

# Friendship Caving Group

# NEWS

NUMBER 213

NOVEMBER 1990

## VERCORS '90 (THE LOST CAVERS' EXPEDITION)

*by Brian Murlis and Steve Redwood*

In the early afternoon of 3rd July the two of us were leaving Portsmouth on the Cherbourg-bound ferry. At 8.30 the following morning, after non-stop driving, we arrived in Villard-de-Lans in the Vercors, our chosen base for the next 7 days.

Villard is a ski resort in the winter which unfortunately makes it a little expensive but we found it a good base as the adequate camp site is not far from the picturesque village centre which has a number of bars, restaurants and shops. It is also centrally placed in the Vercors, being at the head of the Bourne Gorge with its many caves, and a short drive from most of the well known caves. After making camp we bought provisions (mainly beer) and settled down for a well earned sleep in the sun.

THE BOURNE GORGE is a spectacular 15km gorge leading from Pont-en-Royans to Villard-de-Lans which makes Cheddar Gorge look like a scratch on the landscape. The cliffs tower well over 1000ft above you in places and the winding road is cut into the cliffs at regular intervals, with sheer drops of several hundred feet to the river below! Everywhere you look there are caves, some just on the side of the road and others high up in the cliffs. Be warned though, if a rock fall does not get you the mad French drivers are sure to!

GROTTE DE GOURNIER is found high up in the Bourne Gorge at the base of a cliff just 10 minutes walk along a footpath from the Choranche show cave. The cave is a major system of horizontal development, consisting of about 4km of very large fossil passage with the main streamway running directly below. At the end of the fossil passage the main stream continues into the mountain for several more kms. Access is across a long, deep entrance lake which the French cross in boats but which we, in true British style, swam across wearing wetsuits - it was bloody freezing! This is followed by an easy 25ft climb up and a traverse into the start of the fossil passage which averages 50 x 50ft with progress hampered in most parts by extremely large boulders which make K2 in St Cuthbert's look like a pebble. The formations are massive, dwarfing a human but unfortunately not many have escaped desecration by the French who seem to delight in touching, climbing on, breaking, and covering in spent carbide any formation within reach! We explored to the end of the fossil passage and then climbed down into the crystal clear waters of the streamway for an enjoyable trip downstream through pools and cascades before finally making our way back up into the fossil passage. An hour or so later we exited from the cave into torrential rain. This was a superb trip very much enjoyed by both of us.

SCIALET DE MALATERRE is a large daylight shaft situated in the forest about 20 mins drive up the mountain above Villard-de-Lans and is only 200m from the road. The shaft is 120m deep with a metal footbridge over it for tourists to stand on and drop rocks onto cavers below. We made our descent over the side of the bridge (not through the removable floor panel for tourists to drop through onto cavers below!) landing on a broad ledge after 60m or so overlooking the next 60m to the bottom. From this ledge there is a choice of two ways down: a direct descent on a single spit which protrudes nearly 1/2 in from the rock or a climb up behind the ledge to a parallel series of pitches which eventually bring you out at the bottom of the main shaft. We chose the latter route! As our luck would have it this way was extremely muddy, tight and had a severe lack of decent belays but we eventually made it to the bottom. From here the cave continues on down another couple of pitches and into some large chambers but we had run out of time and energy by then. The best part of the trip is the descent and ascent of the main pitch, especially the first one up, wondering whether someone above has sabotaged your belays on the bridge!

(cont. on p4)

++++ MCG 1990 MEETS PROGRAMME ++++ BANK HOLIDAY WEEKENDS IN ITALICS ++++

DATE	AREA	MAIN EVENT	AND/OR
03 Nov - 04 Nov	Mendip	HALF YEARLY MEETING	BARN DANCE/BONFIRE
17 Nov - 18 Nov	S Wales	Pwll Dwn	
01 Dec - 02 Dec	Mendip	Charterhouse	GB Cavern
08 Dec - 09 Dec	S Wales	Craig-a-Ffynnon	
15 Dec - 16 Dec	Yorkshire	Alum Pot	Bar Pot
29 Dec - 01 Jan	Mendip	New Year Party	

