



Fragments from France - 21

Those who progressed through the books of Norbert Casteret en route to speleological enlightenment will perhaps remember the **Gouffre d'Esparros** which was referred to in "Cave Men New and Old". Casteret and Germain Gattet discovered and explored the cave in 1938 and were highly impressed by the profusion and quality of the formations in the lowest levels. Casteret's book gives an indulgent account of a religious Mass held in one of these decorated chambers. In 1961 a group of MCG members visited this area of the Haute Garonne, found the tiny village of Esparros, about 40km southwest of Lannemezan, and asked the locals about this cave. We received the most evasive of replies and were unable to locate and explore Gouffre d'Esparros.

It transpired much later that there was considerable animosity surrounding access to this site, almost to the point of open warfare. Having plugged the entrance passage at a low crawl, local influence was suspected of planning to commercialise the cave. The cave was declared a national heritage site in 1987 and the lower section made accessible by a mined tunnel in 1998. Visits are best made by prior reservation in high season; parties are limited to 20 persons.

Gouffre d'Esparros is not quite one of the gems of French show-caves but is worth a visit if you are in the area. The entrance tunnel runs slightly upslope for some 200m, entering the cave proper at a dry passage devoid of formation. This is probably the lowest point in the cave and excavations in the clay floor may be connected with an attempt to find a downslope continuation.

The configuration of the areas visited is in the form of a T-junction, entering by the vertical element and then following linked, roomy chambers to right and left - extending about 300m in each direction. There is no active streamway; the only water is seen as small pools amongst the profusion of calcite and aragonite formations, many of them with the usual imaginative names: the Shark's Tooth, Devil's Bridge, etc. It can easily be appreciated why local interest saw the prospect of creating a viable show-cave in Gouffre d'Esparros, but the visit lacks the sense of 'going down a cave' due to the artificiality of its entrance.

The Grotte-aven de Teillet (TM 71) is in the Aude (11) département. Its small entrance in the left-hand flank of the Aude valley is just visible from the N118 road which follows the river down through Axat. The cave extends within the boundary of the village of Fontanès-de-Sault; its code name of TM 71 refers to the local place name of le Teillet, the Montpeyrroux caving club that discovered it and 1971 when it was first explored. It is 5km long and virtually horizontal.

The story of its discovery is amusing. In the opposite, southeastern, flank of the valley is situated the Grotte de l'Aguzou; it is almost 10km long, profusely decorated and open to cavers and the public on the basis of all-day 'safari' trips. While he worked on extending l'Aguzou, J. Bataillou told his two sons to go off and amuse themselves. They duly went off and discovered TM 71 and invited their father to see what they had found. Daddy was overcome by a fit of pique when he saw beautifully decorated open cave, and immediately closed the way in that the boys had found. It must have been like digging in Priddy Green Sink and having your children discover Swildons Hole.

continued on page 4

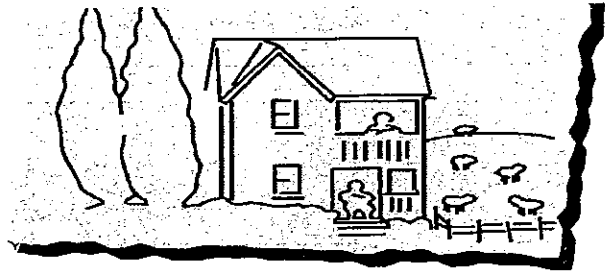
MENDIP CAVING GROUP

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Ben Cooper (Cottage Warden)
Tel: 01256 364199
Or e-mail: ben.cooper@sbs.siemens.co.uk

MCG information:- Tim Francis (Secretary)
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 10.00 pm or at the cottage at 7.00 pm 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] 25 nights accommodation	£30.00
ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:	Full and Probationary Members: £30.00	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	

THE 2000 - 2001 COMMITTEE:

Secretary	Tim Francis	Flat 6, 16 Lambert Avenue, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4QR	Tel: 0181 392 2572 secretary@m-c-g.org.uk
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	J-P Burch	01737 217039
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THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP IS A REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 270088

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MCG News and items from the committee meeting held 06-01-01:-

WELCOME:- to Stephen Duckworth and Adrian Gorman who have been accepted as probationary members.

