

U.B.B.S

SUMMER NEWSLETTER



2003

Dear all,

Welcome to the UBSS summer newsletter and sorry it is a bit late – a sad story of several redrafts, some outstanding articles and 3 editors awaits anyone silly enough to ask. Incidentally I look forward to full (and hopefully amusing) accounts of trips people have been on this summer for the Autumn/Winter edition – come on, I know you've been to China, Dominican Republic, Spain, France, Ireland and erm.. Wales so get writing.

Firstly, Graham has asked people to actually read the treasurers report this time as it contains some important details on subscriptions.

Apart from that we have the diary from next terms events, a new t-shirt design, a Co. Clare report and a mammoth account of the Christmas caving/culinary holiday to the Dordogne. For anyone interested in taking part in a similar trip to the Ardecche this coming Christmas, Andy Atkinson will be most receptive to bribes of beer and more frustratingly deposits (hard cash I'm informed) and can be found in the pub on Tuesday evenings.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at the various social events we have planned for the next term – and for the less frequently sighted of you if you only make one, make sure its bonfire night! In addition to whats advertised there will also hopefully be talks in the library plus possibly a pub crawl?, a curry night? and whatever else anyone fancies and we manage to get organised, so keep a weather eye on your emails...

Happy caving!
Ed Hodge

Autumn 2003 Diary

2-3rd October: FRESH – current members come along (preferably with beer) and put in a few hours on the stall. New members, well done for signing up!

7th October (evening): Giants Cave – a tourist trip (i.e. you don't need any gear or experience) to a little cave in the Avon Gorge right under the suspension bridge. More of an excuse to get acquainted with each other and the inside of the Corrie Tap!

11-12th October: Freshers Weekend – overnight trip to the Mendips and our fantastic caving hut in Burrington, sampling some of the local caves and plenty of the local ale.

14th October (evening): Redcliffe Caves – actually mines, right under our noses in the middle of Bristol. An interesting poke about, with plenty of time after for a bit of supper and the famous slide show in the pub.

25-26th October: Wales weekend – over the bridge and down some of the finest (and largest) caves in the country, probably with an overnight stay in one of the very hospitable huts there.

8-9th November: Bonfire Weekend – Not to be missed!! THE legendary event of the year with more roasted animal carcasses, towering infernos, beer, cider, fireworks and tomfoolery than you can shake a burning stick at. Its at the hut too so we can make as much noise as we like. Oh, we also do some caving, but not normally on the Sunday.

15-16th November: Wales or Derbyshire weekend – depends on whether we can get some very nice people to agree to drive us oop North...

28-30th November: Yorkshire weekend – deep caves or potholes as some call em. You'll need to have done your SRT training for this one and its worth it – some great trips down some of the most impressive caves in the country to be had. Did I mention we stay right next door to a pub? And it never seems to shut..?

5th December: Christmas dinner – venue to be confirmed. Probably not the same place as last year – don't think they'd have us back...

26th December: Ardeche Trip – get down some seriously big and sporting caves then eat yourselves silly on gastronomic delights, with the added bonus of burning it all off prussiking the next day!

♣ Check your emails regularly for changes to this diary and any extra events but more importantly come to the pub on Tuesday nights to socialise and sign up for trips. Some of the more popular need booking well in advance to avoid disappointment! See our lovely Hon. Sec Lou for all details – she'll be the one looking harassed! ♣

TREASURER'S REPORT MARCH 2003

For a change, this one's important, so please read it!

Graham Mullan

As has been the case for the last couple of year's, this year's report is dominated by the subject of insurance. Some of you will be aware of a limited consultation exercise I undertook towards the end of last year, when I was concerned about the potential increase in our public liability insurance premium. Well, that particular problem was overcome by my managing to get our cover included within the overall University cover, at no cost to ourselves. However, the astute will notice that despite this our overall insurance bill for 2002/3 is still within £10 of last year's. This is completely outside our control and further rises should be anticipated (see below). The extremely astute will notice that we still have a public liability bill of £50. This is to cover some items that are not covered by the University's policy.

Leaving the issue of insurance, it might be argued that the accounts look quite healthy, with a small excess of receipts over payments. This is somewhat misleading as our bill for *Proceedings* 22.3 was significantly lower than usual. Had it been close to previous figures then we would have been significantly overspent. It is fair to say, therefore, that we are very close to the edge and it is therefore time to put up subscriptions for the first time since 1995. (Student subscriptions have risen from £6 to £8 over that time).

Accordingly I put a proposal to this year's AGM that subscriptions should rise from £12 to £18 (joint £27). This was reluctantly agreed, with the proviso that recent graduates should pay a reduced figure (£12) for their first two years. The increased figure to come into effect from March 2004. At the time, I was criticised for proposing what seemed to many to be an unjustifiably large increase, based only on speculation on what might happen. Since then, however, My fears have been amply justified and that's mainly to do with insurance. Firstly, the contents insurance on our rooms has risen from £367.50 to £525, an increase of 42%. And we were lucky! The Insurers have decided on a *minimum* premium of £1,000 for policies such as this and only discounted ours because of the tie-up with the University's own policies. It seems that such increases are standard across the market, so no better quote can be obtained (quite apart from the dangers of disengaging from the University policies in this regard when we are occupying University premises. This does not affect the Hut, at the time of writing I have not received the renewal figure for that). At the same time, a problem arose with the public liability insurance and it looked like that cover, via the University, might not be renewed for this year. This would have thrown us back into the BCRA scheme which those of you who are also BCRA members, or members of other caving clubs, will know is becoming an expensive administrative nightmare. That danger has now passed, for the present, but all this should give you a flavour of how we are subject to forces beyond our control and must be prepared for -and have the resources to deal with - further problems.

I sincerely hope that this increase, necessary as it is, will not lead members into resigning from the Society. Our work, in all its aspects, relies strongly on the support which we receive from you. Without you, the resources that the younger, more active members can call upon: the Library, the Museum, the Hut, our store of tackle, and most importantly your experience; would be sadly depleted and we would all be the poorer.

In order to make life easier, I have included, below, a draft Banker's Order form, which can be used both to renew those that already exist and to start this kind of payment for those that do not currently do so. I hope that you will all take advantage of this as this takes a great deal of work from my shoulders and prevents us wasting resources that can be better used elsewhere. Note that the new rates are:

Normal	£18
Joint	£27

And that they become due on March 10th 2004.

