



**Eldon Pothole Club
Newsletter**

July – Sept 2008



Pete Pollard canyoning in the Vercors. Photo by Jules Barrett.

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Editor's Bit

Firstly, congratulations to Sam Townsend, Bog Bergmann and everyone else involved in Sam's Dig which eventually led to 'Paternity's Fault' – the new find in Bagshawe Cavern. With the work in the Bagshawe entrance stope finished Sam and friends kept the momentum up and after a couple of months of determined digging got a great result with a significant new aven. Further afield it's been a good summer for the Eldon in Matienzo with the regulars finding extensive new passage. Also in this newsletter, reports from a successful trip to the Vercors for the European Speleological Conference. While we can't claim to have furthered anyone's understanding of the underground world we did have a great time and two got to the bottom of the Gouffre Berger.

Over the last year or so the weekend meets haven't been particularly well-attended for various reasons and it would be good to see a better turn-out. So, have a look at the Upcoming Trips and Events diary in this newsletter and see which ones you can make.

Thanks a lot to Sam Townsend, Dan Hibberts, Dave Cowley, Jon Pemberton, Rowan, Dave Gledhill, Rob Eavis, Bob Dearman, Bob Toogood, Toni Murphy, Pete Pollard and James Wood for their contributions to this newsletter.

Jules Barrett.

News

'Sam's Dig' in Bagshawe Cavern has Gone From Sam Townsend

On July 31st 2008, after 4 years of digging, Sam Townsend and Bog Bergmann, accompanied by Dave Cowley, John Taylor, Jules Barrett, Sam Pemberton and Jon Pemberton pushed up through the choke in 'Sams Dig' into a large rift chamber. Named "Paternity's Fault" after the fact that nearly all the diggers have had children during the course of the dig, which has been a bit of a hindrance. Sam and Jules free climbed an estimated 50 metres up the rift (a bit like the West Swirl Passage in Oxlow, but steeper). Unbelievably - the rift looks to be blind at the top. There looks to be a floor level continuation that draughts but it's going to require some serious digging. Since the discovery work has been done to stabilise the choke which was in danger of running in. Anchors and fixed ropes have been installed to the top of the aven and the next job is to survey the new find. See photographs later in this newsletter.

DCRO From Jules Barrett

I was pleased to be promoted to the DCRO core team during the summer. No doubt you all find that terribly reassuring!!



In the bottom of Paternity's Fault
Photo by Dave Cowley

EPC Website

From Jules Barrett

The members only section of the EPC website has had problems through the summer. I'm hoping that I can get it fixed (more likely someone like Mike Annersley can fix it) very soon.

New Door and Lock for the Coe at Bagshawe

From Jules Barrett

PICA (Peak Instructed Caving Affiliation) have bought a new door and pushbutton lock for the Coe at Bagshawe. The door has been on a while and the new lock was fitted on Saturday 7th September. The code is substantially easier to change than on the last one so will allow Amanda to change the code whenever necessary.

Please ensure that you always close the door properly behind you when you go into Bagshawe Cavern. The Custodian is concerned that local youngsters might follow you in and go 'exploring' themselves.

Kordas Rope

From Jules Barrett

Whilst at the European Speleological Conference in the Vercors we had a quick look around the trade stands and came across a spanish bloke extolling the wonders of 'Kordas' rope. He reckons that his Kordas 'Titan System' rope is significantly better than other brands of rope and was doing a demonstration meant to show why. He had a piece of 'normal' rope and put a one-inch long vertical cut in the sheath. He then anchored the piece of rope above head-height, put a jammer and footloop on the rope below the damaged piece and stood in the footloop. The sheath parted and the jammer sailed off down to the floor. At this point there was lots of gesturing in spanish about pain, injury and death and the dangers of using such ropes. He then did exactly the same thing with his 'Titan System' rope and when he stood on it this time the sheath held fine. Now, I'm usually quite sceptical about such things on the basis that if it looks to good to be true it probably is. The brochure suggests that Kordas have patented whatever it is that makes this rope particularly resistant to damage in this way and they are making both semi-static and dynamic ropes. They also make a big point about their ropes being pre-shrunk so they're not going to shrink in use and the sheath is not going to slip. Hmm...I'll believe that when I see it! Anyway, I don't know if Kordas ropes are available in the UK yet but they might be worth looking out for in the future.

Upcoming Trips and Events

The last few trips haven't been well attended and some have been cancelled due to lack of numbers. This is a shame because there's some great caving to be done outside Derbyshire and the trips that Pete and others put on deserve better support. If you would like to come along on any of these trips etc. PLEASE let the person organising it know as soon as you can. If the organiser doesn't know that anyone is planning on coming along they're not going to organise the permit and the chances are that the trip won't happen. Ta.

Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th September 08 Alum Pot & Hidden Earth

Contact: Jules Barrett

A trip down Alum Pot - one of the classic Yorkshire caves on the Saturday. Choose from the Long Churn - Dolly Tubs route or the big hang down the open shaft. Hidden Earth on the Sunday in Otley (info at <http://hidden-earth.org.uk/>).

Thursday 2nd October 08

EPC Monthly Meeting

Contact: Sam Townsend

The usual highbrow discussion and comment at the Bowling Green, Bradwell.

Tuesday 21st October 08

SSSI Cave Conservation Monitoring Meeting

Contact: Toni Murphy

SSSI Cave Conservation Monitoring Meeting held at Natural England offices in Bakewell. Forum to discuss conservation issues surrounding Derbyshire caves. Contact Toni if you have anything to raise.

Saturday 18th to Sunday 26th October 08

Central Pyrenees trip

Contact: Jules Barrett

Trip to the Central Pyrenees for either Cotiella or the Felix-Tromme system (see elsewhere in this newsletter).

Thursday 6th November 08

EPC Monthly Meeting

Contact: Sam Townsend

Arguments and perhaps free Thai crisps at the Bowling Green, Bradwell.

Saturday 15th November or Saturday 22nd November 08

South Wales trip

Contact: Jase Rider

Weekend will depend on when we can get a leader.

Friday 21st to Sunday 23rd November 08

CHECC Student Caving Forum in Castleton

Not necessarily something to attend but certainly something to be aware of...! Derbyshire and its caves is likely to be over-run by students. Visit www.checc.org for information.

Saturday 22nd November 08

DCRO Induction Day (Whitehall)

Contact: Jules Barrett

If you are interested in joining you should attend this day for an introduction to DCRO.

Thursday 4th December 08

Festive meet at the Bowling Green, Bradwell.

EPC Monthly Meeting

Contact: Sam Townsend

Saturday 6th December 08

Another famous Yorkshire Pot. Needs dry weather so may go for an alternative if necessary.

Meregill, Yorkshire

Contact: Pete Pollard

Between Christmas Day and New Year

The traditional Eldon Christmas trip where we get flooded out of a Yorkshire cave followed by the evening in the Helwith Bridge (or similar). Not to be missed! Please let Jase know if you are interested.

Yorkshire trip

Contact: Jase Rider

Saturday 17th January 09

We'll be getting the big rope out this weekend for a trip to Nick Pot. Home of Vulcan - one of the biggest underground pitches in Yorkshire. Bring a foot jammer!

Nick Pot, Yorkshire

Contact: Pete Pollard

Saturday 21st February 09

Biggish SRT trip with loads of character...perhaps best savoured in the wet! Previous trip report on the Eldon website at: <http://www.eldon.org.uk/juniper.html>

Juniper Gulf, Yorkshire

Contact: Pete Pollard

Saturday 21st March 09

Varied (and excellent!) SRT trip. Lots of small pitches and proper (sometimes tight) caving in between. Previous trip report on the Eldon website at: http://www.eldon.org.uk/gingling_august2007.html

Gingling Hole, Yorkshire

Contact: Pete Pollard

Roughly two weeks from 6th April 09

The annual easter visit to Matienzo with Dan Hibberts, Bob Toogood and others. With 2.5 km of new cave surveyed in summer 2008 it's unlikely that you'll come back disappointed. Big, sociable trip and all are welcome.

Matienzo Expedition

Contact: Dan Hibberts

Saturday 18th April 09

Classic through trip. Not a lot of rope needed but lots of caving.

Providence – Dow Cave, Yorkshire

Contact: Pete Pollard

Eldon Library

New additions to the library:

- **Torca La Vaca (Matienzo) Survey** - Survey of Torca La Vaca in Matienzo provided by Dan Hibberts.
- **Descent Issues 203 (August/September 2008) and 202 (June/July 2008)**
- **OCC Newsletter Vol. 42 No. 1-2 (Jan-Feb 2006), Vol. 42 No. 3-4 (Mar-Apr 2006), Vol. 42 No. 5-6 (May-June 2006), Vol. 42 No. 7-8 (July-Aug 2006), Vol. 42 No. 9-12 (Sept-Dec 2006), Vol. 43 No. 1-3 (Jan-Mar 2007), Vol. 43 No. 4-6 (Apr-June 2007), Vol 43 No. 7-9 (July-Sept 2007), Vol 43 No. 9 – 12 (Oct-Dec 2007), Vol. 44 No. 1-3 (Jan-Mar 2008)**
- **EPC Newsletter No. 2008_02 (Apr-June 2008)**

Eldon Tackle Store

New club rope bought

From Jules Barrett

At the September monthly meeting a decision was taken to purchase 200m of 10.5mm Beal rope and Bob D has procured it for us. This has been cut into sensible lengths and will be made available for the use of members. Eventually it will live in the tackle store (see below).

Tackle store building

From Jules Barrett

Work continues on the EPC tackle store and there's lots more to do before the tackle can be moved into it. Next steps will be to finish the new roof before some internal fitting out. Contact John Taylor if you are able to help.

A word from the Training Officer

Has been another good few months from a training point of view. The tree at Bagshawe has proved it's worth and is a great facility for introductory SRT training. Before going away to the Vercors I did some basic rigging training with Sam Pemberton and had a trip into the wet inlets in Giants Hole with Angie Goode and James Wood looking at basic SRT skills.

SRT Competence Check for Aspirants

One of the cornerstones of the Eldon is that we require a certain level of competence amongst our members. The reason for this was very well described to me by Bob Dearman when I joined the club. It went something along the lines of "if you're going to put yourself in potentially dangerous places you stand a better chance of staying safe if you're with people who know what they're doing". Now, given that some club members have been sticking their necks out a long way for a long time this policy seems to have stood the test of time. Of course this approach will not suit everybody and other clubs are available who expect nothing more than you pay your subs and buy your round.

Obviously there are many different skills involved in caving and some will be more adept at some things than others (as anyone who's seen me wield an angle-grinder underground will testify!) One of the most important skills in modern caving both in the UK and abroad is an ability to get up and down ropes using SRT. For a number of years the club has made it a condition of full membership that aspirants should be able to demonstrate that they are proficient in SRT. Over the years this definition of 'SRT competence' has evolved to mean that whilst you might not be the best rigger in the world you can get up and down ropes, pass rebelayes and deviations, change direction on the rope, pass knots and a few other related skills. In the past with perhaps one or two aspirants per year this has been relatively easy to do. At least a couple of members would have caved with these new aspirants during the year and were usually prepared to give the nod when AGM-time came.

The current group of aspirants will be eligible for full membership of the club at the AGM in the spring of 2009. With so many aspirants in the club at the moment (I think there's about twelve) I've started to think about how we assess SRT competence. Basically, it's just not practical for me to arrange to go on trips with all the new aspirants at the start of the year so I am proposing that we organise a number of weekend days during February and March where aspirants will have the opportunity to show us what they can do. This will be very informal and hopefully will be a straightforward exercise. Perhaps a session above-ground in the morning and then a caving trip in the afternoon/early evening. As well as giving us the chance to have a look at how aspirants have developed their skills through the year it will also give aspirants an incentive to practice and is an opportunity for some more training. A number of members have agreed to make themselves available to help with this and everyone will be seen by more than one person.

The skills that I am suggesting that we need to see are as follows:

- a. set SRT kit up
- b. safeguarding progress on a traverse line
- c. manage a pitch-head in descent and ascent
- d. locking off the descender
- e. pass deviations in descent and ascent
- f. pass rebelayes in descent and ascent
- g. changeover from abseil to prussik and vice versa
- h. pass a knot in descent and ascent
- i. down-prussiking
- j. isolate a section of damaged rope

We have had SRT training notes for some time and these are the backbone for the training that happens in the club. They cover all these skills and I think have proved valuable to the current group of trainees.

