

To the Bottom.
(By Simon Leach)

Paul Gelling (of that not-to-be-mentioned club), and myself descended the Gouffre Berger at midday, Tuesday 2nd. August, expecting the cave to be rigged to the bottom and with the job of taking emergency supplies to Camp2 en route. We dropped rapidly down the Entrance Series and at Camp1 found out the latest news. We had extra work to do, and would not get an easy ride after all! We rapidly proceeded to the end of the long canal into the 'Couffinades' where the previous party had dumped the remaining five tackle bags. Here we set to work.

From the Abelle Cascade onwards, tackling went smoothly until we arrived at 'Mât'. The rope we had cut from the spare end of the Gontard's rope to replace the abraded Balcony rope (not necessary in fact) was used for rigging the short but 'awkward if wet' climbs in the Cascades. Luckily Paul had brought two short ropes and extra hangers as insurance, and they proved invaluable later.

Paul could reel off the names and depths of pitches as he had organised the 'pirates' tackle, so he rigged fluently as far as 'Mât'. To my surprise, he hesitated halfway down. Half an hour later he continued to the bottom. I casually clipped on my descender and followed, only to encounter similar problems.

The rope passed diagonally down across the first stage of the pitch on to a sloping boulder, at the bottom end of which a metal spike acted as a rebelay. Unfortunately, an intermediate bolt belay above this had sheared off and we had no bolting kit to replace it. Hence I slid down the boulder, clipped on to the spike, and was pulled backwards off the slope by the upper rope! I found myself hanging spreadeagled on my back underneath the boulder with no purchase to right myself! A clear example of how not to carry tackle sacks on your back while doing S.R.T.

Paul passed helpful comments, like "Interesting isn't it?", until the problem was resolved by dumping the sack into the plunge pool below. This enabled me to regain a more normal attitude (of body if not of mind). Paul never recovered mentally from his experience, and let me tackle the rest of the cave. Subsequent parties, not heeding our warnings about needing a bolting kit also enjoyed themselves here.

'Singe' and 'Grande Cascade' followed on uneventfully, and then, Lo and Behold, 'La Baignoire', for which one of Paul's ropes was used as there was none allocated for it in the tackle sacks. At 'Little Monkey'-the derivation from the french eludes me- Paul just said "Traverse, followed by descent to aerial rope guide away from the water". Hence, no trouble was experienced here apart from selecting the correct traverse ropes from the general knitting at the head of the pitch. Other people unsettled by 'Mât' (of no reputation), were apparently overawed by 'Little Monkey', which Paul later told me was of considerable renown. You can thus know too much in advance!

After 'Hurricane', a steady plod took us past '1000m. inlet' to the head of another pitch, bypassed back up on the left by an oxbow containing the remnants of an earlier diving expedition (metallic, not organic!). Wading and traversing deeper pools, brought us to the 'Pseudo-siphon', too long to traverse and too forbidding to swim. A boat jammed in a nearby crack deflated after twenty feet and forced me to swim back. A good point to retire at!