

## Tsingy de Bemaraha Caves Expedition 1999

Tim Francis

### **Introduction**

Well we're back from another jaunt to Madagascar and in between trying to get the journal together I'd thought I'd do a quick update for the newsletter. This year's expedition members were Pete Bennett, Ben Cooper, Tim Francis and Julie Hesketh. Due to a lack of holiday entitlement only three weeks could be spared for the trip. Logistics were fine tuned giving us a potential of 13 days in the field. We elected to take internal flights rather than taxi-brousse wherever practicable to minimise time lost due to travelling. This year the expedition also benefited from a Ghar Parau grant.

We decided to concentrate upon an area of Tsingy just to the south of the Manambolo River. Ben, Yong Shik and myself had previously explored a number of entrances in the area known collectively as the Arch Caves. It was our intention to tidy up the loose ends we had left, complete the photography and survey, and explore further caves in the area.

### **The Journey In**

Our journey to Bekopaka went according to plan. A constructive half-day was spent in Tana sorting out currency and ordering maps and aerial photo enlargements from FTM. Then it was a 5am start to take an internal Air Mad flight to Belo-sur-Tsiribina. The views from the aeroplane of the countryside (deforested and badly eroded) below were fantastic. Our time in Belo was spent wandering around the market picking up provisions for the camp. A lift was arranged for the following day to Bekopaka and remarkably we arrived at the village bang on schedule. A slight hiccup over permits took a bit of sorting but two days later we were pitching camp on the banks of the Manambolo at Vazimba Canyon.

### **Cave Exploration**

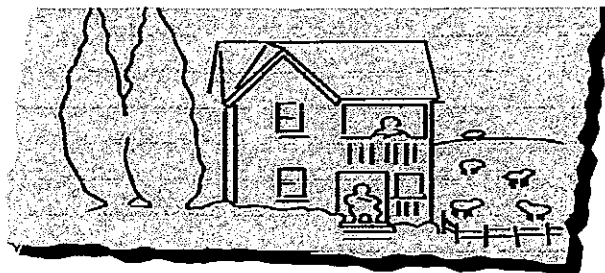
In the field the first few days were spent tidying up the loose ends at Arch II. New passage was explored and surveyed, and more satisfyingly we were able to locate Entrance 4 on the surface. A fine 15m daylight pitch was found in a nearby canyon, which was eventually tied into the 1998 survey. Another well decorated cave in the canyon, Pearl Cave, was surveyed and photographed. Entrance 3 was not located although I did manage to free climb out into the Tsingy to find myself at the bottom of a large shakehole. The tantalising lead we had left last year was eventually pushed, via a delightful up and over pitch, Peat's Pot, and a desperately tight calcite squeeze to the surface and hence entrance 5. It's rather hot work dashing around in there but in quick time we rigged and de-rigged all the various pitches whilst Ben completed his photographic record.

**MENDIP CAVING GROUP**

Nordrach Cottage  
 Charterhouse – on – Mendip  
 Blagdon  
 Bristol BS40 7XW. Tel. 01761 462797

High quality caving accommodation available for bookings of up to 16 people. All usual charging facilities, keys etc. Guests £2.50 per night.

Ben Cooper (**Cottage Warden**) Tel. 01256 364199  
 Or email: [ben.cooper@sbs.siemens.co.uk](mailto:ben.cooper@sbs.siemens.co.uk)  
 M.C.G. information: - Tim Francis (**Secretary**)  
 Tel. 0181 392 2572



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**Weekly Meetings:**

- At The Beehive, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 9.30 pm
- At The Hunters Lodge, Somerset, on Tuesdays around 10pm or at the cottage at 7pm for caving trips.

