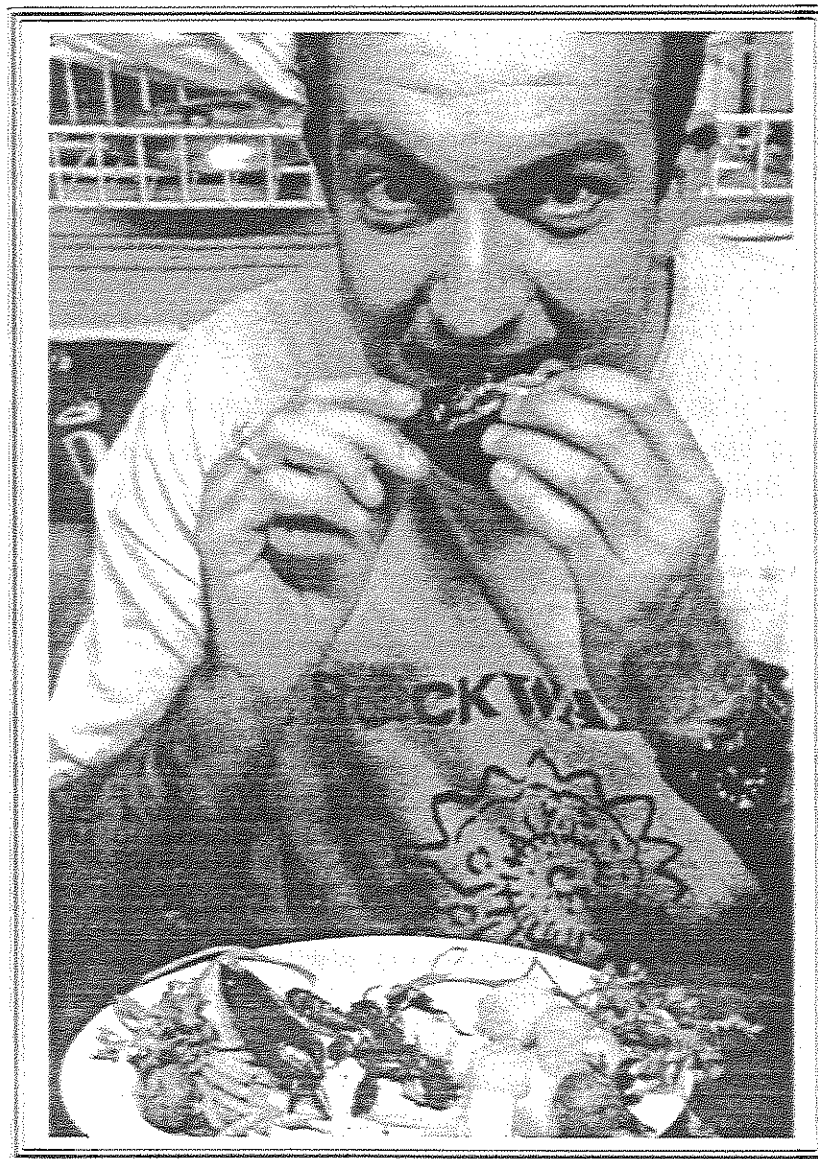


UBSS NEWSLETTER

March 2001 Vol. 17, No. 2

A belated Happy New Year to everyone, from the editors. We hope that you are still filled with enthusiasm for our favourite underground pursuits, and have been finding alternative pastimes during the current 'foot and mouth' crisis. This month we feature the long-awaited news of our very own expedition to Thailand, along with the return of 'Dirty Uncle Dickon', and the first instalment of 'Gravel'. Please send us your slander, and enjoy!



Coverboy, Eddy Hill, enjoying a light snack of deep-fried beetles, crispy crickets and cold, boiled grubs. Mmmm - perfect filling fodder after a hard day in the jungle....

Charlie wrote this article for the newsletter last year, but unfortunately we didn't have enough room to include it in the previous edition. Imagine yourself in the cold, bleak days of December, and it will all make sense!!!

KUNGUR ICE CAVE

Charlie Self

With the clocks now turned back an hour, it is time to make plans for the New Year holiday. A bit of winter sunshine, with perhaps a cave thrown in for good measure? Why not go to Russia, as Galina and I did for the Millennial New Year?

The primary reason for our journey was to visit Galina's family, who live near the provincial town of Kirov - about half a day's train ride east of Moscow on the main line to the Ural Mountains (and then Siberia). Having celebrated New Year with the family, we left our young daughter in their care and took a night train further to the east. By breakfast time, we had passed the city of Perm and were among the low hills of the pre-Ural region, soon reaching the small town of Kungur. A local bus took us to the cave, which is just on the edge of town.

Kungur Ice Cave has been open to visitors since the 18th century and now receives up to 200,000 tourists a year. However, it is much more than a popular show cave. The nearest building is a research station dedicated to the cave, and part of the Russian Academy of Sciences. We stayed in this building as guests of its director, Igor Lavrov. Also staying there were a team of Moscow cavers, including an old friend of ours, Bulat Mavlyudov. Somehow, the Moscow team had developed a pattern of sleeping in the daytime and caving at night; when we arrived, only Bulat woke up to let us in the door. After a cup of tea, we left the rest of the team still sleeping and with Bulat headed back to town, taking the direct route - a well-trodden footpath across the frozen river. The weather was cold and bright, with temperature in the middle 20's (below zero, of course!) so the snow gave that characteristic and very satisfying squeak under the boot. We visited the museum of the local Art College, which is excellent; the college also has a craft shop where students can sell some of their work. A speciality of the region is the carving of figurines from gypsum rock and from satin-spar selenite.

That night we went to the cave in a party including Bulat's two school-age sons. The cave is in gypsum rock and is essentially a planar maze with more than 5km of development. The tourist path traverses much of the cave in a circular route between two entrances, but our goal was the "New Series" in the NW part of the cave.

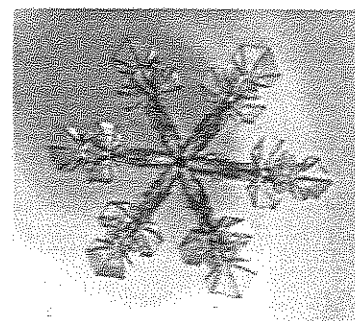
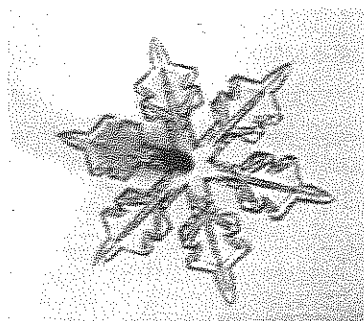
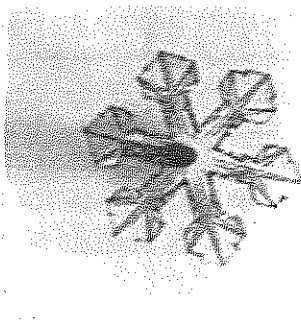
I found the New Series largely forgettable, but the tourist path is simply brilliant. The deep cave has slightly positive temperatures (around +2°C), but near the entrance there are cold traps, which remain below freezing all year round. This causes deposition of ice stalactites, stalagmites and flowstone (very nice), but the most

spectacular formations occur where warm wet winds from the deep cave meet these cold traps. Sublimation ice crystals coat the roof in vast arrays, the complexity of their structure defying the eyes of the beholder (imagine tightly packed chandeliers, each one a jigsaw constructed from snowflakes). It is the ultimate "winter wonderland" landscape and totally gobsmacking. Other parts of the tourist route are also good value, with attractive small lakes and some areas of cave roof fantastically etched by condensation corrosion processes. The whole route is well-lit (and switched on and off by the guide in passing) and easy underfoot on well-made concrete paths.

After the tourist cave, the New Series is a real shock to the system. This is real caving: awkward, slow and quite confusing in terms of route finding. Gypsum is a much weaker rock than limestone, so the passages are full of coarse breakdown debris. There are no obvious trails, so the contrast between these boulder-strewn galleries lit by dry-cell head torches, and the main electricity-lit tourist route is stark. With positive temperatures in the New Series, ice formations are sadly absent. But there are other features of interest in this part of the cave: tall, fluted avens and a low-ceilinged lake which gloup-gloups for an eerily long time if a rock is thrown into it. In one tall stoping chamber, we found veins of white selenite. We were underground for about 6 hours and explored most of the cave, returning to the research station (and bed) just before dawn.

That afternoon, after breakfast, I returned to the cave with Bulat to take a closer look at the ice crystallicities. I had hoped to make sketches of the structure of these beautiful formations, but I found it beyond my limited artistic ability. Individual crystals are skeletonised, often as shallow hollow cups with spiral growth patterns, but they do not grow alone - they grow one from another in a massed aggregate of crystals, with structural complexity an order of magnitude more difficult to interpret compared to individual crystals. We gave up our task, left the cave, and with Galina made another trip into town. We first made a visit to church, where a service was in progress (this being January 7th, Orthodox Christmas Day), then we went to a local park where ice sculptures were on display. That evening, after a farewell meal at the research station, Galina and I caught a night train back to Kirov.

