teams and cover the route of the balloon until all the people had been accounted for. This would be an all day exercise. The teams of around six people were constructed as much as possible with people from different organizations so that we would have to work with people we didn't know. Team leaders had already been selected.

Once with the rest of my team the first thing to do was delegate the relevant tasks to the members. There are two schools of thought in this situation, either volunteer for nothing and hope to get a cushy job or volunteer for the first reasonable sounding job that comes up in case all the remaining jobs are worse. I went for the second option. The first job was navigation, definitely not for me since I barely know where Dartmoor is and certainly don't want the blame for getting us all lost. Next came first aider, just the ticket since I am fully qualified and would only be needed if we found someone. After offering to do this the rest of the team started saying things like, "You actually want to do this", "Be my guest" and "Quick, give him the job before he changes his mind". I looked under the table, the chair and all around me, I couldn't see the little bugger but I was sure I could smell a rat, but it was too late now. Of course, there turned out to be the job of radio operator still to go followed by no other jobs and if I had kept my mouth shut I could have had the glorious title of 'follower on'.

I was led to the main entrance and the team leader pointed to a huge mound of green nylon, "That's the first aid rucksack", he said... bugger! Being more than a little on the short side (lets face it, you have to dig a hole in the ground just to kick my butt) this thing was nearly as big as me. Normally practice kits would be used for practices but due to some confusion the real ones had been brought instead. I was told to put the contents of my own rucksack into the two pockets on the side, further increasing the weight of this monster. When I tried it for size the overall effect was something like one of the Ninja Turtles, but without the looks. With our route planned and mapped out it was time to head out onto the moors.

We piled into two cars and raced to the nearest point to our search area we could manage (about 3 miles away). We donned our rucksacks and strode boldly onto the moor ready to face anything. Having left the carpark at least two paces behind me a message came through on the radio, there was a change of plan. We were now to meet near Wilsworthy Camp for deployment by helicopter ... this is more like it!

As the camp neared, the sun glinted off a large, shiny yellow helicopter. Finally my luck had changed. Each team climbed into the helicopter for basic training. The gist of this was that you should carry your own ear plugs to avoid going deaf, how to jump out if the ground is too rocky to land, and lots of talking about crashing and burning and climbing through tiny escape hatches. It was soon time to be deployed, which we told would be done in numerical team order, us being team 2.

We sat down patiently and watched team 1 leave ... followed by teams 3, 4, 5 and 6 at which point we were told that they wouldn,t have time to deploy our team and ours would be the only team walking into the search area. My luck strikes again. For a second time we headed out from the original car park but 2 hours later and with less enthusiasm, watching the helicopter pass overhead ferrying the remaining teams into the search area.

The weather was still fine and we made good progress for a couple of miles until we reached Brat Tor. I started to feel the strain as we climbed up the 1 in 3 slope but it was manageable and as we reached the top I started to feel better again. It was now time to take a new bearing and start our search. I looked in disbelief as my compass pointed straight towards the highest and steepest tor in sight. Dartmoor was once the core of a huge mountain range, reduced over millions of years to produce one of the worlds best examples of erosion. Somehow erosion must have missed this spot. None of the rest of the team showed any concerns about tackling this giant so I put on a brave face as we started our search. The usual method when doing a search is to spread yourselves out in as wide a line as possible whilst still searching all the ground between us. By keeping yourself between the people on either side an even spread is created. Before reaching the tor the ground was level and the visibility good so the line spread out wide to cover the area.

I was hardly surprised when I looked around and the saw the person on my left aiming to the left of the tor and the person to the right to the right of the tor leaving me with the route up the steepest slope to the top.

Optimistic as ever I thought back to my walk around the Cornish coast path a few years previously. My rucksack then was much smaller but around the same weight and I had done a lot of steep hills with no difficulty. By the time I had reached the bottom of the steep section I was already knackered. I climbed on muttering under my breath the mantra, "I must stop smoking, I must exercise more, I must lose weight". Remembering that when I had done the coast walk I had fitted into my walking trousers and had only just started smoking I realized I was no longer as fit as I was.

