

UBSS Newsletter



Traversing the Verneau
Caving in Mica Schist
Goats, Cats and ... Minchen???
The Clay Figures of Montespan

Summer 2005

Third Series
Number 1

The Traverse of the Reseau du Verneau

The Jura region spans the Swiss-French border north of Geneva. It also gives its name to the "Jurassic" geological period, limestone and dinosaurs. Limestone usually means caves, and the Jura's longest and finest river cave system is the Reseau du Verneau just south of the major city of Besancon. It is possibly the longest in France, discounting the PSM which as everyone knows is just an EDF mine at the bottom.

By 1985 over 30 km of cave passage had been explored, from many sink holes where surface streams enter the Verneau cave system to the single large resurgence some 400 m altitude below. Much of this exploration was done by cave divers but it is now possible to descend one sink - La Gouffre des Biefs Boussets - and come back out via a fossil dry pot near the resurgence - La Grotte Baudin - with just a wet-suit (and light of course).

The Verneau traverse is just a tourist trip, though the French do require you to get a permit to ensure that you have adequate rescue insurance.

I have been into the Verneau system four times before, but jumped at the offer last year to join a strong team planning to do the full traverse.

I left the North Coast of Scotland at midday on a Thursday last July for the pleasant five hour drive to Edinburgh to catch the EasyJet flight to Bristol. Another five hours later I left the airport somewhat dispirited by car as the flight was cancelled. The M6 is quite nice overnight and dawn saw me in Somerset to join up with the rest of the party. Happily I slept through France, where torrential rain and thunder slowed us to a crawl.

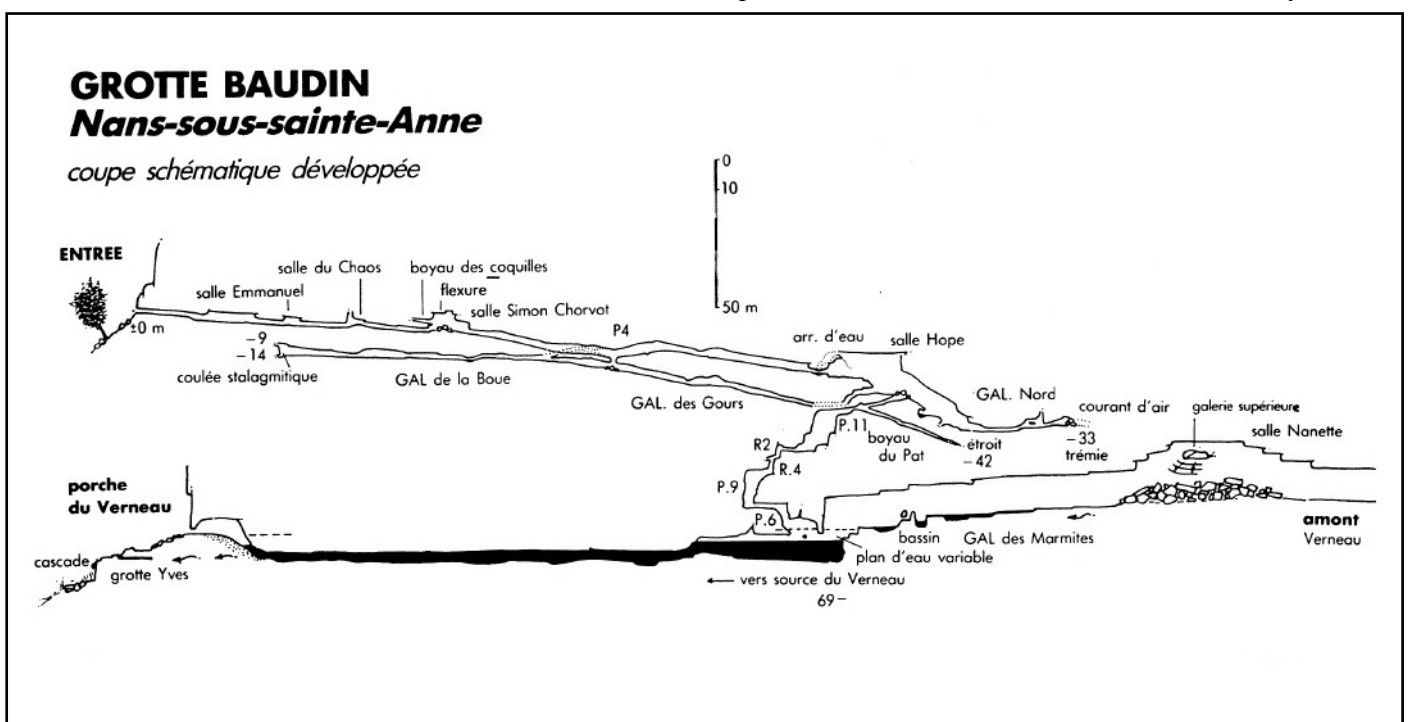
Thunder and caves don't mix and luckily on Friday there was alternative entertainment available - a Tour-de-France time trial. Even if you are not a cycling enthusiast this is good fun with an all-day party atmosphere; and it stopped raining.

Saturday saw the first rigging trip to La Grotte Baudin - the dry way into the bottom end. It is a bit muddy - hence the name. Unfortunately the third pitch went down into a flooded sump-pool, the water levels being clearly a metre or two higher than needed. However it was easy to find the flood-bypass - as a howling draught emerges from it. The passage emerges at the top of the huge final chamber. Awesome noise of water cascading in the gloom below!

So back next day to rig it, and descend - great 20 m fast free abseil! At least if you are still using decent 1970s gear - a rack! Not quite so fast on these Petzl things.

