

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 208

NOVEMBER 1989

DORDOGNE 89, THE CAUSSE DE GRAMAT

by Brian Murlis

The three of us, Brian Murlis, Steve Redwood and Vince Simmonds eventually arrived at the campsite near Gramat, on the Massif Central, after an eight hour ferry delay and a thirteen hour drive through France, stopping only to change drivers or to get a quick bite to eat. It was twelve thirty at night and we had started off from Mendip at 6pm the previous day.

Our next problem was to locate the CDG, SWCC and MCG lot that we were supposed to be meeting, who had already been there for a few days. Bearing in mind it was pitch black and the campsite was large, covering an area of about ten acres, and wooded, we eventually located some English cars. After being told to belt up by the familiar voice of Nick Geh we realised we were in the right place. Already at the camp were Nick Geh, John Adams, Pat Cronin, Mike McDonald (Trebor), Digger Hastilow, Pete Harvey and John and Pat's wives. Tony and Denise Knibbs were to join us later in the week.

We pitched camp under car headlights and petzl microlights then turned in for a long deserved sleep. The morning dawned sunny and warm to reveal just how good the campsite facilities were, including a small swimming pool.

Still being tired from the previous day we decided to take it easy and have a drive around to get to know the area. It is not unlike Mendip to look at, just a lot bigger and more picturesque. We eventually found ourselves at Fontaine St. George (Ed. that name seems familiar!) near the Dordogne River, one of the most famous resurgences in the area, so armed with a couple of baguettes and a pack of beer we spent the afternoon diving into, then rapidly getting out of the sizeable and freezing resurgence pool.

The next day we got down to some proper caving. The first cave we visited was:

SOUFFRE DE REVEILLON

This cave is famous for its' spectacular entrance, approx. 150ft x 150ft, and must take a massive stream in wet weather. The huge entrance chamber narrows down to a 20ft x 20ft stream passage which can easily be followed passing deep clear pools, and down climbs, to a low muddy area, with plenty of wildlife, mainly toads. We followed an upper series into some quite well decorated small passages and some large chambers to a drop down of 30ft with a fixed handline with a notice at the top that nobody understood. The drop led to a miserable section of wet and muddy crawling, reminiscent of Mendip, to finish at a tricky climb requiring a hand line so we turned back yearning after the large passages we had been in previously. Back at the fixed rope we think we worked out what the notice at the top said - something like: DON'T GO DOWN THIS ROPE BECAUSE IT'S BLOODY IMPOSSIBLE TO GET BACK UP AGAIN!!! And it very nearly was.

Back at the low muddy area we found our way to the large continuing streamway, down a 10ft pitch, another 35ft pitch then a climb up opposite leading into a large well decorated fossil passage 200ft long. The main passage continues down short climbs, through pools, to a point where the sump usually is but due to the very dry conditions it continued through a low series of muddy passages and climbs to a final sump. There is a large overhead chamber in the lower section of the cave, called Les Grandes Salles, but we did not find the right climb up to it as there were so many to choose from.

(cont. on p4)

* * * 1989 MEETS PROGRAMME * * *

02 DEC - 03 DEC	MENDIP	RESERVOIR HOLE	NEIL HUTCHINSON	0734-320665
15 DEC - 16 DEC	S. WALES	DAN YR OGOF	DAVE LITTLE	0753-866659

02 Dec - 03 Dec	Members weekend
09 Dec	Reading Universty (12)
18 Dec - 22 Dec	Royal Navy (22)
30 Dec - 01 Jan	Members New Year Party
06 Jan - 07 Jan	Members weekend
03 Feb - 04 Feb	Members weekend
09 Feb	Dave Gibson's sch (11)
03 Mar - 04 Mar	Members weekend
31 Mar - 01 Apr	Members weekend (AGM)
05 May - 06 May	Members weekend
18 May	Dave Gibson's sch (11)
02 Jun - 03 Jun	Members weekend

Cottage doings

WEEKLY MEETINGS are held at the Group's Mendip headquarters on Wednesdays at 7.00pm. and at the Eclipse Inn, Egham Hill, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 8.30pm.
 CAVING ACCOMMODATION for 30 people is available at the MCG headquarters, Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse-on-Mendip, Blagdon, Bristol, BS18 6XW Tel.0761-62797
 National Grid Reference 5147.5606 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 sheet 182

COTTAGE FEES per night: MCG members, member's children, SWCC and NPC £1
 Guest clubs and member's guests £2
 ANNUAL SEASON TICKET: Optional exemption from cottage fees, for members £10
 ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: Full and Probationary Members: £20; Associate Members: £10
 The subscription includes free day-time access to the cottage by the member, their accompanied guests and children.



