

# UBSS NEWSLETTER

June 2001 Vol. 17, No. 3

## *Note from the editor*

Hello, and welcome once again to the UBSS newsletter. In the face of F&M adversity, we have actually managed to do quite well this term, and the more intrepid amongst us have made up for the overall lack of caving by pulling off some superb trips to places as far-flung as Spain, America and France. Our roving reporters have also been kind enough to recount their experiences for us in tales of daring adventure (or maybe they just wanted to rub our noses in it). The one thing I have to point out is the shameful lack of gossip that has been brought to my attention – perhaps we can remedy this next year with the arrival of new blood in Freshers week? One thing is certain, we shall be going unrecognised no more – Ed Hodge is bringing to us a new statement in fashion – the latest batch of UBSS T-shirts. Many of us racked our brains and consumed vast quantities of beer before we settled on our final design – based on the Sci-Fi epic “2001 – a Space Odyssey”. We think you’ll agree that it’s quite apt. The T-shirt will feature a group of primitive cavers worshipping a conveniently pint-shaped monolith, which stands majestically in the centre of a huge cavern. The scene is lit from above by a heavenly shaft of light (Gaping Ghyll main chamber?), and the caption will read “2001. A Cave Oddity”. The order form and details can be found within – please be reckless – the more we buy, the cheaper they get!



As usual, I also have to make my plea for articles, photos, gossip and letters for Dirty Uncle Dickon. Hopefully some of us will be caving regularly again soon, so keep sending your material to me over the Summer. We need some spectacular stories to wow the Freshers in next term's edition! [E.Todd@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:E.Todd@bristol.ac.uk)

# " Le Jura de France 2001 ou il pleut tous les temps !!! "

Saturday 7th April 2001 - Monday 16th April 2001

Bill Miners, Steve Cottle, Tim Parish

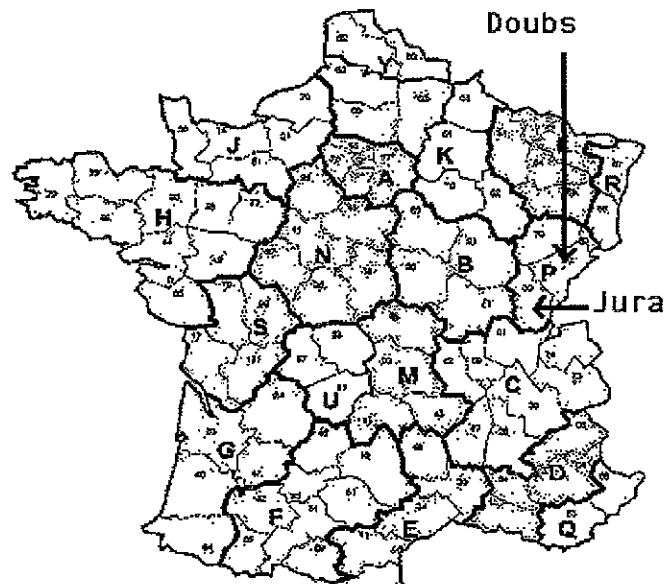
## Background

Faced with the prospect of a wet Easter in the UK, and Foot and Mouth having closed off all caving Bill, Tim and Steve cobbled together a trip to France. The destination was to be the Jura region on the strength of a dim recollection that some people from the EBSS (Everything But Sodding Spelaeology) subsection of the UBSS had gone there once and returned quoting "France has a Mendip and we found it".

## Trip across

The ferry across was called the 'Midnight Merchant' (we soon renamed it to the Midnight Muncher) and took the three of us in one very full car across to Dunkirk.

We made it as far as the town of Dole on the East Side of France that evening and stayed in a motel. By this time it was already starting to rain. Next day (still raining) we decided to head towards a village that had been suggested by various people as a good place to stay - Nans Sous Sainte Anne. This is about 10 km south of Besancon, 3 km east of Salins les Bains. It is actually in the department just to the North East of the Jura which is called the Doubs. We had all brought tents, but as it had yet to stop raining, the mention in some publications (see references at end) of a hostel or Gite to stay in sounded good.



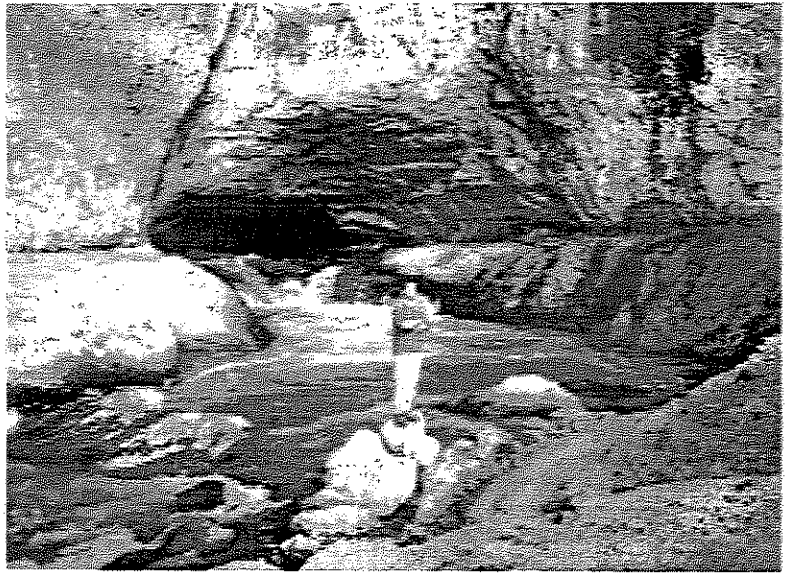
*East side of France up against Switzerland. A region called the Franche-Comte.*

Nans Sous Sainte Anne is all of about 40 houses and as we drove ever so slowly through the centre the cry from the back seat of "I've just seen a caving tackle bag back there !!" meant that we found some cavers packing a car, and hence the Gite, and were able to get a room out of the rain. Hooray! We ended up staying here all the time - though for some reason we kept getting asked to move room.



*The Gite*

Having checked into the Gite the rest of the day was spent looking at the impressive resurgences of the Lison (1 km from the Gite) and near to it the Grotte de Sarrazine - at the bottom of an impressive cliff, but from which too much water was coming out to enable entry. Behind the Gite is a path up the hillside to the resurgence Source du Verneau. This is the water from a 12 km plus system in the hillside which has at least 6 entrances, one of which is in the hillside above the resurgence, Gouffre des Biefs Bousset which has been found since the SMCC write up (see references at end). Sadly the water levels were so high that it was not possible to get into the main cave from any of these caves.



*Mouth of a resurgence*

The owners of the Gite were three cavers, and the other people staying there were also cavers on the whole. One group of friendly German cavers was always up and had left to go caving before we even got out of bed. There is also a bunkroom attached to the Gite, which you could hire out at 800F a night and fill with 16 plus people. When we arrived this was occupied by a bunch of Belgian cavers. We got to know this group, as Bill got the dubious notoriety of having offered sweets to a group of young girls wandering through the village. Then when we were in the village restaurant later that night the little girls were at the next table with all their parents and hence a conversation was started. From the Belgians, later that evening in a very drunken discussion, we got a whole bunch of sheets with descriptions of caves and suggested trips that would be possible in the present flood conditions (it was still raining!).

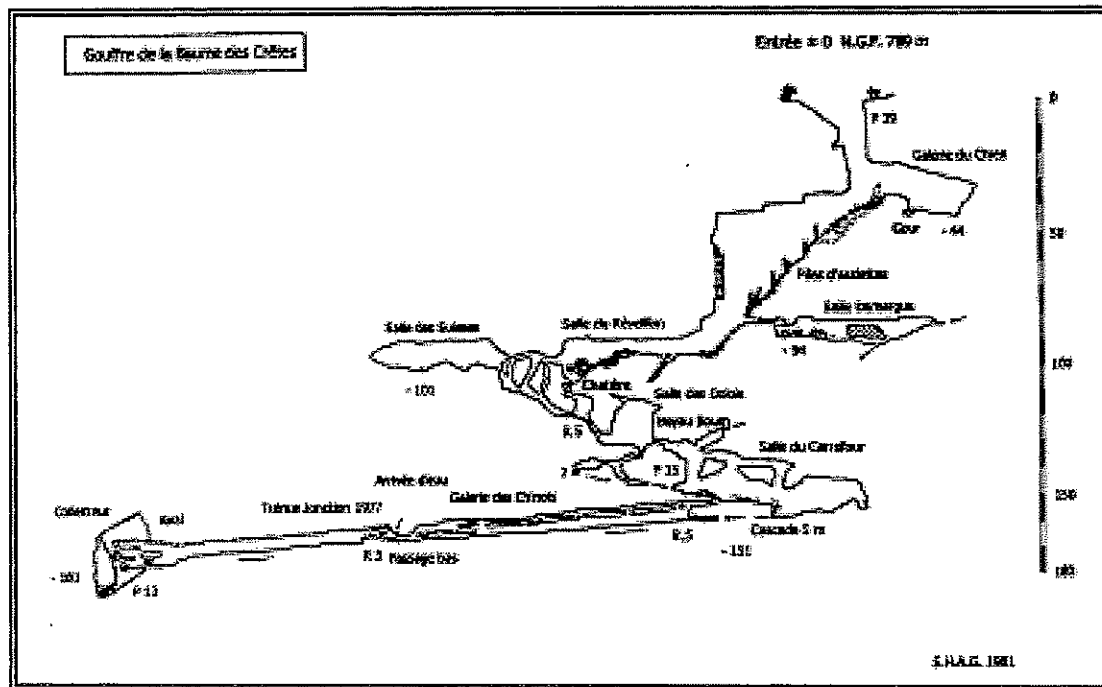
#### Monday the 9th April

Woken to the gentle sounds of metal clinking on metal as the Germans packed their cars to go caving. Today we went to Gouffre de la Baume-des-Cretes, which I would recommend to anyone. It is one of the entrances into the Verneau system. Go south from Deservillers on D9, immediately on leaving village take track on left with a sign to Plastimag. Follow road round to the right past first football



pitch and go towards a single goal post in another field next to a concrete shelter. The village provides this shelter for people to get changed out of the rain (super!). The cave 100 metres away,

found by leaving the shelter, cross the track, through the barbed wire fence across the field towards the trees where the large entrance hole is located.



