

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 227

MAY 1993

SOUTH WALES, 6th / 7th MARCH, 1993

by Ian McKechnie

Last autumn, in the absence of a published meet programme, two of the MCG leaders for Dan yr Ogof and Ogof Ffynnon Ddu decided to arrange a club meet in South Wales, with a round trip in Dan-y on one day and a through trip from OFD II to I on the other. It was only necessary to mention the trip at the Eclipse one night, and it was fully subscribed. After a postponement last November due to high water in the caves, the next date we could offer was in early March.



The Dan yr Ogof round trip offers an interesting and varied tour through a representative section of beautiful and fascinating cave. The trip includes ample crawling, climbing, and swimming in cold water, so wetsuits are essential, as is previous experience of both tight and exposed caving!

After a hard night of cottage games at the SWCC cottage, we left our cars in the DYO car park and set off through the show cave. The water level in the lakes was low so it only came up to our ears, but the Long Crawl was no less tortuous than usual. After the climb down into Gerrard Platten Hall, we were all suitably flabbergasted by Flabbergasm Chasm, where the straws are as long as 15ft, and one has even grown to meet the floor. The Canyon; the Monk; Cloud Chamber; the names conjure up images of what to expect, but there is no substitute for seeing them yourself.

The Green Canal was as cold as I remember it, and the effort of swimming between the smooth walls for what seems forever doesn't make it any warmer. Then the Abyss; a sheer 100ft descent, made easier by a fortuitously placed vertical tube to slither and chimney down with the assistance of a fixed rope.

The trip back to Gerrard Platten Hall is in a lower level series; the names Bakerloo Straight, Thixotropic Passage, Washing Machine, and Virgin Passage give some suggestion of the phreatic tube, glutinous mud, swirling water, and calcite formations found on the route. There's no escaping the Long Crawl, and the swim through the Lakes washes off the mud.

By now, of course, the show cave is closed, and we have to exit via a small trap-door into the roof of the river cave, and a drop down into the river. No-one was late to bed that night!



On Sunday we set off up the hill from the cottage for an ambitious through trip from OFD II entrance, high on the hillside, to OFD I, way down in the valley. The surface distance is about 2km horizontally, and 250m vertically.

The first part of OFD II from the entrance, is a series of enormous boulder-strewn chambers and passages of varying character. If you know the way, this leads eventually to the tall, narrow, steeply descending Maypole Inlet Passage, which ends in a short climb down into the main streamway.

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++++ MCG 1993 MEETS PROGRAMME +++++ BANK HOLIDAY WEEKENDS IN ITALICS +++++

This list is updated monthly - to add your trip, please phone the Meet Secretary

DATE	AREA	MAIN EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
22 May - 23 May	Derbyshire	Mines	Joan Goddard	0608-810382
05 Jun - 06 Jun	Mendip	Geology walk & caving	Malcolm Cotter	07842-52643
05 Jun	Mendip	Swildons Forty (Tony Knibbs 40th caving anniversary)	Denise Knibbs	01033- 61858232
26 Jun	Mendip	Stoke Lane Slocker	Bill Headington	0761-419766
03 Jul	Mendip	Charterhouse Cave	Yvonne Rowe	0252-872006
10 Jul	Mendip	Swildons 40ft Pot (1968)	Martin Rowe	0252-872006
17 Sep - 18 Sep	Bristol	BCRA Cavers Fair	Bill Headington	0761-419766
02 Oct	Mendip	MCG Forum	Joan Goddard	0608-810382
06 Nov	Mendip	SRT Bonfire (Sparkler, Rocket & Thunderflash)	Yvonne Rowe	0252-872006

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	Janice Richards	0985 219111