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AN INVITATION...

...from the local members to all MCG. They are putting on a Christmas barrel at the cottage on 23rd December to which everyone is invited.

EARWIG...

...payphone rental saved by purchasing own payphone... new cottage locks to be fitted in New Year... new keys to be issued on receipt of 1990 subs... list of cottage maintenance work drawn up... cottage working weekend t.b.a. probably coinciding with AGM, alcoholic incentive?... 1990 Journal in hand, articles wanted... Recorder is recataloguing library... cottage and public liability insurance still under review... lounge seating to be recovered by members!... raffle t.b.a. to subsidise coach to Annual Dinner.

PROSPECTIVE MEMBER

The following application for probationary membership has been received:

Christopher Nevard, 93 Ponster Road, Sundridge Park, Bromley, Kent, BR1 5HE
Tele: 01-857-5508.

Proposed by D. Tooke, M. Carson.

CONGRATULATIONS...

...to John Beauchamp and Alison who are flying out to Melbourne, Australia on 24.12.89 to be married on 6.1.90. Should anyone just happen to be passing, you can call in and see them at 4 Ambrosia Street, Emerald, Victoria.

...and to Neil Hutchinson and Janet Cursi who are to be married on June 2nd 1990.

YVS' DROPPINGS

Andy (after the caller explained a particularly difficult move at the Barn Dance): "Looks like you need to put some bolts in first".

Pat: "Rubber boats can be torn to shreds".

Wayne: "So can blow-up dolls".

Mike L: "What should we charge members children?".

Pat: "I think we should charge double until they stop pissing on the mattress".

Marcus: "Did the frodge defrist?".

Mike H: "When I die I want my ashes put down Upper Flood so I can be the first to do a through trip!".

CHRISTMAS BEER

We still have an account at Fullers Brewery. Anyone wishing to purchase beer for Christmas should contact Roger Wallington by early December.

VEHICLE APPEAL FUND

The West Brecon Cave Rescue Team was formed in 1975 and as part of the SWCRD deals with all cave rescue in the western part of the South Wales caving region. This role makes it one of the busier teams in the UK since the ever popular OFD, the flood prone Little Neath, and the easy access Porth yr Dgof all lie on their "patch". Since their formation they have relied on an ancient Land Rover made available by the SWCC. This vehicle can no longer be relied upon and they have set about raising funds to replace it. There is an immediate target of £10,000 and the caving community in South Wales has already contributed nearly £3,000 towards this. Whilst they hope to raise much of the remainder from local industry, student rags and charitable trusts, they are also extending the appeal to cavers and caving clubs from other areas in the knowledge that they cave in South Wales from time to time. Donations may be sent to R. A. Hall, Fund Secretary, West Brecon Cave Rescue Team, Vehicle Appeal Fund, c/o 1-10 Powell Street, Penwyllt, Pen-y-Cae, Swansea, SA9 1GQ.

DEADLINE...

...for December's Bulletin: 02.12.89

...for January's Newsletter: 30.12.89

DORDOGNE 89, THE CAUSSE DE GRAMAT

(cont. from page 1) That afternoon we did our second cave:

GOUFFRE DE ROQUE-DE-COR

This cave, like the Reveillon, is close to the road. It is situated in a massive doline, 150ft deep. An obvious path leads down the stream bed route, into the doline and to the very wide, low bedding entrance of the cave. A short section of crawling and stooping soon leads to a large dry stream passage which continues for about half a mile to a sump, passing some good formations on the way. There are no significant side passages in this cave.

The following day we set our sights on doing three caves, Les Vitarelles, Perte De theminee and Gouffre De Theminettes, all being in the same area, or so we were led to believe! We found the cave that we took to be Les Vitarelles but it was only a soakaway in the middle of a field. We obviously had the wrong place as Vitarelles is supposed to be a pothole entrance into a major streamway. So we went to our next objective!