I'm going to propose this for a vote at the October monthly meeting so come along or get in touch if you would like to discuss.

Jules Barrett (EPC Training Officer).

Central Pyrenees trip - October 2008

Getting close to the October Pyrenees trip and if anyone else would like to come along they would be most welcome. The rough dates are 18th October to 26th October 2008 although if people want to come out for a shorter time that's fine too. Basically we will be flying to Toulouse (from Gatwick) and having a look around one or two areas of the Pyrenees. Accommodation may be on the floor, in mountain huts or tents (or some combination of all of the above). More detailed plans will be made nearer the time depending on the weather/numbers etc but we have two things in mind:

Felix Trombe - Henne Morte. This is one of the largest caves in France in terms of length of passage with 45 entrances. Sounds as though there is excellent caving and potential for extension etc. Lots of high-level fossil passage so good for any weather.

Cotiella area of Spain also sounds good. There are lots of caves already known on the plateau and the deepest is around 600m. I've recently got hold of a 1:25,000 scale map of the area which has most of the already known caves marked on it. There's a mountain hut nearby which could be used as a base for exploratory forays onto the limestone plateau.

If you are interested in coming along contact Jules Barrett.

Projects

Sam's Dig has GONE!

Report by Jules Barrett

Sam Townsend, Bog Bergmann and many other Eldon members have finally pushed through the choke at the end of Sam's Dig and into a large aven/rift. The aven named 'Paternity's Fault' has been climbed (see 'News' above) and is undoubtedly a very significant find; a tribute to the tenacity and hard work that Sam and others have put in over the last four years. At the time of writing the aven has been rigged with anchors and fixed ropes but not yet surveyed. There are digging prospects high up in the aven and in the bottom but high water levels in the Bagshawe Top Stream Passage are currently hampering progress.



Sam Townsend in the top of Paternity's Fault. Photo by Rob Eavis.



Sam Townsend installing the fixed ropes in Paternity's Fault. Photo by Rob Eavis.

Plantation Swallet

Report by Dan Hibberts

After hearing all the stories about Plantation Swallet: one hundred and eighty feet deep, constantly on the move, with the smell of crushed limestone, girders bent like bananas after being fitted the previous week. Not to mention all the club members that had dug there in the past. Mike Salt, Dave Ottewell and I just had to go and have a look.

It was Autumn 2006 and Mike was very enthusiastic for us to go for a nosey. Dave and Mike had already been for a look and found the depression but were unable to locate the entrance. So, a couple of weeks later, Mike and I went for another look. It did not take us long to locate the entrance which was buried under eight inches of leaves. A very good job had been made of the entrance, so good in fact that we were unable to gain access!

The next I heard about Plantation Swallet was that the lid had been prised off and it was discovered that someone had previously thrown a dirty great boulder into the entrance to restrict access. The Darfar Pothole club then spent three weekends removing it! For the next 18 months Mike expressed an interest in having good look, he said that the Darfar were not interested or didn't have the time but were keen to pass it on. So we went for a look and it didn't take us long to work out why the Darfar were not interested, or why everyone had abandoned the place, also we had found a new meaning for the word "dodgy". The entrance consisted of two huge metal drums, which are laid vertically on top of the choke; you climb down between boulders for forty feet or so until you arrive at a large chamber with a sloping floor. Two

car-sized boulders are at the entrance and need supporting. Half way down the right side of the chamber is a difficult to find entrance, hidden amongst boulders, leading to the top of the choke. After crawling back under the chamber you find yourself at the head of a very awkward pitch that requires care when placing feet. At this point we both agreed that work needed to start from this point, as this was by far the most frightening place either of us had ever been. There are three large rocks, four feet above the floor, which hold each other and the rest of the choke up. Just below us, the choke didn't extend much further - about six more metres - and the route onwards passes back under the choke into a very unstable area, but what a draught! We both agreed it was an excellent prospect.

The following Saturday we returned with loads of scaff poles liberated from various building sites and set about stabilising the choke from the point decided on the previous week. We made good progress that day; we installed a scaffold platform part way down the pitch with a fixed ladder to make access safer. We stabilised the hanging boulders utilising an old steel girder that the previous team had installed. It was looking good; at this rate it would take us no time at all. How wrong could we be?

The following weeks were spent digging shoring up and listening to all the funny noises that the boulders were making and on some occasions, while digging on my own, the banging noises would make my mind up for me that it was time to leave. We had gained a few new recruits along the way, who only seemed to come for the day. Strange! After lots of work shoring up to the end of the known cave, it was looking very promising, like it would go every time we removed one more boulder. Bob Toogood and Dave Ottewell made it whenever they could. Bob said that mine and Mike's enthusiasm would get the better of us but we were making very quick progress. I was spending every spare minute underground a lot of it on my own. Mike and Dave had turned up one Saturday Morning while Nigel Strong and I came to survey from the entrance. All we could hear was rumbling boulders as Mike had been let loose with a crow bar.

The next week I scaffolded what Mike had dug out. A hole had appeared in the floor, while digging and scaffolding, which needed just one more rock removed and we were into a small chamber with a steeply descending floor. Throwing rocks down the hole was very encouraging. The next day the rock was persuaded to move, and we dropped into a small chamber back under the floor of what we had just scaffolded. You could see down three and half metres between boulders and the draught was getting stronger. Mike and I returned with that crow bar and more scaffolding, Mike got to work demolishing the choke while I scaffolded up what he had demolished. It was looking good. We were left that day with a rock you could nearly pick up but it was too awkward to shift. Mike had started work in Switzerland so was not about. On Monday, the 7th of July I thought I would go remove the rock that was in the way with the aid of Mr Hilti. Behind the rock was an open tube: it had finally gone. Mike and I had an arrangement that, if it went, we would wait till we were both there, that week must have seemed like a month to Mike, it felt like a year to me.

On Saturday the 12th of July Mike, Dave and I returned and pushed through the tube into a small chamber with an avenue into boulders, presumably part of the choke. Looking on through a squeeze was another chamber that was about twice as big as the last with a sloping boulder floor; this chamber also has looming boulders just above head height. We had now reached the bottom of the choke and an accurate survey showed the depth to be forty-three meters or one hundred and forty one feet. On entering the chamber it soon became apparent that the way on was blocked. After jiggling things with a bar we soon gained access to an even bigger chamber with two ways on. Straight on was thirty metres or so of very muddy steeply descending passage, which ended in a dig, mud filled and reducing in size until too tight. The other way on just ended but there was a tantalising sound of water through muddy boulders. It was decided that we would come back the next day.

The next day Mike, Bob and I came back with extension cables and more scaffolding tubes. I arrived at the dig face first. It had been raining all night so the water was very loud. By the time Mike got to the bottom I had dug my way in. We just needed a little more help from Mr Hilti before dropping down three metres into a very clean chamber with a stream running from North to South. This could mean the water may resurge at Ilam, which would be very exciting.

The water ran into a very tight rift, which continued for about four metres or as far as could be seen until it went around a corner. Blasting has revealed an undercut. As of this being written, water can be heard dropping just ahead and the draught is intermittent. The total depth is now approximately Fifty-five metres. Digging is still in progress...

Jim's Crawl Oxlow

Report by Dan Hibberts

Bob Toogood's mind must be full of interesting digs that he has been to over the years. He had been going on about a bedding crawl in one of the chambers in Oxlow that he thought he had been to, but could not remember much about it. While studying 'Caves of the Peak District' the only bedding crawl I could find was Jim's crawl. So we went for a look.

The book says that at the bottom of the second pitch there is an easy traverse onto a crumbling rock bridge. Well I could not find an easy traverse, I suppose I must be going soft. After climbing the left wall I found some deteriorating bolts and home made hangers on top of the rock bridge. I rigged a rope to aid Bob T, Sam P, John P and James W. There was another pitch above with a dubious looking rope hanging over a massive rub point. I chose to free climb this, as I didn't trust the rope. Upon reaching the top I found a massive bolt, which didn't look very encouraging, so I replaced it, using it

as a back up. At the top of the pitch you have some acrobatics taking off your harness, before entering Jim's crawl. Not far in, on the right there was an aven with some loose rock, which would be needed to be removed to gain access to the chamber behind. It did not look as though anyone had been there before and there was a good draught.

Bob had got a bug and wasn't feeling great but said he would wait while I went to the end. Every five or six metres you would find a pot in the floor with an aven above, although they all soon choke, most of them seem to draught. The book mentions one being eleven metres deep which unless one has been filled with rubble is untrue. On the way to the end, stone chippings had glued themselves to the main drag with calcite and had to be removed to carry on, leading me to believe that people had not been here for a very long time. Along the way to the end you meet various bits of digging equipment, one being an old- fashioned drill, which should be in a museum, presumably used by the legendary Keith Bentham.

The end is a flat out crawl, but, if you took off your helmet, you could see the passage open up only a few feet away; there was a very encouraging draught. On my way back I realised what a tricky bit of cave this was, there are about six squeezes they are not that tight but they are relentless.

Bob was eager to find out what I had seen. Discussing our thoughts on the place, we now had a "to do list". We set off back, and soon realised this was not a trip for five people three of which were novices. Bob and I had planned to come back soon so we left it rigged.

The following Wednesday Mandy Fu, Mandy's mate Kev and I went back in with a drill, replacement rope for the dodgy pitch and long life anchors. We planned to enlarge the bedding at the end of the crawl: we made good progress that day but managed to divert a hidden stream into what used to be a bone dry dig. Now soaking wet and Kev complaining that this was one of the longest trips he had done and that he was cold and wet, we called it a day.

Returning with Bob on the Saturday (30/8/08) we first poked at the looming rocks, which we had seen in the aven the previous weekend. It only took a few minutes to clear a way through. Looking into the chamber you could see a load of hanging death ready to fall at any moment. I decided that I was not in the right frame of mind to push through right now and decided we would put it off until we were on our way back; Bob agreed.

Digging at the end revealed a lot more work and a pool of water, which needs a lot of determined pushing but we could see a lot farther and had made a few metres more progress. There was also a hole in the floor blocked with calcite, where a stream can be heard falling. We did spend some time trying to enlarge the way through, but it still needs work. The aven, which we had ignored earlier, received another look; I crawled through into a roomy chamber, which was on the edge of a big collapse. I wished I had not bothered as I nearly got trapped by a rock fall. Another digging trip is planned in the near future.

A Few Rigging Tips – it's not rocket science is it!

Jules Barrett

Here are a few rigging tips that might be useful.

Traverse Lines

When rigging traverse lines along ledges it's common to see people trailing their rope bag below them and booting it along the ledge with them. Much better to wear a caving belt under your SRT harness and attach the bag high up to the belt as you're moving sideways. If you attach a heavy bag to your SRT harness it will pull your harness down so best to wear a separate belt and attach the bag with a HMS krab. This also means that if there are sections in the cave where you need to take your harness off you've still got something to attach a bag to.

Knots for Traverse Lines

It's common to use some sort of butterfly knot on traverse lines which allows sharing the load across multiple anchors. Whether you choose to use an 'Apine Butterfly' or 'Caver's Butterfly' is up to you but most people find it easier to measure out and adjust the length of the loop with a 'Caver's Butterfly'. Whilst the butterfly knot is probably most appropriate in most situations there are some occasions when you want to keep the traverse line as high as possible. As long as you are using krabs for rigging rather than maillons the humble clove hitch will allow you to get your traverse line as high as possible.

Easy Rigging

If you really want to make it easy for people to pass your rigging (perhaps the rigging is going to be in for a long time and lots of people will be using it) consider putting a screwgate krab through the middle of the knot at rebelays. This gives people something to clip their cowstail into on the way down and up.

Long Pitches

If the cave is dry long pitches can cause Descenders to get very hot. Ropes get glazed and the handling suffers. Don't forget to wet your ropes before you use them.

Arms on Y-hangs Rubbing on Rock

Sometimes you get one of the arms of the Y-hang rubbing on the rock below the anchor. In this situation try adding another krab (or better still a maillon) so that the back bar of the krab or maillon is rubbing on the rock rather than the rope.

Trip Reports

A bit of a through-trip - Serendipity to the Pène-Blanche Main Entrance (Réseau Felix Trombe – Henne Morte, Haute-Garonne, France)

Made up by Dave Gledhill

Cavers: Martin 'Barny' Barnicott (EPC), Bob Toogood (EPC), Dave Gledhill (EPC)

After a week of digging and also as I was due to fly home the next day, we decided to have a bit of a rest by doing a tourist trip. Bob had flown out the previous evening, so this would be a good re-introduction to the system for him (he had previously caved in this system in the past).