The hospitality we received at Kungur was essential to make this visit possible. The small team living at the research station were very welcoming and are glad to meet visiting cavers. They have e-mail, so we were able to arrange our visit at only a few days notice. Spasiba bolshoi!



THE HYDROLOGY OF BURRINGTON COMBE AND THE JCB

Graham Mullan

Over the years, members of the Society have been involved in elucidating the complex hydrology of the Burrington area. Aside from cave exploration in this area, with which we have been involved since the Society's earliest days, and occasional attempts at dye tracing, the work really started with Tratman's classic study published in Proceedings in 1963. The job was continued in collaboration with the Geography Department during the coming years until now the complicated interrelationships between the various sinks and the Rickford and Langford risings are fairly well understood. Now however, a new era of Society involvement in this area has opened with our first participation in an attempt to modify said hydrology! The streams which flow down the East and West Twin Brook valleys both normally sink long before reaching the road in the Combe, however in recent years - and especially in this, the wettest Autumn and Winter on record - both have frequently been seen flowing onto and along the road. This has caused considerable damage to the road surface and so attracted the wrath of the local Highways Authority. As a consequence I met with Les Davies, the Mendip Hills Warden, and Bob Corns of English Nature to work out a suitable, conservationally-proper, way of solving the problem. This is where the JCB comes in.

WEST TWIN BROOK

The West Twin Brook has become the more serious of the two problems. Prior to the 1940s, this stream sank in a swallet by a Yew tree in the valley floor (ST 4758 5832), but this was choked by shale debris from the digging of the waterworks adit further up the valley.



*Work in progress at
Flange Swallet*

Subsequently, and up until about five years ago, most of it sank at the site known as Flange Swallet (ST 4758 5832), situated under the right wall of the valley about half way between Sidcot Swallet and the path up to Pierre's Pot. The stream only flowed down to the road in very high water conditions. Flange Swallet was dug to a depth of about 10m in the 1960s, being abandoned when it reached narrow fissures in solid rock, but much material was washed in during the big flood of 1968 and subsequent winter storms. By this autumn little, if any, water was actually sinking here. Thus, when the Highways Authority started talking

about culverting this stream under the road and diverting it down Aveline's Hole, I suggested that it would be considerably easier and cheaper to simply clear out the swallet - to say nothing of being more environmentally sound. On the 9th January I met Les and a JCB crew on site and this was done. There is now a 2-2.5 m deep hole in the valley side with about 1 -1.5m depth of water at the bottom and it seems to be successfully taking all the flow. Time and the next heavy storm will tell. The only downside to this is that in this litigious age it has had to be fenced off and a deep-water warning sign put in place, to save the public from itself.



The pool at Flange Swallet after work was completed

EAST TWIN BROOK

The situation in the East Twin Brook has also changed in recent years. There are a number of sinks in this valley and at one time the Top Sink (ST 4792 5796), about 200 m upstream of East Twin Swallet (ST 4796 5814), took most of the water in most conditions. However, now it would seem that more water was reaching the cave and, again, overflowing onto the road in high water. The problem here was alleviated by removal of the grill over the sink at East Twin Swallet, as this had a tendency to clog with leaves and other debris, but as we had the JCB on hand it was deemed to be a good idea to improve the situation even more. The streambed just upstream of the cave has thus been trenched out slightly, and the overflow channel downstream has been filled in by flattening the old spoil heap from the Society's original 1930s dig here. This work should mean that this stream rarely reaches the road in future. The downside is the increased likelihood of debris being washed into the cave. This will have to be watched.

AND WHERE DOES THE WATER GO?

It has been known since 1968 that both of these streams flow to both (!) Rickford and Langford risings. However, there are a few surprises in how they get there. Virtually immediately below Flange swallet is the streamway in Pierre's Pot. Surprisingly, water from Flange does not reappear here and is not seen again until it reaches the surface. Even more surprisingly the East Twin water is seen in Pierre's. After sinking and flowing through that cave, it is seen again in the streamway of Lionel's Hole and then becomes the Pierre's Pot streamway before embarking on the completely unknown part of its journey to the risings.

Much is indeed now known about the underground courses of the streams in this area, but there have been surprises along the way and much still needs to be learnt. A first, useful task would be to construct a compilation map of all the active streams in the area, surface and underground, and their known connections, to see just where the gaps in our knowledge lie.

Cowslips from heaven

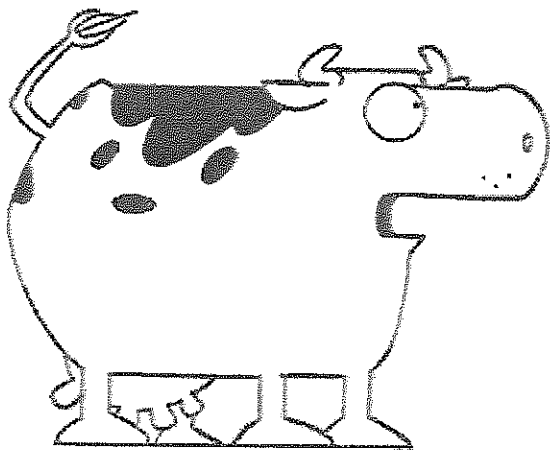
Christina Hoskins

I'm aware that I'm just a big girls blouse with a chip on her shoulder and something to prove, however, everytime I get into a cave or prepare to go over the top at the Union, the same helpless question still lights up in my mind - "Why do I put myself through this?". I've been offered several explanations - all along the lines of how its due to a thrill-seeking personality driven by the adrenaline rush and the exhilaration as well as the thought of the pub and a good nights sleep afterwards. Now, I'm not sure that I've ever been convinced by this psychobabble - I mean I can think of many other things which give you a thrill and help you sleep which don't involve rope burn (well not on a regular basis anyway!) - but it was whilst on the last Yorkshire trip that I think I might have come close to the elusive answer to 'the question'.

The Sunday blizzard prevented all but the most hardcore (Eddy, Emma and Juliet) from going underground. Fortunately Saturday was more friendly and whilst Sam, John, Si, Ed and Charlotte were still searching for Juniper Gulf, Eddy, Emma, Jez and I climbed through the fog towards Barr Pot.

Now, I know that Gaping Gill is one of the most visited caves in England (Eddy and Emma did groan a little at the prospect of going down for the third time in a row) but for me it was fairly daunting - my first SRT trip. Emma's calm and patient coaching got me down the two pitches in one piece (for which I was extremely grateful) and whilst we moseyed on, hunched over like apes, we started to feel the curious breeze and in the distance we could hear water. I had heard and read people's accounts of how impressive the waterfall was but even so I was not at all prepared - I must lack imagination because what I had envisaged bore no resemblance to what I saw.

The light was pale and blue, like a midnight swim and despite the sound of water the scene was utterly tranquil. Gallons of water were cascading down yet it disappeared as quickly as it hit the pebbled ground. Staring into the torrents every now and then I saw what looked like sticks being washed down and whilst I marvelled at the sheer power and magnificence of nature, one thought would not leave my mind; cows must get washed down here every now and then.



We stayed at the foot of the waterfall for quite a while and for the whole of that time I was transfixed and convinced that if we waited around long enough we'd see a washed up cow. Contrary to what Jez interpreted as a scene of horrific bovine carnage, what I was imagining completely defied gravity and involved cattle mooing peacefully on their way down, landing daintily and unfazed before finally trotting off into the passages.

So how did this bizarre trip help me to uncover the answer to the question "Why do I put myself through this"? Well, although the

magnificence Gaping Gill made me realise how the terror and toil of caving is sometimes well worth it, to be honest I think my vision of raining cattle holds testimony to the actual sad reality which is that I've finally just gone mad!

Now we are all back at work and recovered from our New Year's festivities, we might only think back to those hazy days when we curse the logic of our well-intentioned resolutions. But, how did our caving forefathers celebrate the coming of the New Year, and have our ways really changed much over the last 75 years? I think not...

Taken from "The Nonesuch", No. 39, Spring Term, 1924.

Cedric at Burrington

CEDRIC arrived at Burrington in the twilight, and shouldering his bed, toiled up the hill to the hut. Before the summit was attained he was grunting profusely and sweating volubly.

As he opened the door he upset a long, narrow person, and also the primus stove and kettle, which the latter manipulated. He skilfully caught the stove and hot water in his lap. Cedric considered his language belied his ladylike appearance.

When he had accustomed himself to the feeble light and smoky interior, Cedric made a close inspection of the members present on parade. Two he found to be using that particularly obscene lingo which constitutes the Medical "shop." Another, of cherubic appearance, whose large, bland face was overbalanced by his large, ubiquitous feet, stoically smoked box after box of England's Glory matches with the aid of a huge new pipe. Next sat a cubical fellow with a blue face, who discussed a highly philosophical subject with a deep-browed, black-haired man in white raiment. The Cube noticed Cedric, and welcomed him with a terrible blow on the bosom.

