

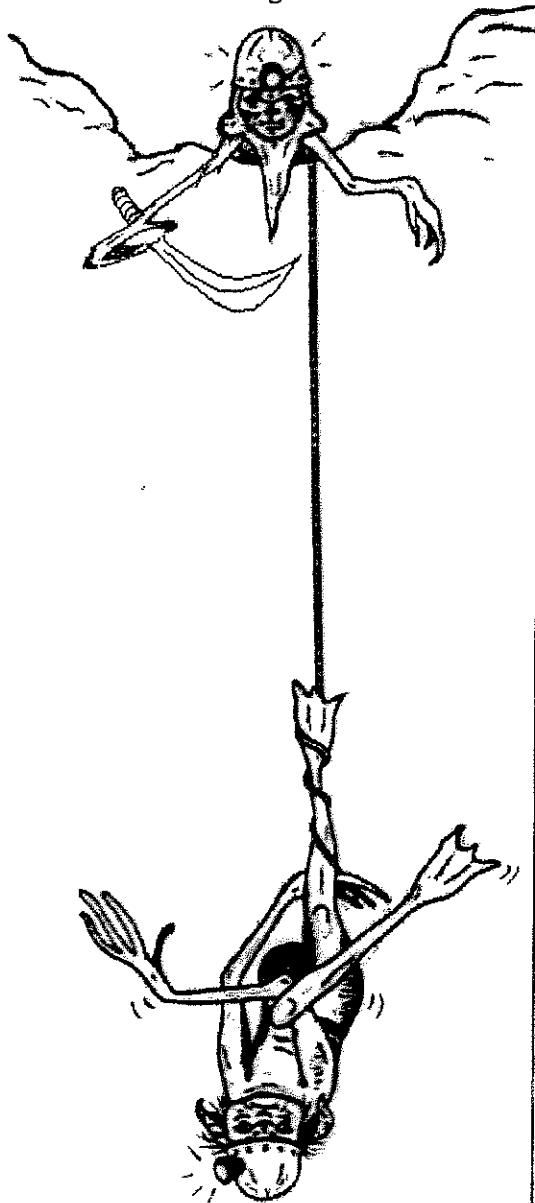


UBSS NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2000



Hello again everyone. For all those of you who survived the New Year festivities, I hope you had a great time and have enjoyed this terms caving as much as I have. Once again many thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue: Simon, Morven, Graham, Linda and anyone else who has handed something to me at the last minute. I hope this reaches you before the AGM. Thanks again - Jez



Expedition Caving in Austria With Cambridge University Caving Club

By Simon Flower

I had been in Austria for a couple of weeks, and had just dropped my girlfriend Jo off at the airport in Salzburg. Fearing my chances of hitching out of a city (something I've never been able to do), I took a bus 15 miles to Bad Ischl, then thumbed a lift to Bad Aussee (after half an hour spent trying in the wrong direction and wondering at the apparent hostility of the passing drivers). It was at a camping place just past here that I was to meet up with CUCC. I was welcomed into a little wooden shack hiding in the corner, in which books, bits of food and beer bottles were scattered all over. One wall was dominated by a large complicated survey, and another by a pile of light chargers and other such devices. Shoehorned in-between was a monitor with two figures stooped over it. A whole host of new faces were crowded around occasionally chirping in little snippets of useful advice. A beer was placed in my hand. Mark, the CUCC president, was explaining to me that the swirling coloured lines on the screen were a full survey of the caves. He looked quite pleased with himself. "This bit", he explained, "was the limit of the exploration in '136' last year. That line there", he added pointing excitedly to another couple of indiscriminate squiggles, "is what's been found so far in 'Chile', and would probably end up linking to 'Stellarweg'".

I nodded. I didn't have a clue what he was talking about but was impressed nonetheless. I would later learn that

this survey could be continually updated as new things are found, and so provide instant feedback as to the position of the most promising leads.

This rustic little shack, I would come to appreciate, was the centre point of life at base camp, not least because it was the only place with a light. Backed onto it was the food tent (storing mainly porridge and potatoes), and scattered about around it were a motley selection of rusting automobiles and tents. The toilets were over the road and if you wanted a bath you sat in the stream. Life was simple.

The day after I arrived, a guy called Julian accompanied me to top camp. Top camp, and the caves around it, is found on a series of low hills, about 900m above base camp, called the Löser Plateau. As you make the 45-minute walk from the car park to the plateau, the scenery undergoes a transition from easy-going alpine pastures into a vast sprawling expanse of limestone pavement. It's a walking nightmare. Virtually the whole surface is exposed rock, worn into sharp ridges and other awkward shapes that defy sure footing. Everywhere there are drops and deep fissures to fall into called grikes. Away from the hazards of rock, in case you were thinking that would be any easier, is the notorious bunder. This is the term given to the vegetation that can grow in this harsh environment. It sprawls above head height and forms an impenetrable net of twigs and thorns that sticks into faces and rips clothing.

But it's this very hostility that gives the area so much potential for discovery. All the land visible from top camp is there for CUCC to explore. There isn't a single public path in the whole area, and it's the sort of terrain to appeal

only to the most intrepid of walkers. All the cave entrances discovered so far are within one and a half hours of walking from top camp. The hills furthest away, a good 5 or 6 hours walk, have probably never been visited by anybody at all. Just this year, Duncan, claiming he was feeling too lazy to go caving, stumbled upon Steinbrükenhöhle - a brand new cave - just an hour and a half from camp.

Top camp is a little different from base camp. The few tents that comprise it sit squeezed on to a very unlikely flat grassy patch on the edge of the plateau. As far as I could tell, there was not another space like it in the entire place. The few lumps of limestone that do jut from the surface serve well as seats at meal times, and a solitary grike contains the only fresh running water for miles around. The grikes on the edge of camp are used to store ropes and other bits of kit, whilst those a little further a field, hidden by bunder, are used for more private functions.

The tent space at top camp is limited. Once all the tents are bagged the only place left is the big tent where all the food is stored. People sleeping here have to put up with constant rummaging in plastic bags when everybody starts to reappear from trips in the small hours of the morning. I was (less?) fortunate enough to share with Jon. Jon had been there about a week or so before me and had already taken on the characteristic dishevelled appearance of your average expedition member; his hair was wild, his face unshaven and the muck on his hands would only come off when the skin underneath it did. But since I'd worn the same t-shirt day and night for the last 6 weeks, I didn't really mind.

The following morning we readied to go caving. My first trip would be with Jon and a veteran Expo member called Becka. Jon had been concentrating his energy on a region of the cave in 136. There are 5 known entrances into the 22km long Kaninkenhöhle (or Rabbit Cave) system: 161a, b, c and d, and 136. The idea was not now to push the cave to its maximum depth (which, incidentally stands at over 500m), but to continue it horizontally. It can be seen from the survey that a number of passages in another system, Stellarweg, are only 500m south, and 100m deeper, than the passages at the end of 136. If the two should join, as is generally believed they will, the total length of the cave will rise to just under 40km, and the total depth to -943m, and would become one of the most extensive caves in the world.

The entrance, an inconspicuous gap in the ground, was 45 minutes from top camp. A traverse led to head of the first pitch: a 30-metre drop into a large chamber. A scramble over boulders led to the second pitch; the first of many in the immense Steinschlagschacht shaft. A stone dropped from the top of this would go crashing down about 250 metres. Some very precariously perched boulders just below the take-off were therefore very much on my mind as we abseiled our way down. After a number of re-belays we arrived at a split. Continuing down would come eventually to a scrotty end. The way on was a cracking traverse through a series of openings like keyholes. The walls were clean-washed and scalloped and provided perfect friction for wellies.