**Prepayment Stickers:**

(Available to members only) 12 nights accommodation £15.00  
 25 nights accommodation £30.00  
 55 nights accommodation £55.00

**Annual**

Full and Probationary members : £25.00

**Subscriptions:**

Associate members : £12.50

**Reciprocal Rights:**

MCG (members only) have reciprocal booking rights with SWCC and NPC.  
 NPC bookings via Nic Blundell on tel. : 01203 713849 (home) or 01203 838940 (work) or on email : [nic.blundell@bigfoot.com](mailto:nic.blundell@bigfoot.com).  
 SWCC bookings via Ian Middleton tel. : 01703 736997. Email : [ian\\_m@tcp.co.uk](mailto:ian_m@tcp.co.uk)

***THE 1999 - 2000 COMMITTEE :***

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**Rescue Warden**  
**Conservation Officer**  
**Cottage Extension**

Brian Snell  
 Marcus Ward  
 Wayne Hiscox

01329 238341  
 01252 815112  
 01749 671282

**Examiners**

James Allen & Martin Rowe

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# News in Brief

## Change of address :

**Pete Hollings** : CODES SRC, University of Tasmania, GPO Box 252-79, Hobart, TAS 7001. Australia. Phone (61-3) 6226-7210, Fax (61-3) 6226-7662, e-mail: Peter.Hollings@utas.edu.au.

## Change of email address :

**Victoria Arbizu** is now at :  
varbizu@aol.com

## Accepted as Prospective Members :

**Peter Mullins** , 13 Tongham Road, Runford, Farnham, Surrey. GU10 1PH. Tel 01252 782883.  
**Derek Sutherland**, Earlsfield, Farnham Road, Farnham, Surrey. Tel 01420 520341

## Accepted as Probationary Member:

**Paul Craddy**

## Forward Meets Programme :

DATE	VENUE	EVENTS	CONTACT
<b>4<sup>th</sup> &amp; 5<sup>th</sup> December : Library weekend :</b> <b>All welcome to come down &amp; help with finishing off the library extension.</b>			
6 February 2000.	Mendip	Shatter Cave (Fairy Caves Quarry): Trip limited to 5 plus leader. Please contact Julie to reserve a place.	Tel : (0181 340 2613)

### ➤ Ogof Draenen

Please note that as from the 1st November 1999 the combination lock will have a new number. If you are planning a trip contact the Caving Secretary for the new number or check the key board in the tackle store.

Access arrangements remain the same but ensure that you enter the following details in the cave log book:

- Date
- Names of all members of the party
- Name of the club
- Planned destination / route in cave
- Time in
- ETR

Remember to cross your names out as you leave. The log book is currently jammed in the roof, just inside the entrance, but may be moved in the near future.

### ➤ OXLOW CAVERN WARNING

Information received from Dudley Caving Club (Formerly Dudley Cave Rescue Team) on 1st. November:

"On a trip last Sunday in Oxlow we found that the connection between West Ante Chamber and West Chamber, just after the ladder, was very loose.

Where you drop through the crawl, several boulders around the top of the connection shifted and fell into the hole. Due to the instability, we did not proceed through the connection."

If you require any more information, please contact Dudley C.C.

Secretary, Emma Porter on 0121-565-5401 or contact the club via < Keith=Edwards@dcrf.freemove.co.uk >

**Please fill in the Booking Sheets**

Tim Francis

It has become apparent that many members staying at Nordrach Cottage are not filling in the booking sheet correctly, if at all. Cottage fees are not being paid and money is being left lying around. Below is a gentle reminder for those who don't know what it looks like! Please could someone at the end of each weekend fill in the summary sheet; it's all self-explanatory. There is a convenient letter box just up the road for posting envelopes.

<b>Summary of Cottage Fees</b>			<b>Dates:</b> _____
Total up the number of bed nights for members and guests, and insert the details in the table below. Make a note of any unpaid nights or inconsistencies in the booking-in sheets. Please return a cheque for the grand total, along with this summary and the relevant booking in sheets, in the pre-paid envelopes provided in the lectern.			
Category	No. Bed Nights	Cost per Night	Total
Members (pp)		£0.00	£0.00
Members		£1.50	
Guests		£2.50	
		SUB - TOTAL	
Category	Quantity	Cost per Permit	Total
CCC Permits		£0.30	
Other			
Donations			
		SUB - TOTAL	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>			
If you have any deductions from the cottage fees for items such as toilet paper or washing up liquid please leave details at the bottom of this sheet and include the receipt in the pre-paid envelope.			
Please make all cheques payable to " <b>The Mendip Caving Group</b> "			
Other Information: _____			

**Pet excuses:**

*"I don't know how to do it"*. Just fill out the page on the back of the bunk booking sheet and follow the instructions. It's as easy as that!