I climbed on.

The mantra changed to, "I hate Dartmoor".

I still climbed on.

The mantra changed to, "I hate Dartmoor Rescue Group and their heavy rucksacks".

I still climbed on and the tor was now mainly rock.

The mantra changed to, "I hate all the other members of the Devon cave rescue Group for not being here instead of me".

I still climbed on, occasionally pulling myself up rocky ledges and repeatedly twisting my ankles.

The mantra changed to, "@%£$*~!"

Two weeks later (or there about) I reached the top, exhausted. The leader and the rest of the team had been aware of my struggling and on his instruction I gratefully swapped rucksacks with another member of the team. In comparison this new rucksack weighed considerably less than my left testicle. When we set off again I was feeling better and ready for a few more miles even though we had now covered 5 to 6 miles of tough terrain. Barely 200 yards after setting off, and with lots of gentle looking tors ahead, we met a member of one of the dog handling teams.

He instructed us that two casualties had been found by the dogs in a steep valley to the right of our current heading but had been unable to get a radio message out of the valley to us. He stayed in this position to act as a radio relay point as we headed down to the casualties, the first aid rucksack back with me for the look of the thing.

On reaching the casualties we were briefed on the details by the other dog handler. There was one female casualty with a shoulder injury and one male in an overexcited state, both in a temporary shelter. The overexcited male was removed and passed on to another first aider, allowing me to concentrate on the shoulder injury. I started by asking the relevant questions about how she had injured herself and where it hurts, then started the inspection of the shoulder to confirm my suspicions of a broken collar bone. The scream left me deaf in one ear for several hours. With my other ear I heard the laughter of the rest of my team coming from a long way away. Still cursing, I looked outside to find the team standing far away, fully aware that the casualty was an accomplished screamer for rescue practices.

A stretcher was radioed in for moving the casualty and I requested entinox (a powerful gaseous painkiller) to be brought with it. I then set about putting the casualty's arm in an elevation sling. It was finally time to explore the contents of the first aid rucksack.

Hat...Gloves....Flares...(fair enough), Huge Stretcher...Fire Extinguisher...(Bastards!)

Is a fire extinguisher really going to be much use by the time we've got there? The main stretcher that was called in only took another few minutes to get there (theoretically, since the stretcher team got to us but no one had packed the stretchers for the exercise) and came with enough people to carry it properly.

Finally, I found the first aid kit which included a list of the contents. Considering the size of the rucksack the kit was a little lacking in content. I looked for one of the 8 triangular bandages....there weren't any there. Luckily the rest of the team were carrying first aid kits and two triangular bandages were quickly found. With the casualty bandaged and painkillers administered I could finally relax.

As I sat down to eat a message came through on the radio that the casualty was to be removed by helicopter. Over the next few minutes rescuers started appearing on the horizon heading for us and the hope of another helicopter ride. Soon at least 50 other rescuers had joined us. The decision was made that only the casualty, the first aider (YES!) and the rest of my team would be getting a lift back. After a few minutes the sound of the helicopter could be heard, and was definitely getting closer....then it started getting quieter again. The helicopter had been called away to an emergency. For the final time my luck had struck and dashed the hopes of the team.

The casualty made a miraculous recovery and I put the rucksack on for the long walk back to Wilsworthy, this time round the tors rather than over them.

Back at camp I cleaned up, had dinner and felt much better. It was time for the pub again and the annual skittle challenge. Unfortunately there were not enough of us for a Devon Cave Rescue team and the highly contended trophy went to Ashburton. After many beers and half remembered conversations it was time to head back and get ready for another day.

The next day brought threatening weather, aches and pains and the prospect of a solo navigation exercise. It was time to call it day and head for home, leaving it to Dartmoor Rescue Group since this is really their territory and they were much better equipped to do it.

On reflection, it was a great weekend, with Dartmoor Rescue Group demonstrating the skills of their leaders and other members. All were friendly and professional and keen to work more closely with Devon Cave Rescue. All the groups were keen to do joint rescue practices with them concentrating on the above ground aspects and us dealing with the underground side. All in all a closer relationship between us could be more efficient in some situations, would give us access to their radios and other kit and would certainly be good fun. If you don't believe me....be there next time!