ON THE MOVE:- Julie Hesketh to Flat 1, 162 Stapleton Hall Road, Stroud Green, London, N4 4QJ Tel: 0208 340 2458

POST CODE CHANGE:- for Marcus Ward which is now GU52 0YB

NEW E-MAILS:-
Barry Clements:
Bazclements@aol.com
Tel: 01293 408631

Ian McKechnie (Webmaster):
webmaster@m-c-g.org.uk

...and a reminder that the MCG's Secretary and Cottage Warden e-mails are:
secretary@m-c-g.org.uk
cottage@m-c-g.org.uk

...and a correction for:
Richard Carey:
RichardMCarey@email.msn.com

...and while we're on e-mail addresses:-
at <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/nca/miscdocs/caf.htm> is the 'British Caving - A Functional Analysis'. This is the report undertaken by CAF Consulting and Development which was commissioned by the NCA.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2001

The AGM of the Mendip Caving Group will be held on Saturday 31st March 2001 at 2.30pm at the Hunter's Lodge Inn. (Tim Francis and Richard Carey will be in Argentina at this time so will be absent.)

SLIDE SHOW & CURRY EVENING:- Zot of the BEC is going to give a slide show of his exploits in Antarctica during the evening of Saturday 3rd February. This will probably be followed by a curry (at a small cost!).

Caving items

BONE HOLE CAVE:- There is to be a cave work weekend on the 3rd and 4th March to fit the new lid. Volunteers are needed so if you're interested please contact Tim Francis or Martin Rowe.

UPPER FLOOD I:- As most of you know we have to provide a list of all trips taken in the Blackmoor Valley Reserve to the Charterhouse Centre. So please remember to write up details of all your trips. Things you might want to include are an indication of water levels, any incidence of pollution (some water pollution was noted in the summer so make a note if you see anything similar) and wildlife (fish, bats etc.). A new idea for 2000 was to record water and air temperatures in Upper Flood. So if you remember please can you make a note of temperatures in Midnight Chamber and in the canal (Puddle Lake).

UPPER FLOOD II:- The 13th - 16th April has been suggested as a date to have another crack at opening up the second entrance. Volunteers are needed so if you're interested please contact Tim Francis or Martin Rowe.

MID-WEEK CAVING:- Apparently there is quite a lot of caving going on most wednesday nights. If you are interested in taking part, meet at the cottage on Wednesday nights at 7pm, or phone Richard Carey on 0117 986 2029

AND FINALLY... don't forget the Annual Dinner at Cox's Mill Restaurant on 31st March 2001, 7:00pm for 7:30pm. The menu can be seen on page 10 of newsletter no.294. The cost is £18.50 per person. Transport will be arranged nearer the time for a small charge.

Please send your order and cheque to Lynn Furneaux at 4 Tor View, Wallaford Road, Buckfastleigh, Devon, TQ11 0AP by 10th March 2001, and make cheques payable to 'Mendip Caving Group'.

FRAGMENTS FROM FRANCE - *continued from page 1*

A family row continued but the cave was eventually made accessible by another entrance which was gated after the first proper exploration. Moves to have the site protected as a Réserve Naturelle (the same as the nearby Grotte de l'Aguzou) were made straightaway. Unlike the SSSI system in the UK, this form of protection actually works in the public interest and is enforceable by law. Cavers are responsible for administering the 'cavers only' access arrangement in agreement with local residents.

We visited the cave on 29 October, in a group of eight cavers led by Philippe Moreno who manages the conservation of this cave and l'Aguzou. Scrambling 7m up the wooded slope above the road brought us to the 1m x 0.5m gated and alarmed entrance; a short flat-out crawl reached a second gate. And that was the only 'obstacle' - the rest of the six-hour trip essentially involved easy walking, stooping occasionally to avoid pendant formations, and gazing in amazement.

About 400m passage, approximately 3m high x 6m wide and with a well-marked taped path, led to a T-junction where a short scramble dropped a few metres into a passage of roomier cross-section. To the left, in the upstream direction, some 600m of easy walking reached a chamber where a boulder choke bars further progress. The chamber is very photogenic with blue/green aragonite formations (their pigmentation is attributable to the presence of zinc rather than copper) on roof and floor, and a remarkable formation in an alcove - a slender 25cm calcite column interrupted at its mid point two small 'saucers', the upper one inverted and separated from the lower by 1cm.