With clear sunny weather on the surface, the water level had dropped so the flooded normal route was now passable. We went up the system to check-out the two pitches in the middle - making the odd short route-finding error of course. We were pleasantly surprised to find bright new bolts, duplicate y-hangs and new rope on both, plus a nice little ladder on the first. Exited well-satisfied. Quite tiring though and you appreciate that you have only gone maybe 1/4 of the way up the system! I was pleased to find that I could still keep up with the youngsters. Though we rigged Grotte Baudin with ropes, the three short pitches would be better rigged with ladder as they aren't really vertical and the mud doesn't help rope-work.

Next day another team of four immediately went down the top end - La Gouffre des Biefs Boussets - and the system



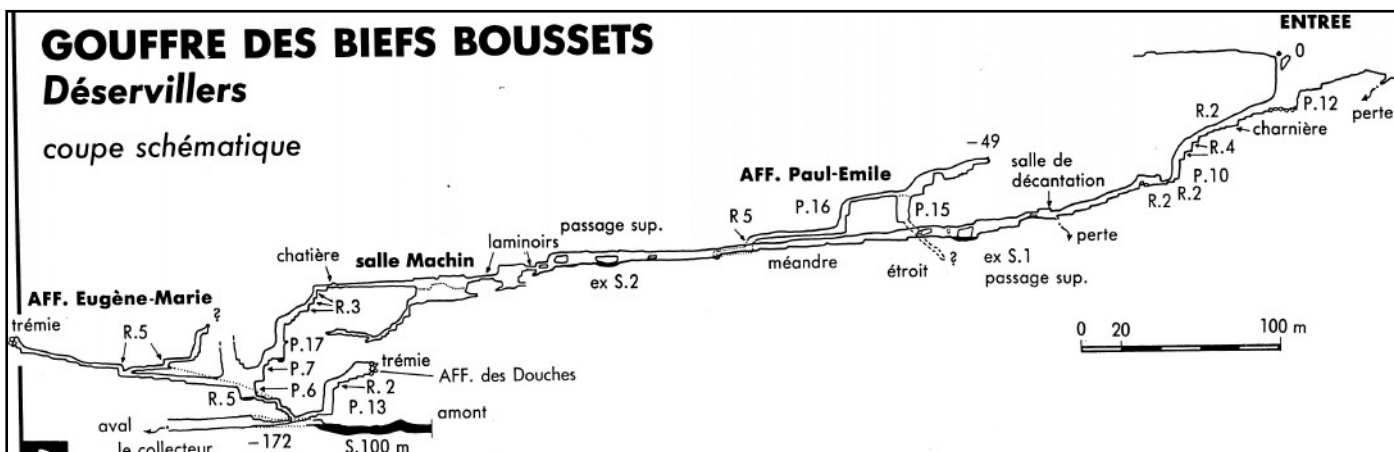
was fully rigged. So a day later my team started the first full traverse. It is a great abseil in, down half a dozen pitches some quite small, longest 17 m, but there is nasty wriggle in the middle, and in a couple of hours you are in the collecteur (main drain). It starts as a good stomp - always high but not that wide. Then we got to the sump. I had been warned about this to ensure we all had brought hoods and masks but the survey shows it as 5 m long and looking maybe a couple of metres deep. No point in thinking about it - kit up, breathe in and go for it!

Magic - a couple of metres and I was through; no depth at all. Straight back and told the others the joyous news and we were all through with our kit. The survey and reports are wrong. Saves the hour-long three pitch dry bypass - strange people the French!

worming around in Baudin and we were all out - 11 hours and 9 km after we had gone in and all mighty pleased.

Team No. 2 did the traverse a couple of days later. It appears there was some trepidation at the sump despite our tales of ease. This could have been because no-one had done a free-diveable sump before. Anyway all went well except that someone arrived at the far side without one welly - thrashing about no doubt. Some effort was made to find it but that is not going to happen in a wide muddy sump.

I can only guess at what went through the team's mind. No doubt one option was to leave the poor unfortunate to try to hop out the top on his own, or to bring him a spare a day later. Perhaps the effect of this on his wife was considered - now single-handedly looking after 2 year-old twins back at camp. Luckily Britain's top cobbler was in his element, and



The system really starts to get big here as it takes inlet after inlet. Careful navigating ensured we picked up the vital junctions. This section is simply fantastic - large, often wet, always changing passage shape km after km.

The Salle de la Corniche traverse is reached - a rope encourages one to hold it. Then it suddenly goes vertically over the edge! The stream has dropped down a pitch and it's a long way to the bottom. Harnesses go back on - it looks muddy but actually it is a simple climb on calcite. Then big collapse chambers - Salle du Bon Negro and another food stop. Then quite suddenly the pitch up - been here before. Brew up at a food dump we left on the rigging trip before and off out.

By the time we got back to the 'marmites' - huge pots in the stream near the bottom - I was really enjoying myself and plunged into them - unfortunately the last one involves a 4 m plunge so I had to have a line passed to me, but I did liberate a Petzl hand-jammer from the bottom - this makes two we have found in this cave. The usual

in a few minutes using only spare parts (insoles, knee-pads, glove fingers) a new "boot" was fashioned and attached. And the team walked on through to reappear some 13 hours after they started.

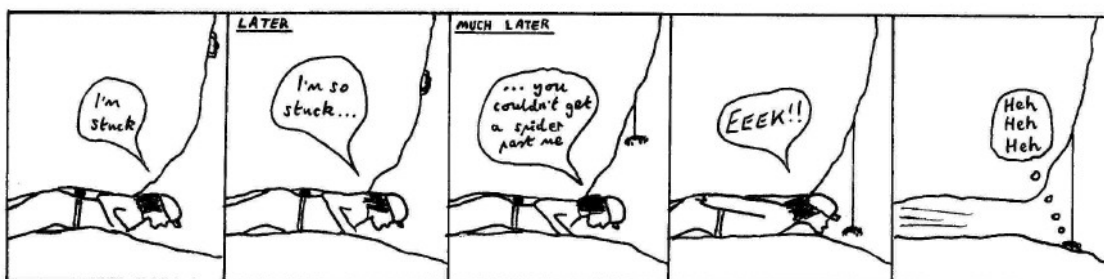
A brilliant through-trip, longest in France and by all accounts the best.

