

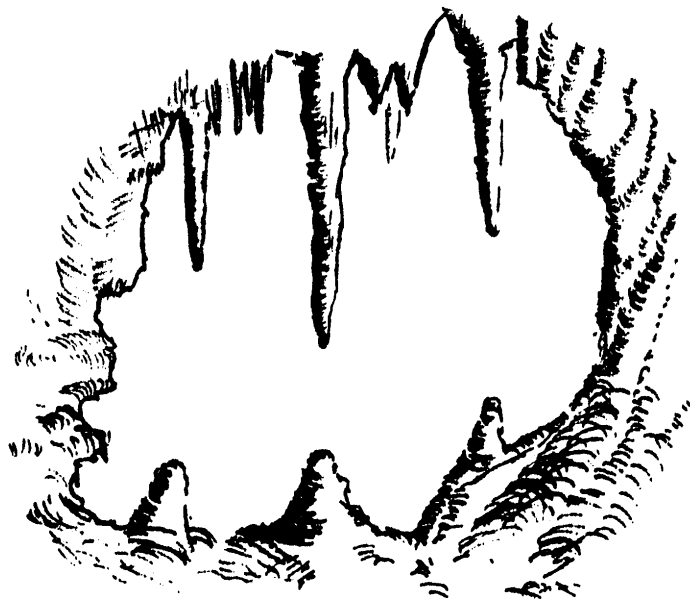
**GLOUCESTER
SPELEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY**

NEWSLETTER

2001, No. 1 - JANUARY



The Journal





Editorial

Well, here we are at the start of another new year, and I'm still in charge. What else hasn't changed? The usual lack of articles, of course. I've expanded on this theme in an article at the end of this newsletter. Come on, don't be shy. Tell the rest of us what you're up to underground: how your dig is going, how you had a totally boring trip into cave so-and-so, how your light failed as usual.

Joe Duxbury

PS The images above represent "Rover", one of the Polish cavers we met in 1999, who uses para-gliding to return from his caving trips.

STOP PRESS
CLUB WORLD RECORD BROKEN !

By Elise Jones

"Read all about it"! A club world record was broken on 7th October 2000.

After a history of caving trips being arranged for the morning after the clubs annual event, the A.G.M - and I quickly add, been cancelled again as soon as it's made - a group of four dedicated underground dwellers pursued the idea. Paul Taylor, Gareth Jones, Syd Grinnell and Elise Jones, with hangover in tow, walked (or even crawled) into the darkness of Wet Sink.

The initial intention was to do a round trip, so we started off following the stream. Stopping to look at Cross Stream Junction to see if there were any blind trout, but no such luck today. So we continued following the stream, walking past the turning to the round trip and on to Kama Sutra 1 and 2. However not brave enough to attempt the holes we carried on down to Condom Passage. Where, I hear, a fellow caver/diver explored, but when he finished his trip through condoms (hence the name) and other such substances that may get flushed down the toilet, he had picked up a rather nasty virus. I should imagine that he was in no hurry to explore the depths of Wet Sink again. While on our way back to the entrance, places were pointed out for ideal future photo shoot stops. Then the dreaded pitch that nobody particularly enjoys on ladder, but with the drive of getting back out to fresh air, you pull your body up, using every last ounce of strength you have. The trip only lasted a few hours because of other time commitments but the record was broken, and I feel that that makes an article itself.

*Congratulations to all concerned. We need more activity like this. **Let the Darkness into your life.***

Burial Alive: Guinness Book of Records, 1975

In June 1951 two men emerged from an underground bunker at Bobie Doly near Gdynia, Poland, which had been demolished and blocked by the retreating German Army in January 1945. One died immediately.

Annual General Meeting

You've had the essential details of the AGM in the last Newsletter, and in the November Newsheet, but here, to expand on the info given in the latter document, is a fuller account.

The AGM for 2000 was held on the 6th October, again at the Dog and Muffler, Joyford. Paul Taylor brought along the display that had been used at this year's Forest Symposium, showing many of the recent caving activities in the Forest of Dean, in which several GSS members have been active. This provided an excellent backdrop to the evenings proceedings. The guest chairman was Ian Standing, a member of GSS in its early days. Introduced by Maurice Febry, Ian skilfully steered the meeting through all the necessary business in less than an hour. Which left more time for the social interactions and beer drinking.

