



BOS SWALLET

by Paul Craddy

Bos Swallet is one of those little caves that fills up the pages of Mendip Underground and unless you cave regularly with either Richard, Tim or another "cave spotter", you are unlikely to have done it. So on one spring-like April day Richard and myself decided to go down and explore it, as it had so far eluded Richard.

From the description, the cave actually sounds quite exciting. There are some nice formations, 2 ladder pitches, and you need some 8M rawl bolts (which for reference cost £1.29 each from any good hardware store). So it seemed a bit of a challenge.

I was not mistaken. The entrance is a nasty muddy slippery slope that leads to Disappointment Chamber, and I can tell you that is a very good description of it. In the chamber there is a small hole drilled for a rawl bolt and as the book had said that at the top of each pitch there is a hole for these, then we naturally assumed we were at the top of the pitch. It appeared to be a fairly easy free climb but there was a hole so we continued. So we laddered it in the usual way and then carried on into the rest of the cave.

Again we found another small hole at the next pitch which lead in to a small chamber, called Dorned Chamber, with some pristine formations, namely because no one had been silly enough to go and visit them. The cave then carries on in its usual muddy and loose style, over what was a fairly difficult (or more commonly described "sporting") overhanging free climb to the final Long Rift. Here a small excuse of a stream trickles into a small 3x3 inch hole which is where the cave ends. It was really uninspiring. There was only one way now and that was out. But Bos Swallet doesn't give up as easily as that. Climbing up the slippery muddy slopes that cover the cave is a much harder task than it seems, especially carrying a tackle bag.

I now reach the highlight of the trip for me, leaving. I have to say that this was one of my least favourite caves I have ever done and not one I would wish to repeat in my lifetime. Although the cave is only 74m long and 42m deep, it took us 1 hour 45 minutes. This roughly works out to be less than 1 metre a minute, which is quite pathetic really.

The other interesting thing to come out of this is that what we thought was the 1st pitch was just the easy free climb that we had thought, and the "sporting" free climb was the second pitch, even though there was no bolt holes that we could see. So we managed to ladder a pitch we didn't need to and free climbed the second pitch. Well one out of two isn't bad.

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Tel: 0181 392 2572

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



WEEKLY MEETINGS:	At The Beehive, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 9.00 p.m. At The Hunters Lodge, Somerset, on Tuesdays about 10pm or at the cottage at 7pm for caving trips.	
COTTAGE FEES per night:	MCG members, members children, SWCC, NPC	£1.50
	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 Nic Blundell, tel: 01203 713849 (hm) or 01203 838940 (wk) SWCC bookings via Ian Middleton, tel: 01703 736997 or email ian_m@tcp.co.uk	

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MCG NEWS & ITEMS FROM THE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 10TH JUNE '00

AN APPLICATION:- for membership from Sophie Chambers of 7 Narcissus Road, London, NW6 1TJ ☎ 020 7813 7442 and...

Robert Fountain of 8 Heathfield Road, Chelmsford, Essex. ☎ 01245 442523

IS THERE ANYONE OUT THERE who would like to be our Conservation and Access Officer? You would be required to finish the fixed point photography and conservation plan for Upper Flood (well on the way I understand), with help from the ex-CAO, Marcus Ward, plus attend the odd conservation and access type meeting.

WOODSTORE:- Ben Cooper has proposed that we build a weatherproof woodstore round the side of the cottage (where it is presently stored). The aim is to keep wood dry and to give wet wood the chance to dry out. It will probably have a Corrolux roof, and sides made from the sheets of wooden shoring that we purchased for the Upper Flood dig and no longer have a use for.

DEHUMIDIFIER:- This has now been installed in the shed along with a heater to make the shed a drying area. It is awaiting a hose to drain the excess water to the outside, and a 10 hour timer before the system can be used. Watch this space.....

BONE HOLE:- There has been renewed interest in Bone Hole re its access and archaeology. A lid is currently being made by Wayne Hiscox who will be overseeing other aspects of its security. The National Trust are paying but are happy for MCG to continue to look after access to Bone Hole.

SINGING RIVER MINE:- Just a reminder - could we possibly avoid going down the mine on July 9th as a wedding reception will be taking place in the garden of the adjacent house.

