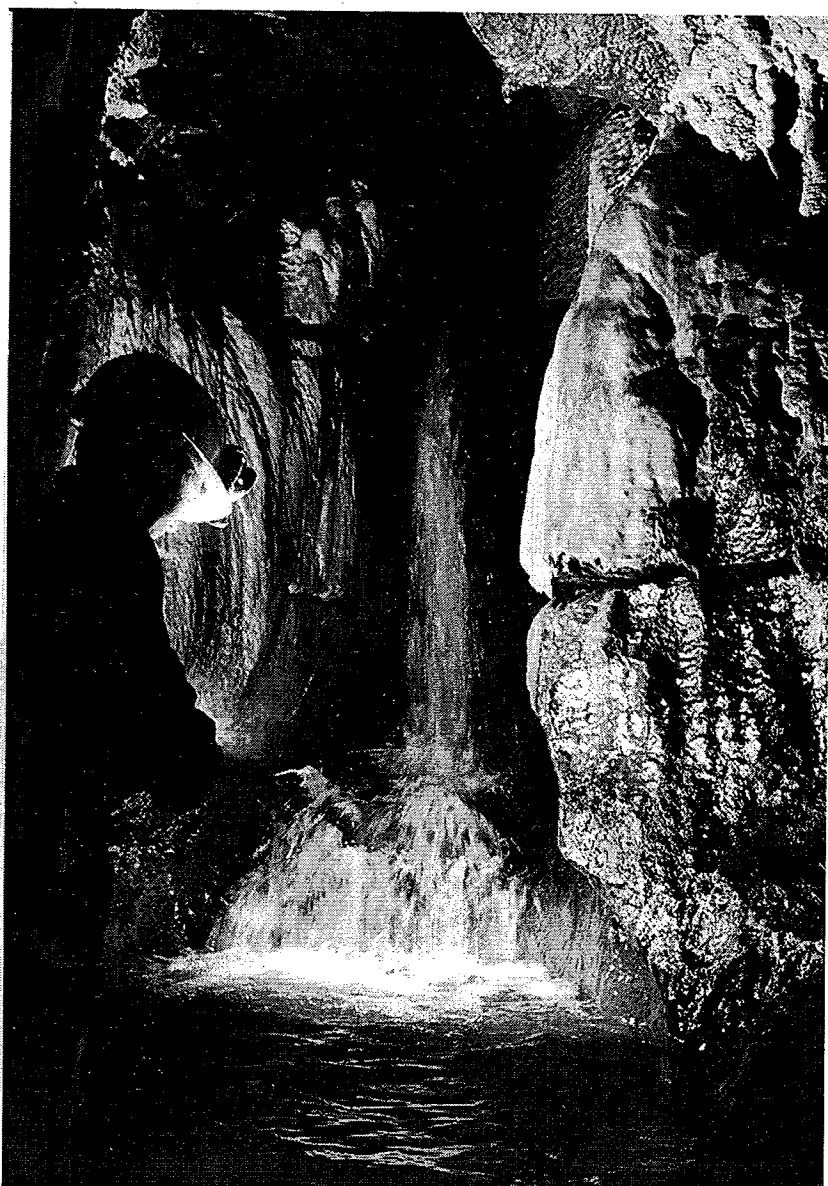


U.B.S.S.

The University of Bristol Spelæological Society



Somewhere in the Mendips, if the information on the box is to be believed

Newsletter
Vol.14 No.1

March 1998

The Editor's Bit

Hi there,

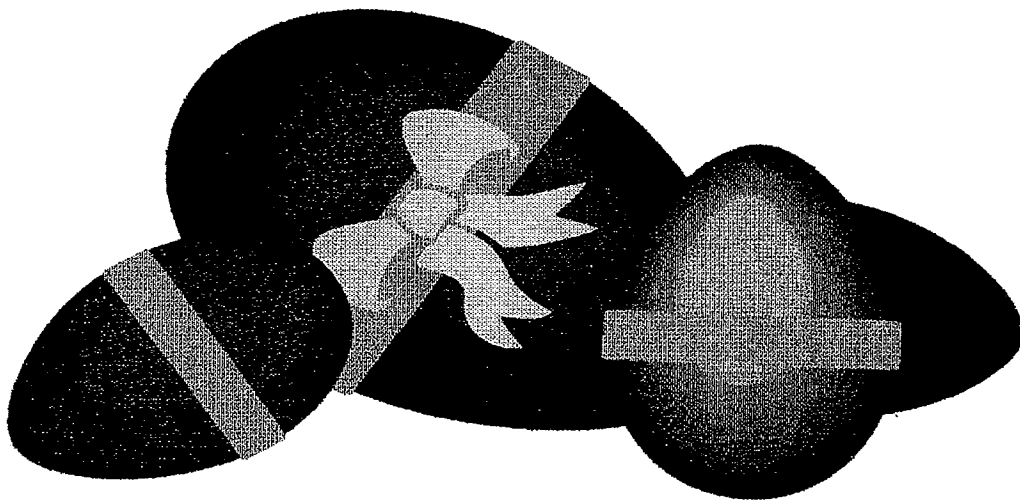
Sorry this is coming out rather late in the term, but being a hard working final year student I have had better things to do.

Thank you to those who have finally keeled under the pressure and written for me – this is the last time I will be badgering you as the next issue will be under the jurisdiction of the new Editor, Mr. Roland “don’t blame me, blame the parents” Parrott.

