

WINTER 1985

C.C.P.C.

Newsletter. No. 11

EDITED BY PAUL
TYPED BY JANE
WRITTEN BY YOU!

CAVE VANDALISM;
IS GATING THE
ANSWER ?

GULP!

CAVE
ENTRANCE.
ACCESS:
SEE SWCC

BANG

'ELLO 'ELLO
'ELLO
WOT 'AVE
WE 'ERE ?

KIN.

TO BOLT OR NOT TO BOLT.....

A heated debate took place at this year's B.C.R.A. conference on the question of bolting. The present proliferation of pimples all over the fair face of Yorkshire limestone is causing the Dales Cavers to rise up with hitherto unprecedented fervour. The outcry comes in two forms, firstly there are too many new bolts appearing on the scene, especially badly placed and badly drilled bolts; and secondly - the appearance in vast quantities of diseased red bolts, (the Dave Elliot/Dick Lawson variety).

At the conference we were given a lecture on the extent to which natural belays can be used and a selection of photographs took us down Notts Pot pitches with only two rigged with bolts. Occasionally bolts were used as backups. Colin Boothroyd (answers to the name "handsome" in Inglesport) illustrated the red bolt disease at the top of Rowten Pot. Carefully drilled in at the top were 2 red bolts, a little to the right were several non-red ones, and 2 feet away to give a perfect free hang was a relatively enormous tree! Why then the need for bolts?

Now all you bolters out there, (I can honestly say that I have NEVER put a bolt in in my life) you know how arduous it is to put in a bolt, well - relief! There is now a NEW bolting tool which boasts a successful rate of 5 bolts per half hour. Heaven forbid the red-bolt brigade to get hold of one. Suppose you're in possession of this mega-machine, where are you going to place your new bolt holes? The majority of caves now have sufficient (ie. far too many) bolts and by drilling too close to the others you are in-fact endangering life as it weakens the rock substantially. Some planks are even drilling in calcite. This I believe is for a screening of 'Deathwish III'

The debate came up with several constructive ideas, one was to propose the N.C.A. drafting a bolting code. eg 1) no bolts to be drilled within a safety margin of 12" of another. This would reduce the possibilities concerning bolt placements. eg 2) a colour coding so we'd know what bolts were safe. No one agreed with this and the metallurgists and geologists pointed out that any caver could easily discover whether a bolt was safe. We discussed the possibilities of stainless steel bolts (ie. non-rustable) but this cannot be hardened enough for the job. So we're stuck with mild steel ones which need greasing.

Even more proposals came with the second problem - red bolts. Now these are even more frustrating because they do scar the subterranean landscape visibly. Some cavers give them credit for that, as they needn't look so closely for their bolts as these are immediately apparent. However, should we become a lazy breed and play dot-to-dot caving?

Dave Elliot is putting in these red bolts where there are quite sufficient bolts already for the sole mercenary reason of selling his SRT book. It is a two man enterprise enforcing itself of the mass majority of cavers who do not want these bolts or his book. The caves are no longer being scarred for



the sake of being safe, but are being irreparably damaged for his pocket. Indeed some of his bolts are so badly done that they will be fatal if used. Not only that, as he bolts, Mr. Elliot is systematically removing fixed aids which other clubs have with hard work, installed. eg. the stemples over Battleaxe traverse in Lost Johns. It has suddenly become an intimidating venture with red bolts leering at you as you pass.

There are solutions -

- 1) Break his arms.
- 2) Send a petition to him to stop.
- 3) Get the NCA to act eg. a bolting code.
- 4) Remove the red plastic and thereby invalidate his book.
- 5) Boycott his book. This will leave us with the bolts but at least he will not have profitted. Phil Brown of Caving Supplies has surpassed himself and refused to sell his book. Colin Boothroyd seems likely to follow suit.
- 6) Smash the bolts in. A thoroughly bad idea as we get a 12" crater as opposed to a 1" bolt hole.

Whilst this fervant debate was underway we asked how many of the NCA were present. Only two, both of whom had no powers of voting or proposing a motion. How much use then are the NCA? If we take a look at the legal side of bolting, should a speleo insert a badly drilled bolt and someone subsequently be killed on it, a Judge, to determine liability in negligence proceedings, would need some form of "bolting code" to go by. How is he to know how a bolt should be put in and how is he to know then how grossly unsafe a "bad bolt" is? If he was presented with a bolting code he would have more of an idea and anyone bolting outside that code would not be covered by BCRA (or other) insurance.

Well, if you've read this far, you'll deduce that I, like many others, feel very strongly about this subject. We could as a club ask D.C.A. to petition, or get D.C.A. to suss out a bolting code along with N.C.A. and LEGALISE it under the conservation laws and we're all capable of boycotting a book and removing plastic discs. Ralph, if the club feels strongly enough, could on behalf of CCPC ask Jo Royles not to consider stocking Dave Elliot's book when it is released for the market.

REMEMBER. THIS IS CAVE CONSERVATION YEAR AND THEY'RE YOUR CAVES.

LIN.

