



The  
**Wessex Cave Club**

**JOURNAL**

Volume 31 - Number 320 - March 2010



**La Grotte de la Diau in a  
Weekend**

**Christmas in Covanera**  
*A Caving Christmas in Spain*

**Evia Island Greece 2008**

**Emmys from China**

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# The Wessex Cave Club

**JOURNAL**

Volume 31 - Number 320

3	Editorial
3	Locker Ownership
3	Journal Submissions
4	<b>Christmas in Covanera</b> <i>A Caving Christmas in Spain</i>
7	<b>Dr William Iredale Stanton</b>
7	<b>The Little Monkey</b>
8	<b>Emmys from China</b>
10	<b>La Grotte de la Diau in a Weekend</b>
14	<b>Evia Island Greece 2008</b>
20	<b>Club News</b>
20	<b>Diary</b>
20	<b>Recent Additions to the Library</b>

**The Journal of the Wessex Cave Club is  
now available at:**

**<http://issuu.com/wessex-cave-club/docs>**

**Cover Picture:**

Brian (Dylan) Norton  
Passage just below  
entrance pitches in  
Milea (Evia Island)  
Photo Andy Jackson

Taken from the Article  
starting on page 14  
about caving on Evia  
Island in Greece by  
Malc Foyle

# EDITORIAL



Firstly, I feel I need to say a big thank you to all the people who have been sending me comments on the changes I made with the last journal. Most of the comments were good and all were very helpful, so please keep them coming.

I had quite a varied response to my idea of making the journal available digitally. The general consensus seems to be that although the digital edition is a good idea, most people like the tactile feel of reading a “real” magazine.

I was actually surprised by the number of members who don't have regular access to a computer, making me think about how we communicate as a club. For a long time, a lot of the club news has been put on the forum and other areas of the website, but I have been informed that many people who use computers at work simply cannot access these areas and therefore have no access to the information. It is for this reason that the diary area of the printed journal is going to be increasingly important, so please let me have any events etc in plenty of time. (321 will be going to print around the middle of May).

For those of you that like the convenience of a digital journal, The current edition along with a rapidly growing stock of back issues are now available on [www.issuu.com](http://www.issuu.com) where a quick search for “Wesssex” or “cave” etc will bring up our journals and those of many other cave clubs from around the world including those from Cheddar, Poland, Spain, America and so on. From here, any of these magazines

can be viewed, downloaded and if wanted printed off to keep. The plan is to eventually incorporate these digital issues into the club web site for anyone to view.

On the subject of club communications, most members seem unaware that we have a general club email “mailing list”. This is an extremely useful tool, as it allows any member of the list to email every other member of the list quickly and simply. This can be used for letting members know of events, planned trips and most importantly, last minute changes and updates. Using this list, we can distribute information without having to trawl the depths of the forum. Currently, the sign-up for this list is in the members area of the forum, but the plan is to move it to the general members area of the website. If any members would like, then it is possible for the committee to set this up for you without you having to visit the website.

One thing I have noticed by writing the journal is just how varied and widespread our club is. We have members all round the world from Australia, the Philippines and even some in Somerset. Lots of these members are actively caving all over the world and hopefully I will be able to continue bringing you details of their exploits in the pages of the journal. As I write this, there is a contingent of Wesssex members hopefully discovering new passages in Meghalaya in India. Hopefully, we will read about their exploits in the next edition. No pressure, but you know who you are!!

AndyC

## Locker Ownership

*I am trying to complete an exercise started, by my predecessor, in establishing ownership of all the personal lockers so that we can maximise their usage. Unfortunately our membership records have not tracked this accurately with time. There are currently 4 lockers whose ownership cannot be established; these can potentially be rented out if I am sure they are vacant, and there is always a demand. If you think you own a locker, or even if you have owned one in the recent past, I need your help!*

*On the members area of the website is a document showing the layout of the locker room, together with a list of who owns which locker. Please could you have a look at this document and confirm to me that the record is correct, i.e. you do own a locker and it is the one that is identified thus on the diagram. The members area of the website can be accessed using the username and password on the sticker which is on the back of your membership cards (the 2009 password remains active until end March to give people a chance to pay their subs). Additionally I have put stickers on some of the lockers, so this is another way of checking the records that I have. If you think you own a locker but it has a “blank” sticker on it with no name, then claim the locker by writing your name on it and let me know the locker number (please do not do this if you want a locker but have not previously rented one).*

*The committee has decided that lockers whose ownership is not established by the end of March shall be considered “available for use”. They will be opened and their contents removed so that they can be let out again. If you would like to rent a locker, please let me know. The vacant lockers will be allocated on a first come first served basis in April.*

*Your help with this matter is much appreciated.*

Tim Ball.  
Membership Secretary

## Journal Submissions

*Can you please email your text submissions as Microsoft Word files. If you can ensure these are spell checked and correct in grammar and punctuation, then my life is easier and the article is more likely to be published (Proofs will be sent out for checking prior to publication). **Can you send any images separately** (i.e. not embedded in word files) in standard image file formats, ideally high quality Jpegs or Tiffs. All photos need to be supplied with both a caption and a credit to enable them to be used. If your article is of a historical or scientific nature, then can you ensure it is supplied with relevant references and information on abstracts. Information on how to present this can be provided if needed. As a guide, an article of 3300 words will fill 4 sides with images.*

# CHRISTMAS IN COVANERA

*Emsy and co head off for a luxury Christmas in sunny Spain*

“Do you honestly believe that I would rather spend my Christmas living in a draughty Spanish ruin of a house, putting on freezing cold wetsuits every day, working hard, than spending a lovely relaxing week off work with friends, family, good food, drink and central heating?”

That put paid to that then. But after Jason had no luck persuading Chris Jewell and Madphil to join him over Christmas he tried me again ... this time armed with surveys and aerial photos of the area, and tales of open passage, left from last year just waiting to be explored. It was as easy as giving sweets to a toddler; my speleo-brain kicked in and I was persuaded, but on one condition ... we at least did Christmas presents on St Nicks big day. Deal done (and I got an early Christmas present from my folks in the form of a set of thermals. Brilliant – thanks Mum ‘n’ Dad).

We set off on 22<sup>nd</sup> December amid the media reports of chaos and hours, no ... days, of waiting at the Channel Tunnel, only to find the terminal very quiet and we got our allotted train. With France being no less icy than England it was not with much joy that we finally stopped our drive through France at 5am and prepared to bivvy in the snow. This however was exceedingly toasty. Mummified to the hilt in my down sleeping-bag, woolly hat and fleece-liner, neither of us could be bothered to get up until about 10am. Then we set off again for a full day and evenings drive down to Covanera.

Covanera is a small town in the north of Spain, about 2 hours drive due south of Santander on the Burgos road. It has most recently been made famous in UK caving terms by the long penetration dives made in Pozo Azul within the village by Jason Mallinson. With the help of his Spanish diving friends over a seven year period, he extended sump 2 to 3,530 metres by 2007. In 2009, following a German push on the cave in 2008, he, John Volanthen, Rick Stanton and a Dutch diver, Rene Houben extended sump 2 in a series of dives, reaching air surface 5,160 metres from base. Pozo Azul now has the second longest sump in Europe and exploration is ongoing. This of course, was not to be our caving project during our stay, though I was secretly hoping for a tourist dive in sump one during the week.

We were to be visiting two caves: Cueva de Aguanal and Barbancho. Water sinks in Aguanal through a series of ten Swildons-style sumps with ongoing partially explored streamway beyond. This flows to Barbancho, a distance of over 6km away, resurging in a beautiful village called Orbaneja del Castillo. Barbancho itself can only be entered by passing a sump in the entrance and bar two very short sumps further into the system, the rest of it is a cavers paradise of long canals, streamways, gour pools and ongoing partially explored stream passage heading in the direction of Aguanal. With the gap between the two caves rapidly closing as a result of exploration in the last year, clearly the potential for a connection was quite promising.

When we finally arrived in Covanera there was an awful lot of snow and we could only hope that the temperature stayed below freezing, else our diving plans would almost

certainly be wrecked. The bar owners advised us that it had been -19 degrees during the week but that a lot of the snow had already gone (not a good sign for us). Tere and Carlos (the bar owners) gave us a very warm welcome and a beer on the house when we arrived. Clearly Jason is fondly known by the locals because of all the years of ongoing explorations in Pozo Azul and during the rest of the evening it was clear that they take a keen interest in the caving projects in the local area.

And so to bed, in our Spanish ruin of a house ... this had to be seen to be believed. It was an end terrace, only the house next door had long since fallen down, taking the side wall of our accommodation with it. A new gable wall was obviously hastily put up and the roof repaired making the place watertight (and draught free), though that was about it. The rest of the house seemed to be stuck in a ruinous time-warp, the stairs were separated from the wall, most of the internal walls were missing and electricity was only available because the Spanish cavers had rigged up lighting on the ground and first floors. The only element of the house that looked homely was the kitchen area. Despite, this, it was in fact quite a homely place, and once we had sorted out our beds on the second floor, (half of which was not to be walked on for fear of it collapsing into the first floor) it felt like our personal little squat. Heat provided by the log burner helped enormously.

## Objective One - Aguanal

In the morning (Christmas Eve) it was very clear that it was rather wet outside and all the snow had melted. With little prospect of achieving much in speleology terms, we opted to



*Emsy kitting up in the shelter of the van*



### *Emsy diving sump 1 (Aguanal)*

have a lazy morning, then headed up to Aguanal for a recce, around lunchtime. On arriving it was exceptionally cold outside the van and we opted to set up a little kitting up bench inside instead, putting on absolutely everything including neoprene hoods whilst safely sheltered from the elements, then jumping out, clipping on cylinders and taking the brisk 5 minute walk to the cave (no fins required in this cave). A routine we settled into on a daily basis made me very glad we had driven down in Jason's van and not my Fiesta!

Aguanal has an impressive entrance and easy walking passage to the first sump which is around 100 metres in, and my first sight of the sump was of a tiny freezing jacuzzi on overdrive. This was going to be interesting given the high water levels so Jason dived first to check it was ok. When he stepped down into the narrow gap next to the dive line, all that could be seen was his helmet sat above a small white foaming pool, then as his head disappeared under the water the bubbling torrent was briefly illuminated from below, then darkness again. Before long he reappeared and announced that all was fine. As I inserted myself into the Jacuzzi, there was a final shout from Jason about holding my nose if my mask became dislodged in the current, and I was off. With the water pushing me gently but not obtrusively down, I turned round in a slightly more spacious area where the current eased off completely. I kicked my way through the short sump, enjoying the peace but not so much the 6 degree temperature.

From the other side, five minutes of caving took us to the narrow slot at the head of sump 2; the section of cave that Jason considered most likely to be impassable, and he was right. This was a small tube with a vertical drop of about 6ft – 8ft straight into sump 2 and in normal conditions it was necessary to take off cylinders and bags and pass them through the slot, then re-kitting on the other side. With the full flow of the water closing the slot to just a few inches, today was not a day for pressing on, so instead we carried out a survey from this point back to sump 1 and headed out. After quickly changing (reversing the kitting up operation in the shelter of the van), we headed home, but not before stopping off to collect a big pile of wood for the log-burner. This was another routine we adopted every day. Sawing logs and carrying sacks of wood is a very good

post-dive warm-up, not only that but having the woodburning stove was invaluable for drying out wetsuits for the next day's trip. There would probably have been a few daily complaints from me otherwise!

