

**South Wales Caving Club  
Clwb Ogofeydd Deheudir Cymru**



**Newsletter No. 119  
1997**



# South Wales Caving Club

## Clwb Ogofeydd Deheudir Cymru

Newsletter No. 119, July 1997

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Front Cover: Martin Hoff on the traverse at the head of the P36 in the Trou du Glaz, Dent de Crolles, August 1996. Photo by Tony Baker.

Back Cover: Tony Baker on one of the Lantern Pitches in the Trou du Glaz, Dent de Crolles. Photo by Martin Hoff.

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Opinions expressed in this Newsletter are the contributor's own, and not necessarily those of the Editor or of the South Wales Caving Club

# Editorial

by Tony Baker

Somehow I never get around to writing editorials until every other page in the Newsletter is complete, so it comes as something of a relief to be writing this, knowing that it brings to an end not only the work on this edition but my stint in the editor's chair. This edition is the eleventh I've done over the last six years, and it has to be said that the job has occupied a lot of my spare time, so I'm happy to be handing it on to someone else.

That someone is Martin Hoff, who was elected into the post at the AGM in May and who has already done an excellent job with the Newsheet over the last year. In the best tradition of Newsletter Editors, Martin is, at the time of writing, about to move house so I am unable at the moment to provide you with his home address, but contributions for the next Newsletter sent c/o the SWCC HQ (address on page 1) will reach him. I'd like to wish Martin every success, and I look forward to reading his first edition.

This edition of the Newsletter has taken a long time to put together. I've written that in virtually every editorial I've done but the main problem is always the same: extracting material from contributors. It simply isn't economical to produce smaller editions more frequently, which I'm afraid means that some authors wait a long time to see their work in print and some of it is rather dated by the time it appears. There isn't a great deal an editor can do about this - I have tried very hard throughout my time in the job to hassle people but articles arrive when they arrive. Most people have many demands on their time and in the grand scheme of things not many can give writing for a caving club journal a high priority. There isn't much the editor can do towards compiling the Newsletter until he or she has nearly all of the material, either, since it's impossible to lay pages out until you know the length of articles you're dealing with. Of course, none of this is my problem any more but I make the point again so that you will appreciate why Newsletters don't drop onto your doormat with the frequency that you might wish, and so that any of you writing for future editions might be jogged into writing slightly more quickly!

In all the time I've been editing the Newsletter, and for a very long time before that, one of its most frequent

contributors was Mel Davies, who sadly died earlier this year after a long illness. Frank Baguley has written an obituary which appears on page 9, but I'd like to include a few words about Mel's work for the Newsletter during my time as Editor. He was extremely diligent about writing up anything he'd been involved with, and his copy would always arrive within days of the events he was writing about taking place. It was always concisely written, and never needed any alteration or correction. He would always provide maps, surveys and photographs to accompany his words, and include references to other relevant material.

While it is true to say that many of the subjects he wrote about were rather "dry", all of his articles justify their inclusion by their usefulness to anyone researching such subjects in future. He was very quick to pick up on any inaccuracies in either Newsheets or Newsletters, but would always do so politely. If ever I telephoned him to ask for additional material, such as an extra photo or two, or to ask him to submit a copy of an article on a disk, he'd always put the requested items in the post first thing the following morning. I wish that more contributors had followed his example, and I agree with Frank's point that his services to caving will be greatly missed.

On a more upbeat note, I would like to express my thanks for all the good things that people said about the 50th Anniversary Publication. Having put together such a bumper edition, which not only took up a lot of my time but cost the club a small fortune to print, it was rewarding to get good feedback from it. There are more words on the club's anniversary in the pages that follow; I think we certainly celebrated a landmark in the history of SWCC in fine style.

Finally, I would like to thank all the people who have contributed to all the Newsletters I've done. There have been a fantastic range of articles, and some great pictures, and looking back at all of the last eleven editions makes me realise what a diverse bunch SWCC members are. Keep it up! And just in case you thought you wouldn't have to read any more of my outpourings: well, somehow I seem to have agreed to edit *The Way Out*, the WBCRT newsletter/sheet, for a while. Sorry about that. But right now the sun is still shining, and I'm off to dig the mountain bike out of the garage...

# Celebrating the Past, Present and Future

## And now for the next fifty years...

by Fred Levett, Chairman 1995-97

As our 50th Anniversary year draws to a close I thought the events marking our celebration ought to be recorded to instruct the next generation as they approach the 100th Anniversary. I have a feeling they are going to need some help.

I will always remember the dinner. 240 members and guests sat down in the Fulton Building at Swansea University on the night of March 2nd. Representing the whole spectrum of membership, including several founder members, we all enjoyed the meal which was followed by excellent speeches from Peter Harvey (President), Les Hawes (Vice President), and Gary Vaughan. I have never heard Peter so eloquent, not even after excessive lubrication, and Les and Gary summarised two very different trips abroad - Balinka Pit 1966 and Berger 1993. Living proof SWCC has got what it takes. My own speech is just a blur now. I just remember thinking how many of the older members I only knew by name and reputation. The dinner menu and a list of those who attended are given at the end of this article.

*Organisation of the dinner was co-ordinated in the final stages by Sue Mabbett, no easy feat since payment had to be extracted in advance! Even at this time her name had been given to the universal measure of length underground. Ask any digger of that time what progress had been made and the answer would be along the lines "6 Mabbetts". Her slight stature allowed access to even the tightest of grot holes, and unlike other measures was self-propelled.*

Next event was the AGM; not strictly a celebration but it did start the year with a new constitution, a policy statement about the Club's activities for the first time, and a desire to improve the kitchen at the HQ. Other members may not have celebrated but I did, having seen that lot through! A ceilidh followed that night with the younger members in high spirits. I was pleased to accept the "juvenile committee of the year" award on behalf of the Committee. This may have depressed the "juveniles" but certainly cheered me up as someone pushing the average up. Over 100 must

have eaten that night, food courtesy of the Soup Dragons; the second of many feasts to come.

The Bear Band did us proud as always, and Paul and crew from the Copper Beech provided the beer.

*The price of beer was all important to the Club as it was also used as a yardstick to set the hut fee per night. Even more important were the Soup Dragons. They would toil for hours to produce a meal for 100 cavers, then cheerfully serve the results to the 120 who by now had turned up. Fortified only by G and T they would then wash up before collapsing exhausted. What heroines!*

Before I had a chance to visit Twyn Tal-Draenan summer had arrived and with it the Clwb 50 week. A week-long festival of caving, drinking, eating and merrymaking began. Passions were inflamed by such a large crowd of active cavers at Penwyllt and even those not known for regularly partaking of earthly pleasures were seen underground. Classic trips to capture the spirit of a bygone era (mostly the '60s and '70s) were undertaken. OFD I to II, II to I (and back again), Cwm Dwr to III etc.

Some, frustrated by their inability to find an entrance, created their own adjacent to a convenient footpath and the club HQ. Known as "Anniversary Dig" this set out to prove "Greensites" once and for all. Like most such scientific experiments it created more questions than answers but much fun was had. However, undeterred by science, scores of other members were digging and digging and... but discoveries in Ogof Draenan - in, as they say, another place - were outstripping OFD.

*At this time Twyn Tal-Draenan was but a poky hole at the further reaches of the DY0 catchment area visited as little as often by most ordinary members. "Greensites" was an incredibly good idea beset by bad luck. Since it was about finding cave by scientific means perhaps the problem was that it was trying to breach an, as yet, unidentified natural law.*

At the end of Clwb 50 week a substantial party marked the Club's first half century (and also Jopo's). The Squirts - our favourite rock band - and a large cake marked our golden anniversary in a marquee in the brickworks quarry. Thanks again to the Soup Dragons for the third feast.

*The marquee in the brickworks quarry featured heavily in all substantial events at SWCC in this decade. Viewed at night from the quarry rim the scene took on a fairytale air stripped of colour by the halogen lights and the moon. Just an occasional splash of pink as another member emptied his bladder on the surrounding grazing.*

RESCON, the biennial cave rescue conference, arrived with the Autumn. Penwyllt weather took a turn for the worse to remind us not to become too complacent. Our guests, mostly convinced that it always rained in the Swansea Valley took it all in good part. Even holding on to the marquee poles in the teeth of a gale seemed a normal part of life. Through the storm The Squirts played on, slowly sinking into the rain-softened ground. Rosie, the lead singer, was heard to remark, "at least its better than last time, when I went out for a pee and the side blew off the marquee. There I was with the whole audience looking at me." The new format for the conference with discussion groups proved very successful, much information was shared by all. Thanks to Jopo who came up with the idea after a visit to Eire. Could it have been the black stuff?

*To those in the future: Jopo wasn't just a legend, he really did exist. Brian Jopling was his real name, an honorary member. He started most things and miraculously others joined in to finish them. He struck a fine sight in his wide-brimmed hat. Particularly that Guy Fawkes Night when, having blown up a condom with acetylene to a size that would make your eyes water, he found out why you must not pressurise the gas in the presence of organic lubricants. It blew him up! Not a pretty sight, eyebrows burned off and deaf as a post, eardrums burst.*

Once again we finished RESCON in style courtesy of the Soup Dragons. The fourth feast.

Christmas was approaching and so arrived the 50th Anniversary Publication. Dressed in black the contents were far from sombre. As I wrote to the editor, Tony Baker, at the time: "I read the Publication from cover to cover over the Christmas period. It proved quite an emotional read. I know almost all the names either personally or by reputation. The dedication, resourcefulness, and bravery brought to the subject of caving by so many members condensed into one publication is very compelling. What a club...What can I say; congratulations? well done? - but that hardly does your achievement justice. I think as future members read it, perhaps in 20 years time, they too will marvel at the achievement and they will know it was your effort that made it possible." I meant every word of it.

*Tony Baker was a member of a group known as the Number Eights; not a reference to size but their preferred sleeping accommodation. A happy band, they consistently upset many members by giving top priority to caving. Meetings, cottage repairs, good manners and even drinking were ignored in favour of spending time underground. It is highly unlikely any will be reading this fifty years on, having long since succumbed to one of a number of bad habits.*

At the time of writing this article the final event of the year, the Club dinner, had not taken place and I can only speculate on the result. Craig y Nos was chosen as the venue in recognition of fifty years' close involvement in the area both above and below ground. The fifth feast of the year.

At the end of the 50th anniversary year the Club was in good heart, rather fatter than at the start but feeling pleased with itself. After all it had survived 50 years. You have the benefit of having survived 100. Wow!

So many supported the year-long celebration I cannot name them all. It would be roughly equivalent to the membership list.

I hope the second 50 years was as good as the first.



**South Wales Caving Club  
Chwb Ogofeydd Deheudir Cymru**

**50th Anniversary Dinner**

to be held at:

**The Refectory,  
Fulton House,  
Swansea University, Swansea.**

on  
**March 2 1996**  
**7.30pm for 8.00pm**

**50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner**

**Ken Maddocks  
Grace**

**After Dinner Speeches.**

**Peter Harvey, President and Founder Member  
to welcome members and guests**

**Some reflections.**

**Les Hawes, Vice President and Trustee.  
Balinka '64  
and 30 years later**

**Gary Vaughan,  
Berger '94**

**Fred Levert, Chairman,  
members past and present, absent friends and  
guests**

**A Guest,  
the South Wales Caving Club  
to respond and propose a toast.**

**to propose a toast.**

**to respond and propose a toast.**

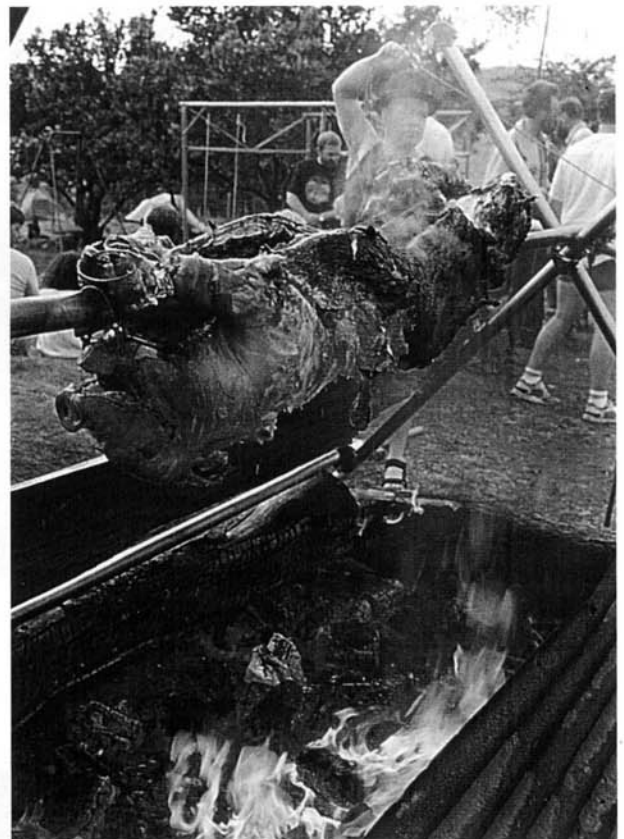
# 50th Anniversary Dinner

Ian Alderman	Mandy Edgeworth	Eric Inson	Ian Nixon	Dominic Wade and
Simon Amatt	Dave Edwards	Vicky Inson	Brenda Nixon	Abigail
N Anderson	Mary Edwards	Chas Jay	John Osborne	Sandra Ward
Frank Baguley	Stanley Edwards	Liz Jay	Jean Osborne	Peter Ward
Ella Baguley	Nina Edwards	Laura Jefferies	Matt Palmer	Rodney Weaver
Tony Baker	John Elliot	Gareth Jones	John Parkes	Bill Weaver
Sue Baker	Kathryn Elliot	Clare Jones	Ann Parkes	Joan Webley
Keith Ball	Nigel Ellis	E Jones	Roddy Pearce	Steve West
David Bancroft	Heather Eteen	N Jones	Jenny Peat	Rob Williams
John Barrows	Eileen Evans	Gareth Jones	Bob Peat	Jan Williams
Wendy Bell	Grant Evans	Gary Jones	Joe Penman	Idris Williams
Bill Birchenough	Tia Exelby	Liz Jones	Chris Pepper	Dot Williams
J Birchenough	Steve Field	Huw Jones	Bill Perkins	Rhiannon Williams
Geoff Bovingdon	Liz Flaherty	Andi Jopling	Louise Perkins	Rhys Williams
Jean Bovingdon	Roger Flaherty	Brian Jopling	Boyd Potts	Lisa Williams
Brian Bowell	Eleanor Flaherty	Marge Jopling	Jenny Potts	Luke Williams
Eileen Bowell	Hazel Forbes	Hywel Jopling	Graham Price	Alan Wood
Margaret Brock	Annie Foster	David Judson	Chrissy Price	Ray Woods and Mrs
Phil Buckberry	Pete Francis	Stuart Kirby	Paul Quill	Woods
Betty Burton	Clark Friend	Tony Knibbs	Bob Radcliffe	
Sarah Cann	Roger Galloway	Denise Knibbs	Angela Radcliffe	<b>Footnote:</b> <i>this list has</i>
Pete Cardy	Laurie Galpin	Tim Leadbetter	John Rennie	<i>been compiled from in-</i>
Lesley Cardy	Mary Galpin	Charlotte Leadbetter	Alison Reynolds	<i>formation supplied by Sue</i>
Ian Cardy	Andrew Gardener	Fred Levett	Allan Richardson	<i>Mabbett, who took the</i>
Julian Carter	Clive Gardener	Jackie Levett	Margaret Richardson	<i>bookings for the dinner.</i>
Jo Chapman	Charles George	Keith Lewis	Nicki Robinson	<i>If your name appears but</i>
Tom Chapman	Keith Goodhead	Vicky Lewis	Andrew Round	<i>you weren't there on the</i>
Richard Cheshire	Sue Goodhead	John Lister	T Round	<i>night because you booked</i>
Graham Christian	Pete Greenwood	Tess Lister	Paul Rowe	<i>but then didn't make it,</i>
Tim Clark	Ian Greenwood	Elsie Little	Susan Sanderson	<i>my apologies. If your</i>
Andrena Clark	Pat Hall	Norman Lloyd	Helen Sargent	<i>name isn't on the list but</i>
Dennis Clarke	Bob Hall	Harvey Lomas	Bob Saunders	<i>you were there, then you</i>
Regina Clarke	Barbara Hall	Tim Long	Denise Saunders	<i>probably had a free meal</i>
Jo Clarke	Bridget Hall	Sue Mabbett	J Semmens	<i>but I apologise nonethe-</i>
Brian Clipstone	Sue Halliday	Ken Maddocks	Roger Smith	<i>less! - Ed.</i>
Gordon Clissold	WG Harris	Alison Maddocks	Vicky Smith	
Joan Coase and partner	John Harvey	Brian Major	Janice Smith	
Peter Collings-Wells	Sally Harvey	Kitty Marsh	Maggie Stewart	
Hywel Davies	Peter Harvey	Louise Maurice	Paul Tarrant	
Ros Davies	Les Hawes	Barry Mawson	Paul Taylor	
Kevin Davies	Jan Hawes	Joan Mawson	Paul Tedd	
Les Davies	Chris Hay	Ian Middleton	Maryke Teeuwissen	
Gareth Davies	John Heath	Paul Middleton	Pauline Teeuwissen	
Jim Davis	Claire Hicks	Gwen Middleton	Jasper Teeuwissen	
Caitlin Day	Alison Hodgkinson	Liz Millett	Huw Thomas	
Mick Day	Steve Holmes and	Paul Minshall	Glyn Thomas	
Judy Day	partner	Terry Moon	Paul Thornton	
Ceinwen Day	Evan Hopkins	Sam Moore	Dudley Thorpe	
Valerie de Graaf	Margaret Hopkins	Ray Morgan	Ben Thorpe	
Kevin Diffey	Julia Hunt	Joan Morgan	Ian Todd	
Viv Diffey	David Hunt	Diana Moss	Ruth Toye	
Andrew Dobson	Russell Hyeus and	Claire Muir	Andrew Toye	
Dave Dobson	partner	David Mullin	Christopher Toye	
Paul Dolphin	Dominic Hyland	Trevor Neatherway	Gary Vaughan	
Toby Dryden	Barbara Hyland	Colin Niell	Susie Vaughan	

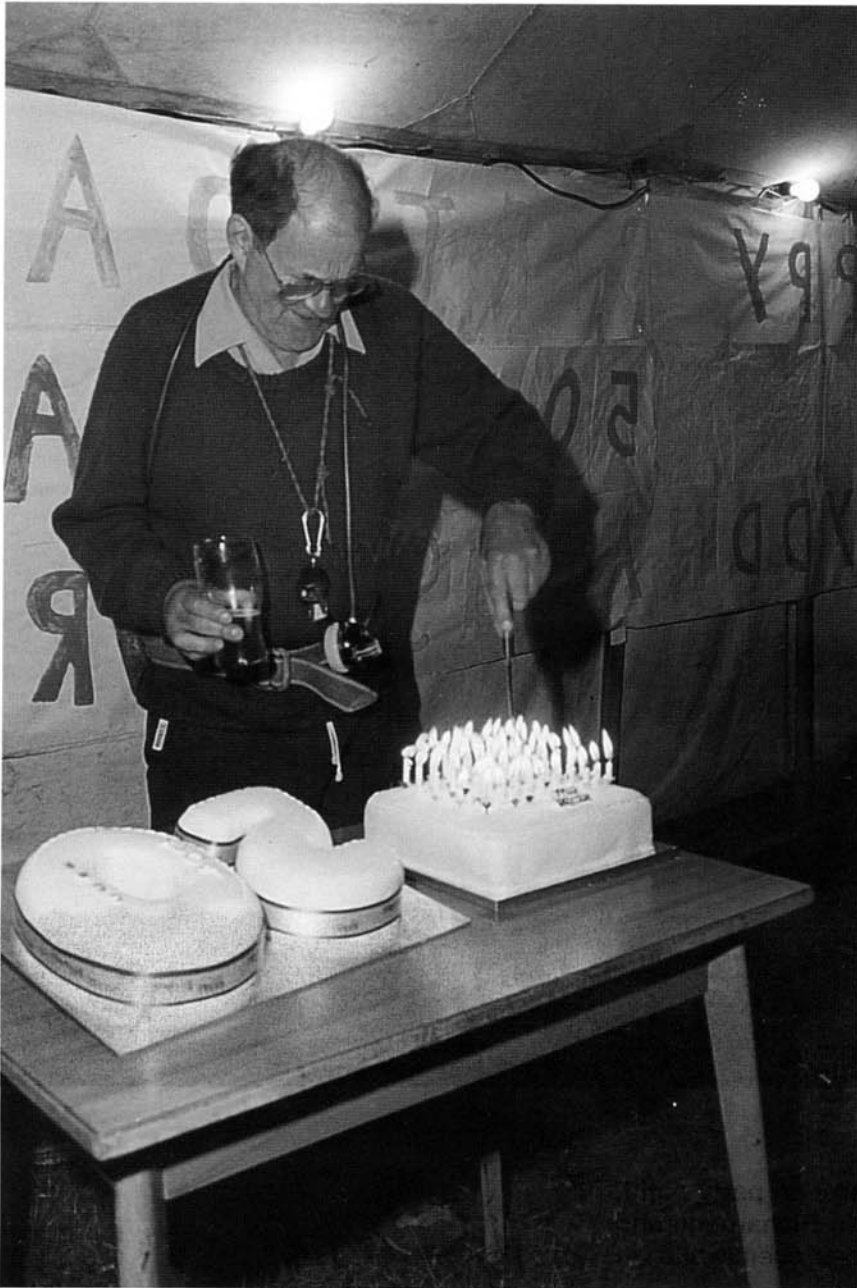
# Photographs from Clwb50 Week by Peter Collings-Wells



Above: the scene in the brickworks quarry on party night.  
Below left: (L to R) Bethan Moore, Caitrin Richardson and Hannah Lister take to the stage to read their poem while Ian Cardy looks on. Below right: the pig roast







Top left: SWCC President Peter Harvey cuts the club's birthday cake. Top right: the Soup Dragons thank the assembled throng for the gift of gin, tonic and lemons. Below left: The Squirts on stage. Below right: Jopo cuts his birthday cake.

Above: the scene in the dickwade du  
Below left: (L to R) Bethan Moore, Cait  
Below right: Jopo cuts his birthday cake.



# Obituary: Melvyn Davies B.Sc.

by Frank Baguley

It was with great sadness that I learnt of the sudden death of Mel Davies on Saturday February 22 1997. He had written to me only the previous week to let me know that he would not be able to attend the Cambrian Caving Council's AGM, and that he was due to receive a further course of radiotherapy. In the same letter he stated that cavers were welcome to visit him, as long as they 'phoned first. Such was his spirit and courage even at that time.