The club has several awards to present each year, and these were won by the following:

Diggers Cup	The Hole-in-the-Hedge Team
Founders Cup	Joe Duxbury
Photographic Competition	Gareth Jones
Best Newsletter Contributor	Not awarded, due to lack of articles

In addition to these there are some less formal awards, presented to those who, in some way, have made outstanding contributions to the social life of the club:

Accident of the Year	This year, a multiple award, each of which received a model of their achievement made by Jon Maisey: Pete Turier , for sheep-demolishing skills Jo Clarke , for ditch jumping in the van (<i>I presume this was the first refusal - you'll be trying for a more successful attempt at a later date?</i>) Dave Appleing , for impersonating a Crash Test Dummy
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We even allow special awards to be donated by kind-hearted individuals. This year, an extra award was given to Trevor Perkins by Dave Appleing. The "Anorak of the Year Award", was awarded for his enthusiasm for Darkhill Iron Works and the life and times of Mushett, and consisted of an appropriately labelled (inc. club logo) plastic anorak. Will it be passed on this year?

About 9 people stopped overnight, so the proceedings didn't finish until 3:30 a.m.

Thanks are due to all the staff at the D&M, and to those diminutive bullies, Rachel and Hollie, for selling lots of raffle tickets.

Response to Anorak of the Year Award

Following the presentation of the above award, the following email was received:

Anorakophobia

Hello Bastard Features,
My wife thinks you're a mean, sarcastic, piss-taking asshole and applauds your choice and taste. She still hasn't stopped laughing.

Parka



This is what happens when you don't pay your subs.

Here is an article that first appeared in "Speleo Nederland, Pierk 2, June 2000", recounting the trip led by our honorary Dutch member, Gareth van der Jones, last summer.

Ogof Ffynnon Ddu

(The cave of the black well)

Participants: Wolter ten Bokkel, Huinink, Gareth Jones, Maarten Poot and Eric Walch

The Sunday before Ascension Day 2000 a heavy storm is entering The Netherlands from the South. Against this storm we leave The Netherlands for a week in South Wales. On the road we try to imagine how it must be to cross the Channel in such a storm. We will never find out however as we take the Shuttle underneath the Channel. The next day, Wolter phones home and learns that in the city of Delft alone already 60 trees have been uprooted. In South Wales the weather isn't helping much either. After a great many trips to South Wales we have visited all the "classics". Only the Dan-yr-Ogof and the Otterhole are still high on our list. Both caves are very sensitive to flooding. As in previous years, this time the rain of the past weeks has made these caves inaccessible for us during our stay.

There was a dry alternative however: the 60 km. long cave system of the Ogof-Ffynnon-Ddu, amongst cavers better known as the O.F.D. Last year, we traversed the O.F.D via the main stream. Now, a wild river with a depth of several meters is roaring in the Mainstream Passage. Luckily, with a system of 60 km. there are

bound to be some fossil parts that remain dry, even during flood. Two years ago we headed for the Northern Lights. Then, we had to turn around at the Midnight Passage. This time, we know the first part of our way through this maze. In addition, we have got Gareth with us as a guide. As a frequent visitor, he knows his way round a large part of the system and he is also a recognized guide for a traverse.

For this trip we enter the cave via the Top Entrance. It is drizzling when we walk the 15 minutes from the hut to the entrance, and we are pretty wet when we reach the cave. The usual route leads straight forward via some wide passages. Shortly behind the entrance there is however a narrow passage on the left leading to the Mini-Columns, and that eventually rejoins the main route. As there is a pretty strenuous vertical climb to be made, Gareth brought a rope. Nobody really needs this, so we can leave the pack behind and collect it on our way back. The white columns are certainly worth the detour. Going further, we reach the Big Chamber Near The Entrance. Here, I believe I recognize the place and enter a corridor to the right. At first, Gareth hesitates.

Pretty soon however he follows and says: "Eric, you are not where you think you are, but this will probably also be right." As I spot the white arch of the White Arch Passage behind me I realize Gareth is right. But, after some time of stubbornly following the "wrong" route, all of a sudden we find ourselves at the entrance of the Gnome Passage. This gallery is unmistakable because of the multitude of "Gnomes" scattered over the entire floor. These gnomes are incipient pillars with a diameter ranging from 5 to 10 cm but yet only as high as 1 to 10 cm. We won't see much of this gallery however as we immediately turn left in the direction of the Chasm Passage. On this route we pass the "Wedding Cake", a white stone formation resembling a huge cake. Slightly past this formation we turn left and descend in the direction of Arete Chamber. We descend about 15 meters in between and over the boulders. Tracks on the rocks show that this is a main route. From here, we follow Salubrious Passage downstream. Because Maarten has never been here before, we stop at the junction to the Trident and the Judge to take a good look at these. Especially the Trident is impressive because of its 4 m. long, orange stalactites that reach down to 1m above the floor. After this little detour we take our old path again and head for the Cross Rifts via the Crossroads. From here, the path leads straight to Midnight Passage. To get there, at the end of the Cross Rift we have to keep left and descend. This is as far as Wolter and I got two years ago; then without a guide.

