

# Clwb Ogofeydd Deheudir Cymru South Wales Caving Club

NEWSLETTER 122, 2001





# Club Ogofeydd Deheudir Cymru

## South Wales Caving Club

### Newsletter No.122, 2001.

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Front Cover: Martin Groves in Jameos de la Gente, Lanzarote. *Martin Groves and Krysia Lewandowski.*

Back Cover: An interesting picture of the cottages and 'The Stump' which shows Kershaw Terrace still intact. *Toby Dryden.*

**Opinions expressed in this newsletter are the contributor's own, and are not necessarily those of the editor, or of the South Wales Caving Club.**

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*Roundabout Chamber, Ogof Ffynnon Ddu I. SWCC Collection*

## **Editorial**

Welcome to my third newsletter, and the clubs 122nd. First I must apologise as this edition has taken much longer to put together than hoped. A combination of awaiting enough articles, time and settling down long enough to get the Newsletter finished! Once again the Newsletter contains a fine mix of articles recounting memorable caving trips, reporting on expedition trips, geological excursions and recounting the life of Robert 'Soz' Saunders who sadly died this year. A big thanks goes to all those who have contributed, and I hope you enjoy their literacy efforts.

The last 6 months have been turbulent ones for the British Caving scene due to the foot and mouth crisis. The cottages at Penwyllt have been closed twice during the crisis, and key events such as the AGM have had to be delayed until a suitable time. Hopefully by the time this Newsletter is printed and distributed we will once again be in a position to freely enjoy the sport of caving and the exploration of hills. In the meantime lets think to the future and keep developing those plans for the next big caving trip abroad, or planning the best approach to tackle the next 'premier' dig. Once the foot and mouth situation is over then the serious sports of caving and socialising can once again get underway!

Thoughts are now on issue 123 of the Newsletter which I would like to get out somewhat quicker this time! However I have very few articles lined up for the next edition. So if you feel the urge to put 'finger to keyboard' or even 'pen to paper' then go with it! After all its you the membership of SWCC who make this Newsletter the quality production it is.

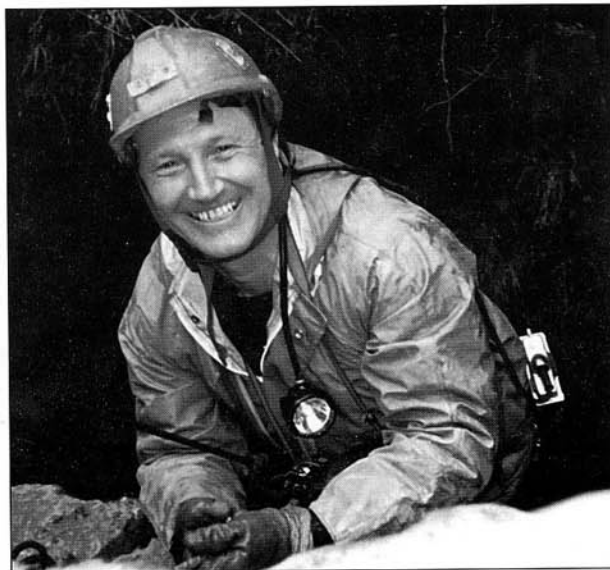
Cave Softly,

Jules,  
October 2001

## VALE: ROBERT SAUNDERS 1950 - 2001

*By Claire Jones.*

"Who is this tall, blond, handsome stranger" I wondered, standing in the middle of Paddy O'Reilly's living room in Swansea. This was my first meeting with Soz, aged 15, this being the nickname given to him by the leader of the schoolboy gang in Aberaman, Dai Merchant. As we sat down to a meal which included frogs legs it transpired that Bob was the keenest member of his school's youth group (Sandfields Comprehensive, Port Talbot) which had employed Paddy to take them caving. With OFDII opening up Paddy was rather preoccupied, but Bob did manage to join SWCC in 1968. This was not such an easy task in those days when John Osborne was secretary and the committee needed more than a chocolate cake to persuade them to take on new members! It was several weeks later that Bob eventually teamed up with Colin Fairburn who was to become a long lasting friend. Having played rugby Bob was very fit and became one of the club's young tigers. His notable achievements were mainly in cave diving. Hospital cave was pushed several times before it was finally abandoned in February 1969 after Colin and Bob had passed sumps 5 and 6. With Dick Arculus they completed the first round trip in OFD from the resurgence to Smith's Armoury and back via Dip sump. Attention switched to DYO in the early 70's with diving off Mazeways and Dali's Delight, including one particularly memorable occasion when Martyn Farr's demand valve failed. No one in those days could afford to carry spares. Bob had a Silver Snark Mark II valve, which I thought revolutionary at the time when I was using a large twin hose valve in the sea. Lighting was by a single nife cell and wet suit usually thin and ripped. This was intrepid stuff.



Bob continued to dive with Neath Sub-Aqua club and others. One weekend was spent looking for treasure in Llyn y Fan Fawr but in reality finding old bits of aircraft and lots of leeches. About this time local cavers and climbers had formed themselves into The Phoenix group spearheaded by Carl Ryan. Trips were made to North Wales and to the Gower cliffs in the evenings.

Bob studied marine engineering at Aston University where he became President of the Students Union. Marion (later to become Colin's wife) remembers voting for this persuasive politician.

Bob married in 1974 to a local girl from Cwmtwrch - Denise Hughes. The occasion was memorable when 11 cavers spent the night in a small, single room at the Dolphin Hotel, Swansea - leaving in the morning with a rebate for not having had breakfast!

A career at sea meant that caving took a back seat but Bob did manage some climbing in New Zealand with Mike Coburn who had emigrated there in 1973.

This period provided a wealth of stories with which to regale his friends, particularly in his favourite local watering hole, The Copper Beech. With his two boys (James and Christopher) growing up and needing a father at home Bob gave up his job as Chief Engineer to find a job ashore. His expertise with steam boilers was invaluable when working with Plant Safety.

The family lived in Brynaman, close to his beloved mountains. More exciting mountains though were the Alps where several summer holidays were spent. One year Bob, Owain and myself attempted to climb the Eiger by the Mittelegi ridge, but instead spent a cold night on the mountain having failed to reach the approach hut before dark for various reasons. Members of the club who were successful shortly after dealt out much stick, which was taken in good part. This was on his list of things to go back and complete one day. The Monch proved a more attainable summit where I was grateful for Bob's strong hands on the rope when I stupidly got my crampons caught and fell off the summit ridge.

Bob was determined to put something back into the club, which had been such a large part of his early life. He spent a lot of time taking people underground including local scout groups, his children and their friends, unsuspecting members of the Neath Sub-Aqua club, work colleagues and others. All benefited from his enthusiastic approach to caving. Everyone on their first trip into OFD1 was told stories of the wandering pig castrator and springs of eternal youth. From 1993-4 Bob was Chairman of SWCC and also did a lot of work for Cave Rescue.

Personal highlights of this era were undoubtedly those provided by Gary Vaughan's caving expeditions to France,

especially to The Berger in 1993. The new technique of SRT had to be mastered first in the gym, then off the viaduct and on trips to Yorkshire. His successful bottoming trip with Mike Coburn was relived many times subsequently. Diving was still a favourite sport but now restricted to exploits in the sea. He organised a week in Lundy for Neath Divers, when gales brought down tents, and took part in other diving expeditions.

When James and Chris had practically grown up Bob was able to return to the working life he knew best this time on cruise ships. He was well respected and liked by his colleagues at sea. This year should have been a new beginning - he joined a new small cruise ship, able to go to interesting places where the large monsters couldn't reach, with full diving facilities on board. But after only three months aboard, on May 9th Bob suffered a fatal heart attack, just 50 years old. He was brought home from Hong Kong by his family and cremated in Morrision on May 24th. As he told us there it is

*"Better that you should forget and smile  
Than remember and be sad"*

Easier said than done Soz.



# 101 Great Caving Trips; Christmas Pot

*by Martin Hoff*

"I was right above it and I would've been next." A quick sprint across the fell, with the spot beams of a lamp little more than a token protest against the evening's broad darkness. "I watched it happen and then it would've been my turn." Careering back across the uneven surface, surely a twisted ankle or worse and a second casualty was imminent. It was only a matter of time, and of luck...

It was mid-November, a glorious still day where the snow lay deep and crisp, and even on the walk up over Inglebrough we'd been lobbing snowballs back and forth. On a day like that, there could only be one possible destination, the 75m depths of Christmas Pot.

And off down Christmas Pot we went, with its distinctive oil drum entrance in the bottom of a shakehole. This was my second SRT trip, and about my fifth time underground; also in the party were someone of similarly limited experience, and two people who'd not been underground before, if memory serves. Which left five people with more than a vague claim of experience and capability. There were eleven of us in total, but two had some reason for needing to be back earlier, and their intention was to accompany us some of the way down the cave, before turning round and moving on out.

The entrance pitch was a little awkward, but nothing special once the rusting oil drum had been passed. Likewise the second pitch which was relatively straightforward below the tricky squeeze (tricky in SRT kit at least) at its head, and the third where the size of the cave increased somewhat. At this point Christmas Pot connects into Grange Rigg Pot, at the bottom of Battleship Passage.

This part of the cave contains a number of fine formations and an active streamway, all quite interesting for the caver of limited experience, and with nothing desperately challenging to get in the way of the enjoyment. The way on follows the water, with a bit of stooping passage before opening out into a larger chamber, from which the final couple of pitches descend.

So far, so good. So what? Well, the last pitch involves a quick drop through a crawling sized hole, and stepping across a trench which on this occasion was taking enough water to make a fair bit of noise. Bolts were put in, rope was lowered and the first man in the party set off down the pitch.

I was next but two to descend. The leader of the party Richard1, an experienced caver was immediately followed by someone else who knew what he was doing, Richard2. Behind him was someone of equivalent experience to me, that is to say not an awful lot, and then yours truly, and it is from this position I can relate what happened next.

Richard1 got on to a ledge – if you look at the diagram of Grange Rigg Pot in Northern Caves 2 (Dalesman Books, 1991) you will see some indication of loose rocks in this part of the cave. Don't go looking for them, they're not there any more. The majority of these rocks have succumbed to the twin forces of gravity and Richard1's body weight.

With an almighty rumble, the ledge onto which Richard had stepped disappeared down to the bottom of the shaft. If it had been a small shelf-type ledge, it would not have been desperately impressive. As it was, however, the ledge was nothing more than a large collection of loose rocks and

boulders, and it took several seconds for the noise to subside as Richard surfed down the remaining depth of the shaft on top of the scattering mass of limestone. From directly above we watched the light of his lamp drop, bounce, drop, bounce again and disappear. Then there was silence. Richard called to the bottom of the shaft, and carefully made his way down to find Richard, bringing a few more rocks down with him.

The noise of the water thundering down the pitch was sufficient that while the rest of the party behind us had heard something had happened, they didn't know exactly what. I stepped back across the top of the trench to instruct the guy behind me, one of the first-timers on the trip, to get back up the hole into the larger chamber which left two of us perched in the top of the shaft. The magnificently named Dr Huggins who at that time was sporting a fledgling pony tail came on down to join us, and talk to Richard, while we rejoined the others in the larger chamber.

The early leavers were caught as they turned round to make their way out, and with the news that Richard had a broken leg, they sped off down the hill to call upon the assistance of Yorkshire's finest.

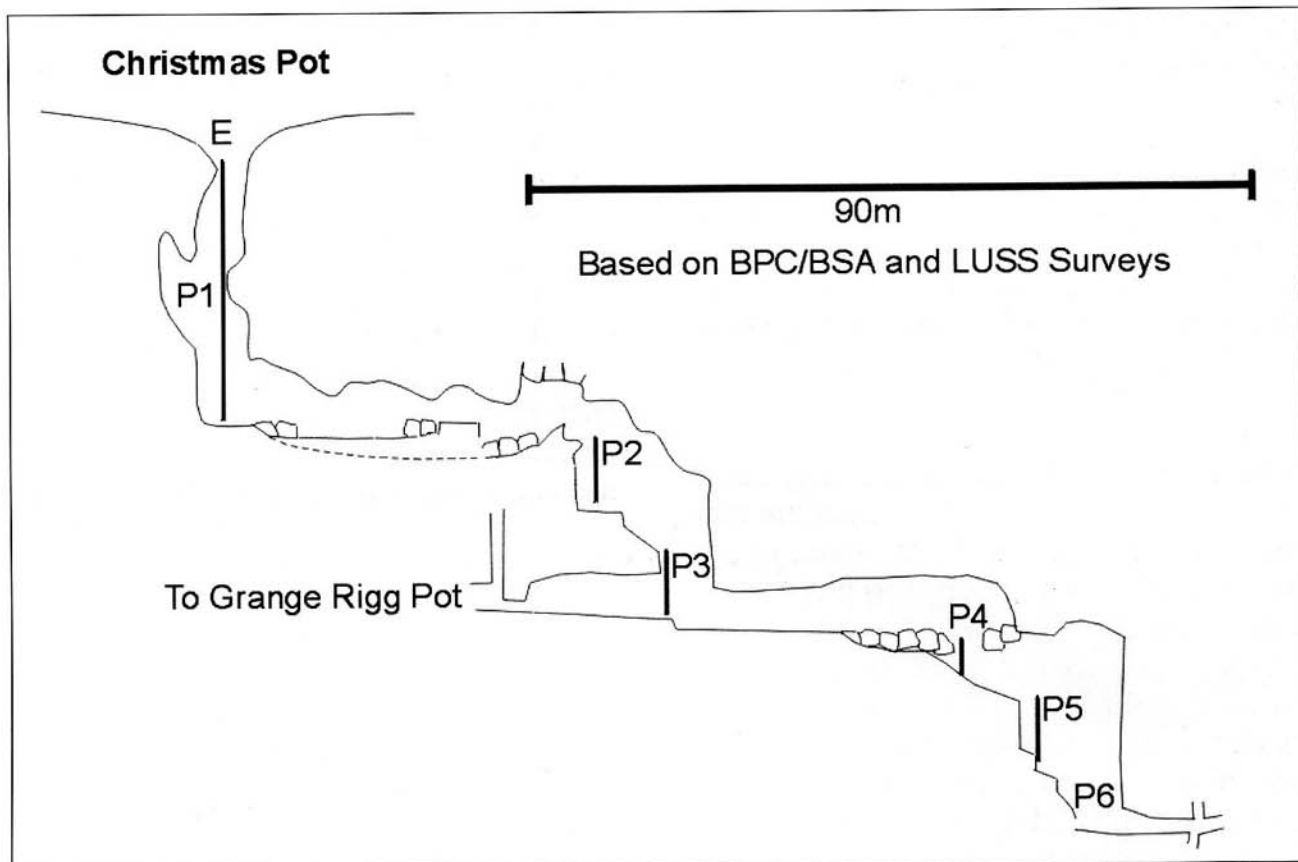
There was nothing that would be achieved by the majority of the party staying where they were, so leaving the two Richards and Huggins at the site of the accident, the rest of us turned to leave.

There was no point in speculation, or going over what happened. Our job at this point was to get out of the cave, and out of the way of the CRO. Equally there was no point in rushing and causing further problems for ourselves, and so it was that with the time approaching 7pm I pulled myself through the oil drum and back into the evening air.

It was mid-November, a glorious still night where the snow lay deep and crisp, and even the lights blinking up from Clapham and beyond seemed to be joining in with the quiet seasonal theme in what resembled a giant open air library. It will come as no great surprise that the peace and solitude of the spot was not to last. First I was joined on the surface by the mad fool referred to at the start of this tale, careering about in search of a broken ankle. He had been between me and the two Richards, and in his state of shock, all he could think about was the fact that he would've been next down the pitch.

One of our first time cavers was nearly up the entrance pitch when a pair of headlights loomed over the distant horizon. And on the advice of a man in shock she went back down the pitch to spend two hours waiting for CRO people to get past her and into the cave. Even though she'd have been on the surface well before the CRO arrived on site.

