

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETYCIRCULAR TO MEMBERS

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Dr. Tratman has written the following account of his discovery of Trat's Temple in Swildon's. In these days, when the caver drives to the cave in a car, dons his wet suit and Nife cell and carries the lightweight electron ladder to the pitches, the article certainly shows the difficulties that beset the original explorers!

SWILDON'S HOLE. THE DISCOVERY OF THE TEMPLE. NOV. 12th. 1921.

A number of people at different times have asked me to write an account of this discovery, which paved the way for so much else in Swildon's Hole. Inevitably in such an account personal pronouns are bound to be used.

First, though, let me set the background scene. There were only two caving clubs on Mendip, the M.N.R.C. and the U.B.S.S. It was the day of push-bikes, candles for lighting down the caves, no helmets, no exposure suits and no Neoprene suits. Just layers of clothes to keep you warm or a little less cold may be. No light weight tackle. At the Hut all water had to be fetched from the cottage. Cooking was done on an open fire outside the hut though there was a small recess, where the washbasin now is, where there was a table and a couple of primus stoves.

There were only two of us from U.B.S.S. from Bristol, Bruce Perry and myself. So we met early and cycled out to Burrington and up to the hut. There we fetched water, prepared a stew, (bully beef and baked beans), and left it ready for our return. We made a few sandwiches and put them in a tin which we hoped would keep them moderately dry. Picked up our caving gear, took two heavy hemp rope and wooden rung ladders and tethers with us for the pitches and a life line. A generous supply of candles. And so off to Priddy. There we met the others. These were, though I may have forgotten one or two, Balch with the long line for crossing the Double Pots, Harry Savory with his whole-plate and half-plate wooden heavy box-cameras, stand and other minor impedimenta. Dr. Norman Cooper from Winscombe was there. Mr. Maine and, I think, his brother too, and Mr. Barnes (Barnes' Loop) made up the rest of the party.

Now on a previous trip I had sat with Balch under the roof opening that connects with the Temple, and we had discussed the impossibility of climbing up there and how if we could it would lead, in all probability, to major discoveries. I had thought about this and had ideas, which I kept to myself. And on this trip I was determined if opportunity offered to put them to the test.

Well by 11.30 a.m. or earlier we were going down the cave. Balch insisted as usual on the gear being "chained", which made progress slow. For there was much gear and a relatively small party and the lengths between dumping spots were comparatively short. All too often from the back would come the command "CHAIN". And the gear would be passed. Eventually the 40 ft was reached and rigged. The "Elephant's Trunk" was puddled in to take the trickle of water -- 1921 was a year of record and prolonged drought -- and so we gradually got down. Then on to the 20 ft and I was given the task of taking the hand line across the Double Pots. Mr. Balch always insisted on this line being used.

At Barnes' Loop the party settled down to photography, for Balch had decreed that this was to be primarily a photographic trip. By this time we were all a little wet and not too warm. So I asked Balch's permission to go down to the end of the cave (now Sump 1). So off I went. Soon I reached the roof opening and then cast back along the way I had come looking for an alternative way up, which I was sure existed. Well it was there and I was soon up on the bridge. I tried round to the right, looking downstream, and got into the chamber where there are those lovely curtains. But I was the wrong side of the hole. Even with a candle I could see across to the slender pillars and the passage going on. Back to the bridge and another attempt to the right but again back into the chamber on the wrong side of the hole. But I had noted yet a third way which, if I could reach it, would take me to the other side of the hole.

Back once more on the bridge I tried to climb, what was then, the muddy slippery slope but could not quite grasp the nearest handhold. Everything was slippery and, quite candidly, I was a bit scared of a slip which would let me fall clear of the bridge straight down to the stream. Then I heard someone else coming down the cave. I shouted to him and found it was Norman Cooper. I said, "Come up here and see what I have found." He was soon up on the bridge, there being only one way up. So he gave me a back which allowed me to reach the handhold and pull myself up. Once up I lighted a candle. He slung up a haversack to me and I used this to give him a handhold to get up beside me. Then we crawled off into the Temple proper and up the passage to the unbelievably beautiful grotto, now a high road to the further reaches of the cave, at the end. The incredible beauty of the whole place took one's breath away just as Barnes' Loop did when one saw it in its pristine glory.

