

U.B.S.S.

University of Bristol Spelæological Society



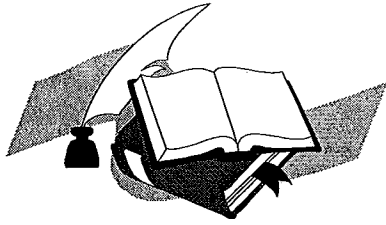
H.E. Balch in the water pipe above the passage in to the boulder chamber, Eastwater 8/4/1912.

NEWSLETTER

Vol 12 No. 3

December 1996

The Editorial Bit



Greetings from the Editorial Consortia, and welcome to a whole new year of fun with the UBSS. Welsh Tim and I are now doing our level best to turn out some sort of respectable newsletter, even if we are a pair of scientists with no access to a snazzy desktop publisher.

I think this would be a good time to thank those people who allowed themselves to be bullied into putting pen to paper for this noble cause, berate soundly those lazy specimens who promised great things but did not deliver and humbly beg for more stuff for future issues. After all, it really is quite difficult to produce a newsletter if no one will write us anything.

I dare say it may seem a little odd, having a dedicated non-caver as co-editor, but I shall do my best to include some speleo related things in amongst the tales of misdeeds down the pub and other such reprehensible behaviour. I may even venture down a hole sometime soon, as Tim has been giving me glowing reports of Peak Cavern, and if I'm fed enough to drink I may go. In fact, it's in your interest to get me to go, because I'll undoubtedly write about it, which lets one of you off the hook. Mine's a pint cheers...

This year, we think, should see the re-emergence of the Annual Dinner awards, so if anyone has any bright ideas for them, feel free to let any member of the committee know and we'll pick a sucker to award it to.

On behalf of the club I'd also like to try and persuade any member who hasn't been down the pub/a hole yet (apart from me) to come along and see us on Tuesday nights down at the Red Lion on Worrall Rd. We're not as bad as you might think you know; even the ones with beards can be quite sane at times. Honest.

Now I've run out of things to say I shall stop drivelling on and leave you to enjoy the rest of our little offering.

Chris.

UBSS Newsletter Vol12 No.3 December 1996

Co-Editors Christine Benn & Tim Davies

Contributors to this issue - Adam Goulding, Graham & Linda Mullen, Jenny Vickers, Juliet Morse and her ghost writer, Dr. Andy Farrant, Clive Owen, Simon Grace, Taz Williams. I hope that's everybody.

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this publication are not those of the Editorial staff (either of us) or the committee. Well, mostly not anyway.

Honorary Secretary's Message

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Juliet Morse

{Translations on a postcard to the usual address - free trip down Charterhouse for the winners, geological tour of Goatchurch Cavern for the losers. - Eds}

Forthcoming events:

- 7 & 8 December - Derbyshire weekend, including Christmas dinner.
- 29 Dec - 4 Jan 1997 - County Clare (provisional - private transport necessary; £160 per car on Irish Ferries; no accommodation sorted out as yet because Millie is "getting cheesed off running around."
- 18 & 19 January - Yorkshire (provisional)
- 1 & 2 February - Heaven on Earth i.e. South Wales (prov.)
- 15 & 16 February - Yorkshire again (prov.)

FROM THE TREASURY

Graham Mullan

Unfortunately I have to report that a number of 1996 subscriptions remain unpaid. If your name is on this list please send me your subscription balance as soon as possible (We have another *Proceedings* bill to pay, soon). If you are not on this list, but are in touch with someone who is, please chivvy them up for me:

Malcolm Anderson	£24	Rosemary Balister	£4.90
Hannah Bartholomew	£12	Martin Bell	£24
Marcel Dijkstra	£12	Paul Drewery	£12
Alison Garrard	£12	Eve Gilmore	£2
Paul Harding	£12	Topher Martyn	£24
Trev Mosedale & Sarah Walker	£16		
Mark Owen	£4	Marco Paganuzzi	£12
Nick Patrick	£4	Rod Pearce	£24
Simon Shaw	£12	Mike Simms	£12
Pete Simpson	£12	Mike Thompson	£12
Maire Trendell	£4	Martin Warren	£24
Mike & Nicky White	£18		

At the best part of three hundred pounds, your Society needs you (to pay) now!!

NEW YEARS DINNER

The Society's longest running Annual Dinner (of the three!) will take place as usual at the Hut. Will all those wishing to attend let either Linda Wilson (0117 9502556) or Wanda Owen (0117 9732433) know & they will be told what to bring. As there is only limited space in the Hut places will given on a first come first served basis, as last year.

COUNTY CLARE REUNION 1998

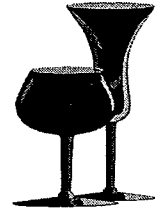
Graham Mullan

Places at the dinner are filling up with a satisfying rapidity. If you haven't yet booked your place but do want to come, let me know soon. Don't forget, places are limited and rooms in the Hotel are even more limited, so if you want to come, but don't want a long walk back to your room afterwards...

So far, we have arranged dinner and accomodation at Ballynalackan, free visits to the Ailwee Show Cave (or will organise trips to the Cullaun Three of your choice!). Any other ideas for that weekend (24th-26th May 1998) are welcome.

I am reliably informed that the British Geological Survey can map the underground when the surface is covered with several feet of snow! Well done, Andy.