*Gouffre de la Baume des Cretes*

(Notice the name of the club that did the survey, bottom right)

We found the SMCC description in the cave useful. For rope lists see SMCC and Spelenans. The Chatiere chamber is non descript and it is possible to abseil straight into here from the Salle du Reveillon. The Salle des Dolis is nicely decorated, and we found the way on to be through the chamber to the right, following to the end, where a 1m climb up through a constriction pops out into a small chamber. From here the descent into the main river starts. I think a 25m rope here would be good, as it would allow attachment to some of the first bolts arrived at, rather than doing the awkward climb down to the y-hang at the head of the pitch. The "back" passage in the riverway is 20 or 30m back from the 5m drop. In the passage we found very few safe bolts and mostly traversed with rope on naturals, eventually using the stal on the right before dropping down. We eventually got to a sump some distance before hitting the "master" streamway.

#### Tuesday the 10th April

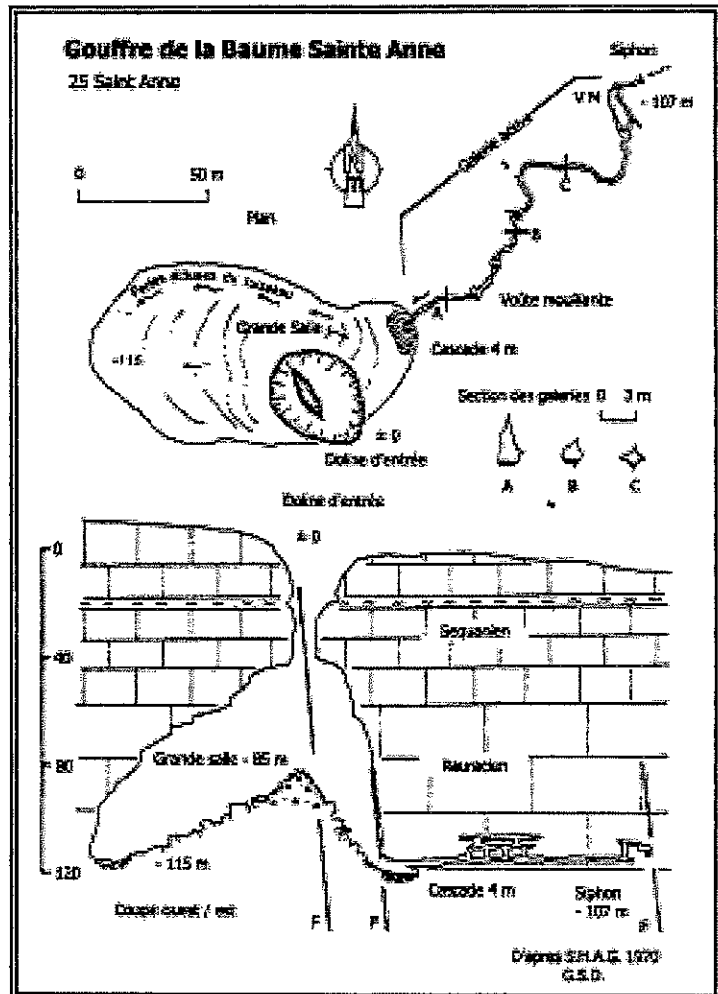
Lazy day spent in Salins le Bains eating Pizza and visiting a Salt Mine based on pumping brine out of the ground. Not very exciting! Then to a good showcave which had Cave bear skeletons in it, though I can't remember the name. Before being allowed into the cave you had to go on a very tedious tour of the mineral collection, the high point of which was trying to decide when in the next few days the roof would fall down.

#### Wednesday the 11th April

Having seen a Petzel poster at the Gite depicting some people on a talus cone in a chamber at the bottom of a huge shaft (I still want to buy this poster if I can find it), and being told that it was taken in the nearby Gouffre de la Baume Sainte Anne, we set off to find it. From Nan Sous Saint Anne, drive up the valley towards Villeneuve. Turn off on D229 across Pont du Diable (no abseiling allowed off this sadly), through Village of Saint Anne and about 500m after passing last farmhouse

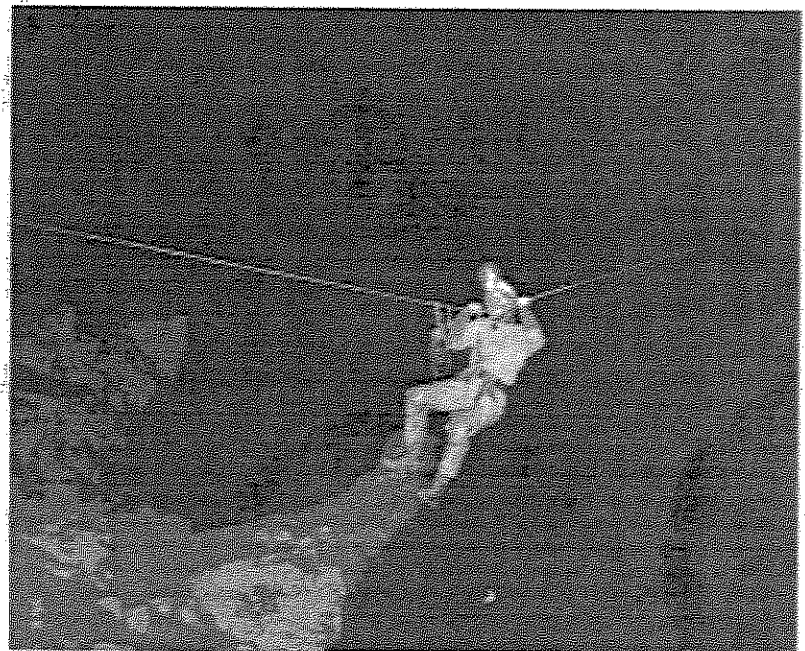
there is a very obvious cluster of trees on the left, 100m from the road. When we got to the cave there were already a French group there so we went shopping (getting through lots of beer) and came back later.

The rigging in Spelenans is very easy - from huge fixed ring bolts. We just trailed rope all the way down. Changing rope at various bolts (there are many), a fifty metre length was sufficient for the final straight drop into the chamber. A bit of a waterfall was coming down from the surface onto the final pitch, so it was gently raining and the large surface depression nicely funnelled this to the pitch head. The bottom chamber is very impressive, with lots more light coming in than in Gaping Ghyll. There was a lake in the western end of the chamber and another lake in the eastern end, across which Steve (brave man) traversed on a Tyrolean rigged up across into the Galerie Active. He managing to stay dry, despite having to pull himself a considerable distance with his back in the water.



#### Thursday the 12th April

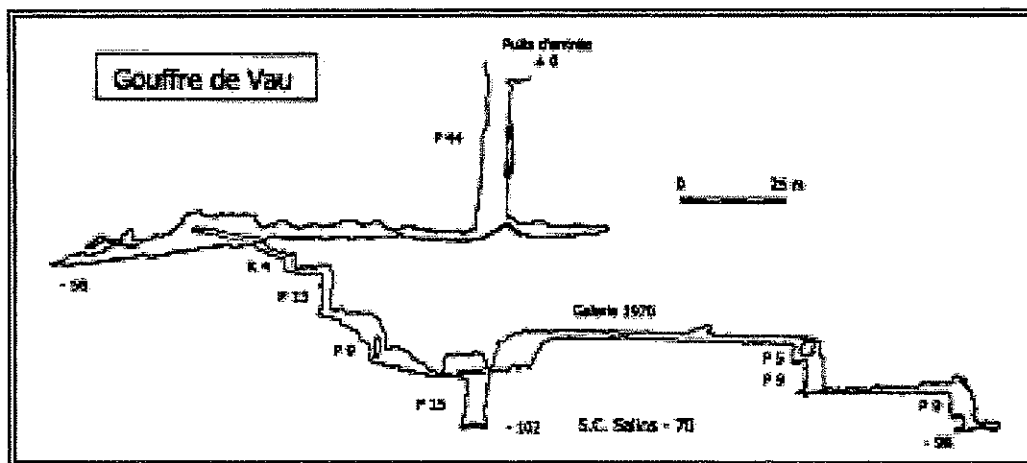
Went to visit a showcave, Grotte de Glacier, which has a large entrance into which snow blows in winter. The inside is meant to be a winter wonderland, but sadly there was no snow last year, so we felt a bit sorry for the guide who had managed to transport what were probably the contents of his deep freeze into the cave. The mineral collection was thankfully not compulsory this time. I would not recommend this to anyone. After that, we drove across to look at Source de la Loue, which was very impressive, with loads of water thundering out of the base of the cliff (it was still raining).



*Steve on the Tyrolean traverse*

### Friday the 13th April

Tim and Bill went to do Gouffre de Vau (sometimes called Gouffre de Vaux). Asking for trouble really going caving on Friday the 13th. From Nan Sous Saint Anne drive towards Salins and turn left to Saizenay. Take the D262 out to the east towards Geraise, and after about 1km turn left into the forest, following signs to Belvedere de la Chaussee. You come to a turn off (I think signposted Belvedere de la Chaussee). Turn right and then carry on until you come to the end of the road, which is a turning circle where you park. The cave entrance is less than 100m from here. Leave the turning circle on the obvious path opposite the direction the road came in. Walk 50m straight on and come to the edge of a slope. Walk 20m down the slope and the cave is on the left. It has a plaque above the entrance commemorating a fatality. From a sketch map provided by owners of the Gite it would appear that to get to Grotte de Vau/Vaux we would have had to turn right at the top of the slope.