PERTE DE THEMINEE

This cave is situated virtually in the middle of the village of Theminee at the end of a deep, blind, very flood prone valley. The cave is extremely flood prone as can be seen by the flood debris jammed high up in the roof throughout. It is also the best cave we visited. The entrance, a small hole back from the end of the valley, soon leads to a 20ft ladder pitch then a small passage (by French standards, large by Mendip) continues for a little way to the main streamway. This can be followed, wading and swimming (wetsuit essential), for several hundred feet to a sump. A climb just before the sump leads to a very large fossil passage. Turning left into this passage leads to some well decorated chambers, then on down to meet the streamway again in a large domed chamber. Following the stream through large sculptured passage again leads to a sump. Just before this a steep mud and gravel slope leads up to another very large fossil passage. To the right the passage floor is extremely muddy, the mud being up to 4ft deep and innocently overlaid by 6ins of water. The further we went along it the worse it got. Somewhere in there was the gloop monster waiting to suck your wellies off, or worse! Retreating, we followed the passage to the left which continued very large past big gour, deep pools and some fine large formations for several hundred feet. The passage enlarges to a big chamber which drops down to a deep pool. Left is a crawl leading to a sump but swimming to the right across the deep pool leads to a continuation of the large passage with still more superb formations, but eventually ending at a sump.

Retracing our footsteps back to the first large fossil passage that we climbed into before the first sump, we decided to explore the other two ways on. Right led us to a complex of crawling smaller passages but straight on led to a climb down into a larger passage and on to split into several ways on. We tried every one, most closing down fairly quickly, but there was always one that continued and split again, gradually getting smaller and leading us to believe that they were degenerating into small inlet passages. Just on the verge of turning back, we decided to look at the final hopeless-looking crawl. It ducked down under a blind low arch to suddenly open out into a magnificent gour passage disappearing into the distance and getting bigger all the time. Each very large gour pool was succeeded by another and another, all with deep crystal clear green water, necessitating swimming across in most cases - it was a cavers' dream. After several hundred feet we suddenly emerged into a beautiful immense chamber over 100ft high and wide and around 200ft long. The formations were huge and breathtaking. A climb up an obvious mud slope led to a balcony giving panoramic views around the chamber and a handline to a still higher superb extension with a beautiful forest of stalagmites as its centrepiece.

It was while in these chambers that the words of sceptics came back to us. "Why do you go underground, I don't see what you see in it", and "What do you want to go to the Dordogne for, I've been there and there's nothing there worth doing". The beauty and immensity of these chambers left us feeling very insignificant and totally spellbound. On leaving the chambers we continued on down the gour streamway for a few more hundred feet with the gour pools increasing in size, when it suddenly ended at an extremely large gour pool and a 30ft drop down to the main streamway, which we presumed must be downstream of the furthest sump we had been to. The climb down needed a handline which unfortunately we didn't have, so the exploration of a further stretch of main streamway was denied to us, but we will return!

Retracing our steps we managed to avoid getting caught by the gour monster and exited the cave after a superb five hours, feeling truly exhilarated. Tony and Denise Knibbs, Pete Harvey, Digger Hastilow and Nick Geh visited this cave a couple of days later on our enthusiastic recommendation but unfortunately they failed to find the gour passage that we had found.

Needless to say, we didn't have time to do the third cave, Gouffre de Theminettes, but we did locate the entrance, completely covered in flood debris (trees, etc)!

The next day we drove over to do:

IGUE ST. SOL

"Igue" is the local word for surface shaft and there are hundreds of them in this area, some blind and some dropping into main streamways or in the case of Igue St. Sol a massive horizontal passage. This was our longest walk, about 1km up a hill, in the shade luckily. The shaft is in a wood surrounded by a fence. A large tree on the uphill side of the hole gives a good belay for a decent down a muddy 45deg. slope to the edge of the shaft. Here another tree overhangs the shaft and gives a freehang for 60ft to a ledge. A choice of rebelays here either gives a freehang of 150ft or so to the bottom or 80ft to a rebelay followed by a final 80ft. We took the latter route. The decent is a fine one in an oval Yorkshire-style shaft landing on the top of a large mud cone to the side of a massive horizontal passage up to 50 x 50ft. Around the bottom of the mud cone are several World War 2 parachute cases obviously dumped by the Resistance.