"So you have come, Cedric," said he; "why didn't you turn up before?"

Cedric murmured something about a party and previous engagements.

"And what did you do at the party?"

"I sang, played postman's knock"

"And with a fair measure of success, as the ragged outline of your right ear shows. At the last party I attended I also played that game; but I did not sing, I performed on the jews' harp. However, my teeth wobbled so much that I thought the plate might break, so I desisted, much to the regret of all present."

The Streak interrupted here.

"Tell me," said he, "who is Dolly? I want to know so badly."

"Ignorant devil, ain't you?"

Answered a person with huge spectacles, who sat on a bed, where he used a tin opener to construct a candlestick out of a treacle tin.

"Who do you think knows Dolly if you don't? I'm sure we are all agreed that the lady has shocking bad taste."

The Streak replied with sustained abuse, causing the spectacled Rough-Neck to rise from the bed and walk towards him. Before he had made two paces he tripped over the Cherub's right foot. He swayed a little, and took a step forward to regain his balance, but struck the left boot and toppled over. On rising, he commenced to "fondle" the apprehensive Cherub, and a mill followed, in which the pickles and paraffin found a resting-place in some old washing-up water. The celestial being was left on the floor snorting in a puzzled fashion, while his aggressor continued to pursue the original object of his wrath, the Streak, who disappeared rapidly into the night. Rough-Neck grunted, and returned to his candle-stick.

The table was laid and tea was made. Beyond the entrance of the Quartermaster and a fellow-engineer, each with a new tale of Ivy, the village belle, which was calculated to arouse envy in the hearts of their fellow Spelaeologists, that function passed off without event.

After tea the company divided into two parties, one for washing-up and bridge, the other for field work. The latter party, which had the study of village life as its object, proceeded to Blagdon, where the church bells and the rush of villagers to church informed them, for the first time, that the day was Sunday. They halted at the House with the Sliding Door, and hammered at its portals, but finding this unavailing proceeded to a well-remembered spot, where the knocking was repeated with an equally fruitless result.

Accordingly the party hurried to a third mission hall, and tapped gently on the door, but obtained no answer. It is a long lane that has no turning (as the monkey said when he sat on the tread-mill), and the deep-browed one, who had grown desperate, made a complaint to a personage he thought might be the Mayor of Blagdon, from whom he learnt that the institutions opened on Sunday at 6.55 p.m. (guide books, please note); and so the five investigators stood in the bitter cold of the village square for forty minutes, with pendulous tongues and heaving bosoms. At 6.54 sharp the party assembled in close column outside the House with the Sliding Door. At 6.55 the deep-browed bloke tapped on the door, at 6.56 he hammered, at 6.57 the whole party banged and shouted, at 6.58 the door was opened from inside, precipitating them to the floor. Then comparative happiness was obtained.



Next day visitors arrived. The first came on a motor-bike, and spent most of the day carrying his bed from the village to the hut. The second was a learned individual with an exciting story. He said that while waiting for the Burrington bus in Bristol he was arrested by a young policeman, who thought he was Major Bailey.

"He must have been very young and short-sighted," said the Rough-Neck. "The papers describe the Major as a tall, hand-some fellow. I hope you tipped the slop well. He deserved it for the compliment."

The society migrated to Goatchurch Cavern, where the Streak, Cube and Rough-Neck fought a boulder viciously. They eventually left it, having removed about 300 pounds from a total of four tons. Meanwhile, Major Bailey and the man with the domed forehead discussed technical questions, each quoting many authorities, and generally gave a highly philosophical air to the proceedings, which were otherwise rather messy. This method is an advance on that used by the Cube and Rough-Neck when discussing a parallel and equally technical subject, the former giving a bargee of his acquaintance as authority, the latter quoting huge excerpts from the work of his old sergeant-major.

In the evening a strong party proceeded to the House with the Sliding Door, where the soul of the landlady was ravished with sweet music. The halt was not long, and the return journey was made with large jars of cider and some other stuff wrapped up in bottles. By the time the hut was reached the beef had been roasted, while the potatoes and puddings were boiled. All disappeared in due course, and desert was produced. A regrettable incident happened at this point. Sunshine, a tall, handsome youth was sucking an orange, and, as is usual in the best circles of today, he disposed of the pips by projecting them to diverse parts of the hut. One of these fell on the red-hot stove in front of him, and exploding, blew back into his eye, causing him to forsake his customary air of easy nonchalance.

When that aftermath of banquets in both palace and prison, the washing up, had been disposed of, Cedric had an opportunity of witnessing the play of the University Tippet Team (1st VII.). He found them to be a hard-faced set of men with enormous hands, and points were piled up at an enormous rate. A game of *vingt-et-un* followed, in which the old professionals scored heavily. Cedric noticed Sunshine swigging mugs of invalid port, others

tipped cider, while the Streak sucked blotting-paper moistened with ginger-brandy and water.

At 17.30 p.m. the revellers evacuated the hut, and groped their way through the sepia night to the little grass-covered platform at the top of the wall of Burrington Combe above the "Rock of Ages." Now the ground round the hut bears on its face traces of occupation by many primitive peoples, and doubtless in days long dead it has witnessed the fulfilment of many fantastic rites; but we may safely say that none of the rites were so primitive or fantastic as those with which the Spelaeologists usher in the New Year. A brief account of these will be interesting to the careful student of ritual. Each member of the party bore an empty mug in one hand, and in addition several carried bottles and lamps. A spot was chosen, and some of the bottles were placed on the ground. The high priest, Major Bailey, then uttered mystic



words, and thrust the sticks of rockets into their necks. To the noise of various age-old ditties, such as "Here's to the Good Old Beer," "We are the Chosen Few," and "Jogging along to Canterbury," the rockets were fired, along with many squibs, crackers and jumping Jeremiahs. Cedric decided that the flashes of light revealed countenances as villainous and misshapen as any yet seen on Mendip. When the fireworks were exhausted the clocks of the hidden churches in the valley below commenced to strike. After this solemn moment wine was drunk and the company danced furiously round a huge potassium flare, singing quite untruthfully, "Here we go round the Cheddar Cross." A solemn hymn was sung at the conclusion of the dance, and was followed by a symphonic sneeze to the four cardinal points of the compass. (Item. - Do not stand in front of a Spelaeologist when he sneezes.)

The wind had now sprung up, and before all the company had entered the hut it brought rain, which soon beat on the iron roof like peas from a myriad pea-shooters rattling the sides of an unsuspecting tank. Within all was harmony and goodwill. The Rough-Neck was soon in bed, where he alternately wrote a letter to his love and composed his now celebrated *Ode to Linoleum*. The Cherub, with the assistance of the Major's boot and the Quartermaster's vast fund of knowledge, made his bed. The motor-bike man grunted contentedly from beneath the table, while the deep and even breathing of the Cube, combined with the staccato rattle of the rain and the aeolian music in the trees, producing a lullaby which soothed Cedric to sleep. He woke for a moment three hours later. The Cherub was putting the finishing touches to his bed in the most determined manner, and from the floor the Streak sleepily murmured,

"Who is Dolly?" —

As for the rest of the works of Cedric and his friends during the December camp, are they not written in the Log-Book of the Cave-Men?



GRAVEL

A Gallimaufry of Revelations, Aspersions, Veracities, Exaggerations and Lies

- ❖ Ms Samantha Smith and Mr Jonathan Telling were caught in a compromising position on the morning of the Christmas dinner last December. Ms Smith commented "He wasn't a very good victim - he was struggling to get up, so it made it quite hard". An amateur photographer present at the time of the incident captured startling images of their acrobatic endeavours.



- ❖ Club treasurer, Mr Simon Lee, is rumoured to have suffered confusion over his sexual preferences since his trip to Thailand this Christmas. On the said expedition, Mr Lee was approached by strange men on a daily basis, and another (unnamed) member of the group was offered money in exchange for the services of Mr Lee. The value of his asking price is unconfirmed.
- ❖ Reliable sources inform us that the entire Thailand expedition party resided in a disreputable establishment for a substantial portion of their stay. The cavers in question strongly deny knowledge of the true purpose of the red light gracing their window - claiming only that it added a 'nice ambience' to the room. Two of the offending students, Mr Nicholas Ireland and Mr Simon Lee (bedfellows) are unavailable for comment.
- ❖ Concerns regarding the dietary preferences of a Mr Edward Hill have been expressed by the student members of the UBSS. Photographic evidence has been produced to suggest that Mr Hill has abandoned the 21st century diet for something more primitive - grubs and insects. Entomologist, Mr B. Tull, has proposed that he is suffering from a rare disorder known as 'arachnosis' (a severe eating disorder brought on by exposure to East Asian cave atmospheres). It is hoped that Mr Hill will return to 'normal' after the two-

month incubation period is over. Anyone noticing signs of cocooning, or chrysalis growth, should contact the newsletter immediately.

