



SOUTH WALES CAVING CLUB

CLWB OGOFYDD DEHEUDIR CYMRU

Newsletter

No. 117

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South Wales Caving Club

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Caving Club.

Movers and Shakers

by Clive Jones

It was maybe twenty-five years ago when the dig across the wall from Pwll Byfre was started. Maybe it was Dai Hunt who started it, as he had started so many digs. But does it matter now? All that I recall is that there were many people involved and that a galvanised iron drum was Land Rovered up to the site and sunk into a hole through loose boulders and rubble. This gave us a feeling of security as iron rails held the drum above a space in boulders of all shapes and sizes. Why were we digging here? Because the place had all of the classic omens. Near a big sink, melting snow in the winters of that time, and a warm wind with a steaming draught in a small depression. A small depression meant that there was no big collapse beneath. Good thinking. No Ogof Ffynnon Ddu Two in those days: just one entrance at Y Grithig with the cave ending at Boulder Chamber or Starlight, and a number of people with Ffynnon Ddu fever. The only cure for these poor souls would be a through trip from the sink to the rising. Timbers, good thick stuff, including railway sleepers were used to hold back the boulders which seemed perched in a way designed to hide the black space just beneath. Boulders were lifted out almost without effort and space, lots of it, appeared everywhere. The space got bigger and bigger and soon a chamber appeared. Ffynnon Ddu One here we come!

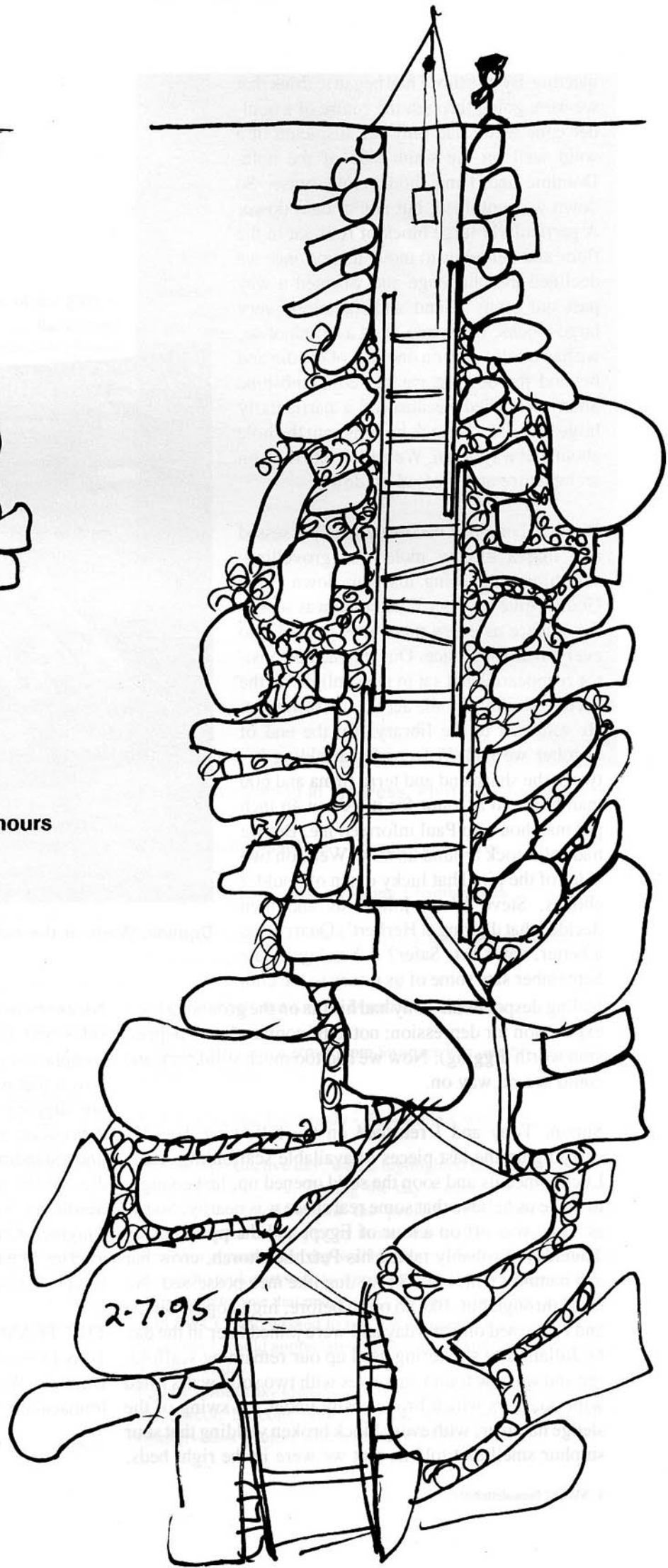
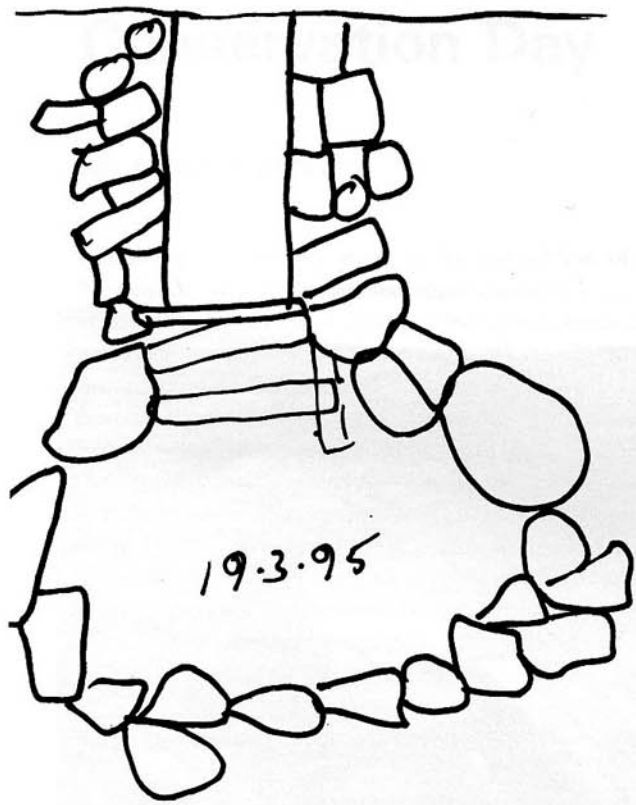
We dropped down into the inside of an hemisphere of boulders with a boulder floor. This was no place to linger. The shakers and movers seemed ready to dance to their tune at our cost at any time. Enthusiasm drained like the water into the Byfre and a lid ended Episode One. There were many attempts to restart this dig as cavers passing in the winter saw the steaming cloud above the drum created when the warm humid air pouring out was chilled. All took one look at the chamber below the drum and concluded that life had more to offer and was likely to be longer by digging elsewhere. So it was that Hanging Death, as the chamber had now come to be called, was left to hang for some time.

Digging is an addiction and those inflicted with it must have at least one good dig on the go at any one time. Without a regular fix they become nail-biting bewildered beings. So it was with several of us who had been digging at Penderyn. That dig had hit some problems and we were giving it a rest but we needed another dig. We needed another dig - soon.

Tony, Paul, Dominic and I surveyed the digs above Top Entrance and put the drum dig near the bottom of our list. We returned again to the site. That sweet-smelling draught, that air of expectancy, convinced us that it was worth a go. Anyway - times had changed, battery drilling for banger and scaffolding for shuttering had now given us the technology. And we were getting very jumpy - very, very jumpy. It had been three weeks without an active dig.

On the 19th March 1995 Tony and Mike paid the shakers and movers a visit and started Episode Two. The following weekend I joined Tony, Dominic and Paul to take the first of the scaffolding up to our dig and to start to build a tower down through the space of the chamber. The distance to the floor was some 25 feet. In April, we were joined by Simon, Rhys and Matt and between us we started the long haul of scaffolding up to the Byfre. The first job on site was to remove those timbers that time and boulders had pushed into the shaft. Some were rotten but some had stood the test of time better than some of the original diggers. They were sound but in the wrong place and now deprived us of a straight drop to the boulder floor. They were removed and four slender strips of scaffolding now stretched down to floor. They were held in place by appropriately-spaced horizontals. Any dig a nice walk's distance from the club will attract rubber necks and sure enough our first day's effort brought the first spectator. He was bemused to see us removing timbers and to hear boulders falling into the hole. He didn't stop long but returned a week later when we were winching boulders down into the hole to pack behind the scaffolding. Our immaculate visitor was now convinced that his concept of digging was wrong and he returned to the comfort of the club library to consult an appropriate text book. Let us hope and pray that he found peace but he did not appear at the dig again until late September, and even then very cautiously.

A dry stone wall now occupied the space between the scaffolding and the perched rocks and we felt that we were now secure and ready to pop through the floor into...? By May we had progressed some ten feet and had used up some 270 man hours. In early June, according to Tony's log, we were 50 feet below the surface and had nearly 300 man hours behind us. Almost as productive as a committee



Date	Depth (ft.)	Manhours
19.3.95	25	0
23.4.95	31	176
8.5.95	33	276
2.7.95	60	395
14.10.95	70	593
14.11.95	78	667
18.11.95	85	682

meeting. By this time I had began to think that we were going through the centre of a boulder cone as we had only the suspicion of a solid wall on the south side of the hole. Dominic and Tony thought otherwise. So down we continued, but not straight down. A particularly large block of rock sat in the floor and defied us to move it. For once we declined the challenge and wormed a way past our stony friend and numerous very large blocks. In a while, well a month or so, we had a solid wall on one side of the dig and beyond the dog-leg we started Tombstone Shaft. So-called because of a particularly large bible-black block bulging into the hole about half way down. We built it into the iron architecture and pressed on down.

By now Tony had become a man possessed and like a mighty mole was grovelling, smashing and lifting his way down. May God forgive us. Very little stone was sent to the surface as every piece was packed into every available space. Our immaculate visitor reappeared and sat in the sunlight on the surface waiting for the action and saw none. He returned to the library. By the end of October we had 75 feet of scaffolding between the sharp end and terra firma and 600 man-hours to account for it. About an inch per man hour, so Paul informed me. But we had solid rock around us now. Well, on two sides of the pit. That lucky omen of boulder chokes, Steve West, joined us and then decided that digging at Herbert's Quarry was a better, safer bet. Safer? A Sunday in late September saw some of us return to the club feeling despondent. Tony had his tits on the ground (a local expression for depression; not to be confused with depression worth digging). Now we had too much solid rock and could see no way on.

Simon, Tony and I returned on the following Tuesday carrying up the last pieces of available scaffolding. Lady Luck joined us and soon the solid opened up, just enough, to make us believe that some real space was nearby. So sad as Tony was off on a tour of Egypt and the pyramids on Thursday. Probably taking his Petzl headtorch, crow bar and hammer with him. So we dug like men possessed. No breakthrough but, like so often before, high hopes. Simon and I returned on Saturday and were joined later in the day by Julian. The shuttering used up our remaining scaffolding and we now found ourselves with two solid walls filled with boulders which broke easily under the swing of the sledge hammer, with every block broken yielding that sour sulphur smell that told us that we were in the right beds.



Dominic Wade at the entrance to the dig. Photo by Julian Carter

Nice to be in the right bed. Two solid walls but, on the other sides and below us, movers and shakers. No time for complacency. No news from Egypt. What is puzzling us now is that we do not understand the structure in which we are digging. This vast collapse under a small surface depression makes little sense. If we could find some understanding we could be predictive and know where to dig. At the moment we know that we are searching for a needle in a haystack but hoping to find the farmer's daughter. On November 22nd, on the early morning news, a series of earthquakes were reported to have occurred in Egypt. To be continued...

THE TEAM: Simon Ashton, Mike Booth, Julian Carter, Tony Donovan, Clive Jones, Matt Palmer, Paul Thornton, Dominic Wade, Steve West, Rhys Williams. And The Immaculate Visitor.

An O.F.D. Conservation Day

by *Julian Carter*

Following the article I wrote in the last edition of the SWCC Newsletter, which highlighted some concerns over the current status of the Ogof Ffynnon Ddu system, it was decided to organise a day dedicated towards conservation work in O.F.D., particularly around the Top Entrance area. This would allow certain areas to be conserved in one go, rather than bit by bit, and show that everyone can play a part in conserving the O.F.D. system.

The event was organised for the 4th of November since there would then be little excuse for too few people to be around. In the end almost twenty people took part in the event, with members from outside clubs such as CSS also involved. The aims of the day were to start and tackle conservation problems in the region of Top Entrance by taping, retaping and cleaning formations. The following points were recommended;

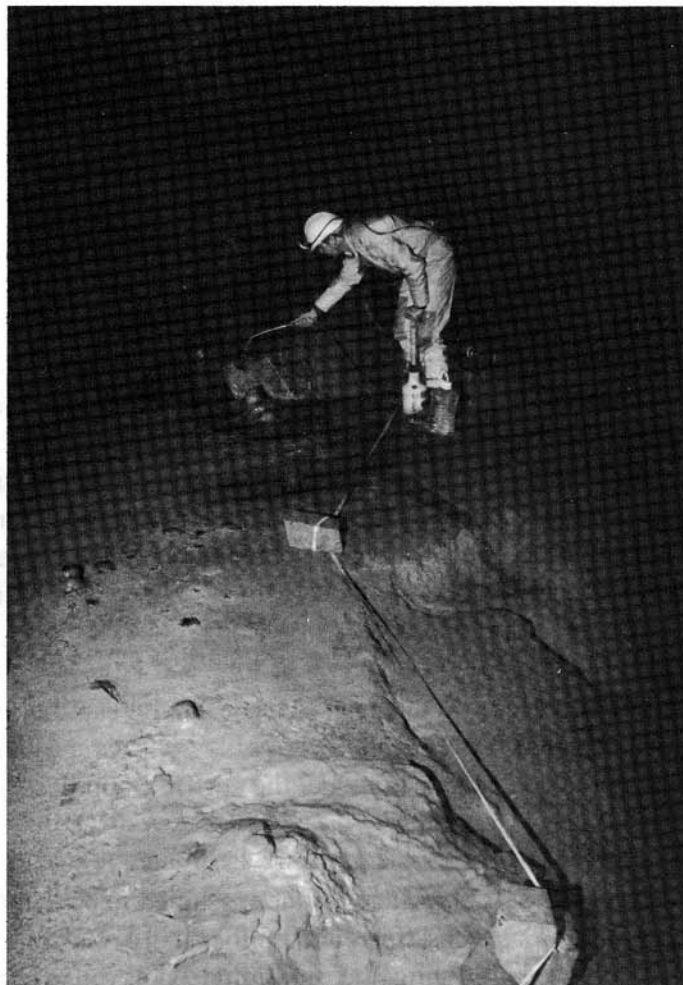
1. Ensure that any taping is obvious!
2. Try to lift tape off the ground so that it is more evident and does not become trampled and covered in muck so easily.
3. Any paths were at least 1m wide and where people will step.
4. If mud/debris is being washed or moved onto formations by the movement of cavers, then means of preventing this were to be considered, for example, a low wall of rocks.
5. Cleaning of formations should be done with the minimum of force. Pressurised water containers were used to removed dirt, using a soft nylon brush if required.
6. Consideration of the water runoff when cleaning such as crystal pools at the base of formations. Bob Radcliffe suggested using tissue paper to catch dirty runoff or to cover pools as it will act as a filter.

It was encouraging to note that very little rubbish needed removing from the cave, and most of this was old tape and a woolly jumper found by John Lister (probably originally one of his!). Such conservation days in the Easegill system in Yorkshire regularly remove almost 100kg.

Orange fibrous tape from 3M was used for the taping, which although more expensive than the plastic stuff tends to last much better. Hard alloy tent pegs were also used to help peg out the tape where possible.

The following areas were tackled to some extent, but as all who took part will agree, the amount of work required became frighteningly evident as one started a project;

1. Paul Stacy/Chris - Wedding Cake area.
2. John Lister/Bob Radcliffe - Creek Alley



Formation cleaning in progress. Photo by Julian Carter

3. Phil Rundle/John/Pete - Selenite Tunnel area
4. Chris Fry/Ian/Simon - Bedding Chamber area
5. Simon Amatt and Myself - Area immediately around Big Chamber and the Brickyard.
6. Sue Mabbett and Louise Maurice - Labyrinth.
7. Claire Muir and a group from Swansea University - around the bottom of Salubrious.
8. Bob Hall and Pete Cardy - Tapioca in Cwm Dwr.

Overall a productive day, which highlighted the amount of work required in the cave. During the day I managed to take some photographs to document the project. The dedication and enthusiasm for the project by those who took part was excellent. A further conservation day will be planned, especially as many of those who took part wish to complete the areas they started. It was interesting to note that many who took part were from clubs other than SWCC who wished to put something back into the system. However I would appreciate a better turn out of SWCC members at the next day!

Finally I would like to thank all who took part in the day, including the Brecon Beacons National Park who supported the OFD Conservation Project with a grant of £150.

SLB Update

by *Graham Christian*

Since the use of SLB has been new to the cavers in Britain, there has been much speculation as to its usefulness. The training has been limited to the basic procedures and safety aspects, including demonstrations of how *not* to use it. I feel that there has now been sufficient progress in its use to make a report worthwhile.

The first thing to clear up is what "SLB" stands for: Safety and Low-sound Breaker - so says Nippon Kayaku Co. Ltd. who make the stuff. "Soundless" it is not!

On our first trials with SLB there seemed to be a poor chance of a successful action. Either it did not fire, or it misfired, blowing the stemming back out of the shothole. The occasions when it did not appear to fire seemed to be on the occasions when it was not employed in limestone. It was first tried in hearthstone, a calcareous sandstone, then in PFA grouting, both in Surrey. In spite of following the instructions to the letter, it just refused to ignite. It was suspected that the electric igniter went off but the charge did not. Later use in consolidated limekiln waste also met with similar failure. All we could deduce from this was that the rock/cheese was porous and damp, and that the act of tamping the charge forced water into it and stopped it from burning. It was reasoned that some form of pre-packaging was required. To date one shot has been fired using a length of thin-walled copper tube to contain the charge. This was set in a large piece of hard roofstone that was impeding progress in the reconstruction of an entrance to a hearthstone quarry. Using the stemming method described later in this article, the result was a complete success, with very little noise.

Stemming the Shothole

The greatest worry was the number of misfires that we were experiencing. At over £2.00 a shot it was not good form! Damp sharp sand seems to take on a multitude of forms. The sand used by Nick Williams

(BCRA - EUG) when he demonstrated its use appeared to be red quartz of a fair size grain. The sharp sand delivered to Penwyllt appeared to be a mix of quartz and ground up shells. What is the definition of damp? We were not happy about the situation at all. Advertised as available from the Explosives Users Group was the "proper" stuff, Kyatampa - at a cost. A packet was purchased, and closely inspected. It was a mix of gritty bits and finely divided white powder. Mixing with water produced heat, so it was reactive in some way. The great thing was that it worked! Six out of the seven shots fired with it were successful, the seventh being suspect before it was fired.

Nick informed me that the source of Kyatampa had dried up, so a substitute had to be found, preferably cheap. We got it right first time - RMC Mortar Mix - sharp sand with cement as a binder. The amount of water required is the absolute minimum to bind it together when tamped into the hole, what would be a very dry mix in normal use. When it is tamped in it feels "right". It feels very solid with no squidding round the sides of the stemming rod. We have had no misfires (blow-outs), and the only times when it has failed to fire have been due to very damp conditions.

Horizontal Holes

You may have noticed that most of the rocks used for the training were suitable for having vertical holes drilled in them. This made charging the shothole very easy - just pour the stuff in with the aid of a funnel. Now, you and I, being keen digging-type cavers know that the lump of rock underground that is in the way is not always going to be conveniently placed for a vertical hole. The loading of a horizontal hole is not going to be so easy. Holding a small pile of SLB in your hand and trying to poke it sideways into the hole is messy, irritating and wasteful as you will probably drop half of it. The solution is quite neat.

First purchase a length of $\frac{3}{8}$ " copper rod at least 25" (620mm) long (at about £1.40/ft) from whatever

source you can - good hardware stores are few and far between. Next, from your local model shop, (a proper one that sells stock materials, not just kits) or from the same source as the copper, buy a length of brass tube of $1\frac{3}{32}$ " diameter, conveniently sold in 12" lengths at about £1.35. Take along your brass rod, neatly deburred and cleaned, to check that it slides perfectly up inside the tube. Cut the copper rod so that one piece is about 12" long and the other, conveniently, cannot be lost in the brass tube. There are two tests to make sure that your new equipment is all in order. The first is simple and requires you to place a thumb over the end of the tube and then smartly withdraw the copper rod from up the middle, making a popping sound. People will encourage you to go back to your dig. The more specific second test is to find the Soup Dragons at Penwyllt, then blow across the top of the tube while sliding the rod in and out to make a pleasant oscillating whistling sound, which should be continued until one of the kitchen utensils finds its mark. At this point withdraw to your dig.

Now when you have a horizontal hole to charge, you simply withdraw the copper rod from the tube so the tube is half empty, then tilt it so that you can pour the SLB into the tube. The tube can then be slid into the shothole and the rod used to "inject" the SLB into the bottom of the hole. There will be enough room in a 12mm diameter hole for the wires of the igniter down the outside of the tube. The second copper rod can then be used for pushing in the wadding, then the stemming mortar. The reason for a second length of rod is that the end will burr over when hit with a hammer, and suffer other nicks and rough bits that might impede its fit in the tube. It is best to keep one specifically for each purpose.

PBC - British SLB

PBC stands for Pyro-Breaker-Capsule. Whereas the original SLB looks like dark grey chocolate vermicelli and is soft when pressed, the new PBC looks like grey coffee granules that crunch up, or even more lately, a grey powder. When it was first used PBC sounded like it was a bit more lively than SLB - a sharper "crack" rather than a "thud". After a training session that used both, a period of foul weather prompted a

retreat to the shed to conduct further experiments. When laid in trails along the bench, the PBC burnt twice as fast as the SLB, with a brighter flame. There was still the same amount of residue. Of course, how an explosive burns in free air does not necessarily reflect how it behaves when it is confined, but this may give some indication. It is interesting to note that the fumes had no noticeable effect, but that is no recommendation to ignore their presence underground. However, with a good clearing draught, it has been possible to have multiple shot sessions underground, where only one shot of conventional HE would have been possible.

Used in larger quantities, placed before and after the igniter, it seems to have been reducing boulders to very convenient-sized rubble, rather than just "man-liftable" boulders. **THE POWER OF THIS ROCK BREAKER SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED!**

New Igniters

Nick Williams has been looking at various substitutes for the original (expensive) igniters. Stage maroons, for theatrical effects, are cheaper, but have short leads that do not give much leeway. He eventually found some German igniters at about £1.00 a time, that do the job and have leads as long as conventional detonators. These igniters consist of an open metal tube with the electric "match head" at the bottom. At the Cavers' Fair we tried these for the first time, filling the igniter tube with PBC powder before inserting it in the shot hole. A normal charge was put on top, and the whole stemmed as normal. It did the job. To the best of my knowledge these new igniters have not yet been extensively tested by cavers, but have probably solved the cost problem.

If you have a genuine need to use PBC/SLB then get in touch with myself or the Training Officer for more details. If you are already trained and use the substance, let the others in the club and the Explosive Users Group know how you get on.

A Beginner's View of Caving

by Claire Muir

Well I've been caving for nearly a year now, whoopee! So I thought I'd write about how it felt to be a beginner, a feeling most of you will no doubt have forgotten.

My first experience of caving was when I was about fourteen: young, naïve and enchanted by a rather tasty outdoor pursuits instructor from Mendip. Recollections of the cave are, however, rather hazy but images of his bum are still quite vivid.

Anyway, a year through university I was getting a bit bored with climbing and kayaking so I decided to go caving again. Hence one sunny Friday I ventured down Tooth Cave on the Gower peninsula. The cave itself didn't seem impressive but I can still remember the feeling of excitement I experienced exploring and manoeuvring underground, in a part of the world only a small percentage of the population will ever see. Soon afterwards, I realised I was hooked.