Further abseiling brought us to a ledge situated high in a large chamber: the Theatre. Passages off here would lead eventually to the 161 entrances and the

rest of the cave. Our route, however, would take a high level passage on the far side of the chamber, obscured from sight by a rock arête (its existence had been suggested by extrapolating a line on the survey). A fantastic abseil-traverse (on acrobatically placed bolts!) was required to span the chasm, which was a good 25 metres across. Pulling up into the passage on the far side, I noticed that the nature of the cave had changed. The solid clean-washed walls of the entrance series had given way to a chossy, fragmented rock, and the floors were covered in a black sand that turned white when stepped on. The walls and floors were now completely dry, the water having long since found a new direction. We would occasionally see waterfalls and trickles of water in these younger passages, but I was told that such passages in Kaninkenhöhle were usually ones that closed down pretty quick.

The cave had also leveled out. Big and ancient, these horizontal bouldery passages reminded me of the great systems of Ogof Draenen or Daren Cilau in Wales, and had replaced the vertical nature of the deep shafts of the entrance. We were still descending, but much more steadily.

After a short while, we came to one of the big discoveries of the year. A low crawl under some boulders revealed a vast passage - awe-inspiring in its dimensions - go sprawling off into the distance. This was Lost in Space. We began picking our way over boulders. Some stood 10 or so metres high and required a rope to assist clambering over. The occasional gap between the boulders in the floor revealed that the real dimensions of the passage were perhaps 15 metres higher.

After about a quarter of a mile the passage came to an unusually abrupt end. There were two ways on. Becka and I made a quick recce down to left, whilst Jon was to rig a rope down to the right and wait by the rope already rigged at the next pitch (this rope had not yet been descended – frustrating for the rigging team). The left did not come to much so we quickly surveyed out and went after Jon. The hole in the floor that he'd disappeared down opened up into a very spacious cavern, probably 30 metres high. At the bottom, however, Jon was nowhere to be seen. This was quite confusing because there weren't many places, except the final pitch, that he could have gone; to the left was a steep slope that didn't go anywhere, and to the right were a bunch of closely packed boulders. We wandered around shouting and poking into all the possibilities, but received no reply.

I decided to descend the pitch. It was another 30-metre descent, through a greasy hole in the floor, into a similarly sized chamber. Again, there was no sign of Jon. I figured that he wouldn't have gone out of earshot, so made my way back up to help Becka hunt for him. We called for about half an hour or more, but were beginning to realise that he may have been scattered amongst the boulders at the foot of the pitch.

Meanwhile, Jon was also beginning to stress. He'd got bored waiting for us to survey (I was pretty crap at it!), and had happily rambled off into the unknown. A drop through boulders had brought him to the rubble slope that descended gently further in to the cave. There were a number of ways on at the end of this, but he took the most obvious continuation, which was a short drop into a twisting dry river

passage. After a fair distance, and a number of cascades and side passages, the passage widened and the roof disappeared. A waterfall fell from somewhere above. Happy to have found somewhere scenic, he decided to make his way back. But instead of coming back to us directly, he inadvertently made extensive detours into most of the side passages before rediscovering his footsteps in the mud.

Relieved to be reunited, Jon led us to where he had been before. We saw that the little stream formed by the waterfall was entering a low fissure, under an apparently choked high-level passage. Despite being warned that water usually meant the end of the passable cave, I decided that it was continuing in the right direction. It was sort of like the tight bits in the Daren Cilau entrance series, except the walls were very sharp and the water was bitterly cold. It stayed low for a while, requiring me to lay flat in the stream, but soon became just wide enough to stand. At this point there was a dry passage up right, but I carried on, crawling again, until the passage fragmented and became too tight.

I would come back on another occasion with Andy Atkinson to explore the side passage. A scramble up through boulders led into a dry rift that seemed to be going in the same direction as the choked passage, and at the same high level. Was this the dry continuation of the cave? Sadly, we weren't to find out: a high traverse was needed and there wasn't a bolting kit handy.

Back at the dry canyon, a twisting phreatic side passage turned out to be quite well decorated. Very well decorated by Kaninkenhöhle standards (which, if I am right in saying, has not

a single significant stalactite!). The passage was covered liberally in small fossil swirls, individually defined by the soft warm glow of Jon and Becka's carbide lamps as they ascended in front of me. Not far along it, we were surprised to find our floor dropped away a good 30 metres! We would return later in the week to drop the pitch, but sadly the cascading streamway canyon at the bottom sumped after only a short distance.

At the top of the dry canyon, several options were available. On one trip Andy and I attempted to climb up to a gaping hole in the top of a rift. It seemed too slippery to bridge, so we attempted to climb it in a series of pitches. Andy may be mad enough to slip about 400 metres below ground, but strangely when it came to my lead the protection seemed far too scant, the rock too crumbly and the line too difficult. When Jon came down on his next trip, he had bridged half way up before he too realised it was too slippery. Panic-stricken by the prospect of having to reverse his moves, he made a very hasty scramble to the top – only to find that the aven just kept climbing upwards. Another lead at the end of 136 had come to an end.

Without a doubt, coming out of 136 a number of times improved my SRT a great deal. This was particularly so on the first occasion, when I neglected to do my chest strap up and virtually chin-upped the whole 400m out! I should have had another lesson, when my light failed right at the bottom, but I've never learnt to take enough light and it still happens now.

About a week before the end, we had a trip to a cave called Eishöhle (or Ice Cave). The biggest reason for most of us going was tourism. Eishöhle

contains a chamber called Schneevulkanhalle – the largest ice chamber in the central Alps. It was discovered some time in the 40s, and yet it is virtually still a secret.

It was an hour and a half's walk in the fierce sun over the plateau, and the icy wind emitting from large ice-choked entrances to the cave provided welcome respite. The only accessible entrance was disappointingly low, but any negative thoughts were quickly dispelled as it opened out to reveal its unusual icy interior. Crampons were soon required to follow the passage as it turned and climbed a little, to a stance covered in snow. A vast blackness to our left told us we had reached Schneevulkanhalle, and that we were right at the top of it. Little could be seen of it until people started descending the 50-metre, 70-degree ice pitch to the floor. When there were a few lights bobbing around below I had quite a panorama from my snowy perch. With my own light I could see beads of water dripping from fine ice structures in the ceiling onto the chamber floor below, where ice stalagmites, 25 or more feet high, were at once illuminated, then cast into glowing silhouettes by the lights of others. The entire floor of the chamber, perhaps 4000 square metres, was one great undulating blue glacier, clear to several feet. Stones that had fallen from the roof a long time in the past could be seen as clearly as if they were only a couple of inches under the surface. Everywhere were translucent formations and fantastic blue towers of delicate blue ice, and from passages high in the walls tumbled frozen waterfalls, sometimes 30 or 40 feet high. It is difficult to convey here just how magical the place was.

