

C.C.P.C.

NEWSLETTER.

No. 32.



1st March 1993.

Due to working away from home and not being able to attend any of the meetings, especially the A.G.M., my brother Neil thought it would be a good laugh to put my name forward to be the new News Editor. Since being press ganged into this position and not being able to get out of it, I thought the best thing, would be to give it a go. So if you would like me to do the News Letter (with my bad grammar that is, as I failed my English) please hand all those articles, which I am sure you will have, to me as soon as possible. For without them I can not do this job.

NO ACCESS TO BALL EYE MINE

We have just received information that Ball Eye Mine will be closed to all covers for the time being. It appears that work is being started again and the mine will be unsafe because of this, so entrances are being griddled. founterabbey level has been dammed in order to provide a water supply for the working and will therefore be inaccessible. The top entrance, Ruggs Hall, is dangerously unstable and should therefore not be entered. It is hope that, when the work has been finished in a few years time, access will once more be possible, but for the time being you will have to give it a miss.

It is possible that this has something to do with the permission just granted to a firm to produce "Matlock Spring Water" from a bore-hole in the Ball Eye Quarry. We shall be investigating and will let you know the position as soon as possible.

Any further information or queries should go direct to DCA Conservation & Access Officer: Pete Mellors, "Fairview" Station Road, Eadingley, Newark, Notts. NG22 9BX Tel 0623-382515.

A BIT BIGGER THAN THAN CARLSWARK!

by Brian Edmonds

I think my main caving memory of the 1991 Gouffre Breger expedition was the enormous chambers and long passages, just going on into the darkness. The most surreal thing about the trip was the sooty sketch of a naked woman at the top of one of the pitches in the lower part of the cave. The rock formation had been highlighted by an unknown carbide artist who had taken advantage of the natural rock texture, just like a prehistoric cave painting. While I was sitting on a boulder at the head of the pitch waiting for Ian to come up, I looked at the painting and let my imagination wander... and woke with a jolt on the floor of the passage. This was something I'd heard other cavers talk of, but never thought I would experience - just falling asleep, still it was the early hours of the next day.

Ian Thompson and myself started our (hopefully) bottoming trip the previous evening. The day had been spent lazing around base camp at La Moliere in the shade, interspersed with short, lethargic attempts to pack our kit. The heat just drained away our energy. At last, all was ready, so we set off for the cave entrance, it was early evening. The walk from La Moliere to the entrance shake-hole took us about three quarters of an hour, ambling along through resinous, sweet smelling pine forrest and hot sunny glades. Amongst the trees and in the clearings were numerous patches of Limestone Pavement and Shake-holes of all sizes. One large one was still full of old winter snow. Somewhere along our route we passed the entrance to the Fromagere, a deep and serious cave which I believe links into the Berger via the 1000m affluent and a sump. It was hot walking, and humid under the trees. Our sweat attracted hundreds of black flies, luckily only after salt and moisture from our skin, but still very annoying. At about six o'clock we reached the entrance, in a small shake-hole bottomed with snow.

We changed into our smelly, crusty caving grots (it was to inconvenient to wash them between trips, so we just dried them in the hot sun.) quickly, before we melted in the heat of the late afternoon. We abseiled down into the cool depths at about six thirty. The big entrance pitches of Ruiz, Garby's, Cairn's and Aldo's slid by easily. On one of these, I think it was Garby's some caver from a previous expedition had written PANDA in soot about half way down the pitch. Most of us on passing this point shouted it aloud, to hear the echoes and let the world know we were here. Not surprisingly this soon became known to all and sundry as Panda pitch. The Meanders, of which I'd heard numerous horror stories, were not to bad, a bit like the canal traverse in P8, but much longer and above a drop of unknown depth. Here and there old wooden stemples were fixed across the passage to make it easier, but Adrian had told us that they were of 1950's vintage, from the early expeditions, so we treated them with all due care and respect. In two sections of the Meanders a steel wire is fixed to the wall, so meeting cavers can clip in on passing. They were not in the most awkward places, but they were apparently above the biggest drops. During the course of the expedition at least three people nearly had serious accidents at various places in the Meanders, including me, but thats another story. (Ed, please tell me I need the material)