The following day (Christmas Day) we were back at Aguanal. The water levels had dropped slightly but not quite enough to make the slot passable, so instead we concentrated our efforts in building a dam to try to divert the water through a short bypass section. When this only partially worked, we noticed that the bypass had potential for a human-sized route so we tried a different tactic, re-diverting the water back to the slot and dug at the bypass. When this proved to be impassable we went back to plan A and re-diverted the water to the bypass. After a few hours of playing in this manner it seemed that the levels had dropped slightly in the slot so decided to come back the next day armed with sheets of plastic to make the dam more effective, then we would push on to the end of the cave.

Boxing Day, luck was on our side. The weather had settled into a routine of freezing temperatures overnight and in the morning and a slight warming during the day. Consequently there was hardly any rain or additional snowfall / snow-melt, and the water levels in Aguanal seemed to have settled to a constant level. We finished our dam off with the plastic and both dropped through the slot. Water levels were still quite high and the return back through would be interesting but not "drowny", but that was for later. We re-kitted and headed through sump 2. From that point on the cave kept up a character of low crawls, interesting turbulent entry pools to sumps and low but relatively short gravelly sumps. With a few stops to sort out line and one interesting moment in sump 9 when we both ended up following the slack line into low beddings and had to return, we soon arrived at the end of sump 10 and the beckoning stream passage snaking off into the distance. This had been explored by Jason and Rene Houben in May 2008, then slightly further by Jason alone in December of that year to a point about 300 metres from the end of the sumps. We continued beyond that limit, and continued, and continued and continued until we were finally stopped at the head of a three metre high waterfall. Very pleased with the days finds and slightly chilled we headed for home, surveying Jason's previous find en-route. Then it was: wood-chopping, fire, dry wetsuits, food and bed, with the aim of getting up early to continue on.



### *The slot before sump 2 (Aguanal)*



***High water levels at Cueva del Agua (fed by Aguanal and Barbancho)***

Rapid progress was made to the end of the sumps the next day, cylinders were left at the end of sump 10 and we continued on with survey and bolting kits and a few short coils of rope. We spent a reasonable amount of time surveying the new passage until, 260metres later; we got cold, and then caved on to the previous days limit. Taking turns to hammer in a bolt at the head of the 3m waterfall (in order to keep warm), a handline was eventually rigged and an easy climb down saw us ready to set off into the unknown once again. Turning a few corners the passage began to take on an ominous character, the roof began to lower, the walls were blackened with mud and there was a strong but not claustrophobic earthy smell in the air. Undeterred we were now crawling, then ducking, clearing dirty thick foam as we went but it was pointless. A sump had of course been reached and with no cylinders or line, this would have to be left for another time. The whole of the stream went through this point and yet the mud did not appear to back up a considerable distance, so a way through may yet be possible ... something for 2010.

Surveying all the new discoveries as we returned, Aguanal was finished for 2009, in total 530 metres of new passage was explored and surveyed, taking the extension beyond sump 10 to 800 metres (800 metres closer to Barbancho and a possible connection).

### **Objective two – Barbancho**

We probably would have spent more of our holiday exploring this cave, but on arrival in Spain following the snowmelt, water levels were far too high. The volume of water cascading from Cueva del Agua through the village of Orbaneja de Castillo was an impressive sight indeed. With Barbancho being the flood overflow cave (no access allowed through Cueva del Agua), this would have to wait until water levels dropped towards the end of our stay. Water levels did begin to drop slowly, and on our second to last day, having finished at Aguanal, we opted for a dive here, accompanied by a good friend of Jason's, Teca (Xesus Manteca Fraile). During the same weeks in 2008 that Aguanal was extended, a very significant amount of passage was found and surveyed by Jason and Rene, and separately, Jason and Phil Rowsell in Barbancho. The streamway had been left wide open after a kilometre of new passage had been found.

The first sump was markedly different to those of Aguanal. It was a wide, spacious, clear and dare I say, warm sump,

where finning was required as opposed to adopting a shuffly, squirmy technique. I however was underweighted on the journey in, making for slightly difficult progress, added to this the loss of the button off my inflator hose through a very low section, and I was a little unimpressed by the time I exited the water. Two hours of caving, very long canal swims and two more short sumps later we arrived at the active streamway. I hadn't enjoyed the journey in too much as I struggled to get to grips with swimming on my back with fins on, (a necessary technique given the considerable distance in the canals), and again, for no obvious reason I found the next two sumps a little tricky, especially the de-kitting whilst struggling to perch on a ledge above 6 metres depth of water. Little did I know that the active streamway was where the fun would really begin!

Wading in waist deep and often swimming depth water, it quickly became clear that the current was very strong indeed. Teca and I struggled to battle against the current and pulling along the walls was not always possible as the rock projections were either very sharp or nonexistent and Teca at one point threatened to turn back. After an hour of this though, we finally reached the previous limit of exploration and pressed on, surveying for a further 100 metres before deciding to throw in the towel. Progress was exceptionally slow and it was difficult to pick stations for the instrument reader that were secure enough to prevent him being swept back down the passage. Teca and I opted to turn back, but Jason spent a little while longer exploring on and found two exceptionally good going leads for 2010; a large dry gallery and the continuation of the main streamway.

The return journey was needless to say very quick, as Teca and I adopted a feet up log-fluming technique, zooming down the stream passage. Buoyed up by the 7mm wetsuits we were wearing, it was like riding a dangerous version of the rapids in a swimming pool, the only difference being was that hidden below were very sharp rock projections to catch the unwary leg, arm or arse on the way. Jason soon caught us up and we made an uneventful exit 8 hours after first entering the cave.

That evening I didn't bother hanging kit up to dry, Teca went to bed early, a little broken, whilst Jason and I enjoyed a few beers and Baileys at the bar, watching "Pirates of the Caribbean" in Spanish. The water levels everywhere were slowly on the rise again as air temperatures began to rise dramatically, and the heavens stayed opened all night; Pozo Azul was definitely not diveable in the morning. A little saddened at having to leave, we spent the morning tidying up our home for the week, (a place of which I was becoming really rather fond), and left mid-afternoon saying a warm farewell to Teca, Tere and Carlos. I had an exceptionally good week of diving and cave exploration and hope to have the opportunity to go back in 2010. I might even get that tourist dive in Pozo Azul too.

A big thanks to Jason for driving all that way and for an enjoyable Christmas break, and to Teca, Julia and Alberto, the Spanish cavers also staying at the house that made me feel welcome despite our language barrier.

*Emsy*  
(Emma Heron) 2009

# DR. WILLIAM IREDALE STANTON - 1930 - 2010

Always affectionately known as “Willie,” William Iredale Stanton was born in Street Somerset to devote Quaker parents. From the age of ten he went to Sidcot School, and it was here in the early 1940’s that Willie developed his great love of cave exploration that would last a lifetime. During his time at the school the caving club was very active and they explored many new finds under Mendip, the most significant being Longwood Swallet. It was wartime and most adult men were away fighting and when the boys found cave that was beyond their resources they often teamed up with UBSS members who took them under their wing.

From 1948 until 1953 Willie studied at Imperial College London graduating with a Bsc, DIC and ARCS. During his frequent visits home he would continue with cave exploration and in early 1950 on a trip to Swildons Hole he made a daring climb across a deep hole to find and explore the Black Hole series. Still one of the hardest trips under Mendip. After graduation Willie worked as a geologist, first in Angola and then in Lisbon finally returning to the UK in 1970 and becoming a consultant geologist, principally for the Bristol & Avon River Authority. During this time until his retirement in 1995 Willie worked as a consultant on various other projects, notably the opening of the ninth chamber at Wookey Hole and improved access to Cheddar caves and advising on the rock stabilisation in the gorge itself. Throughout this time he continued to explore caves and his great love and determination for digging proved fruitful time and again with the discovery of Reservoir Hole, Grebe Swallet and Waterwheel Swallet among others. Willie developed novel techniques to advance down, up or sideways through ruckles of loose boulders and to clear tunnels of mud by storage and judicious release of water. His constant self filling and self flushing systems are legendary on Mendip and his clearing of great boulder ruckles in the likes of Reservoir Hole will remain a testament to his engineering skills long after we have all left this planet. He wrote many papers and books not only on caving but on his other major concern, population growth. These included Pioneer under the Mendips, a biography of Herbert Balch and The Complete Caves of Mendip with Nicholas Barrington. His paper on limestone eating snails is fascinating! Although not a caving publication his book “The Rapid Growth of Human Population” is a fascinating and sobering look at

what the human race is doing to this planet and in my opinion should be compulsory reading in all schools worldwide. Always a controversial figure, Willie was fascinating to talk to and learn from whether it was his view of badgers, cave conservation or caving politics. We discussed caving and projects that I and others had right up to his last few weeks. He joined the Wessex Cave Club in April 1949 and was made Vice President in 2009. Alison Moody presented him with a copy of the new Swildons survey, largely based on his original work from the 1960’s and this he had framed and it remained in his bedroom with him until he passed away on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2010. In 1957 Willie married Angela Fardon who sadly passed away last year. They are survived by two daughters’ Jenny and Susan. Although the funeral was a small gathering of family and close friends the family intend to hold a memorial to Willie and Angela later in the year for cavers and friends.

Martin Grass.  
15/2/10



**Dr Stanton Surveying in The Water Chamber**  
Photo - Oliver Lloyd

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Following an extensive period of testing, Bif is now flat out building his high end caving lamp which he has called Little Monkey; a Gouffre Berger reference. The Little Monkey is a lithium-ion rechargeable waterproof lamp featuring



an aluminium headset and interchangeable helmet mounted battery box. It is a robust, compact design weighing just 250 grams and uses the brightest and most efficient LED currently available. It operates at a number of power levels providing durations between 4 1/2 and 100 hours, has a battery charge level indicator that you can see without removing helmet, and will support AA batteries for expedition or back up purposes. If anyone would like to find out more about the Little Monkey, feel free to contact Bif at [john.biffin@tesco.net](mailto:john.biffin@tesco.net).

THE LITTLE MONKEY  
HAS ARRIVED

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# Emmys from China...

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Award winning Gavin Newman Films the caves of China for the BBC

When I discovered that I'd be working on a Greenpeace Anti Whaling Campaign with a BBC reporter called Jonah Fisher I was sure that it had to be a windup. Turned out it wasn't and sure enough Jonah spent 2 months chasing whales and Japanese whalers in the Antarctic with us. So after that I almost missed the joke when we arrived in China for a cave filming shoot and found that our fixers name was Echo...

The whole idea of the BBC trying to make a Blue Chip natural history documentary series in China was about as unlikely as it gets. Politically the BBC is not well liked in China. BBC coverage of the Tianamen square massacre was shown across the world which didn't go down well with such a secretive regime. Reporting restrictions across the country are common and BBC websites are often blocked.