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Zambia

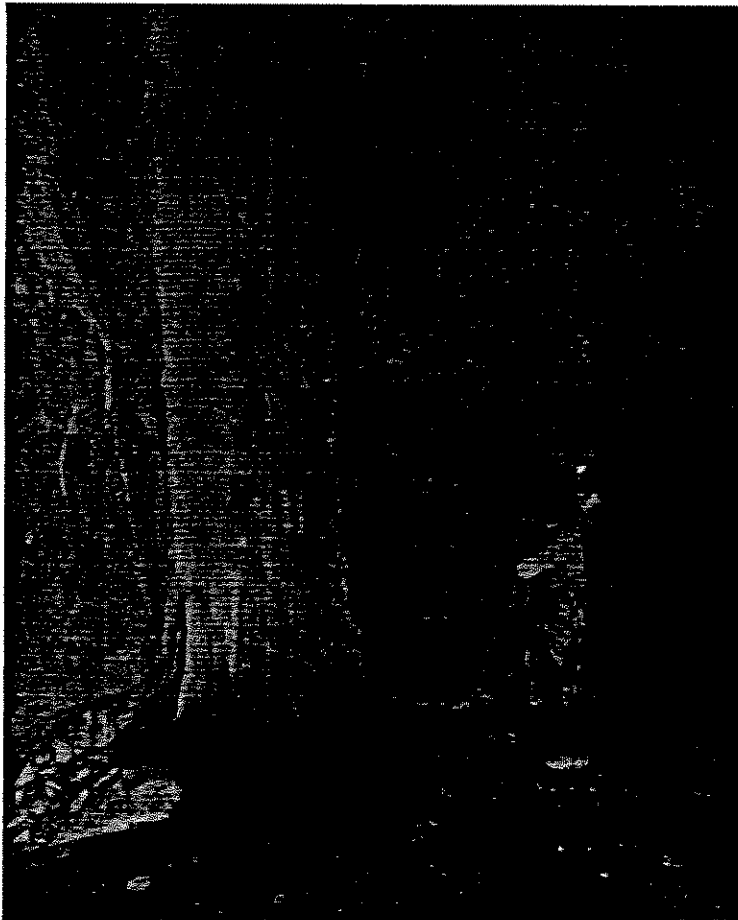
Word has been received from Adam Goulding, who is currently in Zambia, where he is apparently the General Manager of a marble company and therefore responsible for chopping up 600,000,000 year old limestone! He claims to have explored most of the known caves in Zambia and says he will compile a checklist.

Anyone wishing to contact Adam should write to him at:

P.O. Box 30338
Lusaka
Zambia

COUNTY CLARE 2000

A good sized party will be returning to County Clare this summer to continue with work on the new edition of "The Book" and, more importantly, to finish the exploration and survey of the extensions to Poulmagree that were discovered last year. We have six cave divers available for the work in Poulmagree so a good strong support team would be an advantage. If anybody is interested in joining us, please contact Graham Mullan (e-mail: graham.mullan@breathemail.net or Tel: 0117 9502556 or 07887 637064) who is co-ordinating the trip and will try and put people in contact with each other to help sort out the sharing of accommodation and transport. The main party will be out from Saturday May 27th to Saturday June 10th. graham.mullan@breathemail.net Tel: 0117 9502556 or 07887 637064



Can I have a vodka with this?

UBSS EXPEDITION TO WEST VIRGINIA AND VIRGINIA, U.S.A. 1999

Linda Wilson

ABSTRACT

An account is given of the caves visited in the states of West Virginia and Virginia. The expedition's participation in Old Timers' Reunion is noted.

KEYWORDS

Mud; free beer; trees; lost baggage; mud; hot tubs.

PERSONNEL

Linda Wilson, Graham Mullan, Tony Boycott and for some trips Mike Balister and Helen and Richard Rossington.

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this year's expedition arose after a large quantity of alcohol had been consumed at last year's Speleological Union of Ireland Symposium in Ballyvaughan. We met three American cavers, who were giving a talk on medical techniques for rescues, and in the ensuing chat on the subject of parties, they advised us that all serious caving party-goers ought to experience what they described as "OTR", which stands for Old Timer's Reunion. We were regaled with tales of around two thousand cavers getting together for a ginormous party. Caving itself didn't seem to figure too heavily on the agenda so naturally we were sold on the idea. More alcohol was imbibed and e-mail addresses were swapped.

And so, nearly a year later, we found ourselves at Pittsburgh airport (with our baggage stranded in Amsterdam due to delays caused by fog) being met by Jack Grandy, one of our three American friends. Lost baggage or not, we were on our way to OTR.....

We arrived in Elkins, West Virginia, after following Jack's black Jeep for three hours and using a radio set for communication en route. It was dark and the roads were surrounded by flashing neon signs. All most off putting. We were too tired to consider going on to the OTR campground that night so we settled into the Motel that Jack had booked for us, got some beer from the local supermarket as it seemed that Elkins didn't possess a bar and went to bed with a vague feeling that we weren't sure whether we liked this country or not. It all seemed rather "big city" and a bit too strange and daunting... but then, in the warm light of the following morning, I looked out of the door to find that we had been transported somehow in the night to what appeared to be somewhere in rural France, complete with a sleepy little town surrounded by trees. Amazing what a difference turning the lights out can make!!

After we had been introduced to the delights of the eat as much as you want breakfast bar at Shoney's (one chain that should definitely be imported to this side of the pond) we were taken down to the OTR campground near Beverley, about five miles south of Elkins. We were signed in as guests and registered for the weekend (cost \$38, which included free beer and a mug to put it in). Tents were already everywhere on the site and Vendors' Row was well set up and stocked with people selling every sort of gear. Many thanks to Emily of Speleobooks who saved my life that first morning by lending me a T shirt until the baggage arrived as by then I was on the way to going purple in the face wearing a sweatshirt in what was very hot weather. We mooched around getting our bearings and waiting for news of our missing luggage. After some mis-information as to its progress, it finally arrived at the Motel at 6.30 p.m. and we were able to start the serious business of relaxation.

We were introduced by Jack Grandy and John Appleby to their group of friends, known by the acronym of SAVES (nothing to do with religion but standing instead for Shippensburg Area Vertical Extrication and Search) whose tents were congregated around a central eating canopy. A great bunch of people who took us under their collective wing, made us welcome at all times, shared their food and generally provided a base for us while we were down at the campground; somewhere we could be sure of finding people we knew, regardless of whether Jack and John were around or not. John had certainly been right when he told me on the e-mail that "no-one goes hungry at OTR".

Down the other end of the campground from the SAVES area were Vendors' Row, the food wagons (supplying burgers etc. seemingly all day and all night), the beer tents, the showers and the fabled hot tubs... more of them later. And everywhere around were cavers and yet more cavers. About 2,500 in all, celebrating the 50th Anniversary of OTR. There were no lectures or talks, just lots of partying and plenty of silly games in familiar style.

We were joined at OTR on one day by Mike Balister and his wife Diane. We first met Mike (a UBSS member of long-standing) and Diane last year in Co.Clare when they came over for the 50th Reunion Dinner and discovered only within a week of leaving for the States that they live in Charlottesville, Virginia and were close enough to enable them to meet up with us in Elkins.

CAVING IN WEST VIRGINIA

MY CAVE

In company with John Appleby, Joy Hackman and Mike Balister we went off to this rather oddly named cave, about 45 minutes drive to the south. The entrance is an easy 75 foot climb down a spiraling chimney and leads via a 30 foot crawl at the bottom into much larger passage. The crawl normally takes water but at the time of our visit was dry. From there we headed downstream to the Dune Room, named for its large mud banks, which provided an interesting challenge to negotiate at time. Tony proved particularly adept at this doing an impressive impersonation of a human fly, scaling the banks on hands and knees by slapping his hands down for maximum friction, something that the rest of us failed to emulate, making progress by the time-honoured means of combined tactics instead.