Calum Beeson.

Some Accounts of Some Recent Trips

March 2000. South Wales

About ten PCG and University CC attended this meet. On Saturday trips into OFD (Top Entrance to OFD I, and a trip around OFD II for novices), and an Ogof Draenen (looking at digs around Waterfall Chamber, along with CCC and CSS members) were made. On Sunday some people did the round trip in Dan yr Ogof, as far as the rising, while the rest went down Pulpit Hole and Pont yr Ogof.

May 2000. South Wales

A return was made to the dig started last year, with members of the DSS. Keith Pearson and Co had pushed this another 5m or so over Easter, to where a chamber could be seen. On this trip this 'chamber' was entered and found to be head-sized. A narrow rift beyond requires enlarging for a few metres, to gain a continuation.

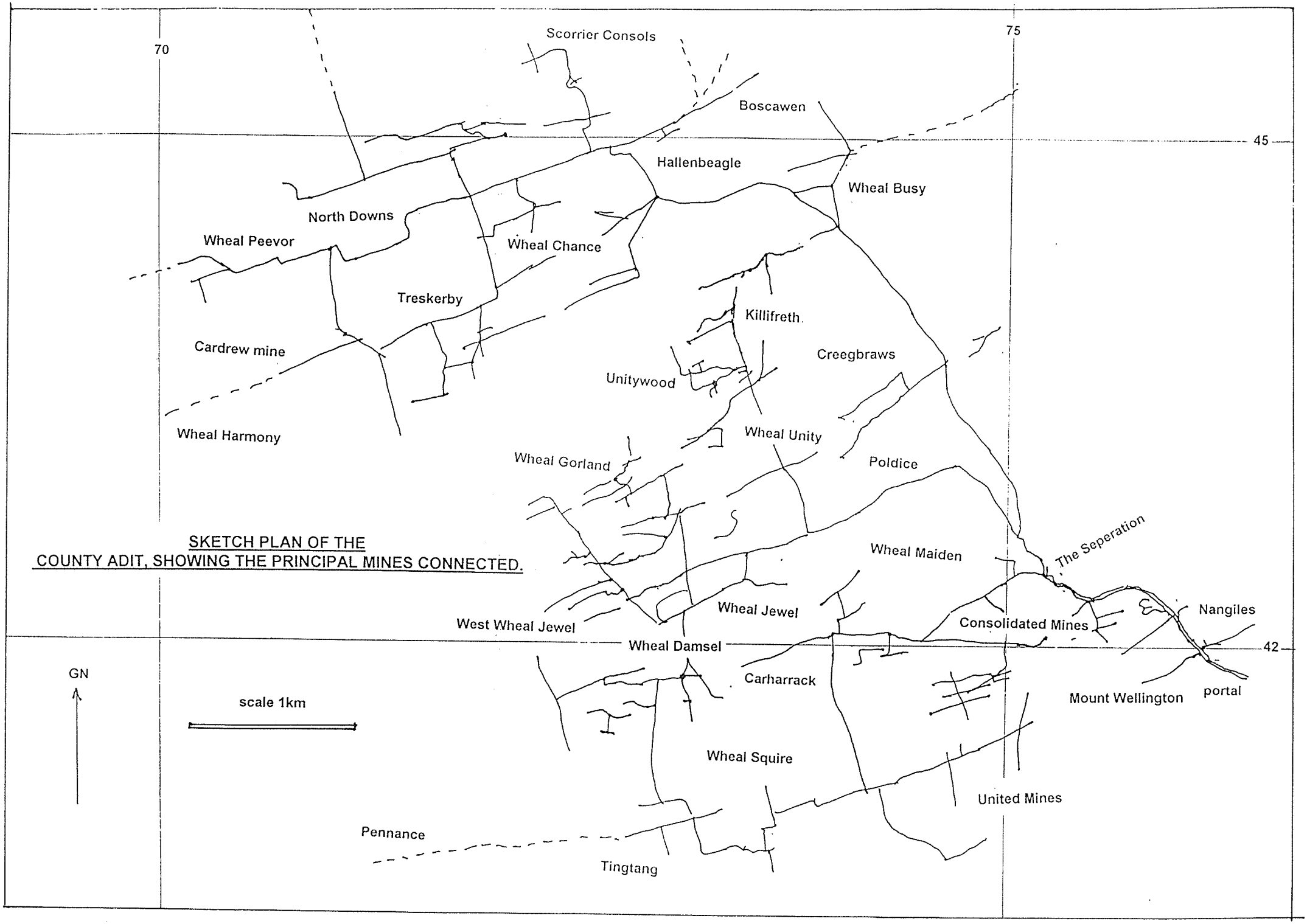
May 2000. Mendip

Six PCG and University members stayed at the Wessex Hut. Trips were made into Pierre's Pot in Burrington Combe (although no one was brave enough to negotiate the tight squeeze into the lower part of the cave), and into Swildons under sportingly high water conditions.