The highlight of this trip was on the floor at the bottom of the first pitch - a collection of salamanders, mainly around the edge of the chamber hiding under stones. They ranged in size from 2cm to 10cm and were a deep shiny black with yellow squares down the sides. I counted at least a dozen, all moving around very slowly.

### AN ACCIDENT

The first pitch has rebelay about half way down. They are slightly lower down than one would expect, so after leaving the last of the top bolts one is abseiling down thinking 'where on earth are they?'. Then one finds the usual French scatter of half a dozen anchors on a large boss. Some are half out already, or stripped of thread, but I thought I had found a decent one, put in a bolt, made a rebelay and descended to the bottom. However, when Tim was at the rebelay the bolt popped out of the anchor and he took a 5m fall on about 25 m of rope. Luckily it was into free space, so no injuries, but it was a lesson that it is probably worth putting a Y hang in if there are sufficient anchors to allow it. Probably the reason that there were so many anchors was because nobody trusted the previous ones!

Back on the surface the sun (for once) was out and a very pleasant hour was spent drinking beer next to the car.

### Saturday the 14th

Today we drove 300km south to the Vercour to try to visit a gear shop, "Expe" and buy cheap oversuits, only to find that it closes at lunchtime on Saturday. So we had a drive around looking



at the impressive Karst and we all decided it would be well worth a return.

#### Sunday the 15th

Looked at the battlefields around Verdun and visited a Maginot line fort (Fort Ferment) which had been repaired by a bunch of enthusiasts. Involved an elevator trip down to the living area, a train ride to the fighting area and another elevator up to the gun bastions. Very impressive - would recommend this to cavers and non cavers alike.

#### Monday the 16th

We found out that most of the French petrol stations were unmanned over the extended Easter weekend, and also found out that our VISA cards would not work in the automated French supermarket pumps. So had to ambush a French family at a neighbouring pump and ask them to fill up the car in exchange for cash. We had a look at the V2 manufacturing site near St Omer before getting our ferry back to Blighty, this ferry was called the Northern "Muncher".

We had a great time and would recommend the area for future caving trips. Visit the library and have a look at the descriptions of other caves.



#### Getting Info (detail here as useful indication for peoples future use)

The hunt for information started on the web on the newsgroup uk.rec.caving (accessed via: [http://groups.google.com/googlegroups/deja\\_announcement.html](http://groups.google.com/googlegroups/deja_announcement.html)), where I saw various references to Jura and approached one of the contributors for references to a few websites. Their tip was to search for key terms like Grotte, Speleo etc. on one of the French search engines: ie: AltaVista.fr etc. The best finds were locations, descriptions, plans and rigging guides for about twenty caves at <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/jura.speleo/topoguid>. These at least confirmed the existence of caves (2250 cavities with at least some large ones up to 15 km long in the case of Borne aux Cassots). I also found lists of who to contact for cave rescue in the area. After printing these off the next destination was the UBSS library.

In the UBSS library a scan through the French journals section upstairs was unrewarding. The best approach, suggested by Andy Farrant, was going to the publication Caving Abstracts (kept in the bottom cupboard opposite the door as you come in). There is one for each year, going to the French section, and looking for English language articles/tripreports from UK clubs in the French Jura. The two most useful references from here were:

*Shepton Mallet Caving Club (SMCC) Journal*, Series Seven, number 6 Spring 1984 - detailed account of knowledge gained after two visits - this is well worth a look at.

*Shepton Mallet Caving Club Journal*, Series Eight, number 8 Spring 1990 - account of trip in just one cave.

The Gite cost 60 Francs a night each for which we got exclusive use of a 4 person room.

Address: Gite d'Etap, Lison Accueil, 7 Grande Rue, 25330 Nans-Sous-Sainte-Anne, Doubs.

Telephone: 03 81 86 50 79. Leaflet will go into Box file. The Gite ownership seemed to be shared between three people who took it in turns to be on duty. They were happy to be used as a call out for us when we went underground.

Finding Caves .Probably easiest to use a GPS as the X, Y, Z are easily available in the references. Do check your GPS has the French grid in it (may need to download from web), as we learnt that the default grids in some GPS don't include the French one (Institute Geographique National IGN appear to use Clarke Ellipsoid of 1880, then a conical Lambert projection, with altitudes referred to the sea level at Marseille - check this!).

While at the Gite we got a load of information from some Belgian cavers, which I will put into Box file.



*Steve and Tim*

We also bought two books in the Gite:

*Spelenans - Grottes et gouffres aux alentours de Nans Sous Sainte Anne*

This is a pamphlet made of stapled A4 sheets of 26 caves around the Gite. Has a suggested contact for Cave rescue in the area.

*Speleologie dans le Jura - Tome 1, Comite Departemental de Speleologie du Jura*

Booklet made of A4 sheets with a glossy cover, Published May 1999. We didn't actually use this book at all.



# Dirty Uncle Dickon's Problem Page

Dear Uncle Dickon,

I was wondering if you might have any tips for removing persistent stains from my caving grungies? I don't wash them very often, but when I do, muddy marks always remain on my rear. What can I do?

Nicholas Brown

Well, Mr Brown, we have all struggled with your problem at one time or another. Unfortunately no domestic washing powder will successfully remove your stains, so I would suggest that you invest in specialist caving pants. Cheap and scratchy nylon y-fronts, or go-faster lycra Speedos are great for shedding mud, but please do ensure you remove them after your session underground to allow ventilation and avoid unpleasant fungal growths. The other option is to go 'commando' whilst underground. Speaking from experience, I can highly recommend the real feeling of freedom this gives.

*(This advice should be taken at the caver's own risk, and Uncle Dickon will not be held responsible for any injuries suffered as a result of his advice. Independent medical advice suggests that 'commando' caving should be avoided during SRT, due to the heightened risk of snagging or compression of delicate organs in the vicinity of the sit-harness).*

Dear Uncle Dickon,

I am not a caver myself, but I often read your advice, as my husband is a member of the UBSS. I have no-one else to turn to, and I thought that you might be able to help me. I think my husband is having an affair – he often comes home in the middle of the night, and complains of fatigue. He insists on doing

his own washing, as if he has something to hide, and he always takes a shower as soon as he gets in – no matter how late it is. I have also noticed that he is often stiff in the mornings, as if he has been exercising vigorously the night before. He won't discuss his activities with me, and I am afraid of losing him completely. Please help.

Mrs Sue Spishous

Sue, Sue...you have nothing to fear! Your relationship with your husband is quite healthy. He is an avid caver, and his mysterious nocturnal activities are merely an attempt to shield you from the unpleasant side effects of his underground pursuit. You should be happy that you do not have to wash his muddy garments, and be grateful that he showers before approaching you all ripe and stinking. If you are worried that he is spending more of his time burrowing than he does with you, why don't you join in? I am sure that any UBSS member with another half in the club, will tell you that there are many activities that can be indulged in underground that will spice up your sex life no end, and cold mud slapped on vigorously will give you silky-soft skin.

Dear Uncle Dickon,

I am a city caver, and I have only a small back garden in which to hang out my caving gear to dry. Recently I have experienced a rather embarrassing problem. I noticed that my oversuit often smells like cat pee, but lately the stench has been quite overpowering. I had assumed that this was just a consequence of the festering cave water I am so often immersed in, but last night I spotted a dog sniffing around my furry, and I suspect the local animal fauna may be using my caving gear as a urinal.

*Why would they do this, and what can I do to deter them? Please help, for the sake of both myself and my fellow cavers, who are forced to inhale my backdraft in tight passages.*

*Mr P. Ongie*

Uncle Dickon says:

I sympathise with you, and understand your problem completely. I once lent my oversuit to a fellow caver, only to be informed that her cat had been spraying on it. The best way to remove the offending odour is to rinse the suit with a hosepipe, and then to take it underground as soon as possible afterwards. Roll in damp mud, and this will absorb the smell. Alternatively, lead a large group into Eastwater Swallet, and soon enough, you will all be indistinguishable. I'm afraid to say that there is no easy way of deterring dogs and cats from using your caving gear as a marking post. Obviously they are going to be attracted to the ripest back yard in the Southwest, and you should consider yourself lucky that they are not thronging there in large numbers. You might like to try sprinkling lavender around in a ring to enclose your drying gear, however, be warned - the smell could be even worse than that which you are trying to avoid, and you may attract nun's and the ladies from the WI. Its up to you to decide which is easier to tolerate.

*Dear Uncle Dickon,*

*I often get bitten underground, have you any preventative advice?*

*An irritated itchy guy*

Young man, I assume when you say "bitten" you mean that you are suffering with bites of the insect rather than human variety! I suggest rubbing

vaseline or washing up liquid into your exposed skin before going underground. Not only will this deter the pesky insects, but it will also provide lubrication in the tightest of squeezes.

*Dear Dickon,*

*I am a lady caver, newly introduced to the sport, and I have some concerns that I would like to air. I have noticed that most of members of the UBSS are skinny and bony men, and the more ample ones that I have met in the pub seem to be more active drinkers than cavers, venturing only into showcaves in the summer. I am quite voluptuous, and well fleshed around my top and rear, and I am worried that I won't be able to fit into a lot of the tight constrictions I have heard mentioned. Please give me your honest opinion, and let me know what my limitations might be.*

*Anna Russ*

Dear Anna, let me alleviate your fears. The first thing I will say is that flesh is really the least of your worries underground - unlike ribs and shoulders, it can be forced aside in tight constrictions. I am sure that you are exaggerating the size of your problem, and that all of your ample assets will squeeze easily through most of the holes we negotiate. Secondly, fat can actually be handy underground - it keeps you warm, gives you emergency buoyancy if you fall into deep lakes, and most importantly it cushions you in falls and when you are sliding on your bottom. Bruised buttock bones are really quite unpleasant, and make sitting quite unbearable for several days after a hard trip. Really the only way to discover your limitations is to try a difficult cave for yourself. I'm sure you will find that all your male companions will be more than willing to lend a helping hand.

