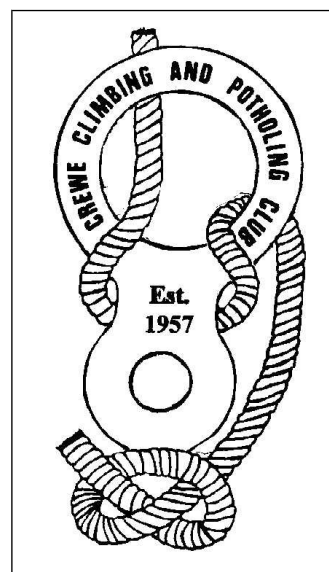


C.C.P.C. Newsletter 98. Late Summer (or early Autumn!) 2009

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A “shout” to Middleton Mine

Information is a bit sketchy on this one so don't take this as gospel. I got a call at around 0900 to say that there was a possible shout in the Middleton area – missing person, possible suicide.

I set off for a climb on Windgather but only got as far as Macc when I got a call saying it was a shout but a decision had been made to only call a small number of the team.

I arrived at the given reference point at around 1130- the “back entrance” to Middleton (limestone) Mine, was waved through the gate by a couple of bobbies, drove around the derelict site but the only evidence of recent activity were tyre marks disappearing into a black hole in the cliff face. (I later discovered that the DCRO vehicle had driven through the mine to the far side of the hill- the main entrance to the mine.) I opted to take the surface route – you all know how I like abandoned mines! Having negotiated the police road block I arrived at the main entrance to the mine to find a small number of DCRO personnel there perusing a large map of the mine – apparently there are 32 miles of passage on 5 levels.

It looked like being a long job so a decision was made to call out the troops and a couple of groups, each containing local guys with knowledge of the mine, went in to search the readily accessible sections of the mine. A police helicopter was already in action and the MRO were on their way. The passages in the mine were enormous, two double deckers could easily pass without even slowing down! As the search teams disappeared the father of the missing person arrived to tell the police that he had a good idea where his son might be. Sure enough he was found lying on the ground beneath a high voltage cable with his bolt croppers still attached to the wire! We departed at around 1430.

Gear.

There appears to be some confusion on where the club gear is stored. There are two official club stores, one in Biddulph at Ralph's and one in Crewe at Darren's. Both stores have sufficient rope and rigging gear for the majority of trips in the UK. They also contain an “emergency kit” should you be in a situation where someone is taken ill or injured. It is recommended that all groups take one of these kits underground when caving. These kits are in a standard tackle bag with a Darren drum containing a **basic** first aid kit, Sam splint, group shelter (4 man), candle and lighter and a small sit mat. (Paper, pencil, Stanley blade, tape have recently been added)

It is however recommended that you carry your own personal “survival” kit on ALL trips. Over the years I have used my emergency kit (which includes a heavy duty poly-bag) on 3 occasions and wished I’d had it with me on two other occasions! Accidents happen in the most unlikely places, the best motto is “hope for the best-be prepared for the worst”.

Darren’s store has 2 sets of gear for novices (there are 2 more on loan to Ron at the moment). Ralph’s store has enough gear for ten novices and includes SRT gear for 4. The “novice gear” at Ralph’s was purchased with a lottery grant.

We also have a selection of “engineering gear” and other bits n bobs stored either at Ralph’s, Nigel’s or Len’s

Any queries ASK.

Ralph

Grotte de la Grande Dore

It may seem surprising, but Burgundy, the French wine-growing region, is limestone country. Limestone cliffs abound and there are over thirty significant cave systems on record, ranging from 16km. in length to 72m. in depth. Dilys and I go there nearly every year to stay with our caving friends, Yannick and Claude Bonvalot. Apart from eating, drinking and loading up our boot with Burgundy wine and food, we usually go walking or caving together.

This July, Yannick and I went into La Grande Dore, a cave below the cliffs near Bouilland, not far from where he lives. Last year, when we visited the cave, it had rained for a fortnight. Water was springing out of holes in the ground as we walked uphill to the cave entrance. The cave entrance was dry, but, as we crawled over boulders to reach the main passage, we could hear the stream, echoing through the cave. As we advanced, it was clear that the cave was in flood! Nevertheless, we ventured further in and managed to traverse above the water in a dry rift with jagged projections, which tore a pocket off my old ICI boiler suit! We struggled quite a way upstream until the passage became impassable due to the water level. This year, however, the weather was dry and we succeeded in reaching the final siphon, about a quarter of a mile in.

