

Installing the Telephone Line.
, (By Bill Brooks)

When Andy and I arrived at the campsite, we learned that although the first tackling parties had taken in three cable drums for the telephone line, no connections had been made. Since Andy and I fancied a 'quick trip' into the system before going to the bottom, we offered to make the necessary connections as far as Camp 1. Little did we know what we were in for...we ended up spending almost 24 hrs. underground...

At about ten o'clock on the Wednesday morning Andy and I positioned a phone on the ledge above the entrance, checked to see that it was working correctly, and set off down the cave with a portable handset, leaving Jenny on the ledge as operator. We followed the cable and reached the first drum in the Meanders after Cairn shaft. The drum had a wooden handle through it, but on reflection, it would have been better to have had a tube through the centre with a loop of rope or tape sling round the tube ends for easier carrying, as the single piece of wood needed both hands to hold it. In the event I dropped the handle anyway so had to unwind the cable by hand. This slowed us down considerably more than we expected.

We found the second and third drums positioned accurately, so that as we came to the end, the next drum was waiting to be joined nearby. The joints were tied with a figure-of-eight knot leaving long ends, with straight twist connections and insulating tape to cover the join. At all stages of the joint we tested the phone with the surface operator. Very important as it stopped her sleeping for long!

At Aldo's we connected our 3-core grey into the red and white left in for us by the Belgians. This saved us unwinding one of our drums although we carried it with us. Now we had to check carefully for breaks in the cable, which always seemed to occur on or near pitches. Checks with the surface established that the cable was in good condition, as we continued on down to Camp 1 with minor repairs en route. We had good contact from Camp 1, but this was soon broken by others coming in behind us! This was a recurring problem and unavoidable due to the way the cable was run. The following advice may be useful for future expeditions:

Do not buy any cable... There is enough in the cave, laid and on drums, to connect the Mayor of Engins to Grenoble! Take some cable clips with hardened steel pins and plastic inserts to pin the line to the walls on pitches and thus keep it away from the climbers. (You will need an agile rigger to do this!) Mark your connections and cable with brightly coloured tape so that everyone knows which cable is in use, and can spot any breaks. Ensure that a reliable handset and batteries are used so there is no doubt when trying to make contact.

Various Adventures.

Once the cave was rigged to the bottom, several parties completed bottoming trips, whilst others had photographic trips and 'Fun' trips to various places. It would be an impossible task to try and recount the variety of experiences that occurred, but to give some flavour of what transpired, the following accounts, somewhat edited in places, have been included.