

CCPC



Newsletter

No. 47

January 1996.

AND THE TORTURE GOES ON !

Lumb Hole is the dramatic resurgence cave in the Cressbrook dale region of the river Wye catchment area. It is quite an impressive rising in flood, and is thought to drain the western end of Longstone Edge, and a possibility it may carry water from the Stoney Middleton area.

Crewe Climbing and Potholing Club have been undertaking a dig in the cave over the past five years. After a great effort and a lot of enthusiasm, by many members of the club, a sufficient breakthrough was achieved last July (95) giving way to approximately 900ft of passage, varying from stooping to crawling, sometimes in sloppy mud.

The cave is formed on two levels, an upper series exceeding 350ft of abandoned fossil passage, incorporating a small chamber. This level ends at an impenetrable bedding plane, which emits a small draught.

The lower series which begins 200ft from the entrance where the cave splits to the two levels, is the active streamway during October through to mid June. This is a downward sloping bedding plane, which breaks into a 40ft long, 5ft in diameter phreatic tube with an inviting sump at the end. This is 18m below the entrance.

The sump was dived on November 11th to a squeeze in a bedding plane, 15m from base at -9m depth, so obviously the cave seems to be going at a deep trend.

This seems to of brought the cave to a conclusion for this year, due to the water level which is not likely to drop any lower, so either an underwater dig is needed, or maybe the sump could be pumped out in mid-September 96.

Further back from the sump is a draughting crawl which is in need of digging, it is approximately 40ft below the upper series, and it may be the answer to by-passing the sump. So if 96 is as successful as this year, maybe more secrets will be revealed from the complex geology of this area.

DARREN CONDE.

"Nobody told me it would be like this"

A LETTER FROM THE HEART

Dear Mum,

Here as promised is the no holds barred expose exclusive of **THAT** day out with a cave rescue team.

Cave rescue groups are interesting things, they are labelled alphabetically in order from the area where cave sites are. This means that Buxton contains the depot and teams A + B. A fine body of heros ready to leap into action and bloody crawl where no man in his right mind would go. Other teams surround these gems on spelology each with an alphabetical assignation making them sound like vitamins.

The crew lot are G, there is no H, also as our leader reminds us Crewe is an independent cave rescue body. It lacks the epithet rescue organisation, infact any mention of the word organisation is completely missing from much outside of the clubs tackle sheds.

This puts the group on a similar evolutionary scale as Dads Army or the Trumpton Fire Brigade in the rescue world. None the less, once or twice a year a call to arms sounds, some hole picked, some gear polished and Derbyshire C.R.O. called in as refs. Well the hole in question was P8, a 'sporting' pot filled with mud, water and radon.

"Never got no stretcher out of there a 'fore' remarked the experts. We had a new flash make of stretcher with a nice furry lining and an old body bag for insulation, (the bag had been used some years ago to remove some long lost corpse from another pit). "Yeh, 'e fell into bits and a shovel was used, but its been hosed out since then", remarked Brian, a full time ghoul and past time Chemical engineer. I hoped he was joking Brians favourite hobby is grabbing hold of novice cavers and telling them about potholers"who are still down there". I had climbed with Brian too, his climbing tales are full of !!!! and he was still preserved in the ice ten years later !!!!, anyway back to my tale.

On being informed by Ralph that I had volunteered as victim for stage two of the rescue I went out and raided every bit of kit I could, even down to surgical gloves from the school labs and a woolly hat gran had knitted. I stuffed myself into thermal underwear, a rexothem quilted suit, another furry suit, plastic over suit and second P.V.C suit on top. Mars bars, gloves and socks were also shoved on or stuffed some where. To cap it all my borrowed lamp blew up and coated my hat in clouds of burning plastic fumes.