After a while, we thought we ought to go back and tell Balch. So back we went and under Barnes' Loop, as instructed by Balch, and then back into the Loop itself. Then we told them what we had found. I shall always remember Balch's remarks. "We must go back and photograph it, for we shall be most unlikely to get another chance for years because the stream will only be low enough to get down the 40 ft. in times of drought." This is a precis of course but contains the gist of his remarks. By this time it was after midnight and my heart sank a bit. Nevertheless back I went with Savory and his half-plate camera. I think we went alone but someone else may have come along too.

Well, the photographs were taken and then it was time to turn back. I have no very clear recollection of the return except that it fell to me to be the last up the 40 ft. and got a wetting because the man before me had moved the elephant's trunk. Along the Water Rift, as we were so nearly out, I decided to go under the "Over or Under", which route in 1921 meant a thorough wetting. As we climbed Jacob's Ladder cold air began to be noticeable. In the crawl from the top it was very cold and I recall asking if it was freezing outside and the comment passed back that it was. At this stage I must have gone to sleep while passing the gear for the man behind me banged my feet together and told me to wake up and pass the rest of the gear.

As we emerged first our caps froze and then the rest of our clothes. There was 12° of frost. The time was about 6.30 a.m. and we had been down the cave rather more than 19 hours. The walk back to the farm was an unforgettable experience. It became

difficult to walk in our frozen clothes. Changing in the barn was a grim affair of fumbling with frozen fingers and even when we were in dry clothes we were still very cold. Bruce and I packed up our sodden frozen gear, put the ladders etc. on to the carriers of our push-bikes and set off for Burrington. Just as we reached the Castle of Comfort Bruce said, "Where's my camera?" We stopped. It was not in the gear. By now we were reasonably warm from exercise so back again to Priddy. The camera was not at the barn but it was at the cave entrance.

By the time we got back to the hut we had been on the go for over 24 hours. We put the tackle away properly, heated up the stew, ate a little of it and then turned in between damp blankets for a couple of hours sleep. Then back to Bristol. Neither of us were very wide awake for our classes.

E. K. Tratman.

### U.B.S.S. AWAY TRIPS.

#### Derbyshire.

The party travelled north in pouring rain on 17.12.65 and stayed in Buxton with the Eldon Pothole Club. On the following day it rained even harder, so that our party visiting Giant's Hole was not altogether surprised at finding a sump at the "Curtain". Total time for trip was about 5 minutes. When we told the farmer, Mr. Watson, he offered to let us have our money back. This came in useful for our next visit, which was to P8. Floods made this cave very sporting indeed. The first ladder pitch was far wetter than the Swildon's 40 ft. without the drainpipe.

On the night of the 18th it rained even harder, but this time fortune favoured us. We accompanied the Eldon on a club trip to Knotlow Mine on the 19th and found it so badly flooded that the third (waterfall) pitch was completely submerged. This enabled us to swim over the top of it, kicking old stemples as we went, into a miner's passage on the far side, which was hitherto unexplored. It led over another flooded shaft to a short rock-strewn passage, and was blocked after about 40 ft. by a rockfall.

Oliver Lloyd.

#### Yorkshire

On Saturday the 15th of January, four of us managed to get as far as Yorkshire and do the Dow Cave - Providence Pot through trip in a little over 3 hours. We had a very good guide, so we didn't waste any effort in losing our way, and the infamous obstacles one reads so much about went almost unnoticed, contributing to a very fine trip. Unfortunately it snowed afterwards and prevented us from doing any caving on the Sunday.

Mike Norton.

#### South Wales

A larger party (8 in all) visited South Wales on the weekend of the 29th - 30th January. After a good night's rest at the palatial headquarters of the S.W.C.C., we went down Dan-yr-Ogof, crossing the lakes and doing a quick tour of the other side. The water level was rather high, so that much of the lakes had to be crossed by swimming against the current. Unfortunately, some of

us couldn't swim, and after getting swept back a few times, decided to go and do Tunnel Cave instead. On the Sunday, Pwll Dwrn was bottomed while some went on a quiet fester around Cwm Dwr. Altogether a good week end.