It was in the Dune Room that we discovered that our "guides" hadn't actually been downstream in the cave before and so weren't too sure of the direction of the main passage. We followed at first what turned out to be a very large side passage, fooled by seeing another party coming from that direction, but what we hadn't worked out was that they were lost too! After that revelation at least Mike understood why neither John nor Joy knew which direction we should be taking. The passages were both large and impressive, whilst being almost totally devoid of formations and there was certainly a abundance of red mud everywhere. Our first, and by no means last experience of this feature of the caves. The main way on was down a rather intriguing mud slope hard against the right hand wall, where it was necessary to make some rather committing moves which proved entertaining on the way back especially when footholds broke off in large chunks before the next person had time to use them. We then followed a dry streamway, slithering up and down more mud and boulder piles. We gave up a short way before the passage actually ends in a sump. This passage apparently can be used as a through trip by coming down a pitch from a second entrance to exit by the way we came in.

A very pleasant two and a half hour introduction to caving in the USA.

BOWDENS CAVE

In the long standing tradition of the UBSS abroad, we visited the local Goatchurch, only in true American fashion this proved to be an order of magnitude bigger than our version of it. There were numerous parties here, some driven in by the foul weather outside, and it was here that we first encountered what our transatlantic friends called by the delightful name of "zoo trips" i.e large novice parties. A large entrance is situated in a small disused quarry just off the road about ten minutes drive from Elkins, with a massive draught blowing out of it. Very pleasant for cooling down in on a hot day. An easy crawl led through the remnants of an old gate to a large dry trunk passage. We tried following a couple of the zoo trips at a discreet distance to see if they knew the main way on, but that didn't really help as they kept asking us the way! Our response that we weren't even from that country didn't inspire much confidence in them. We ended up teaming up with a party of climbers who had been driven off the nearby Seneca Rocks by the bad weather. Only one of them had been caving before and a couple in the group weren't quite as enthusiastic as the others but with them in tow we wandered around a network of attractive passages, some rather like Co. Clare streamways. There is a vast amount of the cave that we didn't find our way into, and we found out the following day that quite a lot of new passage was discovered only a few days before following a dig. Not bad for the local novice cave.

Another enjoyable couple of hours in a mixture of streamway and mud banks.

SMOKE HOLE CAVERNS (Show Cave)

North of Seneca Rocks, a pleasant hour or so drive from Elkins. The cave is a linear system formed along a fault, with high passages and some areas of breakdown. There is an active streamway, just beneath the path which was dry at the time of our visit, in spite of the day's rain. The show cave development itself is aesthetically rather poor, with the floor covered in concrete, and some very noisy gravel covering parts of it; tubular steel handrails, heavily corroded in places and over-bright lighting and cabling snaking obtrusively everywhere. One impressive feature is the "Rainbow Falls", an artificial waterfall flowing over concrete lips fed from what the guide described as an "artesian well", which was actually a concealed pipe bringing the water up to the middle of a stal boss!

The quality of the tour was also somewhat questionable, with a small amount of (poor) science and a lot of "looks like" comparisons aimed at the formations. The guide stopped far too frequently and talked for too long at each stop. The cost was \$8 a head which is apparently average for the area.

SENECA CAVERNS (Show Cave)

An interesting cave with some nice passage shapes and formations. The walk ways were gravel covered and in a few places, concrete block walls put in during the 1950's provided protection for the formations. The hand rails were wood, added about 10 years ago. The tour moved at a better pace than the previous one but the commentary was along similar lines, with the most over-used phrase being "known as", applied to just about everything, including the mind-boggling description "known as the largest room in the cave". By the end of the trip I was itching to strangle the guide. The scientific content of the tour was

absolutely zero and only a small amount of information was given about the actual discovery of the cave, something which usually features in most commentaries. The most interesting thing about the tour was its "people-dynamics". The adults clearly responded well to the "known as " likenesses, however fatuous, and the biggest "wow" of the trip was reserved for a small display of red and green lights which seemed to take the place of a son et lumiere.

It seems that audiences in West Virginia are far more unsophisticated than most of their European counter-parts, particularly those in France. After racking our brains for a comparison we were unable to think of anywhere in mainland Europe with such an old-fashioned tour content. Some of the English caves are still a bit backward and in Ireland, Mitchelstown is a particularly bad case, but in France almost all the tourist caves have introduced a wholly scientific content with heavy emphasis on how the formations grow.

LOST WORLD CAVERN (Show Cave)

We had now moved south following the close of OTR on Monday and based ourselves in Lewisburg about three hours drive south of Elkins. There were very few people around and we were instantly recognised by the staff as cavers which led to a useful conversation about local caves and cavers. We were given the name and phone number for the owner of a cave called Scott Hollow which we had heard of on a recommendation from Pat Cronin, a friend in Bristol.

The tour is self-guided around a large chamber, nicely decorated but suffering badly from algal growth due to the length of time the lights have to remain on. Other than this the cave has been reasonably sympathetically developed and is worth a visit. They also run guided "wild" tours but at \$45 a head we didn't think we'd be taking up that option. The management were interested in methods of dealing with the algae so we proffered some advice on the subject which will hopefully be of some help.

Back at the motel in Lewisburg we swum, chilled out in the sun, met up again with Mike Balister who had driven down to join us for a couple of nights and phoned Mike Dore, the owner of Scott Hollow, (Tel: 772 4249). He gave us permission to visit the cave the following day and equipped me with a description of how to find the cave. The others took no notice of my whinging as to why was it always my turn to negotiate access in foreign countries.

ORGAN CAVE (Show Cave)

More expensive than other show caves in the area at \$10 but this was for a one and a half hour tour so it wasn't bad value. The owner, Janie Morgan chatted to us before and after the trip and is clearly passionate in her love for the cave that she bought at auction about two years ago. By coincidence, Mike has been present at the auction, which was one reason he was interested in visiting the cave with us. The new owners have clearly put a lot a lot of money and effort into the development and have put up new entrance buildings and new wooden walkways down into the cave.

Inside, the development is very minimalist, with beaten earth tracks for the most part, low level lighting in replica old lamps, and as a consequence, no noticeable algal growth. The cave has a long history going back to the 1700's and was a saltpetre mine worked by Confederate soldiers in the Civil War. In one area, there is a large collection of the original hoppers used in the processing. Our guide, Joey, gave a very good tour, he was a little shaky on the science but was clearly interested and in the cave and was particularly good when describing the history of the cave and the mining process. We discovered later that it was a good job we had not been accompanied by the owner, who apparently would have informed us that the cave is six thousand years old. I would have found it rather hard to bite my tongue in the face of such fundamentalist beliefs in that context, so we were lucky in that respect.

The cave houses a large number of bats, with eight different species to be found there, two of which are on the endangered list. The passages are mainly large, with some old dry formations, including The Organ after which the cave takes its name. Sadly, this is now damaged following past mistreatment in the name of attempts at music. The new owners clearly care very deeply for the cave and its conservation and Mrs. Morgan would have been happy to chat for hours about it. According to her, there is a local caver, now 71, who claims that there are 200 going leads in the cave, but the only problem is that he won't tell anyone where they are as he still hopes to be able to do them himself. Now there's faith in the future!!

Very well worth a visit.

SCOTT HOLLOW

Found by following Route 219 to Route 3 to Sinks Grove. Take a right turn into Sinks Hollow Road then after 1.2 miles a sign is seen on the right "The Mystic Spring Company, Scott Hollow Cave". Turn right there down a steeply dipping road into the hollow with a large wooden building at the bottom. The entrance is in the building itself, under a trap door in the main room. At that point we all rather went into reality over-load and found the whole scenario a bit hard to believe. Mike had advised us to head for Mystic River, paying careful attention to route finding in the Junction Room. He said it should take around 3 - 4 hours to get there and back and we would find directions pinned up in the building and some spare surveys there to. His only criterion

for allowing access was that we were experienced cavers and that some of us at least were NSS members. Easily enough satisfied as Graham and I had joined before the start of the trip and Mike has been a member for years.