IS THIS THE WAY ON?

It came to my attention that a change of footwear is about to take the caving world by storm.

SLIPPERS!!!

During a certain weekend in May, I noted that slippers were worn by a collection of cavers. Is this the way on for cottage footwear? I feel a meeting must take place after supper on the next appropriate members weekend to discuss this important matter.

(Ed. there was a pair of slippers lying next to the hearth in the lounge over the weekend of 10th/11th June. No-one would admit to owning them!!!) A concerned caver

THANKS, THANKS, THANKS:- Thanks to everyone who donated something to Joan Goddard's MCG car boot table at Priddy Village Hall. Thanks also to the many people who bought something from her. She raised <<£75+>>. (There are still a few pounds to come, I believe.) Well done Joan, and thanks for all your time and effort.

ANOTHER COTTAGE WORK WEEKEND...

...is planned for the weekend of 5th / 6th August.. The plan (amongst many other things) is to finish the library roof and complete the floor of the porch. These are specialist jobs which Wayne Hiscox and one or two others will do, but they will be glad of any help offered. There will also be many other jobs, big and small, for other keen members (plus friends or family) to do or to help with (see the list of jobs towards the bottom of page 10). The cottage has reached an age where much quite major maintainance is required, but once it has been done, and done properly, it should last a good few years with only a general 'going over' now and again.

STOP PRESS:- Would members please look at their details on the membership list and let Tim Francis know of any errors. He particularly wants any missing post codes.

CAVING DOWN UNDER

Although I've been living in Tasmania since September events have conspired to prevent me doing much caving, however, with three trips under my belt I figured it was time to give the MCG a taste of caving in Tassie

Milk Run - Saturday November 6 1999

Jeff Butt, Alaric and I arrived at Arthur Clarke's place outside Dover late on Friday night, to be greeted by the enthusiastic barks of the new puppy and the even warmer welcome of Robyn, Arthur's partner. We were halfway through our first cup of tea when David, Andrew and Janice arrived from Launceston. We chatted for a while before anticipation of the arduous day Jeff had planned for us drove us to bed.

An early start by caver standards meant that we were able to rendezvous with the other cavers from Victoria only half an hour late. Jeff quickly split us into two teams so that we would be able to rig both Milk Run and Cyclops (with the plan being to derig them the next day). I found myself teamed with the Launceston group and having loaded up on rope we set off into the bush.

We followed the trail to Exit cave for about 40 minutes before heading off on a much rougher track that we hoped would lead up to the entrance. For someone who has spent the last five years on the Canadian Prairies, the stunning temperate rainforest with its lush foliage was an amazing experience. Given the dense vegetation we wasted a surprisingly short time trying to find the entrance. Once there we were able to clearly see the well-flagged trail that we had somehow missed on the way up.

We rigged the 44m entrance drop off a nearby tree and redirected the rope from another, running it over the rotten log that used to be the main anchor. The pitch was a fairly impressive shaft with a clear free hang after the first couple of metres. A small chamber at the bottom offered shelter from the debris knocked down by those above. From the chamber a series of three short pitches were rigged to the top of the next major drop. It was here that we lost Andrew who was worried that shoulder injuries would make the exit up the 44m drop fairly arduous.

David quickly rigged the 26m drop via a traverse to a bolt at an exposed pitch head and Janice and I followed him down into a fair sized chamber. A couple of metres of stooping passage led quickly to the next pitch where David was already traversing out over the drop to rig from another bolt. As he descended the drop Janice and I rigged the tail of the rope from the pitch above so as to make it easier to get on the rope. This 49m pitch was a beautiful free hanging descent through a clean washed limestone shaft typically 3-4 metres across.

In the chamber at the bottom we had a choice of two routes down to the end of the cave and chose the one on the left. A muddy drop with a snug pitch head dropped 9m to the top of the final pitch. As we were approaching the rendezvous time with the other group I turned back at this point and started out, leaving Janice and David to continue. As it turned out only David made it to the bottom as Janice turned round at the top of the final drop. Due to problems finding a rebelay point this ~30m drop included an unscheduled knot some 9m off the floor.

