

# Grotte Roche

**A description of the new extensions**

**Report and photo's by Glenn Jones**



*Grotte Roche was Speleo Vercors summer 2009/2010 project. It is important to stress that we had nothing to do with the discovery of the new extensions, but it became obvious that this was going to become a “really good trip”, and since the description in Speleo 66 was so vague, we decided to produce this description.*



# Speleo Vercors

Version 1: September 2010



## **Grotte Roche Location:**

**Map: IGN TOP 25 3236 OT Villard-de-Lans**

IGN: 848,86 X 312,72 X 740

GPS: 31N 696593E X 4993925N

**Access:** The entrance is at river level in the Bourne Gorge. There is an obvious parking area on the north side of the gorge about half way between the two bridges (Pont de la Goule Noir and Pont de la Valcheviere). A path (near the yellow warning sign) descends from the parking area to the cave entrance. The cave entrance is marked on the map.

**History:** The cave has been known since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is a popular cave for outdoor centers to take novices. In June 2008, approximately two kilometers of new passage were discovered with excellent formations, and varied and enjoyable caving. The new extension is due to the perseverance of Jean-Louis Bret, Jean-Pierre Mericet Jean Brunonttou of the FJS (Furets Jaunes of Seyssins), who have worked here since 1993, using some clever techniques to remove huge quantities (1000 m<sup>3</sup>) of sand. The breakthrough occurred On June 8, 2008.

**Description:** The first part of Grotte Roche (where they take novices) is very impressive. From the entrance a well trod path leads up over and through massive boulders for 150 metres until eventually you reach the highest part of the cave and the roof. The way on (to the new extension) is to the left, up through big boulders which have been chemically repositioned, under a cascade (which was redirected to remove many tons of sand) into the breakthrough chamber with impressive banks of stratified sand. Straight on from here (ignoring the passage in the roof “Fenetre 4” – which has now been pushed to the surface) a scramble up leads to a narrow descending rift which whilst not tight, is certainly "interference" sized.

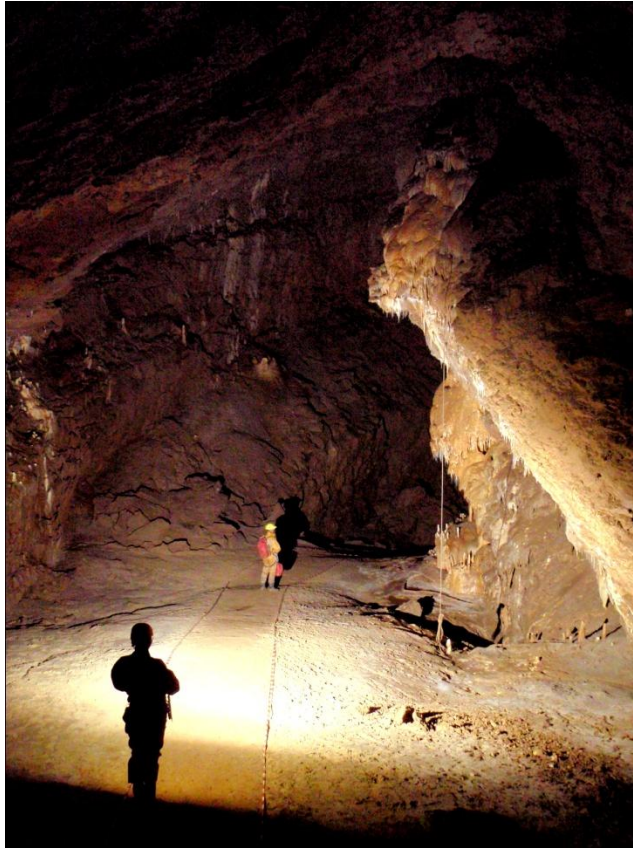
The rift descends into a sandy crawl which soon emerges into the vastness of “Gallery of Perseverance” (note the fixed rope on the right which leads to a parallel roof passage and alternative return route - the Reseau Labyrinths, (networks Anastomoses). The way on descends into the gallery, following a taped route to protect the excellent mud and calcite formations.