Julian Walford

Financial notes - got money back on flights, Petzl jammer worth £40.

Survey notes - the 2 ends are shown here. The bit in between was too long and would have needed a fold-out. (Sorry - Ed)

Troglobyte in Pierre's Pot



Caving in Mica Schist

Caves are normally in limestone but in Scotland anything is possible.

The Scottish Highlands are a popular destination for walkers and climbers, but are a very long drive from Bristol. It is possible to get there in one day, but many travellers prefer to spread their journey over two days, which gives time for a small excursion en route. I can thoroughly recommend Jacobite's Cave, a landslip cave in mica schist, as an en route excursion. It is conveniently located and is not difficult to find.

The road to the Highlands follows the west bank of Loch Lomond, past the small town of Tarbet. A detour of a mere 3 kms to the west takes you to the town of Arrochar, at the head of Loch Long. Go past the main public car park (on the left), cross a small bridge over the Loin Water, then take the first turning on the right. This is a residential street leading into Glen Loin. Park after several hundred metres, where the tarmac ends, then continue on foot on an unsurfaced road past several isolated houses for not quite 1 km. The road becomes a path, still in the valley floor, then crosses a fence and enters the forest just by an electricity pylon. Immediately head uphill on a minor path, through a short boggy section. The path soon ascends more steeply and after a few hundred metres leads to an avalanche of huge boulders.

This boulder pile contains several shelters roofed by large slabs of rock, but what you need to find is Bruce's Bivouac. This is about 20 metres uphill from the path and

has a flat earth floor. Walk through this to a small level area at the top of the boulder fall, beneath a crag split by a large fissure. High in this fissure is the entrance to Jacobite's Cave. Access is by a 5 metre rising traverse from the right up a large rock flake, the climb being of moderate standard. A steep slope then leads up to a sizeable cave entrance. At the back of the entrance passage, a hole in the floor on the left allows a cautious climb down into a series of hading rifts, one ending in a deep pool.

The cave has only about 120 metres of passages in total, but manages to display a satisfying degree of complexity. For a fuller description and survey, see *Scottish Cave Guides: The Southern Highlands* by Jim Savlona and Ivan Young (1988). If more exercise is required, the boulder fall and its various rock shelters offers plenty of good scrambling. However, like many Scottish forests, both midges and ticks may be encountered in summer.

If all this exertion has raised an appetite, Eddy Hill's favourite fish restaurant is just a couple of kms further along the west shore of Loch Long. And if you then need to stretch your legs to let your dinner settle, drive another couple of kms further into Glen Croe. In the short section of the Croe Water where it flows north of the road (between the two bridges), a massive rockfall of mica schist boulders has roofed over the river to form Glen Croe Cavern. The river flows underground for only 20 metres, but reflected daylight and the booming reverberation of falling water make for an enjoyable experience.

Charlie Self

Local News

In March the secretary of the Council of Southern Caving Clubs, Steve King, issued the following message:

6 Following consultations with the landowners, English Nature - who have a statutory duty to protect the resident bat colonies within Box Mine - have informed the Council of Southern Caving Clubs that they are to install gates on all entrances to Box Mine, near Bath, during 2005.

EN are particularly concerned about the possibility of a "catastrophic event" (eg, vandals/itinerants lighting a bonfire within the mine - as has happened - and

thereby wiping out large numbers of bats).

There is NO suggestion that cavers/mine explorers have participated in any antisocial behaviour that might threaten the bats.

The CSCC is participating in consultations over the proposed future access policy and feedback from the wider caving/underground community is now being sought.

EN fully acknowledge that ease of access to the site is of the utmost importance in order to avoid instances of forced entry that may then lead into a downward spiral of ever more restrictive access regimes. The gates are being installed to protect wildlife, not to stop interested parties from having access to this fascinating underground complex.

Of three suggested "closed seasons", CSCC is strongly urging EN to allow unrestricted BUT CONTROLLED access

to Box Mine throughout the year on the grounds that the size of the passages and length of the mine is so great that multiple user groups should be able to visit without jeopardising resident bat colonies. A combination lock or multiple keys being available at, say, the Quarryman's Arms have been suggested, as has use of the CSCC standard padlock for which many clubs have a key.

The CSCC also urged that having insurance should not be a pre-requisite for visitors to the site.

To assist EN and the CSCC, two online discussion forums have been started and may be accessed through the links opposite. If you have a view (Should gates be installed? How should bats be protected? What's the best way of securing the site? Who should have keys/combination? Should it be "access for all"? Access versus conservation...etc), please make it known. 9



The President's Piece

From his address at the 2005 AGM

it would be a useful exercise for University Societies to ask themselves where they would like to be in 5 years time and to develop proposals for appropriate initiatives or projects accordingly.

Caving and Archaeology

The President congratulated Linda and Graham on the publication in Proceedings, Vol. 23, No. 2, of their discovery of probably Mesolithic cave art in Aveline's Hole: this was the first such find in Britain. He was also delighted by news of the entry into the cave at Tynning's Great Swallet, which had only taken a mere 80 years or so.

Picken's Hole

The President had made little progress with his work on the Picken's Hole archive. One problem is CAD - Catalogue Annotation Deficiency - where identifications made by specialists are not entered into the catalogue, making it difficult to check exactly which context specimens came from. There also now seems little hope of recovering archive material lent to one of Pete Smart's erstwhile postgraduates.

AGM

The President hoped that the Committee would give thought to making the AGM more of a special occasion, so as to encourage more members to attend, and particularly senior members. He suggested that the draft minutes of the AGM should be circulated in the Newsletter, so that they could be "taken as read" on the day, sparing the Hon. Sec. the tedious chore of reading them out, and thus saving on valuable drinking time.

