

REVIEWS

Swildon's Hole: 100 years of Exploration. by Dave Irwin, Alison Moody and Andy Farrant. 2007. Wessex Cave Club. Priddy. HB 276 pp. Price £25 ISBN 978 0 9500433 5 7. Available from B. Prewer <brian@prew36.eclipse.co.uk>

This book had a long gestation indeed; one of the authors stated that it swallowed four years of her life, but it has been in preparation longer even than that, I believe. It has been written to commemorate the first 100 years of exploration in what has long been the most important cave on Mendip, in terms of length and depth, and also historically with, for example, the genesis of cave diving in this country. In addition, the cave is important scientifically as one of the main source sites of Derek Ford's models of cave genesis.

The book is divided into three sections, each written by one of the authors, which, though complementary, can stand alone. The first of these is probably the most comprehensive account of the exploration of a single cave ever published. This was the work of the late Dave Irwin (for his obituary, see Wilson, 2007) and it is difficult to think of anyone else who could have completed this task and certainly no-one who could have done it as well. Dave's vast knowledge of Mendip caving history, his understanding of the source materials as well as his knowledge of and friendship with many of the main protagonists allowed him to produce an amazingly detailed, yet still eminently readable account of exploration at this site. That he managed even to include tiny contribution to made by the reviewer to these events is a guarantee that little will have been missed. Those unfamiliar with Dave's work will be impressed, those who knew him will regret that his comprehensive *History of Mendip Caving* will probably now never be published.

The second section, the description of the cave, is, again, remarkably comprehensive. Alison Moody, the author, has spent the last few years revisiting virtually every part of the cave. This has, however, surely only refined her knowledge, based as it is on thirty years of exploration in the cave, mostly in the company of her husband, Pete, and including much of the original work detailed in the first section. Her descriptions are clear, well laid out and extremely detailed. This section of the book, alone, compares in size to *Mendip Underground* the guidebook to the major caves of the area as a whole. As with Dave's section, completeness has not hindered readability. Alison's descriptions are complemented by a series of surveys of the various sections of the cave, drawn by Phil Hendy, and together they mean that no-one should ever again have an excuse for being lost in Swildon's. A full survey of the cave, on an A1 sheet, is included, tucked within the back cover. One of the very few criticisms that can be made of the book as a whole is the lack of a fixed pocket to hold this.

The third section of the book, on the formation of the cave, is the work of Andy Farrant, a native of Cheddar, graduate of the Geography Department of Bristol University where he studied under Pete Smart and now District Geologist for the Bristol and Bath area at the British Geological Survey. Andy's section is based on the pioneering work of, especially, Willie Stanton and Derek Ford but takes account of more recent discoveries to improve and refine their ideas. The result is, once more, a comprehensive account of the local geology and hydrology and how they have affected the geomorphology of the cave. Sensibly, he has included explanations of the concepts that have been used in gaining an understanding of the cave's long history, not least because many of them were based on work undertaken at this and nearby caves in the 1950s and 1960s. From the perspective of scientific study, the authors and editors admit, in the Introduction, that they could not include everything in one book; they

specifically mention the omission of material on cave biology and on water chemistry. Fortunately, for the latter topic readers can turn to page 121 of this volume.

In all, the three main authors and their various helpers have produced an excellent account of the cave which brings credit to both them and to the Wessex Cave Club. Niggles, a few: one wonders at the inclusion of the very similar Fig. 1.149 and Fig. 2.64, both photos of Sump XII and seemingly taken moments apart; your reviewer did not like the layout of the foot (side?) notes in chapter one; the method of crediting photos is inconsistent and there is a missed reference, to Atkinson and Waltham for Fig. 3.13.

The long gestation of this book was noted above, was it worth the wait? It most certainly was, this book will be mandatory reading for anyone with an interest in Mendip caves in particular and British caving in general. But then that should hardly be surprising to us, given that two of the main authors are UBSS members!

Graham Mullan

REFERENCES

Wilson, L.J. 2007. Obituary: Dave ("Wig") Irwin. *University of Bristol Speleological Society Newsletter*. Third Series 6. 9-10.

Cave Art: A guide to the decorated Ice Age Caves of Europe. by Paul G. Bahn. 2007. Frances Lincoln Ltd. London. SB 224 pp. Price £14.99 ISBN 978 0 7112 2655 5.

This is the first guide book of this nature since *The Caves of France and Northern Spain* by Ann and Gale Sieveking was published in 1962.

Bahn deals only with caves currently open to the public, which avoids irritation for the reader by not listing sites that remain tantalisingly out of reach. His task must have been made much harder in the final stages of production by a series of landowner deaths in the Dordogne, affecting sites such as Bernifal and St. Cirq. The former remains open, but for the latter, the future is, as yet, unknown. M. Yvon Pemendant of Bernifal and M. Palusano of St. Cirq are huge losses to those who know and love those sites. On a personal level, I will miss both of them, particularly M. Pemendant, who gave up many, many hours of his time in facilitating visits for myself and indeed other UBSS members to the sites he owned. For anyone who wishes to take their interest in the subject further, there are other caves can be visited, but that is an area which, entirely reasonably, is not within the scope of this book.

On a practical level, the book is small enough to fit into a large pocket, so it can be carried without the need for a rucksack, which is a huge bonus in caves which, for conservation reasons, often do not allow bags inside. The book is robust, with a good binding that looks like it will stand being carried around without falling apart at the least provocation, and the front and back flaps are fold-outs which can be used as page markers for handy reference. Lovely, thoughtful design.

Visually, the book is superb. Nearly every page has colour illustrations, all beautifully photographed and presented, picking out at least one feature of interest from each site, often the most striking. If no photograph is available, a line drawing is used instead.

The first 32 pages comprise an introduction and maps. Bahn provides a concise and admirably uncontentious overview of a subject which is well known for inspiring strong emotions and conflicting views. Some will dispute his remarks about the possible age of the paintings in Chauvet Cave, but while the argument does still persist, it is reasonable to mention