The Réseau Felix Trombe – Henne Morte is the largest cave system in France and also contains the longest through trip in France. Some of the further reaches of the system require camping trips if any serious pushing is to be attempted. The entrance to the system we would be using was found a year ago by Barny on one of, if not the first of his exploratory surface walks on the heavily wooded and steeply sloping hill above this system. The entrance, an easy squeeze over a boulder, leads directly onto the first of a long series of pitches that go by the name of Serendipity, that descends around 650ft into what used to be a fairly inaccessible part of the system.

The initial 10-15ft are on the narrow side, but after this, the pitches are dry, spacious and often free-hanging. Most of the re-belays are done whilst standing on good ground or ledges, making this an extremely enjoyable expedition. At around 300ft, a slight obstruction in the shaft requires removal of SRT kit and a flat out sideways squeeze-cum-thrutch through some gnarly tubes until the shaft is regained lower down. At this point, the shaft divides into two. One shaft draughts up whilst the other draughts down. The shaft that we didn't descend this time (Entente Cordiale), was previously pushed by Barny and myself for (approx.) a further 200ft+ last year. Subsequent trips by Barny and a few of the locals went further still, although this now appears to be petering out into a series of rifts of ever decreasing size.

Once back in the shaft connecting to the main system, further abseils revealed the nature of the rock to be changing, it now having a coating of incredibly sharp and grippy projections guaranteed to shred many an oversuit. There were also a number of entertaining squeezes through holes in the floor, emerging in the roofs of chambers or avens, legs flailing to seek footholds on the unseen walls. It was at this point that we saw the original exploration bolts in the wall, used to climb up from the cave system below. An initially awkward rope traverse over a pit and up into a squeeze led to the final pitch, after which, a final slide down a flowstone wall found us in the known cave and for the first time that day, on surveyed ground.

The passages were large and dry with little or no obstacles underfoot. Instead of making our way out of the system, we decided to go even further in as Barny wanted to have a look at a nearby part of the system called Le Syndrome Chinoise (The China Syndrome). After around 5 minutes easy walking and a slippery handline descent, we proceeded through a series of chambers until we emerged at the top of a large boulder slope overlooking a huge cavern stretching away before us. A scramble down onto a sand/boulder-strewn floor proceeded towards a flowstone/moonmilk covered expanse of wall that dropped away into a very large black void. Water falling from high-up on the wall on the other side of the hole made sounding the depth impractical. The single precarious vantage point overlooking the pit offered no sight of the bottom, even with Stenlights turned up from 'stun' to 'kill' – deep then. The roof of the chamber had been barely visible until this point, it had now totally vanished. Intriguingly, there was a nice clean shiny 10mm rope disappearing straight up into the blackness like some Indian rope trick. The top was completely out of site. We suspect that this was the way into the 'Galerie des Vieux Loups' (old wolves), the continuation of the system beyond the chasm. On exiting the chamber we noticed that what we had first taken to be a solid floor was in fact a false floor, through which glimpses of blackness could be seen. There were no signs that any attempt had been made to go down through the floor to see what lay below. (*Looking at a survey of this part of the system shows the total known height of the China Syndrome at around 80 metres, although the aven/chamber goes up much further than this, it has not been climbed or /surveyed. The survey also infers that the chamber floor is solid, although this is clearly not the case).

As both Barny and myself had only ever exited the cave from this point once before (that's exited as in go out through, not made its legs wobble), it was decided that we should start making our way out, as the route-finding is certainly not straightforward. What follows is a brief description of some of the trip; a full account would be more like war & peace.

Our first objective was to find our way to the 'Delta', a series of big interconnecting passages in which it is easy to round in circles for hours until you realise that some of the formations etc. look rather familiar. On reaching this successfully, we decided on a small detour from the through-route to have a look at some fine formations that are purported to exist along a lengthy passage (Avenue du Futile) that goes off from here into an area known as the Maillon Manquant. After several awkward hand-line climbs/descents and a couple of very entertaining mud/moonmilk slopes, we arrived at a massive flowstone covered chamber, with both the walls and floor being covered in a pale yellow coating (Coulée Champagne). Unfortunately the scale of the chamber made efforts to capture this effectively on a 'point & shoot' camera rather limited. Although the passage continued much further, we decided to retrace our steps.

The next goal was to reach the Salle de la Revanche via a series of large dry fossil passage with the occasional climb over/around transit van sized boulders. The Revanche is a large chamber in which 'edible door-mice' have been seen. This would appear to indicate a link to surface as yet unknown, somewhere in the area. The dormice are believed to have fallen in from above to meet a hungry end, as there's buggers-all down here for them to live on and their SRT skills leave much to be desired. Leaving the Revanche, the way on changed to a twin pitch abseil down a tightish hading rift (aaaahhhh diaclassa – for those of you who did the Coventosa/Tonio trips the other year).

Scrambling over/under boulders saw us emerge in the Salle du Brouillard, another large dry boulder filled chamber. After this, the target was the extremely large 'Salle du Dromidaire'. This is one seriously big space and normally the turning back point for trips into the Pène Blaque system from the main entrance at the foot of the Pène Blaque (White Point) itself. I would describe to you what this place looked like (other than dry boulder strewn etc. etc.....); unfortunately it was so big I couldn't see the damn thing, but I know it was out there.

The important thing about doing this through trip is that you have to remember that on entering the Dromidaire, you must stay close to the left-hand wall for a short way and then head off on the obvious passage to the way out. Having wandered off away from the left-hand wall to look at some very fine formations, and following a series of cairns/markers/well worn floor, we suddenly realised that we had no idea as to where it was we had just come from. It took us about 20 minutes of re-tracing what we thought were our steps through an interesting and intersecting series of paths/cairns/arrows etc. before we found the passage by which we came into the chamber. I suspect that it would be possible to be lost in there for hours, if not days.

The rest of the detail from this point is a little hazy. There was an easy SRT up a narrow and very polished rift (The Letterbox), lots of hand-line traverses, some of which was a tad exposed to be doing without cowstails, lots of easy sandy crawls, more hand-line climbs, more traverses and so on.....

The crawls started increasing in height, initially enabling a vertebrae bruising stoop to be adopted. Thus, Quasimodo like we proceeded until full height was obtainable (well by some anyway) and rounding the final bend we were finally able to see daylight coming in through the twin entrances of the Pène Blaque itself.

A 40ft hand-line descent from the cave mouth down to the sloping floor below left us with just the hour long climb back over the coll and the descent down through the thickly wooded slopes back to the car. A fabulous trip into a rarely explored area of cave, still with lots of potential, waiting to be pushed.

Monday July 7th 2008 – Nickergrove Through Trip and Carlswark Cavern

Report by Jon Pemberton

Cavers: Jules Barrett (EPC), Toni Murphy (EPC), Mark Harrison (EPC), Jon & Sam Pemberton (EPC), Jim Lister (EPC) plus special guest appearance from Guy 1 (no idea), Girl 1 (Bridget Hall) & Girl 2 (Jane Rigby).

An evening trip which was meant to involve actually going down Eyam Dale House Cave but ended up a bit south of the entrance in a completely different delph! After parking and kitting up in the car park for the retirement home we promptly went in search of the manhole cover supposedly "within the grounds of the retirement home." After 10 minutes of searching with no luck we went on our instinct down the path at the side of the car park heading parallel with the road. Bridget rigged the first pitch while we all gathered at the entrance of the cave. With nine people packed at the entrance of the cave getting numerous battle wounds from nettles, the five Eldon (minus Jim) decided that Eyam Dale House Cave could wait a few more weeks so to save time we walked on down to Cucklet Delph for the Nickergrove Mine through trip.

We went through the adit entrance and headed straight for the 15m shaft to the lower levels. Jules rigged while Toni waited at the pitch head for Sam and me to ab down. When we were all safely in the lower level, we took off our SRT gear and secured it to the bottom of the rope so instead of mucking it up through the rest of the crawls we could pull it straight up on completion of the through trip, (Cue Mark). After a few awkward crawls, climbs and scrambles we eventually reached the Didsbury Shaft entrance and after a few metres of vertical free climbing we were successfully above the surface. Jules kindly offered to flee back into the adit entrance to de-rig.

With the above antics over we still had an hour left until we were to meet up with Team-2, (the Eyam Dale House cavers)

in the retirement home car park. We agreed that to fill this gap a Carlswalk Eyam Dale Shaft to Gin entrance through trip would be appropriate. Jules quickly rigged the 11m shaft with the help from my Carlswalk knowledge (Laughter from all!!) When we were all at the bottom of the shaft again we took off our SRT gear, (all except for Toni, see de-rigging Shaft entrance) and made our way to Noughts and Crosses Chamber to gain access to the main Eyam Passage. We made a brief stop for Jules as he wanted to poke his nose down through the rift in Oyster chamber to spot the through trip to the resurgence. We then scaled on out of the Gin entrance. When we eventually made it back to Eyam Dale Shaft the task was now to de-rig. Jules was 100% correct in knowing that the SRT kits and tackle bags attached to the rope would snag on the way back up. Luckily Toni had kept her SRT gear on so that we could safely retrieve the gear. We met up with team-2 bang on 10:30pm, (timing or what?)

Overall although we didn't manage to get even a foot in Eyam Dale House Cave, we still had an eventful night of caving with two through trips.

Giants Hole

Report by Jules Barrett

Cavers: Jules Barrett (EPC), Angela Goode (EPC), James Wood (EPC)

An evening's basic SRT training in the Giants Hole entrance series. Went up into Upper West and abseiled out of the roof and back into the entrance passage. Then went down Garlands Pot and back out and finished off with a trip up into the Wet Inlets, a look at the downstream end of Sump 1 and back down out of the roof and into Base Camp Chamber. A good evening's sport and enjoyed getting out with Angela and James.

Bagshawe Cavern

Cavers: Sam Townsend (EPC), Mark Harrison (EPC), Rob Eavis (SUSS), Katie Dent (SUSS)

A look around the Full Moon Series and other areas of Bagshawe to take some photographs. Although there's no trip report here are a couple of photos.

A couple of Via Ferrata in the Ecrins

Report by Jules Barrett

Climbers: Jules Barrett (EPC) and Toni Murphy (EPC)

Toni and I had a week around the Vallouise/Aillefroide valley in the Ecrins before traveling over to the Vercors for the European Speleological Conference. There's excellent rock climbing, alpine mountaineering, canyoning and via ferrata in the area from the very easiest to harder stuff. There's a good network of refuges and we visited the Refuge des Ecrins above 3000m on the Glacier Blanc. There's a huge amount of quality rock climbing from slabby F3b routes with bolts every metre which are very popular with families to classic multi-pitch routes with bolts. We stayed at the municipal campsite in Vallouise which suited us for getting up and down the valley. The campsite at the head of the valley at Aillefroide is more picturesque and it's possible to walk from there to the climbing etc.

We used the 'Via Ferratas in France' book for inspiration and found these two:

Via Ferrata Les Gorges des Durances

This via ferrata has been installed in one of the small gorges that runs into the main valley that runs from Briancon to



Sam Townsend and stal in the Full Moon Series. Photo: Rob Eavis.



Katie Dent in the Top Stream Passage. Photo by Rob Eavis.

Aillefroide. It is operated commercially costing 6 euros per person and is very well equipped. There are actually three via ferratas here (green, red and black) which link up to make an excellent half-day's entertainment. The black route gets a grade of Tres Difficile making it one of the harder via ferratas in the area. It's picturesque location above the river makes it a great place to be on a warm day and it certainly isn't as remote as many of the European via ferratas.

The hut where you pay is only a few minutes walk from the car park and after being given a map we headed off to the start of the green route. The route begins in the bottom of the valley right next to the river and the green route basically traverses the lower walls of the gorge eight to ten metres above the river. We made our way along here and soon got to the start of the Black route. The route begins with an easy descent back down to the river. Once in the bottom the route takes a rising diagonal traverse across a steep wall finishing at a wire rope bridge over the river. Cross this to the far side and then climb a steep wall straight up to reach another higher wire rope bridge that crosses back. From here the route continues the rising traverse with some great positions before crossing another bridge over a small gorge which leads to the final steep wall. The final wall is 120m high and fairly steep. The equipment on here is excellent and there are metal rungs where there aren't good hand and footholds. We reached the top of the final wall and crossed back to the start of the via ferrata via a final huge (and highest) 'himalayan bridge'. This one is the most impressive and there's a great feeling of exposure. From the end of the bridge it's a fifteen minute walk back down to the car.