Tales of Caves and Schnapps



BY JULIET MORSE

I was bored so I went to Austria. Two hours before Andy was due to leave I decided that going expedition caving was a better idea than staying in sunny Sevenoaks for the summer. Twenty minutes before I was supposed to be going to my brothers graduation I told him I was going on holiday instead. My apologies Richard, but then I doubt that I'll go to my own.

Four people, twenty hours in a van, it was dull but there were a few amusing incidents to break up the journey. Almost as soon as we drove onto French land Andy almost pulled out in front of a car that was going at some considerable speed, fortunately he realised his error and reversed pretty sharpish, straight into the car that had just pulled up behind us. The driver of the French car seemed to find it quite funny as there was no damage done, so we continued on our journey.

When we finally arrived we pitched our tents and went over the road to Hilda's to get our free welcome shot of schnapps (however you spell it). I decided that I liked this place.

Within a couple of days I was to venture up to top camp, this was an expedition in itself. the next day however I realised that it was nothing compared to the trek to the cave entrance, Andy describes it as; short and downhill but the hills were more like cliffs, straight lines were impossible and with a rucksack full of caving gear in the blazing hot sun it was not what I would call fun. The cave was a walk in the park in comparison. Talking of caves (as that is what this is supposed to be about) it was cold and draughty but at least it was dry and spacious.

I went on a total of four trips in two weeks which were good but the weather was gorgeous so somehow the choice between windsurfing(or trying to) and swimming in the lake or climbing up a mountain and going caving was fairly easily decided. The last trip I did was a photo trip which sounded like a good idea at the time, but is not what it seems.

It involves taking lots of equipment that works perfectly above ground down a cave. When you get to the ideal nice bit of cave to take a photo of you spend ages setting the scene (two cavers posed for scale). Then comes the really exciting bit; trying to get the half dozen flashes to work at the same time as the cameras and the people saying cheese. This does not happen, each flash works just not at the same time every single combination of pieces of equipment works but not all at the same time after about one hour and much cursing when we were about ready to give up, it worked. We got a total of about ten photos from the trip I'll probably see them one day. If I had any sense I would have realised that a photo trip was not quite as straight forward as it sounds especially as there seemed to be a shortage of other willing volunteers.

There was a dinner at Hilda's which the mayor came along to, he gave us a large bottle of schnapps which was not quite the beginning of the end; more like the middle really.

(Juliet says this is the end so we must take her word for it - the humble Ed)

Clive's guide to Safe Caving

Before going underground:

Leave a message with a responsible person containing the following information:

- Name of leader and party members
- Cave name and route to be followed
- Time in and estimated time out
- Action to be taken if overdue

Carry appropriate emergency equipment:

Personal equipment:

- Survival bag
- Whistle
- Spare light
- Food

Group equipment (some or all members of the group should carry the following):

- Spare survival bag
- Emergency lighting
- Lighting spares
- First aid kit
- Food
- Pencil and paper
- Candles and matches
- Knife

If an accident happens:

If self rescue is not possible send 2 fit members of the team out with the following information:

- Name of party
- Cave name and area of system
- What has happened
- Name, age and address of injured person
- Time of accident
- Details of rest of party
- Equipment carried (including food)
- Time of entry into system
- Physical and mental condition of remainder of party

On no account leave a casualty alone.

“WHERE'S THE F*****G LADDER?”

(Jenny Vickers' Impressions of Kingsway)

First impressions of the cave was that it was very wet! There were lots of little passageways leading of the main route, but most of them were too small to fit through and even the ones which were big enough to fit through we bypassed to get to the main cave. The route through the first section of cave included a couple of flooded areas which were about 3' deep in places. Needless to say, some of the lads found this to be a problem!

We dropped down into the main stream on a ladder and then set off up stream, which was fairly hard going to say the least. The stream was what out so we decided to make our way back.

Back in the cavern, a few obscenities flew around mainly directed at the previous cavers who had neglected to throw down our ladder after taking theirs away with them. It was decided after a few failed attempts at climbing the wall that someone should be hoisted up on the b-lay rope (my idea I'd just like to point out!). I pulled the short straw though and strapped myself in ready to be hoisted up

through a waterfall. At the top I was very wet and everyone else was exhausted. The ladder was sent down and everyone made it out safely.

Although it took the rest of the evening to warm up again, and despite the fact that we didn't make it to the main cavern and the small hitch with the ladder it was undoubtedly the best cave I've been down, and I would like to go back and find the rest of the cave, but maybe in the summeryou might call fast flowing, and wading through it wasn't easy at the best of times.

Basically we ambled around for a while, looked down a couple of promising looking passageways which turned out to be nothing much, but fun all the same.

We never made it to the main cavern, although we found what might have been the entrance. Time was running!

The date for the AGM and Annual Dinner has been provisionally set for Saturday 8th March. Members wishing to attend the dinner should contact Graham in January sometime when we will know who is organising it.

