

UBSS NEWSLETTER

February 2002 Vol. 18, No. 2

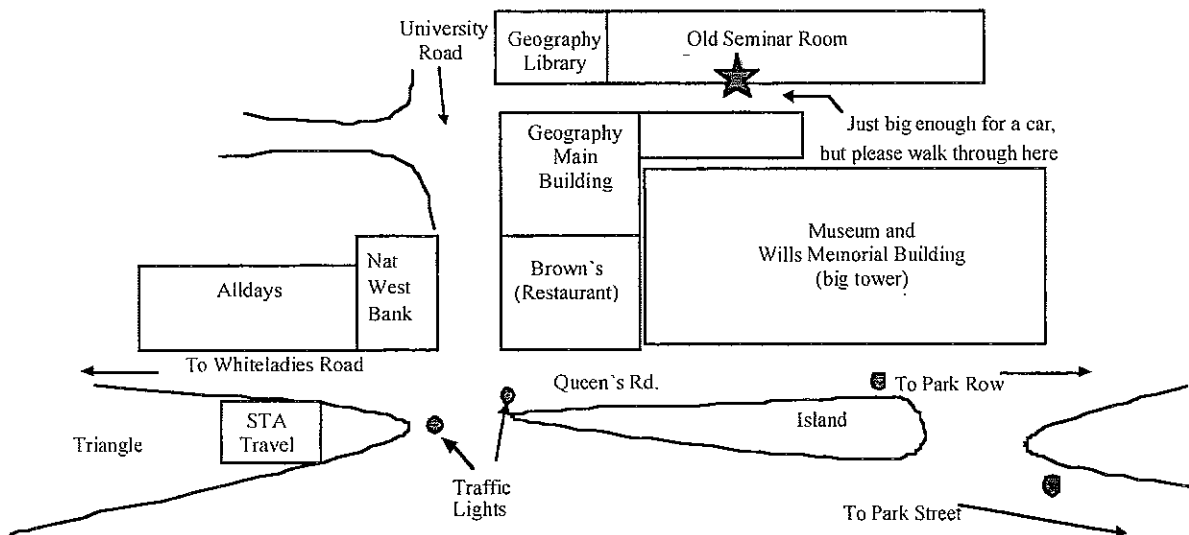
Hi everyone...the daffodils are pushing up, its raining and sunning all at the same time, and we are starting to get tripped-over by hyperactive lambs on our way out to Welsh caves.... Spring is definitely in the air! That also means that its time for our Annual General Meeting and dinner. This year (in case you forgot), the AGM will held at 3.00pm on Saturday March 2nd in the Geography Dept. Old Seminar Room, and will be followed by a presentation, slide and video show by Sam Smith on cave research work in Mexico. The meal and party are to be held in Manor Hall dining room from 7.30pm. The bar will be open from 7.00pm, and will have only a limited stock of wine so it's advisable to bring your own. Our change of venue this year is an attempt to encourage a better turnout for the after-dinner activities (a disco, before you go getting any ideas!). I personally am hoping that there'll be some uncommonly smart outfits, juicy gossip and silly photos generated this time round – people have become far too sensible lately.

Also on the agenda for this term, is another maintenance session at the hut. We need to do some more work on the leaky roof, repair the defunct water system, and have a general spring-cleaning effort – scheduled for sometime after Easter. I am pleased to announce that we will get getting new mattresses this year too – courtesy of ex-member Stefan Creaser. We're all very grateful for his donation...“The Hilton” here we come!

Other news that should be mentioned includes the fact that we have recently acquired new SRT and lifeline rope, and have a complete set of new, working club lights. Also, the Students' Union safety officer has accepted our risk assessment and we have recommenced SRT training in the stairwell. The only thing stopping us from caving at the moment is a lack of transport!

The Editor

Directions to the AGM meeting (coming from Redland Area):



- 1) Go South on Whiteladies Road, continue past the Triangle onto Queen's Road.
- 2) Turn left on University Road (just after Alldays & Natwest, & just before Brown's Restaurant)
- 3) Park on University Road (nearest place to park, but metered). Probably best to park near the Students' Union.
- 4) The Geography Department is located just behind Brown's Restaurant. See star on the map below for the location of the Old Seminar Room in Geography

Daren Deluded

Anonymous

(even though most of you have heard this story already)

Perhaps I should have taken our inability to find the cave easily as an indication of my leader's navigational skills. Our first attempts to find the entrance to Ogot Daren Cilau began by searching on the wrong hill. An hour later, on the correct hill, and after a brief encounter with a farmer with whom cavers do not sit well, my "leader" and I finally made it to the car park near the cave's entrance just before 22:00.

As we were getting ready, the excitement of the upcoming trip began to mount. This was to be my first trip to the "dreaded" Daren Cilau (infamous for its 600m, fairly small and wet entrance crawl) and my fifth-ever caving trip. My "buddy", however, had been to the cave 5 or 6 times previously and assured me he knew the way to our destination: Hard Rock Café. Our plan was to camp there and then head out the following morning. Because of this plan, we had two tackle bags with us. These were filled with food- and clothing-bearing Darren drums. We had also brought a Trangia burner with us. But, as we packed the drums, we realised we'd forgotten a lighter! Luckily, a car full of lads pulled up as we were debating getting changed. Because they'd come up to the remote hill to enjoy some - err - wacky tobacco - they were also laden with lighters and were happy to give us one for our trip.

As I began to get changed into my borrowed caving kit, I had a sinking feeling that I'd forgotten something...wetsocks on...furry on...kneepads? Yep, I had those...uh oh. "Err - do you see my oversuit?" I asked hesitantly. "Uh, no" came the reply. @&\$*!!! My "leader" kindly offered me his oversuit and said he'd be fine in "just a furry" (by the way, he is now known as the "nutter who went down Daren Cilau with just a furry"). Naively, I believed him. In the cave, it didn't occur to me how much it was bothering him until I found myself alone, negotiating the "Vice", pondering the way forward. My buddy had rushed on ahead to keep moving and to avoid hypothermia. Luckily, at this point I was still friends with my tackle bag so I did have some company.

I found the vice slightly awkward going in - I soon found the trick though. Keeping my legs high, I managed through without too much trouble. I don't know what to say about the Daren crawl that hasn't already been said, other than it really isn't *that* bad. Just a wee bit long, so you do need some stamina. After I immersed myself in some muddy and bloody cold water, I found my buddy waiting for me. He assured me that he was hot, let alone warm!

There is one other "infamous" tight bit in the Daren crawl, known as the "Calcite Squeeze". I asked my buddy NOT to warn me when it was approaching. I was trying to avoid the mental build up so often associated with bits of cave requiring some fancy manoeuvring. This build up, in my opinion, has its pluses and minuses. On the one hand, it allows you to mentally prepare for what's ahead. On the other hand, it allows you to MENTALLY PREPARE FOR WHAT'S AHEAD. Your psyche can start having its way with you and you end up more anxious than is necessary. It was this added anxiety that I was trying to avoid. My buddy was obviously a believer in the first mentality. "So, here's that tight bit people have a hard time fitting through", came the warning moments before I reached it. The thing about the calcite squeeze is

that there's nothing technical about it. It's an oval-shaped hole: either you fit, or you don't. Luckily, I fit no problem. I was glad that the crawl would soon be over. At the end of the crawl, I was so grateful to be able to stand vertical again. Oh, to be erect.