This superb passage goes either way for a total length of over half a mile. It contains a multitude of magnificent formations most of which are brilliant white and consist of immense columns from floor to roof some of which have collapsed due to their size and weight. Huge bosses, stalagmite forests up to 10ft tall, beautiful curtains, crystal grottos, etc - the further we advanced, the more beautiful it became. At the terminal dig there are some very artistic mud sculptures, among them are Land Rovers, cave divers, cavers, devils and loads of phallics. The other end of the passage also ends at a mud choke which links with the nearby Lacave show cave. Due to the cave temperature and the dry nature of the cave we wore just furry suits and even then we were too hot.

On the return walk from this cave we had a look at:

GROTTE DE COMBE-CULLIER

This is a very insignificant cave for this area but is still part of the Lacave-Igue St. Sol system. Insignificant it may be but it still had a main passageway 12 x 12ft dissappearing into the hillside for a few hundred feet with interesting side passages. Quite a major cave in Mendip terms.

The next day, our final caving day, we visited:

GOUFFRE DU SAUT DE LA PUCELLE

This cave is situated at the end of a deep dry valley right next to the main road. It is a walking size (15 x 15ft) arched entrance remaining like this for a couple of hundred feet to a duck. Here a climb leads to a huge fossil passage which after a while leads via some low passage to the main streamway. This streamway is superb and is obviously the Swildons of the Dordogne. It is followed for several kilometres down loads of short pitches and cascades. There are numerous deep pools to swim across (taking care that the pool monster does not get you) and some fine formations, as well as a dead fish called Colin who made a hundred feet of passageway very unpleasant. Generally the passageway is of large proportions and makes for a very enjoyable trip. At the terminal sump there is a plaque in memory of E.A. Martel who first explored the cave one hundred years before, in 1889. Great fun was had leaping into deep pools, such to the surprise of two French parties there at the time who were trying to stay dry by traversing around all the wet bits - without much success. Amazingly, the French were SRT-ing all the pitches, non being more than 25ft and quite a few free climbable. We used five ladders in total out of around 10 pitches. If the water had been running faster more ladders or aids would have been required. The whole trip took around five hours.

While the three of us had been doing these caves, the others had been doing mainly diving which they reported was superb, "underwater passages the size of Aggy mainstream passage with crystal clear water", was one quote. Reports of their trips will be in CDG write ups no doubt.

The Dordogne is a superb caving area with a great variety of caves. Gramat is a good base as the campsite is good, the town has a couple of large supermarkets and a selection of bars, tourist shops, etc. We didn't drive more than 10 miles to a cave, or walk more than a kilometre to an entrance. Unfortunately we only had eight days, three of which were spent travelling and one resting - leaving us only four caving days. For this reason we visited caves for which we had been supplied information so that we did not waste valuable time. The weather stayed hot and sunny except on the last day when we were trying to break camp and it poured down. Many thanks to Rob Taviner (WCC) for supplying us with the area information and maps.

DAREN CILAU

by Vince Simmonds and Steve Redwood

Friday After the usual holdup on the Severn Bridge Steve and I arrived at Whitewalls at 6.30pm enabling us to be changed and at Daren Cilau by 7pm. The entrance crawl is made all the more fun when carrying a full tackle bag, but forty minutes later we were tumbling into the larger passage at the end with the chance for a breather before moving on. After the entrance the next sections, the Misfit, Jigsaw, White Passage and connecting crawls and stoops, are thankfully relatively easy. The Time Machine is a vast passage with a floor strewn with very large boulders which leads to a breakdown area sloping down eventually to the Bonsai Streamway. The streamway boasts a few decorations, mainly straws and the small bonsai-tree-shaped helictites which give the passage its name. So to the old camp at the Hard Rock and Kings Road about three and a half hours from the surface. From here the interesting sections begin.