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BANKER'S ORDER

To:Bank PLC

(address)

Please pay on the 10th Day of March, 2004 and on the same day in each succeeding year until further notice the sum of
to the account of the:

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY,
National Westminster Bank PLC
40, Queens Road, Bristol, BS8 1RF
A/C no. 66983673
Sort code 60 -17 - 12

and charge such payment to the debit of my account, no.

This order replaces and cancels any previous order payable to this Society.

Signature.....

(Name)

Date.....

Address

.....

.....

Subscriptions due

The following have yet to pay their 2003 subscription. Please send the relevant sums to the Treasurer as soon as possible:

Sarah Brocklebank £12

Andy Currant £2

Marcel Dijkstra £12

Graham Felce £12

Simon Flower £12

Leila French £12

Adam Goulding £24

Tim Haynes £12

Eleanor Hodge £12

Dirk Hoffmann £12

Heather Jackson £12

Peter Johnson £12

Jodie Lewis £12

Ed Mallon £12

Jez Newman £12

Hugo Pile £12

Jon Telling £12

Mike Thompson £12

Julian & Carol Walford £6

Andy Wallis £12

Carola Wilhelm £12.

If any of the above would consider future payments by standing order (or would amend their current one), this would improve the Treasurer's work load immeasurably ☺

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPEL/EOLOGICAL SOCIETY

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST JANUARY 2003

RECEIPTS

£

Members Subscriptions
Student Members Subscriptions

£

1551.52
364.00

PAYMENTS

£

Proceedings Vol 22.3 Printing
Postage

1238.70
195.00

£

1433.70

Union Grants: Capital
Current

360.09
350.00

710.09

Tools & Equipment
Library
Museum
Sessional Meetings
Postages

Capital
Current

369.53
116.00

485.53

189.20

13.50

-

131.11

Interest on Investments: Bank
N.S.B.

189.04
30.94

219.98

Hon. Secs Petty Cash
Stationery & Duplicating
Rates & Taxes

306.29

48.07

Sales of Publications (not C. of C.C.)

688.83

Donations

268.00

Insurances: Third Party
Property

50.00
736.22

786.22

Tax Refund on Covenants

283.18

Subscriptions & Licence
Travel Money

125.00

319.89

Sale of Charterhouse Permits

15.00

“Fresh”

20.00

Donation To Mendip Rescue Organisation

25.00

Pen Park Hole Tackle Fees

2.50

3883.51

Surplus on Annual Dinner

50.00

Excess of Receipts over Payments

269.59

4153.10

4153.10

“CAVES OF COUNTY CLARE”

Surplus Balance at 31 January 2003

2955.68

PUBLISHING ACCOUNT 2002/03

Sales of “Caves of County Clare”

630.48

Surplus balance at 1 February 2002

2325.20

2955.68

2955.68

BALANCE SHEET AT 31 JANUARY 2003

17528.55

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

Cullaun 4, Co. Clare, Ireland

Graham Mullan

Cullaun 4 is one of the line of swallets on the west side of the Poulacapple Ridge in Co. Clare. It was discovered by the Society in 1952 and recorded as being 200 yards long (Acke, 1954). This figure is interesting because nearly thirty years later Self (1981) describes it as being only 60 m long. Both figures are wrong, but that in Acke and his description are by far the most accurate of the several descriptions of this cave published by the Society (Acke, 1954; Jenkins, 1955; Toms, 1956; Tratman, 1967 and Self, 1981).

Earlier this year, during the Society's annual sojourn in Clare, it was noted that the spruce plantations in the region of Cullauns 3 and 4 were being felled and in order to ensure that the descriptions of how to find these caves remained correct, we went to look at the entrances. As it happened, they were not actually felling the areas around these two caves and the descriptions are, and should remain, usable. In particular Cullaun 3 main entrance is still difficult to locate as it is surrounded by dense trees and, having located it by the underground route from C3b, Tony Boycott nearly got lost in them and was forced to return the same way.

Having sorted that one out, the party moved on to Cullaun 4 (the forestry road directly passes the entrance" [Self, 1981]). Surprise, instead of the very short section of canyon we were expecting, we found ourselves with 5 or 6 different entrances and something over 300 m of cave! This was duly surveyed two days later and the fruits of that survey, that it lead past, not towards, the top, C5e entrance, of Cullaun 5 required a further morning's investigations to work out just which streams went where. In fact, it was later found that the caves did not overlap to as great an extent as was first thought, but the findings remain valid.

The results of our investigations are shown on the accompanying sketch map, which has the caves in more or less the correct relationship to each other and the main surface features sketched in. The main points can also be summarised thus:

Cullaun 4 is 378 m in length, starting where a stream sink in a tiny (1 m deep) limestone gorge enters a 1 m square cave passage. The cave is either unroofed or otherwise connected to the surface in 4 or 5 other places and steadily increase in size to a comfortable canyon 2 m or more high and 1 m wide, until it splits into upper and lower halves. The upper half becomes a flat out crawl in a muddy bedding, too tight after 15 m and the lower half gradually lowers to a wet bedding, impassable after 70 m. Much of this section was sumped between our two visits. The water probably joins Cullaun 5 at an inlet 40 m upstream of C5. Where the cave passes under the forestry track, it is constricted by a limonite flow. This can be reached from either side, but would be severely damaged by any attempt to pass it.

The headwaters of Cullaun 5, other than the C4 water, sink at two choked swallets in the valley floor between C4's lowest entrance and C5c. The more northerly of the two has incised a 4-5 m deep valley in the shales and is the major sink for the area. There is a col north of this sink, separating this valley from the C4 valley.