My buddy, drenched and looking quite small in his sopping furry, was agreeable to the suggestion that we keep moving. We made it to the first aid box, and the site where cavers "sign in", also known as the "Chamber Nowhere Near the Entrance", at around 23:00. We signed our names, the date, time and destination: Hard Rock.

Having been granted momentum once more, my hard-core "just a furry" expert for a buddy led us left from the first aid box as the way on. Up a slight slope with a slippery muddy floor and once again I found myself on hands and knees. Around half an hour later, it occurred to my buddy that we were going the wrong way. We were very close to a part of the cave called the "Antlers". The Antlers are apparently beautiful helectite formations. We turned around and went back to the first aid box - our faithful tacklebags at our sides. Once back at the sign-in point, we split up. I went straight on from the first aid kit to have a look around and my buddy went right. I found a HUGE room with a boulder pile on the right-hand side. I climbed the boulder pile and found two holes at the top. In my inexperienced opinion, both could have gone somewhere. I went back to find my buddy, who was now frustrated with himself for not remembering the way on. "Right" from the first aid kit had not resulted in a successful search. I told him about the boulder pile and the two possible leads. He came with me to check them out. But, uncertainty was prevalent that night. He left his tackle bag with me at the top of the boulder pile as he went to check out the right-hand hole. All I could hear was some grunting and moaning and mild cursing and then his light emerged from the big room behind me. Apparently, we had found "Half Moon Passage" or something of the like and it leads from the top of the boulder pile in the big chamber to, well, the big chamber. My buddy returned, muttering, "That's just taking the piss". The left hand passage did not look familiar to my friend and the search, at that point, was abandoned. At just past 02:00, making our way back to the first aid kit for the umpteenth time, we made a collective and exhausted decision to leave the cave. We each ate a Snickers bar as we wrote 02:00 am as our time of return. Yes, if you check the book, we made it to Hard Rock Café and back in under 3 hours, looking like Cave Gods. Only, now, you know the truth.

On the way out, I felt tired. I felt hungry. And, the bloody tackle bag felt much heavier (I realised once I had exited that it actually was heavier - the Daren drums had filled with water at the beginning of the crawl on the way out). I hummed silly camp tunes as I went and cursed the tackle bag (which was no longer my friend). The vice was easier this time. Although, I did rest my head halfway through and contemplate a quick power-nap! We made it out of the crawl at 04:15 and we were greeted by a dark and wet Wales (much like the cave, now that I think about it). Now, where the hell was the car? We stumbled to it, zig-zagging through sheep and we quickly got changed in the rain. My muscles ached and I could already see bruises on my elbows and knees. Or, rather, I could just make out my elbows and knees through the bruises. I was knackered, but there was also a sense of accomplishment. It didn't matter too much that we didn't find the way on...we still had a fabulous trip. My leader was amazing - with a fantastic attitude. My only word of advice for those desiring to visit Daren Cilau: If you are only planning to go to the first aid kit and back: LEAVE THE TACKLE BAG AT HOME!

CERRO RICO AND THE JOB FROM HELL

(A Visit to a Bolivian Silver Mine)

The tour begins with a visit to the market to buy essential supplies before heading underground. The supplies aren't for our use – the tour price includes hire of a nylon jacket, wellies and a carbide lamp – but for items that might be useful to the miners we are to meet, who will be grateful for any small gifts we might bring with us. They may earn as little as \$10 (yes, that's US dollars) per day. So we buy: bags of coca leaves, some shards of ash to release the alkaloid base, lumps of carbide, packets of locally made cigarettes, sticks of gellignite and lengths of safety fuse.



Our guide gives us the preliminary briefing, apologising for being drunk. It's 10am but normal for miners to have spent an hour and a half chewing coca leaves and drinking beer before proceeding underground. Why will become apparent as we see the conditions they work in.



We enter via a narrow adit, perhaps 1.5m wide and only a little higher. As we leave the surface we enter a true underworld. Here the miners, who are Christians when in the light, make offerings of cigarettes and coca to effigies of Tio (Uncle) – or as we would say, Old Nick. He is noticeably well endowed and tumescent, overseeing the struggles of the miners as they apply themselves to their job from hell.



A little further in, our guide points out a rounded arch of stone, distinct from the usual wooden pit props. This is a vestige of the Spanish colonial era, reminding us that the Cerro Rico (Rich Mountain) has been mined for silver since 1545. As a result the peak is now some 400m lower than it was when mining began. Despite this, we are still at some 4200m altitude and any exercise soon has you gasping for breath. Best not to breathe too deep though; silica in the air (not to mention carbide fumes, arsenic gas and bang fumes) will block your lungs and means that the working life of a miner is about 7 to 10 years before he loses 50% of his lung capacity. Conditions have changed little since colonial times and shot holes are still drilled by hand and ore transported by wheelbarrow, backbreaking work anywhere but especially hard at this altitude and at temperatures up to 45°C.



We meet some miners hauling ore up a shaft from a level 40m below. They are using an electric winch and a leather and rubber bucket. Once up, the ore is tipped into a wheelbarrow to be pushed to another shaft connecting to the surface. There the ore will be assayed and taken away for processing. Its quality will determine the pay of the miners, who work in a cooperative of 6 to 8 members.

Our guide asks mischievously if anyone can remember the way out. I say yes, explaining that we go caving in England. Ten minutes later I admit that I haven't the foggiest where we are now. The passages are narrow and labyrinthine. Uncapped shafts drop into darkness below and we tiptoe over them on planks. Looking up, we can see deads piled on top of criss-crossed wooden beams vertically above us. We move on hurriedly.



Finally we return to Tio and give thanks that we are soon to be released from his dark domain. We leave empty handed, having distributed all our supplies to the miners we met. Shaken by our experience, we emerge blinking into the bright sunlight. What we have seen is both awesome and awful in their true senses.

Clive Owen

Goggle-eyed **R**evellers **A**dmit **V**ile **E**xploits **L**ately

Animal Magic

In Yorkshire last term, Juliet and Si Flower were walking back to the car after failing to find Lower Longchurn. As is often (curiously) the case when walking in the Dales, they suddenly found themselves being chased by a sheep. When Ju pointed this out, Si turned round to have a look. His eyes lit up as he uttered the words "she's quite cute" and immediately gave chase to the terrified animal.

I hope the totty's better in Truro Si...