Returning to the T-junction, we then followed the downstream section for about 700m to a pebble-floored stream inlet and continued for a further 250m to a sump chamber. In the approach passage and high up in the wall of this chamber were seen the claw-marks of cave bears and, back upstream from the inlet, a cave bear skull was admired, covered in sparkling crystals and firmly attached to a flowstone floor.

This was one of those rare caves where the profusion and variety of formations are simply impossible to adequately describe, and even the numerous photos taken could be shuffled into any order and still look as though they are in sequence. Mind boggling indeed.

Tony Knibbs, 4 December 2000

COTTAGE BOOKINGS

GROUP	ARRIVE	DEPART	NIGHTS	BEDS
Bridgwater - provisional	Sun 04/02/01	Fri 09/02/01	5	05
Pete Mullins	Sat 17/02/01	Sun 18/02/01	1	11
Westminster School	Sat 17/02/01	Sun 18/02/01	1	14
Dan Carter - fully booked	Sat 17/02/01	Sun 18/02/01		20
Manchester Uni Speleo Club	Fri 23/02/01	Sun 25/02/01	2	15
Members	Fri 02/03/01	Sun 04/03/01		
Pete Mullins	Fri 02/03/01	Sun 04/03/01	1	01
First Bookham	Fri 23/03/01	Sun 25/03/01	2	06
Hampshire Scout CC	Fri 23/03/01	Sun 25/03/01	2	20
Agm Weekend	Fri 30/03/01	Sun 01/04/01	1	
Tony 8 & 10	Fri 30/03/01	Sun 01/04/01	1	02
HMS Sultan	Mon 09/04/01	Fri 13/04/01	4	17

MCG ARCHAEOLOGY WALK - 2001

Lynn Furneaux asked me if I would be willing to arrange a walk and said I would be happy to retrace the steps of one of my previous archaeology walks. The one I've chosen was the first archaeology walk I composed which took place in March 1992. This time it will take place on Saturday 5th May 2001 (members weekend and Bank holiday weekend). If you are interested in joining me for the walk, then meet me at Nordrach Cottage at 9:00am.

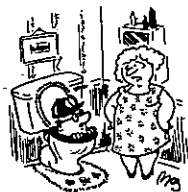
The walk was a bit too long the first time (16 miles!) so I have shortened it a bit. It will now be about 10 miles long and will take place around Burrington, Dolebury and Rowberrow, with a break half way at a hostelry in Rowberrow.

It will be a circular walk starting from Burrington Cafe and will include:-

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 01. Burrington Camp | Iron Age hill fort |
| 02. Bos Swallet | Bronze Age occupation site |
| 03. Read's Cavern | Iron Age occupation site |
| 04. Dolebury Camp | Iron Age hill fort |
| 05. Dolebury Levvy | 1830 haematite mine (Iron Age pottery) |
| 06. Rowberrow village | c20th century ale house! |
| 07. Rowberrow Cavern | Neolithic to Roman occupation site |
| 08. Rowberrow Warren | Iron Age cross-ridge dykes |
| 09. Charterhouse to Uphill route | Roman Road |
| 10. Rowberrow Camp | Iron Age hillside fort |
| 11. Aveline's Hole | Palaeolithic occupation and burial site |

I will bring lots of information on these sites, including pictures of finds and plans of the earthworks. It's a good day out and an opportunity to chat to and get to know other members in a relaxed way. Guests are also welcome.

You would be best advised to wear waterproof boots and clothes, and you might wish to take some food and drink to snack on before we reach the pub (and after). You will also need a Petzl zoom or a torch as we will be looking in a few 'holes'.
by Yvonne Rowe



"Bert, do you have to practice your pot-holing at home?"



"Dad, there's a man to see you about planning permission."

SOME 2001 DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

March 3rd - BCRA Cave Science Symposium, Oxford University.

March 7th - Wilderness Lecture, Dick Willis, 7:30pm, Chemistry Lecture Theatre, University of Bristol.

March 24/25th - Cave Photography Group Field Meeting, talks, presentations and underground photographic trip, Yorkshire Dales.
(Booking forms on cottage noticeboard or contact Richard Rushton on cpg-meetings@caves.org.uk)

May 19/20th - Cave Radio and Electronics Group Field meeting, Cornwall.