Adam Goulding's Definitive Guide to

Cave Speak Part 19 - 'S'

- Safety** - The condition of being safe. Very important - better safe than dead.
- Scrot Hole** eg Rod's Pot - Muddy, slimy subsurface cesspit. Considered sporting by some.
- Sessional Meetings** - spelaeologically related talks by UBSS members in the Union two or three times a term. Zzzzzz....never been yet.
- Sewer** - Manor farm just about sums it up.
- Sink Hole** - Cavity in limestone into which a stream disappears - usually followed by a couple of enthusiastic cavers.
- Singing River Mine** - Fine disused mine full of rusty buckets - remember to bring the key with you.
- Sobriety** - The state of being sober, something of a rare condition amongst cavers. May occur before caving, but definitely not afterwards.
- Song** - Usually the drunken cacophonous ramblings of cavers around the campfire. Used as an opportunity to slag off other caving clubs, extol the virtues of caving and compare degrees of tone-deafness. Also performed in caves = better acoustics = twice as much aural torture.
- Songbook, UBSS edition** - An interesting collection of UBSS and other caving club ditties - well worth a read and a good singsong. Ask Simon G. where it's got to.
- South Wales** - Caving heaven - trying to organise a trip at the moment. Anyone out there with a 32 seater bus and loads of caving gear and an intimate knowledge of the 'big five'? No, I thought not....Oh well.
- Spelaeology** - High falutin' term for caving, or more precisely the study of caves scientifically. From Greek 'spelaion' = cave.
- Sporting** - As in a 'sporting' cave: a cave with more twists in it than a bowl of super noodles, fit only for anorexic, masochistic midgets { *I didn't know you knew Ian so well* - Ed } . Squeezes, sumps, bottomless fissures, boulder chokes and waterfalls all contribute to the 'sportiness' of a cave.
- Squeeze** - An impossible, impassable narrow gap in a rock face usually found in sporting caves. Enjoyed and negotiated with ease by the type of midget mentioned above.
- SRT (abbv)** - Single Rope Technique - revolutionary idea that dispenses with ladders on long pitches. Takes ages to set up. Shouldn't Really Try it. Known alternatively to old hands as Silly Rope Technique or to novices as Scary Rope Technique. So far I have only put on the gear - I haven't even been up the tree at the hut! Uses a descender to go down and jammers to go up. My opinion? Stick to ladders.
- Stables, the** - Repository for UBSS archaeological relics and home of the library, situated behind the German dept. on Woodland Rd. See Chris Hawkes (curator) and Tony Boycott (librarian) for details.
- Stalactite** - A pendant, icicle shaped accumulation of calcium carbonate. Formed by water dripping from cavern roof and precipitating out calcium carbonate.

Stalagmite - An upside down stalactite. Here is an interesting mnemonic to differentiate between the two:

stalactite attached 'titely' to the ceiling

stalagmite 'mite' reach the top hmm...

Can join together and form a column. Usually muddy brown and broken but can be found in pure white virginal form in G-B.

Stew - Optimistically named boiled stuff usually served on Fresher's weekend - responsible for more fresher drop-outs than Rod's Pot or going caving with Trousers.

Streamway - Passage with a stream rushing through it. Bloody obvious really.

Sump - Tunnel full of water. I don't recommend you try one without a wetsuit unless you happen to be Simon Grace. Usually have ropes to guide you through.

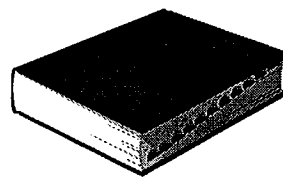
Survey - Mapping out a cave system. Various degrees of surveying exist - from pen sketch on the back of a fag packet to accurate scale plans with spot heights. See G-B Map in tackle store. Loved by spelaeologists, abhorred by sporting cavers.

Swildon's Hole - Nice and wet - ooh, lovely formations. Also Simon G.'s alternative abode. A cracking good cave!

System - 1) A term for the various interconnected passages. May consist of many caves interlinked eg Charterhouse - G-B system.

2) Orderliness, a policy not followed by anyone or anything remotely connected with UBSS committee members/headless chickens. (Only kidding - you do a fine job all of you) {sucker - Ed}

Note - For all of you wondering where the previous 18 instalments (A - R) were, or are awaiting with baited breath parts T - Z, there aren't any, and most likely won't be any either. I can't be bothered (although all keen volunteers welcome).



Adam's Poetry Corner

Innocent Millicent

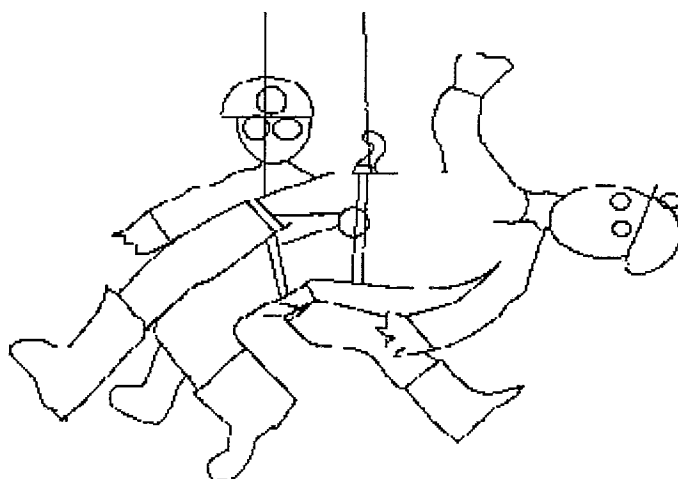
by Adam Goulding

Our Treasurer's name is Millicent,
A Catholic gal, sweet and innocent.
In the pub she does rounds,
Collecting our pounds,
Thinking happy thoughts of embezzlement.

{I like this section - I think we'll keep it. Lots of lovely poetry to me in time for the next issue please - Ed}

The Design for the T-shirt is shown below, although the finished version will be tidied up - this is only a rough scan.

ZIBSS



Position Impossible

The T-shirt will also have a back-print consisting of a selection of the more tasteful reasons why caving is better than sex. Feel free to let us know which 10 of them you'd like to have on the back...