The trip back to the surface was pretty uneventful until I was about 10m from the top of the entrance pitch. Andrew chose this moment to suggest that I prussik more gently but refused to explain why. I cautiously continued my ascent to find that what we thought had been a free hang actually rubbed on the lip of the drop once the rope was loaded. We quickly changed the rigging and the other two soon joined us on the surface.

While we'd been underground (about 6 hrs all told) the rain had continued so we quickly headed off down the now much muddier trail. Back at the cars we were happy to get into warm dry clothes, although I was a little shocked to see how casually Janice removed the two leaches clinging to her legs. The Cyclops team made it back to the cars a couple of hours later, much to our relief as the thought of donning our wet gear to go and look for them was not very appealing.

With them safe, the Milk Run team headed back to Arthur's for some hot food. As we drove off we realised that we didn't know where the key was stashed. Rather than go back and ask we instead retreated to the pub for a beer.

The following day Andrew, Alaric and I entertained ourselves with a leisurely stroll down to Mystery Creek Cave. The cave was the scene of one of Tasmania's worst caving accidents a few years ago when a school group entered the cave in flood and rather than trying to wait out the rising water levels decided to cross a raging streamway. Three kids and one teacher were drowned. Only 20 minutes from the car park this pleasant little cave forms the exit for a fairly impressive pull through trip,

however we amused ourselves with a short walk down the main passage to look at the glow worms. These are apparently unique to the Southern Hemisphere and in Mystery at least are in sufficient numbers to light up the cave ceiling like a starry night.

Newdegate cave clean up and King George V cave, Saturday 11 December 1999

The local caving club had been asked to help with a cave clean up project at a show cave in south west Tassie run by the National Park Service. So on Saturday morning about 15 of us showed up in the car park at Hasting Caves. The plan was for us to head down to the bottom of the show cave where the Park Service had been removing the last 30 years of construction debris from the lower reaches of the cave. All this material had been put into bags and it was our job to carry the hundred odd bags up the 50m of stairs to the surface. With so many of us along this only took an hour or so in which time we managed to baffle quite a few of the tourists on their guided tours. Once everything had been wheelbarrowed back to the car park where it was left for later disposal we were offered a chance to visit the normally locked King George V cave.

A short drive took us to the start of the muddy track to the cave. At the entrance the usual fiddling with the lock quickly revealed an aluminium stepladder leading into the darkness. We were told that the Park Service were planning to use the cave for "Adventure Caving" trips for tourists so they were keen for us to give their route a trial run and provide them with some feedback. As our group included one 4 year old child and a relative novice (my wife Jill on only her third trip) we felt able to offer some comment. Once down the ladder a short traverse led to a section of stooping passage and a short crawl to a streamway, which soon terminated in a gravel sump. Backtracking a bit led to a 2m climb and some very pretty formations and then it was time to head back to the ladder.

We ended the day at the thermal springs below the show cave where the park service had laid on a BBQ complete with beer. Given that we hadn't really worked all that hard we felt a little guilty but we soon overcame that as we huddled around the log fires and watched the wallabies foraging on the grass.

Kazad Dum, Saturday 20 May, 2000

We left Hobart early Saturday morning and headed out to the Junee-Florentine karst. As many of the pitches in Kazad Dum had been pre-rigged, the plan was to take advantage of this. The weather over the last few days nearly brought an early end to the trip as a couple of trees had blown down on the dirt road up to the car park. Fortunately after we'd cleared a few branches there was just enough room to drive around them.

The cold damp weather meant that we wasted no time getting changed and were soon following the well-marked trail out to the cave. Once we got to the entrance it was clear that, in this area at least, Tassie's drought had well and truly broken. The raging torrent that was flowing in to the entrance forced us to reconsider our plans. We abandoned the ropes we had brought for the lower part of the cave, deciding instead to be satisfied with a trip down to the streamway and back.

We headed into the cave via the Serpentine route before rejoining the main route at the top of the first drop. Unfortunately we still had to cross the stream as it flowed into the cave insuring that we were all soaked to the skin. We quickly descended the first three short drops before reaching the 28m pitch. Coming down last I was able to thoroughly enjoy this drop as it popped out of the roof of a sizeable chamber. A quick scramble, a little bit of route finding and we were soon dropping down the 21m drop to the streamway.