I had known him since the early 1960s, just after I had started caving, but he had been caving long before then. He had collected a small band of keen cavers together under the flag of the British Nylon Spinners (later to become ICI Fibres), which supported a social and recreational section for its employees, but "outsiders" could not join it. It was from this that the Cwmbran Caving Club developed, and caving in SE Wales took off. Mel was thus a pioneer.

He was an individual member of several caving clubs and organisations, such as the Cave Research Group and the William Pengelly Cave Trust. He was Chairman of the Cambrian Caving Council in its formative years, and he did much to instil the conservation aspect of caving, particularly the conservation of bats, into the members, as well as encouraging them to explore and record their findings. He was himself a prolific writer and recorder of all his finds, be they speleological, archaeological, palaeontological, biological, hydrological or conservational. He never kept information to himself, and was always willing to share it and encourage others to do likewise. He was a regular contributor to a number of professional organisations, as well as to national, regional and club caving publications. For example, there are some forty-three references to him in the Cambrian CC journals over twenty years. He provided two chapters to *Limestones and Caves of Wales*. He was a willing provider of information - generous to a fault! If I received a query

I could not answer on a cave situated in a quarry I didn't know, I could refer it to Mel and he would provide a sketch map of the area and include other caves or digs in the area as well as giving advice on access and safety, such was his thoroughness. He used to visit active quarries in South Wales regularly to look for possible "openings", such was his enthusiasm. He maintained good relationships all round with, for example, museums, the military at Castlemartin ranges, the monks on Caldey Island, the Dan-yr-Ogof Caves management, and of course the former Nature Conservancy Council (now the Countryside Council for Wales), of which statutory body he became a warden for a number of areas of Wales - in particular the Gower peninsula, where he was based at the Oxwich Reserve Centre. He served on the National Trust Gower Cave Advisory Group, and played a major role in the establishment of the Agen Allwedd Cave Management Committee, later to become the Mynydd Llangatwg Cave Management/Advisory Committee.

He regularly attended the meetings of the Cambrian Caving Council, where his analytical criticism of the accounts, and his forthright views on the various issues, were appreciated by members.

His services to caving should be recognised in some way: I don't think there'll be another enthusiastic caver of his calibre. He is irreplaceable.

Our deepest sympathy is extended to his wife Agnes and her family in their bereavement. He will be sadly missed by them and by his colleagues in the caving world.

# Reseau de la Dent de Crolles: an Introduction

by Tony Baker

In August 1996, eighteen SWCC members visited the Dent de Crolles system in the Chartreuse, just to the west of the main French Alps. This popular cave invites comparisons with Ogof Ffynnon Ddu - the system has entrances on different levels, and the maze of passages that lies between them offers a variety of through trips. The vertical extent of the cave is 623m, while the total length exceeds 53km. Over the next nineteen pages some of the participants record their experiences.

The Dent de Crolles itself is a spectacular limestone hill ("dent" meaning "tooth") that rises to 2062m and lies above the village of St. Pierre de Chartreuse, some 30km north of Grenoble. The most popular entrances to the cave system are the Trou du Glaz (50 minutes' stiff walk uphill from the Col du Coq, the most convenient place to park) and the Guiers Mort, a spectacular resurgence also reached by a 50 minute uphill slog, this time through the woods from the parking place at Perquelin. During the course of our stay, parties completed various through trips between various entrances: Trou du Glaz to the Guiers Mort (using two different routes), P40 to the Trou du Glaz, P40 to the Guiers Mort, and Trou du Glaz

to the Grotte Chevalier. The Gouffre Thérèse has something of a reputation for being tight, awkward and arduous, and would have stretched our rope resources, so we didn't bother with it.

The cave was largely explored by Pierre Chevalier and his companions between 1936 and 1947, and his book describing their exploits, *Subterranean Climbers* ( first published in 1951 and available in paperback as a reprint, ISBN 0-914264-15-X) is widely regarded as a classic work of speleological literature. other sources of information are as follows:

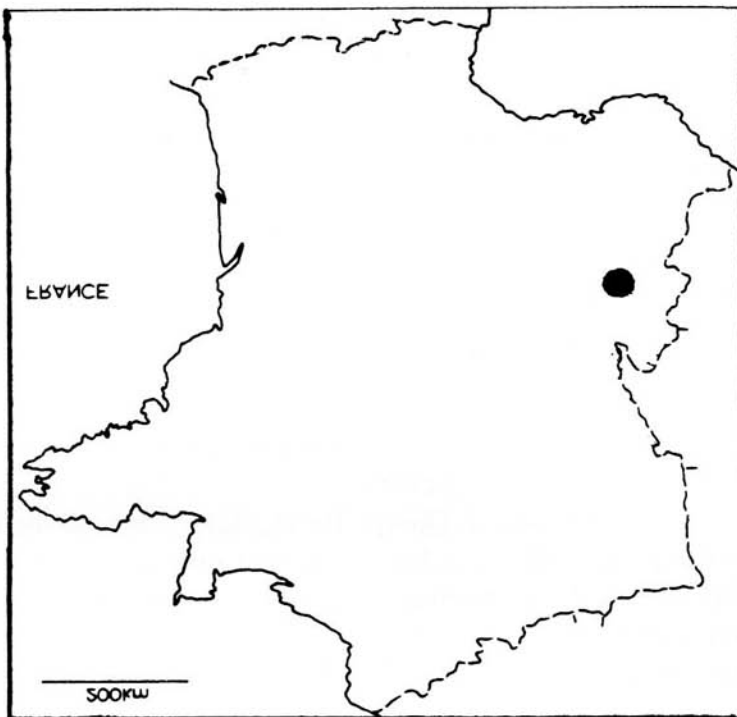
*MCG en Chartreuse '95*. (various, Ed. T.Francis) An "occasional publication", published March '96 and available from the MCG and some caving shops.

*BPC Bulletin*, (Vol.8 No.4: various, Ed. M.Riley)

*Chartreuse Souterraine* (P.Drouin and B.Lismonde, 1985.) In French but covers every cave in the area with surveys etc.

## The Campsite

The Craven Pothole Club recommended Camping de Martiniere (38380 St. Pierre de Chartreuse, France. Tel: 76 88 60 36, Fax: 76 88 69 10). This is close (around 15 minutes' drive) to the various parking places for the different cave entrances. It has a heated swimming pool, good shower and toilet facilities, washing machines, a payphone, and a small shop/bar. Bread can be ordered for morning collection. Ian Middleton can provide further details of any aspect of the campsite facilities, as he spent many hours getting intimately acquainted with them after breaking his ankle on his second caving trip! Right next door to the campsite is an excellent restaurant, the *Atre*



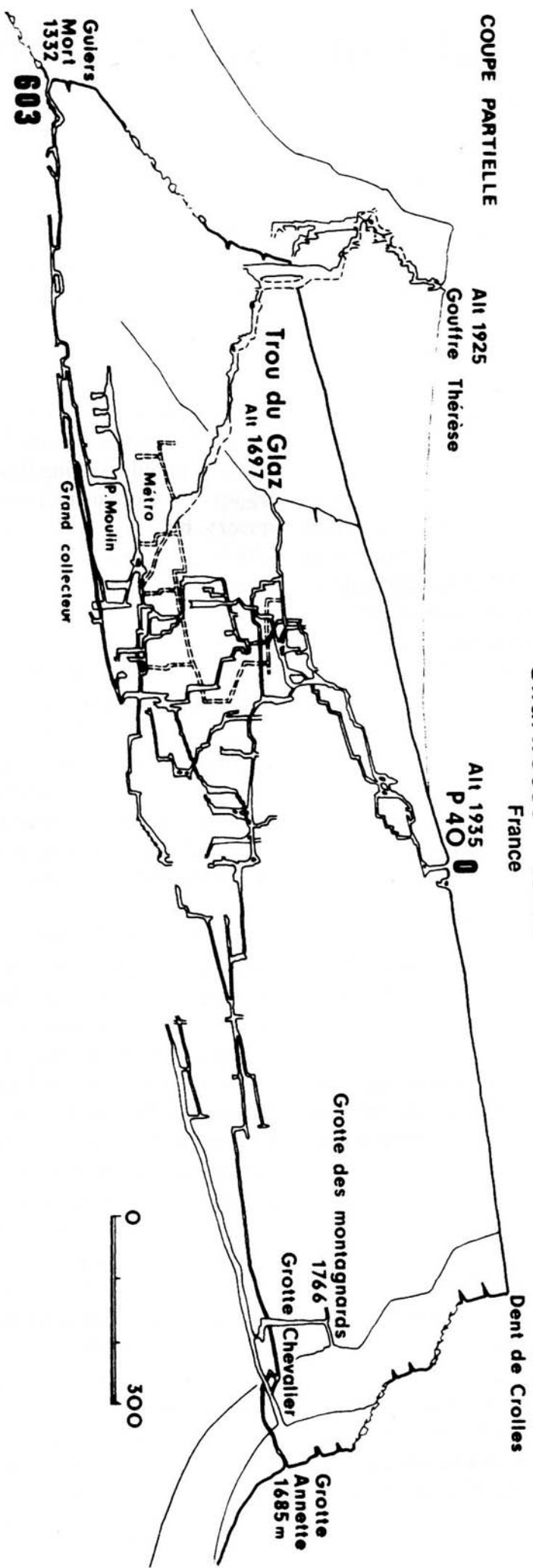
*Fleurie*, which some members visited a total of four times over the two weeks we were there.

## The Participants (in Alphabetical Order)

Tony Baker, Julian Carter, Brian Clipstone, Andy Dobson, Dave Dobson, Clark Friend, Bob Hall, Peter Harvey, Martin Hoff, Denise Knibbs, Tony Knibbs, Sue Mabbett, Ian Middleton, Iain Miller, Tracy Miller, Paul Quill, Dudley Thorpe, Lisa Williams.

# RESEAU DE LA DENT DE CROLLLES

Chartreuse — Isère  
France



# The First Through Trip: Trou du Glaz to the Guiers

## Mort *by Jules Carter*

Note: Prior to the start of this trip some members of the team had done a trip in the Trou du Glaz as far as the Pendulum Pitch, whilst others had been in to the Guiers Mort as far as Bivouac Gallery. For additional route details see Cerberus 1980, BPC 1991.

The day started with the usual Alpine Start (2 pm!) so that the sun was at its hottest as we walked up the steep climb to the Glaz entrance - well, you can't make this caving too easy can you? Our party of five was quickly changed, and off down the initial pitches which myself, Tony Baker and Martin Hoff had rigged the previous day. Within the hour we were at the start of the first meander where we picked up the 28m rope we had left the previous day. At the end of the first meander myself and Ian Middleton were slightly ahead of the rest and so proceeded down the 60m Pendulum Pitch. We continued to move ahead of the others since we were armed with enough rope to rig the next couple of pitches, but first we had the delights of the second set of meanders. This proved to be a particularly fine section, where the rule was to keep low in the rift, and it's well worth removing your SRT rig. Whilst not horrendously tight, the second meander proved to be a complete pig, especially with gear. After 220m and 45 minutes we were suitably sweaty and grateful to arrive at the head of the Petzl Pitch, the first in a series of four pitches leading to the connection with the Guiers.

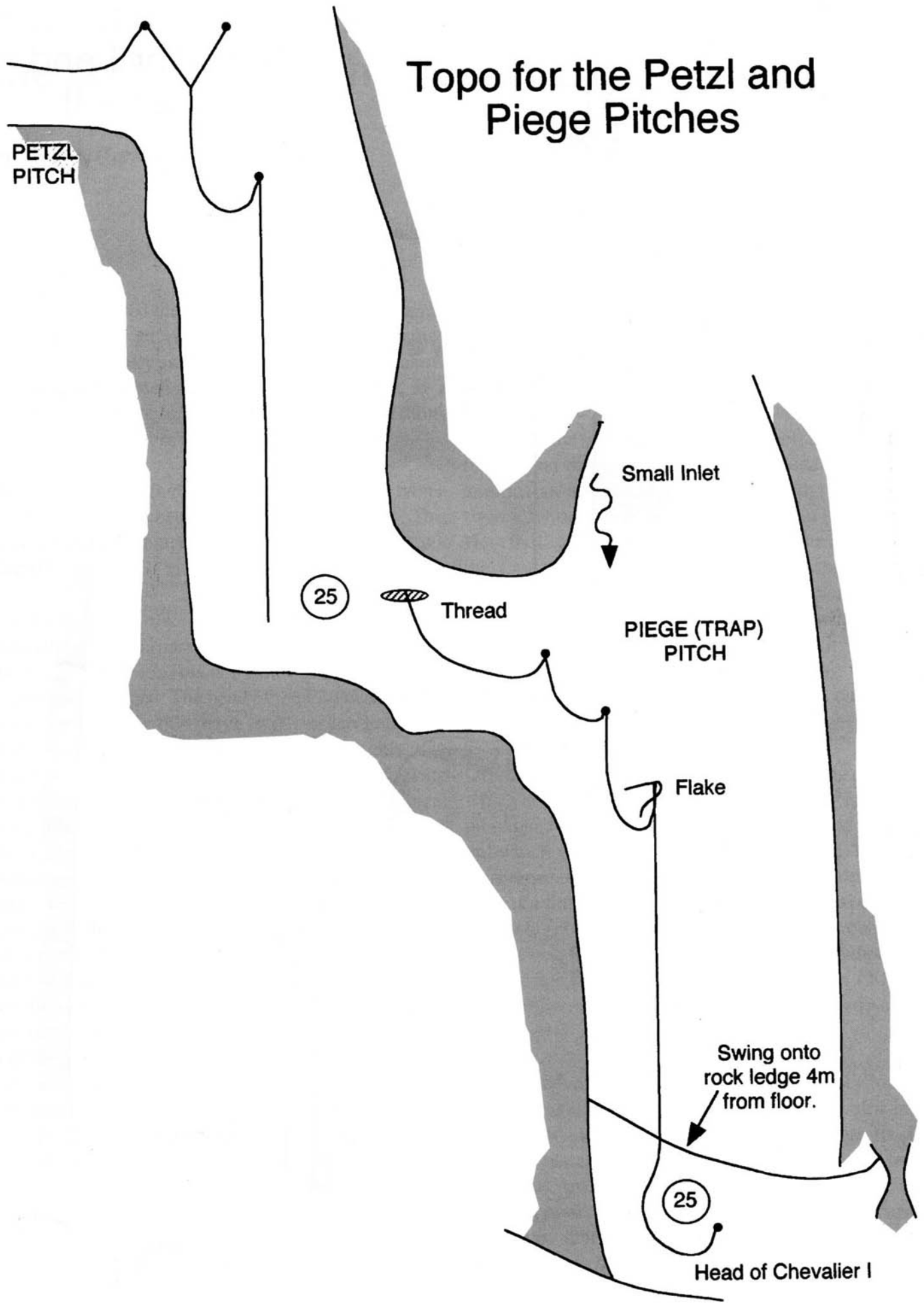
The Petzl pitch started with a nice Y-hang amongst the usual pull thro' tat, down to a rebelay at -3m, and then down to the bottom. From here the Piege Pitch starts - a lovely pitch to rig as it has a trickle of water just where you don't want it, especially when sorting a rebelay on a flake a few metres down. About 4m from the bottom a pendulum is required to gain a ledge, the other side of which is a 2m drop and the start of Chevalier I, a 35m pitch, at the head of which you are confronted with an incredible assortment of bits of string, chains and bolts through which to choose some rigging. A Y-hang was arranged amongst this tat, and then the journey down a superb large shaft, utilising a rebelay at -5m. At the base was a large ledge - the start of Chevalier II. The rigging was again a "mix and match" routine, with a rebelay a few metres down.

The team collected at the base of Chevalier II. At this stage we were all cold. We stopped briefly to fuel up and admire some fine French conservation techniques, a fine collection of stal decorated with a profusion of bits of tat, general rubbish and a cardboard helmet!

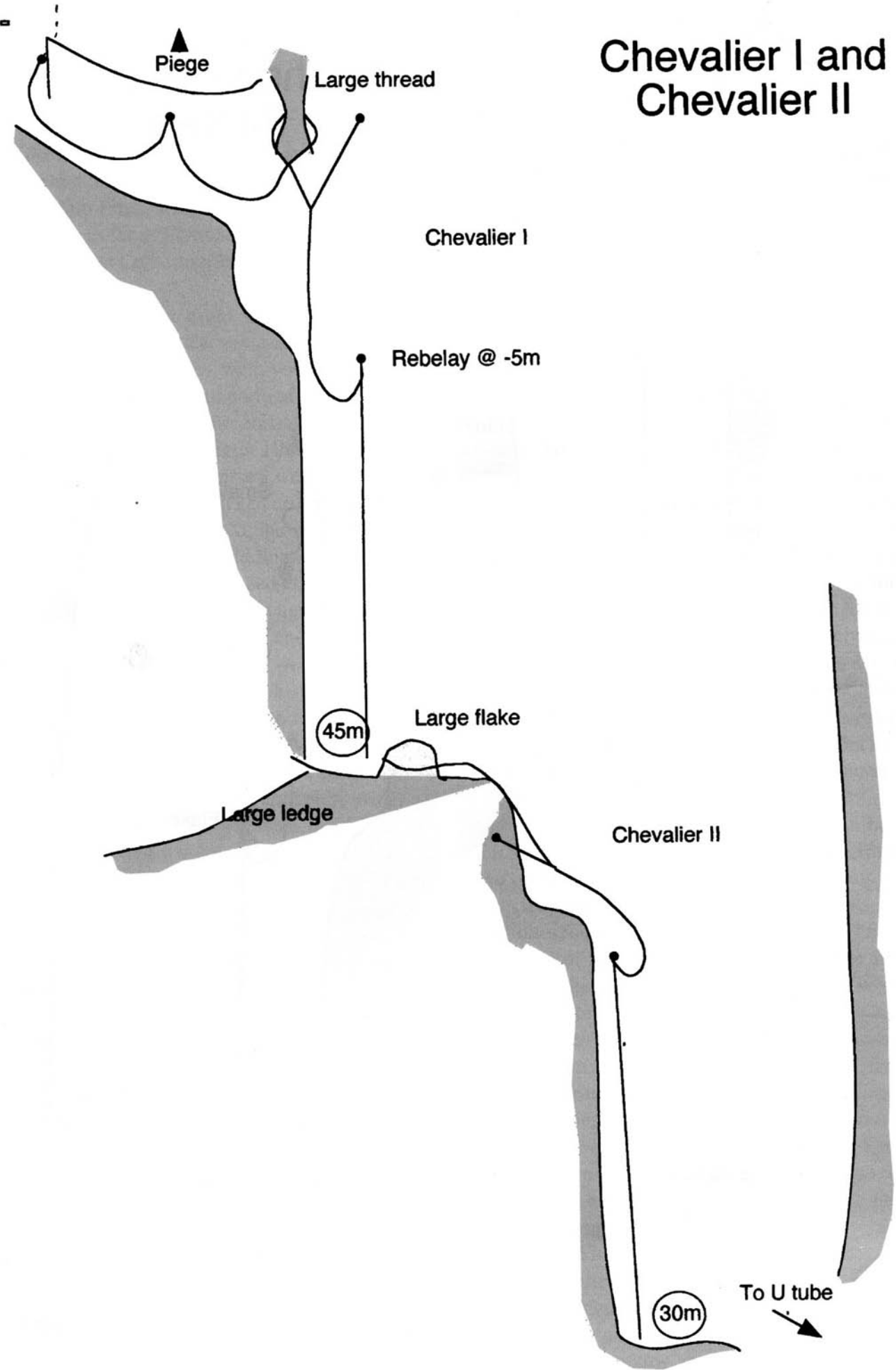
The next stage was to carry out the connection with the Guiers, marked by the U-tube. This was only a couple of minutes caving from the base of the pitches, and was more of an "inclined up" tube with a flat-out squeezey bit. This popped us out into the Grande Collecteur, a very fine abandoned streamway with many pots in the floor (a couple of the deep pools had traverse lines on them) and short climbs. It was at this point that Ian decided that someone else should carry his gear. On stepping off a short climb his footing slipped on the edge of a small pool causing a Middleton to go off balance and shout "Ouch!". Great pain was experienced with his ankle, and it had obviously been made to move in a way ankles are not meant to move. However our hero continued undaunted, handed me his gear, and onward with the adventure. (Back in the UK we learnt that the ankle was actually fractured!)

At the end of the Grande Collecteur things became confusing. What was claimed to be "a clear climb up" wasn't very clear, but a rope hanging down was found. A check up this was made and a traverse line amongst stalagmites found, presumed to be Stalagmite Traverse! At the end of this a 2m climb down into the start of Marmite Gallery, quickly confirmed by the existence of a large hole in the floor: Nimois Pitch, which has a traverse line round on the left. The passage continues to another smaller pot and then involves traversing above floor trenches, to reach an active streamway, Bivouac Gallery, and the La Plage sump area. This point marked our return to known cave as Sue and Clark had been to this point the previous day to rig the pitches. From here the journey was little more than an hour out, ending after some fairly miserable crawling passage in the huge entrance passage and chamber to emerge into the night air. Ian and Clark had gone ahead at this stage, with Clark aiding our limping hero by finding him a stick so he didn't fall over. Overall an excellent trip, taking about eight hours.

# Topo for the Petzl and Piege Pitches



# Chevalier I and Chevalier II



# The Alternative Through Trip: Trou de Glaz to the Guiers Mort, the Sequel

*by Julian Carter*

Having completed the classic through trip, an attempt on the newer or alternative through trip was deemed in order, especially as Bob Hall was still unsure about his shoulder (which he had dislocated whilst in a swimming pool a couple of weeks earlier!) and didn't fancy loads of miserable meanders.

An early start was had: well it was early for us, which meant we actually began caving before midday. This was a great advantage, since for once we were not slogging up the hill in the full glare of the sun.

A reasonable rate of knots saw our team of six quickly down the now-familiar series of Lantern Pitches and to the head of the P36. This is where the through trips to the Guiers diverged. The head of the P36 was actually a lead on the side of a large aven, which had some dodgy-looking rope disappearing to its heights. Our route was down. The rigging was straightforward following the "pull-through" route, although a clear hang from the wall could not be achieved. About 10m from the bottom a large ledge was encountered: dropping down this saw us next to a stream. This was followed and almost immediately reached what the guide described as a "petit cascade" and was stated to be an easy freeclimb. However we found a rigged pitch of 10m (just as well since we didn't have the rope for this). There appeared to be a route following the stream, but it didn't look particularly easy, and it was wet! From the bottom we followed the rift into a familiar meander-style passage. Here the route became unclear. Initially we went high, but this started to look very dodgy as the rift became wider, the drop bigger and even Bob Hall didn't seem keen. Exploring the rift downwards was then tried at a spot where a bit of red tape had been spotted. The floor of the rift was quickly reached with the stream, and very soon a traverse line was reached and the second petit cascade was encountered. This was rigged and again the guide had suggested that this was a free climb. However using

the rope was definitely the wiser option, even the knackered French tat that was in place!