For further details of meetings, contact Dave Tooke (tel: 0923-241522)

"Away" meets: accommodation can be booked by telephoning the relevant cottage warden:

Yorkshire	Northern Pennine Club	Steve Thorpe	0532 559214
South Wales	South Wales Caving Club	Janice Richards	0985 219111

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 1B2

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 children, and their accompanied guests



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The Mendip Caving Group is a registered charity, number 270088  
 The Group's Trustees are: Ron Saunders, Malcolm Cotter, Pat Walsh and Peter Matthews



## ON THE MOVE

Sonia Cotter has moved to:  
38 Penrose Court, Highfield Road, Egham,  
Surrey TW20 0SS

Lesley and Andy Beare are on their travels again - they have sold their house and bought a combivan. First stop is Norway for the winter season, and they expect to be away for a year or two at least. Good bye and good luck!

## CONGRATULATIONS . . .

... to Bob Marles and Keith Knight who have both successfully completed proving trips and who are now full members.

*(about time too - they've been probationary members for years! Ed.)*

## WHAT A WASTE!

Have you ever wondered what happens to all the rubbish you leave behind at the cottage? Mendip District Council will only collect one black bag of rubbish each week - anything more has to be contained within specially purchased refuse sacks which cost 50p each. But, if the Group was to purchase these bags and leave them around the cottage they would be used for all sorts of purposes eg. taking wet caving gear home. The committee have decided therefore to hire a 600 litre trade refuse bin which will be emptied weekly by "Cleanaway". The bin holds the equivalent of 20 black bags of rubbish. This may sound a lot but if you have ever been at the cottage after a mid-week booking you will know how much rubbish 30 people can generate in 5 days! Please continue to use the ordinary black bags provided in the kitchen, and ensure that all rubbish is then put in the trade bin. DO NOT PUT HOT ASH FROM THE FIREPLACE IN THE TRADE BIN - IT WILL MELT.

## COTTAGE BOOKINGS

03 Nov - 04 Nov	Members' Weekend
08 Nov	St Cuthmans School (30)
12 Nov - 16 Nov	Royal Navy
19 Nov - 23 Nov	Royal Navy
23 Nov - 25 Nov	Bill Headington (7)
01 Dec - 02 Dec	Members' Weekend
07 Dec - 09 Dec	East Dorset SS (12)
29 Dec - 01 Jan	Members' Weekend

## CHARTERHOUSE CENTRE

There is renewed concern over the future of the Charterhouse Centre. In the Wells Journal of 14.6.90 it was reported that the county education committee is likely to be asked to bring in management consultants to find a way of saving money. With financial axes flying about the education department, educational services are likely to be examined by the consultants: administration costs, outdoor education centres, further education and the school library and museum service are all under review. The MCG committee are monitoring the situation and believe that the Group's position re Upper Flood can be assured.

## CHARTERHOUSE LEADERS

Brian Murlis has replaced John Beauchamp as the Group's second keyholder and leader for Charterhouse Cave. With Brian living on Mendip and Yvonne Rowe (our other leader) a frequent visitor, especially on a member's weekend, you should have no problem getting a trip although it is advisable to make arrangements first.

Just a reminder - Charterhouse Cave is covered by a CCC access/conservation agreement which means that you must visit the cave with one of the Group's authorised leaders. A maximum party size of four is allowed (including the leader), with no novices, no-one under the age of sixteen, and no carbide. But for all the rules and regulations it is a cave well worth visiting - if you have not already done so. It offers very varied and sporting caving - sometimes very tight, sometimes very roomy, sometimes very wet! - not unlike a smaller GB. It also has some fine decorations and interesting geological features. ("I am happy to go down as many times as requested" - Yvonne).