Firstly, the sand swims: a series of flat out hands and knees crawls, "u-tubes" and squeezes. Obviously, they are filled with sand which quickly clogs velcro and jams zips. The sand swims lead on to an area named Acupuncture: more flat out and hands and knees crawling, this time filled with small stones the size of childrens building blocks - wonderful stuff!! These crawls lead at last to the Micron: a mud funnel leading through a boulder choke to Anklegrinder: a real classic - when you're beginning to flag a little this very waterworn inlet has sharp projections and holes that catch loose straps and trip you up at every opportunity. Anklegrinder ends at a flood-prone duck about 20ft long and the last short leg of the journey to the camp.

When we arrived, Graham Johnson, Andy Cave (camping since Monday), Dalek, Nick Wall, Snablet and Richard Blake were still up, and soon had a welcoming brew in our hands. The journey to The Restaurant At The End Of The Universe had taken a steady six hours. After a change into dry clothes we sat down to a hot meal cooked by our excellent chef, Andy. By about 3am after eating our meal and drinking some dubious punch, we were more than ready for a good night's kip.

Saturday After getting up late and eating breakfast at lunchtime, we set off for the dig sites which were over one and a half hours away. This was new ground for Steve and I. Our previous trip to The Restaurant was only a carry-in for an earlier camp and there was no time for digging. We eventually arrived at Spaderunner, the scene of the latest digging activities. Steve, Richard, Dalek and I spent a couple of hours furling about looking for leads before letting off a couple of bangs. On the way back we met Snablet at another promising dig called "Yoh Zone", and Dalek, Richard and I had a quick look at "Bad-bat" dig.

When we rejoined Snablet and Steve at the ladder pitch, it seemed that Andy, Graham and Nick (these three remained at camp to do a stock take) had decided to set some traps (tests as they call them). The first involved taping the "C" rings on the bottom section of ladder causing Snablet to fall in a crumpled heap two rungs off the floor. We managed to rejoin the ladder by climbing the hauling rope. Other "tests" included old "det" wires, batteries and a section of passage walled up. We finally made it back to camp and the ever-welcoming brew-up. While Andy was making supper, Richard and I went for a trip to see the breathtaking "Blue-Greenies", a curious mixture of helictites, crystals and flowers coloured blue-green by, presumably, copper sulphate. They are unique and mere words can never do them justice. Back at camp, supper was ready and another punch had been concocted which really helped us to relax. About 1.30am we retired, bleary-eyed, to our respective pits.

Sunday We got up early to clear camp and leave by midday. Tackle bags were stuffed with rubbish and dead batteries. Everyone was putting off the unpleasant experience of climbing into wet, smelly furry suits for the journey out. Packed up, camp clean, we set off at 12.15pm and surfaced at 5pm. An excellent trip and truly enjoyable.

There is an exclusive party at Millways - The Restaurant At The End Of The Universe - on Dec 2nd. All are welcome; bring a bottle, sleeping bag and dry kit.

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE - 6

by Tony Knibbs

Where do all the hours go? Far too few are spent writing for the newsletter - my jottings are now over a year behind the actual events. (Ed. better late than never!) Now then, where was I...

ARDECHE

Prior to moving into our new house at Thil, we decided to join a large group of SWCC camping in the Ardèche Gorge near Vallon-Pont-d'Arc for a week in July 1988. We had the good fortune to meet the Flahaut family from Paris - Jean-Claud and Annie, and their son Christophe - who were camped close to the Aven-Grotte Marzol show cave.

Christophe was kind enough to show us round several local caves starting with GROTTA DE BARBETTE. This small cave is easily reached from the D901 Barjac to Pont-St.Esprit road. A low entrance amongst bushes led via a descending passage into a decorated chamber. Hidden behind stalagmites, a 30m flat-out crawl (tight in places) provided difficult access to an "inner sanctum" of blind passages richly decorated with Gypsum crystals and featuring the unusual "shield" stalagmite formations. The approach crawl obviously acts as a deterrent to vandals here since little damage was noted.

The AVEN DU CAMELIE is located in the open, grassy plateau off the D167 near Méjannes-le-Clap. A doline entrance offered a steep 15m pitch to the large Salle Mazaurice from which a 12m "toboggan" led off towards a dry, bouldery chamber and short passage down to a 22m pitch. Big passage gave easy walking to the Boite aux Lettres after 300m, where a 6m pitch marked the start of even larger passage - The Metro. Unfortunately we had run out of time and turned back here.