- ❖ Female members of the club were shocked and distressed by the behaviour of certain males at the Christmas dinner, held at the 'Fox and Hounds' pub. In particular, Dr Jeremy Newman was publicly molested by Mr Dickon Banks. Dr Newman, and Mr Timothy Haines, are also facing charges of indecent exposure after dangling inappropriate body-parts over dinner.



- ❖ One of our newest members, Mr Edward Hodge, underwent a gruesome metamorphosis during the last club Yorkshire trip. On the night of Saturday 3rd February, he went to bed in the normal fashion, but witnesses on the scene claim that when he awoke he had four legs, and a female-shaped tumour growing from his side. Expert scientists can only suggest that chemicals in the local brew encouraged this mysterious transformation.

- ❖ Canadian cavers, Miss Patricia Beddows and boyfriend, Mr Edward Mallon, are reputedly squatting in the UBSS hut. Attempts to extricate them have been hampered by protests from local residents, who speak very highly of their takeaway pancake service.



A HOLIDAY IN THE VERCORS, SEPTEMBER 2000

Part 2 (Continued from previous edition)

Graham Mullan

Towards the end of last summer, a mixed party of UBSS and Grampian SG members spent two weeks caving on the Vercors plateau in SW France. Despite some transport difficulties brought about by the fuel blockades, the weather was generally superb and a lot of good caving was done. What follows are edited highlights from the trip log.

10-9-00 - Les Saints de Glace

Julian, Dan, Fiona, Pete I and Davie set off for a fine day's trip. After a fair amount of faffing about trying to find the entrance from a dodgy translation in Marshall known to be an inaccurate guide, we eventually found a steaming hole emitting a howling cold draught - most pleasant after a hot and sticky stomp up and down in the forest. For future reference, park on the bend as per the guides. Walk along the forestry track, past the barrier and round just one right hand bend. The track then bends to the left and there is an obvious path down through the forest (to the right). There may be a small cairn. There is also a vague blob of orange and black paint (at about head height) on a tree trunk on the right of the path. This path starts approximately 150m from the beginning of the track (at the road) and is the most obvious one in a half-mile stretch of the track. 80 metres of zigzag path leads to a small streambed (dry for us) where there is a large spoil heap, and the entrance.

The cave starts as a low tube, descending at about 45 degrees. The first pitch is gained in about 50m and is broken about 1/3 the way down. P-hangers are in place. We used two separate ladders (15 feet and 30 feet) and a 29m rope, along with 6 MR's.

The second pitch follows not long afterwards and consists of a single pitch from an airy position over the drop. A number of huge blocks are jammed across the passage and a lean forward reaches the belay. A single 30 foot ladder was used with a 26m rope. At this point we lost a member of the party and Davie found the call of the car and a less exposed position a better option.

The cave continues steadily onward and downward with the passage cutting down to sideways walking in places and the roof lowering in places. Three more pitches were encountered; all of which were passable with a 5m ladder. One of the pitches was 6m and two ladders were used, but removed once all were off the ladder. These pitches were intermingled with free climbs of various lengths.

An interesting "toboggan run" of a slippery passage leads, via a short bit of passage, to a fine 11m pitch down into the Salle Hydrokarst - a huge chamber - the biggest in the system. The routes continue from here but we just went as planned simply to the siphon in the Réseau Nord. A group of French cavers arrived as we ascended our ladder. They seem most amused at our use of ladders and self life-lining. I think the phrase was "do you still use those things in the UK?" Whilst there is a technique involved in climbing ladders, given the short pitches, I doubt if SRT would have been much quicker. The advantage of course is less gear to carry. But only if you have enough ropes the right length.

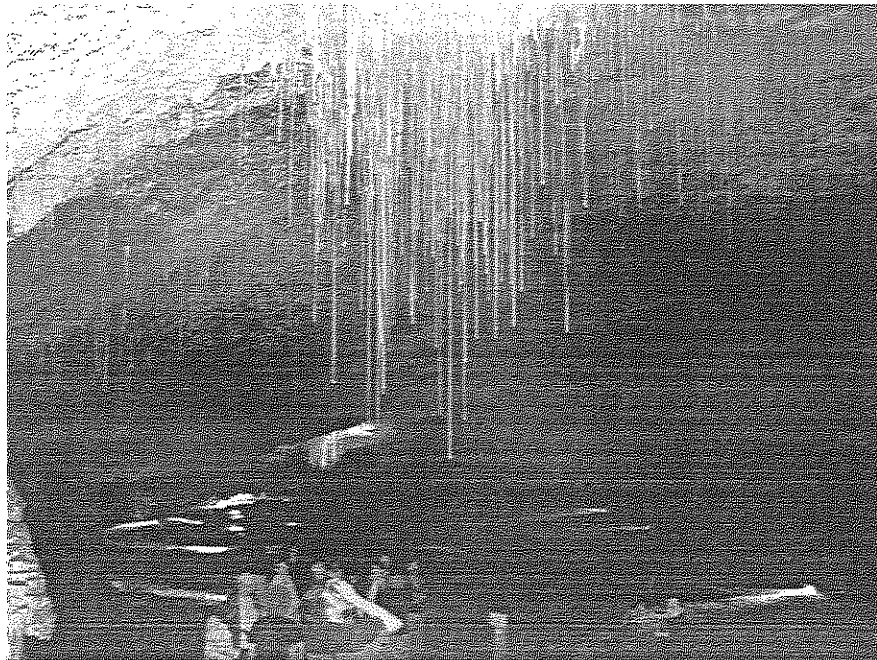
The return to the surface seemed much quicker if a little humid! Despite the draught throughout the cave, there was not much opportunity to get cold provided one kept moving. The cave was mainly phreatic with sharp edges - not good for sunburned bodies. Or maybe vadose in the upper parts, but the limestone is a funny sort, with lots of chert-like ledges. The system has another entrance further back down the road and it is reputed to be riggable from the comfort of one's car! The original entrance (Trou qui Souffle) was discovered when the road was built. A through trip is possible with two parties and considering the entrances are only about 300m apart, the 16 hours it takes to complete

seems a bit excessive. We were assured by our French friends it is an accurate estimation as route finding can be tricky.

11-9-00

Two caving groups for today's activities.

The hard men and women attacked Grotte de Gournier - a superb cave located a couple of hundred yards beyond the show cave of Choranche. Some of those who had not visited Choranche before (Pete D, Ivan, Bob, Dan, Fiona) did the tourist trip while the rest (Julian, Carol and Pete I) went on ahead to sort out access to the fossil passage. This involved (i) inflating the Battleship Potempkin; (ii) Carol rowing Julian and Pete (one at a time) to the landing stage below the traverse; and (iii) Julian rigging the 10ft ladder pitch and the 30ft traverse, aided and abetted by Pete. By the time this had been done, the rest of the party had finished the tourist trip and Carol/Dan ferried them to the landing stage.



The Choranche showcave

No-one had any problem with the traverse, despite the reputation Carol & Julian had given it. It's a lot easier if you don't watch it being rigged first, but just turn up and march across it. Cow's tails give a sense of security, and though probably not strictly necessary are recommended. The traverse used a short length of ladder to climb from the landing to the traverse. This used 40m of rope and 10 MR's, plus one hanger/bolt.

Once reassembled at the end of the traverse (dry gours this time, unlike on the last occasion when J&C saw it) the trip proper began. The huge passage continued for a LONG way, heading gradually upwards all the time. The best description of the floor is being covered in chaotic boulders. Some of these boulders being the size of a small house! There were areas of fine formations covering the passage. It seemed strange to be walking through areas of stal and columns but the route clearly went through them. There was a very nice area of wet gour pools with a fine flowstone coming in from the left. The passage continued in a similar vein until a climb down (second access point after 1.1 km) reached the active streamway.

The floor and pools are coated in white calcite, and the pools are green-blue. To avoid deep pools traverse wires and ropes are in place, but the quality is dubious - we found one rope anchorage point nearly severed and an iron hanger broken. Dan & Julian went upstream for some 10 to 15 minutes while Fiona and Pete looked downstream. The traverses are strenuous in places, going up. Quite sporting! Carol & Bob just waited and Ivan returned at his leisure marvelling at the pretties and taking photos of the gours and of Pete at the entrance traverse. The six remaining returned in due course to a scorching afternoon on the surface - well worth avoiding!

All the rest to Grotte des Ferrihres. A short hot walk to a short cave, fine old stal with steps cut for 19th century style show cave. Much blackening of stal by benzene burning but still fine. Plenty of wildlife; spiders, cave crickets by the hundred, pale with eyes but very long antennae, opillionids and many oestivating flies on the walls. One bat seen (first in the Vercors?), but not identified. (Large, with a light grey furry body). Davie found a tight, muddy, draughting tube in the floor, but failed to persuade anyone to push it. (Note: this tube is at the end of a tight meander that was very nice. Unfortunately, no one else wanted to enter it for some reason. Some mention was made of mud.)

