

MCG NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

NUMBER 265

DECEMBER 1997

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE - 17

by Tony Knibbs

Outdoor activities having been somewhat restricted following Denise's achilles tendon injury, there has been little caving to write about this year. But everything is getting back to normal since "field trials" in Cueva de Coventosa in Cantabria during July and August. The Cueto-Coventosa through trip was considered off limits, so we spent three excellent trips exploring the lower part of the system upstream to the head of the lakes and into the dry, profusely decorated chambers near the bottom entrance.

Gouffre de Peillot No.1, 14th September

With Summer holidays finished, our French caving club is getting its act together again, notably to run "freshers" trips for new members. The Gouffre de Peillot No.1 has previously been mentioned in "Fragments". It is a classic beginner's cave - a 3km-long fossil passage is entered by a 15m deep open hole (formed by a roof collapse) about midway along its length. A lower active streamway is accessible by a choice of pitches - either 50m or 30m. The cave is situated near the village of Cazavet 10km north of St. Girons.

Parking cars on the south side of Cazavet, we walked up the minor road towards Peillot Farm, turning off right between a couple of houses to follow an obvious path down to a wooded slope from which the tree-rimmed entrance pitch is easily reached. A scramble downslope in a 15m-wide hole reaches an inclined 15m pitch into roomy, dry passage offering a choice of departure: "upstream" or "downstream".

We had already visited the upstream section of dry chambers and a lower streamway. Today, Michel Souverville, ourselves and three novices took the "downstream" alternative, roomy dry chambers with a bit of scrambling and a toboggan to reach a flat-out crawl(!) after 100m. A 45m inclined pitch can be descended to meet the stream but we continued across the hole, along an easy traverse (La Corniche) for 10m and into a 1km-long succession of big passages and chambers, so dry that one area is named "Dustbowl". At one point a few metres of flat-out crawling puts one in touch with the roof but the passage regains its roomy cross-section (about 10m wide and up to 40m high) before enlarging into the Salle du Dome which is floored with stal-covered boulders sloping down a damp rift to a choke.

A couple of side passages were explored on the return. The most interesting was entered by a thrutch up through boulders into a 5m-wide, 25m-high cross-rift leading upslope to a small chamber with some amazing, root-like helictites on the roof. A short passage continued through a decorated portal into a wide chamber with some notable stalactite groups, some of which had "come unstuck" and lay on the muddy floor. Norbert Casteret noted these on his survey of 1934. Beyond, a roomy passage led up to a 4m climb bringing us to a pitch back down the main passage. Yet another lead-off and the pitch below the traverse was left for another visit. The novices fully enjoyed their five hours of user-friendly caving.

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WEEKLY MEETINGS: At the Eclipse Inn, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 9.00 p.m.
CAVING ACCOMMODATION: For up to 30 people, is available at the MCG headquarters:
 Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse, Blagdon, Bristol, BS40 7XW
 Tel: 01761-462797 Grid Ref ST51475606 OS 1:50,000 sheet 182
COTTAGE INFORMATION: Through the cottage warden please (address and tel. no. below).
COTTAGE BOOKINGS: MCG members, members children, SWCC and NPC £1.50
COTTAGE FEES per night: Guest clubs and member's guests £2.50
PREPAYMENT STICKERS: (Available to members only) 12 nights accommodation £15.00
 25 nights accommodation £30.00
 55 nights accommodation £55.00
ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: Full and Probationary Members: £25.00; Associate Members: £12.50
RECIPROCAL RIGHTS: MCG (members only) have reciprocal booking rights with SWCC and NPC:
 NPC bookings via Andy Goddard tel: 01978-812100 (wk) 01244-570944 (hm)
 SWCC bookings via Ian Middleton tel: 01703-736997 email ian_m@tcp.co.uk

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MCG doings

On the move...Julie Hesketh to 23 Ashleigh House, Mortlake High Street, London, SW14 8SH.

Rupert Knowles...to 1 Gainsborough Road, Chiswick, London W4 1WJ Tel:0181 994 3709.

Cara Allison...Stoke Gabriel House, Stoke Gabriel, Devon TQ9 6QY. Tel:01803 782856.