Crack-Crack

Whilst dangling uncountable metres off the ground in a Spanish cave at Christmas, Eddy Hill was disturbed by the gunshot-like sounds exploding from his SRT gear. Shifting nervously, he eyed his harness in trepidation – expecting at any moment to see the fibres popping, and to watch himself slip from the retaining straps and hurtle to the ground. Nothing was outwardly wrong, so he completed the trip, and that night examined every stitch in his harness, but to no avail. All were mystified by the sounds, which reverberated in his head at night, and trailed him down every cave.

Back in England, Eddy dissected his cowstails, only to find most of the fibres snapped inside the core. Now he has nice shiny new ones, and no bad dreams
....pop..pop..pop...

The Human Dustbin

During the hugely successful Burns Night celebrations at the UBSS hut this January, all were surprising in their ability to consume immeasurable amounts of haggis. None, however could match Jon Telling and his never-ending stomach. Many sat and watched aghast as more and more leftovers were shovelled onto his plate, and passed to him from all sides. He was never defeated, but perhaps did bear a closer resemblance to a stuffed-sheep's stomach in the morning.

Ghastly remains found in Goatchurch

Rumours have been circulating recently, that some grisly remains have been found in Goatchurch Cavern, Burrington. A pool of blood, said to be between several inches and a metre in size, depending on the gossip source, is reputed to lie at the bottom of a sloping climb. The time of deposition of the gruesome juice cannot be pinpointed exactly, but no reports date from prior to the UBSS Burns night party. Toxicologists currently analysing the organic matter, can reveal only that the blood is rich in haggis and belongs to a 5'10"-5'-11", dark-haired male with Mediterranean roots. The alcohol content of the unknown liquid also suggests that it was shed during drunken revelling, after consumption of Spitfire, Whiskey and Vodka, and probably whilst caving in totally inappropriate attire in the middle of the night.

A sticky situation

Whilst caving in Yorkshire this month, Emma Todd (that's me), found her sanity tested to the limit. Stuck in the most awkward and intimidating squeeze in Pippikin Pot, Lancaster-Easegill system, your faithful editor was left dangling with her legs in mid air, one arm waiving above her head, and the other thrashing uselessly below her. Slipping deeper into an inextricable jam, her mounting panic was not eased by the sounds of Bill coming to her rescue from the rear. His words of comfort..."Do you want some squash?"..... seemed so inappropriate in her time of desperation that she was forced into a fit of giggling and became stuck even tighter. As it happened, Bill himself was also wedged, so how he was going to get the drink to her if she'd accepted, no-one knows...

Quotes

"I'm wedged underneath you. Slide your body over my helmet!"

Bill (to Sharon), Yorkshire, February 2002

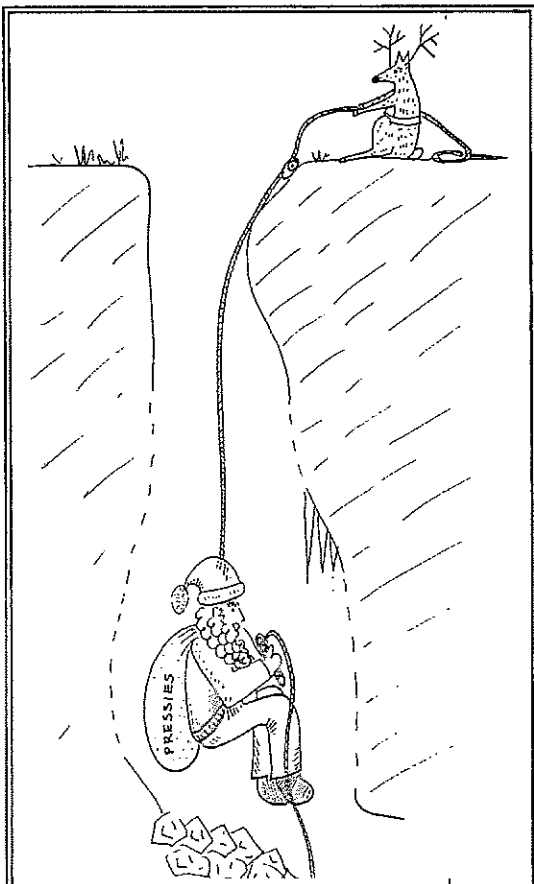
Caver 1: "Isn't that porn?"

Caver 2: "Yeah, but the music's rather good"

Anonymous for obvious reasons, Wales, February 2002

"At last, I can give my nuts a break!"

Tom, SRT training in a painful harness, Students' Union, February 2002



"The deliberate mistakes"

(I expect I missed some, so don't base your SRT on this...)

- Long beard not safely stowed (may get caught in descender {Santa's about the only person that this might apply to!}).
- No knot in the end of rope.
- Abseiling with descender attached to absolutely nothing.
- Abseiling without a harness.
- Caving without a helmet or proper protective clothing.
- Tackle bag worn on back – should be dangled between legs on a cord to maintain a vertical centre of mass.
- Obvious "rub point" at pitch-head.
- Abseiling off an unattached lifeline (these are not in any order of priority!).
- Caving without a lamp.
- Belaying off a reindeer.

Treasurer's Report February 2001 - February 2002

Graham Mullan

Taken at face value, this year's accounts appear to show that the Society has healthy and stable finances. To a large extent this is true, but there are a number of issues looming on the horizon which may easily upset this perception.

Looking first at the Receipts and Payments Account, this appears to be well balanced but both Student Subscriptions and Sales Income are unusually high and Investment Income is unusually low. Sales are up because, in effect, most of the sales of two issues of *Proceedings* are here. Interest is down because all interest rates are relatively low at present. Note that, aside from a small number of private donations, the only grant income is that from the Union. This is also below normal, but as a consequence of my requesting a smaller Current Account grant when we were not travelling during the FMD outbreak. This should return to normal in the coming year.

Payments were, in theory, also fairly stable but aside from the Travel Grant issue mentioned above it may also be the case that the cost of printing *Proceedings* will also rise again and there is no doubt that postage costs will rise. It is also highly likely that our 3rd Party insurance costs will rise, owing to changes in the insurance market beyond our control. It is also possible that the Museum Curator may need to spend some money at some point! The small sum labelled "Annual Dinner" relates to the deposit on this year's event less the small surplus on last year's.

The *Caves of County Clare* Publishing Account shows a further small gain from ongoing sales. This account is due to change radically this year as the new edition of this book is completed. No figures are yet available on costs, but we have contingent plans on budgeting and where the money might come from.

Of the other funds shown on the Balance Sheet, well the Tackle Warden has already spent the Equipment Hire Fund on new lights! The only other fund showing movement is the Hut Fund. Despite a fair amount of maintenance having been carried out this past year this still shows a significant surplus. This is due to our having received a generous donation from an old member, Stefan Creaser, to replace all the mattresses in the main Hut. These will shortly be installed, wiping out this surplus. More work needs to be done on the Hut, notably to the roof, and now that we no longer let it out to other groups we must be sure to collect Hut Fees on our own visits!