It was at this point that it all started to unravel; with a molephone aerial being extended, medical supplies being unloaded and CRO people appearing out of nowhere, the peace and silence were rapidly dispelled as the scene exploded into action. The surface controller was trying to find out what had happened, how many people were still underground and where, and all the usual information, but was hampered in this by a man in shock, desperate to tell everyone how he would've been next down the pitch. There wasn't much to do but try and keep out of the way, and walk backwards and forwards trying to keep warm. Once the rescue was underway properly, the remainder of our party emerged and was ferried down to Clapham. In the back of the vehicle, the one person who had kept his helmet on to try and keep in that little extra bit of warmth was soon rejoined by everyone else



scrambling to protect their heads from beating on the roof as we rumbled over the bumps.

We emerged into the warmth of the CRO headquarters in Clapham, where we were to stay for some hours. Here the sometimes unsung part of the rescue operation came into its own, with soup, sandwiches and hot drinks aplenty. For a group of student cavers, this was great, an unexpected opportunity to do redress the nutritional balance, in the warm. We were kept updated with Richard's progress, as an RAF helicopter which had been on exercise in the region joined in, ferrying personnel and kit up onto Inglebrough, and Richard to an ambulance waiting on the nearest road. We'd earlier been amused to realise that the keys to the transit were on a string around the neck of the casualty; in order for those of us already back in Clapham to get into warm, dry clothes, an Oldham cell managed to find its way

through the back window and secure our access to the van.

Richard had suffered little more than a fracture of the tibia and fibula, which for the drama of the incident was definitely getting off lightly. I'm not sure it would've seemed quite like that at the bottom of the fifth pitch though. With naturally occurring painkillers amply supported by artificial ones, Richard had been assisted on his way out through the cave surprisingly rapidly, and was soon on his way to the hospital in Lancaster. By the time the rest of the party was reassembled in Clapham it was the early hours of the morning, and by the time we got home it was nearly dawn.

The effects of all this excitement on those who participated were varied. The two first timers never caved again. Richard's leg didn't quite set properly, and the last I heard he was considering getting the



medical profession to break it again and fix it properly. The more experienced members of the group seemed none the worse for the experience, although the lack of enthusiastic beginners and competent leaders meant that caving trips for the rest of that year were few and far between. The shock guy was last heard of doing his caving in the north of England, and if he reads this I'm sure his account of the events of that day will differ somewhat from mine; if he wants to respond with his version, I for one would love to read it. And that'll give me a nice lead in to the story of the caving trip where he nearly caused me to lose a couple of fingers, but I digress.

For me, the experience was a wholly good one, excepting the obvious facts of the injury. For this novice caver at least, the opportunity to observe a well-drilled and equipped cave rescue team swing into action to the aid someone whose accident was exactly that rather than the result of some negligence or stupidity was merely

the confirmation that caving was for me. I've been back down the cave since, and a couple of years ago the place looked a bit different to someone who's done a bit more caving in the meantime. If you're in Yorkshire and you fancy a quick trip that isn't one of those trips you do over and over, I'd thoroughly recommend Christmas Pot. But what I would say is that although rescue from the bottom is possible, it's been done and there's no need for it to be proved again.



Martin Hoff looking out of Christmas Pot on a return trip. *Tony Baker.*

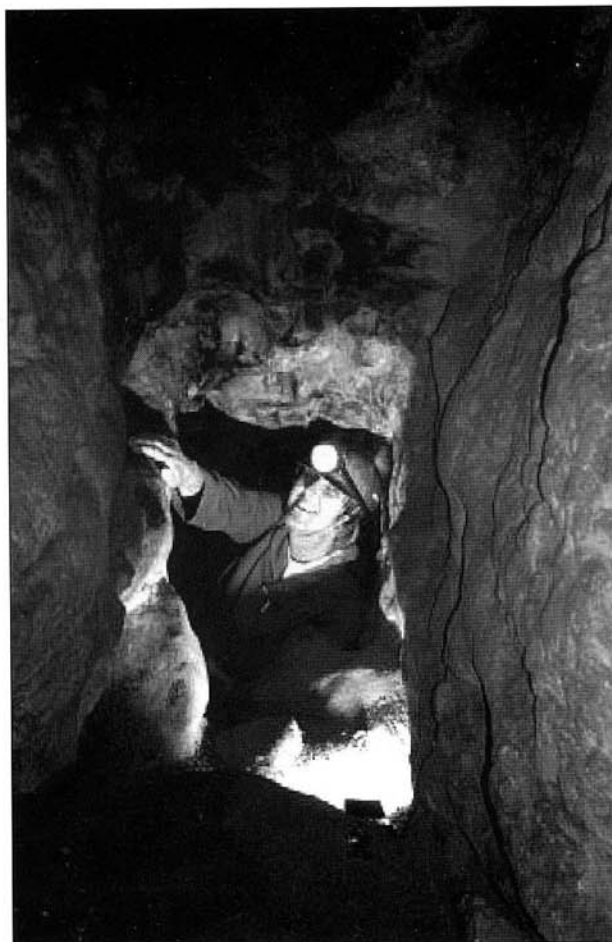
## La VÉZÈRE

*Words and pictures by Gary Jones*

Where can you find some of the best known caves in Europe, more than a hundred internationally famous archaeological sites, excellent canoeing, world class wine, first class gastronomy and cheap campsites all within an easy drive of Britain? The answer? **Perigord**, in France. You could add that the summer weather is predictably good, the exchange rate very acceptable and the local speleo-clubs very hospitable. This article gives a very quick introduction to the area based on three weeks holiday there last summer.

I guess most adventurous holiday makers are put off the Bordeaux / Bergerac area because the Dordogne valley is so popular but north and just inland Perigord is a vast tract of forest and plateau and it is quite easy to stay away from the crowds if you want to. And if you know where to go! Liz and I wrote to the local caving club and were offered a few visits underground and some advice on what to see. Jean-Francoise Legone is the president of the Speleo-club Perigueux (affiliated to FFS) and was very helpful. We have his address if you need it.

Just North of the Dordogne is the VÉZÈRE river valley. The little towns are still busy in the tourist season but here most visitors have come for the archeology. La VÉZÈRE is what the locals call "the river of prehistory". At Montignac, where the river enters the Perigord district, is the cave of Lascaux, probably the most famous painted cave in the world. From there and for the next 60 km. until the river joins the Dordogne at Limeuil, there are an amazing succession of cliff dwellings, rock shelters, troglodyte strongholds and caves. This makes driving along the winding narrow roadway really hazardous for cavers because there are open cave entrances to attract your attention at nearly every corner.

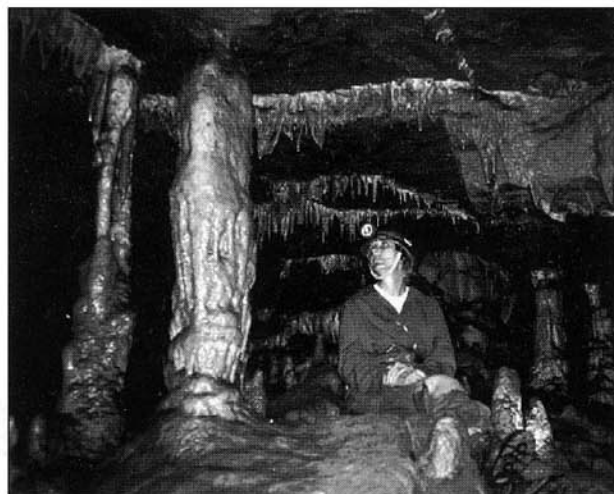


The whole area is classified as a world heritage site mainly because of its archaeological importance. The best centre for exploring the valley is the town of Les Eyzies which has a good number of shops, a great open air market and an extraordinary museum of pre-history. There is even a little centre for advice on which caves to visit! This is worthwhile because several of the really good sites have severely restricted numbers of visitors per day and it pays to book ahead!! Naturally they are selling the pay-as-you-go sites like Rouffignac, Font-de-Gaume, les Combarelles, etc. but as tourist caves go these really are worth seeing. Also, it seems likely that a number of the very famous but fragile sites such as Font de Gaume may well soon be closed to the general public because of wear and tear.

Like Lascaux you may have to book years ahead in order to see the real thing – so see them while you can!

Most significant sites in the area date back to the middle or early Palaeolithic (100,000 to 10,000 BC.) Humankind doesn't get much older than that, so these are some of the oldest human habitations on the planet. Also, it was in this area during a warm post-glacial period that our remote ancestors had some leisure-time and appear to have "invented" art! There is very good evidence to suggest that humankind first produced substantial decorations and carvings in Western Europe (things which were not just purely functional like earlier artifacts). Here in the VÉZÈRE valley hundreds of examples of cave painting, carvings and engravings have been found. So many that several of the epochs of pre-history are named after sites which are within a few miles of each other, Magdalenian, Perigordian, Mousterian, etc. Cro-magnon man, (the people to whom the welsh "Red Lady of Paviland" belonged) is named after a village just near Les Eyzies!

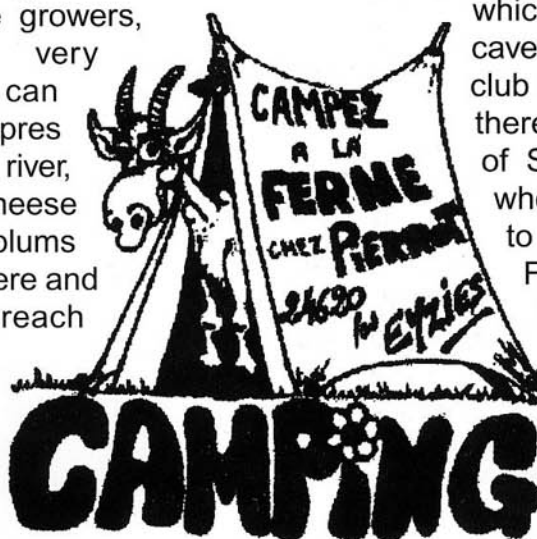
Well, it's a small world and if you are going to have an epoch of leisure then there can't be much better places than La VÉZÈRE. Some of France's best red wines are from nearby Bergerac. Local vintages, bought from the growers, are very cheap and very palatable. Nothing can compare with a warm apres caving afternoon on the river, local wine, good local cheese and fresh bread. Apples plums and peaches grow easily here and some of the orchards reach down to the river, making a canoe trip particularly satisfying. The river is mostly grade 1 and 2 with some higher reaches

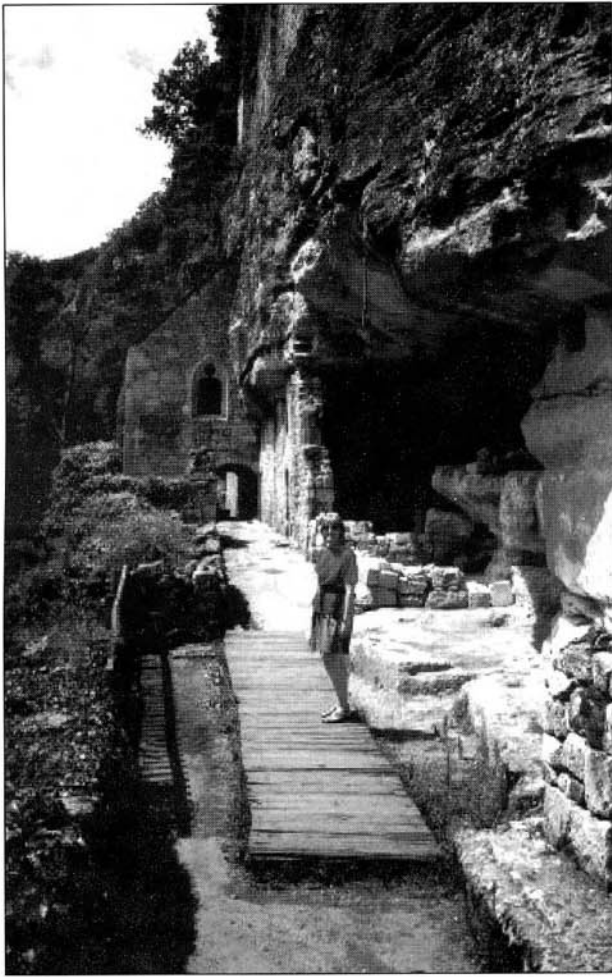


grade 3. It pays to bring your own canoe but most towns have a hire-and-get-you-back service, same with mountain bikes.

Several of the GR routes converge in this area and provide good mountain-biking and excellent low-level walking. Much of the upper plateau is forested and a map is very useful (1936ET-TOP25 1:25,000, easily available locally) though all GR routes are well way marked. There are caves and rock shelters everywhere, so a torch is always handy on a walk. The GR 6 traverses part of the plateau above La VÉZÈRE and comes down through the Gorge des Enfers which has a number of really great rock shelters and caves. Serious sporting caving is controlled and keys are available to several systems. You have to show proof of sports insurance, which should cover you for cave rescue. The local speleoclub can help with access but there is the National Museum of Speleology at Les Eyzies who are also helpful. It pays to speak at least a little French as once you leave the tourist trail you also leave translation facilities.

If you visit the area you can't do much better





than staying at Chez Pierrot at Lespinasse. This is near the archaeological cave site of le Moustier.

It is worth knowing that most of the medium to small campsites (the nice ones!) do not usually take formal bookings. The large sites who do take bookings from UK (and charge a fee for it), are best avoided as they are usually full of Brits and Germans and rather noisy.

The local caves are usually not very long and most are wet'n'dry river systems with the occasional shaft cave. We had several really good caving trips organised for us by the locals. We are also indebted to the manager of the show cave at Proumeyssac who made us very welcome, provided access and gave us a set of maps and books on the cave system.

I guess that for me the most impressive caving trip was not a wild cave at all but the tourist cave at Rouffignac. As tourist trips go it was relatively quiet and not too "tacky" with souvenirs. Here a little train takes you about half a mile into the hill where there are a series of cave drawings. The most impressive was a frieze of mammoths and some woolly rhinoceros. These were not coloured paintings such as Font-de-Gaume or Lascaux but black and white, charcoal-like drawings on a white limestone wall. What is so impressive is that you get the feeling that whoever drew these pictures had actually just seen these animals in the wood outside and in the deep forest of the Perigord it is not difficult to imagine that the mammoths, cave bears and cave men moved out only yesterday.

# The caves of the Sychryd Gorge

*By Keith Ball*

This is the first of a series of articles that we hope to produce. These will look at our rather smaller caving areas, or rather areas in which few caves have been found in the past. We shall attempt to give an indication of the controls for cave development, especially in those areas that are normally dismissed as having a low potential for major cave discoveries. This lordly dismissal is sometimes with good reason. However even in the least promising areas there is often something to be learned, and these lessons can then be applied to other potentially more promising areas.

Our first area is at Craig y Ddinas near Pont Nedd Fechan. The main cave is Wills Hole, a technically undemanding pothole with a more interesting series of sloping passages that connect near the base of the pitch. The only other cave of any note is Ogof Pont Sychryd which is low crawly grovel or grovelly crawl close to or at the water table. A few other short caves are found in the vicinity, of which the largest is under the arch of Bwa Maen. We even have a vanishing cave: Ogof Coed y Ffyrnau which has been totally filled with mine waste. For a fuller account see Keith Jones (1992) who lists the caves and includes a brief description and plans for most of these. This booklet is especially useful as it also includes a description of the mines. The mines are beyond the scope of this article.

## **Geology.**

The geology has been studied by a number of workers, the most comprehensive and one of the most recent investigations being by Barclay, Taylor and Thomas (1988). This is published as a British Geological Survey memoir and describes the geology of the Merthyr Tydfil

Sheet No 231. This map is at 1:50,000 scale and both solid and drift versions of the map are published. More detailed maps at 1:10,000 scale are also available.

Our particular area is underlain entirely by bedrock of the Carboniferous period and this is overlain by unconsolidated overburden, the main bulk of which is alluvium, close to the river course, with glacially derived drift sparsely distributed on the higher ground. There are some landslips in ground underlain by the Millstone Grit strata, resulting from the contrasting weathering and erosional behaviour of soft shale and hard sandstone.