Leaving behind some vertical gear we headed off down the streamway for a look at the next pitch. At times the water in the stream was thigh deep but it didn't pose too great a challenge. A quick look convinced us we had made the right decision. The rope was running straight down through the waterfall, despite being rigged in what had probably been a dry location a few days ago. As by now we were all soaked and starting to get pretty cold we headed back out.

The ascent was uneventful although a few problems with my lights meant that Janine had a long cold wait at the top of the last drop as Ric and I sorted things out.

Although an enjoyable trip, Kazad Dum was a rude reintroduction to the "joys" of cold wet caving, bringing back far too many memories of trips in the cold, miserable caves of Yorkshire, rather than more recent and warmer trips to Mexico. This was compounded by the fact that at one point during the walk back to the car the near constant drizzle changed to hail. At least the sun came out as we were changing!

Pete Hollings

MCG BILLBOARD

MCG ITEMS FOR SALE

Are new members aware that MCG has items for sale in the 6-room cupboard? Well, whether you are or not, here is what is on offer:-

2 small 'Bob Speleo' t-shirts	£2.50
2 med. 'Cave' t-shirts, blue	£4.50
6 large 'Cave' t-shirts, blue	£4.50
2 XXL 'Cave' sweatshirts, green	£10.00
Wetsuit jacket zip	£2.40
1 med. cotton boiler suit, blue	£8.00
Nylon boiler suits, orange	£12.00
Wool thermal walking socks	£2.50
Nylon waterproof overtrousers	£8.00
Small 3ml wetsuit trousers	£15.00
Textile waterproofing	£3.00
Ariane carbide generator	£20.00
FX2 car charger	£12.40
Pulley wheels	.70
Various 'caving' bulbs	
Half round MR	
Ammo boxes	
Caving books	£10 max.
Surveys	£1.50 max.

If you would like to purchase any of the above items, ask any committee member.

...ALSO... If anyone would like to purchase any old MCG journals or Occasional publications, you will find them in two box files in the library on the right. The Upper Flood publications are £3 each, all other publications are £2 each. See Joan Goddard or put the money in one of the boxes with a note of your purchase.

...ALSO... There are duplicates of Caves and Caving, Descent, NSS News and Cave Science in a box in the library. They are 50p each to members - please pay Joan Goddard, any committee member, or leave your money in the box with a note saying what you have taken.

FOR SALE

A Karrimor Condor 60 - 100 ltr rucksak

- One careful owner
- Very low mileage
- Price - £120

Contact Bill Richards on 01626-366639

MCG FLEECEs

Are you ready for this? My contact, Nigel, has given me a list of fleeces and prices which I have reproduced below, but it is not exhaustive. The cost of the set-up/disk will be approx. £45 but the following prices are inclusive of embroidery so here goes:-

<u>Regatta</u>	
A542 Scorpio full zip	£23.00
A620 Proteus windproof full zip	£37.00
A613 Argo full zip	£27.00
A617 Fabian full zip	£22.00
A615 Francisco half zip	£22.00
<u>Jerzees</u>	
865M Half zip fleece	£22.75
866M Full zip fleece	£23.75
<u>McForsum</u> MC 743 Half zip fleece	£25.95
<u>Result</u> R36 Populaire full zip fleece	£21.05
<u>Grizzly</u>	
KK901 Half zip unlined fleece	£23.75
KK903 Full zip unlined fleece	£24.75
KK907 Full zip lined fleece	£29.20
KK905 Sherpa half zip fleece	£30.20
<u>Ravine</u>	
PF3 Sherpa half zip fleece	£24.80
PF4 Half zip drop needle fur top fl.	£25.80
<u>It's</u> JS7 Sean cotton rich zip Sherpa	£26.95

All prices are subject to VAT @ 17.5%
Lead time approx. 3 weeks from order.
Colours are various. If anyone is interested in any of the above, I can give you more details over the phone, eg. type of pile, colours, sizes, pockets, type of cuffs, types of welts (shockcord or elastic), etc. etc. etc. Don't hesitate to contact me for advice or to order - Yvonne Rowe ☎ 01524-762664

WORK WEEKEND 6TH & 7TH MAY 2000

A big thank you once again to everyone who came and helped out at the Cottage work weekend in May. Once again a huge amount was achieved – even considering that one or two of our main DIY helpers had not been able to make it. I would like to say a special thank you to my father who spent the two whole days helping out with some of the more specialised projects.