The building, still under construction in places seems intended to act as a base for the wild caving trips run by Mike Dore's company, the Mystic Spring Company. There were many, many wellington boots and knee pads for the use of his "paying guests" but the only formality required from us was the completion and signature of some quite reasonable waiver forms. A nicely relaxed attitude from the owner, considering that he has obviously invested a lot of money, and a lot of time and effort in getting his own venture off the ground. Thanks are definitely due to him for not try to profit from his fellow cavers.

We made a detailed note of the description of how to find Mystic River and then set off down the pipe set into the floor, a vertical climb down an iron runged ladder. From the bottom of the pipe, the passage descended steeply over boulders, Mastodon Avenue, and after 700 feet a crossover passage provides a link to a parallel passage, Patty Lane which forms the normal route into the cave. These passages then form a Y intersection, and a 100 feet down from here Mastodon narrows to 3 feet wide by 6 feet high, then reduces to a crawl. Just past here is the Junction Room. Pay close attention here as this is really the only tricky bit of route finding. This is a central junction and some passages are concealed. The stream crawl at the bottom of Mastodon is deceptive when looking back up it. Continue straight through following the crawl into a hole up through breakdown into the Junction Room itself. Continue down to the lower (west) side of the Junction Room, then turn right, downstream. You will encounter two small loop bypasses almost immediately and then the passage becomes a tall narrow canyon which ends when the roof comes down to meet the floor and turns into a sump.

100 feet before the sump, a rope on the left hangs out of a small loop passage, 7 feet above the stream. Climb up here then go up through a hole in breakdown, up a slope and step over and through the breakdown. In the upper level, continue in the downstream direction. After 50 feet, climb down into The Dripper to the base of another climb. There is a good but rather obscure route up, straight ahead which avoids the overhanging climb, but needless to say we only found this on the way back after negotiating the over-hang in by various hair-raising methods on our way in. From the top of the climb continue on downstream to another small streamway. Continue following this until you reach Mystic River. This is an enormous and extremely impressive passage, without a doubt the highlight of the trip. We went downstream to the where the water sumps in a huge pool and then back upstream for a short way. There is loads more cave to be seen but we had accomplished our objective.

A superb trip, taking just over an hour to reach Mystic River, half an hour or so in the river passage itself and about an hour out. Just under three hours for our trip, somewhat less than the time I was originally told it was likely to take. Thanks to Pat Cronin for the recommendation and to Mike Dore for permission.

BOAR HOLE

This cave is on land owned by a very helpful local caver called Carroll Bassett, whose details John Appleby had given us. John's actual words had been "He's got a cave in his back garden, he'll probably take you there". Carroll lives about half an hour's drive north of Lewisburg and does indeed own the cave, which he described to me as a "nice big friendly cave". He was right on all counts. Carroll was too busy at work that day to accompany us but we were able to look at a survey he had obtained from him so we set off on our own, down the road, to the first telegraph pole on the left then straight up the hillside for about 400 feet. The entrance was easy enough to find and once inside, the route drops quickly into very large passage, Boaring Boulevard. We followed this to the left in a major trunk passage to the junction with the stream passage, the upstream for several hundred feet to an area of breakdown which is close to another entrance. Then we went on downstream until the passage lowered. We basically followed Carroll's advice that there was no need to crawl so when ever a passage got that low we retreated and found another one. By now we were getting the hang of this sort of West Virginia Cave, large, lots of mud banks and very few formations.

Another enjoyable two and a half hour trip. Many thanks to Carroll for his help.

CAVING IN VIRGINIA

DIXIE CAVERNS (Show Cave)

A two hour drive from Lewisburg. We were the only people on the tour with a friendly and helpful young guide called Whitney who had just recently taken up caving with the local Grotto who were digging in the show cave. The cave was discovered in the early 1920's by the usual method of following a dog who was chasing rabbits. The cave is supposedly named after the dog. It has been nicely developed and there is not much greenery. We were unable to gauge the quality of the tour as knowing we were cavers, Whitney didn't try out her speil on us, but we got the impression that she was reasonably well versed in how the cave was formed and would have given a more sophisticated tour than the normal one on the other side of the border.

Whitney told us about a nearby cave called Little Dixie which has a 50 foot fixed ladder leading into the lower cave. She indicated that the owners of the show cave would usually give permission for visiting cavers so this looks like something to remember for the future. She also showed us a useful guide to the local caves given in the NSS Convention Handbook for 1995.

NATURAL BRIDGE CAVERN (Show Cave)

The whole of this area is a mega tourist development that makes Cheddar look quiet and under-stated. We gave a visit to the Natural Bridge arch itself a miss as it looked a rip-off on price so we just got a ticket to the cave. It was discovered in the 1880's but the story goes that the original party looking at the possibility of a tourist cave development heard strange noises and believed them to be the ghost of a woman called Emma who had been lost in the cave whilst looking for her child. They retreated in a hurry and didn't return and the cave was not developed until the 1970's.

There are three levels to the cave with a nice 100 foot high canyon at the bottom. The lights seem to be kept on most of the time resulting in a lot of greenery on the abundant stal. The usual problem. The commentary was a lot more informative than the average tour in West Virginia. There definitely seems to be a cultural difference between the states in this respect. A pleasant trip for \$7 a head.



Shield formation in Grand Caverns

GRAND CAVERNS (Show Cave)

This cave is definitely worth a visit as it has the largest collection of shield formations that any of had ever seen. The cave has been open a long time and has suffered a lot of damage due to deliberate souvenir hunting over the years but even so, the shields are magnificent and really not to be missed. The cave was surprisingly clean and the tour content was reasonably informative. The cost of \$11 for 1 and a quarter hours was not bad value considering the rarity value of the formations.

ENDLESS CAVERNS (Show Cave)

Another good trip, costing \$12 for one and a half hours. Some very large chambers, well decorated and pleasantly free of algae. There were some shield but nowhere near as many as in Grand Caverns. A good tour as well with a fair scientific content. There was also a very good collection of T shirts for sale! We noticed that in both Grand Caverns and here, the tours started with an almost identical talk on Virginia Cave Protection laws and the reasons for the laws.

Until this point in our visit to the States we had been staying in motels, first in Elkins and then in Lewisburg but now we had moved north a west heading for Charlottesville to take up a very kind invitation from Mike and Diane Balister to stay with them for a few days. I had imagined Charlottesville as something like an English town and so, armed with Mike's description of how to find them in Gordonsville in what seemed to be the suburbs, I was a bit puzzled when we were nearly there and were still seeing nothing but trees with only the occasional building here and there. Nothing like an English suburb at all! We were made very welcome and had a great swim in their pool to relax before being joined for a barbecue by their English neighbours. It made a very pleasant change to be out of motels for a while, particularly as the three of us had been sharing a room to keep the costs down, and Tony does have a habit of snoring when he sleeps on his back!!

During our stay with Mike and Diane we had a lovely drive along the famous Skyline Drive and admired the spectacular views; experienced culture (unusual for the three of us) in a very enjoyable choral concert in Charlottesville in which Diane was singing; went for a four hour walk down White Oak canyon starting at the top and being picked up by Mike at the bottom and spent a great night helping to bottle and drink beer with Mike and his brewing consortium in a local micro-brewery - every cavers idea of heaven!