A simplified bed-rock geological map, with the location of the main caves, is given in Figure 1. This is based upon the geological survey Sheets 231 and on observations by the writers. The figure also includes the geological succession. The drift is omitted to improve clarity. It must be remembered that the geology shown is the surface exposure. The caves are found beneath the surface (by definition) and the beds dip so that the caves are not necessarily found in the same rock types that appear at the surface. You have to think in three dimensions.

There are limestones and limestones. Subtle differences in appearance and composition enable geologists to divide the main limestone into discrete units (known in the trade as "Formations"). The distinction between the limestones is important since the likelihood of caves is much greater in some formations than in others (see for example Ball and Jones, 1993).

The oldest rock formation exposed in the affected area is the Dowlais Limestone

(DoL) which is up to 100m metres thick, however only the uppermost few metres are exposed. Although weathering to a light colour the Dowlais Limestone is typically dark-grey on fresh surfaces, and gives off a sulphurous smell when struck by a hammer. The zone fossil *Composita* (formerly *Seminula*) *ficoides* is abundant in some beds.

The Dowlais Limestone is overlain by the Penderyn Oölite (PO) (about 20m thick). It comprises pale-grey coarse-grained massive oölite. About half way through the oölite is a carious (honeycombed) weathering calcareous sandstone called the Honeycombed Sandstone. This provides an useful marker horizon within the limestone succession. Another

Honeycombed Sandstone sometimes is found at the base of the formation but has not been observed in the Sychryd Valley, although this is common west of the Nedd Fechan. Neither of these beds is easily discernible in the Craig y Ddinas area although the upper Honeycombed Sandstone is well developed at Moel Penderyn to the east-north-east.

Overlying this in turn, is the Penwyllt Limestone (PeL) which is about 10m thick. The beds show a stacked cyclic sequence of dark grey shelly and crinoidal grainstones. Locally sandy, the beds also contain chert nodules and sandstone and shale layers. Sometimes seat-earths and thin coals are also present and are well displayed at Bwa Maen and at Pont

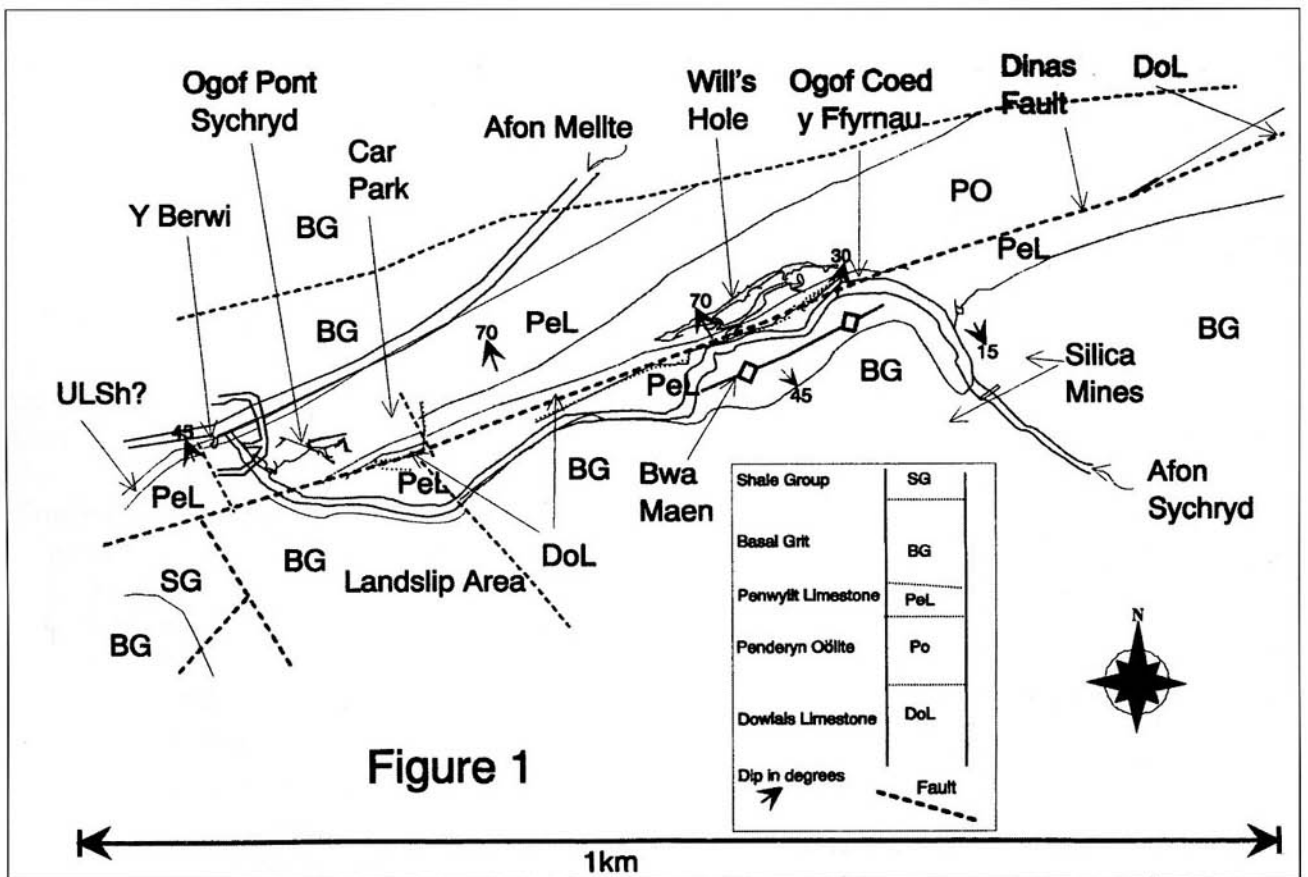


Figure 1. Simplified geological map of the area showing the positions of major caves. The map is based upon the British Geological Survey's Sheet 231, Merthyr Tydfil geological map and upon observations by the writers. The cave surveys are based upon Jones (1992).

Sychryd. At the top of the limestone sequence is a thin shale about 40 cms thick which is variously interpreted. Some people think that this is the last exposure of the Upper Limestone Shales (ULSh) that elsewhere only outcrops west of Pwll Byfre. However shales interbedded with limestone are common in the upper part of the Penwyllt Limestone locally.

The Basal Grit (BG) rests directly upon this shale and the lower surface also cuts down into the limestone beds of the PeL. In this area the gritstone is about 35m thick. It was originally deposited as quartz-rich sand and pebble banks in a large estuary which had its source material to the north. Many of the beds are lens shaped and others have U-shaped bases where the

bottom of the bed has cut down into the underlying strata. They represent sand banks and river channel infillings in temporary river beds which spread out and changed position frequently over the flood plain. Some of the beds are sufficiently pure that it was economical to work them underground and thus gave rise to the intensive silica mining industry. The estuary beds sometimes emerged above sea level and were often tree covered. There are traces of tree roots and fallen trunks on the upper surface of many of the beds. Periodically the sea level rose and the sea flooded in, resulting in the deposition of muds. These have been converted into shales and have a characteristic fossil assemblage which indicate marine conditions.

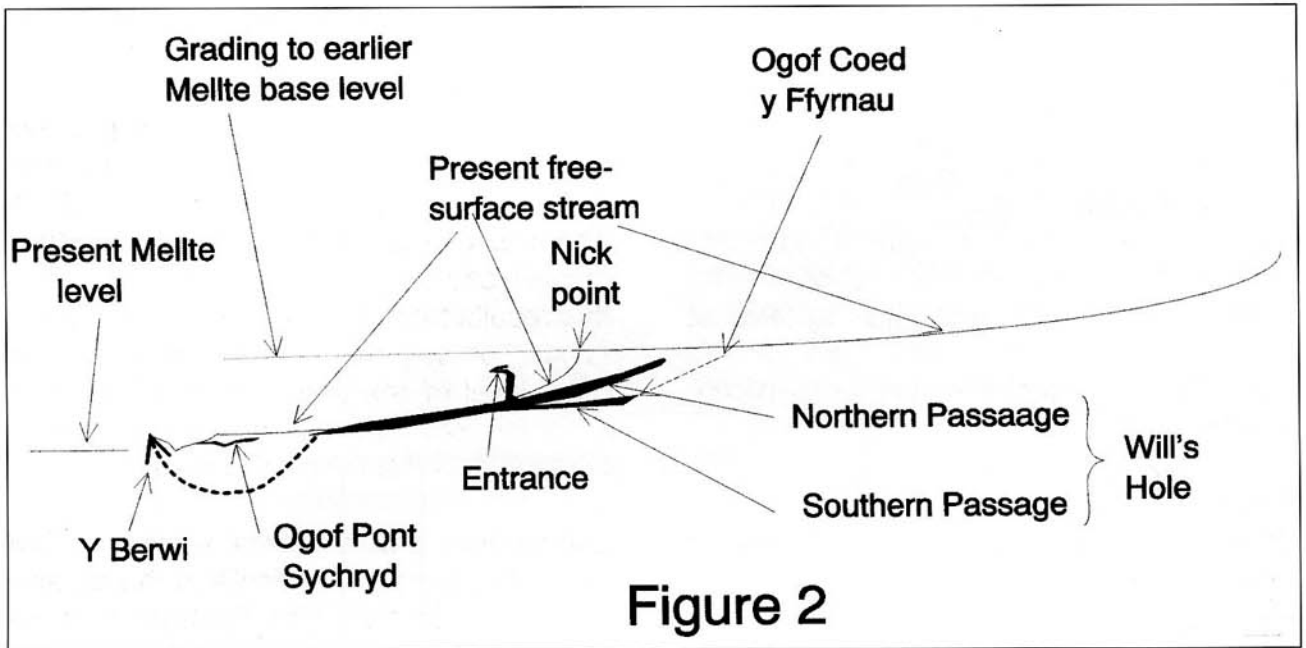


Figure 2. Diagrammatic synthesis of the proposed drainage history. Not to scale. The upper Afon Sychryd is graded to a higher elevation of the Mellte. Following rejuvenation of the Mellte the Sychryd had to adjust to this new base level. It cut its way back eventually to produce the cascade region which was in turn abandoned and by-passed by capture of the surface stream by underground piracy. Firstly the course was along the northern passage of Will's Hole. Then via the Ogof Coed y Ffyrnau - souther passage route. Finally the Ogof Coed y Ffyrnau route became closed and the stream resumed its surface path. Relatively recent downcutting of the Mellte induces a small degree of sympathetic rejuvenation in the lowermost part of the Sychryd and enables entry to Ogof Pont Sychryd to non-divers.

Above the Basal Grit is another marine mudstone sequence (the Shale Group - SG) - but we stop the stratigraphical description at this level.

The Afon Sychryd forms the main drainage feature and comprises a shallow gradient section south east of Bwa Maen, a steep section where it passes Bwa Maen and then a further shallow gradient section to the confluence with the Mellte. At the steep section the river forms a series of small waterfalls and cascades which in aggregate form an impressive cataract, especially following heavy rain. The gorge at this location is imposing, with the north bank formed in steep to overhanging massive pale limestone (Penderyn Oölite), whilst the south bank is formed of the rather darker more impure Penwyllt Limestone with its shale partings, and with a fairly steep dip, being on the northern limb of the spectacular anticline of Bwa Maen. The bed of the stream is eroded along the Dinas Fault, which is one of the elements of the Vale of Neath Disturbance, a complex fault / fold system that extends from the sea near Neath, crosses the country to the north east where it eventually feathers out and is buried beneath the younger rocks of the English Midlands.

### **The river and rejuvenation.**

Over a long period of time rivers tend to adjust their beds so that there is equilibrium between erosion of the bedrock and deposition of sediment, the end result is that if you plot distance along the river against elevation the plot will tend to produce a smooth curve which is logarithmic (Figure 2). These longitudinal profiles (often called "Thalwegs" after the German geomorphologist) may not be truly smooth because of the presence of hard and soft rocks which result in different amounts of erosion, but generally the approximation is close. The shape of the

longitudinal profile depends on the height of the source and to the lowest point in the stream or river (the base level). This base level may be at the confluence with another river system, or a lake, or ultimately at sea level. If there is a change in base level, then the stream will attempt to readjust its profile. If the readjustment is the result of a lowering of the base level then, if the readjustment is incomplete, the new profile will interfere with the old. Where the two curves intersect is called the "nick point". Below the nick point the stream profile will be characterised by a series of rapids and waterfalls and the gradient will be steep. This is often called the "rejuvenated section". Rejuvenation of course, may not have been lengthy enough to produce an equilibrium profile. Above the nick point the profile may tend to be more mature with gentle gradients and meanders.

The history of the development of the river system has been discussed by R. O. Jones (1939), North (1949) and George (1976). The area has undergone a complex history of river capture and rejuvenation. Much of this results from the periodic and pulsatory uplift ( or step-wise decrease in relative base level of the sea). For a full account we cannot recommend more highly North's (1949) book on the area.

Longitudinal profiles reveal segments that relate to previous standstills in the erosive history of the area. The Sychryd rises on the Coal Measures on the slopes of Craig y Llyn and flows over these relatively soft rocks and eventually over the similar rocks of the Shale Group of the Namurian in a dominantly northerly direction. The gradient is still fairly steep but uniform, a few small waterfalls occur over steps formed by the occasional sandstone bed(s) within the dominantly shale succession. The river enters the Dinas Fault zone near Bwa Maen where it is



deflected into a west-south-westerly course (along the fault). Close to this point it forms a 4 - 5m waterfall over a step in the Basal Grit, then flows more gently over the Penwyllt Limestone before descending the steep cascade zone. The river then makes its way with a rather shallow gradient again to the confluence with the Mellte - about 500m away. A short distance above the confluence the river makes another steep descent and has cut a small gorge through the limestone extending a few tens of metres upstream from the confluence. Figures 1 and 2.

The name "Sychryd" means "dry ford" and implies that the river was at one time dry, at least over long periods during each year. Historically and predating the industrial development of the mines it is likely that the river sank where it first encountered the limestone and entered the Will's Hole system via Ogof Coed y Ffyrnau. We can just about remember that during the long hot summers that used to abound when we were youths (when our valleys were

always green) the river was largely dry during the summer. More recently it has become permanently wet.

The effect of industrial pollution seems to have been marked from an early time. North (1949) mentioning Will's Hole notes "About ten years ago a cave-entrance was discovered on the right bank of the Sychryd near Bwa Maen. As at present it leads to two narrow irregular passages running roughly parallel, to one another, but at different levels, for about 300 feet, after which they are connected by a short zigzag passage. The sound of fast running water can be heard in one of the passages, indicating the proximity of a considerable underground stream (we are unable to detect this these days), and the presence of coal dust on the floor and the lower part of the walls of the other passage which is usually dry, suggests that in times of flood the waters of the Sychryd pass that way. The passages point in the direction of the Mellte river, so that the cave system as a whole appears to constitute an underground connection between the two rivers a little above their confluence."

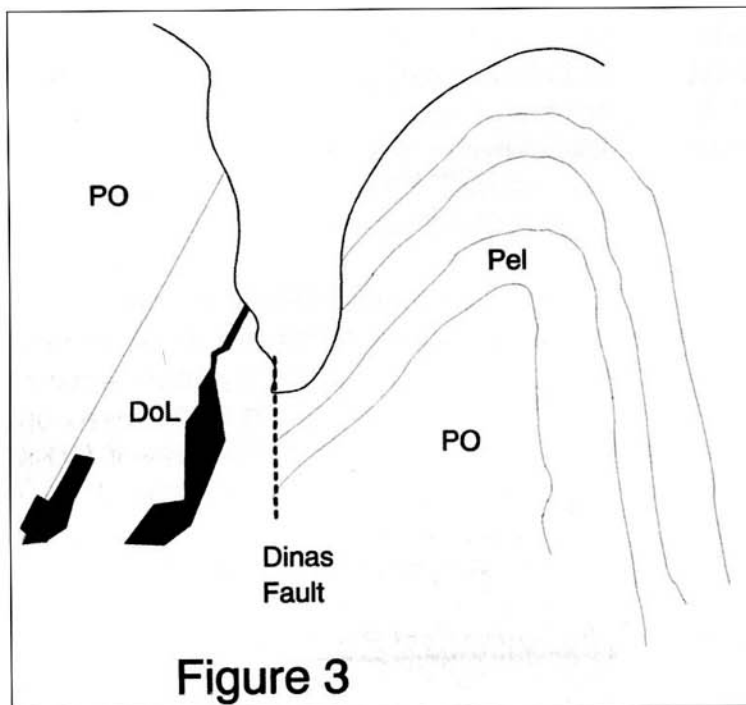


Figure 3. Diagrammatic cross section (not to scale) through the Bwa Maen showing the position of the main passage in Will's Hole in relation to the rock formations.