You will notice that Mr. Grace has drawn us a cartoon. I managed to collar him for the few days he returned here and persuade him to do a final episode in the life of Boris before he left our shores for good. This, I fear, will really be the last we shall see of the hapless caver. Bit like me.

To all those members who haven’t braved the pub yet, do come along and see us. We’re all right (honest) and the pub’s just got a new window and everything. Go on – give us a go. We promise you don’t have to go caving or anything silly like that.

Chris



UBSS Newsletter Vol.14 no.1 January 1998

Editor – Christine Benn

Distributors – Tim Davies, Tony Boycott

****Person who actually did all the work** – Ian Wheeler**

Contributors to this issue – Steve Cottle, Adam Goulding, Charlie Self, Taz Williams, Simon Grace, Graham Mullan & Linda Wilson.

Disclaimer – The opinions expressed within these pages are those of the individual contributors and are no reflection on the broad minded attitudes of the committee and myself. Especially not the bits about Charlie’s sex appeal.

HON SEC'S BIT.

Yes at last I have got my act together and am setting pen to paper. I feel it is time to look back on this last year (now that I have finished my stint), and reflect upon the many successful trips (organised by your other more efficient and better looking Hon. Sec.).

The discovery of lots of lovely virgin passage in Poulmagree, County Clare, Ireland, bringing a happy end to that hideous dig of eight years duration and vindicating the large amounts of Guinness consumed, is the shining star in our firmament of achievements. Sadly our main aim of taking our esteemed editor caving has still not been realised ...

Trips to Devon, South Wales and Yorkshire have been successful (that is if you own shares in any of the major breweries). A tailor made trip for novices is on the cards so all of you people who parted with £6 at Fresh and have not had the benefits (apart from these wonderful newsletters) come and see us at the Red Lion on Tuesdays from 9.30 onwards and get what you paid for.

Well that's about it, pity I could not leave in a blaze of tabloidesque publicity e.g. HON. SEC'S SACKED IN SECRET SECT'S SHOCKING SEX SCANDAL.

I'll go now and leave you in the capable hands of Taz.

Adam xxx

{except, of course, he's doing no such thing as the Hon.Sec's bit hasn't been written by Taz}

TREASURER'S REPORT, MARCH 1998

Graham Mullan

The last year has been a fairly straightforward one, financially speaking. The usual items have gone up, insurances, subscriptions, and the only thing that comes down is grant income. There are, however a few specific points that I would like to make:

➤ When I took over this job, in 1985, the Union Grant stood at £1,020 and total income from subscriptions at £741.29. This has now been turned round at Grant: £827.92 and Subs: £1863.66. My point is that in a world where grants are fewer and further between, generally, the Society is slowly becoming more and more self-sufficient.

➤ The above situation would be further helped if all those ex-students who are U.K. tax-payers were to fill out Deed of Covenant forms. These are available from me.

➤ This year's Receipts and Payments account is close to being in balance. This is not, quite, an accurate reflection of events as it includes last year's payment for *Proceedings*, not this, and no publication grant (not received by Jan. 31st). As, however, this year's *Proceedings* will be slightly more expensive, this will, again, balance out.

➤ As a consequence of *Proceedings* being late and therefore not paid for, the Printed Publications Fund is still artificially high. If I can manage to get the next one out in good time, all these things will finally level out properly.

➤ The item of £74 for Charterhouse cave offprints is due to our buying back the stock of these that we sold to the Charterhouse Caving Committee in 1983. We are almost out of stock whereas they don't sell them at all. Tony and I therefore agreed this was a sensible move.

➤ Despite the Hut no longer being hired out to outsiders, there is still a small surplus on the Hut Fund. I think this shows that the decision was a correct one.

➤ There has been little use made of the Society's equipment for hire this year.

➤ I acknowledge the AGM's requirement that the annual donation to the MRO be increased. I trust that this does not mean that we will require their services more!

➤ I have also taken on board the President's comments about the "Caves of County Clare" Reserve Fund. The economics of publishing have changed considerably in the last few years and it should now be possible for us to re-enter the fray. I know that a number of Members are interested in a new book on County Clare and would like to hear from all who might like to contribute to such a project.

➤ And finally, Subscriptions for 1998/9 are now due. These remain unchanged at £12. Will all those members not paying by standing order please send a cheque promptly. Thank you.

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST JANUARY 1998

PUBLISHING ACCOUNT 1997/8

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BALANCE SHEET AT 31 JANUARY 1998

	£	£	£
<u>HUT FUND</u>			
Balance at 1. 2. 97	3779.69		
Add net income	<u>136.00</u>		
	3915.69		
		<u>INVESTMENTS</u>	
		Capital Reserve Account	16250.00
		N.S.B. Investment Account	<u>966.60</u>
			17216.60
<u>PRINTED PUBLICATIONS FUND</u>		<u>CURRENT ACCOUNT</u>	
Balance at 1. 2. 97	5080.00		435.37
<u>LIBRARY FUND</u>		<u>CASH IN HAND</u>	
Balance at 1. 2. 97	299.50	Hon Secretaries	2.80
		Hon Treasurer	<u>15.47</u>
			18.27

EQUIPMENT HIRE ACCOUNT

Balance at 1. 2. 97	279.92
Add net income	<u>10.00</u>
	289.92

"CAVES OF CO. CLARE" RESERVE FUND

Advance for Publication	7000.00
Add surplus balance on sales	<u>600.84</u>
	7600.84

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT

Balance at 1. 2. 97	640.88
Less net expenditure	<u>156.59</u>
	484.29

17670.24

17670.24

HONORARY AUDITORS REPORT: I have examined the above Receipts and Payment Account for the year ended 31st January 1998, and the attached Balance Sheet as at that date and certify that they are in accordance with the Society's accounting records and explanations provided.