STOP PRESS
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FRESH DISCOVERY ?
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Returning from an exciting weekends trip to Mendip Country, our two brave and gallant explorers, Kev Mountford and Ian Freeman, instilled with an insatiable urge to visit hitherto 'Virgin Soil', bravely stepped where no man had dared to tread before M6 Services Ladies Loo!!!

Good try though lads!

CAVE VANDALISM; IS GATING THE ANSWER?

As another Welsh caving-ground seems set to go behind lock and key, let's take a closer look at the effects, if any, which gating has on preserving the natural state of our underground heritage.

Let's start with a place dear to our hearts - Knotlow Mine. Has the gating restriction on access preserved this as neolithic man left it? Not unless our cave man had a fetish for um Mars Bars it hasn't. However, the point can be examined by looking at a cave with something in particular to protect.

Consider the proposed gating of Daren Cilau. This "open-cave" has so far - despite painstaking taping off of forbidden routes - had formations soiled, mud sediments disturbed and, inevitably, spent carbide dumped thoughtlessly throughout. Now Daren Cilau is such that the forboding entrance crawl serves to discourage most inexperienced and most cowboy cavers from attempting the trip, and so the damage must be done by cavers who should know better. If the cave was gated, such cavers could still obtain a key, though the casual calling in on the cave at will would be frustrated. Would a moral sense of propriety be instilled into the otherwise destructive cavers? Most certainly not. It seems the answer then, is to follow the example set by Otter, O.F.D., and D.Y.O. and have a leader system. This does have it's disadvantages.

Firstly, unless there's a leader within your club, the presence of an outsider leading the trip makes the party feel as though it's being shepherded around a particularly strenuous tourist trip. The atmosphere is often lost. Secondly, how would it be decided which caves had formations worthy enough of the effort involved in introducing the system. Would the consequential drop in the number of visitors to the cave be rated as beneficial to the cave's environment, or as a further bane to the caver?

You might gather that I don't approve of access restrictions unless it's to appease the landowner or to protect formations IF BACKED UP BY A LEADERSHIP SYSTEM. This is not to say that I approve of gate-blasting. Criminal damage is definitely off my list of hobbies. And with a maximum jail sentence of 10 years it should be off your list too!

LIN.

STOP PRESS.

Ralph finally made it through Dowber Gill (Providence - Dow), despite harassment from Lenny and Paul H. Needless to say, the entire group failed to warn him that everyone would be in wetsuits (except him). However the trip does provide an alternative to vasectomy as a means of sterilization. Anyone needing a guide for this trip should see Paul, Jane or Derek (but not Ralph).

WANTED. Can Ralph please have his "Kettlewell Guide" back???

FOR SALE

TACKLE SACKS	£6.	
CHEST HARNESSSES	£3.50	
KNEE JAMMER STRAPS	.75p	
8 HOUR CELLS	£11	(NON MEMBERS £15.)
OLDHAM HEAD SETS	£3.50	(NON MEMBERS £6.)

B. C. R. A. CONFERENCE 1985

Well yet another poor turnout from C.C.P.C but at least you didn't miss quite as much as last year. I'll write on a selection of the lectures given.

All you keen miners missed a talk on recent work in the Alderley Edge mines, and Paul and Phil missed an informative half hour by the mole-man himself, Bob Mackin - "Radio location".

There was the inevitable Mulu session but since we've got our own private collection of Jerry's photos, nothing was lost by not seeing it.

Tony Waltham gave a lecture on China but enough said as I told you in the last mega edition about it's conical karst.

Of all the lectures to miss, I missed the Untamed River! Needless to say, reports of it's brilliance were rife, and I had to console myself with a visit to the pub.

Ralph, you missed a very illuminating lecture on your favourite cave - Lost Johns - Lyle Cavern Extensions. Unfortunately, the wire with which one formerly pulled up ones rope to gain access to the Lyle Cavern series has been dismantled by someone. The extensions are quite a decent size, veering off towards Notts Pot at one angle and Short Drop at another. What with Colin Boothroyd's Lost Johns - Rumbling connection, and a possible Notts connection, things are looking desperate for idle cavers like me.

Next was a talk of which I strongly approved. Our own dear Geoff Yeadon on caving, without a single underground shot! He, his pretty wife and his gorgeous dog, Humphrey, set off walking from Bull Pot Farm all along that ridge of upwards-inclined land (sounds less energetic), encompassing the three counties. He took us on a tour of cave entrances and showed us the hydrology of different systems which more than suggested numerous connections from Bull Pot of the Witches almost down to Mendip!

Paul was my reporter for Rob Parker's discussion on "New Techniques in Cave Diving", but he was suffering from postman's eyelid and missed most of it!

Ian and I watched the final part of Indonesia '85 but all I'll tell you about that is the natives have disgustingly runny noses and exceptionally crude means of carrying bits 'n' bobs in a hollowed out branch.

A lecture on County Kerry made it sound very interesting underground if only you can fight your way through all the old rusting cars dumped down the entrances.

Cave '85 was another episode in the annual, hilarious look at caves and cavers. One topic emphasised overall - the Red Bolt. The Sit and Shiver Award was awarded to the Derbyshire venture scouts for their antics down Diccan, and the Most Unpopular Man of the Year Award went to Dave Elliot.

