

WORLD MUSIC

CAVING BALLADS GREAT BRITAIN

Introduction

Normally only music released on discs (shellac, vinyl, or compact) are included in this discography, but, due to the fairly small number of recorded caving songs and the evident interest among cavers, an exception has been made to also include here those caving songs recorded and released on cassettes.

The lyrics of most of these cave ballads are available in the caving literature and transcriptions of these texts will not be included here.

WD-CB-US4 United Kingdom 1990

THE CAVING TAPES LIVE

FK – Cave Ballad – Vocal

Comp: (?)

Perf: **KLAUS TROPHOBIA, THE APPALLING BROTHERS,
TROG & THE DELIGHTS, RAVING GONZOLAS,
& THE EVEN MORE APPALLING BROTHERS**

Prod:

Prod. Co: Damian Paton; Brighton, Sussex

Liner Notes:

Time: (?)

CASSETTE: THE CAVING TAPES LIVE

(Label & Cat. No. Unknown)

90min (Sides 1 & 2)

Notes: Regarding content of the 12 songs here the insert says – “Sex, drink, rock and roll and caving, they all go together, and now have been brought together! Performed live at Wookey, Wrington and Woodstock the songs tell of the ideal caver, ‘Tex’ – and Tex’s inventor, having been snubbed by Polydor, has released a tape containing 12 original and yet uncensored caving songs.” (Anon. 1990) It is not known if this means that part of this offering was recorded in Wookey Hole or just in Wookey. “Polydor,” of course, refers to Polydor Records.

Unfortunately, nothing further could be learned about these songs.

It is hereby requested that if any caver worldwide has a copy of this cassette that they kindly send a copy, either in cassette or CD form, to this author so the information can be transmitted via this Website. All that is needed is to contact the author via the [Contact](#) page posted on this site’s Home page.

Ref: Anon. 1990, The Caving Tapes Live, *Descent*, August/ Sept. 1990, p. 5

WD-CB-GB1 United Kingdom 1982

MENDIP MELODIES

Selections:

Side A – 1. MENDIP IS BEAUTIFUL/ 2. PUB WITH NO BEER/ 3. FLUSH THE MAGIC TOILET/ 4. BCG SONG/ 5. HUNTERS HOLE SONG/ 6. WHOOPS SHE 'AD IT/ 7. I WANT TO BE A CAVER/ 8. ALL THE NICE GIRLS LOVE A CAVER/ 9. SIDE BY SIDE/ 10. SPELEOPOD/ 11. I'M OFF CAVING/ 12. I'LL GO NO MORE A CAVING/ 13. A YOUNG MAN BY THE NAME OF JIM/ 14. DAN DAN/ 15. DA DOO RON RON

FK – Cave Ballad – Comedy – Vocal

Comp: (Various)

Perf: (Various Artists)

Prod. Co: Cerberus Speleological Society; Bath, Somerset

Liner Notes: (18-page songbook)

Time:

CASSETTE: MENDIP MELODIES – A Selection of "Caving Croaks" or WANKING IN WOKING C.S.S. (No Cat. No.) 90min (Sides 1 & 2)

Notes: A collection of humorous caving ballads and some bawdy ballads.

"Mendip cavers had something of a reputation for singing and northern cavers were heard to comment when singing throughout a trip (plays havoc with ones breathing when climbing ladders) pervaded the pots, that it was more like a choir outing than a caving trip.... Music is always present in the Mendip caving scene (probably it is even an essential part) there was an earlier skiffle era, currently it is traditional folk." (Mills 1976)

The "BCG Song" is not included in the cassette songbook but can be found in Cornwell-Smith's cave song anthology. Four songs here are straight bawdy ballads and having nothing to do with caving – "Flush the Magic Toilet," "Whoops She 'ad It," "Side By Side," and "Dan Dan" – and therefore will not be discussed here, not out of prudery, but simply because this is a speleo-discography that only deals with cave and bat-inspired music.

Whereas it is not known who the performers were on each of these ballads it has been decided to discuss each caving ballad separately below and assume that all were performed by "Anonymous."

1. MENDIP IS BEAUTIFUL – The joys and woes of caving in the Mendips. In this five stanza ballad stanza 2 tells of a caver who got stuck in a tight squeeze and was helped to advance "by a carbide [flame]" on his backside. Stanza 3 spells out another story –

We know a caver who went down a pitch
He tied up his lifeline with just a half hitch,
But sadly he fell off and as he could not fly,
He now does all his caving in that cave in the sky.

Stanza 4 is about a cave diver who lost his rope guideline and had to "drink" his way out. The final stanza has a big busty girl caver getting stuck badly, so "now there's a pair of stalagmites for the tourists to see."