.....D.J. Allen C.I.P.F.A.

The Devon Six

What better place to have an UBSS Christmas meal than somewhere with so few caves that no-one can possibly venture underground on Sunday without fear of repeating their own footsteps? Well, I suppose somewhere with no caves at all...

Anyway, one dark, miserable December evening we all set off for sunny Devon. OK, so it wasn't sunny, and it was only me and Tim, everyone else failing to arrive till around lunchtime the following day. "We'll be there around half ten, I Promise," Adam.

Friday night proving relatively uneventful (well no events that anyone wants to hear about at any rate), Tim and I ventured to local pub, a mere 20 yard stagger away, to check out the beer, the pool table, and plead with the landlord over a last orders pint, to change the number of people/vegetarians/etc. for the next day, UBSS organisation being up to its usual high standards.

After the eventual arrival of the remaining Bristol party, all four of them, I had festered in the rain too long drinking endless cups of tea to possibly go caving. However this proved fortunate since I only had one wellie boot, the other still in tatters after a trip down Aggie the week before. A pub lunch was clearly called for. This still left plenty of time for the obligatory dozen cups of tea before the arrival of Rachel, and a start to the early drinking. Approximately two or three hours later, down the pub, a few jars along the way, it was time for dinner. However the intrepid cavers still hadn't returned from Prid., and serious talk began of the landlord becoming their rescue, so long as we lent him a light and drew him a map. Fortunately for us, since if he left us we could have no more beer, they arrived and we all sat down to an evening of good, clean family fun, or something like that.

The evening progressed in the way these things usually do. Good food, good beer, a good time, and cigars (?) were had by all. On returning to the hut the party continued. The rope ladder, the cooker, a painting ladder, and a random car were all put to good use in the ensuing celebrations and later the bird camp decided a close inspection of the hut weelie-bin was called for. I will call this the end, since it really was the beginning of the end, but it must be mentioned that not a sole stirred in that hut until midday the next day, and after a hearty portion of lard, the party was over.

By Taz

FIVE THREE GO TRESPASSING IN THE DORDOGNE

Linda Wilson

Graham has described elsewhere the more intellectual side of our January holiday in the Dordogne, but as part of the same trip we spent a fascinating afternoon in the company of a gentleman named Jean-Louis, who lodges with Tom and Lynne, from whom we rented our accommodation. This arose from an evening's drinking with our hosts in which Tom mentioned that Jean-Louis had mentioned to him some while ago a nearby chateau which had a secret passage leading into it and Tom wondered if we would be interested. With fond memories of Enid Blyton books, we agreed, although not really expecting to meet with success. We were wrong. With Jean-Louis directing, we drove some 20 km to the Chateau of St. Vincent le-Paluel, which had been bombed by the Germans in the war when they were attempting to dig out the Resistance in this area. We parked nearby and were led up the wooded slope of the hill, past the "Privee" sign to a small hole, into which our guide disappeared. We followed and found ourselves in a textbook (or rather children's book) passage, nearly head height and about a metre wide, hewn by hand out of solid sandstone with the pick marks showing clearly on the walls. The passage went into the hill, past a disguised doorway, and up a flight of stairs, circling around a large deep well that clearly was the water supply for the chateau. The occasional lesser horseshoe bat decorated the roof and we expected at any time to see the Famous Five and Timmy the Dog come rushing past us pursued by villains! Eventually, we emerged into the ruins of the chateau itself and saw some beautiful stone work, which must have been quite magnificent before its sad demise. After a tour of the grounds, we made our way back down the hill, absolutely amazed to have discovered that there is some truth in the often talked-about but seldom experienced secret passage theory. A must for all lovers of children's books!

After that, and knowing by then our interest in matters subterranean, Jean-Louis suggested a further site that might be of interest and so we drove off in the direction of Les Eyzies and parked in a disused quarry near to the abris of Cap Blanc, famous for its deep relief horse carvings. It appeared from Jean-Louis' actions that the (non-French) owner of the land might not be too keen on visitors (inspite of the lack of "Privee" signs), as he took a look to see if anyone was around in the driveway of the nearby chateau, and then dived off into the woods, muttering something about guard-dogs. Not wishing to appear wimps, we followed, relying on his local knowledge to get us out of trouble. He followed a track down and around the slope of the hill for a little way across a couple of narrowish traverses, to the entrance of a very large abris (rock-shelter), partially walled off across the entrance by a structure of stone "pigeon-holes", some 20 m high and 10 m wide, forming the pigeon loft (now disused) for the nearby chateau.