UBSS Museum - the Neolithic, Beaker, and Bronze Age displays. The Union Treasurer had recently suggested that

The President's response was that as a professional archaeologist, he would like to see, by 2010, the Neolithic, Beaker, and Bronze Age displays in our Museum renewed and re-vivified. He outlined a number of ways in which the displays would benefit from up-to-date specialist input and from being made more comprehensive than at present. There are sites or important and exciting material not presently displayed, such as the Maritime style Bell Beaker from Brean Down Sand Cliff; likewise, there are sites from which material is already displayed, but whose significance and relevance to thematic issues need bringing out, as for example the Biconical Urn from Tynning's Farm, South Barrow.

He hoped that in the next five years we could create new displays for this material which would be visually attractive, informative and thematically valuable. As a specialist in the Neolithic and Bronze Age of the British Isles and Western Europe, and with a detailed knowledge of much of our collections, he will be delighted to help with the task. As a practical matter, the first step will be to prepare an outline scheme for initial consideration by Chris Hawkes, our Curator, and by Lesley-Ann Kerr, our Curatorial Advisor.

Implementation of such a scheme would be a very valuable reaffirmation of our responsible policy on the display and presentation of archaeological material which we hold in our care.

Arthur ApSimon
President

<http://ukcaving.com/board/viewtopic.php?p=6213#6213>

(this forum is "endorsed" by the CSCC)

<http://www.darkplaces.co.uk/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=345>

Alternatively you may email the CSCC Conservation & Access officer at:

<mailto:canda@csc.org.uk>

STOP PRESS: English Nature has decided postpone any action until September 2005.

£££ Treasurer's Report 2004-5 £££

Further to last year's subscription rise, this should have been a pleasant and easy report to give, but the insurance issue (see below) has thrown an enormous spanner into our financial works. Apart from that it has been quite a good year, income is up, as would be expected, but sales are holding up well and, even better, sales of *The Caves of County Clare and South Galway* are sufficiently buoyant for me to predict break even point for me to predict reaching break even some time this year.

Anybody who has any detailed questions on the accounts shown here is welcome to e-mail me on graham@wotcc.org.uk

Public Indemnity Insurance

This is important, please read this carefully and reply to the questionnaire as soon as possible.

For the last few years, we have enjoyed Public Indemnity insurance via the University, as part of their insurance and at no extra cost to us. For reasons completely beyond our control, this cover is being withdrawn by their insurers and we have to make alternative arrangements. In effect this means that, as of 1st October, we will be joining the BCA (British Caving Association) scheme. Unfortunately this cover does not come cheaply, with a headline price of £18 per member per annum for active cavers this year. Non active, retired, cavers are charged at £6 per head. There are also contingencies so that cavers who are members of more than one club do not pay multiple premiums, as many of you will know.

As you will recall, subscriptions went up last year and we are unwilling to raise them again. However, we cannot stand the entire cost of this scheme from our current resources. We intend, therefore, to cover the lower figure for non active cavers from current income and ask active members to top up their contributions to cover this cost, as all other UK caving clubs are having to do. Those who have already paid via another club will not have to contribute again.

I am asking you all, therefore, to return to me the information on the attached questionnaire so that we can accurately assess what we need to pay for the remainder of this year. I am afraid that I cannot give an accurate figure for the additional payment required as we are still negotiating exactly when we will enter this scheme and exactly what it will cost. What is important is that all of you respond quickly: we need this information to be up to date and accurate. It is also essential that all subscriptions and other sums are paid promptly, failure to do so may jeopardise the cover for all of us. I will no longer be able to be as relaxed about overdue subscriptions as I have in the past.

All being well, student subscriptions will rise to cover their contributions in October and no payment will be required prior to then. The Students' Union has kindly offered a contingency grant to cover any shortfall if we have to pay before that date.

We have also taken the opportunity to gather some other information about communicating with members in the future, which may improve the speed and quality of our communications with you all.

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST JANUARY 2005

RECEIPTS		PAYMENTS		
	£	£	£	
Members Subscriptions		1994.50	Proceedings Vol 23.2 Printing	2245.00
Student Members Subscriptions		562.00	Postage	241.23
			Tools & Equipment	862.00
Union Grants: Capital	480.00		Capital	862.00
Current	<u>250.00</u>	730.00	Current	<u>0.00</u>
			Library	212.76
Interest on Investments: Bank	199.45		Museum	-
N.S.B.	<u>34.49</u>	233.94	Sessional Meetings	-
			Postages	172.27
Sales of Publications (not C. of C.C.)		1109.86	Hon. Secs Petty Cash	-
Donations		735.00	Stationery & Duplicating	47.95
Tax Refund on Covenants		390.50	Property Rates	50.16
Sale of Charterhouse Permits		1.50	Insurances: Third Party	0.00
Treatman Grants		1475.00	Property	<u>921.52</u>
			Subscriptions & Licence	129.00
			Travel Money	238.02
			"Fresh"	-
			Donation To Mendip Rescue Organisation	25.00
			Loss on 2004 Annual Dinner	39.38
			Display Materials	364.23
			I.T.	192.61
			Treatman Grants	1100.00
			Excess of Receipts over Payments	<u>391.17</u>
		<u>7232.30</u>		<u>7232.30</u>

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BALANCE SHEET AT 31 JANUARY 2005