La Grande Dore has been formed along a major joint in thickly bedded limestone. The entrance is low and access to the stream-way is over boulders, where we had to stoop and crawl forward through a low chamber. We followed the stream a short way via several constrictions and then climbed up into a rift passage, traversing on ledges occasionally, with short climbs and descents over and down to the stream. After about 250m, Yannick climbed down a tricky climb over a deep pool to a junction that had been under-water last year. He then tried to continue along the rift at water level and missed the way on. I climbed down behind him and, as the rift was too narrow for him to return and pass me, found the duck that he had missed. It only had a few inches of airspace and I could not be sure that it led to a larger passage beyond. Anyway, the water was crystal clear and not too cold, so I ducked under, getting an ear-full in doing so, to surface in a large passage. Yannick quickly joined me and we explored a delightfully clean stream-way to the final siphon. Yannick was very pleased. It was the first time that he had been able to reach this siphon for many years! We made our return with no problems and took a different route out through a low, watery, passage that we had traversed over on the way in. We emerged, wet, but clean and ready for the picnic lunch that Claude and Dilys had prepared for us on the surface.

The next day, we all went out to visit the Grottes d’Azé, near Cluny. These show caves had been explored by Burgundian cavers in the sixties and many important Palaeolithic finds were recovered by archaeologists. Cavers and archaeologists are still excavating new passages in the caves which now have several miles of passage. There is a very good museum that displays many of the artefacts and bones that were recovered from the caves, as well as videos, maps and photographs of the system. There are two caves at Azé, an active river cave with both tourist and ‘wild’ sections, and a prehistoric cave situated above this. Yannick, Claude and their two daughters are great friends of the cave owners and have all been involved in exploration and as guides over the years. Patrick, Yannick’s brother-in-law, was on guide duty when we arrived as it was a busy weekend for tourists. Yannick obtained a key

and led us on a private visit counter-current to the tourists through the river cave and then through the upper prehistoric cave on a trip that lasted almost two hours. The cave is well worth a visit if you are in the area.

John Gillett 14th.July 2009

Scrambling in the Canadian Rockies

Well ... scrambling was the grand plan, but, less than a fortnight before we were due to fly out, I took an unfortunate tumble in a British Championship fell race up at Tebay, in the Howgills, and snapped the acromioclavicular (try saying that without you're your teeth in!!) ligament in my right shoulder, thereby putting a painful hold on many of my activities – running, caving, cycling and climbing, and, indeed, anything involving a rucksack! It looked as if the trip may not happen, but discussions with my local GP (who, fortunately, is a runner and a climber), my hospital doctor and my insurer, it became apparent that the trip might be worth a go, and that it was likely that the pain would diminish and my mobility would improve during the holiday – and, indeed, most of the swelling had gone down by the time we left.

It's a long, long flight to Calgary; even with in-flight movies, free drinks, meals, books etc etc it's a very long eight hours, and, by the time we arrived, we both felt tired and not really keen on sorting out immigration, customs, drug-sniffing dog ("Go find!"), car hire, different driving rules and shopping – it was Canada Day the following day, and we didn't know if we would be able to buy food or gas if we left it until the morning. So we spent the first night in a cheap hotel, after doing all the necessary chores, leaving the drive up to Banff until the day after.

Before we arrived in Banff, we had to get permits to actually stay in the Canadian National Parks – in fact, if you're going for a fortnight or more, it's worth getting a year ticket. As it was Canada Day, the passes came with two dinky little maple leaf badges!

Banff is a pleasant, bustling touristy town filled with friendly people. There are loads of shops (open, despite the public holiday) and at least one coffee bar with free wifi, The people are very friendly – I managed to drop the key to our hire car and, by the time we'd done the shopping and discussed a couple of mountains with the park wardens and walked back to the car, somebody had picked it up and phoned the rental company (who got in touch with Martin back in the UK), found the car and placed the keys on the roof. All our gear was still in the vehicle ... all present and correct!

Banff is dominated by two huge limestone mountains – Mount Rundle and Cascade Mountain, both on our to-do list. As both were also a smidge under 3000m, we decided to spend the first afternoon doing a yomp up Sulphur Mountain which, at 2270m, might provide a little acclimatisation. This mountain is a good viewpoint, and also the object of a local cable car operation, so the summit was very busy when we had walked up the far side of the mountain. It gets its name from a thermal spring which we visited on our walk back into Banff.

