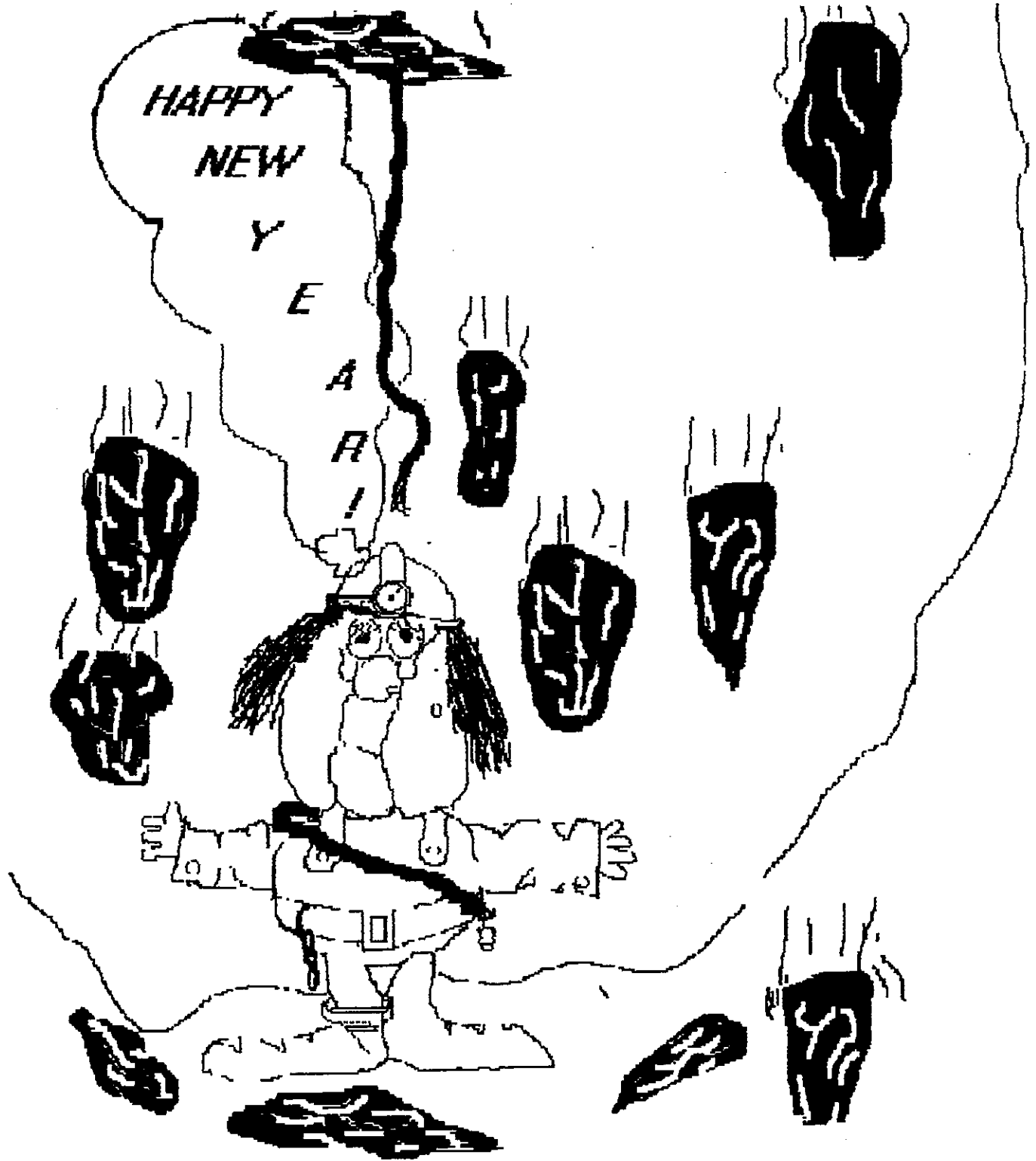


Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 219

JANUARY 1992



1992 ACTIVITIES PROGRAMME

Date	ACTIVITY	VENUE	CONTACT	PHONE
Jan 9	Slide Show	Eclipse Egham	Ian Mckecknie	0932 228292
Mar 7	Archaeology Weekend	Mendip	Yvonne Rowe	0252 872006
Mar 22/3	SRT/Rescue Workshop	West London	Kevin West	081 570 6625
Apr 4	AGM/Dinner	Mendip	Arthur Spain	

Accommodation in Yorks & S.Wales can be booked by through the relevant cottage warden:

Yorkshire	Northern Pennine Club	Steve Thorpe	0532 559214
South Wales	South Wales Caving Club	Debby Stevens	0202 679602

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.0761-462797
 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 children, and their accompanied guests

SECRETARY: MALCOLM COTTER tel: 07842-52643
 249 Feltham Hill Road, Ashford, Middlesex, TW15 1LU
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 3 Keward, Glastonbury Road, Wells, Somerset
ORDINARY MEMBER: ARTHUR SPAIN : 0749-679358
 Waitangi, Long Lane, Dinder, Somerset, BA5 3PQ

The Mendip Caving Group is a registered charity, number 270088

The Group's Trustees are: Ron Saunders, Malcolm Cotter, Pat Walsh and Peter Matthews

STOP PRESS COUNTY CLARE, IRELAND, 11-25th JULY, 1992.
 If interested contact MARTIN OR YVONNE ROWE or JOAN GODDARD.

* SRT WORKSHOP

This is not an official MCG activity, but is such that members may well wish to attend. It being run by Kevin West and the Derbyshire Caving Association Training Officer Nigel Atkins who is an accredited NCA Caving Instructors Certificate holder. There is a charge of £20 for MCG Members and there will be some spare harnesses available.

NATIONAL CAVING ASSOCIATION

The National Caving Association runs training courses for its Caving Instructors Certificate, Local Cave Leader's Certificate Grade 1 (Walk in Walk out Caves) and Grade 2 (for Caves Liable to Flood and having pitches up to 60 feet). These courses are required by Insurance Companies for Cave Leaders and Instructors requiring insurance cover.

ERRATUM

Constitution and Rules :- Paragraph 9(d)

Contrary to what the secretary had inserted as the wording of the motion accepted at the EGM assembly on page 5 of Newsletter 218, the wording of the motion put by Ron Saunders, and accepted at the November EGM was as follows:-

Nominations for Office and proposals to change the Constitution and Rules must be submitted in writing by First Class Post to the Secretary's home address with signatures of Full Members proposing and seconding and at least 25 days before the meeting. A Nomination for Office must be accompanied by a signed agreement to stand for Election by the Nominee.

The original paragraph read :-

Nominations for office and proposals to change the Constitution and Rules shall reach the secretary at least 21 days before the meeting.