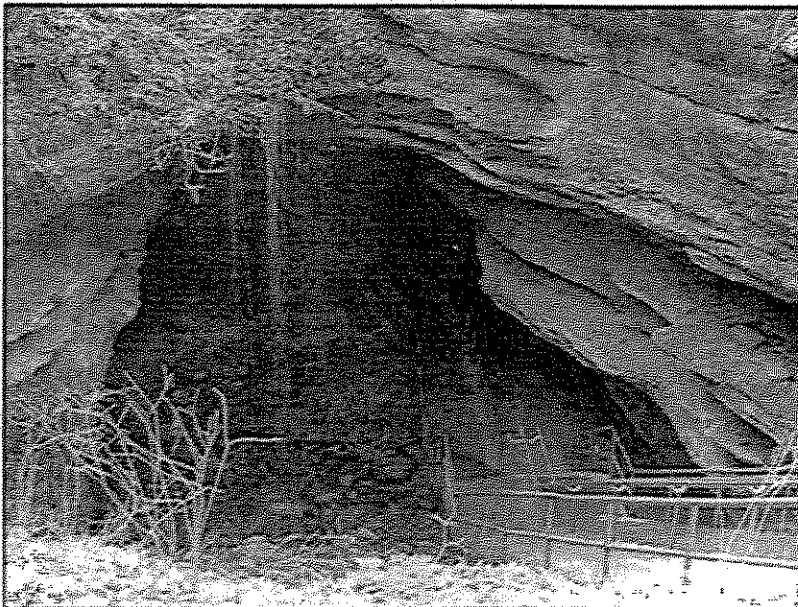
## If I can't cave in Britain.....

*Andy Farrant*

Taking a leaf out of Graham and Linda's manual on 'Caving for the Middle Aged' I thought I'd take the opportunity to do a few show-caves in the US while I was over there attending a conference (whose somewhat wordy title was 'The Eighth Multidisciplinary Conference on Sinkholes and the Engineering and Environmental Impacts of Karst™') in Louisville, Kentucky. As some of you may know, Kentucky is home to one or two little caves, the most notable of which is Mammoth Cave.

Mammoth Cave is a pretty good name for this particular system, not because of the local abundance of large shaggy mastodons, but because of the sheer size of the system. The total length of known passage is well in excess of 560 km. When you consider that Ogof Draenen is somewhere around a trifling 70 km long, and the total length of known passage on Mendip and South Wales combined still doesn't come anywhere close, you get a pretty good idea of the immense scale of the system. Part of this cave is open as a show cave, and has been since the early 1800's. A total of eleven different tours can be taken, including some 'wild' caving, the longest of which is the half day tour which takes about five hours, is 3-4 km in length and involves an underground lunch-break.

As it was a karst conference, the pre-conference field trip involved visiting the Mammoth Cave National Park and being given a guided tour of the show-cave. On our first trip, we were led round the shorter 'Historic Tour' by the Mammoth Cave National Park's resident hydrogeologist, Joe Meiman, a round trip of about 3 hours. So, early on a sunny Spring morning, a pontification of about fifty karst and cave scientists gathered at the entrance. The first part of the trip descends down some steps into a large horizontal phreatic tube which leads after a few hundred metres to a huge chamber.



*Mammoth Cave – the Historic Entrance.*

This was the only original natural entrance to the cave.

As the cave expanded, explorers simply dug a new entrance where necessary.

Weaving our way passed particularly impressive specimens of the bloated waddling human sub-species *Homo fattus-americanus*, we entered the Rotunda, where some ancient archaeological artefacts can be seen. Well, we're talking American culture here, so rather than Palaeolithic cave paintings or stone age tools, a few holes and artefacts left from saltpetre

mining during the Civil War were all that could be seen. Leaving the touroids to gasp in awe, we departed from the waddling masses and headed off down the Broadway, into the darkness.

Once away from the tour parties, we could turn the lights on again. From here on in it was a case of looking up at the ceiling and coo-ing with pleasure as we strode down a massive passage 10-15 m wide and 10 m high for several hundred metres, before turning off sharp left into Dante's Gateway, a smaller steeply descending passage down to the stygian lower levels. Numerous passages could be seen leading off Moria-like into the darkness as we blindly followed our guide. Down the Lost Avenue, through Black Snake Avenue, past Cyclop's Gateway, the Bottomless Pit and the Scotchmans Trap ('cos its' so tight), and on into the Labyrinth. Beyond was the Fat Man's Misery. No problem for me, but for *Homo fattus-americanus*, it could provide a serious challenge; a 'tight squeeze' some 30 cm wide!

Beyond lay Great Relief Hall. Aptly named this, not because of the preceding squeeze, but more for the public conveniences just beyond, replete with urinals, flushing loo's and separate ladies and gents cubicles. So, one can relieve themselves underground (without carrying out their steaming excrement in a wellington boot up the Swildon's streamway - although one has to admire Julian's conservation ethics for this crap-tastic feat), safe in the knowledge that your excreta is pumped to the surface up a specially drilled borehole. Perhaps we should drill a borehole down to the GB dig to pump all the crap out ....? But I digress...

From here, a stroll led down to a large chamber, River Hall, with some fantastic scalloping and pendants hanging ponderously from the ceiling. A detour led down to the Dead Sea and the River Styx, a rather dry overflow passage which led down to the Echo River, replete with albino crayfish and other stygian monsters of the deep. It was here our guide Joe cheerfully told us about the level the floodwaters reach in this part of the cave, pointing to a muddy line some ten metres above our heads. It was at this point I wished I hadn't sat glued to the Weather Channel over breakfast, watching forecasters gleefully rambling on about severe thunderstorms, tornado warnings and flood watches across much of the mid-western states.

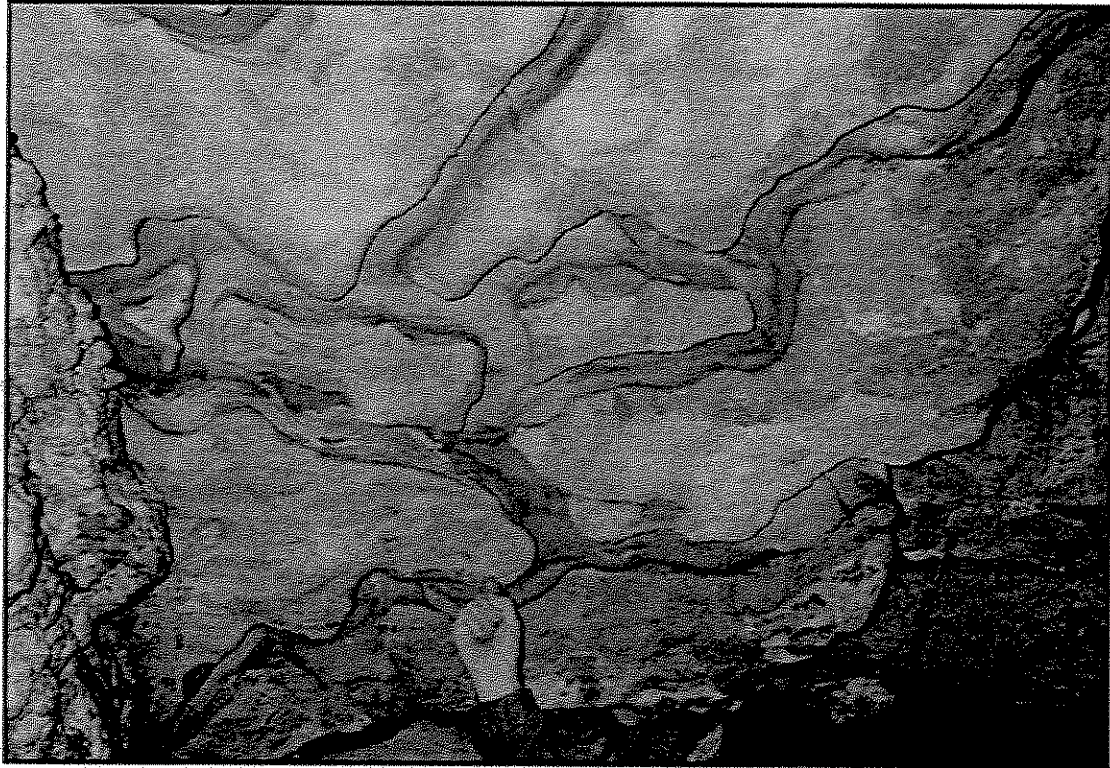
Departing from Echo River rather faster than we arrived, a climb up into Sparks Avenue led on for a very pleasant 200 m to Mammoth Dome, an awe inspiring 58 m high shaft with a less than inspiring metal flight of stairs zigzagging up the side (but a damn sight easier than prussiking). From here, an easy stroll through a nice phreatic tube popped out into another enormous passage which led back to the Rotunda, the entrance and the touroid masses.

Our second trip a few days later after the conference was even better. Myself and a colleague from work had arranged to drive down to Mammoth Cave and meet up with a few other conference delegates to do the 'Half-day Tour', a through trip several kilometres long, but in reverse to avoid the tourists. According to Derek Ford (a karst 'Grand Fromage'), this tour was second only to Carlsbad Caverns for its stunning cave scenery...

Once I'd mastered the art of driving an automatic on the wrong side of the road - it's like driving an armchair, the biggest problem is keeping awake - we drove down to Cave City, stayed in a ghastly motel, stuffed our faces with Kentucky Fried Chicken ('when in Rome...') and met up with the others at the entrance the following morning. We were privileged to have the exclusive use of both Joe Meiman and Derek as our guides. With us two English guys, a couple of Chinese bods from Guilin, a Australian woman (of Polish descent), a Canadian (but originally from England) and our American guide it was to be a truly international expedition.

The entrance to this trip was mind-blowing; a series of steep metal staircases led down a narrow windy canyon, popping in and out of deep dripping shafts, some over 30 m deep, which led down to Kentucky Avenue at Grand Central Station. From here it was a stroll down a girth big ginormous tube for over a kilometre – imagine a much longer, bigger, better, pleasanter version of Aggy Main Passage... orgasmatronic...