So it was a bold plan to even propose to make a series there and only came about through the determination of the Series Producer Phil Chapman, who spent over a year in negotiations with China TV to get the go ahead. So far as China was concerned the series was made by China TV although the reality was that it was a co-production between CTV, The Travel Channel in the US and the BBC, and whilst CTV provided the logistics support and the 'face' of the production within China all the actual filming was done by crews from the BBC Natural History Unit in Bristol.

The series travelled the whole length of this vast country looking at natural history and the environment. China has more limestone than the rest of the world combined along with the odd cave here and there. So with Phil being a long time caver it was a certainty that caves were going to feature in the series somewhere.

There were several sequences that involved caves such a school that's built in a cave entrance and swifts nesting, but the major caving sequence was highlighting China's Karst landscape and the way the water has sculpted it.

For this sequence Tom Chapman, Tim Fogg and myself travelled to Guilin in Guangxi province to film in the caves around what is now the Crown Showcave complex. Crown cave was one of the first caves explored by UK cavers back in the early 1980's when Andy Eavis and Tony Waltham first

established contacts with the Guilin Karst Institute and took the first of what was to become many China Caves Project expeditions into the country.

Tim was on that first expedition and explored much of Crown Cave which has subsequently become one of China's top showcave 'experiences'.

I say 'experience' as Chinese showcaves are unlike any found here in the west. On arrival at the Crown Cave complex you board a mini train with individual cars more akin to a gentle rollercoaster and with the build quality of something you might find on a very run down British seaside pier. This takes you on a journey of more than a mile through the stunning Karst scenery and rice paddies before diving into a man made tunnel that brings you into the showcave itself. Once underground sunglasses are the order of the day as natural lighting is not a big feature of Chinese showcaves although mobile phone coverage is. Antenna situated throughout the cave ensure that the excited chinese tourist always has 5 bars on their mobiles and are never without that vital link to Witter or Bookface... Quite strange to be several hundred metres underground in the middle of China and have a better phone signal than I usually get in Bristol! But then I guess when you cater for over 1.5 million visitors a year you need to offer them rather more than a staff member dressed as a witch and some smelly cheese...

The tour continues by boat, train and glass elevator, accompanied by live musicians and a very sad live giant turtle photo op ( good luck symbol in China ) to complete the theme park experience. However, in spite of the sometimes rather lurid far eastern interpretation the cave is truly spectacular and surprisingly undamaged by the show cave infrastructure.

The main river canyon passage would be a joy to explore anywhere and is untouched, bridged high above by the public pathways and the main chamber is one of the largest I've seen in a show cave with some towering formations. Like most such caves around the world the public area of the cave are only a small part of what's actually there and just as at Cheddar or Wookey no show cave however popular ever turns down some extra media attention, so our CTV credentials easily gained us free run of the whole system 24hrs a day.

Unusually for a BBC shoot we didn't have a producer with us, just a shot list of the sequence required and how it fitted into the sequences around it. I guess being a caver himself Phil knew that between Tom, Tim and myself we could probably look after ourselves underground and there was a good chance we would bring back the sequence he needed. With only two weeks in the field to get the five minute sequence time was actually quite tight. Shooting in High Definition places extra technical demands on every shot and at this level of documentary making an 'OK' shot is just not good enough, every shot has to be something special. Fortunately for me, Tom, Tim and our Chinese assistants had endless patience and at least in China the waters relatively warm!

The other factor on our side was that the sequence was a theoretical through trip and didn't need to depict a real caving trip so we could pick and chose our locations. My ethos for cave filming is simple. If you are depicting a specific cave or trip like we did in the Wookey film you should always film at



*'Fortunately Chinese caves are nice and warm. Filming with Tom and the Chinese cavers in Crown Cave Sink'*



**Regulation filming break for Chinese Fishing Cormorant...**

the locations you say you are at. With today's equipment there is no excuse for cheating but when depicting generic cave sequences like Wild China required it's a different matter and we don't need to let the truth get in the way of a good story. Also when you have half a ton of cameras, lights, cranes and other toys there's no point in spending the whole day dragging it through one cave when there's another next door with a train, electric boats and a glass lift to take you back to the bar at the end of the day...

So the secret is out. About half of the Wild China caves sequence is shot in the show cave, often several meters off the concrete pathways! Personally I'd much rather spend the time and budget getting the best cave shots possible than lose sleep over the fact that the cave happens to have a roller coaster and mobile phone reception. Obviously multi coloured lighting and noisy tourists tend to spoil the cinematic illusion so the sequences in the show cave passages were recce'd during the day and then shot at night after the cave was closed. We even considered liberating the appallingly treated 'lucky' turtle during one such night session but given that the Chinese regularly shoot people for lesser crimes we thought better of it and left it at expressing our disgust to the showcave management.

Other locations we used within the Crown Cave complex were away from the public areas and allowed for more normal working hours. Breakfast and dinner at a sensible time were a welcome departure to most natural history shoots where the prime shooting hours are pre-dawn to mid morning and mid afternoon til after dark to get the best light. Fortunately on this shoot our best light came courtesy of numerous gel cell batteries and could be switched on and off to suit. The only problem with using numerous batteries is they need to be charged. With more batteries than chargers this involved me setting my alarm for 3am everyday to stumble out of bed, switch the batteries around on the chargers and then crawl back

to bed. This was fine until stumbling back to bed one night I noticed the world's largest spider had taken up residence on the wall by the head of my bed! Well Ok maybe it was only 3 or 4 inches across but at that point in my life, prior to a highly recommended hypnotherapy course run by London Zoo I was the world's biggest arachnophobe, the sole reason I've turned down numerous invitations to join Mulu expeditions. So what to do... leave the room, leave the hotel, leave China... all were options but unfortunately the only possible way out was to wake up Tom in the room next door and explain to him the real reason I'd invited him along... the only consolation I convinced myself was that I know the roles would have been reversed had a rat been involved!

Our last day of filming was at a different location just outside Guilin. This rather dull cave ends in a large chamber with a single spectacular stal totem pole standing in its centre.

High definition cameras need plenty of light to get the best from them which with modern arc lights is not a problem. Except HMI arc lights need a lot of power. We'd sourced a 2500w lamp unit from a film lighting company in China but they insisted that their staff had to come along to operate the generator and switch the lamp on and off. Now I don't speak much Chinese and I don't know where they'd been told they were going but after a 30min uphill slog and 20mins of caving with a generator slung between them I got the distinct feeling that they were not about to take up cave filming any time soon!

With all the cave filming in the can the pressure was off. Well that is until I managed to lose the entire tape stock that we'd shot during the previous two weeks... Convinced that I'd packed all the tapes in an Aluminium flight case for the trip back to Guilin, suddenly I couldn't find the case. When traveling with 20-30 flight cases of filming gear it's easy to lose track and a worrying hour was spent trying to work out what had happened to the case in question. Normally on a shoot with a producer they look after the tapes but as we'd been let out on our own I was not looking forward to calling back to Bristol to tell Phil that I'd managed to lose the entire tape stock and we were going to have to reshoot everything! Fortunately though, brain fade was at work and the aluminium flight case I'd packed the tapes in actually turned out to be a black peli case which was with us all along!

Took a while to live that one down with Tom and Tim but I'm sure the day they spent throwing live fish at me in the Li River while I was trying to film fishing cormorants for another part of the series was some compensation!

In all I spent nearly 4 months in China working on the series filming caves, people, underwater, flowers and some of the biggest white water rivers in the world. Dangling in the middle of a huge river on a 150m long tyrolean traverse whilst a 70 year old pipe smoking man and his daughter with a live goat on her back cross on a steel cable next to you certainly makes anything we do in caves seem rather normal!

The series was aired alongside the Beijing Olympics and was a huge success and a real coup for the BBC. Recently without our knowledge the American co-producers the Travel Channel entered the series for the Emmy awards, the TV equivalent of the Oscars. The series won best Music, best Editing and four of the cameramen including myself won Emmy's for Best Cinematography so in spite of trying to lose the tapes, harassing innocent spiders and caving by roller coaster we must have done something right!

*Gavin Newman*

# La Grotte de la Diau in a Weekend

Tim Ball talks you through the logistics of planning and undertaking this classic cave system

**A** lot of people in the Wessex have done this trip in the past few years, some more than once. For the benefit of others, this article is split into two halves: "how to do it" and then the trip write-up itself. The write-up provides some anecdotal evidence of what to expect.

**Trip Technicalities:** How we did it with 5 People over a Long Weekend

**Time of year:** August bank holiday. We had two days of uninterrupted clear blue skies with very low water levels in the rivers. It doesn't get better than that. Our departure was from Mendip on Thursday at 5pm, returning to Mendip the following Tuesday at 1am.

**Ferry:** SeaFrance was used via the Dover to Calais route. A midnight sailing to France, and a 9pm return journey, cost £110. This included a £10 charge to re-arrange the return journey from 10pm to 9pm local time.

**Campsite:** We stayed at "Camping Rural Les Combes d'Usillon" (address: 461 Chemin des Combes d'Usillon, tel: 04 50 22 28 96, e-mail: camping-usillon@orange.fr), which is open from 15th May until 15th September. Importantly, the campsite was selected since it allows cavers exiting the Diau to walk all the way back home without transport (more about this later). The nearest town is Thorens-Glières, with the campsite itself being about half a kilometre west of the hamlet of Usillon. To reach it, take the Route de la Louvatière (found on the south side of Thorens-Glières) for 1.5 kilometres, before turning left at a signpost indicating "Camping". By looking on [www.multimap.com](http://www.multimap.com), selecting France as a country and searching on Usillon, all of this can be clearly seen. Switching to "aerial" mode, the farmhouse and washing block can be seen as two red-roofed buildings 1km west of Usillon. Additionally, the track from Usillon to the camp site can be clearly seen as a white zig-zag starting from north west side of the village. Initially it follows a line of trees in the south west direction, before turning through 90° to the north west before entering a forest turning south west again and then arriving at the edge of the campsite field. Worth noting is that when walking through Usillon towards Thorens-Glières, this track is the penultimate one before leaving the hamlet. It is obvious when on it due to its size and the fact that you are in a big field after leaving the tree line.

The campsite is medium-sized (6 "emplacement" capacity), with

prices being very reasonable at 11 euros/night for two people, and 7.5 euros/night for 1 person. Hence for 5 people staying for 3 nights it cost us  $[(11 \times 2) + 7.5] \times 3 = 88.5$  euros. In terms of facilities it had a washing block having a couple of toilets (proper sit down variety), x2 showers, x2 wash basins, x1 washing up sink (drinking water) and a washing machine. There was also a separate block on the camping area having a sink (this used spring water), fridge/freezer unit plus recycling. A river runs to the south of the camping area (easily accessible for kit washing), plus there is a barbecue area with the campsite providing small pieces of wood for it. If required there are some electricity points (we did not use these). The washing machine costs 4.5 euros a wash. Everything was perfectly satisfactory although it is probably not suitable for a very large group. The owners live at the house near to the washing block and are very friendly.