I set off for my adventure escorted by a caving friend and his brand new carbide generator, (carbide is that fun stuff that generates acetylene gas when in contact with water. Cavers use these things for light and to satisfy latent pyromania. This can make a caving trip look like a very muddy re-enactment of the Pentecost with lots of blokes walking about with tongues of fire on their head), while I sloshed along the flooded floor feeling like a sumo wrestler in my layers of clothing. Suddenly the light dimmed and there was a clattering thump as some thing skidded

into the stream. Rockfall! Brian will be saying things like "yeh buried under four tones had to leave them there, stream still runs red despite the quick line", but it was worse..... Ian's carbide generator had fallen in, Ian dived after it and triumphantly in the air "I wonder if it works", he pondered as he jammed it back in place. Before I could scream the narrow passage space filled with a golden "Woof!" and acrid fumes, (Brian's voice echoed in mind "Yeh, found them frazzled like crisp. Gas filled passage went up like a deep fat fryer". I was looking forward to the safety of the stretcher.

A Journey in a stretcher on a rescue is a long tale of odd angles, dark corners, nose to wall intimacy (and interface) with limestone, caving boots, wet puddles, gushing streams, fingers, acetylene flames and bad language. The cold nibbles at your extremities and begins its numbing creep towards your cave.

I was in a unique position to observe my fellow cave dwellers. The males can be of two morphic forms, bears and ferrets. Bears are huge, powerful men with huge powerful beer guts able to do huge powerful things. Ferrets are lean and wire like, they can leap up passage walls, squeezing up to the roof on down the lowest crevice. The ferrets scampered about the roof rigging up pulleys systems under the directions of the "arch ferret" Kev. While the bears jammed and lifted the stretcher through the tight winds and twists of a two foot passage. How they did it I'll never understand, and how anyone has the strength and endurance to shift an awkward load the way they did was beyond me. There was a female of the species present, Jane the most I saw of Jane that day were her fingers as they tried to stop my face being scraped off on the wall.

As the end drew near, we played our joker for this game, a respirator. The object for the contestants here is to get the inobilized victim up the waterfall for maximum points the victim should still be alive at the end of the ordeal.

The plan was to fix a respirator over my face for this point. What followed was the subject of nightmares. The force of the water tore the mask forward and it began to rapidly fill the demand valve was now under water and began to inhale liquid. Unable to move my arms or legs I could sense the water rising over my eyes. My screams would not have been heard over the roar of the water and would have wasted precious air. Although the time span of all this must have been much less than a minute, it felt a lot longer. The terror that the stretcher might jam or the lads stop for a fag was very real. suddenly something knocked the mask partially away from my face. I later found out that it was one of the team who had guessed what was happening, (I must still owe him a pint). Some of the water drained out and the stretcher shot up in to day light.

The speed and teamwork of the crew had impressed the observers. They had solved the problem in only three hours. A lot of experience had been gained especially about respirations and waterfalls.

I sloshed my sodden freezing way back to the welcome warmth of Kev's car feeling lucky to be alive but some how I could have this voice drifting back from an alternative future..... "Yeh the respirator failed and she drowned under the waterfall..... it took weeks for anyone to notice the difference".

With Love and Crushed Mars bars

Your daughter.

HILLOCKS MINE

Last summer , when my daughter Eleanor was about six and a half I took her and two friends of a similar age caving . The following is her own account of the trip , and I hope it shows how much she liked it . So , next time I take her , if there are any offers of help , please dont hesitate to speak up...

I got in the car with Brian , my dad , and Ruth . Ross came in his own car . Edward is a friend of my dads and my mums . He came in his own car with William and Alistair , his sons . We parked our cars by the side of the road . There was a bog next to the road . Me and the boys played in the mud and my boot got stuck! Dad carried me out without my right boot then Brian and Ross had a tug of war with my boot . It was like pulling a brick out of set concrete ! At last they got it out and we changed in to our caving stuff and set off down a track . We climbed over a stile and down a hole in the ground and through some pipes (Gildrums) and in to a big chamber and through a low tunnel with water in the bottom . The tunnel gradually grew bigger and wider and then there was a huge drop ; it was 8 metres deep and 2 metres wide . We were lowered down it and into a little chamber with a tunnel leading down with a ledge in between the tunnels and a tunnel the far side . We went through the tunnel and came to the next pitch which was 15 metres , we were lowered down it then we climbed over some rocks and came to the end then we went all the way back . In the last chamber there was a hole going up to the surface . I liked it a lot . The twins didnt like it . I have been down some other caves since . I'm going to go down Giants to the end , I only went to the Pitch before .