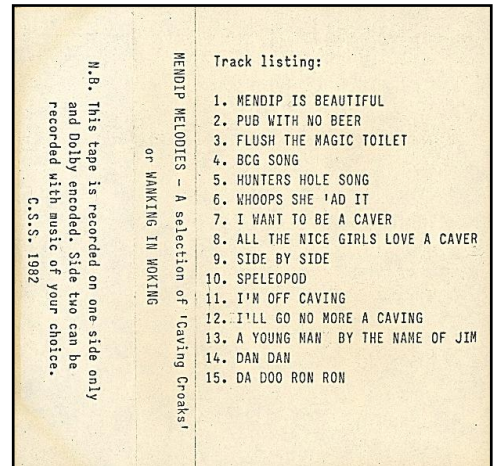
2. PUB WITH NO BEER – In the tradition of the classic complaint ballad. The six stanzas go down the list telling how – But there's nothing so lonesome, so dull or so drear,
Than to stand in the bar of a pub with no beer.

First off there are the publicans & others, then the stockman sneering, then the dog cringing for fear, and then the quarryman cold sober. The final stanza gets to the caver –

A caver comes in after a hard trip down Stoke
And the words of the barman made there make him choke,
He's been cold stone sober for an hour or near
He'll have to drink something, but the pub's got no beer.

Stoke refers to the notorious wet cave, Stoke Lane Slocker, with its active streamway. "Its entrance is flooded; and, after diving in water of doubtful purity, the hardy caver is rewarded by the sight of many large chambers and some of the finest formations in Mendip, and also by some narrower places to be negotiated. It appears that the present stream only discovered this cave at a late stage in its history, as it cuts its valley down, eventually dissecting the hidden cave system." (Cullingford 1962)

The illustration for the "No beer" pub is from Alfie's, *Reflections*.





4. BCG SONG – The B.C.G., being the Border Caving Group, is a much-beleaguered club based in Surrey, but not to the liking of the native *in situ* Mendip cavers. Notice the alternate title of this cassette, “Wanking in Woking.” Well, Woking is a town in Surrey, southwest of London. The BCG did most of their caving in the Mendips and in 1974 they had accommodations (club hut?) at Fairy Cave Quarry, Oakhill, Bath, Somerset. (Anon. 1974)

5. HUNTERS HOLE SONG – Hunter’s Hole is a classic for those of the Shepton Mallet Caving Club for Hunters’ Lodge Inn is their free house (pub) and this is their song. The **ten four-verse stanzas tell**



Hunters’ Lodge Inn – Priddy



Illustration by Reg from *A Strange Device*

7. I WANT TO BE A CAVER – Set to the tune of “My Old Man’s a Dustman,” this is a homophobic ditty about a gay novice’s dream to join a caving crew and do all the butch things they do. Stanza 3 tells how the novice visited various show caves all over England and Wales: the Cheddar Caves, Gough’s Cave & Cox’s Cave; Dan-yr-Ogof in Breconshire; White Scar Cave in Yorkshire; and Speedwell Cavern in Derbyshire. Then in stanza 4 he imagines himself doing the Blue Pencil Crawl in Swilden’s Cave, the Main Shaft in Gaping Gill in Yorkshire, and the free climb out of Bar Pot, which is one of the four entrances to the Gaping Gill System.

8. ALL THE NICE GIRLS LOVE A CAVER – Now with a title like that nothing can go wrong. The alternate title is “All the Nice Birds Love a Caver” and it was set to the tune of “Ship Ahoy (All the Nice Girls Love a Sailor)” written by A.J. Mills & Bennett Scott (1909) The first of three stanzas makes it very clear –

All the nice girls love a caver,
 All the best girls love a trog,
 For there’s something about a caver,
 That you’d think is rather odd,
 Black and slinky, loves a stinky,
 It’s the wetsuit that he wears,
 But there’s something out of sight,
 That he gets down every night,
 Pints of beer, pints of beer.

10. SPELEOPOD – An original tune and lyrics written by L. Mills. “First heard at a B.S.A. Conference reputed to be contributed by Manchester Speleological Society. A biospeleological ditty which explains the development of all ‘we low caving persons’ from our original amoebic ancestors. Ranks equally with Darwin’s ‘Origin of the Species.’ “ (Biddle 1976)

The speleopod is 16 million years old, has 16 hairy legs, a trunk, trumpet ears that pick up echoes, and has “lost his twinkling eyes.” The cucumber monster from the 1956 horror film, “It Conquered the World,” directed by Roger Corman is shown here coming out of its lair, the Bronson Caves, in



Griffith Park, Los Angeles. The resemblance to the speleopod is purely coincidental.