**Weather forecasting:** Prior to reaching France I got some advance data from the Meteo France website, which can give a 4-day forecast for the nearby town of Annecy (select using the City scroll-down list): [www.meteo.fr/meteonet\\_en/temps/france/prev/frprev.htm](http://www.meteo.fr/meteonet_en/temps/france/prev/frprev.htm) Also a 3-day forecast for the nearest mountain area to the town of Annecy (Le Semnoz) can be found at <http://france.meteofrance.com/france/montagne>. Select the "Alpes du Nord" region and then you can hover the cursor over the mountain region of interest. There is also an Office de Tourisme in Thorens-Glières which can provide on-the-spot information.

**Personal clothing/equipment:** x4 people in yellow PVC suits, x1 person in cordura (good condition). All had at least one thermal layer underneath, plus a balaclava which was definitely required in the lower reaches of the cave (there is quite a draft between the last of the pitches and dropping into the collecteur of the Diau). We also took: first aid kit, solid fuel cooker and a ready-to-cook meal in a bag, two litres of water each (a lot was used on the walk to the entrance), plus more spare dry clothing, spare warm gloves (I used two layers), spare batteries, and snack food such as energy bars, fruit and nut mix, flapjacks, salami etc. etc. In the event we had too much but were prepared for the worst: as Tom wisely said "It's better to be looking at it than looking for it". Four people had complete SRT kit, with one person having "down" gear only.

**Rigging:** 9mm rope was used, with three lengths of 40m and one of 60m. This was split between five tackle bags (the "spare" bag being used for food, first aid and personal possessions). The 60m rope was mostly used for pull-down, except on the 60m pitch where x2 joined 40m ropes were used instead. New stainless steel fixed aids have been placed on the majority of the large shafts. In the main these consist of a pair of stainless steel ring bolts located near to each other where required, in some cases connected together with stainless steel chain having a large central "ring" for pull-through rigging. However, somewhat frustratingly, all of the fixed traverse lines and existing rigging "tat" use the existing old anchor points, which have definitely seen better days! These consist of a variety of bent aluminium plates, clown-type hangers, hangers into 8mm spits, hangers onto 8mm studding, and pitons. Many had an unhealthy degree of rust or rotation present. Naturals were very rarely utilised. The traverse lines leading to pitch heads were short in places (or nonexistent), and are not anchored to the rock very frequently. Having a tall and confident rigger is therefore desirable.

**Finding the cave, cave description and plan/rigging topo:** The French book "A travers le Karst" by Fabien Darne and Patrice Tordjman (ISBN 2-915166-00-5, published by Abymes in 2002) contains full details of access, a description, history and a bibliography. The cave is number 55 in the list of 100 systems discussed (information on the nearby Merueilleuse/Vertige system is also in the same book as number 54). Details can be found on the internet at [www.abymes.com/catalogue.html](http://www.abymes.com/catalogue.html)

A description of the alternative top location (Tanne du Bel Espoir)



*Our Illustrious Leader!*

*photo Tim Ball*

can be found in a 2004 EPC trip report (see <http://www.eldon.org.uk/grottedeladiau2004.html> for more details).

The cave exit (resurgence) can be found by driving through the hamlet of Usillon in an easterly direction and on through the hamlet of La Verrerie (Chemin de l'Adiau road). Before a series of hairpin bends, there is an obvious car parking area with a memorial to wartime resistance fighters. Park here and follow the signed path over a bridge and up to the huge resurgence exit. The walk takes about half an hour.

## Trip Report

Participants: Mark Easterling, Sarah Payne, Tom Chapman, Dave Cooke, Tim Ball.

Every man and his dog in the Wessex seems to have done the Diau, and it was only by sheer luck that I managed to get on this trip, having bumped into Sarah Payne in the Hunters one Wednesday night (I don't normally visit on this evening). She mentioned that there was a spare place going on a visit in two weekends time, and it would probably be OK to go if it was alright with the other members in the group. I must thank Mark Easterling (Bean) for allowing me to gatecrash his trip at the last minute.

### La Grotte de la Diau (Saturday 29th August):

When I initially spoke to Sarah she said that they were all taking their PVC suits. I don't own one, so she said to speak to Bean about it and see what he thought. When I rang him up and explained my position about only having cordura, his encouraging words straight off-the-cuff were "You're going to die". Great! This would become a theme of jokes for the rest of the weekend until I had exited safely. Reports that came back from other visiting Wessex groups said not to underestimate how cold it could be, and how frozen your hands could get. The real words of advice were that this was going to be a cold trip, and plenty of insulation would be needed. A thermal underlayer, gloves and balaclava was therefore mandatory for everyone. Fortunately for me my oversuit was in good condition, with the waterproof inner coating largely intact.

With 5 of us in the party, and Bean having done the trip at least 7 times previously, we didn't have any navigational problems finding the "Les Trois Betas" entrance, and made our way there in an hour and a quarter. Having got up at 6am and left camp about 7.30am, we also did not suffer from the effects of strong sun when walking across the limestone plateau. When we arrived, we kitted up. Sarah had two thermal layers of everything, and Tom had about three layers on top. I had one layer on top plus my cordura, and was thinking: would it be enough? We then had a group photo. Four people in yellow suits, one in a red suit. "It's for the coroner, so he can quickly work out what went wrong" said Bean. The black humour provided me with much encouragement (!).

The first pitch, 88m split into three sections, provided a taste of what was to come. The limestone is very clean and white so your light does a great job, being effectively reflected from the walls, showing lots of lovely fluting. Bean was on a mission with the rigging; nothing seemed to slow him down. Cookie and Sarah were next, with Tom and myself doing the de-rigging. The bags were passed forward quickly. It was a great arrangement and we seemed to zoom on down. From many of the pitch heads it is possible to see the bottom, so some very spectacular views were had for those in the middle of the party. It reminded me of the best of Yorkshire. The first obstacle of fun was a two-part pitch, the first section of ~12m and the lower section of ~50+m, separated by a very narrow ledge. It provided a comedy moment to see a pair of lovely new stainless steel ring bolts, sitting unused, about three feet above a group of old hangers that had several metres of tat strung between them. Needless to say we used the tat and old hangers like everyone else! Due to the possibility of the rope snagging when being pulled down, Tom and I changed position at this point so that he could descend next, putting

in the two 40m ropes joined together at the same time. There was a set of instructions that I was to follow since this was a change to the de-rigging technique that had been used so far. One minute he was above me to my right, then he was directly above me, and then he was below me to my left. I wasn't too happy with all the acrobatics that were going on, mostly being done by Tom, and did my best to avoid looking towards the people below - they were a very long way away! I'm not sure how the bits of tat would have protected us had there been a slip, and tried my best to put it out of my mind. It was a deft set of moves, one that I couldn't have pulled off, but that's rope-access nutters for you! After descending Tom was going to pull down the 60m rope by a foot so that it got clear of all the artificial rubbish at the pitch head, then I was to get on and descent. Before departing Tom patiently put up with me going through the procedure at least another couple of times until I understood what was going to happen, which I was grateful for. He body-belayed the far end of the pull-down rope just in case I got it wrong (I learnt a few tricks on this trip)!



*Cookie, Sarah and Tom at the cliff face exit of the Merveilleuse*  
*photo Tim Ball*

After some welcome horizontal caving and a pitch or two, plus some navigation, we got to the huge "Salle des Rhomboedres" where we stopped for a bite to eat. Surprisingly some of the PVC gang were complaining of the cold, so they donned their balaclavas.

Next was the enormous Puits des Echos, aptly named. At the bottom of the 39m pitch there is some writing from the original SGCAF French explorers which indicates that this point is the end of the "entrance series" of the through-trip. The next section of the cave called the "Affluent des Grenoblois" reminded me of Swinsto since we had finally reached running water, and the overall size seemed to decrease. The pitches became wet, and it was impossible to stay dry since the rigging was set-up for a pull-through. Fortunately due to the overall water levels being extremely low we avoided a good soaking. One of the final pitches was more of a ramp than a free hang, and I remember that the fixed aids consisted of a knackered pieton and a rusty hanger, not good enough in my opinion. There was also a pitch with a tyrolean rigged to keep people out of the water.

Between the last of the pitches and the collecteur of the Diau, the draft was bitter due to the passage size reducing to more of a tunnel profile which really funnelled the wind. I think everyone had their balaclavas on at this point. I also put on a set of gauntlets over my usual gloves so that the wind-chill factor was reduced. To keep out of the ever-growing streamway (our feet were still largely dry at this time) there was some traversing to be done, and then we lost Cookie for ten minutes. Before we noticed however, the rest of us had bombed on through a long canal that was our first prolonged soaking up to the thighs. Where was he? Being last in the party I hung back for him, but was extremely reluctant to go back through the canal. Time passed and the others, waiting ahead, called back



*Group photo before entering the Diau*

*photo Bean (Mark Easterling)*

to see what was going on. I shouted for him and heard a distant reply that he was stuck getting across the end of the traverse. At this point the stream is deep and about six feet below. The route then goes to the right, and the high level bridging arrives at a section which bells out. It is impossible to bridge, and the only way on is to get across this “belled” part and onto the other side. The “bell” is however rather wide and I remember it took some thinking about (plus deft hand and footwork) to get across without falling in. On the way to this point, Tom was between Cookie and myself, and had zoomed effortlessly over the obstacle without so much as a batting an eyelid (flipping rope-access people!), then overtaken me before arriving at the canal. Poor old Dave hadn’t seen what the technique was, and also had the disadvantage of having the shortest legs. With me waiting the far side of the canal he assured me that everything was alright, and just sizing things up before he made his move. Eventually he reappeared, saying that he got across on a wing and a prayer, finding only a greasy pinch hold to assist!

Once into the main collecteur, the cave takes on another dimension again. This final section of streamway, more of a river, is the biggest that I have seen. With the low water levels progress was not difficult, but it is a sobering thought to consider what the place must be like in flood. At first we were able to keep the water to below about thigh level, using the sides of the passage to stay out of the deep bits, but eventually it does indeed go over the waist, especially when it is required to go from one side of the passage to the other. There are also a couple of high level bypasses to be taken to avoid the worst horrors, with one having a miniature “stemple ladder” in an upward-trending rift. Fixed ladders also start making an appearance. After the first bypass (which ends in an abseil off a single bolt, going back into the streamway), the deepest river sections are encountered. Some of these are waded, and some have traverse wires to assist which can be clipped into if needed. The water was bitterly cold but at least we were near the end. There are also several vertical levels of traverse wire which show just how high the water can reach. The final bypass marks the end of the stream for cavers. Part way around this is a new stainless steel ladder which leads to a narrow ledge around what looks like a large open area. Bean told us afterwards that on one of his visits this area was full of water up to the ledge. Another ladder follows, followed by a short scramble down into an enormous chamber which is just before the entrance. Cookie provided another moment of amusement by missing the scramble down and continuing to yet another ladder whose end was not attached to anything. When he got to the bottom of this his feet were in mid-air and he had to jump for it. We think it was put in for some of the adventure groups that use the cave, perhaps when there

is more water present.