Our track took us into the mid-level of the abris and a ledge ran around the inside, typical of those in the previously inhabited cliff-dwellings in the area such as the extremely extensive Roc St.Christophe. To our surprise, we saw some wooden structures inside, two walkways, one at the front and one at the back, with a wooden ladder, the rungs lashed on with rope, looking decidedly rustic, leading down to the floor. Seeing what appeared to be a rift leading off from the bottom of the cave, some 7 m below, I asked Jean-Louis if it was all right to descend. He looked a little dubious, but investigated the ladder and it seemed to be sound so we descended. I promptly started to get messy by crawling though underneath the second set of pigeon holes which walled off the passage beyond. I found myself in a very high, steep and narrow rift which stared to head straight up for the surface. I followed it up for about 14 m and could see that it went at least that far again, but by then I was facing the prospect of starting to thrutch more than I felt appropriately dressed for, so I decided discretion was the better part of valour and came back down. While Graham went to take a look Jean-Louis explained that apparently, the wooden walkways and ladder were put in as part of some filming a few years ago. My French wasn't up to working out what the film was about, but I think he said that this place was used as the company couldn't get permission to film in Lascaux! He also told me that on his previous visit he had met the owner, who took exception to his

presence and brought on the guard-dogs. Jean-Louis apparently found the dogs to be friendly, at which point, the owner's sense of humour evaporated further and our guide was threatened with the gendarmes. I gathered from the amusement with which the story was being related that the irate owner was probably simply answered with a Gallic shrug of supreme indifference, but even so I started to listen out rather more keenly for any approaches from outside.

Once back in the open air, Jean-Louis looked up the hillside at a non-existent path and raised his eyebrows at us. Mindful of the tales of guard-dogs, I guessed that he wanted to give the chateau as wide a berth as possible on the return, and mindful too of the fact that our guide was at least sixty, I thought that if he could do it, the route couldn't be too taxing even for armchair cavers like us so I shrugged and gestured for him to lead on. The route was nearly vertical and Graham claimed that by the time he got up the first section, all the footholds (of which there weren't many to start with) had been kicked off and the small tree which acted as the only handhold was in danger of losing its precarious hold on the rock! We finally arrived back at the road by the direct route, with not a guard-dog in sight.

Later that day, when regaling Tom and Lynne with a tale of our adventures and our guides somewhat challenging routes, Tom remarked that he had forgotten to tell us that Jean-Louis is an ex-commando who saw several years of active service in Algeria!!!!!!

A most excellent and interesting afternoon and in defence of our guide's seemingly somewhat casual disregard of property laws, it appears from what we are told that such signs are in many places there more as a negation of liability rather than from any intention of being obeyed. Honest, Gov'ner. (Or if challenged just say "Pardon, je ne comprends pas", and retreat hastily, smiling and nodding, the typical English approach to most problems abroad.)

If anyone is interested in self-catering accommodation in the Dordogne, 10 km from Montignac (Lascaux), 17 km from Sarlat, (and just round the corner from the Doux de Coly) in quality accommodation at a very reasonable price, particularly out of season, contact Graham or myself and we will give you the details, after all who knows what other treats an afternoon with Jean-Louis might hold in store?

New Year in the Russian North

Last summer, at the 12th ICS in Switzerland, I camped among a large company of Russian cavers. Of several invitations I received, one of the more intriguing was to go to the gypsum karst of Pinega, about 100km east of Archangelsk. The expedition was planned to coincide with New Year. As winter approached, the accumulated wisdom of the UBSS (as represented by the Tuesday night regulars in the Red Lion) responded very favourably to the idea. "It is where? You must be mad!" With such encouragement, I felt sure that I would have a splendid adventure.

Russian visas are always a problem. For a private visit you need an authorised invitation, and the visa names the town to which you are allowed to travel. My wife Galya is a Russian citizen, so she invited me to go with her to visit her mother in Kirov (to the east of Moscow). I obtained a visa for Kirov. Meanwhile the Russian Academy of Sciences was preparing a formal invitation for me to go to Pinega, a process so slow that the paperwork was finally completed the week before Christmas. At this point the Russian Consulate in London decided to be awkward. No, they wouldn't add Pinega onto my visa. I would have to give back my Kirov visa and make a new application, in person, then wait for them to process it. At this point common sense prevailed and I photocopied my Kirov visa and faxed it to my friend in Moscow, who added the names "Archangelsk" and "Pinega" onto it and photocopied it again. He then took the forgery to the railway booking office and bought my train ticket to Archangelsk.

A few days later, I was on a railway platform in Moscow meeting the rest of the team. As I said goodbye to her, Galya made me promise not to sleep with any naughty Russian girls. To those who have known the author over the years, such concern may seem unduly alarmist, but we are not talking about usual wooden English girls here. More of this later. From Moscow to Archangelsk the train travelled north for 21 hours. The temperature dropped from a disgusting and slushy +1 to a bracing -20 degrees. A further 5 hours by local bus took us to the small village of Golobino in Pinega district. A wooden house with earth closet, wood-burning stove, candlelit, water by bucket from the river (just keep breaking the ice in the same place to keep it from growing too thick): a real house, but reminiscent of the UBSS hut.

There are two very good reasons for visiting the Pinega caves in winter. Firstly the water table rises in spring and most of the caves become flooded. Secondly, in winter there is ice. I had expected to see icicles and ice stalagmites, but I was unprepared for frozen cave streams or for frostwork - crystals of ice by the tens (sometimes hundreds) of thousand. In their winter glory, these are some of the most beautiful caves in the world. A problem of winter caving is the unpredictable climate. In the week before our arrival, the temperature dropped to -43. As we were leaving it had risen to around -5, with resultant heavy snowfall. Daylight hours seemed to defy the laws of science. Pinega lies only 2 degrees outside the Arctic Circle, yet only a week after the winter solstice there was 6 hours of good daylight, plus a twilight period.

The village of Golobino is well-situated for cavers. The main cave of the area (Golobinski

Provull) is only a few hundred metres away, with many others within a radius of a couple of kilometres. Our usual routine was for everyone to visit a cave during the day, or two if they were short, then half the team would go out again after supper. Evening trips were usually for photography. The evening trip of 31st December was a bit special. The day had already been excellent, with a good cave and a visit to the banye.