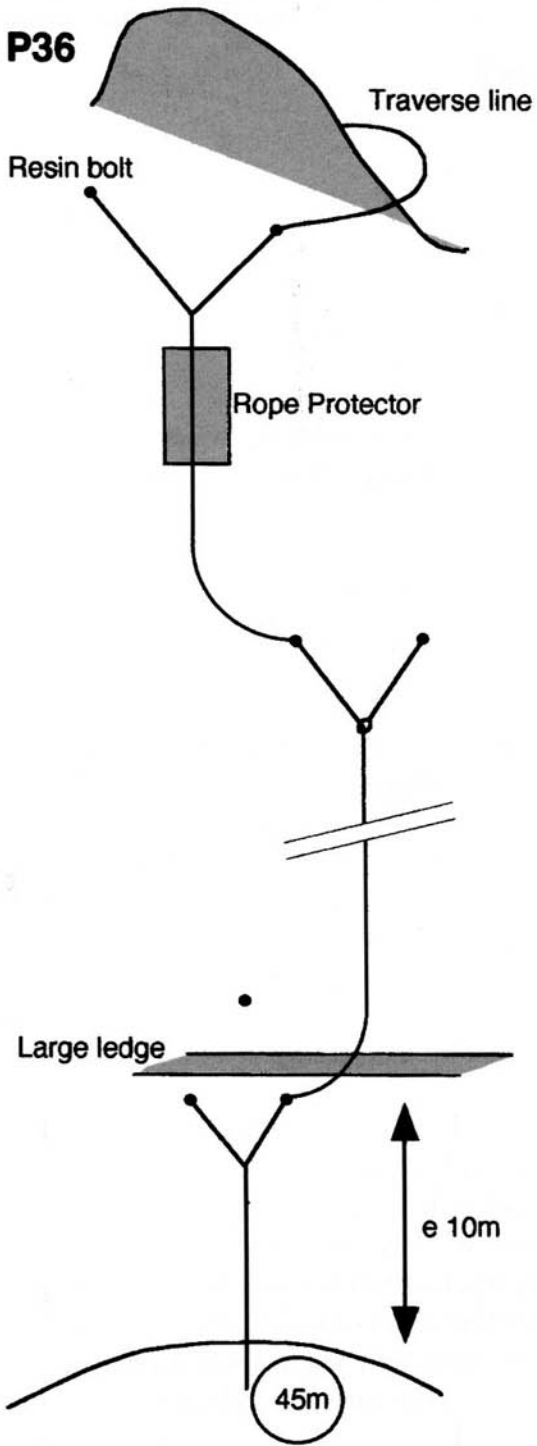
So down we all went and continued on our merry way. Here "slightly meandering ledges" were followed as stated in the guide, to reach another traverse line hanging on the left. This crosses the Puits de L'Arche and has an abseil-and-swing-onto-a-ledge at its end (watch for rub points on the pre-rigged tat if in place). Here the head of the Puits des Malchanceux is reached, the first of two P11s we had carried rope for (the previous two petit cascades were not meant to be pitches). Again the pitch was pre-rigged with French tat and a decision was made to use it to save derigging. This was despite the interesting way the two spits had been loaded by the use of a continuous loop of tape (see diagram).

Off the bottom was a short length of stooping passage which brought us to the head of the second P11, again pre-rigged with a knackered piece of plaited horse's tail which we used, but it did have a decent Y-hang. Here we reached the Champs Elysee which marked the start of a fine series of fossil galleries. Our expedition had so far gone well and this was deemed a good spot to dine out, fettle carbides and siphon the python (or otherwise). Here your SWCC Conservation Officer will admit to a crime - sitting on a rock I crushed a cave beetle.

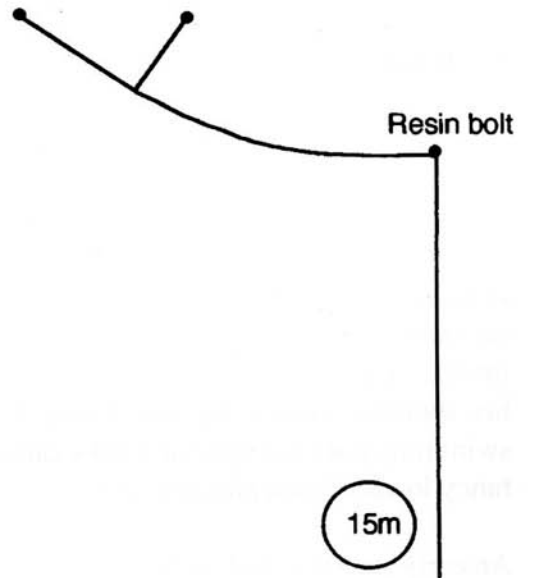
Suitably refreshed and chilled we made a decision to go left, a decision somewhat aided by a large cairn and rock arrow, and started to stomp along large fossil phreatic passage which had non-carbide covered formations, quickly reaching the Galerie des Champignons. This passage was filled with bizarre nobbly concretions which had a strange moonmilk effect on top, hence a resemblance to mushrooms. Even stranger was the fact they hadn't been stomped to death or covered in carbide. Very quickly we



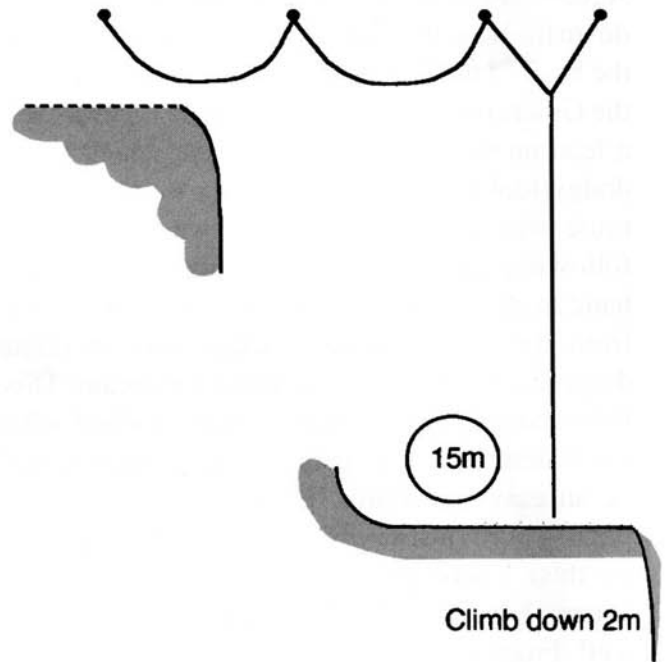
# 1. P36



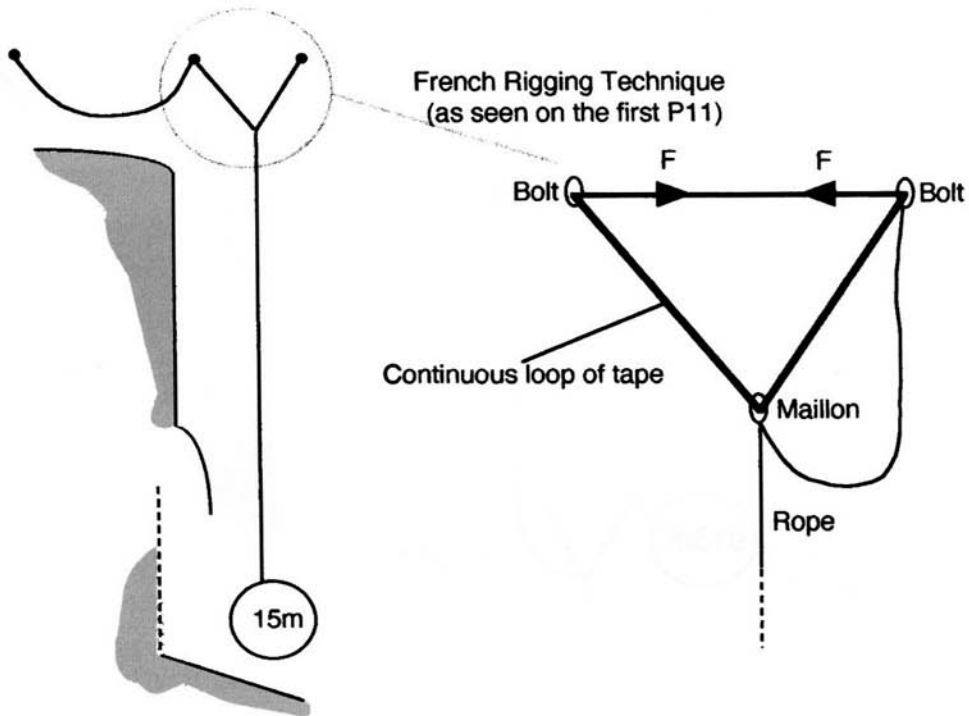
# 2. 1st 'Petit Cascade'



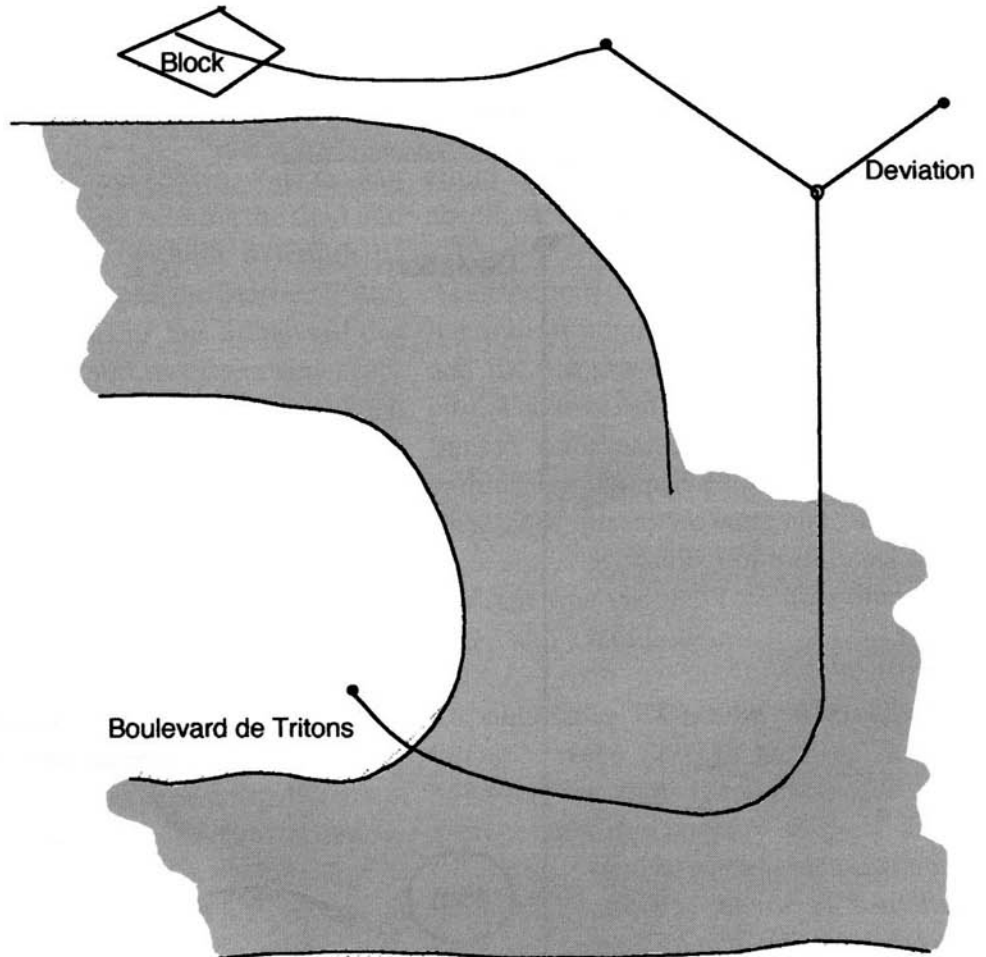
# 3. 2nd 'Petit Cascade'



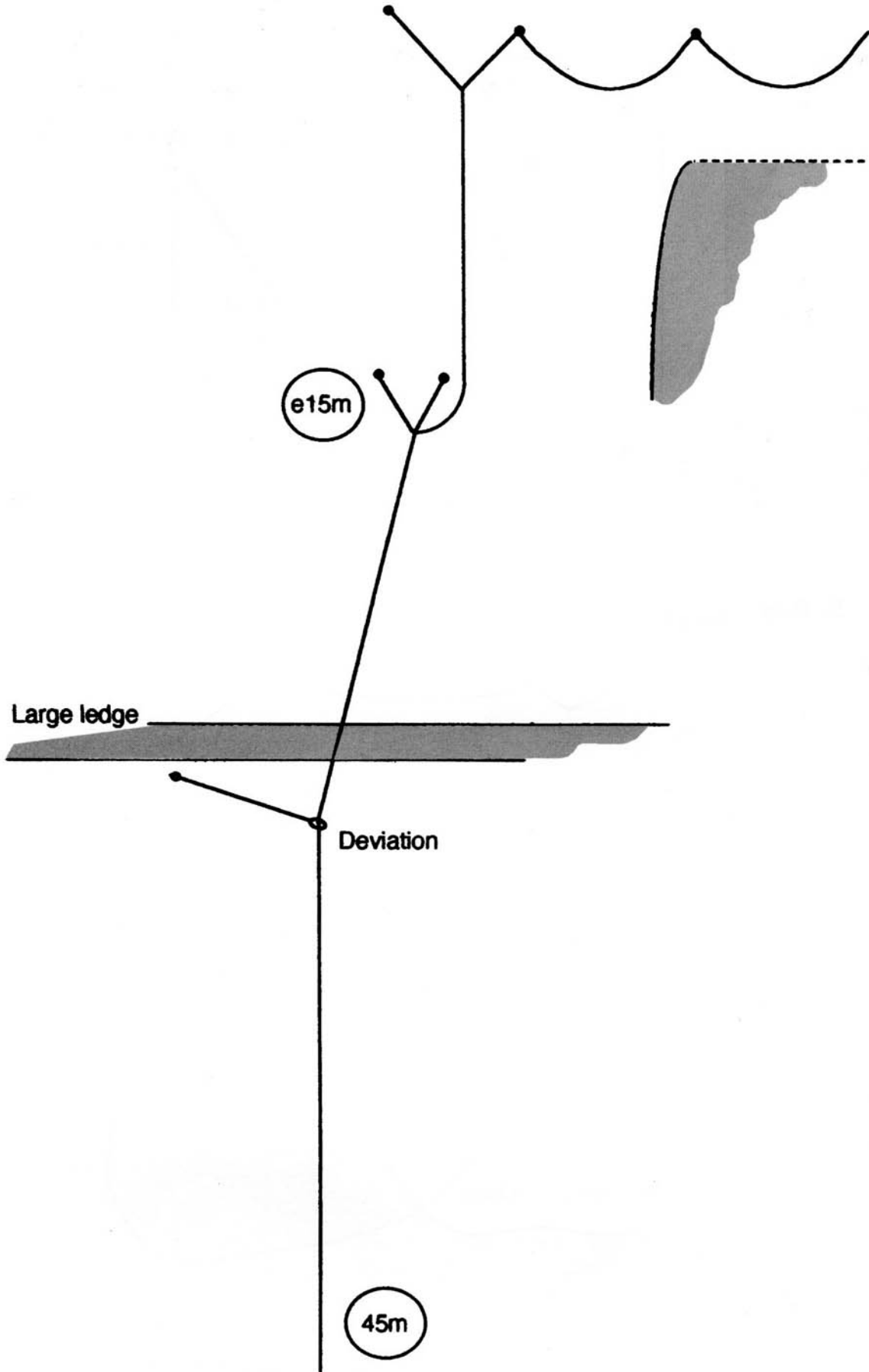
#### 4. P 11's (both rigged very similarly)



#### 5. Puits Banane



## 6. Puits Pierre



covered the next 500m of fine phreatic gallery and arrived at the next challenge, the Cascade Rocheuse which required us to go up 50m. Luckily a line was in place, but if it isn't the guide book recommends;

1. Freeclimb (!)
2. Use a lower route through the Puits de Cerf and into the Metro.

The cascade is at a slight angle and as a result the rope is against the rock, making SRT awkward. The alternative is to self-line up the pitch. Halfway up is the first rebelay where the bottom of a ladder is met. Once at the top the passage slopes off down to quickly reach a pot. Here if you go under a rock bridge you can traverse the right wall to reach a handline, or easier is to climb above the bridge and follow beddings along the side of the pot. From here the Puits Banane was encountered. Again the pitch was pre-rigged and had a particularly fine brand of mud-coated rope which had excellent Petzl Stop erosion features. This was an entertaining little pitch in which you followed a traverse line from a block to a 10mm anchor. About 3m below was a deviation. Abbing down, you then had to drop level with a large passage entering the shaft and pull yourself over to meet up with a length of knackered ladder (probably from the Herbert's dig) and a scramble up to the start of the Boulevard des Tritons. This passage has good entertainment properties due to the trench in the middle of its floor which at times had the six of us, in a line, doing a waddle resembling a pack of demented penguins with sore arses!

The passage continued as well-decorated, walking-sized and phreatic. The junction with the Metro was particularly impressive due to the mixing of the air currents from these two large phreatic tubes, creating a misting effect and an even more impressive draught. Although more passages were appearing the route remained easy to follow with small arrows or reflectors as extra guides here and there. A traverse around the Vire Rias was easily followed via a fixed line on the left, and the impressive Puits Isabelle quickly met. This is passed by a short crawl on the left just before the pitch, which meets a short traverse with a fixed

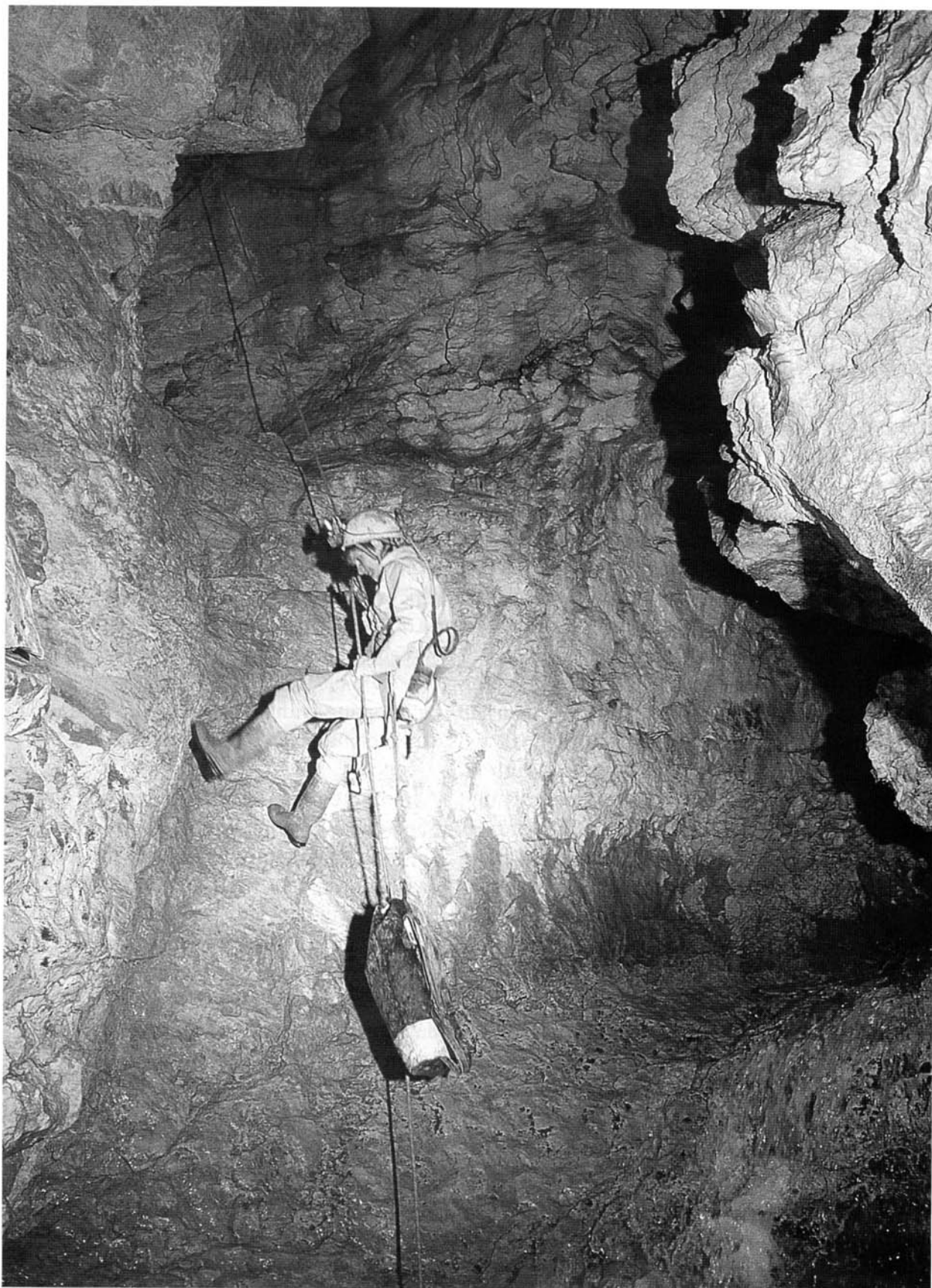
rope. The route is easy and gives an impressive view of the drop.

Large passage is again followed for about another 100m to where a small left-hand passage is met, although the main route appears to continue straight on. This is a low crawling passage which is followed to the top of the Puits Pierre, a 35m pitch. Again the pitch was pre-rigged and again we decided to use it, especially as I was the first down and had the rigging gear! The first part of the pitch was to prove most entertaining. First you have to visualise the rope we were about to use - thin, oval in cross section, glazed and covered in mud. My first experiment in descending this rope was most interesting, and this was despite using a braking krab in the system. As I attempted to descend a good foot of rope would just drop through the Stop, giving that sudden freefall sensation. The word was sent up to the others to warn them that this rope was fast! (Later confirmed by Martin who did a bit of a freefall indicated by a loud "AAAAARRRRGH!") As each team member descended the rope so improved the technique for descending in a controlled manner, culminating with Bob's method which used a classic abseil combined with the Petzl Stop.