October 12/14th - Hidden Earth 2001, National Caving Conference, Buxton

COTTAGE DOINGS

By the Cottage Warden

NIGHT LIGHT

You may have noticed in the last newsletter that I intend to install a night light in the cottage. The night light is intended to come on in the dark, and provide a dim light so that people can find their way downstairs without the need to turn on the main lights. This is a safety feature, to help prevent people falling downstairs in the incredible cottage darkness (at least incredible for us townies). The night light comprises a photo-cell and 3W low wattage bulb. The estimated running cost of the light is about 60p per year.

I managed to find time to install the night light in the hallway at the cottage during the January members weekend. Temporarily, I have hung the light as a pendant fitting directly hanging off the photo-cell in the hallway. This was really just to see how it worked, and also because I had left the light fitting at home! I also left all my cable clips at home, so have not yet clipped back the cables.

The photo-cell seems to work quite reliably, turning the light on just before dusk and turning it off again in the morning. The light is surprisingly bright for just 3 Watts - seemingly as bright as a 60W tungsten bulb (it is supposed to be equivalent to a 15W bulb), but that's a bonus really, although I admit that it seems odd to have the night light as bright as the main hallway light. Maybe I should replace the standard lights with 3W low wattage bulbs too?

EMERGENCY KEY

Some of you may be aware that we have lodged an emergency key with Mary Fry. The purpose of this key is to enable people to gain access who have become locked out by virtue of a failed Cotag. It should not be used for any other purpose - please do not put Mary in the embarrassing position of saying 'No' by asking for this key for any other purpose. It is certainly not available to non-members who turn up at the cottage without booking.

Meanwhile, to help guests who want to stay at the cottage at short notice, I have lodged a Guest Key with a local member. I would like to thank Richard Carey for his help in this. Guests should contact me as usual to arrange their booking. Usually, this involves posting me a cheque for the key deposit (£15), and on receipt I then send them the Cotag and key. Clearly this requires about two weeks, and so it has been difficult to accommodate guest bookings at short notice. From now on, guests may be able to book at short notice by contacting me (the Cottage Warden) as usual. This is important, as I hold the master booking list. If there is insufficient time to arrange the key by post, then I will make enquiries with Richard to see if it is convenient for the guest to collect the key from Bristol. Often, Richard may also be able to bring the key to the Mendips, depending of course on the particular date and time. Richard will collect and hold the key deposit from the guest in the usual way.

SNIPPETS

'We used to live in 'ole in f'ground'

A member of the public told his councillor that he had to swerve his car after a sheep suddenly popped its head out of a pothole in the road. The hole, near Pontadawe, is some three feet long and a foot deep.

Swansea councillor Ioan Richards said, "It comes to something when a pothole is big enough for a sheep to use as a shelter." A spokesman for Neath and Port Talbot County Borough Council said it would urgently investigate the claims.

Western Mail, 23rd Sept. 2000

NEW WORLD DEPTH RECORD

During the months of August and September 2000 an international team made up of Spanish, French, Russians and Ukrainians were working in Sima Voronya (Massive of Arbika - Western Cucaso in the republic of Abkhazia) in two phases of work. We planned to take our team (MTDE Team) to the end of the exploration at -1410m during the second phase.

During the third phase of this ambitious project of exploration, our Ukrainian friends were able to reach a depth -1680m, stopping at the head of a well of 70m, thus establishing a new world depth record. At present, the exploration of the sima continues and it is thought to be already at a depth of -1750m!

Sergio Garca-Dils, Head of Expedicin "Voronya 2000 - Second Phase"

DISAPPEARING!

A Victorian underground chalk mine may be behind mystery holes which are swallowing up parts of houses in a street in Reading, Berkshire. All the houses at risk have been evacuated.

BBC Ceefax, 09.01.01

(Ed: Is this the mine at Emmer Green that Geoff Beale has taken us down?)

SWINSTO GREAT AVEN COLLAPSE UPDATE

I went for a look at the bottom of Swinsto's Aven on Sunday 17th December. I wouldn't have wanted to be near there when that lot came down. The good news is that both exits from the bottom of the aven are passable. Philosopher's is do-able, although it was somewhat sporting squeezing past all that fresh debris. The 'wet crawls' route isn't much different to before so I would suggest people went that way. I think everything that was going to come down has come down so it would seem unlikely that through-trippers would be unable to get out of Kingsdale Master Cave. Take Care!