Kevin West.....38 Westerly Lane, Shelley, Nr Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. HD8 8HP. Tel:01484 605304.

Martin and Yvonne Rowe....."Abingdon" Off Church Hill, Arnside, Carnforth, Lancashire, LA5 0DJ. Tel:01524 762664.

Gordon Woodhall..... has a new telephone number 01278 641455.

1998 MCG Rescue Practice.

This is to take place on 16th May 1998. The venue is Longwood August and carry/rescue will begin at the junction between the start of the Upper Dry Galleries and the main streamway down. From here the route will be to the Main Chamber of Longwood via Swing Pitch and Christmas Crawl. If time and energy allow we will continue over the Bad Step and up to just past the Shower Bath

Brian Snell

Internet News

The central register of charities , the public record of all registered charities ,is now on the internet. Details include - the name and address of the charity, the objects of the charity, the type and date of the governing documnet, and the geographical

area the charity operates in. The address is: www.charity_commission.gov.uk.

Request from tackle master.....please will all members rummage through their personal tackle to check and see whether they have inadvertantly acquired ropes D and F which are missing from the tackle store, and not logged out. Return of missing ropes would be much appreciated!

Cotag...has now been moved to the toilet window..

AGM and Annual Dinner....AGM at the Hunters as usual on 25th April 1998, at 2.30pm. This will be followed by a dinner at the Seymour Arms in Blagden. Separate table to be provided for vegetarians/vegans. Further details to follow. Please try and attend.

Snippet of Mendip News....Wells Community Education have been successful in their bid for lottery money for a new sports hall which is due to be completed in early 1999. It will include a climbing wall and a specially designed cavers' balcony with rigging points for SRT and ladder and line practice.

Bosch Drill.....has now been serviced and a new battery box is to be purchased from Stuart Kirby. A Hilti drill is currently on trial.

Forward Meets Programme

Date	Area	Details	Contact
February 1998	Reservoir Swallet Mendip	A Saturday evening trip led by Geoff Beale. A once in a lifetime opportunity to view the only cave likely to keep you out of the Castle on a Saturday night. There are 4 places in addition to Geoff.	Julie Hesketh ☎0181 392 2572
25 April 1998	AGM and annual dinner	AGM at Hunters as usual. Dinner venue to be decided.	Tim Francis ☎0181 392 2572 or Pete Mosely ☎01458 860524
16 May 1998	MCG Rescue Practice	Longwood/August	Brian Snell ☎01329 238341
Summer 1998	Madagascar	Jungle, snakes, poisonous spiders and if you're very lucky a spot of caving. A 6 week (or so) expedition to the Mahajunga region, probably in July/August but you could meet them for a few weeks only if time is a problem.	Tim Francis ☎0181 392 2572

Library Additions Part One

by Joan Goddard

The Cave Rescuer's Manual - The Speleo Secours Francais is the French cave rescue organisation and this English version of the second edition of its manual has just been published (translated into English by Tony and Denise Knibbs and Martin Hoff). It consists of 96 pages divided into four parts; an overview of the SSF, rescue situations (including call-out procedures), equipment and evacuation techniques. The book is clearly laid out with diagrams and photos on almost every page. It is essential reading for anyone caving in France - preferably buy a copy and take it along with you; it's very reasonably priced. Thanks to Tony and Denise for donating a copy to the club.

Cave Guide to Slovenia - by Ian Bishop of Keyhole Caving Club - the book provides information on where to stay, what sort of equipment to take, shop opening hours, insurance, cave rescue telephone no., some useful Slovenian words, a short bibliography and relevant web sites. The cave descriptions are somewhat brief but the following details are supplied:- map reference, cave reference number, elevation, length, depth, equipment required, description and, usually, a survey. The 78 page book is produced on glossy paper with eight colour plates. It is a bit pricy at £9.50 but provides a good starting point for anyone thinking about caving in Slovenia.

International Caver No. 20, 1997 - Reports of expeditions to Sardinia, Vietnam, Jamaica, Croatia and Sarawak.

Underground Photographer, Autumn 1997.