Our helpers this year were: Charlie Alison, Richard Carey, Ben Cooper, Brian “Dad” Cooper, Paul Craddy, Tim Francis, Lynn Furneaux, Joan Goddard, Lee Hawkswell, Wayne Hiscox, Bill Richards, Caroline Robson, Yvonne Rowe, Martin Rowe, Arthur Spain. God forbid that I have forgotten anyone! (Which statistically is the entire committee, two visitors, and just five other members.) Apologies were received from Brian Snell and Geoff Beale who both had family commitments that weekend.

Saturday morning started well. Arthur set about channelling the lobby walls and installing the meter leads, in readiness for moving the meters outside. (This will have to be carried out by a SWEB engineer, who is coming to size the job on 16th June). Brian (called Dad by me, and soon by everyone else too that weekend!), repaired the ceiling and chimney plaster in the Foreman’s Lounge. Wayne finished off the library cupboards, with some help from Bill. Under the general theme of spring cleaning, Richard dismantled the cooker, and cleaned and sterilised it piece by piece – woe betide anyone who makes it dirty again! Yvonne steam cleaned all the pots and pans, threw out the broken ones, and cleaned the kitchen shelving. Caroline painted the side door, and side, back and front doorframes. Paul scrubbed the algae off the shed in readiness for staining, and just as his arms were dropping off, Tim came back from a meeting and was able to take over. Martin and I chipped away the old cess-pit lid surround. We thought this looked an easy task – but the concrete was like rock. It took ages, and hands were smashed with hammers and blood drawn on both sides. Luckily neither of us fell in. Wayne and Paul finished off the job and concreted in the new lid – and for posterity initialled and dated their work. Unfortunately, their letters were all but washed away in the thunderstorm that followed.

As the afternoon progressed, Brian moved on to start installing power points in the battery changing area. The reason is that no-one seems to use the lead-acid battery charger anymore, but most people now have their own individual chargers for their own particular type of lighting system. Hence, the emphasis now is to provide plenty of power sockets for everyone’s own chargers. So, we have removed the lead-acid charger (offers anyone?), and installed six pairs of sockets on two shelves.

Does anyone have a lawnmower they could donate to the club? Tim tried to mow the lawn but the lawn mower, kindly donated by someone, caught fire! I have since mowed the lawn, but this will, of course, need to be done again throughout the summer, and bringing my lawnmower from home every month is rather inconvenient.

As an experiment, we stripped the changing room outside window frame, in order to stain it. I have before indicated that this would be an horrendous job, but in fact it went very easily. The first window was stripped as a joint effort by Brian, Caroline and me, in between other jobs. Caroline then stained it, and the result so encouraged me, that we went on to strip and stain the tackle store window too. The stain we used was coloured mahogany, and is perhaps too light. There is still black paint residue in the grain, and the mahogany stain does not mask it. However, the effect is not unattractive. I have now obtained a darker stain (dark oak) which would mask the paint residue better. Meanwhile, Joan did a similar job to the interior window frames in the foreman’s lounge. Her approach was to sand down the worst of the flaking paint – which is generally at the bottom of each pane where the condensation collects. This is an excellent idea – as the rest of the paint is sound, and the emergency repair will protect the exposed wood for a few years hence. On the following Monday and Tuesday I happened to be working in Bristol, so popped back to the cottage in the evenings to strip and stain the outside toilet window frame, and, following Joan’s approach, “emergency” repaired the lounge and kitchen window frames on the inside. I did the same for the lounge back windowsill, which was suffering from an advanced stage of wet rot (I first killed the rot with 5-Star). *continued on page 10*

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE - 20

Trassanel is a tiny village some 20km northeast of Carcassonne in the Aude (11) département and gives its name to an impressive cave on the Cabrespine/Lastours syncline. The Grotte de Trassanel is situated about 250m west of the village, on a hillside in the thyme-scented 'garrigue' and overlooking a stream. Its total length is over 6000m, developed on four levels connected by pitches of which the deepest is 93m; the cave is well decorated throughout and can only be visited accompanied by a guide from the Spéléo Club de l'Aude.