Great fun half-day entertainment which gives an excellent perspective of this part of the valley.

Via Ferrata Les Vignaux

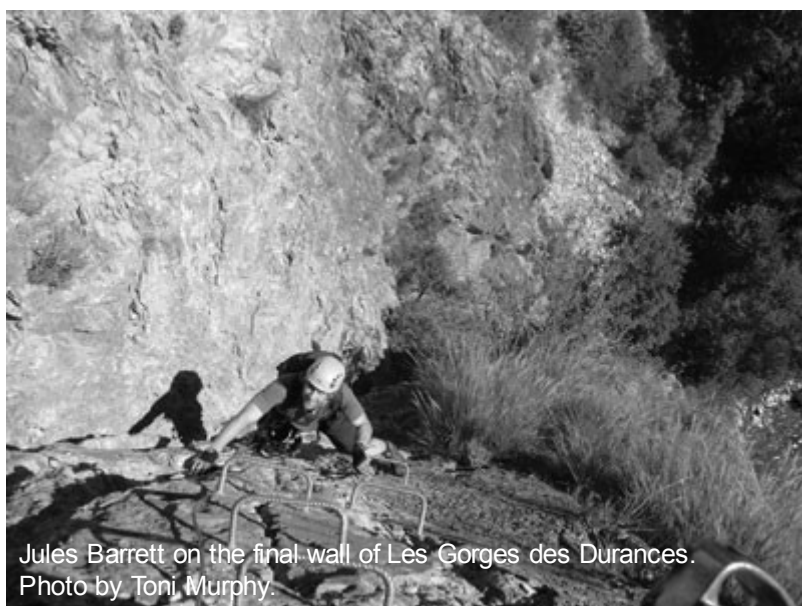
This one only gets a grade of Difficile so after having done the Gorges des Durances via ferrata earlier in the week we thought this would make a nice relaxing way to finish off the day. The guide described this as one of the most popular via ferratas in France so we thought we'd have a look. The car park wasn't straightforward to find but eventually we found it. Although this is also run as a commercial via ferrata there was nobody there to collect money so after a very steep walk up from the car we jumped on. The first part of the route is a rising traverse across the lower part of a large rock face which has some very slippery rock and airy positions. After a while there are two options – the black route goes steeply up a wall on the right whilst the red route disappears over an arete via a fixed iron ladder. We took the black route which suddenly went very steeply up a rock wall with very few rungs. Certainly for some of the route the only choice was to yard up the wire so gloves definitely needed on this one. The equipment wasn't as new-

looking as the Gorges de la Durances and there were some frayed wires but all plenty sound enough. The route snakes up these steep walls, slabs and corners until eventually arriving at a small cave. Here there are some iron rungs and the route actually goes overhanging for a few moves. This part is quite strenuous and significantly harder than anything on the Gorges des Durances route. Because this one is actually going straight up the large rock face this route takes in far more remote situations and feels more serious. After more steep walls and slabs we eventually arrived at the top of the route about an hour before dark. Fortunately the walk down follows a very obvious and huge path/track back down to the village of Les Vignaux so we made our way down as it went dark. The route down gives great views of the Tete a'Val where there looks to be some brilliant rock climbing.

Although this part of the Ecrins is only a hundred kilometres or so from the Vercors you do have to go the long way around the mountains and the journey from Vallouise to Villard-de-Lans took around four hours.



Toni Murphy on Les Gorges des Durances
Photo by Jules Barrett.



Jules Barrett on the final wall of Les Gorges des Durances.
Photo by Toni Murphy.

Eldon Hole – West Wall Route

Report by Toni Murphy

Cavers: Toni Murphy (EPC), Bob Toogood (EPC), Clive Westlake (EPC/TSG), Ann Soulsby (TSG), Tom Spriggs (TSG)

Plans were made for Bob and I to do Giants Hole on ladders, or so I thought... However with very high water levels we decided to meet up with Ann Soulsby at the TSG and Bob and I piggy-backed on Ann, Clive and Tom's trip down Eldon Hole (West Wall route).

This was my fourth attempt to get down Eldon Hole. The first time I got just below the traverse on the North Gully route and the second and third times work commitments took over.

So, Tom rigged, Clive found a suitable position for photographs and I followed Tom, then came Ann and finally Bob. Passed a couple of quick rebelayes and then onto the 61m 'big pitch'. It looks a long way down and once I'd got to the bottom and looked up at the person coming down it really does put it into perspective.

We went up into Miller's Chamber, I thought quite an awkward dismount. I went up to the start of Damocles Rift but decided to leave going through for the next trip.

Really enjoyed this one!!

7th September 2008 – Eyam Dale House Cave

Report by James Wood

Cavers: Jules Barrett (EPC), Mark Harrison (EPC), Toni Murphy (EPC), Jon & Sam Pemberton (EPC), James Wood (EPC)

After the previous attempted trip had to be rethought due to the excessive numbers, Sam was determined to arrange a trip and have a look round. He had spoken to the nursing home a week before and they didn't appear to be too restrictive. A quick phone call on the day to confirm and we were in. We all met in the car park at 18:30, Sam and myself arriving earlier to collect the key and open up the entrance (a scaffolding bar across a manhole cover).

It was decided to do the trip on ladders, due to the previous trip being awkward on SRT. Mark and Jules set about rigging the 18m entrance pitch. Mark was first to descend the ladder, belayed by Jules, followed by myself, Jon, Sam, Toni and then Jules. Who was belayed from the bottom of the pitch by Mark. Unsure of the way on and failing to remember the description, Mark had a quick look straight ahead over the calcited boulders, coming back to report he was unsure. I had a quick look down to the right of pitch, were after a few metres it went into a tight crawl, with a hole in the calcite,

which went nowhere. We rigged the blind shaft, corrected by Jules when he met us. We de-rigged the pitch and continued past the shaft. Jon meanwhile had another look where Mark had been, he managed to find the way on. A slide over calcited boulders leads to a small chamber, to the right a rift which leads to the second pitch (6m). Jules rigged the ladder down the pitch, using rope around a thread to the right. Mark was again first to descend crawling back under at the bottom. Next was Jon who after the descent continued on in the rift which after a distance leads to a large chamber, where it ends. Next I was to descend and followed Mark, then Jon who continued on after Sam, Toni and Jules followed and went down under the wet muddy crawl. Tight in places the crawl shortly leads to 'The Pearly Gates', a squeeze through stal. Continuing on to the right it opens out, where Mark firstly climbed down, I followed not as tricky as it was made out to be. A hand line was tied by Jules to a small bridge at the top of the climb, if needed for the ascent. Toni was next to climb down, Jules, Jon, and Sam followed. Now all in the rift chamber, one by one we climbed up the calcited boulders ahead to a smallish pool, with some pretties. Higher up, in the chamber were some nice formations and 'the boulder of doom'. We all followed the rift on, which required a short climb down. Straddling the drop in places to a lower



L to R. Tom Spriggs, Toni Murphy, Clive Westlake and Ann Soulsby at Eldon Hole. Photo by Bob Toogood.



The Sword of Damocles. Photo by Bob Toogood.

level we carried on to the end of the rift. Jon at this point was attempting to climb down into the lower level, I joined him. Jules found a more suitable down climb, further back towards the chamber and climbed down to find a dig. Jon and I decided to climb back up to have a look where Sam had previously been. Back towards the large rift chamber under calcited boulders, I climbed through a rift to a small chamber that was quite wet and relatively clean and mud free. First I had a look to the left to find some wood holding up some boulders, easier access could be gained from the other side. I went round and climbed down into a small chamber, on my hands and knees at this point. To the left looked quite tight but I didn't have a look where it went. I followed the flat out crawl to the right after about 15m I got to a muddy pool of water, 90° right was about a 1m climb up. The crawl continued on to the left to end after about 3-4m, where the mud/silt was roughly 10-15 cm from the roof of the tube. Although it has been reported to draft here, the air was very still and the steam from my breath wasn't being carried. I crawled back out to meet Sam. We both then go back into the main chamber, to meet Jon. Toni, Jules and Mark had already started to make their way out, the climb up where the hand line was now fixed came in useful to pull up on. Mark waited for us at the top of the pitch, where he and I de-rigged. We then continued back to the entrance pitch where Toni and Jules had already ascended by this time. A belt was lowered down for Jon, Sam and I, which got caught further up where Mark climbed up to a ledge to retrieve it. Jon, Sam, Myself and finally Mark ascended the ladder belayed by Jules. Jules, Mark and Sam de-rigged and locked the lid back down.

Between the group we managed to cover pretty much all of the cave, a worthwhile trip, which remains unspoilt from traffic. Not like the usual Stoney caves.

Monday 8th September 2008 – Carlswalk Dynamite Series (Porth Crawl) **Report by Jon Pemberton.**

Cavers: James "Beaver" Wood (EPC) & Jon Pemberton (EPC)

Another night of fun for James and myself was on the cards and after our failed attempt to reach picnic passage last time we decided to have another go at Porth Crawl. On the previous trip we were also joined by Sammy Pemberton (EPC) but shortly after calling "Shotgun" once James had gone through Porth Crawl Sam got stuck and panicked resulting in me unwilling to carry on.

Anyway back to the story...

After quickly kitting up we slung a ladder down Flower Pot and gained quick 'easy' access into the Dynamite series dropping into Falls Chamber. Plodding along we reached the first flat out which seemed tighter than usual or maybe our hearts weren't set on fun-times crawling. At the end of the crawl we climbed 3m down into prospect chamber and dived head first into the second flat out. James went first having already accomplished the "horrible" crawl so after a climb over the blind shaft the helmet came off and through he went as I shortly followed. Basically Porth Crawl explained; you pop through a small (one arm forward, one at your side) hole Big enough to turn 90% and take your helmet off. Now you have to go completely on one side best approached facing the right hand wall and just push your way through! With no hand or foot holes to assist. When reaching the end with sense of accomplishment the helmets went back on and we started the tight climb up the rift towards clog passage. I would honestly consider this to be more awkward than Porth Crawl (steep and tight!) at the top is a crawl leading on which sharply turn right. A left turn leads shortly to a spoil filled tube. Right follows on to mine development along a prominent vein with loads of blast marks coming in from every direction. A short climb leads up to a boulder choke with roots running through which surely must be close to surface. Straight on leads to a few side passages one a very tight rift leading to a small chamber where water can be heard trickling away although it was way too tight for James or myself to dare look!! We eventually reached the final aven which we weren't expecting at all with at least four very large pieces of digging equipment just left sitting there. We then dropped down into Buckley's dig and the start of Picnic passage flat out muddy crawling until we reached a large cross rift that we could stand up in (Straw Inlet) James decided to go for a look so after a short break to catch our breath. When returning back, James said, "It's too tight and I can't be arsed to be honest!" So we hastily decided to retreat rather than use up the rest of our energy flat out crawling to the end of the dig knowing that we'd have to come back the same way! The exit was eventful where we had a few situations of our usual laid back approach to caving where we normally sit in random places and talk about random rubbish, this time it was in Porth Crawl my face touching his boots and James deciding to throw his helmet down the hole at the end of Porth Crawl! Lolz.

Overall very worthwhile trip to see a different side of Carlswalk. If anyone plans to go in the near future give James & myself a shout and we'd be more than happy to go again just to reach the end of the dig.

Eldon Urban Myths 1 - A Blast from the Past

("Never let the truth bugger up a good story" - Anon.)

The first in a series of tales from the Eldon's long, distinguished (and sometimes hazardous!) history.