*"I haven't got my cheque book with me"*. Fine, take the booking sheets and money home with you and post on Monday morning. Or find someone else with a cheque book.

*"I couldn't find an envelope"*. They're in the lectern and are stamped addressed to the Treasurer. If there are none there, post from home and tell the Treasurer we've run out.

*"Not everyone has paid"*. Tally up what you can and make a note on the back of the sheets telling the Treasurer who hasn't paid. Ideally please chase people up at the time.

*"It was 10p short"*. We're a charity. How about making a small donation to cover it?

*"It still doesn't add up"*. Ok, do what you can and still post off the sheets. Write some sort of explanation on the back so that the Treasurer can at least see what you've done.

*"I was the only person staying"*. Still send off the sheets even if you used a pre-paid sticker. The Treasurer needs to keep an accurate record of all bed nights.

**The bottom line:**

***Please don't leave any money, booking sheets or Charterhouse permits at the cottage.***

### **Continue from Front Page...**

Next followed a mad yomp across the Tsingy in the baking heat to try and find a large doline we had spotted on the maps and aerial photograph. The terrain proved exceptionally difficult to traverse and it took us over half a day to reach our destination. Swarms of insects had a field day particularly the horse flies, which had a nasty bite. The doline proved to be as impressive as we had suspected but the obvious cave at the bottom closed down. The size of the 'hanging death' has to be seen to be believed. Other tantalising black holes in the walls of the doline were not entered due to lack of time. After this we decided to pursue potential caves nearer the Vazimba canyon.

On a day off, back at camp, Julie had spotted a low sandy entrance right next to where we were sleeping. Pete and I pushed this horrendously flood prone cave for a hundred metres or so. The whole thing was liberally coated with black mud and dead sharp. I turned back when the claustrophobic conditions and the thought of an afternoon downpour got the better of me. We did not return but intriguingly this cave does show that resurgence caves in the Tsingy are a possibility.

The final caves explored were just next to the Grand Arch and originally found when an alternative overland route to Entrance 2 of Arch II was being opened up. A bypass to a 15m pitch was discovered which led to the discovery of hundreds of metres of passage. Lack of time meant that only 800m+ were surveyed but with plenty of leads left behind. This was the deepest cave we had found in the area so far with potential for far more below. There is a good draught in a number of places suggesting more entrances exist to the north. For me there was the tantalising possibility of pushing the cave towards Arch II. It was left to Peat and Ben to do the exploration of this cave for Julie had left camp early for a spot of Lemur spotting elsewhere and I had slashed my foot during a midnight dash to the toilet!

I think given the small amount of time and personnel we have achieved a great deal this year. Considerable amounts of surface and underground data were collected and hence expanding our knowledge of the region. We achieved a good balance between exploration, surveying and photography. The downside was that we were unable to devote much time to individual projects. The fauna in the caves was literally 'in-your-face' with frogs, butterflies and bats in abundance.

### **The Trip Out**

After leaving the Tsingy we gave a brief verbal report to ANGAP (the National Parks body) before leaving Bekopaka. A bi-lingual report will follow and members should receive a copy in the New Year. The journey back to Tana was a little slower than on the way in with taxi-brousses taken to Belo and then on to Morondava. From there a flight back to Tana gave us a day and a half in the capital. Most of this was spent writing up postcards and buying souvenirs. Oh and eating!

### **The Future**

There is already discussion of a return in 2001, hopefully to coincide with the eclipse. A lack of holidays means that a trip next year is not really a possibility. So in 2001 we will probably look at a different area of the Tsingy to the north of the Manambolo and further upstream. Here the depth potential is 400m. The area is a little bit more remote so the logistics could be a bit tricky. Supposedly crocodiles are more common here so that will make bathing a bit more interesting. A few more weeks in the field will be required but in terms of cost it's getting there that's the expensive bit. So book your holidays now!