We leave Midnight Passage on the North side and climb to the right over the rocks. From here, it's getting more difficult. We find out that there are more caves here than shown on our map. After a few corridors, some of which are pretty difficult to pass, we find ourselves at the crossroads of five corridors at the beginning of Lavender Way. That is to say, according to the map there should be five ways; I myself can't see more than a T-junction with a rope leading up high. It must be attached somewhere four meters above our heads. Gareth disappears into a hole, climbs up and crawls back to the top of the rope. We follow him, and discover that the rope has only been secured by one anchor! My first impression is not to use this rope at all. Then I realise however that it may be better to lean on it slightly than to run the risk of falling. All of us pass this point very carefully. A few yards further we have to step over a deep cleft. Luckily, there is a rope here, this time secured by two anchors - however, only one at each end. We pass four chambers. In the last one, an old hemp rope is leading up. Using this rope, we climb up to find a big surprise: an enormous hall of at least 15 meters high. Somewhere on the right, a waterfall is rumbling. Straight through this waterfall, an old rope is leading up. According to Gareth this rope was already there when he came here for the very first time.

After a break we enter the Northern Inlet. This whole route is taped. It is a whole series of dripping stone and

other calcite-formations. We wonder how the other corridors in this area will look like - according to the map, this whole area is full of such stone formations. Soon, we enter Mudlust Hall. Here, we find impressive layers of fossil mud. A long time ago, with every flooding a layer of mud of between less than a millimeter to a few millimeters was deposited. This has repeated itself to such an extent that in the end the mud reached a height of no less than three meters. However, an enormous flood must have swept away most of it, as today we only find the remainders of these mud layers on the walls. Each individual mud layer can be distinguished, a bit like tree rings: The upper 30 cm of the mud look white because of a sort of moonmilk. Also at places where there is no clay any longer, this 30 cm broad, white band can be seen on the walls. We follow the path upstream until we reach a spot where the water pours out of a narrow cleft. Here, Gareth stops and says: "This is our way on. From here we will get wet. But on the way in you will only become half wet. If you remember which side was down inwards and you crawl back on that side you stay just half wet." Bearing this in mind, I enter the cave on my right side. For the time being, I can keep it dry. Pretty soon however there is a sharp turn to the right. From here, there's not enough room above the water, so that we are left with no choice but to get wet. The curve is too sharp, and I have to crawl back and enter on my other side. This works better, and after only two meters I can climb out of the water. The corridor seems to go on forever when I hear Gareth behind me. I climb up towards a bigger and higher part of the corridor. This is the Moonmilk Revenry. We are now above the mud banks we saw before. Everything is covered in a white layer. At last, all four of us find ourselves at the crossroads. We decide to explore the caves one by one, starting with Peat's Playground. There's no end to the stone formations here; small wonder that Gareth brought his camera.

Finally, we've seen it all and start to head back. On the way back I decide to have a go at the guiding, map in hand. This time we follow the Cross Rift, take the fourth corridor to the left and head via the Shatter Pillar, Selenite Tunnel and again Salubrious Passage for the exit. Especially the Selenite Tunnel is very attractive. As we still have got some time left, we take a little detour and visit the Shale Chamber and the White Arch Series. This last route was new for all of us, even including Gareth. At last, after six and a half hours of caving, we find ourselves outside again.

Extra information

The caves have a predominantly horizontal character. In the (few) occasions where you need ropes, it's mostly fixed hand ropes. Because of the sheer size of the system, there is a difference of 308 meters between the highest and the lowest point, at the same time making it the deepest cave in Great Britain. The cave has three entrances: Ogof-Ffynon-Ddu is the highest,