"THE LOST CAVERS' EXPEDITION" (cont. from p1)

GOUFFRE BERGER was the next cave to be visited in the hope that we could beg a trip down from whoever was rigging it. The drive to La Moliere is beautiful and the views from there over to the French Alps. From La Moliere the Berger is easily reached on foot in 45 mins if you stay on the right path (passing Scialet Fromageire/Gouffre d'Engins which is another mega trip). Unfortunately, on arriving at the entrance, we found that it had not been rigged, which surprised us. The entrance itself is very disappointing and belies what is beyond. There is a vast amount of rubbish around, filling most of the cracks in the surrounding Karst! We would definitely recommend not straying from the path in this area as are holes everywhere and the forest is dense.

GOUFFRE DE BOURNILLION is a major tourist attraction and is visited by every Frenchman and his dog, wearing shorts (him, not his dog), yet no trip to the Vercors is complete without a visit to this cave in the Bourne Gorge. It has the largest known entrance in Europe with a span of 200m containing a sizeable lake (it was dry at the time of our visit). A huge boulder-strewn passage continues for several hundred metres to a sump and if you visit it on a Sunday, as we did, it is full of Frenchmen carrying torches! Apart from the main passage there is a smaller lateral passage which we declined to take, instead opting for a higher level return revealing an immense chamber above the main passage. Outside the entrance to Bournillion there is a sheer cliff over 1000ft high with a waterfall coming down its full height. About half way up, on a broad ledge and behind the waterfall, is a cave: La Grotte de la Cascade.

LA GROTTTE DE LA CASCADE is, according to the description we had, approached by a 500ft aided climb straight up the cliff next to the waterfall. We decided after a few beers one evening that an approach could be made up a steep slope through woods then along a ledge to the cave! The next day we put our theory to the test. The slope we had in mind was nearly vertical and thickly wooded with a good supply of loose boulders held back by the trees - but not for long! Inevitably, the higher we climbed the more boulders we sent crashing down the slope, and the more unstable it became. At the same time, we were being eaten alive by mosquitoes! We eventually reached the point where progress became too dangerous and we realised that there was no way to reach the ledge so a very careful descent was made behind the avalanche of boulders!

GROTTE DE FAVOT is a cave high up on one flank of the Bourne Gorge, and is the Goatchurch of the Vercors - but with a 70m pitch at the end of it, hence our visit. What is supposed to be a 20 min steep walk to the entrance took us and a French group following us a good 2 hrs - we could not find it anywhere. Eventually, we found the entrance a long way from where we had believed it to be. The large entrance arch led via a low crawl to an immense tunnel 25 x 25ft descending at a 45° angle to a junction. Right led to a series of large dead-end passages and low crawls, left was a very large passage leading to the 70m pitch. Due to our "getting lost" trying to find the cave, the time was now 6.30pm and we did not have time to descend the pitch, which was very annoying as we had been hauling two heavy tackle bags all over the place with us! Needless to say, this cave was virtually devoid of formations due to its popularity.

SCIALET DU TOROGGAN was chosen as our final cave because it was described as having a 30m+ entrance pitch along with several other shorter ones, some large passages and chambers, and a good streamway. Also it was next to the road so we mistakenly thought it would be easy to find. The book said that it was near the ski lift but it did not say that there are two ski lifts. We just happened to look near the wrong one! Eventually the entrance was located, only to discover that it was free-climbable as were all but one of the other "pitches" so we quickly dumped all the tackle bags and ploughed on. From the entrance to the climb down into the streamway, the devastation in the cave was unbelievable - virtually every formation was either broken or covered in mud. One particular passage would have been one of the most beautiful imaginable; about 600ft long and 10ft in diameter with a profusion of stal throughout its length, but every piece had been totally ruined. It was heartbreaking. Incredibly, the cave was only discovered in 1975.

From the streamway the cave changed character with refreshingly little damage. We carried on through two immense chambers where reflective tape and cairns showed the way. We eventually reached the bigger of the chambers where we were unable to find the way on. Lack of time and shortage of carbide forced us to begin our return just as we found the way onwards, but it was too late. We exited the cave just in time to set back for a last meal in our favourite Pizza restaurant.