But it was to get even better. After an hour or so, we entered a smaller side passage which developed into a rather pleasant twisting Clare-type canyon passage. Half an hour of this and we entered Boone Avenue, which had some fantastic anastomosis on the passage roof. This eventually led to the Snowball Dining Room, which came as a bit of a shock.



*Anastomosing channels on a bedding plane on the passage roof, Mammoth Cave.*

*Photo: A R Farrant. British Standard hand for scale.*

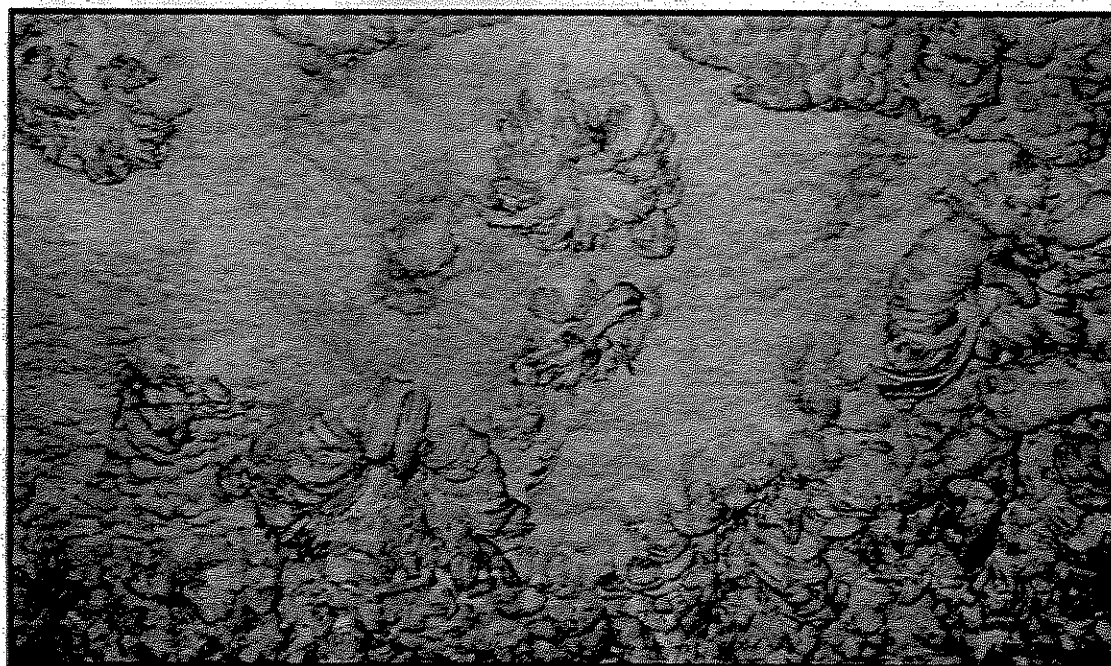
We could hear it from some distance; the excited screams and yelps of a large school group having a picnic on tables and chairs and ordering food from the snack bar - yes, a snack bar, which happened to be located next to another set of public toilets. Now, I've seen it all; underground football pitches and churches in Brazil, 15m high Buddhas in Thailand, subterranean vodka drinkers in Siberia, catholic shrines in Ireland, and now fast-food outlets and rest-rooms in the US... national cultures in a nutshell.

But the best was saved to last... Cleaveland Avenue is an almost perfect elliptical phreatic tube some ten metres across, beautifully adorned with delicate gypsum flowers and crystals, gently meandering along for almost a kilometre. At one point, one could look back down the subtly lit passage for over 200 breathtaking metres. Occasional side passages beckoned in the darkness, and periodically delicate hair-like mirabilite crystals formed a pale, ethereal fluffy carpet across the passage floor. But it had to end. A short climb up led into a large truncated

fragment of Kentucky Avenue and the inevitable breakdown collapse beneath a surface valley. A steep climb up an artificial tunnel and we were back on the surface.

Not content with just two show-caves, and having the rest of the afternoon to spare, we decided to do another privately owned show-cave, Diamond Caverns, just outside the National Park. On arriving, we bumped into two colleagues from the conference, Dave Drew (a fellow UBSS member) and Donal Daly. This time we were part of a normal tourist group, but the cave-guide soon realised we weren't 'normal' tourists (abnormal perhaps?) and let us do our own tour before we upset the rest of the party. It should be noted for all aspiring cave guides that karst scientists, especially those resident in Ulster, are probably the worst kind of tourists a cave guide has to put up with.

As it turned out the cave had been recently taken over by new management and was very well lit, displaying some of the best formations in Kentucky as well as some very nice condensation corrosion pitting in the roof. A particular feature seemed to be broken stalagmites which had then been polished to reveal their growth rings.



*Gypsum flowers and wall crusts, Cleaveland Avenue, Mammoth Cave*

*Photo: A R Farrant. Each of the flowers is about 8cm across*

There are several other show-caves in the region which are worth a look, including the Lost River Cave in Bowling Green, the city which once boasted about its natural underground sewerage system! Numerous trails, springs, sink-holes and forested valleys elsewhere in the National Park make for a very pleasant visit and highly recommended. It was so enjoyable I almost forgot it was 'work'...

***For further information check out:***

<http://www.diamondcaverns.com> and: <http://www.mammothcave.com/>

Both contain extensive links to all the show-caves in the area. 'A geological guide to Mammoth Cave National Park' by A N Palmer, 1995 is worth reading too.



# The Pit and the Pick – a hole near Backwell

Emma Todd (with advice from Eddy Hill)

During the terrible 'Foot and Mouth' crisis, we have all been suffering the inevitable withdrawal symptoms from our favourite unique sport, so of course we were all excited when we heard on the electronic grapevine (commanded by Andy Farrant) of a 'hole near Backwell' – a mysterious shaft which had apparently opened up in someone's field.

For about a week, Eddy Hill and I whispered conspiratorially, but never got round to making the phonecall to organise a trip out to investigate this tempting opening. One Tuesday we were discussing it in the pub, when Charlie walked past with pricked up ears; "*are you going caving?*" .... "maybe, are you?" ..... "*yes*" ..... "where are you going – Mendip?" ..... "*might be, why, where are YOU going?*". Gradually we prised out of each other our mutual goal, and Clive and Charlie invited us along to explore the new find with them that weekend.

On a beautiful Sunday afternoon at the beginning of May, we drove out into the forbidden countryside, and found ourselves in the grounds of a lovely Mendip manor house. We followed our host, Andrew Tobin, across the croquet lawn, behind the manicured box hedges, and across muddy fields ploughed up by cattle. Coming out into open fields, we were greeted by the most spectacular views across Bristol and its environs. Although I was unfortunate enough to be plagued by the worst hangover ever known to woman-kind (no sympathy expected!), I was really able to appreciate what we have been missing out on over the last few months. Even walking amidst the cows was a pleasure, but seeing the green fields laid out before us, and the woodland begging to be explored for other undiscovered shafts, was enchanting. We walked up to the brow of the hill, where our hearts started to beat fast at the sight of wooden stakes laid out across a hole. It wasn't quite the 3-4ft wide, 80ft pitch we had been led to expect, but it was certainly intriguing. On this flat plateau of grazed pasture, the hole opened quite unpredictably into a 20ft pit. The entrance itself was 1-2ft wide, but the edges overhung a little, and the shaft itself was about 3 feet across. Peering down into the darkness, we saw that the walls had been lined with pieces of stone removed from the hole, but they were quite loose and crumbly. We could see the bottom of the excavation curving away, and the possibilities set our caving blood pumping. We all raced back to the cars to collect our gear and tackle.

Half an hour later, we were back in the field, rigging the hole with a ladder suspended off a sturdy stake laid across the entrance. I was still hungover, and Charlie offered his place to Ed and Clive, who drew lucky dandelions to see who would have the honour of descending into hell first. It was Clive. Soon enough, he disappeared underground, and we all leaned over the hole to listen to his descriptions drifting up.

The shaft descended about 15ft, before it disappeared from sight, then narrowed and twisted, to be met by a steep slope formed by the entrance collapse. After another 5ft the end of the ladder reached the floor of the shaft and a small chamber, approximately 5ft in length, 4 ft high and 2 to 3 ft wide. Along the roof and following the line of the chamber, there was a calcite vein (up to 1ft wide) containing large nuggets of galena (lead sulphide). This had obviously been the focus of excavation. Following the vein to the rear end of the chamber revealed a back-filled passage that seemed to continue deeper into the hill.

After Clive had resurfaced, Ed took his turn at the bottom, and then Charlie went down to rummage amongst the loose rubble. While he was gone, Ed wandered down to the field boundary to hunt for evidence of a surface outcrop of the galena vein. We were all confused about why the ancient miners might have chosen to dig in the middle of this apparently featureless field. After a short while, Charlie appeared from the shaft with quite a collection of rhombohedral dogstooth-

spar calcite crystals, and some lovely pieces of galena set in sericite. In fact, I was surprised he had managed to ascend the ladder at all with all that booty shoved in his armpits. According to our on-location geologists, the material remaining in the vein was still uncommonly rich in lead, so the deposit must have been particularly bountiful when it was discovered, or a local farmer long-ago had simply chipped out the best of the ore to subsidise his income. While we were packing up, Ed returned, carrying something in his hand. Hidden amongst the vegetation at the bottom of the field, he had found an enormous iron pick head. Clive examined it and pronounced that the width of the blade could match the marks on the edges of the passage at the bottom of the shaft, although we might just have stumbled across an old farming pick (we liked to imagine the former!).