The reasoning behind the accepted amendment is that motions sent to the secretary by First Class Post, postmarked 25 days before the meeting (for which a date stamped certificate of posting can be obtained), will be legally accepted as proof of having been sent to the secretary.

MCG AGM 1992-Officers' Reports

The 1992 AGM is to be held at the Hunters on Saturday 4th April at 2pm. To assist in the smooth running of the meeting it would be appreciated if the Editor could have all Officers' Reports, and the Audited 1991 Accounts for inclusion in the next newsletter, copy date Thursday 6th February.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

At the AGM all Committee Posts are up for election. Brian Murlis has informed the Editor that he will not be standing for any position on the committee as he feels unable to give the time to a committee post that is required due to family commitments at present.

It has to be remembered there has been three Co-options in the last year, and that Candidates should be able to give the time and energy to each post that is necessary for the smooth and harmonious running of the group. One of the pre-requisites for this to be possible, is that each Committee Member should be able to attend most committee meetings, another being an ability to work with the rest of the committee as a team. It is only then a spirit of trust will be maintained, and once again the MCG can develop the dynamism it used to have, rather than stagnate in a quagmire of rumour and mistrust that abounds in the MCG at present.

BARN DANCE

Arthur Spain wishes to thank everyone who helped with food or practical assistance at the Barn Dance in November. It is felt that although not as well attended as expected, everyone had a good time and we are looking forward to the next one this year.

ANNUAL DINNER

The Annual MCG Dinner will be held on 4th April at The Crossways, North Wooton, starting 7.30pm for 8.00pm. Tickets will be available shortly. It is expected that there will be a guest speaker and a couple of sketches involving dinner guests as well as other diversions. So it should go well this year.

APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

The following applications for membership have been received:-

LAWRENCE CONISBEE, 1 BROOKSIDE CLOSE, FELTHAM, MIDDLESEX TW13 7HR
proposed: C. Allison seconded: M. Cotter

MATTHEW HORROBIN, AVIAN, REDGATES ROAD, MINEHEAD, SOMERSET TA24 8DA
proposed: C. Allison seconded: S. Cotter

ROBERT WHALLEY, 55 PINNER ROAD, OXHEY, WATFORD WD3 4E9
proposed: L. Hawkswell seconded: W Headington

SLAUGHTER STREAM CAVE

Extracted from The R.H.B.N.C. Newsletter

Team:- Pete Bennett, Ralph Diment, Tim Francis, Julie Hesketh, Pete Mollings, and Karen Leslie.

Trip:- Saturday 9th November

Further access details Contact:- John Sibley 0594 37126. Flat 2, 9 Boxbush Road, Coleford, Gloucestershire, GL16 8DN.

Welcome my fellow moles to this brief report of an independent trip to Slaughter Hole that brand new cave in the Forrest of Dean (although by now you have probably heard all about it and are thoroughly fed up with it all). Well anyway four little Moles (Big Pete, Little Peat, Karen and Julie) set off from college on Friday evening heading for that most salubrious of caving huts the M.C.G. On arrival we found Tim and Ralph in the pub (no surprise there! Ed.) and were forced to join them, so far it was looking like a good trip.

Saturday saw us up at the disgustingly early hour of 7.30 in order to get to the cave at 10.30 (which we only just managed thanks to Ralph's wonderful route finding!). On arrival we were met by one of the discoverers who gave us a key, showed us the entrance and then promptly left us to get on with it!

The entrance was reached by descending a series of "fixed" ladders, the only problem being that as they were only held in place by washing line they were somewhat rickety. Following that there was a normal caving ladder which was rigged in a way that I thought only Jules and Chris could manage (the rungs were at an angle of 45°). It was at this point that Karen decided to avenge some earlier comments that Ralph had made by kicking a few sizeable rocks down on him. Unfortunately (oops I mean fortunately) they missed.

From the foot of the ladder we headed off upstream in search of the fossil section of the cave. Despite a few route finding problems caused by the presence of the novice Tim we eventually got there, on the way we managed to lose a couple of lads from the B.E.C, who found one of the climbs a little difficult !!

The fossil passages were absolutely brilliant with both the Chunnel and the Deserts being fairly spectacular, particularly the mini sand dunes which Tim reliably informs me were Barchan type (if anyones interested). Throughout the cave there were numerous bones as well as a plastic rat (it's alright Julie I won't tell anyone that it had you convinced). At the end of the passage a tight squeeze led to some stunning formations and the end of the cave (in that direction at least).

Having made our way back to the ladder it was decided that a quick trip down the streamway was in order. The first obstacle was the "showerbath" which consisted of a passage filling deluge of nearly pure cow s**t, very pleasant. After that things could only get better, and get better they certainly did with one of the best bits of streamway anyone had seen. It was supposed to be low water but it was still very fast flowing and in places waist deep on Big Pete (of course that meant that it was neck deep on Julie and Tim !!). It was also rather worrying to see flood debris at roof level !!

Finally after 7.5 hours six weary Moles returned to the surface having only explored about half the cave.

Sunday found Tim leading L.Peat, Ralph and Julie down his dig in East Twin (Oops sorry Ralph it's your dig as well isn't it), while Karen and Big Pete went for a walk to the Pub. We'll leave it to you to decide which group made the right decision. Although it must be said that Julie did offer Karen large sums of money if Karen would stop her ever going down East Twin again.

Well anyway that's enough of this rubbish, I'll let you get back to your beer!!

SINGLE OR SILLY ROPE TECHNIQUE?

By Charlie Allison

"Personally I think that anyone who ladders Rhino Rift is a few sandwiches short of a full picnic"- Richard Barnes, page 34, Caves and Caving No. 54.

Further to my comments at the half yearly meeting, I believe that one or two points need to be classified as to the attitude of the Mendip Cottage, sorry, Mendip Caving Group's attitude to Single Rope Techniques. There appears to be a general mass hysterias of blinkered opposition to the technique that has led to an official policy of NOT purchasing ANY SRT rope. Such an attitude is very, very misplaced, and I believe, very, very wrong. I outline my main reasons below:-

i) -Paragraph 2, MCG Constitution and Rules.

"The object of the Group is, for the benefit of the public, the furtherance of all the aspects of the Scientific Study and Conservation of Caves".

The policy of refusal to meet the needs of modern, safe, methods of cave exploration and study is in contravention of THE VERY OBJECT OF THE GROUP ITSELF.

ii) Much of the resistance to the acceptance of the technique appears to be that of the legal position of the Group should an accident result due to the rope or equipment failure. Again the very constitution of the MCG shows this to be totally without foundation:-

Paragraph 12, MCG Constitution and Rules.