This song was first published in April 1976 in an occasional publication of the Grampian Speleological Group in Edinburgh. Martin Mills, then of the Shepton Mallet Caving Club, commented that the fact that this songbook – “has been done by a non-Mendip club avoids much of any scorn and reluctance/ problems in publication, but it is nor so surprising when one considers that as the premier Scottish club and covering a large proportion of the total area of the U.K. it has undoubtedly more Mendip exiles than any other club – apart from having the only hut with a harmonium!” (Mills 1976)

11. I'M OFF CAVING – To the tune of “Bye-Bye Blackbird,” the famous standard written by Ray Henderson & Mort Dixon and first published in 1926. A six stanza drinking song starts out with the caver, misunderstood by his girlfriend, saying – “I’m off to BCG, silly cow don’t bother me/ Caving for me.” So there you go, the Border Caving Group is back again. The lyrics go on to describe this caver getting sucked into heavy drinking. He says he’s “off caving” yet declares “caving for me,” but actually never does any caving, all he does is drink, gets sick, and then goes back for more.

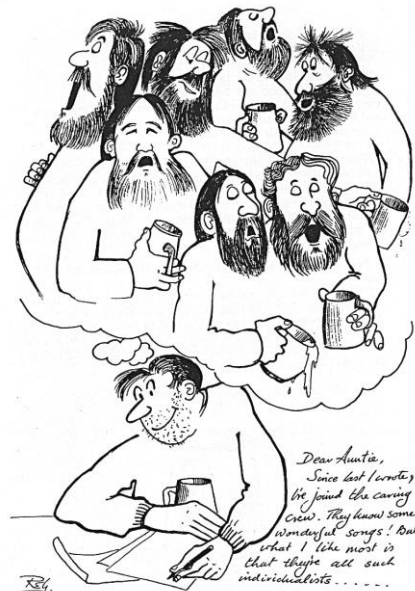
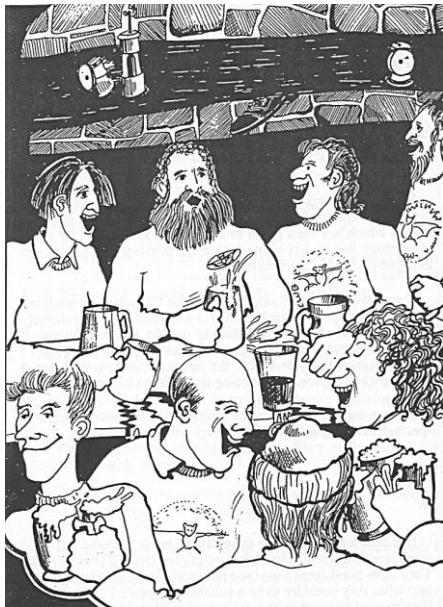


12. I'LL GO NO MORE A CAVING – The chorus of this five stanzas ditty spells ti out very well –

A caving, a caving, since caving been my ru-i-n
I'll go no more a caving with that cave crew.

The illustration here is by Jim Eyers from the cover of his 1992 book, *Right in It*.

13. A YOUNG MAN BY THE NAME OF JIM – A ten-stanza bawdy ballad about Jim, who’s a bit impotent when it comes to making it with his girl Kate and as a result he gets duped by Dave a caver who exits a cave only to find Kate half-naked and abandoned at the entrance.



Illustrations by Reg from *A Strange Device* by Alfie

15. DA DOO RON RON – A bawdy ballad set to the tune of the famous 1963 rock song written by Jeff Barry & Ellie Greenwich and performed by The Crystals.

The lyrics tell of a caver who picked up a chick in Priddy and took her to the cottage, etc.

Stanza 4 continues – We were late next morning when old Eric came
Da doo run run run da doo run run
He said, “You dirty Speleos, you’re all the same.”
Da doo run run run da doo run run

The last stanza laments that – she left me for a diver from the CDG (Cave Diving Group).

This cassette comes with an 18-page booklet with all the song lyrics with the exception of the "BCG Song." However, the order of presentation of each song in the booklet does not correspond with their order on the cassette.

To put you in the right mood and mood is everything in music, to get into the spirit of these caving songs the required supplementary reading would be the two humor books by Alfie, who was a certified old Mendip caver and a jolly one at that. If you crave visual aids when you listen to music it is suggested you also look up or borrow two books of caving cartoons: Jim Evers' *Right in It* (Mendip Publishing, 1992) and Phil Hendy's *Muddy Oxbows* (Mendip Publishing, 1978).

Ref: Alfie (Collins) 1971, *Reflections*, Barton Productions & Cheddar Valley Press, Cheddar, Somerset, 91p

Alfie (Collins) 1995, *A Strange Device*, Bath Graphics, 97p

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Anon. 2013, Da Doo Ron Ron, [Wikipedia](#)

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No. 3, Apr. 1976, Edinburgh, Scotland, p. 24

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Cullingford, C.H.D. 1962, *British Caving: An Introduction to Speleology*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., p. 137

Mills, M[artin] T. 1976, Book Review of the Caving Songs of Mendip, *Shepton Mallet Caving Club Journal*, Series 6, n. 2, Autumn 1976, p. 19-21

Shepton Mallet Caving Club, Home page, shepton.org.uk

caveinspiredmusic.com