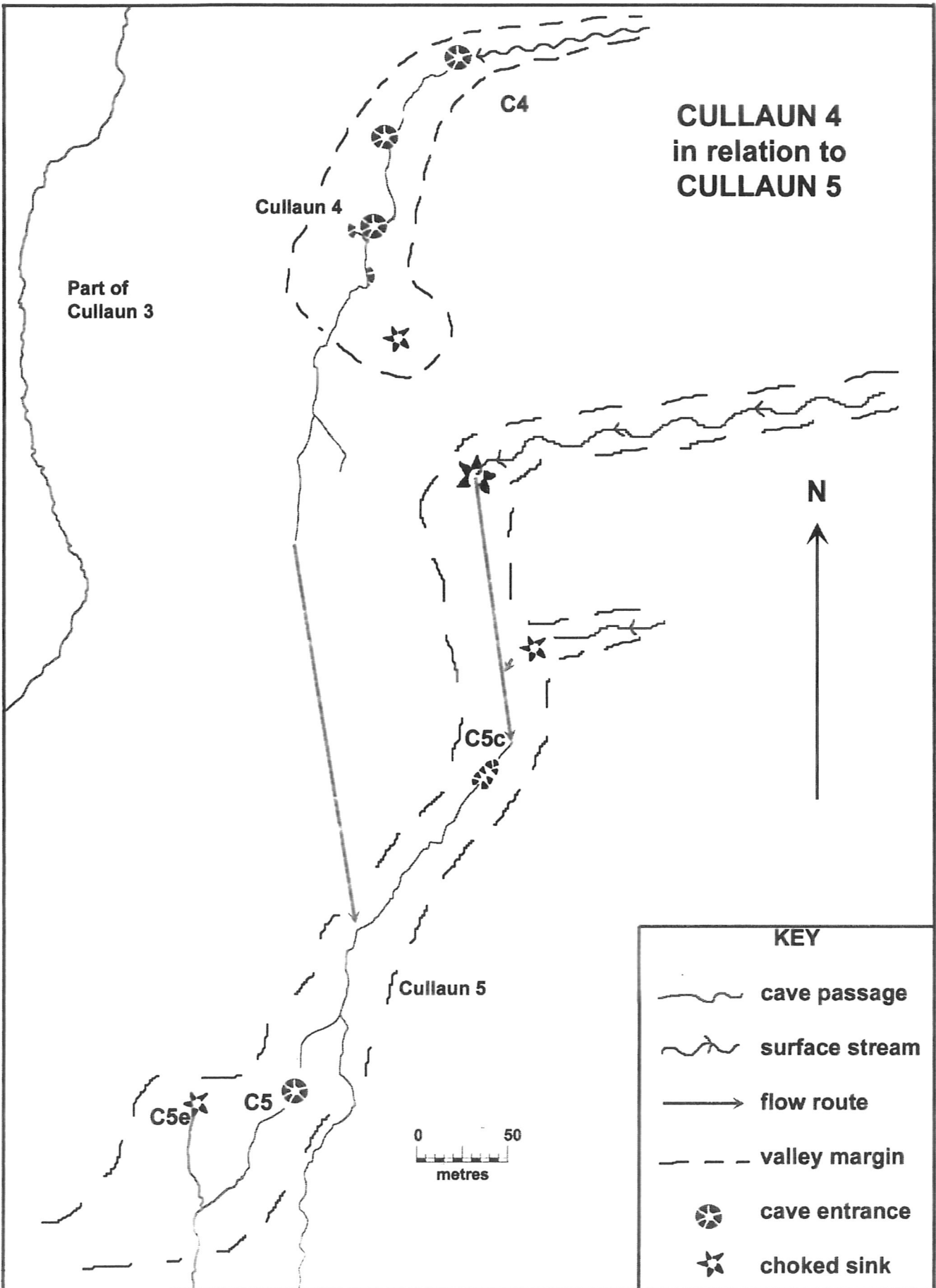
The passage upstream of C5c is not an impenetrable bedding as stated by Self (1981) but can be passed for 10 m until becoming too tight. Again, this was not a new finding as this length of passage was mentioned by Toms in 1956. The cascade mentioned by Self is just a trickle down the side of the C5c shakehole.

In the water conditions prevailing, the major part of the stream from C5c flowed not past C5 but down the alternative Loop Way. Tony reckoned that if he had been exploring downstream rather than upstream he would have assumed this was the main route.

Finally, we also looked at C5e. There are two shakeholes here, next to each other. Neither has ever been passable and at present they are solidly choked with brash from the forestry clearances. It is interesting to note that although many drainage ditches were dug as part of the forestry plantation work, the major features of both surface and underground drainage do not appear to have been severely affected. They do make the ground much harder to cover on foot, however.