WEEKLY MEETINGS:	At the Group's Mendip headquarters on Wednesdays at 7.00pm. & at the Eclipse Inn, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 9.00pm.		
CAVING ACCOMMODATION:	For up to 30 people, is available at the MCG headquarters:- Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse, Blagdon, Bristol, BS18 6XW		
COTTAGE INFORMATION:	Tel: 0761-462797 Grid Ref 51475606 OS 1:50,000 sheet 182		
COTTAGE BOOKINGS:	Through the cottage warden please (address and tel. no. below)		
COTTAGE FEES per night:	MCG members, member's children, SWCC and NPC		£ 1.50
	Guest clubs and member's guests		£ 2.50
PREPAYMENT VOUCHERS:	(available to members only) 12 nights accomodation		£15.00
	25 nights accomodation		£30.00
ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:	Full & Probationary Members: £20.00; Associate Members: £10.00 The subscription includes free day-time access to the cottage by the member, their children, and their accompanied guests		



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COTTAGE
doings

ON THE MOVE

Simon Hewlett: 4 Polmennor Road,
Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 5UX

Clive Maybury: 2 Woodford Close,
Nailsea, Bristol, BS19 2UH
tel: 0275-851597

Joel Corrigan: new tel. 0344-842083

WELCOME TO..

..new Probationary Member Nic Wood

FORUM & EGM 1993

There will be an EGM to discuss Privileges of Membership on the 2nd October 1993, followed by a Half-Yearly Forum. The Barn Dance will be at Chewton Mendip Hall with music by John Puddock. Watch this space for full details.

MCG AGM 1994

Who noticed that Saturday 24th April 1994 is a Sunday? I took the date from the draft AGM minutes without checking the calendar. To put the record straight: the 1994 AGM is on Saturday 23rd April.

BARREL AND BBQ

Bill Headington is organising a barbecue on 10th July, the Great Flood Weekend. Bring your own food, and 1968 coins for the beer.

YV'S DROPPING...

...on a conversation about different grades of MCG toilet paper:
RK: "You could have Mendip breakfast grade, Butcombe grade..."
YR: "... and JP's Curry grade"

JG: "I've got 8" but I'm keeping it to myself"

STOP PRESS: SLB explosive training. Mendip, 6th June £15. Contact Nick Williams, BCRA Explosives User Group, tel: 0772-421119

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

04 Jun - 05 Jun	Members' Weekend
11 Jun - 12 Jun	Phil Barton (12)
18 Jun - 19 Jun	Ian McKechnie (12)
02 Jul - 03 Jul	Members' Weekend
09 Jul - 10 Jul	Gt Flood Weekend
26 Jul	Ealing Scouts (6)
06 Aug - 07 Aug	Members' Weekend
03 Sep - 04 Sep	Members' Weekend
01 Oct - 02 Oct	Members' Weekend
05 Nov - 06 Nov	Members' Weekend
19 Nov - 20 Nov	EDSS (12)
03 Dec - 04 Dec	Members' Weekend

GOOD JOBS JOBBED

Lee's cottage work weekend was a great success with 17 members and Geoff Beale's Mum turning up to do their bit.

The jobs completed were as follows:

- * Shed and picnic table treated with wood-preserver
 - * Drain from hosing-down area unblocked
 - * Additional silt trap added between hosing-down area and soakaway
 - * Windows cleaned
 - * Kitchen fan cleaned and serviced
 - * Stair cupboard cleared & tidied
 - * Grass to side of cottage cut
 - * Gutters cleared
 - * Gas store door repaired
 - * New stair carpet laid
 - * Inside walls & paintwork washed
 - * Gate sanded & painted; channel dug to allow gate to swing back
 - * FX2 battery chargers mounted on wall and area tidied
 - * Extra pan shelf fitted in kitchen, and wall behind painted
 - * Shower room bleached
- All this without a barrel!

RUBBISH!

The Cleanaway bin will now be emptied fortnightly to reduce our huge refuse bill. To keep rubbish to a minimum, burn what you can, break things up and squash cans.