On Sunday 30 April we enjoyed a through-trip into the two upper series: Réseaux 1 and 2 - of the two lower series, Réseau 4 was inaccessible due to flooding. One of our two SCA guides gave perfect examples of how not to use ladders, first by belaying himself to the 'permanent' electron ladder (badly hung round a scaffold pole inside the entrance blockhouse) while lifelining the 10m entrance pitch, then climbing down himself without a lifeline. A high rift - averaging 2m wide and pleasantly decorated - gave easy going for the first 200m or so in Réseau 1. Beyond a short squeeze through formations the passage character changed as the floor sloped away and handlines were followed to the head of a 5m pitch where a ladder hung from a rope sling with a rusty krab. A further short handline soon reached a 17m ladder pitch into an impressively decorated rift chamber in Réseau 2.

Calcite formations now became more spectacular as we sloped off to the left of the ladder into a pleasant cul-de-sac terminating in a roomy chamber. Back at the ladder we had lunch; traditional red wine, saucisson, baguette and cheese were on some menus!

Heading off to the right of the ladder offered easy walking along a passage of somewhat irregular cross-section with an increasing profusion of stalagmite 'monuments' to photograph, and occasional outbreaks of gypsum needles. A brief detour was made to see the top of the 93m pitch (leading to the two lower series) with its ancient steel winch still in situ and approached over a suspended floor of rusty iron plates - but it felt solid enough!

The much-photographed 'candlestick' formation was (of course) recorded on film again, despite the presence of some 15mm iron pipes serving as a protective barrier - one fell aside as I leaned on it. Our wanderings continued through a succession of well-decorated chambers and grottos until one of the guides pointed to a flat-out squeeze under the right-hand wall which, he explained, gave access to the skull of a cave bear still in situ.

Apart from the older and wiser element, several cavers strained, sweated and partly stripped in their efforts to get through. Eventually, and to my surprise, two of the party managed the feat after almost an hour of communal thrutching. Maybe the cave bear had a bit of trouble here too.

This diversion over, we ambled on through the last few chambers to reach the stal slope up towards daylight at the second entrance. At one point a few minutes were spent in admiring parts of a reindeer skeleton which had become a stalagmite formation itself, the eye sockets of the skull being particularly prominent. One more ladder, up an almost vertical stal gulley where footholds had been cut, brought us to the entrance grotto lit by sunlight coming in through the already opened door.

The cave was first explored in 1963 by the SCA following the chance discovery of a small hole by a shepherd. Whatever were the initial approaches to cave conservation and subsequent efforts to minimise wear and tear, the result today is not good. No litter was seen, apart from a small heap of dumped carbide, but virtually all of the accessible floor areas have been trampled on, whether necessary or not. There were no guide tapes or the like, and our guides gave no verbal indication of what to avoid, even to the extent of ignoring 'musical banging' on certain formations.

A few kilometres back towards Carcassonne is the village of Limousis and the nearby show-cave Grotte de Limousis which is well worth a visit if you're in the area. Despite our visit falling on a French 1 May national holiday the site was uncrowded, the office and reception areas neat and tidy (even the WCs), and the patron and guides very friendly. Surprisingly, the gift shop cum ticket office was most interesting; the stock was of sensible quality (including wine matured in the cave) and about 50 different posters from other French show-caves decorated walls and ceiling.

Again, the cave occurs in the Cabrespine/Lastours syncline and is 900m long. It was first explored in 1811 by the local inhabitants, then more thoroughly in 1963 by the SCA who produced the survey. Early 'visitors' included professional vandals who methodically removed a couple of hundred tons of stalagmite formation to be used as decoration in country houses. Luckily, this has had little effect on the cave which is extremely attractive and sympathetically lit. The entrance chamber is used for Mass every Easter and one of the inner chambers once served as an ad hoc 'night club' for clog-dancing.

Our lady guide gave a splendidly lucid presentation throughout the visit which terminated at the Fifth Chamber with a brief son-et-lumière spectacle which most strikingly exploited the Chandelier formation - 4m long and 3m diameter - a stunning pendant showpiece of calcite and aragonite crystals. This final chamber, alone, would be worth a visit. Although it is not a show-cave on the grand scale of Avens Armand or d'Orgnac, the Grotte de Limousis has a memorable charm reminiscent of the Aven de Dargilan in Lozère. With the slightly unfortunate example of Trassanel still in my mind, it occurred to me that here was a viable response to those who discredit the whole raison d'être of show-caves. Demonstrably, the average caver has very much less motivation than a show-cave owner to maintain intact something beautiful.