Finally we exited into the evening sunshine after a magnificent trip of 8 hours 40 minutes. When viewing the entrance from outside, it really does not do justice to the huge chamber behind, or the size of the river passage beyond.

In summary: what a fantastic cave system. Having now done it I can honestly say that in my ~17 years of caving it is the best sport trip I’ve done, without exception. Masses of SRT followed by streamway and then huge river passage. I’d love to go back and do it again, plus also spend more time in the large lower section (entering from the bottom, and having a good look around since it is so big!). It did push stamina. The only possible criticism is that there are few formations, but I guess you can’t have everything. I survived in cordura, although due to the excellent weather conditions this wasn’t really put to the test.

To return to the campsite we followed the obvious path downhill (there is a short section with a rope in place to protect a steep drop), over a bridge and onto the road. It is then best to take the main road through La Verrerie, go through Nant-Sec and onto Usillon. The track down to the campsite is the penultimate one on the left hand side before leaving Usillon. Don’t try to follow the river as a shortcut - it didn’t work for us! Bean and Tom went to fetch the car with all our clothes in, parked back at the Chalet L’Anglette, by taking a path which departed from close to the cave exit. This took two and a half hours, all uphill.

### **Gouffre de la Merveilleuse (Sunday 30th August):**

If you are going for a weekend of caving, this is definitely the Sunday trip of the two, although it has a nasty sting in the tail.

For this trip we again had 5 tacklebags, but this time containing only one 60m rope and two 40m ropes plus personal items between them. Everyone had full SRT kit due to there being some pre-rigged “up” sections.

We didn’t actually get underground before 3pm due to a late finish after the Diau, and the requirement for a lie-in. Everything started well due to only an hour of walking from the van in broken cloud (so not too hot); however we went down the wrong shakehole to start with even though we had reconnoitered the entrance on the Friday! This mistake was quickly rectified and we were on our way again, although soon delayed by Cookie’s second subterranean faff when trying to get out of the crawl after the first pitch from the surface. This manoeuvre could only be described as not being best suited to stereotypical WCC members. After some guidance from Sarah as to suitable footholds he was down, and we were perched on top of some

jammed boulders in a small space above the biggest pitch in the cave (50+ metres). The descent is between some of these boulders where a bit of wiggling was required to obtain an optimal body position. People waiting above had to take care not to dislodge stones from the small chamber since they could have fallen between the cracks and onto Bean below. Once through the top squeeze the pitch opens out to another stunning free hang down yet another lovely white fluted space.

The cave is quite different in character to the Diau. In total there are approximately seven pitches in comparison to the Diau's ~26, and there is no active streamway. Thermal underlayers are not required. Once down several of the pitches, the cave changes into a horizontal system, with some of the passages being very phreatic in nature, having a large diameter. There are also route-finding choices to be made, but the majority of these are helped by vertical strips of reflective tape which have been placed at junctions. Excellent for navigation, but they do make for some unwanted photographic artefacts. And then there was the mud! Some of the phreatic passages have a thick layer of mud in them which is completely dry in places (wide deep cracks can be seen), but in other areas where water has percolated through the rock it becomes completely muddy, occasionally beyond welly depth! Combined with plenty of crawling it felt more like being at home in the UK. After the exertions of the previous day most of us had some amusing moments in the goo, losing footing at inconvenient moments. For some reason the group humour seemed to focus on Sarah, probably because she was the only female on the trip and therefore an easy target. She got a lot of ribbing, but to her credit took it in very good faith! I think she knew that the "mock patronising" was actually us being chauvinistic in a protective way. En route we also encountered some sections of vertical "up" where fixed rope had been installed, or ladder, or stainless steel "staples", or combinations of these. We found a WCC electron ladder that had been left from a previous visit - it was most useful and so it was left in place. Generally all of the "ups" were difficult since they had been glutinously coated, and were slippery as hell. In one place the cave passage at floor level had a U-shaped profile. Due to the depth of the liquid mud there was no way anyone could go down one side and up the other, so a traverse line had been rigged across the top. As we had found in the Diau, this was not anchored to the rock at very close intervals. Bean went across first, then Tom, and then it was Sarah's turn. The technique was to clip in a short cowstail, then try to pull yourself over. However due to the long length of rope in the critical central section of the traverse, and the coating of goo all over the rope and the wall, this proved not to be easy. By now the party males were in full laddish mood, and Sarah departed the safety of the near side with cries of "Go on!", "Go on love!", "Give it your all!", etc etc. Of course we were loving it (the spectating and the banter), whereas for poor Sarah it was a real physical effort. The traverse was a dog. Half way across Sarah leaned back for a rest, and thinking she'd given up I remarked "It's not just yourself you're letting down". If there had been tumbleweed in the cave it would have blown past in a light breeze. Everything stopped and Bean said "I think you've gone too far there Timmy boy". Tom and Cookie made similar remarks. It was the comment of the weekend. Later over dinner Sarah remarked much to my relief that she had found it priceless funny, but was just too exhausted to laugh. Phew!

The exit lies in a cliff face some 20m above a significant ledge, with the final pull-through being from a tree. Once down, the ledge traverses the cliff face for some 200m with via ferrata style rigging for protection. There is only one tricky section where there is not much footing. Despite some brand spanking new stainless steel studding and hangers, the rock is extremely frost shattered and can come away in your hands easily. When traversing the ledge there are some excellent photo opportunities, and we were again blessed with clear skies. Mont Blanc could be seen beyond the nearest ridge line and visibility was superb. What an exit.

Now came the sting in the tail. After the traverse the route back is up the side of the cliff, or abseiling down into the gorge below the

cliff face. I can't comment on the second option since this was not taken, although Bean stated that Carmen had done this previously, taking several hours. As for the "up" option, it's not vertical, but the slope must reach 60 degrees in places, and is either scree or long grass, with occasional larger shrubs. There is no path (this was confirmed later by a French caver that we met). It can be politely described as an absolute bast\*\*d. If anyone is to have an accident on the trip it is most likely to be here. It would be so easy to twist an ankle. Dislodged rocks roll downhill for miles. The scree is tricky since the stones are smallish and don't hold together very well when being stood on. Normally I consider myself to be good on foot, but this was something else. We got to one section where the only way up was to grab hold of big clumps of the mountain grass and rely on the strength in their rooting for security. I spent a lot of my time with my face in the grass so that my centre of gravity was as low as possible (we each had a tacklebag on our backs). Exposed roots were used as handholds and footholds. Branches were used to pull yourself up. Several times I cursed after grabbing what looked like a root, then hauling on it only to find that it was a piece of dead branch and totally useless. There was almost nowhere "safe" to stop due to the slope. Bean did his best to navigate (he had visited the cave a couple of times previously), but despite this we went too high and had to come down some in height. Getting further round the vegetation got larger, so there was less opportunity for falling miles if you went over, but it was easier to lose sight of the person in front, or get poked in the eye. Traverse, check position, correct direction. Traverse, check position, check direction. What a sod. It would be pointless to try and describe the route here with confidence. At one point we thought there might be a path heading off upwards to our right as we faced the cliff, but this was not taken. Eventually we reached a gully having scree-covered grass in the bottom that lead to what looked like a col having proper fir trees growing in it and down one side. We headed up the gully and found a barb-wire fence. This was salvation - the nightmare was over. After a few minutes we found an animal track (hooray!) which was followed uphill, soon emerging out of the woods onto the grassy col. Sticking to the left hand side we followed the track tending downhill slightly, to reach a point where we could see the Chalet l'Anglette and the van.

We had spent three hours underground. I didn't time the return, but estimate that it took us nearly three hours to get back. When we finally got sight of the Chalet, light was fading, and we got changed in the dusk.

In summary: a question of taste. Would I do it again? Perhaps, but not as a through trip due to the awful return trek, which would be positively dangerous if it were in any way wet. I'd also have to forget about the mud (there is nowhere to clean this off in the cave). The phreatic passages are extremely beautiful and it would be nice to go off route and explore or take photos. Some people preferred this cave to the Diau.

Despite it being a Sunday and 9pm, we got a meal in the Chalet. A four course effort was 17 euros (superb), with beer being a pricey 2.5 euros for 250ml. Here we met some French cavers from the local Annecy club, who visit the plateau (and the Chalet) every weekend to explore it. They have over 600 entrances logged, although most do not connect into a master system.

Footnote

Thanks to Bean Tours for organising such an excellent weekend, keeping us on schedule, and leading us very proficiently through the two caves.

On the way home, Sarah tried to explain to Tom the difficulties posed by the tricky traverse. "How can you, with all your rope-access qualifications, NOT UNDERSTAND THAT SIMPLE POINT?". We all laughed. The score had been settled.

*Tim Ball.*

# Evia Island Greece 2008

After our previous successful trips to Greece, which have all been documented in the journal, we were invited back by Speleo. Our destination this time was an island called Evia. Although it is the second largest island in Greece nobody seems to know it is there, even though it is only about 100 km east of Athens.

After the normal intense correspondence by e-mail the dates were set and the trip was to run from 2nd - 16th August. This year I was allowed to take 10 cavers. We had the original crew of me (WCC), Pete (Dwarf) Hann (WCC), Kevin Hilton (WCC), and Mike Thomas (WCC). Andy Judd could not come this year owing to the fact the flash sod had spent 3 months swanning around the world earlier in the year. To add to the previously mentioned team members we had David (Cookie) Cooke (WCC), Laura Trowbridge (WCC), Jon Beal (WCC), Russell Brooks (WCC), Bryan (Dylan) Norton (CPC) and Andy Jackson (BPC). We had to take a couple of token Northerners just to confuse our Greek friends.

We were to be based in the hills not far from a town called Kimi. The plan was to help survey, photograph, explore and dive some large sinks which were grouped quite closely together. Also there was a group of three or four resurgences around the foot of the mountain for us to look at. While we were to be camped on the mountain the plan was to find rooms for the girls not far from the beach which we could also use as a base for R and R, showers and the like. Our camp site was apparently very 'au naturel'.

Vassilis from Speleo was in charge of organising the camp. He and his wife Libby tracked down some rooms for the girls to rent and spent a good deal of time gaining all the necessary permissions including liaising with two Mayors and councils, because the area we were to be working spanned the boundaries of two communities so the poor bloke had twice as much work to do with the various parties.

Anyway everybody eventually booked flights and hire cars and the time very quickly arrived as it always does. Russ and Andy flew out first from Manchester on Wednesday and you've guessed it Russ lost all of his luggage. After few frantic phone calls between Jon, Pete and me we had sorted a complete set of spare kit including sleeping bag and karri mat ready to take out for Russ if we needed to. On Thursday the phone calls carried on from Athens to the UK. Dylan and family flew out on Thursday and whilst Russ was on his way to the airport to collect them he got the call to say his luggage had finally turned up. He was mightily relieved because he was not looking forward to wearing some of my old caving kit. Rita, Pete, Sandie, Sarah, Kev, Cookie and I flew out on Saturday and met up with the rest in Athens.