"Neither the Mendip Caving Group, nor the Committee of the Group, nor any member, can accept responsibility for any loss, injury, or death arising from a group activity, however caused....Members of the Group and guests are deemed to know of, and accept without qualification this rule".

iii) There seems to be some concern over the safety of the technique compared to ladders and lifelining. I believe in the MCG, this is due to the use of a single rope as a means of climbing up or down a pitch, and so thus provide a lower margin of safety. This is not so.

SRT rope is much more durable than lifeline dynamic rope due to its much closer weave preventing the ingress of dirt and its inherent greater abrasion resistance.

Attitudes to safety are now changing: "Single Rope Techniques, very much single person techniques, nowadays foster a far healthier attitude towards training and reasonable safety than ladder and lifeline ever did". - David Judson, page 53 Caving Practise and Equipment, 2nd edition.

CRO statistics show only 21 SRT related incidents since 1974; perusal of Appendix 2 of Race against Time shows a much higher incident rate of falls due to incorrect use of ladder and lifeline techniques and the use of outdated techniques such as body belays (a 1 metre fall can produce forces of around 300kg). There has been only one incident in which a rope broke. That was in 1974 when a 'caver' tried to abseil down a polypropylene rope, which he was told was totally unsuitable for his intended use of it. The rope melted through and he fell many feet to his death. Most of the accidents in SRT are caused by 'fast' abseil resulting in more or less a fall injury. However a lifeline is no better protection. In ending 1990 a caver fell from a ladder in Thrupe Lane Swallet, plummeting to the bottom of Atlens pot, breaking a leg, whilst 'protected' by a lifeline.

- iv) At the half yearly meeting there seemed to be concern at potential sources of damage to the rope if purchased. All rope is susceptible if the Group continues to buy and use 'lifeline' rope.
- v) To explore deep caves, or to cave abroad, SRT is invaluable. In large caves it lowers the risk of exhaustion due to less equipment needed (Just a rope!). Considerably easier to rest on ascent, and the use of the Mao system to attain a mechanical advantage and an easier climb. It also allows a smaller team to go deeper and explore much more, much faster. For example Avon Rochas in the Ardeche is a large pretty cave with pitches of 28, 40 and 55m. To SRT it, one needs 3 ropes and a large bag of bolts. Just manageable by a team of two (as done by Tim Francis and myself). To ladder it would need 13x10m ladders (five tackle bags). The length of rope needed to double line the pitches is ludicrous. Either people need to belay at the top of each pitch to lifeline the returning cavers, not much fun; or self-lifeline may be used - half way to SRT. we are now talking at least five people, and a higher risk of exhaustion and consequently a lower margin of safety.
- vi) Both techniques are complimentary - pointless to SRT Longwood/August - pointless to ladder Rhino Rift.
- vii) The cost of SRT rope is very reasonable, 10mm Superstatic is around £1.20 - £1.30 per metre retail. 300m, cut to suitable lengths would be a great aid in the further development of the Objectives of the Group. Very reasonable when one considers the cost of new floors and seat covers, and the current financial situation of the MCG.
- viii) The storage of the rope and potential abuse caused some concern. Lock the rope away, give keys only to registered (with the MCG) cavers. Maintain a log of use and provide a suitable penalty for abuse e.g. giving to other clubs to use. Knowledge of how to care for the tackle must be a pre-requisite for registration. This to be tested by oral/written examination. If any person is unsure about a rope - throw it away!!!!. The present static rope in the tackle store is unsafe and should NOT be used.

ix) It is most unfortunate that the wish by a few keen people to participate in the best ways to explore a cave, be it SRT or ladder and lifeline, are prevented from doing so by the uneducated and ill-informed attitude of mind of those unable to come to terms with caving in the latter part of the twentieth century; resulting in official MCG policy not to fulfil to the best of its ability the very object of its existence. I personally find this very sad, and urge perusal of the books below. There needs to be a change of direction to get members out of the Cottage and into the Caves, to put the MCG back to the forefront of caving developments, where it belongs.

I would strongly urge the committee to reconsider MCG policy in this respect.

REFERENCES:

Judson, David:	Caving Practise & Equipment 2nd Edition Pub:1991	BCRA /Cordee.
Eyne, Jim:	Race Against Time Pub:1988	Lison Equipment.
Mantinez, Dan	Vertical Pub:1986	Lison Equipment.
Sparrow, Andy.	A Mendip Caver's Rope Work Guide. Pub:1991	St. Andrews Press
Judson, David.	Ghar Parau Pub:1973	Cassel & Co.
Kose ,David	Beneath The Mountains Pub:1987	Hodder & Staughton

DIGGING SKIPS

Tim and Charlie would like large plastic liquid containers suitable for use as digging skips. If anyone who knows where they may get some please tell Tim thanks.

BAP DROPPINGS

The only way to drink cold tea is when its hot. Sian Pittman

I don't like things dangling between my legs. Joan Goddard

COTTAGE UPDATE

The top element in the hot water tank has now been repaired, as well as the latch on the lounge door. Although the front door latch has been replaced the handle return spring is broken so we are still need to replace the handles.

DAN YR OGOF

Over the last year or so a number of us have been making regular trips into Dan yr Ogof, mainly Nick Geh, Brian Murlis, and Digger Hastilow. The objective of these trips has been to tie up some loose ends and to push the Battle of Britain series (MCG News 214 Feb 1991), discovered by Nick in August 1990 on the weekend of the 50th anniversary of the event.

Other areas pushed in the cave have been Phyllosan Drive (our wet weather alternative), Mazeways, and Productus Passage.

Phyllosan Drive is a 4 ft diameter sand and cobble filled phreatic tube just past the end of the show cave. It is very easy digging, and so far we have achieved about 200 ft of passage, heading north towards Tunnel Cave, but bad air only allows us about four hours digging. However, the dig is virtually unaffected by high water conditions in the cave, so makes for a perfect wet weather alternative.

Productus Passage is a high level passage above the Green Canal. It was first discovered by Martyn Farr in the seventies, when he explored it to a sump. No one had been back since, until Nick had the idea of diving the sump (which Martyn had not done). So in April this year five of us, Nick, Brian, Pat Cronin, Tom Chapman and his girlfriend Jo, set off for the Green Canal loaded up with climbing and diving gear. The hardest part of a hauling trip in DY0 is the Long Crawl, just ask Pat (Stumpy) Cronin. To reach Productus Passage requires a 35 ft bridging climb above the canal, enter Tom and Brian. The climb was not easy, especially as we ended up on a shelf on the the wrong side of the canal with a 35 ft drop below us and a 5 ft bold step to the other side, but combined tactics got us there. A quick recce was made to confirm the sumps existence, then a bolt was put in and a ladder dropped down for those below. Unfortunately, the ladder was hanging 4 ft above the water, and the water was about 4 ft deep, which made getting on to it rather difficult! When the rest of the party and the diving gear were all up, we were able to have a good look at the passage. There is around 450 ft of hands and knees passage in total, consisting of a single passage which splits into three, one ending in a choke, another gets smaller and smaller and continues too tight, the third ends in a well decorated chamber with the small sump pool in it. Nick kitted up and in nil visibility entered the sump. Unfortunately, it only went about 20 ft and was completely choked.