Any possible sink of the river into Ogof Coed y Ffyrnau has clearly been affected by the presence of the mineral tram-way embankment used to carry the silica rock (quartzite), from the mines that are only a short distance upstream. It was during the final days of the silica mine that the worst of the pollution occurred. To reduce the dire effects of mud pouring into the river, the flow was diverted again into the Will's Hole system via Ogof Coed y Ffyrnau. This resulted in the silting up of the higher levels and the spreading of a layer of thick slimy mud over floors walls and roofs in the lower part of the cave.

A preliminary water tracing experiment was carried out by John Hartwell and Clive Jones in the middle part of the last century. The sump in Will's Hole was shown to connect with the rising of Y Berwi on the banks of the Mellte below the main confluence. This means that the flow from Will's Hole passes under the Sychryd. It was uncertain at the time whether there was any leakage into the Sychryd. If it happened it was too dilute to be visible. The diving notes for the resurgence (CDG 1977) state that the main flow at the limit of exploration is from the north. The resurgence however shows a much stronger flow than would be expected if all the water came from the sump in Will's Hole. There may well be some leakage through the bed of the Sychryd.

### **The Caves**

Will's Hole is located in the banks of the Afon Sychryd at NGR SN 9148 0801. The cave is accessed from a small entrance on the side of the gorge. Then follows a relatively easy climb of about 3m followed by a pitch, steeply sloping for about 12-15m that requires ladder or SRT. At the base of the pitch a gently sloping passage leads off in both directions along the strike. Upwards to the NE it eventually becomes too tight but downslope to the SW it enters a series of passages and eventually another major strike oriented passage. Downslope to the SW this soon reaches a sump that has been dived by Martin Farr to a depth of 15m (too tight Pers. Com.). Upslope the passage goes on and on and eventually chokes. Both major passages are eroded along beds which are particularly conducive to cave development. The passages are strike oriented and since the dip is steep (about 70° to the NW) erosion along the beds produces steeply sloping slot-like cross-sections. The dip reduces to about 30° at the eastern extremity of the northern passage and this is reflected in the cross

section. The southern passage is formed within the upper beds of the Dowlais Limestone. The northern passage spans the contact with the Penderyn Oölite but is mainly within the very uppermost beds of the Dowlais Limestone

Ogof Coed-y-Ffyrnau . SN 9154 0805. A lost cave formally about 85 metres long. and is now blocked due to silt having been washed in from the silica mine. It was first found and explored during 1951 by David Hunt and John Truman. The cave was very narrow, strike-oriented and eventually blocked by boulders in a clay matrix. A voice connection could be made with Will's Hole. The nearest part of Will's Hole (the eastern extremity of the southern Passage) was estimated to be 45-50m away horizontally and 10m below, and in the same beds.

The entrance was located by the overhang at the north side of the river, about 110 metres upstream of Will's Hole. It would seem to be entirely developed within the upper beds of the Dowlais Limestone.

Ogof Pont Sychryd NGR SN 9108 0792 This is a small very tight cave with about 220m of passage. It is found entirely within the Penwyllt Limestone and although the tight bedding control is not as apparent as in Will's Hole the cave extends generally along the strike of the beds in an easterly direction. Water table control is apparent - few passages extending much above the present water level and, as far as can be judged, below it either. The recent (geologically speaking) rejuvenation of the river has probably dropped the water table sufficiently to provide access to those cavers without gills.

### **(Pre)Historical Perspectives.**

We envisage the more recent geological history of the area to be dominated by the effects of the rejuvenation of the river systems and the effect that this process

has had on the caves. Originally the river was graded to one of the much higher levels of the Afon Mellte. A number of river bank caves (now fossil) were developed in response to this higher water level. These are still visible as arches, shelters and drift filled passages.

A sudden (geologically speaking) pulsatory drop in the base level of the Afon Mellte developed, in turn responding to a drop in the base level of the Afon Nedd, and this resulted in the rejuvenation of the lower section of the Sychryd. Progressively waterfalls receded up the valley, to their present location at Bwa Maen. During the down-cutting remnant arches and small rock shelters were formed and then abandoned as the river level dropped. Above this section the thalweg shows a mature section. It is clear that there was progressive sinking of the water at stages during the recession of the waterfalls. The entrance of Wills Hole is clearly related to the bed of the river at a higher level than at present and can be related to the projection of the upper section of the river.

The sink of the system through Ogof Coed y Ffyrnau is a further reflection of the recession. Although the transmission of the water through the cave had reduced the gradient it was still very much steeper than the more mature sections up- or down-stream. The in-filling of this latter cave has deflected water once again down through the surface feature of the gorge. However one can only think that this is temporary and the fill is likely to be flushed out in time along with the mud in the lower reaches of Will's Hole.

It seems unlikely, in the light of the present hydro-geology of the area that there is much potential in the Will's Hole area of the Craig y Ddinas. This is especially true if one thinks of the likely positions of the

main favourable beds for cave development and where they are exposed. These are near the top of the Dowlais Limestone and within the lower beds of the Penderyn Oölite. Elsewhere in the region, these are the beds that the major cave systems of Porth yr Ogof and those in the Nedd Fechan are found. The exposures of these speleogenic beds along the upper section of the Afon Sychryd and considerations of the geometry suggest that the contact would repay further exploration for fossil resurgences. Since there is underground continuity as far as Moel Penderyn, some three kilometres to the east-north-east and about 150m higher, this stretch would be the obvious target if we had a means of seeing through the rocks. Unfortunately there appears to be no obvious drainage conduits that would further reduce the options, although these may have existed in the past in response to higher water tables.

#### **Footnote.**

*In a recent issue of Descent (158, Feb. 2001) it was reported that Ian Pinkstone had restarted the underwater exploration of Y Berwi, following on the work of Martyn Farr. It remains as low and as horribly muddy as before, but now extends for some 60m, achieves a depth of about 7m and almost reaches the large display board at the entrance to the car-park. That is well beyond the surface course of the Afon Sychryd.*

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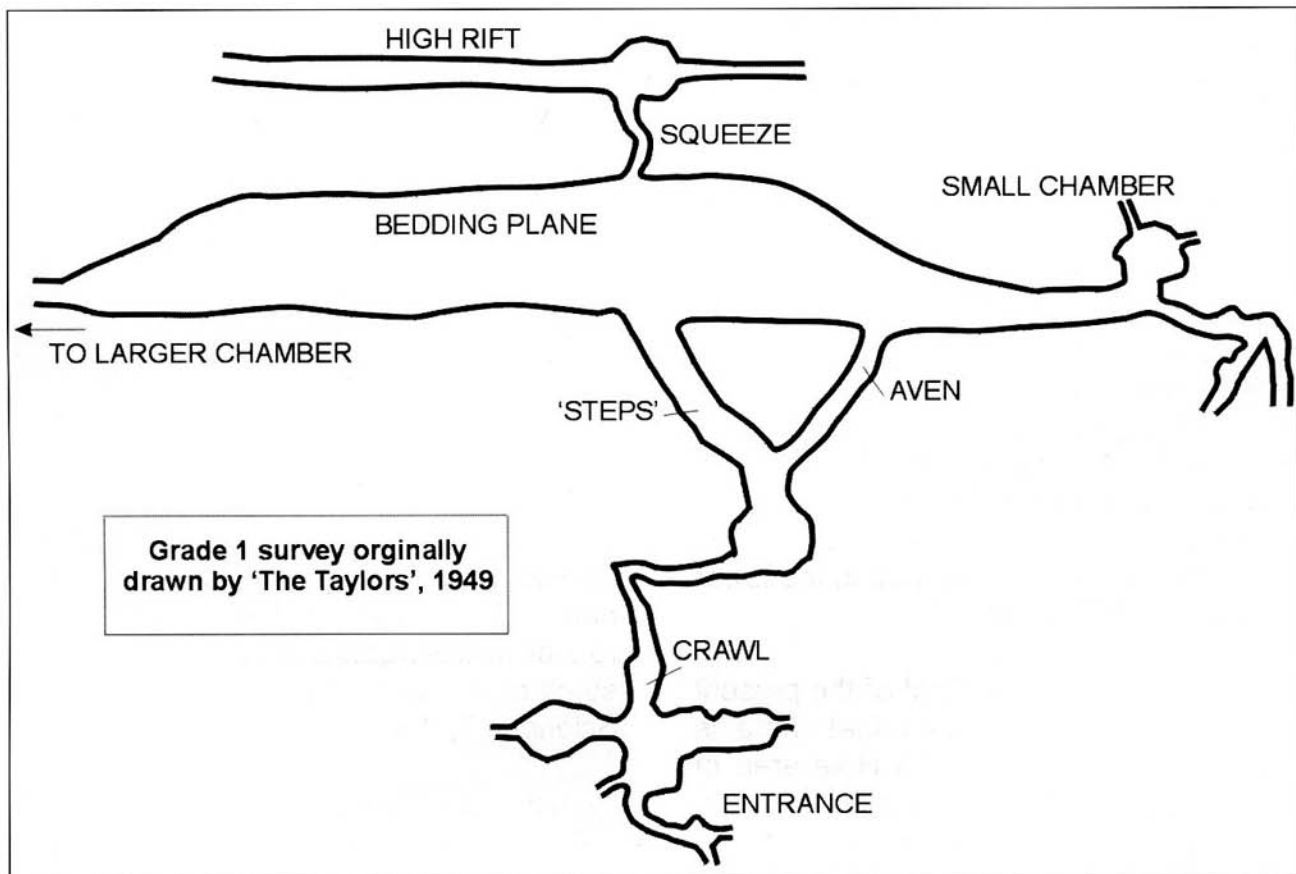
**Appendix:** Sychrhyd's lost cave, Ogof Coed y Ffyrnau. An account and

description of the cave by 'The Taylors, Feb. 1949 (from a donation to the SWCC library called 'the Cave Book', a gathering of cuttings and notes put together by the Taylors).';

**'New Cave' above Will's Hole, Sychrhyd Gorge.**

Discovered a few years ago, this rather pleasant cave is difficult to enter – firstly because the entrance itself is very tiny and difficult to spot, but chiefly on account of the exasperating way in which it vanishes completely from time to time under the dumping of chippings put there by the workmen from the silica workings higher up the gorge.

The cave is a hundred yards or so farther up the gorge from Will's hole and on the same side at the distant end of the great overhang of rock and the entrance itself is but a yard or so from the tramway.



A vertical drop of some nine feet reaches a small chamber and the way on (often blocked by rubble fallen from above but easily clearable) is via a low crawl.

This in turn leads to a twisting and rather awkward tight passage with more headroom. The passage increases in size and drops very steeply down in a series of gigantic steps until, at a depth of some thirty feet a long low bedding chamber is reached extending north and south as in wills hole.

To the right an aven joins the 'steps' down and further along in a small chamber.

In the opposite direction a tedious and painful hands-and-knees crawl eventually

comes to quite a large chamber in a rather unstable condition but with a possible way on.

Returning to the foot of the 'steps' – two slightly easier ways through the accumulation of stones under the bedding plane lead to a deceptive squeeze through to a parallel passage. This crawl looks perfectly simple (and is when going through) but it is a very different kettle of fish when trying to come out so be careful. This passage is a high rift and has not yet been fully explored but the whole system appears to have had a connection with Will's Hole.

## What is this life so full of care if we have no time to stand and stare?

*By Clive Jones*

Stand and stare at the face of the Dinas rock. Stare with care for it contains a picture of the past, a portrait of a pothole which once penetrated that limestone mass. It carried a stream through to a cave. The marks of this ancient water course snake down the centre of the rock. Most miss seeing it and those that do cannot fail but be puzzled by the scale of the thing and more puzzled as to where it came from and where it went to. It seems to have continued below the level of today's water table at a time when the water table was much, very much higher. A phreatic system down to some depth to emerge-where?

The quarry master called a halt at this point for reasons unknown and left the Dinas monument as his contribution. (possibly when they reached more cave than rock). Time has weathered the rock until today it is hard to imagine that this place was an active quarry and that the current cliff face is the off spring of hard labours.

This lime-stone cenotaph is made from the widths of beds which plunge almost perpendicularly to interity. On one side the river Sychryd carves its way along the Dinas disturbance and on the on the other the river Mellte does its own thing along the Neath disturbance. Rivers ruled by faults. It was at this point, the confluence of the two rivers that Keith and I started our walk one fine July morning. This tranquil place was once the focus of an industrial revolution. Black powder was produced along the banks of the Mellte to keep miners, quarry men and soldiers happy. Limestone from the Dinas quarry fed kilns to produce lime to keep the land sweet and was used as an essential ingredient for the

many iron works in the area. At the silica mines, one of the few underground sources of silica in the world the miners hacked away at the only pure silica beds in the basal grit. Their output was converted into high quality refractory bricks which were exported world wide to keep the furnaces of the metallurgical industries intact.

All that now remains of this hub bub of activity are a few rusting remnants of the super structures and walls of workplaces and water works. There are tales of horse power, water mills, explosions that shook the valley, overhead cable ways and of the engineering ingenuity that was the hall mark of those times. All this had been driven by a special breed of entrepreneurs.

William Weston Young was typical of the times. He came to the area, acquired some knowledge of flower milling and set himself up as a farmer flower miller corn merchant. The business failed so he found employment as an illustrator at a porcelain factory in Swansea. A host of ventures and adventures followed including recovering a part of a cargo of copper lost of the coast near Porthcawl and a patent for making salt He then made his fortune by inventing the Dinas refractory brick using the silica that occurs near Pont Nedd Fechan.

But back to the purpose of today's walk and the rest of the summer wine. I needed to understand the shape and structure of an area which had been my childhood playground. Keith too knew the Dinas rock of old, but being a geologist his understanding of the place was much greater than mine. He could easily believe how the hands of time had moulded the

rocks around us as if they had been putty. I had more difficulty.

The Sychryd is no different from the other rivers in this area. Lush vegetation at this time of year and leafy trees trying to give cover to a turbulent river. It appears that the river runs in a fault and that one side is as different geologically from the other as Lords are from commons. The beds that were almost vertical at the face of the Dinas rock had now been bent over so that those that were the cliff top are now on the right hand side of this valley as we walked up it. One of the beds, a massive light oolite carries more marks of water flows which I always associate with old cave systems.

Its worth talking time to look at the writing on this wall and trying to imagine the power of the pen that authored it.

Soon into a clearing. A magic place. An old bridge, wild strawberries and Bwa Maen, a natural stone arch on the other side of the river. This tortured anticline illustrates the power of geological forces, so I was told by an unbiased source. The folding which can be replicated by bending the pages of a book produces gaps between the beds which once we both explored. The top of the fold had once been capped with gritstone now long gone. We scrambled up the rapids and came to Wills' hole a cave discovered by a local caver in 1939. The puzzling thing was that today there was a very strong draught blowing out. Neither of us could remember a draught in the past. None of the three dead ends to the cave indicated any way on. A sump and two tight boulder chokes. So where was the wind coming from. Perhaps there was enough head between this entrance and the place under the cliff higher up the valley where the stream once sank to create such a draught.