### **The Reseau Labyrinths, (Networks Anastomoses)**

The climb using the fixed rope (use cowstails for protection) leads to the Labyrinth, a confusing 3D maze of solution tubes above the main gallery. It is possible to follow these low passages to arrive at the other side of the “ladder tube”. In fact Speleo Magazine recommends this as the return route from deeper in the cave. **NB.** The Labyrinth is a very confusing area, so be sure of the route!

The gallery is very impressive being about 20 X 25m, with beautiful mud and calcite formation on the ground.

Part way along, the gallery bears left at some fine formations (on the floor) and then descends slightly to another left bend at some fine formations high on the left hand wall



At the end of the gallery, a short climb of 4 metres (on the right) takes you around a splendid column and further formations and leads to a semi fixed ladder that allows access to a roof tube. This tube is a bypass to the boulder choke that effectively closes this part of the gallery. The tube is about eight metres long and leads (on the right) to the Reseau Labyrinths, (Networks Anastomoses) and on the left to the rest of the cave.

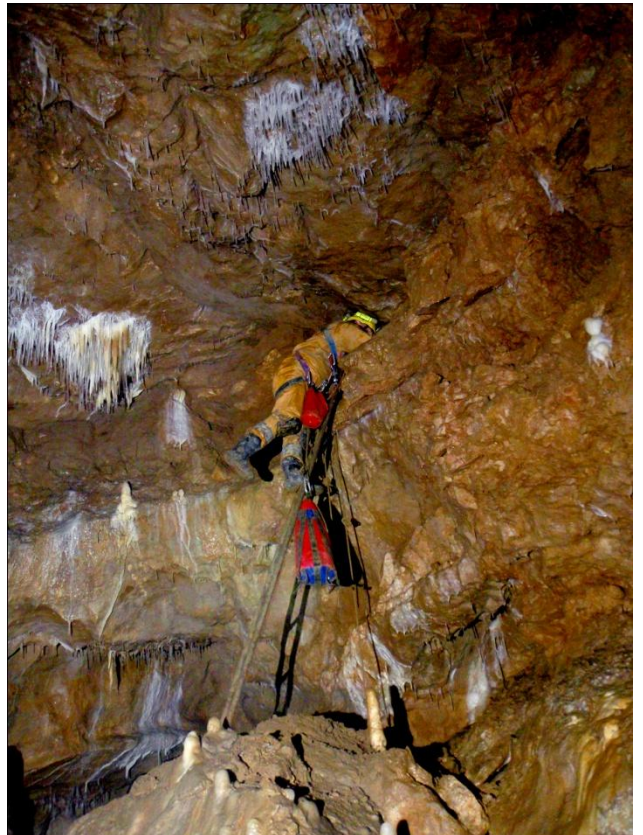
### **The Ladder Tube**

Use cowstails for protection at the top of the ladder. The body sized tube bears to the left and ascends to a short squeeze before arriving in the passage that leads to the rest of the cave. If returning via the tube, *go feet first*, as it is not possible to turn around at the top of the ladder. Again, use cowstails for protection when getting onto the ladder.





The stal column near the ladder



The ladder

The ladder tube enters an ascending cross passage. To the right (downhill) is The Laberynth, a confusing three dimensional maze which leads back to the start of the Gallery of Perseverance. Fortunately it is really well route marked with unsightly tape, otherwise, it would be a really difficult section of cave to navigate.

Turning left (uphill) is an easy hands and knees crawl passing some holes on the left to the Puits de la Vire. The pitch is in two sections, the first, a steeply sloping (and slippery) rift leads to the second section, a vertical slot, fitted with re-bar staples (ala via ferrata). *Speleo Magazine suggests this pitch is free climbable, just using cowstails for protection on the staples. However, the bottom of the slot opens into the side of an impressive rift, so falling anywhere here is likely to be painful.*