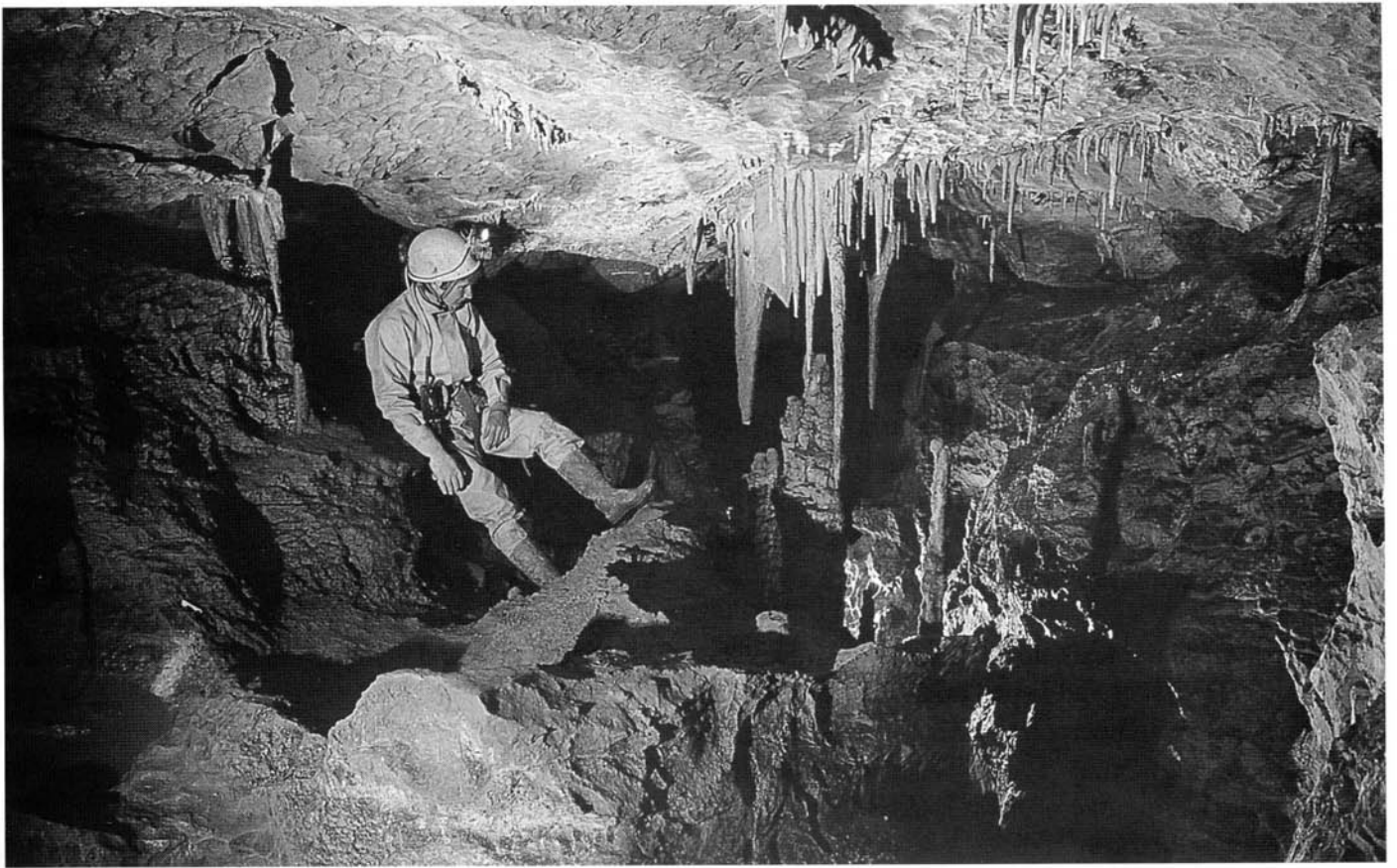
At the bottom was the final low section out, the Reseau Sanquin, a combination of hands-and-knees crawls and flat-out gravelly bits where the draught howled past. The way out was pretty obvious since you were limited to the passage you could fit in, but plenty of carbide arrows marked the way anyway. From this final bit of misery we were almost blown out into the large entrance chamber of the Guiers Mort, where the daylight was visible. Total trip time was a leisurely seven and a half hours.

To summarise - this was an excellent through trip taking a route through the vast network of fossil galleries. The route is recommended, especially as it crosses different territory to the "classic" route of Chevalier *et al.* The route is also easier and much less prone to flooding problems. If you want to see the Dent de Crolles system then do both the classic and the alternative routes.

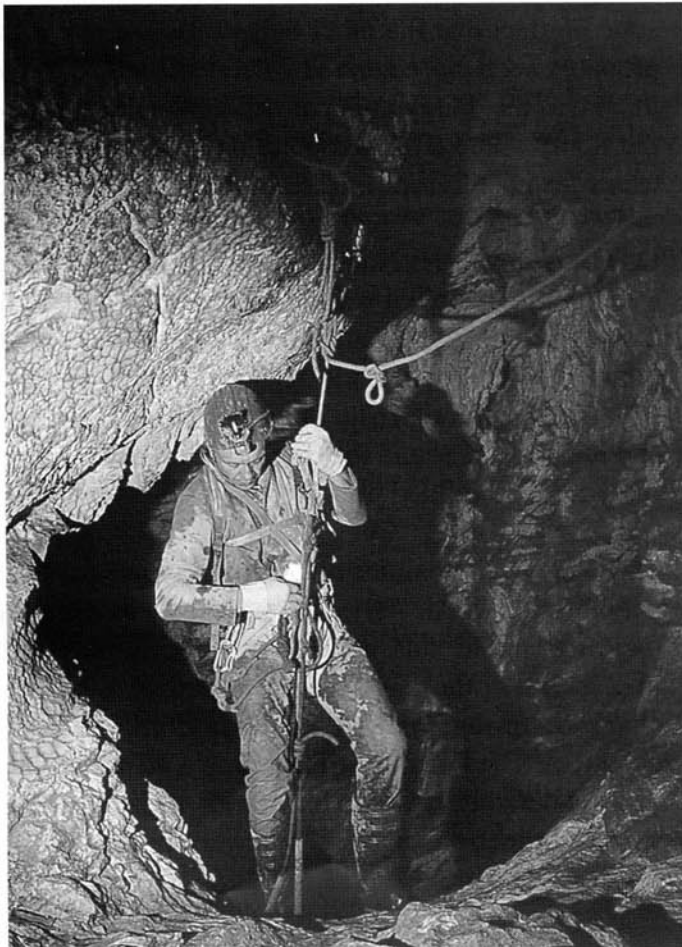
## Photographs of the Dent de Crolles System by Julian Carter



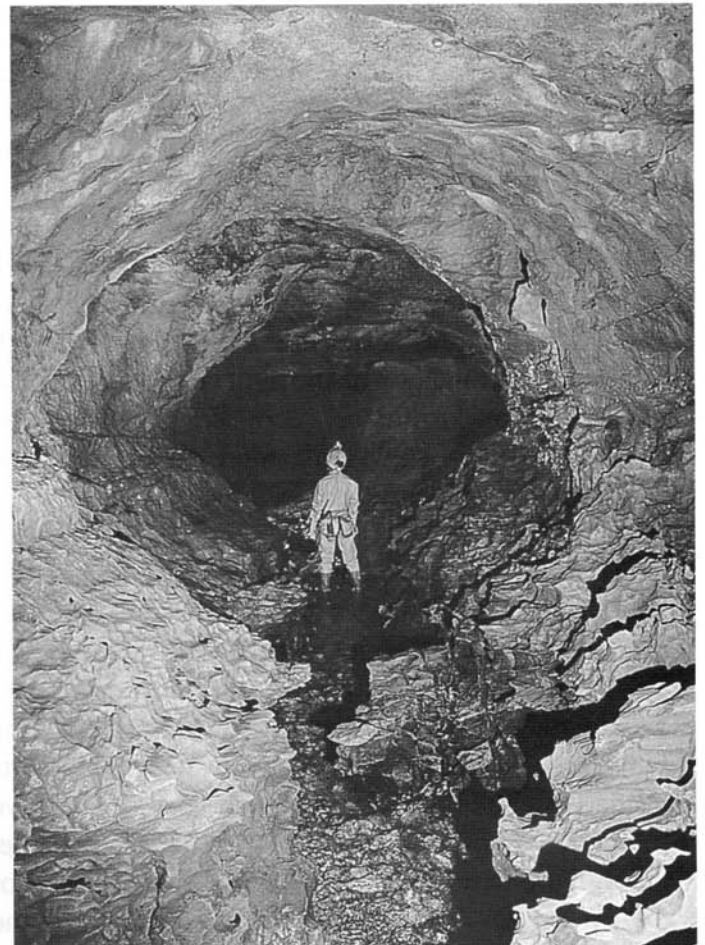
Sue Mabbett descending Elizabeth Cascade



Above: Sue Mabbett near Stalagmite Traverse



Above left: Paul Quill at the top of Elizabeth Cascade



Right: Sue Mabbett in the passage between Bivouac Gallery and Stalagmite Traverse

# Out on a Limb on a Wing and a Prayer: Trou du Glaz to the Grotte Chevalier, 21/08/96

*by Martin Hoff*

A nice simple through trip for three fit, experienced and capable cavers. Six hours the guide said. We'd already covered the first half of the trip, we expected to rig the next two pitches as far as the fixed ropes and fly down them (if you've used in-situ French ropes you'll know how literally that is meant). Six hours it said, but we could probably do it in less...

Nearly used to the walk up to the Glaz by then, Clark Friend, Tony Baker and I sped up the hill to change in front of some archetypal British tourists. "Are you going climbing?" they asked. When they heard we were going caving one of them looked thoughtful for a second and then continued "...presumably you need lights as well then?" Well spotted, and the theme of stating the obvious was upon us for the rest of the trip.

The trip to the top of the Puits Fernand took an hour and a quarter, and from here on we were in territory new to us. This 25m pitch used all of our 30m rope to hang just short (like three feet) of the floor. Round a couple of bends and up onto a large ledge on the left; the traverse line attached to various nobbly bits of rock was fairly confidence-inspiring as far as the crux move - a bold step from what was left of the ledge on the left wall to the continuation on the right wall. The Diaclose Annette followed, a short section of awkward rifts with tight corners which led to more easily negotiated passage.

Down a straightforward but narrow pitch, taking care with the deviation attached to what looks like a small pile of birdshit, and about as firm. The big stuff, the Tal-Draenan-plus-sized proper stuff then; we could walk without stooping, traversing round the top of the Puits de la Vire as far as the next meander. This starts in the floor, on the right side of the passage and we found it without mishap. Bit of a struggle to get through the first bit, and off we rattled to the base of the up pitch, a reasonably roomy relief from the confines of the meander.

A traverse line led off from the top of this 10m pitch,

and this took us up over some "firmly" lodged blocks to the top of a pitch; something like a tri-hang with a huge steel ring in the middle ought to have made it obvious, but following the instructions which said we would cross more than one pitch head before the one we wanted to go down, we trotted off over a couple more dodgy traverses following a howling gale of a draught and reached the base of a well-watered pitch, a pleasant stop and a chance to fill up with water.

This oversight, at least, we were to live to be grateful for. Back the way we'd come, then, to the Puits Maurice, a fine 55m pitch rigged as we expected. This trip had been my idea and so I was duly elected to take the plunge. At both rebelays the comforting sight of a bright shiny new hanger was accompanied by the sobering fact that the other hanger looked like it had probably been placed there by Petzl himself. And then there was the dodgy knot pass about twenty feet from the floor, where a rubbed point had been knotted out to ensure that this rope too did not quite reach the floor.

Onwards down the Nadine Meander to the Puits de l'Oubliette; by now it was becoming clear that all the pitches were rigged, and that the 60m rope in the bottom of Clark's tackle sack was also likely to complete the through trip. This pitch was a little damp, and the traverse round the corner would make for real fun without the fixed line.

These few technicalities out of the way, we made our way through the heavily calcified crawls to the top of the final pitch; this area must have looked quite impressive in the days before a herd of wildebeest charged through demolishing anything remotely attractive. The Puits de la Toussaint, a stunning finale to a moderately taxing trip, a brief walk out of the stonking great passage and we were home and dry. Every word a lie...

The rigging was such that locking off your Stop was a practical impossibility unless you wanted to conduct a series of tests on the forces the rebelay bolts would



**Tony Baker wrestles with the assortment of ropes and chains in situ at the top of one of the Lantern Pitches. Photo by Martin Hoff**

stand; the tautness of the rope meant that at any given moment you had a wide choice of rub points to be worried about, although luckily the rock was fairly smooth, and we were only going down, we hoped; and when you finally reached the end of the rope you had no choice but to swing into the slope of boulders which formed the "floor" to avoid dropping another ten or so feet.

Following the instructions (look, where's your degree in French, you disbelieving bastards?) we kept to the left as we made our way up a passage fit to belong in the Pierre St. Martin, up to 30m wide with a floor composed of boulders the size of cars. A fork: OK, so what are you going to do when the instructions tell you to keep to the left? And off we trotted up the Invisible Gallery. If it actually had been invisible it would have saved us an awful lot of aggravation, and my French might have retained some shreds of credibility. As it was, we headed up to a T-junction from which we had a choice of narrowing rifts, obviously not right, and decided to return to the main trunk passage and the fork.

At this point Tony stepped awkwardly between two rocks and twisted his ankle. While he stopped with Clark to take the weight off his feet some gung-ho imbecile decided that the time could be profitably used in searching for the exit down the other fork. The passage went on, and forked again, but both ways seemed to close down; one stopped fairly rapidly, and the other led to another stretch of Superhighway and that familiar and distinctly different air you get near the entrance to a cave. Nearly there then. Ace!

Having checked the top of the slope of boulders which

appeared to form the end of this passage, and having found no way out despite the trail of cairns leading up to it I was baffled. The obvious entrance failed to (de-)materialise, my carbide and water were definitely running low and as I grovelled around the side of the passage and brought down a few chunks of loose rock on my shoulders I realised that once again I was pushing my luck somewhat... With the other two a good 400m away and my light on the verge of extinction I should perhaps rejoin Tony and Clark. With every step my carbide flame flickered, and as I made my way back towards them I was growing ever more anxious.

I'd been twatting about on my own, failing to find the exit where I was sure it ought to be, and the more I realised just how far I had been from the other two, the more aware I became of just how exposed I was when bits of the roof were falling around me. Feeling decidedly clever I reached Tony and Clark, explained what I'd (not) found and sat down for a welcome rest. I had covered the best part of a kilometre of passage while they had sat and waited for me. Over this time they had considered the situation, and concluded they felt we had tried to go in the wrong direction from the base of the last pitch.

So, back that way then. By this point we had all but used up the water collected at the top of the Puits Maurice all those hours ago, and our remaining fresh carbide stock was down to a couple of small lumps each. Within sixty or seventy metres of the pitch the cave closed down. Not much enjoyment in being proved half right, and off we went again, retracing our steps. Back up to the left fork, trying to follow the wear on the rocks rather than any instructions. It was rapidly



becoming clear we had lost the Superhighway we had been following. All the same we kept going, further this time to the base of a climb which looked quite fearsome, and resolved to retrace our steps once more. With the wisdom of hindsight and a survey in front of me I can confidently say that at this point we were no more than seventy-odd (horizontal) metres from daylight, although that would have included ascending a 90m pitch.

Having elected not to exit through the Grotte des Montagnards we discussed our situation as we headed back to the main passage again. Within moments of realising that we needed water at the earliest opportunity, our luck briefly changed; Tony and I were looking up an obvious side passage so we could write off the whole branch of the fork when a dripping sound suddenly began. Within a minute the volume of water emerging from a hole in the roof was such that we could replenish water bottles, generators, have a quick drink and probably irrigate half of Ethiopia. It had been raining a bit on the surface, then.

Revitalised and doing our best impressions of camels we followed the other branch back to where I had been within twenty-five metres of the surface. At the first attempt we again failed to find a way out, and as we turned to retrace our steps for the nth time Tony stopped. "We must be missing something. The air change is right, and these cairns have to mean something." We looked again, Clark along the left wall, I along the right wall, and Tony up the top. Predictably Tony found the elusive slot almost immediately, and less than sixty seconds later we were stood in the entrance of the Grotte Chevalier looking down on the lights of St. Hilaire du Touvet.

By now it must have been approaching midnight. We'd been underground well before 2pm. Having effectively completed a horizontal traverse from one side of the tooth-shaped mountain to the other there now remained the simple task of contouring round the end to get back down to the car. We finished what food we had left, and I chucked in the last of the carbide and cranked up the water supply to produce a "flaming forehead fireball" effect (copyright P. Quill). At least we'd be able to see where we were going now...

Passing the entrance to the Grotte Annette we contoured round the south end of the Dent, following the path round to the foot of the cliff. where it disappeared. The way on was obviously straight ahead, roughly horizontal

across the thin layer of gravel that briefly resisted gravity. We stepped out, and the further we got, the less I liked the way the gravel was moving under my feet. It had rained heavily for about four hours, or so we were later to hear, but the evidence was clear enough as I climbed down to a patch where the water had washed the gravel on down the valley. This was at least solid rock to stand on.

Tony's lamp had died by now, and the wind was such that it wasn't really worth trying to keep the carbide flame going. The fact we could barely see fifteen feet helped, for although we knew we were teetering along above a fatal drop we didn't really have to face the fact, and could concentrate on trying to get off. We followed the water down for a couple of hundred feet to a cascade that it would have been suicidal to climb down. And although Clark was still carrying that 60m rope we could hardly attach it to the bare rock. Back up again, then. Higher this time, right up to the foot of the cliff; Clark boldly stepped out across the perilous pebbles, and gradually made his way up onto grass and then a path. Tony followed, and it was all I could do by this time to keep moving. Wouldn't it be ironic, don't you think, to have slipped off this final stretch? Careful not to keep my weight on one spot for any time I inched across, trying to follow the impressions made by Tony's feet.

We'd survived. The path led further back to a point I recognised from my trip to the top of the Dent days previously, and we knew where we were; the abundance of water illustrated that good old story of heavy rain while underground, and we returned to the car exactly thirteen hours after we had left it.

If you should wish to undertake this fine trip there are several factors you should take into account for maximum entertainment of the sort we enjoyed: having a survey will erode much of the potential for following erroneous instructions, and encountering other parts of the cave than the main through route; reading such instructions as exist about the walk back round will provide much inspiration and confidence, particularly the bit which says "on no account attempt this walk in the wet"; a short trip down the road on the eastern side from the Col du Coq will provide a spectacular view of the hundreds of metres you have to fall if you are unlucky. And oh, make sure you leave some food and drink in the car for when you return, although the food may not get consumed immediately.

# Fragments from the Chartreuse

by Tony Knibbs

Denise and I arrived, bringing Peter Harvey with us from Toulouse, on the 16 August and installed ourselves on the Martiniere campsite at St. Pierre de Chartreuse.

The first few days were hot and dry, ideal for sweating off a few pounds by moving kit up to the Trou du Glaz and exploring the top of the Dent de Crolles and locating P40 - not forgetting to stand on the highest point (purely for the view, you understand) at 2062m. We also bagged the Pic la Pinea at 1771 as a lead-in exercise; this offered more marvellous views, of course.

## **Guiers Mort - Glaz junction (U-tube)**

Eventually we persuaded ourselves that the weather was deteriorating enough to go underground. On 21 August Denise and I joined two Dobsons and Bob Hall on a trip into Guiers Mort, aimed at reaching the Glaz connections. The walk from Perquelin car park (980m) up to the Guiers entrance (1332m) took about an hour and we entered the cave at 13h00. The stream seemed very low, welling up from beneath the right-hand wall 50m beyond the impressive entrance arch; an obvious hole in the wall evidently carried water but was dry.

We dumped our rucksacks in an alcove before reaching Climber's Chamber where (surprise, surprise and big mistake) we ignored the inviting 10m rope up the right-hand wall and scrambled on down to the sump pool, above which a howling gale blew outwards in our faces. Deep water was not on the menu so we set off up a grotty hands-and-knees crawl to the left, which degenerated into flat-out grovelling then worsened to become a wet squeeze.

"This is not the way," I thought and back-tracked to an obvious right-hand branch, hopped over a low wall of rocks and promptly found the Hurricane on my left - hard to miss, really. With half an hour well wasted we lost no time reaching the Balcony Pitch of 10m, via a deviation down into Grand Canyon. 100m upstream we reached a 6m ascent at the Elizabeth Cascade then,

crossing pools (where was Christmas Basin?) and making various easy ascents got us into Syphon Gallery, past its 12m rope descent then down another 12m pitch to reach La Plage sump - beautiful.

Easy walking over the cobbles of the stream bed soon brought us to a parting of the ways, where we left the stream and climbed up 3m on the right into Bivouac Gallery. We had set 18h00 as the turnaround time - whether or not we reached the U-tube junction - so there was no time for sightseeing. Route-finding was mostly a matter of following one's nose; Pothole Gallery was obvious, the appropriate holes were traversed around and stalactite traverse involved straddling over a deeply entrenched floor for about 100m. The climb of 4m up to the right at the junction with Grand Collecteur gave easy access to a hands-and-knees crawl along a broad ledge for maybe 80m to reach a 10m rope descent into the streamway.

Upstream was now mostly a stroll with occasional pools - including the famous "Piscine" - for company, soon becoming more energy-consuming as numerous short climbs presented themselves. Then, all of a sudden, there it was on the right - the hole in the floor into the U-tube - the rift passage continuing ahead past a laddered inlet on the right to drop into a streamway after 100m.

Having proved the connection, we set off back at 18h30, reaching the entrance just as violent storm was abating. The stream had risen noticeably and the hole in the wall 50m inside was now gushing out water. It was now 22h00 and no time was lost squelching down the path back to cars. Later I looked again at the survey and was surprised to see how much of the horizontal element of the classic through-trip we had covered in this trip - about 60%, reaching over 100m above Guiers entrance.

In the evening of the next day we met Bruno Talour, a local caver who lives opposite the campsite. He

brought us a copy of his guide book describing selected trips in the Chartreuse. Discussing the Dent de Crolles System he recommended an alternative to the normal through-trip, one which took in more of the big, fossil galleries and completely avoided the Guiers streamway by rejoining the entrance passage between Climber's Chamber and the entrance. Yes, it avoids the meanders!

Two through-trips having been made through the "classic" route, the third party through de-tackled from Puits du Pendule in order to put the tackle back into the system from P36 downwards.

### **Trou du Glaz to Grotte Chevalier**

On the 24th August we set off from the campsite at about 10am to do the through-trip from the Glaz to Grotte Chevalier. We dropped two of the party off at the Col du Coq and drove over to St. Hilaire to leave one of the cars at the hospital car park for the return journey. This took longer than expected due to the heavy rain and mist and our two friends at the Col were pretty cold by the time we got back to them.