Axbridge Caving Group Journal Expedition Special - June 1997 - ACG's Albanian (1995) and Malaysian (1996) expedition reports make very enjoyable reading and include notes on reconnaissance visits during which contact was made with local cavers and other useful bods. The diary-like style of writing makes one feel almost part of the trip!

Postojna - English version of the official guidebook for the Cave of Postojna, published 1973. A short history and description of the cave is followed by 49 colour plates - a 1970's coffee table book!

library additions continued on page 7

At the Digface

by Joe Frampton

Pinetree Pot - No progress for quite some months now, mainly because other projects sidetracked the usual diggers or possibly this is one of the most muddy uninviting holes in the Mendips which only gets dug due to its proximity to the cottage.

Ubley Warren - Great expectations turned to mild disappointment as Tim and Dave fought their way into the little girls room. Initially it was thought there were a few potential leads but all closed down rapid style. Meanwhile in more muddy but solid surroundings Joe and Letti have pushed down 3 feet and in 6 feet at the mud and rock choke at the known end of this cave.

Upper Flood II - The entrance lid is now being repaired by Wayne after some cheeky scamp vandalised it! Work will resume here once we've disentangled all the red tape and got our greasy paws on some rock persuader.

...STOP PRESS... The much improved lid is now in place and should prove fun on the way out of the cave! Cheers Wayne we owe you a pint.

Battery Swallet - 5/6 feet of passage was recently opened up with the help of a hired electric hammer but due to death by drowning/ electrocution or both it was decided not to go back on Sunday (nothing to do with the fact we were at the Wessex till 3am). Rapid progress can be made using this technique here but only in dry weather as the digface fills up quicker than you can bail.

Body piercing was the days fashion as Letti lunged at the barbed wire with her head and Joe thought hawthorn spikes made pretty hand accompaniments, meanwhile Keith's antics on the mud slope had to be seen to be believed, what a star! Also present were Dave, Brian and Tim (the boy moth)

Dan-Yr-Ogof - S. Wales - Permission was sought and granted to set up a camp near the end of the cave by the Great North Choke, however appalling weather (surely not in Wales!) has kept us out most of the summer. Tim and Joe managed only one trip with 3 sizeable tackle bags to stock the camp. Cave access, committee willing should see us back there early '98. There are quite a few leads to pursue and a strong team effort may produce great results. Spaces on the dig team are limited and are on a first come first served basis. However it improves your chances of being included enormously!!! if a photo and vital statistics are forwarded to Joe.

Upper Flood - During the summer a wave of activity was seen at the boulder choke in the red room. Tim, Joe, Dave, Letti and others had a couple of small pointless pointless digs that produced only a few feet of passage. Meanwhile the main dig going straight through the choke was stabilised on a number of trips by Malcolm, Sonya and Lee. Any Visitors to this area should be aware that the choke is still on the move, so take care. Tim and friends had a couple of trips upstream of Midnight chamber to dig the floor of the stream bed hopefully to wash out the tailings, don't hold your breath!

Finally thanks to all the people who have helped but weren't mentioned.

Caving with Carbide

by *Stuart France*

Permission has kindly been granted by the Editor of the Chelsea Speleological Society to reproduce this article in our newsletter. Many thanks!

An awful accident in France in which a group of Belgian cavers were engulfed in an underground acetylene fire in a narrow wet passage is described. The main casualty sent the following first-hand account in a letter to me. He is making a good recovery but has not resumed caving yet, and hopes that others will learn from this incident:

"I had an accident but now it's almost over. I just have to wait. It happened a month ago. We went to the Doubs department in France for a caving trip. It started well, for each trip in the caves I was preparing kit bags with ropes and karabiners. I wasn't preparing chocolate and drinks. First day was consacred to Grotte des Cavottes in Montrand-le-Chateau, it's a pleasant trip ending on a lake we never saw because to go there the meander is very long, muddy and narrow. I was the only guy who wanted to see it! So we turned back. Second day was consacred to Gouffre de Pourpeville, a classic trip to a river. There is 70m of pitches and then you are in the horizontal level going to the river. I equiped the pitches because I prepared the bags but I didn't prepared the kits with food, drinks and carbide packed in pieces in tyres (to make it waterproof). At the bottom of the last vertical section we made two teams, my team wanted to see the river section, and the other team the dry section, so we shared the food drinks and carbide. We made a mistake, each team took the path of the other team! Nevermind we saw on the survey both sections are joining up in the river, we decided to make the loop trip.