On Sunday, the most popular talk was that on the latest developments in Daren Cilau. If you're a reader of C & C or Descent you'll probably be sick to death of hearing about it, but it was refreshing to have a clear photo session of it. The surveys were on sale for just £1.

A frightening talk on what can go wrong with ladders and lifelines was given by Brian Cowie (see article in next newsletter). Making the best of natural belays in S.R.T. came next and the speaker had overwhelming support.

An unusual lecture on Art and Caving was slept through by Paul and yawned at by me, as I'm not a great fan of so called modern art whether it's supposed to be a cave or not. A brick looks like a brick and no stretch of the imagination can make it look otherwise.

There were lectures on caves from all over the world, of no real interest unless you're going there, but there was a slide of Phil in the Y.U.C.P.C. Picos lecture.

This year there were videos to see and there was a strong emphasis on cave conservation. Did you know it is cave conservation year? On the whole the conference wasn't as good as last year. The speleo stomp on Saturday night was violent (take a close look at Ian's nose) and full of naked men which was particularly offensive. The videos were a good idea, and if you haven't seen "The Underground Eiger" then it's well worth seeing.

The Inglesport stand was better than usual as they were selling off cheap Whernside gear.

The new Troll sit harness has one drawback, it's got nylon webbing and polyester stitching.

By the way it's the C.R.O.'s Golden Jubilee so put a few pence in the tin for good measure. We have people sitting down caves for days and jumping out of aeroplanes for various charities, could we not have a concerted effort at raising cash for the C.R.O.? Any ideas?

LIN.

CAVE RESCUE

Monday 30th September - another exciting day in the 'dogs life' of a caver.

Off we raced, Ralph, Rob Heath, Melv, Kev, Steve Knox and myself, to Peak Forest on a mercy mission for D.C.R.O. A small hound with suicidal tendencies had decided that it would be fun to jump down a 70' shaft and wait for half a dozen idiots from the human race to fetch it out, having performed a similar stunt 3 days previously at Eldon Hole.

It took us approximately 20 minutes to retrieve the 'beasty' and return it to it's new found owner.

The rest of the evening was spent enjoying liquid refreshment at Ralph's local.

Derek.

3000' UP 3000' DOWN: A WEEKEND TRIP TO THE P.S.M. BY PLANE.

Engine roaring, our tiny monoplane fought its way up the Biggin Hill runway, wartime launch pad of "The Few". Although our caving gear and spare clothes were cut to the minimum, the weight of ourselves, our in flight sandwiches and the fuel in the wingtanks took the all-up weight to the limit and our takeoff run was three times the normal. Eventually we were airborne, and Ron Crocker, our pilot, set course for the Channel over the Seaford beacon. Our flight to the Pyrenees had begun.

During the next 52 hours I often had to pinch myself to see if the scenes and events were real, as almost everything seemed unbelievable. The idea of traversing the Pierre St. Martin over a weekend, using a light plane to fly there and back, was dreamt up a year ago, one wine and woodsmoke scented evening on the Plateau. Bill Brooks, Andy Ive and I were celebrating a trip down the Gouffre Berger around the campfire, and as the wine flowed, so did our future plans. I said I could arrange to have the P.S.M. booked and rigged and Bill reckoned he could organise a plane, so it seemed feasible. As 1984 unrolled, our plans matured and were finalised. I telephoned my old caving friend Michel Lauga in the Pyrenees, and Bill spoke to an ex pupil of his who owned a four seater Rallye Tobago 10. Both Michel and Ron were keen to help, and the descent was fixed for the first of September. Now, after all the planning, here we were airborne into adventure.

At first the plane seemed very insubstantial. Flying at 3000 feet we dropped into the occasional airpocket leaving our stomachs momentarily poised midair, also from time to time, the plane seemed to slip sideways. It was completely different from the familiar and stable platform of a scheduled airliner. As the drone of the engine and the voices on the intercom became more usual, we began to notice the lack of legroom and the heat of the sun through the canopy. I idly perused the instrument panel, trying to decipher the digits on the navigation computer, in between watching the landscape below and shouting to Andy, sitting next to me in the back seat.

By the time we crossed into France, high over Le Havre, I was well accustomed to the scene and the motion and started to show interest in our route, using maps provided by Bill. We flew for about three hours, mainly following electric pylons, roads and rivers, with occasional towns like Le Mans acting as waymarkers, until we touched down at Poitiers to clear customs and top up the fuel tanks. A brief chat with the local gendarmes who were standing in for the douanier and we were off again, anxious to make our final landing before dusk. We only just made it. The shadows on the ground were lengthening and the sun very low on the horizon when we reached the Pyrenees. We eventually made out the grass landing strip at Oloron - Herrère, with its corrugated control tower roof carrying the faded letters "OLORON - HERRÈRE", picked out in white on the rusty surface.