followed by Cwm-Dwr Quarry Cave and Ogof-y-Nos-Hir. All entrances are gated and locked. The lowest entrance is only accessible with a guide; for the other two you need written permission to obtain the key. You will need to have a good map however! In the nearby hut maps of the cave are for sale. It must be said that the sheer size of this map (5 pages A 1) makes it rather difficult for use underground. A small version of this map can be obtained from the author of this article. To obtain permission for entering the cave write well in advance to: Permit Secretary, S.W.C.C. Headquarters, Pen-y-Cae, North Swansea. Indicate how experienced you are. Without experience, you'd better stay clear of this maze, and probably you won't get permission to enter. With a good guide however there is a wide variety of nice trips to be made here. The most popular tour is the traverse from the lowest entrance to the top entrance. A shorter traverse starts or

ends at the middle entrance. For the large (guided) traverse you should allow 6 or 7 hours. In 1998, all ropes and supports on the routes used for the main traverses were replaced by new and better ones. The intention is to check everything twice annually and to replace all the ropes every other year. Dated labels tell you when the supports have been last checked. Outside of these routes, you will find old material however. Another impressive formation is The Columns, which can just be seen in the right top hand corner of the map in this article. Two entrances lead to this vulnerable area. Because of too much carelessness, some years ago this area was closed off completely. On four days per year, the doors are opened give visitors a chance to explore

Literature: Caves of South Wales, 4th Edition, by Tim Stratford.

Many thanks to Rinke Vinkenoog, at the University of Bath, for translating this report.

The holder of the World's deepest cave title has changed rapidly in recent years. We'd better get a move on at Hole-in-the-Hedge.

A NEW WORLD DEPTH RECORD IN ARABIKA MASSIF, WEST CAUCASUS

Preliminary information

I am happy to inform all cavers, speleologists and karst people that the new world depth record has been set up at the very beginning of the new century. It was set up on January 6 in Voronja cave, Arabika massif, West Caucasus, by the expedition of the Ukrainian Speleological Association led by Yury Kasjan (Ukraine).

Previously (during 80th) the cave was explored to a narrow impassable meander at -340m. Being located next to the 1110m deep Arabikskaja system (Kujbyshevskaja - Genrikhova Bezdna) and heading towards Kujbyshevskaja cave, Voronja was regarded as a part of the system, although not directly connected.

In 1999 the Ukr.S.A. expedition have re-inspected the cave and found two "windows" in the 60m deep pit, one at -200m and another at -240m, both leading to new branches. The second branch led toward the Kujbyshevskaja cave and has been explored to about -500m, yet not provided direct connection. The first branch went in the depth steeply by a series of pits. Exploration was stopped at -750m in 1999 due to the lack of equipment.

The multi-stage expedition of the Ukrainian Speleological Association, held during August-September of 2000, pushed the cave to -1410m. During the first stage of the expedition the cave was explored to -1200 m. At the second stage held in the first half of September, in which a French-Spanish MTDE team took part (also the Ukr.S.A. members), the cave has been pushed to the depth of 1410m.

The current expedition started on December 25. On January 2nd the underground base camp at -1200m has been set up. On January 3-rd the team started pushing the continuation remained from the last expedition (behind -1410m). On January 5 the depth of -1580m, and on January 6 - the depth of 1680 m has been reached. There was a next pit of about 70 m deep ahead.

This is the latest information which has been received in Kiev by phone on January 7. Exploration continues, so one might expect that the depth of Voronja is now over 1750m.

More detailed information and the final (official) figure about the depth of the cave will be reported in the next feature.

The depth potential of the system is illustrated by the hydrologic connection established by the dye test yet back in 1984, between Kujbyshevskaya Cave and the large Reproa spring located just on the Black Sea beach. The entrance of Voronja is located at about 2230m.

Expedition members:

Yury Kasjan, Poltava, Ukraine (leader)
Yulija Timoshevskaja, Poltava, Ukraine
Denis Provalov, Kiev, Ukraine
Sergej Zubkov, Kiev, Ukraine
Anatolij Povjakalo, Poltava, Ukraine
Ilja Zharkov, Sverdlovsk, Russia

Nikolay Solovjev, Kiev, Ukraine
Oleg Klimchouk, Kiev, Ukraine
Konstantin Moukhin, Moscow, Russia
Vitalij Galas, Uzhgorod, Ukraine
Dmitrij Skljarenko, Moscow, Russia

Sincerely,
Alexander Klimchouk



Caving is very popular in all corners of Poland. This shop was spotted in Zakopane.

Problems with new Petzl sit harnesses have recently come to light. I present the following articles which describe the problem, and advise people to take that little extra care with new gear...