Banye is the Russian name for a steam bath and is similar to the Swedish sauna, with optional extras of being beaten with birch twigs then rolling naked in the snow. Our banye was a small log cabin equipped with a wood-burning stove, a water tank and warm wet girls lit by candlelight. The Russian banye is surely one of the world's great cultural inventions. (This is not intended as a sexist remark: the girls seemed equally enthusiastic, for their own reasons).

By late evening, we were well-fed and well-pickled in vodka, having celebrated New Year in Kamchatka (9 hours ahead of Moscow time) and each subsequent time zone. Twenty minutes before midnight (Moscow time) we all dashed to the cave Golobinski Provull. The cave entrance is a dome-shaped chamber, open at the top, with a fixed wooden ladder. We celebrated New Year with Crimean champagne and fireworks, the rockets ricocheting from the walls more often than they escaped into the night sky. As the party broke up, some of our team went on into the cave, others stopped for photography, while I set off back up the ladder. I was not alone for long. I had gone perhaps a hundred metres through the trees when I found myself flat on my back in a snowdrift with a naughty Russian girl on top of me. Military tacticians please note: do not "wait until you see the whites of their eyes", as girls very often close their eyes at the last moment. However, I digress from topics suitable for Newsletter.

Two days later, the minibus of the Pinega Reserve collected us and took us through Pinega town, then along forestry tracks for a further 10 kms. We had to ski the next 5 kms with rucksacks on our backs to reach the log cabins of the Iron Gates protected area. There is an extensive system of caves here connected (in part) through sumps. In one of these sumps the great Vladimir Kisselyov lost his life. We carried with us a large inscribed tablet of black volcanic rock, and spent our first day hand-drilling bolt holes at the entrance to the cave where he died. With this black memorial stone fixed to a vertical wall of pink gypsum, we lit candles and placed them on a small ledge underneath. Vladimir was one of the most liked and respected of Russian cavers. He had many friends around the world and had made plans to visit us in Bristol just before he died.

Our duty done, we could now enjoy the caves. As with those near Golobino, the caves of Iron Gates are sub-horizontal and mostly flooded in summer. The main difference is winter access. For most Golobino caves you walk along the road to the point nearest the cave, then wade through deep snow. In Iron Gates there is no road and you must ski. There is something immensely satisfying about coming out of a cave late at night with your camera in a rucksack, putting on a duvet jacket and hunter's skis (wide and with skins underneath), and by headtorch returning to a warm log cabin in a pine forest far from any other habitation. In the ten days that I was in Pinega district, I went caving thirteen times (in ten different caves, though some were very short). It was a wonderful expedition and I want to go back there again. One last anecdote: on the train back to Moscow, we were sharing our supper of bread and sausage with a well-dressed woman who had a jar of buttered potatoes, still warm from the pan. A few minutes after introductions had been made, she leaned across and said, "Charlie, ti ochen seksualniy mujchina (you are a very sexy man)." Russian women!!!

Charlie Self

PAINTED CAVES IN WINTER

Graham Mullan

Having decided that January really was a bad time to stay at home, Linda and I headed south, for a week in the Dordogne, in France, and - hopefully - some slightly warmer weather.

Our main objective, this time, was to visit a number of the decorated cave sites that were important in the acceptance of the genuine antiquity of cave art around the turn of the century. Now that so many sites have been carbon 14 dated, of course, there is no doubt about this, but the first discoveries of such work were attended by great controversy, to the extent that Don Marcellino de Sautuola, the discoverer of the first and still one of the greatest sites, Altamira in northern Spain, died before his claims were finally accepted. This was, however, a Spanish cave and at that time most prehistorians were French!

The breakthrough came at the cave of La Mouthe, not far from Les Eyzies, when both paintings and engravings were found in the cave on the far side of a complete blockage containing undisturbed Upper Palaeolithic deposits, thus giving a similar minimum age for the art. This interpretation was confirmed at another cave, the Grotte de la Marie, at Teyjat, North of Périgieux, where a particularly fine series of engravings were found on a stalagmite boss that had also been buried by Upper Palaeolithic deposits.

The publicity surrounding the finds at La Mouthe, made the archaeologist François Daleau look again at the cave of Pair non Pair, just north of Bordeaux. He had excavated the sediments at this site in the 1880's and at the time had noticed some engraved lines on the walls but had not really paid them much heed. On re-investigation these turned out to be another fine set of Upper Palaeolithic engravings authenticated again by the archaeological deposits which had covered them. By now, the existence of Palaeolithic Cave Art could not be denied and Emile Cartailhac, who had been one of the most outspoken critics of Altamira, though he had never visited it, drew on his visit to Pair non Pair (in 1896) when he published his "Mea culpa d'un sceptique" in 1902. This was, however, too late for Sautuola, who had died, embittered. This particular piece of writing is recommended to all lovers of humbugs.

This, then is the historical background to the three caves that we wished to visit during the week. Of the three, only Pair non Pair is normally open to the public so some planning and some luck would be required.

The Grotte de la Marie, Teyjat.

This site has been open to the general public in the past, but for reasons of conservation, access is now limited to small groups of interested people, by appointment only. It is necessary to contact the Museum at Les Eyzies and state your case, alternatively you could wait until the small museum being arranged next door finally opens, probably early in 1999, to see an interpretation of the site and its archaeology.