One of the main attractions of caving is the variety of different situations you come across, and the challenge of overcoming them using different manoeuvres, climbs, squeezes, legs over your ears and so on for the first time, each time learning new techniques and skills. Having climbed for several years, the thought of using my elbows, bum or hips to get up something was quite weird, but many people mentioned that I could get quite a lot of use out of mine! They are in fact very useful, but whether they are more so than anyone else's is questionable.

After my first few trips, I thought that caving was a piece of cake, with little apparent danger. That is until I went down Maypole Inlet for the first time! The sight of the black, rocky hole and the search for the good hand- and foot-holds were quite frightening. Why was I doing this, I must be mad was the thought that kept crossing my mind. Anyway, the art of weight distribution, leaning and edging were quickly learnt and I feel quite silly now having acted like I did. It just goes to show what a bit of practice and experience can do. Now I'm suffering quivering of the knees across the smaller Marble Showers traverse: hopefully next time that will seem less intimidating.

Another attraction as a beginner was the water. The movement of the flowing water and the accompanying rapids are an extra obstacle to overcome. From kayaking experience, I learnt to assess what the river bed was like by looking at the water's surface. This has helped on some OFD and St. Cuthbert's trips but some crafty boulders still have a habit of jumping out in front of me with rather wet results!

Lacking in the long legs department has meant that being able to do the splits, albeit accidentally, has been a help. It is without doubt a sport where you learn how agile you are. Being physically denied (little) I also discovered that men make great stepladders, after all they may not be much good at anything else! (Sorry guys, just kidding, I love those strong, muscular... step-like bodies.) Tim's nose was extremely, although unintentionally, useful and I hope, Tim, that it straightens up soon.

As well as being a fun attraction water also adds a certain aura to the cave. Its colour, light, flow and reflections all add to that mysterious beauty. Purely wading through the water in quasi-symmetrical tear-shaped passages held my mouth and eyes permanently open. It even brings back one good memory of my "favourite" cave, Aggy!

The infamous Green Canal was for me an unforgettable experience. Floating in tubes while singing tunelessly amidst the winding phreatic passages and milky-blue waters was simply ACE!

Llygad Llwehwr was my first watery cave. Climbing down the ladder into the water having used that ever-so-useful bowline for the first time seemed all very exciting. Prancing around like a chicken after swimming down the flowy bit all seems quite daft now, but hey, it was new and it was fun.

However, pretending to be a chicken was nothing. I soon realised that making noises and acting as silly as you want (within reason) is all perfectly acceptable (to most). Talk lots, laugh lots, sing along with Pat, fart along with Ian, wobble with Dom, Yip Bong as loud as you can with Paul and Rhys, anything, even join in with the Time Warp with us down OFD. (Ian and Paula knew it particularly well!)

It seems cavers also know how to have a party. Beer and a band and lots of happy people are all you need to have a really fluffy time. The annual swing-your-partner-round-as-fast-as-you-can-without-making-them-sick came highly recommended and very good it was too. Boogieing down to The Squirts, and later in the evening being part of their human percussion, was crazy. I bet it won't be long before Pete Francis is signed up by a major record company. He'll stand alongside the famous names of Rolf Harris and Ken Dodd singing his rendition of "Stevie West Can't Drink Beer" On that note I'd also like to suggest that the club gets some real drinkers for the Mendip Stomp this year if you are to have any chance of beating us champs from Swansea Uni!

Anyway, on to the future. SRT is the next step: a few more sweaty practices above ground and then I'll hopefully be down there discovering even more.

On the subject of discovery, I've found that digging is another big part of caving. I'd never even thought about it when I began but the search for new caves is very important and something many people take for granted. Learning about resistivity, controlled explosions, geology and draughts has been really interesting. Maybe it's because I'm a geographer, but it's perhaps more to do with my interest in caving. Even the university club has a lot of interest. I have memories of us hopping madly around the Black Mountain, waving pickaxes and Chris having slug races. Needless to say, that was one of the less successful attempts.

My first year in caving has been a really good laugh and I've met some really interesting people. Hopefully during the next year I can become more involved in related activities like digging and conservation as I now have a bit of a background. Even so, there is a lot to be learnt and a lot still to see. So let's get that big old boulder rolling and have some fun.

In good old caving spirit I'll end with a big YIP BONG!



Towards the Connection

by Joel Corrigan

This article is the sequel to Joel's earlier contribution, Daren Cilau: Memoirs of a Support Diver, which can be found in SWCC Newsletter no. 116, pp30-33.

Daren Cilau was the first Welsh cave that I went down. At one point during the 28th of August 1995, it appeared to me as if it might also be my last...

At the end of April, I had been the support diver for Rick Stanton's bid to connect Daren to Agen Allwedd via the Gloom Room extensions in the main streamway. Four months later, and a wealth of hard-earned experience under my belt, I went back to the limit of exploration with Rick and Duncan Price, in a bid to find a way through the terminal boulder choke.

Stress, prior to a big dive, is something that all cave divers are familiar with. Some of us have different methods of dealing with it, but the end result is always the same: smelly underwear! On this particular occasion, "Tangerine Dream" on the Walkman seemed to do the trick for me. For some reason, whenever I'm underground, I can only ever remember about three songs, so it was nice to be able to hum something different for the forty-minute dive into the cave. I almost enjoyed myself!

After the April push, I was familiar with much of the territory, and had prepared well for this day. After changing into wetsuits, and leaving the comfort of our drysuits behind, we found ourselves hardly slowing down to catch our breath before we reached St. David's Sump. Once through, the treacherous nature of Psychatronic Strangeways made itself apparent as we slipped all over the place. After an hour or so of mixed caving - walking, crawling, and climbing - we arrived at the Gloom Room.

I was first into the sump, finding that the visibility was reasonable, and that the cold wasn't affecting me as much this time, as I was wearing a thicker suit than before. Once on the other side of the 240-metre long siphon, all three of us left our larger (7-litre) cylinders behind, and carried on up the San Agustin Way carrying a single 4-litre bottle each, as well as the usual paraphernalia that would be required later on.

Duncan and I hadn't been beyond Sump 4 before, so after a briefing from Rick, I was off. The flooded passage was longer than I'd imagined, but much clearer. After a short section of streamway, the passage sumped once more. Duncan had the honour of going into Sump 5 first, but even so the visibility remained good for the other two. 70 metres later, we broke surface for the last time.

We were in a spacious passage - for about 10 metres! Rick's disappointment upon seeing the size of the boulder choke that blocked his way four months earlier must have been intense. As

it happened, he managed to find a way through for quite some distance before being stopped by a HUGE boulder wedged in the streamway. This was our objective. Duncan was carrying a hefty amount of bang with him, with the intention of blasting the offending rock. Our first priority, though, was to search for an alternative route through.

After wriggling about in the choke for a few minutes, we arrived back at stream level. We were in chest-deep water in a narrow canal, with a loose, boulder roof. Less than 10 metres upstream the mother of all boulders blocked our progress. We could see around it into the continuation of the streamway, and we could hear what sounded like a waterfall in the distance, but there was no physical way past the thing. To add salt to the wound, it was also clear that the explosives would make little impact. Even after intensive searches, we could find no other way into the passage continuation.

For some ridiculous reason, I've always been able to convince myself that I can force my body into the tightest of holes! Years of Mendip training has led me into a false sense of security in boulder chokes, tight rifts, and miserable places in general. It came as no surprise to me, therefore, to find my body headed up into the roof armed with a crowbar, pulling out likely looking rocks. I had not spent five hours of pain (I'm the proud possessor of a duff back) getting to this place for nothing! My beady little eyes had spotted a possible way over the top of this boulder, but it entailed going through the choke proper.

After a few minutes, I managed to get my head through into an open space. Several metres above stream level, the noise of falling water was amplified, and felt like a red rag to a bull. The wetsuit appeared to be all that was preventing a breakthrough, so I stripped off the top and tried again. With a lot of breathing out, accompanied by the required groaning and swearing, my chest popped through the squeeze. After shifting a couple of large boulders that were blocking my view, I knew that I had to continue: there was an open route back down into the streamway BEYOND the monster boulder. Within a few minutes (my deluded mind screamed) I could be in a position to make THE connection!

The greatest difficulty in this particular choke was that there was nowhere to pull up. I was surrounded by hanging death, and the slightest touch on the wrong boulder could easily have resulted in strawberry yoghurt instead of a skull (my caving helmet was not located where the manufacturers intended it to be). As a result, all that I could do was to push up with my legs. This had the effect of flexing my buttocks, which meant that I couldn't squeeze through!

For over half an hour I tried in vain to get past the restriction. Only

when Rick and Duncan were really unhappy did I finally admit defeat. Taking one last look at the way through, I started to drop back out...NOT. To my total and utter horror, I found that I was stuck in the most remote section of cave in Britain! What had been a painful squeeze for my ribs on the way in now took on the status of sheer agony for the reverse manoeuvre. When it became apparent that this wasn't just a temporary situation, Rick wedged himself in the rift so that he could help me out.

For a long, cold hour I was firmly wedged in the boulders. Duncan made some comment about how I should bite down on a detonator and make it a quick ending! Rick was more sober about the situation - it was his head that I was standing on. Visions of becoming another permanent resident of this streamway were at the forefront of my thoughts. Try as I could, there was no way back out. Each and every combination of struggles achieved nothing more than to leave me feeling more knackered and demoralised. Just when my reserve levels of energy and morale were being swallowed up, I painfully slid out, tumbling into the chest-deep water.

I can't remember ever being so relieved in my life. Even the cuts and bruises all over my chest and back didn't bother me, but this feeling was short-lived, as exposure threatened to take hold. Once my wetsuit jacket was back on, Duncan stuck his head up into my erstwhile prison and placed a charge on the flake that had prevented my progress. The three of us laid out the bang wire, only to discover that it wasn't long enough to enable us to exit the choke! Duncan set off the charge, accompanied by squeals of fear from his two battle-hardened companions, and we raced for the sump before the fumes reached us.

Personally, I found the trip back through the cave to be a real test of stamina. My lower back was in agony from carrying the kit, and the joys of being trapped had really drained me. Finally, upon reaching the Terminal Sump, I felt that it was nearly over.

The others had laughed when I'd brought a "Hot Can" through the sump. I'd always wanted to try one of these self-heating meals, and this had seemed to be the perfect excuse for a bit of gluttony. Following what was left of the instructions, I pierced the lid and proceeded to get into my dry suit. After the required few minutes wait to allow it to do whatever it is that it does, I took a mouthful of the yummy-looking vegetable stew. Rick and Duncan looked on enviously, chewing their soggy Mars bars. It must have been a funny sight, therefore, watching me screaming down the streamway, drysuit around my ankles, gargling pints of cave water. Instead of the piping hot meal that I'd been expecting, I'd swallowed a cocktail of lime and cold stew - the tin had imploded on the way through the sump! My throat was burning in agony...

After the seemingly endless decompression stop, we surfaced at midnight, to be greeted by two Chelsea members who had taken it upon themselves to help us with the gear. This is typical of that mob, as they have been trying to make the connection for years. Having been underground for twelve hours, and swum two kilometres underwater, we were also very prone to catching a dose of decompression sickness, or the bends as it is also known. Their help was much appreciated.

As for the Aggy-Daren connection, it's become a personal issue between me and the boulder choke, so the three of us will be headed back down during Easter, when we'll be hoping for good conditions, plenty of support, and a cylinder full of luck !

The Belgians Will Be Back

by Eric van den Broeck, Dominique Lemoine and Dirk Verschueren, of Speleo Hades, Belgium

Editor's Note: When compiling this Newsletter, it is my usual practice to apply some judicious sub-editing by, for example, tidying up sentence construction and the like. To have done so with the article that follows would have destroyed its essential nature, so I present it exactly as it was written.

On our caving trip to the Llangattock area, getting introduced into some great new caves and revisiting some of our "classic glories" we arrived in Penwyllt at South Wales Caving Club. Since we've just missed the weekend, we were all alone up there, surrounded by a September night with hundreds of little sheep and a thousand stars.

We needed a leader for tomorrow's trip in Ogof Ffynnon Ddu, but after a dozen phone calls to local cavers, most of them being right back from holidays and already at work, our hope was vanishing until we got the key for Cwm Dwr from Elsie Little late at night.

That Tuesday morning we got up very early, went to Dudley's Dragon Shop to get a small map (because I didn't want to take our five square-metre survey sheet we've got at home), but ended up with a new version of similar dimensions. So we went to Ystradgynlais to make some reductions of the planned through-trip. We filled out the log sheet in SWCC (Cwm Dwr to OFD Top; in 12.30 out 17.30). Two years ago we did the trip from bottom

to top with Eric Inson and Malcolm Herbert in four hours in high water conditions, so today's little trip timing should be quite accurate, given we've never been in the Cwm Dwr network before.

Right on time, the three of us were sliding down the concrete pipes, and after ten minutes of easy caving, we met a first obstacle: a high rift above a tight cobble-filled siphon made us wonder about the way on. A sign was warning us to adapt to the progression code - what code, which way? We had doubts about the way on, but the draught made us do the crawl through the streambed, where the little waterflow was cooling down Dirk and myself because of our wetsuits, but made Dominique wet. Especially the little pool got her quite soaked. An easy climb up brought us in a well-decorated but slippery section of huge passages, the Jama.

Not without doubts we were crawling again through a tight boulder choke. The big passages were dead-ended and trapped us time after time. Water could be reached in many places, but never followed. Blocks were moving as I was looking for the way on in the tight corners, where you had the feeling of "this is the way" after seeing crawling-marks for a few metres, before they suddenly stopped. The way on became obvious once we got down to the river, then right and up again. We reached the other end of the black hole on the map, the Big Shacks, and everything became big again.

A few exciting high-level traverses (hell for short-legged Dominique) brought us to the Smithy, where we climbed down a huge hole in the floor, to join the active Cwm Dwr streamway down to the confluence with the Black Cave river, the main stream. In this pure black passage we had a break and a bite - short, however, because Dominique was still not dry, so she put on her pontonnière. We were progressing much slower now, because her ducky-suit was disabling her knees from being fold. So we got organised: I was going first for route-finding and Dirk was used as a step-up for Niki, who was gratefully adding bruises to his pair of blue knees after every short climb.

Again, we had a wonderful view to see the water bashing the limestone with such a power, forming the strangest rock sites and deep marmites between these sparkling white quartz wires in a web of black corridors. It really felt like canyoning underground, and we enjoyed it deeply. When we left the main stream at Maypole Inlet, Dirk had to free-climb the 6m pitch to attach the rope, so we could assist Niki up to the bottom of the fixed ladder, into the white rift river passage. Most of the time we had to oppose ourselves in the upper part of the meander, in order not to miss the 16m climb up, because I remembered from last time it's easy to do so. However, we managed to go too far and when it got too narrow we knew we had to go back, which is time-consuming in a typical Belgian passage like this.

It was already 5.00 pm when we were at the Crossroads, we should have been nearly out now, so we were hurrying up a bit in the little stream we met, and we arrived at the far end of

Salubrious Passage when we realised we had missed a key connection to the upper level with Chasm Passage and Gnome Passage, as nobody recognised this part of the cave. We were having a look at the map and decided to go out through another part of the cave, climbed up a few west-warding passages to a higher level, until we were in Cairn Chamber, next to Big Chamber Near The Entrance. Only according to our timing, we were already one hour overdue and we were still not in the chamber!

Because Niki's movements were limited in her pontonnière, she installed herself in Cairn Chamber and we started meditating, but Sesame didn't want to open! So Dirk and I went looking ahead and marked the strategic corner to our meeting point with a paper sign. Out of all the (big!) passages we were into, none was ending up in Big Chamber, however on the survey we could see that we just had to arrive there. Four circles later, we finally concluded what the map didn't show us: the Labyrinth was levelled too low and we must have been under the chamber, regarding the big boulders at the end of the passages.

It was around 9.00pm when we decided to sleep a little before we would continue our search in the higher level passage, and prepared our bivouac at 100m from Top Entrance! I assumed nobody would miss us before the next morning, since I had promised to bring back the key to Elsie the same night or drop it into her mailbox the morning after. Anyway, we had our emergency kit with spare lights and food.

But after her swimming session that night, Elsie was concerned about what kept us, and when we didn't answer the phone at the caving club, neither had landlord Paul seen us at the Copper Beech Inn, so some time later they found our cars at Penwyllt and the log-sheet on the board. Around midnight there was a call out for rescue.

In no time the team started unrolling a telephone line in Cwm Dwr, while two of their searchers went down in Top Entrance and almost immediately found our traces. Dirk and I were already snoring in our rescue blankets, when Niki heard whistles, a little after 1.00am. She realised it was not our usual noise, so she woke us up, and soon we encountered our two rescuers.

"Hello, we're looking for you."

"God, is this really the rescue team?"

"Don't worry, there's plenty of people up there!"

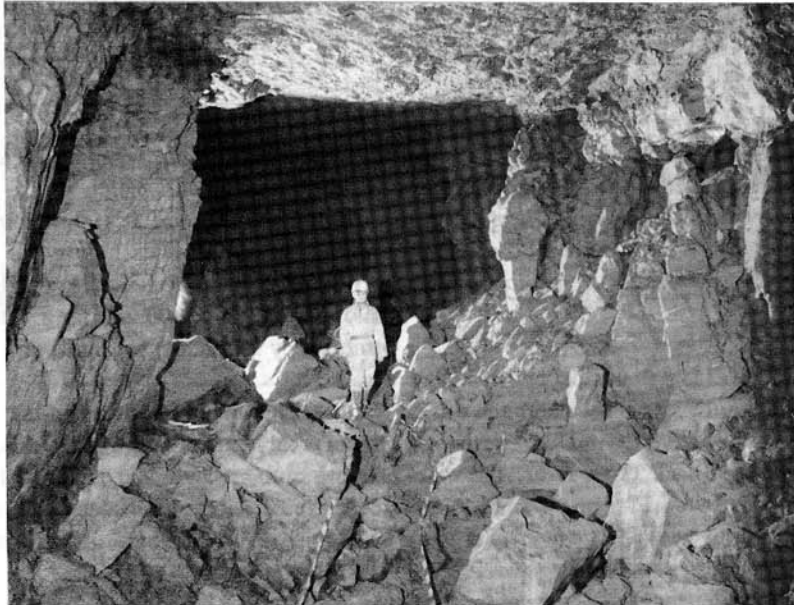
The two nice guys even brought us some delicious hot soup to cheer us up. We were so glad they took us through the passage were about to take later, and a few metres further we were in Big Chamber, and in no time all of us were out. The Land Rover took us down to the caving club, where we found the place crowded with cars and volunteers who had left their bed, came back from work or were sobering up after the pub! This must have been the shortest rescue action in history; the alarm was cancelled and time after time we had to do our story. Since the pubs were closed already, we promised to come back soon and bring lots of our Belgian traditional beer to the nicest cavers we've ever met: South Wales Caving Club, thanks to all of you!

Ogof Tardiadd Rhymney

by Julian Carter

A 'new' discovery has come to light over the last few months in the South Wales area. Adam Jones of Chelsea S.S. was prospecting around the Cwar yr Ystrad quarry about two miles north of Trefil village when he thought he had come upon a new cave, only to find he had been beaten to it about two years earlier! This secret cave is Ogof Tardiadd Rhymney and is currently approximately 1km long, much of it large fossil passage. Two reasons exist for the hushing-up of the caves existence. Firstly until recently the quarry was an active site operated by Gryphon Concrete Products, and secondly the cave was discovered by John Parker et al, of Grwp Ogofeidd Craig y Ffynnon.

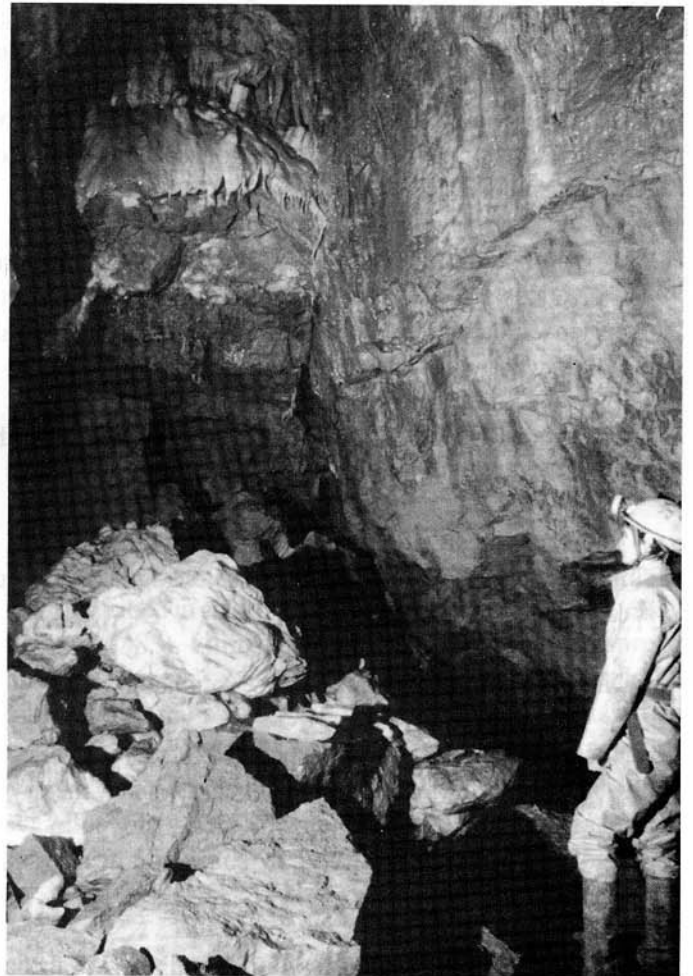
The quarry site currently has open access, but is quite extensive with the cave entrance pretty well hidden, especially as it is usually walled up. This makes the cave great fun to find if it is dark and misty as it was on my own recent visit! The cave is located roughly at NGR SO086141 against the south face of the quarry on top of a slope of limestone boulders. To reach the quarry drive through the village of Trefil, just North of Tredegar, and follow the road until it reaches the quarry complex. Continue to follow the now gravel track through the quarry for almost 1.5km until a line of boulders is met which blocks the way into the Cwar yr Ystrad Quarry. Park up here and then walk into the quarry for a short distance until you almost reach the remains of a steel-framed building. The route to the cave bears left over an open area of gravel and down a track. In front is the quarry wall and the cave entrance is slightly right to the bottom of the track on top of a boulder slope, and is usually walled up.



Once through the entrance hole there is immediately a 2m drop into large fossil passage in solid rock which then just heads off in a south-easterly(ish) direction into the hill. Generally the passage is some 4 metres wide, but is up to 8m in places, with one or two low areas of breakdown. The stal formations are nothing dramatic but there are some rather fine sediment banks which have been well taped off, so please observe the path carefully. After around 450 - 500m of this superb pleasant fossil passage, which has very little in the way of any obvious side passages, a choke is reached which is around 10m long, after which the large fossil passage is again met. However after little more than 50m this becomes a low sediment-filled crawl in the stream, becoming quite squalid after about 200m, but can still be followed for a considerable distance.

The stream in the cave has been traced using lycopodium by Bill Gascoine to the Rhymney Risings which are about 3km away. Digging is still in progress, and the potential is thought to be good, especially when considering the vast amount of limestone in this area. Overall a very pleasant trip, though it is recommended cavers keep a low profile and limit trips to late afternoons and weekends. The only thing which marred my visit was the distinct smell of diesel, especially in the entrance to the cave.

A final note of warning - on a recent visit to the cave Jeff Hill and John Parker had their cars broken into, which included the thieves stealing their car batteries! They thus had a long walk back in caving kit. This area is a remote spot, but is used by local youths for various activities, so beware.



Pictures of Sue Mabbett in Ogof Tardiadd Rhymney by Julian Carter

The Belgians Go... Yabba Dabba Hilti!

by *Eric van den Broeck*

Instead of explosives, for our caving desobstruction work we are currently using bullets for Hilti hammers (in these devices the bullets are used to drive holes or nails into concrete or steel profiles).