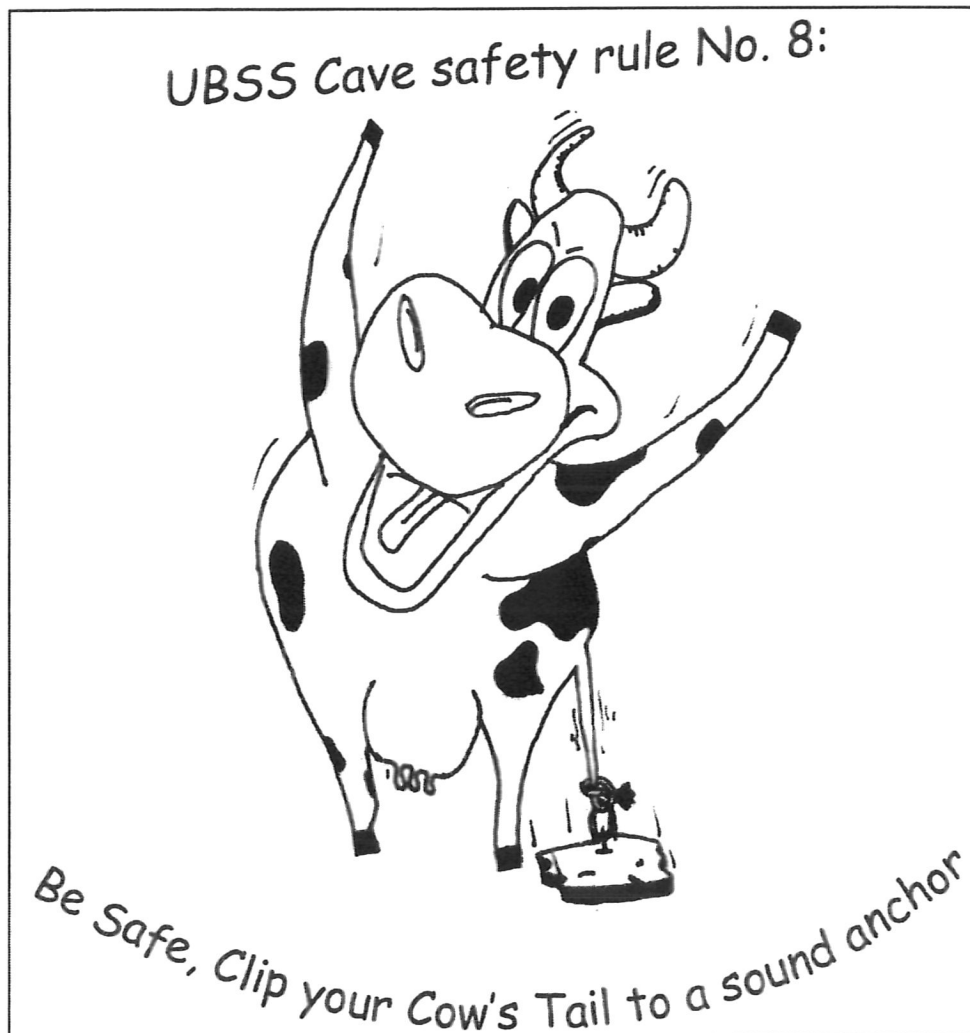
References

- ACKE, P. R. 1954 The Cullaun Series of Caves, County Clare, Ireland *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society* 7(1), 7-22.
- JENKINS, H. M. 1955 Cullaun IV and V County Clare, Ireland *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society* 7(2), 105-109
- TRATMAN, E.K. (ed) 1969. *The Caves of North-West Clare, Ireland*. David & Charles, Newton Abbot.
- SELF, C.A. (ed) 1981 *Caves of County Clare* University of Bristol Spelæological Society,
- Toms H.M.K. Shorter Accounts of Caves [Co. Clare, Ireland] - Cullaun V. *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelæological Society* Vol 7 (3) pp 180 - 181



UBSS T-SHIRT

The new UBSS T-shirt is now available, in a collection of traditional colours, for the very reasonable cost of £8. All orders to Eddy in the pub or contact on hilleddy@yahoo.co.uk for further details.



News Flash!! Stay tuned for the forthcoming release of the UBSS Passport and Captain Caveman's views on caving...

New Year's Bash Dans le Lot, Dordogne 2002-2003

Editors comment: Only Grammar and Spelling have been murdered, in the following article, to protect the freshly laid impressions of a handful of cavers on their first caving trip abroad. No names have been changed to protect the innocent because few have been named and, they're not so innocent!

The following text was written as a log in the evenings, at around the time when the second bottle of vin rouge was kicking in and the pain, cold and adrenalin were fading... See if you can guess who wrote what?

Thanks are extended to the trustees of the Tratman Fund, for the generous financial support extended to student members on the trip.

Day 1: (Broom....broom...broooooom... a bit of sailing and some more... broom)

As has become customary we dispense with a description of the journey. For those of a bureaucratic nature may we refer you to annex ZZ plural Alpha. Or the yellow pages; or the bible perhaps? As did most of the passengers in Andrew's and Eddy's cars as they tandemed their way through the maelstrom of the Periferique (to the Bond theme tunes, of course!!)

Day 2: (Food, wine and mud... Fantastic!!)

After navigating the aisles of E-LeClerc on a Friday morning (not enough booze bought) a late start was necessitated and with much groaning of joints etc (not to mention GPS calibration – the end result of which was both parties agreeing that we were “here!”) we headed off from the gites. An hour later after a not disagreeable tour of the local countryside we decided to actually try and find the cave... Wasn't too hard when we consulted archaic “paper maps” and the two parties were split into rigging and de-rigging (bad luck to the latter) – rigging: Andy, Ju, Ed Hodge (hence forth known as Ed), and JoseLuis, de-rigging: Eddy, Lou, Becca and Julian. The bolts were pretty rotten and therefore the rigging tight – forget anything you've learnt in the union or elsewhere, it won't work here. Well, 120m of rope and one continuous pitch later we found the bottom: a dig site, lovely. A la par with last year's trip, this year we found a beastie in need of rescue; a toad, poor bugger (is it a cave toad? Does it need rescuing? Lets hope not because it's still there). At this point with the rigging party at the bottom, the others on the way down (and no way of passing, dammit!) an 11.30pm finish was forecasted (for the first day? no thank you!) and, by executive decision, the full trip was cancelled. The chain of command quickly went up the rope and, after a bit of squawking further up, people started moving out (sorry to those who only had a sniff of the pitch). However, if you think this description is missing something please entertain thoughts of 4 ropes (OK one stayed in the bag but it still needed carrying out – by Eddy again!), 5 rebelayes (all VERY tight except the last), one abandoned deviation (sorry deviation lovers), some terrible bolting (unless you are 8ft tall and left handed) and a ton of interesting looking bones at the bottom. The de-rigging was demanding to say the least, with liberal use of the new “skyhook” and muscles long

since ignored, not to mention the rutting boars heard at the top of the pitch whilst waiting for Eddy. Eddy emerged a shattered human being (quote: "It felt like carrying a corpse") leaving me to pull up all the rope and tackle sacks up from the last ledge. It waited until that moment to start pissing it down to cap things off. A very brief but monsoonal car journey later we were back for beer, wine and curry – for a full Michelin rating of the "mild" vindaloo 'a la Eddy' please apply to Miss C.Hamilton...

Meanwhile.....after a dismal attempt at trying to find Crouzates, the rest of us, determined to at least get underground (looking like wusses on the first day wouldn't be good) trundled off to Reviellon in the rain. After an entertaining mud slide we arrived at, apparently the second biggest cave entrance in France. It has to be said, that's about all it had going for it. After a couple of hundred metres of easy walking in the cave, we arrived at a rather ranzid looking pool of bulls**t (in Emily's words). This, of course, had to be used for a quick trip just to make sure the day was spent doing slightly more than a walk in the park. It was bloody cold and as predicted sumped just round the corner.

Day 3: (Hmmmm... more caving)

For lack of inspiration in the spelling department, today's cave was pain-e-gris (Planagreze, apparently- the descriptions have just arrived). After conveniently avoiding the rain showers Eddy disappeared off into the undergrowth, tackle bag on shoulder. Half an hour later Char turned up at the top of the large hole in the ground expecting Eddy to have disappeared and be growing gradually more irritated at the late arrival of more rope. However, by the time Lou and Si turned up half an hour later still, Eddy was cursing French bolt positioning at the bottom of the first pitch and Char was lying flat out on the floor, fast running out of tunes to whistle. Three hours later, when the de-rigging party of Juliet, Andrew, Emily and Jose Luis turned up, Si and Lou were still on the surface, Eddy was attempting to rig the second pitch with the rope for the third, as the first rope had proved too short for the first pitch. After re-rigging by Andrew the rope on the first pitch finally managed to reach the bottom (a 90m would make things a heck of a lot easier, plus a 70m for the second pitch). Jose Luis, Si, Ju, Andrew, and Eddy then managed to get down to the first lake while the rest of us having given up at various points for various reasons, entertained the locals with our outfits, or lack of them.

Aaaaaah – Viazac!