Our guide was a member of the Museum staff, Mlle. Gizardin, who is working on the new display, next door. She was most enthusiastic and very helpful. The engravings are all to be found on a large and now partly broken up stalagmite boss just a few metres into the cave. They are extremely fine and show in some cases much greater anatomical detail than is usually found in this work. The cave clearly has a long geomorphic history as the stal shows distinct signs of having been re-eroded by an active stream after its original deposition but clearly before the visits of the artists and the subsequent archaeology-rich deposition. Despite this, the left-hand gallery seems still to connect with an active streamway, whose river has apparently been artificially led to its current resurgence in the village square, below the cave. At the time of our visit, the whole area was in spate and water was coming up through the tarmac around the square at a number of places. Somehow I doubt that permission to do the cave, as opposed to the simply seeing the art, is often forthcoming which is a pity as it looks interesting.

The conservation problems at this site are interesting, but not quite what Mlle. Gizardin was telling us. The Museum staff are apparently worried about the entire ensemble of calcite blocks being undermined by water, but it seemed to me that the water running around this area - which had been diverted away from the engraved surfaces some time ago - was actually depositing calcite and was therefore more likely to be stabilising than destabilising the pile. More important, we felt, is the removal of old fittings in corrodable materials and modifying the artificial roof over this area so that condensation runs away and does not drip, as at present, all over.

Pair non Pair

The cave and its surrounding area is owned by the Government and, like many of their sites, is open all year round. However, we got there to find the approach roads from both sides sporting "Route Barree" signs and confusion set in. In fact the road is being repaired, but access was still fine, although we did not trust the speed at which the work might move down the road and so parked outside this area and walked in.

The artwork here consists mainly of large, quite deeply picked out engravings which are slightly unusual in nearly all being in the daylight zone, rather than the deeper cave. It is possible that like some similar work at La Mouthe these were also outlined with pigment, but M. Daleau unfortunately took a pressure pump from his Vineyard next door to clean them up and any pigment would have been lost at that time. Many of the pieces are quite large and the best of them, the "Agnus Dei" a horse drawn with two heads to indicate movement, is very fine indeed

The conservation problems at this site are also interesting and slightly unusual. There is a little algal growth near a couple of the lamps, though nowhere near the artwork, and some new calcite deposits. A two pronged attack on this latter problem has been started, firstly by diverting groundwater away from the cave, upslope and secondly by planting trees, again upslope to draw the remainder of the groundwater off. This is somewhat amusing in context, as the immediate area has been a scheduled ancient monument since about 1910 the land surface has not been worked in any way - and so a little wood has grown up over the cave and the roots of one particular acacia tree over the entrance caused problems and it had to be cut down. Our guide was extremely helpful and as we were the only visitors at the time he took care to show us as much as possible.

In one respect it is amazing that this cave has survived at all as the outcrop has been mined for building stone and the nearest mine is only a few metres from the cave!

La Grotte de La Mouthe

In many ways this was the most important visit of our trip, as this was the first cave in which parietal (wall) art was properly recognised as being ancient. It was also the one which we felt we had the worst chance of getting into. The cave was once open to the public but was closed in 1981 as the artwork was deemed to be too fragile and too vulnerable to sustain high visitor numbers. In recent years it has also gained a reputation for being very hard to organise any visits at all as the landowner M. Lapeyre was 'difficult'. In fact, we found him to be polite, helpful and informative. The problem is not so much that he is awkward as he is old and infirm. Consequently he cannot cope with prearranged visits as he may not be up to it on the day, but if you are lucky enough to catch him when he is feeling well on a nice day then you may well get in. Having said that, he took some time to walk the couple of hundred metres down to the cave from his house and when we came out he was obviously very short of breath; so do not be offended by a refusal. For information, his house is the first on the right in the tiny hamlet of La Mouthe.

The broad cave entrance is walled up. A door leads into a quite sizeable chamber, now used as a farm store and an eminently suitable place for the seed potatoes stored there. This was the site of a dig in the 1890's which showed occupation from Mousterian (Middle Palaeolithic) to Magdalanian (Upper Palaeolithic) times. After much of the sediment had been removed, the cave was found to continue and lo and behold paintings and engravings were found on the walls. As the passage had been completely blocked by the archaeological deposits, there could be no doubt about their authenticity. There are engravings, line paintings and one polychrome painting, the unique 'hut' which looked just like a rather basic structure in the farmyard above us. The passage has been dug out to about 2 m depth to allow access to the decorated part. It continues as a crawl and there are said to be more engravings deeper in, but I bet hardly anyone gets to see those. There is some good stal in the first part of the cave and some stal covered surfaces similar to that which has been used to such good effect at Lascaux, but these have not been decorated here. M. Lapeyre also pointed out a good dig site in the "Hut" chamber, which he was certain would go.

This is the first and only cave that we have been shown round by candlelight although it is worth taking an electric with you as the red pigment used to highlight some of the engravings does not show up in the candlelight.

Conservation wise the only problem here seems to be the vulnerability to visitors and this is informally addressed by the fact that very few visits appear to take place. For the future, however, it is not known what will happen here.

Together these three sites have proved extremely important in the history of the archaeology. They are by no means the most spectacular of the decorated caves, to my mind nothing holds a candle to Lascaux anyway, but their contents are interesting and each is well worth a visit in its own right.

Whilst in the area we also paid another visit to Les Combarelles which, as with the nearby Font de Gaume is open all year round (except Wednesdays). At the start of the trip we were alone with the guide and as we had told him that this was our third visit to the cave he took the trouble to point out a number of engravings before the start of the normal tour which were of interest. Somewhat to our annoyance, some late arrivals were then brought in to join us; but even then the guide made sure that we saw a number of things not shown on the normal tour including many more 'anthropomorphs' and a very fine rhino. This shows that it is always worth making your interests known to the guides who seem only too willing to accommodate you if they can.