The bullets were used in a Belgian cave for the first time on November 25th 1994, when an extension in Trou Bernard led to the discovery of a new entrance and further through-trips. It has also been used throughout 1995 for connecting the major caves in the area (Eglise, Wéron, Dury, Dellieux), with success, and also to dry by-pass the siphons in Galerie des Sources.

The Secret

Into a hole of 7.0 to 9.5mm (respectively for the Italian and Hilti bullets) and 150mm deep *minimum*, preferably 200 to 250mm, we put a few bullets. In a small block one single red will do, in massive rock up to four black bullets are needed.

The munition is brought to explode by putting a suitable hard steel or stainless shaft into the hole and hitting the top with a hammer.

This Desobstruction Technique Has Many Advantages

- It provides a controlled desobstruction, and with a little experience you can direct the crack very easily. You only blow off what you want to get rid of.

- No loss of time because there are no gasses from the explosion, so the whole team can stay where they are.

- The rock doesn't fly around in thousands of pieces. It simply breaks apart into a few massive fragments, which break off the main rock.

- The bullets are cheap and easily obtainable.

- Normally you don't need a special explosives licence to buy or store the bullets. However, local laws may mean you need a weapon holder's permit, since the bullets are categorised as munition-type in some countries (as in Belgium).

- It's much easier to carry in your expedition kit abroad. (I remember my wife being shocked when she found 200 bullets in the lunch box when we were on holiday in

Slovenia. Then she realised that it was better than the time she found a forgotten slab of dynamite when we drove to the south...)

- It's much safer than explosives, especially if you apply the basic principles.

A Few More Tips

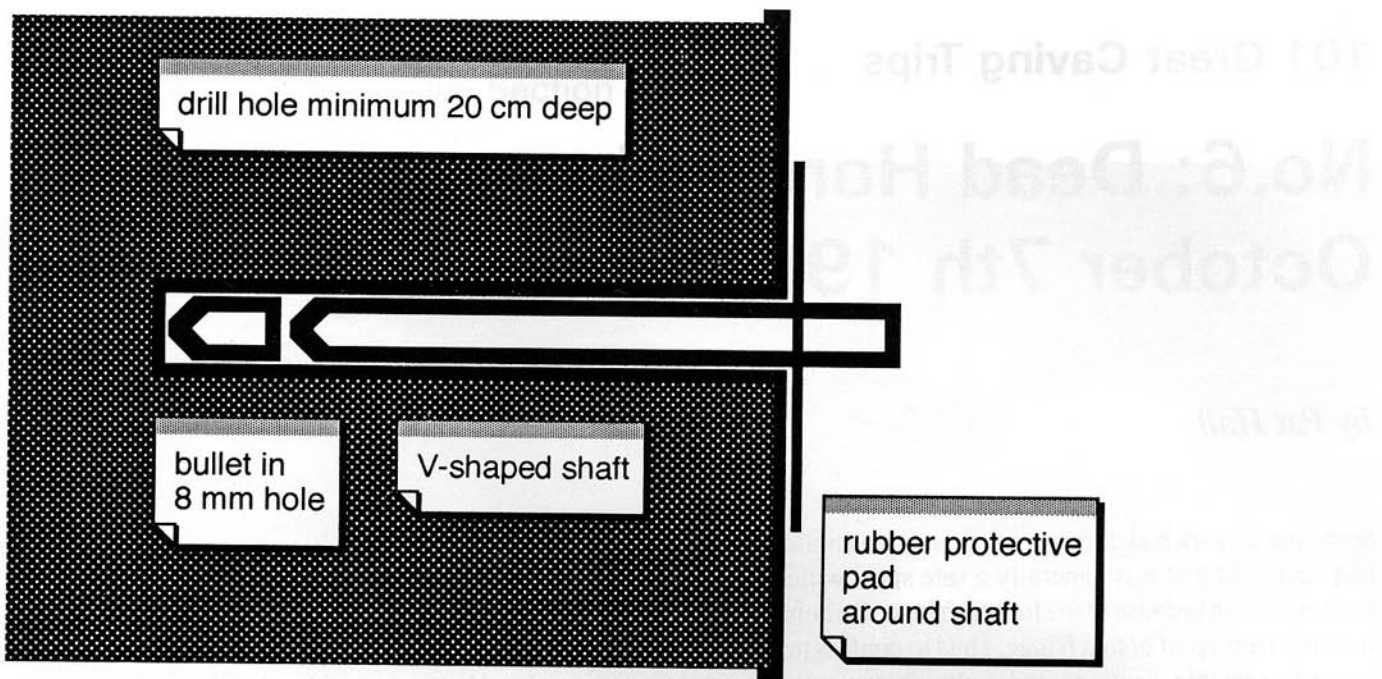
- Wear helmet, safety goggles and ear defenders. The system is normally very safe, but even if you're experienced sometimes things don't go exactly as you intended them. Though we have never experienced the fly-rock effect, sometimes poor quality rock can fracture into small uncontrollable fragments, especially if the borehole is not deep enough. This will also result in loud noise.

- For this last reason, it's advisable to put a rubber cloth around the steel bar so that if things go wrong it can't move far.

- The bullets look a bit like long rifle bullets and come in different sizes (depending on the power) and forms. We prefer the Italian charges since they are cheaper (around 9p per piece), smaller (6.8mm) and longer (18mm), which makes them more reliable for the job. Unfortunately they are not being produced any more, so we are currently switching to the shorter (7-15mm) Hilti 9mm diameter ones (although on a caving holiday to the Czech Republic they managed to find us some small Hilti bullets of 7mm diameter), which tend to fall apart and create problems, and are more expensive (around 12p each).

- The bullets have rim fire ignition, which makes them go off only by hitting the back rim. Be sure to sharpen the front of the shaft like the head of a screwdriver: in V-shape, but never use an arrowpoint.

- Use good, straight, full hard steel or stainless steel shafts. Poor quality shafts create hassle: when they are too small to fit in the hole, the gas is lost through the airspace and you get backfire: danger! When the bars are too weak or thick, they get stuck in the hole and your working session will end there. Trying to get the jammed shaft out is particularly difficult. It results in a damaged shaft stuck in the hole and several charged bullets beyond it which make life even more difficult. The only thing you can do then is to drill a



new hole some distance away, apply a new charge and hope it will free your material. It is always better to have a few spare, carefully-made shafts.

- In narrow passages an extension for the shaft may be useful, especially in twisty passage where it is difficult to hit in the direction of the shaft.

- Another tip for narrow passages: if you want to make a sideways hole but the drill is too long, start with a shorter drill. When you have used the entire length of this, put the longer drill in the hole then mount the machine over it. You can gain up to 150mm of extra depth this way, although it's useful to have an SDS-type head for easy drill-mounting.

- Sometimes not all the bullets in a series will explode. When it's not your lucky day, the inevitable will happen when you hit the rock later: beware!

- The harder the rock, the better. In soft or porous rock, the power is dissipated by airlocks and holes in the rock. Tight, hard rock, like the black Welsh limestone is good but could result in sharp fragments.

- Sometimes it helps to drill one or two more holes in the estimated direction of the crack; this will speed up the process of rock-breaking.

- Don't be over ambitious. You must not try to blow up our Prime Minister's fortress with a box of green bullets: his mother-in-law is using her tongue for that. (*Clearly this is some sort of Belgian political joke - Ed.*)

- The only limiting factor is the drill's battery capacity. Get a good machine, for example the new 24v Hilti TE-A10.

(Expensive, but the trip plus time spent plus beers at the pub are doubled too when you have to go back twice!)

- Put your machine in a pair of your grandma's nylon panties so it doesn't get dirty: the panties will keep the mud away but still gives you perfect control of the machine. Clean gear makes the job more enjoyable!

- An extra battery pack is more useful than a fast charger, do as we did and talk to your dealer about it: maybe he'll sell you a slower charger and give you half an accu for free!

- Sharpen your drills before every trip. This reduces the battery consumption and could make all the difference at breakthrough time.

- Everything should be packed carefully into a waterproof and shockproof tackle bag; the equipment is valuable and worth looking after.

The basic technique was developed by Italian cavers, but is also described in an article in the Swiss magazine *Stalactite*, 94 No.1 (SSS). I think it should be reproduced and spread among the more serious cave diggers, but care should be taken that all the world is not soon breaking up rocks down to the centre of the planet. Careless use could endanger our caves. Nevertheless, the technique could prove useful in rescue and in exploration, so we are trying to perfect it as best we can.

101 Great Caving Trips

No.6: Dead Horse Dig, October 7th 1995

by Pat Hall

Someone at work had done a spot of caving on holiday, and had been told that it is generally a safe sport which gets a bad reputation because of the lunatic fringe. On being asked whether I am a part of that fringe, I had to confess that I tend towards sensible caution, and only occasionally throw caution to the wind. Saturday 7th October, 1995, provided just such an occasion.

It was very wet in Wales that day, and it had been tipping down for a couple of days, so the river was high and no-one got anywhere in the Ogof Ffynnon Ddu stream. Ian Alderman persuaded me to join him and his huge team (Pete Francis) on a return to Dead Horse Dig, at Herbert's Quarry. The dig had been the subject of much mirth in the Copper the night before, its 150ft depth in a very promising area having taken ten years to achieve, to say nothing of accusations put by one member that the Club was being milked dry to pay for this progress. The three of us set off after a hearty breakfast, furnished as ever with an infinite absence of Club property and funding, expecting to find the slightly damp atmosphere of the cave augmented by a bit of extra water seeping in through the walls. After quickly changing in the howling wind and driving rain, I dashed over to find the relative shelter of the cave, and found a raging torrent pouring into the usually dry 12ft entrance shaft. The slope of boulders and pebbles running down to the top of the shaft was less stable than usual, and a fair amount of detritus had come to rest on the corrugated iron covering the top. Ian and Pete appeared and the iron sheets were pulled back. Water filled the shaft with a swirling whiteness, which we all agreed looked a little too exciting to attempt. Then Ian started talking about having a look at the end, and I realised that I actually wanted to go down into the aqueous maelstrom, so I said I would go there with him. Pete reluctantly resigned himself to sitting it out in the warmth and dry of his car. He was very disappointed!

Ian went first and I followed close behind. On the way down it was just about possible to look down and see the ledges to aim for, but the water was everywhere, and we were drenched from the outset. The flat-out crawl from the bottom of the entrance to the top of the ladder pitch was

littered with loose stones ready to be carried by the water over the pitch onto Ian, so great care was needed. At the ladder itself, most of the flow went straight down the near wall, and it was possible to climb out and avoid it, but the more constricted lower part of the chamber gave us another soaking, which continued for most of the rest of the descent. The narrow scaffolded drop through boulders, excavated a couple of years ago, presented superb images of rock and steel and moving water, and another gloriously wet climb down. Further down the water burst out into a chamber, and dropped straight onto the rock bridge, behind which you have to climb to reach the bottom, filling the void with spray and noise. Just beyond here, a few dislodged boulders had to be moved to clear the way on to the final crawl, the object of recent chemical and mechanical activities. At the end all of the water just disappeared down the inclined bedding on the left, with the clay-floored passage filled with water up to the depth of the natural dam. It was not somewhere that either of us wanted to hang around, but well worth the visit if only to see what the water did.

The climb back out presented its own problems and excitement. Crawling through curtains of cold water, it was impossible to look up to see where to go next, and getting up the vertical bits meant keeping your head down and feeling up for hand holds, hoping that what you had grabbed had not been made unstable by the exceptional water flow. The wettest bit of all was the entrance shaft, but there at least daylight gave a hand.

Ian and I went back to the car grinning and chattering away, consumed by the sheer pleasure that the preceding forty minutes had given us. It was only a short trip, but the intensity of the sport and natural drama involved must rank it among the finest I have done.



Salle Adelle, by Tony Baker

La Pierre Saint-Martin August 1995

A visit to the classic Pierre Saint-Martin system and its associated caves,
by 39 SWCC members and others.



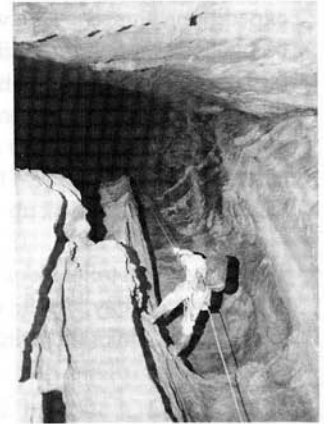
Martin Hoff



Tony Baker



Dave Dobson



Tony Baker

Le Camping

by *Haley Gardner*

"Camping... The campsite is 'Camping IBARRA' at SAINTE ENGRACE. Tel: 59 28 73 59. It is a nice clean campsite with a bar, excellent showers and toilet facilities and plenty of room."
- *Pierre St. Martin 1995 1st Circular.*



Photo A: The river. Both pictures by the author.

As I was unable to cave on this expedition, or walk any great distance - being nearly 6 months pregnant - I had to spend most of my holiday taking it easy at the campsite. So it was a good job that it exceeded my expectations from the description given in PSM '95 1st Circular.

The attached plan - Le Camping - of the campsite and the description and photos below should give you some idea of the campsite layout and facilities and who camped where. The plan is not 100% correct as it was drawn from memory, several months after our return.

The campsite was located along a river valley and was fairly peaceful once you had tuned into the fast-flowing stream, which ran alongside the campsite (see photo A), and the continuous clang of cowbells.

It was essentially split into two fields. Field One was where the expedition camped. This was a free-for-all area and tents could be pitched wherever you liked, amongst the trees or in the open (see photo B - taken from the road above: "road to ski station" on plan). Field Two was a more formal arrangement with designated plots, as well as the shower and toilet block. There was a caravan belonging to the Saunders family who had to pitch in Field Two to get the electrical hook up - or was it to get away from the rabble?

The shower and toilet block was extremely good and was cleaned at least twice a day. At the rear of the block to the left (see plan) were laundry sinks and urinals - yes, urinals outside for all to see.

The laundry sinks were well used for hosing down caving gear and the existence of trees throughout the camping area meant that there was no problem in rigging washing lines. To the rear right of the block were the washing-up sinks and draining boards.

A small stream (see plan - "babbling brook" running from "woody embankment" to "bouldery stream/river") acted as our fridge provided that whatever you put in the river was secured with a boulder or hand line. This kept perishables a bit fresher than otherwise for a reasonable period of time.

Items 1 to 5 on the plan show the communal cooking, eating, drinking and meeting area which was covered by item 4 - a tarpaulin - to keep off those evening showers. Many an evening was spent in the communal areas and much drinking and story-telling was accomplished. You may notice on the plan that item 5 is the used carbide dump. Nothing was better than to be eating your meal as some nice caver was cleaning out their generator. It amazed me that the used carbide dump remained in this location for the whole two weeks. But then I suppose most cavers are used to the noxious smell produced by certain cavers at Penwyllt so the smell of used carbide was nothing out of the ordinary!

The Bar (see plan - "path up to bar to collect bread") was never really frequented for the imbibing of alcohol, for it was cheaper to purchase beer and wine from the local supermarket (10miles+ away). However, it did sell tobacco and postcards and it was the



Photo B: Looking down on Field One

collection point for the daily bread delivery (orders placed the night before).

As expedition campsites go (so I am told) this one was luxury. The facilities, the location, the river, the scenery... marks out of 10? I think I'd give it 9. I had a very enjoyable and relaxing holiday and I would definitely consider returning one day.

Le Camping

(Not to Scale)

- KEY**
- 1 - MESS TENT
 - 2 - STORE
 - 3 - EQUIPMENT STORE
 - 4 - TAR PAULIN - COVERED EATING AREA
 - 5 - CARBIDE DUMP (RIGHT NEXT TO EATING AREA)
 - 6 - DAVIS + BAKER, CORDON BLEU COOKERY TENT + STORE
 - 7. DAVIS + BAKER SLEEPING TENT
 - 8. S. HOLDER
 - 9. B. BOWEL
 - 10. G. BAZELEY
 - 11. A. DOBSON
 - 12. D. DOBSON
 - 13. P. MEREDITH + H. GARDNER
 - 14. G. NEVITT + A. HAYWARD
 - 15. S. GANN + ~~MIDDLETON~~
 - 16. K. BALL + M. STRUTT
 - 17. S. MABBET
 - 18. S. SCARDE
 - 19. H. THOMAS } (O.G.'s)
 - 20. P. FRANCIS }

ROAD UP TO SKI STATION

WOODY EMBANKMENT

PATH UP TO BAR TO COLLECT BREAD

BABBING BROOK (THE FRIDGE)

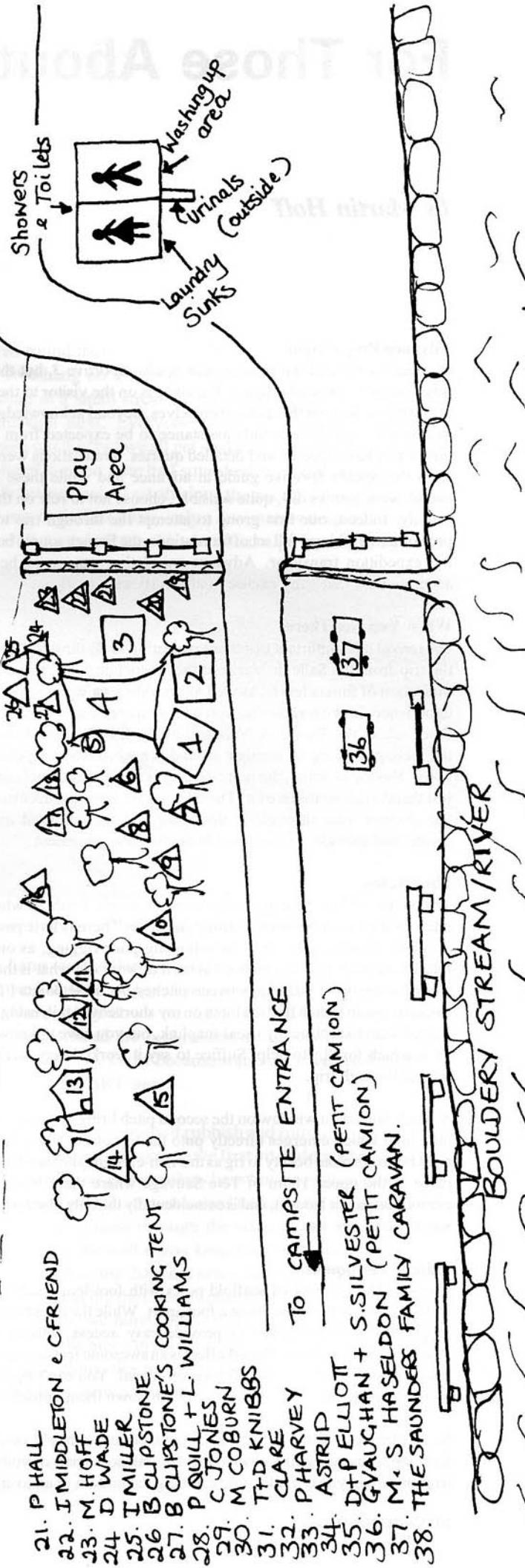
BIG ROCK

- 21. P. HALL
- 22. J. MIDDLETON & C. FRIEND
- 23. M. HOFF
- 24. D. WADE
- 25. I. MILLER
- 26. B. CLIPSTONE'S COOKING TENT
- 27. B. QUILL + L. WILLIAMS
- 28. P. JONES
- 29. C. JONES
- 30. M. COBURN
- 31. T. D. KNIBBS
- 32. CLARE
- 33. PHARVEY
- 34. ASTRID
- 35. D. P. ELLIOTT
- 36. G. VAUGHAN + S. SILVESTER (PETT CAMION)
- 37. M. S. HASELDON (PETT CAMION)
- 38. THE SAUNDERS FAMILY CARAVAN.

TO CAMPSITE ENTRANCE

BOULDER STREAM / RIVER

38



For Those About to Through Trip...

by *Martin Hoff*

Advance Preparation

Our main source of information was *Spéléo Sportive 3*, but there are other useful books and articles. The onus is on the visitor to the Pierre St. Martin to find out things for themselves; beyond acknowledging the intention to visit there is little assistance to be expected from ARSIP unless you have specific and detailed queries. Translations were made from the *Spéléo Sportive* guide in advance and while these proved useful, some parties did, quite sensibly, choose not to rely on them too heavily. Indeed, our first group to attempt the through trip took the precaution of taking a full set of translations, the French source book and the expedition translator. Advance translation can never be 100% accurate (and that's my excuse, and I'm sticking to it).

When You Get There

On arrival it is important that those expecting to do through trips make the trip from the Salle de Verna to the Tunnel du Vent; this is a good indication of fitness levels, as well as providing valuable route-finding experience. Make no mistake, you will not quite be abseiling in just the other side of the Tunnel du Vent and by the time you reach this point the feeling of being on familiar ground is a worthwhile psychological boost. Having said that, the route-finding is rarely that complicated, it's just that there's so much of it. The eye rapidly becomes accustomed to the obvious wear throughout this route and the coloured markers, cairns, and carbide arrows provide ample encouragement.

The Pitches

The pitches of Tête Sauvage are a delight, but only for those who enjoy pitch after pitch of featureless dropping shafts. There is little possibility for route-finding error, only for following poor rigging, as one drop follows another. In some places it is hard to work out what is the pitch, and what the bit of walking between pitches. At these points I found it easier to use an Italian friction hitch on my short cow's tail, using a pear-shaped krab to replace my usual snaplink, but you have to know which bit is which for this to help. Suffice to say it worked very well on my second through trip.

A pendulum into a window on the second pitch brings you into a lovely little tube which emerges directly onto the top of the 50m pitch. This must be an absolute beauty to rig as this non-existent pitchhead is the one place in the upper 180m of Tête Sauvage where there is no *mât de perroquet* (parrot ladder), and is coincidentally the only place where one would be of any use.

Mâts de Perroquets

Parrot ladders consist of scaffold poles with foot-long pieces of pipe welded halfway through, about a foot apart. While the intention may be to produce a fixed ladder to provide easy access without rigging absolutely all the pitches, the net effect is an awesome feat of engineering resulting in the Devil's Own Television Aerial. You can't rig to abseil past them, and obviously you can't climb down them unlined.

No matter how well you tidy your jammers etc., they'll catch your footloop; if there's half a chance they'll grab some part of your tackle bag; the unwary may find a rung catching the bottom of an oversuit leg

and turning them upside down. Even the dastardly dream team of Jeremy Beadle and Noel Edmonds would have trouble coming up with an invention of such deception and destruction. and that's before you consider the implications for derigging trips, and the effects of parrot ladders on cavers who have just prussiked more than 300m. And those who have heavy tackle sacks of rope dangling from them...

Wetsuits or Dry Gear?

Except for the Tunnel du Vent, it is possible to complete this trip dry. More or less. The pool before Salle Susse is three or four feet deep. And exceedingly cold. Likewise the Grand Canyon provides for immersion up to about waist level, for several hundred metres. But, for an average group of fit and capable cavers moving at a reasonable pace, the dry passages allow for rapid draining and rewarming, as long as you don't sit and brew up in the draughtiest passage available, as we did.

For the Tunnel du Vent itself, you will need boats. No doubt this will be fully documented elsewhere. However, I would recommend exhaustive sea trials in advance, which should be conducted with the full involvement of those taking part in the expedition. You will have no-one but yourself to blame when it emerges that you are the one sharing the boat with your expedition's secret sixteen-stone neanderthal liability; and you should expect little sympathy as he or she capsizes the boat and calmly steps onto rocks just below the surface as you plummet into thirty fathoms of Tunnel du Vent faster than a Scout down Gaping Ghyll. The only advantage of such an experience is the establishment of an expedition fridge; ten seconds in the left hand of one of our through-trippers proved entirely successful as a means of producing the perfectly-chilled ready-to-serve beer. (Note: these figures are accurate for 250ml bottles only.)