Camping in Banff is run by the Parks people and most of the regulations are in place to protect the local wildlife (you know bears, squirrels, deer, elk ... oh, and bears) from being fed by you (directly, or indirectly) because, if they get too tame, they get to be a nuisance, and have to be shot. So ... no food, drink, utensils, stoves or toothpaste anywhere near the tent. Anything smelling at all attractive to an animal has to be locked in the boot of the car ... or the trunk, as they say over there.

Not that we saw any bears. We saw the odd notice saying there was one in the area – we were even advised to be careful be a park ranger when we were ascending Mount Yamnuska – but we never actually saw one. We saw loads of deer, plenty of long horn sheep, thousands of squirrels and quite a few grouse. The latter were larger than the English variety, and promenaded through the forest with large, straggling broods of chicks bouncing along in their wake.

The weather was mostly dry and bright (although there were two periods when it was very wet), warm during the day, cool at night and very cold in the morning. Most Canadians seem to camp in RVs – basically charabancs which have been converted into mobile homes approximately twice the size of anything we've seen in the UK. Many of these were towing vehicles bigger than the car we'd hired, for those short trips when you just don't want to use the RV ... like to the shower, or whatever. Our two-

man tent seemed quite small by comparison, and we often used our “subcompact” as a shelter from the ever-hungry mosquitoes.

The mountains are spectacular – very loose, but very big. There aren’t many mountain huts like you get in the Alps, so, if you want to do some of the more remote mountains, you need to carry a camp. Camping is highly regulated and also means paying for a back-country permit and committing to the site – it also means carrying a heavier load than I really wanted to with my injury. Consequently, we chose to climb only hills we could access there and back in a day. Fortunately, there are more than enough in this category, but it did mean that we had lots of long, exhausting days and, by the end of the holiday, I think we were more than happy to relax on a plane for eight hours!!

As well as Banff, we visited Lake Louise, Jasper, Canmore and Kananaskis Country. As well as mountaineering, we did plenty of touristy things like tripping around Malign Canyon, Takakkaw Falls, the Iceline Trail, Athabasca Falls, the Icefields Visitor Centre, Grotto Canyon, Grassi Lakes etc. The hills we took in were Mount Rundle, Cascade Mountain, Mount Edith, Mount St Piran, Hawk Mountain, Indian Ridge (via Whistler), Mount Yamnuska, Mount Lady MacDonald, Mount Niblock, Middle Sister, Heart Mountain, The Wedge and Mount Baldy.

Alan Kane’s Scrambling Guide for the area is worth getting, but much of it is out of date, and it is more useful as a rough guide – we still had to work out many of the routes ourselves. Scrambling in Canadian sense is the grey area between walking and climbing, and doesn’t include as much actual climbing as you would expect from, say, an English scrambling guide – but climbing skills and good mountaineering sense are essential. As I have already said, much of the country you’re climbing through is extremely loose, and careful footwork is often necessary – as well as a reasonable affection for scree.

The mountains we visited were mostly limestone, and, although there was evidence of caves (and a couple of cave tour companies advertising in the local papers) we saw no actual cavers on any of our travels. We did find a local caving magazine at Calgary Airport on our last day – it was a bit like Descent used to be in the late 70s.

Hopefully we’ll get some of our photos (we took an awful lot – almost 1000 between us) onto Picasa on the web but, as you can imagine, this is quite a big job and it will take some time.

We’d both like to go back to the Rockies. There’s lots we didn’t do – we didn’t do any alpine routes (largely because of my shoulder), we didn’t do any climbing (and there’s lots available) and I’d like to have a look at some of the cave systems over there.

Alan Brentnall August 2009

Meets

26 September DCRO street collection, Bakewell. *

4 October Lancaster-Easegill

14 October DCRO training

25 October Titan AND Peak Cavern

8 November West Mine (Alderley Edge)

10 November DCRO training

29 November JH “plus something else”

2 December DCRO training

12 December Cwmorthin slate mine . N Wales

19 December. DCRO Bag Pack AND Pub collction *

* Help required partic for bag-pack Morrisons Buxton.

As soon as Brendon (team doctor) knows his shift pattern for the next few months we will arrange a date for a one-day first aid course.

Basic SRT course: Venue and date TBA but probably October.