The right hand side of the Balance Sheet shows where our money is held. It is mostly in interest bearing accounts, though interest rates are low, as noted above. The unusually large sum in current account is there to pay for the new lights and mattresses and by the time you read this will have all been spent.

And finally, I thought that I had reduced my cash holding to zero, but the auditor pointed out an error in my addition and I still hold £10. Damn.

If any member could not be at the AGM but has a question on these accounts, I will be more than happy to ignore answer them.

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BALANCE SHEET AT 31 JANUARY 2002

<u>HUT FUND</u>	£	£		£
Balance at 1. 2. 01	3237.77			15000.00
Add net income	<u>606.57</u>	3844.34		<u>1146.56</u>
			<u>INVESTMENTS</u>	
			Capital Reserve Account	15000.00
			N.S.B. Investment Account	<u>1146.56</u>
				16146.56
<u>PRINTED PUBLICATIONS FUND</u>			<u>CURRENT ACCOUNT</u>	
Balance at 1. 2. 01	2330.00	2330.00		1136.72
<u>LIBRARY FUND</u>			<u>CASH IN HAND</u>	
Balance at 1. 2. 01	922.99	922.99	Hon Secretaries	16.80
			Hon Treasurer	<u>10.00</u>
				<u>26.80</u>
<u>EQUIPMENT HIRE ACCOUNT</u>				
Balance at 1. 2. 01	229.90	307.90		
Add net income	<u>78.00</u>			
<u>"CAVES OF CO. CLARE" RESERVE FUND</u>				
Advance for Publication	7000.00			
Add surplus balance on sales	<u>2325.20</u>	9325.20		
<u>RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT</u>				
Balance at 1. 2. 01	595.44			
Less net expenditure	<u>15.79</u>	<u>579.65</u>		
		<u>17310.08</u>		<u>17310.08</u>

HONORARY AUDITORS REPORT: I have examined the above Receipts and Payment Account for the year ended 31st January 2002, 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*.....D.J. Allen C.I.P.F.A.

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST JANUARY 2002

RECEIPTS

PAYMENTS

Members Subscriptions	£		£
Student Members Subscriptions		Proceedings Vol 22.2 Printing	1830.27
		Postage	348.25
Union Grants: Capital	503.55	Tools & Equipment	509.19
Current	<u>153.00</u>	Library	530.44
		Museum	255.90
Interest on Investments: Bank	382.47	Sessional Meetings	-
N.S.B.	<u>43.11</u>	Postages	-
		Hon. Secs Petty Cash	131.73
Sales of Publications (not C. of C.C.)		Stationery & Duplicating	6.00
Donations	1173.00	Rates & Taxes	416.17
Tax Refund on Covenants	68.25	Insurances: Third Party	47.30
Sale of Charterhouse Permits	274.72	Property	342.00
Sale of T shirts	1.50	Subscriptions & Licence	770.77
	8.00	Travel Money	118.00
		"Fresh"	98.56
		Donation To Mendip Rescue Organisation	20.00
		Annual Dinner	25.00
	4618.60		<u>36.00</u>
			4634.39
Excess of Payments over Receipts			<u>4634.39</u>

"CAVES OF COUNTY CLARE"

PUBLISHING ACCOUNT 2001/02

Surplus Balance at 31 January 2002		Sales of "Caves of County Clare"	260.44
		Surplus balance at 1 February 2001	<u>2064.76</u>
			<u>2325.20</u>

Stuck in the mud...and the rock...and in mid-air

Emma Todd

All the cards seemed to be stacked against us as we tried to organise our February Yorkshire weekend. First we had more people than we did transport, then Steve's car was broken into. Our hire-car plans were thwarted by people dropping out, and in the end, only four of us made our way to the "Red Rose" hut on Friday night. Our fears built as we heard an extreme rain warning on radio four "avoid travelling wherever possible", and as we approached our destination up North, the roads were more like ponds and rivers. Going underground didn't seem like such a good idea afterall.

Still, the next day dawned dry(ish), and we donned our gear and set out for some local caves. Being on the doorstep of the Lancaster-Easegill system, it seemed sensible to pick a trip within walking distance. As long as we avoided the "main drain", we would be fine. We split into two parties, and my group (consisting of me, Juliet, Bill and Sharon) headed off towards "Pippikin pot".

"WARNING"

"The entrance series is tight and strenuous - Think of the return journey"
(Easegill Guide)

We were planning a through trip - to emerge through "Mistral". In getting to the cave, we had to cross a mile or so of open moorland, then traverse a tinkling struggling into our SRT kits, the peace was shattered by the sound of voices cresting the hill. Nine people were approaching, and were intent on doing our same route! 'It might be OK' we thought, since the cave was already rigged, and we weren't carrying any tackle.

The first pitch was a nice, short drop into a small open chamber. My spirits were high as I looked up to see the last of the daylight streaming through the entrance. The way on was a flat-out bedding crawl off to the right. Juliet and I squeezed into it, and were immediately confronted by a vertical tube with no rope anywhere to be seen. We called for Bill, and then the fun began - the four of us might well have been holed-up in a cardboard box for all the room there was to turn round, but we managed to rearrange ourselves and were also soon greeted by the first of our following party, who seemed to know what he was doing. He suggested that we traverse across the hole and climb up to the right. This involved lowering yourself; backwards and blind, out over the pitch, then standing on a jammed scaffolding pole. To achieve the next section of the cave, one had to somehow get feet-first into a space at shoulder level (all the while balanced over the pitch). I followed Bill through, and climbed down the other side, where I waited to the sounds of Sharon having the same problems as I had - how to turn round. In the end, she came through head first, and at the other side, a

waiting Bill caught her as she popped out. I tried to suppress the images of "that childbirth video" we had been forced to watch for GCSE biology, and headed on, feeling a little queasy!

In all my experiences of caving, I have found that I have the ability to get terrified over most obstacles that I encounter underground. Heights, exposed climbs, waterfalls and rushing rivers alike...never though have I been afraid of squeezes. Generally, if everyone else fits through, I am absolutely fine, and the usual way of things is that the tight bit is short and painless - followed by something airy and spacious. Not this cave. Round the next corner was a vertical slot. Bill was already through, and so I followed without thinking much about it. A metre in, I shouted to Bill "what's behind me?", and he said that I was fine and should keep coming. That was about where the trouble started - my left buttock became jammed. This was more than apparent to me, but Bill kept saying for me to come backwards - denying the fact that my buttock was stuck. Actually, it really was, but I managed to lift myself out and slide backwards through the hole. I descended the next short pitch, and waited at the bottom while Sharon approached the squeeze. I would like to nominate Sharon for the Annual Dinner award for perseverance at this point. Time after time, she inched into the gap, and got stuck. I listened from the bottom, not sure whether to laugh or cry..."Bill, I'm stuck"...."no you're not"...."yes I am Bill"...."no you're not - keep coming back"...."I can't Bill, I'm stuck"...."you're doing fine, just keep inching back"...."no Bill, I can't inch - I'm stuck"....and so it went on. I tried to imagine what was going on above me, as one of the guys from the following party came to help...."I've got her legs"...."I've got her head"..."lift her up"..."which way does her body need to bend?". Sharon said she was going to go out, and eight male voices chorused back "NO NO, that's OK - keep trying, we don't mind waiting".