Also near Méjannes-le-Clap, following a narrow road northwards almost as far as the picturesque river Cèze, is the well decorated AVEN DE LA SALAMANDRE. Its 50m entrance pitch opens out into a huge chamber where enormous white stalagmite columns stand in ghostly groups, reminiscent of Aven d'Orgnac. The chamber was devoid of any really worthwhile continuation - apart from a high-level passage out of which a German party were practising free-fall techniques.

West of Barjac and south of the D901 between St.André-de-Cruzières and St.Paul-le-Jeune are the resurgence entrances to two very long systems - AVEN DE PEYREJAL (5365m) and SAUVAS-COCALIERE (9130m); the latter can be followed up to a connection (gated) with Grotte de la Cocalière show cave. We walked up to the sump in Peyrejal and wandered around the lower end of Cocalière. It proved an enjoyable visit for the many children amongst the group; they found the upstream walking in Cocalière quite tiring!

Through introductions by the Flahauts, we made the acquaintance of André Vermorel, the manager of the GROTTA DE LA FORESTIERE show cave. Of course, a free visit was instantly arranged to this small but crystal-encrusted cave situated south of the Ardèche river and between Orgnac l'Aven and Labastide-de-Virac off the D217.

North of the Ardèche and close to the D201 between St.Remèze and Bidon (of which André Vermorel is mayor!) is located in the show cave of AVEN DE MARZAL. The cave was moderately interesting - a long stairway down to several decorated chambers - and the associated Museum of Speleology offered some fascinating insights into the exploits of early French cavers: Martel, Casterot, Ageron, de Joly and Guy de Lavour. The display of de Joly's personal equipment showed considerable sophistication and innovation.

Adjacent to Aven de Marzal was the annual campsite of the Flahaut family and their incredible MARZAL 2 dig, about 30m deep and well-equipped with electric lighting and an electric winch operating a delightful truck and railway system. The dig had originally been an effort to get into the reputedly enormous unexplored drainage system towards the Ardèche Gorge. However, the discovery of a rich deposit of animal bones radically changed the emphasis.

Last and by far the least of our visits was to AVEN DE ROSA, a very small cave near Bidon, with an 18m pitch into a modest chamber. By contrast, during our motorings around the region we looked into the (then) almost dry entrance of the Réseau de Foussoubie, 22738m long and 138m deep. Next time, perhaps...

On August 7 we were again caving in the Pyrénées, the Réseau Trombe at Arbas, in the company of John Gillett and daughter Catherine who were camping at Fougaron. For ease of access and minimum tackle we chose TROU MILE, descending the sporting streamway to the rather muddy ascending link passage to TROU DE VENT with its enormous main chamber.

October 15/16 weekend found us at Arbas again with a group of virtual novices from the Aérospatiale Club. Saturday was spent practising SRT in an open 20m shaft near Souffre des Fuxéens. Rather ambitious, we thought was Sunday's HENNE MORTE through-trip with a party of about 10 including several less-experienced cavers. The entrance to this classic system is in a doline at 1339m altitude, from which we planned to descend to the lowest point then exit via GROTTES DES COMMINGEOIS at 940m altitude; mostly downhill all the way and pleasantly dry.

We approached from the Fontaine des l'Ours car park, lightly loaded because the tackle was already in place. The 10m entrance pitch was soon followed by Puits Ségouffin 27m then a string of short pitches: 10, 6, 3, 7 and 8m to two rather more impressive drops of 35 and 44m. Short pitches of 5 and 11m preceded the very imposing Puits de la Tentation - an enormous damp shaft of 75m with an airy traverse out to the main take-off. Pitches of 25 and 17m brought us to the bottom of the Henne Morte and we set off along the substantially horizontal passage towards Grotte des Commingeois. The only obstacles remaining were a couple of traverses over pitches and two drops, each of 7m, one of which had a handy cascade and pool deep enough to provoke a spirited water fight.

The walk back to the lower car park at 450m altitude was the most tiring aspect of the trip, descending 490m in about 5km. But it was well worth it - a superb trip.