The Hard Stuff

There are a few bits where advance knowledge may help; it is possible to bypass the 5m climb from Galerie Des Marmites by climbing up slightly before, or by continuing along the low passage and climbing back over where you've just come from. This is not obvious. The best approach is when members of the party are prepared to look separately for those tell-tale signs which show you are back on the right path, as may be necessary around Hidalga. The first large pool preceding the Tunnel du Vent may be bypassed by staying up in the Galerie Principe de Viana, and crossing a fair amount of loose and uninspiring rock to a bottle-testing move around an exposed corner. Rocks dropped from here land in the water with an impressive splash - you are some way above the water, which is something to bear in mind if the party splits up and uses both the wet and dry approaches. A similarly loose climb on the left into a small grotto and down the other side leads you to the Tunnel du Vent. Simple. No PSM-related article of mine could be complete without a reference to football, so this will have to be that. And one final thing; when you get to the foot of the 92m pitch, those white arrows are there for a reason. That is the way. The only way.

The Wimps' Through Trip

by Andy Dobson

I awake with the strangest sensation - I'm not nervous. But I'm always nervous before a big trip (and most small ones, come to that). I crawl out of my tent and find it has stopped raining. Things seem to be going far too smoothly, we have even sorted and packed the gear the night before. Taking advantage of my lack of anxiety, I munch through my bucket of muesli, washed down with gallons of tea. Slowly the rest of the team gradually surface - Paul Meredith, Paul Quill, Lisa Williams and Dave. Something is seriously amiss here, how could I possibly be the first one up, it's still hours till midday. Slowly it dawns on me, there is no sign of Martin, our secret weapon (he has already done the trip once). Jitters just starting as I walk over to his tent.

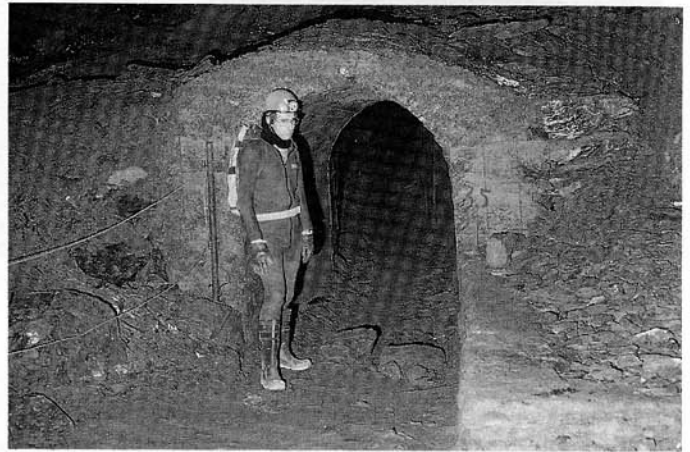
"Martin, if you're coming it's time to get up". There's a muffled grunt and a bit of rustling, sounds promising. I stroll over to Brian's tent as he had asked for a lift up to retrieve his car, left at the top after yesterday's through trip, but all I get is some groaning. Well how was I to know he'd only got back two hours ago? As I pour another mug of tea, Martin crawls out of his tent, bleary-eyed. (How does a teetotaler get a hangover?) Brilliant, he's coming and the nerves subside.

Several more mugs of tea and some grub follow before we finally set off. By now it's mid-morning but Alpine starts were never my style (Understatement Of The Year). We drop Dave's car at the bottom of the track to the EDF tunnel and drive up the mountain and past the ski station. It seems an awfully long way to go back down underground. Paul's car won't make the hill on the track to Tête Sauvage, so we leave it just off the road and start walking. It is a fair stroll up and over, but then the cave is nearly all downhill and the air is fresh and cool. We kit up, then crawl in through the stack of fish crates over the entrance.

Underground at last, it's good to get going even with a crack of noon start. Unfortunately the "parrot ladders" in the early shafts prove to be as much of a nuisance as everybody has said. Try to stop one piece of kit catching and another snags instead. Eventually, I work out a method of sliding one boot down the middle strut of the ladder and cursing loudly whenever anything got caught. Very therapeutic, a good rant at an inanimate object. Reaching the flat-out crawl between pitches about halfway down I hear a stream of abuse ahead of me, suggesting someone else is trying the same technique, but in fact it's Paul getting in a tangle on the traverse line where the window pops out straight over the pitch. Fortunately no-one repeats Martin's previous trick of straddling it completely, just hearing about it brought tears to the eyes.

Problems sorted, it is an easy jog down lots of short drops, nothing too technical, just concentrating on getting it right. Even the 92-metre pitch is broken up into several sections and as it

curves round there is no yawning black space to frighten me. A nice free-hang on the final drop, and at last we're all down and standing in a small stream staring at the grotty duck we have to go through next. Everyone tries a different technique to get through quickly but we all get soaked. Lisa re-arranges her wrist-and-hand support (she had squashed her hand in OFD III only a month before) and we set off along the passage. Almost immediately we come to the last pitch, only a few metres deep but with a small waterfall. I produce the old, sacrificial rope from my bag for Dave



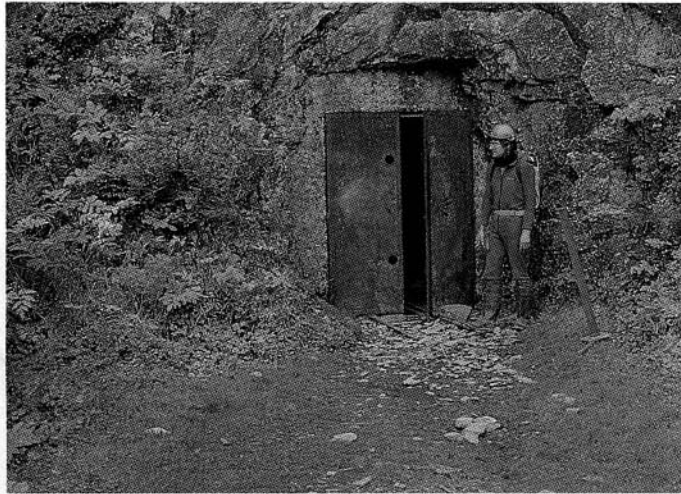
The entrance to the EDF tunnel in the Salle de Verna

to re-hang (so the derigging party don't have to go through the duck) and stuff the soggy new rope back into the bag to carry out. With Dave safely down we carry on, still kitted up as the three rope climbs ahead are best treated as assisted SRT. Arriving in Salle Pierrette (we know because someone's written it on the wall) we take off the SRT gear.

Trogging on past mounds of rubbish and rotting Intermarché bags in Salle Monique, we come to the first bit of deep water. The guide says to put on our pontonnières here but as we don't have any we ignore it and get wet. An awkward low crawl-cum-traverse leads round to a mad dash through the edge of the deep water, only chest-deep by the wall if you keep hold of the handline. It seems a lot longer than the 20m the notes say, but this is probably due to the water making the Green Canal seem tropical by comparison. Once through, we hurry off to warm up, though care is needed as most of Salle Susse involves ridge-walking on huge blocks and scrambling along the tops of Transit van-sized boulders with yawning gaps between them.

Soon we enter the Grand Canyon, "the prettiest part of the trip" (well, there's not much competition). Reminiscent of the Great North Road, a meandering stream runs between pebble beaches

and rock piles in a high passage of varying width. It's best to go quickly as it's impossible to avoid getting wet and the water is so cold I'm left wondering why it hasn't got icebergs floating in it. Unfortunately we only amble along it so we end up getting frozen feet. There are four boulder chokes along the canyon, each one progressively more complicated and we grot around each one in turn disputing the way on. This is really just an excuse to give our feet a chance to warm up before the next soaking. The last 300



Entrance to the EDF tunnel

metres is all wading and definitely best done at speed.

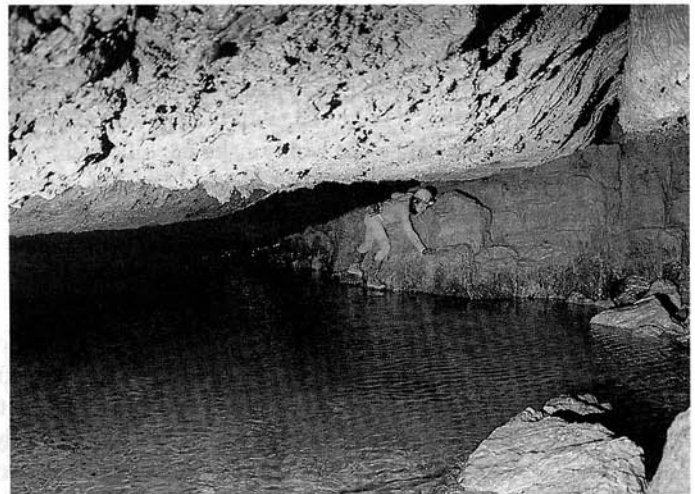
I pause on a large rock directly before a very deep-looking section, and luckily Martin says we can climb up here. After several small climbs - made tricky by the fact that I can't feel my feet - we reach a higher level of small muddy passages and spend several minutes searching for the way on. Martin finds the correct climb and we go through a fossil gallery with lots of pots full of water in the floor (Galerie des Marmites), into a big passage with ascending boulder piles, similar to the bottom section of the cave. Time to fettle the carbide lights again.

Despite having made the mistake, years ago, of buying Petzl Arianes, Dave and I have managed to improve their performance considerably. We have fitted larger jets and drilled out the holes in the water feed pipes which soon get clogged. We use only small fills inside bits of old stocking, and crank the water supply right up. This gives a moderate light, rather than the totally pathetic one previously achieved, though still not a patch on that available with other makes of generator. Using the carbide fill in old stockings makes changing fuel and cleaning easier, and avoids accidental spillage polluting the cave.

Lights sorted, we clamber up and down over boulder piles, following Martin's lead. We have been recommended to take the unmarked high-level bypass to avoid the series of deep pools down in the river in Galerie Principe de Viana. We shouldn't have bothered: the bypass is complicated, with some dodgy traverses, several bold steps and a hair-raising move around a rock bluff on

loose stuff which relies on two very dubious bolts. As we're already soaked, we might as well have gone for it through the water. Still, at least it's got the adrenalin pumping and added some excitement. The whole of this middle section is quite complex and I'm glad Martin is leading or we might spend the rest of the holiday finding our way through.

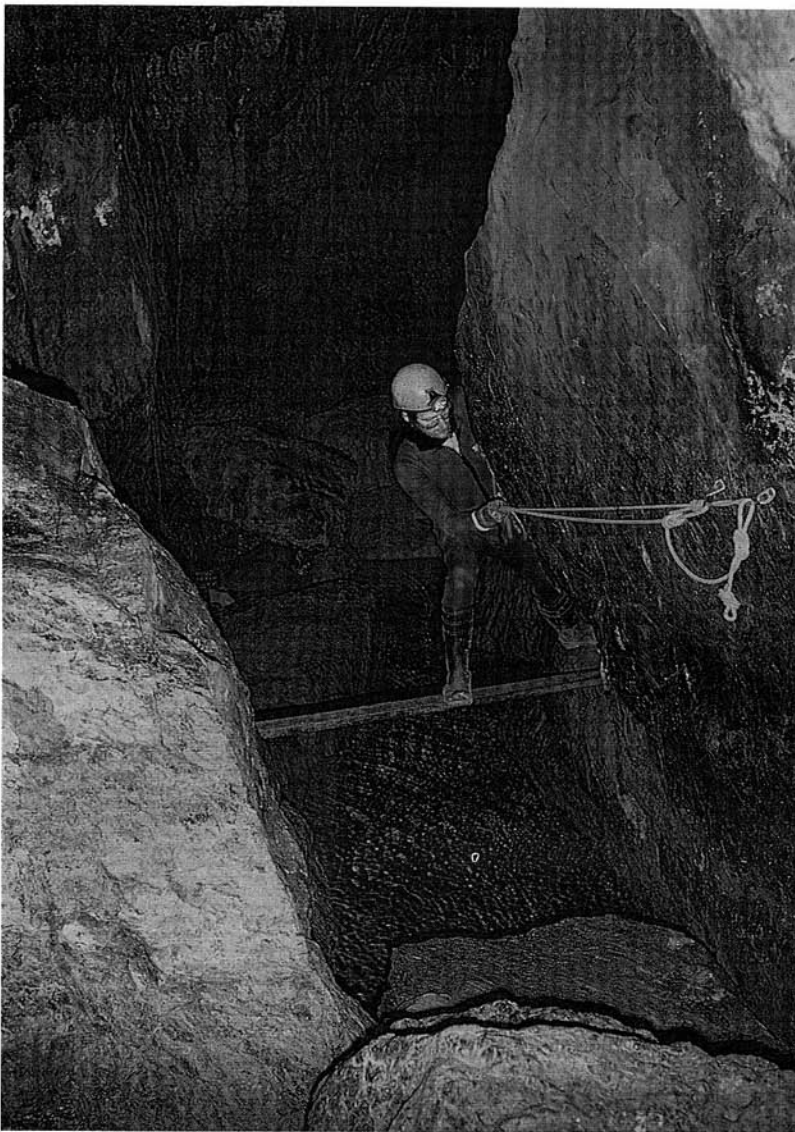
After splashing through some low pools we reach the Tunnel du Vent, the most distinctive part of the trip. The roof comes right down and the wind howls through a low arch over very deep water, which sumps in wet weather. Boats are needed here and there's a steel hawser running along the roof to haul on, but the draught is so strong it's hopeless to try and fight it, more a case of hanging on and going as the wind takes you (sounds like cottage No.8 on a Saturday night...). Despite the daily rain, there's plenty of airspace for us, though the expedition's Toys R Us boats don't inspire much confidence, especially as one is leaking and won't inflate at all. Lisa volunteers to act as ferrywoman, bringing the empty boats back while Dave and I opt to let the others go first. They disappear into the darkness, then suddenly there's a deep, echoing boom as someone falls into out-of-their-depth water. Dave and I look at each other and both say: "Oh shit!" The sound of thrashing about in deep water subsides and we hope everyone is safe. After what seems an age, Lisa appears towing the empty boat, smiling though rather soggy, and we both breathe a sigh of relief. Apparently Paul Quill has overturned the two-man boat and while he landed on a rock a couple of feet below the surface, Martin had been dumped in eight feet of water but managed to



Andy traverses round the pool at the end of Salle Chevalier. Photos: Dave Dobson

swim out after touching the bottom. Lisa had laughed so much she capsized her own boat and so got a soaking as well.

Suitably forewarned, Dave and I put on our electric back-up lights ready for when the wind blows out the carbides, and take great care to go with the wind as it twists and turns the boat, then hold it steady while we beach ourselves and haul clear of the water.



Andy Dobson near the Salle de Verna

A hasty brew stop, along with some food, follows as Martin tries to revive himself from his ducking in icy water and everyone else tries to raise his spirits and avoid laughing too much. At least with the Tunnel du Vent behind us we know it's just a long plod out through 3½ kilometres of huge, boulder-strewn passage, even if the near part involves some awkward routefinding. Dave, Paul and I had spent over an hour of our previous trip up from the bottom entrance failing to find the Tunnel du Vent from Salle Navarre, while most parties on the expedition have done at least one circumnavigation of the chamber. This time, however, we get it right, with Martin leading the way, anxious to warm up. I'm finding it almost impossible to light my carbide lamp despite a fresh fill and a smell of acetylene. At the top of a cliff climb best done ignoring the rope, we stop to check out the problem while I apologise for holding everyone up. Lisa remembers that the gas pipe sometimes fractures inside the protective sheath, we check and it has. Quillie brings out his big knife and it's soon repaired. Suitably illuminated, we set off again.

We clamber down the rubble heap beneath Lépineux and Martin shows us where Casteret's memorial to Marcel Loubens is etched. After a moment's pause with a lump in my throat, we climb down through the dodgy boulders, across Salles E. Casteret and

Loubens, past the wrecked gours to the Métro. This is a distinctively-shaped passage with a flat floor and an arched roof. Progress is rather slow by now, and the rope climb at the end of the Métro proves difficult for Lisa with her battered hand. As always with a large party at an obstacle we get rather chilly, so as soon as everyone's up we march off briskly along the quick route, high up by the left wall all the way along Salle Queffelec. At the end of the chamber we wait for Paul and Lisa to catch up. We wait and wait but nobody appears. We pass several rather improbable suggestions as to the reason for their delay (nudge nudge, wink wink, say no more...) but still no-one appears. Realising they're not coming (!) I sprint back along the chamber, the fastest I've caved all day (well that's not difficult). Reaching the boulder pile at the far end of the chamber I can see their lights heading back into the cave. I shout at the top of my voice but to no avail, the sound lost in the vastness of the cavern. Then, suddenly they turn round and start back: Paul has realised the stream is flowing the wrong way.

Relief washes over me as visions of chasing them back towards the Tunnel du Vent subside. We're all reunited: Dave, Paul Meredith and Martin now shivering from the waist, and set off in crocodile fashion. We stay close together now, careful not to lose anyone on the final hike. I realise we'll be out way past our estimated time, but no-one will look for us until the morning anyway so it won't matter. The succession of boulder-strewn passages seem to melt into one another, then at last we're at the top of the Salle de Verna, and soon trudge out of the EDF tunnel into a clear night. 13½ hours underground, easily the slowest through trip of the expedition, so at least we've lived up to expectations. With an hour's walk down the mountain to the car still ahead,

I open a celebratory fruit juice, then clamber down the rough forest path to the start of the track.

Walking down the seemingly endless track, the forest has a special air to it tonight. The gentle voice of the trees, the damp freshness combined with the elation of completing the trip makes me forget my aching feet and the long trudge down. The walk feels like it goes on forever, but eventually we reach the car. A bit of a squeeze with six of us in soggy gear, but it's not far up past the church then down the gorge to the campsite. We bundle out to be met by a marvellous sight: at 3am Gary Nevitt is still up waiting to serve up our dinner, what a guy! Suitably grateful, we head for the showers, then crack open the beers while sampling the wonderful Nevitt cuisine. I'd like to offer Martin a beer for his routefinding but as he doesn't drink, I can't. Instead I'll have to drink it myself, as chat into the early hours, remembering a good trip in excellent company, even if it took forever. And now we know that PSM means Paul Soaking Martin...

A Boat-Hunter Writes...

by *Bob Saunders*

As part of the geriatric Welsh ex-pat and honorary Welsh *Marie Celeste* boat-hunting contingent (the ones who weren't noisy at the No Fun Saloon) that completed the traverse of the system, I offer the following observations.

The translation of the route prepared by our resident linguist was excellent, although I must apologise to those in my company for the continuous "sermon" they received underground as I struggled to read it - I was keen not to take unnecessary deviations from the desired course and thus waste valuable energy!



As an indication of the accuracy of the guide we made only one mistake: under the heading "Marmite Gallery - Grand Cornice" a tricky 5m climb is mentioned along with the fact that there may be some gear on it, "but ignore it". We could find no way up this little obstacle without using the string hanging on it, and even then it was

difficult! Indeed, most of us used our SRT gear to get up it. It was only later on we realised that the instruction meant ignore the climb altogether, not the gear - there was another way round. (*We made the same mistake - Ed.*)

The recommended approach to a trip, unless you have a guide, is to complete a Salle de Verna to Tunnel du Vent return trip to familiarise oneself with the route. We all believed this was worthwhile and pays dividends other than easier routefinding. It also provides a psychological boost when, on the through trip, you reach the Tunnel du Vent as you are then on familiar territory, with food and fuel to hand, and you know what remains in front of you.

Even with the plentiful waymarks the route can be easily lost in the big passages and more than one party found themselves retracing their steps after circumnavigating a large boulder.

On the Salle de Verna - Tunnel du Vent trip we laid down some reflective markers (which we collected on the through trip), to supplement ARSIP's tapes, which could be picked out from 150

metres or more with the aid of a good torch. (In our bag was an Underwater Kinetics 400 rechargeable diving lamp: overloaded and oversupplied was the verdict of some, but with porters like ours... This lamp and the markers worked well and avoided many deviations off the route. If you're not on a road-runners outing, it's well worth the added weight, even if just for sightseeing.)

With regard to the equipment, in my opinion the boats and survival gear were not left in the right place. If the Tunnel du Vent sumped the canal just upstream of it would also be sumped or impassable and you would not be able to get to the gear. Furthermore, the boats would probably be punctured against the roof by the rising waters and be rendered useless when your need for them was greatest. It would be prudent, therefore, to bring the emergency gear and boats through to the large chamber behind the lake, where they would be accessible regardless of water levels.

Finally, most of the teams geared up in furies and oversuits. Mike Coburn wore a neoprene "long john" with a furry top and oversuit, and I a 2.5mm neoprene *pontonnière* (long johns, I just like the name) which I found to be functional and very comfortable. With hindsight, I would take a "Toys R Us" plastic buoyancy ring or a sealed waterproof inner in a tackle bag to afford some buoyancy, forget the boats and swim it. This would possibly also give you a better chance of getting through the Tunnel du Vent in high water conditions, the only concern being the amount of coiled wires and bits of rope in the canal that might entangle you.

A big "thank you" to the organisers, without whom things don't happen! Where to next? We look forward to a fearless-leader decision soon...



Top Left: Claire Jones in the EDF Tunnel.

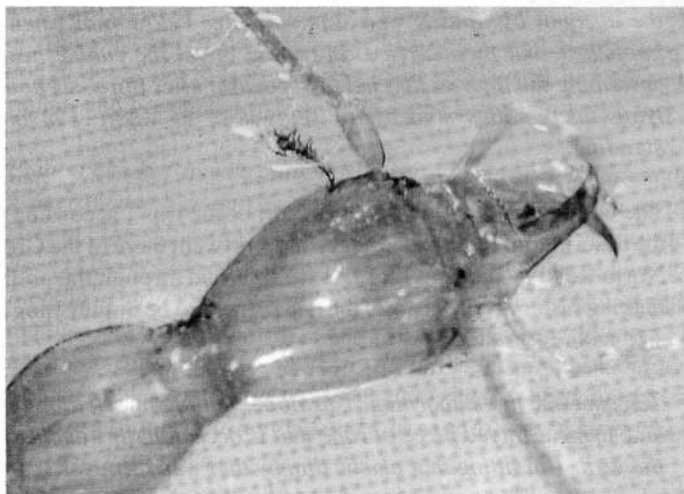
Right: Pete Francis with some remains of earlier activities in the cave.

Both pictures by Mike Coburn

The Pierre Saint-Martin Beetle

by Julian Carter

Several members of last summer's expedition to the Pierre Saint-Martin came across a number of beetles deep in the cave on their trips. Thinking of me, Tony Baker collected one of these beetles, shoved it into some French-style meths, and finally remembered to pass it on to me several months later.



So that the beetle didn't suffer martyrdom in vain I have examined the specimen and thought I would write this short piece on it. The beetle is a member of a very large family known as the *Trechidae* and is of the genus *Aphaenops*, but I am unsure of the exact species, though it is more than likely endemic to the Pierre Saint-Martin. These are blind trogloditic beetles common to caves throughout the Pyrennees. They are totally specialised to the cave environment, being well adapted to the stable environmental conditions and extremely limited food supply. It is believed these beetles evolved from nivicoles - beetles that lived in snow holes and ice caves, which gradually moved deeper into the subterranean habitat in response to pressures from the environment or competition.

These beetles feed by hunting over concretions or stalagmite floors damp with seepage water which attract minute insects such as *collembola*, *diptera* and *acarina* on whom the beetles feed by grabbing with their pincer-like jaws.

When reproducing the female lays a single egg at a time, which is enormous and completely fills the abdomen. This

is a response to a nutrient-poor but stable environment, with the beetle putting its reproduction effort into smaller numbers of larger eggs than equivalent surface forms.

Other responses to a long adaptation to the cave environment are evident. The beetles are totally blind, with even the optic ganglia absent. This represents the last stage in the regressive evolution of the eye which is definite and of which no form of intervention can modify. The beetle's ultra-specialisation is also shown by its rigid requirements of high humidity, possessing a very limited ability to autoregulate, again reflecting the stability of the cave environment they live in.

