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CAVE DIVERS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

(The following is an abstract of an article by Oliver C. Lloyd, University of Bristol. The original is available from Michael Terry.)

J. . (73), an inexperienced caver, descended Beldon's hole, England, during midwinter of 1959. When the cave began to flood, the party turned back and began the ascent of a forty-foot entrance shaft. By this time J. . was tired and cold, and inadequately clad for such conditions. The water streaming down this pothole was at about 40° F. After an unsuccessful attempt to climb out, J. . was hauled out by rope with difficulty, lapsing into unconsciousness on the way. At the head of the pitch he recovered consciousness and ate some chocolate, but was unable to converse. As he was being taken out of the cave, he died suddenly at 9 pm. He had been underground for nine hours.

H.M. was a thin but healthy seventeen-year-old woman, who had not been caving before, and went through similar experiences to J.W. The caving party who had also been flooded out, were delayed for about two hours in a particularly difficult section of the cave. Everyone was soaked through, the water was at about 43° F, and all attempts by H.M. to climb out of the entrance shaft failed. She was by now frightened. A rescue organization was called in, and brought her to the surface. Hot soup was poured into her mouth and some entered her larynx. It was evident she was dead.

Both cavers were inadequately clad, inexperienced, and died of acute heart failure within two hours of first becoming aware of the intense cold.

Prevention and Treatment of Chilling of Cavers

Chilling does not occur in a dry cave with moderate activity.... Woollen clothing is better than cotton even when wet, and retains the heat much better if it fits closely than if it is loose. Once soaked it is well not to try to change the water nearest one's skin, so that it can be warmed up, but it is often best to wring out one's underslothes if one does not expect a second soaking soon.

Immersion suits have increased cavers' tolerance of cold and wet conditions very greatly. They are, however, difficult to get and perish easily. Wet suits made of neoprene foam are the complete answer.

The taking of food in adequate quantities both before a wet caving trip and even after shivering has begun will delay the fall of inside temperature. If, however, the internal temperature falls to dangerous levels, the blood sugar level rises, because the muscles are no longer able to utilize sugar. At this stage giving glucose is of no use. No drug is of any avail. Alcohol is worse than useless as it accelerates body cooling by causing the blood vessels in the skin to dilate.

Exercise is nearly always better than inaction... If exercise is not possible, close contact with the body of another person will prevent heat loss, but this is not an effective form of treatment for severe cold.

If after rescue the subject is still torpid, the rectal temperature below 89° F and the pulse slow, treatment by immersion in a hot bath is called for as soon as possible... Rubbing with towels is of no use unless the skin has already been warmed.

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Some of the information in this article is not applicable to most of the caves this club visits at the present time. Coolaman is the only frequently visited cave which could be classed as wet, and thus the only one in which wet suits might be an advantage. But Mr. Lloyd's studies indicate the following basic rules:

warm clothing is essential. Although the cave may be dry and you may feel hot while moving, if you sit still for a while you will find out how cold it is. Wool is better than cotton - a close-knit woollen jumper would be adequate, but a looseknit, bulky jumper would be heavy and hamper movement.

don't go caving on an empty stomach, and carry food, especially chocolate, glucose or similar glucose rich foods.

don't take alcohol. This is especially dangerous because of the feeling of warmth which it imparts. This is due to the dilating of the blood vessels, and is accompanied by internal cooling.

as an extra - don't drink 'fizzy' drinks because the gas they produce expands when you come out, into an area of lower pressure, causing severe stomach cramp.

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Caving in Elizabethan Times

It is not generally realized that caving was a popular and highly developed sport as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century. However the following interview, found recently in an attic in London, and sold at public auction for an undisclosed, but very large, sum, proves this fact beyond doubt. The date is uncertain, but the year is 1587. William Shakespeare, who is the person interviewed has been identified as one of the most active member of the flourishing Stratford-on-Avon Caving Club, affiliated with the English and Scottish Potholers Association.

The interview is as follows:

- Q. Mr. Shakespeare, I believe you are a keen caver.
A. Oh my soul's joy -
Q. Yes, quite. What is so attractive about caving?
A. There be some sports are painful, and their labour
Delight in them sets off.
Q. Do you look on caving only as a sport?
A. More to know did never meddle with my thoughts
Q. What exactly is a cave?
A. The earth has bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them.
Q. Where do you find caves?
A. On hill, in dale, forest or med,
By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
Or on the beached margent of the sea.
Q. What do you actually do while underground?
A. What should such fellows as I do crawling between
heaven and earth?
Q. I believe you put great stress on lighting - is it
really that important?
A. I might do't as well i' the dark
Q. I have heard that the formation is quite spectacular.
Could you describe what you see in a cave?
A. ...brave o'erhanging firmament,
This majestical roof fretted with golden fire

- Q. Could you tell of some of your experiences? I suppose you have had some hair-raising adventures.
- A. I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul; freeze thy young blood;
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres;
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine.
- Q. Would you then, agree that caving is not a sane sport?
- A. ...'tis a fault to heaven
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
To reason most absurd
- Q. Totally without reason?
- A. Though this be madness, yet there is method in't
- Q. Finally, what advice would you offer to someone about to embark on their first caving trip?
- A. ... cure thy brains
Now useless, boil'd within thy skull

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TRIP REPORTS

or to be more accurate, Trip Report. One report in six weeks speaks for itself and student apathy.

Weekend Trip to Wyanbene, July 9th-10th.

Ian Raine, David Nicholls and a non-member visited Ridge Mine Pot and Wyanbene Cave. They spent about five hours in Wyanbene Cave, looking at the usual sights, and exploring passages off the river tunnel, where they found some magnificent formation. Most noteworthy point is that the ladders have been shifted to a new and unstable position, so they belayed down them.

The Ridge Mine Pot trip which also took about five hours was the first from this club. They slung 100' of ladder from the entrance and used about 30'. In places the going was difficult and in places just awkward crawling. Not all the cave was explored thoroughly due to lack of time, but some interesting discoveries were made. These included lots of formation and bones, which have not yet been finally identified, although they are probably the remains of a wallaby. There is no running water in the cave.

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COMING TRIPS

Wombeyan, probably 29th or 30th July.

See Graeme Chapman at the Chem. Dept. This will be a trip to the tourist caves which are well worth seeing, although there is no real caving involved.

Wee Jasper, 6th - 7th August

See Bob Orreill at the Geol. Dept. or the Union at lunchtime. It is planned to explore the area a little more thoroughly than we have done in the past in the hope of interesting finds.

We have been informed that the Canberra Bushwalkers are going to the Colong area on the weekend 6th - 7th August. Anyone who doesn't want to miss another walk up that hill see Neville King, Chem. Dept.

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