I was carrying the bag, we were three. We passed trough some squeeze and we stopped in front of a small lake. The ceiling was 40cm above the water level and the lake was 20cm deep. A friend decided to go first because he had a wetsuit. OK. At the end of the lake there is a dry squeeze in calcite on right and a larger (squeeze) wet

passage. He chose the dry passage and I followed him in the water with the bag attached to my harness between my legs to see the left passage. I stopped to see the passage and heard a big noise, carbide was strongly reacting with water. I went back out of the water shouting to the friend behind me to run away. I was affraid about breathing problems caused by the gas. When the bag was on my side I saw acetylene coming violently out of the bag. Suddenly there was flames everywhere. I throwed my helmet in front of me, tried to protect me and open the karabiner's bag. The kit was now in fire and making a lot of black smoke. I took my friend still in the squeeze and he ran through the fire. I followed him, when we were three we ran again to leave the cave. Both friends were two meters away from me head not facing me (protected) and they saw flames running on their side and making big whoooof-bang. So there was flames on approximately 10 meters!

In every small lake I took water for my face, it was burning like a very strong sun burn (a 10²⁵⁹⁸⁶ sun burn). We went back at the bottom of pitches, I sent my faster friend to organize "rescue" (prepare car to go to nearest hospital) and I began to come slowly out of the cave. I never stopped on the ropes, my last friend was following me. When I came out my friend found other friends ready for rescue (they put their caving gear in less than 10 minutes, ready with all the ropes!). One of them, his father is a doctor, so he gave me first cares. At the hospital they said "it's a second degree" and they put a big head bandage. Back to the refuge nobody was believing it, me first. Now I try to turn caver's mind to use electrical lighting, but people are crazy and I think they must experiment by themself such an accident to change."

West Brecon Cave Rescue Team

WBCRT are desperately short of funds at the moment and are frantically fundraising. So if anyone feels inclined to help out please send a donation to their treasurer Kevin Davies at The Coach House, Craig-Y-Nos, Powys SA9 1GJ.

Solution to last months crossword

by Dave Tooke

Across

1, Swallet; 6, Horizontal; 8, Flood; 9, Pitch; 13, Wellies; 15, Atlas; 16, Eastwater; 18, Longwood; 20, Swildons; 22, Bat; 23, Stream; 27, Daren; 28, Mud; 32, Shovel; 34, Crawl; 36, In; 38, Aven; 39, YrOgof; 40, Tynings; 41, Traverse.

Down

2, Waterwheel; 3, Lane; 4, Thrupe; 5, Stal; 7, Lionel; 10, Is; 11, Harness; 12, Upper; 14, Pot; 15, August; 17, Wade; 19, Otter; 21, Sump; 22, Boulder; 24, Rebelay; 25, Aday; 26, Ma; 29, Duck; 30, Rope; 31, Dan; 32, Shaft; 33, Lounge; 35, River; 37, Rods.

C.S.C.C Goings On by Tim Francis

Conservation and Access - concern was voiced over the "conservation" work being undertaken at Burrington Combe. In particular the construction of new pathways around Goatchurch. Please take the time to have a look and pass on your comments!

It has been proposed that White Spot Cave, Cheddar Gorge should be gated. This is to help prevent the loss of the last remaining site of horshoe bats in Cheddar. It is hoped that caver access can be maintained in the summer months.

Climbing and Caving Liason Group - this was created as a result of the Mendip Hills local plan and is chaired by John Baker. Its role appears to duplicate much of the work by the CSCC.

Training - a National Lottery grant has been obtained to help with training facilities at the Blue School. The cavers fair/training weekend will be on the 4th and 5th of June. An additional day is to be organised which will focus on training within clubs.

Library Additions Part 2 by Joan Goddard

Darkworld - The secrets of Llangattock Mountain - by Martyn Farr, 1997. This 125 page softback/hardback book is the first comprehensive account of the exploration of Llangattock Mountain. I have to admit that I expected it to be a bit of a "catalogue of events" but, in fact, Martyn has produced an exciting story of the history of exploration and the people who persevered over many years to prove their theories about the mountain's drainage system, and, in doing so opened up over 40 miles of cave passage.