The specimen collected is also showing some parasitism by a fungus growing out of the integument (note the small black feathery growths). The species is unknown, but in such cases the fungus usually gradually "overtakes" the animal until eventually it can no longer feed and dies.

Unfortunately the UK cave fauna does not have such specialised beetles specific to the cave environment although some common cave species such as *Trechus microns*, which are considered to be troglodites, do appear to be evolving into troglodites of the underground habitat.



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Les Couilles du Chien

by Tony Baker

Five o'clock in the morning. I'm walking - or rather, trudging - along a muddy passage that has the arched shape that only mined tunnels can achieve. My backside is very, very uncomfortable; two twelve-hour plus trips on consecutive days, in a damp fleece suit, have brought on acute "nappy rash" which gets worse with every single step. My mind is focussed only on getting out, getting down the hill to the car, and as a result I'm tending to leave the others behind. But I'm past caring. We've done it, and now we're very nearly out.

We started late intentionally. Hywel Davies, Sue Mabbett and I had been in Gouffre du Couey Lodge until past midnight, returning to the campsite after one o'clock. We needed a late start, a chance to let our aches and bruises recover and eat plenty before embarking on another long trip. Brian Clipstone, who was joining us for the through trip, never needs much encouragement to start late. So it was quarter to five before Andy Dobson took a photo of the four of us, we said goodbye and struggled, one at a time, into the rickety wooden structure that marks the entrance to D9, Tête Sauvage.

Somewhere around four in the morning. Madonna's Express Yourself is going round and round in my head, for some reason, which is annoying me intensely because I don't know the words and the same bit of it is repeating over and over. I'm fed up with scrambling over boulders, and I can't remember this bit of the cave well enough to know how far we've still got to go. I could reach into my suit for the description, but this requires extra effort and I don't think it will help anyway. The others are flagging, too: I'm in front, trying to spot the routemarkers. Every so often I miss one and have to retrace my steps, cursing every one as the suit rubs my backside raw.

Some of the others had done through trips the previous day, and had given us some routefinding tips. Somehow I think we thought this would be an easy trip, but the pitches of Tête Sauvage are hard work and it took almost two hours before we were assembled at the bottom of the 92m pitch, filling our generators from a convenient pool. At the Berger two years earlier, I'd felt a real thrill at the remoteness of the bottom section of the cave. This was different: the deeper we went, the closer we were to being out. The feeling of remoteness was experienced here, beyond all the pitches and before the miles of horizontal passage. We clambered along the dark rifts and waded through the pools towards the main stream. Salle Cosyns is an uninspiring place, and this heightened the feeling of being in an extreme environment, a long way from sunshine and comfort and warmth.

Around three o'clock in the morning. I'm standing beside a large rock on which is written, in rough sooty letters: "Ici Marcel Loubens a vecu les derniers jours de sa vie courageuse." Beppo Occhialini and Haroun Tazieff wrote that, shortly after Loubens died. It is an eerie place; I remember the story of Loubens' death sending a shiver down my spine when, as a fifteen year-old, I read it in a library book. He fell only about ten metres, according to the account by Tazieff who was standing below him when it happened, but then carried on rolling down the rubble heap, sustaining the injuries that led to his death, a few thirty-six hours lying unconscious somewhere very close to where I'm now standing.

The Grand Canyon - "the prettiest part of the trip", according to the description. It reminded everyone who went there of the Great North Road in Dan-yr-Ogof. As we splashed through the pools, making faster progress now, the trip seemed to be diminishing in size with every step.

Ten past one in the morning. I'm alone, pulling myself along the lake using a frayed piece of rope that is occasionally attached to the wall. I'm sitting in a plastic dinghy that was made for kids to play with in the swimming pool and it's all that's keeping me from this very cold, very deep, very dark lake. The wind has blown my carbide light out and is rippling the water. I can just make out a glow from the others' lights around the corner. We're still a long, long way underground: ahead lie several hours of scrambling up and over boulders. And I'm thoroughly enjoying myself.

The description said: "There may be some gear on this climb, but ignore it." Ignore the gear, or ignore the climb? The gear on it must be there for a reason, and the way on below didn't look very promising. I grabbed one of the less frayed bits of tat and hauled myself up, sweating as I clambered over the overhanging bit at the top. I was enjoying myself now, caving well and feeling good about the cave: a fantastic trip. Every section of the cave was different, required different techniques and attitudes. Routefinding wasn't particularly difficult: the plentiful waymarks saw to that.

Half past eleven. We're sitting beside a pool of water, drinking coffee and eating Christmas cake. I set the camera and flashgun up, set the self-timer and we stand and look into the lens. By now, we're starting to feel cold and starting to realise that this trip is turning out to be rather harder than we'd imagined. We're not yet at the Tunnel du Vent and even when we get there it's still a long way. Still, the hot drinks taste good and revive our spirits somewhat. It is for moments like this that I go caving; the heady mix of excitement, exhaustion, achievement and anticipation, the thrill of being somewhere remote and conquering it, yet knowing that there's still more to do before you're back in the real world.

"You don't need to go through this section of deep water" Gary had said, pointing at the book. "Go up this boulder slope, and there's a route through that isn't shown here." It sounded easy, and definitely preferable to the lower route where, according to Gary, "Sue Cade was swimming". Now, however, it seemed rather daunting. We'd gone up the boulder slope and followed the obvious route along the ledge, and now we were faced with an awkward move around a corner, a long way up, using a tatty bit of rope attached to two bolts, each of which looked decidedly dodgy. I was still in front so, after cautiously testing it, I stepped round, and breathed a sigh of relief as the bolts didn't give way.

Eight o'clock. I'm wriggling through a gap between boulders in a narrow passage that separates Salle Pierrette from the main stream. This isn't what I expected from this trip: neither was the duck at the bottom of the 92m pitch. "Might as well have gone to Mendip" I grumble as I reach back to free my tackle bag. A few minutes later the strap breaks and I'm faced with the prospect of having to do the rest of the trip with it slung over my shoulder instead of wearing it rucksac-style, until Sue Mabbett produces some safety pins from her bag and I manage to effect a temporary repair. Thanks Sue.

We reached the top of the giant rubble heap in Salle Lépineux. The bottom of this was the furthest point we'd reached on our trip in from the EDF tunnel, when the lateness of the hour and sheer enjoyment of everything we'd seen so far led to the decision to turn round and save the rest for another day. Now we were looking to try and see where Lépineux shaft entered this vast cavern, but our carbide lights wouldn't illuminate the roof and even the beam on my torch wasn't powerful enough to help me see it. That would have been a superb way of entering the cave: abseiling down a thousand feet to emerge here, where the original explorers used to land, damp and cold after an hour or two being lowered by the winch. It's a place steeped in speleological history, and the visible remains of the camps used by those original explorers add to the experience.

Ten past five. I hated this move when I did it the other day, and I hate it now. I'm in a narrow muddy tube, my helmet keeps getting wedged in the top of the passage and my tackle bag is being especially uncooperative. A metre or so beyond my feet is the top of a fifty metre pitch, but I can't see it from here. I clip both my cow's tails onto the traverse line and wriggle down into the tightest section. The bag's stuck. Again. Pull myself back up, reach up to free it. Come on, bastard, don't do this. Slide back down. My feet are over the drop. Hold onto the traverse line, wriggle down some more. My legs are now out in space, I gently lower myself down further until the weight comes on the cow's tails. Pull the bag down and lower it so that it's hanging from my

harness, out of the way. I'm sweating, this is bloody awkward, but at least now I'm over the top of the pitch and can thread my descender. Double check. There are no footholds at all, to unclip my short cow's tail I have to heave myself up. It comes off, I unlock the descender and check that everything's where it should be before unclipping my long cow's tail and tentatively starting to abseil.

The night air smelled fresh and clean. It was a big psychological boost to be out of the cave, even though we still had an hour's walk down the track to do. This was as hard going as I'd expected, stumbling over the sharp stones, but every step was taking us closer to the car. By the time we made it down, the first purple hint of dawn was appearing over the horizon. I wasn't able to walk quickly but the others were slower still. Near the bottom, I left them behind, the soreness from my backside as it screamed to be released from the furry suit overtaking all other considerations. Back at the car, I opened the boot and rummaged for the can of soft drink I knew was there somewhere, before starting to peel off the caving gear.

Quarter to five. Underground at last. Step off the bottom of the wooden slats, slide a few metres down and clip straight onto the first traverse line. It feels good to get going, but it still seems odd embarking on a trip this late in the day. The descender slides easily down but the tackle bag repeatedly checks my progress by snagging on the bloody parrot ladder. It's not a pretty bit of cave, this: an inauspicious start to a classic trip, made even less attractive by the parrot ladders that clutter all the pitches in this upper section. Still, depth is quickly gained as pitch follows pitch, and once my muscles have warmed up a bit it starts to get easier.

A few days later, I did the through trip again. Five of us - Dominic Wade, Ian Middleton, Pat Hall, Sue Mabbett and myself - breezed through in eight and a half hours, including time spent deflating the boats and bringing them out. It was a more enjoyable trip, if a less memorable one, but it confirmed in the mind the feeling that this really is a magnificent cave, one of the best I've ever done.

We're sitting around the dining table, drinking tea on a sunny afternoon. Someone next to me is writing a postcard. "How do I say, in French" he asks Martin Hoff, "that this cave is the dog's bollocks?" Martin reaches across for the pen and scribbles on a scrap of paper: *Le gouffre est les couilles du chien.*

Cave Description

by *Martin Hoff*

The cave description which follows is based upon a translation of that in Spéléo Sportive à la Pierre Saint-Martin by Michel Douat, Jean-Francois Pernette and Serge Puisais, Edisud, 1985.

Through Trips

A highlight of sporting caving within PSM, the through trips are arduous, and to be taken seriously. Contacting ARSIP will provide various necessary advice, and this contact should be made well in advance of the planned trip. It is recommended that at least one trip be made from the Salle de Verna to the Tunnel du Vent (Wind Tunnel) to familiarise yourself with the route before attempting a through trip. No through trip should be considered except under favourable weather conditions - rainstorms and prolonged showers can often cause the Wind Tunnel to sump, as well as making other parts of the system extremely dangerous.

Choice of Direction

Most through trips work down towards the Salle de Verna, as descending is easier both in terms of route-finding and physical effort. This does, however, mean finishing a trip with a 3km walk through large boulder-strewn passages after at least ten hours of hard caving. Going uphill at least means you approach this section fresh, and what could be better than emerging from ten or fifteen hours underground onto a beautiful mountainside rather than coming out of a dark artificial tunnel? If you do contemplate doing it from the bottom up, you will have to be entirely sure of the route and your own physical capabilities.

Equipment

It is up to you to decide how to rig the pitches. You may need a rope or two of 15-25m to help with the traverses and climbs, and a boat is indispensable for the Tunnel du Vent. There are no maintained fixed aids - treat anything you find within the cave with distrust; only if you have found out from an exploratory party which pitches they have left rigged should you use anything found in the cave. In other words, take everything yourself and make sure you use it.

The through trips described are intended to be done using pontonnières - waterproof oversuit-type doofers. Immersion should (and usually can be) avoided.

To Bivouac or Not to Bivouac? (That is the Question)

Bivouacking just makes the trip longer without really helping. It leaves you with more to carry, making the party even more tired, and camping underground produces pollution of many unsavoury kinds. In short, DON'T.

On the other hand it may be a good idea for each member of the party to carry some sort of survival bag to rest or wait out the

floods in. Pull-through trips, while more convenient from the derigging aspect, should only be attempted by small groups of competent people; mind the blind pots, and be prepared to lug over 100m of rope through the system...

Rigging Details

We aim not to prescribe rigging details. There is no golden rule for the cave - it depend what the party is used to, its experience and choice of equipment. No-one would be in this system if they did not know what they were doing, so we aim to let them get on with it.

To Organise a Trip

Get in touch with ARSIP at least one month before the planned through trip. ARSIP will be able to tell you if any parts of the cave will be rigged by exploratory parties, who may also need your assistance. And whether entrances will be in use by other parties, if other parties will be interested in sharing ropes and so on. The area is often saturated with up to 450 cavers which may cause some complications.

The only way to prevent PSM becoming a gated and bureaucratic nightmare is to liaise with ARSIP, accept its advice and follow such safety advice as may be given. Familiarity with the route through the Tunnel du Vent - Verna section, and the pitches of the chosen entrance can save several hours on a trip.

Which Time of Year?

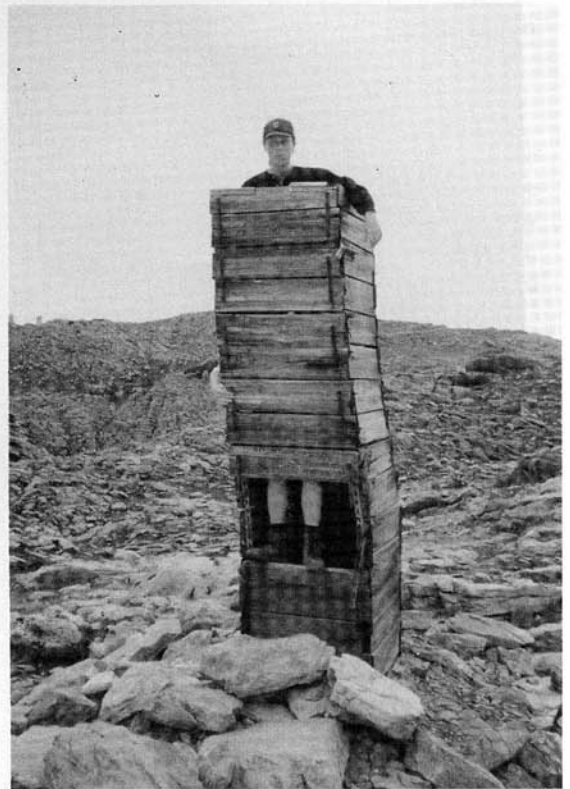
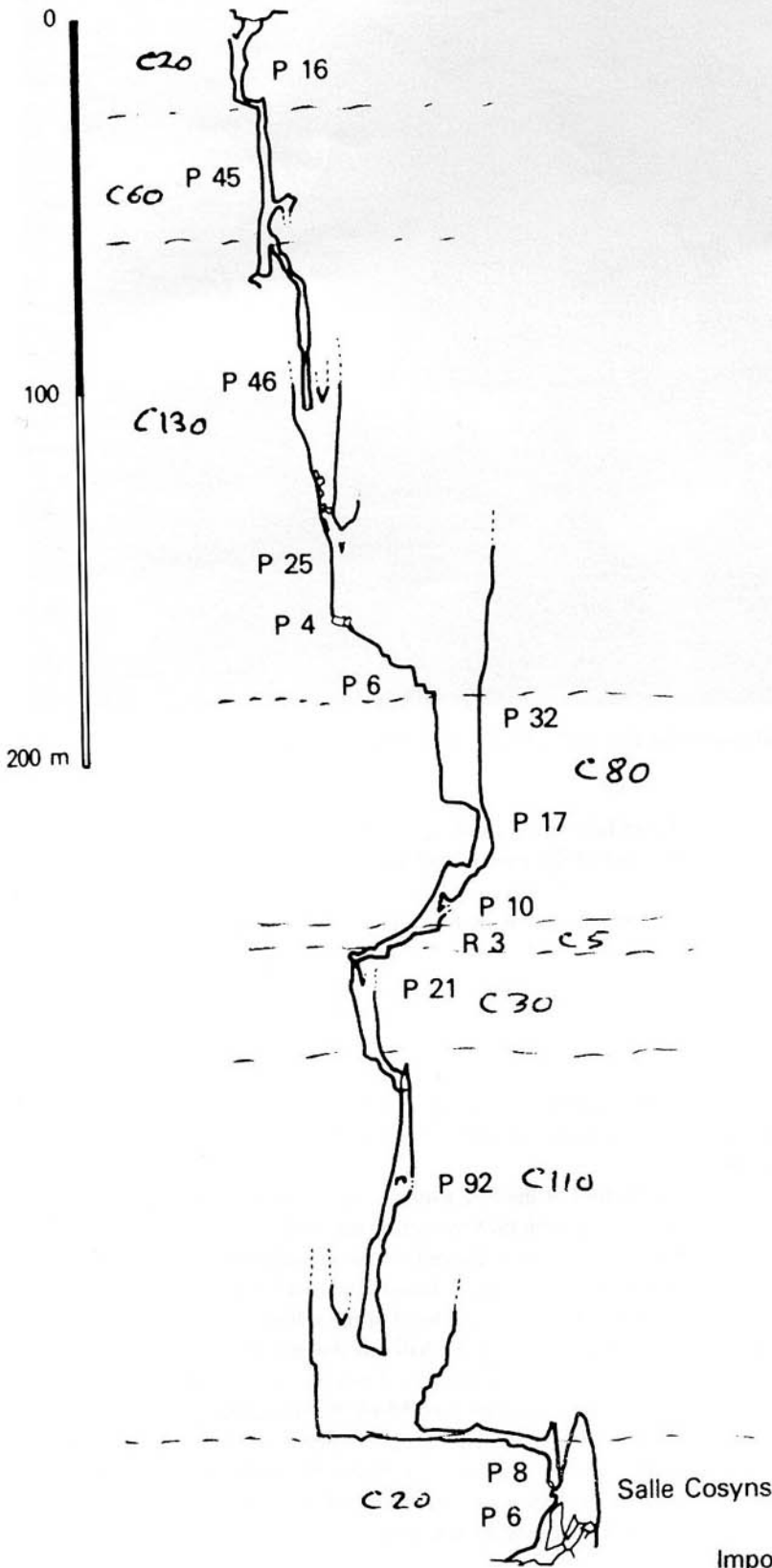
Through trips are impossible from mid-April to mid July when meltwater flooding is almost constant. Winter conditions are often excellent, but sudden storms are always possible. In summer you should beware of sudden storms and their effects on the water levels; any weather forecast information can only help. ARSIP requests that trips should not be planned in August, the area being overrun with French cavers. September and October generally offer the best possible conditions.

Finding Tête Sauvage

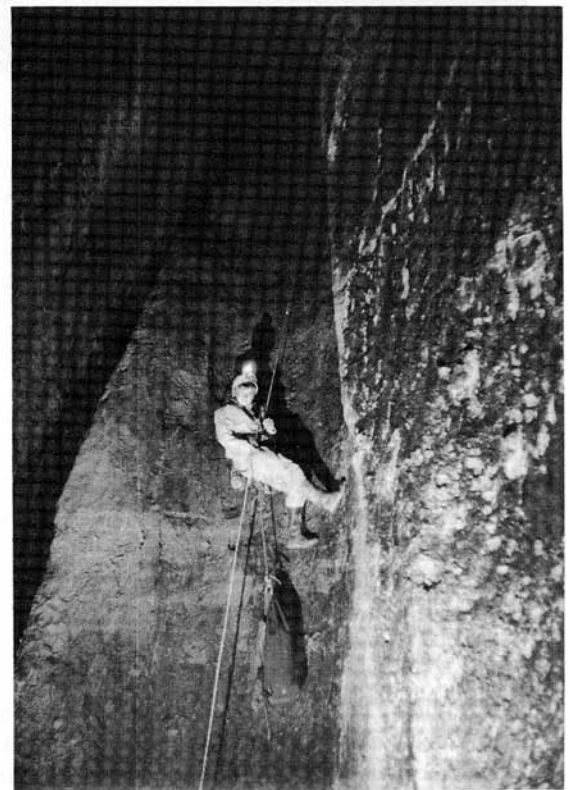
From the PSM ski station you should follow the track from opposite the restaurant "Le Relais" up to the Pescamou depression, heading eastward below the Pic D'Arlas. The track is just about negotiable in a car. 200m before the track reaches the shepherd's house is a good spot to park, on the grass at the top of the meadow. Follow the track to the point where it forks, and it is here you need to take a turning on the right through an obvious gap in the rocks. You are at the edge of a large expanse of lapiaz, and the 3m high wooden chimney immediately in front of you is the entrance to Tête Sauvage.

Gouffre de la Tête Sauvage

Topo by Douat, 1967 from
Spéléo Sportive à la Pierre Saint-Martin.

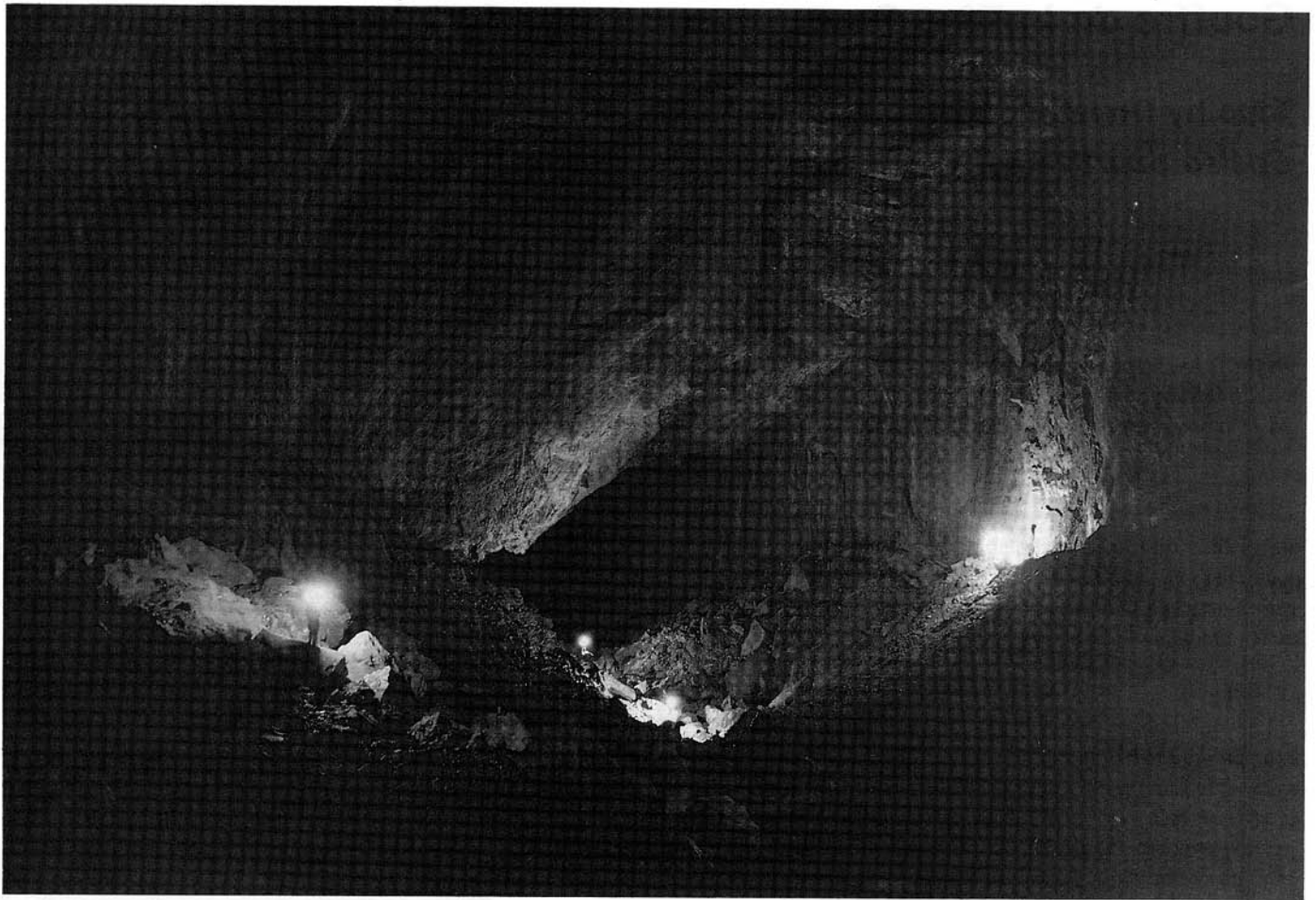


Entrance to Tête Sauvage



Sue Mabbett at the bottom of the 92m pitch.
Photos: Tony Baker

Important Note: the dotted lines and rope lengths are annotations which were added by Iain Miller when he was calculating rope requirements before the expedition left for France. They cannot, therefore, be taken as an accurate indication of what is needed.