Thank you to Taz for the design and the idea, and to Adam for volunteering to sort the whole thing out; you're a brave man.

UBSS T-Shirts

As some of you may know, one of our latest intake has come up with a new design for the UBSS T-shirt. It has been decided to include an order form in this newsletter for you to fill out if you want one of the new design T-shirts and send to:

Adam Goulding
3 Walsingham Rd.
St. Andrews
BRISTOL
BS6 5BU

Name

Address

.....

.....

.....

Size : S / M / L / XL (circle as appropriate)

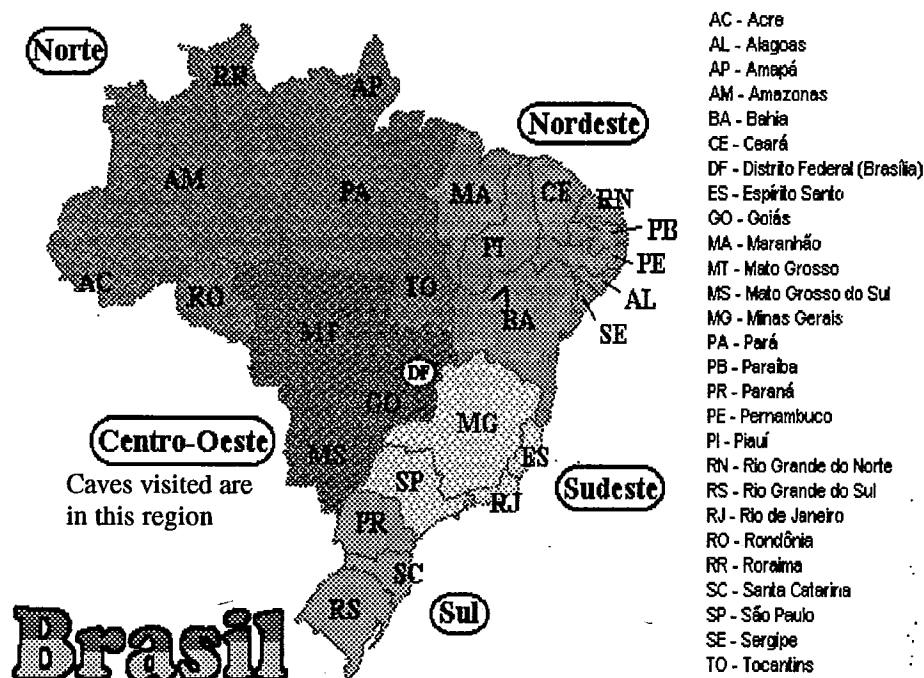
Colour : red
white on black
black on white
navy blue

The cost of a T-shirt is £5.00, with 50p postage and packing per T-shirt if you need it sending to you.

Please send a cheque made out to the UBSS with your order, and we'll send it as soon as they're printed.

Dr Andy's Brazilian Odyssey.

Although not as famous as Mexico or Sarawak for its caves, Brazil has many large and impressive caves which are comparatively little known. This is partly because of the vast and remote nature of much of the limestone areas in Brazil. This year, I had the opportunity of accompanying Augusto Auler, one of Pete Smart's new postgrads on one of his field trips to the north-eastern state of Bahia. Augusto is probably Brazil's more active cavers, and with other members of the Grup Bambui de Pesquisos Espeologica (a local caving club based in Belo Horizonte) has been involved with much of the exploration of the Bahian caves.



Map of Brazil, all the caves visited are in northeastern Bahia (BA) state, close to the border with Piau (PI).

I flew out in late May, and arranged to meet Augusto and several other local cavers in Belo Horizonte, but first had to 'endure' a 14 hr stopover in Rio. Luckily I bumped into another Englishman at the airport, who like me couldn't speak a word of Portuguese, and was also completely bemused and as lost as I was. We caught a bus to Ipanema beach where we spent several sundrenched hours admiring the 'scenery' - the surrounding landscape was pretty impressive too. The taxi ride back to the airport was more like competing in the Brazilian Grand Prix. Not only do Brazilian's worship Ayrton Senna, but they drive like him too.

I met up with Augusto in Belo Horizonte, where several days was spent furling gear and the expedition itinerary sorted out. The aim was to do a reconnaissance of the different caving areas in northern Bahia, and to collect samples for U-series and palaeomagnetic dating as part of Augusto's Ph.D. project. The area we planned to visit was between the Salitre and Jacara Rivers (42°W, 12°S) in the northern part of Bahia state, plus a few other areas in central Bahia near the Rio Sao Francisco. Much of Bahia is an extensive semi-arid karst region with subdued relief. The geology comprises three main units; the cave bearing Precambrian carbonates ('Una Group' - 600-900 Ma) which overlie an older Quartzite unit (the 'Chapada Diamantina' Group). Much younger Quaternary (2 Ma) conglomeratic limestones, known as the 'Caatinga' unit occurs along the valleys. The last major tectonic event occurred 550 Ma, generating gentle folds. Most of the caves which are planned to visit occur in the Una Group and Caatinga carbonates. Six out of the 15 longest caves and the longest cave in Brazil at 65 km, Toca da Boa Vista are known in this area.