STOP PRESS: Chris Howes: "Where No Light Shines". 8pm 4th June, Lecture Theatre L, University of Surrey, Guildford. Tkts £3 on door

"SOUTH WALES 1993" continued from page 1

Progress along the stream involves splashing, wading, and on occasions diving across deep holes in the floor. The highlight is the Marble series, where the black limestone is inlaid with a filigree of white veins giving the impression of a millionaire's marble bathroom. After what seems miles, the stream sumps and we follow a dry passage. The route becomes more and more complex, including a 60ft free climb up the knobbly Divers Pitch, convoluted crawls to emerge from the Letterbox, and a maze of small tunnels leading eventually to a boulder ruckle with the tempting sound of a stream below it. On emerging from the ruckle, the passage opens up to eventually rejoin the stream in OFD I.

The OFD I streamway is similar to OFD II, but the deep holes in the floor have scaffold poles to balance across. Several hundred feet more of this, and we leave the stream for the last time, into high calcite-lined passages once used as a show cave, and climb a series of fixed ladders to emerge into the afternoon sunshine.

It's a long slog back up the hill to the cottage. By now we were overdue, having spent much longer than we should in route-finding the link between OFD II and I, and after apologies (supported by a free issue of beer) to those kept waiting for us, we were glad of a shower and a cup of tea.

This was a superb weekend of caving, in two classic South Wales caves. If anyone would like a trip in the future, the Meet Secretary has a list of leaders and should be able to arrange something. Or even better, why not suggest that this could be part of the published meet programme?

ARCHAEO / SPELAEO SPEAK

by Yvonne Rowe

I was browsing through my *Dictionary of Terms and Techniques of Archaeology* (as one does) when I realised that 2000+ years on, the terms can be applied to MCG and caving in general! Here, for a bit of fun, are two interpretations. There are many more that can be attributed to caving so, for a giggle, I will print a few when I have gaps to fill.

Archaeo

AKHNATON: This was the name, meaning "it is well with the disk", adopted by the heretic pharaoh Amenhotep IV, who renounced other Egyptian gods and became fanatically devoted to the monotheistic cult of the Aten, the sun's disk, as the sole object of worship.

BEAKER PEOPLE: These are named after their ware: bell-shaped beakers. The wide distribution of this ware forms the main evidence for their migrations at the opening of the second millenium BC. The strongest traces of the Beaker People have been found in Iberia, Germany and Britain. They came originally from Carmona in the province of Seville, and spread by an overland route to central Europe. Here they came into contact with the battle-axe folk - a people also producing beakers, though with certain characteristics of their own. This region formed a mingling zone for the two peoples and it was here that they set up colonies.

Spelaeo

AKHNATON: This was the name, meaning "it is well with the disk", adopted by the heretic editor Yvonne Rowe I, who renounced other computers and became fanatically devoted to the monotheistic cult of the BBC, with 40 track disk, as the sole object of worship.

BEAKER PEOPLE: These are named after their ware: tankard-shaped beakers. The wide distribution of this ware forms the main evidence for their migrations at opening time, during the second millenium AD. The strongest traces of the Beaker People have been found in the Hunters Lodge, Castle of Comfort and Queen Victoria. They came originally from London, and spread by an overland route (M3 or M4) to west Mendip. Here they came into contact with the BEC folk - a people also possessing beakers, though with certain characteristics of their own!! This region formed a mingling zone for the two peoples and it was here that they set up caving clubs.

CARBON DIOXIDE: A DANGER UNDERGROUND

After the verbatim logbook report on Old Ham Iron Mine in the last newsletter, Geoff Beale wrote to me explaining that the report was in fact about a mine called Brinchcombe Levels near Soudly. He had tried to gain entry to Old Ham Mine but was refused due to high carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentrations in some of the lower levels. He was handed a report by Clearwell Mines Ltd (who control access to Old Ham Mine) on the dangers of CO₂ and printed below are some extracts:

To assess the danger of CO₂ in caves and mines there follows a summary of the properties and detection of "bad air" caused by CO₂.

PROPERTIES OF CARBON DIOXIDE CO₂ is a compound of carbon and oxygen, which is 1.5 times heavier than air. It is colourless and odourless but can seem acidic on the tongue or in the eyes and nose. CO₂ will not burn and will not support normal combustion. Due to its being heavier than air it can be poured downwards in air. Air normally contains 0.03% CO₂. When underground this can change due to poor ventilation and CO₂ can collect in hollows, layering in dangerous conditions. CO₂ is the most dangerous constituent of black-damp.

PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS The air we breathe normally will contain around 0.03% CO₂ and when we breathe out again the CO₂ level of our breath will have risen to 3-4%. The increase in CO₂ in our lungs makes us wish to breathe out and take in more oxygen. This is a mechanical reaction that allows us to breathe at the appropriate rate.

At about 1% CO₂ breathing becomes noticeably deeper and with exertion panting occurs. At 2% there is panting almost immediately and a heavy feeling in the neck and head (a candle flame will be considerably reduced in height). At 3% panting and headache becomes more severe (a candle flame will be difficult to keep alight and if left on the ground the candle flame will rise and fall of its own accord or self extinguish). At 5%, there is severe distress and at 9% the gas is a narcotic poison, within minutes unconsciousness and death occurs. At 10%, CO₂ is fatal within seconds.

Flames extinguish at 3%, at over 5% CO₂ is lethal.

When CO₂ is present at above normal levels it creates a slightly narcotic effect that gives a feeling of calmness and complacency to the situation, allowing you to be aware of severe panting and a heavy feeling in the head but not to feel concern or panic.

Any atmosphere containing more than 1.25% CO₂ is unfit to work in and you should withdraw from the cave or mine. People with heart trouble, breathing problems, etc. are particularly at risk due to the extra strain on their system coping with oxygen deficiency causing permanent heart strain.

DETECTION Detection is the same as for black-damp: by using a flame. It should be looked for by holding the flame below face level at all times: inspecting low lying areas and near water. If the flame burns low, dull, or rises and falls when the candle is undisturbed by draughts, there is oxygen deficiency. If the flame goes out then there is far less oxygen than is healthy and everyone should withdraw. If the flame goes out there is no further indication of oxygen levels or what percentage of CO₂ or other gases may be present.

A point to note is that a carbide lamp is not a suitable detector for two main reasons; although the flame does become more smokey, the heat of combustion and the pressure fed flame means that the jet will continue to burn in worse conditions than a candle. The other problem is that a lamp worn on the head is above your nose and mouth and you would walk down into the gas, breathing it in, before you see any effect on the lamp (if you could see the lamp worn on the front of your helmet).

In the past it is not until there is a fatal accident that people take a situation seriously, it is hoped that this short article will make you aware of how dangerous CO₂ and other gases can be. Make sure that the air is breathable.

BITS FROM THE BURREN - 1992

by Tony Knibbs

CULLAUN TWO - 13th JULY

The weather having decided to remain fair, we set about our first caving trip of the holiday. Cullaun Two had been selected on the basis of not being notably flood-prone, technically straightforward yet offering a route diversion. A stream passage of 1300m forms the backbone of the system with a high level alternative offering a more sporting trip to the sump. Geoff Beale, Pat Beale and Pete Harvey set off down the stream passage while Tony and Denise Knibbs, Martin and Yvonne Rowe and Joan Goddard took the high level option which is described here.

We entered the system by the 3m drop into C2 (UBSS reference) sink and briefly followed the main passage for 10m, turning sharp right along a crawl at floor level. Now heading towards C2A entrance, a narrower crawl - Year Passage - was followed to the left before reaching C2A. The crawl continued at uncomfortable dimensions for what seemed like forever, but was only 250m really, and progress was made in a dense, sweaty fog as the gentle air current overtook us. Things eventually became easier and a further 200m of rift passage brought us to a 2m drop into the main streamway.

We headed upstream for 30m to reach Dome Chamber and climbed up a few metres to the right in search of the Old Streamway. We eventually located the Old Streamway, after a couple of false starts, which offered a mix of low stooping over a boot-trapping floor trench, easy walking, or hands-and-knees crawling. After some 600m a steeply sloping descent of 3m brought us down to the Main Streamway near Pool Chamber. The high stream rift now provided easy going with interesting formations - especially on the flat roof - and prominent chert ledges at stream level. About 300m ahead a noisy waterfall announced a wet 10m rope pitch and a further 50m reached the froth-covered pool of Sump One.