All in all, we had a great time but it was a shame that nobody else came along with us (Ed. the trip was advertised in N/L 209 Jan'90 but not a single person expressed an interest). If we could have had another two or so people with us we would have been able to do some more complex systems and gone further into the ones that we did. But two of us were very limited in the amount of tackle we could carry. The other main problem we had was finding the caves! The Vercors is very extensive, mountainous and heavily forested which along with trying to interpret French directions created quite a few difficulties. We were extremely disappointed with the French attitude to cave formations, the desecration was unbelievable and unforgivable, unlike the Dordogne where damage was more or less at an "acceptable" level. Despite this, we have plans for the future and Vercors - we shall return...

### LATE TACKLE!

In Bulletin No.11 (Sept '90) I announced an amnesty for MCB tackle missing from the tacklestore. I'm glad to report that most of the ladder and some of the rope has now been accounted for. 13 ladders were missing. One is in Bone Hole, one in Daren Cilau, four in Eastwater, one in Rod's Pot and three were left in the loft by a probationary member without a key to the tacklestore. This means that three MCB ladders are still missing - please can we have them back?

Some of the missing MCB lifeline has been returned, two short lengths of lifeline were found in Bone Hole and one rope is believed to be in Rod's Pot. There are still several ropes unaccounted for. Again, please return them or notify the tacklemaster as to their whereabouts.

The committee were concerned to learn that considerable amounts of ladder have been left semi-permanently in caves on Mendip and in South Wales and that perfectly good lifeline is being used as hauling rope, or left underground for long periods of time. Group tackle is meant to be returned to the tacklestore in good condition after every caving trip. The committee are not opposed to tackle being used in digs but feel that it would be courteous of the diggers to let the tacklemaster know where our tackle is being used. He could then arrange for our poorest quality ladders to be downgraded rather than almost new ladders being written off. Likewise, the Group will purchase cheap hauling line for digs whenever needed rather than see expensive lifeline destroyed by misuse.

After much discussion the committee agreed that the following procedures must be observed by diggers: lifeline must not be downgraded to hauling line by anyone other than the tacklemaster who will ensure lifeline is clearly re-labelled as hauling rope. The tacklemaster will also ensure that adequate lengths of hauling rope are always available in the gas store. HAULING ROPE MUST NEVER BE RETURNED TO THE TACKLESTORE WHERE IT MAY BE MISTAKEN FOR LIFELINE. Ladders must not be left underground or otherwise removed for long periods from general use without prior agreement with the committee. If the committee agree that a ladder may be removed from general use, the tacklemaster may then consider it's replacement.

Adrian Duckett (a.k.a. the tacklemaster) has instigated a loose-leaf tackle log-book to monitor the use of Group tackle. When a sheet is full please remove it from the ring-binder and post it to him. This will enable him to keep a close eye on the use (or misuse) of Group equipment.

(Ed. see also article on p6)

## THE LADDER SKETCH

Scene: The tacklemaster is tidying the tacklestore when a member enters carrying a ladder.

Member: Hello Miss.

Tacklemaster: Whaderyer mean, "Miss"?

M: I'm sorry, I'm an Honorary Member. I wish to make a complaint.

T: I'm sorry, we're closed for lunch.

M: I wish to complain about this ladder what was borrowed not half an hour ago from this very tacklestore.

T: Oh, yes, the MCG 35? What's er, what's wrong with it?

M: I'll tell you what's wrong with it my lad, it's kinked. That's what's wrong with it.

T: No, no, it's er, it's coiled!

M: Look matey, I know a kinked ladder when I see one and I'm looking at one right now.

T: Remarkable ladder the MCG 35, innit eh? BEAUTIFUL RUNGS!!

M: The rungs don't enter into it. It's badly kinked.

T: No, no, it's coiled.

M: All right then, if it's coiled, I'll uncoil it.

(The member starts to uncoil the ladder. As he does so, the Tacklemaster attempts to straighten out the kinks)

T: There you are look. Nice and straight.

M: No it isn't - you pulled on it.

T: I never.

M: Yes you did.

T: Never.

M: Now that's what I call a kinked ladder.

T: It's not kinked, it's twisted.

