

REVIEW

MANUAL OF CAVING TECHNIQUES by the Cave Research Group, Ed. Cecil Cullingford. 416 pp., text figures, 1 plate, index. Published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1969. Price, £4.20.

This long awaited successor to Part 2 of "British Caving" has an impressive list of authors—21 in all. Their collected expertise has been moulded together to form a book which will probably become a classic. Caving, of course, thrives on individuality and it would be impossible to compile a manual that pleased everybody. Nevertheless the chapters of this book are sufficiently varied in style and content for both novice and experienced caver to find something of interest. For example the chapter on "Water in Caves" is readable enough for bedtime consumption whilst the meticulously sub-headed review of "Ladders" will satisfy the more enquiring mind. Unfortunately multi-authorship does have its drawbacks too, for the standard of the chapters varies considerably. Those on Expeditions, Digging for Caves, Communications and Underground Bivouacs are excellent but a few are rather mediocre. Some chapters e.g. "Diving" are beautifully concise whilst others are unnecessarily long e.g. "Moving in a Cave". Indeed this last chapter could have been omitted completely. There is only one way to learn how to move in a cave and it's not by reading a book! Chapters on Cave Surveying and Cave Photography are unaccountably absent and it seems a pity that only one photograph appears in the book.

Some authors have delved into the literature very deeply and Baguley and Brandon are to be congratulated on their bibliography. Indeed their chapter on Ladders is the most comprehensive work every published on the subject. Some other contributors have skimmed through the literature very superficially and one, the author of the "Use of Ladders and Ropes" has ignored it completely. He has consequently missed important references to Piton Failure (Griffin, 1966), to Self Lifelining Devices (Clark & Little, 1962) and many others. The chapter on "Digging for Caves" omits reference to the work of Bristow (1966).

The most controversial chapters are undoubtedly those on the use of tackle and climbing equipment. On p. 30 mild steel karabiners are recommended whilst the lighter alloy ones are dismissed for no good reason. On p. 121 no mention is made of the method of climbing electron ladder with one foot behind and one in front and the text figure (20a) shows the ladder climber's feet in a most unsuitable position. On p. 119 the danger of double lifelining over the top rung of an electron ladder is not mentioned. On p. 46 we are told that "no matter which method of abseiling is used a knot in the rope cannot be passed". This is not true for American cavers have an extra large karabiner which will take knots and they have also developed a number of descendeurs better suited to caving than the Pierre-Allain one illustrated on p. 148. The author does not mention the use of a single prusik chest loop for extra safety whilst abseiling and his description of prusiking itself suggests that he has little practical experience of the technique. He ignores the fast two knot system whereby one foot sling is attached to the chest loop. The poor descriptions of abseiling and prusiking and the absence of any reference to the standard American works (e.g. Plummer, 1966) make it difficult to justify the dropping of the word "British" from the title of this book. On p. 177 there is an obvious fourth possibility for regaining access to a high level passage—namely to leave a rope in position and prusik up it!

The book ends with a general glossary of caving terms which includes one delightful new definition—that of a "tiger". This apparently is a colloquial name for a caver of more than average energy and stamina who seems unable to understand that the performance of the average caver may be less than his.

In summary this book is the most detailed caving manual yet published in Britain and as such deserves to be widely read.

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