This meant that the walk up to the Glaz was a lot cooler than usual. The cloud seemed to follow us up and had almost gone by the time we got to the top. Tony and Peter took our kit back down and four of us set off.

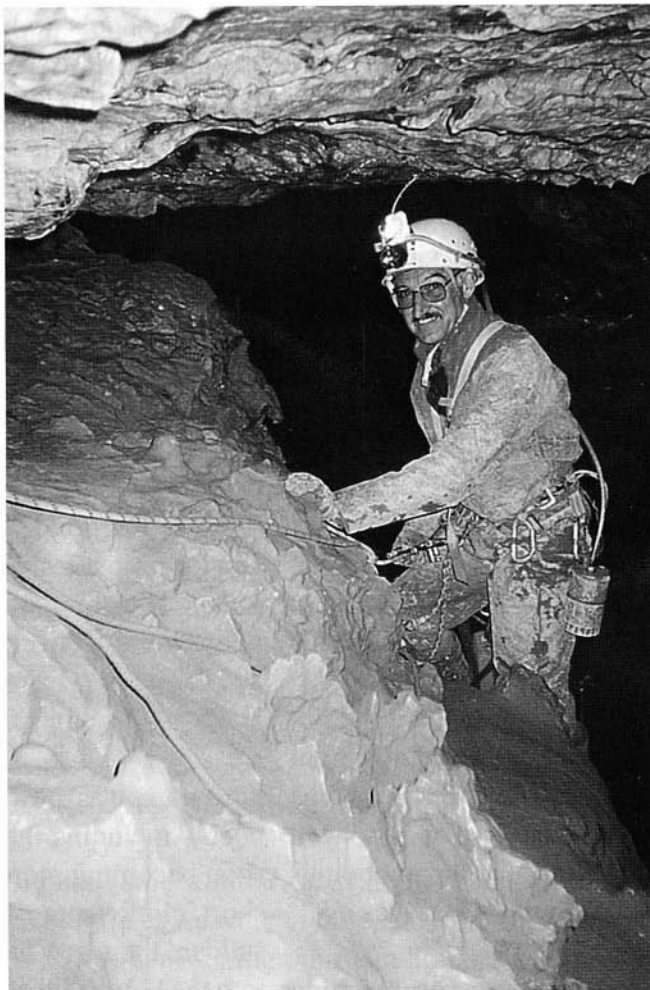
Everything went well and we had no route-finding problems until we were beyond the Fernand pitch. On the traverse line leading to the Diaclase Annette everything was straightforward, down some rifty pitches and round a big hole in the floor. In fact everything was going so well that we forgot to look for a small hole in the floor leading to a tightish meander. Instead we went merrily on and up a fixed rope leading to a big pitch that was not rigged. We began to search for the way on eventually realising that we should not

have gone up, but down. We lost about an hour with this diversion but were soon on the right road again.

The meander was tight at the start and led to a 10m rope followed by the Puits Maurice. Next came the Nadine Meander leading to the Puits de l'Oubliette, an interesting move down to a rebelay and across and round the corner up a traverse line. This led to a low

passage, hands and knees crawl on to the last pitch. Feeling good now that we were near the end, we hadn't banked on the final rope being so tight and a real pain to get on and off. To add to the fun, it was also too short!

But here we were finally in the huge passage of Grotte Chevalier. It reminded us of the large passages in the PSM; you couldn't see the sides. We remembered what the previous party had said about not getting lost here and kept to the left-hand wall, taking care not to go down the left-hand passage. We clambered up what seemed like a never-ending boulder slope until the roof came down to meet the boulders. Here we



searched around on the right for the exit. Climbing up a loose boulder and rock-strewn slope we eventually emerged through a small hole to a beautiful moonlit night. From high above the valley, we could see the lights of the towns below and the mountains silhouetted against the moonlight. One of the most impressive views from a cave entrance I have ever seen.

From here we just had to get back to the car. First a scramble down the slope a bit until we found the path and turned left away from the cave. The walk was about 1hr 30min back to the car. The trip had taken us about eight hours, not including the walks up and down the mountain. Back to camp to find that Peter had drunk all of my beer but that he had made an excellent curry!

### **Glaz Through-trip (P36 to Reseau Sanguin)**

On the 27th August a party of six assembled at the Trou du Glaz portal, just ahead of the rain, at 10am. Peter Harvey had selflessly walked up with us simply for the pleasure of taking rucksacks back to the car at the Col de Coq, then repositioning the vehicle at Perquelin.

The remaining five duly set off for P36, losing little time with the Lantern Shafts. Despite some strange rigging, P36 was quite straightforward and dropped into a pleasant streamway. Two cascades of 11m and 9m in a fine high rift were passed before reaching the wet Puits de l'Arche over which we traversed on fixed lines to reach the 11m Puits des Malchanceux. Now dry, the passage soon brought us to Puits du Bivouac, also 11m, down to the beginning of the roomy passage of Champs Elysee, entered by a turn to the left.

Champs Elysee begins gently upslope, levels off then runs markedly downslope; it later becomes modestly well-decorated with moonmilk and "cauliflower" formations on walls and floor signalling a transformation into Galerie des Champignons. It was while moving downslope over a stretch of these formations that one of the party, Tracy [Miller], took a headlong fall, winding herself and suffering a cut hand. I wasn't the only one to think that this was not the best place for a real accident to happen. We continued steadily downslope to a sudden change of direction as the Cascades Rocheuse was reached. Here we were confronted by an almost vertical wall across the passage, disappearing up 50m into gloom from which a rope hung in one of several deep flutes separated by sharp, raised ridges.

Beneath the wall a small passage carried a steady trickle of water at which we filled the carbide lamps. Ascent of Cascade Rocheuse was rather a messy movement, swinging about across sundry flutings, then the rope was joined by a ladder which either got in the way or provided occasional footholds, depending on one's point of view. The top was a broad, roomy

stance from which a splendid roomy passage - Boulevard des Tritons - headed purposefully downslope for 200m to the head of Puits Banane, a drop of 18m to a traverse off to the left (before reaching bottom) to a 4m climb into the continuation of Boulevard des Tritons.

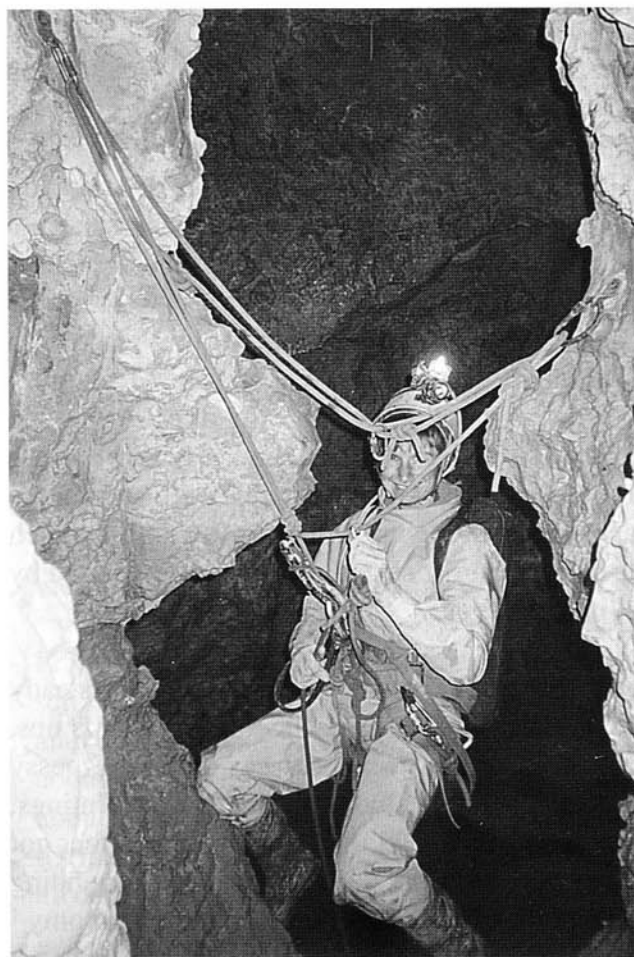
Still going downslope for a couple of hundred metres we reached an obvious route marker: a low wall of rocks across the passage, indicating the need take a left-handed bedding-plane into small passages soon reaching the head of Puits Pierre, 35m. An assortment of grotty ropes was reinforced by an SWCC line, red in colour and thick enough to prove awkward to descend.

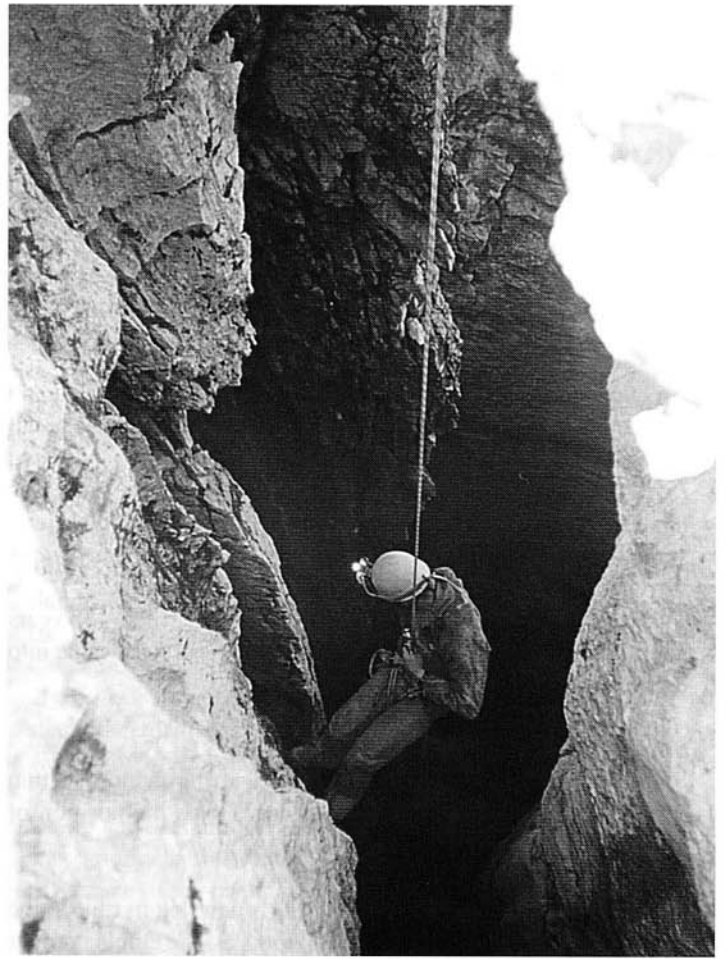
As progress reduced first hands-and-knees crawling to flat-out, so the air current increased to gale force as we grovelled through the final 250m of Reseau Sanguin to pop out spectacularly into the Guiers Mort entrance series between the entrance and Climbers's Pitch. We emerged almost exactly at the point where we had hidden our rucksacks before exploring Guiers Mort six days before! It was now 7pm, allowing an unhurried descent to Perquelin then time for a shower before dinner at the "Atre Fleurie" adjacent to the campsite. Why aren't all caving days like this?

## Photographs of the Dent de Crolles by Bob Hall



Above: the walk up to the Trou du Glaz. Below left: about to leave the Col du Coq, the "Dent" in the background. Below right: Sue Mabbett models the notorious French "tat" which adorns so many pitches in the system.





**Top left: Jules Carter rigging the P36 on the "alternative" through trip. Top right: Iain Miller descending the entrance pitch of P40. Bottom: Sue Mabbett on Puits Banane.** Footnote: all these pictures were taken with a Canon Sureshot A-1 camera identical to that reviewed in N/L no.115 by Tony Baker. No additional flash was used on the underground shots.

# The Great Penwyllt Bang Gang - the Sequel.

"This time it's personal."

by Steve Thomas

An outside view of a parallel universe allows easy viewing and it is simple to skip through time to observe events. You may recall the observations made in a previous chronicle entitled *The Great Penwyllt Bang Gang*, where a skip in time of many years was made to observe the concluding events of that particular tale, and similarly it is possible to retrace time to pick up on events surrounding a different time in the life of the Bang Gang.

This is not a story, this is an insight into daily life when, two years after the formation of the Bang Gang, a new secretary came into being at Penwyllt.

## Starring :

Fred Lettit-bee - A man who holds the warring factions within Penwyllt in a miraculous state of peace. Holds the position of secretary.

Tony Pattercake - Edits the Bang Gang's newsletter, runs to the pub no matter what the weather and works at "the club's premier dig" called Twyn Twan Drynot.

Ian Altered-man - Leader of the diggers at "the Bang Gang's premier dig" in Herbert's Quagmire.

Pat Entranceporch - The treasurer who stops the Bang Gang spending any of its money.

Bob Haul - SRT, first aid and tutor. Has been known to be a touch wild when drunk.

Sue McMahabbitt - An exceptionally fine caver at Penwyllt who insists on not having a romantic relationship with any club members.

Julian Farter - Currently having a romantic relationship with Sue McMahabbitt.

Stevie's Vest - A long time caver, currently working at the "Bang Gang's premier dig", Herbert's Quagmire. Encountered fame briefly when, in a book, he was described as being sick over the side of a boat and later being sick over the side of a mule.

L.C. Fickle - Enjoys rescues and generating large piles of politics related paper.

Sozzled Saunders - A stout fellow who likes an occasional drink. A big grin and a tale to be told from behind a bent arm holding a pint.

Clarke Shoes - A man who enjoys caving politics and surveys.

Clive Moans - A caver of many years and breakthroughs. Thinks that all cavers should be Welsh.

Ow Bristolcream - A dependable caver with a family history running through much of the club. Is very keen to prove how much caving and diving kit will fit into a Mini.

The Old Dragons - Penwyllt catering team who flog themselves stupid feeding drunk morons at parties.

John Listerine - A man who is very good at blowing things up. Has discovered that excessive use of explosives can lead to bad taste in sweaters.

Janice Sorrie - A lovely lass that has the Bang Gang's hearts. Apologises regularly.

Pete Bicardi - Is very happy to run the bar at parties. Has accidentally discovered that most bars have a design defect and need propping up. He selflessly devotes himself to this task.

Alan Woodifeecould - A secret undercover agent from Penwyllt, making sure that all rules are followed to the letter. Most people think that he works in a bank and lives with his mum.

Nickyerdig Rogers - Someone to confide in about your latest project.

Clive Northpuddle - An unstoppable man. When not teaching history to schoolkids he can often be found miles underground photographing distant parts of newly discovered caves or hauling diving cylinders underground and pushing sumps into unknown territory.

Emma Diveporter - Often seen carrying diving cylinders for Clive Northpuddle or posing for photographs for Clive Northpuddle or social caving with Clive Northpuddle or travelling around the country's caving areas bumming lifts from blokes.

Hazel Knutt-Forbes - Currently working herself into the education/rescue hierarchy which, when qualified, will allow her to give orders and tell people what to do without having to go underground

Billy Joel Corrugated - The man behind the Bang Gang. Soon to be under cottage arrest charged with everything.

Liam Caves-Keenly - The Clint Eastwood caver - with two side mounted drills and a bandolier of drill bits, no roof is inaccessible, no aven unclimbable.

Tubby - A pivotal member of the caving grapevine and pub excursions. Still has his dog that was bred from a horse inseminated with wolf sperm.

Scrounger - Tubby's dog.

Ian Middlebum - Has done less caving since losing his virginity. Was an active digger until recently at the "Bang Gang's premier dig" - Twyn Twan Drynot.

Pete Francisnextoswitzerland - A digger, largely involved with the "Bang Gang's premier dig" at Herbert's Quagmire.

Gavin Secondhandman - A very able cave and sub-aquatic cameraman. A week before he was born, a government "cloud seeding" experiment had been carried out near his parent's home resulting in an unexplained genetic oddity in Gavin, allowing him to generate rain clouds every time he thought about fast cars, loose women or caves. These days he could turn the Sahara Desert into an oasis just by taking a caving expedition there.

Paul Quimm - A fashion concious caver that models the latest lumberjack shirts. Currently smokes about ten fags per cave mile.

Dud Gere - Runs the local sweat shop making caver's products. You name it, he'll invent it, improve it or just repair it.

Bent Gere - A slave in his father's sweat shop.

Morag Gere - Runs the gossip department of DragBag Caving products, the outlet for the sweat shop.

The Flobbadobba Brothers - Penwyllt handymen who are rather adept with pyrotechnics.

Bowlegs - A suspiciously bowlegged sheep.

Garies Vann - Cottage warden at Penwyllt.

Brian Legjoint - Spends every spare moment struggling to keep Penwyllt from falling down.

Brain Coupling - Party organiser and engineer, rumoured to have invented an automatic caving suit programmed with the most popular tourist routes, intended to be used on Sunday mornings when people were generally too hungover to cave.

Gary Evansabuv - A man with the impossible task of streamlining cave rescue.

### **Penwyllt, Saturday, 9.14 am.**

The cottage was almost quiet. The only noise was coming from number 8, the natural sounds of a morning following a beer and curry night. Even Sue McMahabbitt had failed to disturb the tranquillity by, yet again, bringing around mugs of tea to the sleeping hordes at 7.30 am. Outside the birds were singing and the early morning sun was warming the spring air whilst the plant and airborne insect life greeted the day.

Fred Lettit-bee looked out of the window by the callout board and sighed. He had been a keen member of the club for many years and had only received a smack in the mouth once during the whole time. Since the episode with the formation of the Bang Gang two

years previously, the rest home for retired cavers at Penwyllt had seen something of a revival. It was now possible to get on the occasional caving trip without attracting too much abuse from other members, and there was even a log book near the telephone, although none of the entries were signed by those involved. Digging and exploration of any kind was still frowned upon, but things had moved forward considerably and Fred held out hopes that the momentum could be maintained. In his capacity as the new secretary he intended to give the club his all and build on the less than solid foundations left since the rebels had taken over the Dump and established it as their headquarters.

### **9.31 am.**

Flatulence and teeth cleaning sounds drifted down the stairs, obscured largely by the crackling and popping of burning breakfasts mixed with pans and plates clattering.

The magic of the morning was gone for Fred so he went outside and looked across the mountain top. To his disbelief he saw flames coming from the Dump's kitchen area and a few of the Bang Gang punching out the people who were trying to extinguish the fire with the club's barrel of beer. The blaze spread to their drying room which promptly extinguished the flames. Smoke and steam then drifted from the building for a couple of hours.

An envoy from the Bang Gang arrived at Penwyllt shortly, requesting a truce as the rebels needed a place to cave from as the Dump was "temporarily out of action". An emergency meeting was arranged and Penwyllt agreed to give the rebels basic assistance - they could use the vehicle inspection pit as a tackle store and cooking and sleeping could be done in the men's changing room. This demonstrated how relations had improved between the clubs and how Fred's leadership was pioneering the negotiations between the cavers and the non-cavers (ie, retired cavers, do nothing talk a lot cavers, rescue club cavers and all the families and friends).

### **1.25 pm.**

The Bang Gang was back at Penwyllt. Some members were edgy but most were happy just to have somewhere to operate from.

### **Sunday, 10.45 am.**

The cottage was almost quiet. The only noise was that of a small team outside hammering nails into wood.

Billy Joel looked out of the window. He saw Scrounger the dog cock his leg on a small child and then wander over to a bin which he proceeded to rip apart looking for a snack. The sun was out and it looked like being a another beautiful day - except for the other thing that Billy Joel could see.

The Flobbadobba brothers were putting their usual ingenuity to the test by building a gallows in the car park. This had been ordered by the committee after the Bang Gang had discovered a mile of new cave during the first afternoon of staying at Penwyllt. The membership was in uproar and had court marshalled Billy Joel immediately. As leader of the Bang Gang, he was sentenced to hang and was locked up in the cottage. Fred Lettit-bee had done his best, but Penwyllt felt that their goodwill had been abused and had no mercy. Billy Joel was to hang at dawn on Monday.

### **2.15 pm.**

The sheep were baffled. A whole Saturday night had gone by and there had been no sign of Billy Joel. This was most unusual. Bowlegs, Billy Joel's long standing acquaintance, wandered over to Penwyllt and bleated. Billy Joel sat up and looked outside. He



whistled and Bowlegs wandered over.

"Hello Billy Joel" she said. "Where have you been?"

"No time to explain" replied Billy Joel. "I'm imprisoned here and have got to get out. They plan to hang me in the morning and I don't intend to stay around here any longer than I have to or I'll miss my sherpas!"

Suddenly there was a commotion and screaming people started running out of the cottage. The toilet plumbing had been needing attention for a long time and had chosen this moment to rupture in the foul water area, depositing three weeks worth of blocked sewage pipe contents on the dozen or so people standing near the key cupboard.

The place was in uproar and Billy Joel seized the moment. He climbed up to the ceiling and punched a hole large enough to get through and heaved himself up into the loft. A few swift kicks and enough roof tiles were displaced to allow him to pass. He slid down the roof and climbed down the rusty drainpipe to a delighted Bowlegs. They both ran off into the quarry and waited for dark. Shortly after 9.00 pm they headed south, Billy Joel intending to lie low for a few weeks. If the Dump was repaired in that time he would come back sometime soon to steer his band of rebels to their destiny in the scene at the end of the last story.

#### **Monday, dawn.**

The gallows were finished. There had been a slight delay during the night when the Flobbadobba brothers had been informed that there was no need to have rocket launchers and firework mountings bolted onto the gallows. It then took two hours to remove their sturdy mountings.

A small group went to get Billy Joel but returned quickly, reporting his escape. Arguments broke out and everybody tried to blame everybody else for the problem. In the end, as the lust for revenge was overwhelming, they decided that they should hang somebody else instead.

Fred Lettit-bee offered himself, if it would help. He was dragged up to the noose where common sense prevailed and they all realised that maybe they should be doing something more constructive like fixing the burst sewage pipe.

#### **Friday, 8.30 pm.**

The pub was just starting to fill up.

Alan Woodifeecould was sat in a very well placed seat and was able to overhear three separate caver's conversations simultaneously. His pencil scribbled notes into his pad as he tried to look inconspicuous.

"Alan's ear wiggling our conversation and writing it down again" stated Stevie's Vest.

"Don't worry" replied Ian Altered-man. "If he heard that after the last explosives were used at Herbert's we broke through, then we'll just have to play safe and put a gate on it".

Alan was confused. He was pretty sure that he had got it right, but it seemed unbelievable.

"Herbert's broke but he's got the explosives for the safe? My God, I'd better report in!"

After knocking a few stools over and colliding with a table and smashing some empty glasses, Alan made a discreet exit and into the nearest telephone box. Here he remembered that he owned a mobile phone then reported the news to his superiors.