Tim Francis

From a puzzled reader...

...I'm intrigued by these 'larva' caves which Tim and Richard visited while in Argentina (see newsletter no. 291). Now I know Tim is a *bit* on the small side but I didn't think he was *that* small. I await, with interest, his metamorphosis intoWHAT?

Suggestions, please, to the editor. *(Spellcheck be damned)*

MCG CAVING AND SOCIAL CALENDAR

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
		<u>2001</u>		
3rd Feb	Nordrach	Slideshow - Zot	Tim Francis	0181 392 2572
Feb TBA	Devon	Cave meet	Martin Rowe	01524 762664
3/4th Mar	Mendip	Bone hole w/e	Martin Rowe	01524 762664
3/4th Mar	Mendip	Cottage work w/e	Ben Cooper	01256 364199
31st Mar	Mendip	MCG AGM	Tim Francis	0181 392 2572
31st Mar	Mendip	MCG Annual Dinner	Lynn Furneaux	01364 643679
13-16th Apr	Mendip	Upper Flood II dig	Martin Rowe	01524 762664
5th May	Mendip	Archaeology walk	Yvonne Rowe	01524 762664
2.3rd Jun	Mendip	Cottage work w/e	Ben Cooper	01256 364199
Jun TBA	Wales	Gower Peninsula	Richard Carey	0117 986 2029
TBA (n/l 292)	Somerset	Castle Cary tunnels	Martin Rowe	01524 762664
Every Weds	Mendip	Mid-week caving	Richard Carey	0117 986 2029

LIBRARY ADDITIONS

Two new videos have been purchased recently and are kept with the others in a cupboard in the library. They may be borrowed in the same way as books i.e. sign out in the library loans book and return as soon as possible.

Gaping Gill - 100 Years of Exploration by Sid Perou (in conjunction with Bradford Pothole Club) - a re-enactment of Martel's 1895 descent by ladder.

Secrets of the Mendip Hills - first shown on HTV and including Cheddar Gorge, East Mendip industrial remains, Priddy Fair, Charterhouse and Second World War sites. (Good for the oldies, this one!)

The Darkness Beckons by Martyn Farr - a reprint of the second edition with a 24pp supplement which describes developments since 1991.

Cave Exploration in Canada - a second hand book so not up to date, but will serve as a starting point for anyone visiting Canada. Similarly, The Castellana Grottos (Italy) and Grottos of Majorca.

Underground Clwyd by Cris Ebbs "a pictorial expedition into the nether regions of Northeast Wales" - consisting of photographs (not very well reproduced although some of them are historical) accompanied by a short descriptive text. Cris has also produced a guidebook to the Caves of Northeast Wales which has been ordered for the library.

Library update

As you will all know by now, the library is up and running although it is still in a bit of a shambles. The exchange newsletters and journals are gradually being checked; as each club's publications are catalogued they are being sorted into bundles kept together with a band of paper. You are welcome to look at them (and even borrow them if you must!) but please replace them in the correct place. Eventually there will be a file containing Excel sheets for each club publication so that you will know what we have.

The books are on the shelves in a vague sort of regional or subject order, but need to be properly arranged when I, or someone else, has time to do it. Some books are 'REFERENCE ONLY' and should not be removed from the library (usually we have a second copy which can be borrowed).

WHEN BORROWING ITEMS PLEASE SIGN THEM OUT IN THE LOANS BOOK AND RETURN THEM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (six months should be ample time to read them). When you bring them back sign them back into the loans book and put them in the wire tray on the shelf to the right of the door; this enables me to check them off in the book.

PLEASE NOTE: DO NOT PASS ITEMS ON TO A THIRD PARTY WITHOUT MAKING A NOTE IN THE LOANS BOOK as it is very easy for them to get lost in these circumstances. (If you are not able to get to the loans book please email or phone me so that I can keep track of the situation)

INCIDENTALLY, THERE ARE SOME OUTSTANDING LOANS, SOME FROM PRE LIBRARY EXTENSION DAYS. Please can they be returned to the library as soon as possible.

Thanks, Joan