A Merry Irish New Year

Or How To Spend a Week in The Rain and Still (occasionally) go caving

Scenario

After an excellent new year celebrations of '97 whilst staying in Doolin plans were drawn early for a return for the seeing in of '98. Andy Atkinson speculatively bought 3 cheap car ferry tickets on the hope that there would be enough people willing to go. A quick session of e-mails later and within a week we already needed a fourth car! (somehow also arranged cheaply after the deadline!) Thus on the evening of 28th of December thirteen cavers arrive at the tackle store and proceed to fill every available space in two small cars, a merc and a van with gear, caving gear, diving gear, cave diving gear and food. How we did it last year in a car and a transit van with almost as many people I'm not sure but there must have been a lot less gear.

The Caves

Unfortunately the weather wasn't as good as last year and a fair amount of rain was around, the forecast was for more low pressures and frontal systems. So Poulmagree was to be done on the first day with Adam, Taz & Andy Atkinson (it is probably worth pointing out that on this trip we were down on our quota of Andys. Andy Atkinson (Trousers) Andy Farrant (Dr Happy) Andy Cook (Barrel) were the only three out of five to return Thank god it wasn't too confusing!). In the last newsletter (long article by Graham) you may recall (if you read it closely) that Tony, Rachel and myself dug our way passed sump 1 and found around 250m of streamway after the sump. At this point we were met with a duck with a very small amount of airspace but through which running water could be heard. Thus while Dr Andy led a group down Callaun 2 and Andy C took a group to get lost looking for the "monotonously long streamway" of Faurnarooska, Andy T and the group carrying the bottles went down Poulmagree. As appointed person to die I went to look at the duck (now definitely a sump due to over 6" increase in stream height). Knowing that there was a sound from the previous trip I passed from air bell to air bell round a corner to the exit of the sump. The stream loudly crashing away around a corner. After securing the line Andy joined me and we de-kitted to go and have a look at the new passage. Around two corners and it soon became apparent what the noise was that I'd previously heard. A waterfall entering from the right was dropping down eight feet into the stream. After a couple more corners the roof again ducked low so we decide to go and get our face masks before continuing. This meant a quick exploration of the inlet, but unfortunately it was a very tight rift that became difficult to travel along after about 20 feet. (See New Proceedings for survey etc.). Having picked up masks we returned to the duck and passed this but alas after about 20m another sump loomed. This one was not a duck. So we went back to Taz and Adam who were waiting (coldly) for us, then exited the cave only to meet Julian, Becka, Juliet and Andy C on their second

trip of the day!

The next day put two Andys together in St Catherine's for a trip down Doolin River Cave, which merited only a short log book entry of "got very wet - a low point so went out again!" Thus Andy T and I left earlier than Adam, Sharon and Chris so that we could dive sump 2, look at sump 3 and survey out. Sump 3 was passed only to very rapidly find sump 4 so we surveyed the bit in between sumps 2 & 3 and then left. Meeting sherpas (who were a bit late so they carried on down) except for Adam who helped us but then hurt himself thus leaving Andy and I to carry our own gear out. As with the change before caving we just managed it in time before another for 6 hale storm hit us. We went back to the Hostel for mega amounts of food followed by excellent Guinness and the wishing in the New Year.

The Aftermath

No-one went caving! It was raining harder than before and nobody really felt like getting changed into wet caving gear. One group went for a walk (in between rain showers) and had a look at a lot of extra resurgences, whilst another group went for a drive and had a look at the bigger resurgences. Then they went to visit the Sea life centre at Lahinch (well worth a rainy day's trip to see the local sea life and lobster farm) as well as the swimming pool, Jacuzzi and sauna! Roads were flooded and Fisherstreet Pot was only about 15-20 feet deep until you hit water! Thus as usual we had to retire to the pub and make sure that Guinness sales weren't too low!

Two more trips took place down Poldubh (with the cry of churt nodules whoorrr!) and Pol-an-Ionain (still a lot of water around here but the stal was worth the trip).

The Sting In the Tail

The tail is that of the storms that then raged across Ireland just as we wanted to leave. One group went to Rossalre to see if there was a ferry. There was but it was firmly moored up and not going to leave in the force 8-11 gales that were blowing in the Irish Sea. Thus they retired to a small hostel in New Ross and went sight seeing, played cards and drank! The other group went to Dublin to go sightseeing & drink. Thus after 4 days of cancelled/ rearranged ferries we left for Pembroke on Tuesday morning on a packed boat with the prospect of just getting back to Bristol in time for the meeting in the Red Lion.

In all, a good time was had by all and all we need to do for the next new year is go somewhere warm & dry but with still a good quality of beer & caves!

By Steve Cottle

Darn Darren

An epic Valentine's Day adventure of umm... epic proportions starring the lonely hearts club/ lowly tarts club: Tim Haynes, Andy 'Stal-crusher' Jacket, Arjan 'Flying Dutchman' Boonman and little ol' me.

Wot with the recent flash of engagement rings in the caving club (obviously triggered by the slump in gold prices and the recent diamond crash) and hushed conversations of wedding plans, best birds and beards maids, the lowly tarts club decided we'd take a trip down Valentine's chamber and nab us a bit of toff.