Brazilian Beach Scenery

As seems usual for these foreign expeditions, I only met the two other team members on the day we left for Bahia; Ezio and Flav were to join myself and Augusto for the first 2 weeks of the trip. It was an 18 hour drive to our first destination on progressively worse roads occupied by even worse drivers. We arrived at Bom Jesus do Lapa at nightfall, a somewhat weird place on the banks of the Sao Francisco river. Its main attraction was a small limestone hill which contained a large cave which had been converted into a church (with the aid of some explosives). The cave was also a major religious shrine, with many of the passages choked with effigies, Virgin Mary's (the phrase 'virgin passage' took on a whole new meaning..) candles and crutches left behind by those miraculously healed by praying at the alter. Didn't seem to work for hangovers though....

Another terrifying 3 hour drive ('just down the road' according to Ezio) we arrived at Grutta do Padre. This was a large 12 km long cave which had been explored about 10 years ago and hardly visited since. The initial exploration and underground camp was the subject of a TV documentary which attracted a prime-time TV audience of about 19 million people! The spectacular entrance led to a chamber with a nice sandy floor next to the river, providing a fine camping spot. The temperature was a pleasant 21° C. Much of the cave was a single large river passage, most of which was occupied by deep water. A few large inner tubes solved that problem - and we gently drifted off down the huge 10-15 m high and 6 m wide passage, in water that was about 20°C. All we lacked was a cool beer... However, things were just getting seriously pleasant when the roof dipped down almost to water level. To get past we had to lie flat out on our tube to avoid hitting the roof, whilst trying not to capsize or think about the flood debris plastered on the roof less than an inch above my nose.

Upstream was similar, but longer with thankfully, no low bits. Three hours of sculling (with one or two small cascades) led to a point where we could climb up, via a death-defying leap across a 30 m deep hole, into a huge passage, every bit as large as the passages in Mulu. Stalagmites 5-10 m high loomed out of the darkness, while the distant roof and walls could just be made out in the gloom. Strolling down the immense passage, following the few footprints over the huge sand dunes and avoiding the holes back down to the river, led to a climb up into another immense high level passage. This required a rather dodgy traverse over loose rock above a steep 30 m drop back to the passage below. However it was worth it as Augusto managed to get some excellent samples. We climbed back down and along the main passage to another climb into the streamway.

After two nights underground we emerged and recovered in the local bar, before popping across to the next caving area, 6 hours drive away. The roads became worse, bad even by Brazilian standards. For some reason, as if someone got their sums wrong, the tarmac would run out for a 100 m every other km. Scores of small scruffy kids lined the roadsides making a pretence of filling in the potholes in an attempt to get money as we tried to drive past without wrecking the car. It was late when we arrived in Seabra and met up with Biarno, the resident National Park Officer and local caver. This area, Iraquara, has the highest density of caves in Brazil. Myself and Augusto did a through trip (Grutta do Cao) which was mostly walking down a huge tunnel 30 m in diameter until the way on became choked by a huge stal flow. The only way through was an Augusto-sized boilersuit-shredding squeeze through jagged calcite, with a draft strong enough to blow my carbide out. More gloomy walking, or rather squelching and scrabbling through thick calcite-raft encrusted mud and water on the passage floor finally led to one of the more impressive entrances I've seen. We got out, and walked to the track where we had arranged to be picked up. However, Biarno was as usual late, so we walked to the nearest 'bar' (a mud hut with no electricity or water, miles from anywhere in the middle of the bush!) and ordered a beer.

However, the gas fridge wasn't on so the barman cycled 3 miles to get us some cold beer. Biarno finally arrived 3 hours later, by which time we were completely sozzled and singing Beatles and Simon & Garfunkel songs with the locals who had produced a rather old and tuneless guitar. Things went downhill fast when a bottle of Cashasa, the local hooch, was produced....

Meanwhile, Ezio and Flav were surveying a cave they had discovered on the previous expedition, so Augusto and I joined the surveying trip. Most of the cave was a muddy partially dried up streamway which provided much amusement trying to avoid slipping down mud slopes into deep pools. This, plus one of the loosest boulder chokes I've had the misfortune to levitate through and the odd Tarantula spider thrown in for good measure provided for an interesting trip. However, the cave ended in a 10 m diameter going lead which we pushed through low muddy section into a chamber with 4 ways on. Hah - I thought, at last - the major breakthrough. And for once it was! We found over 2 km of new stuff, some passage up to 40 m wide. We christened the first chamber 'Bristol Chamber' on account of the dried up river complete with muddy 'tidemark' looking rather reminiscent of the River Avon at low tide.

As always, this was found on the last day before Ezio and Flav had to return to Belo Horizonte. Myself and Augusto then travelled north to the Grutta dos Brejoines, another 6 hours drive to the north. En route we stopped at Poço Encantado, a huge collapse chamber with a daylight entrance and a deep crystal clear lake at the bottom illuminated by shafts of sunlight. It was probably one of the most awesome underground sights I have seen. Nearby, a similar smaller cave provided one of the most unusual swimming holes I've been to. The water was so clear that swimming in it was more akin to flying. Tree trunks could be seen over 15 m below whilst bats swooped overhead and Tarantulas watched from the sides.