#### **Saturday, 8.30 am.**

It was raining. It was also very misty. It was very cold.

Fred sipped his tea and looked out of the window. The repaired,

smoke-stained Dump was barely visible through the fog and it was just possible to see Tony Pattercake returning from the previous night's pub session. He looked incredibly wet and bedraggled and he hadn't even been digging. It was unusual for Tony to run back from the pub but he had made the exception as there hadn't been enough seats available in cars. Unfortunately, he hadn't reckoned on the fog coming in so early and had been running around the quarry all night trying to find his way back to the Dump. He kicked open the door, sat down and had a cup of tea.

"Where's the article for the newsletter?" he demanded of Ian Altered-man. "You promised me I would have it by last Christmas and it's spring now!"

"Er, the dog ate it!" replied Ian.

"You haven't got a dog" stated Tony.

"No, but Tubby has and Scrounger was hungry".

Tony didn't pursue the matter any further. He had heard many excuses from people who had failed to deliver their promised newsletter articles on time but realised that Ian's excuse was rock solid. It was well known that Scrounger would eat anything, preferably from your plate while your back was turned, so Tony couldn't prove anything. Instead, he slagged off Ian's dig at Herbert's Quagmire.

#### **11.55 am.**

The Dump was very active. The diggers were preparing to go digging, the divers were preparing to go diving and the dive sherpas were hiding.

Gavin Secondhandman had a photo session planned in Ogof Mushroom Tea and needed at least fourteen sherpas to help carry the tripods, floodlights, cameras, gantry lighting, diesel generator and diving equipment he needed to get the planned shot.

Twenty minutes later, the diggers left to go to their respective "premier digs" and the divers went off to pose in front of the tourists in the local showcave leaving Gavin alone and next to an enormous pile of expensive equipment. The sherpas had nipped out the back and gone down the pub. Gavin dejectedly sat on the pile of equipment and something went crunch. Then it started raining. Gavin looked over to his Sierra XR4x4, thought about the sixteen year old temptress he had met in the pub the previous night and the skies opened. Scrounger idled over and sniffed around for a snack, cocked his leg on a £1400 Nikonos rig and felt a steel toe cap caving boot in his bollocks. With a woof he quickly limped away to lick his wounds.

#### **4.30 pm.**

Ian Altered-man had been on the sharp end of the days digging for three hours and had opened up a small hole in the boulder choke that occupied the furthest reaches of Herbert's Quagmire. He called back to the others to tell them that he was about to squeeze through the hole and then disappeared. In twenty seconds he was back, panting and looking very pale.

"What's up?" asked Pete Francisnextoswitzerland.

"I think we need to stick a provisional member who desperately wants to join the club into this one" answered Ian.

"That bad huh?" said Pete.

They called over John Listerine and asked his opinion.

"Blow it up" he replied.

They called over Paul Quimm and asked for his opinion.

"Got a light?" he replied.

They called in at the pub on the way home and had a pint.

#### **4.47 pm.**

Tony Pattercake was hacking away boulders on the sharp end of operations at Twyn Twan Drynot. They had made two metres progress in only six months and this really spurred them on. The team was overcome with black space fever.

"It'll definitely go on this trip!" stated an excited Ian Middlebum who was taking time out from finding out what his willy was for to attend the dig.

"No doubt about it!" agreed Tony.

### **8.30 pm.**

The bar of the local hostelry, The Crappy Beer, was beginning to fill up with thirsty cavers.

"It'll definitely go on the next trip!" stated Ian Middlebum.

"No doubt about it!" agreed Tony.

### **Sunday, 11.00 am.**

Clive Northpuddle had all of his equipment ready and had rounded up his sherpas. He was the only cave diver in the area that was organised enough to have willing sherpas asking if they could carry his gear for him. He rarely declined the offer and had worked out a highly efficient way of getting the gear that he had to carry himself underground by strapping it to a Zimmer frame. He could get up the Ogof Mushroom Tea 1 streamway in about twenty minutes without any problems and had proved himself on many occasions to be resourceful beyond belief.

Emma Diveporter was stationed outside the Dump, making sure that there was no sign of Gavin Secondhandman in the area. Water levels were low and Clive wanted to keep it that way.

Suddenly a fast red car screeched up outside the building and out stepped Gavin. With the promise of any photographs taken on his planned diving trip having the possibility of appearing on the front of the next issue of Cavers and Cravings, he swiped all of Clive's sherpas from under his nose. Even the ever loyal Emma was lured by the possibility of being displayed on the front of a caving magazine and defected. Very quickly the sun disappeared and it started raining. Gavin got things sorted quickly and left with his team without telling them that he was actually intending to photograph a rotten miner's shovel at the bottom of a long abandoned mine in the middle of a forest.

Clive philosophically strapped every bit of his kit onto his Zimmer frame and went into the cave on his own. He then Zimmered up the streamway and swam for an hour and a half in his sump discovering two hundred metres of virgin phreas for his efforts.

Gavin got washed out at his dive site in the forest of Pearl and Dean, having found the worst flood to hit the area in thirty years was happening by the time he and his team arrived. The locals were very confused as the weather forecast had been very favourable.

"Looks like you brought the weather with you," said a man with a very strong Forest accent. Gavin avoided eye contact.

"The weather was fine ten minutes ago and now it's a monsoon. Never seen it's like!"

They went into the local pub and Gavin bought the sherpas a few beers and booked them for the following weekend if the floods had abated in time.

### **Fifty years earlier, 2.30 pm.**

All of the local cavers were having a beer in the local pub.

"I know", stated the most drunk caver, "Let's form a caving club and buy that run down row of old cottages up on the hill".

"Good idea", stated the second most drunk caver. "We should

be able to have the building up together in six months or so" .....

### **Fifty years later, 4.00 pm.**

"The roof needs repairing again and the wiring's gone" said Garies Vann to Brian Legjoint. "This place is never going to be up together!"

They were standing next to a bunch of Penwyllt members who had suddenly realised that the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the club was upon them and that nobody had sorted out any kind of celebrations. Brain Coupling quickly took matters in hand and volunteered himself as organiser and the man where the buck ends. Fred Lettit-bee said he would get it together and contact all of the members to get some sort of week of celebrations sorted out.

"I don't want any of those caving types at this party" said the wife of one of those gathered there, "They'll just get drunk and eat all of our food. And what if they've been caving? There'll be mud and dirty kit everywhere".

This was a significant problem and Fred could see that his work was really cut out for him with this one. With the number of people at Penwyllt now involved in regular caving trips on the quiet, this could well cause some friction. In the end, he managed to get everybody around to the idea that they should invite The Rebels from the Dump and get them to pay for tickets to get in. This would mean that the party would almost be free of charge for Penwyllt members and the attention would be on the Bang Gang so the secret cavers within Penwyllt would be out of the spotlight. Although being quite humble and possessing a relatively small ego, Fred was really quite pleased with himself. This was devious and cunning but, at the same time, kept everybody happy without stopping anyone from coming to the party. He had earned himself respect, he felt, as the best secretary the club had ever had.

### **Saturday, 11.15 am.**

Fred sat down dejectedly. The Bang Gang had declined the invitation to go to the fiftieth celebrations as they would be out looking for new cave that week and wanted to get drunk in the local pub afterwards. Fred got up and headbutted the wall next to the callout board. The fiftieth anniversary would just have to be how it turned out and he left it to the others to organise it on their own. He knew when he was onto a loser so concentrated his efforts on the event occurring later in the day.

### **3.00 pm.**

The rescue club were in their element. A high profile rescue practise with plenty of handheld radios, instructions to be given and T.V. cameras promising to turn up was occurring. The Bang Gang volunteer cavers were sitting around in their dusty oversuits looking very miserable and waiting for something to happen. The rescue generals were proudly strutting around looking very important. Gary Evansabuv, Copo and Bob Haul were behind the scenes making sure that all the necessary kit was packed into the landrover and the usual hard core of workers was well out of sight trying to make the event work.

Hazel Knutt-Forbes was the newest of the rescue generals and was practising giving orders with Scrounger the dog. After fifteen seconds, Scrounger realised that there was no food involved with this caper so sauntered away and swiped a Mars bar out of the hand of a four year old boy. He felt better then and had a snooze. Suddenly a shriek made everybody look over to the rescue depot. There appeared to be a fight going on between two of the rescue

generals. Fred Lettit - bee quickly defused the situation and calmed everybody down.

"What's this all about?" he asked in his best calm voice.

"I'm wearing the luminous jacket!" replied one.

"No. It's my turn!" replied the other.

It appeared that one item for the rescue practise had been overlooked. Since the news that T.V. crews would be coming to film the event, the demand on bright lime green jackets with "RESCUE" written across the shoulders had been immense. There simply weren't enough to go around.

With a bit of quick thinking, Fred had the problem solved. He got all of the generals into the building and let five of them go outside in rescue jackets to strut around and give orders. After fifteen minutes they came back inside and gave the jackets to the next five who went outside to strut around and give contradicting orders. All was running smoothly and the generals were relatively happy. Unfortunately the cavers weren't and they went down the pub.

Ten minutes later the T.V. crews arrived and in a very orderly fashion the generals formed a queue in front of each camera ready to be interviewed. The crews looked at each other, packed up and went down the pub.

The rescue practise ended.

### **The following Friday, 6.00 pm.**

The pub was buzzing merrily. Sozzled Saunders was sat at the bay window table with ten of the Bang Gang. He broadly smiled as he related the anecdote of how he got the clap whilst urinating next to a goat in a bar in Hofrika. The cavers loved his tales of life in the merchant navy and were spellbound. Sozzled's arm was in it's usual parked position, horizontally across his chest, with a pint of beer held tightly at the end. He took a healthy swig and continued with his story. Behind him, Julian Farter walked in.

Julian was largely responsible for local cave conservation and had spent the day making a safe route for cavers past some delicate straws in Ogof Mushroom Tea 2 by sledgehammering a large stal boss to pieces and then digging a trench through an unspoilt sediment bank and filling it with concrete. On top of this fifteen breeze blocks were cemented together and the smashed stal boss splinters were sprinkled into wet cement on the top to deter people from climbing over it. He had then painted the breeze block wall bright red and laid a paving slab path around it. The straws were safe. It would be the equivalent of a digging trip for anybody to damage them.

In many alcohol blurred arguments, Julian had stood his ground when accused of causing more damage in a day's conservation work than one hundred years of caving trips could inflict. He justified himself well, he thought, as it was better to sacrifice a "controlled" amount of cave to guarantee the survival of a another part.

He went over to sit with his girl friend, Sue McMahabbitt, and listened to Sozzled's story which, by now, was set in Turkee.

Suddenly the phone rang and Copo was called over to it. It was a rescue callout! After mumbling a few instructions into the phone

Copo announced the situation to a pub full of uneasy looking people. The cavers were avoiding eye contact.

"Serious problem up at Penwyllt!" stated Copo. "I don't have the full details but it appears that the police have received a callout for Brian Legjoint. It seems that nobody has seen him since last Sunday evening. We don't know where he is so it looks like we've got a search on."

The members of the Bang Gang realised what was needed of them and got themselves together in readiness to get to Penwyllt as quickly as possible. Various rescue generals got their mobile phones out and called the local newspaper and T.V. offices to give interviews from the scene. After making sure that their names had been spelt correctly they went out to their cars. They had all learned a good lesson at the rescue practise the previous weekend and they all now had their own bright green jackets with "RESCUE" written across the shoulders. Some very organised ones even had a special "CAVE RESCUE" sign for their car windscreen. Hazel Knutt-Forbes was the winner in this respect. All the other generals were green with envy as she sped out of the pub car park with her very own blue flashing light.

### **7.05 pm.**

Up at Penwyllt things were looking serious. The first of the search teams was back without having found Brian. Liam Caves-Keenly had searched Cwm Dwr finding his bandoleer of drill bits a little awkward in the crawl. He couldn't take it off because, since he had discovered the wonders of modern 10-watt caving lamps, he'd realised that there were holes in roofs everywhere and a bolting ability was the priority of every trip, even a rescue. Pat Entranceporch and Ow Bristolcream returned from Top Entrance shortly, also having found nothing.

Tubby was a bit worried. Brian Legjoint owed him a beer and was supposed to be down the pub at 9 o'clock but at this rate Tubby was going to have to buy his own pint. He took over control of the rescue from L.C. Fickle with an air of urgency. The rescue generals stood back aghast. They looked at each other and made huffing noises. Tubby wasn't noticing and was getting the show on the road with immense confidence. One by one the generals began to look quite impressed. They had never seen such command of a situation and shortly one of them shuffled over to Tubby and with a big beaming smile presented him with his very own bright green rescue jacket. Not wishing to be distracted, Tubby threw the jacket down beside him where Scrounger just happened to be snoozing. It landed on him and he awoke with a jump. Being unsure as to what was happening he got up and sauntered outside. A T.V. crew had arrived and got some great footage of a dog in a rescue jacket.

"Why are you filming Tubby's dog wearing a rescue jacket?" asked Janice Sorrie as she walked past.

"I know a showcave owner nearby who'll pay a fortune if we use this and say it was his dog" came the reply.

"Oh, sorry" said Janice.

A car pulled up nearby and out stepped Pete Bicardi. He was in

action immediately and spent fifteen minutes running in and out of the building with various poles, planks, boxes, steel barrels, more boxes, scaffolding and sheets. Shortly he stopped and announced that everyone could relax as he would have the bar open in five minutes.

A van pulled up and out stepped Dud, Bent, and Morag Gere. Bent and Dud got to it and within five minutes had the mobile shop open and were trading with the cavers.

Morag picked up some of the latest gossip and passed on her own. The atmosphere was very positive and even the non-cavers were beginning to get into the swing of it. A spirit of oneness and unity slowly spread about the place and all energies were directed towards the rescue.

Fred Lettit-bee walked around looking amazed. He had been striving to make the cavers lot a better one for many years and had spent much of his time encouraging all to work together. Now it was happening in front of his face and he was stunned. He couldn't believe it. He also felt a bit strange - almost as though he had nothing to do. His goal had been realised and now there was a big gap left. His mood got worse over the next few minutes and shortly he had a row with someone for having dirty caving kit near his car. He went for a walk.

One by one the search teams returned each reporting no sign of Brian. It was a complete mystery.

The Old Dragons had the tea and soup on the go and fed the hungry hordes. Shortly they realised that they were running out of serviettes but Clarke Shoes remembered having seen a box of them up in the loft. He volunteered to go and get them and disappeared off to climb up through the small hatch and into the loft above the men's toilets. He lifted the lid, climbed up and stopped with surprise. There in front of him was Brian Legjoint. Brian was very red faced and looked in great discomfort. He was bent over and large amounts of sweat was running down his face. It didn't take Clarke long to figure out why Brian was in such a state. There, resting on Brian's back, was the sagging roof of the cottage. Brian, with his best selfless devotion, was holding up the roof of Penwyllt.

"Help" he whimpered. "Been here since Sunday night - It collapsed just before I was going home so I've had to prop it up all week."

Clarke hurried back downstairs and informed Tubby of the situation. All the cavers were called back to base and John Listerine was called in to assess the situation.

"Looks like a scaffolding job to me" he said. It was agreed that the best approach was to start building a scaffold cage around Brian until he could have the pressure taken off him. A large amount of scaffold was required but all were in agreement that the bar should not be dismantled. Pete Bicardi was aware of the potential for this happening and was very alert. Nobody was going to dismantle his bar if he had anything to do with it.

Tubby quickly called in Nickyerdig Rogers as a consultant. He was very familiar with everybody's digs and knew where the best scaffold could be found.

One by one, the digs were dismantled and many years of labour by Clive Moans collapsed into un-enterable boulder ruckles. The cage around Brian grew slowly and eventually the strain was taken and Brian was free. With great concern he was carefully lowered from the loft entrance and stretchered to the bar where he was forced to buy everybody a beer.

Slowly over the passing weeks things returned to normal. Digs were going to go on the next dig, the Penwyllt walking club occupied the majority of cottage beds, a small minority of the cave diving club local section continued to draw surveys on rubber paper (quadrupling dimensions with accidental stretching) in between talking very loudly about how hard they were underwater despite the fact that they didn't do any cave diving, and most people hated the Bang Gang. Fred Lettit-bee recovered from his brief period as a depressed alcoholic with no direction in life as Penwyllt again needed his guiding hand in all matters.

#### **Saturday, 9.14 am.**

Fred Lettit-bee looked out of the window by the callout board and sighed. He felt good. The mountain side was misty and the cars parked outside were just visible. An argument broke out between a caver and a non-caver, the plumbing burst a pipe nearby and some more of the cottage roof collapsed.

"Great" he said with a beaming smile and set off on that day's mission.

# A Winch for Wales!

by *Graham Christian*

When I first saw the ICBM silo that masquerades as Babysitters' Dig at the beginning of May 1996, I was impressed. I was also impressed by the amount of energy that was needed to haul the buckets of digging spoil and rocks up to the surface. It was during one of the breaks for resuscitation that someone said that what we needed was a motorised winch. Knowing that my father was considering buying a new lawnmower, and that Paul Thorne (KURG and OCC) had built his own man-riding winch using a Briggs and Stratton lawnmower type engine, I said that it was worth thinking about.

My father was encouraged to buy his new mower (all belts and interlocked levers) and a call to Paul in Dartford was made to discuss the possibilities. Paul immediately offered me some parts that he had no need for and invited me down to pick them up. Over a coffee he gave me tips and hints on construction and offered yet more useful bits. Anyone who wants a sight of his engineering capabilities should see the rope washer at Orpheus CC's cottage and try the mains-powered gas lighter!

There now followed a period of consolidation where I had a lot of parts and lumps of metal. The mower was stripped down and the bits inspected. A second old mower (a two-stroke Atco) was also disassembled and thrown into the equation. A further visit to Babysitters' increased my conviction and serious planning started.

## The Box of Bits!

I now had various facts to hand, which could start to dictate the design:

The winch is to be based on a 98cc Suffolk Punch engine, developing 1.5 hp at 3000 rpm. The winch wire is to be 4mm galvanised R.H. ordinary lay small wire rope of 7 x 19 construction, having a breaking strain of 1000kg. The purpose of the winch is to haul buckets of digging spoil and small rocks up a shaft that is currently about 7m deep.

The Suffolk had a 10 tooth drive cog, 30/10 interme-

mediate and 25 tooth cog on a dog clutch. The Atco had a 20/10 ratchet drive, a single 28 tooth cog, and a 22/10 intermediate.

Supplied by Thorne Engineering of Dartford at no cost, with best wishes, were the following:

- 1 off drum centre, ends faced true
- 2 off drum end plates, marked for drilling
- 1 off used, certified, headframe pulley for wire
- 1 off rear Mini brake drum, backplate and shoes
- 1 off 49 tooth, 1/2" pitch x 5/16" wide motor-bike cog
- 1 off length of chain, 1/2" pitch x 5/16th wide

Also available were photos of Paul Thorne's winch and kibble, for studying the construction.

## Some Headwork

In order that the lifting power of the winch could be calculated, first the torque had to be resolved.

$$P = \frac{2(\pi)NT}{60}$$

where P = power in watts

N = revolutions/minute

T = torque in Newton/metres

60 = seconds/minute

From the engine specifications the maximum output power is 1.5 horsepower which equates to 1119 watts at 3000 rpm.

$$\text{Thus: } 1119 = \frac{2(\pi) \times 3000 \times T}{60} = (\pi) \times 100 \times T = 314.2 \times T$$

$$\text{So: } T = \frac{1119}{314.2}$$

Therefore the torque of the engine = 3.56 Nm

The drum of the winch is to be 115mm diameter, and the wire is 4mm diameter. Assuming that there are two layers of wire on the drum.

The effective radius of the drum is

$$\frac{115}{2} + (2 \times 4) = 65.5\text{mm}$$

which expressed in metres = 0.0655m

now  $T = F \times r$

where T = torque, F = force and r = radius.

So  $F = \frac{T}{r} = \frac{3.56}{0.0655} = 54.4\text{N}$

The force due to gravity acting on 1kg is defined as 9.81N, so a wire attached to the drum can lift a weight equal to  $\frac{54.4}{9.81} = 5.54\text{kg}$

if the drum is attached directly to the engine output shaft, which it is not!

If the gears on the donor lawnmower only were to be used for constructing the winch, the following calculations resulted:

Existing gear ratios = 1:2.5, 1:2.5, 1:3

Effective reduction = 1:18.75

Assumed efficiency of system = 0.75 (75%)

Maximum weight for hauling =  $5.54 \times 18.75 \times 0.75 = 77.9\text{kg}$

Where the effective radius of drum = 0.0655m

the length of one turn of wire =  $2(\pi)r = 0.412\text{m}$

Speed of engine at max. power = 3000 revs/minute  
= 50 revs/sec

The hauling velocity =  $\frac{50}{18.75} \times 0.412 = 1.099 \text{ m/s}$

The following table of gear ratios/winding velocities /max. loads was made to help achieve a suitable figure for gear ratios:

Ratio	Velocity	Load
18.75:1	1.099 m/s	77.9 kg
20:1	1.03 m/s	83.1 kg
25:1	0.82 m/s	103.87 kg
30:1	0.69 m/s	124.65 kg
40:1	0.52 m/s	166.2 kg

From the above table it was deduced that the best ratio would be between 25:1 and 30:1, enabling a heavy kibble to be raised at a reasonable speed.

A big unknown was at what speed the centrifugal clutch cuts in. There has to be enough power at that speed to also lift the load. A snatch lift would not be a good idea, although still a possibility. These worries about the clutch were not resolved until the winch was actually built and tested.