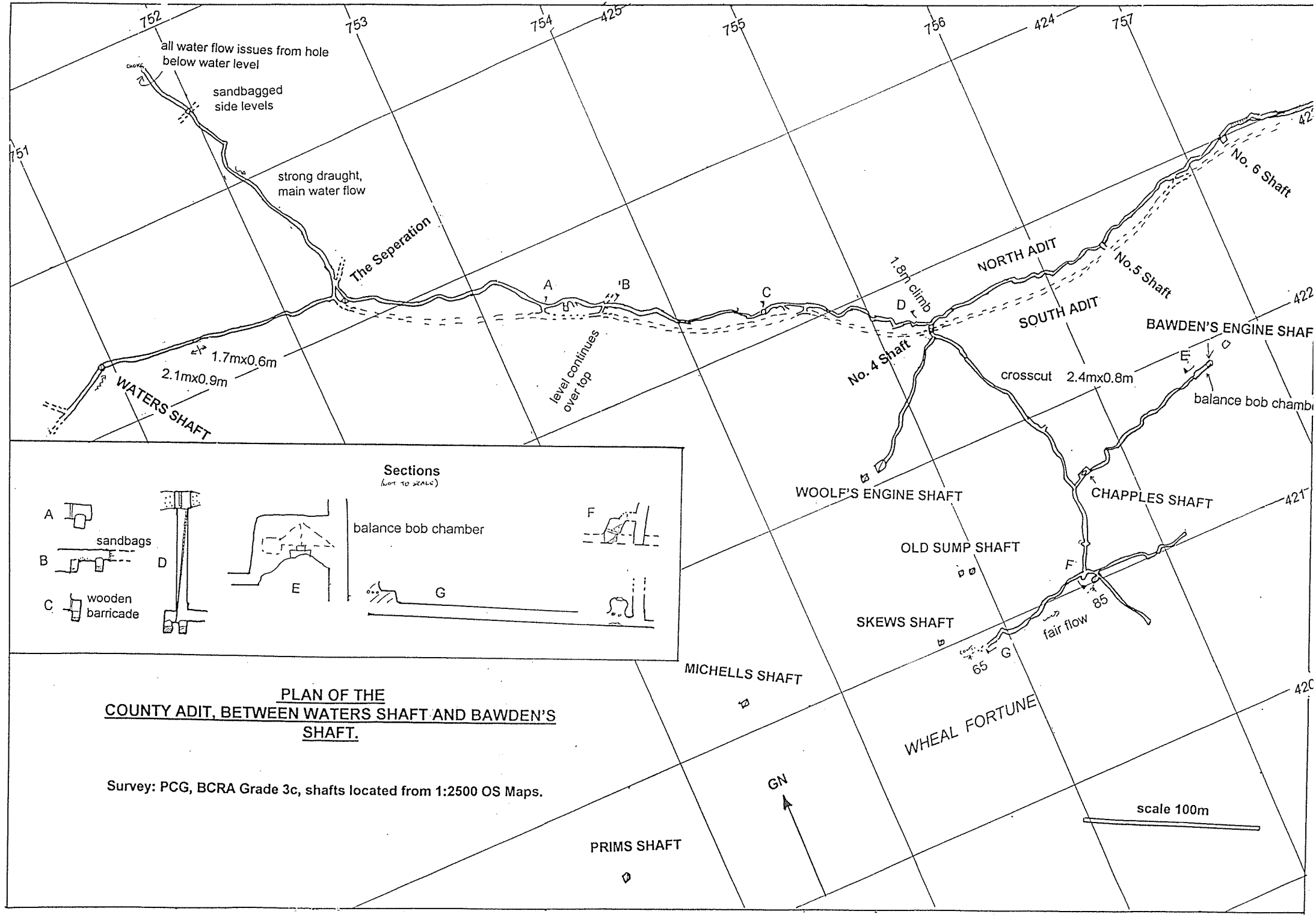
Alasdair Neill

The Great County Adit

In 1748 a deep adit was commenced below Nangiles Mine, to drain the important Poldice Mine. This was driven for 2km following the valley under Twelveheads up to the mine. In the following years branches were driven into most of the main Gwennap mines, which for the next 100 years were to form the most important copper mines in the world. These mines also produces substantial amounts of tin, fluorspar, in later years arsenic, and other minor minerals. Eventually the adit totaled over 61km long (its extent into some of the smaller mines on the edge of the area is uncertain), draining some 20 major and many minor mines in an area of 31 square km in the parishes of Gwennap, Kenwyn, redruth and St Agnes. The huge amount of water the adit was soon called on to carry proved beyond its capabilities, so a second parallel drive close to the original adit was driven in the section below Poldice down to the portal. The greater part of the adit seems to have been due to the Williams family of Scorrier, who were major shareholders and pursers of most of the mines in the area. A management system developed whereby costs for maintenance of the adit were charged to each mine according to its location and pumping capacity (see Buckley 1989). Part of the adit cost was also made by sales of ochre which was settled from the water draining from the adit. Mining on a large scale ceased around 1870, but some mines managed to carry on for another 50 years working tin. The adit was kept open for these mines in part, but following closure it soon became choked in many places. This resulted in problems in prospecting operations, for instance at West Peevor in the 1960s where heavy rain caused flood water from the adit to overcome the pumps which had been installed there. The PCG's first recorded visit to the adit was in 1965, when it was noted that the entrance was buried under rubble. A shaft was descended into the adit, where a 30cm airspace could be seen over fast flowing water. Over the next year many shafts were descended but the adit was always found to be impassable after a short distance.