Eventually, that horrid cave won the battle, and also sent two or three of the other group back to the surface too. We carried on about five metres, and found the next squeeze. It was getting beyond a joke. There was Juliet taking off her SRT kit to fit through, and me thinking that if Ju was worried, there was no way I was going to fit. SRT kits OFF...ON...OFF...ON....squeeze followed pitch followed squeeze, until we reached the worst one of all. Bill went first, and directed Juliet (with some difficulty). All the guys waiting behind me said they were going to go headfirst (but they did everything headfirst, and UBSS people seem to prefer the safer feetwards option). I struggled into the narrow rift, about three to four metres long and slightly less wide than my ribs. Inching backwards, I kept my body high - with one arm below me, and one flailing above. My legs hung out over a short pitch. Everything was going fine, until I stopped to rest. Gradually I slipped down into the tightest bit of the rift, and soon enough I was wedged tight with nothing to push my feet against, no hand holds above me, and the floor almost out of reach below. I lay on my side panting and trying to suppress my panic. It really was utterly terrifying. There was no way anyone could really get near me to help out, and I was tiring quickly. I suppose though, in that situation, you have to find strength from somewhere, and I wriggled my way free. Waiting back at the mouth of the squeeze, I let all the guys from the other party go first, except one - who waited behind to help me. I was petrified - the thought of going back into the slot was only a thousandth of a percent more desirable than turning round and facing the squeezes we'd already come through, and I didn't want to let anyone down. Breathing deeply,

I opted for the headfirst technique, and dived into the rift. Actually it was fine. I am not someone to recklessly slide into unknown spaces headfirst, but this way, you could see the intricacies of the rock, and plan your route. I slithered to the end of the squeeze, and was confronted by a three metre drop. Wedged across, about a metre or so below, was an acroprop. This was the bit everyone had been talking about - a kind of controlled dive out of the rift. Aiming for the pole, I slid rather too quickly towards the pole, and caught it with my hands thankfully, just as my legs reached the edge of the ledge. By then I was so scared, in my inclined hand-stand, that I couldn't even think about jumping to the bottom of the climb as everyone else had done, and since my SRT kit was bundled up in my hand, I had get out and abseil down the rope using an Italian hitch off my belay belt. Painfull!

At the bottom, I put my gear back on, and abseiled the next short pitch. Soon we got to a narrow meandering passage - just wide enough to slip into sideways, but narrow enough to make your descender squeal as it tore against the rock. The eight or nine of us went into the passage, and crabwalked sideways for five minutes or so, at which point a shout came back through the ranks - "back, back"....we all reversed further and further, until eventually we were back where we started. Apparently the guys had entered the passage with their left-sides forward, and in fact they needed to be on their right. It was so tight, they couldn't even turn round!

This cave seemed to me like a never ending hell, but eventually we hit a just-about-walking passage, with a churning stream thundering at its base. Although narrow, it threatened to rip my feet out from under me. Brown and angry, the water was like coke erupting from a shaken bottle. Confusion and wet boots followed, but finally and at last, we climbed up from the river and into the "Hall of the Ten" - Cathedral-like and deathly quiet. I could have cried with relief.

We spent half an hour exploring the next huge chamber "Hall of Kings" - even bigger, and full of mud. Juliet jumped into the big pit at the bottom, and I expected her to disappear over her head in gloom. We were all tired, and fighting against the mud was a tough job, so we headed out - past a chamber where falling water made the walls thump and reverberate as if an illegal rave were happening next door. We entered a series of horrible crawls through mud and stones, flat out on our bellies, hunched and hobbling through stooping passage, dragging throbbing knees and bruised hands over vindictively-placed sharp pebbles. We got oh-so lost, and I just wanted to be transported direct to a hot bath in Bristol. Eventually though, we climbed up out of "Mistral" and into the horizontal, sleet-whipped night. The tinkling river was now a raging torrent - deeper than wellies and hungry for tired cavers. The fell was one huge black bog, and my feet felt like lead. I could well have laid down and slept right there - my body all spent - but Bill talked me back to the hut, and hot pasta waiting for us.

The next day, my crippled back let me know that I wouldn't be going down "Juniper Gulf" on Sunday, even though I really wanted to. Back home now, I feel better, and believe it or not, I can't wait to go caving again! ☺

Wine, Beer, Food & Caving or What Jon & Sam Missed

(A Christmas caving holiday to Spain and France)

All GPS co-ordinates are Lat/Lon given in Degrees then Minutes to 3 d.p. with the datum as WSG84. Co-ordinates were taken using a Magellan 315.

Day 1 (Gnawing at lamb bone day) - SPAIN

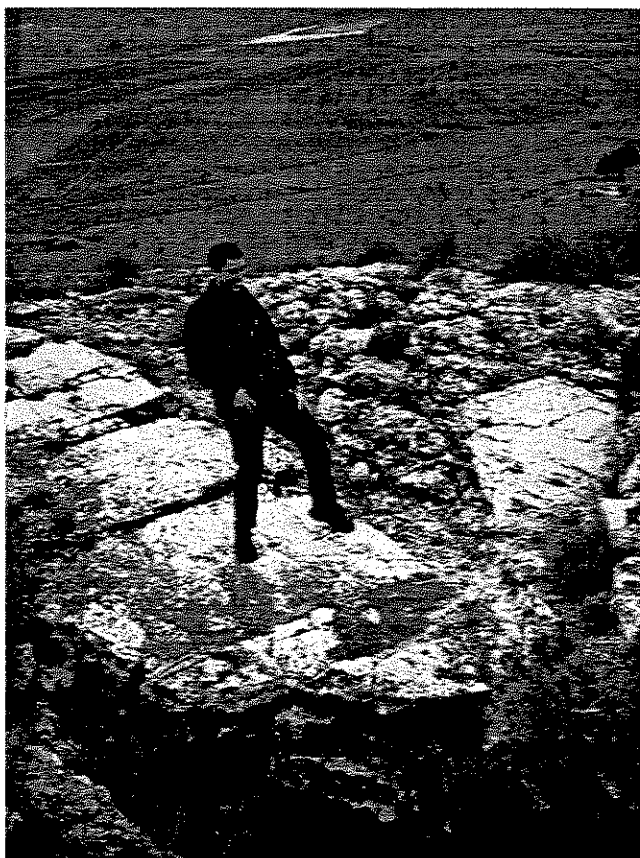
Drove all day and all night. Had little to eat but for last night's leftovers. For further details see chapter zzplural alpha in the next newsletter.