Sunday dawned with the first of our challenges - sorting out the hire cars. Hire cars in Greece have to be some of the most expensive on the planet. Since they cost so much you would expect them to be superb - wrong! My van is in better nick than the cars we had - lets just say they were all well lived in! We eventually managed to find three hire cars - Russ looks quite funny driving a citron C3. Then we had to try and drive in convoy, behind Costas, through the centre of Athens and

back to Speleo's headquarters to collect everybody else and all the gear that had not already been taken to the island, which we actually managed to do.

The cars were all well loaded and again we started off in convoy, this time behind Vassilis out of Athens bound towards the port and the ferry to Evia. So far so good - driving in Greece is quite an experience.

We all arrived at the port at Nea Palatia in one piece, boarded the ferry and set off for Erertia on Evia. After a forty five minute crossing we had our first real view of the Island. It was much more rugged than most of us had expected. Pete and I were further south on Evia when we first met the members of Speleo in 2004.

We had to cross the entire width of the island on the very narrow roads. The fun soon started. Sitting on the wrong side of the car and driving such narrow roads we must have stuck out like the group of tourists that we were. Oh and we were all trying to follow Vassilis in convoy! What a laugh. Dylan was the first; he had a bit of a fight with a large lump of concrete in the verge and totalled a wheel. A bit further on Russell's ignition light came on so we came to another stop. Vassilis had the patience of a saint. Anyway we carried on and found somewhere for Dylan to get his wheel repaired, so he and Vassilis departed to sort it out. Libby took over as the guide of choice now. I then decided it would be best if I nearly drove off the side of a cliff when meeting a lorry coming the other way. Mr Cook went quite white but in the end we all survived the journey and met up with Vassilis and Dylan in a village called Andhoniani which was where the girls were to be based. The journey had taken us about four hours. Vassilis normally makes the same journey in just over half that time.

Time was getting on now. We off loaded the girls as quickly as we could, loaded Vassilis' kit into Pete's car and set off for the camp. We were led to believe that the camp was about twenty minutes drive from the village up an unmade road. It took us nearly one and a half hours and boy did I wish I had my Land Rover. The cars took a lot of stick even in first gear.

The camp site was in this fantastic wooded, almost alpine like, meadow and was covered by very mature fir trees, which must have been ancient to grow that big in such a dry climate. Some members of the Speleo team were already on site. Yan, Chris and John had already started rigging one of the caves, with the plan to dive the terminal sump on our first day.

We all set to and tents were put up as quickly as possible anywhere we could find some level ground. As usual, the snoring end of the camp was the flattest and the least used. Kev had managed to bring a mountain tent with a snow valence! Did he know something that we didn't? Camp site prepared, kit and food tents erected we set about preparing the evening meal. Speleo always cook communally which works really well. While we were preparing the meal, Stephanos and a few of the team went to look at a small cave a couple of hundred yards from the camp. Apparently it contained some human skeletons believed to be from either the Second World War or the Civil War. Since we found a 6mm spent cartridge from a

Lugar hand gun in the camp, this possibly meant they had met an unnatural death. We all turned in after a busy first day.

Monday dawned, everybody was up and ready to get going. The plan was to split into two teams. One team was to go to a cave called Milea with Stephanos, to try and push the end and survey out. The other team was to go to a cave called Tsekoura (Axe cave) planning to rig what was believed to be the final pitch, help get the diving gear to the sump for Yan to dive it, then retrieve the gear and start to survey.

The Tsekoura team consisted of Vassilis, Chris, Cookie, Pete, Kev, Jan and I. Chris, Cookie, Pete and Kev set off first followed about 30 minutes later by Vassilis and me. Jan was to follow down one and a half hours behind us in the theory that we would have finished the rigging and have all the diving gear at the sump.

We all went on this trip not really knowing what to expect except that there were four large sinks all in the same location, all at around 350 metres deep with one having a sump that needed diving.

The entrance to Tsekoura is situated on a small bluff about 5 metres above a meadow that had an obvious dry stream bed sinking about 50 metres away. The cave started off as a series of pitches dropping 50 - 60 metres straight down, followed by a larger passage that dipped gently varying from quite large canyon to meandering rifts and even a couple of places that you had to get flat out in the water!! All in all some very fine passage interspersed by 12 to 15 more pitches with the largest single drop of no more than 30 metres.

None of the caves in Greece are visited very frequently and the caves that we were working in had received very little attention. Places like West End in Eastwater have had dozens more visits than any of the caves we were looking at. Most of the rigging is still exploration rigging and surveys are not complete even if they have been started.

Vasillis and I had a good trip down the cave, made more interesting because Vassilis had actually been on the original exploration. We eventually met up with the early team quite a way down where they had had to start rigging. Kev had also had to adjust some of the rigging on the way in. Once we were all at the bottom of that pitch we came across the diving kit that had been transported down the cave a day earlier, plus the rest of the tackle that was needed to reach the bottom of the cave. Kev rigged over a large block and entered a large descending rift which needed rigging. After a bit of faffing about it was decided that the rope would not be long enough, but it was the last rope we had. We ended up removing the rope from the large block and turned it into a very interesting free climb that gave Kev the whole rope to play with. He attached it to a chocked boulder in the rift and set off down what looked like a twenty metre pitch. All of a sudden Pete started shouting 'Kev get off the rope, Get off the f-----g rope now.' The chock was starting to follow Kev down the rift! After this bit of excitement we decided that discretion was the better part of valour and gave up on getting to the bottom that day, which meant that Yan could not attempt to dive the terminal sump. Unfortunately this was Yan's last day on Evia as he had to return to work in Athens the following day. Since the cave had never been surveyed some of the party started surveying while the rest of the team started carrying out Yan's dive gear.

The Milea team consisted of Stephanos (Speleo) Russ, Andy and Dylan. The cave was a very large stream sink

consisting of an entrance shaft of approximately 60m which was split into 4 or 5 short pitches with the largest drop being about 20m. This landed in a large chamber with a couple of what looked like inlets emerging high up in the walls. A steeply descending passage continued for a short distance followed by a short 8m pitch which landed in an even larger chamber, also with several potential passages high up. This larger chamber ended at a large sand choke with a huge number of tree trunks and branches stuck in it. This was very strange because we understood that the cave was supposed to be in excess of 200m deep and still wide open. We had a good look around, but no way past the choke was found. Again this cave had never been surveyed so the team surveyed & photographed on the way out.

Overall everybody had a good first day. The remaining team members, Mike, Jon and Laura, were due to arrive later in the evening. We had arranged to meet them down in one of the villages and it was a good job that we did because they would never have found their way up to the camp by themselves and it gave a few of us a good excuse to drop down and have a cold beer or two. Mike, Jon and Laura arrived at around 9pm without any problems and like us were quite surprised at our journey from the village to the campsite.

The following morning people set off again to Milea and Tsekoura. The Milea team descended to what we now called the terminal choke having a good look around on the way down. There were several potential climbing projects in the upper bit of the cave some of which looked like they could bypass the choke. There was also another passage about 100m long near the choke which ended in a well decorated chamber. After a couple of hours spent digging the choke it was decided that there were better things to do and a return to the surface was made and the cave was de-rigged.

The Tsekoura team, plus Mike, Jon and Laura, returned to the point they reached the previous day and finished rigging to the bottom. They looked at the terminal sump, but concluded it was too small to even get in. They found an inlet sump just upstream, but again it was very small, and another rising passage was explored for about 30m. Other members of the team carried on with the surveying and noticed a large inlet across from the head of one of the pitches. Mike also noticed



*Kitting up outside Matoxi spring.*

*Photo Andy Jackson*



*Large passage below bit like Maypole inlet. Papa o Lakkos ( Priest Hole). Photo Pete Hann*

this on his way out and put his climbing prowess to good use to climb into it. It went for about 70m to a well decorated chamber.

That night we decided we should finish surveying and try to de-tackle Tsekoura the next day. So Andy, Russ and Kev went to bottom again to finish looking at the inlet we had investigated the previous day and started de-tackling from the bottom. Meanwhile Mike, Pete, Jon and myself went about two thirds of the way to the bottom in order to climb back into the inlet Mike got into yesterday in order to survey and photograph it. We were then planning to de-tackle out until we met up with the survey team which consisted of a couple of the Greek lads, Cookie and Laura. Jon was then supposed to give the survey team a hand while Mike and I carried on de-rigging. In the event we were just abseiling out of the inlet when the team from the bottom arrived and leapfrogged us. We carried on the de-tackling and didn't meet up with the surveying team until we were nearly at the entrance pitches. Everybody reached the surface after a good day with the cave photographed, surveyed and completely de-tackled.

Thursday was to be a day off. Most of us were going off the hill, down to the village where the girls were staying and spending a day on the beach. While we were all relaxing on the beach, Mike and Jon were travelling around the base of the hill with Vassilis checking out some of the known resurgences. Stephanos and a couple of the lads from Speleo were going to start rigging a cave called Papa o Lakkos (Priest Hole). Andy, Kev, Laura and Russ were going to have a look at Priest Hole, but George, one of the lads from Speleo, failed to find the entrance and after a couple of hours trudging around in the heat they called it a day and joined us on the beach. The day was spent swimming in the warm Aegean Sea, sunbathing and eating ice-cream.

I stayed down in the village that night and enjoyed some creature comforts like a good meal in a taverna and a shower. I arrived back at camp the following lunch time when everybody was off caving. Mike and Jon were checking out the resurgences again. Andy, Laura, Kev, Russ, Cookie and George (Speleo) were finishing the rigging to the bottom of Priest Hole. Stephanos had managed to rig down to about -120m the previous day and the team had a successful trip rigging right down to the sump at -360m.

I was dossing around camp with Pete, Vassilis and a couple of the Greek lads when one of the local shepherds turned up and started chatting to the lads from Speleo. The upshot of these conversations was that the shepherd knew of a large resurgence that the Greek lads had heard about but didn't actually know where the entrance was. So the shepherd volunteered to show us. We piled into a couple of cars and with the shepherd as a passenger we set off down the hill towards the village of Matoxi. We spent about an hour or so guiding the cars carefully around several miles of dirt track, trying desperately not to damage the hire cars. We were travelling down hill, but eventually it was impossible to get the cars down any further. The shepherd said that we were close to the cave and could walk. We followed this mountain goat of a man down the track for a few hundred yards to a very obvious dry river bed which met the path from the right hand side. We turned right and set off up the river bed which turned quite quickly into a small gorge. It was clear from the start that a large amount of water flowed down the gorge in winter as the river bed was up to 10 meters wide in places and strewn with large boulders. After 15 minutes walking up the gorge in the heat of the afternoon we were at the entrance to Matoxi Spring and very impressive it was too.

The entrance was some 15m wide and possibly 6 or 8m high with a large sand bank at the entrance. The passage descending steeply down was pretty much the same dimensions as the entrance. You could imagine the amount of water discharged by this resurgence when it was flowing. We followed the passage down to a sand blockage some 30-40 m from the entrance. This was obviously caused by receding water allowing the slope to slump back on its self.