Mazeways was our next objective. Again, in the seventies, Martyn Farr had dug open a sandy crawl in Mazeways and discovered about 1000 ft of passage leading to a sump. He dived the sump to 150 ft, had problems, so ditched the line reel and turned back to base, leaving the sump wide open. Since then it appears that no one else has been back there. Nick, Digger, and Brian visited Mazeways with intention of re-opening the sandy crawl and inspecting the sump, with a view to diving it. The sandy crawl was completely blocked, but after two hours hot digging we had excavated 25 ft of sandy, tight crawl. The passage beyond was not what we were expecting, it was all hands and knees crawling for

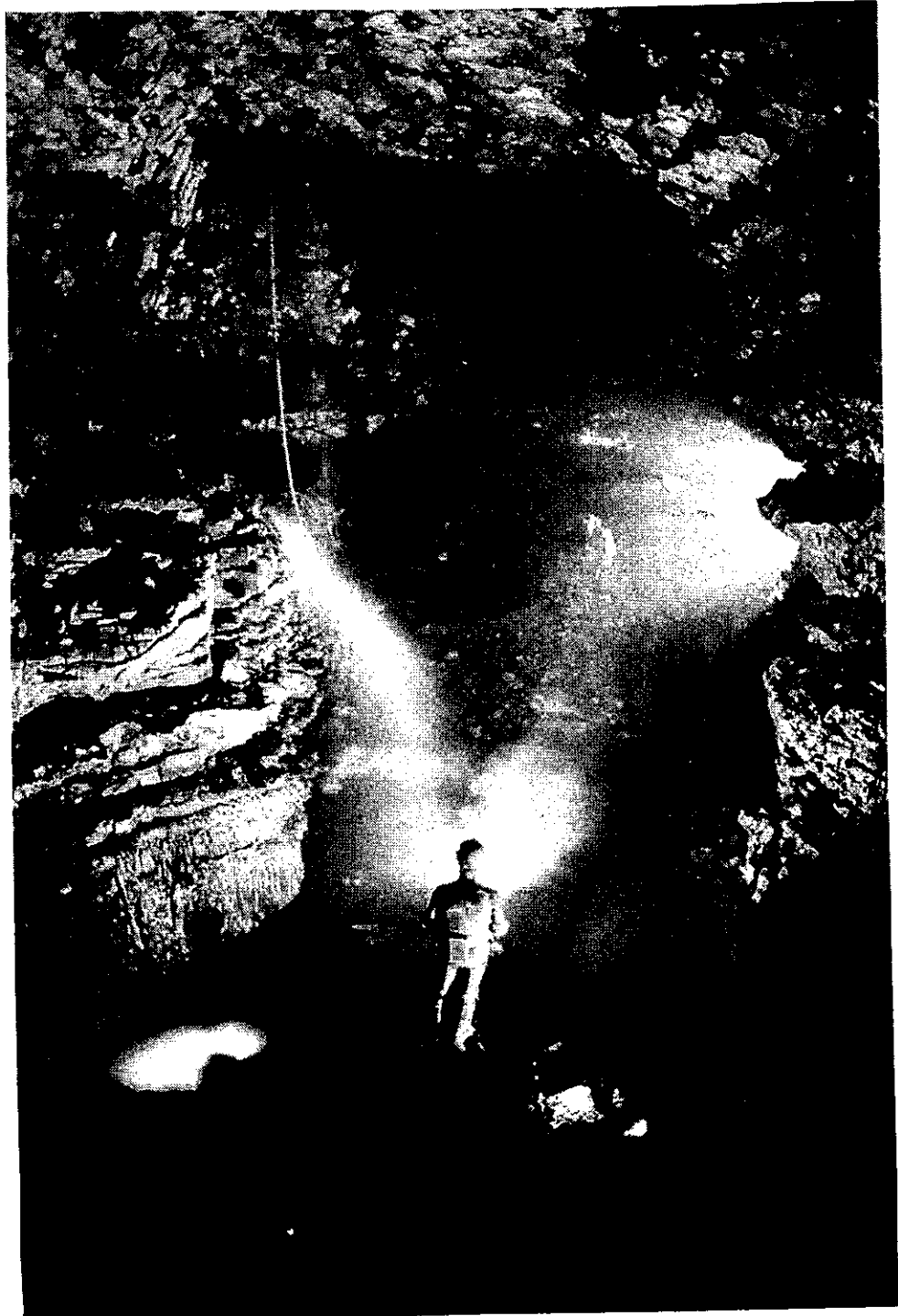
over 1000 ft, mostly on jagged rock. We eventually found the sump, with Martyns' diving line still in place, and crystal clear visibility inviting us to return with diving gear. On the return journey from Wales we called in on Martyn and asked him why he had not told us about the unappealing nature of the passage, to which he replied "you never asked!"

On 17 August 1991, after a couple of failed attempts to return with diving gear (one when the Mazeways duck was sumped, and another when a bag of diving gear was lost in lake four by a nameless person), four of us (Dig, Brian, Mike (Trebor) MacDonald, and Andy Dennis) eventually returned, hauling loads of gear through the long crawl (again) and all the way to Mazeways, then all the way over the 1000 ft or so of jagged crawl to the sump. Digger kitted up and disappeared into the, by now, murky pool. After what seemed like an eternity, Digger returned. He had found Martyns' line reel about 150 ft in, then continued for a further 150 ft or so to surface in a short section of passage, which ended in another, completely blocked sump. The reward for Digs' discovery was, unfortunately, a burst ear drum, which put him out of diving for a few weeks.

The Battle of Britain series has been our main objective throughout the last year or so. There are two ways in to this section of the cave. The first, and easiest, is a 50 ft long sump (not free divable), in the river entrance to the cave. The second is a 360 ft sump just beyond the end of the show cave. Nick Geh found the series by diving the 50 ft sump to an airbell (this airbell was found by others in the early seventies, who discribed it as going nowhere). On surfacing in the the airbell Nick could hear the roar of a streamway, but as he was on his own, he went back for help, then returned to climb the 15 ft to the top of the airbell, where a passage led to a climb down to a fine section of streamway. The series consists of the streamway with a long section of deep canal, which sumps in slightly wetter than normal conditions, several streamlets leading to sumps, two well decorated chambers, and the impressive Gwynne Saunders Hall, containing a small lake fed by a waterfall entering from a tantalising hole 50 ft up in the roof, all originally surveyed to 1500 ft of passage.