	£	£		£	£
HUT FUND			INVESTMENTS		
Balance at 1. 2. 04	3244.58		Capital Reserve Account	14000.00	
Add net income	<u>220.31</u>	3464.89	N.S.B. Investment Account	<u>1238.86</u>	15238.86
PRINTED PUBLICATIONS FUND			CURRENT ACCOUNT		
Balance at 1. 2. 04	2330.00	2330.00			467.11
LIBRARY FUND			CASH IN HAND		
Balance at 1. 2. 04	763.68		Hon Secretaries	16.80	
Less net expenditure	<u>497.80</u>	265.88	Hon Treasurer	<u>21.60</u>	<u>38.40</u>
EQUIPMENT HIRE ACCOUNT					
Balance at 1. 2. 04	10.63				
Add net income	<u>169.61</u>	180.24			
"CAVES OF CO. CLARE" RESERVE FUND					
Balance at 1. 2. 04	5480.55				
Add net income	<u>2955.67</u>	8436.22			
RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT					
Balance at 1. 2. 04	675.97				
Add net income	<u>391.17</u>	<u>1067.14</u>			
		<u>15744.37</u>			<u>15744.37</u>

HONORARY AUDITORS REPORT: I have examined the above Receipts and Payment Account for the year ended 31st January 2005, 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.
 (original signed)D.J. Allen C.I.P.F.A.



I am happy to receive these questionnaires either by post using the Freepost envelope enclosed, or by email to graham@wotcc.org.uk. Obviously subs payments need to be made by post! I will notify those who will need to pay an additional insurance payment of the figure as soon as possible. I will need to assume that the information given remains current for future years *unless I am informed otherwise*. It is incumbent on you to ensure that the information given is accurate and up to date.

* The active communications list is an e-mail distribution list for members of the society who wish to be informed of caving trips and social events on a day-to-day basis. If you are not on the list but would like to be, contact Paul Savage: ps2711@bristol.ac.uk

Title:	First Name:
Surname:	
Address: _____ _____	
Postcode:	E-mail address:
Phone No:	Mobile No:
Do you consider yourself to be:	
An active caver? <input type="checkbox"/>	A non-active caver? <input type="checkbox"/> (please tick ✓)
Have you paid a BCA insurance premium through another Club or caving body?	
YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/> (please tick ✓)
If YES, which club/body? _____	
What is your BCA number (if known)?	
Do you wish your e-mail address to be included on the active communication list* ?	
YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/> (please tick ✓)
Would you be willing simply to download future newsletters from the UBSS website (e-mail notification will be sent) or do you require a paper copy to be posted to you?	
DOWNLOAD <input type="checkbox"/>	PAPER <input type="checkbox"/> (please tick ✓)



Goats, Cats and Minchen???

A Palaeolithic Exploration of the Gower Caves

Sunday 13th March 2005

University of Bristol, Diploma in British Prehistory organised by Dr. George Nash



Talk to anyone who knows and they will agree ... one of the best things about Georges' trips is the gravity he attributes to education and the acquisition of knowledge. Especially when it applies to one of the most important things in life – where to get the best bacon and egg butty for breakfast! Today was no exception and after a slap up feast at a seaside café with spectacular views over the Mumbles we were ready to head for our first destination, Goats Hole Cave at Paviland.

This limestone cave is the site of the oldest modern human burial in British Prehistory, and possibly even in Europe, it has been radio carbon dated to 25,350 ± 500 BC, putting it firmly in the Gravettian period of the Upper Palaeolithic. The burial was undertaken with significant ceremony, the extended body of a man was buried in a shallow grave on the west side of the chamber with stone slabs marking the head and feet. He was buried with many grave goods including beads, shells, ivory rods and a bracelet, his clothes were stained with red ochre.

Until recently, it was thought that Britain was totally uninhabitable at this time, however recent discoveries have now suggested otherwise, and although it would have been marginal to live here, it would not have been impossible and with the wealth of seasonal hunting, maybe even desirable. At the time of the burial the coastline would have been a number of kilometres away, as the sea level was much lower during this period. The land in front of the cave was a vast tundra

plain of sedges, grasses and dwarf willow, supporting mammoth, reindeer, woolly rhino, arctic fox, arctic lemming and other cold loving fauna. To the south the river Severn would have been visible. Behind the cave, just about 1 kilometre to the north, the southernmost edge of the Devensian glacier would have dominated the horizon, rising at its maximum to over 1 kilometre in height. The winter temperatures would have been -10 C and the summer temperatures +15 C

This burial was discovered by Rev William Buckland in 1823 and he mistakenly thought it was that of a Roman woman, hence it's nickname of 'The Red Lady of Paviland'. It was subsequently investigated by Francis and Jefferies in 1836, Davies in 1839-40, Sollas in 1912 and Aldhouse Green in 1997.

Next on our tour was a visit to Cat Hole Cave just a few kilometres away. This is another limestone cave and evidence of early human use has been found in the form of flints, dating from 28,000 BP to 12,000 BP including 6 backed blades of the Magdalenian period as well as burins, scrapers, awls and a bone needle.



Additionally, there is a wealth of animal bone from the other animals that either occupied the cave, or were brought there by either human or other predators. These include red fox, arctic fox, brown bear, reindeer, vole, mammoth, woolly rhino, red deer and giant deer. Also, during our visit, we were very excited to dis-

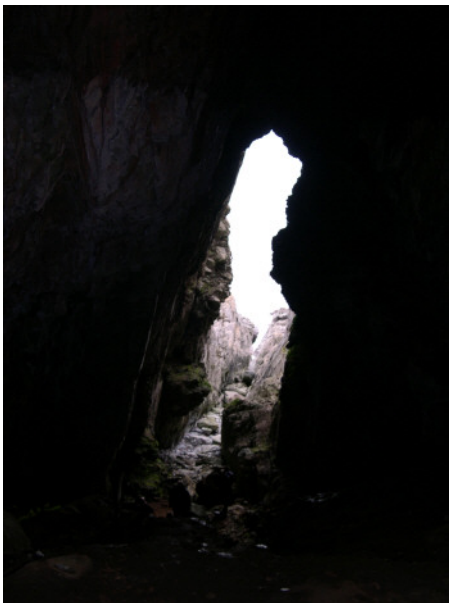
cover some previously unrecorded cave bear scratches at the back of the cave.