SHENENDOAH CAVERNS (Show Cave)

About an hour and a half drive from Gordonsville. As we drove up, the advertising logos seemed pretty cringeworthy, little leprechauns dressed in green and red and smiling brightly. We wondered if the cave would be as bad. In fact, it wasn't. There was the now familiar talk about Virginia Cave Law (I loved the signs with the leprechauns holding signs with the rules on), the floors were mainly gravel covered, the lighting was well designed and not too bright, with a small display of coloured lights

which once again, the audience clearly enjoyed. The cave is very pretty and unusually is totally wheel-chair accessible. \$7 each.



Beware of the leprechauns!!

Nearby, is a very well preserved example of a covered bridge (as featured in *The Bridges of Madison County*). An interesting detour and worth the effort.

We left Mike and Diane's the next day after four days of their wonderful hospitality, to move on to Luray where we were due to try and meet up with Helen and Richard Rossington who were by then on the second week of their honeymoon. As the rendezvous had been arranged by me and Helen, the menfolk seemed to harbour some doubts about whether we would be successful in finding them or not. The place we had decided on was the Luray caverns motel.....hmmm, the only problem was the discovery that there were two of them I decided that one of them was more obvious than the other so as we were early, I left a message with the reception and we returned to the show cave development for drinks and burgers and wondered if the other two would turn up. Then, much to the amazement of an English couple at the next table, Graham jumped up and ran out, chasing a car around the car park, waving his arms about. The car stopped and he got in, leaving Tony and I wondering vaguely what we would do if the car drove off and didn't come back. Fortunately it was Helen and Richard that he had waylaid so the best laid plans of the female members of the party hadn't gone awry after all.

LURAY CAVERNS (Show Cave)

We were fully expecting this to be over-hyped but as it is the biggest tourist cave in either Virginia or West Virginia, but as it turned out, we were all very favourably impressed and thoroughly enjoyed the trip. The cave is large, well decorated with the best reflecting pool that I have ever seen. I could have stared into it for ages. Classic Swiss village stuff, but quite beautiful. The nearest thing to "tacky" on the tour was the "world famous stalacpipe" organ, wired up to play notes by hitting the formations in one area with rubber mallets!! Every cave should have one??? The cave seemed both cold and dry and there was little or no algae growing anywhere. The tour was very large but the tour was informative, as all the Virginia tours have proved to be.

We got a slight concession on the cave rates by staying in the motel, but the cost for the trip is around \$10, not at all bad value for a cave as good as that. This is one trip not to miss so don't be put off by the hype.

SKYLINE CAVERNS (Show Cave)

Our last trip in Virginia, before heading north into Pennsylvania on our way back to the airport. This place is billed as having a very fine collection of Anthrodites and we wondered if they would live up to their publicity. They certainly did!! Again, the best collection any of us had ever seen, quite spectacular with room after room of the spiky white clusters crowding the passage roof. The guide was very obliging in letting us take photos, probably as we were the only people on the tour. The cave is also known for a rare beetle found there that has not been found since. The only known specimen is now in the Smithsonian.

Another cave not to miss. The formations really are wonderful. There is another good collection of T shirts as well.

After this, we parted from the Rossingtons and left them to the last week of their honeymoon and we drove north intending to stop at Laurel Caverns before finding somewhere to stay for the night before flying out of Pittsburg the next day.

LAUREL CAVERNS (Show Cave)

There were times on the drive that we thought we had no chance of finding the place open. It was getting late in the afternoon and we found ourselves in a horrendous mist such that we could barely see the road in front of us and when we finally found our way into the car park of the cave, we couldn't actually see the entrance building at first and the place seemed to be deserted but to our amazement, it turned out to be open and even more amazingly, we were in time for the last tour. In fact, we were the last tour in entirety!



Anthodites, Skyline Caverns

This place turned out to be a real oddity. One of the only two maze caves in the U.S, formed on the dip of 30 degrees. The tour led down through a nice rift controlled, scalloped passage to the Dining Room where the main cave goes off down dip to a larger passage with formations, visited on the wild cave tours that are run by the management. The trip then winds back up through the labyrinth, past a dig still active on Wednesday nights, dug by the Pittsburg Grotto. We were boggled by the discovery that Wednesday night digging is a Transatlantic phenomena as well and is not just confined to Britain!.

Th cave tour had rather an unusual collection of gimmicks: low level coloured lighting with some rather nice chandeliers; a narrow passage with sound controlled lighting, aimed at kids who have to spend the rest of the time being quiet so this gives them an opportunity to let off steam and yell, just to see where they are going! A son et lumiere of a more substantial type than the tree coloured lights features in a couple of the other caves, in fact a rendition of Handel's Hallelujia Chorus with lights focused on different formations responding to the notes in the music; an optical illusion of a golf ball which appears to be running uphill in the passage with the 30 degree dip; an underground climbing wall and abseiling station for visiting activity groups of kids; and an artificial cave in the main building housing a mini-golf course, with a haunted Halloween theme. Most impressive, for various reasons. Certainly one of the more unusual show cave developments.

All in all a most enjoyable holiday. The wild caving trips were great and we certainly succeeded in fitting in as many show caves as possible. West Virginia and Virginia are both very beautiful states, not overly densely populated, and the towns had a certain charm that I had not expected. And there were trees everywhere! The driving was easy (even allowing for the strangeness of a left hand drive car) and the roads were good, but the distances involved need to be taken into account when planning any itinerary as the time taken to go from one area to another is not inconsiderable. OTR was a great bash. I still find it hard to believe that 2,500 cavers can have been that well behaved. In that respect, they certainly put their British counterparts to shame. The hot tubs were an experience not to be missed (there only seemed to be three rules: no glass, no photos and no clothes!!!). There a large numbers of American cavers that I can truthfully say I wouldn't recognise with their clothes on.

Many thanks to all the people who made such a great holiday possible: Jack Grandy and John Appleby for all their help and support with the arrangements; the whole SAVES crowd for their unstinting generosity; and last but certainly not least, Mike and Diane Balister for their wonderful hospitality. We definitely want to go back again as soon as possible.

UBSS T-SHIRT

**Finally we are getting some more quality gear to
be worn above ground**

We are getting T-shirts, long sleeve T-shirts and sweat shirts made with the 'position impossible' on the front and '10 reasons' on the back, printed in cream.

U.B.S.S.

TEN REASONS WHY *CAVING* IS BETTER THAN SEX

1. YOU'VE GOT A BETTER CHANCE OF GETTING INTO A VIRGIN PASSAGE.
2. CAVES DONT MIND WHICH ENTRANCE YOU USE.
3. TO GET RID OF CRABS YOU JUST UNCLIP THEM.
4. A CAVE WONT KICK YOU OUT FOR FARTING.
5. YOU CAN GO DOWN AS OFTEN AS YOU WISH.
6. YOU CAN STOP FOR A MARS BAR IF YOU GET TIRED.
7. YOU CAN DISPLAY YOUR TACKLE IN PUBLIC.
8. CAVING ALREADY INVOLVES HELMETS BANGING IN DARK WET PASSAGES.
9. IT ALWAYS INVOLVES BEING TIED UP.
10. NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU SWALLOW THERE IS ALWAYS MORE COMING.

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

UBSS



Position
Impossible?

T-shirt — Pure cotton in black, bottle green, navy blue or crimson £8.52

Long sleeve T-shirt — Pure cotton in black or navy £9.70

Sweaty shirt — Cotton rich with set in sleeve in black, bottle green, navy blue or burgundy £14.28

Tear here -----

Please return completed requests to: Roland Parrott, School of Geographical Sciences,
University of Bristol, University Road, Bristol BS8 1SS.

By 31th March, with your payment, checks payable to 'Roland Parrott'.