Since the discovery we have been making regular trips to the series to push the various leads. The main attention has been given to a large choked passage heading north at one end of Gwynne Saunders Hall. This passage is about 25 ft high and 20 ft wide with a loose slope of sand and boulders leading up to its' roof. We have been digging a tunnel into the choke, following the roof and one wall of the passage, it is easy going, pulling out mainly sand and the odd boulder. So far we have gone about 15 ft into the choke, but it is a long term project.

Another project we had in mind was to climb the waterfall to see if there was a person size passage up there. Brian had a go, unaided, on one of our earlier trips, but was forced to give up due to very lose and slippery rock. To this end we recruited Tom Chapman (BEC/CDG) to the digging team. Hence, on the 1 September 1991, Tom, Brian, Nick and Trebor McDonald dived through the sump loaded up with climbing gear and ladders. On arrival at the



BRIAN MURLIS AND NICK GEH IN GWYNNE SAUNDERS HALL

waterfall Tom and Brian set about tackling the climb whilst Trebor continued the dig. Nick was still in the sump fixing a hauling line through it, to alleviate the need to keep using fins. Tom managed to get two thirds of the way up the climb where he put some protection in, then came back down. Brian then climbed to the same spot, and whilst trying to find a way on, spotted another passage 5 ft lower and 10 ft across from the waterfall one, so earmarked it for the next visit. Tom then took over again, and this time managed to reach the waterfall passage via a side inlet into it. Brian soon joined him, and subsequently, 700 ft of meandering, clean washed stream passage (The Doodlebug) was explored to an easy looking choke with the stream coming out of it. The well decorated passage varies from 6 ft high and 3 ft wide to flat out crawling in a canal, there is one small chamber and a pretty oxbow.

Wet weather denied us access until 13 October 1991, when four of us, Dig, Tom, Brian and Trebor, returned to gain access to the passage that Brian had noticed on the previous visit, and also to survey The Doodlebug. Brian prussiked up the rope that we had left in place, then traversed across to the new passage, disappeared into it for a quick recce then returned to haul up a ladder for the others. The passage was a discoverers dream, a pure white calcite floor with crystal pools led to a beautiful cascade, at the top of which a 4 ft diameter passage continued over calcite floors and passed columns and straws to a low section with a superb crystal pool in the middle of it. We had surveyed 70 ft to this point, and beyond the low bit the passage could be seen to continue, but at what cost to the formations if we went any further! After much discussion, it was decided that Brian should take his wetsuit, boots, lamp and helmet off and carefully continue with just a diving torch! He managed to pass through the 20 ft low section with no damage to the crystal pool, but had to sacrifice a couple of straws to get through. Beyond the low bit, the passage briefly became walking height then back to 4 ft diameter tube which meandered passed plenty of excellent formations to eventually end at a long, deep (and cold without a wetsuit on!) canal which sumped. For obvious reasons we were unable to survey this part of the passage but Brian took rough measurements on his return and estimated it to be at least 200 ft, making the passage around 300 ft in total. We named it Wellington Passage, as Trebor was unable to climb the ladder due to the fact that he was not wearing any boots. Our new discoveries now totalled 1000 ft, making The Battle of Britain series over 2500 ft long.

On the 27 October 1991, Dig and Brian returned to have a look at a stal blocked passage below the choke, at the end of the Doodlebug. The stal dam was soon removed and Dig squeezed into a body size passage, the size of the smaller parts of the Long Crawl, but half full of mud and water, and under protest proceeded to explore it. He went about 50 ft to a further restriction, where the passage could be seen to continue, but with no sign of any where to turn around, he backed all the way out. Brian also had a look, and both decided that it was a cavers nightmare, so it was named Elm Street!

The choke at the end of the Doodlebug was also attacked on 24



KITCHEN AT DIG

Digger Hastilow, Brian Murlis, Nick Geh

November 1991 by Nick and Trebor whilst Dig and Brian were taking photos of Doodlebugs' formations. Unfortunately, after removing a few boulders, it was obvious that the stream was issuing from a very tight, loose rift. We decided that it was not worth pursuing, so on the way out we removed the rope and ladder on climb to Doodlebug.

To make life more comfortable during our digging trips, especially as it gets very cold when you're not digging, we swam a kitchen through the sump! This consisted of a small camping gaz stove, a saucepan, two mugs and several BDH tubes full of ration pack food that Brian borrowed from our Naval benefactors! We set the kitchen up at the top of the slope, at the entrance to the dig, about 22 ft above the level of the lake in Gwynne Saunders Hall, and on several of our visits there have been signs that the water level has risen to within 2 ft of the kitchen! For this reason, on our last visit on 24 November, we brought the kitchen out with us as we did not want to lose it over the winter!

We still have other projects to tackle in and around DYO, as well as the continued digging of the choke in Gwynne Saunders Hall, so keep watching this space.

Brian Murlis

SAWA - I - LAU CAVE, FIJI

It's taken a long time to write about this as I doubt whether you will be able to put this cave on your agenda for a weekend trip!

Fiji, if you didn't already know, lies in the southern tropics, about 2800km NE of Sydney and 1800km N of Auckland. It is also within spitting distance of the international date line, a fact used by the local newspaper whose catchphrase is "The first paper to be published in the world - today".

Fiji is also an archipelago consisting of approximately 300 islands, the main land mass being Veti Levu. The Yasawa Islands

start 40km N W o f Lautoka on Veti Levu, and stretch for more than 80km in a N N E direction, being rarely more than 5km wide. The islands are real picture postcard stuff and apart from T u r t l e Island, are undeveloped. Sawa-I-Lau is a tiny island some 60km inside the group FIJI



and is an oddity being

a lonely limestone outcrop amongst its volcanic neighbours.

The cave holds a legend, like most things unusual in these here parts: Here a young chief hid his betrothed, whose parents wanted her to marry someone she didn't exactly like. He serviced her daily (with food and water, what else?) until it was safe to elope to friends on another island. - so next time you see some women sitting around the other side of sump 1, you'll know what they are up to.

A raised entrance 4m x 5m, which now has steps, leads down to an inviting and compulsory dip in a turquoise pool, lit by shafts of light from the main and a second entrance. The pool forms the "floor" of a chamber some 15m x 10m with sheer walls around two thirds of its perimeter. Looking down into the warm crystal clear

water, I would gauge its depth at 4m. Scrambling up a slope takes you either out via the second entrance, or offers a climb on the left and a drop of 2m into a flooded chamber.