Eleanor Edmonds , aged 6½

Eleanor Edmonds

HOW TO BUILD A FXSOMETHINGOROTHER.

One or two people have expressed an interest in making an "FX2" to the new "slimline" design, so hear goes. You will need a 220mm length of 40mm plastic pipe (sink outlet) with end caps to match. Glue one into the base of the pipe and cut a section out of the other to accommodate a no.7 cable clip (or no. 5 if you plan to use a smaller attachment carabiner). Drill a 10mm hole off-centre in the same end cap to accommodate the cable grommet from a standard "miners lamp". Fit the grommet, which should be a tight fit then, with the aid of a little Fairy liquid, push the cable from the same lamp through the grommet. The cable should then be bent back on itself and taped to prevent it being accidentally pulled back when in use.

Take two "F" cells and solder end to end in series. [Or better still get someone else to do it for you! (Private joke)] Solder a wire to the positive terminal and another to the negative on what is to become the bottom cell. This is best done about 3cms from the base of the cell so that the cell fits snugly into the end cap previously glued into the waste pipe. (You can use silicone sealer for this)

Before fitting the cells drill a 6mm hole about 6mm from the top end of the pipe to take a "spout bolt" which secures the pipe clip previously mentioned, (to take an attachment carabiner.) Fit this pipe clip to the end of the pipe with the nut inside.

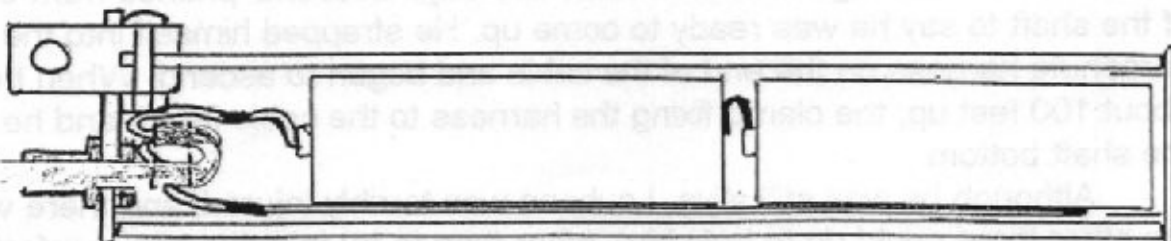
Drop the cells into the pipe (I normally squeeze a little silicone in at the same time to prevent movement later) Solder the cable to the wires coming from the cells (don't forget polarity and insulation) then glue in the end cap. A copious quantity of silicone makes the whole thing watertight. If your worried about pulling this end cap out then either use a better glue or secure it with a couple of self tapers or pop rivets.

All you need now are a couple of 2.4 volt bulbs and away you go!

You can obtain the waste pipe and end caps from a friendly plumber. The club has a supply of headsets (donation welcome!) Ralph has a supply of cable clips and hopefully a supply of cheap BRAND NEW "F" cells in the very near future.

The lamp should cost you a fraction of what you would pay for an "FX2" but you will have to buy a suitable charger ... or is this a cue for another article!!!

P.TON (Equipment Advisor)



The Gouffre de la Pierre Sainte-Martin : Summer 1995

When our small group of club members, and families, arrived at Tardet in the Basque area of the Pyrenees it was just about ^{forty} thirty-five years to the day since Max Cosyns sent his message to Norbert Casteret : "Have discovered deepest known vertical shaft." That discovery was the start of an amazing story of exploration and courage in the early days of modern caving. Sadly it is a story that includes a tragic accident.