Dominic Wade, Pat Hall, Sue Mabbett and Ian Middleton in the Salle Chevalier. Photo by Tony Baker

Tête Sauvage to the Salle de Verna

Distance: 7700m

Depth: -828m to the EDF tunnel
 -909m to the floor of the Verna

Difficult trip, takes 12-15 hours

Equipment needed: 430m of rope, two boats.

Tête Sauvage

Depth: -600m to Salle Cosyns

Discovered in 1965 by cavers of the Pyrenees and the Languedoc. Connected with PSM the following year, by the same people. First through trip from Tête Sauvage to the Verna took place in 1966 by members of Spéléo Club Paris and R.Gomez, taking fifty hours.

During rainfall the pitches of Tête Sauvage act as a huge funnel, and in flood conditions some pitches become impassable. In dry weather the pitches remain dry, more or less. As far as -180m the pitches are rigged with parrot ladders (except the P50), but it is preferable to rig the pitches anyway.

From the entrance a short passage leads to a series of short pitches down to -55m where, some way down the Tortoise Pitch, it is necessary to pendulum into a window which leads to a tube 40m long. This tube grows tighter in the final 10m, which leads to the top of the P50, entirely without warning - beware! At the foot of this pitch (-117m) the cave starts to get bigger. Two small climbs lead to a rubble pile down to the top of the 25m Damocles pitch.

From here three climbs of 5, 2 and 7m bring you to -180m and the end of the parrot ladders.

Beyond this point are two pitches of 32m and 17m which become difficult in high water. Try to rig them dry, if you can work out where that would be. Then, at -220m, you will encounter the second tighter section which is 30m long and split by a 10m pitch and a 3m climb. Almost immediately after the climb is a 21m pitch, which becomes very wet in wet weather. A third rift, both shorter and larger, emerges at -217m at the top of the P92. In truth this is a series of pitches, none of which is more than 25m.

At the foot of the P92 follow a small stream round a bend to the left and through the low section into 60m of rift which leads to the top of the 8m pitch. From here the sound of the Bassaburoko Inlet in Salle Cosyns is easily heard. Down a P3, which also takes a lot of water at times, is the level of the schist, not a nice place to be. This lands you on a ledge halfway down Salle Cosyns. Behind and to your left is an easier way down the direct climb. The way on is behind the large rock (-384m). To reach this point should take 90 minutes if the pitches are pre-rigged, and 3-4 hours if you are rigging as you go. (*Note: we found this to be an underestimation - allow two hours to reach the bottom of the P92 if rigged, and plenty for rigging as you go.*)

Salle Cosyns to the Grand Canyon (900m)

The easiest of routes starts above and behind the large rock in Salle Cosyns. A climb up to your right then leads to a fossil passage which comes back down to a large pool. Before this a 4-5m climb

leads to a higher route avoiding this pool. Now cross the water and follow the short passage up to a 7m climb. The passage from the top of this climb brings you to a 6m pitch, which you will need a rope to get down. Another climb down, this time of 8m, returns you to the streamway. Follow the water for 150m to where the ceiling lowers and a window breaks through into Salle Pierrette, where a different stream flows, the Max Couderc Inlet. Cross the chamber to a small rocky passage opposite the window. The way on is through the boulders on the right of this passage, 15m before its end at the foot of a pitch. A low passage leads once more to the streamway, which you should follow for 150m using ledges between the pools or avoiding them entirely by using a fossil passage on the right. This brings you out into Salle Monique (100m x 50m), which should be crossed on the left.

It is at the end of this chamber you should put on your pontonnières. Around here you will notice "evidence" of previous trips, despite the fact that the area has been thoroughly cleaned several times. The pontonnières will stay on until the other side of the Tunnel du Vent. A 6m slide down a rope at the end of Salle Monique leads directly to a 20m long pool, to be crossed on the left. The water is 1.5m deep in places. Shortly after the pool is the start of the 280m long, 50m wide Salle Susse. At first you should head up the rubble slope to the high point of the chamber, then follow obvious markings on the right side out of onto huge boulders in the middle of the chamber. A couple of steep climbs down to the left at the end of the boulders return you to the watercourse you left at the start of the chamber, now four times its size at Tête Sauvage. This is the Grand Canyon.

Grand Canyon to Tunnel du Vent (2600m)

The prettiest part of the through trip. While straightforward in the dry, wet weather can cause serious problems. The width of the passage varies from 1-10m, and is frequently very high. The water is almost always with you. You should expect to get damp, but all the deepest pools can be avoided except for the Tunnel du Vent.

Grand Canyon

For the first part of the canyon, the river flows across a bed of sand and gravel, after the initial cascades. The sandbanks will keep you out of the deeper water. The length of the canyon is split by four boulder piles; look for the way on at about half-height and it should be fairly obvious. The latter two piles are the biggest, and after the fourth the walls are closer together and the water is between 0.7m and 1.5m in depth. This is the most dangerous part in high water, as the water may rise rapidly, producing strong currents. The final 300m of this wet part of the trip sees the walls widen and the re-appearance of pebble banks. The walls narrow again, the roof lowers and an easy 6m climb leads up to the higher level passage and the Galerie des Marmites.

La Galerie des Marmites to Grande Corniche

This is a fossil passage liberally blessed with pots. (*Marmite* is the French for pot, hence the distinctive shape for the jars of the popular spread.) Towards the centre of the passage, a tricky 5m climb can be avoided by climbing an inlet slightly before on the left. (*We also found an alternative 100m past the climb, again on the left.*) The reliability of ropes left on this climb is questionable. Soon, a trickle of water leads to a 2m climb, and a change in the character of the cave; up into a bouldery passage, further up to a 4m climb where the cave widens. This is the start of the former

bivouac site on the corniche, an 8m long ledge up to 20m above the floor and decorated with more litter. A simple 7m climb down at the end is your next step.

Le Shunt d'Hidalga to La Galerie Principe de Viana

Follow the passage downstream for about 100m, as the top of the left wall opens up. A 5m climb up the left wall returns you to the larger part of the passage. Keeping to the left, a series of low muddy passages leads up to the head of the 25m Hidalga pitch. Further up, an unlikely-looking muddy slope leads to a crack and the remains of a ladder into the Galerie Principe de Viana.

Turn to your left and follow a boulder slope down into the gallery proper. A low passage down to the left rejoins the river, deep enough in places to put you out of your depth. Climbing up boulders into a chamber, then down the other side, brings you to more water and a pretty little passage through to the shore of the Tunnel du Vent and the Arlas Tributary.

Alternatively, the first pool may be avoided by following the Viana up the boulder slope instead of taking the low passage on the left. This area is extremely loose, and partly above the pool: dislodged rocks land in the water with a tremendous splash, something to bear in mind if your party considers splitting up. An exposed step round a corner and directly above the water is the most technically difficult move. A little further on, a climb up the still-loose left-hand wall enters a decorated passage, which then emerges in the Salle Principe de Viana. Down the boulders and left to the water surface brings you to the aforementioned pretty little passage, and the Tunnel du Vent.

Tunnel du Vent

50m long and deep in places, this "pool" requires the use of inflatable boats. In places the roof is low, and the air currents are very strong; this passage frequently sumps in wet weather. Beyond the tunnel are the larger chambers of the PSM. From this point on the boats and pontonnières will be of no use to you.

Salle de Verna to the Tunnel du Vent

(Translation reads in this direction on the basis that initial trips will first be made up through the system, from the Salle de Verna.)

Distance: 3600m (by most direct route)

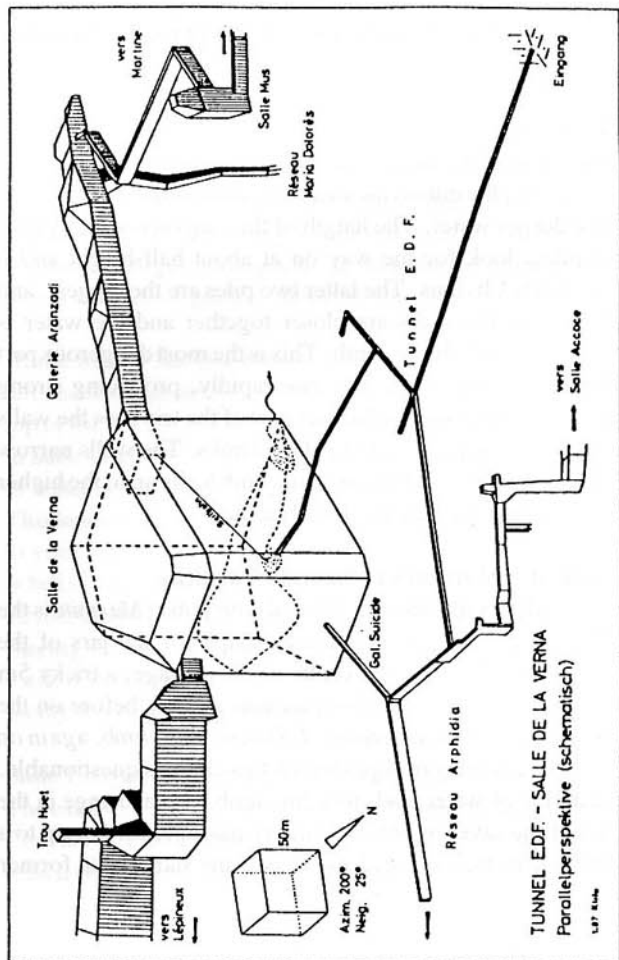
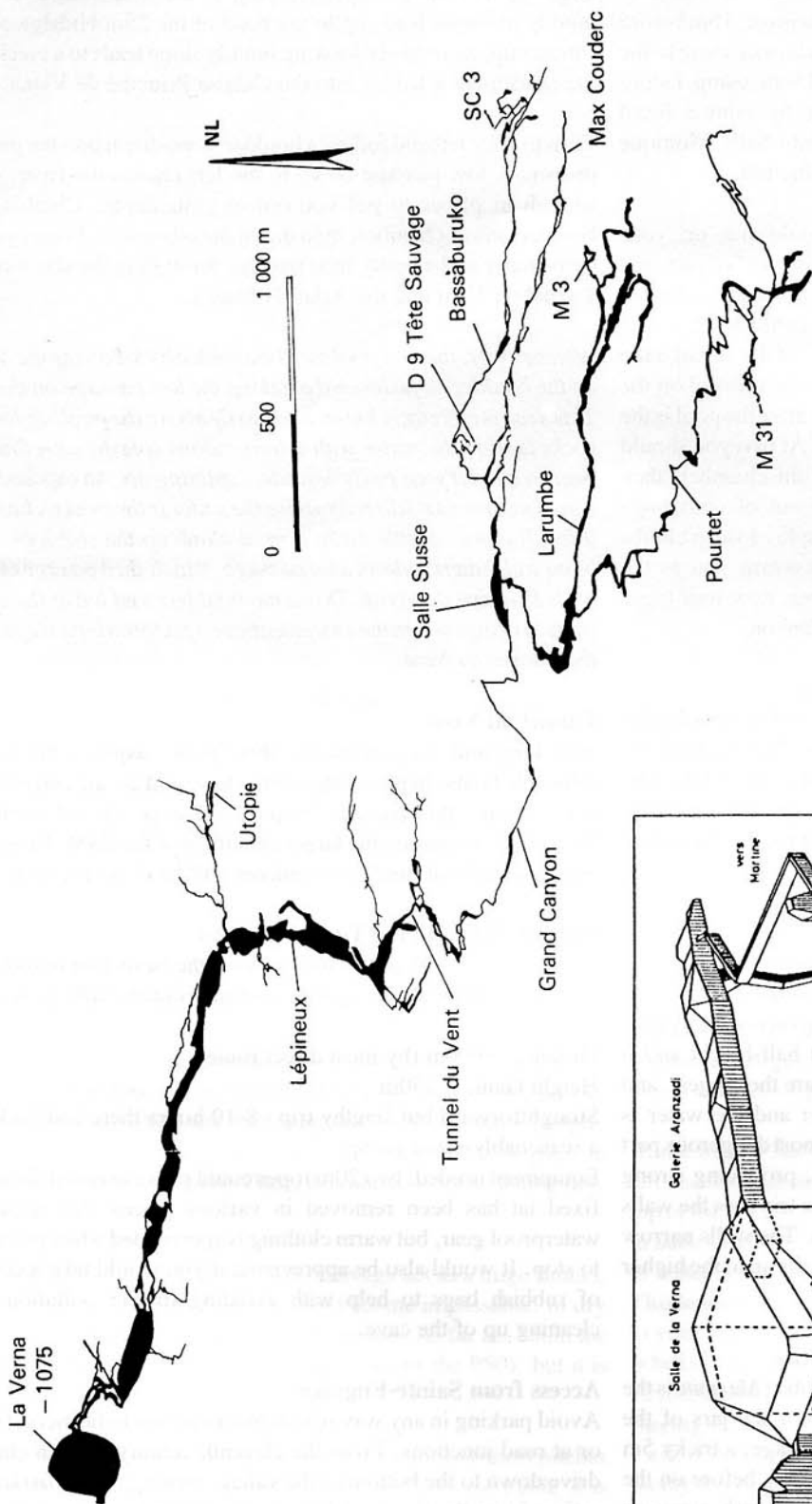
Height Gain: +350m

Straightforward but lengthy trip - 8-10 hours there and back for a reasonably-sized group.

Equipment needed: two 20m ropes could prove useful if the usual fixed tat has been removed in various places. No need for waterproof gear, but warm clothing is appreciated when you need to stop. It would also be appreciated if you would take a couple of rubbish bags to help with avoiding further pollution and cleaning up of the cave.

Access from Sainte-Engrâce

Avoid parking in any way which blocks access to farmers' fields or at road junctions. From the eleventh-century Roman church drive down to the bottom of the valley, turning right (*marked by a tiny sign to the Gorges d'Ehujarre*) until you reach a small stone bridge. From the bridge two options are possible. For four-wheel drive vehicles continue down the valley to another bridge across which is the forestry track towards the EDF tunnel. The track is about 6km long. Follow the main track to where it ends, coming



TUNNEL EDF. - SALLE DE LA VERNA
Parallelperspektive (schematisch)

La Pierre Saint-Martin

plus a 3-D representation of the Salle de Verna, showing the EDF Tunnel.

back down into the Arphidia ravine after 5km. From here a 15-minute walk up a steep path leads to the entrance to the tunnel. Parking at the stone bridge, you should follow the stream to a wooden bridge (an alternative parking place) and cross it. 150m of steep ascent on a pebble-strewn path leads to the edge of a meadow containing loads of junipers. Go straight up past the base of the pylon to a larger path which rejoins the forestry track. Turn left up the forestry track and follow to the tunnel. Allow one to one-and-a-half hours for the walk from the wooden bridge.

Important Note

Access to the PSM system through the EDF tunnel is not open to everyone. This tunnel is effectively the property of the Sainte-Engrâce people, and for security reasons is kept locked. Cavers may obtain a key from ARSIP or from the Sainte-Engrâce Mairie (town hall). Respecting this arrangement is the only way to ensure cavers' access, and people ignoring this risk bringing far stricter access controls down upon all cavers.

There is little technical difficulty in progressing through the main chambers of the PSM, and no need for any particular equipment. All the same, the length of the trip and the possible difficulties involved in finding the way round huge piles of boulders make a reasonable level of fitness a pre-requisite for full enjoyment of the cave. Its main features are the tremendous sizes of the chambers. Otherwise it is of interest largely only to geologists.

The exploration of this part of the PSM is a major part of caving history, done from the Lépineux shaft between 1951 and 1953. This is also now the most frequently-visited part of the system.

Description from the Entrance to Le Métro

400m along the 700m of the artificial tunnel you should turn right. Some minutes later you emerge halfway up the side of the Salle de Verna. The chamber is 250m in diameter. Follow a path on the left which leads to the top of the chamber, and the river. Here two possibilities present themselves: either walk straight up the river (one pool to traverse, except in high water...) or find your way through the boulders and blocks on the left, this way being passable regardless of water conditions. Both routes meet in a huge gallery. 150m from the Verna are the first pools, to be avoided by using the ledges on the left. Follow the left wall up the slope to an easy 7m chimney. This is the start of the Salle Chevalier, 380m long and 60m wide. It is easiest to walk up the V-shape of the chamber.

Towards the end of the chamber passage size decreases; the water reappears and there is a large pool to be passed by a little ledge on the right. A small section of fossil passage returns you to the streamway, where you should keep to the right up into Salle Adélie (150m x 50m). For the next kilometre you must keep to the right hand wall. Salle Adélie is split by a huge rubble slope; climb up it for 50m then stay at the same height looking for a higher level passage which is hardly visible and which turns off to the right. Cross the start of this to a bouldery balcony overlooking Salle Queffelec. A short climb down is obvious. Keep to the right until you climb down into the mass of boulders which marks the end of Queffelec. The Métro is reached down an 8m climb between rocks on the right which usually has some dodgy old rope on it.

Métro to Lépineux Shaft

At the foot of the climb more rubble leads down to the river left behind in Salle Adélie. The 600m long Métro is best negotiated by following the right wall. For 450m the stream is below you, to the point where it emerges from the left wall. This is the last water until the Tunnel du Vent. 150m on you emerge into Salle Loubens. There are some drips from the ceiling into some once-magnificent gour pools. Pass the gour on the right, keeping roughly in the centre of the chamber. You must pass beneath an arch formed by a large fallen rock. 50m further on climb back up the rubble on the left to a point where the ARSIP markings start.

Keep going up to the left to a high point, the entrance to Salle Elizabeth Casteret. 30m down to the base of the chamber, then back up keeping roughly in the centre of the chamber. As the slope grows smaller move closer to the right wall. Another steep slope is obvious, and the path leads into the huge boulder pile (Gibraltar) which separates E. Casteret from Lépineux. A 10m climb in the boulders is your way on. Take care, these boulders are none to stable. Beyond the climb follow the right wall into the base of Lépineux, past the remains of the 1950s bivouacs and N. Casteret's inscription to the memory of Loubens. This is the foot of a very steep and loose slope, best negotiated on the left. At the top of the chamber the 312m Lépineux shaft emerges from the roof.

Lépineux to the Tunnel du Vent

Continue down the left side of this 30m wide passage. 100m on turn left to the top of a 10m climb down. This is the start of Salle Navarre, the most difficult part of the route. The markers will be very useful from here on. From the foot of the climb follow the signs through the rocks until you find the right wall and follow this to a boulder-strewn floor. Up a 120m slope, to where more boulders appear to block the way. Progress is possible by keeping close to the wall.

You appear in a large passage trending down to the right. Cross it to the opposite wall, which leads to the Tunnel du Vent. The wall turns to the left, the right of the passage being no more than a huge pile of rocks where ceiling and wall are indistinguishable. The wall and the markers rapidly lead to the river, last seen in the Métro. 50m on, the roof lowers and a strong air current emerges from a low-roofed canal. This is the Tunnel du Vent.

Reverse these instructions for the return journey. In almost every case where a climb or traverse is mentioned a fixed rope of some kind is in place. Be prepared to re-rig or replace these according to your judgment.

Tried and Tested...

...at the PSM and elsewhere

by Gary Vaughan, Pat Hall and Tony Baker

Intex Inflatable Dinghies

Introduction

Intex are the only US toy manufacturer to have achieved significant recognition with overseas cavers. A manufacturer of sea-going toy dinghies for over 15 years, with a huge portion of the US market, the side-step into the caving arena was inevitable and simply a matter of time.

The first dinghy was the ubiquitous Playtime 10 followed after a few years by the Splash series of transparent buoyancy rings. Early teething problems in development were soon ironed out with the first Seahawks taking to the high seas amid a storm of media adulation.

The early Seahawk 1 series was an enormous success throughout Europe but when its premature porosity problems emerged (due to a sharp rock and arguably not Intex's fault), the company's reputation sank. There has been a lot of criticism about how the crisis was handled, particularly from the caver who got wet, but I always believed it was obvious that a solution that kept cavers and Intex afloat was never going to be possible. At the end of the day, the company put its own survival and that of its established beach-going customers first.

So where does this leave the caving public? Although the new Seahawk 100 series, which includes the 200, 340 and gargantuan 400, (not featured in this article), has been marketed as a successor to the Seahawk 1 series, the design of the new series has little in common with its predecessors. Intex's design team, headed by Miss Inga Sentzafun, claim to have achieved greater playtime appeal whilst still maintaining the old Seahawk 1 trustability. Modifications in aspect ratio and the new range of colours certainly give the new series that "it'll burst if you fart" look, but has the caving world still got a range of dinghies that you'd stake your life on? We put the Seahawk 100, 200 and 340 under the microscope.

SEAHAWK 100

The Seahawk 100 is one of the most compact dinghies on the market - and one of the smartest. It makes even the manageable 200 seem oversized and its neat design, subtle battleship grey colour and modern graphics give it a more expedition-usable look than the Seahawk 200.

Like the 200, the 100 is well balanced and suited to low speed

work. It has an excellent ride quality on the water and feels tauter than the 200 when paddled harder. The turn and braking response are also slightly better than the 200, making the Seahawk 100 more usable in tricky situations.

Its minimalist dimensions make it relatively quick to inflate and deflate, even with the most inefficient of lungs. The smallest of low pressure pumps will inflate the Seahawk 100's main buoyancy chamber in a Dr Banister-like 4 minutes making carry, inflate, paddle, deflate and carry trips quite attractive.

If you're considering expedition logistics the Seahawk 100 scores big points over other models in the series. It weighs in at a mere 1.4 kg and packs to a microscopic 8" x 8" x 4" (200mm x 200mm x 100 mm). The modest retail price of £14.99 (no VAT because it's a toy) makes it an attractive option over the more traditional rubber dinghy which may have a price tag approaching three figures. At the price, you can afford to have a few spare dinghies knocking around the expedition waiting to replace those misused, punctured, hidden or eaten by your 'kinhard members!

Carrying the Seahawk 100 is child's play (usually). It easily stows in the bottom of even the smallest of tackle sacks, unnoticed until required. Its small bulk and low weight afford it a greater degree of "porter protection" than its bigger brothers which may end up punctured in transit.

Launching the 100 is remarkably easy. It slips into the water most unobtrusively, even if you forget to inflate it. I found the best technique was to straddle the floating craft in knee-deep water and gently lower one's posterior into contact with the double aircell deck. The ride position is extremely comfortable, especially if you face the stern. The generous proportions of the main buoyancy chamber provide an armchair-like seating position. Leaving your feet dangling outside reduces water intake and helps with fending off sharp objects like Martin Hoff's tongue!

The Seahawk 100 is strictly a one-man dinghy. Its suggested payload of 55kg is a touch hydrophobic as the 100 easily transports the average-weight caver with a modest tackle sack between his (or her) legs. Of the three buoyancy chambers, only number 3, the main chamber which forms 90% of the craft, offers any realistic assistance in keeping the occupant from drowning. The main chamber is, however, of a very reassuring diameter. The sizeable freeboard of the 100 gives the would-be Columbus that secure feeling of gliding effortlessly over the water as opposed to through it.

The INNER SAFETY CHAMBER alone will keep you afloat.
 La CHAMBRE DE SECURITE suffit a se maintenir a flot.
 La CAMARA DE SEGURIDAD INTERIOR solamente le mantiene a flote.
 Die INNERE SICHERHEITS-LUFTKAMMER allein hält Sie über dem Wasser.
 La CAMERA DI SICUREZZA da sola vi manterrà galla.
 De binnenste VEILIGHEIDS-LUCHTKAMER allen al is voldoende om u drijvend te houden.



The Seahawk 100 boasts the usual range of peripheral accessories, built-in rowlocks and built-in mooring loop are now standard on a boat of this class. All three of the air valves are of the non-return internal safety flap type which offer that additional minute or two of safety should the main valve accidentally dislodge. (If only the *Titanic* was made this way.) Deflations can prove a tad tricky. A second pair of hands or the inside of a disposable biro are invaluable aids in the search for the Williams team-style fast inflate/deflate pitstop.