Tony Knibbs, Toulouse

WORK WEEKEND - continued from page 7

I really wanted to tackle the upstairs windows on the north and east sides of the cottage – as these are suffering badly from flaking paint. However, balancing at the top of a ladder proved too risky on my own, so I abandoned the job after starting.

Saturday night proved very convivial. The thunderstorm, one of the most spectacular light shows I have seen in years, took out the electricity. The cottage was plunged into darkness, but with the candles left over from Christmas, and the fire glowing, a few bottles of wine, and a curry from the Rajah, we had a very cosy time.

On the Sunday, numbers started to dwindle, but the ranks were now also swelled by the arrival of Charlie and Lee late on Saturday afternoon. Charlie removed the old front doorframe in the lobby – with remarkably little damage to the surrounding plasterwork, which will make plastering good so much easier. We then moved the telephone into the lobby, away from the toilet door. Charlie then went on to repair the silicone sealant around all the basins and kitchen sink. Caroline continued staining, helped at various times from Paul, Charlie and Brian. The rear support post, all three doorsteps, and library barge boards were done with fence decorative preserver (i.e. basically creosote with a pigment), the library window with normal stain. None of the “new” woodwork had been treated before, and was starting to suffer badly with algae. It all looks good now! Meanwhile, Lynn and I stained the shed – although I see that we missed a bit round the back, which is yet to be completed. The spring-cleaning was progressed by Bill and Lynn who between them vacuumed the rest of the cottage. Brushing does seem to just move the dust around, so I brought my vacuum cleaner as an experiment. It seemed to be popular, and I will be considering with the committee whether the club should buy its own.

Finally, the big project I was keen to get done, was moving the spotlights. I knew this would be a big task, but had not quite expected it to be quite so tricky. The problem is that the spotlight bulbs had both blown, but as they are located at the top of the gable ends – nearly 30’ high – I have been unable to reach them. Our ladder is almost that long – but one could only reach the light by standing on the top rung – barely feasible, let alone safe. Anyway, I wasn’t prepared to do it, and nor was anyone else. Hence, the light had to be moved – nearer the ground. Wayne offered his scaffold tower, which Paul and I collected on Saturday afternoon, and on Sunday, our resident engineer, Lee, was seen levelling the ground and emerging tower with professional aplomb. Unfortunately, the tower is only about 20’ high. But, we *are* a caving club, and suddenly our vertical cavers were on the case, knitting together ladder, tower and cottage, with lengths of rope that would make a Yorkshire pothole look proud. The only problem was – who would climb the ladder, now emerging from the top of the tower? Suddenly, all helpers had vanished – so Lee was duly volunteered. Of course, the screws were rusted in, etc, etc, and the task was long and laborious. It was not till 6pm that the last screw was replaced with the light in its new position. Sadly, the light still does not seem to work – but this could be a problem with the infrared detector. At least, however the light is now within reach to investigate.

Once again, a big thank you to everyone who helped out, but there is still a huge amount to be done. The library roof is not yet finished, the lobby is to be rendered and decorated, and the lobby floor concreted and tiled. The Foreman’s Lounge needs to be decorated. The scaffold tower needs to be erected on the other side of the cottage to move the other light, and while we have the tower, the gable ends should be repaired and decorated. There are still three downstairs and all (seven) of the upstairs window frames to be stripped and stained. The dormer weather boards need to be stripped and stained too. I have now obtained a dehumidifier for the shed, which needs to be plumbed and wired in before the winter. The shed is in a poor state of repair with many boards around the back (the north and east facing sides) twisted and broken. Now that the wall is finished (a thank you to BTCV), we can take away the stones, and complete the lawn. We know that will be a huge task! And one day, it would be nice to sort out the parking area to remove the mud and improve the drainage.

So, I shall be planning another work weekend later on in the summer (see page 3) to progress some of these tasks – particularly finishing off the library roof and lobby. If you would be able to help in these, please do let me know.

Ben Cooper