Leaving our camp site in the valley, Annie and I drove up the Sainte-Engrace valley to the French/Spanish border at Col de la Pierre Sainte-Martin, some 4500 feet higher. The area around the border is incredible, with vast patches of exposed limestone showing amongst the greener areas of the high pastures. There were a number of deep shafts close to the road, and by deep I mean well over a hundred feet, and we spent some time watching the Jackdaws struggle to fly up from their nest sites somewhere beyond the limit of daylight below. We soon found the top of the Lepineux shaft, the original entrance to the P.S.M., although it was not quite as expected! The great shakehole leading to the opening has been capped with steel beams supporting a concrete slab roof, although there is a locked, barred gate set in the side, and it's all covered with loose rock so it blends into the landscape. On a rock buttress close by are memorial plaques.

346 metres
The original exploration started in earnest in 1951, using a bicycle powered winch to lower the cavers into the gigantic chasm. Georges Lepineux was the first to descend, finding the shaft to be 1,135 feet deep. He landed in a huge chamber, which was later named after him, and three other cavers, including Marcel Loubens, soon followed. Loubens found a way down through a squeeze and rigged a ladder into a second much larger chamber below, containing a river. The second cavern was named 'La Salle Elizabeth Casteret'. Worries about the winch brought this expedition to a close, and by the time the last man was safely up the machine was just about worn out.

August 1952 was to be the main attempt to get to the bottom of the system. The team were equipped with an electric winch weighing nearly two hundredweight, and were well prepared with everything needed for an extensive period of activity underground. Marcel Loubens was the first to go down the shaft, followed by Tazieff, Labeyrie, and Occhialini. This first group carried out a set programme of activities, including dye testing the underground river, and discovered a third huge chamber. After five days Loubens 'phoned from the base of the shaft to say he was ready to come up. He strapped himself into the parachute harness on the end of the cable and began to ascend. When he was about 100 feet up, the clamp fixing the harness to the cable failed, and he fell to the shaft bottom.

Although he was still alive, Loubens was terribly injured, and there was little the other three could do to help him, other than to try to make him comfortable.

Meanwhile, on the surface, the expedition doctor was waiting to descend, using the repaired clamp. Courage indeed ! He got down safely and prepared Loubens for the trip to the surface, strapping him to a simple stretcher. In places the shaft was narrow with many places where the stretcher could become jammed, so Casteret and five scouts from Lyon began to ladder the shaft in order to guide the stretcher as it passed. They took up positions at -263 feet, -492 feet, -699 feet, and -787 feet, and then they waited. Sadly, just as the surface team were ready to start lifting, the doctor declared Loubens dead. After 18 hours in the shaft the scouts returned to the surface, and it was then decided that it was impossible to recover the body without risking further accidents: Marcel Loubens was buried by his companions in the chamber where he died. It was 15th. August 1952. On the boulder beside his grave the following words were written:

"ICI MARCEL LOUBENS A VECU LES DERNIER
JOURS DE SA VIE COURAGEUSE"

The others reached the surface safely, and the expedition was abandoned for that year.

The following year many of the same team were back in action, and explored downstream to the most enormous chamber they had yet discovered. They called it "Salle de la Verna", in honour of the Lyons scouts from the La Verna troop. Their survey work showed that they had broken the record, and reached the deepest point so far discovered on earth. (It was 1953, and man had just reached the top of Everest for the first time.) (-2389 feet)

In 1954 the main purpose of the summer expedition was to recover the remains of Loubens for proper burial. This technically and emotionally difficult task was completed successfully, and the team also reached the barrier of the lake at the "Tunnel du Vent", which they were unable to pass. As exploration continued the French Electricity engineers began to take an interest. At that time the valley of Sainte-Engrace had no electricity and plans were made to use the underground river, discovered by Loubens, to drive the turbines of a hydro-electric station. The engineering works carried out to achieve this end have resulted in a major benefit to cavers ! Usually the reverse is true. A tunnel was driven horizontally into the mountain to intersect the Salle de la Verna so that the waters could be captured and brought to the surface. They would then fall through pipe-lines nearly 2,300 feet to a generating station below. Something went wrong, and after completing the tunnel the project was abandoned, which is probably the best thing for cavers.