In the 60's the Eldon spent many happy hours exploring the various sinks on Stanley Moor and its environs. One such dig was Shay Lodge and one sunny Saturday afternoon cameth the man. This was no ordinary mortal, he was dwarfish, sported a remarkable hunchback and had personal hygiene and culinary habits which would have made a starving porker green with envy. After a cursory investigation he decided that the only way forward was to deal with the final boulder choke by a subtle method courtesy of Alfred Nobel. To this end he rooted around until he came up with the necessary materials. These were less than ideal and consisted of five pounds of "strawberry jam", a plain detonator and a short section of fuse. Problem: how fast did the fuse burn ? Solution: chop the fuse in half, light it and time the burn. Result: 45 seconds. At the boulder choke our hero strategically placed the materials and set off out of the hole timing himself as he went. After 45 seconds he concluded that he would be well out of the way around a series of corners. Returning he took the fateful decision and lit the fuse. With immediate effect he set off legging it out of the cave at a speed which would have left Daley Thompson a dot in the distance. It was at this critical point approximately thirty feet from the choke that fate played him a bum hand. The headset on his Oldham lamp detached itself from his helmet and inextricably lodged itself in a pile of boulders in the floor leaving him well anchored up by his battery belt. This was a tad unfortunate and I have to report that it took longer to extricate the headpiece than it took the fuse to burn.

Back in Buxton the Eldon were well underway with the ritual Saturday night piss-up in the "Eagle" A figure straight from a Tom and Jerry cartoon appeared at the door. His jeans and shirt were blackened, ripped and falling off him. Glacial clay and small stone fragments were embedded in his face, chest, arms and legs. His hair and eyebrows had obviously taken a dislike to him and left in disgust. There was an unmistakable smell of burning bacon and he was staggering around in a manner which suggested that he'd made a concerted solitary attempt at drinking a pub dry. When questioned about the details of his demise there was no reply so it was concluded that he may have been through some sort of experience which had struck him stone deaf. It was at this point that the kindlier members of the club sat him down and started to pour copious pints of bitter down his neck on the basic premise that nothing they did was going to make his condition any worse. The rest just pissed themselves with laughing!

Later that night, well after closing time, he was taken home by a member who lived in Fairfield. In the night he got up to check our hero out and found him missing. He was eventually located walking down Fairfield Road starkers. Three weeks later his hearing began to recover...

Expeditions

Matienzo Summer 2008

Report by Dan Hibberts

After hearing all about Torca La Vaca (Cow cave) at Easter from Andy Pringle and Johnny Latimer, it sounded like they were into a big system which was waiting to be pushed when we came back in the summer. Being among the first to arrive we went straight to exploring the upper series which had been found when we had left the previous Easter. There was about one and a half kilometres of passage found but all the main routes ended in large collapses or calcite. We had previously decided that my team would take charge of descending all the big shafts in the floor that appeared to be twenty or so metres deep. Meanwhile the other team would look at the smaller easier leads that needed ticking off. After a couple of bolts had been placed over a round vertical shaft three ladders were hung and a lifeline was attached. Johnny went down first, he got most of the way down then came back to complain that the ladders did not reach the bottom. Another ladder was added and Johnny was soon at the bottom. Not long after, there was loads of shouting and Johnny went out of contact. I went down next followed by Bob Toogood. Johnny was traversing over a big canal with deep water, which was crystal clear. I was only just able to straddle the two walls; it wasn't long before we found the end which was a sandy dig. Johnny with his short legs was unable to straddle the walls slipped and fell in much to mine and Bob's amusement. After surveying, the shaft was 36 metres deep and there were about two hundred and fifty metres of passage. We decided to change to SRT, as the ladders were a pain in the arse. We dropped loads of shafts which didn't really go anywhere but they were all pretty deep. We decided to focus on a draughting slot, which had a pretty impressive volume of air coming from within and it was on Johnny's to do list. This slot apparently wasn't draughting at Easter, maybe because the water was too high. Mandy Fu and Mike from the MUSC had come along to witness some rock removal techniques. Mandy being absolutely tiny managed to fit through the squeeze, where she was then able to climb down about three metres before walking along to the start of a steep slope. She then requested a rope to get down. We tied a rope around Bill Sherrington and Mandy descended the slope into a large chamber with a deep pool of water that she thought was a sump. Well, as that volume of air can't pass through a sump, we needed to remove some rock to find out for ourselves. On the opposite side of the passage there was an unexplored vertical slot which looked very tight. At the bottom a complex of tubes and rift passage led to more canals, which Johnny fell in while exploring. Toogood and Johnny went to survey these new finds. There was an odd survey error, as the water in this area seemed higher than in anywhere else. Toogood had measured the lot in feet and inches. This got named the Whitworth Series.

While Bob and Johnny were surveying I forced my way into the draughty slot, which Mandy had already been down. It needed a ladder to get down as it was very difficult to get out of. When standing in the passage at the bottom you could feel the air rushing past you. Very impressive. After a short distance I reached the slope that Mandy had needed a rope for. It was a twenty-five foot drop, which was vertical, and needed a bolt and a ladder, rather than a rope tied around Bill. Once at the bottom I quickly realised a wet suit was needed and that it was not a sump as there were waves being blown across the water from the power of the airflow. We all agreed to come back again better prepared the next day.

Wetsuits, flotation, bottles and rope for a dive were among the items that were requested. James Carlisle being a bit of a water baby went in first followed by Bill Sherrington while Bob and I got a bolt in for the dive line. I could hear very large echoes coming from Bill and James's direction.

The sump turned out to be two ducks in deep water with about three inches of air space, which were both about three metres long, with a large air bell between them. The other side of the duck was a very large impressive passage fifteen metres to the roof and about the same width. There was also a big passage that went up a steep slope. We decided to follow the water which took us along the main passage in waist deep water. We followed this for around two hundred and fifty metres to climb up into a dry sandy passage which looked to take water in wet weather.

The upper series (up the steep slope) led back around into the main passage through most of the avens that could be seen from below in the stream way. There are loads of leads here, still waiting to be pushed, which have not been looked at.

The next day we got out of the water and into a massive passage which trended southwards into the hillside for well over a kilometre. At the end of the passage was a massive choke, which Mandy and I got totally lost in trying to find a way through. After hitting the choke having spent all day surveying people were getting a little grumpy, we decided to come back the next day fresh, to explore all the side passages and hopefully bypass the choke.

A full day was spent pushing all the leads of the main passage, which turned to mostly be oxbows back into the passage. We had spent most of the ten days in Cow Cave and had surveyed two thousand five hundred metres in total.

On one of the last days of the trip Phil Pappard had invited us along to push a tube in the bottom of a big hollow very close to a house. The owner of the house had made use of the draught by building a fridge around it! The owner of the house a Spanish lady came down to give us a good telling off, I don't think she was too happy with what we were doing to her fridge.

If you like the sound of discovering and surveying plenty of new passage and would like to join us at Easter 2009 contact Dan Hibberts.

Matienzo – Last of the Summer Whine

24th August – 1st September 2008

Report by Grave Deadhill

Cavers: Martin 'Barny' Barnicott (EPC) & Grave Deadhill (EPC)

Due to various work-related schedules, we were unable to take the opportunity to be in Matienzo for the full push & grab squalor-fest that forms the UK expedition* to Northern Spain some weeks previous to this trip. We had therefore decided to opt for the last week of the 'season'. Although this late approach does not afford the same level of UK inter-regional bonhomie that is the trademark of this area (a nod here to Mr. Sparrow), the lack of focussed pre-planning & re-planning each morning/evening did actually enable us to get out caving well before noon each day. The story continues.....

(* Note – Barny says an expedition is not an expedition unless you've hired a little man to carry all your gear on his head).



Matienzo. Photo by Bob Toogood.

Day 1. Return to Regolfo

Regolfo is the site of a number of surface shafts and a small escarpment on the hill above the further reaches of a larger system (Torno) below. Easter saw us excavate a mud choked tube directly through the face of the escarpment, leading to a cobble filled crawl and then to a 15m pitch, complete with two waterfalls. The pitch-head was and still is rather awkward to negotiate, as it requires a head first flat-out squeeze out over the pitch before clipping in and swinging out onto the rope. Easter saw us reach the bottom of the pitch, only to find that the waterfalls disappeared down another cobble-filled crawl, which at the time was impassable, not least due to the sheer volume of water. There was also another less promising looking (but dry-ish) tube further back in the chamber. The pitch was still damp, but only enough to be a mild irritant. Excavation of the cobbles ensued, only to find that the solid looking floor was turning to liquid mud in a thixotropic (Dave – that's a very obscure word even for the more erudite members of the Eldon! – Ed) frenzy. A second look at the 'less promising tube' found it to be connecting with the cobble filled wet way on. Both were draughting strongly.

Both ways on meet after about two tortuous body lengths. Continuation will be possible although it will require some modification to allow this. Lying flat out in the tight water filled tube allowed water to be pushed forward and out of sight around the bend in a bow wave. The water could be heard falling for a short distance (2m?) followed by approx 5 second silence and then a further sound of falling water, this time much further down. To be continued...

Day 2. Torno High Level Series

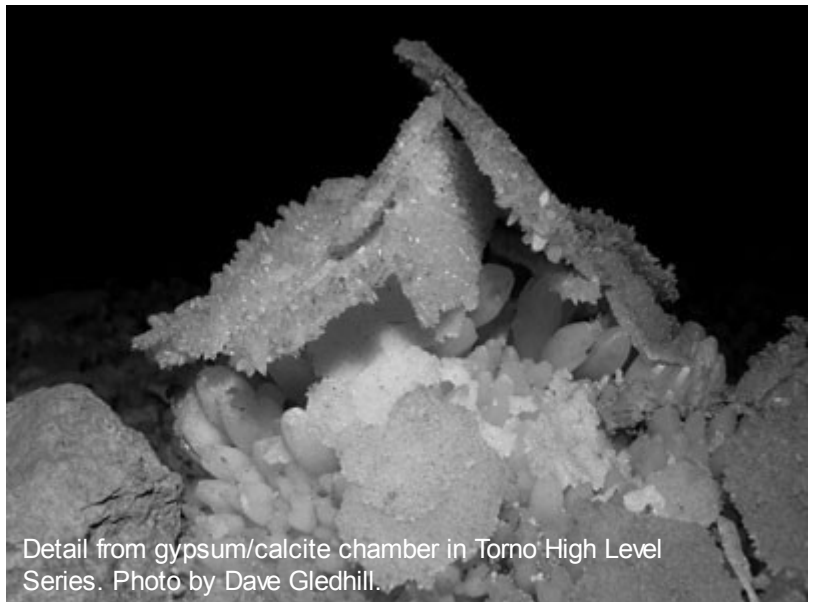
A return to the newly discovered complex of passages found at Easter. Torno is a cave that was first discovered a few years ago after talking with a local farmer in a bar. Initially, a large amount of cave was found but further progress became rarer as leads crapped out or became too committing.

One such lead was through an incredibly frightening looking boulder choke that emitted an incredibly strong draught, but would require a bit of manipulation. Various clubs had looked at the site and retreated very quickly, never to return. Enter the Eldon...

I'd made some progress the previous year with lump hammer, chisel and bar, but it was obviously in need of more persuasive means, preferably whilst sat a safe distance away from the 'action'. Dan & Mike Salt rearranged things to a satisfactory conclusion earlier in the year and the way on was now wide open (see Dan Hibbert's report from Summer 2008 earlier in this newsletter – ed). In the rush down the big passage after the choke, a side passage had been given a cursory glance but was reported to crap out with no leads. A more 'robust' examination revealed a thrutch up and through into a whole new network of draughting passages above the previously known system. It was this that we intended to explore and survey.



The unassuming entrance to Regolfo. Photo by Dave Gledhill.



Detail from gypsum/calcite chamber in Torno High Level Series. Photo by Dave Gledhill.



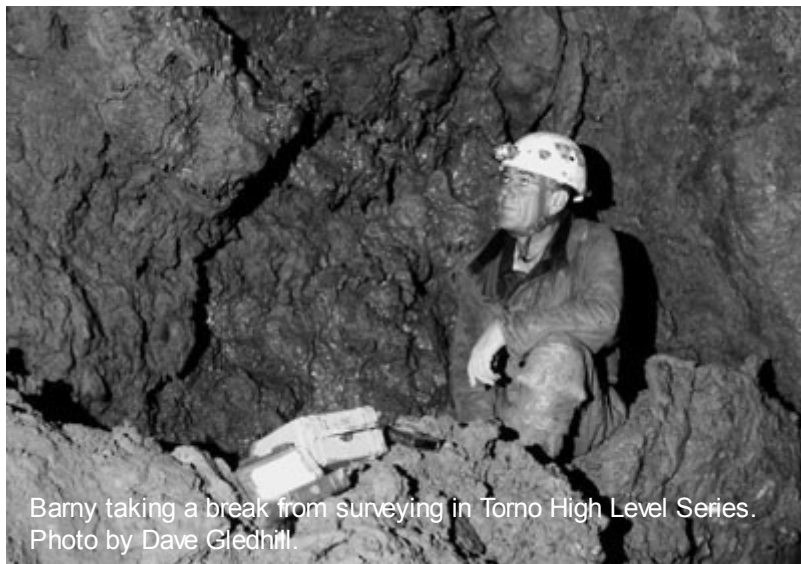
Barny being eaten by the first squeeze into Torno High Level Series. Photo by Dave Gledhill.