The entrance series to the master cave passed quickly, even though our over large tackle sacks were awkward on the traverses, but soon enough we were at Aldo's pitch. From here to camp one seemed to take a fair time, especially on the big boulder heaps, but at last we were there, time for a quick brew and a snack, and to dump the spare kit for our return bivvy. We left Melv' and Malcolm sleeping after their trip to the bottom, and set off through the Hall of Thirteen - impressive, huge, beautiful. the Hall of Thirteen is a large, aircraft hanger sized chamber with what at first sight appears to be a relatively smooth floor. A second look revealed that the whole of the floor of the chamber was floored by Gour pools or Rimstone dams, each with a drop of a few inches to a foot or so, forming an irregular network of narrow and slippery calcite walkways. The pools between were still, clear and deep. At the far end of the chamber were the "Thirteen", a collection of huge stalagmites up to four or five times as high as a man and only three or four feet in diameter. I didn't stop to count them, but there were certainly a lot of them. Below the Hall of Thirteen there were a series of massive calcite flows which were quite slippery and awkward to negotiate in total safety, and a slip here could easily have sent us down the next pitch, the Balcony.

Between the Balcony and the Vestibule pitch were some equally fine formations, even if not so huge. The Canals which followed soon after were for me at least a very satisfying piece of cave, a deep trench three or four feet wide and filled with cold, clear water. In the U.K. this would be a long cold swim, but here traverse lines were rigged enabling us to pass with only our ankles getting wet. The only problem was selecting which was the least frayed and ancient rope to clip into. I wish now, with hindsight, that we had spent longer in this section of the cave, from the Hall of Thirteen to the Canals admiring the formations and feeling very privileged, special just to be there and able to see it all. Beyond the Canals the character of the cave changed from large open caverns with formations, to smaller passages of dull black rock, muddy boulder heaps and generally gloomy caving, although there were still some massive chambers. Pitch and passage, passage and pitch. At each large black draughty drop we came to, we thought, is this Hurricane? I had long since lost count of the pitches.

At a pitch rigged with a guide line we meet Ralph, Paul and Sharon returning from the bottom, looking tired but going well. They told us we still had a long way to go and that there was no one below us. Earlier we had passed a party of Belgians near camp two on the great boulder heap - a greasy, horrible pile of mud and rocks poised above the camp.

Eventually we got to the "Little monkey" pitch, and it certainly looked like it. Ian looked at me, and I looked at Ian, then I mumbled something about having a look-see. Perhaps unusually for a normal pitch down, this started with a move up, standing in an old knotted rope loop. The traverse in was... interesting. I shouted to Ian it was O.K. and down I went.

Hurricane pitch followed quickly with an unpleasant traverse in on a narrow ledge, or a heart stopping hang off the line over the drop. I opted for the latter and abseiled down. It was big, black, windy and a long, long way from home. I think the rope must of shrunk a bit as the rebelay was VERY tight - thanks Melv'. At the bottom we were in another huge chamber, and as I waited for Ian at the bottom by a large boulder out of the draught, I smoked quietly and looked around. Make a "mistake" here and your dead I mumbled to myself, more than once. When Ian arrived we ambled down stream, past the vast inlet of the 1000m affluent and on down the stream passage beyond. Very soon we came to a wide rift section of stream canyon with deep water. We could of progressed by very wide bridging, or swimming, or more likely both, but it was four in the morning and we had both had enough. For us this was the bottom. We looked at each other and shook hands, a very out of place gesture, and then we turned around and headed out, carefully. Later we heard we had missed out on a wet traverse/swim, followed by a short climb up to the divers camp. Shortly after this the pseudo-siphon would be reached, then a very long swim in dry gear to the terminal sump. Maybe if we had brought our wet suits with us we might have carried on to the bitter end, but then again maybe not.