12-9-00

Although it was only Tuesday morning and not Wednesday evening, an attempt was made to go digging. Julian, Dan, Tony and Graham went south along the valley to a site in the bottom of a shakehole noted by the latter two a couple of days ago and declared by Tony to be draughting inwards gently. On this occasion no draught could be detected at all, despite utilising Dan's fag and so no digging was done. Looked at another couple of shakeholes in the same area with no joy and so returned north to yet another site noted on a previous walk. This one was an apparent rift in a patch of nettles close to the rubbish and glass bins. Dan, in his least obvious bright yellow oversuit, investigated the site while the others provided a diversion by emptying 3 days' worth of bottles into the bin. Needless to say this one didn't go either.

Gour Furmant

Two groups descended the cave. The early group of Young Ivan, Young Davie and Young Pete I, set off in the morning with a view to rigging the cave before the later group of Julian, Dan and Fiona followed behind.

There was some confusion as to which of the two entrances we should descend and after a recce in each decided on the wrong one. We only found this out after rigging an airy traverse and descending a 17m pitch. An easy and well-trod passage led steadily downwards from here and was followed for about 50m before returning to prussic back up the pitch.

Regrouping on the surface an assault was launched on the correct entrance. The first two difficulties are described as climbs and although only 2 and 4m respectively it was decided a ladder for each. The pitches proper started after this and consisted of a 6m, 3m, 9m, 6m and an 11m pitch followed in quick succession. A 65m rope will see these completed in one go. A local schematic has been drawn up as the information available was dubious. There was a proliferation of spits, many of which were not useable. This lead to the "Grand Chamber". Davie decided to ascend the pitches at this point and "test the spits whilst being schougled" - how kind!

Two routes from here exited and then joined 25 or so metres further on down the cave. We followed the option of a 6m and 15m pitch. At the bottom of this one, Ivan's lamp was noticed to be decidedly dim. Pete I and Ivan returned to the surface on combined lighting.

Dan took up the rigging at this point to finish the last two pitches. Dan, Fiona and Julian continued down the passage. The initial pitch was rigged from a rather airy Y-hang, which needed to be treated as a rebelay. The subsequent pitch was more straightforward, the pitch-head was about 20m further down the passage, short traverse line, Y-hang, big flowstone ledge ~3m from base of pitch - should have rebelay but we ran out of rope so decided to omit the rebelay.

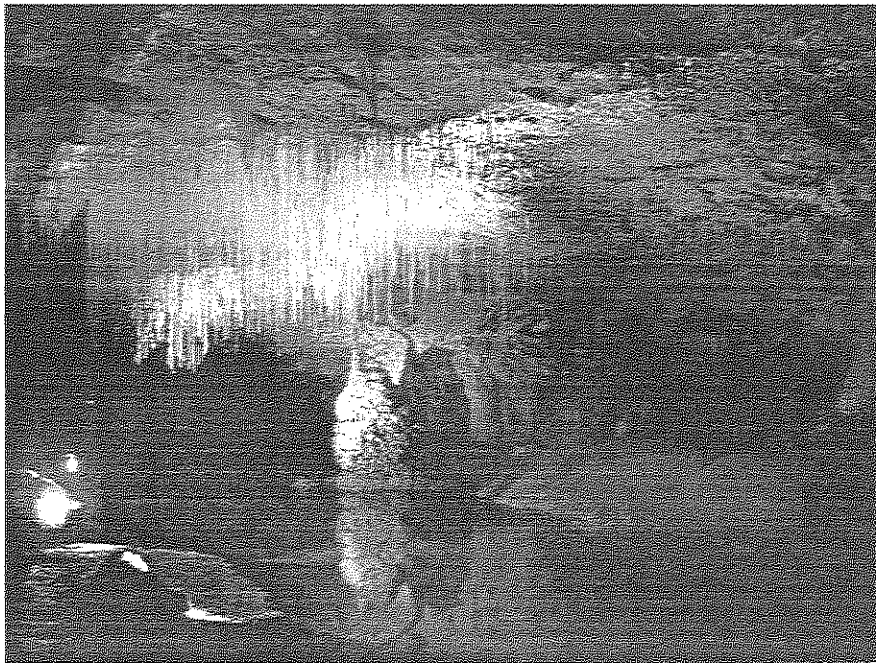
From the base of the pitch the obvious route on was along winding T-shaped canyon passage with active streamway, large gours all along, traces of old eroded gours high on the walls. Eventually reached deep pools, retraced steps to a short climb (~3m) up the wall. Leads to fossil canyon passage with gours and some formations. Passage becomes low briefly & emerges into Dragon Chinois. Wide, low chamber, many formations, impressive columns, and straws.

13-9-00

An easy day today with a tourist trip to Scialet de la Malaterre. A huge chasm in the ground descended to a total depth of 120m. The shaft is split at 55m by a huge ledge. Rocks and coins were dropped but we could not hear anything hit the bottom. A free hang also did not seem possible. The hole was spanned by a bridge, which apparently doubles as the initial belay.

Next a wander down the hill lead to Glacihre - a cave that has an ice plug in its base. Unfortunately the cave had been closed since last year. This did not deter the intrepid members of the G.S.G & U.B.S.S. and with true grit, we scaled the barriers and descended into the cave via fixed ladder.

At the bottom of the cave was a lump of ice with a cold blue face. This contained a few nice icicles but otherwise was a bit of a non-event. The cave did not appear to continue in any direction and not surprisingly was quite cool!!



Another view of the Choranche showcave

14-9-00

Today's caving party was lured by the promise of masses of stal and a "magnifique" streamway to Réseau Christian Gathier, located just over the col from the Font d'Urle ski station. The initial group

of Dan, Fiona, Ivan, Julian and Carol was reduced to four when Fiona decided (sensibly as it turned out) that she wasn't feeling up to the trip. The entrance rift (a steeply sloping and narrow 30m) was easy on the way down, but needed care on the last section - a handline (tied to the rock) provided psychological assistance here. Then off we went, following the draught. The guide didn't really mention mud - but there was lots in the low crawly section. Pitches of 5m - probably avoidable (stal belay - tether), and 7m again (stal belay and tether), took us to the fossil gallery where there was indeed a profusion of stal (muddy) and eventually we reached the 10m pitch (yet again stal belay & tether) to the streamway. No complaint about the guidebook description here - it was truly magnificent with loads of unspoiled stal and a clean washed white floor with the occasional small marmite for added interest. It was unfortunately not very long, and all too soon we were grovelling again through muddy boulders (bad for unpadded elbows). On arrival at the next big chamber (Salle des Tenebres) Carol and Ivan decided enough was enough, and it was left to Julian and Dan to maintain the honour of the Scots and bottom the cave. A short low section led to the 'Galerie Geant', then a large bedding passage led to the R-4, which had both a rope and a short ladder. It was only a metre or two. A short walk led to the Salle de la Cascade where a rope was in place. We then went on a bit until it got too narrow for comfort, so returned to the others for chocolate and toast. The return to the surface was uneventful until we reached the bottom of the exit rift. Here Carol went into wimp mode, and asked for a lifeline (duly provided by Julian). While the males of the party swarmed agilely upwards, toting heavy tackle bags, she struggled and thrutched ineffectually, making slow progress despite the tight line, and emerged into the sunshine totally knackered. She was very grateful to Ivan for recording this on film!!

A few additional notes are that the first pitch lands in a deep muddy hole and traversing round it and out through the stal encrusted exit without slipping provides opportunity for amusement especially on the return while carrying tackle sacks. Also the third ladder down to the streamway joins it a couple of metres downstream of a V-notch weir cemented across the stream.

This showed 9.5 cm of water (assuming it was calibrated in cm). The description of how to find the Salle des Tenebres in the books was unclear.

When the sump pool is reached a wire traverse line on the left can be followed through almost waist deep water to where it changes from the left hand wall and disappears up into a well worn crawly climb on the right that after a bit of crawling enters the massive quarry that is the SdT.

A final note is that the path from the lay-by leads directly to the entrance which is only 110 metres away as the crow flies and Ivan GPSed both the lay-by and the entrance. It really is 5 minutes or less! This small lay-by is just north (500m) of a large parking lay-by close to the lowest ski-tow. There is no sign of dumped carbide at the lay-by now.

Layby UTM co-ordinates: 31T 0683475 4977298

Scialet du Tobogga: 31TR 0683377 4977254

15-9-00

Dan and Fiona were as enthusiastic as ever about caving and set off to do Bournillon. They went as far as the trip of 3-9-00 and also managed to find a passage on the right. This was followed for some distance. It is a bit of an unsolved mystery if this was a passage, previously below the sump level or a passage missed by the last party. Dive lines were in place so free entrance to the passage is obviously only possible in dry conditions.

UBSS Expedition to Northern Thailand

Team members: Eddy Hill, Nick Ireland, Andy Farrant, Simon Flower, Simon Lee, Dean Smart (Thailand), Sam Smith, Jon Telling

As we step into the 21st century, the chance to explore a frontier where humankind has never gone before becomes less and less likely. The chance to be the one to lay the first footprints in a never-before traveled passage is an intriguing and exciting proposition and this voyage into the unknown is the reason some of us yearn to explore. Or, maybe it was just a holiday...