The return to the surface was a restful affair, Main Streamway continuing as a generously dimensioned high rift almost as far as the entrance. Of all the decorative calcite, the Bloody Guts formation - a red, cream and grey monstrosity - evoked most comment. We surfaced after a trip of four hours.

DOOLIN CAVE (through trip) - 15th JULY

Having obtained permission at St. Catherine's Farm, a party of seven (PB was left in charge of the world in general) crawled into ST. CATHERINE'S ONE from the shakehole entrance. Some 50m on hands and knees and a short squeeze brought us slowly into roomier passage, eventually following a small stream augmented by two inlets on the left. Roomy passage with well-marked incised bedding along the walls offered quick progress, with only occasional stooping, to Beautiful Grotto where the stream from the Smithy Complex comes in on the left, over half a kilometre into the system.

Cameras clicked to record the attractive formations in the grotto, then we set off again, initially over breakdown blocks, to eventually regain the stream. After some 600m of very roomy rift passage, we briefly left the stream to clamber over and amongst huge fallen blocks in the Great Oxbow. The stream was soon rejoined, now flowing quietly along in the aptly named Great Canyon.

Variety being the spice of life, after some 500m the passage character changed and the Second Bedding Cave had us stooping for a while. A major inlet on the right - Aran View Passage - provided a brown and smelly landmark bringing in the contents of some distant farmyard. Still, the pale pink eels seemed happy to live in this turgid brown gunge which we now paddled or wallowed in for the next 800m.

The stooping gave way to easy walking again and we passed beneath the Aille Cascade some 400m further on, entering from the roof on the right. First Bedding Cave soon forced more stooping progress and waist-deep wading to reach the daylight coming in from FISHERSTREET POT which we had previously laddered for the 15m exit climb. The stream continued for a further 200m as a virtual hands-and-knees crawl to reach an evil-looking, froth-speckled sump.

Brief fun and games was had as TK's ammo box fell, lid-open, into the water in the wading section of the stream; the camera was out and in action, but the contents included car keys. Duly recovered, it later came adrift of its careless owner - a fact only noticed at Fisherstreet Pot. TK explored the grotty passage to the sump at high speed, in case it had been taken by the stream - an unwelcome diversion. Ironically, the wayward box was found happily bobbing along a fair way back upstream of the pot.

Apart from the muck coming in from Aran View, we rated this trip very highly. It had taken us three and a half hours to cover 3km.

FAUNAROOSKA CAVE - 17th JULY

The main (open) entrance to Faunarooska is shakehole F1 which enters the upper section of the 1.5km long streamway. A party of six, TK, JG, GB, PB, MR and YR, entered the cave at midday to explore the 1km long section from F1.

Only a few metres into the cave the main streamway was met and the initially narrow and sinuous nature of the passage continued, passing below the "skylight" entrance of Heads Pots after 50m, for several hundred metres. Progress was somewhat energetic following the twists and turns of the streamway but the effort was amply rewarded by the many and varied calcite formations, all in excellent condition. Along the route, Chert Bridge was an obvious feature, but First and Second Cascades were passed unnoticed.

A sudden, welcome change in passage cross-section occurred after maybe 650m when the narrow rift opened abruptly into a large tunnel-like passage. Easy walking quickly brought us to the slot on the right where the stream departs down Wet Pitch (35m) to a sump. However, we ignored the tempting sound of falling water and forged ahead up over moonmilk flows into Dry Series where the going levelled off as we followed ledges at the top of Roof Traverse, an 8m high rift. The 22m deep Dry Pitch was seen but not descended, our interest having been earlier deflected to the possibility of descending part-way along the Traverse to see some pretties. We never found them.

Faunarooska is obviously a cave in which haste is made slowly; we took four hours for the whole trip. A welcome bonus was filling our helmets with mushrooms as we crossed the pasture back to the cars. The omelettes were good that night!