Those of you who come to the club and find that they have a little time to spare

would be well advised to spend it visiting this place where the world ends and paradise begins. An added attraction are the several first class hostelrys in the area offering food and drink to the weary traveller.

Above the rapids an impressive cliff face, again remember that this is not the face seen at the front of the Dinas rock. This is those strata folded through 90 degrees. Many caves in the face and one impressive entrance now almost hidden by brambles and other growth but blocked with clay. An under cut in the cliff where once a small tramway ran and later a camping place for local kids. Here once sank the Sychryd into Wills Hole.

These imposing limestone's do not outcrop for long they sink below the surface to be replaced as the outcrop by mill stone grit. On the other river bank was Bwa Maen and this went to Penderyn. We argued about caves being fault driven and that here we had lime-stone and a fault all the way to Penderyn. No real conclusion except that hope springs eternal and in this case it should be that a through route to the Red Lion was a distinct possibility. As a boy I was led to believe that here in Bwa Maen slept Arthur and his knights, the place was known as Arthur's cave. In a storm, with a little imagination, you can sense the slash of sword on shield as the servants of the sovereign settle old scores and prepare for the day of reckoning.

On to the Silica mine, now quiet but once a noisy place where men and machinery clattered away the day. You can laugh I can remember it. There is so much to learn and so much to do in a place like this. If youth only knew and if age only could.

Over the top down to the gun powder works and from thence to the Angel, to continue our deliberations?

# Cantabria '99: Expedition Report

*By Gary Vaughan, pictures Martin Hoff collection.*

## 1. Scope of report

It is intended that this report will provide an overview of the South Wales Caving Club's Cantabria '99 expedition. It is hoped that this report will be augmented by more detailed accounts and observations of those who attended, published either in future editions of the South Wales Caving Club newsletter or by way of a revision to this report.

## 2. Expedition objectives

The objectives of the expedition were as follows:

- 2.1 Follow up and push to a conclusion all unresolved leads left by the 1998 expedition
- 2.2 Continue to surface sweep the Pico San Vicente area (SV), namely complete area SVA and continued into areas SVB and SVJ.
- 2.3 Establish poor weather access to the active resurgence in the Rio Gandara.
- 2.4 Carry out a survey of possible resurgence sites in the Rio Gandara.

## 3. Background information

Following the South Wales Caving Clubs expedition to Cantabria in August 1997 a working relationship was established with the local caving group Agrupacion Espeleologica Ramalegia (AER). During that expedition a survey method was established which provided accurate recording of shaft location quickly and effectively. The area worked in 1997 was the area "SV", Pico San Vicente. For ease of survey the area itself (SV) was subdivided into nine sub areas SVA to SVJ. These areas are identified graphically on the plan attached to this report. For the most part, the 1997 expedition carried out

trials of the survey method in area SVA. Provisional work was also carried out in area SVE. By the close of the 1997 expedition, 42 sites had been located of which only eight were investigated and surveyed to an immediate conclusion.

A second expedition was made to the area in a 1998. During this expedition the surface weep was extended to a point where area SVA was 85 per cent completed. Beneath ground most of the original 42 sites were explored and surveyed to a conclusion. SVA34 which had terminated at a false bolder floor at -54 metres in 1997 was extended to a "too tight" slot at -124 metres. SVA30 entered into a large shaft and was explored to an apparent conclusion at -152 metres. On the final day of the 1998 expedition a further 21 surface sites were recorded and logged for a future investigation. It was therefore with a degree of cautious optimism that an expedition was planned for August 99. The deep drafting shaft of SVA30 and SVA34 offered hopes of a passable connection to larger voids within the mountain whilst other promising surface shafts suggested that there was yet ample opportunity for this area to provide a cave system linking to the known resurgence site.

Both the 1997 expedition and the 1998 expedition were fortunate in receiving permission from the 'Ayuntamiento de Ramales de la Victoria' to establish a base camp at one of the local parks Gandason – Cubillas. This assistance had proved invaluable. It provided a sheltered and secure area in which the expedition could establish a control tent with all of its associated equipment as well as a camping area for all of the expedition members. The site proved to be safe and quiet and with the added advantage of a



toilet block. In 1999 the expedition was again granted permission by the 'Ayuntamiento de Ramales de la Victoria' to use the site.

Another contact who had become invaluable over the two preceding years was Rafael Zorilla. Rafael lives in Riba, a small village in the Ason Valley. As well as providing the catalyst which brought the first expedition into existence, his continuing help over the years has made the logistics of running the expedition that much easier. By allowing much of the heavier equipment to be stored at his house much time is saved by not shipping it to and from the UK.

Contact with the local caving group, the Agrupacion Espeleologica Ramaliega, has been facilitated by the advent of electronic mail and the World Wide Web. Technology has gone some distance to help remove



*Martin Hoff exploring. Cantabria 1999.*

the language barrier and an established route now allows us to exchange data news and views with our Spanish friends.

#### **4. Fieldwork**

##### **• 4.1 Introduction**

The expedition ran from the 7th August to the 21st August and involved 16 participants. Base camp was again established at the extreme western end to of the municipal park at the Gandason – Cubillas by kind permission of the 'Ayuntamiento de Ramales de la Victoria'.

##### **• 4.2 Base camp**

Base camp consisted of two large frame tents erected in line and covered by one extremely large tarpaulin. The control tent held all computing equipment used for the purpose of day to day processing of survey's and GPS data and also doubled as equipment store and first aid station. The second tent acted as mess tent and comprised of a number of butane gas burners set up on the lightweight trestle tables which had been stored with Rafael. The covered space between the two tents (approx. three metres) acted as a dining, meeting and social area again making use of the lightweight trestle tables. As with previous years, the base station antenna was erected in precisely the same location thus enabling continuity of Co-ordinate control. The toilet facilities were again invaluable and this year boasted electric lighting care of the 'Ayuntamiento de Ramales de la Victoria'.

The expedition members continued to refine their techniques for solar heating shower water. The local facilities and services in Ramales de la Victoria continued to provide excellent service by way of food, water, wine and Wellington boots!

##### **• 4.3 Communications**

Previous expeditions had attempted to link the exploration area SVA to base camp by

use of hand-held radios. Trials had proven unsuccessful with clear communication only being possible when line of sight was established between field team and base camp. In the event of emergency it was felt unlikely that communication by this method would be of benefit as much of the area extended out of sight of base camp by a considerable distance. Preliminary trials in 1998 however proved that mobile telephones could provide a reliable (if somewhat expensive) form of emergency communication. Mobile telephones worked well both from the base camp and the exploration area. For the duration of the 1999 expedition a base telephone number was therefore established directly in the control tent whereby the exploratory teams on the hill could ring for assistance in emergency situations.

#### • 4.4 Expedition area

As with the 1997 and 1998 expedition, the majority of the work focused on area SVA (see attached plan). Approximately 75-80 % of all man-hours was used up in this area. In addition however several excursions were made to the Rio Gandara to further investigate access and to commence surface exploration. One team day was also spent in the area SVB and the surface sweep of area SVJ was also commenced.

#### • 4.5 Access

As with previous expeditions the main area of SVA was reached by driving to a point about five minutes above the village of Rozas on the new tarmac road which leads to one of the valley co-operative buildings. >From here a one-hour walk gave access to most of the sites explored during this expedition. Areas SVB and SVJ were best reached from the village of Manzeneda. Parking within the village one strikes a path marked as "SV1" on the local hiking Guide map which reaches the area of SVB after a moderate walk of one hour and the area of SVJ after a gentle walk off

15 minutes.

To establish access to the drafting resurgence site was indeed one of the expedition objectives. Following the failure of the Easter expedition to ford the Gandara on the known access route it was felt that a detailed reconnaissance of the area would be of use. A farm track was followed leaving the village off Incedo which itself joined a footpath almost directly to the resurgence. Although in total the walk from Incedo was only 25-30 minutes it was felt that a suitable vehicle could be taken to within 10 minutes of the resurgence dig subject to the relevant permissions being available.

#### • 4.6 GPS

As detailed above, the peg marking the position of the base station antenna was successfully located thus enabling the new lightweight antenna to be erected in precisely the same spot as previous years. The base station GPS, a Garmin 45, was run on 9 days out of the 14 and collected a total of 5240 observations. The local grid Datum was arithmetically meaned and refined, its position being adjusted by 0.15m East and 0.36m North.

The expedition this year had at its disposal three roving units, two Garmin 45's used in 1997 and 1998 and new for 1999 a Garmin GPS 12XL with a built-in averaging facility. Due to its design the 12XL provided the better coverage in the tree covered and steep sided areas and thus tended to be used by parties working in the Gandara.

#### • 4.7 Equipment

The expedition was primarily an SRT using expedition based on conventional UK rigging practice. Belays were either natural, hand drilled 13 millimetre spit type rock anchors or drilled eight millimetre expansion type stud anchors. Hand drilled anchors were placed using conventional hand held driver and hammer. Over the

duration of the expedition 15 of this type of anchor were placed.

Stud anchors were placed using 24 volt Bosch cordless drills of which three had been made available by the kind consent of The South Wales Caving Club committee. Over the duration of the expedition 42 off these anchors were placed.

The expedition had at its disposal approximately 800 metres of Edelrid

Super Static Longlife Rope, partly donated by South Wales Caving Club, partly remaining unsold from previous expeditions. The expedition also carried an additional stock of 400m of new rope for contingency purposes. In the event however, this rope was returned to the UK unused. Hangers were donated for use by participants on a return or new for lost basis. Adequate Carbide to run the expedition remained in store with Rafael, left over from 1997 and 1998

#### • 4.8 Summary of fieldwork activities

The following details a brief overview of the activities carried out on a day by day basis

Friday 6th August	Advance party arrives on site. Establish base camp. Collect gear stored with Rafael. Prepare equipment ready for the fieldwork.
Saturday 7th August	Establishing equipment in area SVA. Ropes, hangars, water etc. One team commenced rigging SVA30 as far as the slot.
Sunday 8th August	Continuing to transport equipment up the hill. More rope to area SVA. SVA30 rigged to 1998 limit. Narrow slot examined but not pushed. Second team rigged and surveyed SVA51 (blocked at -35 metres). Third team rigged and surveyed SVA52.
Monday 9th August	Multiple teams working in the area SVA. First team rigged and surveyed SVA60, SVA62 and SVA55. Second team rigged and surveyed SVA66 and SVA68. Third team rigged and surveyed SVA61 and SVA53 with the latter left ongoing. Forth team was sent to resurgence site to establish a dry route of access from Incedo for purpose of winter digging access. Continued to make a cursory investigation of the area SVD.
Tuesday 10th August.	More rope transported to area SVA. One team continued to rig and survey SVA53 to its conclusion at -80 metres. A second team started to rig and survey SVA71. Standing water detected in tight rift in SVA71. A third team rigged and surveyed SVA54-56, SVA63.
Wednesday 11th August.	One team continuing at the bottom of SVA71 but with little success. A second team rigged and surveyed SVA72 to its conclusion at -40 metres. A third team rigged and surveyed SVA57, SVA64 and SVA65.
Thursday 12th August.	One team continuing at the bottom of SVA71. A second team examined bottom of SVA30 and pushed slot to a small chamber with continuing tight rift. A third team rigged and surveyed SVA58, SVA59 and SVA73.
Friday 13th August.	One team continued at bottom of SVA71. Second team rigged and surveyed SVA69.
Saturday 14th August.	One team carrying out surface sweep of the remainder of SVA and then across to SVJ. A second team continued to survey

Sunday 15th August.	SVA69. A third team continued at the bottom of SVA71. Link established between SVA71 and SVA69. A fourth team rigged and surveyed SVA70 to a conclusion.
Monday 16th August.	One team continuing with a surface sweep of SVJ. A second team rigged and surveyed SVA67 and SVA48. Third team rigged and surveyed SVA50, SVA82-84.
Tuesday 17th August.	One team de-rigging SVA30. A second team working at bottom of SVA50. Third team extending reconnaissance in SVC. Surveyed SVC3.
Wednesday 18th August.	One team carrying out a surface sweep of SVB. A second team continued to sweep SVJ. A third team continued to sweep SVC.
Thursday 19th August.	One team removing gear from area SVA. A second team rigged and surveyed SVJ7 and SVJ9. A third team continuing at bottom of SVA50.
Friday 20th August.	One team continued to push SVA50 to a conclusion Strike expedition base camp for the return to UK. Litter collection etc.

• **5.0 Conclusion**

Initial reflections upon the results of the expedition may be disappointing. Despite the large number of sites visited, the size and depth of one or two of the more

promising leads, the detection of draughts at quite a few locations and last but not least the enormous effort put in by all of the participants, area 'SV' has failed to provide a significant breakthrough. My personal concern is that enthusiasm will dwindle for work in the area. Without the spark of open leads in front of next year's expedition, there may be a reluctance to return to the hard slog of yet more of surface reconnaissance and provisional shaft dropping. This is compounded by the fact that SVA and SVB are now substantially complete leaving only areas which are mostly low lying farmland to sweep. Although the sweep of these areas can be affected swiftly as the terrain is much more forgiving, my initial perception is that the number of sites found per day which require further exploration will drop significantly thus leading to a crisis in manpower utilisation. In all probability the remainder of the area SV will be completed before the end of next year's expedition.

On a more positive note, I am encouraged at the level of enthusiasm, which exists for further exploration in sites such as SVA30



*Simon Lacy attempting to follow the draft.*

and SVA71. In addition, the vastly improved access route to the resurgence must now lead to a determined assault on this excellent digging site, which I feel certain, will yield access to a major section of cave streamway. Despite the lack of surveyed cave passage the expedition did achieve a lot of hard won conclusions. As I hope will become evident from the final results, every conceivable shaft has been pushed to the best of our ability and to each immediate end.

Although I believe there is potential for a major void to exist beneath the areas covered, I feel confident that the intensity of the search has been such that we can conclude there to be no open direct access to a major or significant cave system. If such a system is to be accessed it will be by continued pushing of the existing deeper sites or by discovery of a lower access point elsewhere in the exploratory area.

Um! One says I'm just outside  
Mexico City  
and the other one says I'm near  
the Greenwich Dome !



*The joys of GPS...*

Don't be stupid, there's too many  
people come this way for it to be the Dome !



## Cantabria 2000

### The South Wales Caving Club Expedition to Northern Spain

INTERIM REPORT by Tony Baker



*The Anson Valley. Photo Martin Hoff*

#### **Introduction**

From 28 July – 13 August 2000, members of South Wales Caving Club paid another visit to the Rames de la Victoria area of northern Spain, to continue with cave exploration work started in 1997 and continued in 1998 and 1999. The expedition objectives were:

- *To conclude the surface sweep and cave exploration work on Pico San Vicente that had occupied the team in previous years*
- *To extend the surface sweep and cave exploration into the area around La Canal de la Hornijo*
- *To continue with work in the resurgence area below Pico San Vicente*
- *To continue with the temperature survey of the Rivers Ason and Gandara, to establish the presence of further resurgences*

Additionally, we were joined on the campsite by members of the Sheffield University Speleological Society, who were undertaking the classic Cueto-Coventosa traverse successfully completed by SWCC in 1997. While some of the SUSS party took part in the exploratory work, some

SWCC members who had missed the trip in 1997 took the opportunity to do the Cueto-Coventosa trip.

Members of both the South Wales Caving Club and Sheffield University Speleological Society would like to express again our gratitude to the Ayuntamiento de Rames de la Victoria for allowing us to use the park at Gandasson-Cubillas as a campsite. It serves as an excellent base for our activities and we consider ourselves lucky to receive such a warm and generous welcome from the town and people of Rames.

This report aims to provide an outline of our activities in summer 2000; a fuller series of reports will appear in a future edition of the SWCC Newsletter.

Each of our objectives will now be dealt with in turn.

- *To conclude the surface sweep and cave exploration work on Pico San Vicente that had occupied the team in previous years.*



*Rhys Williams exploring surface shafts, Cantabria 2000*

Little work was done on San Vicente on this expedition, largely because our attention was heavily focused on the Hornijo area. However, a return visit was made to SVA 50, a "going" cave that was explored in 1999, and this was pushed to a conclusion, sadly yielding little new cave.