(Langa)

Back to 1995. Ralph Johnson, Paul Holdcroft, John Gillett and I had arranged to meet Michel outside the bar in Sainte-Engrace at 8.00am. for a trip in through the E.D.F. tunnel (Electricite De France) and as far upstream as time allowed. Michel is a major caving figure in the area and co-ordinates rescues in the P.S.M. area. John G. and Ralph already knew him from previous visits to the area, but I felt as if Paul and I got a few hard looks as we got sorted out at the bottom of the hill. To reach the tunnel entrance involves a considerable slog uphill through dense forest, probably taking about two hours Ralph had warned us. We set off with Ralph going right while the rest of us followed Michel to the left. "No

Lauga

wonder it takes two hours!", Michel commented in French. He spoke very little English, but I got the feeling he understood most of what was said. Fifty minutes later we arrived at the wooden cabin outside the tunnel entrance, having been well tested for fitness by Michel's pace on the way up! Several times he left the obvious route to use a short-cut ('recoursee' ?? -it's not in my dictionary) and clearly he knew the mountain very well.

Once changed, but carrying our oversuits, we approached the entrance which is closed by a pair of steel doors. The wind howls through the gaps in the doors and getting them open can be difficult because of the enormous pressure, but combined tactics soon overcame this and we were in. Not wanting to break the normal club traditions, my carbide light refused to function so I had to resort to the back up electric while plodding along struggling with bits of 'Ariane' generator. More hard looks from Michel ! I gave up and started taking notice of the tunnel. It runs straight and level for hundreds of yards to a three way junction, where the main route branches right, then after another straight the route forks off to the left for the final long straight to the Salle de la Verna. Piles of timber and a dummy caver (not one of our members) make it impossible to go the wrong way in these tunnels. Then, suddenly, you are in the chamber! It is HUGE !

How can anyone describe something so vast, and so black, that it's difficult to convince yourself that you are actually inside a chamber inside a mountain ! It would be easier to believe that you were outside on a still, black night on Tryfan ! The tunnel emerges onto a flat terrace of broken rock, probably some of it from the tunnel, and you walk forward to the edge, marked by a cable, and see.....nothing. No roof, walls or floor, except the small patch of boulders revealed by the combined lights of the group. The sensation of space is awesome, and remained so for most of the trip. It is all so big !

We followed the left wall round towards the roar of falling water, where the river emerges into the chamber before cascading 165 feet towards the jumble of boulders far below. The path here was well marked, and had clearly been constructed by the E.D.F. workers, as it led to some old pipe-work. Nearby, on a boulder, was a marble plaque to Marcel Loubens, probably the nearest point to his 'tomb' that could be reached by non-cavers.

Our way upstream was hidden behind a vast jumble of enormous boulders. We had to struggle up a polished slab before we could follow the narrow route through into the open river passage beyond, where we crossed easily to the other side. It is difficult to remember the sequence of features as we made rapid progress through one great chamber after another, although at one point we were halted by a lake stretching away between the rock walls. We used the same way past as the original explorers had done, a narrow shelf on the right which allowed us to squirm through without getting a soaking. For most of the trip we seemed to be high up where the piles of rock debris met the vertical walls of the chambers, sometimes following narrow ledges, or having to climb up and over mounds of gigantic boulders. In several places traverse lines had been rigged, one in the first section was around a corner close above the river to avoid having to wade or swim, and there were fixed hand-lines on the more awkward climbs. We

eventually reached a pitch (down) of about 30 feet which had been rigged with a wire ladder, although there is normally just a rope, and descended. We left the river, and shortly afterwards reached the end of Salle Loubens, where there were some large flowstone formations and crystal-clear gour pools. We left our sacks there and went on through Salle Elizabeth Casteret, climbing steeply upwards all the time, to a narrow space that we passed through into the bottom of Salle Lepineux.