For whatever reason individuals became part of the UBSS Expedition to Northern Thailand, the overall team purpose was to locate, explore and survey cave passage and then to share our findings with the caving world. We had heard of a "cave and karst specialist" (Dean Smart) living in Thailand from a talk given by Simon Brooks at the 1999 Hidden Earth conference. We contacted Dean early on. We sought his advice on issues such as transportation, possible base camp locations, site access, local guides and he helped us acquire maps of the region. In addition, he put us in contact with an exploration team from the States who had caved in Northern Thailand in the early 1980's. Kindly, they offered to send us their unpublished surveys and some maps outlining their area of exploration. While waiting for the maps from Dean and the Americans, we had obtained a geological map in Bristol and had already become intrigued by a large karst plateau in the province of Chiang Mai. When we discovered that it remained to be explored (and that it was out of the National Park area, where access would have been difficult), we exchanged knowing looks and grinned like kiddies in a candy shop...we had found our starting point. (Note: our backup plan was to extend the US cavers' efforts in White Horse cave, where they turned back only because they ran out of rope).

We arrived in Bangkok on the 17 December 2000. We stayed there one night and then headed north, towards Chiang Mai. Our first base camp was a guesthouse/whorehouse in a small village called Ban Ai. From here, we drove our two rented jeeps on steep tracks meant to be footpaths and explored numerous pits promising to lead to cave passage. We hired a local guide, named Samkake, who was an interesting choice, as he didn't speak one word of English and our Thai is not even good enough to be appalling. Still, with unique hand gestures and the occasional grunts, we got by and Samkake proved to be a great help. He introduced us to the "Bill and Ted" of the Thai jungle – Bum and Nong. These two characters could sniff out cave anywhere...or, rather: Numerous attempts to explore large, going passage ended, time and time again, with the encounter of bad air. Feeling slightly frustrated, we decided to move our efforts to some tower karst, located south of Base Camp One.

Our second camp was a schoolhouse classroom in a small hilltribe village. Some might say this was experiencing "real Thailand" – except that the local tongue was Lisu and few people even spoke Thai (i.e. they weren't of Thai origin). Despite the tribe appearing to be removed from the outside world, we soon learned they were HUGE supporters of Liverpool Football Club! The tribespeople were very generous

(the children approached us with a mixture of intrigue and apprehension and then challenged us to some footy!) and two men offered to guide us to some holes in the ground. These were Snake Cave (bad air), Monkey Cave and Porcupine cave.

Our third camp was a guesthouse in Chiang Dao. From here, we attacked the tower karst area from even further south. It was here that we would find the jewels of our expedition: Bear Cave and River Cave (see Table 1 below).

This three-week expedition yielded the exploration of 20 caves and the survey of more than 2500 m of passage. Our total exploration area extended over 100 km². We found that, in general, resurgences yield more cave passage than sinks, dolines are a waste of time (they seem to breed bad air), and caves with large vertical pitch entrances are SRT teases, but always seem to end in bad air as well (much to Farrant's dismay – it meant we had to go horizontal).

Sam Smith

Table 1: Summary of caves found, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand

English Name (Thai Name)	Basic Description
God's Cave	Led there by a monk! Tricky rifts, fun climbs, we were definitely not the first to lay footprints here (but we were the first to survey!).
Bat Bone Cave/Cave of Bad Breathe	Located in side of doline. HUGE entrance chamber, leading off in two directions. Floor coated with thick mound of organic debris. Bad air encountered at the top of a ladder pitch (passage going below...argh!)
Tham Nam Huai	Ladder climb into a stal-covered coach-sized passage; connected into previous efforts by the French. Located in side of escarpment. Over 800 m of surveyed passage.
Black Hole Pit	55 m vertical entrance shaft (SRT), huge passage going at bottom. Bad air encountered at 30 m; unbreathable at 50 m. Tried to descend this one with a SCUBA tank – to no avail.
Rift Hole	Four ladder pitches in rift, bad air
Cricket Pot	Descent down a rift. Unstable floor. Passage choked.
Bear Cave	A cave with everything (vertical bits, squeezes and crawls, pretties, phreatic tubes, huge chambers, etc., etc.)! Over 600 m of surveyed passage. Located in tower karst, 3 entrances found, more to find...
Spring Cave	Doline. More like a cavern than a cave.
Snake Cave	Tower karst. Snake-shaped dissolutional feature in roof of entrance. Bad air found in a rift leading down, down, down....
Monkey Cave (Tham Nong Khaem)	Tricky climb up tower karst to reach entrance; three-pitch cave (ladders); decorated with lots of old, crumbly stal. Dig going in bottom chamber.
Disappointment Pot	9 m pit in bottom of doline. Descended with a ladder. Bad air encountered at 8.5 m
Tham Nong	Ladder climb down doline slope, huge entrance, wet in rainy season, lots of animal bones scattered on floor.
Trap Pot	7 m pit. No passage found at bottom.
Porcupine Cave	Large entrance, passage going in two directions. 2 porcupine skeletons in passage to the left.
Bee Cliff Cave	Temple cave (used as a site of worship by monks) – lots of Budhas inside!
"Cave 5"	Large entrance shaft. 30 m pot. Good air!!!! But, no passage.
Crystal Pot	Walls covered in crystal. Lack of time prevented further exploration efforts.
Cricket Pitch	Climb and 2 pitches to choke. In doline.
Coffin Cave	Err...it had a coffin in it.
Kid's cave	Led there by village kids who like to cave without lights or helmets! Picturesque.



Members of the UBSS Thailand Expedition

Disappointment Pot to Black Hole. A Tale of Bad Air.

Day two of exploration and once more we (that is Jon, Sam, Nick and moi) set off in search of the object of our dreams and desires, that most elusive and immaterial of things, a hole in the ground to some and a cave to us.

Surely enough, after a flesh tearing trek through the velcro grass from hell, we found such a hole and promptly rigged a ladder to gain access to its base. No doubt from here we would be able to explore the system that inevitably lay hidden in the karst beneath us. I swiftly descended to the base, constantly looking for cracks in the rock that may lead into passages, only to find the pot not 9 metres deep, devoid of passage and lacking in that most ephemeral of substances, breathable air. Nick named it Disappointment Pot, for obvious reasons.

Later that day, after lunch and a chat with a couple of farmers, we acquired the services of Mr. Nong and Mr. Bum (yep! you read right), to show us to a nearby cave. What cave? It didn't matter. All that mattered was that we had a new lead and this time we were sure it would go. With this in mind we jumped into the jeep and gave chase to the two farmers, as they rode through the jungle on the back of a moped, bearing the largest rifle any of us had ever seen. Soon we reached a clearing, unsure of our position or where we were going but these were minor details. We followed blindly through the vegetation and shortly arrived at what they called "Tham" and we called a huge hole in the ground. While Jon and I had a better look at this beautiful pot, Sam and Nick went off with our guides in search of other possible caves. Finding a suitable tree, we rigged both ladders and Jon descended into the abyss. From the safety of the tree, I egged him on to descend faster (he'd been at the same spot for some time) to which he replied "I'm on the bottom run and I can't see the end of the pitch". We were both quite excited and of course insisted on rigging it for SRT the next day. Meanwhile, Sam and Nick had found another three pots in close proximity to this one. Much to the amusement of our guides they'd been timing rocks thrown into the pots and found they took 6 to 7 seconds to reach an obstruction. It was obvious to us that all these pots must link up at depth and would provide us with a reasonably sized cave.

Day 3 and we were back at the mouth of the pot. Under advice from Dean Smart we rigged the rope with a Z-rig already in place, in case we encountered bad air. Jon won the toss of the coin and with it the prize of rigging the pitch and being the first one to the bottom. Due to the poor quality of the rock, it took ages to rig the first deviation and by the time he'd

hammered the bolt in for the second one he was out of carbide and out of batteries. Bad for him but good for me since he had to abandon the cave and I got a chance to rig the rest and be the first one down. Without hesitation I passed the first deviation and descended to the second. As soon as I'd passed this, it became evident that no more rigging would be required. I could now see the bottom of the pot some 20 metres below me. Bearing in mind that I may still encounter bad air, I rappelled slowly. My breathing was laboured but I attributed this to nerves and excitement. About 5 metres beneath the deviation the pot suddenly opened up to 10 metres in diameter. This larger section was very decorated and the cave appeared red in coloration. The rock was still crumbly. To my right I could see a large terrace but it had no obvious ways on. I continued on my way down, now totally engrossed in my surroundings. Another 5 metres and the cave opened up once more. Now 20 metres in diameter and still heavily decorated with stal and flowstone. I could see the walls descending to the ground approximately 10 metres below. The boulder floor was covered with a scattering of vegetation and just to the left of my landing position a mound rose some 6 metres off the ground. Looking down I saw my feet couldn't be more than 2.5 metres from touchdown and then, I heard my carbide flutter once, twice, three times and it went out. I tried to re-ignite it but it didn't want to know. I switched on my back-up light and noticed my breathing was extremely rapid and I was having trouble catching my breath. I was in bad air, really bad air. I attempted a change over but my chest-strap was too loose. I decided to blow my whistle, to let Sam and Jon (on the surface) know I was in trouble. He immediately started to pull on the Z-rig, this had the fortunate effect of rocking the rope and swinging me close enough to the mound so that I could reach out and pull myself onto and then up its side, into an area of better air. A bit calmer and slowly catching my breath, I scanned the chamber. Straight ahead I could see a passage, 2 metres high by 3 wide, leading off and another possible passage, of similar dimensions, to my left. Shame they were in such bad air. The cave obviously went but where? We would never know. Three or four minutes elapsed and I realised that, although reasonable, the air at this level wasn't really all that good. I changed over and started up the rope. As I passed the second deviation I noticed the temperature drop markedly. I was told later that an increase in temperature is quite natural in high concentrations of CO₂.