There are several sites on San Vicente that still require exploration to definite conclusions and this area still has much to offer future expeditions.

- *To commence the surface sweep and cave exploration of the area around La Canal de la Hornijo.*

This objective occupied most of the expedition's manpower for most of our time in the field. This area had been previously reconnoitred - albeit only briefly

- and was seen as having much promise. However, once we started working in earnest, we soon realised that the terrain here was exceptionally difficult, even compared to the awkward landscape previously encountered on San Vicente. This made thorough, accurate surface sweeps almost impossible and whole days were spent with teams covering little ground and finding very little in the way of promising leads. Many of the obvious cave entrances had been previously explored and labelled with paint markers. While some of these were descended towards the end of the expedition, none offered anything in the way of new leads.

Just as we were starting to get a "feel" for the area, several days of bad weather hampered our activities: low cloud and driving rain, with the attendant poor visibility, made surface work difficult and unpleasant as well as unproductive and, with hindsight, our time would have been better spent elsewhere.

Once the weather improved, we concentrated on an area of more promising terrain that contained several previously examined sites and some that were unexplored. In particular, the area contains a line of big open vertical shafts and adjacent cave features and while these have been thoroughly examined by others they indicate the much better potential of this part of the mountain. There were further difficulties here, however; the area was a long way from the nearest road and getting there involved a walk of more than an hour, much of which was across awkward terrain, which made the ferrying of ropes and equipment arduous.

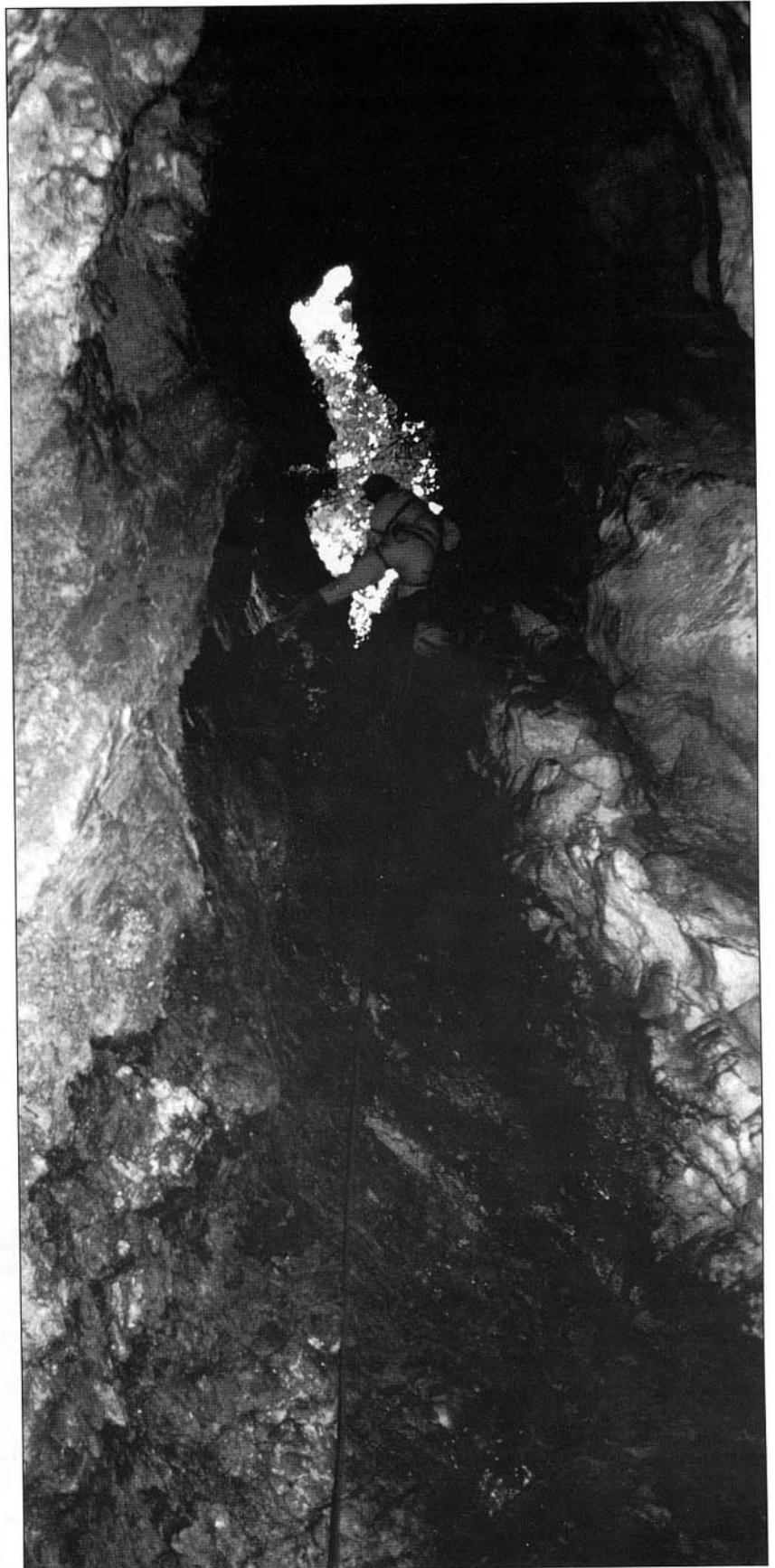
This area did, though, provide the expedition with its few real finds, most notably the site labelled PHA11, which

contained two splendid pitches and was pushed to a total depth of 46m. This site draughts well and a continuation can be seen, but access to it will involve considerable enlargement of a narrow slot and such work is beyond the scope of means currently available to us while in Spain. Other sites investigated here included a large, impressive daylight shaft more than 30m deep that showed no sign of previous descent. Sadly this was easily pushed to its conclusion but not before the cavers concerned had enlarged a constriction and gained access to a side passage containing a pretty grotto.

One team undertook a walk from this area right down to the town of Ramales, but found little of note.

- To continue with work in the resurgence areas below Pico San Vicente

This project had been started in 1999 and continued at Easter 2000. This promising area provides real hope of a way into the large cave system that is believed to exist beneath Pico San Vicente. Several members of the summer expedition continued work here but progress was hampered by difficult surface terrain and the need for more equipment. Attention was transferred to the effort involved in pushing surface sites on Hornijo.



*Tony Baker Exploring. M. Hoff*



- *To continue with the temperature survey of the Rivers Ason and Gandara, to establish the presence of further resurgences.*

The heavy rain encountered during the first week of the expedition had swelled both rivers to the point where work on this objective was impractical, and in the second week we were all involved in work on Hornijo that was deemed more important.

While this objective always seems to acquire low priority when teams are actually out in Spain its importance should not be underestimated.

### **Conclusion**

There is no point in disguising the fact that the results of the summer 2000 expedition are disappointing. What we had believed would be an exciting and fruitful area for cave exploration turned out to offer little in

the way of easily available new cave and the expedition was hampered by weather conditions. Work on other objectives and existing leads did not progress as well as had been hoped. However, some valuable lessons have been learned which will be useful when planning and running future expeditions.

On a more positive note, all the expedition members enjoyed their two weeks despite the pitfalls. Additionally, the Sheffield University SS successfully rigged, traversed and de-rigged the Cueto-Coventosa system and the two clubs now have strong links that will benefit both in the future.

Our enthusiasm for cave exploration in the area remains undiminished and it is hoped that forthcoming visits to the area will enjoy greater success.



*Where's the 'big stuff'?*

## Cantabria 2000: An Antipodeans Visit.

*By Brian Bowell*

If you emigrate from Wales to New Zealand, what motivates you to fly back to Europe on the promise of a 'Osome day, maybe' caving area?

After a couple of summer seasons at Ramales I considered myself a veteran. I'd struggled across those dolines with the best of them. I'd taken part in those evening conversations about how to move on. I'd worked hard and seen others doing the same, showing their conviction that we were on to a good thing. Both years I'd spent days with buddies, hammering seven bells out of a rock or a flake in the hope of moving on. The second summer I was trying to reach the first water we'd heard underground while the rest of my family were flying to take up a new life in New Zealand. We never reached the water, but Tony's torch is somewhere in the wet.

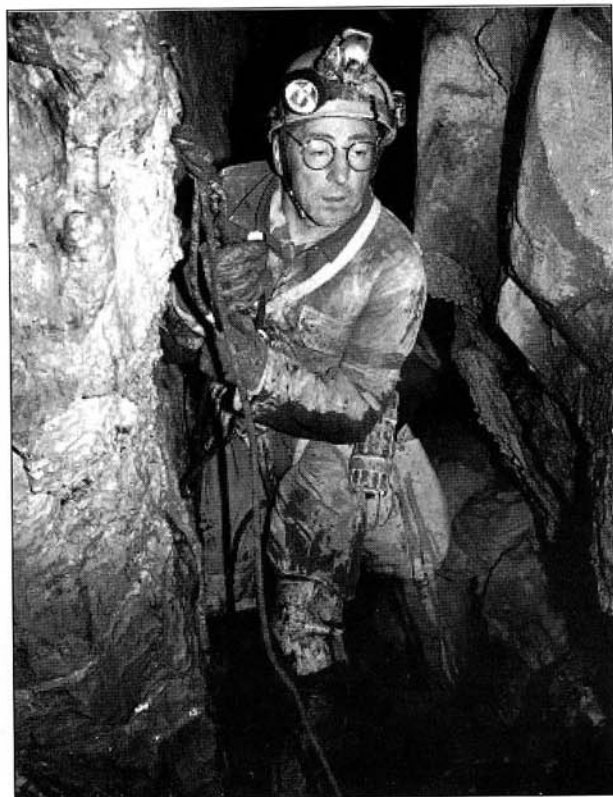
I had several reasons for a third year in Spain: there was some unfinished business in Dead Horse Dig, AKA SVA 50 was awaiting our return, I consider the Spanish trips to be a valuable, hopefully long-term, project for the club, and I wanted to see some SWCC caving companions for probably the last time for quite a while.

'ODead Horse Dig'. It was an attractive proposition because it was on the lower edge of the doline and you arrived there conscious. It's name came from the decomposed corpse of a horse lying at the bottom of the entrance shaft. Tony B, Fred Levett and I first dropped into it on August 16 1999. My diary notes: 'To SVA50 with Tony and Fred. We forgot the crow bar and spent several fruitless hours trying to move an obstinate rock, then surveyed out. Back

on the surface I had a brilliant idea for moving the rock. Tony said he wished I'd had it earlier!' We spent another two days in the cave, passing the rock to a pitch at the bottom of which was the start of another drop.

By then it was time to pack up and drive back to Wales, and SVA50 was still going. I think I'd convinced myself to make a third trip before we arrived back in the UK. After all nobody had been there before, and in exploration that's a powerful motivator.

The 2000 trip began with us spending time on recce. trips over Hornijo, on an area we had briefly looked at in 1998. At the time we had noted a draughting slot that held some promise and one of the objectives in 2000 was to find it again. Unfortunately it



*Brian enjoying the delights of caving in Cantabria. Martin Hoff*

had either moved or our memories were faulty, because we never found it. On August 3rd Martin Hoff, Tony B and I went back to SVA50 to renew its acquaintance. The horse was still there, but even thinner.

This time we were armed with better kit, drills, feathers and wedges. Three hours work saw us almost breaking through at the point we stalled at last year. The shaft below beckoned. Next day saw us clearing a way through and assessing the way down. The shaft was 10.2m and we landed on a gravel floor but there was definitely no way on down. San Vincente wins again. Though there's still one thing about Dead Horse Dig that puzzles me. How did the frog get down to the bottom of the cave? Still fired with enthusiasm we redirected our efforts to Hornijo again. Which was a shame because the walk there does leave you unconscious.

Our new area was fun. It was fun because: it's long way from the cars, the limestone is covered with foliage, the dolines are full of trees. This all makes a systematic search quite a challenge. Down in a doline there may be several shafts but you need to wade through the plant life to find them. Also the really obvious ones have a painted number on them, if you look hard, to show that the Spaniards have been to the easy ones first. Of course, towards the end of the expedition H10 was found.

The guys who first entered it reckoned that it bottomed out at the base of the entrance pitch. But on August 9th, Martin, Tony and I went back. My diary notes H10 revisited for a photographic trip. A way on was found at the base of a 20m shaft (parallel to the 40m). Incidentally the photos were expensive. It cost £100 to get my camera fixed after I dropped it. The next day we were back with tools, including a drill that

should have been strangled at birth. Show it rock and it breaks down. More banging and hammering saw us shove Martin into the start of a meander that may just have a way on. But the expedition was over and we were to leave for the UK the next day. Sod's Law had prevailed, a going lead on the last day. Can you see my dilemma? Can I finance a plane ticket for a fourth trip? With the way on way open(ish) what would you do in my position?

## Red Del Silencio - A Quick 4 Hour Trip.

*By Paul Meredith*

It is a little reported fact that, in addition to the recent summer SWCC expeditions to Cantabria, there have also been a number of Easter trips. This is an account of a caving trip undertaken just before Easter 2000 by Paul Meredith and Tim Clarke - but ultimately involving several others - which took slightly longer than planned.

Thumbing through the Spanish Guidebook on a warm, spring, Wednesday evening in the comfort of the upstairs lounge of the Hotel Anjana the Red del Silencio mid entrance to resurgence through trip seemed like an excellent idea. Although we were blissfully unaware of it at the time this was, in hindsight, the first in a catalogue of misjudgements that led to what has become known to as "the Spanish Incident."

Our real problems probably started on the Thursday morning when, having changed, we realised that we had too much gear and, with only Tim Clarke and myself on the trip, something was going to have to be left behind.

Tim? No, SRT kit? No, Rope? No.  
Hangers etc? No, Emergency bag? Er. si.

The short walk to the cave had a peculiarly Mendip feel to it: shallow valley, lush green grass and an abundance of freshly laid cow mud. We bade adios to Keith Ball at the entrance at 11.00 and arranged to meet him again at 15.00 at the resurgence. The Entrance Series too was very Mendip with just a hint of dry Yorkshire thrown in for good measure. WARNING - the survey here, and elsewhere for that matter, is totally misleading and, apart from the name, "Lamiradores (which we now know

is Spanish for "tight bits") Vertical" gives no indication of just how tight it all is. The survey also fails to mention two short rift pitches(?) which although pre-rigged with the usual continental tat require the donning of SRT kit in some very cramped circumstances. Only slim cavers need apply.

On reaching the main passage, and in the mistaken belief that we had already dropped the two pitches shown on the survey, we were totally confused and must have spent at least an hour going back and forth trying to relate the survey to our surroundings.

Eventually, and I don't quite know why, we opened an old leather briefcase that was hanging from a rope at the end of the entrance series. Inside was a book, "El Libro" clearly marked on the survey, but a considerable distance back from where we thought we were. With renewed confidence we set off towards what we now knew was the first pitch, quickly followed by the second, where, as is inevitable on a through trip, the rope got stuck on the pull through.

The next few hours are all a bit of a blur as we stooped and crawled our way along a back breakingly low, but admittedly quite wide, sandy, gritty bedding plane passage. Way marking was generally good but the passage definitely lacked height. Eventually we reached El Sahara, an area of dry sandy passage, but by this time we were both getting somewhat concerned (!) about the time. Our 15.00 deadline for meeting Keith had long passed and we still seemed to be miles from the resurgence. At 20.00 we arrived at La Plage, where, as

the name implies, the fossil series meets the active streamway. Here again the survey leaves a lot to be desired, even now I still cannot relate the survey to what we saw.