SEAHAWK 200

For a dinghy that first hit the water six months ago, the venerable Seahawk 200 has ridden the crest of the upturn in dinghy sales to become one of Europe's top selling inflatables. It certainly gets around. You'll find keen Aussies at the far end of Nettlebed floating around in tatty old 'Hawk 200s, chic Italians cruising helmetless down the Piaggia Bella streamway and bearded old Brits rowing around some grotty flooded mine shaft, all aboard crusty Seahawk 200s.

The dinghy market is less fashion-conscious than the fickle pontoniere arena. This year's model sees revisions in the all-important rowlocks area and a novel new red/black/yellow colour scheme really makes the 200 stand out from the crowd in any sump pool.

The Seahawk 200 has excellent handling characteristics unless you're with somebody completely devoid of balance. Its bottom-end tractability gives superb confidence to the oarsman. You can

let the tail slide around without ever losing control once you've built up enough confidence. Every power pulse sees the 200 surge forward with enthusiasm, but the forgiving geometry and soft buoyancy compartments mean these surges don't get out of hand. Pitch and yaw are easily controlled by gentle corrective paddling, but roll can be a problem, especially for old sea dogs. Try too hard around a long fast corner and you're likely to feel a slight speed wobble from the 200's stern, a problem common to many sea-going inflatable toy dinghies when asked to perform like a barracuda.

The Seahawk 200 is a highly versatile craft. Although it takes two comfortably it is remarkably compact and trim on the water. It's a fine handling craft if you're not looking to achieve competition speeds. We tested the 200 with two types of power unit. The West-Baker unit gives the dinghy balanced handling characteristics over tricky water conditions. Power delivery was smooth up to 30 S.P.M. with plenty of low-down torque available. The unit unfortunately suffers from poor breathing and is a little on the heavy side. It runs out of puff at 60 S.P.M. which makes overtaking manoeuvres a bit difficult. Slot a Hoff-Quill unit into the frame and the Seahawk 200 comes to life - literally. Power output is unlimited but difficult to keep a hold on. This is where the minimal seating capacity can become a problem. At high speeds, roll stability is affected, sometimes with hilarious results.

Like the 100, the Seahawk 200 sports a reassuringly-sized main buoyancy chamber. This really is a two-man craft. Despite its size on the water, the 200 packs up remarkably small, in fact only

INTEX DINGHIES IN USE

Left: Sue Mabbett, Hywel Davies and Brian Clipstone trying to inflate the 340 at the Tunnel du Vent, before discovering that it had been punctured on its way into the cave. Photo by Tony Baker.

Below: Tony Baker in the Tunnel du Vent, photo by Hywel Davies.

Bottom: Sea trials under way in the lakes in Dan-yr-Ogof before the expedition left for France. Photo by Tony Baker.



slightly larger than the 100 at 8" x 11" x 4" (200 mm x 280 mm x 100 mm). This two-man craft will easily fit into a standard 100m tackle sack and still leave room for a first aid kit and pump. Like the 100, carry, inflate, argue over who's paddling, re-inflate, paddle, fall in, paddle again, deflate, wring out furry suit, and carry trips are a definite possibility.

The ride is superior to anything else on the market, you really do feel like you could float places in this. The freeboard is impressive and inspires greater user confidence but watch that roll stability. If you're going to use the Seahawk 200 for serious white water applications then you will definitely need to "get a life". The 200 is definitely harder to control in the water than the pocket-sized 100, especially with the Hoff-Quill power unit installed. But this is no couch potato. The 200 is all dinghy, input the correct oar-strokes and it will produce all the thrills and spills of the three-ringed circus.

Inflation time is predictably slower than the 100, in fact a modest ten minutes with our standard pump. This time reflects the size of the main buoyancy chamber. The 95kgs quoted payload is again incredibly pessimistic. This craft will easily support two 80kg cavers and still corner like it's on rails. For a two-man craft the price tag of £22.98 is very attractive. You would have to row a long way to better it on value. Standard accessories include built-in rowlocks and non-return safety valves on all three chambers, but whoops - what no mooring loops? I think a rap on the knuckles here for the boys at Intex design. Towing the 200 means attachment to one of the rowlocks and let's face it, that's not cool.

As with the 100, chambers one and two are microscopic. Two people with gear would be in the proverbial if the main chamber was to suffer a catastrophic failure. At least with the 100 there would be only one of you clinging on for dear life to the remnants. The thought of two people in deep water with just chamber 1 and 2 of a Seahawk 200 really brings home the sensibility of auxiliary life-preserving aids.

This year's cosmetic updates include a stupid symbol-come-logo on the bow and a go-faster stripe. They looked like they'd get wiped out in the first oarstroke, but in the end proved to be quite well attached. The deck has a new angle of rake but this won't compensate devotees of the old Series 1 "Dolphin Figurehead". Ah well, they just don't build 'em like that any more.

SEAHAWK 340

The Seahawk 340 comes with the usual claims of increased performance and better handling without sacrifices in stability. Although it's marketed as a three-man craft the 160kg capacity quoted is suspiciously low. "So what?" I hear you say. True, the 100 and 200 were both conservatively "marked down" on the stated carrying capacity, so surely the same is true on the 340. "Not so" is the reply I am forced to offer. No way is this a three-man boat. The 340 exhibits marked design differences to its smaller relatives. The main buoyancy chamber is in fact a smaller diameter than that on the 200. What the boys at Intex have done here is to stretch the size of decking to fit in three persons but not proportionally increased the size of the main buoyancy chamber. Result: should you twitch, blink, burp or fart, the freeboard on the main chamber dips to non-existent and in comes the water!

But enough about the design, what about the dinghy itself? Intex

have always had a good reputation for build quality and the 340 is no exception. Constructed from the latest S-80 vinyl - the new high molecular PVC that's rapidly becoming the industry standard - the 340 offers good resistance to abrasion, impact and exposure to carbide light. S-80 vinyl is totally unaffected by gasoline, oil, salt, water and mildew. The unfortunate discovery that contact with tabasco- and chilli-based gas derivatives causes S-80 vinyl to spontaneously combust has severely limited Intex's Mid-American marketing drive.

The seams are the usual welded type and are neatly disguised to give the 340 that sleek and smooth appearance. Each dinghy comes pre-tested to give the user that extra two seconds of confidence as this proud new ocean-going craft bounces majestically off the nearest micro-surgery sharp natural projection. But this is where the 340 really does score highly. One of Intex's latest features to be added is the inner safety chamber; a modification designed to keep the craft and its hairy-arsed occupants afloat should, perchance, the main outer buoyancy chamber be punctured. Intex have worked hard to come up with this modification. Ever since the incident with the Series 1, toy manufacturers aiming at a caving market have been painfully aware of how hard (and sharp) rock can be. Intex's claim to keep three adults afloat, albeit scantily-clad bimbos, by simply maintaining pressure in the inner of the two main buoyancy chambers, makes the 340 an incredibly attractive proposition, especially if it comes with the three scantily-clad bimbos!

Each of the Seahawk 340's buoyancy chambers comes equipped with the now standard non-return valve which all adds to the level of safety. The largest of the two main chambers, the outer chamber now boasts the new Boston Valve. This latest hi-tech feature allows a high-volume pump to be used which greatly reduces the otherwise lengthy process of inflation. The downside to this modification is that to use a smaller diameter nozzle, the purchaser is furnished with a reducing valve which neatly screws into the standard Boston Valve and accepts a myriad of differing pump nozzles. Those of you that have ever been involved with organising an expedition-style event will be aware of the improbability of two separate but necessary parts ever coming together at the right time and place and in functioning condition.

It has to be said that the 340 is a very safe boat. It sits very flat and low on the water. A capsizing would have to be purposefully made by holding on to the grab line, which runs the entire circumference of the main buoyancy chamber through neat well-designed moulded eyelets, and throwing oneself at the water. Deflation times are decreased by the use of the large diameter Boston Valve but the sheer bulk of the 340 would make carry, inflate, brew stop, inflate some more, do a crossword, inflate, paddle, bail out, paddle, bail out, paddle, deflate and carry trips a less than appetizing prospect.

The sheer size of the 340 makes it a less than attractive boat to take on an expedition, despite its very snazzy yellow and blue graphics. It's a boat particularly prone to being left under a rock. Too big for one person to carry along with his personal gear, this boat would only move through a cave as part of a specific gear-hauling exercise. By definition, it's going to get handled roughly due to its size and weight. The S-80 vinyl really does need to work hard as the 340 is dragged through crawls, thrown down climbs

and sat upon at rest stops. No small wonder, then, that during our test, the 340 suffered a fatal puncture before even reaching its intended launching site.

Summary

If your major concern is safety and you're considering the crossing of a large, deep mass of water close to the entrance of your chosen system then the Seahawk 340 could suit your needs well. With a large air flow pump, it can be quickly inflated to carry two in style or three at a pinch. If you bounce off a needle-sharp flake and the main buoyancy chamber fails catastrophically, dump any heavy tackle you've got and you will be fine on the remaining chambers. Suggested ideal venue, the Grotte de Gourmier.

If you're pushing deep into a system with small groups of two or three persons, or attempting a pull-through trip, either of which involve crossing water filled passages, perhaps small and low in places, then the Seahawk 100 is your ideal dinghy. Cheap enough to have two or three ready to use, small enough for each person to carry his own and controllable enough to avoid bumping into things. If you're crossing something short like Lake Cadoux, don't even think of anything else. A Seahawk 100 on a pull-back cord with spare Seahawk 100 at each end is probably your cheapest, most durable and most flexible option.

The Seahawk 200 seems at first prospect, a little bit left out. Bigger than the 100 for out and out expedition work, at one end, and lacking the inherent safety of the 340 at the other. Surprisingly though, I found the 200 to be the real work-horse of the PSM expedition.

The 340 with all its techno-gadgets and potential for moving lots of people quickly never even made it to the water. The 100s were fine but the logistics of crossing and re-crossing the Tunnel du Vent to move a large party would be time-consuming. Despite the antics of some, the 200 proved to be the ideal people mover over this obstacle. Its reasonable cost and good all-round performance made it my "Dinghy of the Month", so to speak.

Faced with the same logistical exercise again, I would have to opt for the two Seahawk 200s at £22.98 and two 100s at £14.99, total cost £76 give or take a few pennies, and enhance the safety factor by providing inflatable rings (free from most tyre repair workshops). **GV.**

Petzl Pompe

Description

The Petzl Pompe is a combined ascender and foot loop. A single cord runs from the base of the ascender down to a pulley on the foot loop, back up to a second pulley fixed to the side of the ascender, and finally to the top of the chest ascender. The length of the cord is very easily variable by a guy-rope style adjustment plate at the jammer end. A shock cord between the ascender and the main Maillon is still needed, the Pompe's own cord being solely to facilitate its operation.

The two pulleys give a 2:1 mechanical advantage. This roughly means that only 50% of the effort needed to stand in a normal frog system is exerted. The price of this reduced effort, however, is that you only get 50% of the frog system's height gain, meaning that you have to make twice as many movements to ascend a given length of rope. So what's the point?

The Pompe in Use

Prussiking can be hard work. If your technique is less than perfect, or if you are knackered at the end of a long trip, each pull up in a frog system can become a struggle, and consequently highly inefficient. The Pompe reduces the effort needed to make each movement, hopefully making progress up the rope a smoother, more efficient sequence of actions.

I have had the Pompe since March 1995, having bought it to take to the Picos for the big pitch in Sara (*see report in SWCC N/L No. 116, p.39-49 - Ed*). Prior to that trip the only trial I gave it was a play around in Hunter's Hole, Priddy, on a Wednesday evening, where it did not feel any better than my normal gear. In Spain, therefore, I did not have huge expectations for the thing, but at the bottom of Sara's 52m pitch, with some 250m of prussiking to the exit, after sixteen hours of cold and strenuous caving, I would have dedicated my life to Michael Portillo if I thought it would ease my passage to daylight. It took a long time, but I finally got out, feeling no more exhausted than I had done at the bottom. Once I had got used to the Pompe, I was able to make continuous progress on the long ropes without despairing of my lack of energy once, so I pronounced it a success.

I have used the Pompe twice since, in Couey Lodge and Lonné Peyret, both on the PSM trip. It has proved itself able to get a tired caver up long pitches with minimum effort. There are, however, some drawbacks to using it:



(a) The caver has even more bits of string to contend with at changeovers. On the Sara trip I got into some terrible tangles which meant detaching and re-attaching the Pompe, but I have now got the hang of where to put all of my bits of gear in relation to each other, and I'm more disciplined at re-belays, which is no bad thing. This really is not a problem anymore.

(b) Between pitches the cords can snag and the pulleys block with mud. There is no answer to this other than to remove the Pompe when you are not using it.

(c) It is a lot of fuss if you have short pitches and/or a lot of re-belays. In these circumstances a normal frog system is probably better.

(d) The pulleys creak, a noise more irritating than a pan rattled after midnight on a French campsite.

Conclusion

The Pompe is a sound piece of kit which has ably compensated for my own lack of fitness and technique. It is not suitable for use everywhere, but can be taken along as a spare ascender to be used on long, continuously vertical sections. I can't think of many British trips where I would prefer it to the standard frog. When one thinks of the buy-off between speed and required fitness, the Pompe could be considered the opposite of rope-walking. "Ropewalking has a distinct disadvantage if you haven't got the legs of a cyclist" wrote Neil Weymouth (SWCC Newsletter 116, Picos '95 article), so if rope-walking is for young tigers, is the Pompe designed for old gits? Not necessarily. What it gives you, at a price (shop around!), is an extra tool in the fight against exhaustion on long caving trips. Most of us are not as fit as we used to be or would like to be, so if a spare jammer is on the speleological shopping list, the Pompe could be worth considering.
PH.

Solid Fuel Stove

Hot drinks on long caving trips are remarkably good morale boosters. Before leaving on the Berger trip in 1993, I hunted around for a stove that would be light and compact enough to take all the way to the bottom, but still capable of cooking light meals at Camp One. I eventually settled on one of those small, folding solid fuel stoves that are readily available from places like Millets and army surplus stores. It comprises nothing more elaborate than a folding metal stand on which a solid fuel tablet is placed and lit: you then stand your pan or kettle on the top and wait.

Once I'd bought it, I was soon told I'd made a mistake. "Don't bother with those, they're a waste of time" was the general consensus. Well, folks, you're all wrong; it's brilliant. On both the Berger and PSM trips, it has proved invaluable. It will boil a Trangia kettle-full of water - enough for two mugs - in a few minutes, using less than one tablet of fuel. The fuel tablets are small and light and this allows you easily to carry enough spares to cope with any eventuality. There are no components to break, no pipes to split, no gas canisters to leak. Even if you were stupid enough to drop a rock on the stove, a minute or two spent bending it back into shape would have it operational again.

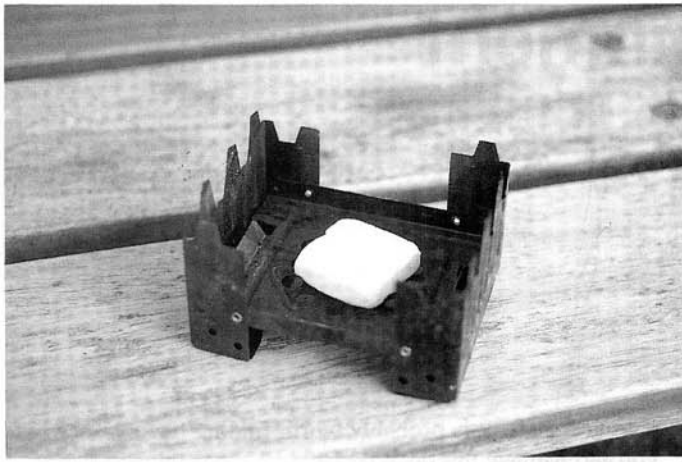
It's easier to light the fuel tablet with a cigarette lighter than to fiddle about using the flame from your carbide light, but the complete brew kit of stove, fuel, lighter, Trangia kettle, plastic mug and sachets of instant drink mix weighs very little and packs down small. This is a distinct advantage: it means you are more likely to have the brew kit with you when the unexpected happens and a hot drink is most welcome. An example that springs to mind is when, coming out of the Berger after an evening jaunt, several of us caught up with a much slower party who were occupying both ropes on one of the pitches. The ensuing wait was made a lot more comfortable with a brew, and the act of making it occupied some long cold minutes.

Martin Hoff's stove has been undergoing a sort of long-term test: it's spent more than two years at the end of Ogof Twyn Tal-Draenan, and even when not touched for several months can be relied upon to provide a hot drink in a few minutes with the simple addition of some fresh fuel.

A few words of caution, however: this type of stove would be of little or no use in the great outdoors. Even a moderate breeze would reduce its effectiveness to such an extent that it wouldn't



Sue Mabbett and Hywel Davies at a brew stop in Gouffre de Couey Lodge. On long trips the small size and light weight of the solid fuel stove comes into its own.



be worth even attempting a brew. I have also heard that the fumes produced by the solid fuel tablets aren't good for your health, so this might be worth bearing in mind when using the stove in very confined spaces. As part of an underground brew kit, though, this type of stove is pretty well unbeatable.

Advantages: cheap, virtually indestructible, compact, lightweight, large amounts of spare fuel easily carried, widely available.

Disadvantages: erm...

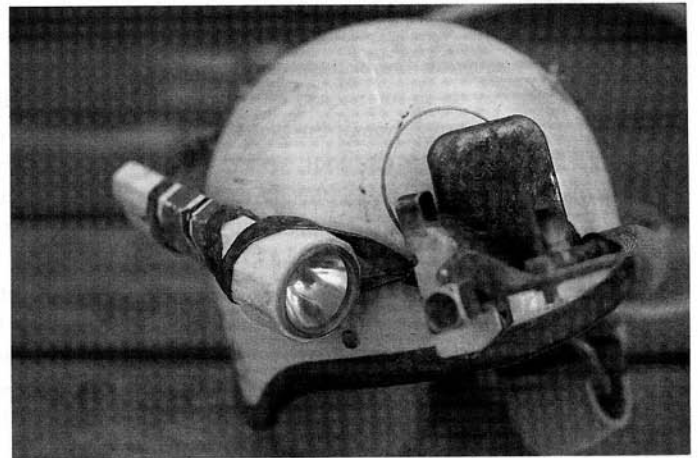
TB.

Stealth Lite

Carbide lights are wonderful things. But you do need some form of electric back-up, for those occasions when draughts, waterfalls or simply nuisance value cause them to go out, and for when you're changing carbide. My carbide light - bought in 1985 - was one of the Petzl Laser type, which had a built-in electric lamp and battery pack. This soon proved to be hopelessly unreliable, never working when it was needed, and after two or three years of fiddling with it and calling it names that cannot be repeated in a family publication, I took it off leaving the carbide headset on its own. Ever since then, I've tried various different electric back-ups, with varying degrees of success. The latest is the Stealth Lite and I think I've finally won.

The Stealth Lite is one of those waterproof torches that you see cave divers attach to their helmets. It has a simple on/off switch that cold or gloved hands can cope with, and it gives a remarkably good light - equivalent to that from an Oldham lamp or similar. It's robust and reliable, and highly recommended.

There are two types: those that accept AA cells and those that take C cells. I bought the former, for the simple reason that I often carry AA cells as spares for flashguns and wanted to avoid having to carry two different types. The bright beam is particularly useful for spotting bolts when you're rigging, peering up avens and all



those other circumstances when the diffuse light from a carbide flame isn't much use. Be warned though: giving such a bright light, the Stealth Lite eats batteries at a rate that would leave Billy Bunter reeling in awe.

Advantages: bright beam, robust, waterproof, easy-to-use switch, lightweight.

Disadvantages: cost, battery consumption, replacement bulbs expensive.

TB.

Alternative Entertainment

by *Tony Baker*

Publication day draws ever nearer, and no-one has yet written anything about two of the other caves we visited: Couey Lodge and Lonné Peyret. Since both are excellent trips, I think they both warrant mentions, as does the Lépineux shaft which is no longer usable but worth a look.

Gouffre du Couey Lodge

This one is a bugger to find, but when you do finally emerge, sweaty and scratched from the dense woodland, it's a real gem. A succession of fine pitches - 200m in all - intersected by short sections of sloping rift, leads to a flat-out crawl followed by some rather uninspiring low passages. Then, just as you're beginning to wonder why you bothered, you descend another short pitch before emerging in a wide stream passage; the Salle du Réchaud. From here on in it's a great cave. There are a couple of short climbs - rigged with bits of tat - as you follow the passage on down, before joining the "master cave" at Salle Henri Brosset after about half a kilometre. As you will see from the survey, there's a load of cave upstream of this point, but I don't think anyone from SWCC explored this for far. Downstream there's more good cave, but don't be deceived, it takes a long time before the roof gradually gains height and you enter the vast Salle des Deux Sèvres.

Finding the way from the bottom end of this chamber into the lower streamway is a bit tricky, but persevere; it's a really magnificent streamway, one of the best I've ever been in. It ends in a crystal-clear blue sump pool, with the divers' line dipping invitingly away into the cold depths. (And it's not often the words "sump pool" and "invitingly" appear in the same sentence, is it?)

It is worth remembering that this is a long trip: Sue Mabbett, Hywel Davies and myself spent more than twelve hours going to the bottom and back, despite the fact that we didn't have to do any rigging or derigging, and this was by no means above average. Sue Cade thought it such a good cave that she went in twice in the space of a few days.

How to Find Couey Lodge

From Sainte-Engrâce, take the D113 up towards the PSM ski-station. At the junction with the D132 turn left towards Arrette, and keep going down the hill for approximately two kilometres to where a yellow sign just off the road to the right warns you that this is a "Zone Sauvage". (Note: this sign is not easily seen as you drive down the hill, you may find it easier to go to the bottom of the hill to a turning space and look for it as you drive back up.) There is a small layby in front of this sign; park in it. From here, a vague path through the woods with occasional red waymarks painted on the rock outcrops leads for about 300m to the (large)

entrance shaft. It is probably worth finding the entrance before you get changed; this saves thrashing through the woods in caving gear and with tackle bags looking for it.