Rigging trip comprised (in order of descent) Steve, Ed, Becca and Julian. Arrived in middle of rainstorm, stopped once we'd got changed of course. Very impressive shakehole entrance. Lots of grunting and straining from Steve sounded like he was taking a dump halfway down the first pitch. Apparently it was a tricky deviation but if his guts were anything like mine after "curry night" it could well have been a full purge. I followed him a little way behind: a couple of rebelay and a deviation later and you're looking at a rebelay hanging off a bit of wire, a long long way off the floor. Did I say a piece of tatty wire...a long, long way off the deck?? Well, trying not to think about it too much it was passed and the floor loomed up (eventually). At this point the decision was made to stoke up the carbide – much hissing and stinking later –lovely light! And lots of it! A small mention should be made of the wire traverse at this point. An inspection of the many (thank f@fk again)

bolts and we were happily suspended over a 60m hole on a thin bit of wire (good idea NOT to have a powerful light at this point). Many, many rebelay and a couple of tackle sacks of rope later we got to the mud, grunge, poo, chocolate, whatever you liken it to. It was sticky, slippery, gooey, squelchy and covered everything rapidly. A few more pitches and the lake was reached. Bit of an anticlimax as by this point we were already tired and covered in goo. The lake (read: rift with a canal in it) had a sophisticated pulley system across it (shame we hadn't taken a boat) but fatigue was starting to set in and the way out foremost in our minds.



First bit lots of 60 degree slope requiring all sorts of manoeuvres to get a good rhythm going. Enjoy the experience of mud fouling up all jammers and them not working (new jammers too!) which can be quite disconcerting. Ho, hum – starting to get bored now. More prussicking. More prussicking. Hmm – starting to get thirsty. Wonder if that drip is potable? Now is that still the curry or something else wriggling around in there?? Ah hell, time to really get cracking. Up the big pitch, hit the cruddy wire, past it, almost out! But whats that? A knot? In the middle of the rope? How? Why? It certainly wasn't there on the way down. Union training didn't cover this. Lets try anything... A few sweaty moments and it worked and almost out now. I would say how pleasant the circle of moonlight at the top was but of course it was still raining and instead I had a shower for the last half hour. Finally exited the cave wishing my gym itinerary had included a few more one-armed pull-ups and vowing to do an "easy cave" tomorrow. Beer, food, shower, beer, food, wine, wine – in that order, then some more wine and now the pain is finally being numbed. The grin is only now fading from my face after what was truly a world-class caving trip. Maybe I'll do some more caving tomorrow...hmm, maybe.

Day 4: (Next stop, La Station de St Martin)

Not so cloudy, not so lucky day. Well, since my point of view (Jose-Luis in Ed and Eddy's team) there was something strange everywhere, every time. Let's start with some gear forgotten, for instance Ju almost forgets her wellies and Eddy definitively forgot his furry suit. Oh! And I almost lose the scheme of the "Igue de St.

1

Martin” when there was a little moment of confusion in the crossroad that separated the teams (each team in different cave). That happened when...I almost forget where the cave is localized. In fact, until we were in the crossroad I realize that I will be caving in St. Martin. Surprises are part of the fun in this trip. But let’s go back to the strange parts of this day. Unexpected. That was the appearance of a friendly French farmer (is he the owner of the land? crossed my mind) who had a brief “conversation” with us. But more unexpected, especially for Eddy was the “hidden” and not easily to find anchors. What was the result of this? More surprises, of course, because we were plenty of time waiting for our turn in the rope. Ed had the worst part of this because our cave with tube station-like entrance receives a flow of cold air, probably warm for penguins but not for us. Escaping from this “cool” situation, Ed met a nice French man with a shotgun during his warming walk. After the obligated exchange of “Bon jours the sight of hunts decided Ed’s return to the cave, sweet cold cave. Just in time for his turn in the rope.

I should recommend to the “Metropolitan” French authorities the building of an electric stair in this station. This “vertical” pitch with its sloped walls really needs one. It was strange to descend in this cave and prussiking was more strange: an hybrid of free climbing and prussiking. Eddy could also agree with my recommendation after facing this hybrid with the hurt of his pained low back (after a fall incident)

I insist. Strange is a cave that looks old, inactive and dead and even that it could host all kind of live. From the flying and sleeping bats, the spiders, the mosquitoes and the little “escargots” to the moving and always falling (be aware!) rocks, all kind, all dangerous sizes. They could make you slip to the pitch or fall over you. Strange is to find an abandoned rope in an apparently closed passage. Strange is to exit the cave with daylight. Strange is to come back to home without being lost in the road.

Shirley Bassey, poo in a welly and success! (Lou goes caving)

They say third time lucky, and today the theory is proved. Finally I got the bottle not just a sniff of the cork.

A beautiful moss clad entrance, lit by the sun and shrouded in fear. We descend into a heavenly hole all hopeful and innocent. First real French cave, first proper SRT. I was secretly hoping that something would go wrong of course, so I could get out but no, not this time, success bitter and sweet as Planagreze loomed beneath us.

After another white knuckle journey to the cave courtesy of Juliet, who’s timidity on French roads far out weighs the possibilities of accidental death than the boys’ reckless, insanity (too much driving into the wrong side of junctions Ju) we made it there. Got dressed, got subterranean.

Hey Descender! descend a little cave with me! Do do do dodo (sang in the style of Shirley Bassey) all the way down a delightful adult play ground of fricking massive pitches re-belays and more re-belays.

At the bottom was a little lake river type affair with a dingy, and a human poo layed by one of our merry band (Juliet, Becca, Lou, Emily and Julian) and then carried to the top in a welly...yuck!

A groovy trip that scared me senseless but thrilled me wildly, Emily to you I say COW’S TAILS! You can ask her about that! (yes Emily, elaborate on this Cow’s Tails issue –ed)

... Viazac, adventure playground of the caving gods, and would be flying apprentices.