Grutta dos Brejoines is reached by a bum-numbing journey over rough tracks (tarmac hasn't reached this far into Brazil yet), some of which looked impassable, even for a Volkswagen Passat driven by Julian Todd. We stayed in a small mud hut village just upstream of the cave entrance. Grutta dos Brejoines has one of the most spectacular cave entrances in the world. A huge passage, over 100 m high leads off from the end of a deep blind canyon and emerges, 3 km later, in a similar canyon downstream. At the lower entrance, several boulders over 50 m high have become detached from the passage walls. Much of the passage is well decorated with enormous stalagmites, and several eye-holes in the roof allowed enough daylight to truly appreciate this awesome place. Our last stop was the Toca da Boa Vista region, yet another 6 hours drive to the north. (Un)fortunately we arrived in the local town at the start of a week long festival. As our hotel was sited 20 m from the main stage, which had 90 odd speakers, we had no option but to join in the party. I think it finished about 4 in the morning - some of the local dancers were truly mesmerising, I still can't work out how they managed to gyrate their bodies in the way they did. Consequently, Augusto decided to call the next day a rest day - perhaps because of the bar situated in the hotel swimming pool...?

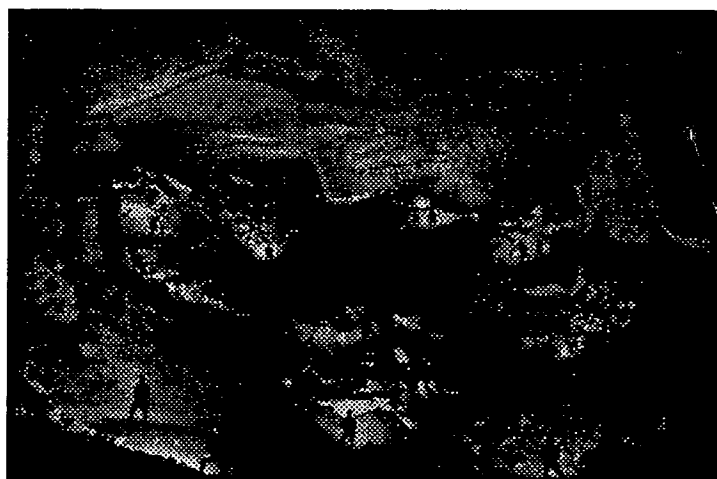
Once fully rested, sunburnt and refreshed, we drove to Laje, our base for the next few days, another 2 hours along a dusty track across a huge flat limestone plain, during which the words 'remote' and 'featureless' began to take on a whole new meaning. We arrived in the village to a rapturous welcome. The Bambui Group is well known locally and own a club hut in the village (although even more basic than the UBSS hut). Consequently we were mobbed by scores of kids as soon as they realised who we were. Augusto made things worse by throwing a load of sweets out the car window, and before long the entire juvenile population of Laje had us surrounded. For the next four days, we were constantly followed and watched by at least 20 kids - to the bar, whilst we ate, read a book, went to the bog...

Our only respite was underground. The caves in the Laje area are quite unusual. Two types of cave exist; 'normal' caves formed by underground rivers, and hypogenic caves. The latter form where oxidation of iron

pyrite in the limestone by oxygen rich groundwater generates sulphuric acid, which then dissolves out the limestone forming a maze cave. These pyrite oxidation processes occur only in the pyritiferous Una Group whilst the former stream caves are concentrated mainly in the Caatinga limestone. Most of the meteoric caves are formed where rivers flowing off the quartzites flow onto the carbonates from the surrounding hills. The hypogenic caves are more randomly located, often bearing little or no relation to surface features. Toca da Boa Vista is a hypogenic cave and has been the subject of several previous expeditions by the Bambui Group. It is the largest cave in Brazil and currently has a surveyed length of 67 km. The place is an incredible maze. If you thought the Box Stone Mines were bad - this place was worse. The entrance is a 10 m deep pit guarded by a wasps nest (despatched with a load of flaming sisal fibres), from which several exits led off.

As yet only the main trunk routes have been surveyed, an estimated two to three *thousand* going leads have yet to be checked - although most will just link up to other known passages. It's a surveyors nightmare, with several thousand closed loops. Several times we stumbled into virgin passage by accident when we lost our way. Furthermore, the cave is **HOT!** In the further reaches, the temperature is about 27-28°C and bone dry. We had to drink about 2 litres of water on one trip. In places the floor is covered with a thick silica dust, mixed with bat guano for added effect, not for asthmatics. In other areas gypsum encrusted stalagmites, cave cones and

anthodites provide some spectacular underground scenery. Chamber, Toca da Boa Vista. Photo Flávio Chaimowicz



About an hour's drive away was another 'normal' cave, this time developed in the Caatinga limestone. It was a huge horizontal tunnel 6 km long, with a floor so flat you could have cycled through it, with the occasional pile of bat guano. Nearby, was probably one of the best caves I have been in - it was a short river cave and daylight shone right through it (so you didn't need a light), over 20 m wide and with a flat sandy floor - so flat in fact the locals had put a football pitch inside, but best of all it had a bar at one end although it was closed at the time of our visit. Now that's what I call caving!

Stalagmites in Toca da Boa Vista, Photo by Carlos Zaith.

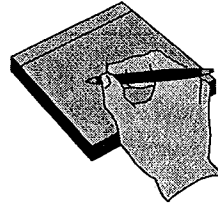


We left after 4 days of impressive caving and then drove for 2 days back to Belo Horizonte. There are many more discoveries to be made in Brazil - I can guarantee you will find something. Augusto will be back in Bristol in the New Year and will welcome any volunteers for fieldwork. Forget dropping icy nasty cold wet snow plugged shafts on top of cold frost-riven shattered mountains in Austria, hours from the nearest bar, Brazil has far more to offer - if you manage to get beyond the fabulous beaches.....!