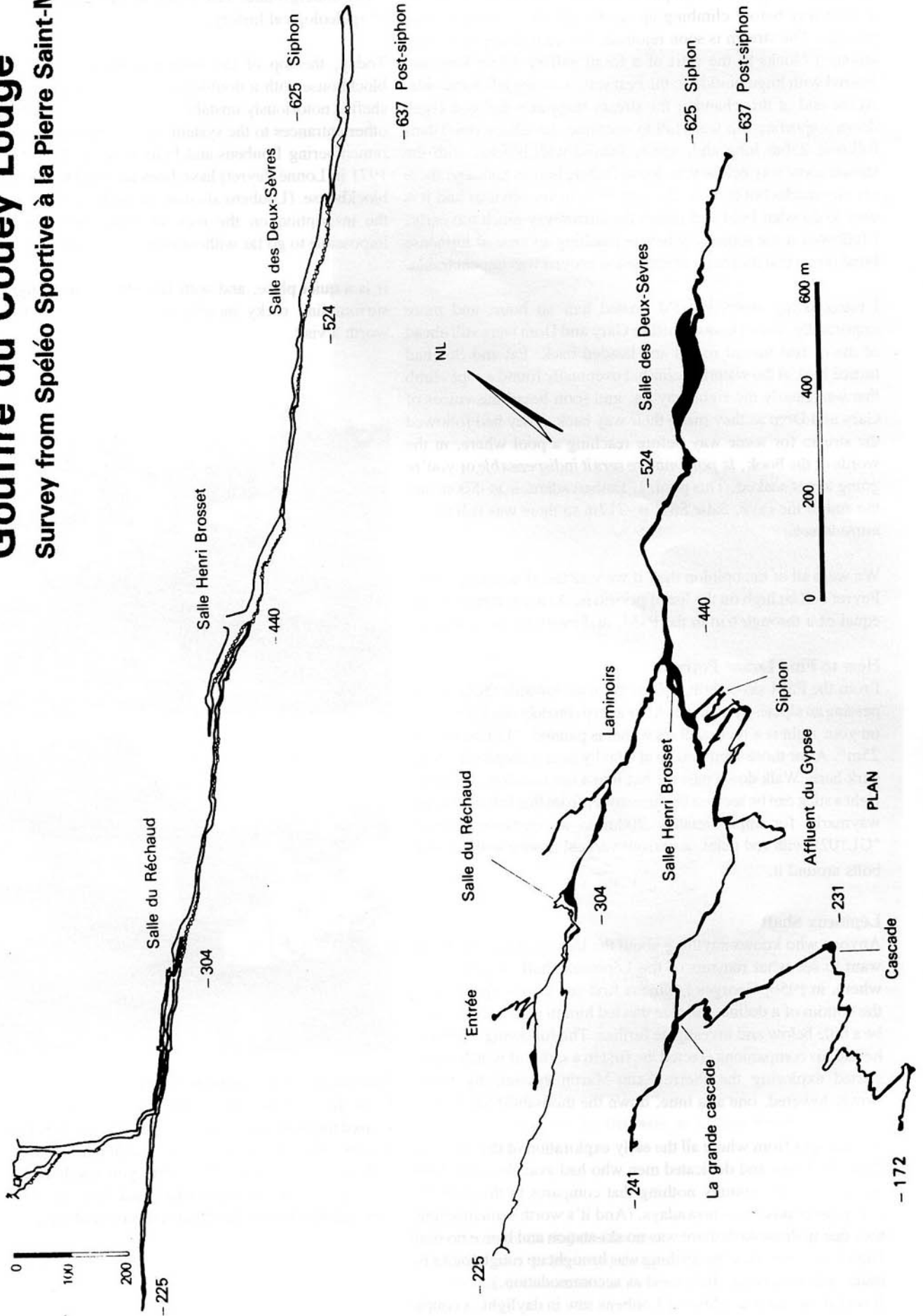
**Gary Vaughan on the entrance pitch of Couey Lodge.
Photo by Martin Hoff**

Gouffre Lonné Peyret

We didn't tackle this one until right at the end of the expedition, and with hindsight it would have repaid more attention, as we didn't have time to bottom it and those of us that went in felt this was a shame. It's an SRT freak's dream: almost 350m of magnificent pitches that present no real technical difficulty, leading to a fine streamway and some huge passage. The rigging was started by myself, Dominic Wade and Pat Hall and finished next day by the Elliots and Mike Haselden. The following day, Dom, Pat, Gary Vaughan, Sue Cade and myself went in to see how far down the rest of the cave we could get, as the place would

Gouffre du Couey Lodge

Survey from Spéléo Sportive à la Pierre Saint-Martin



have to be derigged the day after.

From the bottom of the 47m pitch - the last - you follow the stream a short way before climbing up on the left into a smaller fossil passage. The stream is soon rejoined, before it disappears down amongst blocks at the start of a fossil gallery 170m long and littered with huge boulders: the best way is on the left-hand side. At the end of this chamber the stream reappears and you climb down a sporting 8m waterfall to continue. Le Chaos des Titans follows; 250m long and, again, littered with blocks, with the stream some way below you. Routefinding here is not easy; there are waymarks but even so the way on is never obvious and it is easy to do what I did and regain the streamway much too early. I followed it for some way before reaching an area of immense breakdown that thorough examination proved was impenetrable.

I retraced my steps, but I'd wasted half an hour, and more importantly, didn't know whether Gary and Dom were still ahead of me or had turned round and headed back. Pat and Sue had turned back at the waterfall climb. I eventually found a rope climb that was clearly the right way on, and soon heard the voices of Gary and Dom as they made their way back. They had followed the stream for some way before reaching a pool where, in the words of the book, *la pontonnière serait indispensable* or you're going to get soaked. This pool, L'Embarcadère, is at -500m and the end of the cave, Salle Stix, is -717m so there was still plenty more to see.

We were all of the opinion that, if we visit the area again, Lonné Peyret will be high on the list of priorities. As a trip it must be the equal of a through trip in the PSM, and every bit as sporting.

How to Find Lonné Peyret

From the PSM ski-station, follow the road towards the frontier, passing an alpine-style chalet. After approximately one kilometre, on your right is a rock wall on which is painted: "Lonné Peyret 25m". After those 25m you're at a layby near a shepherd's hut; park here. Walk down past the hut into a flat meadow. On your right a stick can be seen on the limestone; from this follow the red waymarks for approximately 200m to an entrance marked "GL102" with red paint, a narrow vertical fissure with several bolts around it.

Lépineux Shaft

Anyone who knows anything about the history of the PSM will want to see what remains of the Lépineux shaft. It is the spot where, in 1950, Georges Lépineux first saw a crow fly up from the bottom of a doline, the clue that led him to realise there must be a hole below and investigate further. The following summer, he and his companions erected the first in a series of winches and started exploring the Pierre Saint-Martin system, by being slowly lowered, one at a time, down the thousand-foot shaft.

It is the spot from where all the early exploration of the cave was done, by brave and dedicated men who had available only basic equipment and certainly nothing that compares to the gear that every caver possesses nowadays. (And it's worth remembering, too, that in those days there was no ski-station and hence no road from Sainte-Engrâce: everything was brought up rough tracks by mule, and shepherds' huts used as accommodation.)

It is also the last place Marcel Loubens saw in daylight, a couple

of days before the fateful moment when the single clamp on the winch cable came apart as he was being hauled up the shaft after a stay underground. That event, in 1952, is one of the milestones of speleological history.)

Today, the top of the shaft has been covered by a concrete blockhouse with a double metal gate, which is padlocked. The shaft is notoriously unstable and, with the availability of several other entrances to the system, there's no need to use it. Plaques remembering Loubens and Felix Ruiz de Arcaute (who died in 1971 in Lonné Peyret) have been attached to the rock beside the blockhouse. (Loubens also has one in the Salle de Verna, and with the inscription on the rock in Salle Lépineux as well, it is impossible to go far without being reminded of his tragic death.)

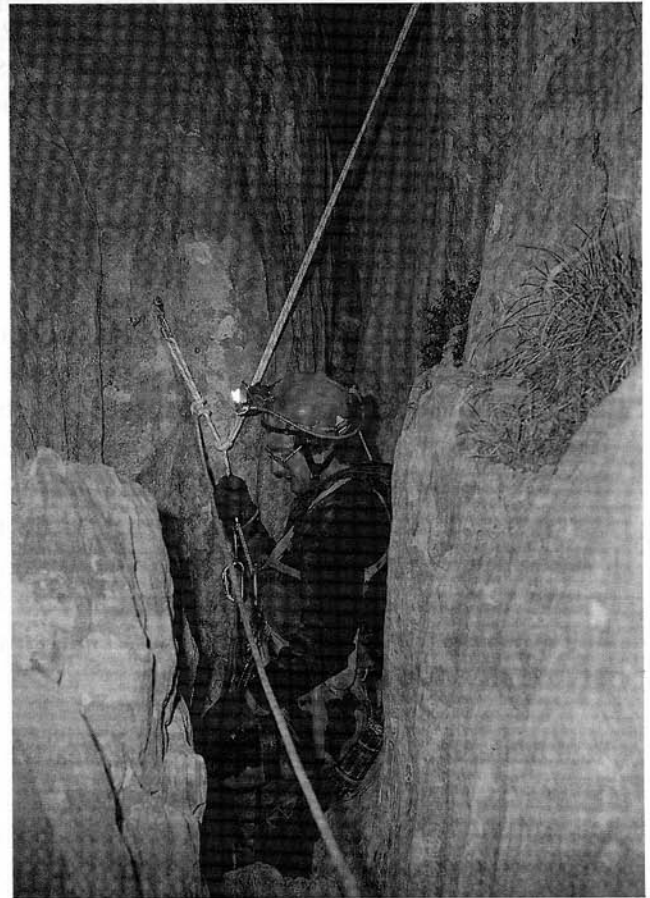
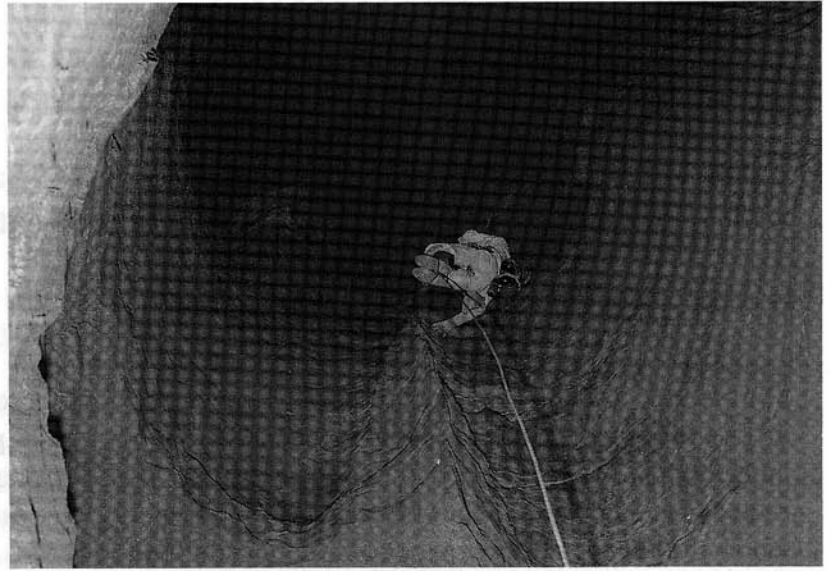
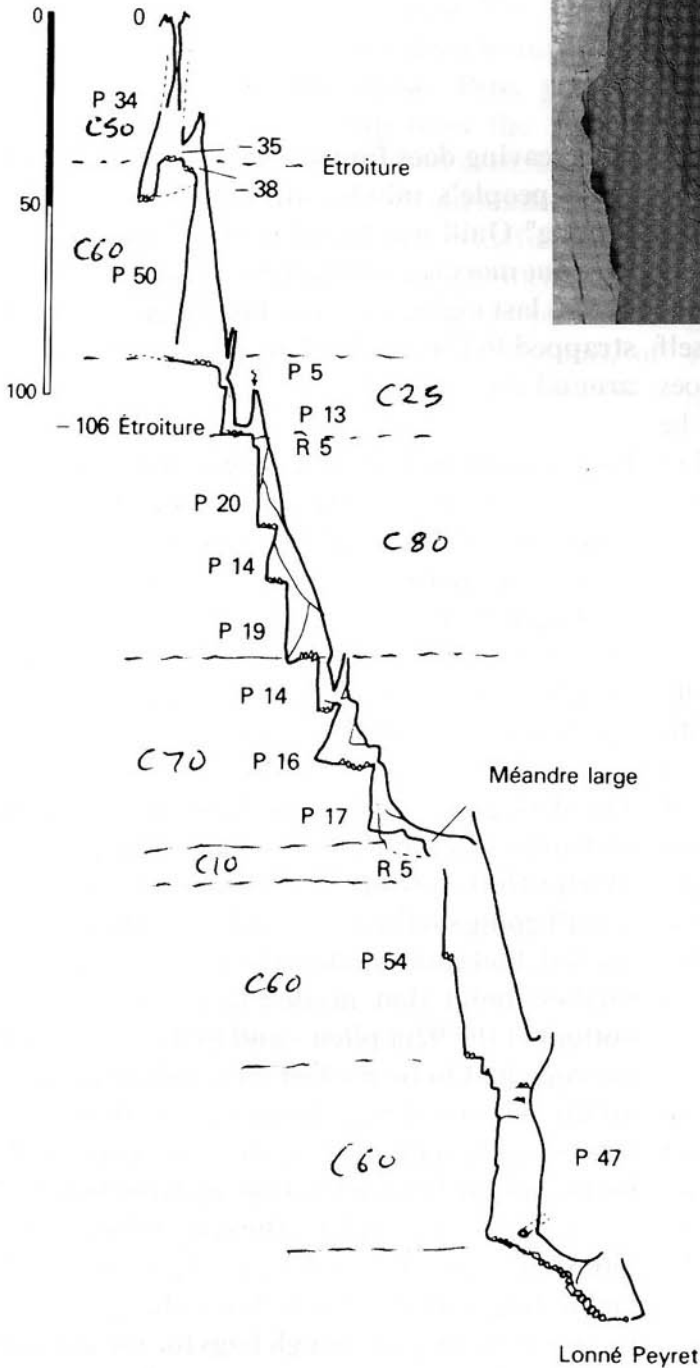
It is a quiet place, and with late afternoon sunlight making the surrounding rocky mountainsides glow, very beautiful. Well worth a visit.



How to find the Lépineux Shaft

From the PSM ski-station, take the road towards the frontier and go past the layby mentioned above as the parking place for Lonné Peyret. Stay on the road for another kilometre, passing the historic frontier stone 262, until you reach a red sign saying "Navarra" at a left-hand bend. Park here and you can see the concrete blockhouse less than 100m away along a rough footpath.

Gouffre Lonné Peyret



Photos of Andy Dobson in Lonné Peyret,
by Dave Dobson

Note: as with the earlier topo, the annotations were done before the cave was rigged, and cannot therefore be relied upon as an accurate indication of what is required.

Nous Sommes Avec Les Spéléos Anglais...

Tales from Camping Ibarra, as reported by Ted Sauvage, our man at the dining table with the bottle of cheap *vin rouge* and the half-eaten *pain au chocolate*.

Martin Hoff is not a man given to displays of emotion or loss of temper. So he must have been very upset indeed when he was moved to call Paul Quill a very rude name. The upset in question was that of a dinghy which the two were using to cross the Tunnel du Vent, and from which Quill managed to deposit both himself and Martin into eight feet of cold water. (How does Martin know it was eight feet deep? Because he touched the bottom, of course.) The usual method of greeting Quill ("Yo! Big Boy") has been changed to "Ahoy, Shipmate!" and he and Martin are back on speaking terms again, but unlikely to share a dinghy in the foreseeable future...

Great entertainment was provided at the campsite by Ian Middleton's wasp trap, a plastic bottle with a hole cut in the side and with a couple of inches of jam and water in the bottom. Trouble was, none of the wasps could find the half-inch square entry hole, even when Ian marked it with white tape. Most of the wasps which did end up in it (and there weren't many) were posted through the hole, already dead, by Ian in a desperate attempt to diffuse the ridicule it was receiving.

Paul Meredith was heard to state, quite clearly: "I'm never going caving again". Speculation was rife about the cause of this declaration - could it be because, within days of returning from the PSM, he was to reach the grand old age of forty? Or could it be that he knew there wouldn't be much time, after the baby that he and Haley were expecting at the time was born? Or was it just that he was still suffering from the after-effects of a fourteen-hour through trip in company with Messrs. Dobson? Whatever the reason, Paul's resolve didn't last long: he was spotted in the Salle de Verna a few days later.

Hard caving does funny things to the mind. Or to some people's minds, anyway. Paul "Salty the Seadog" Quill was heard to stroll into the dining area one morning and declare: "I had a really weird dream last night. I dreamt I had a giant conger eel strapped to the inside of my leg, and was dancing around the table..."

Hard caving may also, it seems, bring on absent-mindedness. Hywel Davies reached the PSM ski station to find that he'd left his wellies back at camp, some forty minutes' drive away. This, at the start of a derigging trip in Tête Sauvage with more than 300 metres of pitches to detackle, was bad news. Proving, though, that married life hasn't softened him up and that he really is 'kinard, he did the trip in his sandals.

The derigging trip in Tête Sauvage was fraught with difficulty for other members of the party, too. Martin Hoff, having been assured that Paul Quill wasn't going on the trip and that no dinghies were needed, had gamely taken the lead. He reached the furthest point that needed to be derigged - the bottom of the 92m pitch - and tied on the bag that the rope had to be packed into, before prussiking up the monster drop, derigging the numerous re-belays and deviations along the way. After catching his breath, he heaved the rope up from below. The task was nearly complete, the end of the rope came into view... just as Martin's knot gave up, and the tackle bag whistled back down the pitch. Since there were only just enough bags for the amount of rope that had to go into them, he had no choice but to re-rig the whole pitch, retrieve the bag and derig it all again. Still, at least by the time he returned to Britain his beloved AFC Bournemouth had managed to propel themselves up to third place in Endsleigh League Division Two...

One would have expected that those employed in the medical profession would be aware of the likely after-effects of imbibing large quantities of alcohol. A certain expedition member appears to have missed that day's lecture at medical school, if the scenes to be witnessed after the expedition meal in nearby Licq were anything to go by. In an unusual role reversal, a certain Master Mariner had to tend to the sick, by emptying it from the bucket that was being used...

WBCRT Executive Member Huw Thomas was quick to back Pete Francis in a stern lecture about the dangers of late-night noise. Pete, you see, suffered a fall during a trip from the Salle de Verna, and blamed those who had come back late from a trip the night before and had inadvertently woken him while cooking their meal. Huw added that it was important that the campsite stayed quiet late at night, as a lack of sleep could put those caving next day at risk. This Huw Thomas, of course, bears no relation to the Huw Thomas who, some nights later, was letting off firecrackers in the campsite late at night. All together now: Neeeeeeeeaaaaaaaaagh...

And finally, a reader's letter:

Lookalike



Clipstone



Goat

Dear Sir,

I wonder if any of your readers have noticed the striking similarity between the club's somnolent Cottage Warden, Brian Clipstone, and a certain nanny goat residing in the parish of Sainte-Engrâce, France. Are they, by any chance, related? What about the kids? I think we should be told.

Yours faithfully,

Patrick Hall,
Bradley Stoke, Bristol.

Thanks

by Gary Vaughan

As with all organised events, one person takes all the credit, and the cast of thousands who really did all the work don't get a mention. I know it's not much, but on behalf of the club and all those who came to the PSM, I'd just like to say an extra big "thanks" to all those who helped out with the setting up and running of the trip, and especially to...

Brian Bowell, for sorting, packing and arranging all the cave rescue gear, touch wood not needed again this year.

Dave Elliot, for arranging and purchasing the rope and tackle with such a generous discount.

Haley Gardner, for keeping a reign on the purse strings and making some sense of the financial chaos.

Gary Nevitt and Alison Hayward, for the on-site catering and limitless supplies of tea and coffee.

Martin Hoff, for his invaluable services as translator of guide books and telephone conversations with ARSIP.

Tony and Denise Knibbs, for their persistent perseverance in trying to talk to ARSIP, arranging the carbide, and setting up the deal with the campsite.

Harvey Lomas, for rushing the tackle from Yorkshire to South Wales in the back of his car.

Paul Meredith, for editing and producing all of the expedition circulars.

Iain Miller, for stout service in washing and sorting of ropes.

Susie, for her constant and patient help throughout.

SWCC committee, for their full support (both financial and in terms of attendance).

Lisa Williams, for being the expo doctor.

If I've missed anyone off, I'm sorry: Susie's always telling me I've got the memory of a dyslexic stoat. Thanks again for everybody's help, and for being such a good team to be on expedition with. See you on the next one in two years time...

Editor's Note: Gary's list of thanks omits the one person who made it all happen: himself. On behalf of everyone who went: you scored another bullseye, mate. Gary and Susie's dedication to the cause even extended to using some of their holiday the previous year to visit the area and recce all the entrances and the campsite so that everything went smoothly in '95. Grateful thanks to both of you from the entire rabble, looking forward to next time.

Waiting For The Big Push Forwards

Lyrics: Pat Hall (and Billy Bragg)

Editor's Note: If one of the qualifications for the title of The Club's Premier Dig is for a project to have had a song written about it, Ogof Twyn Tal-Draenan is the current front-runner, as the following demonstrates. Initially inspired by my comment in the log book that the regular OTTD team were off on the Tal-Draenan training meet at the PSM, it's based on Billy Bragg's Waiting for the Great Leap Forwards, from the 1988 album Workers Playtime (Go! Discs, AGOLP 15), and I take this opportunity to apologise to Billy Bragg and Chappell Music Ltd. for any offence caused...

You may still be comatose like Pete and Ian Cardy
But Susie Mabbett's tea run keeps the lads from being tardy
Caffeine and cholesterol are on the breakfast menu
And pints more tea have to be drunk, to re-hydrate you when you
Are off onto the Black Mountain determined to be finding
The miles of virgin cave in Twyn Tal-Draenen

Salles Queffelec and Adelie have prepared us for the scale
Of what we now expect to find beyond boulders mud and shale
A clean and sporting streamway is what we all have dreamed of
Between that shit-hole and the cave in Dan-yr-Ogof

We're stacking up the orange tape in hopeful expectation
Of needing to protect the world's most beautiful formations
So it's bollocks now to Otter Hole, and who cares Lechuguilla
Cos this stuff's better

A kilometre of SRT rope's ready in the store
For hanging in the pitches there, like none you've seen before
Because despite the depth of limestone we'll need each last bit of it
In the ten-hour course of Britain's finest through trip

You can stay back at the cottages, and fester round the teapot
Or get up and go underground, digging with the hard lot
You can be active with the activists
Or sleep in with the sleepers
While you're waiting for the big push forwards

Well it's one push forward, two loads back
And Clipjoint is still in the sack
...Waiting for the big push forwards

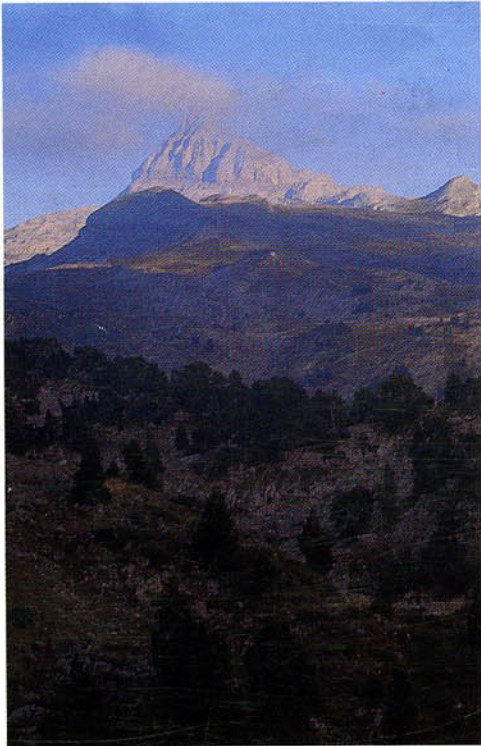
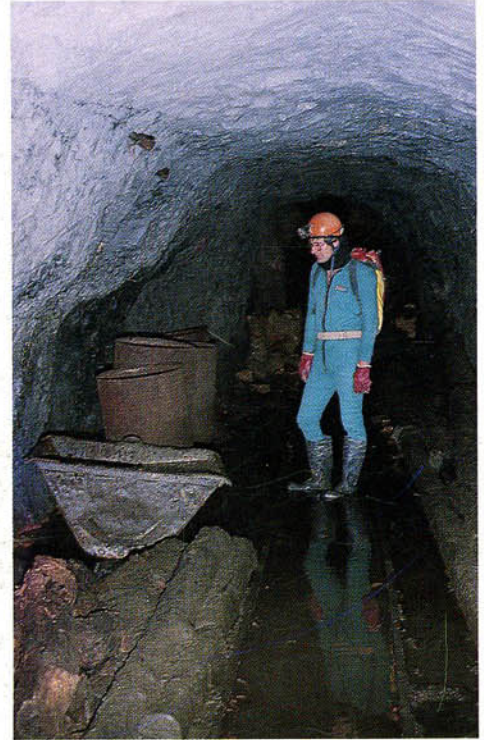
That monster find gets closer by the minute
When the team makes a breakthrough you'll wanna be in it
...Waiting for the big push forwards

It's a mighty long way down speleol
From the P.S.M. to digging a hole
...Waiting for the big push forwards

If you think that the diggers are a bunch of tossers
Just stay in bed and have a moan with the dossers
...Waiting for the big push forwards

In a perfect world this cave would exist
But this is reality so let's get pissed
...Waiting for the big push forwards

So join the diggers while you may
The master system is just a brew-up away
...Waiting for the big push forwards



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