Cavers Digest 5695 Topic Number: 10

From: "LW Sykes" <les@speleo999.freemove.co.uk>
To: "Cavers" <cavers@ditell.com>
Subject: Harness safety
Date: Fri, 27 Oct 2000 08:18:43 +0100

A little word of warning when wearing harnesses. I recently purchased a new Petzl harness, one of the one's with the purple webbing. I was amazed to find out that while prussiking up the big pitch in Gavel Pot, the legs loops came

undone, not completely, but the safety double over buckle did undo so that the engraved word DANGER was visible.

Worried by this I contacted Lyon Equipment (main importer of Petzl equipment). After examining the harness their comments were, 'some slippage of the webbing is acceptable' and that 'the buckles of harnesses should be checked at regular intervals'. I'm not too sure about 'some slippage of the webbing is acceptable', but I do check my harness buckles regularly. The question is how often is regular? I would certainly expect to get up a pitch without having to check the buckles. When asked, Lyon didn't respond to define what regular was.

Recently it has been brought to my attention that a number of cavers are having problems with their new(ish) Petzl harnesses, and yes it's the leg loops working loose. Some have even come undone. Currently Petzl are looking at the problem. I doubt whether they will want to give refunds on the 1,000's of harnesses that they have sold.

So, beware. Check the buckles more regularly than you think that you need to, especially if you own a new(ish) Petzl harness with the purple webbing. Models where loosening of the buckles has occurred are the Petzl Fractio, and Petzl Superavanti. I will keep you posted on developments.

If you are experiencing problems with your Petzl harness, let Lyon Equipment or Petzl know, it's the only way to get the improvements that cavers deserve.

Les Sykes
CNCC secretary
CNCC Technical Group
CNCC Technical Group Web page
<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/members/andy.mccarron/cncctech.htm>

Cavers Digest 5696 Topic Number: 5

From: VauterB@aol.com
Date: Fri, 27 Oct 2000 14:56:06 EDT
Subject: Petzl harnesses coming undone
To: cavers@ditell.com

We, too, have had a similar problem with the harnesses on our adventure tour here at Natural Bridge Caverns. There have been three incidents where the leg loops worked loose, the most alarming on the drop down the original well-shaft entrance. A woman's left leg loop worked its way completely off. Fortunately she was at the bottom of the 160-foot drop, and only 5 feet off the ground. The guide was able to catch her leg and support her the rest of the way down. I know that the buckles were done up correctly as it was I who assisted her in putting her harness on. The guides told me about the problem, and we were able to pull the webbing through [out of] the buckles on four of the 15 harnesses we have - even when doubled back through the buckle! The harnesses were new and had not been worn that much at all. When I contacted Petzl's main U.S. office, I was told that the webbing being new might have a tendency to slip, so the user would need to perform periodic checks to insure that the webbing was in place.

I can understand the need to perform those checks as routine safety, but the fact that we could simply pull the webbing straight out of the buckle (even doubled through) caused us some concern. The guides pay even more attention now to that type of harness.

All that being said, after a year of normal wear-and-tear, the webbing is apparently worn in enough that we can no longer pull it through the buckle. Perhaps being new does have something to do with it. It still scares the hell out of you to think about it, though.

Brian Vauter
Adv. Tour Manager
Natural Bridge Caverns, Inc.

The Annals of Caving

Joe Duxbury

The recent articles in Descent (no's 155 and 156) concerning the attitudes of the press to, and public perception of, cavers, prompted me to ask whether we are partly to blame. If we don't communicate our furtive, underground experiences to the rest of society, is it surprising that we are not held in any great esteem? Compare our situation with that of mountain climbers.

In his foreword to "Epic. Stories of Survival from the World's Highest Peaks" (edited by Clint Willis), Joe Simpson says: "...this is...why mountaineering has spawned such a wealth of truly first-class writing. It speaks from the soul. It is ineluctable, ineffable and quite transcendent".

Wow! Powerful words! So why has caving not produced "such a wealth" of writing? Is our extraordinary sport, so vital to many of us, less "transcendent" than mountaineering? There is certainly no lack of oral tradition. If we haven't actually heard someone describing how they were overwhelmed by the splendours they had encountered underground, or how they battled against appalling conditions or circumstances to regain the surface, then most of us have heard such accounts passed down. And yet so little appears in print to stimulate new blood, or to revive the memories of the old farts. Just compare the number of climbing and caving books that can be found in any local library, or outdoor activities shop. I don't believe it's because cavers are inherently less gifted, less lyrical, less capable of putting their experiences down on paper. Is it because mountaineers are less modest; because their sport exposes them to the public gaze, they're unperturbed about revealing their emotions as well? Is it just an English cultural thing? After all, there are many more French books on caving (but perhaps someone will tell me that even so the ratio of climbing/caving literature is much the same in France).