## 4th European Caving Expedition Symposium. the weekend of 1st May 2000 in Profondeville

### Program

7 themes are proposed (dependent on the interest of the participants):

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| <p>1. Expeditions per continent - Europe, S-E Asia, Middle East, America, Australasia... Permissions, organisation, safety, specificity, future perspectives.</p> <p>2. Desobstruction - The electric drill and cartridges, what part do they play in exploration? Methodology, dangers and ethics.</p> <p>3. Sump Diving and technical diving in resurgences - New techniques and topography</p> <p>4. Rescue - Auto-rescue management in expeditions.</p> | <p>Prevention, techniques and expedition medicine.</p> <p>5. Expedition Cartography - topography, relocalisation and use of GPS.</p> <p>6. Science utilized by exploration (and vice versa) - quick measurements.</p> <p>7. Protection and access - legislation and ethics in expeditions.<br/>Respect of places (nature, properties, populations)</p> |
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### Workshops

Each of these themes will, dependent on the interest, be brought as follows:

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| <p>a) Lectures - for those who want to present discoveries, results, ideas for suggestions,</p> <p>b). Round Tables - constructive, discussions about the subject,</p> <p>c). Workshops - comparison between different</p> | <p>materials and techniques (those who use new material, original, precursors, do not hesitate to show us),</p> <p>d). Posters - for the timids or all kinds of topographies.</p> |
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### The FIESTA

The opening cocktail will be offered by the municipality of Profondeville. On Sunday a visit to the cave "LA Merveilleuse" will be organised as well, followed by a "drink of depths" offered by the municipality of Dinant (Deep Village). In the evening an immense banquet will be arranged so that your ultimate experiences can be exchanged around the table and between pints of Belgian beer!

**PRICE** : The price of 65 Euro covers everything except the handouts, namely:

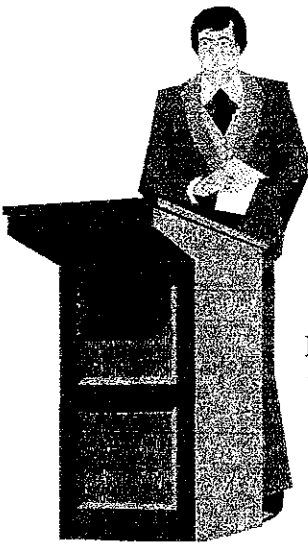
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|---|--|
| <p>1. The registration to the congress</p> <p>2. Sleeping Accommodation in the castle from Friday Night till Monday Morning (bring sleeping bag).</p> | <p>3. Meals - breakfast, sandwiches at noon and a warm meal at night</p> <p>4. The visit to the cave and banquet on Sunday</p> |
|---|--|

### ORGANISATION/CONTACT

Exploration Commission of the USB - Supported by the FNBS (VVS-UBS)  
Contact Address : Comex; Explo2000, Chaussee de Wavre, 300, B-1390 GREZ-DOICEAU (Belgique)

Tel : +32(0)4 3426142 Fax +32(0)4 3421156  
E-Mail : [ubs@speleo.be](mailto:ubs@speleo.be)

Web site : <http://www.speleo.be/explo2000>  
Registration before 20th April - 5 Euro reduction



## **Minutes of the Mendip Caving Group AGM Held on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1999 at the Hunters Lodge Priddy.**

The Mendip Caving Group is Registered Charity No.270088

Chairman: Geoff Beale

Present: 28 full members, 5 probationary, 1 associate member. Of those present 3 were custodian trustees.

### **1 - Apologies for Absence**

Arthur Spain and Steve Wyatt

### **2 - Minutes of AGM held on 25/04/98:**

Copies of these minutes were circulated to all members with the November newsletter no. 273.

### **3 - Agreement that the Minutes are a True Record of that meeting:**

The minutes were proposed for acceptance.

Proposed: Tim Francis

Seconded: Julie Hesketh

Accepted unanimously.