Day 2 (Christmas Eve) (Small Cutlet surprise day)

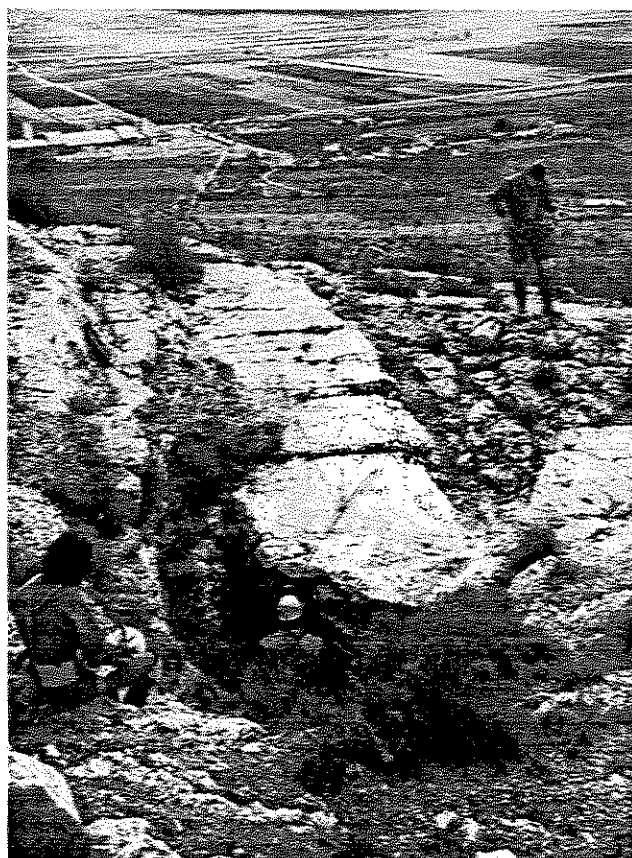
Due to extra shopping trip for wine and beer, we arrived at the guesthouse at midday, not 4 am as we had originally planned. (What!? 8 hours for a shopping trip?!-ed.). Tried to get a few hours sleep in the afternoon but it was miserably cold. As luck would have it, southern Spain was having its coldest winter for around 50 years, including some heavy snowfalls. Eventually we got up and decided to find a cave so that we'd save time tomorrow. Arrived back for dinner with our Belgian hosts (what was it? turkey? pork?). Food was accompanied by local wine and after dinner liqueurs / brandy in very heavy measures (quadruples at least).

Day 3 Christmas Day (The ark goes under day)

Breakfast at 9 and Christmas greetings all around before packing gear for the day's cave. Avenc del Rebalsador (Park 38°17.630N 000°54.878 W, Cave 38°17.785N 000°54.889W). The topo for this was specially sent to us and we knew that we needed around 150m of rope. So off Steve set down the fragrantly herby entrance followed by all, dressed in standard Yorkshire gear due to the cold temperatures on the surface. Very pleasant cave with very smooth limestone features creating a good atmosphere. Unfortunately, Steve's light ran out and some interesting rigging practices ensued; encouraged by the base of each pitch being



Steve unable to contain his excitement at the prospect of going underground.



Entering the cave in Yorkshire gear

easily obtained but the bolts for each new pitch being a few metres off the floor. Having only used about 100m of rope, we reached the end. However, by now the cave temperature was a very pleasant 19-20°C and everyone was getting warm. After a short stop we started to head up and the inner temperatures rose (especially if you had a TSA oversuit on or should that read boil-in-the-bag?). Steve neatly missed the hidden tackle bag due to a combination of failed light and the fact that Ed had hidden it behind a rock, rather than attach it to the line, so Andrew was left with the extra bag! After exiting, the coolness for once was very welcome. By the time Juliet and Ed appeared a group of Spanish had decided that caving looked like an interesting spectator sport and were watching them climb out. We headed back home for a shower before heading out for our Christmas meal at La Fonda, in Pinoso. *(Writer pauses for breath as the meal is still affecting all)*

Loosely the meal consisted of:

- Local village wine (nice)
- Olives
- Roasted almonds and
- Prawns ... *sounds like a good starter but add to this*
- A platter of marinated and battered Pollack
- Pinoso salad (local delicacy made from roasted garlic, peppers, nuts and tomatoes)
- Local cured meats and cheeses
- Pickled pheasant salad (*is this getting decadent?*)
- Wild duck livers in fruit sauce (*oh yeah! Two turtle doves next*)
- Wild boar in mushroom and carrot sauce.

This concluded the starters!

Next, the main course:

- Marinated Venison steak, artichoke hearts, mushrooms and sauté potatoes
- Appreciated with a new wine from a neighbouring village.

After begging for a break, we started the desert courses:

- Selection of traditional Spanish Christmas sweets accompanied by a desert wine made by the proprietors grandparents; this was finally followed by a selection of three different cakes, cheesecakes and grapes (and a partridge in a pear tree).

On exit, we noticed we'd not eaten the turtles ... nevermind, we retired having had a most splendid meal.

Day 4 (Pollacks)

Today we followed a dirt track, a lot further than we expected, to find a couple of caves. Cueva del Niño, (Park 38°22.991N 000°57.567W, Cave 38°23.009N 000° 57.549W) a short cave that even the local geriatrics had been down in their time, and Cueva de la Campana (Cave 38°23.017N 000°57.536W). The latter had two entrances and, from one of them, two routes down. The first was amply laden with ammunition to throw at anyone below and had no bolts! The second had a couple of poor bolts that Ed used and rather than any rocks to throw down the cave he decided to use a "natural" deviation that exploded once he was down by the second deviation. Soon we all reached the bottom of the first pitch and started looking for the second "upslope". However, one direction



Eddy poised and ready to go – "you rig it, you test it!"

was a complete scree slope, with sand and rocks that fell at the merest touch, creating rock avalanches with boulders shattering and sending shards all round. All we gained from this route was a slippery traverse back over the passage we were in. By trying in the other direction (with more scree and hanging death) the head of the second pitch was found. Unfortunately, roosting directly above it was a colony of bats and since the temperature was cool in this cave, due to the wind blowing through, we decided to leave them to their slumber and so exited. Ed and Steve then had a look for a couple of other local caves but failed to find them using the poor map provided by the internet site.