The control tower appeared to be unmanned as no one answered the radio, so Ron circled for a closer look, especially as there was a powered glider attempting to take off. We buckled on our seat belts and Ron brought us in over the tree tops to a neat but bumpy landing on the sun-baked surface. We could see Michel and Anni with their small daughter Laurette over by the car park waving to us. Ron taxied over, and as soon as the engine stopped we clambered out to greet them. For me it was a most pleasant reunion as I had not seen Michel and Anni for four years in which time Laurette had been born, Michel had shaved his beard off and I had grown one! We had lots to talk about, but dinner was waiting

back at Michel's new house, so we unloaded our gear from the plane and into the boots of the two cars nearby, then Michel and Anni drove us to their home at Issor leaving the plane parked like a car on the edge of the grassy runway.

Michel's new house was magnificent. High on the side of the valley over Issor, it commanded a superb panoramic view of the Pyrenees. In the twilight we could see Pic d'Anie silhouetted against the sky, and the mountain air seemed cool and fruity. We walked along a terrace and into the main living room through sliding glass doors to find Michel's brother Jean-Paul and his wife Jaqui putting the final touches to a well laden dinner table. Gilbert and Jean-Gilles, old friends from previous years, were cooking sausages on a barbecue near their tent in the garden, and hearing our voices came in to welcome us. Anni preferred Pernod and we all partook of well-iced aperitifs, the babble of the conversation increasing as news was exchanged and introductions made. Adding to the throng were Jean-Paul's children and Michel's older daughter Anna, who arrived with Michel's enormous sheepdog from a game in the garden.

Anni eventually had us seated around the table and served us cold meats and a superb salad laced with raw chilis. "Un peu épicé" she said as we gasped. Luckily the 'mergeuse' sausages were not as hot as usual or we would have sunk even more wine to cool our mouths! Bill gobbled up the chilis as if they were lettuce....he must have had an iron mouth! We had a most enjoyable dinner during which Michel explained that a room had been booked for Ron in the hotel at Issor, but that he had to take the room before 10 O'clock. The time passed so pleasantly and convivially that it was a surprise to have to leave with Ron (as his interpreter) just as the coffee and cognac arrived. Ron offered to take the girls for a spin in his aeroplane the next day, which they accepted enthusiastically after some trepidation. It was arranged that Anni would travel down and collect him from the hotel in the morning, and then Michel drove Ron and me down to Issor to sort out the hotel accommodation. This did not take long, although there were some complications arising from a wedding at the hotel which meant a change to a different hotel on the Saturday evening. Soon, Michel and I arrived back at the dinner table where the plans for the next day were being discussed.

Two days previously Michel, Jean Paul, Gilbert and Jean Gilles had rigged Tête Sauvage to the bottom. They had arranged transport too. Gilbert's car was already at St. Engrâce and we would travel to Tête Sauvage in Michel's old car and in a Renault 5 to be driven by Jean-Francois (who was arriving tomorrow.) Jean-Paul and Anni would drive up to Tête Sauvage to recover Michel's car once we were underground and take it to St. Engrâce for our return. Because of the weight limitations on the plane we had no food or carbide, but Michel had bought some for us, so we all tramped out to the garage to fill our lamps and pack our tacklebags. With all our preparations for the morning complete, Michel showed us up to the children's bedroom where we were to sleep in borrowed sleeping bags. Soon we were all fast asleep, the days excitement counter balanced by the wine and cognac.

At about 5 am. the phone rang and woke us all briefly. It was Jean-Francois confirming that he was en route! Sleep returned and we did not stir again until the beeper on my watch sounded reveille at 8 am. We arose to a beautifully fresh and sunny morning. The Pyrenees looked as magnificent as ever, and the air, cool and invigorating, ensured that we did not dawdle over our ablutions. Breakfast downstairs catered for all tastes, fruit juice, tea or coffee, rolls, eggs and cereals. We ate heartily and were still busy when Jean-Francois arrived with Gilles, resplendent in a stripy t-shirt and black beret, accompanied by Jean a tough looking Pyrenean carpenter. A general bustle ensued and the cars were soon loaded and we were off down the morning roads twisting down the valley

and up to the Pyrenees. Andy, Bill, Jean-Gilles and I travelled in Michel's old Peugeot, the rest in the Renault 5 belonging to Jean-Francois.

After about half an hour's drive we came to the ski village of Arette La Pierre St. Martin. Here we left the metalled roads and plunged on to a rocky, precipitous track. 'Affreux' was Michel's description; and frightful it certainly was, in many places covered in large rocks which hit the underside of the car from time to time with the most expensive sounding bangs and thuds. Michel revved the engine and fought the car along about two miles of this until we eventually reached the grassy hollow up on the top near the Tête Sauvage, and pulled to a standstill near a parked car. Two cavers were sleeping on the ground and awoke on our arrival. They were from Carcassonne and were to do the detackling on Monday, but today would follow behind us after a two or three hour interval. Michel explained the route to them and gave them a sketch map, and then we started the ritual of changing into our caving gear.

Gilles had some new yellow gloves. He put these on his feet and strutted around like a chicken to the general amusement of us all. We all felt light hearted and Bill and Andy started the policeman jokes going. I interpreted these for the benefit of the others and raised a laugh too. Andy and I donned wetsuits, whilst the others put on thermal underwear and PVC oversuits. Whilst the French cavers carried spare clothes and rubber 'pontoonieres' in their tackle bags, Bill carried his wetsuit, Andy took no spare clothes and I had a cotton overall and Damarts in sealed polythene bags. By now it was well after 10 am. and the sun was beating down strongly so Andy and I began to sweat, mercifully it was a short distance to the entrance, but it was a steep scramble uphill over the rocks in the full glare of the sun, so we were very keen to enter the cool of the cave.