M: Twisted?

T: Yeah. You twisted it just as you uncoiled it. MCG ladders twist easily. BEAUTIFUL RUNGS!!

M: Now look, don't play the slippery Tacklemaster with me. That ladder is definately kinked. When I borrowed it not half an hour ago you assured me that it's total lack of straightness was due to it being tired and sh...ed out after a long dig in Eastwater.

T: Well, er, it's probably pining for a Yorkshire pitch.

M: Pining for a Yorkshire pitch? What kind of talk is that? Why did it tangle the moment I got it out of the tackle sack?

T: MCG ladders prefer being in a tangle.

M: Look, Tosh, I took the liberty of

examining this ladder when I got it to the cave and I discovered that the only reason that it looked straight in the first place was that the wires had wooden splints taped to them.

T: Well of course it was splinted. Listen Mush, if I hadn't put splints on that ladder, it would have muscled out of the tackle sack, tearing it apart with its little c-links and VROOOOM!

M: VROOOOM?

T: Yeah, vroooom.

M: Mate, this ladder wouldn't "vroooom" if you put 4,000,000 volts through it. It's bleedin' devised.

T: No, no, it's coiled.

M: It's not coiled, it's passed on. This ladder is no more. It has ceased to be. It's expired and gone to meet its maker. It's scrap. Bereft of life, it rusts in pieces. If you hadn't splinted it together it would have fallen down the pitch. It's off its belay. It's curled up its c-links. It's shuffled off its metal coil. It's effing snuffed it. Vis-a-vis the metallurgical processes - its 'ad its lot. All statements to the effect that this ladder is still a going concern are from now on in-opperative. THIS IS AN EX LADDER.

T: Well, I better replace it then. (He searches for another ladder) Dh dear, we're right out of ladder.

M: I see, I see. I get the picture.

T (In a whisper): I've got a lifeline.

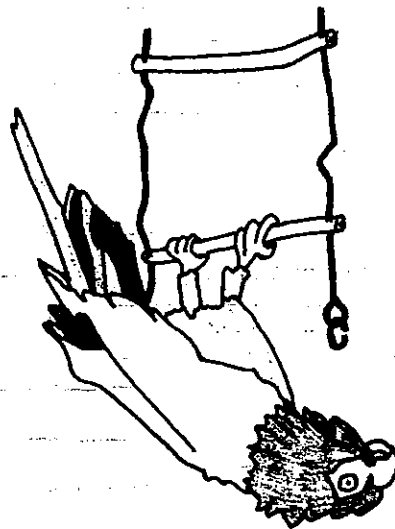
M: Will it haul skips?

T: Yep.

M: Right, I'll have it then.

T: What about the naff ladder?

M: Better donate it to the BEC!



(With apologies to Monty Python and their ex parrot)

## THE REV CECIL CULLINGFORD

The Rev Cecil Cullingford, who has died aged 85, seemed destined to become a leading clerical headmaster; but when he was forced by domestic circumstances to abandon this career he became an international authority on speleology.

Originally introduced to speleology through his interest in archaeology, Cullingford came to believe that the exploration of caves by groups of schoolboys had great educational value, since it combined scientific discovery with physical demands and experience of teamwork.

Cullingford wrote and edited several books on caving, some of which are now standard works on the subject, instructive for beginners and experts alike. To all he emphasised the importance of responsibility and the need for scientific judgement rather than foolhardy risk when venturing into unknown territory.

His own extensive caving experience was ill-starred, as his important pioneering work, mainly in South Wales, had to be curtailed just before spectacular breakthroughs were made by others.

Cecil Howard Dunstan Collingford was born at Battersea on Sept 13 1904 and educated at the City of London School and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where he had a brilliant academic career, taking firsts in both parts of the Classics tripos and then in History.

Thus equipped, he became a sixth-form master at Brighton College. But in 1932 his evangelical convictions took him to Clifton Theological College, Bristol - where, curiously, he held the office of vice-principal while himself preparing for ordination.