A quick diversion into the Neolithic came in the form of Parc-Le-Breos-Cwm chambered tomb. This tomb is situated in the valley below Cat Hole Cave, and is typical of the Cotswold-Severn style of long barrow, dating to between 3,000 and 2,600BC. It is orientated typically east-west and was excavated in 1865 and later in the 1960's by Atkinson. During the excavations 25 disarticulated skeletons were found, and unusually, in the western chamber dog skeletons were found as part of the burial deposit.

Finally we headed off to Minchen Hole. After a few orienteering problems including a diversion through some surprisingly vicious brambles, followed by an 'interesting' walk along the cliff (definitely not to be done on a windy day!) with George striding on ahead as if it was a gentle walk in the park – and his words drifting back on the breeze "Bristol University do not take responsibility own risk ..." we finally reached the entrance to the cave.

From an archaeological point of view this cave has nothing specific of value however, from an environmental and geological point of view it is a treasure trove. Minchen Hole was formed before the Devensian ice age and most likely during the various phases of the Ipswichian interstadial. The unusual thing about this cave is that it has at least two palaeo-beaches preserved within the geology.

Stratigraphically the cave consists of cave-earth and rockfall at the top, breccia deposits remain in parts of the cave where they have not been eroded away during times of high sea level, below this and towards the entrance there are cemented deposits of former beaches. The highest being described as a 'Neritoides' beach named after periwinkles preserved within the calcified deposits, the lower deposit is described as a 'Patella' beach after lim-



pets caught within the deposits. The sea level fluctuated greatly during the Ipswichian interstadial which took place between 120,000 bp and 50,000 bp, therefore creating beaches at different heights. In this case the upper deposits (the neritoides beach), contrary to normal stratigraphic sequences, are the earliest in time, then as the temperature dropped, the sea levels fell, and the next beach was formed lower down and further out (the patella beach). When the sea levels again rose, most of the beach deposits eroded away, just leaving us a hint of what was there.

For us archaeologists, this backwards stratigraphy and geological terminology took a bit of getting used to, and Georges usual 'greased lightning' style of lecturing left some of us wishing we'd paid more attention to our shorthand classes, so his words were accompanied by cries from all over the cave of 'wait, say that again!', 'huh?', 'Neri - whats?' and 'which interstadial?'. But with infinite patience he explained again and again until finally we caught on and everything became clear - I think! Though we never did figure out what a 'minchen' was!

By now it was almost dark, and encouraged by a few phone calls from partners at home with the alarming words 'dinner' and 'bin' in the same sentence, we decided time was up and headed for home. All in all, everyone had a great day, learnt loads, the information was excellent, and the food deliciously satisfying in the way that only the best 'greasy spoons' can achieve, but most surprising of all - the weather was *good!*

Abby George
Photos by John Swann

THE PALAEOLITHIC/MESOLITHIC MEETING THE BRITISH MUSEUM 10th & 11th MARCH 2005 or The UBSS Goes to Town

From what we gather from those who attended the meeting on the Thursday, everything went smoothly and an interesting and enjoyable first day was had by all at the annual Pal/Mes meeting. However, the UBSS was out in force on the second day, so naturally there was a rapid deterioration in the smooth running of the event. But even if the Society's reputation does precede it in many quarters, I felt that shutting the entire Museum and stationing armed guards at all entrances was a bit extreme.

The first person Graham and I met as we wandered towards the main entrance was UBSS member George Nash, chaotic as ever, lugging numerous items of baggage and looking for somewhere to leave them where they wouldn't be blown up. He failed, naturally, but at least he escaped arrest as an Al Qaeda suspect. On the advice of the staff at the front gate, we walked all the way round to the North Entrance at the back, only to be denied admittance there as well. We were told that no-one would be allowed in until at least 10 am. The nearest café was, of course, opposite the front entrance, so George had to lug all his possessions back round to the front.

We joined a motley collection of archaeologists, protesters dressed in chicken outfits and police in the café and waited for the arrival of Tony Blair, who was making some sort of announcement about Africa in the Museum that morning. Nobody seemed entirely sure what the people in the chicken suits were actually protesting about, but they were a civilized bunch who donned their gear and ran out whenever an official looking car arrived, accompanied by their designated police officers, and then came back in to finish their coffee when the car had swept through the gates. Very British.

At 10 o'clock we went all the way back to the tradesman's entrance, waited for half an hour in the cold with the rest of the delegates and assorted members of the general public and then headed as quickly as possible for a very plush lecture theatre to warm up. Jill Cook, looking remarkably composed for someone whose carefully worked out schedule had been consigned to the dustbin by a grandstanding politician, introduced the first speakers, Tom Higham of the Oxford Dating Labs and UBSS member Roger Jacobi who talked about improved methods of radiocarbon dating. In a heroic attempt to make up lost time (or alternatively because he dislikes computers) Roger dispensed with his part of the power point presentation and entertained the audience in his usual inimitable style. The moral of this talk seemed to be "don't nail a theory to only a couple of dates" because if you do, Tom will only come along and prove you wrong!

The first session lunch starred George Nash (he of the abundant luggage), giving an interesting summary of his recent research into the Portable and Static Art of Britain. Until recently, most people would have passed over this subject in a few words but George has now amassed an impressive list of nearly 70 items, ranging from worked bone pieces like the Kendrick's Skull with its regular geometric zig-zag pattern to shell necklaces and other items of personal adornment. He posed the question "Is there a British Tradition?" and then went on to answer it by saying, yes, in many of the pieces there does seem to be a tendency towards geometric and abstract designs. The results of George's work will hopefully appear in the next UBSS *Proceedings*.