Item	Size	Colour	Quantity	Price
Total				

French Holiday Caving Log, January 2000

Graham Mullan & Linda Wilson

Sunday January 16th

Gouffre du Saut de la Pucelle

LJW & GJM

On a gloriously sunny day, not a cloud in the sky, we wandered over to entrance to this cave and found a stream running down it! The stream was about winter Swildon's size (though it had obviously been much higher earlier this winter) and it was still possible to get down the cave reasonably (wet left foot for me) dry-shod. Got as far as the short side passage on the left where we were stopped by a 2 m long pool; but from here one could see as far as the first low bit and it seemed to be open. May well go back for a quick look at just how big the main stream gets later in the week. (*Needless to say, we did not!*)

Grotte de la Tour

LJW & GJM

Cave entrance noted on the map, next to the D32 just south of Rocamadour. Walking sized passage led to a lower bit which opened up into a comfortable chamber. This should have been the end, but at the far side of the chamber was a flat-out crawl which seemed to open out beyond. As LJW was wearing her best trousers, this was not attempted, so yet again we will need to go back.

Monday January 17th

Grotte des Combarelles

LJW & GJM avec Claude Archambeau

This trip had been arranged in order to visit the parts of the cave beyond that which is normally shown to the public - and the immediate misunderstanding was to the definition of what we could see: We were especially interested in the junction area between the decorated cave and "le reseau actif", but access to the latter is interdit and it took a little time before Claude decided that, being unable to talk to higher authority, he would let us go through to the junction.

We walked in through the show cave part and then through the gate at the start of the "tunnel". This section, up to the next corner, had been dug out (circa 1902 to 1916) along with the remainder of the cave to this point to facilitate the activities of the archaeologists. From here it was necessary to crawl (without touching walls or roof!) to the rotunda, the final chamber of the Palaeolithic cave. Here, Claude showed each of us in turn the few small engravings while the other went down to the beginning of the reseau actif. To do this entailed going past a broken stal barrier that was punched through by Capitan and Breuil in 1901, over a dried up calcite pool (see drawings) which was full of water on discovery and through a squeeze which was about 10 cm high when first seen. This leads to a 3 m drop down to the streamway. This was not what I had expected. The stream comes in from the left, as expected, but goes down a small hole again to the left. This, we were told, leads to a passage (?impassable) parallel to the show cave to the rising in the valley floor just up-valley from the entrance. In very wet weather (first noticed in 1902, last seen in 1968?) water actually flows into the show cave passage just round the first corner and out through the entrance. The return through the squeeze was "interesting" and LJW was a little worried that I would embarrass her by getting stuck. Needless to say I did not!

The stal barrier appears to have convinced everyone that Paleolithic men could not have reached the reseau actif, but I am not so sure. Closer to the entrance, archaeology seems to be indicated under somewhat thicker stal layers than the 2 cm of the barrier.

To the right from the junction, the passage was quite lofty, up a mud bank with a distinctive narrow trench through it. I suspect that this passage once led to the fossil resurgence of Comb 2 and that the trench indicates a local reversal of drainage when the lower routes developed from this point. Difficult to say more without going further than one is allowed, though a good extended section would help.

The walk back took in the art of the *profond* section (many excellent horses, some tectiforms, some anthropomorphs etc.) and enabled me to note that the roof and floor both varied in level, denoting a phreatic origin, but not to come to a decision as to how much of the art is being covered by calcite (see above).

Points to note about the art, possibly not found elsewhere: We were shown several dubious anthropomorphs, but one is extremely clear, being fairly heavily cut, and is similar to that found in La Marche. Secondly, about three or four figures (all horses) have a large (almost head diameter) circle drawn around their eye. This I certainly have not seen elsewhere.

According to Claude, about four people per year visit this part of the cave. These are probably the same four people that he told us last year see Combarelles 2. I doubt, however, that many of them go through to the reseau actif. And no English for a very long time.

Tuesday January 18th

Gouffre de Reveillon

GJM & LJW

As we were staying so close to this cave, we had to have a walk over to look at the entrance. In so doing we discovered two things: Firstly that, even had we wanted to, a descent was out of the question as a fair stream was thundering over the fall and into the entrance, from which we could surmise that it would be sumped about 50 m in, and secondly that the easy ignoring of the "access interdit" signs, previously practised, was no longer an option as the fence has been replaced with a new barbed wire topped one and especial attention has been paid to the point where you used to climb over. Linda thinks this may all be a consequence of the high-profile rescue at Les Vitarelles late last year. Oh Well!

Grande Grotte de Saint-Front

LJW & GJM avec Christian Archambeau

We met M. Archambeau, as arranged, by the church in Vitrac (LJW having been unable to work out the first suggested meeting place on the map, so had to ring back for an alternative - and easier - spot) and then drove down to the Hameau de Saint-Front to walk up to the cave. The cave is much as described in *L'Art des Cavernes*, being a 6-7 m diameter tunnel with a clay floor and some calcite on the walls. The entrance is blocked by two walls - making a small habitation that was occupied as late as the 1940's - which means that the first part of the cave is now in darkness but would have previously been lit by daylight. We saw most of the pieces described in the book, though none of us could find no. 12, but an additional animal head was seen at no. 11, there are two there, not one. It is also fair to say that the main piece in this cave, the bas relief carved mammoth is exceptionally fine and much larger (about 1.5 m high) than one expects. Unfortunately, owing to the extremely friable nature of the rock in this area, much of the work in this cave is in a very poor state of preservation, the mammoth having escaped by being slightly shielded from the weather by a calcite drapery. Our stronger lights proved an advantage when lighting the mammoth as Christian was able to stand well back and light it strongly in a way that his lamp wouldn't allow. The books do not do it justice.

Unusually for the sites that we have visited with Christian, this cave apparently gets quite a few visitors each year, as it is large and easy. The next gets far fewer, as shall be seen.

Grotte du Pigeonnier

LJW & GJM avec Christian Archambeau

This cave is to be found a short distance around the cliff from the last site. Access is interesting, one goes through a doorway in the first wall but then has to climb up a couple of metres of the second wall to the gate. Fortunately on the far side of the gate there is a small metal stage and a ladder down to the floor. Again, *L'Art des Cavernes* describes most of the work to be seen here. For the same reasons as for Saint-Front, friable rock and open to the weather, the work is poorly preserved, but what can be seen shows signs of skilled workmanship. Probably the best preserved piece is the little mammoth (not referred to in *L'Art des Cavernes*).

On the way back to the car, we asked about access to various other sites. Jovelle will be a possibility for next year. It is about two hours drive to the north but is within M Archambeau's area and he seemed to see no problem with that. Also Cournazac, next to Font de Gaume could be a possibility but it sounds much more of a serious caving trip with climbs and pitches, but not impossible to arrange. We also asked about Rouffignac. The person to contact is Jean Plassard. We were told that we need to stress how keen we are and how many sites we have already seen as he gets lots of requests for trips beyond the show cave. The trips are long and more difficult in places as well. The name not to mention is apparently Paul Bahn, whose anti-Rouffignac comments have not endeared him to M Plassard, so being English we have that hurdle to overcome! Our guide was impressed by our lights and also by the fact that we came equipped with our own laser pointers, which as usual came in quite handy. Even more useful when doing these visits is the handy photocopies of the relevant sections of *L'Art des Cavernes* which we always carry with us. Firstly, they provide a talking point with the guide and also a useful aide-memoire for them in finding a lot of the stuff. (when we mentioned our abortive attempt last year in Grotte du Bison playing "hunt the mammoth" with M Pemandran, Christian was surprised that we hadn't found it but when he sketched its location on the sand floor it was exactly where we had all been looking. We agreed it must have disappeared!