By this time our electric lights were definitely on the wane and it was becoming increasingly obvious that we were not going to get out. With the prospect of getting wet Tim and I therefore reluctantly took the decision that we would be "camping out". El problema! Having dumped the emergency kit our emergency supplies comprised a tackle sac, 2 SRT bags, some rope, a single bivy bag and a few crushed chocolate drops. After an initial aborted attempt Tim and I eventually bedded down on a sandy floor close to one of the way marks - would not want anybody to miss us - and both squeezed into the single bivy bag. If you've never tried it, don't knock it! However any thoughts of sexual impropriety were far from our shivering bodies as we squeezed in and tried to get comfortable. Eventually the atmosphere in the bivy bag must have warmed up and, surprisingly, we both dropped off to sleep, although I do remember wondering if this was a good idea.

The next thing I knew Tim was saying "Paul, there's voices". It was 05.00. And lo, out of the darkness there appeareth three Spanish cavers, complete with stove, soup etc. but unfortunately no lights.

Although they spoke only a little English we were, in the true spirit of European harmonisation, very pleased to see them. However something that came as a somewhat unwelcome surprise was the news that we still had some 4 hours of caving ahead of us to get out! It had also taken the Spanish 4 hrs to reach us. In other words, even if you knew the way, it was an 8 hr trip. Hm, another lesson learned.

Although the trip out was something of a slog, (no lights etc. tended to detract from the experience) the streamway caving here is really very good and a trip from the resurgence up to La Plage and back would make an excellent 8 hr caving trip - be prepared to get wet though.

Eventually, at about 09.30 on Friday morning, some 21.5 hrs after entering the cave, we emerged to daylight, beer and food, in that order. Not bad for a 4 hr trip which had started at 11.00 on Thursday!

Many thanks to all who helped in our rescue and especially the local Spanish cavers; the Gardia Civil; Carlos, the proprietor of the Anjana; and to messers Vaughan, Nevitt, Lacey, Miller and Ball who endured an uncomfortable night waiting at the resurgence.

Learning points:

- Never believe the survey.
- Bivy bags work. Carry one. Always.
- Don't dump the emergency kit.

## New Age Caving.

*By Clive Jones.*

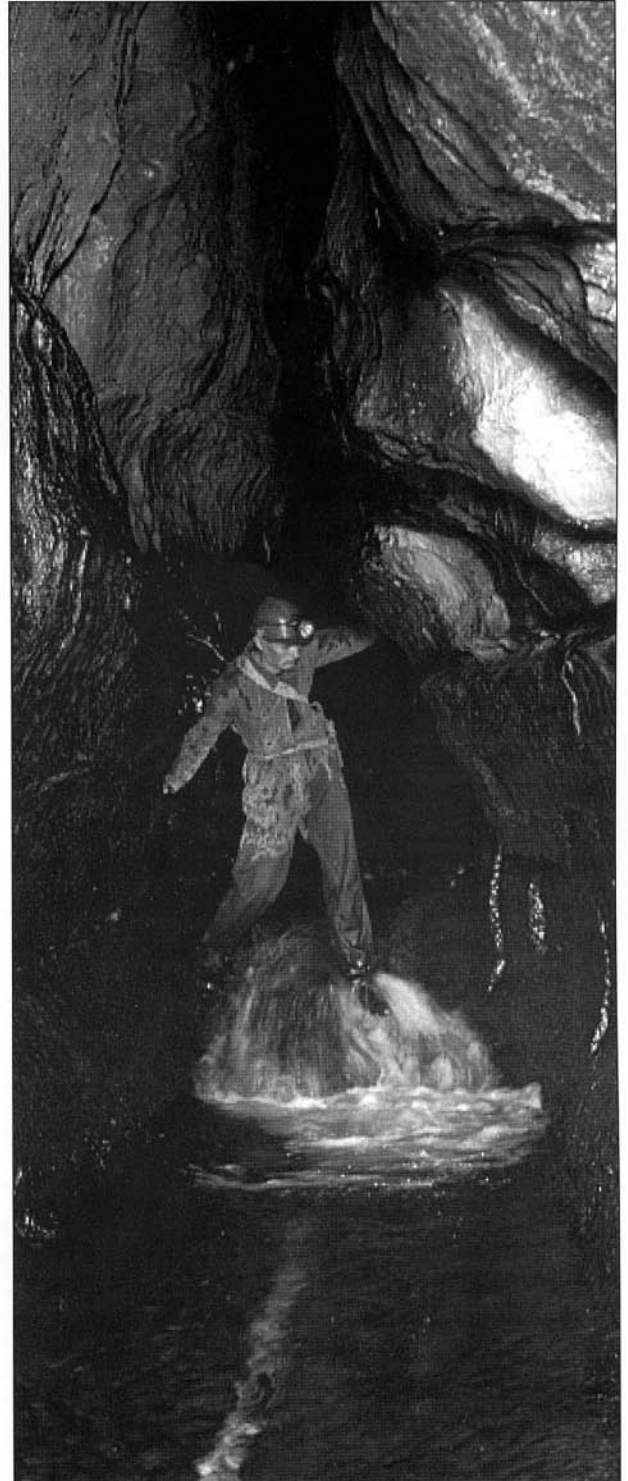
*Note; The potential digs mentioned in this article are all in situations which could be dangerous to cavers digging in such places. A proper risk assessment needs to be taken before digging any of them.*

In our search for a better understanding of the drainage of the waters from the Ffynnon Ddu system we believe that we know the source of the stream that emerges at the Grithig but do we?

The Cwm Dwr stream contributes about one third of the water emerging. Only God and the clubs trustees know where this comes from. God will not tell us because of our ungodliness and the trustees will not without legal advice.

On the few occasions that we have dammed the flow at the Byfre either in anger on a real rescue or on a practice just for the hell of it, the flow at the Grithig has altered little. All we achieved was the creation of a great lake behind the dam. Can it be that we have two flow patterns? In dry weather the bulk of what emerges is from the Byfre and Cwm Dwr. In flood conditions numerous tributaries spring to life to contribute significantly more water than the two normal sources of the stream. If so these dry weather trickles, which turn to torrents when the rains come, are collecting their waters from numerous inlets via miles of virgin passage.

What we should be doing is visiting these trickles in flood conditions to see which of them are significant. Flood conditions are those interesting times when water rises to show us where they may be new cave, when easy trips become challenges and when silent ways echo to the thunder of



*Ogof Ffynnon Ddu 1 main streamway.  
SWCC Collection*

the raging torrents. If you have not been in Boulder Chamber when the flood comes and got out by the escape route you have not seen or heard the music of Ogof Ffynnon Ddu.

Cave water in flood conditions is a messenger from places unseen and understanding it has led to new discoveries. Have you ever looked at the place where Peter Harvey and Ian Nixon first dug their way into Ffynnon Ddu. It's just to the north of the entrance to Ogof Ffynnon Ddu 1. A most unlikely site. A place not worth a second look. However twice in the life time of Cyril Powell, (1907 and 1933) heavy flood, water emerged to give a clue and this was reported to Peter and Ian who acted on the information. What resulted is history. It pays to talk to the locals.

Back to Cwm Dwr and it's stream, which to those who just pass through is nought but

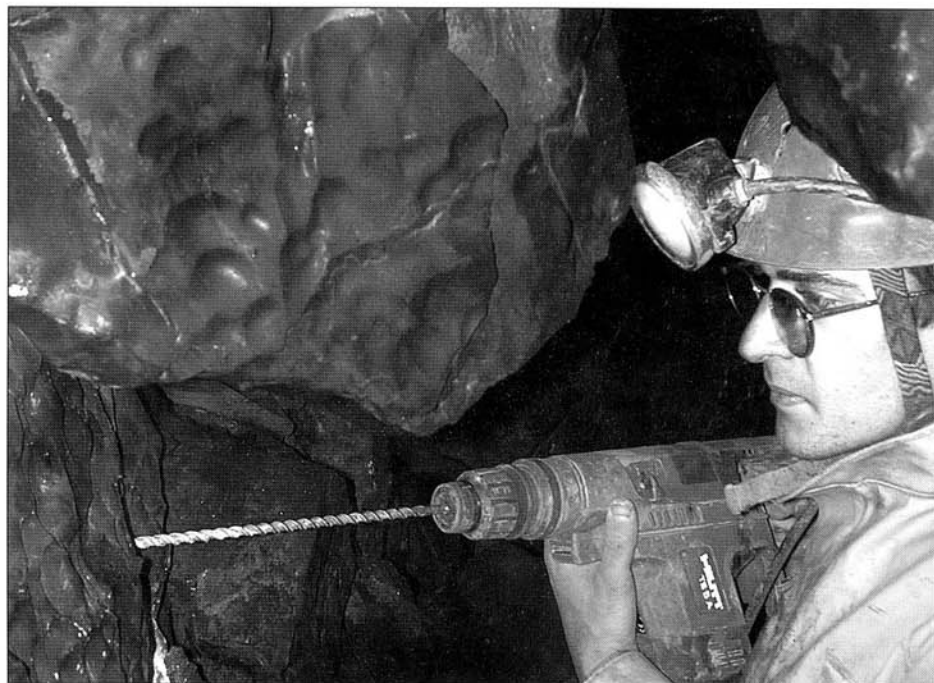
a stream way – a route to down stream not a message from upstream.

The Cwm Dwr stream surprised every one when it was found. We first thought that it was the main stream. But dye tests showed the error of our thoughts. It issues from a boulder choke. Bob Hall drove a tunnel through the centre of the choke, like a bull at a gate and eventually gave up. Bob! How can it be that He who made the lamb made thee?

Bruce Foster blasted away at a number of tubes on the right hand side of the choke and he too got nowhere.

But wait! Times have changed.

Bruce, like the rest of us was using black slab. Lots of smoke and a bang like the crack of doom and a few broken boulders. Once you had fired you had to get out or risk being kippered by the smoke and



*Ali Garman putting modern 24V 'cordless' drill technology to good use. Jon Jones*

having a headache which seemed to last forever.

Today we have more effective ways of breaking boulders, battery drills and cortex or detonator banging. A whole new approach to blasting. This is an ideal dig using the new technology. The other option is the upstream boulder choke. A massive heap of perched boulders, waiting, watching, challenging. Approach with hope and care all who enter here.

This pile of pyramid steps gives way to a gap that is the space above the choke, the route on? Many have toiled up here including myself and Neil Weymouth. Many have taken to religion after a couple of trips.

The top is an interesting place as the perched boulders give way to collapsed beds that gave the appearance of going

down on the other side. But we only had black slab. It was like a cheap brothel, a quick bang and you had to get out because of the smoke and the smell. (so I'm told). This is another prime site for using the new technology.

Ogof Ffynnon Ddu bristles with such sites where the new technology can be used with good effect. Take time to look at the survey and see how many big passages end in boulder chokes. These can now be dug using New Banger or the tirfor.

Time and tide wait for no man and I must pass these promising places to others and concentrate on the last of the summer wine. But there are good vintages close at hand. But for those with the ability the new technology has opened the way to what could be the most exciting time in the clubs history.



## 101 Great Caving Trips: Dent De Crolles; P40 to Trou de Glaz (The Bob Hall Memorial Through Trip).

*By Andrew Dobson*

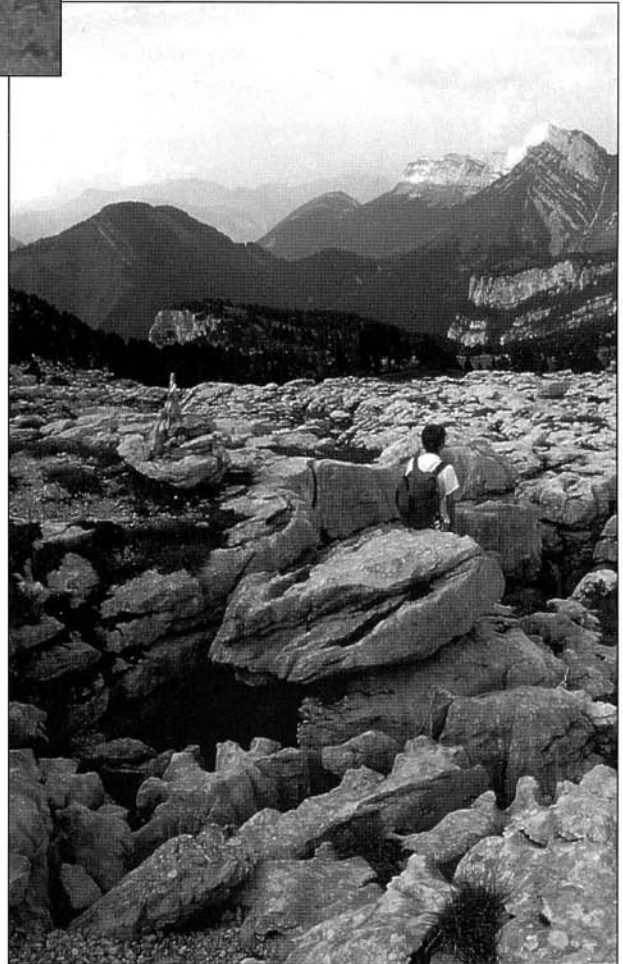


kindly helped porter the gear up and now collected all our rucksacks together to walk back to camp, while Lisa, Paul and Dudley started down the 40M entrance pitch. Bob had dislocated his shoulder only a month before, so did not want to rig.

Immediately the lead team hit problems – first we found we had left the survey and rigging topo behind, then they had great difficulty passing the awkward slot at the bottom of the

Just an easy trip to acclimatise, nothing too long or demanding. Well, that was the theory, anyway. Dave and I had arrived the night before having wound Dave's rusty, oops sorry trusty, old Cavalier up for its fourth European caving expedition. Dudley suggested we join him, Paul, Lisa and Bob on rigging through from the P40 entrance on the plateau just below the top of the mountain to the Trou De Glaz about half way down. Wide eyed and bushy tailed we loaded all the gear up and drove round to the col.

Although the second half of the fortnight was to experience weather like Penwyllt in November, the start was hot and sunny and we sweltered our way up the mountain aided by a cooling breeze. We all made the short deviation to the Dent de Crolles summit and marvelled at the fantastic view. The usual search around for the entrance wasn't too prolonged and we enjoyed lunch in the sunshine before kiting up. Martin had



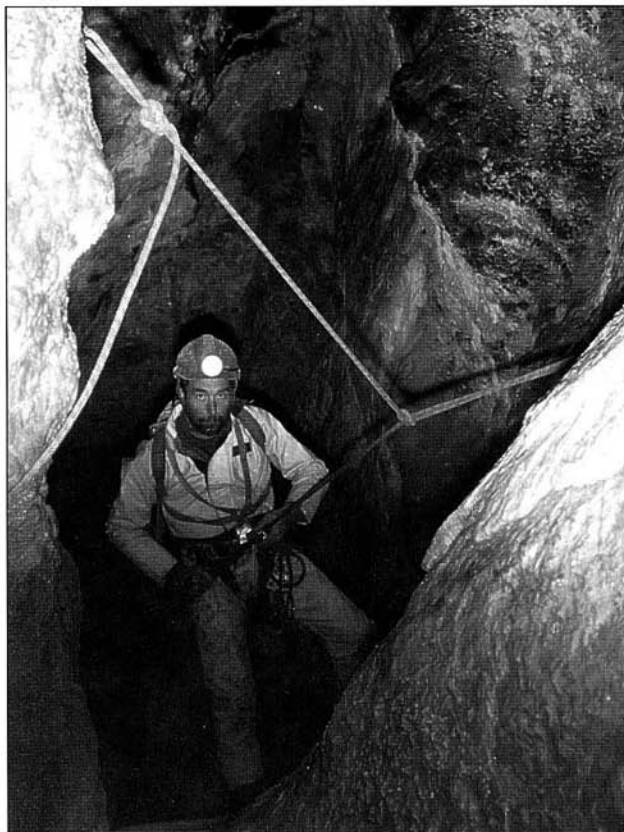
*The entrance to the P40. Jules Carter*

pitch. Eventually they squeezed through and the remaining 3 of us descended. Unfortunately Bob, who was reasonably confident he could remember the rigging plan, found the squeeze too awkward with his injured shoulder and not wanting to find he couldn't get back up the slot, sensibly made his way back up the pitch to walk back.