It seemed that our picture was complete. The Mendip limestone region is riddled with lead deposits, as well as other valuable ores, which have been mined since Roman times. Indeed, we still see evidence of the ancient workings around "Velvet Bottom", and many of us have been lucky enough to visit prime cave alternatives such as "Singing River Mine", which was mined for calamine (ZnCO<sub>3</sub>), galena (PbS) and sphalerite (ZnS). Andrew Tobin informed us that he knew of two quarries or mines lying on either side of the large field containing our newly-opened shaft, so it seemed that our Sunday discovery was linked with these – probably the downwards continuation of a deposit outcropping on the surface. Mined who-knows-how-many years ago, the workings had laid unexplored until the heavy rains this winter finally laid bare the secrets buried so long ago.

## Treasurer's Report as almost given to the 2001 A.G.M.

Elsewhere in this Newsletter you will see a copy of the Society's accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> January 2001. There were, of course, presented at the A.G.M. in March, with a report saying "Here they are, the details are obvious, any questions?". Of course I did not quite get away with that and had to answer a few queries raised by those present, but they are actually quite straightforward this year. Of course, if anyone who was not at the A.G.M. has a question then I will endeavour to answer it for them. I do have two points to make, however: we have now kept the subscription steady at £12 for seven years. I am not sure how much longer this can be maintained. Secondly, the procedure for reclaiming tax paid on subscriptions under the new Gift Aid system is considerably simpler than under the old covenants. I will therefore be contacting all those members who can make a difference and asking them to do so. All existing covenants remain valid, however.

**The following members have yet to pay their subscription for the current year, please read the list closely as it includes one or two members who have previously paid by Standing Order and whose non-payment may be down to a banking error:**

Ed Bailey ✓	Mike Balister ✓	Dickon Banks ✓	Ruth Charles ✓
Andy Currant (£2 only) ✓	Marcel Dijkstra ✓	Simon Grace ✓	Tim Haines ✓
Heather Jackson ✓	Peter Johnson ✓	Jodie Lewis ✓	Tim Lyons ✓
Rod Peare ✓	Hugo Pile ✓	Helen & Richard Rossington ✓	
Mike Simms ✓	Ian Standing ✓	Mike Thompson ✓	Roy Vbranch ✓
Julian and Carol Walford (£6 only) ✓		Andy Wallis ✓	Bob Williams ✓

**\*\*APOLOGIES TO ANYONE WHO HAS SINCE PAID\*\***

*Graham Mullan*

## RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST JANUARY 2001

[illegible]

# UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## BALANCE SHEET AT 31 JANUARY 2001

	£	£	£
<b><u>HUT FUND</u></b>			
Balance at 1. 2. 00	3446.80		
Less net expenditure	<u>209.03</u>	3237.77	
			14750.00
			<u>1103.45</u>
			15853.45
<b><u>PRINTED PUBLICATIONS FUND</u></b>			
Balance at 1. 2. 00	5080.00		
Less transfer to R&P a/c	<u>2750.00</u>		
			502.95
<b><u>LIBRARY FUND</u></b>			
Balance at 1. 2. 00	832.99		
Add net income	<u>90.00</u>		
			22.80
			<u>1.66</u>
			24.46
<b><u>EQUIPMENT HIRE ACCOUNT</u></b>			
Balance at 1. 2. 00	378.92		
Less net expenditure	<u>149.02</u>		
			229.90
<b><u>"CAVES OF CO. CLARE" RESERVE FUND</u></b>			
Advance for Publication	7000.00		
Add surplus balance on sales	<u>2064.76</u>	9064.76	
<b><u>RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT</u></b>			
Balance at 1. 2. 00	574.73		
Add net income	<u>20.71</u>	595.44	
			16380.86
			<u>16380.86</u>

**HONORARY AUDITORS REPORT:** I have examined the above Receipts and Payment Account for the year ended 31st January 2001, and the attached Balance Sheet as at that date and certify that they are in accordance with the Society's accounting records and explanations provided.

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

# 2001, A FRENCH ODYSSEY

(Well someone had to!)

**Graham Mullan**

## **Sunday 14th January 2001**

Having arrived in Les Ans yesterday afternoon, we decided on a fairly lazy day today, but did take the opportunity to check how long it would take us to get to Rouffignac for tomorrow's trip (45 minutes) and to look at a couple of other sites:

### *Ruisseau souterrain de Tamnihs*

This cave is described in 'Cavernes en Pirigord' and its entrance is marked on the IGN 1:25000 map. It is found right next to the road and there is a convenient parking space a few metres away. Despite the alarmist descriptions in the book, the entrance passage looks stable enough, but it seems possible that we would be stopped by a sump.

### *Les Grottes du Roc de Cazelle*

The idea here was to find the owner, M. Touron, and see whether it was possible to visit the Grotte de Nancy. (Answer, yes, either with him, were he to be available, or with M. Christian Archambeau. His mobile phone number is 06 80 58 32 70). Having done so we decided to have a tour of this site. Roc de Cazelle is one of those rock shelter sites which has been inhabited from Palaeolithic times right up to the present day (the last residents moved out in the 1960s) and it is arranged to demonstrate the various phases of occupation; stone age, iron age, medieval and recent. It is actually extremely well done and deserves a visit. The site is by no means as spectacular as the Roc Saint Christophe (also owned by M Touron) but the displays are very well done. Linda was particularly taken with the Marmots! Entry was 32 FF per head (reductions for groups etc. and a joint ticket with Roc Saint Christophe is available). Opening times are: high season 9 a.m. - 6 p.m. low season, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. January Fri, Sat, Sun only.

## **Monday 15th January 2001**

### *Le Grotte de Rouffignac*

We had arranged in advance to meet the owner, M. Jean Plassard, at the entrance at 9 a.m. for a trip into the undeveloped parts to see the artwork and how different the cave was from the managed portion. This required an alpine start as the cave was 45 minutes drive away and the sun doesn't come up until 8.30 a.m. in mid-January! The total trip time turned out to be 3 hours.

We were met by M. Plassard, but he had assigned one of the cave guides to accompany us as he speaks no English. Fortunately, our guide, M. Frederic Goursolle, did. We changed into caving kit, having been warned that it was muddy, but helmets were not to be worn as they allowed your head to get too near to the artwork. Our trip utilised the electric train that transports the tourists, as we were following their route and then going further at each stopping point.

We first followed the tourist route, seeing the mammoth of the discovery and a couple of other pieces, along the "Sacred Way" to the Grand Plafond. Here the floor has been cut down about 1.5 - 2m to allow ease of access and viewing for visitors, but further on it was too low to walk easily so we lurched over the innumerable bear hibernation pits as far as the Grande Fosse. Here there is a very fine frieze of five engraved mammoths and one smaller bison. These have to be viewed sitting or lying down, but that is only right as that is how the artist saw them and presumably intended them to be seen.

Back at the Grand Plafond, we descended the "well" to the rather different narrow winding passage below. There are a number of pieces here, smaller than those in the main cave and drawn in clay as well as manganese dioxide, including one human head. A flint boss nearby appeared to have been "painted" in red clay.

The train then took us back to the junction of the Sacred Way and the Galerie Henri-Breuil, to view the famous frieze of 11 mammoths, the "Patriarche", and the three woolly rhinos. We then walked onwards as far as the two large human heads known as "Adam and Eve", passing various mammoths en route.

Back with the train, our next stop was a small side-passage, which boasts a fine pair of mammoths drawn face to face. These are no longer included on the tourist route, but are familiar as they are used as the cave's emblem. Also in this little passage, M. Goursolle showed us a small, rather enigmatic figure and we spent some time discussing whether it was a poor representation of an animal, or simply a chance collection of natural lines. I am still not sure and would like to see a photographic enlargement or better still take a lens to the original.

Next stop was the Salon Rouge, a wonderful place. This chamber was used by early Iron Age (Hallstadt) visitors as a depository for human ashes in pots. The steps leading down to it, and the enlarged entrance and wall are believed to date from this period. There are two groups of mammoths engraved in the red ceiling and the larger group, of 6 beasts, is very fine indeed. M. Plassard has recently had the engravings cleaned and they are well worth seeing.

On the way to our final stop, our guide pointed out a poorly preserved frieze of mammoths and bison in the main passage that, although the closest to the entrance, was only discovered, by M. Charles Plassard, after the cave had been developed and opened to the public, in 1959.

The last stop was the Plafond aux serpents. This is a gallery which has a thin red clay covering, similar to that in the Salon Rouge, but here it has been scratched with innumerable sets of lines in various patterns including straight, curved and wiggly (the serpents). In some places the density of lines is such that the entire clay covering has been wiped off, though the indentations into the rock beneath can still be seen.

A number of different techniques were used to produce the artwork in this cave, including engraving and painting. The paintings, or rather drawings, are all simple line art and are drawn either with manganese dioxide crayons, one of which was found in the cave, or, rarely, using the red clay. The engravings were also done using different techniques: where the rock was soft enough, i.e. where there was a covering of soft "moonmilk", a finger was used. Sometimes possibly a stick was used, recognisable by the square-cut cross section of the



engraved line. More rarely and in harder rock, a thin tool, probably flint, was used either to cut into the rock or, in the case of the Salon Rouge mammoths, to cut a thin line through the red clay to expose the lighter rock beneath. In some cases where the manganese crayons did not work well, the surface was pre-prepared by removing or smoothing the surface. This is particularly apparent on the middle of the three woolly rhinos. Only once did we see a mixture of techniques on one animal. A fairly small bison on the side of the Grand Plafond appears to have been started in black crayon and partial utilisation of natural rock shapes but finished by thin line engraving where the crayon did not take well. Surprisingly, only one flint artefact has been found in the cave, given the amount lying around and the apparent fact of its use in engraving, surely some tools must have been lost down here? Mention must also be made of the conservation work that M. Plassard has undertaken in the cave. Much of the artwork, especially on the Grand Plafond, the Rhino frieze and in the Salon Rouge, was badly disfigured by graffiti, mostly carbon from lighting sources but sometimes engraved. Much of this has now been cleaned. Three sessions have been carried out on the Grand Plafond, in 1991, 1993 and 1998. At the same time the rhino frieze was cleaned. Most recently the engravings on the ceiling of the Salon Rouge have been cleaned, in 1998 and again in November last year. On this last occasion, two men (from Spain) worked for four days to clean one panel of five or six mammoths. This work is particularly gratifying as it is well off the tourist route and M. Plassard is having it carried out purely for his own satisfaction. The techniques used are similar to those we have used to clean stal in England: carbon is washed off by using fine sprays of distilled water, with no brushing and no direct contact with the rock except by water. Obviously it can only be applied where it will not harm the art and consequently carbon streaks can still be seen overlying manganese dioxide lines. Engravings cannot be removed but have been obscured by application of a thin patina of limestone dust and water.