We visited the Ardèche area again over the Toussaint holiday weekend 28 October/1 November. The weather was extremely warm and memories of a visit to AVEN DE VARADE, just off the D201 between Bidon and Grotte Marzal, chiefly recall how hot it was wandering around in a Petzl suit with SRT equipment. The pot had two entrances within a few metres of each other and simply provided 25m of pitch practise.

Far more interesting was a trip down AVEN DESPEYSSE near Bidon which is the upper entrance to the very extensive Grotte de St-Marcel d'Ardèche, 24757m long and recently opened as a show cave. A 13m entrance pitch in the lapiaz led to a short passage reaching the head of a 22m pitch. A further short stretch of passage brought us to a split pitch of about 40m, the walls of which glistened with wet flowstone. From a pool at the bottom, water trickled through a hole down to a series of pots above which a series of rope descents resembled a steeply sloping traverse.

The passage ahead now took on a rift-like character as we straddled along good ledges and out into notably big passage which soon took on a 45deg. slope and called for the occasional rope. We ran out of time (trouble with a few novices) as we entered an area of horizontal passages from which the main St.-Marcel system is joined via a long and (reputedly) bedding plane crawl. It was said that the entrance of Aven Despeysse would be filled in to deny cavers access to the new show cave but we have heard no more of this.

A several-week period of idleness extended beyond the Christmas holidays (with some caving on Mendip) and into February 1989, finally broken by a visit to the Coume Ferra district near St. Girons on 5 February. The morning was spent chatting and tipping with local farmers before an afternoon's prospecting near Balagué.

On 12 March we visited a gypsum mine near Tarascon and spent much time wandering around huge rectangular-section galleries looking for mineral samples.

Nick Geh paid us a visit at Easter and we managed a trip to the Lot which featured a descent of IGUE DU PENDANT. The ferme du Pendant is located in undulating countryside about 40km north-east of Millan; the entrance concrete blockhouse (shades of GB) is only five minutes walk away. A 30m entrance shaft starts off vertical but adopts the form of a very steep 80deg. slope halfway down. From the bottom, indifferent passage continued upslope and down, carrying a small stream.

Back again in the Pyrénées with Nick, we had a splendid day's walking in the Arbas area, following the Coume Quarnède up past Trou Mile and on to the high ridge between Tuc de Haurades and Tuc de la Casse. The view was wonderful and we had some fun on snow slopes on the descent. We passed an hour or so looking around an interesting lapiaz on the lower slopes of Pic de Palounère - several good potential digs noticed near Puits de la Hajolle (1450m). An area worth more attention.

A week's holiday beginning 29 April gave us a chance to visit the Cevennes region in gorgeous spring weather. With others from the Spéleo-club Aérospatiale we did a very wet through-trip of ABIME DE BRAMABIAU and, next day, a descent of the GORGES DE TAPDUL which had quite a lot of water to contend with. We also managed an excellent day's walk from our gîte d'Etape at Lanuéjols.

For the rest of our week we went down to the coast near Marseille where some sea diving was enjoyed and we visited the limestone of St. Baume near Aix-en-Provence. TROU DE L'ECUREUIL was descended with local Aérospatiale cavers; it was the club dig. Having now got the account more or less up-to-date I can take a rest from writing until after Christmas!

CAVE YIELDS FRESH ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Excavations at Gough's Cave in Cheddar Gorge are yielding bone, antler and stone tools made by late Ice Age cave dwellers 12,000 to 13,000 years ago, as well as new evidence of probable cannibalistic practices. Human bones scarred with cut marks made by flint knives were first discovered at Cheddar two years ago, but recently at least 14 more pieces of material have come to light. Ten ribs, four teeth, and possible fragments of limb bones have been unearthed, together with bits of animal bone, in a Stone Age rubbish dump built up against the north wall of the cave.

The most important find has been a rare type of prehistoric tool made of reindeer antler and probably used for straightening arrow shafts or making strips of leather supple. It is one of only four such objects ever found in Britain, and is the best preserved. Many similar items have been found in French caves over the past 100 years; they are known as *batons de commandement* and are often decorated or marked. The example unearthed at Cheddar has deeply incised spiral grooves carved around and into the hole.