The series starts with a couple of highly entertaining squeezes through calcite windows, leading into traverses in dry meandering rifts with a stream far below until a slope up to a complex junction is reached. Initially we followed the right-hand passage. Again this is traversing at high level in tortuous rift passage. There must have been extensive amounts of false floor because at times it appeared to be around 2m below and at others around 15m. Breaking out into a high rift chamber revealed a potential way on up a wall and under a large wedged boulder. The disto revealed this to continue up for at least 20m with tantalising glimpses of white helictite covered stals appearing from the blackness. Return with bolts and dynamic rope is already pencilled in. The chamber was left via a wonderfully exposed climb up a wall of fallen blocks, emerging in a larger chamber with an excellent rock arch running the length of the area. This chamber also had a possible climb up into a black space beyond a series of worryingly perched blocks. Climbing would theoretically be easy – if you could rely on the blocks staying in situ. Descent (in a condition fit to leave the cave unaided) would be trickier, as all the holds sloped down and out – that'll be another rope then? Across the chamber, half-way up the sheer wall, a passage led off and round a bend. As this involved a climb up above the previous climb up, a slip would result in a good 10m + fall – rope etc. The roof of the chamber had a tube inlet heading up from which there emitted a small but steady flow of water. The positioning of this chamber and the type of rock etc. gives a strong indication that this could well be the bottom of the Regolfo inlet, although this is as yet unproven. We surveyed back to the junction.



Barny and 'toys' surveying in Torno High Level Series. Photo by Dave Gledhill.

A 2m climb/step up and back from the junction leads to a dry canyon passage and scramble up over blocks into a marvellously decorated chamber. One wall is completely covered in flowstone. It may be possible to climb but would wreck some of it. We think it may lead into the same area as the first chamber/rift so will wait and check that out before wreaking destruction in this part of the cave. The chamber ends at a very large boulder choke with no immediately obvious way on. Surveyed out.



Barny taking a break from surveying in Torno High Level Series. Photo by Dave Gledhill.

At the junction again, a very bold climb / bridge up (10m) and to the left over some very loose looking slabs saw Barny gain a higher series of passage. Joining him, we proceeded to squeeze through/step over/run along/climb up a series of passages and avens. One passage ended in an excellent chamber with the lower section covered in gypsum flowers and a dog-tooth crystal floor, which was very painful on the knees. Another passage ended in a climb up an ascending rift – progress blocked by loose perched blocks above. Yet another easy crawling passage led to a draughting aven from which there emitted a good inward draught. We were surprised to find the slabs at the bottom of this aven covered in scratch marks and paw prints. It was obvious that some large animal (badger / fox?) had obviously spent considerable effort trying to get up the aven. We also found other similar scratch marks in other areas of this section, although no obvious sign of bones (other than a mouse and a caddis fly) or piles of sh**t. Had the animal got out? We suspected we must be fairly near the surface and so concluded that it probably had. (We later found that we were around 90m below the surface so have revised this opinion slightly. Surveyed back to the junction.

From the junction we headed left along a rift which then turned left and descended sharply. Various twists and turns found us back in the passage leading up to the 'complex' junction. We surveyed round this and closed the survey leg.

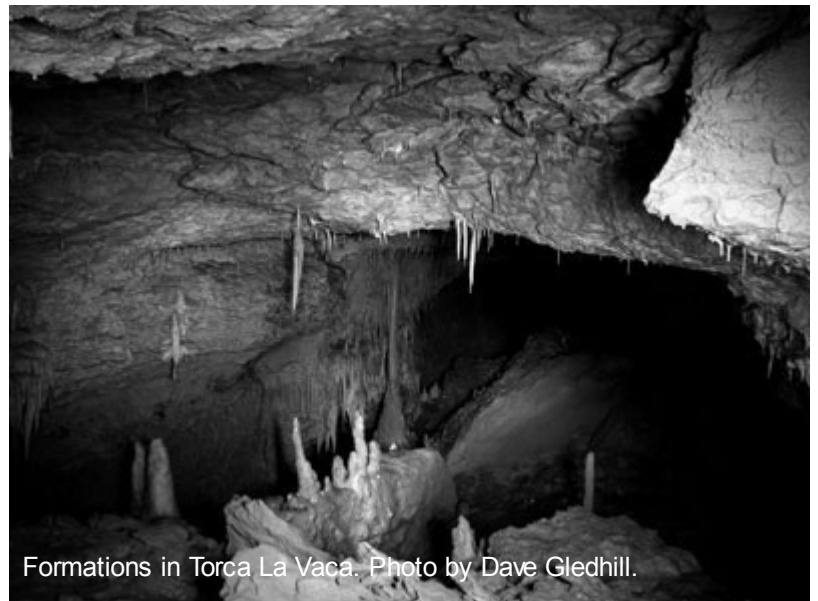
Exiting the cave, we had a poke around a few other bits and pieces to try and tie things together. We also retrieved a blue 'edelrid' drybag, a couple of 12mm drills and about 20m of electric cable. Can't possibly think who might have left these items here? They are now back in the Matienzo tackle store.

Day 3. La Collada

Bob Toogood had found this cave entrance during a day of prospecting the previous year. The site was not recorded 'officially' (GPS etc.) as we assumed we would be returning for further investigation but for some reason we never got round to it. The cave was 'rediscovered' (although not entered) last month by Phil Pappard, (local semi ex-pat, cave diver and bicycle stunt man). This site had generated interest again as the area survey shows it to be placed directly above the further reaches of the newly discovered cave Torca la Vaca (Cow cave – see later). A smallish entrance quickly finds you wedged at the top of a descending rift. The rift was free-climbable but a handline is reassuring. There were a stack of very precariously positioned boulders in one end of the rift and great care had to be taken not to dislodge these. An 8m descent found us in a small chamber with a draught coming up through the floor. We had cleared a way on down through the floor the previous year and a squeeze round and under a large slab gained an awkward step down into a larger chamber filled with many old stals and flowstone. At this point I remembered why we had not returned the previous year; the entire roof was a large boulder that was perched precariously on not very much at all – don't look, don't look, don't look, ah that's better – its gone away. At the foot of the sloping floor of the chamber was a silted/calced wall beyond which was a calcite/moonmilk covered 3m drop down to what appeared to be a shaft in the floor. Above was an impressive white calcited aven containing many very large boulders. This was the limit of the previous years exploration. Barny climbed down the drop and then disappeared through the hole in the floor. The descent continued, not as a shaft, but as a rock/boulder covered slope, disappearing again through a squeeze under a very large slab. A further rocky slope down led to another squeeze into a tight rift, the way on draughting out but blocked by rocks. Barny started passing rocks up the rift to where I was wedged directly above, grabbing the rocks in one hand and carefully transferring to the other being careful not to let it fall back down onto Barny. I was unable to turn round at this point which made the blind wall-building / rock-stacking interesting. A way on was cleared into hands and knees crawling, enlarging to waking size passage. This headed off into the hill but became too tight to go either on or down. A return to the original rift and the extraction of more rocks revealed that the way on down continued, but it would not be today. We left the pushing at approx –40m, all free climbable with care. It appears that we are at the edge of a large boulder choke with one solid wall to work from. The cave is draughting out, although this varied from very strongly to barely discernible over approximately a 5 min cycle. Further progress would require scaffolding etc to engineer a way through. Definitely a goer in the Peak or the Dales, but too long a term project for Spain at present.



Barny climbing up the entrance rift in La Collada. Photo by Dave Gledhill.



Formations in Torca La Vaca. Photo by Dave Gledhill.

Attempted to survey but found that the SAP was not giving consistent readings. It later transpires that the laser had become misaligned – I think.

Day 4. Torca la Vaca (Cow cave)

This cave was discovered earlier this year and has been the focus of many pushing/grabbing trips in that time. We saw no reason to buck this trend. Due to reasons that never became totally apparent, a lack of precise hand/eye/legs/body spatial co-ordination had developed, necessitating the need for an easy day. We'd already planned to look at this new cave, partly because some of it is very pretty and also because there were some definite leads I wanted to check out from my initial visit earlier that month.

Cow cave is reasonably easy going. A 6m handline/ladder scramble into a typical carcass/rubbish filled 'pot' followed by a quick duck down under the low entrance and into the bone-dry passages. First 100m is a step up then hands and knees crawling until stepping down into a sand floored rift. By this point you will have lost about a litre of body fluid as the cave is seriously hot. The upper section of the cave has sandstone sections that are well weathered and also a little 'friable'. Parts of it resemble old collapsed mine-workings rather than natural cave. The rift passage contains many fine formations although unfortunately some of these are already showing signs of damage due to increased traffic. Luckily, the anorexic porn-star has all its faculties intact and has not succumbed to excessive 'banging'. A complex series of tight rift passage leads past more pretties to the head of the first pitch. A 12m laddered route drops down an aven that enables a reassuring back rest when on the ladder. Further enlarging passage at the bottom of the pitch leads via gours, columns and stals of impressive size until what was until recently the final chamber is reached. Standing in the chamber you can actually hear the wind blowing from the narrow rift in the left hand wall. Standing in front of the rift leaves you with no doubt as to the way on. A squeeze down followed by a 5m-ladder pitch landed at the base of a chaotic boulder choke, the top of which forms the floor of the chamber we had just left. A further 8m ladder pitch found us standing on the shore of Bassenthwaite lake. An interesting bit of caving this, swim out across a chamber and the turn left to go under the low roof. The low section requires the helmet removal to allow you to keep your nose above the waves created by the howling wind blowing through this narrowing which goes by the name of the 'Penrith historic market town duck' (don't ask). There's around 10m of low section to be swum before emerging on the far shore of Bassenthwaite. There are two main routes on from this point. I had previously been along the lower streamway and so we decided to have a look at the dry upper section, which neither of us had seen before.



The Anorexic Pom Star - Torca La Vaca
Photo by Dave Gledhill.

From the beach at the edge of Bassenthwaite, we climbed up the sandy mud/rock slope heading up into a very impressive aven that appeared to be getting even larger the further it went. After around 30m-height gain, the passage levelled out and continued onwards with no signs of stopping. We had a copy of the survey with us and proceeded to follow up some of the sections labelled with question marks. I entered a rift to the left of the main route. This had a set of footprints for about 20m but these stopped at a boulder blockage. A climb over the block revealed virgin mud ahead. The rift was followed at varying heights for approx 100m. At places it appeared to be at least 20m high and between 3m to 0.5m wide. The rift eventually swung round to the right and had a set of footprints in the floor. It had obviously been visited from both ends but never explored properly. This was around 200m of largish passage but there was no mention on the survey. There could well be leads off this bit, especially at a higher level when it swung right. I thought I'd arrived back in the main passage and waited for Barny who I thought would walk along the main route to meet me. To my surprise, I saw Barny but he was around 8m below me. I was in a section of large passage directly above the main passage itself. Both sections of passage were incredibly well decorated with large columns, stals and walls heavy with flowstone. The upper section only appeared to have one set of footprints along it at this point. Barny scrambled up to the upper level and we proceeded to explore the passage, looking for more elusive ways on that may have been missed in the initial excitement of the original exploration earlier that month. A climb up and 'iffy' sloping traverse into a roof level passage marked on the survey as 'appears to close down' found Barny in a series of well decorated passages and chambers although with no obvious way on at present.

Returning to the main passage, we continued along and found that there was in fact a number of parallel rifts, not just the one indicated on the survey. As one rift closed down too much for easy progress, a short backtrack would inevitably lead to an opportune window into the next rift. These rifts also tended to be different in character too. One would be clean dry sand; another would be covered in yellow flowstone whilst the next would be gnarly scalloped limestone that snagged at oversuits with great regularity. We arrived at a very large opening



Barny swimming through the Penrith Historic Market Town Duck.
Photo by Dave Gledhill.

in the passage where the floor dropped away, the roof gained height and the width increased dramatically. Combined use of fenix torches allowed us to inspect an aven high up in the roof (30-40m?) from which a small amount of water was falling. It appeared that at the highest level there were signs of passages heading parallel to that which we were in. Could have been shadows though. This would be incredibly difficult to bolt up, as the higher parts of the aven appeared to be in an overhanging sandstone band that seem intent on self-destruction. This area was like being in the top of a massive funnel filled with large precariously placed boulders, all poised to move downward taking everything else stupid enough to be there with it. After debating as to the wisdom of further progress at this point (it looked do-able with care) we felt that due to the diminished co-ordination referred to earlier, a leisurely exit would seem prudent. We took yet another route back to the top of the slope leading down to Bassenthwaite. This time it involved crossing over very obviously false floors of calcited nothing – very pretty though.