POULNAGOLLUM / POULELVA CAVE SYSTEM - 19th JULY

At 12km total length this system is a must on any itinerary; ours was no exception. On this visit, the first of two, we divided into two groups: GB, PB, JG and PH entering POULNAGOLLUM POT and going downstream, TK, DK, MR and YR descending POULELVA POT and exploring upstream to exit Poulmagollum Pot. This description deals with the upstream trip.

Poulelva Pot entrance is a roomy and quite awe-inspiring 25m daylight shaft which we descended opposite a substantial cascade, finding adequate natural and bolt belay points. Ignoring the descending stream, we entered an upslope passage, dropped into a rift and turned left only to find ourselves back at the shaft. This was to be the only navigational error of the trip!

Repeating the route but turning right in the rift brought us down to a crawl to the left into a pleasant mud-floored hands-and-knees crawl. Passing incoming streams from the left, we entered the 3m high rifts of Craven Canyon which gave easy walking for 100m. Two more inlets were passed, crossing the rift floor from left to right, and then more crawling ensued as we easily (surprisingly) negotiated the Maze to reach Main Streamway 100m beyond. The first couple of hundred metres upstream were of easy going in roomy passage which eventually degenerated into a wide bedding plane where crawling flat-out over cobbles in the stream was enjoyed for 150m. Upright once more, we soon passed the end of Cotter's Gallery inlet on the right, whose stream tumbled over a white flowstone floor into the main watercourse. A further 600m of easy going brought us to the Main Junction where the more inviting route ahead - Branch Passage Gallery tributary - had to be avoided by turning left up the more constricted Main Streamway.

cont. on p.8

We soon found ourselves in the classic, roomy rift passage for which Poulmagollum is noted, following its amazing twists and turns - sometimes the upper and lower parts being out of phase with each other. Adding to this, wide and low bedding planes had developed to the right or left at floor level, taking with them the stream. Two fine cascades were passed en route, both entering on our right and the first very well decorated, as we pushed on a further 800m upstream towards Poulmagollum Pot entrance, previously laddered.

Daylight was reached after a most enjoyable 2.3km through-trip lasting nearly four hours.

POLLDEREEN (not POLLDUBH) - 22nd JULY

For reasons unknown, we had Polldubh on our listed itinerary but our visit turned out to be something well worth missing - DK and PH wisely did so! The day was bright and warm as we parked the car along a small track on the west of Slieve Elva. Wetsuited and map in hand, TK, JG, MR and YR set off across a pleasant pasture with a few clints and wild flowers for company.

Within a few minutes it was obvious that this pasture had no worthwhile perforation. So we moved towards a plantation of fir trees, whose edge was thought to be the shale margin. Then it happened. Already warm in our wetsuits, we were set upon by clouds of flies of incredible tenacity. The next 30 minutes involved non-stop cursing and futile gestures towards the flies, but did produce a reasonable-looking hole vaguely matching the description of Polldubh North entrance sink. Whatever it was, it promised an escape from the flies!

Tethering a 10m ladder to a handy fir tree we descended a 5m wet fluted shaft to meet a small stream which we followed along a 5m high rift for about 50m. Then we met the solid stalagmite choke; a frog might have followed the stream under it, or a ferret the constricted space over it. But we turned back deciding, after probing every nook and cranny, that it must be Polldereen, ie. not Polldubh.

Out with the flies once more, we continued our search for the sink, then tried our luck with the downstream entrance; we thrashed around in endless armpit-deep holes in the clints and nameless boggy hollows before admitting defeat in all directions. Hot, tired and still suffering a suseit of flies, JG hit on a marvellous idea - let's all go swimming in the sea! In 30 minutes we were in the Atlantic breakers at Fanore Beach, still warm in our wetsuits as we admired the outline of Slieve Elva from a safe distance and wondered why we hadn't done this in the first place.