The Tete Sauvage entrance was easily recognised by a fifteen foot wooden rectangular chimney-like construction, used to keep the entrance clear of snow in the winter. Jean-Francois climbed up the outside clutching the guy ropes and standing precariously on minute projections afforded by the holding bolts. He disappeared inside, and since no one else appeared to be ready I followed. The climb up the outside of the wooden chimney was not too difficult, but the descent inside was obstructed by the Dexion framework holding the edifice together. My tackle bag, suspended by a cord from my sitharness, jammed and stuck, making my progress slow. I eventually dropped down into the rift below, however, and managed to sort things out.

The rift led to the first pitch, which was equipped with a fixed aid called a 'mat du perroquet' which literally translated means a parrot ladder. These aids were in place to a depth of around 200 m. and each consisted of a tubular iron pole with rungs driven through at intervals of about 30 cm. Since Michel had fixed safety lines, however, I clipped my rack in for protection and slid down the rungs hand over hand, my feet only touching when I needed to stop and see where I was going or changeover ropes. The first pitch of about 30 feet led directly on to a 60 ft pitch followed by an 80 ft and then a 100 ft pitch to the First Meander.

The first Meander was not too difficult to negotiate, but I had to crawl through towing my tackle bag and then wedge out to get on to the next pitch. A 200 ft shaft was equipped with four of the poles in series, the last one lying obliquely across the shaft leading to an awkward constriction above an 80 ft rope pitch. Here I was overtaken by Andy who came flying down with gay abandon and no attachments to the safety lines. The bolt change on the other side of the constriction was quite awkward involving a difficult move out over the 80 ft drop below on a long cowtail before I could take my weight on the short cowtail and attach my rack to the rope. I think Andy dispensed with these high assurance tactics and just hung on by his arms! The rope dropped me down to a large platform when I

was narrowly missed by a pebble dislodged by Bill who had arrived at the constriction. Several rope pitches followed down a steeply inclined rift dropping a further 150 ft or so to another Meander.

The second Meander was fairly easy and opened on to another rope pitch with a bolt change at a small ledge to the left. Unfortunately there was insufficient slack in the rope for me to take out my rack from the first section and I had to hoist myself up bodily to release the rack, using my long cowstail for protection clipped into the bolt below—a most unsafe manoeuvre. As soon as the rack was free I managed to crab my short cowstail into the hanger and effect a conventional changeover. All of this faffing about allowed Bill time to catch me up and I could hear the others hard on his heels, so I made a rapid descent to the Third Meander.

The Third Meander led to a series of easy climbs over large waterbasins, where I tried to keep my tackle bag dry with some difficulty. Here Bill decided to take a photograph of Andy who was now at the top of the final 100m shaft. Bill's camera was a doctored 'Instamatic' with a piece of string to hold the shutter open, the whole carried in a 1½ litre lemonade bottle with the base cut and used as a waterproof plug. He hoped it would survive the trip! A great deal of shouting and flash bulb popping later, and Andy departed downwards. Bill soon was on the rope and it was my turn to follow.

The shaft was quite deep (over 300 ft) and had been equipped with six bolt changes and a protection belay to negotiate. Liasing between Bill below and Gilbert who was now following called for a clear head not to mix the languages, as I could swear in both! The last bolt change was really entertaining and defied expletives in French or English. A large rib of rock stuck out from the opposite wall and the hanger for the final section of rope was inserted behind the rib forcing one to swing out on to the rib somehow before being able to clip in and change ropes. A tatty piece of very ancient rope dangled off the rib and there were one or two tiny foot holds on the rib itself. After a brief period of indecision, I swung out on the upper rope, clutched the rib, got a knee on the other side of it and grabbed the ancient rope. Muscles straining, and poised almost off balance on a negligible toehold, I managed to clip my cowstail into the Maillon on the last section, and then dangled in an ungainly manner struggling to undo my rack from the upper rope. Eventually I completed the changeover and made a smooth descent down into a huge rift, where the lights of Andy, Bill and Jean-Francois were twinkling far below.

I soon found out why they were waiting; the next obstacle was a low duck. Bill decided that the overalls lent him by Michel had outlived their usefulness and that he would change into his wetsuit, whilst the others arrived. Jean-Francois lowered himself on to his back and slid under the duck face upwards to ensure an air supply. Andy and I followed face downwards and not too worried at the soaking in our wetsuits. The route on was down a series of climbs and two short pitches rigged with 8.5 mm cord. The area here was quite damp so I did not hang around, but even so, the other two were soon out of earshot. I found myself in a largish chamber and after climbing down a slanting slab and rift came to a streamway; presumably this was the Salle Cosyns although I could not be sure of that. With no signs of the other two I moved downstream, the roar of the water quite deafening as the passageway diminished. I took a right turn to avoid a deep pool and entered a narrow rift-like passage where my shouts were answered. Andy and Jean-Francois were sitting at the top of a calcite slope on the righthand wall. Unless I had known, I would never have seen the way on, and almost walked straight past them. Whilst we waited for the others to arrive, I broke open a bar of chocolate from the supply in my helmet, and as we munched Jean-Francois explained the route ahead. So far we had only been underground an hour and a half so we were making good time.