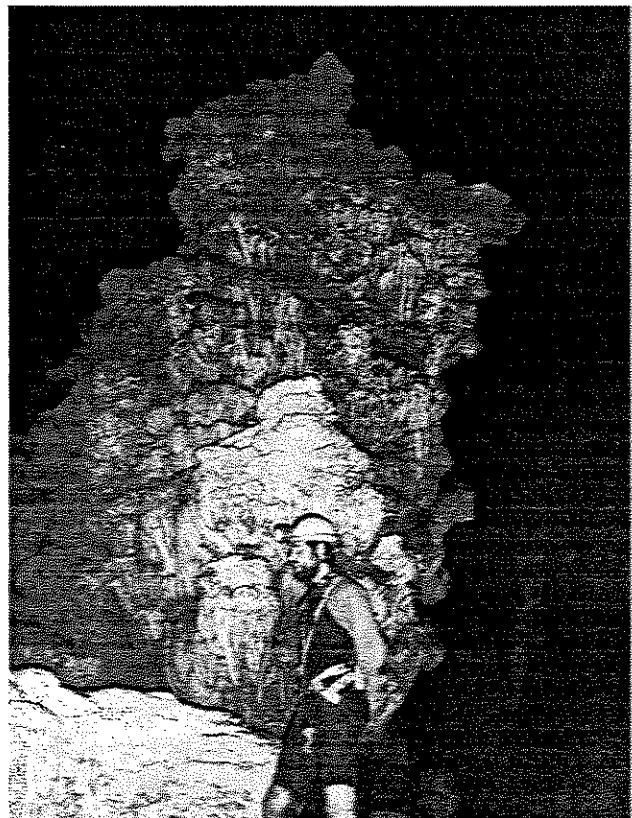
Day 5 (Terracotta Chicken day)

Of all the help we could have found, Steve decided to acquire the aid of two little, hairy, smelly (actually quite cute) mongrels to find the cave for us. Thankfully they knew all the short cuts so the climb up to the cave entrance, Sima del Caballo (or was that Avenc del Caval? – Park 38°18.229N 000°57.511W. Cave 38°17.905N 000°57.341W) was a lot shorter than it could have been... especially since the GPS reckoned we were 750 metres away from the spot... good doggies!!

Anyway, once in the cave Andrew proceeded to rig the pitches in a manner more in line with what we're used to, rather than the 4 re-belays per 20 metres that seem to be preferred by the local populace. As a result we used a lot less rope than the topo recommended... read this as someone had to carry a tacklebag that wasn't used, AGAIN!! La Cueva del Caballo (cave of the horse) is a 154 metre deep rift (the deepest cave in Alicante) named after the unfortunate animal who managed to fall down the entrance several decades ago; although local gossip would have us believe it was an ass who lost his marbles and was thrown down the entrance by his owners, to avoid vet fees ☺. Evidence for this mishap can be found 110 metres into the cave in the form of a collar. A few metres further down the cave changes in character from an almost clean, safe environment to a bat guano-laden pile of choss that even Andrew thought was tooooooo stupidly unsafe to hang around on. Our final depth was 135 metres, which we have since found is the current accepted depth of the cave without covering territory currently under exploration. All in all a good cave but beware of Ju handing you a tackle bag, to carry out, containing 6 big rocks... no wonder Ed thought it was HEAVY!! Steve missed out on a good cave, preferring a few moments of privacy with the mongrels and a "deserved" nap in the car afterwards.

Day 6 (Paella day)

This morning we met Jaime Bru, our Spanish contact. We had agreed to meet at 11am, at the petrol station opposite Carrefour in Elda, but Elda turned out to be a bit larger than we expected so it took us a while to find him and we were a bit late. Eventually we set off to find our target for the day, La Cueva del Campillo (Park 39° 13.257N 000°40.859W, Cave 39°13.547N 000°40.659W). To find this, drive to a plateau 2 hours from Elda, 9 miles along a dirt track with randomly tarmaced sections and 11 miles away from the nearest village (New Tous... the old one is under the reservoir, courtesy of the EU)... stop on a muddy patch... any will do, abandon car and turn right for about 200 metres, find a little doline in the middle of absolutely nowhere and look down hole to see... blackness. Steve rushed to claim the 80 metre line leaving Ed with the 60 and working hard to remember if he'd tied a knot at the end ☹. As it turned out



the pot is 55 metres deep with a 50 metre freehang, so Ed, tying into the pitch a metre below the lip, ensured there was enough rope to reach the bottom. Both ropes (the 80 and the 60) are rigged barely half a metre apart. The first and only pitch descends 3 metres to a re-belay and is followed by a freehang (50 metres), entering a large chamber (100mX50mX50m) through the top of the roof, about 5 metres below the re-belay. The descent is impressive and long, as the chamber bells out to reveal a stal covered roof and a forever-approaching-floor. On landing we found the chamber peppered with stalagmite forests, some of which reached 25 metres in height. All in all a very nice cave with impressive formations and light effects provided by the sunlight



entering from above. Needless to say, the forever-approaching floor translated as the never-nearing entrance on the way up. Stopped off to look at entrance of another cave (Sima de Alienca, Park 39°13.216N 000°40.063W, Cave 39°13.179N 000°40.075W) on the way back down the track.

Day 7 (Spag Alicantese Day)

Drove out past reservoir close to cave but didn't find it. Description read: "look under pile of stones in field on left!" We didn't have a chance in hell as the locals seem to crop stones as their main produce. Gave up and went on wine tour of the region instead. Ed now needs replacement enamel for his teeth, after the first sip of wine. Nevertheless we bravely battled on through another three Bodegas and a dozen wines finding one suitable for "drinking" (only if you were mildly desperate). At £2 for 5 litres, it will do very well for the boeuf bourguignon.

Day 8 (Goose, duck, steak and lamb in separate accounts day!) - FRANCE

Spent travelling (see previous journals for examples). First evening in the Dordogne. Nice meal in restaurant with rather nice cheese board. Oh yeah! Viandes as per title.

Day 9 (Oink Oink Day)

Morning spent shopping for vast quantities of food, (still trying to find a different meat for each day of the holiday) and trying to get the car serviced – going to have to return after New Year.

Returned to Gite and spent unfeasibly long time trying to work out assorted technology in order to be able to find cave for which we had a perfectly good description. Found Grotte La Crouzatte, the GPS did prove vaguely useful as Ed set off in the wrong direction from the road. Pleasant cave, first pitch is free climbable (around 10m), we used a 30m rope but a 15 would be perfectly adequate. Second pitch followed shortly after (40m rope); interesting get-on with free hanging traverse to a free hanging Y-hang. Third pitch, Andrew tried some creative rigging to avoid some shitty rock at the top, most of the rest of the way down was on a slope that could be climbed from about half way. Bottom of cave. Two ways into a sump, we couldn't be bothered to get wet!

Exited cave, without incident apart from the box splits that Ed had to do to de-rig the second pitch. Raced back home to see if Steve had guessed which piece of meat to put in the oven.