POULMAGOLLUM (Branch Passage Gallery) - 24th JULY

Leaving PH to hunt the wild mushrooms, TK, DK, JG, MR and YR descended the 10m pothole entrance of Poulmagollum for the final trip of the holiday. The aim was to descend downstream via Branch Passage Gallery to Main Junction then return up the Main Streamway.

Taking the low passage to the right at the bottom of the shakehole, we entered GUNMAN'S CAVE and soon met a small stream inlet on the left. Leaving the roomy passage of Gunman's Cave, we followed the narrow inlet which became a flat-out crawl in a rock-floored elliptical, flattened tube - Muddy Link - for 45m. The crawl opened dramatically into the roomy rift of Branch Gallery. Ahead was a caver's paradise - easy going in a well-decorated 10m high passage with a babbling stream at one's feet. Occasional scrambles over fallen boulders and splashing about in deep pools added to the fun. And many were the halts to photograph the superb surroundings as we made our leisurely way along the 1km of streamway towards Poulmagollum main stream at Main Junction.

A couple of hundred metres before the junction, the stream dived into a small hole, cascading noisily into a lower passage, and we continued for about 10m further in dry passage to the head of a 7m pitch back into the stream. A bolt belay and natural rock spike ensured a good ladder hang and lifeline security for this idyllic descent between clean-washed walls. We could not resist making a swift detour upstream to see the incoming cascade before going on downstream along a gently meandering high rift down to Main Junction.

Moving upstream now in Poulmagollum Main Streamway provided more easy going and we decided to seek daylight via Gunman's Cave, TK climbing 6m up to winding rift at a guesstimated point and maintaining this level for maybe 100m until the inlet was found. Duly discovered, this large, moonmilk-floored passage was followed upstream for about 200m to emerge in the shakehole by the same passage we had entered four hours earlier.

Not a lot of effort was required to complete this delightful 2km circuit which fittingly brought a happy ending to our underground exploits.

POSTSCRIPT

Before departing for Ireland, an article in Descent had carried some disquieting comments on the deterioration of relationships between cavers and landowners on Co.Clare. However, our own experiences did not support this allegation. Permission was asked, and readily granted, where this was necessary, and the atmosphere remained friendly and helpful throughout.

We learned, however, that the proposal to create a show cave of Poll-an-Ionain had set a number of Irish cavers at loggerheads with local people. It seemed that this had probably (wrongly) raised the spectre of more widespread discontent. *Motto: Beware of false prophets.*

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE — 10

by Tony Knibbs

GOUFFRE DE GENAT Tarascon, Ariège (March 1992)

This interesting pothole is located 3km SW of Tarascon as the crow flies and is reached by turning off the N20 towards Vicdessos on the D8. Turn right in the village of Niaux, cross the river Vicdessos and drive up through the village of Alliat on the D508 to reach the tiny village of Génat after some 5km of zig-zag ascent, turning left just beyond the village Mairie.

The entrance is a locked, square manhole cover set in the tarmac road surface. A key is available at the Mairie, or from the Spéléo-club du Haute Sabarthez, in Tarascon.

Gouffre Génat was discovered during road construction in 1944 and pushed to its 200m depth in 1967. Its character is close to that of a classic Yorkshire pot - Lost John's springs to mind - and it is a popular trip for local and visiting clubs.

A 10m rope is useful on the steep entrance passage (toboggan) and can be belayed to the nearest car! A flat-out crawl to the right quickly opens into a small chamber from which a second "toboggan" requires a 17m rope belayed to bolts. Roomy passage is followed for about 10m where a 4m climb up the right-hand wall (fixed rope) gains a small passage to the head of a 29m (32m rope) pitch.

The first 5m are in a steeply sloping rift to reach the pitch proper, with descent against the wall in a large shaft. At about this point in the trip, tiny gold-coloured, pin-points of reflected light are noticed - iron pyrites - and seen almost throughout the cave.