Eventually we heard a faint shout and Gilbert appeared below. Like me, he almost walked past us, but for our shouts. The others trickled in behind, so we crawled through a small constriction and on to a climb down of about 30 feet into another largish chamber, using a rope for safety and a spare figure of eight descender, as by now we had divested ourselves of all our SRT gear. On the other side we had to scramble up a steep slope leading to a large passageway where we paused from a good vantage point to watch the others descend and cross the chamber, their lights outlining the route like cats eyes. Bill tried to take a photograph and persuaded everyone to stand stock still whilst he did so. By now his lemonade bottle was dented and decidedly fragile so I doubt if the shot was a success.

The way on was through a series of large, boulder strewn passages where we made rapid progress to the 'Salle des Anciens', a large dry chamber with a rubbish strewn camping area. Here Michel called a halt for a snack and for the French cavers to put on their "pontonières" for the water ahead. By now Bill and Andy had exhausted all the 'policeman' jokes and were on to 'woman in bed' jokes; Gilles had finished his 'chicken' jokes and was on to 'sheep' jokes when not inflating his 'pontonière' to do a busty woman turn or two. I reckoned that we must have been underground about three hours or more.

Replete and kitted out for watery routes, we set off once more at roughly the same level in high vaulted passageways strewn with boulders, following the occasional luminescent red way marker as the route became more complex. At one point (it may have been 'the Grand Cornice') we had to inch across a narrow sloping slippery ledge, stooping to avoid our tackle bags fouling on the overhanging wall with a bottomless pit on our left. Michel said that there used to be a fixed handline here once, and I for one would have welcomed it. After this obstacle we scaled a small cliff, where a rocky foothold broke under my weight and I fell back on to my tackle bag several feet below. Then we got lost.

Michel and three others prusicked up a rope into some roof passages, but after a while concluded that this was the wrong route and so we all dispersed to look for way markers and the route on. By the time the correct passage had been found we had occupied at least an hour or more in scouting operations. We dropped down into the water and waded and climbed various boulder falls until we entered the Grand Canyon, reminiscent of 'Go Faster' passage in Dan yr Ogof but much loftier. We marched along the pebble bedded streamway for over a kilometre, an exhilarating and most enjoyable part of our journey, until boulders blocked our progress again.

My memories of the exit from the Grand Canyon are vague, but we climbed a 40 ft pitch on electron ladder left in as a fixed aid to enter a smaller upper series of some complexity. We came to another pitch rigged with an ancient piece of electron ladder with most of the rungs missing. Andy and Jean-Francois had quite a few problems in climbing up as the hanger at the top was loose. The rest of us struggled up with the benefit of Andy holding the bolt for us! Since this obstacle was time consuming Bill took the opportunity for a nap. He had worked hard at the navigation during the flight and tiredness was beginning to catch up on him. We continued along a passage, which I recognised from Pierre Minvielle's book of the "Hundred best trips in France", with potholes filled with water to traverse over or jump across. After several climbs we eventually chimneyed down to the Canals.

Michel had been carrying a rubber dinghy for this eventuality and he soon had it unpacked and inflated. However, we wetsuited Britons had no need of such devices and explored ahead to find we could keep dry above the waist by using handholes on the walls and only a modicum of floundering. This was good news for the French as they could keep dry in their 'pontonieres' and use the dinghy to ferry the tackle bags. Andy, Bill and I acted as ferrymasters and made good progress forwards

until we came to the Tunnel of the Wind, where we had to unload half of the bags as the roof was too low. In addition, the water became deeper and there was a sharp bend in the passage. Venturing onwards in the icy water, with a howling gale whistling in our ears with such ferocity that our lamps extinguished, we struggled with the dinghy using traverse lines in the roof to pull ourselves along. After about a hundred yards we came to a rocky island where we could see an enlargement ahead. Here we unloaded the tackle bags and Andy bravely set off back to collect the rest, whilst Bill and I humped the first loads on to dry land in a massive chamber. Andy was soon back again with the rest of the bags and then even more heroically he returned with the dinghy for the others to use as life support. We discovered that the 'pontonieres' were not so effective as bouyancy aids! Gilbert's pontonieres let in water and he froze to the marrow, Gilles got a soaking too, so wetsuits seemed the best after all.

We assembled on dry land, and soon two gas stoves were roaring away under billies of water as those with dry clothes available got changed. I opened my tackle bag, removed the polythene bags of dry Damarts and boiler suit, happily intact, and stripped off my wetsuit. Using the legs of the cotton boilersuit to dry myself I soon warmed up and the final luxury of dry pants, Damart vest and longjohns was indescribable. The warm glow suffused my chilly limbs and once fully kitted out my thoughts turned to food. Michel had provided enough sustenance for a seige! Whilst my 'Bolino' macaroni and mince cooked, I ate some cheese, pâté and nuts, washed down with lemonade. The hot 'Bolino' was delicious and after polishing it all off I helped Gilbert finish off his soup. With chocolate and dried fruit to follow it was a veritable banquet. Anyway, it filled the energy gap of nine or ten hours continuous caving.