Maybe you're not quite so overwhelmed as Joe Simpson, and agree with Andrew Greig, who says in "Summit Fever" that he found "most climbing books left [him] vaguely dissatisfied...something was always left out". He thought that "the contents are there but the...inner substance of the experience is missing". We cavers have difficulty saying even "most caving books", because there are so few. Would you argue that while caving literature lacks in quantity, it makes up for in quality? Or perhaps you feel that expression through the pages of club journals is enough? Perhaps the written word is so inadequate a medium to capture "inner substance" of the caving experience that the effort is too much.

Interestingly, the most recent upsurge of caving writing in English (sic) that's available to the general public has appeared in the USA. They seem to have thrown off their inhibitions and are now revealing their feelings in print. The National Speleological Society has an Arts and Letters Section, covering both art and literature, whereas here not even the SpeleArt group is accepted as a Special Interest Group within the BCRA.

This is of course a consequence of my own opinion. I, like John Ganter declared in an article on the effects of mass publicity on caving, "love to read ... caver accounts". These readings have taught me a great deal about the world of caves and cavers. But perhaps I'm in a minority. Perhaps the majority of my fellow enthusiasts consider caving literature to be unimportant, merely an amusing diversion. Even if cave writing doesn't result in a Booker Prize, if I succeed in provoking others to share their underground triumphs and disasters, moments of despair and exhilaration, and plain old mud stomping, I for one will buy their books.

Clint Willis (Ed.), "Epic. Stories of Survival from the World's Highest Peaks" (Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1999)

Andrew Greig, "Summit Fever" (Canongate, Edinburgh, 1997)

John H. Ganter, "Caves in Magazines, Caves on Television: Mass Publicity and the Growth of Caving", NSS News, May 1992, pp. 121-129.

Ouch! *Something to cheer you up after the festive season!*

When a 40-year old man turned up at a hospital asking to see a doctor specialising in men's troubles, he was shown into a cubicle, where he gingerly unwrapped three yards of foul-smelling stained gauze from around his scrotum, which had swollen to twice the size of a grapefruit. On further inspection, it was discovered that his left testicle was missing completely, and, embedded within the swollen, tender and weeping wound, were a number of dark objects which the patient confessed were one inch staple nails from an industrial staple gun. It transpired that the man spent his lunchtimes alone in his workshop, where he regularly enjoyed the sexual thrill of placing his penis on the moving canvas fan-belt of a piece of machinery. One day, the excitement had caused him to lose his concentration, and the fan-belt had snatched his scrotum into the fly-wheel, throwing him several feet across the floor tearing off his left nut. Rather than go to the hospital, he performed first aid on himself with the stapling gun, then went back to work when his colleagues returned. It was two weeks before he got around to visiting the hospital.

A man turned up at a hospital wearing an overcoat, and with blood dripping down his leg. When he removed the coat, the doctor saw he had a geranium inserted in his penis. The man got the flower in without any difficulty, but when he tried to remove it, the hairs on the stem of the flower had dug into the urethra and ripped it to shreds.

A policeman in Staffordshire returned home from a night shift to find his wife preparing breakfast. For some unknown reason, he wrapped a slice of bread around his penis, at which point the dog leapt up and took a bite out of it. The man needed cosmetic surgery to restore the damage.

A 34-year old New Yorker injected a cocaine solution into his penis to heighten his sexual pleasure. He then enjoyed intercourse with his girlfriend. However, after three days, he went to the doctor in search of help.

Shortly afterwards, he developed blood clots in various parts of his body, gangrene set in, and he lost both legs, nine fingers and his penis.

A student wrote the following in his journal...

"When I was studying in Ireland, I took up rugby. As my first season wore on the lads and I were eventually scheduled to play a team which had a reputation for violent play. Considering that we weren't the most talented outfit to have ever taken the field, we decided to accept the challenge with a "do or die" attitude, hoping things would eventually swing our way. They didn't. And to make matters worse, our star player dislocated his hip after a particularly ferocious tackle. He was clearly in a lot of pain, so we all stood back to watch the medic who, in one swift movement, managed to slot the hip back into its socket. Then Alan began a long blood-curdling scream. To our horror, we realised that one of his testicles had also been jammed into the socket and was now firmly held in the place by the hip. Incidentally, Alan managed to rip a vocal chord with his screaming."

Finally, some more belated season's greetings. Question: can the handwriting be identified?