From where we turned around to get back to camp one was eight hours of hard graft, fighting tight rebelay, awkward angled pitches (with and without guide lines), boulder heaps and streamways. Eventually, we reached the balcony pitch again and up we went, slowly, hauling our tired limbs up the rope. From camp one to here had only seemed a short step coming in, but going back it seemed to be a long way. I went on ahead, to get a brew on for us while Ian climbed the pitch. As I stumbled through the Hall of Thirteen into camp I'm sure my steps were weaving and my body staggering. At camp one, which I reached at midday after about eighteen hours of steady caving, I met the Conde brothers with Colin and John Gillet, who offered me a cup of tea, freshly made and steaming hot. I got changed into my dry grotts, left here for the purpose, and instantly felt much better, refreshed. Eventually I realised Ian had not yet arrived, but just as I was about to voice my concern his light appeared coming up from the Hall of Thirteen. It turned out that he had gone off exploring at the top of the Balcony pitch and became disorientated. Finding himself at a pitch head he nearly descended it before realising he had gone in a circle and was back at the Balcony again. A long plod later and he was back at camp one. While we ate and drank, the Conde's and Colin prepared for their trip to the bottom. John was uncertain whether to go for the bottom with them, or wait for someothers and go with a later group. Eventually he decided to wait and bedded down beside us while the others went for the bottom. With only three bodys at camp one we could have two furry sleeping bags each. This, combined with the dry clothes and karrimats meant that we were lovely and warm in our pits, the only problem being condensation caused by the bivvy sacks. As I was warm enough without a bivvy sack I left it off and stayed drier as a result.

As soon as I lay down I was asleep. Perhaps not surprisingly I slept better here than I did on the surface, as I was tired, the cave was at a constant and reasonably cool temperature, and it was quiet, unlike the base camp at La Moliere. Around ten or eleven in the evening we began to wake up and get ready for the trip out. Apparently Adrian and Jane had stopped off on their way to the bottom for a brew, but I had slept right through. John had decided he would head out with us, and after a brew and some food we tidied up and left the camp at midnight. Putting on wet neoprene socks was extremely unpleasant, but once we got going we soon warmed up. A long slow trip out resulted as Ian and I were both still very tired, but one after another the landmarks slipped past until we were at the bottom of Aldo's pitch again. The hard graft of the entrance series followed until we finally got to the surface, just as the sun was rising, good timing or what?. We had been under ground for 34 hours, 12 of them at camp one, and the rest moving through the cave.

The day was coming up bright and clear, so we stripped off most of our kit for the walk back to base camp, only three quarters of an hour away through the forest. On the way back to camp we planned a trip into Autrans for breakfast and to take advantage of Dean and Keith's very generous offer of a shower at their gite in the town. Briefly John, Ian and I joined pavement cafe society for "Cafe Compleat" as Autrans came to life in the warmth of the early morning sun. Later in the day, still tired but well fed and clean (thanks again, Dean and Keith), we visited the information centre to see an exhibition on the Berger, with lots of photos, surveys and useful information about the cave. Then we drank lots of beer and wine, stuffed ourselves silly and slept again. The joys of derigging could wait until later. We relaxed slowly, knowing it was done. Been there. Done that. Don't have to go again!.

LOST : One mountain bike roof rack. Any information please contact Ralph.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS : Darren Conde, [REDACTED]

ARTICLES : Would members who have any articles or information for future Newsletters, please, either give them to my brothers or myself, via the meetings. Or if you wish either phone or send them directly to me at, T Conde. [REDACTED]
Tel. [REDACTED]. But please may I ask that any information be written clearly (unlike the one I received through the post, off a person who will remain nameless). Because if I can't read them I can't use them

Thankyou Caddy.