Cullingford stayed on for a time as assistant chaplain, but his heart was still in school teaching and in 1935 he became chaplain of Oundle.

Having joined the Reserve of Officers, he was among the first Army chaplains to be called to active service in 1939 and was soon in France, serving with the Grenadier Guards and then with the Welsh Guards.

He returned to England via Dunkirk in 1940, and was senior chaplain to the 79th Armoured Division when the 21st Army group under Gen Montgomery drove through France and the Low Countries and into Germany in 1944 and 1945.

On demobilisation Cullingford was appointed headmaster of Monmouth School, conveniently placed for the Mendips and the cave systems of South Wales. He brought to the school an invaluable combination of intellectual gifts, teaching skill, pastoral sensitivity and wide experience.

But in 1956, after his wife, Olive, whom he had married in 1933, developed a distressing mental illness, he felt obliged to resign the headmastership.

After a three-year spell at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, where he lectured in naval history, Cullingford became chaplain of St John's School, Leatherhead, from 1960 to 1964, then of St Michael's School, Limpsfield.

The most important of his books were *Exploring Caves* (1952), *British Caving* (1954), *A Manual of Caving Techniques* (1969) and *The Science of Speleology* (1976), which he edited with Trevor Ford.

In 1967 Cullingford moved to north Norfolk to join a rural group ministry based at Blakeney, where he had a particular responsibility for the parish of Stiffkey with Morston. On his retirement in 1972 he served for a time as rural dean of Beccles and assisted in several Suffolk parishes. His first wife died in 1971, and the next year he married Penelope Wood-Hill.

## FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE - 7

by Tony Knibbs

As usual I'm picking up the thread of activities of a year ago, starting with a visit to Gouffre Georges, the deepest cave in Ariège at -687m, and 3490m long. The four entrances lie on the eastern flank of Pique du Mont-Béas which overlooks the tiny Etang de Leis, some 15km west of Vicdesses. It was June 3 and it snowed as we arrived!

We chose the lowest of the entrances, entering the system about 300m below the top entrance. The unimposing 5m excavated entry shaft was followed shortly by a 20m handline traverse and 10m pitch into the huge Salle de la Famine. Floored by boulders of all shapes and sizes, of black limestone prominently streaked with white calcite, the chamber tips precipitously at around 45°. Initial rock-hopping needs a 30m line then it's all delicate downslope going to an area of wall traversing, passing below the Feuilles Mortes inlet. After an hour or so, the chamber is narrow enough to see both walls at once, and a snack was enjoyed in a pleasant inlet cul-de-sac at about -600m and before the first of two sumps. An easy trip in an otherwise difficult cave.

June 17 found us in the snow again, this time at Gardonie where we visited the ice cave, Grotte Casteret. Cars were parked at the Port de Boucharo at 2270m and we set off in early morning sunshine to cross the Col des Sarradets at 2589m to meet others in the party at the CAF refuge. Breakfast in the sun over, we tackled the steepish snowfield up to the Brèche de Roland - a remarkable "doorway" through the craggy skyline at 2807m. Another pause here before heading east along a path then a "via ferrata" traverse below the bulk of Le Casque (3008m). Downslope now, crossing tongues of dusty snow, brought us to the impressive portal of Grotte Casteret after 1.5km and close to the Spanish Frontier.

Donning crampons and a minimum of caving gear we set off across the ice-rink floor of a roomy chamber to an area of ice columns and frozen cascades where a low arch to the left opened over a 5m rope pitch to an attractive ice grotto. Here, in a wall of ice, could be seen the stratified testimony to the "fossil" age of the ice. Returning up the climb, we continued up an ascending passage through many and varied ice formations, eventually climbing a snowy chimney to reach an alternative exit into the sunshine.

The night was spent bivouacing back at the Brèche. A fine night was followed by a brilliant morning with the prospect of an ascent up Le Taillon, west of the Brèche and 3144m high. Clutching ice-axes, we set off past the smaller Fausse Brèche then up onto the snow, carefully crossing a rather narrow ridge before a final slope up to the summit. It was an exhilarating situation with views for many kilometres across the snow-capped French peaks and their markedly more arid Spanish neighbours. It was a worthwhile and memorable visit.