Finally one needs to make mention of the cave itself. It has a number of remarkable features. The rock has very, very few joints but copious quantities of flint, the passage shapes are seemingly phreatic, but with occasional notches and, of course there is thick sediment on the floor everywhere. To me this means that the whole system, save possibly the present active lower levels, was formed by paragenesis. It is a shame that it has had no modern geomorphological study.

## **Tuesday 16th January 2001**

### *Le Grotte de Font-de-Gaume*

The most remarkable thing about the way we have arranged this week's tours is that we get a considerably longer time in the cave, we get to see much more of the cave and of the artwork and it is all free! Today was no exception.

Unlike yesterday's visit, this cave is open all year round and consequently our appointment was at the usual opening time of 10a.m. and we were accompanied by one of the on-duty guides (whose name we foolishly failed to get).

We started into the cave and the first thing we learnt was what had been going on when the cave was closed this time last year. The whole floor from the entrance as far as the "Rubicon" has been re-laid with an open grill under which tubes of lights have been placed. We were told that they had also carried out some cleaning deeper into the cave, though we did not discuss methodology.

There is very little to see prior to the passage narrowing at the "Rubicon" as the first side passage, the undecorated Galerie Vidal, was open to the cliff face and there was a constant air circulation through this and the main entrance, which, as can also be seen at Lascaux, is a good way of removing paint over time. There are, however, a few red traces, one faint red mammoth on the wall just beyond the Galerie Vidal and some engravings, notably a tectiform. We looked into the low entrance of the Galerie Prat, in which some poorly preserved paintings can be found, but it is low, crawly and out-of-bounds.

Beyond the "Rubicon", we looked at all the major works which are figured on the normal tour, but with more time to spend and such a small party we were better able to appreciate them. We also saw all the minor figures and engravings which are not normally seen. One interesting engraving we had not seen before was a small mammoth drawn in very similar fashion to those at Rouffignac, even down to the characteristic triangular eye. Linda was particularly taken by a tiny engraved feline down at floor level (the smallest figure in the whole cave) and I was by a finely engraved tectiform superimposed on one of the bison which was only found when a covering of calcite was removed, in the 1960's. The calcite actually showed a negative impression of the engraving on its back surface, when removed. We also saw the four human hands, two on each side of the main passage. As usual when I visit this cave, I mourned at the sorry state of preservation of most of the main paintings and then marvelled at the last two bison, just beyond the Carrefour. One particular impression we noted in this part of the cave was how well our lights showed up the colours of the paintings. I had a 7 LED array with a 1 LED pilot and Linda had a 3 LED pilot. These were OK for viewing the engravings, though possibly a better focused conventional bulb was preferable, but on the paintings they were far superior, showing up the reds and blacks very well and allowing me to clearly make out the occasional yellows which are normally very hard to see here. Our guide was equally impressed by the quality of the white light and its ability to bring out the colours.

Most interesting, here is the superposition of bison, mammoth and horse at a couple of points. To me it also seemed to show a superposition of painting - engraving - painting. But of course I am probably wrong.

In the Galerie Laterale, we went beyond the normal tour ending into a further, very heavily calcited chamber, undecorated, and looked through the hole in the stal wall into the extension beyond. The floor in here is also covered in stumpy stalagmites and would be difficult to crawl over. Beyond a number of figures of which a bear on a stal column (according to Breuil) would have been worth seeing, but this part too is out-of-bounds. Back in the main part of this gallery, we noted some red marks on a broken stal curtain (Palaeolithic Vandals! - most of the broken stal beyond were also damaged anciently), and a red mark on a gap between two small folds of stal, which has been interpreted as a feminine figure.

Another notable off-route excursion was to lay down and poke one's head and light into the little Boyau Surbaissi next to the Cabinet des Bisons. Here there was a faint "figure humaine" and a bison. Difficult to see and probably very difficult to draw!

The last part of the tour was into the last part of the main gallery, the Diverticule terminal. Our guide was a little dubious about this being allowed at first but when she found that the gate was unlocked on we went. This was very important, as there is some fine stuff in here: a human head drawn in black, a very fine red woolly rhino and a second rhino's head drawn in

red, five engraved horses and a feline. To see the last group necessitated climbing a short ladder as they are about 3 metres up in a quite narrow passage.

Having discussed the matter with the guide, I was surprised at how little modification has actually been carried out in this cave. Apart from the installation of lights and some barriers of plastic or metal tubes, the floor of the main gallery has been lowered, but only by about 30 cm. That seems to be it, plus the various cleaning and restoration works.

The total length of the visit was just under two hours, which meant that the guide got out just in time for a French two-hour lunch break at 12 noon.

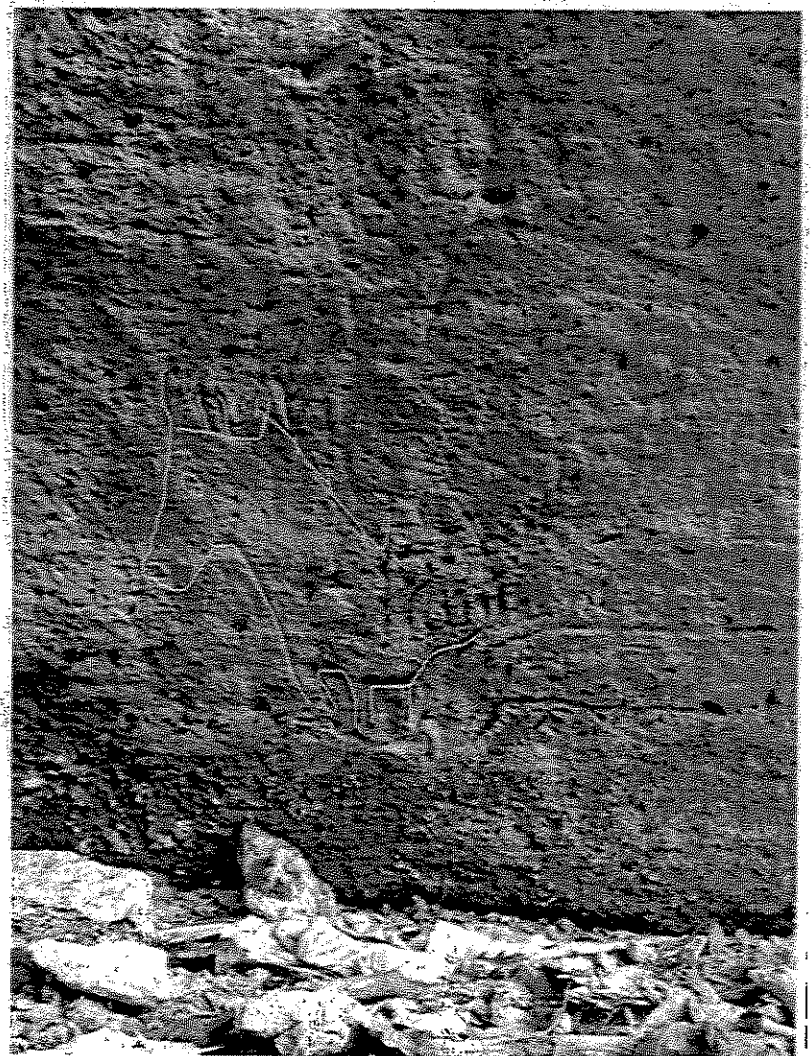
In the afternoon, Linda rang M. Tournon and arranged for us to visit the Grotte Nancy with him at 11 a.m. tomorrow. A nice, civilised starting time.

### **Wednesday 17th January 2001**

#### *Grotte Nancy*

Shortly after 11 a.m. we met M. Tournon at Roc du Cazelle, as planned and drove the kilometre down the road to the Grotte Nancy. It is situated a short distance above the road and next to the nearest quarry to Cazelle, in the direction of Sarlat.

The cave is much as described in 'Art des Cavernes', though it is somewhat longer, as the final passage is being dug. Cave dig or archaeological dig is hard to tell - I suspect it is simply for the owner's amusement. All the artwork listed is straightforward to find, except the animal indeterminable in the entrance chamber and the head of the horse there, which has fallen away since being discovered by Breuil in 1915. In addition however, there is a fairly deeply engraved mammoth in Salle V, just to the left and above the exit when facing outwards, and a painting largely covered by stal in the roof of Salle V (roughly where "Salle V" is written on the survey). There is a red blob and some black lines. M. Tournon suggested they were of a 'figure humaine', Linda agrees, but I saw



*La Grotte de Jovelle*

*A photograph of an engraved mountain goat, "bouquetin", with the engraving highlighted in white.*

'une tete de cheval'. Still we have a photo, so others can judge for themselves.

We asked whether it was possible to take photos and he readily agreed, but possibly because he has been on cave photography trips before or possibly because it was nearly 12 noon, he showed us how to lock the door behind us and rushed off! The opportunity was thus taken to try various lighting techniques, flash, LED light and halogen light, with the digital camera. The success rate seems to have been quite good for this sort of experimentation.