Saturday dawned and today most people were heading to Papa o Lakkos (Priest Hole). After the successful rigging trip the day before to the undived sump, Kev was very keen to have a dive in it even though the vis was crap. Kev, Andy, Russ and Laura set off first, followed by Mike, Pete and myself.

The cave was located in an obvious stream gully some 400-500m off the nearest track, across a grassy area and then through a heavily wooded area. (It was easy to see how they failed to find it a couple of days earlier.) Kitting up was done near the entrance pitch with about 5 million flies for company - needless to say kitting up was done very quickly. The entrance pitch was about 15m in a large open shaft which starts as a ramp covered in rocks becoming more vertical for the last 10m. This landed on a boulder strewn floor slopping off to the next pitch, but there were also a few pieces of tree lying around including trunks of up to 600mm in diameter. (I would not like to be anywhere near this spot in the winter floods.) The next pitch was again quite short about 10-12m. This landed on a ledge and was immediately followed by another pitch of about the same length. This one landed in a small chamber with a traverse line running around the right hand side of it. A further drop of only 6-8m was followed by a pitch of 60m which was

just off vertical and landed via one deviation in a large pool of water which was a bit of a bitch to get over with dry feet. We were now following a fairly easy going large passage which eventually went into something a bit like a slightly larger version of Maypole inlet in OFD. This carried on for quite a distance with one very short pitch in the way. Eventually we came upon some flowstone ramps that were rigged. Two short sections of ramp and we were looking out over a drop of 20-25m into a very large canyon passage. Once down the pitch we were in a very impressive large passage with some fine decorations. I only went about 150m down this passage before returning to the surface. (One of the problems we were all finding this year was the amount of insects that really took a liking to our flesh (and people say they don't like bad meat.) One of the little buggers had taken a liking to me and nabbed my left leg just above the ankle which had duly swollen up so much that I could only just get my welly on and it was quite painful.)

Mike and Pete carried on down to the sump to meet the rest of the guys. Despite diving in completely zero vis (he could not even see his gauges) Kev managed to lay 20m of base fed line in what appeared to be a large steadily descending passage. An uneventful return to the surface was made.

The trip was going well and everybody was still keen so today (Sunday) a team consisting of Russ, Cookie, Laura and Pete went back to Matoxi to try and find a way round or through the sand choke because it had now emerged that there was a sump at the end of the cave that had been dived. According to our information Sump 1 was about 90m long and surfaced in a canal which went immediately to Sump 2. Sump 2 appeared to be 200m long descending to -40m and ending in a boulder choke. We were obviously keen to have a look at the sumps. After a couple of hours digging the team decided it was possibly going to be a longer project than they had hoped so decided to leave for the day and have a rethink. Whilst on their way out though Cookie spotted a small open arch about 20 meters back from the terminal choke that they had been digging. A quick look and 5 minutes digging and they were through, by-passing the sand choke and into the rest of the cave via a small 3 meter pitch. The upstream sump was very inviting and definitely needed diving if we had the time. There was also a lower area to the cave down a short 8m pitch. This area took all the water flow at this time of the year (Had the resurgence cut down to a lower level?)

Back at Priest Hole the rest of us were setting off again with Kev and a load more diving gear for another go at the sump. The trip went smoothly and once passed the point that I had reached the day before the passage, if anything, got more impressive staying just as wide, but getting higher and higher with more and more flow stone. We could hardly see the roof now so it was impossible to see if there were any other high level passages coming in. One thing it is worth remembering about the caves that we are working on here in Evia is that the trips written about in this article are only the second or third ever visits to caves. In most cases the initial surveys are not even complete so the prospect of extensions is very real. Papa o Lakkos

carried on with this grand very steeply descending passage dispersed with several short pitches until we reached a huge calcite ramp descending at some 60 degrees. Part way down was a large gour pool with a Tyrolean over it. This was a laugh. The Dwarf was too short to get his cows tails off when he reach the bottom end and I, no matter how hard I tried could not keep my ass out of the water. Mike of course being only half my weight managed famously.

The cave carried on steeply down until we eventually came upon a rope traverse vanishing off around a corner. The traverse ended up with a classic 'Y' hang on a pitch of some 30m. Following this pitch the passage carried on for a few more metres to a short 5m pitch down the side of a huge flake of rock lying across the passage. From there on the cave was full of gloopy mud for the remaining 150 or so metres down to the large filthy sump pool. We think that the large rib of rock across the passage is large enough to act like a dam even though there is a lot of space all round it. It must slow the water down so significantly that it dumps all the mud that it is carrying, because the rest of the cave is completely devoid of any mud.

Kev kitted up 100m above the sump to try and keep as much muck out of the water as possible. He was diving with a 3l and a 7l cylinder. The plan was to use the 7 and keep the 3 as reserve because of the lack of visibility. Also his depth alarm was set at 25m and his watch alarm was set at 15 minutes. These alarms were to govern his dive. The first alarm that went off would signal time to return to the surface. Jon Beal very kindly offered to be the primary line belay owing to the lack of anything else to belay the line to close enough to the water. Kev set off and as soon as he was under water there was no sign of any light at all (lovely). We all sat around waiting for what seemed like ages for him to return which of course he duly did.

Kev reported that the passage carried on large and steadily descending, but all in crap vis. He ran out all 40m of line that he was carrying and his watch alarm went off at the same time as the reel ran out. He opted to rewind the reel on exit owing to the lack of visibility and solid belays for the line. We packed up all Kev's gear and set off out. Before the start of the day's trip we had decided that it would be the last trip to



*Large passage in Papa o Lakkos ( Priest Hole )*

*Photo Pete Hann.*

the bottom so Mike and I followed on at the rear and started to detackle the cave. Everybody and all the kit arrived back to the 40 degree heat on the surface with no problems. Another good day all round.

Back at camp that night plans were made for the following day in between eating and drinking Amstel. Dylan, Pete, Andy and I were going to head off down to the village. I had to help Vassils prepare for the presentation that evening and Pete and Andy had to sort out a load of photographs to show. Mike, Jon and Kev were going to dive a resurgence called Atsitou that had been looked at earlier in the week. Russ, Cookie and Laura were going back to Matoxi to check out a few things. We would need to be up and off promptly, because we all had to be at the mayor's house in Kimi early in the evening to give all the local dignitaries and invited guests a presentation on the work that we had been doing over the last week and a bit.

Everybody was up and about pretty early having breakfast and getting gear ready for the day's activities. Mike, Jon and Kev went to Atsitou as planned, where Jon dived a previously un-dived sump. The cave is found by walking up a dry valley to an obvious dry resurgence emerging through a boulder pile. There is a small hole down through the boulders which apparently is quite snug for us proper sized people. This lands you in a canal which has to be swum down to reach the sump proper. There is a convenient dry bank for kitting up. Jon dived and followed a sizable passage for some distance, eventually surfacing in a kicking water air space in a rift. It was not possible to get out of the water, but Jon thought he heard the sound of running water up ahead of him somewhere. No other underwater exploration was carried out because the sump was covered in fine silt and the visibility disintegrated very quickly.

There is another large resurgence quite close to Atsitou which some Greek divers have pushed to around 1100m into a dry chamber with another sump as yet undived. Also the largest cave in the area, a cave called Manika is close by. Unfortunately Manika has been capped for some reason and there is no access at the present time, but watch this space. Because of its closeness to another major resurgence we believe that Atsitou is probably an overflow, but having said that the lads noticed a climb that needed looking at on the way out and Jon reckons that the sump warrants another dive.

The Matoxi team had another good day and ended up with some good photos. They also went back to the lower levels of the cave to try and push some small passages, but without much success. The rest of us departed to the village to get on with the preparation for that evening.

After the day's caving it was back to the camp get the kit washed and then off down the hill to Andhoniani to the girls' rooms in order to get cleaned up ready for the evening with the mayor. We quite often wondered what the locals thought of the girls staying in their village when, every three or four days different unkempt men would turn up and either go to the shop and completely clear it out of beer or disappear into one of the rooms for a while and come out clean and then disappear again. We all got showered and changed and departed for Kimi. Kimi is the main town on that part of the island. It is about half the size of Wells and has everything that you need including a hospital which we had to visit one day when the Dwarf had a little tooth ache (not really he had a huge abscess come up and he looked like he had just been four rounds with Mike Tyson.)

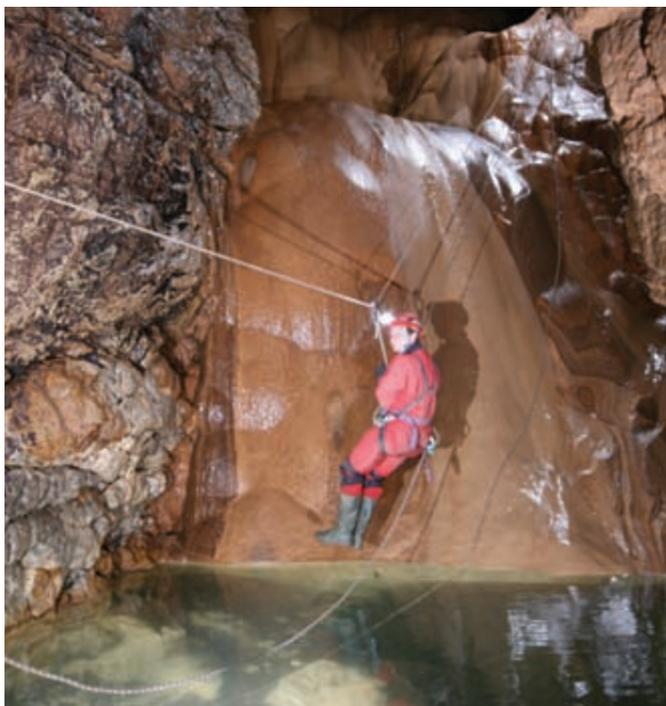
We had just settled down in a bar in the square in Kimi and were getting stuck into the first cold beer any of us had drunk for a few days when Vassilis arrived and carted me off to meet the mayor and a few other dignitaries while the rest of the gang enjoyed the cold beer.

The mayor's house was quite a large affair with a superb view out over the bay. The mayor was infact the mayoress and very nice she was too. They were all very keen to know whether we had been enjoying ourselves and what we thought of the area. The presentation was to be done outside and a large screen was in the process of being erected. Introductions done, we headed back to our beer for a few minutes.

We all wandered back to the mayor's house to find a few people had started to turn up. Vassils and the president of Speleo who we know as Jack were putting the finishing touches to the presentation. Andy and Pete had already worked wonders to sort out a stack of photos and convert them from RAW to Jpeg for the evening - well done guys. At the allotted time the presentation was started and by now we reckon that there was approaching two hundred people in the audience. We all sat to one side listening to Vassilis and Jack talk for just over an hour and then they took questions for another twenty minutes, such was the interest of the audience. After it was all over and packed away the mayor took us all out to a restaurant and supplied us with copious amounts of food and beer for which we were all extremely grateful. We all headed back to the girls base to spend the night.