Later that evening we managed to borrow an air tank off Matt (an American cave diver) and decided we would have another go at the cave we later named Black Hole. That, however, is Jon's story and he can tell you all about it.

Ed Hill



A fat buddha in "Tham Tab Tao" religious cave

Kids' Cave

It was another hot and sweaty Thai morning and, once again, time to head to the hills for another day of exploration. We had decided to target a stream in the hope there would be a sinkhole at the end of it for us to drop into, bringing kilometres of cave and speleological fame with it.

After relocating various innards and pushing them back towards where they should be, we stopped the jeep at the edge of a tiny village located roughly in the middle of nowhere at an altitude of quite a bit. It was at the end of a muddy roller coaster overconfidently advertising itself as a road.

There are roughly 750,000 hill-tribe people remotely located throughout the length and breadth of Thailand, divided up amongst some 3,500 villages, and as the dust settled and we consulted the map, two of them stared at us with poker faces and shoots of sugar cane in their hands. They were curious yet a little wary, as five year olds are.

By the time Andy, Eddy, Si Flower and myself had donned gear and set off towards the stream, word had spread and ten or so children were around us trying on our hardhats and tackle bags.

Si decided to explore a little on his tod and the remaining three of us took the dry streambed. Following 90 minutes of scrambling, cursing, discovering a dearth of sinkholes and Eddy doing slapstick impersonations by stepping on dangerously balanced planks of wood that promptly leapt up and gave him a few days worth of black-eye, we gave up and returned to the jeep.

Not 10 minutes later and Si appeared over a nearby ridge, waving madly with a swarm of kids in tow who knew exactly where a cave was if only we'd bothered asking!!

The cave in question was a large, sloping-floor chamber with a few passages and rooms leading off from it. The decoration was well above par and included a couple of pristine white flows alongside pillars of stal.

As we finished the survey and headed out of the cave the late afternoon sun shot bold rays of light through the entrance, leaving long shadows trailing from the silhouettes of the children at the mouth of the entrance.

Definitely a trip highlight and a lasting memory.

Si Lee



River Cave, "Tham Nam Huai Luk", and the French Connection

It was about four in the morning. I'd been awake for about an hour or so and at last made the decision to get out of bed and made a beeline across the room for the toilet. A few minutes of hugging the sink culminated in me hurling copious volumes of vomit into it. The next few minutes were spent manually bailing said sick into the toilet after realising that the plug would not cope with such great volumes.

I returned to bed to find Nick awake.

"You OK Si?"

"Hmm."

"Yeah, I feel a bit like that too."

A few minutes later, I could hear the hurried throwing back of sheets, and then a scampering of bare feet across the floor. This would be the first day of our little epidemic.

The next morning, the two cars set off as usual. Si, Jon and Sam were in one car, and the rest of us in the other; Ed driving, Andy shotgun, and Nick and I slumped in the back (concentrating on not feeling absolutely terrible). We were going out to visit a bowl of limestone towers with two purposes: to look at a big hole we'd seen high on the side of a tower, and to explore the place for other caves.

We parked up by some woods at the foot of the tower. Ed and Andy got out and started ascending into the trees. Nick and I wobbled slowly after, part of us thankful to be out of the heat, part of us protesting at the extra effort required of us. At one point we came to a miniature ravine straddled by a fallen log. "It's not so bad", Ed called back, "it just requires a bit of balance". "*Balance?*" came the horrified reply from behind me.

Quite a while was spent crashing around in the bamboo trying to locate the entrance through the trees. Progress was slowed considerably by inappropriate timing of bowel movements, but it was finally located at the foot of a 10m scramble. We all stood around for a while 'umming and ahing' at it, but it was decided, when Ed found it too committing, to leave it for another day.

So a retreat was made for the car with a promise of return, and attention was centred on new discoveries. It was decided to go and get some local advice.

Whilst Andy and Ed lounged in the shade by the car, Nick and I wandered drunkenly over to some local woodcutters. Ten minutes of pointing at maps and muttering the slurred words of a very limited Thai vocabulary produced, eventually, a map to a destination that wasn't too clearly defined.

Unusually, their directions appeared to be absolutely right, and we were once more right up against the escarpment. The mood lightened when we saw that the track terminated by a river that seemingly ran straight out of the rock. We spent quite a while ferreting about at the foot of the escarpment looking for an obvious passage, but the ground was thick with mud and huge boulders, and none could be found. I eventually stumbled upon a small deep hole between one of these boulders and the rock face, and dashed back to the car for a ladder. Down inside I was greeted with an open space - a cave! By now we were quite used to finding promising looking cave only to find it ended after a short distance, so I had no great expectations. Nevertheless, I shouted up to Ed and Andy to follow me down, and wandered off into the space.

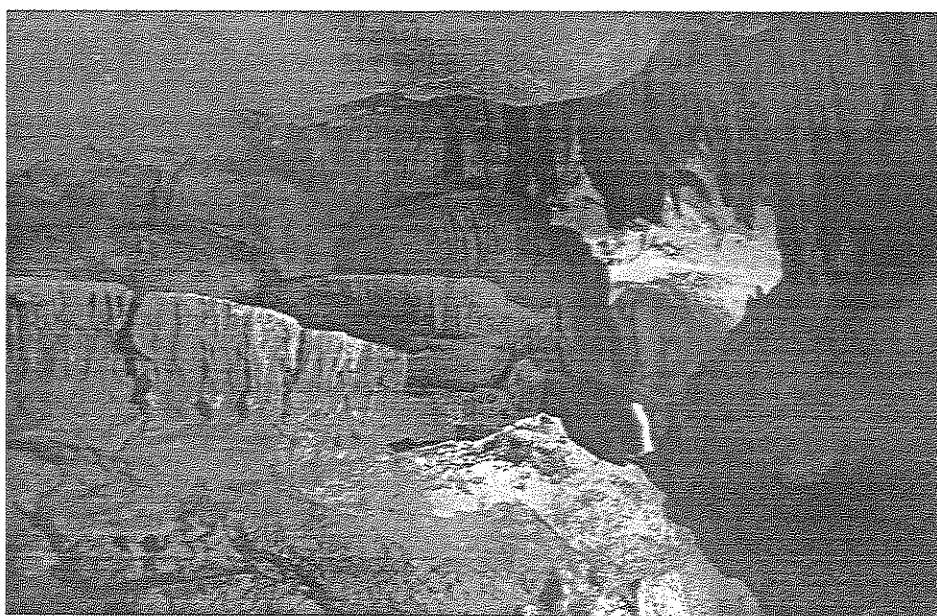
The cave opened out into reasonable dimensions, a sort of mini-chamber, which closed to a keyhole slot at the far end. The draft blowing out of this gap was strong enough to blow out the flame of a carbide lamp - the passage beyond seemed huge. I ran on whooping and yelling whilst the others battled with the ladder rungs, yelling back to a green looking Nick that the passage beyond was the size of a train tunnel.

And it was. It was about 10m wide by 7m high, and remained so for five hundred glorious metres. It was fantastically decorated, too - from flowstone walls and giant stal, to gour pools and crystalline formations. After two and a half weeks of finding mostly shite, we finally find *this*. Until we came round to surveying it, I completely forgot about feeling ill.

The unusual thing though, was that the cave just seemed to stop dead. It went for 500m+ without ever showing signs of closing down, then just came to a wall, with two great avens above it. There was still a draft coming in from somewhere, so we all split up to explore the various small leads off. Ed drew the short straw and found himself face down in a low watery inlet, while the rest of us negotiated minor climbs, but it was to no avail. We had to entertain the possibility that only the way on was at the top of the avens - unfortunate because we couldn't even see the top of them. We decided to leave it for the day and return afresh in the morning.

That evening, the position of the cave was plotted onto the map. The cave seemed to be the resurgence for a stream sink that a French group had found on the other side of the mountain. They'd mentioned in their report that a large seasonal streamway had sumped just 60m from the entrance. We decided to go and have a look at this the next day to see if there was away through, but the sump just turned out to be a mud choke. There did appear to be a way off at high level, but this was best left owing to the 15m overhanging bolt traverse required to gain it!