The changing, cooking and feasting took some time, and everyone perked up although Bill and Andy with no dry clothes to change into were shivering uncomfortably at the end. They were glad when our caravanserai moved on again. The galleries we entered were of the enormous dimensions associated with the PSM and we soon heated up with the exercise of rapid walking and scrambling on the trail of the red route-markers. Soon a rope pitch upwards confronted us. Using ascenders for protection we free climbed, hauling the tackle bags after us. I ascended last and of course the final tackle bag got stuck, so I had to use up precious energy to descend and retrieve them. We were now in the complex of the Salle Navarre where Michel navigated adroitly so that in a short time we were at the top of the rubble heap below the Lepineux shaft.

It was four years since I had visited this region of the cave, and as I slithered down the scree slope towards Louben's tomb, I noticed that Michel and Gilbert were standing exactly where I had photographed them all that time ago. The timeless atmosphere was unchanged, and the smoky lettering on the now empty tomb still proclaimed its eternal message. I had that eerie feeling of déjà vu and wondered if I would ever be destined to pass this way again. My reverie was broken by the general movement and bustle of our group towards the exit. The next section was through an enormous boulder ruckle, equipped with a handline through the dangerously loose areas. A small hole through ominously poised boulders necessitated a firm hold on the rope to avoid clutching a catastrophe. One by one we carefully lowered ourselves through the blocks and filed along the Elizabeth Casteret chamber and on into the Loubens cave.

By now, although our tackle bags were biting into our shoulders and our legs becoming leaden, we were on familiar ground and made good progress so that we were soon in the vast gallery of the Metro. We took the lefthand wall with the torrent on our right, and after a short pause to regroup marched on along a well beaten track and then on over the boulders into the Queffelec Chamber. Here Michel, Bill and I, who were in the rear, took a wrong turn leading to a high

route where we temporarily lost sight of the others. We eventually regained the main route however and caught them up as they were crawling over the ledge past the pool guarding the Salle Chevalier.

The Salle Chevalier is indescribably enormous and as we traversed it along the right hand wall we continually were amazed by the grandeur. Our path lay along a series of narrow ledges, very loose in places with a steep, occasionally vertical drop to the stream below. As we progressed along the chamber the stream became lost in the deep blackness below us and eventually we reached a constriction caused by a boulder fall where we had to take off our packs and crawl.

We emerged into the monstrous blackness of La Verna, the largest underground cavity in the Western World. In several places we stopped to gaze into the void and to try and pick out the Aranzadi Wall on the other side, but we were falling behind and had to keep moving. Soon we reached the EDF tunnel, easily located by a fenced pathway and steps above the abyss below. The tunnel cut by the EDF still had railway lines in and Bill tried to balance on these to keep his feet dry as he had no other shoes to wear. In places the roof timbers were in a state of collapse and in one place Bill trod in a deep puddle with resultant expletives sufficient to effect a complete roof failure. However, the mundane tunnels soon ended and before long we stood before the final doors, deafened by the wind roaring out through the cracks. As we edged through, the wind blew us out into the midnight air.

In the cabin near the entrance we could see the flicker of firelight, and could we believe it, smell cooking! Two heroes of the Ziloko, man and wife, had driven up to the cabin, lit a log fire, and cooked soup for us. What comradeship! We sat ourselves down on the wooden benches and slurped up the hot chicken noodle soup so generously provided and our legs tingled with relief after the long walk. Bill found an old mattress in the corner and fell asleep. A brief rest and some desultory conversation and the final walk to St. Engrâce had to be faced. I knew that it would take at least an hour from my previous trip, and that was in daylight. Bill could not be roused so Andy, Jean-Francois and I started off downhill leaving the others to get their boots back on and drag Bill out of bed.

The route downhill was along a well worn track, and we passed the van used by the Ziloko members who had lit the fire for us. My lamp suddenly went out, and in fixing it I fell behind the other two who were moving at a fast pace. From then on I did not manage to catch up with them and I trudged on as fast as I could, catching a glimpse of their lights as the track twisted and turned along the hillside and in amongst the trees. As we neared St. Engrâce I shouted them, as I knew a shortcut which branched off directly down through the scrubby open ground at the bottom of the hill. They waited for me and we stumbled down until we reached a stream with a wooden bridge over it which I remembered from previously. Soon we were on the metalled road leading up to St. Engrâce and we found Michel's car parked in a layby at the bottom of the steep hill. Peering through the windows we could see our dry clothes, toilet gear and sleeping bags inside, but search as we may, it was impossible to find the key to get access to them. We decided to carry on up to the Gite d'Étape and wait there for Michel. Once more our legs were goaded into action, but mine would not go as well as those of Andy and Jean-Francois and halfway up I just had to stop and have a sit down. A few minutes rest and I felt slightly refreshed (we had been walking for over an hour now) and made my way steadily up to the village where the lights were on in the bunkhouse and I could see Andy sitting in the porch.

