

"A Short Trip down The Berger"  
(By Brian Cowie)

Towards the end of the first week of the Berger booking, various parties were 'having a go at the bottom'. After two trips in already, I sat back and watched the brave set out with their ginormous loads, ragged sleeping bags, weird assortments of food, bundles of carbide, muddy S.R.T. gear, and most importantly a plastic bag which cost each of us £30.

Meanwhile, back at the campsite, now a truly British Armpit, our great leader was kicking his heels and giving people cigars. To cut a long story short, Lenny and I were engaged by John for a short trip to see how far we could get in 'about twelve hours'. This was decided after a particularly heavy night on the local plonk whilst listening to Andy Ives in concert. To make matters worse a 6a.m. wake up call was arranged.

At the appointed hour, breakfast was prepared and by 8a.m. the three of us stood at the entrance. The only good thing about this time of night is that you can walk to the cave in caving gear without melting. We took forty minutes to get to the bottom of Aldo's, and were at Camp1 in less than an hour and a half. Here we partook of a Lenny meal of meat balls, dehydrated veg., and 'Smash' to give it body. As we were all feeling fine we decided to continue down. Thinks, thought me...no wetsuit!

"Hello people going out, can you lend me a wetsuit?"

"You can have mine if you bring it back out." chorused the reply.

Picking a suit to fit, the next problem was a sleeping bag, again no problem when you think of the 1000ft. haul out!

Liam and Phil, who had spent the previous night at Camp1, were heading for the bottom, so we joined them and became a party of five. We moved off through the Hall of the Thirteen to meet the water. Here, I discovered that Kevin was larger than me, or rather his wetsuit was! Lenny too had problems with a leak in his 'Pontonière'. Nevertheless we all enjoyed the cascades and found the bottom alluringly calling us on.

By Camp2, John reckoned it would be a good idea to head back to Camp1. Lenny had got the itch for the bottom, so leaving the three of them to continue, John and I made a leisurely ascent. It is worthwhile taking time over this part of the cave as there are many fine formations, some off the beaten track.

Cosy in wet sleeping bags at Camp1 after a hot drink, you soon doze off waiting for people, but you don't sleep long when the Westminster arrive! At least Chris gave us some hot chocolate to drink...Thanks Chris!

Eventually Lenny (the man with a ferry to catch who had to be out in three hours!) Phil and Liam arrived back after a most successful trip. Lenny gets fed, wrings out his furry suit and gets into a sleeping bag to warm up, far too worried about the ferry to sleep. Less than an hour later, the original three are off again, noting it's a lot harder with a heavy load. However, thanks to Lenny's "secret weapon" (a concoction of Glucose, salts and vitamins?) we made good progress until the last pool before Aldo's where we stopped to fill up with water. Lenny taking things a bit far falls in...hey presto another wet Lenny! Could be serious we thought, but Lenny, still high on adrenalin switches to automatic and gets out before us. (N.B. Don't let John meddle about with hauling systems underground!). Altogether a 24hr. trip, double that expected, but one which I would readily repeat.