The Cheddar excavations have also yielded a flint knife, flint debris from tool making and sharpening activities, and an awl for puncturing skin which is made from the tibia of an arctic hare. The cave may well have been partly used for awl and needle making. Tiny fragments of hare bone have been found scattered over the Stone Age surface. The arctic hare was of considerable importance to the Lateglacial people as the animal provided furs for footwear, bones for needles and other tools, as well as flesh for food.

The bones of wild horses with butchery cut marks on them, and two partly burnt lynx bones, have also been unearthed. A new radiocarbon date obtained from a fragment of a mammoth ivory javelin has revealed that mammoths survived in the British Isles later than had been thought. The new date - in radiocarbon terms 12,100 years ago - is 300 years later than the previous latest date for mammoths in Britain.

from an article by David Keys in *The Independent*, 13.9.89

OVERDUE LIBRARY BOOKS

According to the library loans book, all the following titles have been on loan for between six months and six years! If you have returned a book but it is still on this list, please let Wayne Hiscox know. Overdue books can still be returned with no questions asked!

BORROWED	BORROWER	TITLE
19.06.83	A. Spain	10 Years Under the Earth
06.09.83	A. Tizzard	Somerset Mines Research Group Vol1 No2
06.09.83	A. Tizzard	Indications of Lead Mining on Clifton & Durdham Downs
06.09.83	A. Tizzard	Axbridge Archae and Local History Society Journal 1978
06.09.83	A. Tizzard	Burrington Cave Atlas
08.07.84	A. Mellon	MCG Journal No3 1962
08.07.84	A. Mellon	MCG Journal No4 1967
08.07.84	A. Mellon	MCG Journal No6 1976
08.07.84	A. Mellon	MCG Newsletters Nos53-170
04.08.84	A. Dougherty	Northern Caves Vol4b
24.08.84	P. Walsh	The Mendips
23.09.84	J. Roberts	MCG Newsletters Nos1-110
07.10.84	S. Knight	Alfies Songbook
28.12.84	M. Lovell	Caving Practice and Equipment
02.01.85	J. Roberts	Second Edition 25in:1ml Charterhouse
17.02.85	J. Roberts	Axbridge Archaeological Society Journal 1981/2
23.02.85	P. Walsh	The Caves of Ireland
23.03.85	N. Hutchinsonson	Surveying Caves
09.04.85	M. Haselden	Mendip Underground
03.11.85	M. Cotter	Maps ST55NW and ST45NE
09.11.85	P. Merron	Vertical Caving
29.12.85	J. Pudduck	London Under London
23.03.86	R. Wallington	Some Buildings of Mendip
30.03.86	A. Beare	Axbridge Journal 1967/68
14.04.86	G. Barton	Cave Science 9-4 1982
01.06.86	A. Beare	Caves (T. Waltham)
06.07.86	J. Mirriam	St Cuthberts Survey
31.08.86	A. Beare	Limestone and Caves of NW England
10.05.87	D. Hodgson	Wookey (M. Farr)
06.06.87	M. Haselden	Dowsing
12.07.87	S. Bohin	The Heart of Mendip
30.07.87	A. Dougherty	WCC Occasional Publication 2/1
06.09.87	J. Beauchamp	Caves of Derbyshire
24.01.88	A. Dougherty	Scotland Underground (A. Jefferies)
19.03.88	D. Hodgson	World of Caves
19.03.88	D. Hodgson	Underground Worlds
26.03.88	A. Dougherty	MCG 172
26.03.88	D. Haselden	Caves and Caving No35
26.03.88	D. Haselden	Spelionics 1-7
27.03.88	R. Wallington	Survey Craig-A-Fffynnon
27.03.88	R. Wallington	Survey Dan-Yr-Ogof
27.03.88	D. Walsh	Potholing (Heap)
27.03.88	R. Wallington	Caves of Scotland
11.06.88	M. Haselden	Pictorial History of Swildons
02.07.88	A. Dougherty	Haute Savoie Translations
20.11.88	P. C-Wells	Techniques De La Speleo Alpine
20.11.88	P. C-Wells	Man of Pierre St Martin
11.03.89	P. C-Wells	Atlas Des Grandes Cavities Mondials
19.03.89	J. Roberts	Map ST55SW
02.04.89	I. McKechnie	New SWCC Songbook

(Apologies if your name appears but you have already returned the title - Ed.)