Outside the hotel was a tap, and so thirsty was I that I turned it on and took the full bore in my mouth, regardless of potential tummy bugs and the large slug hunched on the pipe below. We had caused something of a commotion as there seemed to be

a busload of schoolgirls inside and their giggling and chattering seemed quite incongruous. Luckily our bunks were upstairs. Andy and I sat and waited and soon the van appeared bearing Bill, who had cadged a lift downhill, followed shortly by Michel with our clothes. Hot showers were available so we could now remove the last of our sweaty clothes and clean ourselves up. With little ceremony we all found bunkspace and were soon fast asleep in our sleeping bags, oblivious to the world for a while.

No one stirred until at least 9 am. and then we went to the bar next door to buy breakfast. I was amazed to find that I was not at all stiff, especially as my legs had felt so tired at the end, but maybe summer in the Jura had given me more stamina than I thought possible. "Café complet" came and we sat around the tables on the terrace outside the bar, just across the road from the squat Pyrenean church, and ate rolls and jam whilst the conversation flowed. Our traversée had taken about 14 hours altogether and we exchanged views on the various events that had taken place. Believe it or not, but we actually started to plan what to do next summer! Jean-Francois had traversed the Réseau Trombé, which was my next target, and we started to discuss possibilities. The time flashed past and we were suddenly reminded that if we wanted to get back to Biggin Hill, then we should leave "dès que possible."

Our farewells took some time as only Jean-Gilles was coming back with us in Michel's car, and we would not see the others for some time; if ever again. Our companionship and common bond had forged a wellknit team and the ambiance that had developed was a pleasure not to be relinquished easily. Bags packed, boots closed, we shut the car doors and in a flurry of squawking chickens drove off en route for Issor again. On the way we passed Ruben Gomez house and called to see him but he was out, so on we went, Michel and I speaking French in the front with cross talk to Jean-Gilles and a mixture from Andy and Bill. Soon we swept up the hill and on to the drive of Michel's house.

Anni had prepared an excellent lunch for us, and once again we were overwhelmed with the French hospitality. Before we could eat, however, out came the bathroom scales and Bill weighed himself, Andy, Ron, and me and all of our gear. I think I had put on weight! Ron and Bill were rather concerned about the short bumpy runway at Oléron, and did lots of calculations on fag packets and chocolate wrappers. The rest of us sat down to lunch, facing the view across the Pyrenees and sad at the imminent departure. We had to go at last, and Michel helped us to load the car for the final ride to the airstrip. We said goodbye to Anni and the children, to Jean-Paul and his family, and to Jean-Gilles, then Michel drove us away down the steep Pyrenean lanes to our waiting aeroplane. Flight checks completed, Ron discovered the fuel tanks were nearly empty so we should be O.K. for lift off provided we could make a fuel stop soon. ~~Throbbing across the~~ ^{heavy air} ~~our~~ ^{tiny} plane clawed its way into the sky, and after a circle to wave goodbye to Michel, Ron set course for Pau airport using the navigation beacons on automatic direction finding. After all our physical and emotional exercise, here we were once more encased in modern technology.

Our landing and refueling at Pau was trouble free and with a good tail wind we reached Deauville in three hours, Andy and I drowsing in the back for most of the way. On the ground we bought our duty free's, refueled and had afternoon tea before takeoff. Soon we were airborne again, over the Channel and in a remarkably short time landing at Biggin Hill in a welter of Sunday fliers.

The English Customs were quite meticulous. Our plane was emptied of bags and inspected, and they looked in our tackle bags. My stinking wetsuit was sufficient

repellant, however, to prevent a complete unpacking. Tired, slightly dazed by our activities, we strolled into the bar for a few beers and for Ron to complete his flight log. Our trip to the Pyrenees was over as quickly as it had begun.

John Gillett. 20/10/84

Come on - admit it:
Have you got personal problems?
Does water rush up your dry suit legs aggravating the situation?
Your problem is that you have skinny legs!
There is now an answer that does not involve countless hours of exercise.
Simply glue some 3"-4" strips of stiff plastic inside the leg of your welly.
You can now put elastic bands, worn outside your wellies, over your oversuit creating a reasonably watertight seal. Happy wading.

P. Ton.

AND THE LATEST FROM PETE TON....."Self balers for wellies"!!! Having stopped water getting into your wellies (see elsewhere in this issue) how can you get it out when it gets down your neck etc....use a hot 6" nail to melt a hole near the ankle then fit a tight $1\frac{1}{2}$ " band from an inner tube over it, any water can then leak thro' the "valve" or for a rapid drain move the rubber band !!! DIAGRAM ON REQUEST ..SEND S.A.E.

MARS BAR/SURVIVAL BAG WARNING !

There have been numerous reports of woodcutters storing a small lint bandage INSIDE THEIR HELMETS and coming to grief when falling timber, landing on their head, causes the bandage to impale itself in their skull. Imagine then, a rockfall underground with your Mars & survival bag snugly fitted inside your helmet. In future, these should go inside an ammo box or SRT bag.

LIN.

The D.C.A. Report on our attempts at removing Oxlow from the map is impossible to read! They seem to be discussing it rather more than necessary which outlines a slight agenda.