Ate, drank and ...*(well it was New Year – okay I'm writing this before we get too pissed but I'm sure the evening will pall out to the inevitable hangover tomorrow morning).*

Day 10 (Ed's first Pigeon)

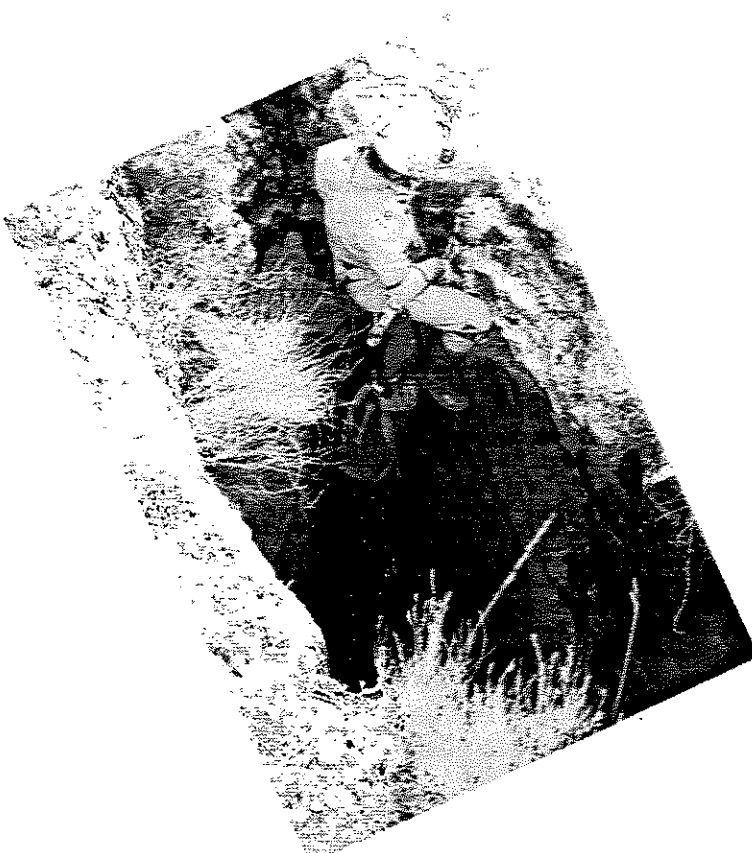
A day of firsts, especially for Ed. After sufficient faffing over deciding which cave to do, we eventually settled on trying Igue de Viazac for the first time, rather than having a second attempt (for Andrew and Steve) at Igue du Planagreze. Four tackle bags of rope and two small bags for the boat were packed and off we went. Andrew started rigging the first 65m pitch with the (as later found) wrong starting rope; hence his first reverse double bowline was borne. On reaching the first ledge, at -34m, he called for Steve to join him... uttering the words "how the hell am I meant to rig that?!!?!?!?"... (add a distant whimper for good effect). Steve joined him on the ledge and found an interesting sight; a long freehanging wire rebelay with a 5m wire

attached to some form of hangers above (a first for all as the most free-free-hanging rebelay ever encountered). Steve decided a major swing would be OK and rigged the next 30m. At the bottom of the next slope, Andrew was faced with a similarly rigged pitch on two rawbolts amazingly placed 3m up in the roof. At the base of the short pitch was a 25m long wire traverse across the Puits Martel. The first bit was not too bad, but the second section loomed over a deeper pot and we were suspended, on a wire, over a very, very large drop (a first for Ed). At this stage Steve took over the rigging by finding the very aptly named Puits de Echo... with an echo of remarkable repeatability. Here the 81m pitch was very muddy and sloping. Rebelay after rebelay followed until a deviation, which just happened to be succeeded by a deviated knot pass (a first for Ed). Another 30m of dynamic rope and Steve still hadn't reached the bottom so the final 60m of rope was added in another knot pass (a second for Ed),

which preceded a rebelay! The final 20m dropped us into mud chamber and the puits de *mud*, where we ran out of rope with a 24m pitch left to do and believe it or not, requiring a 120m rope! By this time we were 175m deep (the deepest for Ed) and the slow prusik up the 81m sloping pitch (another first for Ed) followed by a heavy haul up the rest of the cave. Typically, Steve set up the pitch forgetting the rack of hangers he was meant to carry (not a first for him ☺). We finally exited just before 10pm from this fairground of caves with thoughts of enjoyment, how do we get more rope? we must try this again and WHERE IS FOOD, BEER & WINE! This did follow as Ed cooked (you guessed it, for the first time) Pigeon au Estragon et Vin and we dined (Quote from Ed: "My bird is still hot on the inside". Steve: "How many fingers can you get into it now?" Ed: "The whole fist!") before retiring very sleepily.

Day 11 (Cheval Pinoso)

What a day!!!! Steve and Ed started the morning by tackling yesterday's gear and spent a couple of hours washing mud off the hangers... yuk!!! Later we all spent a couple of forgettable hours hanging around the Citroen garage waiting for the car to be serviced. Good end to the day with Cheval Pinoso being served as this is being typed... Mmmmmm food and wine call... bye for now.



Day 12 (Steak à la Ed)

Today we decided that we would get to the bottom of Riviere de la saut de la Pucelle after a number of previous attempts having failed, due to lack of gear or Jon dropping the required gear into the deepest of pools. A 2.8km river cave with sportingly wet climbs, pitches and a few swims! 3 tackle bags of gear were packed on the basis that this would get us to the end. However, after about 1km Ed decided that his arm was hurting too much and chose to leave. Juliet followed for safety and they rescued a bright yellow and black salamander.

The adventures of Pierre Le salamander

Pierre was unfortunate enough, one day as the snow melted, to be carried by a large current (of flood-water) deep into the recesses of the cave known as Pucelle. After a significant length of time... longer than most of us would like to spend in a dark, damp, foodless environment... Pierre was confronted by the horrors of hunger. Gripped in the throws of death he decided, in desperation, to tackle a huuuuuge, fat, slimey slug (*all this read in a dodgy french accent*). Fortunately for Monsieur Pierre le Salamander, Ju and Ed happened along and in a touch of unusual sentimentality decided to rescue the afflicted amphibian by introducing him (or her) to the miracle of modern technology and flying it out first class on "Greenglove" airlines; a short stopover at the dodgy climb resort was followed by a long-haul flight with "Stickair" to a final destination in the sunny spot by the stream.

Asides over, we return to our main feature with Steve and Andrew still tackling the perils of cold and water... Andrew and Steve were left to try and finish the cave. After 5 pitches, some of which matched the descriptions, they believed they were at the bottom. Still carrying a couple of ladders they headed off to try and find the sump. After a long period of time and having been sapped of most of their energy by the cold wet swims, they left the ladders only to find a 2m pitch; tired and exhausted they exited having spent 6 hours underground. As it happens they were only 80 metres from the end of the cave... bobbins!! Back to the gîte for some excellent steak cooked by Ed.

Day 13 (Chick Chasseur)

As Andrew attended to the house keeping and Steve attempted in vain to enjoy a couple of hours watching Planet of the Apes in the car, Ju and Ed set off to visit Igue St Sol. Worthy of mention are the looong descent, smoky rope, formations and the sculptures. Ed was forced to venture past the horny devil as his light run out in the deeper recesses of the cave but it was to no avail; the exit that lies past this guardian was firmly secured and the key may as well be made of mud. There was nothing for it but to return the way one had come.



The gang "angeling" into one of the caves

Day 14 (Service station fodder... hmm)

For a description of the drive back please refer to days 1 and 8. Never before in the annals of history have so many customs officers been so impressed by a pig's leg and over 200 metres of muddy rope, on the outskirts of Paris.

Eddy, Juliet, Andrew and Steve