### **4 - Matters Arising:**

J. Goddard: I would like to amend what I said in paragraph 5.6 line 11. What I meant to say was 'No they are aware that we would like the land. Eventually they will probably sell.' Omitting 'to us'.

### **5 - Officers Reports:**

Chairman: These have been circulated are there any matters arising?

#### **5.1 - Matters Arising from the Secretary's Report:**

M. Cotter: I would have liked the report to have included information with regards the purchase of land at Velvet bottom and Charterhouse by Somerset Wildlife Trust and it's affect on cave access.

T. Francis: The land was transferred to Somerset Wildlife Trust on March 8<sup>th</sup>, after my report was written. I have written an article for the newsletter that gives details of the access arrangement, this should be published soon.

M. Cotter: We need to keep an eye on Somerset Wildlife Trust to ensure that cave access is not unnecessarily restricted.

Y. Rowe: I would like to thank Letti on behalf of the members for a very good standard of newsletters.

J. Goddard: Yes I would second that.

There were no other matters arising from the Officers reports.

### **6 - Election of Honorary Officers for 1999/2000:**

Chairman: Could we have two tellers please.

Tellers: Zoe Hammersly, Fiona Kempston.

Chairman: Can we have nominations for Rescue Warden please?  
Brian Snell was proposed by Joan Goddard and seconded by Julie Hesketh.  
Chairman: Can we have nominations for Conservation and Access Officer please?  
Marcus Ward was proposed by Tim Francis and seconded by Letti Patte.

The results of the ballot are as follows:

Secretary: Tim Francis, 25 for, 2 abstentions.

Treasurer: Dave Tooke, 25 for, 2 abstentions.

Editor: Letti Patte, 26 for, 1 vote of no confidence.

Caving Secretary: Julie Hesketh, 27 for.

Cottage Warden: Ben Cooper, 18 for, Richard Carey, 7 for, Ben Cooper duly elected. There were 2 abstentions.

Tackle Master: Marcus Ward, 20 for, 6 no confidence, 1 abstention.

Recorder/ Librarian: Wayne Hiscox: 25 for, 1 no confidence, 1 abstention.

Social Secretary: Pete Moseley, 27 for.

Rescue Warden: Brian Snell: 18 for, 2 no confidence, 7 abstentions.

Conservation and Access Officer: Marcus Ward: 16 for, 7 no confidence, 4 abstentions.

### **7 - Election of Examiners 1999/2000:**

Chairman: James Allen has been proposed by Tim Francis and seconded by Julie Hesketh, Martin Rowe has been proposed by Wayne Hiscox and seconded by Ben Cooper. Both are elected unopposed.

### **8 - Election of Rescue Warden and election of Conservation and Access Officer:**

This item on the agenda was covered under paragraph 6 above.

### **9 - Motions:**

There were none.

### **10 - Any Other Business:**

**M. Lovell:** It is not acceptable to include the cost of the coach in the dinner ticket cost as not everyone uses it.

**P. Moseley:** I can sympathise with this view but the committee did this to make accounting easier. This year the cost is not so high as we have hired a mini bus.

**J. Goddard:** It is not on for individuals to phone the dinner venue independently and arrange for meals at a lower cost.

**P. Moseley:** If people do this it will be the club that suffers, we have to meet the cost of the dinner which includes a charge for extra catering staff and the cost of inviting guests.

**T. Francis:** I would like to thank Martin Rowe for taking on the Treasurer's job over the last few months.

**J. Goddard:** When will the Library be finished?

**W. Hiscox:** Because of the problems caused by the Treasurer's resignation it has not been possible to buy materials, thankfully this is now behind us and progress should now be made.

**L. Patte:** I would like to thank Linda Milne and Mike Lovell for all their help with the newsletter printing and distribution.

### **11 - Date and Venue of next Annual General Meeting:**

There was some discussion on whether an early or late date should be chosen, the earlier the date the more work the Treasurer has to do to get the accounts ready in time.

Eventually the date was fixed as Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2000, at 2.30 p.m. at the Hunters Lodge, Priddy.