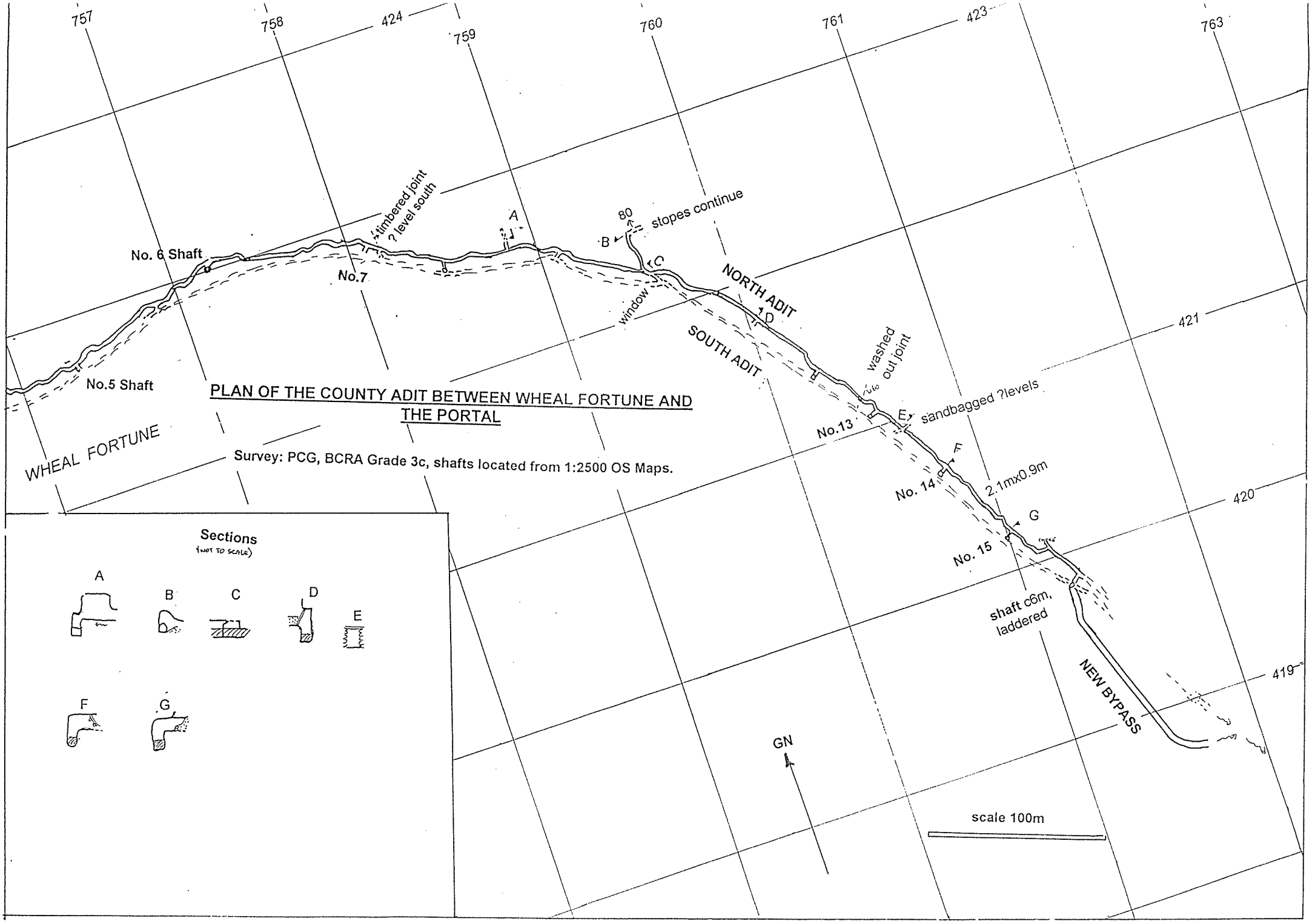


SKETCH PLAN OF THE
COUNTY ADIT, SHOWING THE PRINCIPAL MINES CONNECTED.



PLAN OF THE COUNTY ADIT, BETWEEN WATERS SHAFT AND BAWDEN'S SHAFT.

Survey: PCG, BCRA Grade 3c, shafts located from 1:2500 OS Maps.


757
758
424
759
760
761
423
763
No. 6 Shaft
timbered joint
? level south
No.7
A
80
B
stopes continue
C
NORTH ADIT
window
SOUTH ADIT
washed out joint
421
No.5 Shaft
PLAN OF THE COUNTY ADIT BETWEEN WHEAL FORTUNE AND THE PORTAL
Survey: PCG, BCRA Grade 3c, shafts located from 1:2500 OS Maps.
WHEAL FORTUNE
No.13
E
sandbagged ?levels
F
No. 14
2.1mx0.9m
420
G
No. 15
shaft c6m, laddered
NEW BYPASS
419
Sections
(NOT TO SCALE)
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
GN
scale 100m

Shafts on United and Consolidated Mines were also looked at. In 1967 when Consolidated Goldfields commenced reopening Nangiles Mine as part of their Wheal Jane project, much water from the County Adit started to find its way into Nangiles as a result and water levels in the adit entrance dropped. A dam was built in the North Adit Entrance, to divert water into the South adit which resulted in the flow into Nangiles dropping off to acceptable levels.