Arrived a'la cave good and early, all going well so far. Disaster strikes, the shtop/ descender of my fair self has been mis-laid! Search the vehicles, search the grass! Nope, it appears it has been left at the gite. A swift change of plan as Eddy speeds off in a cloud off dust to go and find him. Juliet and Lou already quite a long way down. Jose Luis commences decent. Knot pass doesn't pose a problem, "Rope Free", is heard within a matter of seconds..... Becca looks confused, he couldn't have got passed that re-belay and all the way to the bottom of the pitch? Looking down, the rope doesn't hang anywhere near him..... "erm, I can see him on the ledge, I think he's detached himself from the rope". Much umming and arring later, I come back up passed the first re-belay as Becca descends to save the day. Pas de probleme. Eddy returns just before I start to descend with his shtop, should I change it and use charlotte's instead (mine wasn't found.....I'm sure I'll find it later)? Are the rumours true? Aaaaah, feck it! Down we go. *Don't stop me now, I'm having such a good time, I'm having a ball!!!* (n.b. see other songs of SRT by Lou and Emily! Appendix 1) This cave is going amazingly well, for once someone is doing things wrong other than me! Lying in the starfish position from the bottom of the pitch, (worry not my little munchkins, I was near the wall at the side), watching the scitsoblaniac descent off monsieur Hill (does he live in a convent?!), this is fantabulous. There's a mini lil tiny bit of light, "B-Jesus I'm a long way down!"

More going down yada yada yada..... WTF!! This bridge is a bit of a beaut. Clippy Mc Clip with the ole cows tails, and across we go! Scooty Mc Scoot, shufflely shuffle. Up a bit of some kind of electric cable, down a big slippery hill, tis the way to go. I will stand in an upwards manner like a normal caver (no offence Char). Oh dear, I fear I have fallen downwards to the muddy floor, face imbedded in mud..... yummy! Most amused, all continues well. Better put cowstails in at rebelay, descend onto shorty.... *scream!* much affearing later, upside down clasping ropage with fear of life, Mr Ed had the marvellous idea of me coming back up the rope, *why hadn't I thought about that?* Up we scurry, second disaster of the day- my chocolate has melted! Can't be helped, munch, munch.

Anyways, after trying to explain events to those below (not especially easy with copious echoage), ascendage proceeded, until the rebelay hanging from the ledge of the first pitch was reached. Damnation, this is a tricky little beggar! Can't get on the ledge (better not swing too much, bolt might unscrew- found out later this was most unlikely!) this was a serious balls up, if only I had the gift of ambidexterity, on second thoughts I can't be bothered to talk about it, it was too distressing!

An hour or so later.....! Ascent continues and emergence from the cave. Sitting by the car, strange noises heard from all directions.... If a wild boar comes I can jump on the roof..... better not, might scratch it with my SRT kit. Luckily the pig type beast did not occur. All is good .

And – Ed and Andy de-rigging Poulmagree, sorry PLANAGREZES!

A couple of deviations and a rebelay at the local Intermarche, back to the gite for a cuppa and I was just about ready for bed again. Nope – some sort of caving trip beckoned and I wasn't getting out of it without some sort of serious note from my mother. What awaits me in the depths of poulmagree (Aaargh – planagrezes – sorry Andy!!) I don't know. Starting to wish I had a bit of local knowledge – especially just after being told I am de-rigging it later in the day. Really, really hoping it is nice and straightforward – maybe a couple of rebelayes and some nice freehanging stuff.

Lovely mossy entrance – looking promising so far and I was starting to get happy. Hmm – quite a far off rebelay off a couple of P-hangers, still not too much to worry about. The bottom of the first pitch was followed by a fairly tricky traverse line – hmmm... Already realising that an impending de-rig kind of takes the shine off a fun caving trip. However I still had enough enthusiasm to enjoy the beautiful water worn walls and pitches – fluted and sculptured rock heading up and down all the way. Got to the end of the second pitch and started to think we might be out in record time, but no – this was only about halfway apparently. We carried on heading down through the bowels of the cave with me “leading” (in body if not spirit). I started to hear a very



loud rumbling, thundering noise – it sounded like the Niagara falls further down – stomach starting to churn now but impelled by an urge to bottom it. Every turn seemed to uncover another pitchhead and by now I was just moving on autopilot. Then all of a sudden I ran out of rope...at a rebelay...with a fair drop behind me... The rebelay was a sling around a small jutting and very spiky protrudance of rock. I stopped there not quite sure what to do. I clipped into the sling and the spikiness sort of glued me to the rock. I was still there clinging on like a stranded cat when Andy came down to join me. Ah, silly me, this was the terminal lake – all we had to do was descend a little further, dip our wellies in the water and we would have completed the full descent. Hum, only problem is that the lake was about 10m below where it should have been. Obviously things been too dry recently (could have fooled me). Either way this led to a fairly complex changeover with the spiky rock doing its best to keep me attached until the very last minute when I managed to rip myself free. A couple of pitches ascent later and Andy and I were ready for the changeover. A brief tousele with the various ropes and Andy was above me and I was left below, ready for the task in hand. Only problem – no spanner to undo the rebelay with. Probably a good idea to shout to Andy before he prussiks out of sight. A spanner was precariously handed down and gripped between fingertips and all of a sudden I was left alone, with only a shedload of rope to pull out and a vague memory of what awaited me further up the pitch. Very quickly I was aware of the fact I was truly alone and started to get an idea of what I needed to do. Basically prussic, changeover at rebelay, undo bolt behind me, put rope in bag and carry on ascending. I'll spare you the majority of the details but a mention should be made of that P-hangered rebelay: got to it (fine), clipped into it (fine-ish), changeover my croll into the up-rope (OK), change my hand jammer into the up-rope (OK-ish). So now what? I'm hanging on an improvised Y-hang between my jammers on the left and my cowstail on the right. Still no way I can unbolt from the P-hangers as they are totally loaded. Need some way of getting over there without actually hanging off them. Ah, how about a foot, hooked around that bit of rock? Got it! Now hanging horizontally with a

trembling foot wrapped around a slippery bit of rock – but the hangers are loose! Quick, quick – undo those hangers with slippery hands. Much fumbling and they're free. Now what? Let foot go of course. Hang on, that would mean flying pretty fast across to the other side of the pitch.... Too late – its happening – WUMPH!!! That'll be the other side then. Stop swinging and check all systems still working and attached. Phew – everything cool. AND its still light at the top of the pitch – right, lets get out of here. Puff, pant and a few more of each and I got to the top. Sorted out the tangle of ropes and tackle sacks and strode purposefully for the car – for a welcoming committee I had Steve and Andy asleep in the front seats. The boot was open so I had a quick change in the pouring rain. An ignominious finale for what was for me a fairly groundbreaking trip. Cheers Andy for guiding me through the motions of de-rigging and then leaving me to get on with it.

Um, honourable mentions should be made to the gourmet supper – the veal was the most tender I have tasted (NOT from a crate apparently), the leeks somewhat springy but the piece de resistance was the sautéed potatoes slavishly and meticulously prepared by Si. What a hero – his skills surpass mere mortals...

