

Three more meetings were held at the same venue on a monthly basis with the same core participants, and by the end of September an expedition Bank Account had been opened with a starting balance of £60 donated from C.C.P.C. funds to set things moving. More than forty firms were contacted to try and obtain free or discounted goods, and a few replied with offers of help (see Acknowledgements). The equipment requirements were assessed, and preliminary cost estimates based on thirty cavers indicated that a deposit of £30 per head should be adequate. Alternative transport arrangements were studied including Minibus hire, towed trailers, and the use of personal vehicles. Several friendly caving clubs had expressed a willingness to participate and the French club Ziloko Gizonak had been invited as some recompense for their hospitality in various trips to the Pyrenees.

By the end of 1982, twelve club members and four Orpheus members had paid deposits and a further fifteen cavers had promised to pay, so it looked as though the budgetted costs would be met and the tackle burden handled effectively. An overall plan of all the activities necessary prior to the descent was drawn up so that the critical activities could be defined (See Appendix 5.). Detailed studies of alternative tackling arrangements and descent strategies were made. It was decided to form teams of about four cavers, each of whom was well-known to the others, and to plan descents on a team basis to simplify management. By Christmas the organisation seemed fairly well defined and we moved ahead confidently into the New Year.

The Warm-up Month by Month

January was a month of hectic activity albeit on phone and paper. The outbreak of Histoplasmosis on the Mexico Expedition had resulted in heavy claims on the B.C.R.A. Insurance, and we were warned that the premiums that we had budgetted for could well be doubled. Several alternative insurance firms were contacted, but their premiums were all more than double those budgetted, so a reappraisal of expedition finances was carried out. The costing was performed in some detail as it had been decided to approach the British Sports Council for a grant, and a complete financial and organisational statement was required as part of the application procedure. The budget for about thirty expedition members, assuming a trailer was used to transport tackle, came to about £6000 including about £1000 for rope and hangers. Luckily the Westminster Speleological Group, the Wessex Caving Club, and several other clubs provided enough additional members to enable the costs to be met, as well as providing an injection of continental caving expertise. A Newsletter was circulated to the many far-flung members to inform them of the current position, including estimates of personal costs, personal tackle needs, and dates of practice meets.

During February, the Mayor of Engins wrote asking for the expedition dates to be confirmed for him to complete his diary of expeditions to the Gouffre Berger for 1983. He asked that a leader be nominated to be totally responsible for all activities during the period booked, and John now took on this role with Ralph as deputy. We requested the Mayor to reserve the 1st. to 12th. August for us, as this promised to provide the best weather and suited the holiday arrangements of most expedition members. Having fixed the dates and studied all the alternative routes to the area, the ferry bookings were made. The optimum route for length, cost, timing, and ferry availability appeared to lie via Dover, Calais, then down the Autoroutes via Paris, and Lyons to Grenoble. We had obtained a discount from 'Sealink' ferries and most members took advantage of this, although some obtained discounts through personal contacts.