The weeks in July were spent conducting a group of our French colleagues on a visit to the UK. Many Group members gave valued assistance during a short stay in London and during the subsequent visits to Mendip and South Wales. Our French friends were impressed and very grateful.

On September 9 we met several Group members for a Day's caving in the Lot area - Causse de Gramat - where Pete Harvey, Nick Geh, Brian Murlis, Steve Redwood, Vince Simmonds, and Digger Hastilow were already installed at the Gramat municipal campsite. There was only time for one trip and we chose to visit the Perte de Thémines with PH, NG and DH. The entrance is a seasonally dry sink in the small valley which carries the river Ouyse, just below the village of Thémines some 10km SE of Gramat and 250m N of an antiques shop on the N140. We chose the upper of two holes in the valley end, well-furnished with tree trunks attesting to the power of flood water in season. The Ouyse system is about 6km long. After a few metres a 7m pitch required a ladder, then the way on enlarged and the problem of route-finding began. Our first choice led into



a gently descending bedding-passage floored with dry gourls and becoming low and muddy. Another option had us wading in thigh-deep mud to a sump. Eventually we stumbled on a likely looking passage offering some deep pools and some pleasant swimming to another sump; at least it washed off some mud. Alas, time was running out when we reached a descent into a large passage which appeared to be the beginning of an altogether more grandiose part of the system. We'll explore the remaining 5km next time!

On two separate weekends in October we joined our usual colleagues in Spéleo-Club d'Aérospatiale for visits to two very interesting, but small caves near St Gironst: October 15 to Trou de Peillot II at Cazaret, October 29 to Grotte de Francazal at Salège. A hole in the hillside above Peillot Farm leads downslope to a 15m pitch (25m rope) pitch, leaving a rather inviting clean-washed rift for another time. Below the pitch, the floor slopes down to a 12m pitch through a narrow slot then opening out nicely and passing an intermediate eroded floor. A short upslope passage from the foot of the pitch reached a T-junction: the right-hand passage soon became too tight but a 4m rope scramble to the left opened into the bottom of a shaft. Bolted climbs were seen to the left and right, the latter gaining a low passage (not reached) alleged to lead into decorated passage and a final chamber.

Grotte de Francazal lies between the villages of Francazal and Salè, almost at the roadside on the NE side of a prominent bend. An obvious hole leads to 2m drop into a roomy passage with several leads. The most obvious way on soon reaches a 9m pitch, soon followed by a 7m pitch. Stooping passage leads into clean-washed rifts, slides and pots to arrive at a 10m pitch. A fine meandering rift was followed until a 3m climb up into a climbable 4m cascade and sump upstream. The cave was rather reminiscent of passages and pitches in Yorkshire.

November 1st found us back at Gramat, in the Lot, for a visit to Gouffre du Saut de la Pucelle. The cave entrance is an impressive arch at the end of a (then) dry valley which abuts the N140 from the NE, about 5km NW of Gramat. A wide lay-by on the right affords ample parking from which, crossing the drystone wall, a scramble down the valley side reaches the entrance in five minutes.

The stench of a long-dead fish met us about 100m along the roomy, pebble-floored but currently dry entrance passage. After some 100m an obvious, but smaller, passage is followed to the left into a parallel passage of larger dimensions, and the start of a 2km active streamway is easily reached, beginning with a 4m rope descent to a large pool. The streamway is normally of ample cross-section throughout, with only three or four short hands-and-knees grovels. There are plenty of cascades, canals and pools to splash about in. Reports vary as to how many pitches there are; in the event, it really depends on what can be easily free-climbed and what cannot. A total of ten pitches has been referred to elsewhere but, of these, only about eight needed ladders - say, two 10m and six 5m - plus four 5m ropes for handlines. The passage terminates at a sump which we did not quite reach in a return trip of seven hours.