Wednesday 19th January

Today we went for a walk, 15 or so kilometres across the Causse near Padirac on a delightful day with little wind and not a cloud in the sky - Glorious.

Thursday 20th January

Perte de Themines

GJM

Given that this cave was blocked just inside its entrance the last time we were here, in 1998, we had to go and see whether the French had dug it out. When we arrived it was to see the river flowing strongly to the final sink at the end of the valley (in summer it sinks several hundred metres further upstream) and a large quantity of wood, gravel and sand recently deposited all

around. The gate, which was more than a metre off the floor when we first saw it, was clear, but debris had been deposited right up to the level of the opening and we had to dig the bottom of it free before we could open it. At the current rate the entrance could be completely covered next year and it will take a hell of an effort to keep it open.

Inside, the first 2 m drop down was unchanged, but below this all was different - again. 1.75 m from the entrance were two holes in the floor. The right-hand one was where two years ago AB and JDW had tried to dig down to the pitch (as known in 1996). This was now a 1.5 m drop to a swirling pool with a smallish stream entering from underneath where I stood. The left-hand one had a much larger stream entering (though not as big as that outside) from forward-left and cascading down to join the pool. Climbing down here to just above water level I could see that the water flowed off to the right (viewed from the entrance) and was not backing-up. There seemed to be air space but I would have needed a wet-suit to tell whether it was passable. All that one can say with confidence is that it is much changed and needs to be looked at in summer to tell whether it is open.

Grotte de la Tour

LJW & GJM

This was the site we visited on Monday. Having returned with kit, LJW slid through the squeeze and muttered "It goes about 5 feet". She entered a small, sitting size, chamber, but the way on was choked with gravel. Oh well! Of the three bats we had seen here on Monday, the larger and one of the smaller had moved and the other small one had gone away.

Grotte Tournie

LJW & GJM

This one was chosen from the *Inventaire Speleologique du Department du Lot*, that wonderful book that makes it so easy to find caves but tells you bog-all about them except the size of the entrance. The choice was made because it was only two metres from the track. However, that part of the track proved to be a 20 minute walk from the nearest parking place! That little matter notwithstanding, we actually located it quite easily.

The entrance is just under a metre high and two metres wide and opens out into a nice squarish phreatic tube. This could be followed round a corner and across a couple of blind pits but after only about 30 m it deteriorated to a very low flat-out crawl, over mud fill, which neither of us fancied. Still, it was quite nice and there were a few hibernating bats to admire/avoid.

Friday 21st January

On yet another glorious day, we decided not to venture too far underground, so we went entrance hunting, again, with lights and overalls along "just in case".

Grotte de Cuzoul

Another large entrance (Fr. vaste porche, very useful term) which lead into an even larger chamber. Remarkably, this had a well dug in the middle of it, with a metre or so of clear water in the bottom. A rift passage led off for 15 or so metres to a small chamber inhabited by burrowing animals. Interesting spot, needs digging.

Perte de Igounet

Either we got the description wrong or it has been buried under a pile of stones. pity, as its alternative name is "Ruisseau Souterrain de l'Igounet"!

Grotte de Dongay

Easily located, as the fence around it is visible from the nearest track. Steepish descent to a chamber, up over a boulder to where there seem to be a number of ways on. Is this the local Goatchurch?

Perte de Lavalade

This is the hole we pushed JDW down in 1996. It seems bigger than then and, interestingly, compared with the major sinks, did not seem to be taking any more water than then.

Grottes de Fieux

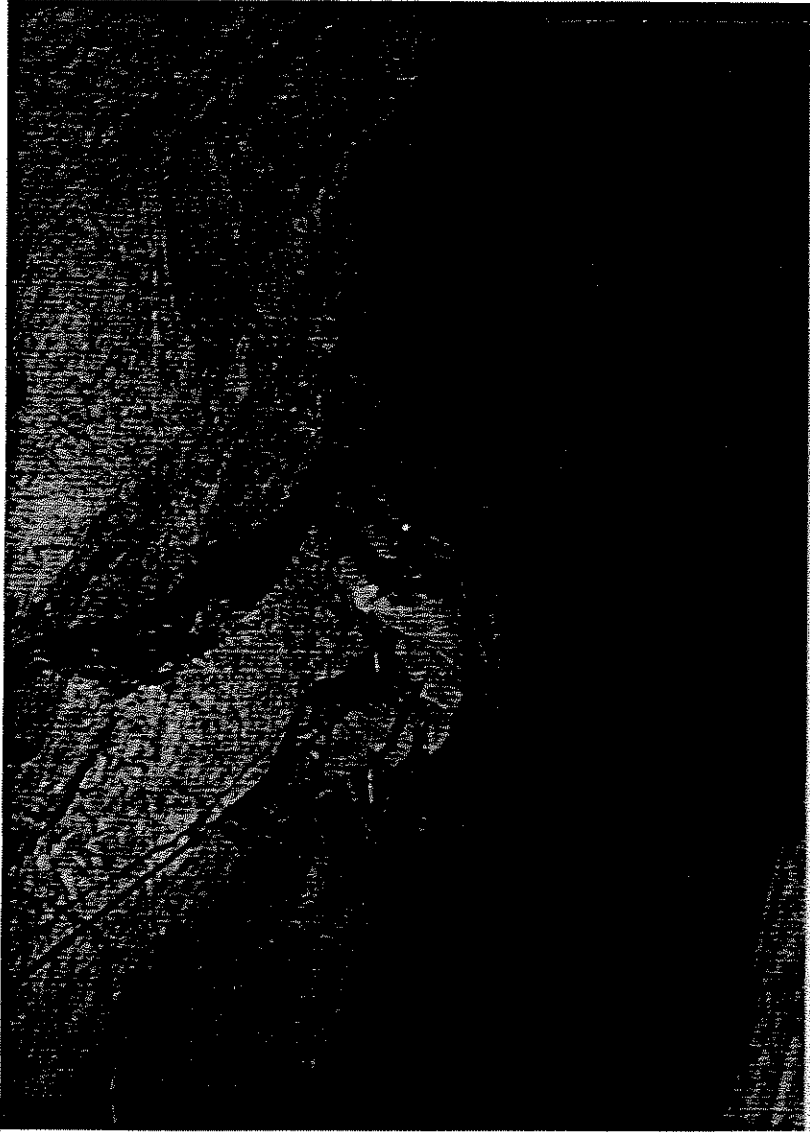
Both of these seem to be part of the same system: a major horizontal trunk passage virtually completely infilled. At the site called Grotte No. 1, archaeologists have virtually emptied a 30 m unroofed section of big passage and work seems to be continuing. There was a possible way on at the north end of this and the southernmost entrance, to Grotte 2, seemed to be an active cave, as opposed to archaeological, dig. We did not venture in as this may have disturbed something we should not have done.

Perte de Miers

This sink, at the edge of the village, was taking a Swildons size stream in a passage 1.5m high and 0.5m wide, which disappeared around a corner. Worth a good look in summer.

Saturday 22nd Jan.

For the first time in a week we awoke to a overcast sky so we went home!



'If only I could scratch my bum...'

Treasurer's Bit

I am still pleading with the last few reluctant souls to pay their subscriptions for the current session.

Phil Davies £12, Marco Pagnuzzi £12, Pete Simpson £24, Paul Turner £12, Martin Warren £12, Adam Goulding £12, Nick Patrick £12, Mike Thompson £12, Andy Tyler £12

Please contact Graham Mullan ASAP if you are one of the above or know where they are....