I would like to thank the Tratman Fund for its generous financial assistance. For those with a more academic leaning, it is hoped a paper will be published in Proceedings giving a summary of the Brazilian karst. Info about the Grup Bambui de Pesquisos Espeleogica can be found at <http://degeo.ufop.br/~basilio/bambui.htm>

Andy Farrant

Gravel



Everybody's Favourite Gossip Column

Not that there's a lot to say, as the new influx of Freshers are distressingly well behaved (and of course there is no Rupert to corrupt the young and innocent).

Firstly we can have a little competition - it's called 'What is Simon talking about?'

"Just a bit harder and it would have gone in" - Trousers

"Story of my life" - Simon Grace

Simon, we don't want to know.

In a bid to cause scandal, Hilary made the headlines again at Freshers, keeping that incestuous old lags club going, by snogging Paul Drewery-Brewery. Just what sort of an example is that for the younger generation? You should be ashamed of yourself Hilary - we don't want all the young females thinking that pulling Paul Drewery is a good idea.

A bit of advice from us at the Gravel offices - don't choose the Plume as the sight for your get-really-trashed sessions. It should be screamingly obvious that it's miles from somewhere to collapse, and over-zealous medical types will whisk you off to hospital, not thinking of any particular incident of course...

As you may have noticed, Tas has been turning up at the pub with yet more suspicious injuries. She may say they're from skating or stairs or some such contrived excuse, but we know the truth. Yes, Simon Grace has been beating you up again, hasn't he? Come on Tas, you're among friends here, tell us what really happened; we know that a savage beast lurks below that mild, West country yokel exterior *{Don't make me angry. You wouldn't like me when I'm angry}*.

Yeah, OK, so I'm making it up now, but if you lot won't make any real scandal, we'll just have to start putting our imagination to work - we'll leave it to you to decide which is likely to be the more salacious. If I were you I should get snogging each other straight away.

20 REASONS WHY CAVING IS BETTER THAN SEX

1. Caving already involves banging your helmet in dark wet passages.
2. Caving must always be undertaken using head protection.
3. You don't *just* get bruises on your neck.
4. You can do it with a headache.
5. You can do it after ten pints of beer.
6. You've got a better chance of getting into a virgin passage.
7. It always involves being tied up.
8. You can do it any day of the month.
9. No one gets annoyed if you scream.
10. A cave will always wait for you.
11. Caves don't mind which entrance you use.
12. No matter how much you swallow, there's always more coming.
13. You can go down as often as you wish.
14. A cave won't kick you out for farting.
15. To get rid of crabs you just unclip them.
16. A cave doesn't care if you never enter it again.
17. Twisting and turning in small holes doesn't always result in getting wet.
18. You can stick your helmet into any cave's hole without other caves getting jealous.
19. You can stop for a Mars bar if you get tired.
20. You can display your tackle in public.

The Bonfire of the Vanities

A Classic Weekend

"A tale of two cities" (Bristol and Burrington Coombe (OK, not a city)). Off we drove in twos, threes and fours to the caving hut, perched in the idyllic, sylvan beauty of the Mendips.

Nature cringed as we immediately created a wasteland, felling trees, using selective deforestation techniques and dragged them towards the clearing, the site of that peculiar English ritual that is bonfire night.

An ASDA shopping trolley was sacrificed, sawn up neatly into a do-it-yourself barbecue, Trousers' idea, I believe. Tim Parrish decided to brighten up the already garishly multicoloured interior of the hut by placing the two adverts from said trolley onto the mantelpiece, adding a touch of class to the place.

Whilst all this was occurring some of us actually went caving - Eastwater was my particular "Shallow Grave". Those of you that have done his particular beauty will understand why I don't want to talk about it...

After caving we plodded back to the hut and a roaring bonfire and lots of lovely food - I have been told to write nice things about the garlic bread, chicken and kebabs - happy now Trousers?

Hilary's car became a sacrifice to the Gods of this spelæological ritual - Hilary, not a *better word* - Ed} at the attempted destruction of her and her car with a rocket.

But the finale was yet to come.... Yes, it was time for Jacket's £7 rocket, hyped to be

In true West Country tradition it rained intermittently and as annual tradition dictates, we left for the Plume enmasse, in the mud and rain. The lucky few with Petzels (brought solely for this purpose, as they are useless for caving) managed to get to the pub relatively unsullied by the mud.

In the pub, pub-like activities went on, pool was played, drinks were quaffed (by one person in particular), and the conversation flowed merrily, punctuated by Rachel's drunken pleadings with the landlord for another pint of Fosters. Eventually it all got a bit much for the poor girl and she was promptly whisked away to the BRI in Sarah's car, accompanied by Jim, Bill and Henry, entertained by the melodious strains of Bob Dylan and occasional retching sounds.

Sadly they all missed Andy Jacket's £40 fireworks, which were set off back at the hut once the landlord had thrown us all out of the pub.

Simon Grace (and his floppy hat) and Andy Jacket proceeded to ignite firework after firework, each one provoking gasps of awe, comments of "is that it?", and occasional sniggers from everyone gathered around the bonfire. fan of fireworks at the best of times, was understandably

more impressive than a Saturn IV rocket, and in reality was about as successful as the Challenger mission but not as spectacular.

Once again the woods settled into a dreamy quiet, disturbed only by the occasional

comment about how crap the fireworks had been.