Even more aquatic was a visit to the Grotte d'Aliou, 2km SE of Cazaret, in the Ariège, made on December 3. This resurgence drains the important and only partly explored plateau of the Forêt Domainale de l'Estelas. The wide, arched entrance marks the start of a 500m boat trip or swim, according to taste, best done in settled weather. We swam. Apart from a couple of "islands", the water remains deep (over 2m) throughout, and the average passage/river width is 3m with very few handholds for the occasional rest. Swimming on one's back allows the stalactite-hung roof to be admired; normal progress gives the frequent glimpse of submerged stalagmites. A brief narrow section of about 50cm width is created by an enormous stalactite flow, the Méduse, 30m high.

Eventually a bouldery landing is reached where the stream descends a few metres as a noisy cascade. Following the stream reaches a too-tight tube at the end of an ascending rift. Nearby, above the cascade, a slightly overhanging climb (forbidding as a free-climb) of about 4m to a passage and terminal sump. For our next visit we will take some sort of flotation aids, and maybe a powerful sub-aqua torch to view the river bed.

## ... AND YET MORE



### ECLIPSED!

Although the MCG Thursday venue at the Eclipse, Egham started off ideal and full of promises - a side room with a bar for our use, the snooker table put aside on MCG nights, and undisturbed early evening use assured for committee meetings - sadly these promises have not been fulfilled. Things have gone from bad to worse with the room occasionally being booked by other (paying!) groups, loud pop groups often performing making it impossible to hold any kind of conversation, and we've given up trying to conduct committee meetings there so we now hold them temporarily at Malcolm's house...

...so here we go again. If anyone knows of any suitable pub, preferably with a separate room for committee meetings and slide shows, etc., please contact the committee with your suggestion. The most practical areas are those just outside London, accessible by M3, M4 and M25, and with a rail station for those without transport. Egham was ideal for all this and it was also equi-distant for Londoners and non-Londoners alike. So now you have a good excuse to go pub crawling (if you needed one) to find MCG a good new Thursday venue. Good hunting.

### EARWIG...

...in on the committee meeting held 06.10.90... B Murlis to order commercial type toilet rolls and dispensers... Payphone: B Murlis to arrange repair of coin switch and consider fixing secure but larger coin box... A Duckett will repair old toaster... New 2gal urn to be purchased and will be securely fastened and plumbed in... A Duckett & B Murlis to investigate type of fire alarms and best positions... M Rowe to establish what our likely working capital should be so that surplus may be invested by trustees.

### UPPERFLOOD UPPERDATE

The committee have reviewed the list of Upper Flood leaders, and the full list is shown below. Access conditions laid down by the Field Centre are: all trips led by an approved leader, generally max 4 per trip, and the Blackmoor log book to be completed after each trip.

#### Current leaders:

S Wyatt	M Cotter	M Haselden
W Hiscox	G Lister	L Hawkeswell
B Murlis	D Tooke	V Simmonds
M Lovell	A Spain	R Wallington
A Duckett	M Rowe	J Crowlsey
S Eddy	V Gill	J Beauchamp
A Thomas	M Carson	S Redwood

In addition, all the above can be approached for the key to the rock drill ammo box as it is now kept in the Upper Flood keysafe.

### YV'S SDROPPINGS

LH: "I wouldn't use Fig-8s underground."  
 DT: "Bill wasn't underground."  
 MR: "He nearly was!"

LH: "Barry's making himself look pretty"  
 DH: "What's he doing - putting a paper bag over his head?"

Mike Haselden (Whirling Dervish) planning a trip down GB...  
 YR: "If Mike's going down GB it will only take him half an hour!"  
 AM: "Is he staying down there then?"

Checking in the oven...  
 AM: "Your plate's almost done, Malcolm"

### CALCIFIED ADS

Who said Andy Beare has gone abroad? The following advert appeared recently in a local paper. We wish him well in his new(?) career.

**Punch & Judy • Magic • Puppeteer**

**Andy B.**

**Children's Entertainer**  
Tel • 04488 • 203

**Music • Games • Singer •**  
**Guitarist - for your Party,**  
**Fete, Coffee Morning etc.**