In 1979 Rio-Tinto Zinc Corporation acquired the recently closed Wheal Jane and Mount Wellington Mines, and one of their main priorities was to reduce the huge amounts of water which needed pumping from these mines. Much of this water was thought to come from Consolidated and United Mines, partly due to chokes in the County Adit, which was partially choked for the first 400m and totally choked beyond. In addition the Hot Lode passed under the adit near the portal, which was extensively worked below so water was thought to be leaking through here. The adit discharged between 6 million and 12 million gallons of water a day, depending on rainfall. Over the next couple of years the adit was extensively refurbished in the sections connecting to Consolidated and United, and a new entrance section, 250m long, was constructed to divert water away from the Hot Lode section (Davis and Battersby 1985). The present portal is some distance above the original entrance, much of the bottom section of the adit having been opened to form an open cutting over the years. While the new adit was constructed, pumps were installed in a shaft nearby to divert water away from the bottom section of the adit. Many connections into the adit which could cause water to overflow from the adit into old workings were sealed with sandbags, and at least three adit shafts were laddered to provide access. During this period there was a danger of flooding in the adit, when increases in water flow resulted in the water rising rapidly towards the roof above constrictions, causing workers in the adit to have to beat a hasty retreat.

Wheal Jane closed in 1991, pumping ceased and when the water reached adit level, soon after the much publicised pollution incident in Falmouth Bay resulted. As a result the Environment Agency have maintained an interest in the area, which has included maintenance of some of the adit shafts. Also the county waste concern has shown an interest, as the main United Downs landfill site overlies part of United Mines, drained by the adit.

Recently the Carn Brae Mining Society has negotiated access via one shaft from the Poldice Valley Trust. The current ownership of other access points is unknown. Anyone entering the adit should take regard of the flood danger here.

A Grade 3 survey has been made of parts of the lower section to add to details shown on old plans. This covers the section from the portal to near Water's Shaft (near the Wheal Maid tailings dam), and is mainly confined to the North Adit. The only branch covered in detail is that connecting to Woolf's and Bawden's Shaft of Consolidated Mines. Both these shafts were drained by 90" pumping engines, and were opened to a great depth prior to 1991. The most notable feature is the balance bob chamber entered at Adit Level in Bawden's, with its granite mounting blocks. The main adit above the Separation near Hale Mills was only cleared as far as a choke near Wheal Henry, but it may be possible to explore further here. Sections can be explored elsewhere, for instance in Killifreth (*see PCG Journal 99*).

References

JA Buckley 1989. The Great County Adit. A Model of Cooperation. Journal of the Trevithick Society **16**
CJ Davis & GW Battersby 1985. Reopening of Wheal Jane Mine. Trans. Instn. Min. Metall. A **94**
Plymouth Caving Group Journal and Newsletter **17, 24, 26, 99**
J Symons 1993. Investigation of Old Workings by the Use of Adits. West Cornwall Mine Exploration News **2**

Alasdair Neill

Levant Man Engine Shaft

The Man Engine Shaft at Levant lies on the left of the road as you approach the mine down the lane from Trewellard. It's history is well known; for many years the men used the engine on the first stage of their journey to work way out under the sea. The shaft was sunk to the 266 fathom level.

The Man Engine remained in use at Levant until 1919, long after such antiquated a machine had been replaced by more modern equipment at all other Cornish mines. In that year the upper part of the rod failed, resulting in the death of 31 miners – the second worse disaster known in Cornish mining history.

The shaft was then abandoned, the miners descening the cliffs to Adit Level and down the ladder road in Engine Shaft during the last years of the mine up to 1930. The collar subsequently collapsed, and where the shaft could be seen underground in recent years it was mostly choked. The engine house for the horizontal engine which operated the rods in later years still remains although much has been lost to stone thieves.

The Levant miners were relatively lucky in having a good dry built in 1888, the concrete floor complete with the miner's baths still survives. In 1899 a tunnel was constructed to connect with Man Engine Shaft so they did not have to brave the elements whilst in their underground clothes. A flight of spiral steps led down into this tunnel.

The top of these steps became infilled over the years, and it was rumoured the granite had been removed. However, in 1995 work started to clear the tunnel. This was eventually opened up, it being found most of the short flight of steps cut in one piece each including the central pillar remained. The tunnel was opened up to the shaft.