We opted for the sump!

It was the first time Ally had free - dived, but these surroundings put your mind at ease. A zig-zag dive following the roof (moderately visible) lead you into the previously mentioned chamber. The water gets deeper and the roof lower but there are plenty of projections to grab if you really must. The chamber closes down after about 50m. Swimming in, on the left, there is a large submerged void, I presume as yet undived?? If there was any place on earth to take up cave diving - this is it.

As you swim back out towards the sump you can see that you have the option for a deeper and longer free dive back to the main chamber. We didn't.

A local told us that there are one or two more entrances up the side of the hill, but that they were overgrown and creepy crawlies were abundant. The best option seems to explore from the bottom up (what most men do with women).

Good luck if you want to visit the cave.....the launch takes 16hrs from Lautoka (each way), but modesty forbids me to disclose how we got there.

John Beauchamp



CZECHOSLOVAKIAN DIARY

Friday and Saturday

Afternoon start, picked up everyone yet decided to return to Heathrow with transit van as the thrust bearing was noisy. After discussion with Hire Manager we continued to pick up our last member, JP.

Arrived Dover in plenty of time for ferry to Zeebrugh so had food and drink. Checked in with ferry operators by 20.30 when informed of need to go to Calais instead; this was a problem as we weren't insured for France.

Arrived Calais at 02.00 during disembarkation met group of cavers going to Dolomites. Rearranged gear on top of transit at dockside and then headed for Belgium and our original route.

Drove through Belgium into Luxembourg where we stopped to change money and eat. Rest of day spent driving through Germany. Stopped at service station where JP tried to fix 2CV for German woman, something was overheated? Situation spawned first saying of the trip, 'What's it all about?'

Spent the evening in Germany at where had many beers. Spent evening under the stars in a field nearby. This took a few hours to locate. Woke to the sound of rain and then thunder and lightning at 05.30.

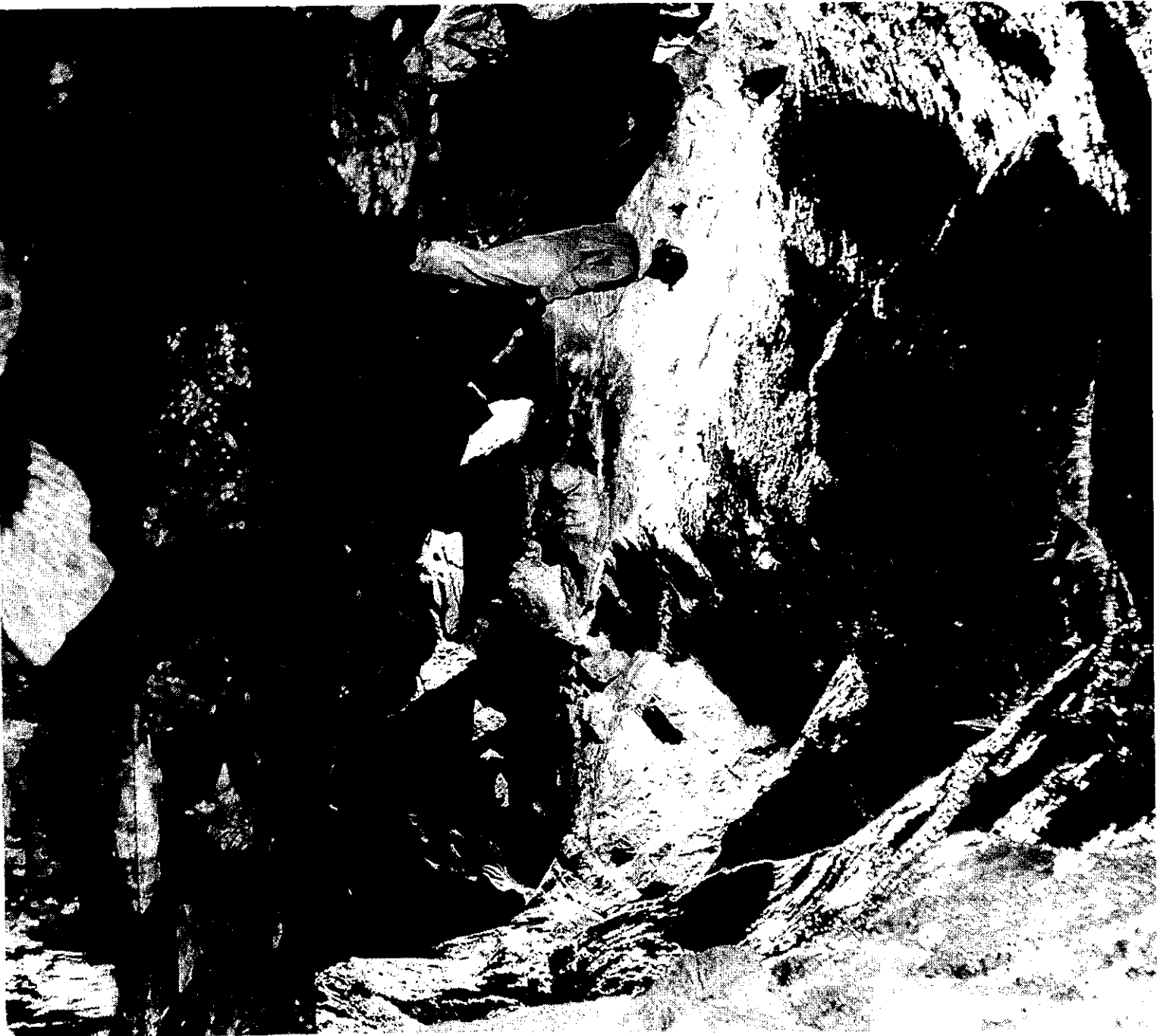
So up at 05.30, everyone pissed off, dirty and hungover.

Sunday

Arrived at border at 06.00. German police waved us through with a look of disbelief. Czech customs looked at passports and realised a search would take hours so there we were in Czechoslovakia after 36 hours travelling. Changed money at border and then on the road to Pilzen in the rain.

Stopped for breakfast in a roadside shack with Gypsies and smelly loos. Had ham and eggs, from the size of the portions and the state of the food, we all thought we might starve, albeit cheaply.

Arrived Prague by 11.00 and tempers were frayed to say the least. Phoned Lada Benz and given address to head for in Sporilov, a suburb of Prague. Found Ladas (address!) after asking locals and finally looking at the map. One fellow even drove with us to the correct place, which we'd just driven past.