One by one everyone staggered off to bed, many not to rise until 10am the next day, others crawling out of their tents at three minutes to twelve (*anyone in particular? - Ed*).

The firework display was not quite over. With a final loud bang the last firework went off in the fire, nearly blowing away Andy Tyler and anyone else in the vicinity, and provoking a startlingly violent reaction from one Bill Miners.

The explosion also accounted for the disintegration of Millie's fried sausages, served up to us all as a breakfast treat.

At last it was time to teach us novices the art of SRT (*nothing to it - Ed*). Simon Grace rigged up the Beech tree at the back of the hut. Jenny was the first to go up the spider's web of rigging - I was next, having succeeded in putting on my harness and clipping onto the rope, I was told it was time to go down GB, and that's as far as my SRT training went. I may have another chance though, if the rumours of an SRT training session in the Union are to be believed.

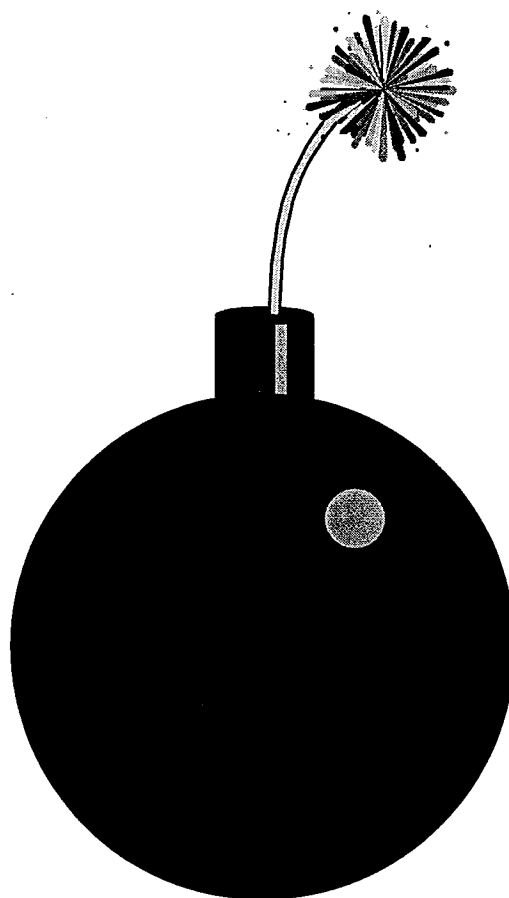
Dr. Andy, Jenny, Bill and myself entered GB after negotiating the muddy morass by the entrance, getting an interesting guided tour of the cave by Dr. Andy. Galena veins, phreatic and vadose passages as well as fossil spiriferid brachiopods were some of the many subjects covered. (*Or they might have been something completely different as I can't read Adam's handwriting very well. Apologies Dr. F for any ridiculous geological blunders - Ed*)

Jenny and myself led the way out and I made the important discovery that passages look totally different when going in the opposite direction. Eventually we made it out and enjoyed a few

ripple bars in the fading sunlight and walked back to the hut to be greeted by Juliet, Will and Tim. At long last we all went home - leaving my flask behind. Could any future visitors to the hut a) ascertain if my flask is still there and b) see if the coffee in it is still warm.

Cheers to everyone who actually remembered what happened on the trip - Jim, Pete, Juliet and Chris. Originally this article was going to be literally laced with classical references, but I thought cavers in general are a bunch of semi-literate (*generous*) philistines and it would be lost on you all. Besides, I'm a lazy sod and I couldn't be bothered.

Adam Goulding



The Further adventures
of
BORIS
THE UBSS MASCOT
With Special Agent Guest Star
KING ARTHUR

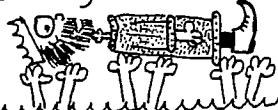
Thus exhausted and
finally defeated,
King Arthur returns
Excalibur whence
it came...

Lady, where art
thou?..



Whereupon he is carried
aloft over the waters
of the lake to the
Isle of Avalon...

Not tonight nidears, I've
got a terrible headache...



...Where he lies in continual slumber
until Englands shores once
more face peril...

PRIVATE
NO SWANKING

Do Not
Disturb

Meanwhile, some 1500 years later,
Boris is exploring some virgin passage...



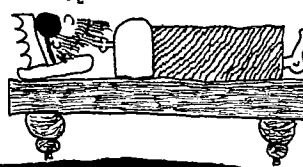
He's not lost...

I wonder what's through
ere...



...Just locationally unaware...

Zzzzz



LIVE FAST, DIE YOUNG, LEAVE A GOOD LOOKING COPPERS...

Well, I bet their Farrants
never seen a formation like
this before...



Fear not young sir, for the time has come for me to rise
up and protect this mighty kingdom. What is it that now
threatens our verile land? An invading army? Plagues of
locust? Armageddon? A Conservative government? With
my trusty sword by my side I shall defeat all...



Hang about, your one of those
wargamers arnt you? I know your
type, with your rubber swords and
bearskin underpants...



I suppose your going to
cast a spell on me
now or something

Merlin...



Narrator:
ONE THUNDERBOLT
AND PUFF OF SMOKE
LATER...

er...



...I didnt mean to
piss on your tent that
time...



Next Issue: SCANDAL! As Boris hops off with a young toad and his tadpoles!

© Simon 'One sugar (and a bit for luck) in my Lapsang Souchong if you please' Grace, 1996

...It's just you against your battered blade, the book and the motion, forever man, and it would have been luck if you could get out of life alive...