We continued to climb the slope of rubble until, quite suddenly, we stood at the place where Loubens had been buried. The boulder still carried its inscription, though now a little less clear, and there were two small flags and a container for flowers. Ralph and John had passed this way before, but for me, it was the first time and it was special. Michel took Paul and me further up the enormous slope to a point below the shaft, which was invisible somewhere in the blackness above. A great pile of decaying wire ladder lay tangled on the rocks, and Michel told us that this was left from the rescue attempt, having been used by the original explorers. I couldn't help picking up a couple of rungs to bring home.

We stopped at the gour pools for a meal break, before our trip out, which was uneventful apart from one or two wrong turns in the chaos of boulders. Much of the route was marked with fragments of tape and throughout the trip Michel had let us find our own way, only commenting if asked, or if we were about to make a wrong choice which would have wasted a lot of time. Back in the Salle de la Verna I was surprised to see some tiny specks of light sprinkled down the opposite wall of the chamber. I was still trying to work out what they were when John pointed out that they were cavers. They were so tiny because they were so far away !! That chamber is BIG !

After a superb trip Ralph, Paul and I set off down the hill, leaving Michel and John to follow on when John had sorted his gear. Some time later, having gone through all the usual comments, like: "Do you remember this bit ?" and "Are you sure we had to go uphill ?", we saw Michel and John sitting under a tree in the shade waiting for us. What else can you say !

That evening Michel and his wife Annie, with their two daughters, entertained us all to a superb meal at his house. By all, I mean cavers and families, making twelve guests altogether. (How did Ralph manage to get away with not having to drive ??) It had been a very enjoyable day, and as we left we were still trying to persuade Michel that he must come over to England so we could show him some of our outstanding cave systems, like ... er Gaping Gill and er Lancaster Hole and er er

Colin 'Steve' Knox 1-9-95

Acknowledgment:

"The Descent of Pierre Saint-Martin" by Norbert Casteret
Published by J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd.. (English) 1955

CONFIRMED MEETS FOR 1996 SEASON.

JANUARY.

Sun 7th Vespers Pot. East Kingsdale, Yorkshire.

FEBRUARY.

Sun 4th Tathams Wife. Whitherscar, Yorkshire.

Sat 10th Oxlow/Maskill Exchange. Castleton, Derbyshire.

Sun 25th Swinsto/Simpsons Exchange. West Kingsdale, Yorkshire.

MARCH.

Sun 3rd Eldon Hole. Eldon forest, Derbyshire.

Sat 16th Gapping Gill. Fell Beck, Yorkshire.

APRIL.

Sat 6th Nettle Pot. Castleton, Derbyshire.

Sun 21st Little Hull Pot. Penyghent, Yorkshire.

MAY.

Sat 4th Rowten Hole. West Kingsdale, Yorkshire.

Sun 19th Alum Pot/ Lower Long Churn. Yorkshire.

JUNE.

Sun 16th Ogof Hesb Alyn. North Wales.

Sat 22nd Hurnal Moss. Gapping Gill, Yorkshire.

JULY.

Sat 6th Swildons Hole. Priddy, Mendips.

Sat 13th Birks Fell Cave. Upper Wharfedale, Yorkshire.

Sun 28th Out Sleet Beck. Penyghent, Yorkshire.

AUGUST.

Sun 4th Penyghent Pot. Yorkshire.

Sat 17th Rumbling Hole. Leck Fell, Yorkshire.

Sat 24th Slaughter Stream Cave.

SEPTEMBER.

Sun 1st Little Neath River Cave. South Wales.

Sat 21st Lost Johns Pot. Leck Fell, Yorkshire.

OCTOBER.

Sun 6th Gapping Gill. Fell Beck, Yorkshire.

Sat 19th Juniper Gulf. The Allotment, Yorkshire.

NOVEMBER.

Sat 2nd Notts Pot. Leck Fell, Yorkshire.

Sun 17th Gingling Pot. Fountains Fell, Yorkshire.