A 35m (45m rope) pitch soon follows; another big shaft where a parallel shaft can be seen. At about 15m a knife-edge divides the pitch into two and there is a rebelay at 21m, reached by following a diminishing ledge for a few metres to the right, for the final 14m of the pitch. The route now becomes a meandering rift with occasional short drops of which three require ropes: 5m (8m rope), 6m (7m rope) and 6.5m (9m rope). By this stage, water infiltration had produced a tiny stream.

A magnificent 40m (48m rope) pitch soon followed - a vast, black shaft brought to life by the gentle spray of the falling water. From the bottom, a traverse out over jammed boulders in a deep rift reaches the head of the final pitch of 13m (17m rope) from the base of which a narrow, descending passage leads to a small and unpromising sump pool.

cont. on p10

"FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE - 10" continued from p9

Our party of five completed the trip in seven hours, moving at a relaxed pace. There were no technical difficulties and a welcome lack of "hanging death" with mostly cleanwashed floors from the 29m pitch onwards.

GOUFFRE DE PEILLOT No.1 Cazavet, Ariège (June 1992)

The cave entrance is clearly marked on the IGN 1:25000 map sheet 1947 Est, Castillon en Couserans, at about 750m north of the village of Cazavet, itself located just south off the D117, about 10km northwest of St Girons. A wide verge on a bend in the minor road east of the cave offers parking space.

A tiny gate in a hedge opens into a field sloping to the wooded entrance depression, skirted to the left to find a makeshift "gate". A short scramble leads down to the imposing arch entrance at the bottom of the depression.

Just inside the arch, an 11m pitch requires a 25m rope, belayed back in the depression, to give an awkward abseil down a steeply sloping, eroded wall and into a sizeable chamber. This is the midway point along the cave's 4km linear development, from which we took the "upstream" direction going upslope into a horizontal passage soon reaching a 10m pitch through stal columns and down a flowstone wall into a high rift. The head of a 50m pitch is passed on the right and the rift becomes a chamber in whose boulder floor a 30m, free-hanging pitch drops to the main stream.

We left the chamber, ascending the steep slope up to the right, and passed through a short crawl into a wide, boulder-floored chamber sloping gently up to a roomy passage where the fine stal decoration included the "Pilier rouge" column formation. Very gradually steepening, the boulder floor ended abruptly at an 11m pitch, just prior to which holes between large blocks offer two consecutive (4m and 5m) pitches to emerge at the next level of boulder floor. Crossing a collapse funnel and continuing upslope led us past an almost-hidden hole on the left (to which we later returned) and into Salle Lafront. This sizeable chamber offers a 10m inclined pitch (15m rope) followed by a steep ascent up a dry clay slope to reach a short passage to an upper grotto.

Returning to the easily missed hole in the left-hand wall, we rigged a 5m handline to drop down into the roomy, calcite-veined Galarie de la Rivière which led to the steeply sloping Puits de la Rivière where a 15m rope belayed to bolts protected the scramble down into a boulder-floored chamber. A small stream was clearly audible and was found emerging from amongst rocks; following it through a couple of bouldery crawls brought us into a wide stream passage to a sump pool. The upstream part of the cave beyond the chamber was an interesting complex of boulder chokes, passages and grottoes. There is a 400m long horizontal continuation from somewhere in this area but it escaped us.

Perhaps, like the upstream section of the cave from the entrance pitch, acquaintance will have to await another visit.

TO LET 5 STAR CAVING HUT

Tony and Denise Knibbs have kindly said that club members can use their beautiful home in Thil, France, between Friday 30th July and Sunday 22nd August, 1993. It is a bungalow comprising three bedrooms, lounge, dining room, bathroom with shower, toilet, a fully fitted modern kitchen and, underneath the building, a garage with various other facilities. Altogether, the bungalow will sleep eight and is an ideal base for a family holiday or walking/caving holiday.

It is 25km northwest of Toulouse, 10km off the A62 motorway and only one and a half hours from the Pyrenees. The cost? - a donation towards gas and electricity, and feeding Orlando the marmalade cat during your stay.

Contact Tony and Denise by phoning 01033-61858232 or write to them at Las Claourios, Thil, 31530 Levignac, France.