Much of the surface at Levant has recently been acquired by the National Trust, and funding has been obtained from English Partnerships to deal with these shafts.

On 6 February I followed a Hymac down the Levant Lane to observe what was being done. Two projects were undertaken that day; one was to dig up the road where the tunnel passed just underneath in order to secure it. A cast iron pipe was soon encountered, which appears to be the section in which a Cornish plunger operated – although not of the usual H-piece design. This was probably buried here to strengthen the road.

Meanwhile the Hymac cleared a way to the top of the shaft and started digging down on the seaward side. This soon encountered a brick wall, which may have formed the edge of the shaft at this depth. Shortly after lunch, adam Sharpe managed to push a bar through from the tunnel into the excavation, and a connection was soon made at a depth of 7.5m below surface.

By the time this appears these excavations should have been secured. This project shows how Government Direct Land Grant finance can be used for more constructive projects rather than the usual destruction and sanitation of old mine sites.

Alasdair Neill

Club Information

Members

C Beesom	5 Sunnybanks, Hatt, Cornwall
P Benson & M Prince	7 Marchants Way, Meavy, Yelverton
H & P Browning	2 Sandy Way West, Tavistock
R Cawthorne	Lista de Correos, 03727, Jalón, Alicante, Spain
S Daw	Flat 3, 12 Trematon Terrace, Mutley, Plymouth
J Hanlan	62 Callington Road, Saltash, Cornwall
P Hanlan	'Demelza', Tremabe Lane, Dobwalls, Cornwall
K Jackson	4 Tamar Terrace, Saltash, Cornwall
D Jean	13 Tor Road, Hartley, Plymouth
C Kelland	251 Victoria Road, St Budeaux, Plymouth
M Kent	1 Rockland Place, Well Street, Callington
R King	Old Orchard, South Milton, Kingsbridge
T Miles	Rose Cottage, Lower Durston, Taunton
A Neill	25 Lipson Road, Greenbank, Plymouth
S Newall	21 Fowler, Stantonbury, Milton Keynes
J Palmer	25 College Avenue, Tavistock
C Smith	15 Bearsdown Close, Eggbuckland, Plymouth

Members should remember that the New Membership cards from Calum act as a discount card for the Plymouth Youth Hostel Association Adventure Shop. Members who have not yet paid their subscription for 2000 should now do so either in person on a Thursday, at a Tuesday meeting or by post to Patrick Hanlan.

DCRO Rescue Practice

There will be a rescue practice on Sunday 19 November at 10am. Please contact Keith Jackson for further information/details.

Planned Meets

Some PCG members will be, as usual, in Matienzo for the summer (contact Ali for details).

Tuesday night trips and weekend trips.

11 July	Devon & Courtenay Consuls	Contact Chris Kelland
18 July	Bickleigh Viaduct	
22-23 July	St Just, Cornwall w/e	Contact Ali Neill
25 July	Pridhamsleigh	Contact Patrick Hanlan
1 August	Bickleigh Viaduct	
8 August		Contact Chris Kelland
22 August	Radford	Contact Ali Neill
26-28 August	Bank holiday in Yorkshire	Contact Ali Neill
5 September	Kit Hill	Contact Patrick Hanlan
15-17 September	Hidden Earth 2000, Bristol	See separate flyer
19 September	Kitley	Contact Dave Jean
3 October	DCRO Committee 7.30	Crest Hill, Buckfastleigh

17 October	Whitecleaves/Bunkers	Contact Ali Neill
31 October	Marquis	Contact Ali Neill

Next Newsletter

The next Newletter is due for publication in the late autumn and could include details of your summer adventures if you write them. It will contain articles on Caves of some Caribbean Islands, an account of Kerrier District Council's Shaft Investigations and a trip to Mylwr Tunnel in North Wales.

Please send any articles to Dave Jean, 13 Tor Road, Hartley, Plymouth, PL3 5TE
Or e-mail them to davidjean@tinyworld.co.uk