The others were by now some way ahead of us, but Dave and I had nearly all the rope, so we made rapid progress to catch them up. Everyone was singularly unimpressed by the passage size and shape – after the Gouffre Berger and Pierre Saint Martin systems with huge chambers on previous expeditions, this was small, grotty and awkward. In addition we now had no guide, no survey and no one who had mugged up on the route, in effect we were doing the trip blind. We discussed stashing the rope and coming back the next day, but Paul and Lisa were keen to press on for a while and of course the further in to the system we got the less any of us wanted to turn back.

Route finding difficulties inevitably ensued, but wear marks, the draught and the usual continental practice of carbide arrows helped us struggle on downwards. Lisa had glanced through an old French guide book the previous evening and had a very hazy recollection of some of the

details but not being certain of anything meant very slow progress, especially as one pitch split into two, going different ways. Then we reached the meanders, a series of narrow, winding rift passages where usually the only negotiable route was lying in the small stream running along the floor. With the benefit of hindsight it would have been better to remove all our SRT kits for this, but as we did not know how long the meanders went on, where the pitches were or if there was any room to kit up, we kept our harnesses on and only took off descenders and ascenders. Even so progress was awkward and painful (and painfully slow!) especially as I was trying to haul two bags full of now sodden rope along the contorted rift. The whole system carried a very cold draught and in the confines of the meanders this



*Bob Hall in the Trou de Glaz.  
Dave Dobson*

made it particularly unpleasant. In addition my carbide lamp kept going out as I crawled along and was reluctant to relight, so I spent much of the trip in the gloom of my Petzl Zoom back up light while inhaling acetylene fumes. It later transpired we had descended too soon and should have traversed at a higher level for some way rather than grovelling along the bottom for the whole way. Circumstances like these require finding someone to blame and Bob's absence made him the ideal candidate, with various questions about

his parentage and eventually the name of The Bob Hall Memorial Through Trip.

Eventually, after much cursing and thrutching we reached the succession of big pitches. Lisa remembered there were three pitches, though ledges and existing traverse lines of tat for pull through trips somewhat confused the reality. On reaching the bottom of the fifth pitch (out of three !) we were getting short of rope and long on concern when we found there was another drop in front of us. An innovative bit of rigging using some old rope someone had left on the previous pitch and a couple of slings, meant our last rope stopped some way off the floor but a pendulum to the sloping boulder pile enabled us to land. Everyone was by now very cold and shivery with the inevitable delays of rigging and descending while soaking wet.

Our hopes that this was the bottom, however, were cruelly dashed - around the corner was another long pitch, but at least it had a dubious piece of muddy, grotty

rope already hanging down it. This was a bit of a culture shock at the start of the expedition - by the end of the fortnight we were blithely abseiling on bits of in-situ tat with knots tied through the rub points. But right now it was scary, though no one fancied going back. Paul bravely volunteered to go first and gradually we all followed down, trying to minimise the twanging rub points while watching the gritty rope eat our descenders.

This landed us in the Salle des Douches (we knew because someone had painted it on the wall), very cold and wet, but at least we knew we did not have to descend anymore but believed we had to prussik up three of the four Lantern pitches, which had been rigged by Tony and co. from the Trou de Glaz the previous day. We now spent a disheartening hour and a half searching for the way on, spirits sinking very low as it was past midnight. Eventually, having looked far and wide, Dave noticed the draught diminished at a junction, not far from the Salle des Douches - we had tried the main passages



*Looking out of the entrance to the Trou de Glaz. Dave Dobson*

but missed the climb up to a small passage about ten feet above. Dave and I made a rapid exploration along the crawling and stooping height passage till, to our immense relief, we found a pitch marked Puits des Lantern with an SWCC rope on it. Unfortunately it went down when we were expecting to prusik up, but our relief was tangible. We eventually managed to find everyone and decided to carry on along the passage looking for a pitch up, not realising the route we had followed was a bypass discovered since the old guide book Lisa had seen was written.

More stooping height passage and a few slippery rifts (with the inevitable wrong turns and unnecessary climbs up and down blocks) brought us to a crawl, which opened, into a big old phreatic passage with a stonking draught. It was heaven to be able to just walk along. Unfortunately we came to a low arch with a small boulder wall built in front of it. Taking this to mean it wasn't the way on we again spent what seemed like hours searching round. Thinking it didn't seem right that the passage should end, especially as it still draughted strongly, I ducked under the arch and continued along it, still looking for a pitch up. A few minutes later I stopped on the edge of a precipice while my tired brain tried to make sense of things - that light seems to be a long way away, why is there grass around

my feet and stars shining above me? Suddenly the penny dropped - I was standing outside on the mountainside. I rushed back to find the others with great sighs of relief all round.

It was now about 2:30 AM and the trip was starting to seem like an adventure again rather than a horror story. We stumbled down the long walk back to the col. Arriving back at the cars we were amazed to find Bob waiting for us with hot coffee, wine, french bread and cheese. This was gratefully consumed and the opinions of a few hours ago hastily revised. Arriving back at camp at 4AM we didn't bother to rattle any pans as we were too knackered.

Needless to say the rumours of Bobs' demise were unfounded, and he completed 3 different through trips in the remainder of the expedition. To add insult to injury, Tony's Hard Man team later de-rigged our route in less than half the time it had taken us to do it. Four and a half years later my right shoulder has almost recovered from dragging all that rope through the meanders. Just an easy trip through to acclimatise, nothing too long or difficult - oh well it was great after we finished and if everything had gone to plan there would be no tale to tell in the pub back home.

## A Week Beneath Lanzarote.

By *Kryisia Lewandowski*  
and *Martin Groves*.



The Canary Islands proved the obvious choice for a short winter caving break away from the Welsh hills. Most of the islands contain lava caves formed when lava flow in contact with the air solidified containing the flow beneath in a tube which later drained as the flow ceased, leaving a lava cave. A few hours research in the library at Penwyllt convinced us that Lanzarote was the ideal choice with the Cueva de los Verdes System which contains in excess of 6km of passage, Volcan Nuevo which can be descended and the Southern end of the island with exploration potential.

Following a typical package tour start to the trip, day one saw us heading off to the northern end of the island to the Cueva de Los Verdes System in a comically small Fiat hire car. This system was produced by the eruption of Monte Corona and extends through the lava fields into the Atlantic Ocean. Entry to the system is made through collapses known as Jameos. Two of the Jameos, Cueva de los Verdes and Jameos del Agua, have been converted into show caves although there is no physical connection between these two caves they are almost certainly part of the same system. Jameos del Agua ends in the famous Tunnel de Atlantida, a 1.6km long sump that extends beneath the Atlantic Ocean and marks the end of the system at a depth of 50m. After spending an unsuccessful couple of hours scouring the lava fields beneath Monte Corona for the most 'upstream' entrance to the system we decided to try and find Jameo

de la Gente which lay nearer to the road. Pulling the car up in a dusty track next to a vineyard we were greeted by a rather chilled out rotweiller and then a rather rugged looking local. A futile 'conversation' followed trying to ascertain the locality of any Jameos, but the chap eventually indicated that he did not have his glasses/could not read/ was hard of hearing/something. He could not see the map nor could he understand our Spanish and soon sped away into the distance on his motorbike. A short walk from the vineyard yielded a most impressive site, Jameo de la Gente was an almost circular crater some 70m in diameter and 20m deep with large cave passages disappearing from both ends beneath the lava field. A few short climbs followed and we were at last in a lava tube and far from disappointed. The passage dimensions were particularly impressive up to 20m in width and 20m in height, with a boulder-strewn floor it was somewhat reminiscent of Ogof Draenen except that the temperature was some 150C and the atmosphere very dry and dusty. Most surprising of all were the variety of colours in the rock and the quantity of calcium carbonate patches that cover the walls. The walls of the lava tubes were far from the pitch-black railway like tunnels we had expected. Anticipating few technical difficulties we soon ditched the SRT equipment and moved at a more rapid pace 'upstream' in the direction of Monte Corona. The impressive passage continued for over a kilometre with occasional areas of significant breakdown

and the odd higher level passage, until it appeared to come to an abrupt end in a keyhole shaped passage with some fine



unearthly reason seemed worthy of investigation. Sliding down beneath the loose boulders seemed totally stupid when

we knew that the lava caves tend to develop just as one large trunk passage however the effort was justified when we popped out into what can only be described as an amazing 'Winter Wonderland'. The initial chamber contained fine veins in the dark basalt filled with calcium carbonate dust forming a myriad of lattice like patterns. A short crawl lead to an even more impressive chamber with numerous fine fluffy balls of calcite adorning the chamber with even more intricate patterns of calcite

lavatites hanging down from the ceiling. A hands and knees crawl through a dusty passage with a howling draft proved to be the way on and the passage soon resumed its large dimensions again. Our progress was brought to an abrupt halt when we met a totally unexpected 10m pitch down. The pitch was rigged with dubious looking rope and without our SRT kits we decided to call it quits for the day and head back to take some photographs. On the way back a small hole down through loose boulders, which we had noticed on the way in, for some



*Top picture: exploring Jameos de la Gente.  
Bottom picture: ascending out of Volcan del Nuevo.*

on the wall then that of the first chamber; it seemed unlikely that many had been here before us. Sadly the electronic flashes decided to play us around on this trip and after a frustrating hour spent trying to take photographs dehydration and hunger got the better of us, we decided to head back to the surface. Day two and the objective was to descend into the depths of Volcan Nuevo on the Southern part of the island. Volcan Nuevo erupted in 1824 and its crater contains a series of five vents known as the Cuevas del Diablo, two of which give access into the heart of the volcano. It is quite rare for volcanic vents to remain open after eruption and it is thought that powerful jets of water were emitted clearing the remaining debris during the final phase of the eruption to leave the vents open, now that would have been a sight to see. After a quick initial examination of the individual vents it was obvious which ones had potential. A few minutes wrapping slings around boulders and placing rope protectors at some rub points, we were ready to go. Given the fact that there were only two of us and Martin had done the rigging (though thankfully not a 'Lump' knot in sight!) it was decided that he should act as the guinea pig and go down first. The first vent descended appeared to be blind after just 10m, however, on descending a boulder slope a vertical rift was met which continued downwards. A quick shout up to inform Krysia some boulder re-arranging was about to take place and the descent was soon resumed. The vent was choked solidly at a depth of just 35m with digging being the only possible way forward. Roles were then swapped and Krysia had a look down the vent. Quickly we moved onto the next vent, from which a large owl had appeared a few minutes earlier. Rocks thrown down suggested that this was a much deeper vent than the first. About 10m into the descent a pigeon bolted out

of the tube and missed Martin's head by centimetres. The first 20m of the descent consisted of a 5m diameter circular tube that then pinched in to become a vertical rift. There were numerous lavatites, calcite deposits and other interesting rock formations around. Upon landing on a boulder floor at around 30m depth a fine calcite grotto was found. Throwing rocks down the small rift continuation produced a most pleasing rattling noise as the stone plummeted into the heart of the volcano. This coupled with the occasional howling noise produced by the draft coming from the floor promoted a quick return to the surface to get another rope, camera and spare lamp. Several photographs were taken whilst descending and a new rope was tied on; the rift was dropped to a depth of 50m. The descent was halted due to a rope rub on a very loose boulder highly evident from the melodious twang of the rope and the accompanying percussion of rhythmically falling rocks. Lack of naturals and a bolting kit meant any further progress would have been foolhardy if not suicidal. However, it was obvious that the rift continued for some significant depth beyond the limit reached. A rapid exit was made and then Krysia descended to look at the grotto checking the condition of the rope on descent and applying additional rope protection where possible. There was one more vent that warranted investigation, however, the sun was setting and it was time to call it a day.

Due to a serious hangover and an illness contracted from inhalation of volcano dust deposits a couple of days were spent taking in the main tourist attractions of the island. The Timanfaya National Park proved a most imposing landscape and this area certainly looks as if it has exploration potential, however access is restricted in this area and permission would have to be sought. (In addition, the

Montanas del Fuego - mountains of fire - sport temperatures of around 1400C at a depth of just 10cm in some places). The Cueva de Los Verdes show cave was quite impressive and involved a fun guided tour with an entertaining aside. Jameos del Agua is really a fancy night-club, however the indoor lake is populated with thousands of blind albino crabs which makes the visit worthwhile. A walk up to the summit of Caldera Blanca proved to be a pleasant one that ended at the edge of the crater offering a wonderful vista of the island and an impressive view into the crater of the volcano itself. The walk had added appeal when a guidebook tantalisingly mentioned a cave that is "...very difficult to find and contains some very fine lava stalactites." Unfortunately, the hard work of prospecting for cave off the beaten track and across a vast expanse of unrelenting black volcanic cinders proved more or less fruitless, the guidebook was right, the cave was difficult to find. Enthralled in the search, time passed by, the sunset and the return journey was under the guidance of petzls. Now, the Canary Islands are named, not after the pretty blue and green singing birds, but after the Roman word 'canis' meaning wild dogs, known to roam the islands. The approach of two pairs of yellow eyes and panting breath proved the guidebook correct yet again; Kryisia

followed closely behind Martin as he afforded some protection with a dodgy-legged tripod stand. Luckily the dogs seemed to consider humans far less appetising than the mountain goats further along the way.

The last day or two were spent re-visiting several lava tubes and taking photographs. The large PF50 and PF100 flashbulbs that had taken a lot of effort to get hold of prior to the trip certainly came up trumps, although Martin was stunned when one was screwed into a still active home-made firing unit. The lingering afterglow reflected in his eyes was visible at a distance of more than a hundred metres.

Lanzarote certainly proved an interesting alternative caving holiday and there is definitely enough there to fill a week. Partly due to illness there were several objectives that were not achieved, like examining the northern terminus of the Cueva de Los Verdes system and the remaining parts of Cuevas del Diablo vents. Both systems contained strong drafts so you never know there may be just a few boulders to be removed to reveal open passage into the heart of the volcano!



## Some notes on French Showcaves.

*By Peter Harvey.*

During my holidays in France over the past few years I have revisited a number of show caves which I had seen many years ago. Some of these, mainly the 'pretty' variety, were as I remember them and in France these are usually pretty spectacular. Grotte Des Damoiselles, Clamouse Aven d'Orgnac and many others are still very fine.

I am afraid, however, that the same cannot be said of the caves which include any cave paintings. Gargas is much the same as it was but apart from a few mutilated hands and some minor cave paintings there is not a lot to see anyway.

Lascaux I visited several times in the years after the war but now this has been closed and a model has been constructed in an old Quarry nearby. This is a very fine effort but only consists of part of the cave. At least in Lascaux there was enough light to see the paintings.

My greatest disappointment was at Niaux. I went to Niaux in about 1952 and we had to collect the guide from Foix and drive him up to the locked cave. We spent several hours in the cave. The guide showed us all the engravings and paintings and also the places where ancient man had used the shape of the rock to make his work more realistic. During my visit this summer the guide showed us hardly anything. We did see one Ibex in the light of torches at a distance of about thirty metres and a few of the less important 'Joly Bison'. All the

passages and chambers in the cave are enormous so we were probably walked past a number of interesting things which of course we could not guess were there in the light of our torches. It is as well to take your own caving light as the torches supplied are pretty poor. We also went to Bedeilhac but I can't remember anything that we saw in the way of paintings or engravings

The whole attitude at the painted show caves in France, nowadays, is to show the visitor as little as possible. At Niaux the place is so large that it is a spectacle in its own right. But I think that nowadays when going to a painted showcave don't expect too much. The stalactite caves are always very well lit and are very impressive

The one exception was my visit to Altimara this autumn in Spain. Alan Richardson booked a tour some two to three years ago and during October he received a permit for six people to visit the cave.

Travelling arrangements were by car to Plymouth, staying at the Devon Speleo hut at Buckfast on the way. Crossing via the car ferry to Santander. A gite had been booked in the country nearby for the four days we were there. On the second day we went to Altimara and a guide conducted us round the cave which was better than I was expecting. We had plenty of time to see all the paintings and engravings. The trip proved to be well worth while.



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