Understanding the sequence of events was aided by the inclusion of a series of plans showing passages at eight different dates (from 1959, when Agen Allwedd was the only sizable cave to 1996) and a useful chronology of events (Appendix I). A short section on access arrangements, conservation and rescue, together with a glossary of caving terms, completes the book.

Obviously the book is of interest to Llangattock cave enthusiasts but it also makes compelling reading for those who cave, or have caved anywhere else.

Ask Joan if you want to borrow the library copy, or buy your own - it's worth it.

Speleological Abstracts No35 (1996) - is invaluable for anyone researching a particular caving area of the world or a particular caving topic. A CD-Rom is included, which covers Speleological Abstracts from 1989 to 1996.

Wigmore Swallet a history of the discovery and exploration - by M.C. McDonald, A.R. Jarratt and K.N. Savory, Sept 1997 (BEC Caving Report No.23). As someone who doesn't know the cave or its environs I found this publication a little difficult to follow, but it is crammed full of information on the exploration history, geology and hydrology and it includes surveys. It is certainly worth reading if you intend doing the cave.

More Fragments from France - 17

by Tony Knibbs

Norbert Casteret Centenary

This year is the centenary of Casteret's birth and our club (Speleo-Club d'Aerospatiale) is hosting an exhibition of photos, publications and other ephemera concerning his life and caving career. Born in Saint-Martory, Haute Garonne, Casteret was a local caver and it is fitting that the regional branch of the Federation Francaise de Speleologie should do something to mark his centenary. Hence the exhibition and an evening's conference attended by his daughter, Sister Marie Casteret, and a veteran of Casteret's work in the Grotte de la Cigalere, Bernard Magos.

Sister Marie's presentation consisted of a talk on Casteret's work on determining the source of the Garonne (in Spain) and bringing this fact to official attention. Accompanying slides made the complicated situation somewhat clearer. Bernard Magos presented a 16mm film on the Grotte de la Ciglere - a blend of early footage of the 1950's explorations, later discoveries of richly decorated (gypsum crystals) areas and some surface shots of the general lapiaz around la Ciglere. The cave was first explored in 1932 by Casteret who spent much effort attempting to force a link with the nearby Gouffre Martel.

Grotte du Goueil dy Her, 21st September

Each year it seems that we explore another segment of the Reseau Trombe, the 100km-long system in the Arbas plateau near Saint-Gaudens, Haute Garonne. This year is no exception because the recent dry spell lowered water levels enough to give easy access to the Goueil dy Her (Eye of Hell - patois) resurgence which drains the vast Trombe/Henne Morte system.

The entrance is 2km beyond Arbas village, turning off the Labaderque road past the hang-glider landing site and following a narrow road to the end where there is space to park cars. Five minutes walk down and across an obvious valley and stream reaches the boulder-masked entrance, above which a sombre plaque commemorates the passing, in 1957, of one Dr. Dufour who died of thermal shock (hydrocution), probably in the first sump only 100m into the cave.

A 5m rope descent and a couple of toboggans are met before reaching the sump, today only a knee-deep paddle. (There is a muddy, narrow high-level bypass accessed by fixed ropes if conditions demand.) Ahead, the streamway mostly conformed to a vertical rift-like cross-section averaging 5m wide and 10m high with occasional expansions at roof level. Everything above stream level was covered in dark brown mud apart from a few inlet areas which could easily be identified by cleanwashed rock walls or formations. The pervading gloom reminded me that a sudden thunderstorm on the plateau above could have serious consequences for streambed strollers!

Unlike our two French companions, we chose to wear wetsuits (longjohns in my case) so when the first deep water was met we were spared the joys of using an incredibly muddy traverse line by taking the cooler (9°C) alternative. Two further brief swims were necessary before reaching the second sump after a kilometre or so of plodding, paddling and wading. This final sump, Syphon JYG, was successfully dived in 1979 to confirm the link with reseau Trombe to bring the depth to 1004m and length to 60km; the length has grown somewhat since then.