Viazac, also known as stupid mother of a bch but beautiful big ice cream cone.**

That's your lot of descriptions, I loved the cave it rocked, wicked kicking, hip to the lip!

Well maybe I'll add a little more.

Viazac, viazac, viazac, it's all you hear on a Tuesday night in Micawbers. The biggest cave in the universe with bottomless pitches, cheese wire bridges and echoes loud enough to deafen a deaf person. This cave is the daddy.

BUTto a novice with an intense fear of heights the idea of a pitch any higher than a very small emu is terrifying. However I knew that the rest of my life would be a desolate wasteland of missed opportunity and unattained ambitions if I didn't go in. So, desperately trying to hold down my breakfast I allowed myself to be taken to the cave. The plan was to descend in sort of pairs, me(Lou) and Ju, Becca and Jose Luis, Emily and Eddy. I requested to go down in the first pair to get it over and done with and reduce the talk-myself-out-of-it time available.

I'll take this sober opportunity to thank Juliet, she has been patient and reassuring throughout a real inspiration...oh and full to the brim with bull s**t!

Okay, so you've already heard the lost stop fiasco.

Ju was already down to the first rebelay and waiting for me so I had to go in, Becca waited at the top to give helpful hints during the bits where I wasn't in hearing distance of Ju (remember this is the biggest cave in the universe and the decent would take me a good few years I needed a good supply of moral support and badgering). The deviation was problematic, still can't get to grips with the lack of complication involved, for some reason I always think it will be easier to detach myself from the rope and reattach below the deviation....foolish I know, I got the opportunity to do that faffing on the daft "knot pass" rubbish which has now righted my crippled sense of logic regarding removal of ones going down stuff from a loaded rope. Then the big decent into the cave proper. Now I know what the buggers have been going on about all this time, it is amazing, stupendous, astonishing HUGE! I loved it instantly the whole of the cave was just perfect, the cheese wire bridge wasn't at all scary it was fun and exhilarating (didn't look down though) echo passage/ beach was just heaven, testing my SRT ability and surrounding me in what I can only describe as luxury. My fear of heights has been replaced by a healthy respect and I can now pussycat with the bounce.

Referring to my earlier comment regarding Juliet's lack of honesty.....On the way out of the cave, at one of the many rebelay's Juliet was peering down at me and pointing to what she described as a practice knot pass, just to help me with the one on the final pitch. I looked at it and thought "oh that's sweet of her, just after a deviation like the one up there too" I performed the manouever with little finesse and continued out of the cave all naïve and glowing. I later discovered that the practice knot pass was in fact where a bolt had fallen out and sent Emily floor bound. Cheers Ju, ya did the right thing!

Day 5: New Years Day

Wow! What? a lack of a hangover?? Something must be wrong! I must go caving to rectify this. OK, Andrew and Steve have promised to let me use expensive photo equipment in the worst environment for it for a while – time to take them up on it. Looking out through a new year grin we pack the gear and get ready for the most irritating abseil. Sixty metres on a stop hurts. Since when has going down hurt? (ed – never on a rack! (are you sure? Have you asked Julian? –2nd ed))

Igue de St. Sol is pretty. Very. In fact 150 odd photos later it is still pretty. The muddy entrance belies the subtly-pleasing morphology of the cave. It's always hard to get across the way some caves just sit right as you look at them. Large passageway floored by undulating mud and flanked with tens of metre high stal results in a fun walk and lots of stop-and-snap opportunities. First up – a big depression and a big lump of flowstone. Nice.

"Oh, sh*t"

"What?"

"That's the biggest I've ever seen"

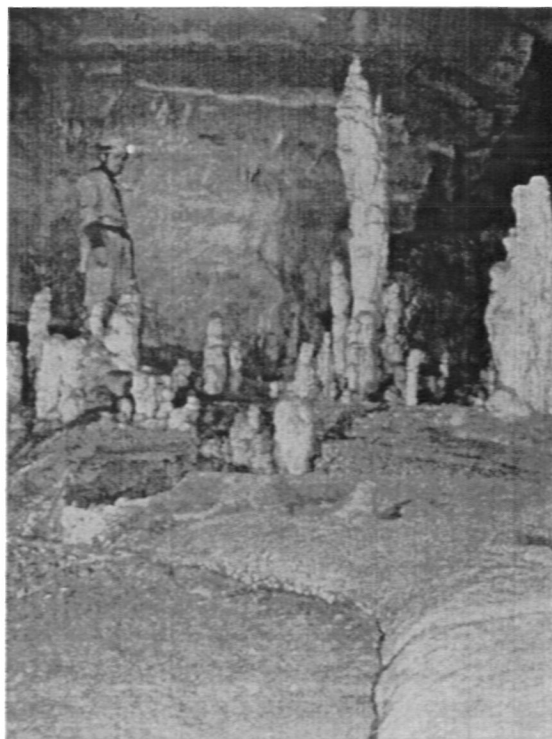
"Hey, knock it off – is there no privacy?"

"No, the group of bats!!!!"

Above our heads a couple of hundred bats rest, hanging from the ceiling. In all his time caving Steve has never seen this many in one cave, and excitedly shares this with us. I haven't either. Then again I haven't been caving that long....but it's still a lot of bats.

I'm not even going to go into the plethora of entertainingly sculpted mud sculptures to be found at the end of the cave (Pink Floyd's stage set, the horny devil, moles coming through walls and, yep the odd phallic image or ten). You really have to see the feasting table....erm, so I won't describe it ;)

The maze of stal on the way back provided my spelaeo-photo-training. Steve and Andrew showed the patients of saints as I



spent ages setting up shots and they also provided an amazing insight into the strength of flash placement on composition.

What can I say - fun trip, well recommended. Oh, and digital is the cave photographers godsend (even whilst using slide).

Ok, well that's all very well but I had one of the worst hangovers known to man. I did, however, manage to suppress this appalling feeling by descending into the depths of the magnificent Igue St Sol. Beauteous stal, complete with cauliflour! I was so over come by some of the creations, it sounds OTT but to think of how long some of the formations must have been growing was so inconceivable to me, I was completely in awe. Not to mention the mud sculptures in the 'museum'.

The way out was a bit of a trek, (50/60 m vertical prussic so I've heard). Was particularly unimpressed by the roosting bat that appeared to have copious blood around its mouth. Passed deviations and bat ASAP got the hell out of cave.