Next up was Paul Pettit who talked about the discoveries at Creswell Crags and explained amongst other things why he feels that the interpretation of some of the figures at the back of the cave as "birds" is incorrect and that an attribution

to female anthropomorphic figures is more sensible. From my own experience of cave art in France, I have no hesitation in agreeing with him. The figures fit perfectly well into the mould of anthropomorphs such as those of Lalinde, Pestillac and Gunnersdorf, but they certainly make lousy birds, and if they don't look like ducks or quack like ducks, it's reasonable to believe they aren't ducks! Paul also gave a much more balanced and sensible view of the number of figures that have been discovered, commenting that he believes there are about 14 engravings, rather than numbers running ludicrously over a hundred, as claimed by his co-researchers. When asked by someone how the team intended to reconcile their differences of opinion over the number of engravings and their attributions, Paul caused amusement by pointing out in reply that he was the lead researcher. Clearly a democracy – one man, one vote. But Paul's the man and he's got the vote!

Jill Cook then gave an extremely interesting account of her recent re-appraisal of the figure known as Pin Hole Man, also from Creswell, an odd little "otter-faced man" carved on an ancient piece of woolly rhino bone found in the 1920s. Questions have been raised on several occasions about the authenticity of this figure and as a result of recent accusations of forgery levelled at the little man during last year's Creswell conference, Jill arranged for the figure to be cleaned, to remove the pencil lead commonly used in the early part of the last century to highlight carved lines to make them easier to see.

She also examined the figure very closely using microscopy and was able to say with reasonable and well-founded confidence that there appears to be no truth in any allegations that the figure is a fake. The only casualty of the investigation was Pin Hole Man's penis, which disappeared along with the pencil lead and seemed to have been a product of joining natural marks on the bone in an exercise in wishful thinking. But even if he has lost his manhood, he has at least regained academic credibility.

Graham and I then lowered the tone with a presentation on Aveline's Hole, with Graham giving a brief account of the history and archaeology of the site and with me describing the engraving itself. Somehow we managed to spin this out for a nerve-racking twenty minutes, but the audience were kind to us and several people, not all of whom were our friends or relatives, said they found it interesting, which was a great relief. Presenting a talk in those surroundings to such an audience was an ordeal neither of us had been looking forward to and when we saw how large and posh the lecture theatre was, the pair of us nearly turned tail and ran.

Other talks during the day were: "*The Rewards and Pitfalls of using Radio Carbon Dates to Plot later Palaeolithic Population Movements*" by William Davis; "*A Debitage Workshop from Maiseries in the North West European Aurignacian Context*" by Damien Flas (who would like to carry out research on some items in the UBSS Museum); "*A New Perspective on Upper Palaeolithic*

Lifeways" by Martina Sensburg; "*New Climate – New Moves, Mobility patterns during the late Glacial, the example of Italy*" by Nellie Phoca-Cosmetatou; "*Irish Antiquarians and a Different Perspective on the later Irish Mesolithic*" by Peter Woodman; "*A Mesolithic Settlement Sequence at Goldcliff East in the Severn Estuary, Wales*" by Martin Bell and "*Dating the Appearance of Late Mesolithic Flint Traditions in Britain, New Evidence and New Interpretations*" by Clive Waddington.

There was only UBSS member present who let the side down by not presenting a paper and I won't name names, but the President knows who I mean! (OK, I'll name namesit's your turn next year, Arthur!!!!!!!)

It was certainly an interesting and informative meeting for anyone interested in the Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic and there was even cave related stuff for good measure. Not a cheap conference at £30 per day, but there was plenty of wine with the buffet lunch and an interesting selection of people to talk to during the coffee breaks. I'd certainly recommend it to anyone with time to spare this time next year who has an interest in this period.

Linda Wilson

THE CLAY FIGURES OF MONTESPAN

Graham and Linda investigate some ancient mud pies

In April last year, Graham and I returned to the Pyrenees for some further prehistoric cave research. We hoped on this occasion to be successful in our aim to visit Le Tuc d'Audubert, after last year's near miss when a rapid snow melt in the middle of the day caused the River Volp to rise dramatically, preventing access, and causing a retreat to Les Trois Freres for a second visit. We also had plans to see Ganties-Montespan and Bedheilac, but with the exception of the latter, we were very dependent on weather conditions.

Sunday dawned fair and very cold, which we hoped was a good sign. We were meeting Yanik le Guillou, the conservator of the prehistoric caves of the Midi-Pyrenees, at the horrendously early hour of 7.30 am, which was in reality 6.30 am as the clocks went forward an hour that morning.

We all arrived promptly at the bridge in Foix and drove an hour west to Montespan. We had been warned to bring wetsuits and we knew that there was probably less than a 50 % chance of success at this time of year. There have been times, Yanik had told us, when the cave has been inaccessible for much of the year due to bad weather. On arrival, Yanik went to look at the stream near the entrance and a long string of French curses then followed, from which I deduced that a stream flowing in a wide channel across the field near the entrance was not a good sign. I suspected that we would be retreating to Labastide, which Yanik had mentioned in an email the previous month as an alternative. Never mind, I thought, we would be quite happy to see Labastide and its large bichrome horse. Whoops, Yanik had not brought the key. So much for Plan B.

To my surprise, he suggested that we get changed and go and look at the gate. What fun, putting on a wetsuit anyway, a suggestion that was strangely unattractive, but it seemed churlish to refuse, so we fought our way into neofleeces and went to look at the gate. More curses followed as we viewed a stream flowing out through a large stainless steel gate. I gathered that if water is seen here, the sump beyond is invariably closed. It seemed that Yanik hadn't visited the cave in the last three years, so while we were here, he decided to try the locks. There were four of them, plus a set of hinge bolts. It took him half an hour and the help of a large hammer to convince all of them to let us pass. Plus the frequent use of a phrase which I took to be "open sesame" in French.

