

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE - 12

by Tony Knibbs

The villages of Fontanes-du-Causse and Sennaillac-Lauzes are 7km apart and mark the northern and southern limits of the limestone region of La Braunhie in the Lot (46). Except for two major caves - Igue de Planagreze and Igue de Viazac - few exceed 50m in depth or have any notable horizontal development.

We visited this area on the weekend of 22/23 October 1994, arriving at the gite at Cabrerets too late on the Saturday to do anything substantial. The nearby CUZOUL DE SENAILLAC was chosen to at least give some SRT practice.

The cave lies 1km east Sennaillac-Lauzes and is a short 100m walk off the d17 to reach the open 5m dia. shaft in a woodland clearing. A straightforward 18m pitch reached the apex of a talus cone extending down into an almost circular chamber, the roomy Salle du Velodrome. A 20m wide, 5m high passage was followed to a stooping-size opening into a gently sloping Salle des Gours with numerous stalagmites and columns in addition to the dried-out gours. A muddy crawl through a stal barrier was not thought worth following to a blind 10m pitch, about 200m from the shaft entrance.

Setting off up the pitch, I was amuse to find a frog (cf. amphibian) already 2m up the rope and climbing steadily. Such effort merited a reward, so I popped it into my camera bag and gave it a lift to the surface where it was now raining, but the frog hopped away happily, regardless.

Sunday's trip was to the extensive IGUE DE GOUDOU near the village of Labastide-Murat 22km southwest of Gramat. The open entrance shaft, again about 5m dia. and in a woodland clearing, was 200m off a track beyond Ferme de la Conque (close to the hamlet of Bramarigue) where permission was obtained.

The 30m shaft belled out to a boulder floor where an excavated hole gave access to a 6m pitch opening out into the roomy Galerie Martel down a steep boulder slope, negotiated using several handlines along the left wall.

So far, so good - or was it? Why was I breathing so heavily going downslope, stopping every 50m to recover? I seemed to have been struck by a sudden illness which intensified as I painfully progressed. Being the last in the party I had no idea of how others were feeling - things were difficult enough without trying to catch the person in front and ask questions!

A drop down to the left brought us into the smaller Galerie des Marchands, then into the roomier Galerie Sauvage with its attractive formations and a couple of handline pitches. The floor of the passage eventually dropped away to an active streamway - La Riviere de la Toussaint - reached by a 7m pitch. Breathing still difficult.

We proceeded upstream along one of the finest stream passages I have ever seen: some 3-5m wide, 5-10m high, with the stream flowing over a clean, pebble bed and the whole passage seemed to be decorated with predominantly white flowstone. I struggled on upstream wishing for a new pair of lungs or instant heart transplant (at my age strange fears abound when notable malfunctions occur). Up ahead others in the party were tip-toeing through a deep pool and certain oversuits were proving less than waterproof! Soon, a 5m climb provided a more tangible obstacle at which Denise appeared to suddenly become exhausted - breathing heavily.

So it wasn't only me who was feeling the effects of (you guessed?) carbon dioxide. The truth dawned with much relief! One or two of the party, including a young lad of about 14 years, decided that enough was enough and set about a gentle return to the entrance; a shame really because the river passage was fantastic. Some people made a detour to visit a higher-level chamber on the way out, but Denise and I, with young Eric, had greater need of fresh air and headed directly to the entrance.

Needless to say, going upslope was a slow and uncomfortable affair with the daunting prospect of the 30m climb out always at the back of our minds. But we made it, the ascent taking about 20 minutes for each person. Discussing the event afterwards, it appeared that carbon dioxide is a well-known problem in many caves in the region, and it reaches a concentration of up to 0.6% in places. However, its presence is somewhat seasonal, autumn being worst, so another trip is eagerly awaited, during a more clement time of the year.

**ON THE MOVE:** Mark Ward, Snr  
to: Firecrest, Wells Road, Priddy,  
Wells, Somerset, BAS 3AZ Tel:  
01749-675693

Joyce Dines to: The Coach House, Newton  
Farm, by Broxburn, West Lothian,  
EH52 6QH

**CONGRATULATIONS** To Nicky  
Barrall and Jeremy Gilson on becoming  
Full Members.

**WESSEX CHALLENGE** We won!  
Thanks to Joe Frampton who was Captain -  
the team list can be found in the log  
book. MGG now have to think of a theme  
and a venue for next year's Challenge -  
any ideas?

**EARWIG** in on the committee meeting  
held 8.07.95... Cottage extension:  
Footings are in and a channel dug for  
the water pipe. Wheelbarrow to be  
purchased (useful for future projects).  
At present, it appears that we will be  
able to keep within our £10,000 budget.  
See below for Wayne's plan of work and  
Roger's drawing update... Half-yearly:  
Bill Headington has applied for a drinks  
licence. He is trying to book a 60/70s  
music group, with a disco during their  
break. Food will be Ploughman's and a  
baked jacket potato. Period dress and  
raffle... Upper Flood II entrance: All  
external work complete. Awaiting  
lockable lid (fitted weekend of 29/30th  
July)... Rope testing: NCA were  
contacted and they sent us details of  
all drop tests they had done. Tim to  
send them a sample of rope for a drop  
test at the end of the year...  
Outdoor Activity Centres law: This has  
received Royal Assent and is now law.  
Over 18 year olds not a problem but  
under 18s could be. Committee to try to  
acquire copy of act to see how we stand  
with respect to scout and school groups  
using cottage for accommodation, and  
members children using Group  
equipment... Stop Press!: The Yeo Valley  
Gazette sent a reporter to interview  
Joan for an article on the new Upper  
Flood II entrance.

#### **LIBRARY EXTENSION...**

##### Plan of work:

1. Cut off mortar at points where new  
walls join existing building, slot walls

for vertical DPC, cut through concrete  
for new rainwater drain. WH

2. When building materials on site, mark  
out wall positions and lay engineering  
bricks. Fit wall profiles. WH ALL

3. Oversite concrete to be laid with  
damp proof membrane, remaining trenches  
to be dug for rainwater drainage and  
site levelled and tidied up (by  
contractor). Rainwater drains to be  
laid. WH (have to be on site with the  
contractor so that all remaining  
groundwork can be completed).

4. Lay DPC and first course of blocks  
ready for building inspector. WH

5. Ready for blockwork to be completed  
by Gordon Woodall, hopefully by next  
committee meeting on 4th August, or  
following weekend 4th August at latest.

##### Drawing updates:

1. Glidvale PVC-U eaves skirt not  
required. Use one section of untearable  
slaters felt along eaves, laid into  
gutter. Corovin 150 roof underlay to be  
laid over this section of felt.

2. Roof barrier required between tree  
and blockwork. At one foot from footings  
dig trench 1ft wide and 6ins below top  
of wall footing. Fill with concrete  
reinforced with expanded metal to ground  
level.

3. Twist type wall ties preferred,  
stronger than butterfly. Butterfly type  
cannot be used for cavities wider than  
50mm. However, as cavity of extension is  
only 50mm, butterfly type acceptable if  
suitable, cheap twist type not  
available. Provided that care is taken  
to use correct tie spacing and a tie is  
used every course at openings. Any type  
used must be stainless steel.

There will be reduced car parking space  
at the cottage while building materials  
are waiting to be used. Also, take care  
with some building materials which are  
temporarily stored inside the cottage in  
unusual places!

#### **YV'S DRIPPINGS...**

TF: "It has quite a low ceiling."

JG: "That's probably why you like it!"

YR: "You've got to get it vertical."

JH: "Now there's a challenge!"

JG: "You must all make encouraging  
noises."

RP: "Baa Baa!"