### Make Your Mind Up Time

The dog-clutch, old roller shaft and 25-tooth cog would be used for the winch drum. This would be driven by the original Suffolk 10/30 tooth intermediate cog. This gives a reduction of 1/2.5. The Atco intermediate 10/22 would drive the Suffolk intermediate. The reduction is 1/3.0. The 49-tooth bike cog could be bolted to the 22-tooth side of the Atco cog, and a new cog fitted to the output shaft from the engine. The existing one was jammed on and getting graunched in the attempts to remove it. A bit more maths of the what-if variety:

$$\frac{10}{25} \times \frac{10}{30} \times \frac{\text{new cog}}{49} = \text{final reduction ratio}$$

12 teeth would give 1/30.625

14 teeth would give 1/26.25

Using the same calculations as tested above:

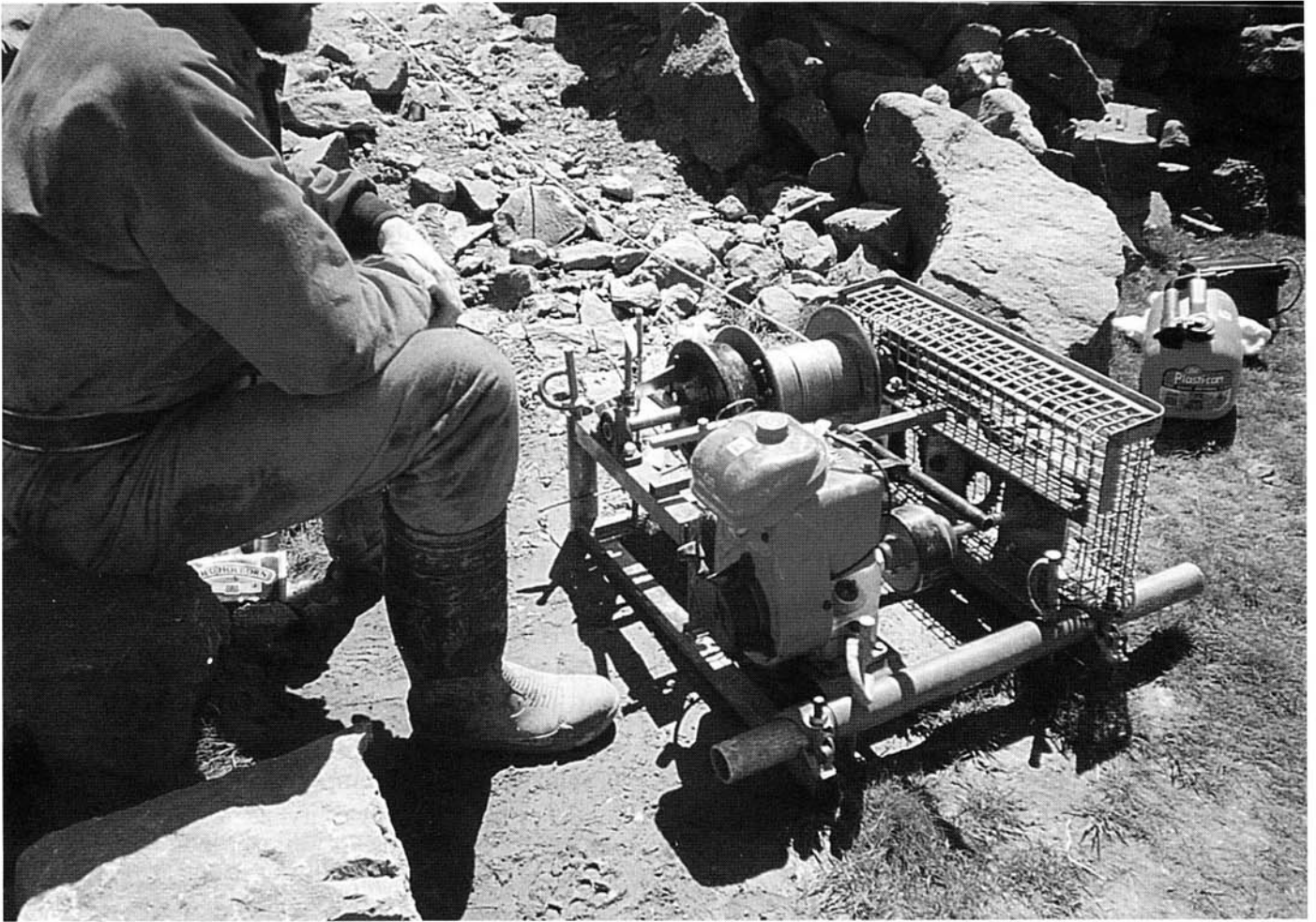
12 teeth would lift 127kg at 0.67m/s

14 teeth would lift 109kg at 0.78m/s

Armed with this information, I called at Redhill Bearings to see what they could supply. They could offer the 14 teeth, so that was that. A pair of decent bearings for the drum and a chain link saw me heading to Horley Drill Services for a tap to put a thread through the middle of the new cog. Once again "Thorne Engineering" in Dartford was able to assist with a bit of machining.

### Now Just Put It All Together

The drum was made from the parts supplied by Paul. Small holes drilled in the end plates and nails tapped through to ensure that the ends were centred on the drum centre. A length of studding up the middle, bolted up as tight, ensured that there was as little movement and bowing as possible when the ends were welded on. The old clamping rings from the lawnmower



roller were salvaged and welded on too, so the drum could be clamped onto the shaft.

I knew that it had to be as compact as possible for minimum weight and ease of transport. I intended to use existing chain lengths, as they should be fairly close to ideal. To be able to clamp the winch to scaffolding would be useful, so scaffold pole could be used in the construction. A length cut in two would give enough height to the drum to allow the driving chain to be run from vertically below it. A quick layout of the other drive components showed that two bits of square tubular steel table frame would be long enough for the base rails. The drum shaft dictated the distance between the upper angle iron rails. The first intermediate gear back from the drum was mounted. The large bike cog was bolted to the second intermediate gear, and that mounted.

The engine mounting plate from the lawnmower was pruned down in size, the engine re-attached, and placed on two strips of angle iron across the base of the winch. This was then slid back along the base until the chain from the bike cog was tensioned correctly on the drive cog on the end of the engine output shaft. A mounting plate for the output bearing was fixed and the engine mountings welded into position.

Attention was now turned to how to stop the thing from dropping full buckets back down the shaft. It was probably the most difficult part of the winch to design, with many scribblings on bits of paper. If the engine failed when lifting a bucket of rocks, then the design had to be such that the drum could not reverse and unwind the wire. Some form of ratchet mechanism was therefore needed. It was finally decided to fix the ratchet teeth to the brake drum and the pawls to the winch drum. With the brake on, the winch drum could wind in, the pawls clicking over the ratchet teeth. If the direction of the winch drum was reversed the pawls would lock up against the teeth and the "on" brake. By releasing the brake drum, the winch drum would then be allowed to wind out the wire again.

A spare Land-Rover driveshaft end cap was turned down to my specifications by return of post from Thorne Engineering, and the teeth of the ratchet dog cut into it. The ratchet pawls were made with bits of metal found lying around and the springs are Land-Rover gearbox detent ball springs that just happened to be available after a rebuild. I knew that they would come in handy one day! The brake backplate was

cleaned up, and using old phosphor bronze bearings from the lawnmower roller, the brake assembly was fitted. A lever to operate the winch drive dog clutch was welded on and the two connected with a bit of the winch wire. The winch wire was fixed to the drum and wound on. At this stage Clwb50 week arrived and I took the nearly-finished item and a few bits down to Wales.

A throttle control lever was fitted in the workshop of No.1 Powell Street, and the debate on how to operate the brake started. It was found that a long extension attached to the short brake operating lever was sufficiently heavy to hold the brake on. In this state a headframe was knocked up out of scaffolding and the winch was tested for the first time. We actually managed to lift 100kg of water! 125kg was too much, so it looked like it was built right on specification.

We (that is, the interested parties) were not happy with the long brake lever arrangement, so we sought to shorten it and use a spring to maintain tension and the brake on. This still did not seem very positive, and having to hold the brake off could be a nuisance. One of the resident mining engineers suggested using a screw thread to wind the brake on and off, as used on various lumps of machinery to be seen underground. This seemed sensible, so it was adopted. The winch then went into action on Babysitters' Dig and has proved itself to be very effective, raising an estimated 4 tonnes of spoil in a single day.

There have been a few improvements along the way, the most obvious being a cage over the flailing chains. A gate for the dog clutch lever allows it to be held open, and a scaffold pole and clamp arrangement at the back of the winch provides for ground anchoring or assembly into a headframe. Improvements in the future are an engine investigation, as it seems to be blowing oil and have lost a bit of power, and a handbrake lever like that on a car that will be easier and quicker to operate than the screw brake, but still be safe.

The diggers at Babysitters' have noted that bailing the bottom out before digging can commence is a tedious process: a pump would be nice...

**Opposite page: the winch in use over the Whitsun Bank Holiday weekend, 1997. Photos by Phil Buckberry**



# Somewhere in France

by Nig Rogers

Each year I go on holiday to France, not solely to go caving although I do usually try to have a few trips while I am there. The caves are better than here in Wales and I am normally content with just seeing the sights, not bothering to go looking for new stuff. In the past I've dug a few chokes, climbed the odd aven but haven't really found anything decent. Last year was different.

The phone rings. It's Erik on his mobile, stuck in a traffic jam in Brussels.

"O.K. Nig, I meet you somewhere in France on Monday and we go caving - yes?"

"Fine, but where?" It's Thursday night and these arrangements sound nebulous even by my standards!

"I call you back. Have a map ready."

One phone call later I've got a cross in my Michelin Road Atlas marking a supposed campsite near a town I've never heard of. Erik assures me the site will be open even though it's early May. Of course, it isn't and we eventually meet up early the Tuesday morning having spent the night at different places.

The cave Erik intends taking me down sounds interesting to say the least. Discovered the previous summer and now 5km in length, it lies in a relatively virgin area some distance from the nearest recognised caving region. Originally explored via a tortuous entrance series (two hours' crawling to reach the big stuff), two further entrances have since been found and we are to use the easier of these (30 minutes' pleasant passage to reach the same point). Sounds good to me!

The fun begins when we leave the main road at a small village. Following Erik's van along kilometre after kilometre of rough, steep forest track I can't decide whether he's trying to confuse me on purpose so that I don't divulge the location (still a closely-guarded secret known only to the six people, four Belgians and two French, to have visited the cave so far). If so, it's working because I soon haven't a clue where we are or how we have got there! Eventually we pull to a halt at an obvious corner before an even steeper section. The only landmarks are trees - lots and lots of trees! Erik tells me the entrance is only a few minutes away so we begin changing. Having spent years walking round Yorkshire dressed in caving gear looking for potholes which people have told me are easy to find, getting hot and sweaty in the process, I'm somewhat sceptical. Erik reassures me, he was here only six weeks ago and the cave is easy to find - it is near a tree! Six likely-looking trees and one abortive dig later - "I do not believe it - someone has filled it in!" exclaims Erik - we stumble across it, one of the most unlikely-looking cave entrances I have ever seen. A perfectly circular hole in the forest floor, surrounded by pine needles, with no limestone visible whatsoever!

It's just as well that I'm used to caving on a "rescue is impossible" basis both at home and abroad because in this instance the call-out procedure is dubious to say the least. If we aren't back in nine hours Mary will phone a campsite 350 km away where Erik's friends are supposed to be staying and they in turn will phone the two French cavers who know of the cave's existence - they live a mere 60km away. Of course, none of those involved, ourselves and Mary excepted, are aware of this yet! I'm glad I've got plenty of spare light with me.

Once inside the cave, my doubts evaporate as usual. Sliding through the grotty entrance, a muddy slope descends straight into a section of walking-sized passage. Within 10m or so a 2m high column is encountered on the left - so this *is* France after all! We are following an inlet steeply downwards and soon descend an awkward climb, then another. Erik becomes unsure whether this is the correct route - he has only been out of this entrance, not into the cave through it - and we thrutch up a nasty tight rift, tackle bags snagging all the way. A crawl leads off from the top which Erik does not remember so I wait with the bags while he takes a look. Five minutes later he is back, having explored 30m of crawl with a 10m long chamber at the end, all of it previously unentered! We slowly retrace our steps, down the snagging rift then back up the second climb and locate the correct route across a shelf on the right. Not the best of starts but at least we've found something new even if it is by default.

Back on course, the first pitch is marked by a bolt on the right-hand wall a little way back from the pitch head. It could almost be classed as a back-up were it not for the excess of slack in the already-rigged rope. The true belay is one bolt in soft calcite, low down for an awkward take-off, and Erik descends first. The passage we have been following has broken out midway up the side of an enormous aven and I shine my light around in an attempt to take my mind off the belay I'm about to use. As I slide over the calcite and past the bolt I try not to look at it too closely. The pitch is split by a wide ledge with a fretted pot in the floor on the near side and I'm so engrossed trying not to bounce around that I begin to abseil down the pot. Erik pulls me in to one side to save me the ignominy of having to prussik out. The belay for the second part of the pitch is almost as bad as the first - one bolt again, although it does appear to be in rock this time. I laugh out loud when I see what is presumably meant to be the back-up - a slack sling from the bolt to a tiny stal fastened as a lark's foot. Just the sort of thing you see a skull-and-crossbones beside in all those how-to-do-it SRT books! The take-off is equally awkward but at least it gives a nice free hang and I soon join Erik at the foot of the pitch.

"In Britain we normally use two bolts for each belay", I point out.

"Yes, we do in Belgium also. But this is France", he replies.

I don't bother saying anything else but silently vow to put some proper bolts in if I ever come here again. In fact, I've got the drill in the car and would have brought it today if I'd known it was going to be like this. I suppose I should have guessed. At least I can forget about the belays until we have to use them to get back out!

We set off, passing a side passage on the right which Erik says he would like to have a quick look at on the way back if we have time. The other route into the cave soon enters from the left where a rope is hanging down. Amazingly, it is rigged in a Y-hang with bolts apparently on either wall. Perhaps we should have come the longer way after all!

"Bloody French! Only two of them come here and look at the shit they leave!" curses Erik in anger, pointing at a large pile of spent carbide dumped carelessly by the side of the stream.

We carry on down a narrow canyon with lots of delicate formations, mainly along one wall. We have to change levels at several points and it's really hard to avoid causing excessive damage in places. The cave is descending steeply and I'm already beginning to think that it's going to be more strenuous on the return journey when the character changes. It's still going down but now as a larger square-cut passage, 6-8m in cross section, with lots of breakdown and shale bands along either wall. The slippery floor makes for rather unpleasant caving and although the size is impressive, it's not really what I was expecting. Fortunately, the character changes again before I can become too disillusioned and we encounter an area of superb formations where the (by now) keyhole passage turns a strange dogleg. A short section of crawling with the stream makes me wish we were back in the big stuff but it's soon over and we are walking once more.

We pass quite a large inlet entering through a narrow slot at roof level and Erik remarks that it wasn't there on his previous visit, which took place in the middle of February during a deep freeze. His friends have warned him to beware of snow melt from the higher mountains above the cave and this appears to have instilled a sensible trace of caution within him. I've been looking around for any obvious signs of flooding but have seen nothing to worry me unduly as yet.

Before long we come to a large chamber with a wall of pure calcite in front and a hole in the floor down which the stream can be heard. Erik and his friends had pushed this on their previous visit and had been able to follow the stream for 100m or so through some wet squeezes to a point where an even wetter section had forced them to turn around. Today's increased water levels mean that this is out of the question for us, especially as we are clad in dry gear, but Erik goes down the hole to check the height of the stream. I climb up the calcite wall for 6m but there is no way on at the top. Erik returns and confirms that the stream is a lot higher than the last time so this leaves one last option, a crawl over mudbanks on the left-hand side of the chamber. This leads to a

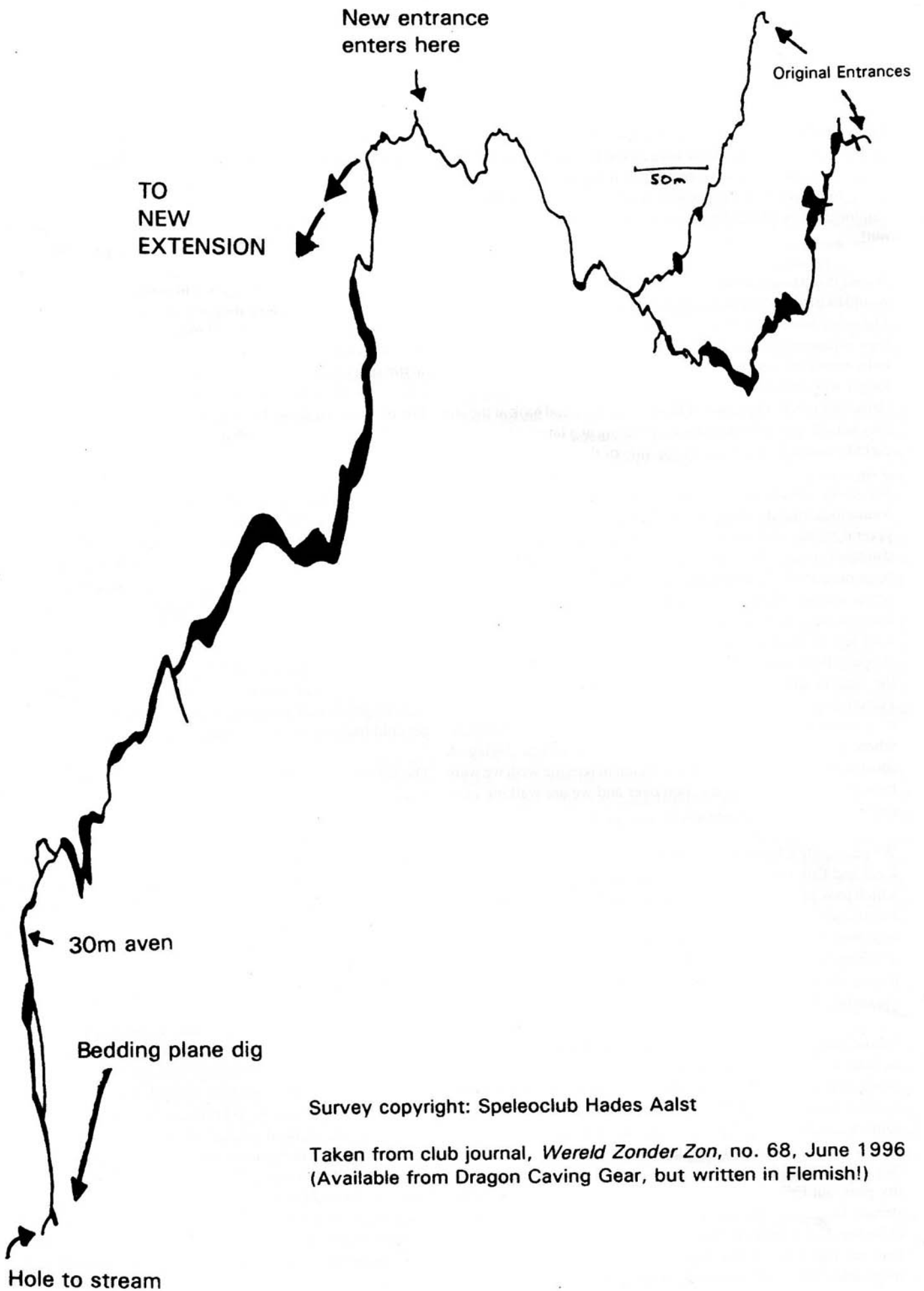
wide cobble-floored bedding plane extending 50m or so until it requires digging out to progress further, a faint outward draught providing some encouragement. The whole of the bedding appears to flood to the roof on occasions but there are still marks in the floor from Erik's previous visit so it can't do so all that often. We decide not to hang around too long just in case.

It has taken us less than two hours to reach the end of the cave and we decide to check everything we can on the way out as we have plenty of time left. Our original intention had been to push a high level lead left ongoing in February and we have left our SRT gear at the foot of the fixed rope leading up to this. After the entrance pitches I have got severe doubts about what the rope may or may not be fastened to so I decide to take my time looking around rather than hurry back to that.

The few side passages that exist all turn out to be oxbows and the best hopes for finding something appear to be the numerous holes visible at roof level. Unfortunately, most of these prove impossible to reach due to the slippery nature of the mud and the looseness of the rock. We each take turns failing to get into any of them. Back at the narrow slot providing the inlet from above Erik crawls off along a tube at floor level while I shine my light in the roof. A few metres before the inlet itself it looks as though there may be something going off to one side, on the left facing upstream. Getting up to it appears problematical, however, and I begin to wish that it was not my turn to check out this particular lead. Oh well, might as well give it a go - Erik hasn't returned and I'll just get cold hanging around waiting for him.

The actual climb turns out to be easy after the initial move but reaching what I can now see is a definite tube requires an awkward straddle across a wider section. The floor is 5m below and I take my time before committing myself. Once in the tube I'm already thinking that it's going to be harder getting down than it was getting up. Never mind, there's a spare rope back with our SRT gear that Erik can go back for if I can't reverse it. So long as he comes back of course!

As I don't fancy going down the only alternative is to go along the tube. This is tight for 2m or so and I have to remove my lamps to get through to where it widens out at a corner. The floor is deeply scalloped and moving aside a couple of loose blocks enables me to reach a larger section. Sensing space ahead, I decide to return for Erik, but shouting through the tube elicits no response. I don't want to go back through the tight bit and down the climb unless I have to so I turn around and press on. Within a few metres the sound of falling water becomes apparent and then all of a sudden I'm there, at the foot of a tremendous aven soaring upwards for 25m or more. The water is falling from the left and I can't see the top through the spray, although huge curtains can be seen either side of the waterfall. The aven is about 10m across, the floor being composed of beautifully rounded pebbles of calcite and stone. Up to the right, opposite the waterfall, a calcited rift leading upwards looks climbable but I decide not to risk it on



Survey copyright: Speleoclub Hades Aalst

Taken from club journal, *Wereld Zonder Zon*, no. 68, June 1996  
 (Available from Dragon Caving Gear, but written in Flemish!)

my own. I stand in silence listening to the sound of the water, feeling the draught coming down on the side of my face. The darkness and the space above and around me seem to swallow the beam from my lamp. No matter how much digging and dreaming you do you never really expect to find anything like this and when you do it takes a while to sink in.

Taking one last regretful look (silly really, as I know I'll be back within a few minutes), I head in search of Erik. This time he hears my shouts and he's up the climb and through the tube in no time, thoughts of getting down again momentarily forgotten. Upon entering the aven, he is as impressed as I. We proceed to climb the calcited rift on the right, using stal columns as handholds, and are soon at an impressive vantage point 20m above the floor. We can see right across to where the water enters, whilst off to the right is a dry passage 6m higher up. Erik begins to traverse out over nothing.

"If I fall now I am dead", he says, perched on the edge of forever. "Yes," I agree.

He comes back and we both decide that a return with climbing and bolting gear would be by far the most sensible option.

Climbing down, the calcite feels a lot less solid than it had going up, but it could just be the result of witnessing Erik's aerobatics. Reversing the tube is awkward, particularly at the far end whilst trying not to fall down the climb below. Surprisingly, the straddle across is not as bad as I had feared and we are soon back on terra firma.

We are both wet with spray from the waterfall and the steady outward ascent helps us warm up. By the time we reach the fixed rope to the high level passage we are feeling the pace and Erik seems as unenthusiastic about going up it as I am.

"There are open leads but it is very muddy up there," he says.

"What is the rope belayed to?" I enquire, looking upwards at it snaking away out of sight.

"Bolts."

"What, more than one?"

"Yes, I think so but I cannot remember for certain."