## **Thursday 18th January 2001**

### *Grotte de Jovelle*

As arranged, we met Christian Archambeau at La Tour-Blanche and went with him to see Jovelle. As expected, this site is a mess! The cave was discovered as a by-product of stone mining and it is only sheer luck that all the artwork was not destroyed before it was even noticed. As it is, that which remains is in a poor state of preservation, being open to the air, and has required cleaning to remove lichen before now. It is fascinating stuff, however. Apart from a fine Bouquetin's head - the first piece to be discovered - there are the remains of several mammoths, which are of a very unusual long-legged and high-backed shape. All are fairly heavily engraved, though anything finer would probably have gone by now anyway.

### *La Grotte de Bernous*

Christian had a little time on his hands still, so took us to Bernous, which was only a short drive away. This cave, very close to the road, has one of the clever door locks that we met with at Commarque, where one must first unlock the plate covering the lock before unlocking the lock proper. Use this design on GB and nobody would ever get down it!! Several nice pieces in here of which the most interesting is a bear, which has unfortunately been traced in carbon by vandals before the old wooden door was replaced by the current steel one.

### *L'abri du Forneau du Diable*

As this site was just up the road from Bernous, Christian took us for a quick look at "where the woozle wasn't". There was a nice engraved block here, which is now kept in the museum at Les Ezyies. If I understood Christian correctly, there was also a painted wall here which collapsed when some unauthorised digging took place. Presumably this is why the engravings were taken away for safe-keeping.

## **Friday 19th January 2001**

No caving today, so we went for a walk in the Vezere valley, starting at the Roc Saint Christophe and taking in a look at the middle Palaeolithic gisement of Le Moustier.

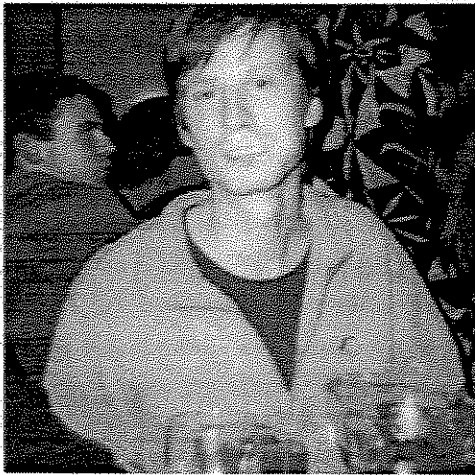
## **Saturday 20th January**

A miserable wet morning, so we packed up and went home.

# GRAVEL

## *Annual Dinner Shockers*

- Mr Graham Mullan made a scandalous statement at this year's annual dinner by appearing in his custom-made 60's rock band get-up. Speculation about Mr Mullan's alternative lifestyle has long been heard, but this was his first confirmed public appearance dressed in his "Status Quo" tribute attire. Ms. Linda Wilson was not available for comment.



- Mr Dickon Banks was captured on film at the annual dinner sporting a strange jaw deformity. It is not certain whether this startling transformation is a result of injury, or cosmetic surgery. Reliable sources suggest that since beginning his pilot training, Mr Banks has been insatiable in his urge to attain perfect white teeth. Updates on the development of his matching fake-tan will be broadcast as they are leaked to us by our undercover agents.

worrying behaviour at the Annual Dinner, when he indulged in an unashamed display of public affection for his new 'bird'. As the meal itself was very nice, we can dispel claims that Mr Hill was in fact devouring the innocent chicken. We are still clueless as to the identity of his mysterious partner.

- Mr Ed Hill was once again demonstrating



## *Top Quotes*

### *(Courtesy of Bill Miners in Jura)*

- Whilst trying to see if it was worth climbing a steep hill to look from the top  
Bill asks a Frenchman: "Vous Avez une bonne Visage?" (You have a nice face!)
- On inquiring of a German girl whether they had had a good caving trip, Bill asks:  
"Haben Sie ein gutte Holle?"  
Strictly true in that context, but slightly dodgy!
- After turning the light by his bed on in the middle of the night, Bill apologised in the morning with the following excuse (if anyone knows what this means, please let us know!):  
"Sorry but I was pillow munching and the pillow turned the light on."

# UBSS Matienzo correspondent, April 2001

Ed Hodge

After a casual (if possibly drunken) invite to go caving in the Matienzo region in Northern Spain, I found myself pitching up there one afternoon in early April. Having endured a 14 hour train journey from Malaga, where I had been doing some fieldwork, to Bilbao, and then some crafty hitchhiking (no mean feat considering I had all my fieldwork gear, caving gear and camping equipment), I was feeling pretty pleased with myself when I finally arrived at "Pablo's Bar" - literally in the arse end of nowhere. This was the Matienzo expedition base camp, with a tackle store, library, survey computers and of course no shortage of cheap beer.

Trying to remember everyone's names proved to be a bit of a problem, especially as numbers swelled over the next few days to about 60 people (wonder if that had anything to do with FMD?) - mainly from Liverpool Uni Potholing Club and Red Rose Caving Club, plus three individuals from University of Wales College of Medicine Caving Club, who took me in as one of their own.

There isn't space for a full run-down of my experiences (luckily for the readers of this article) but as a very recent recruit to caving I did many things I still look back on and wonder why? Some very hairy traverses for instance, jumping from height into underground lakes, or an SRT trip down the most unstable shaft I have ever seen, followed by a 5 hour dig after which I could hardly get out again due to exhaustion. Needless to say I made up for in keenness anything I lacked in experience and did the UBSS proud, searching for new caves, shaft bashing (oo-err), digging and of course my fair share of drinking.

One trip that sticks clearly in my mind however is that of a cave called Torca del Carlita. Not strictly in Matienzo but in one of the adjoining valleys, it was fairly easy to find because the entrance is situated on top of a small mountain, some few hundred metres above the entrance of a show cave (Cuevas de Pozalagua - stunning helictites). We had left it rather late and were climbing up to the entrance in the burning late afternoon sun but had wisely decided to do the trek in shorts and t-shirts, carrying our gear. Much huffing and puffing later we found the cave, a rather unassuming shaft entrance located in a stark but beautiful karst landscape with views out over miles of Cantabrian countryside to the sea. Some Spanish cavers who had beaten us to it were rigging the entrance so we had to wait our turn and found little grassy niches here and there and lay in our furies out of the wind soaking up the evening sunshine.

When it finally came to our turn to rig, the shaft entrance was venting steam at quite a rate adding to the rather ethereal atmosphere. I had been warned that this was rather a severe SRT trip and small doubts had been gnawing at me ever since I had agreed to go on it. Was this the time to tell people that this was my second ever SRT trip? I decided that it was probably best to just get on with it, what could be worse than the union? Besides which, they seemed pretty nervous about it themselves.

After the first few people had abseiled off into the darkness I realised I had better be going - I didn't want to be the last person down. I switched on my lamp, attached myself and swung out



testing and tightening everything before I was ready to descend. The first rebelay passed with no hitches and I was beginning to enjoy myself – then my lamp went out...

Cursing the feeble MkI I had borrowed as my backup, I soon realised I would have to get my carbide going whilst hanging there in near blackness. I hadn't wanted to use it on the descent, being convinced I would burn through the rope at some point. So I carefully (and with trembling hands) turned on the drip, waited a few moments and then with a familiar pop all became light again. Wondering why I hadn't used it from the start, I set off again, marvelling at the way the flickering flame picked out all the features in the gouged wall as I descended. The



*Floor of Carlista, L-R Tig, Crog, Ed and Skip (UWCMCC)*

next few rebelay and a small traverse along a ledge passed without incident and before long I found myself at a Y-hang with the rope dropping through a small letterbox shaped hole into blackness. I hadn't been taught how to transfer from one rope to another, but there were plenty of places to attach my cowstails and I treated it as another rebelay, trying not to look at the difference in thickness between the chunky 11mm I was leaving and the seemingly string-like 9mm rope I was now attached to. It didn't help knowing that below me was a 105m free hang into the 4<sup>th</sup> or so largest chamber (by area) in the world. It also didn't help that as I started off, the weight of rope below me meant that I had to manually feed rope into my stop, bouncing each time I stopped with an alarming creaking sound coming from the washing line I was attached to. As I dropped through the letterbox the walls suddenly shot off into the distance in every direction and I realised we were entering the chamber through the highest point of the roof. Slightly more comforting was the fact that I could see people, albeit very, very small people, on the cave floor below and due to incredible acoustics I could hear almost every word they said. I yelled down to ask if I was halfway down yet and was greeted by a great deal of laughter.

After a while the rope started to slip through my stop of its own accord and I started to enjoy the descent a bit more. We had wet the rope earlier that day and I noticed that steam was beginning to pour out of my stop, which was also starting to get fairly hot in my hands. Having been advised to carry some water with me I halted and thoroughly doused my stop, leading people below me to shout up to ask if I was pissing myself. I set off once again determined not to let my stop get so hot again. Unfortunately when you have no walls for reference you can't really tell how fast you are going and I soon noticed the temperature rising steadily and the steam building up. I looked down and it didn't look far to the floor so I decided to go for it. It was probably another 20 or 30 metres however, and by the time I got there my stop was almost glowing and I was frantically trying to get the rope out before it melted (or so I thought anyway). I don't think I did any major damage to the rope – it didn't break when we prussiked back out anyway.

The floor of the cave was a mass of huge (think double-decker buses) boulders and some even larger stal formations, which were too large to comprehend. To get to one side of the chamber you had to follow a cable along the floor or you might not find your rope again on the way back. It didn't seem like proper caving though – more like hiking at night with no stars or moon above you. In truth though our minds were really on the prussik back out again, which is another story...

## New and Exclusive – UBSS T-shirts for 2001

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The new UBSS T-shirts will be available this summer, and will feature the “2001 – A Space Oddity” theme (see front cover for more details). The T-shirts are available in four colours, and the design will be printed in either yellow, or white. Please specify your preferred colour – the final version will be based on the majority vote. The basic layout of the T-shirts will be a large image on the back, and a small UBSS logo on the front left breast.

Prices will be just over seven pounds, assuming that we can get more than 25 orders. If not, the price will be one or two pounds more, so please order extravagantly!!!

Please complete the order form and return it to Ed Hodge, or send him the relevant details by e-mail.

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