Mike Norton.

### NOTICES

Sessional Meeting. The next meeting, to be held in conjunction with the Classics Society, is on Friday, 18th of February at 8.15 p.m. in Room 28 of the Wills Memorial Building. The speaker is Prof. Sheppard Frere on "The Roman Army in Britain".

Annual General Meeting. Monday, March 7th, Geography Lecture theatre. Presidential Address by Dr. E. K. Tratman on "The Fourth International Spelaeological Conference, Jugoslavia, 1965".

Amendment to Constitution. At the A.G.M. the Committee will propose that Subsection 2(b) of the Constitution be amended by the deletion of the word "prehistoric" to read :-

2(b) The study of archaeology.

U.B.S.S. Dinner. As mentioned in the last Circular, this is to be held at the Cliff Hotel, Cheddar on March 12th, at 7.30 p.m. for an 8 p.m. meal. Present figures indicate that there will be between 40 and 50 present. The menus are given below.

A.	B.
Chicken Soup or Fruit Juice	Mushroom Soup or Fruit Juice
Grilled Halibut	Fillet of Plaice, Mornay
Roast Aylesbury Duckling, apple sauce, roast and boiled potatoes, peas, etc.	Roast leg of Lamb, mint sauce, roast and boiled potatoes, peas, etc.
Apple Tart and Cream	Fruit Salad and Ice Cream
Cheese and biscuits, Coffee.	Cheese and biscuits, Coffee.
18/6 plus 10%.	14/6 plus 10%.

We would be very glad to see any Old Members who can make it, as this is one of the few opportunities there is for maintaining contact. All those able and wishing to come, and who have not indicated their choice of menu on the Spelaeo Rooms' notice board, should let Mike Norton (Spelaeological Society, University of Bristol, Bristol 8) know their choice of menu by the end of February, enclosing 10/- deposit. (Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to M. G. Norton).

Yorkshire trip at Easter. A party from the Society will be staying at Clapham and have permission to visit the four pot-holes at the end of the Turbary Road in Kingsdale. These are Simpson's Pot, Rowten Pot, Jangling Pot and Bull Pot. Of these only Simpson's Pot is super severe, but the others are all said to be well worth doing. Some will be staying at the New Inn, others will be camping as we did last year. Bed and breakfast at the New Inn costs 25/- and dinner is very expensive but very good. Anyone else wishing to stay there should write direct. Anyone at all wishing to join the party is asked to write to Dr. Lloyd and say whether he has transport, tents, etc. The

party from Bristol will be travelling north on the afternoon of Thursday, 7th April and returning on the afternoon of the 11th.

#### CAVE DIVING

Members of the Society have been diving with the C.D.G. at Wookey Hole twice during January and have reached the 13th and 15th chambers. The way on upstream appears not to be obstructed, but it is deep.

#### ROMAN TEMPLE ON BREAN DOWN

There are still a number of offprints of this very important publication available. Enclosed are order forms, in case any members or friends wish to receive a copy.

#### RECENT LIBRARY ADDITIONS

- E. A. Martel                    Mitchelstown Cave. 5p. Survey, extracted from Irish Naturalists Journal, Vol. V, No. 4, 1896.
- E. Lyster Jameson            On the exploration of the caves of Enniskillen and Mitchelstown for the R.I.A. Flora and Fauna Committee. From Irish Naturalists Journal, Vol. V, No. 4, 1896.
- C. H. Carpenter              Animals found in the Mitchelstown Cave. 11p. illus. From the Irish Naturalists Journal, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1895.
- E. A. Baker et al.            Cave Explorers in County Fermanagh. 1907. A xerox copy. 30p.
- R. Pinney                      The Complete Book of Cave Exploration. 250p. illus. 1962.
- B.S.A.                          Speleological Abstracts. Vol. 1, No. 2. Covers British literature of 1963. 96p. Published by British Speleological Association. Duke St., Settle, Yorks. 1965. 6/6.

M. G. Norton, Hon. Sec.  
4th February, 1966.