"Right, let's head out and check that other side passage you mentioned on the way in," I instantly decide, not wanting to subject myself to any more psychological pressure than I need to. I haven't done much proper caving for a while and I can feel this trip beginning to take its toll. It's a long time since I've ascended 180 metres from anywhere now that I think about it! By the time we reach Erik's side passage I'm sweating and need a rest along with some food and drink. If truth be told, I'm ready for daylight and I tell Erik not to be too long as he sets off to explore. Twenty minutes later, having put on a thermal vest to stop myself chilling down too much, I reluctantly decide I better go and look for him. I leave the food behind but take a spare light.

Turning right at an obvious T-junction leads to a chaos of huge

slabby boulders which seem to have fallen from above. I weave my way upwards between them but soon think better of it and decide that Erik can't have gone that way. Left at the T-junction, a short climb up is followed by a loose slope to the apex of a boulder cone. Back down the other side, the passage begins to descend and I pass a short section of crawl where some rocks appear to have been moved aside. This looks promising - he must have gone this way! Once through the crawl, the passage turns into a large, steeply descending rift following the same downward dip as the main passage. Great, just what I need right now! I shout for Erik but get no reply and the further I go the greater are my doubts that he has come this way after all. I'm just about to turn around when I hear a faint call somewhere ahead. I'm rather relieved, to say the least.

Reunited, Erik tells me that he has reached a point where the rift has levelled off, becoming smaller, but continues. I can tell that he is keen to carry on.

"We push just a little bit more, yes?" he asks.

"O.K. but only half an hour," I reply doubtfully, looking at my watch. I'm thinking about the outward journey, all of it uphill.

Once the rift levels off, the formations begin to increase. Helictites like spaghetti, some as big as fingers, adorn the left wall. Some, up to 15cm in length, extend horizontally and have weird nipple-like formations on their tip. Large aragonite pin-cushions slow our progress as we gape in astonishment and try to squeeze past without destroying them. Erik, in the lead, is finding it particularly trying having to crawl over an unmarked floor of pure white crystals.

"Oh, you poor cave," I can hear him muttering to himself.

We eventually come to a point where the crawl is almost blocked by calcite, the only way on being a small hole on the left. Erik manages to turn around and goes through feet-first, calling back that he has popped out into a larger passage. I have to remove both lamps in order to join him and, once through the tight bit, realise that it's going to be even harder getting back out. We have emerged at roof level in a passage 2m high by 3m across, extending both left and right, our entry point being rather obscure to say the least. We make a cairn to mark it for the return.

We decide to turn left, down-dip, and within minutes our hopes that we are on to something good are dashed - a set of footprints in black, peaty mud beyond a pool! Someone has been here before but goodness knows how they got in - it certainly wasn't by the route we had taken. The main passage ends within 50m, but a stream can be heard down a muddy hole on the left. Descending this leads to a separate streamway which I follow upstream and downstream until both ways degenerate into crawls - definitely not for today!

Back at our cairn, I have a quick look in the other direction - the passage continues but we haven't got the time to check it out. Whoever has been here before us may well have come in this way but there's no way of telling for sure.

## Truc de X

There are certainly more caving areas than one should ever think. Especially in France they are everywhere, and if you just take a walk and look for new caves, you will find them. The caver's dream exists!

For protection reasons, the cave's original name and coordinates will be kept secret, but we want to reveal that the area is a well-known tourist attraction in the Lozère department. Once you're familiar with the name, the locals won't have much difficulty to indicate the precise spot, though there is no general indication for caves around.

The entrance, however is quite obvious to find, once you're walking in the stream. The fossil sink was a hopeless Lozère caving club dig for over eight years, and as the club had shrunk to their last two members, Marc and Daniel joined forces with Guido, the Belgian from Speleo Hades who was spending his 1995 holidays there looking for houses.

Suddenly that summer, the three broke through an ultra-difficult, low bedding plane, which actually takes over two hours for 80m, and which was dug through into a narrow, walking-sized active streamway. Climbing up and down, descending two small pitches, with a bang every now and then, they explored a total of almost 800m; once the side leads had all been surveyed, the cave was around 1.5km long. Further work was carried out in the most unstable conditions, the ceiling being very much corroded by the acidity of meltwaters. But there was a strong draught and even stronger hope for more finds.

During the winter 1995-6, members of the Hades and Lozère clubs got lucky again: they discovered the connection of a side passage with a foxhole, which made an easier entrance, although on the way out through the new entrance there were a few complications, since the fox was found dead and decomposing. The actual dig could now be reached in about one and a half hours and with less crawling, but a 7m pitch still required SRT gear.

The following breakthrough resulted in more than 2km of "Draenan-sized" passage, beautifully decorated from beginning to end, with plenty of aragonite, moonmilk and helictites. The odd thing was that, generally, only the left-hand wall had formations. The draught was still strong, even in the big passages. Multi-staged and bearded stalactites on one side had aragonite needles pointing out.

Christmas holidays finished with two different rivers being followed down to -180m, over 4500m of splendid cave with open leads to push *par-marque de temps* (lack of time).

The 1996 expeditions in April and May revealed more passage, adding up the main passage length to 5km. A new inlet led to a pitch section closer to the surface so gear could be left there after dipping down a hole in the woods, emerging in big passage after 2m, soon changing into a fossil rift passage with fragile helictites all over the walls.

Balance: a dozen inlets, multiple entrances, multiple streamways and potential for over 10km of passage, since the furthest point

is still 5.5km from, and 150m higher than, the nearest resurgence, and we might not even be in the master cave yet! It is supposed that the whole system was once a shortcut of a nearby stream to itself, and later to the River Lot, but actually the valley has been reshaped and due to the incision of other streams, the flow directions have changed completely and the cave now drains towards the valley of the River Tarn.

After the April expedition, I made a halt in the area with Nig and Mary Rogers to check some side leads. We were only in for ten minutes before I got lost, and ended up in a new bit as a result. A 3m dip down into a chamber with a nice mud floor, followed by wonderful helictites on the walls. Checked out a roof passage crawling towards a stream, down a 30m pitch which we freeclimbed: no rope to make the traverse to the passage beyond. Then Nig had a bite to eat while I was crawling around and half an hour later he found me back into a new streamway where, after 350m, we almost dared not walk any further: with every step the passage became prettier and more vulnerable. It's still going on, but for conservation reasons this part was closed after pushing, as we later found we were ending up in the same section of the cave. The proof of this was that we both found a certain helictite combination, called "The Dildo" sticking out of the wall, but from either side. Then there was the prettiest aragonite ceiling I've ever seen, about ten square metres of pure virgin needles hanging a few feet above our heads.

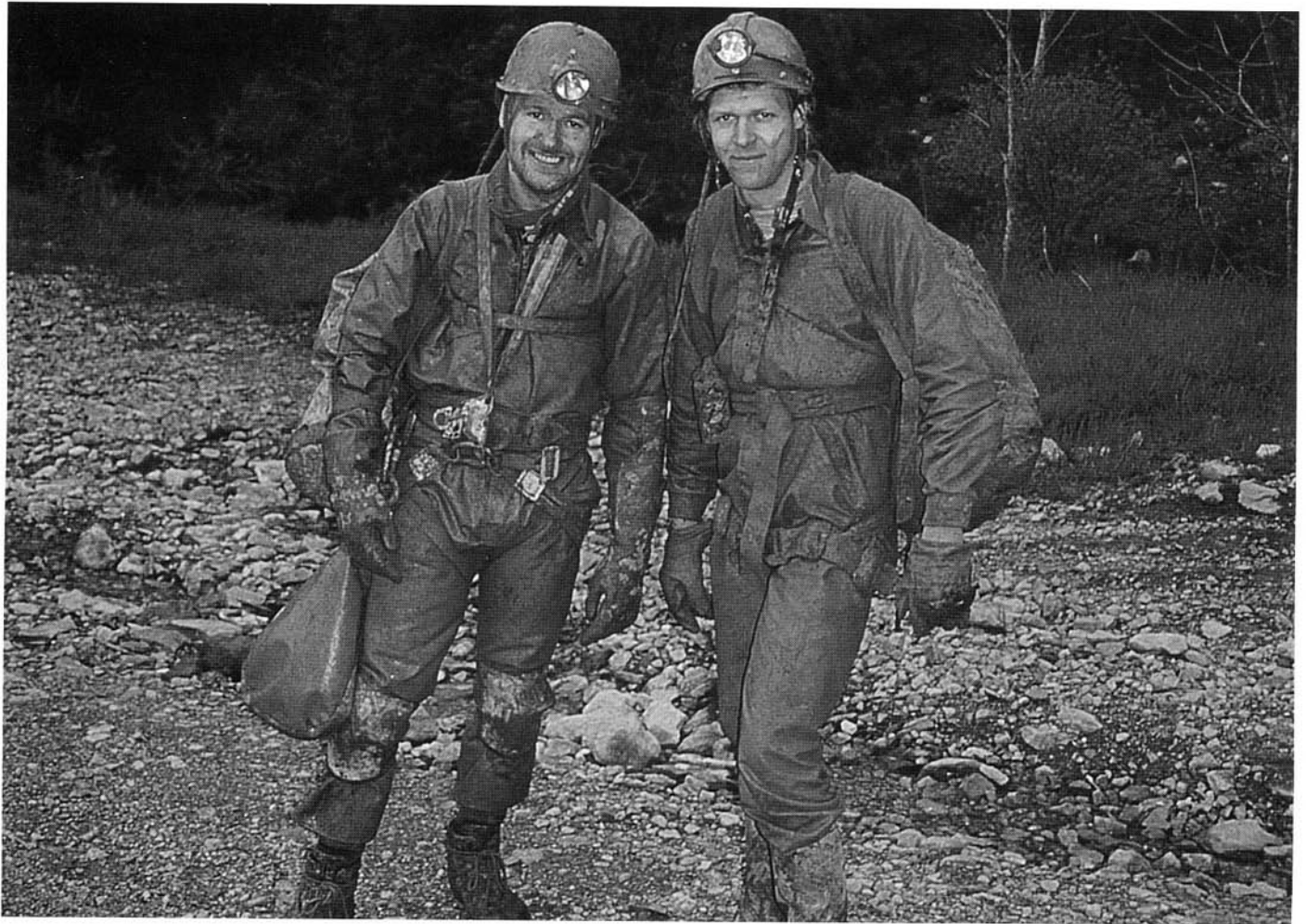
The next day we went walking, when a draughting hole between loose sheep revealed the draughting entrance of "Ogof Mary", of which only the first few (promising) metres were explored without caving gear, due to lack of time and a dead car battery. Nig even lost a crucial part of his jeans, which I found the following summer. It's supposed to be the fourth entrance to the system, with access to a more distant part of the cave; we'll see this year. Don't worry guys, I blindfolded them both, just to make sure you wouldn't make them talk.

The discoverers brought friends, who brought friends, who brought visitors and there was mutual trust between them all. Until, finally, rumours arose about commercial outdoor groups coming with inexperienced and reckless people and there was evidence such as litter, carbide dumps and all kinds of disrespectful damage to the cave.

In December 1996, both Fox and Bush entrances were blocked by the Lozère and Hades cavers, to protect the cave from further damage through easy access. Even though big passage is so close to the surface, there is no indication of the presence of caves or entrances nearby, so hopefully these two easier entrances will remain closed forever.

At the time of writing, only the original entrance remains open, and any visitors wanting to get into the cave will have to spend two hours crawling through the entrance series with SRT gear, and come back the same way.

**Erik Van den Broeck**



"I am going to be knackered getting out from here," says Erik, echoing my own thoughts, as we have a final breather before the tight squeeze.

He's right and we are both in need of a further rest and something to drink once we regain our tackle bags. We estimate that we have discovered around 300 - 400m of new passage, well worthwhile even if it does just join together two sections of known cave. Certainly, in terms of quality, the formations are the best I have ever found.

Checking my watch, I discover that we have just over an hour to go until call-out, such as it is. It always takes me ages to put on my SRT gear at the best of times and I give Erik the dubious honour of ascending the pitch first, in the hope that it will speed things up. It therefore comes as something of a surprise to find myself fully kitted-up and Erik only 2m off the ground!

"I have a problem with my Croll, it will not work," he says.

This does not really surprise me considering that it is totally coated in mud from some wonderful Belgian cave, as indeed Erik's SRT gear always seems to be! I offer him my spare jammer but he perseveres and finally gets his own to grip, making painfully slow progress. I quickly follow, taking it nice and gently, still not trusting the bolt.

Things go smoother on the second part of the pitch and I am at last able to cast aside thoughts of the poxy French belays. Looking down and around the aven one last time, I spot a 6m high passage coming in on the right some way above the floor.

"What's up there?" I ask.

"No one has climbed it to find out," replies Erik.

I look again. It would take five or six bolts at the most, definitely worth doing even if it does turn out to be just another inlet. Wish it was in Wales!

Struggling on the final climb, which hadn't seemed too bad on the way in, I decide to put some decent bolts in here for a handline if I should ever return.

Crawling up the entrance slope ensures that we are covered in soil and mud when we finally emerge into the fading daylight to find Mary waiting nearby. The air feels warm to us but to her it is cooling down. As usual, she does not seem overly concerned despite the fact call-out time is supposedly only half an hour away. It's going to be a long wait if I ever really am stuck somewhere! There is just enough light left for a couple of photos, providing a pleasant end to a memorable trip. It's as well this is the start of my holiday as I can feel that I'm going to need some time to recover!

The following day we are too stiff to even consider caving so go for a walk instead. Erik shows us the other two entrances and we carry on round to the next valley. After several attempted digs close to stream level, Erik gives up and sits in the sun while Mary and I check out a small limestone exposure we can see higher up

the valley side. I waste twenty minutes digging at the foot of this only to discover that there is an open entrance a couple of metres lower down! This looks big enough to enter and is emitting a nice cool draught into the heat of the day. We have no lights so decide to go back and bring the vehicles closer if possible. Our battery is totally flat, however, so we spend the next few hours in a French garage rather than exploring the new cave. Erik has to return to Belgium and it is time for us to head south so it will have to wait.

A fortnight later, on our way from Perpignan to Provence, we make a major detour and are back. Erik hasn't been able to get the time off work so it's just the two of us. The entrance seems to have shrunk in size since we first found it and it takes me the best part of an hour hammering lumps off the left-hand wall before I can get in. I have to go feet-first and the initial couple of metres seem desperately tight before it widens out and I can turn around. Mary throws me the hammer and bar in case I've got to enlarge it even more to get back out. The passage is wide and dusty with plenty of dried-out calcite on the walls. The mud floor is unmarked and it's clear that no-one has been here. A smaller passage enters from the right, probably from the foot of the small cliff where I had started digging. Ten metres of comfortable crawling leads to some collapsed slabs and I look closely at these before forcing a way through. It starts getting bigger and I'm just beginning to get excited when the way on appears to be blocked by a choke entering from the right. Carefully removing a few loose blocks reveals a black space but this seems to be going upwards, back towards the surface. The only alternative is at the foot of the choke but there is nothing immediately obvious. I spot a small hole between boulders and drop a pebble down it, being quite surprised when it falls for 10m or thereabouts! I return to the entrance for the digging gear, telling Mary what is happening. Stacking space is a problem but within half an hour I've manufactured a fair-sized hole and only one boulder is preventing me getting down it. The boulder rocks but it is too big for me to remove on my own and I finally have to admit defeat. I scratch my initials and the date on the wall above in frustration so that the French will know someone has been this far before them should they come and break through to the miles of passage which probably lie beyond.

So, for myself at least, that was it for another year. As things turned out it was Erik, not the French, who found my initials later in the summer! Unfortunately, he was alone as well and was no more successful moving the boulder than I had been. Apart from this flying visit, Erik was unable to take any more time off work so our intended return trip failed to materialise. I had the chance to go over and meet up with one of Erik's friends and the French guys but I didn't really fancy caving with people I didn't know, particularly having seen the state of the belays they use. Perhaps I should have gone - they found another new system 12km long in the same area! It goes to show that there's still plenty to be found if you know where to look - just like at home really. Maybe I *will* have another try at moving that boulder after all!

# 50th Anniversary Publication: Some Corrections

by Tony Baker

Despite my best efforts, there were inevitably a few mistakes that crept into the 212 pages of the 50th Anniversary Publication. The following have been pointed out to me so far...

\* **page 106:** The first paragraph in column 2 concludes: "... which at this time was led by two people - Bruce Thomas and Eileen Davies; in those days they were the cream." As Annie Foster has pointed out, it should read: " - Bruce Foster and Eileen Davies...". Sincere apologies for not having spotted that.

\* **page 130:** Between the second and third paragraphs of Dave Edwards' article there should have been another, which seems to have disappeared between Dave's hard disk and the floppy one he sent me. It would have read:

*Many years later, I became involved in the activities of a crystallography research laboratory, designing various pieces of equipment to enable their research activities. Having no background in this area (a polite way of saying that I had never even heard of crystallography!) I was forced into a crash course on the subject, and X-ray photography in particular. After a while it occurred to me that maybe this could be put to good use. I duly presented the lab with a sample of helictite (picked up from the floor - honest!) which I had found in Cairn Chamber in OFD II, at the junction with Northern Canyon. This particular sample was the bulbous tip of an helictite, about 40mm long and deep red in colour.*

\* **page 149:** the photo caption disappeared somewhere in the printing process. It shows Bob holding a "bong", the monster piton he describes in the text at the top of column 2 on the same page.

\* **page 161:** the lower photograph is captioned "A 1937 Meet". Peter Harvey has pointed out that this is not 1937, as he is in the photo, and it was in fact taken on the Friday of the weekend of the club's inauguration in 1946. His best efforts at naming those in the picture are as follows. Top row, L to R: ?, Charles Freeman,

Stride, ?, Tudgay, Peter himself, ?, Arthur Hill, Ian Nixon, Gerard Platten. Bottom row, L to R: Geoff?, ?, ?, Harold Davis, ?, Bernard Dembo, John Parkes.

Additionally, Peter has been able to add more details to some of the photo captions...

\* **page 35:** the photo top right is *not* Gwyn Thomas, and the one bottom left features John Davis in front.

\* **page 38:** the middle picture is of Peter himself in the Ogof Ffynnon Ddu I stream, not Ogof-y-Ci as suggested by the caption.

\* **page 53:** the complete caption for the top picture should be - L to R; Bill Little, Bill Clarke, Edward Aslett, Mrs. Clarke, David Hunt.

\* **page 56:** the bottom picture "looks like Gwyn Thomas and Peter Densham".

\* **page 61:** pictures feature mainly Sheppard, Balcombe, Weaver, Hill and Freeman.

\* **page 71:** bottom picture was taken around 1939. Bill Weaver is to the left of Platten.

\* **page 72:** bottom picture features Rod Pearce on the left.

My thanks to Peter, Annie and Dave for the above information. Additionally, some of the photographs suffered from very poor repro, most notably those on pages 65 (Steve Thomas in Dip Sump) and page 151 (Fault Aven). Both were good originals, but because strenuous efforts were made to keep the cost of the publication down pictures were scanned in groups; inevitably some suffered and those two were the worst examples. Apologies to Gavin Newman for page 65, the picture on page 151 was one of mine.



# Karaoke Corner

**Editor's Note:** Regular readers may remember page 48 of Newsletter 117, on which Pat Hall rewrote the lyrics of Billy Bragg's *Waiting for the Great Leap Forwards* into a song about Ogof Twyn Tal-Draenan. Now it so happens that two of the three regular OTTD diggers are big fans of Mr. Bragg, and with only two metres of progress made per year in the dig, they have to find something to do with all the hours they spend up there. Apart from quoting catchphrases from BBC2's *The Fast Show* at each other (thereby winding up the third member of the team, who's never seen it) and talking about football (which also winds up the third member of the team, 'cos he knows nothing about it) many long muddy hours of contemplation have been given over to rewriting more lyrics from the Bragg songbook (and you can guess what the third member of the team thinks of that, too). So here, with more grovelling apologies to Billy Bragg, and his publishers and his publishers' lawyers, are two more OTTD songs, both largely the work of Martin Hoff. The first is based on "The Saturday Boy" (from Billy's second album, *Brewing Up with Billy Bragg* and later included on the *Back to Basics* compilation) while the second is a rewrite of "Levi Stubbs' Tears" (a hit single in the mid-1980s, and from the album *Talking With the Taxman About Poetry*).

## The Saturday Boys

I'll never forget the first day I went there  
That November morning was cold as f\*\*k  
The way we chilled, and the trip hardly thrilled  
From the way the digging went it was the deadest of ducks  
It became a magic mystery at once  
And we'd sit together in the squalor twice a month  
And some days we'd take the same thought home  
And it's surprising how drink can clear a rational brain  
We dreamed of her and compared our dreams  
But mud was all that I ever tasted  
She lied to us, she was a fantasy  
And we lied to ourselves 'bout the system that waited  
The times that we moved on were far and few between  
In half-dark enlightened where rabbits had been  
Did she swear as much as we did when our tackle got stuck  
And "b\*gger w\*\*ker f\*\*ker b\*\*tard c\*\*t" means "Tal-  
Draenan"  
She yielded once and I still hold that memory soft and sweet  
And I stare at the survey on the nights I can't sleep  
But I never made the breakthrough, I just made the Cup-a-  
Soup  
At the end of every trip how our spirits would droop  
In the end it took me a dictionary  
To find out the meaning of "virgin passage"  
While she would give in at Carreg Lem  
And the scale of the scaffold we never would manage  
I never understood our confidence  
And I hide my own regrets now  
Thinking back, she made us go there  
A cave not big enough to stretch your legs.

## Martin Hoff's Tears

With the glue bought from the Dragon shop he's patching up  
his oversuit  
So the shreds of his backside aren't left there to litter the route  
And you could say that this was head against brick wall  
Get through to Dan-yr-Ogof, one target above all  
  
And the world moves along, he's digging the same old place  
Martin Hoff's tears run down his face  
  
He ran away from home, to the region he moved  
To be nearer to what the dye tracing had long before proved  
And the project was one of those jokes  
The sort for which there'd only be low hopes  
The sort that's never gonna break through  
But if he didn't go there he'd have nothing to do  
  
And the world moves along, he's digging the same old place  
Martin Hoff's tears run down his face  
  
Peter Francis and Stevie West are here to proclaim how their  
dig is best  
Alderman, Richardson and Nig Rogers too are here to jump in  
at the first breakthrough  
  
And one dark night he came home off the hill  
The entrance had fell in, and he'd nearly been killed  
The next six months of effort shored it up  
And though he still goes daylight digging  
Eternally he's left to curse his luck  
  
And the world moves along, he's digging the same rift floor  
He rolls up the survey and puts it back in its drawer  
And the world moves along, he's digging the same old place  
Martin Hoff's tears...