AMISCAR CAVE

Proceeded to unpack and then make a mess. With eight of us sharing three rooms the size of cupboards.

Saw David Heurlcheecks mother who showed us round the house and the local shops.

So after a shower and shave each; the first in two days, we went to Prague for a drink. The eveing saw the invention of 'Oh my Gaw'd' a new saying relating to the scenery kept seeing!

Came back to Sperilov to finish off the day in the local bars which were drab but had cheap beer.

Monday

The original diary says 'Power struggle - ego trips' I wonder why? Anyway we split into two groups to go sightseeing. Exchanged money for Petrol coupons in very ornate bank. Spent another hour or two 'wobbly watching' or should I say sight seeing. Then all of us went for a meal. This was a bit of a feast. Four courses of traditional Czech food plus appetitifs plus beer, Avo (Billy's only Czech word), all for the equivalent of £7 each.

Tuesday

No sign of Czech cavers so we spent am sightseeing in Prague and then later went to 'M' Borilslav for lunch. Caviar, bread, cheese and champagne. Dodd bought us all liquourice, he almost bought the whole 1 kilo box, she was that good?

Found place called Yrain with a map of Sid Me Harche (sandstone climbing area) in a shrine in the market square. Found the area in late afternoon after driving through a locals back garden. Spent a few hours climbing, walking and had first through trip. 60' cave by Kevin and Steve. Dave and Lee spent time climbing.

Drove back to Sperilov via two bars, one where we had dinner, the other in the middle of nowhere.

Wednesday

At last we see our first Czech cavers. Firstly, Lada Benéz who gave us maps, updated us on why Dave 'H' wasn't around, (ie. skoda broken down in Italy) and briefed us on itinary for next week.

Then second caver arrived, he took us to first cave area. At first he didn't understand our sense of humour, but he soon joined in! We obviously didn't understand his sense of humour regarding caving. The kerjstein caves (Charles Castle caves) where he took us were not a simple walk through as he'd described them. Luckily we all decided to abandon the shorts and flip flops. The cave is the largest in the area, very 'mendips' in character and notable for its pre 1968 revolutionary shrine, with anti-communist caricatures. This shrine was in small chamber with tight entrance squeeze, entrance was blacked out by police, destroying caricatures, these have since been re-modelled in a cruder fashion.

1st cave

Climb up to quarry. Awkward 6' climb up to entrance with 60' crawl with 10' descent to silt hall. Short climb to passage 20' on right, then 15' drop down and 20' crawl to double letter box squeeze; too tight for Bill without push and pulling. Drop down along bedding plane 20' to first chamber, this had shrine in small antichamber with tight squeeze off to left attempted by D.T.

Beyond first chamber up 100' along bedding plane to second chamber. Above was 120' shaft too loose/steep to attempt.

Returned to base of bedding plane and then to upper chamber and exited cave by steep climb up and over unstable scaffold poles.

Viareel climbing and traverse practice site for Czech caving club in same quarry. Then lunch and off to a show cave. On the way drove over prohibited wooden bridge with wobbly bits at railway crossing. The gates wouldn't open because the keeper was asleep.

Show cave called West Bohemia's largest. Saw top two free of charge and without the guided tour, we were also allowed to take photos. Centre for forgery in medieval times, display of Pleistocene fauna, Human included. This cave had abundant algae caused by lighting. Exited (ODCHOD) and returned to Sperilov for few beers and a meal.

Thursday

Had final sight seeing in Prague. We all went to Hippy bridge and then split up to go into town square for final view of wobbly bits and then money changers. Left Prague for Brno at 11.15, filled up with petrol en route. The journey was rapid so we stopped at riverside for swim, pivos and sausage just outside Brno.

Brno town centre at 1700 asking for directions of every pretty woman along the way. Found flat more by good luck than judgement, as they are all identical multistory blocks. Met Otta and

his wife then Robert arrived.

Problems! This caving group didn't want an exchange visit just funds for their next expedition to Greece. The misunderstanding, which was caused by D Havlicheck caused embarrassment on both sides. And as DH wasn't available we made our own arrangements, ie. donate £250 to their expedition fund and pay our own expenses in exchange for accommodation and guides to caves in maravian karst.

Once contact sorted out they were all very hospitable. Robert took Dave, Lee, Barry and JP to his house, the rest of us stayed with Otta. We were all fed and watered very well by respective hosts.

Friday

After excellent breakfast we were taken to caving cottage near Rudice, the cottage has no facilities and we've had something of a culture shock, as were washing in the local lake. The cottage is alpine style with only one convenience the latrine. Used by squatting over a precipice and being eaten by killer ants from behind!

Second caving trip

Climb down through wooded vally and over slag deposits from old iron smelter. Crossed over river after changing at caving hut. Cave entrance 20 m climb up opposite bank. Entered wide rift and after 50' climb down came to bolted door. Then first laddered (all caves were rigid some weren't fixed) this wasn't fixed, it was rusted and unstable. Even so it was fine compared to some on the 130m descent into 1st chamber. The ladder here was approx 60-70' and entered chamber at low angle with views of water fall and stream way beyond.

Split into two groups at this chamber, one went straight on, taken by Robert, the other a photo trip was guided by Otta.

The streamway was narrow and meandering, which with wetsuits was unnecessary. These Czech cavers don't like to get wet and we didn't see one in a wet suit. Come to first siphon and bypassed by climb over via more unstable fixed ladders with very 'iffy' Climb down into streamway was 30' plus. Passage was becoming smaller but more decorated, with notable calcile encrusted wooden ladder and flow stones with goure pools. Passed several inlets and character changed to wider and lower passage after fresh water inlet, this was the older part of cave, filled with Deronian sediments. Cave continued in series of stoops and short crawls to Dragons Chamber and another beyond in which we rested up and filled carbides with H₂O.

Started to make way out and met second group. Returned to exit enmass.

That evening we met local alcoholics in Rudice bar, like a working mens club, invited to a sing song on Saturday night.

Saturday

Two caving trips today, both within 1 hours walk of caving cottage. The first was to sink hole for vertical SRT cave. The second to horizontal cave with Helectites.

Sinkhole cave

Cave of series of sinks following the regional strike. At cave entrance Otta descended first followed by Lee and (Barry lost more hair by burning) Dave. Kevin was about to descent when decided rope hang from old piton and snap crab with fig 8 to 2" square hold in drainage pipe was chaffing rope and dangerous. Still everyone descended first pitch. Group decided to exit cave as rope was untrustworthy and guide couldn't speak good english. This cave had narrow entrance rift leading to second largest cave in this karst area.