Day 7: Mammoth spotting and xxxx

A notable morning: Si was part of it! Tempted out of bed by a breathy sunrise, no less! Coffee and jam on bread – this is feeling like we're in France! The whole gang gets its' derriere in gear and we're scraping ourselves into the parking lot of Font de Gaumes by the crack of eleven. Failed. All the tickets are gone by 9.30 we're told. Steve, Char, Ed and Si head to the cave next door (Combarelle) to check out the etched cave art (FdG is painted). A detour via Perigeaux, beforehand, produces cafés in a café and a wander 'round the old town. Very pleasant too. The line art in Combarelle is surprisingly fascinating and provides an insight into life 14,000 years ago. Can't argue with that can you.

Ok it appears I'd better go down a proper cave then. St Martin doesn't sound too taxing. Lots of sloped pitches with the integration of a device known as a clown... naaa, he wasn't too much of a problem, just looked a bit evil! Found some big bones to poke, managed to fill wellies with water by kneeling on flowstone complete with running stream (yes I'm sure everyone apart from me has learnt not to by now!).

The way up was leisurely until I was introduced to James. At first he struck me as a bit boring, not an especially motivating sight, no amazing figure, rather grey. He annoyingly followed me all the way up the pitches, continually hassling me with his inability to squeeze through small spaces. Never have I known such a troublesome beast!. After much hauling of James at each rebelay (to get him on the suitable side of the rope) we eventually reached daylight. Jose Luis offered very kindly to take James off my hands and help him up the last few metres, however, as Jose already had a tackle bag to carry, I was concerned James might feel passed off with second best! The slog continued at no great speed, and I carried his helpless form back to the car. No worries, he was crushed in the boot in the same manner as he had arrived in France. Thanks for nothing James, you treated me like sh*t and deserved all the beatings you got! Ha ha bloody ha, don't try the nice guy act with me, I know the type of scum that you are. If I ever see you again it will be too soon!

Day 8: On the trail of polychrome bison, wet caving, first aid and gite cleaning

VERY early start – woke up about halfway to Font de Gaumes. Off to see the other half of the Palaeolithic spectacle. Got there 45 minutes early to find 2 other cars waiting. Bummer. They left us waiting even longer before opening (probably to finish

off a few paintings) but let us all in at once which was nice, until we realised that this involved jostling for position with “La Famille Francaise typique” at every painting – a whole slew of inane questions later and we were looking for a handy pitch to bump them all off. The paintings sort of made up for it, including some very detailed bison and reindeer but the engravings yesterday provided a much more personal and interesting trip. So... Thoughts turned to some proper caving. Back to the gites to tackle up (i.e. stuff as much food in our gobs as we could) and Andy, Eddy, Ed and Jose Luis headed off to Igue Combette. An imposing sign warning of “Site Dangereuse” and “Propriete Private” concerned is for about a millisecond and very soon ropes were being slung round trees at the lip of a small shakehole. At this point the sun decided to start shining very brightly and going underground seemed a lot less attractive (note: first proper sun of entire holiday!!). However it was also the last day so reluctantly we climbed into our soggy gear and started down. The first pitch was a very slippery muddy slope – this caused Eddy to give us a quick demonstration of his barn dancing technique. After leaving the mud the main pitch was about 40m with a change of ropes halfway. This lands in a fairly small pot with a crawl leading off to the right – following the sound of roaring water - gets you to... some roaring water! At this point Andy and Eddy had headed off downstream and the other two of us were left to make our own way. Got to a rushing cascade which looked a bit tricky but it had a narrow passage leading off to the right near the ceiling. Perhaps this was a bypass?? Worth a look anyway – or so I thought... In fact it went on for a few hundred metres more at least during which two things became apparent: firstly it got narrower and secondly it became very difficult to breathe. Unfortunately being wedged and suffocating isn’t very pleasant – and a brief panic later I was gasping my way back to the streamway. After ten minutes trying to suck up some oxygen it was decided to continue downstream. Very pleasant streamway actually with a few small pitches necessitating a handline in two places (20m at each) and the terminal sump was reached. Still too much CO₂ to comfortably support 4 people (OK, cavers – but still...) so we decided to get out. Much splashing, wading and climbing later and we were back at the bottom of the rope. Tackle bag hauling duty again and a quick hornpipe by Eddy led us to the surface just in time to see the stars appearing and some distant lightning (thank goodness no storms had hit while we were in the streamway). Detouring via an E.Leclerc took us through Rocamadour and on approach we happened to notice two cars sitting in a strange configuration on the road – right in the middle with broken glass, smoke and not a lot of movement from within. We thought we’d better check things were OK so pulled over, grabbed 1st aid kit and Andy and Eddy tended to a wounded Frenchwoman whilst Ed and J L supervised the traffic. The short of it was: one drunk woman – seatbelt = crash with oncoming bloke in van and headbutting windscreen en route. The pompiers arrived fairly quickly so we headed off before getting detained for questioning. Unfortunately a rather attractively foxy female ‘fireperson’ turned up at this point and made us wish we’d hung around for a bit longer.

Not only that but the accumulated muck of 12 cavers needed washing off and out of the gite on return. They are REALLY understanding people if they let us back. The gift of a load of undrunk beers (what were we thinking!!) and 300m of old SRT rope might soften them up though. Lets hope so – or maybe we’ll find and destroy somewhere else next year.....

Juliet, Becca, Julian Gourfre de Leone

Quite a long drive, past Cahor to Promilhanes and then found the cave remarkably easily. The entrance is in at the first junction on the road, go left and the entrance is in the field on the left covered by a metal plate with the name of the cave on it.

Rigging guide:

Tie off entrance bit of metal, and two bolts in the entrance concrete.

A few metres down shaft (lots of spiders) to next y-hang.

Then a deviation around a bit of stal takes you to a ledge about 5 metres from the bottom of the pitch and then there is a y hang that takes you to the bottom.

Two pretty and muddy chambers take you to the stream (from the big flowstone bosse/stalagmite thing left takes you up stream and right takes you downstream).

Goes further downstream than upstream, both ways very nice streamway.

Just though I'd add this as it was said, as I was writing, lou was sitting on Eddy's lap.

Lou "Ed, just stop moving your muscle"

Eddy "I had to get some blood down my leg"

Day 9: Skiing back



Appendix 1

Not sure if this is allowed in the article, apparently I have to talk about serious cave things, Ha!!!!!!

- Hey descender, descend a little cave with me ! (going down!)
- Jamming (bob marley)- going up
- Also, prusicing, prusicing something something, sorry Lou, too pissed to remember the other words!