Before descending to the lake, we decided to have a look at a tight rift passage that was heading off to the right. The rift was way too tight to attack at floor level, and the walls were coated in mud that made a simple thrutch up impossible. We resorted to throwing rocks into the tight section to use as stemples to climb up. There appeared to be an endless supply of rock, unfortunately they were virtually all calcited together and impossible to move. When the few rocks available ran out we resorted to me wedging in the rift as far as I could and then Barny standing on me to gain the height required. After much cursing and a bad case of cramp Barny gained the wider passage above. This led to a mud blockage that had come from what was now an open tube in the roof. This is reported as requiring 'a bit of gear' to ascend. To the left of the tube was a way on that led to a massive wide-open cave passage stretching for as far as the Sten could see. Unfortunately the passage came complete with survey stations and footprints – Barny was looking down from a roof level passage into the main section of cave from which we had just left (lets be honest -hands up who hasn't done this recently?).

Thwarted again, I had a look up another passage that the survey said required bolting – it didn't. A traverse up and into what initially looked a promising way on turned out to be a very wide but impossibly narrow bedding plane that extended for at least 30m. There was a potential way on via a small less narrow section, but this would require the use of a flexible eight year old on a string and a long pointy stick of encouragement.

Day 5 & 6. Surface Prospecting.

Due to a continuation of feeling odd & wobbly but for no apparent reason, we decided to have a proper look at the hillside above La Vaca to see if we could find another possible way in that would bypass Bassenthwaite lake. It is obvious that the water level rises considerably but to what height, for how long and at what speed are all known unknowns - as Rumsfeld would say.

There are a number of shakeholes of considerable size on the hill above La Vaca. Some of these tie-in with underground features that may indicate another entrance. The availability of napalm would have been welcome for some of the shakeholes, some of which are completely inaccessible at present due to many decades worth of thick brambles and other thorny creepers of phenomenal tensile strength. Needless to say we found at least a dozen excellent looking (and draughting) projects all of which were attacked with varying degrees of vigour. Most of them draughted in, but one emitted the coldest draught I think I have ever felt. Extensive earth removal revealed a very narrow rift (15cm) that unfortunately did not appear to alter in size for its length or height. There are still a couple of potentially very good opportunities here that only require the altering of a rock or two if anyone fancies a bit of practice with Mr. Hilti's products.

Late on in the second day, whilst driving back to the village, we decided to have a quick look at a hole called 'Needs another ladder' which is also located in the area above La Vaca. I had been down this earlier in the month with Bob Toogood. It did indeed need another ladder, several in fact, and fly spray. This had been followed up further for another couple of pitches but was reported to get too loose and tight (can you get too loose and tight?).

There was another draughting site I'd found in this area and I wanted to have a quick 5-minute dig to see if it had the legs for another return. The cave entrance is a 2m-drop down between two sandstone boulders, landing in a chamber covered in very old bits of stal. There appears to be a hole in the floor but on closer inspection it is just a heap of sandstone blocks in a depression with no way on. Under one wall of the chamber is a gap of around 6 inches from which there emits a steady draft. The floor appeared to be sand and the way on seemed to open up into another chamber. I did not have the time or means on the previous visit to get through the gap, but a 2-minute scrape with the shovel allowed me through a tight squeeze into a large but low chamber with walls covered in very old stals and brilliant white flowstone. In the floor directly below my head was a hole of 30cm diameter down which I could see a wider shaft of around 10m depth. The draught was coming from the hole. To be continued.....

Day 7. Torca la Vaca Again

A return to la Vaca, this time to chase up some leads from a previous trip in the lower (wet) section of this new system. Arrived on the far shore of Bassenthwaite as before, but this time we headed left and into the gnarly limestone streamway. The first section of the streamway is in clean washed but quite sharp limestone that has a tendency to rip your gear. Progress is entertaining as the route is along a passage cut through a series of faults running at 45 degrees. This

means that you are constantly stepping in and climbing out of pools, some of which are chest deep. We passed under a previously seen aven in the roof from which water was raining down. The aven has the appearance of a mineshaft and was initially thought to be a continuation of the aven in the high level series mentioned previously. After careful examination of both I feel that they are actually totally different avens, albeit very close together.

Two of my initial leads turned out to be nothing more than oxbows, albeit rather long and at a higher level than the streamway. The streamway comes to a point where we had previously been forced to climb up into higher dry passage. This had been due to not everyone in the survey team having neoprene gear and low-level progress would have necessitated swimming in canals. This section has apparently been surveyed now (another one off my list then) but appears to crap out at a muddy dig in water. As the wet surveying was no longer needed, we reluctantly climbed to the higher dry stuff and continued further into the system.

The survey showed a number of passages leading off the main drag, but none had any notes or clues other than '?'. The vast majority of these were ticked off and redrawn on the survey – usually as they were more oxbows or rifts to dead ends. There was an area I was very keen to get back to as it had appeared to be of a distinctly different nature to any other bits of the cave seen so far. At a significant left hand right-angle bend in the main passage (Vindication Highway) was a very small hole in the right hand wall at roof level (Whites-haven). A quick look in here previously had revealed a dry rift passage with pure white stals covered in helictites. For those who've been, it looked just like some of the passages in Smallcleugh mine at Nenthead. The passage continued as a narrow rift that become progressively more and more heavily decorated with gypsum flowers and crystals. The roof was completely covered by helictite-covered stal and straws. A squeeze up and around a rock-fall (just like Smallcleugh) led to a T-junction with a much larger passage. Initially I assumed (from previous experiences this week) that we had just oxbowe'd round back to the main drag. Climbing down into the passage showed that this was new stuff, not a cairn, tape or tuna fish tin to be seen. This passage was also very dry and sandy with lots of gypsum crystals on the walls (watch you nose in here as they're like razors, aren't they Barny?). A turn left ended at a solid rock wall, whilst right led along 90m of high rift passage to a sand/mud choke rising up to roof level. An acrobatic climb by Barny, which again involved standing on my knee, back, shoulders and head (Eldon state circus?), led to a high level passage that definitely continued but from which return would be virtually impossible unless there was some other gullible person to stand on at the other side. Passage surveyed and 'officially' drawn up to approx 200m.

Whilst checking out yet another random oxbow, Barny disappeared along a rift in the left wall. I had previously been about 100m along this on an earlier trip but had to return to rejoin the rest of the survey team. Around 15 minutes later I heard Barny's voice from way further down the passage. It transpires that he had been along a long passage with countless twists, turns and double-backs and had found himself back on the main drag. A return to the start of the passage meant he had to climb up and over a very large and very horrible bolder pile which included a couple of interesting moves to get down. We didn't survey the passage, but judging by where it came out it must be at least 500m long.

Proceeding to what had been the end of the original survey trip, we had a good poke around in the boulder choke from which there emits a strong draught. A good hour was spent climbing up, down, through and around these boulders, but no continuation of the passage could be found. At one point I thought I'd found the way back into proper passage, only to find myself having connecting a large loop back to the main drag, coming out around 100m before the choke – weird.

Various other holes/rifts/avens etc were pushed. Some draughting strongly, some not at all. A descending rift with an incredibly warm draught found us popping out back into the main passage. Why the air was so warm in that particular section we had no idea?

Overall we must have travelled through at least 3km of unsurveyed passage on this trip. There are oxbows on oxbows, joint controlled rift mazes in which at one point you can see about 20m to water below. There was also around a similar amount of passage that we saw but did not go in, usually because it obviously connected through to a passage we had already been in (or at least thought we had). There are also the climbs up rifts & avens that have never even been sniffed at. If you want to go and get some practice at surveying in uncharted territory, this is the place to do it. There are many kilometres of passage just waiting to be recorded.

La Vaca Survey.

A pdf file of the cow cave survey so far can be found at: <http://www.geography.lancs.ac.uk/Matienzo/indexnf.htm>
Click on cave/survey number 2889, the current version is version 2 medium quality. This site will also connect you to descriptions, surveys & pictures etc. of all the Matienzo caves.

A final thought: Although we could have technically doubled the known length of La Vaca during our week here if we'd come in every day, the question is, if it is just a 5m dead-end aven, should it technically be counted in the total length?

IVth European Speleological Conference (Lans-en-Vercors)

Report by Jules Barrett

Cavers: Jules Barrett (EPC), Toni Murphy (EPC), Bernie Maddison (EPC), Julian McIntosh (EPC) plus Joy and Rowan, Pete Pollard (EPC), Nige Strong (EPC).

The fourth European Speleological Conference was held in the french village of Lans-en-Vercors during the week of 23rd to 30th August 2008. A small group of Eldon members visited along with cavers from many other countries. The event is basically a continental version of Hidden Earth with a program of lectures, films, slideshows and workshops alongside trade stands, a cafe/bar in the evening and other random events like the longest rope zipwire in the world (over a kilometre and almost a minute of sliding). The big draw for me was the fact that the french clubs were rigging around fifteen caves for the event meaning that we could potentially get a lot of caving done in the week without the hassle of rigging them ourselves. I'd never visited the Vercors before and felt a bit like a kid in a candy shop all week. The weather was excellent with a brief rain storm on the first Friday evening being the only rain we saw all week. We stayed on the L'Oursiere campsite in Villard-de-Lans which was a great site with excellent facilities. From there it's a fifteen minute drive to Lans-en-Vercors where the conference was based. Details are at: <http://www.camping-oursiere.fr/fr/accueil.php>

Each cave had to be booked in advance and groups were given time slots which would ensure that congestion was minimised. Although some people found booking caves a bit of a pain the booking system did ensure that caves didn't get ridiculously busy. In general, places for the Berger were difficult to get hold of whilst everything else was easy.

In fact we hardly got to any of the lectures or events but went caving or canyoning every day. By the time we had got packed for caving, travelled to Lans in the morning, booked your cave for the next day, driven to the cave and done the trip there wasn't much time left in the evening for lectures etc.

Pot de Loup

Report by Jules Barrett

Cavers: Jules Barrett (EPC), Toni Murphy (EPC), Bernie Maddison (EPC), Paul Tarrant (CSS), Simon Mee (TSG)

Having taken care of registering and all the paperwork during the day we were keen to get a trip in on Saturday evening so went looking for the Pot de Loup – a short, straightforward and pleasant SRT trip. Pot de Loup is easily found a short walk along a good track from the parking. The cave is mostly vertical and has two entrances – an abseil descent down the open pot and a sort of 'adit' entrance which leads in to the base of the first pitch. Three of us opted for the abseil entrance whilst two went for the 'adit' entrance. The initial pitch-head and rebelay led to the bottom of the entrance shaft where we met a group of french children on a speleo-camp. From talking to the french instructor it seems that many of the french departments (presumably those which have caves) hold summer camps for children who are keen cavers. As they made their way back out up the first pitch we ascended a short section of rope to arrive at the top of a significant shaft with lots of calcite on the walls. Here a pitch-head leads to a rebelay just below and then a straight hang to the bottom. A scramble down over boulders leads to the top of the final pitch. We were surprised to find that this wasn't rigged but using a few spare hangers that I'd thrown in and the end of the rope we were able to rig it to the bottom. This last pitch led to a pleasant chamber where the water disappeared into a sump. The journey out was uneventful and we all exited out of the 'adit' entrance.