Second cave this day

Robert and Steve continued walking another 30 plus minutes over fields through forests and over cliff faces to cave. Cave entrance easy 30' climb up from road in limestone canyon, very much like cheddar gorge. Cave on two levels. Second level found by digging up into brecciated fault and into calcified joint system. Displays of moan milk Stalagites and Helectites. Climb down to lower series by very unstable ladder. Cave extended by digging into ORS deposits and involved very slippery climb up day bank to upper level where varied Helectites (see diagram for correct description of route).

That evening had swim and wash in lake and then off to a vinyard owned by Roberts father. Visited cellar under the house where we chose Red and White wine for the evening meal of sausages and cheese etc. Sausages cooked over open fire and served with mustard and brown bread. Slept outside on the grass after a great evening.

Sunday

Woke up to a good breakfast with tea and coffee. Today we had a tourist day scheduled and this started with visit to fine restored Baroque church. The early morn service cut short our visit. Went into Eves cave and iron smelting industrial history tour.

Visited resurgence of cave we explored on Friday. Also invited outside Bulls cave where Germans had aircraft parts factory during war.

Bulls Cavern

Cave entered by two iron doors, immediately in large chamber; the old factory floor. Then through second door into main passage, this led to lake which was pumped to remove sumps. Bill tried to walk on water but as this wasn't 'confident Bill' yet, he failed. JP at same time was caving in flip flops and shorts. Returned to caving hut where we saw full extent of mapped cave. A pity we had no equipment with us but the chance of seeing even this much cave was so unexpected that Robert only came here on the off chance! The guide was very interested in the tee shirts so he got one when Robert took it that evening.

After lunch saw sand quarry with geodes, then onto Robert's club's dig. with shaft and windlass. Lastly onto the Abyss a 130m hole in the ground with lakes and trees in the bottom.

That evening JP and Bill both got falling down or falling out? drunk on the Czech national drink Bechel? a herbal short anyway.

Monday

Picked up by Robert at 10.00. The only people fit were Dave, Lee and Steve; the rest had sunburn, bad tummies etc. No one owned up to a hangover.

A 10 minute walk drive to an area just outside Jedovice brought us to where Amiscar cave should have been. We spent next half hour walking round trying to find it. This apparently was another cave Robert hadn't seen in twenty years.

Amiscar Cave

This cave was unusual in that the entrance was deliberately sought at top of hill and therefore wasn't blocked with mud. A previous dig in a swallet nearby was abandoned due to it being filled with the stuff.

Eventually found entrance, piping covered with very heavy lid. The original entrance was fissure with a memorial stone to two men, 26 and 27 years who died in 1970.

New entrance built to withstand military attack with lid made of quarter inch steel plate 4' square with two locks. Once in Robert led and Dave had dubious pleasure of lowering the 60-70lb lid at top of 40m shaft.

Shaft made of 1m sections of concrete pipe with fixed ladder which appeared to be in good condition. Half way down second door passed and also entrance to old boulder choke seen.

Small chamber at bottom. Nothing special yet apart from Lees gas pipe catching fire. Second set of piping 20m long descending at 60° with a bend at the bottom. This ended at top of second chamber which had the first of the decorations. Impressive curtains, stalls and bosses. Passing down through this chamber involved scrambling down entirely over defaced flowstone. Original cave discovered in 1960's was pristine white, while now it's muddy with footprints. Only large stalls and curtains are intact.

Passed catwalks and small ladders down into Streamway where we saw rubber dingies for later excursion.

In streamway took left hand fork to upper series, this lowered to a damp flat out crawl and then opened into long chamber with many decorations especially 'sharks teeth' curtain and false floor stalls. A series of decorated chambers were passed through until streamway sumped at point where cavers died in 1970.

Returned to dingies, these were inflatables with no paddles. Dragged down to water and through first 20' of streamway. Then short float to shallows where we dragged boats over to deeper streamway. Here we found rope attached to passage roof, this made dragging boats much easier. Pulled up to next shallows and then again into deeper water but soon shallowed to sandy beach.

Streamway continued as an awkward stoop to series of chambers with smashed foundations due to 70s flood. Halted by deep streamway and assumed sump around corner, but another low crawl for 30-40m found us in large chamber with Leopard skin stalls and decorations.

This was turn round point and we retraced our steps apart from taking correct route in dingies. From here to the way out the trip became a photo opportunity especially in the Hall of discovery (the second chamber). By this time everyone apart from Lee was low on carbide and so it was back up these fixed ladders.

Climbing these ladders was easier than expected, but raising the lid wasn't easy at all. First Robert and then Steve tried opening this too heavy lid. Eventually raised but not without strains and crushed fingers, neck, etc.

Went to Sloup for lunch, here we saw the local baroque church and burial ground for the salms, they came from the village of Salmon in Belgium and were the local industrialists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, involved in iron smelting in the area.

On to show cave in same village, just looked at cave description and climbers on nearby pinnacle. Next onto local disused rail quarry with derelict kiln (NB Show cave connects to

Palaeolithic settlement round corner), collected a few examples of vien calcite crystals.

Returned to caving hut at 6.30 to find the boys from Brno hadn't returned. So the cavers had three 5's and went to the local bar. Picked up the others as they walked back to hut.

Tuesday

10.30 start, with Otta and wife plus a Canadian called John. We visited three caves this day, all on the Abyss road from Sloup.

First cave SEDMNACTRA also called cave XVII, steep climb up wooded cliff face to entrance 70 feet above road. Walk in entrance rift closed down to narrow riff after 100 yards, passed second entrance in roof on way in. Tight crawl with two squeezes for 40 feet. Then traverse over 6 inch deep goure pool using plank!

Found very low and long decorated chamber with tall stals, this opened up into larger chamber with vandalised decorations.

After short crawl came to 3 foot drop into large end chamber with possible dig sites at far top end. Some reasonable formations but most vandalised or muddied. Took series of photos of decorations.

Second cave PUSTOZLEBSKA ZAZDENA this is next to car park by Abyss. Short walk through trees to another locked door. The whole passage was blasted and dug by paid workers in 1940s, in an effort to reach the Abyss. This was yet another prospect by Prof Absolom. The effort took three years to excavate 1000ft of passage to a chamber with many short stals, quite impressive. Cave still had signs of old railway, blast holes and chisel cuts.

On route to chamber passed over 10ft hole with slippery plank traverse then up extensive mud slides and over short step avoiding another small drop.

Coming out of the cave was rapid due to the angle of the passage and the amount of mud. Very slippery!

Third cave

Otta is a master of understatement. When asked if there were any decorations, he said there was one! Well there was one but it filled the end chamber completely.

End chamber was reached by series of stooping walks and short crawls through sandy cave with evidence of once having powerful streamway, series of small decorations passed and then short climb up into small yet very well decorated chamber.