A hideously early start saw us all ready and speeding along in Jacket's car in the direction of Whitewalls, South Wales. Arriving, waving to the nice farmer and nearly dislodging a rider from her horse, Arj and I were having doubts about our chosen sport - it was a lovely day, too lovely to go subterranean, but we did anyway. Our misgivings grew when we saw the entrance, akin to a rustic storm drain inlet, with a bonus cold puddle of water. 10 hours of this!! No wonder the rest was only discovered in '85.

Tim led, complete with a tackle sac, containing two Daren drums, followed by Jacket and yours truly, with only one knee pad. Arj drew the short straw following last. One hour and twenty minutes worth of crawling later we emerged into something that could be described as a decent cave.

Following a handy phone cable, we negotiated an interesting boulder choke - ideas of dialling Sprint Pizza for an Hawaiian with extra pineapple were quashed upon reaching the end of the line (literally), and finding no telephone. What's the score there then?

Tim infallibly led the way on (well, he had been there 12 times before), recounting tales of blown up carbide and broken pickle jar disasters (what is it with pickle jars and caves?). Arj revealed what he thought about whilst caving and Jacket informed us that it was his birthday the next day.

Ideas began to form ...

The lowly tarts club signed the Daren logbook and preceded with haste to Valentine's

Chamber, despite it being Valentines Day nothing of feminine ilk was lurking. Perturbed and feeling slightly conned we headed in the direction of the ladder, an interesting feat of engineering, put on upside-down, with sharp metal bits obviously designed to impale various parts of one's anatomy. Reaching the top, we encountered 'the village', a novel insight into the diseased and tortured minds of cavers in general. Looking like Lego on acid, the clay models exhibited such talent. The true to life sculpture in precise anatomical detail will haunt me until my dying day.

Heading onwards, we found the camp, complete with a street sign. Here we drank a couple of beers and listened to some cool tunes (if you can call Blur being played on Walkman speakers, with decidedly ailing batteries cool), ate some excellent sandwiches (cheers Tim) - steadfastly refused by Jacket who proceeded to munch through a fair few sausages (what else?!).

A quick trip to terminal sump (Like many (all?) pretty foul and dismal) and back ensued, Jacket remaining behind, no doubt demolishing chipolatas.

Was it just me or was everyone longing to return to the calcite squeezes at the beginning of the entrance crawl? The return journey was sedate, the timing had to be just right... Yes, Jacket's birthday was fast approaching and we were still in the cave. Was it deliberate planning or an omen from God that Jacket happened to be in the calcite squeezes with a tackle sack at the stroke of midnight. A rapturous chorus of happy birthday echoed eerily throughout the cave, punctuated by choice un-birthday like expletives from Andy "the working advert for the incompatibility of a purely carnivorous diet and caving" Jacket. We all got out alive and went home after spending 14 hours underground. Obviously Tim and I had not learnt our lesson, as next weekend he went down Draenen and I went down Aggie...

by Adam Goulding

OK Chissie, live draw the cartoon, now where's the hand-drawn you promised?

AND THE DEAD SHALL STAND BEFORE HIM. GREAT AND SMALL. WERE UPON A BOOK SHALL BE OPENED AND EACH MAN SHALL BE JUDGED ON HIS DEEDS AS IS FOUND WRITTEN IN THE BOOK. BUT WOE TO THE MAN WHOSE NAME IS NOT FOUND WITHIN THE BOOK FOR HE SHALL NOT ENTER BUT WILL BE THROWN INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE ABYSS...

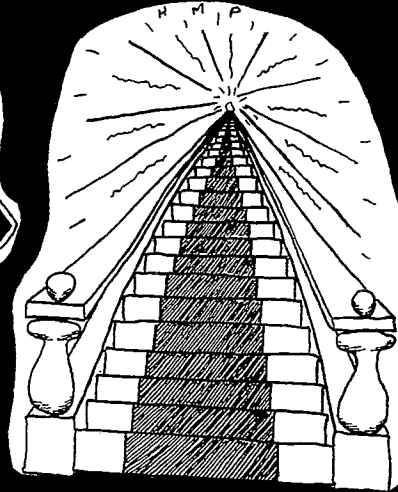
APOCALYPSE

BORIS



Mmm... The cave Continues past the boulder chamber, along Stairway to Heaven passage...

STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN



Hang on, it doesn't say anything about a gate in the guide...

Heaven is a five bar gate...

Ah, Hello my friend! Welcome to the Pearly Gates, gateway to the Heavenly afterlife...

Blimey! I must have caved myself to Death!

Don't look so worried, Heaven awaits you! I just have to check the book

So you must be St. Peter.

Hmm... Lets see... Boris Karloff...
...Boris Zuhälter...
AH! Boris the Caver!
Well, you can go on in.

So, what's it like this Heaven place?

Well, there's your Cherubim or Seraphim with their Glories and their Excelsis Deos or then there's your great Multitude in white robes where you can proclaim your Exaltations to your hearts content...

But what happens to the people who don't get in?

For them awaits the neverending Fiery Passages of Hell, below us, with only the flames from the burning Souls of unrepentant Sinners to light their way as they wander through the Sulphury depths of Damnation... Forever!

Did you say neverending passages? Blimey! If this doesn't beat Dracoen, then nothing will!

Pass me a Goat and some velcro gloves... I'm going down!

Has Boris faced his final Fate in his Furry Suit? Will I pass my finals or will the world remain a safe place to fly in?...

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You think in crazy or something, always following you around, you think in a hopeless case, running obsession into the ground... So why do you call me? Why do you look for me? And why do your eyes follow me the way they do?

WANTED

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