The following morning Vassils turned up saying that some of the locals had reported knowing of a cave that had never been looked at, not far from the village. We all piled into our cars and headed out of the village in a convoy. After a few miles we turned up a small road, parked by a church and then we followed a couple of guys up the hill. It was very hot. We walked up the hill for fifteen minutes or so until we were stood outside an entrance. Unfortunately it chokes after only fifteen metres but never mind these things happen. The local blokes said that they had heard of another cave near by, but were not sure where the entrance was. We spent the next hour and a half trudging over the hill side without any joy so we gave up and went back to the village.

Most of the team then went back up to the camp to collect some gear and head off back to Matoxi to have a dive in the sump and another look at the lower section of passages. Mike managed to successfully pass the first sump and again it warrants a sustained effort to get back to the reported choke for a proper look. We think Matoxi is a main resurgence for the area. The other part of the team spent a couple of hours rooting around in the lower section of the cave and got some good photographs. Pete and I spent the day with the girls drinking beer by the sea and relaxing before driving back up to the camp. After arriving back at the camp Pete and I walked up one of the tracks to find the entrance of another large sink called Papastilla (Priest Cave) which was another of our targets for this trip, but with everything else that was going on we had not had time to get down the cave even though the Greek lads had spent a couple of long trips (twelve hours plus) earlier in the week re-bolting the cave ready for us to survey it as it had not yet been done. Pete and I tracked down a very large surface shaft that was hidden in the trees quite easily. Again just looking at it you could see it took a huge amount of water during the winter months. We were all very surprised by the size of the sinks on the mountain and the amount of water they



*Tyrolean over large pool in Papa o Lakkos ( Priest Hole)  
Photo Andy Jackson*

appear to take. It was something that none of us had expected to find. We had a bit of a look around on the walk back and in a shallow depression not far off the track we came across a small descending rift with a strong cold draught coming from it. The Dwarf was now in heaven not only had he managed to get some great pictures now he had a dig to play in. We duly started to pull out some rocks.

Wednesday arrived. It was the day that Mike and Jon had to depart back to sunny England so they had to pack up and get off back to Athens in the morning. Laura was also going that morning, She was not heading back to the UK for another day, but going out on the town for the night with Giana one of our friends from Speleo who had to return to work in Athens.

Kev, Andy and Russ were off back to Matoxi to dive a sump found on one of the previous trips. Kev dived the sump which surfaced in an air bell covered in stal. Pete, Dylan, Cookie and I went back to Priest Hole to finish detackling the cave. This was finished without incident and Pete got some good photos. Pete wanted to get one particular shot looking down the passage from where you drop the pitch at the end of the passage which is like Maypole inlet. Pete did the shot and while he was packing up he just happened to glance up at the wall behind his camera. About 15m up the wall he saw a passage that looked to be about 5m high and 1.5m wide just waiting to be climbed into. Don't you just love it - it always happens on the last trip into the cave. Mind you we still can't believe that the Dwarf was observant enough to actually see the passage. Incidentally the combined age of the four of us on the de-tackling trip was 195 years (we should have been sat in the bar drinking beer.) We all exited with large bags to find Andy (David Bailey) Jackson hovering around the entrance with his camera photographing anything that moved. That evening we all went up to the dig that Pete and I had found the previous day. Again the Dwarf was in heaven - digging on a Wednesday evening! We pulled out some more rocks (with the help of some 'blacks') to find the rift descending pretty much vertically and draughting well. We did not have enough tools to be very effective so after an hour or so we gave up at

the point we were able to see down another 3-4 metres with the passage getting bigger. Kev had found another entrance about three metres in diameter so we went to have a look at that. It was a walking sized passage that went for some fifty metres to a shaft blocked by boulders which again could easily be dug out. We had all had a busy day so we retired for food and Amstel.

Thursday was our last day in camp so as you would expect the day was spent washing rope, cleaning and packing away all the gear involved in a trip of this nature. Kev and Andy were to head off to Papastilla to remove the entrance rope. The Greeks had decided to leave the cave rigged, because they were going to return in September to survey it. Andy and Kev being who they are could not just descend the entrance pitch - no they went all the way to the bottom and came back with stories of a huge entrance shaft dropping to a ledge and then carrying on vertically down, giving an entrance of some 280 metres straight down with daylight still visible for over 100 metres from the surface. At the bottom of the pitches they dug through a small gravel choke and found a crystal clear four metre diameter wide sump pool with the passage just carrying on down.

With all the gear packed and the camp site tidied up we jumped into the well loaded vehicles and headed off the hill back towards Andhoniani and civilisation. That evening was spent in a taverna eating, drinking and reminiscing about a great time on the hill, before all piling back to the girl's rooms for more beer and sleep.

The next morning was spent on the final bits of packing before starting the long and exiting drive back to Athens. Of course we had to stop for a few hours on a beach for a proper relax and swim. We all arrived back in Athens in one piece where we unloaded all the gear at Speleo's hut, followed by more food and beer and a good night's kip, then back to Athens airport and home.

All in all a great two weeks. Lovely place, great caving and loads left to return for. We all found Evia a totally unspoilt island. It gave us a view of life as it should be and possibly has been for a very long time on the Greek islands. The weather was hot and dry with temperatures up in the high thirties centigrade, but the nights were down in the mid to low twenties so that coupled with the shade we had on the camp meant we always slept very well unlike when we were on the Peloponnese a couple of years earlier. The caving in these very large sinks was first class - better, I think, than we could have imagined. The caves are dropping between 320 and 360 metres and gaining up to one kilometre in length. Going in and out of these kinds of caves every day is surprisingly hard work.

Although we did not find very much in the way of new passage this year we now have a good overview of the area and next year (yes everybody is already talking about returning) we will be able to hit the ground running and we believe the potential for new discoveries is excellent.

The whole team would like to thank the Speleo club in Athens, without their cooperation and organisation, particularly arranging the relative permissions and permits, these trips would never happen. Thanks lads. We are already looking forward to next year.

*Malc Foyle*

# Club News

## Diary

May 8th 2010 - CSCC AGM, 10.00am @ Hutters Lodge Inn

April 11th 2010 - WCC Committee Meeting - 10am @ Upper Pitts

1st weekend in May & July - Members only weekends - (Cheese & Wine + Slide show @ Upper Pitts on Sat 3rd July)

Upcoming club trips - April 17th & 18th Yorkshire - April 30th to May 3rd South Wales - May 28th to 31st North Wales

2nd Saturday trips - These happen (as the name would suggest) on the second Saturday of each month. Usual meeting time and place is 10am at Upper Pitts. These are a fantastic way for members old and new to cave with people they otherwise may never meet. For more details please contact Les Williams (your Caving Secretary)

### Photographic Competition

MCRA are running a competition to find the best photograph of a Mendip cave or mine entrance.

The entries will be displayed at the Mendip Cavers Fair (June 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>) and prizes awarded.

Send your entries to: MCRA, 10 Lancock Street, Wellington, Somerset.. TA21 9RS

<http://www.mcra.org.uk/>

#### The Rules

1. All entries to be submitted as prints.
2. Please include the photographer, email address or phone number, who is in the photo and where and when it was taken.
3. Closing date for entries is June 11th 2010.
4. By entering the competition you agree for your photo to be considered for inclusion in the registry photo archive.

### New Members

New Members Joining the Wessex since the AGM are:

Paul Stillman - proposed: Rich Witcombe, 2nd: Dave Morrison  
Laura Grange - proposed: John Osbourne, 2nd: Dave Morrison  
Kevin Speight (Gerbil)- proposed: Nigel Gower, 2nd Stuart Waldren  
Rebecca Varns - proposed: Stuart Waldren, 2nd: Nigel Gower  
Maxine Bateman - proposed: Jacky Ankerman, 2nd: Tim Ball  
Ollie Brown - proposed: John Osborne, 2nd: Marion van de Waterbeemd

### Wessex Cave Club - Yorkshire Meets List 2010

March 20 <sup>th</sup>	Juniper Gulf
March 21 <sup>st</sup>	Rift Pot/Long Kin East
April 17 <sup>th</sup>	Top Sink/Lancaster Hole
April 18 <sup>th</sup>	Pool Sink/County Pot
June 26 <sup>th</sup>	Gingling Hole
June 27 <sup>th</sup>	Hammer Pot
July 17 <sup>th</sup>	Notts Pot
July 18 <sup>th</sup>	Deaths Head Hole/Big Meanie
Sept 11 <sup>th</sup>	Birks Fell Cavern
Sept 12 <sup>th</sup>	Washfold Pot
Oct 16 <sup>th</sup>	Penyghent Pot
Oct 17 <sup>th</sup>	Little Hull Hole
Nov 20 <sup>th</sup>	Dale Head Pot
Nov 21 <sup>st</sup>	Grange Rigg
Dec 11 <sup>th</sup>	Lost Johns/Boxhead Pot
Dec 12 <sup>th</sup>	Notts II

Anyone wishing to use these permits, please contact The Caving Secretary - Les Williams or The Northern Cave Sec. Keith Sanderson: Tel: 015242 51662 email: keithsanderson@btinternet.com

### Mendip Cavers Fair 2010

11th-13th June. A festival of caving in and around Priddy. Co-ordinated by the CSCC there will be talks, films, training, Wessex Challenge, stomp, BBQ and more. For further information see [www.csc.org.uk](http://www.csc.org.uk)

### N.A.M.H.O.

NAMHO 2010, 4th-6th June. The National Association of Mining History Organisations is holding its annual conference just to the north east of Bristol at Coalpit Heath. Titled "Fuelling the Industrial Revolution" it is an exciting series of lectures and over/underground tours recognising Bristol's part in starting the Industrial Revolution. For more information see [www.namhoconference.org.uk](http://www.namhoconference.org.uk)

### Anchor Placer

The CSCC is presently without a certified individual who is capable of placing anchors into rock (P-hangers) to the required standard. This means that any Mendip caves needing P-hangers cannot presently be fitted with them. If you are willing to get involved in this activity, are SRT competent, and are familiar with using cordless drills underground, then please contact Les Williams who is the club CSCC representative. Many thanks

### RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

As at 5th February 2010

BCA N/L 12 (Dec 09) - BCRA Cave and Karst Science 35, 3 (2008) - Cave Diving Group N/L 174 (Jan 10) - Chelsea S.S. N/L 15, 12 (Dec 09), 52, 1 (Jan 10) - Craven Pothole Club. Record. 97 (Jan 10) - Descent 211 (Dec 09 / Jan 10) - MCG News 359 (Oct 09) - MNRC N/L 125, 126 (Autumn 09, New Year 10) - N.S.S. News 67, 11,12 (Nov, Dec 09), 68, 1 (Jan 10) - Journal of Cave and Karst Studies 71, 3 (Dec 09) - Societe Suisse de speleologie 'Stalactite' 56, 1, 2 (Apr, Dec 06), 57, 1, 2 (Jun 06, 2007) - Speleological Union of Ireland 'Irish Speleology' 18 (Oct 09) - Union Belge de Speleologie Regards Speleo info 195 (Jan/Feb 10) - WSG N/L 2009/4 (Oct 09)