

REVIEW

Proudlove, G.S. (ed). 2006 Essential Sources in Cave Science. *British Cave Research Association Cave Studies Series*. **16**. 56 pp. Price £4.50 ISBN 0 900 265 31 0.

The latest volume in the BCRA's well established Cave Series differs from previous productions in being A4 format rather than A5 and being, effectively, over twice as long. It consists of a number of introductory sections and then a series of 13 chapters describing various aspects of cave science, such as *Geomorphology* (chapter 3, Tony Waltham), *Minerals & Speleothems* (chapter 8, Charlie Self) and *Archaeology and Palaeontology* (chapter 12, Andrew Chamberlain). Each chapter gives a brief introduction to its subject, followed by lists of what the authors consider to be the most important printed and internet-based references in each area. Each contributor has been allowed to finish with a list of their three "most essential" sources.

The aim of this publication is to "allow anyone to obtain sufficient information to understand the basics of any discipline within cave science. The audience for this book is anyone who needs this information, from the amateur caver who finds an animal in a cave and wants to know what it is, to the professional academic scientist involved in planning and implementing an interdisciplinary research project".

This is a laudable aim, but I do wonder whether this is the right way to go about it. To start at one end of the spectrum, how many amateur cavers will have this book on their shelf, or even know of its existence, before they want to use it? Very few, I suspect; surely what happens now, in these circumstances, is that the person will turn to Google or other search engines. If it occurs to them to check with the BCRA website, they will find this publication listed <<http://bcra.org.uk/pub/cs/index.html?j=16>> but that they then need to order it (with another 50p p&p) and wait for it to arrive before they can even begin their research. I suspect that most of them will stick with Google.

A further problem is also inherent in a publication of this type is that it becomes rapidly out of date. Indeed it is guaranteed to be by the time that this review arrives. That is a second reason for potential users to utilise the internet first. New works are published all the time.

As Editor of the journal publishing this review, I am the last person to denigrate paper publications. To my mind it is essential that serious works in all disciplines continue to be made available in this form; the internet has major unsolved problems over both the long-term availability of material and its reliability; the controversy surrounding the content of Wikipedia is a good illustration of this. Having said that, however, the internet remains by far the most suitable place to find indices, bibliographies and other similar source lists that are subject to continual change. Our own website, at <http://www.ubss.org.uk/search_literature.php> has good examples of this. In my view, the BCRA should have put the contents of this book on its website and set up a network of people to keep it updated.

Graham Mullan