Scialet du Tonnerre

Report by Jules Barrett

Cavers: Jules Barrett (EPC), Simon Mee (TSG)

The Tonnerre was one of the two rigged caves that I was very keen to get into (the other being the Berger) so I booked it as soon as I could in case the weather deteriorated later in the week. The sump at the bottom is at -507m and the cave reacts quickly to rain. The Tonnerre is pretty vertical and you spend a fair proportion of your time on the rope. Simon and I drove to the parking which is in one of the ski car parks near to Lans-en-Vercors. From here an hours walk led to the small rift entrance which took some finding. Eventually we found it marked SGCAF and V18, the name that the original explorers had given it. In we went down some short pitches with a pendulum on the second pitch before arriving at the Meander Combivore. There's more loose rock here than you might expect to find in a classic Vercors cave and we felt very at home. A climb and a couple of pitches in the Meander Combivore and we heard voices up ahead. It turned out to be Geoff from SUSS who had tagged along with the french cavers who had just finished rigging the cave. They were on their way out and we continued past a couple of small climbs to arrive at the top of the first big pitch (Puits du Fada). The 55m pitch is an impressive place and from here the route drops another big pitch known as Puits de la Capuche (48m) which is more broken by rebelays. The Puits de la Capuche dropped us into the Salle a manger (the Vercors equivalent of 'the Eating House') which quickly leads on to the Puits des Maries (54m) and then a variety of smaller pitches and

traverses before arriving in the Collector at the bottom. Having visited the sump we had some food and started out back up the ropes. We were lucky not to meet any teams on the way out and arrived back on the surface seven and a half hours after going in. We were pleased to have bottomed the cave well within guide-book time and without any problems.

Brilliant cave! The french rigged it in two trips and had a lot of people along to carry rope etc. Rigging it yourself would be a fairly big effort so was great that the french rigged it for us.

Gour Fumant **Report by Rowan**

Cavers: Julian McIntosh (EPC), Rowan and Joy, Bernie Maddison (EPC), Paul Tarrant (CSS)

We set off down the Gour Fumant at 13:20. The system has two entrances – the Gour Fumant and the Faux Gour. We entered down a few pitches in rapid succession and came to a crossroads. At this point you can go up to the surface via the Faux Gour, do a loop to near the bottom of the cave or you can do a figure-of-8 down a pitch called the Letterbox. At the bottom another pitch meets on a crescent ledge and two pitches go down side by side then at the bottom you can carry on to the bottom of the cave or carry on the figure-of-8 and go up the other pitch and when at the ledge go up the pitch opposite to the letterbox. This route has some crossovers and I found it hard when you get to the crossroads you go up three pitches of the Faux Gour and into the open at 16:30.

Gouffre Berger to the Hall of the Thirteen **Report by Jules Barrett**

Cavers: Jules Barrett (EPC), Richard Tooley (TSG), Martyn Grayson (TSG), Gordon Fiander, Jenny Fiander.

The organisers of the conference had organised a Berger permit but only ten people per day were allowed to go to the bottom whilst thirty per day could go to the Hall of the Thirteen. This meant that to have a chance of getting a ticket to the end you had to bivi in the car park overnight outside the 'Explos' tent. I didn't much fancy that so settled with a trip to the Hall of the Thirteen. We drove to the car park at La Moliere and walked to the cave entrance finding the route well marked. We descended down the entrance pitches and down Cairn pitch to arrive at the start of the Menaders. Here we met some traffic and the pace slowed significantly. Some of the people in front of us obviously hadn't done a lot of SRT and were taking far too long on the ropes. All of the big pitches were double-rigged which helped to speed things up a bit. Eventually we passed another team who were on their way out and got going down Garby's, Aldos and under the boulder into the big walking passage. Lake Cadoux was totally dry and we descended down the Tyrolienne and Cascade. Eventually arrived at the Hall of the Thirteen which was even more impressive than it looks in photos. Every caver should see this at some stage in their caving career. From here we set off back encountering more traffic on the way out. On the way up Aldos a bolt came out of a Spit half-way across the traverse line between the two Y-hangs on Aldos but no-one hurt. Arrived on the surface to a dark but warm evening eight hours after going in to find the french bloke on the surface had a healthy fire going. The walk back to the car seemed to take for ever!

Pissarde (Canyon) **Report by Jules Barrett**

Canyoneers: Jules Barrett (EPC), Bernie Madisson (EPC), Toni Murphy (EPC), Nige Strong (EPC), Pete Pollard (EPC), Julian McIntosh (EPC) plus Joy and Rowan, Paul Tarrant (CSS)

After a few days of caving and excellent weather on the surface Julian and family, Pete, Nige, Toni and I fancied doing some canyoning. I had picked up the local canyoning guidebook at Expe earlier in the week and found one called Pissard which seemed to fit what we needed. Ideally we would all do the small pitches of the first part before some would escape out whilst a few would go on to finish the 90m abseil down the Cascade d'Allieres. The conference guidebook said that this canyon (along with others) was 'rigged'. We assumed that this would mean that ropes would be left permanently on the canyon during the conference. With hindsight this would be a bit daft as you'd get all sorts of day-trippers and local nutters inventing their own methods of descent on the conference ropes. Anyway, we arrived, parked up and got changed before walking uphill to the likely top of the canyon. There was a group already in the canyon and I watched them pulling their rope down and realised that the canyon wasn't actually 'rigged' at all. Pete and I went back

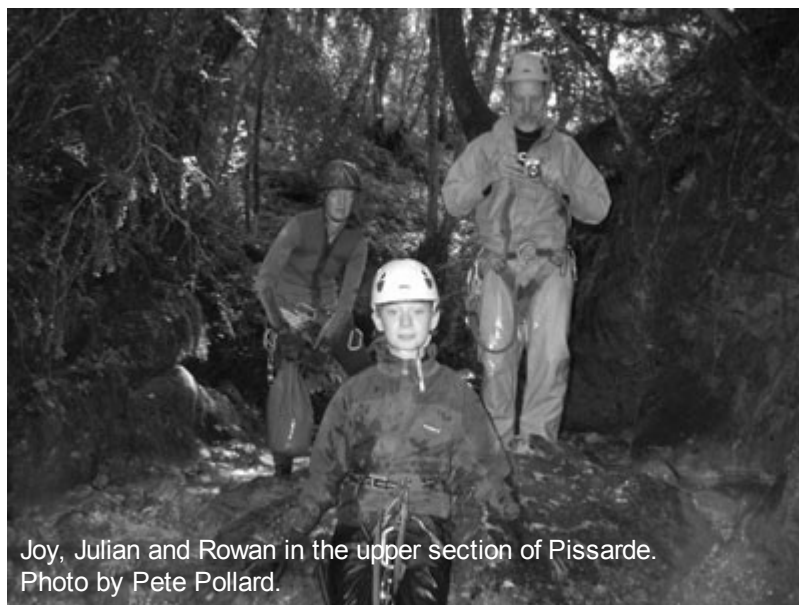


to the car for a 50m rope that I'd put in just in case. Finally we all got into the water and set off down the gorge towards the first pitch. All of the pitches were rigged with double stainless steel anchors (either expansion or resin anchors) making the rigging very easy. The canyon begins with a few small climbs and pitches and then there are some bigger pitches up to 16m. Eventually we got to the pitch with the 'Epingle' a pointed piece of rock at the bottom and escaped out back to the car. I was annoyed that we hadn't been able to finish the descent of the Cascade d'Allieres and added it to my list of unfinished business.

On the Thursday Toni, Bernie, Paul and I wanted a steady day so we were able to go back to Pissard to finish it off. This time we went and stashed the ropes that we would need for the Cascade d'Allieres at the escape route and we descended the upper part of the canyon as before using a 50m rope.

Reaching the escape route Toni and Paul got out of the canyon leaving Bernie and I to continue with three large bags of rope. A few good pitches with a couple of deep pools led after a while to the top of the Cascade d'Allieres. This is a superb 90m pitch with a small stream tumbling down a wide sweep of limestone which drops steeply away from the pitch-head. I rigged a retrievable traverse line to the pitch head, threaded the ropes through the ring on the pitch-head, tied them together before throwing them down. Abseiled down slowly looking for some more anchors and found two more anchors 20m down on the true left-bank of the stream. Clipped myself to the anchors and Bernie followed. Soon we were both hanging on the anchors contemplating a 65m

abseil down to the small lake at the bottom. Spent a bit of time re-rigging the rope and I set off abseiling down the steep, greasy wall. About 20m from the floor there's a lip and once past that we were hanging free underneath a huge roof. Eventually reached the ground and pulled the rope down to the floor. Fantastic trip!



Joy, Julian and Rowan in the upper section of Pissarde.
Photo by Pete Pollard.

Trou Qui Souffle to Saint de Glace Traverse

Report by Jules Barrett

Cavers: Jules Barrett (EPC), Paul Tarrant (CSS), Tam and Leanne (Lincoln Scout Caving Club)

This is one of the classic Vercors trips and one that had been recommend to me. Tam and Leanne had already had a go earlier in the week and turned back when they weren't sure of the way through. It's usual to do it from TQS to SG as the Meander Francais is particularly hard work the other way. We drove to the entrance (which is a hole right next to the road) and descended. The cave starts with a few shortish pitches and then it's into a muddy crawl (which feels more like Derbyshire than the Vercors). There's an easy flat-out squeeze and then a bit of route finding trickery leads to the Meander Francais. This is a fairly deep winding rift that snakes around forcing you onto one wall and the the other. There are traverse lines in place most of the way and a number of short pitches break things up. It's surprisingly hard work and seems to go on forever. Eventually we reached a bigger pitch (20m) that drops into La Concierge. This is a decent-sized chamber that smells of piss and has a small waterfall. We didn't hang around here for too long and set off towards Saint de Glace. A short pitch leads into the Galerie des Marmites which is big PSM-style walking passage. There are loads of 'marmites' in here (circular pools of water in the floor) and soon leads to a short 5m pitch up into another passage. Arrived at a boulder choke and climbed up through this into another large passage. This leads after more walking to the huge Salle des Hydrokarst – probably the biggest chamber that I saw in the Vercors. We found the bottom of a rope leading up into the roof and made our way into Saint de Glace. Climbed up a Toboggan and continued following the red and white tape that had shown the way all through the cave so far. The red and white tape seemed to end at a tight rift so leaving the others behind I started traversing in the roof. Seemed much more necky than any other traversing that we had done and I was surprised that the French hadn't put a rope on it. Decided that couldn't be the way so returned and explored I the bottom. Didn't look very worn so came back. Hmmm... Headed back a bit to try to find the way but without more information was difficult to figure out. Frustrating as we knew we were only 300 metres from the Saint de Glace entrance. With all options exhausted (or so we thought) I made the difficult decision to re-trace our route back the way we had come. This certainly wasn't popular but there was no way I was sitting there waiting to be rescued. So, we started on the long journey out which turned into a bit of a mission and we eventually surfaced eighteen hours after going in. It turned out that the tape had mis-led quite a few other parties and we needed to climb up into the roof well before the tape finished(!).

Other caves visited by various Eldon members were the Trou d'Ira and the Scialet du Vincens. Julian, Joy, Rowan, Bernie, Nige and Pete also took in the Grenoble via ferrata which sounded excellent.

Highlights of the trip for me were the Tonnerre, Pissarde, Berger and despite a few problems – the Trou Qui Souffle – Saint de Glace trip. Pete Pollard and Nige Strong got to the bottom of the Berger and Pete came out saying that it was the best caving trip that he's done so I suppose that speaks for itself.

A very successful trip all round!



Nige Strong relaxing in the Vercors. Photo by Pete Pollard.



Pete Pollard on the Grenoble via ferrata
Photo by Nige Strong.



Nige Strong on the Grenoble via ferrata
Photo by Pete Pollard.

Book Reviews

Cascades, Gorges & Canyons (Pre-alpes d'Iserre et de Savoie)

Bertrand Hauser and Delphine Baratin

Picked this canyoning guidebook up at Expe in Pont-en-Royans at the start of our week in the Vercors and thought a bit of a book review might be in order. It's not a very extensive book review though as we only did one canyon out of it. It's published by descente-canyon.com which as you might guess is a canyoning website. The canyons are split between three geographical areas – Bauges, Chartreuse and Vercors and 119 canyons are covered in total. Of these forty-five canyons get the full treatment whilst the rest get a more brief description. The book is written in French but is surprisingly easy to use for those of us who have limited French due to the symbols that are used throughout.

The book starts with the usual sections on how to prepare for a canyoning descent, equipment, safety and etiquette but since this is in French we obviously didn't need this! There is a table explaining the canyoning grading system which seems to be a complex mix of how watery the canyon is and how vertical it is. These two components feed into an overall grade from 1 (Very Easy) to 7 (Extremely Difficult). Each section begins with a map showing the location of the canyons which is good for planning but you'll probably need to use this in conjunction with a more detailed map of the area to