And so attention returned to the river cave. A brief amount of time was spent exploring side passages left from yesterday (adding another 70m of length to the cave), but efforts were to be concentrated at the avens. When I arrived, Ed was already busy back-and-footing up a narrow groove that flanked a 15m high stal bank. He had the look about him of a man who isn't too sure why he's in the position he's in, and was beginning to babble a bit. He soon reached the top though, and disappeared from sight. At about the same time, Nick was making light work of a delicate climb in the second aven, and was now also out of sight. There then followed a period of mass confusion as Nick tried to communicate with the group who were watching him, who were then relaying it to the group watching Ed, who were trying to listen to Ed, whose voice could be heard by Nick and the group listening to him. Both Nick and Ed then found pitches, which caused quite a lot more excitement, and the shouting intensified as both groups wanted to know what both climbers had found.



Gour pools rising to the ceiling in main passage, River Cave

Both were describing a drop into a streamway, and suspicions were immediately aroused as to whether this was the French cave. Ed had not been to the French cave so couldn't tell, so I went up to see if I could recognise anything. At the top of the climb, a grovel up onto a boulder led to an eyehole that looked out into the big passage he was describing. This was definitely the French cave; we could even see daylight and trees if we leaned out far enough. Nick then appeared in the streamway, having just acquired a ladder, and wandered around for a while confirming our find.

This was my last day, and it was a perfect way to finish an expedition. We returned to the cars happy, to take group photos and ritually incinerate my clothes.

Si Flower

Overall Thailand was great and can definitely be recommended it for its scenery, beaches, cuisine and very friendly people. Caving in Chiang Mai province, with it's choked caves and bad air however, was disappointing and the group will not be making a return trip. Apparently though, other parts of Thailand do not suffer the same problems and Dean Smart is keen for people to go out again. He's even promised a 4-5 km system in Mae Hong Son, NE Thailand, so if you have nothing to do next Christmas...

Foot and Mouth Disease Update

The current Foot & Mouth outbreak is extremely serious and the Countryside Agency, the National Trust and other organisations are advising everyone to stay away from all areas containing livestock. Cavers are therefore being asked to follow this advice and limit their activities until all restrictions are lifted.

It is very important that everyone cooperates in this matter which poses a severe threat to the farming community and others. If there is any doubt whether a cave is situated on land that may be affected please contact the regional Conservation and Access Officer; contact details for which can be found on the NCA web site at www.nca.org.uk. The basic rule to follow is DO NOT go onto any land if there is any doubt, or without first obtaining permission from the landowner.

Currently there is no access to many caves on Mendip, in the Peak District and the North, however some local Wildlife Trusts and other organisations are continuing to allow access onto some of their land and access to some other non-grazing land may be permissible, but it is essential to check first.

Charterhouse Caving Company clubs have stopped issuing permits or keys (G.B., Charterhouse, Longwood or Rhino Rift) until further notice. Most parts of Mendip are now to be avoided without good cause. This includes Burrington Combe, even though it is not actually farmed land.

General information on the disease and restricted areas is available on the MAFF web site at www.maff.gov.uk.

Annual General Meeting and Annual Dinner

March 10th 2001

This year, the AGM will be held at the University of Bristol Student Union on Saturday 10th March 2001, and will be including a talk by the Thailand expedition. All UBSS members are invited to attend the meeting, and of course, the annual dinner following.

The meal will be held at "Pizza Plus" on Park Street, Bristol. The cost will be £15, including entrance to Benny's Nightclub. Please contact Morven regarding your menu selection at: mb8163@bristol.ac.uk

Menu

Starters

- *Gamberoni Fritti* - Six breaded tiger prawns on a layer of lettuce with lemon and garlic mayonnaise
- *Funghi Con Panna D'Aglia* - Pan-fried mushrooms served with a fresh cream, garlic and parsley sauce
- *Minestrone Soup*
- *Mozzarella Carozza* - A cheese envelope dipped in milky egg, breadcrumbed, then deep-fried and served with tomato sauce
- *Insalata Di Mare* - Mixed seafood specialities with garlic and topped with lemon dressing

Main Course

Pizza

- *Margharita* - Tomato, cheddar, mozzarella, basil
- *Tropicale* - Tomato, cheese, pineapple, ham
- *Etna* - Tomato, cheese, chilli, sweetcorn, peas, onions, peppers
- *Pizza Plus Special* - Tomato, cheddar, mozzarella, sausage, mushrooms, peppers, onion, garlic
- *Fiorentina* - Tomato, cheese, ham, mushroom

Pasta

- *Lasagne*
- *Spaghetti Carbonnara*
- *Rigattoni Volcano* - *Pasta with mushrooms, ham, chilli, tomato and cream sauce*
- *Ravioli Al Salmone* - *Pasta parcels with a mushroom, salmon and cream sauce*
- *Risotto Milanese* - *Basmati rice with ham, mushrooms, peas, tomato and cream*
- *Gnocchi Al Pomodoro* - *Pasta and potato dumplings with a meat and tomato sauce*
- *Cannelloni Della Casa* - *Layers of pasta, ground beef, egg, mushrooms, onions and garlic served with a béchamel and tomato sauce, topped with cheese*
- *Spaghetti Vegetarian* - *Pasta with peppers, mushrooms, tomato and peas*

Seafood

- *Fritto Misto* - *A special selection of deep-fried seafood served on a bed of salad and garnished with lemon and garlic*
- *Breaded Plaice* - *Golden fried served with lemon and tartar sauce*

House Specials

- *Pollo Sopresa* - *Breast of breadcrumbed chicken cooked in garlic and parsley butter*
- *Polpette Alla Sciciliana* - *Meatballs cooked in a tomato and mushroom wine sauce*
- *Filetto Al Funghi* - *Fillet steak cooked in a butter, red-wine, demi-glace and mushroom sauce*
- *Petto Di Pollo Alla Crème* - *Sliced breast of chicken in a sherry, cream and mushroom sauce served with rigatoni pasta or vegetables of the day*

Desserts

- *Tiramisu*
- *Chocolate Gateaux*
- *Cheescake*
- *Crème Caramel*
- *Ice Cream Selection*

And finally – our most recent instalment from Dirty Uncle Dickon. If any of you are offended by these questions and answers, or find them at all non-PC, perhaps you should write to Uncle Dickon himself at: dickonbanks@yahoo.co.uk - he is always after new material to keep himself occupied when he is not being distracted by Algerian women.

Dirty Uncle Dickon

Any tips on improvising a descender out of a scout?

Pass the rope through the woggle, several turns around the scout and back through the woggle. This will provide the friction necessary, or alternatively just use the scout as a landing pad.

How should I take Freshers underground?

As often as possible.

I can't seem to find an oversuit in pink – what should I do?

Fashion Conscious Girlie Caver

P.S. How do I protect my nails when caving?

For caving fashion I'm afraid you must take matters into your own hands, I for example have yet to find a helmet that goes with my eyes, but you could do worse than talk to Juliet, whose furry is an inspiration to us all. As for your nails, gloves - preferably something industrial in black for that retro look.

I fear that my caving experience is undermined by the fact that I am unable to grow a beard. Please advise.

Name withheld

I would suggest working on the other symbols of caving excellence - the beer belly, prodigious alcohol consumption and a team of UN weapons inspectors monitoring your rear-end-eruptions. These will more than make up for your lack of beard, and don't worry - I happen to know that you are already an expert in one of these fields.

I use the frog technique when prusiking, but after about ten strokes I feel a strange sensation beneath my harness and have to slow down. How can I maintain an even pace?

Sit back and think of England?

I get terrible chafing from the SRT harness. I've heard that slipping a couple of banana skins between the thighs may help alleviate this painful problem. Is this true?

I have to say that I disapprove of putting animals or fruit under your harness. I feel that it is asking for trouble to squash either in the genital region - given cavers previous hygiene records. I recommend vaseline. The thought of a group of cavers greasing up before a trip has brought me over all funny. So bye for now, and remember - "a scout lost is a joy forever".

*But seriously, if the problem continues, try tandem prusiking. The reduction of bounce combined with the distraction of another caver could well beat the situation. Just in case, could you tell me how you rig your harness?

STAR LETTER

Dear Uncle Dickon,

I have recently developed sores and itching in the groin. I feel that my caving may be the cause.

Yours desperately,

anonymous.

What you have contracted is 'trench groin'. It is caused by not changing your underwear after caving trips. Go and see your GP (Tony has informed me that he is NOT available for consultation on this matter). To prevent this condition I suggest that a change of underwear every two weeks is optimal to avoid groin rot, but at the same time, preserve the mature fragrance of the authentic male caver.

Note from the editors:

Thankyou very much for all your contributions. Please keep them rolling in. Perhaps next issue, if the current land access restrictions continue, we will be featuring an article on alternatives to caving...but whatever you get up to, we want to hear about it.

Send your material to: e.todd@bristol.ac.uk

In the meantime, check out more pictures and gossip on the new and improved UBSS website:

<http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Union/UBSS/Home/Home.htm>

and send any funny anecdotes and photos to Simon.Lee@bristol.ac.uk