Once inside, we made rapid progress in a wide passage, about 2 metres high with mud banks on either side. Yanik started to look more hopeful as we approached the sump and even went so far as to throw his caving helmet, otherwise known as a blue woolly hat onto a mud bank to prevent it getting wet. There was about three inches of air-space in the sump but it was clearly passable so we cheered up immensely and went through. The roof rises almost immediately and the passage turns slightly to the left. We had passed the famous sump of Montespan.

The way to the Casteret Gallery is off to the left, not far beyond the sump and the main streamway continues on at a similar size and shape until the narrow gated exit of Ganties is reached. There are a few engravings along the way, but not many and they are said to be poorly preserved. We headed up the Casteret Gallery. The only obstacle en route is a swing around a large stal boss and down beyond a pool using a piece of tat rope that looked like it had been placed by Norbert himself. We passed the site of an archaeological dig and arrived at the inner gate. It was not meant to be locked.

Well, it wasn't locked exactly, but it still posed a problem. Someone had put a bolt on the frame back in place when they closed the gate and since then the door had dropped slightly on its hinges firmly wedging the bolt in place and we had nothing to remove it with. The hammer and Yanik's tool kit were back on the other side of the sump. It was time to improvise. There are no suitable bits of rock around and no pieces of metal left lying around back at the dig, so one of Yanik's krabs was pressed into service and eventually the bolt yielded to gentle persuasion, which was fortunate for

me, as I had just started back towards the sump to fetch the tools.

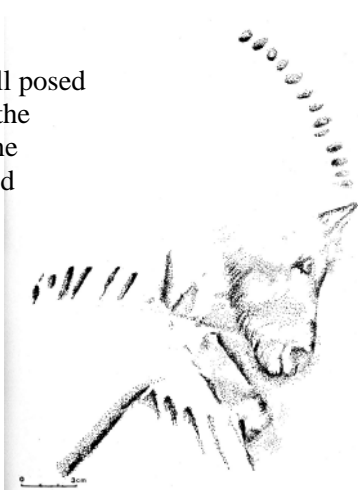
At that point, our companion started to remove a large quantity of camera gear from his Daren Drum. Lovely, we were wet up to our ears with a photographic trip about to commence! Yanik grinned and remarked that we obviously hadn't come all the way from England to be in a hurry.



Linda & Graham studying engravings towards the end of the Casteret Gallery. (Photo Y. le Guillou)

The problem with our companion is that he was a caver before he became an archaeologist and, I suspect, a poacher before he became a gamekeeper and he certainly has a caver's sense of humour. In answer to an enquiry as to our call our procedure (as we were beyond a locked gate, on the other side of a near- sump in winter eventually elicited the response that his mayor would notice if he didn't turn up to vote in the local elections that night. Not much use, however, as he also admitted that the mayor didn't know where he was. Oh well. So on we went.

The first engravings in the Casteret Gallery are in fact just on the outside of the gate. Two rather fine horses heads. From there, beyond the gate, the passage winds on, mostly comfortable walking height, with a stream in the floor and mud banks on either side. It is clear that much of the mud in the cave has been "mined" at some time in the past. The date of these workings is not known but is thought to have been done about 2000 BC (on the evidence of a C14 date), maybe contemporary with similar activity at the cave of Foissac in the Lot, which shows similar signs of large scale clay extraction. Everywhere you look there are signs of human activity, marks poked in the clay, sometimes with fingers and sometimes with broken stal.



Engraved horses heads at the entrance to the Casteret Gallery

The first clay sculpture to be encountered is on the right hand side of the passage, a large horse, sadly incomplete now as most of the body has been removed at some time in the past. Quite probably by whoever was mining the cave for clay. The best known figure is the large headless bear, made famous by Casteret. Also on the right of the passage, set to one side and under the over hang of the roof. No chance of dancing round that in a hunting ceremony! So much for those theories. The roof is far too low behind the figure – not even a tribe of enthusiastic limbo dancing dwarfs could have conducted a ceremony there. Another theory which has no substance is the fact that there had been a skull attached to the front of the figure by a wooden peg, as mentioned by Casteret. Firstly, no-one other than Norbert ever saw a skull, there are no remains of any wooden peg and there is not even a hole in the right place. Yanik dismissed that description as being entirely without foundation.

There are numerous marks of poking, again by fingers or stal, on the beast, which have been interpreted by some as evidence of a “killing” ceremony, but from what we had already seen in the rest of the cave it seems far more likely that these were holes made by the clay miners testing to see if the clay was the right consistency to be worth the bother of removing. Unlike the body of the horse a little way back up the passage, they left the headless bear intact.

There are several other much smaller and more poorly preserved figures along this passage, mostly on the right hand wall, but the bear is by far the most impressive. The passage now lowers rapidly to crawling size and starts to become drier, until you are crawling, mostly flat out on a mud floor. The passage splits and engravings start to appear on the walls and the ceiling. At that point, Yanik decided to take some photos and as the passage is really too confined for anyone to act as a guide, we were sent off on our own to look around. Yanik’s view was quite clearly that we had enough experience now to be able to find the engravings for ourselves. And we did. Most of the small alcoves have figures in them, generally fairly small, but quite easily visible. The passage loops around in a circle, with one dead end off to the right, containing several fine figures, and then comes back to join the main passage.

We spent nearly four hours in the cave and had an excellent trip. Many thanks to Yanik for his time and kindness. Fortunately, the weather remained fine and we did not need to test the telepathic powers of the mayor in Yanik’s village.

Linda Wilson

Notes From The Editor

Welcome to the latest incarnation of the UBSS newsletter. This paper version is designed to complement the online one and to make news and views available to all members of the society, including those not blessed with internet access.

This being my first acquaintance with a modern desk top publishing package, please feel free to contact me with helpful suggestions about layout

and style. Also consider content. Are there any regular features you would like to see? Has any exciting news been left out? I set it down but I don't make it up. Ultimately that responsibility is yours.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to this issue.

Clive Owen
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