The first “slanting” section



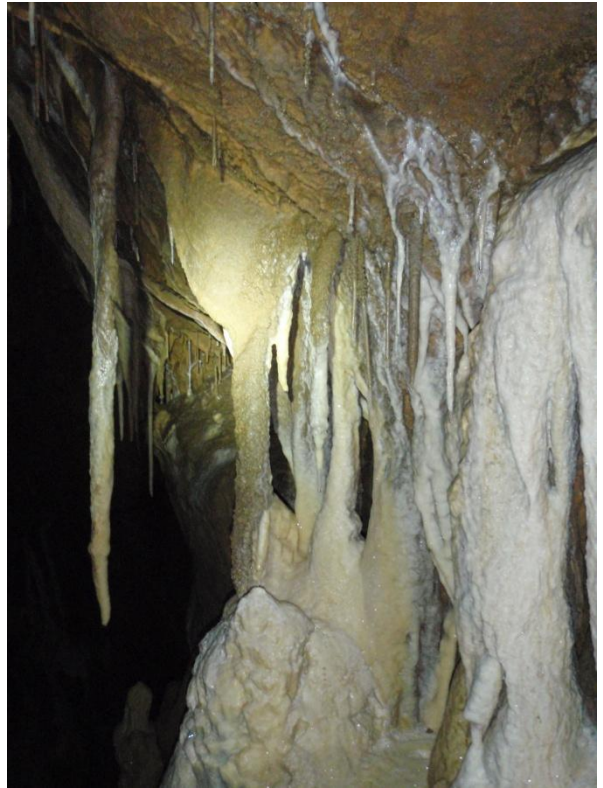
The “slot” pitch and staples

A 35m rope "just" does the slanting pitch, the slot pitch and the traverse across the following rift. Use the second staple as a rebelay (it makes getting off the slot pitch so much easier coming out) and use the last staple as a rebelay (as it makes getting to the short drop to the first ledge at the start of the traverse easier as well). There should be 4 slings on the traverse, but the second was missing in August 2010. (The third sling is hidden behind a flake).

***Equipment list for Puits de la Vire: 35m rope (minimum), 8 krabs, 5 slings (just in case some are missing).***

The bottom of the slot pitch breaks out into the side of a great fault richly decorated with formations. (At the bottom of the rift is just a muddy sump).





Formations in the rift immediately after the “slot” pitch

The continuation is a traverse across the rift. The traverse leads to a breakdown passage which leads back into the main, wide phreatic tunnel. Over on the left (by two small stal columns) is an inconspicuous ascending crawl over blocks that leads into Salle Hopf - a very pretty chamber. The main way leads to bigger and bigger passage.

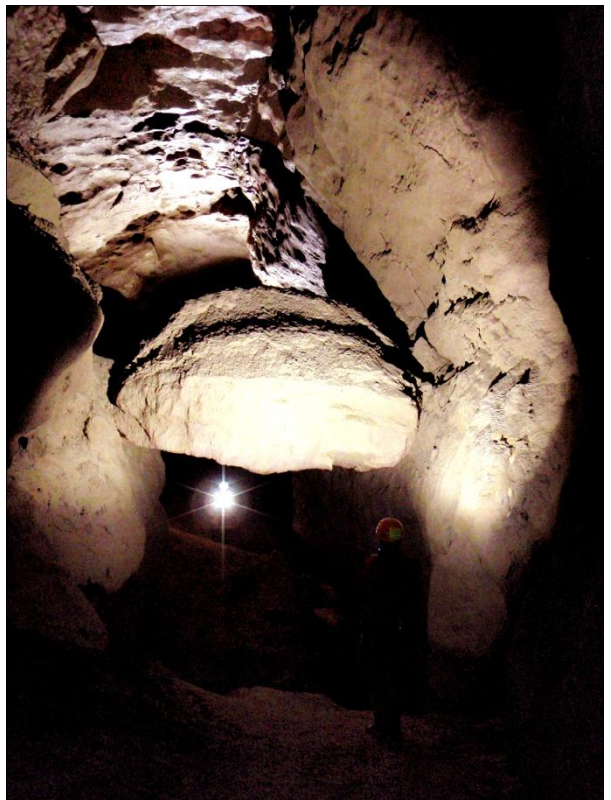
There are some really pretty formations in the first third of the passage, but then it just gets bigger and bigger, passing under a jammed block the size of a family car , before finally closing down at the sump. There appear to be leads everywhere and local cavers are still pushing the cave.

On the way out, there is the option of going via the Labyrinth. This will probably take about 15 or 20 confusing minutes of grovelling in a three dimensional muddy maze (not fun when towing a tackle bag). Going feet first down the ladder tube takes about 1 minute! (go *feet first*, as it is not possible to turn around at the top of the ladder).





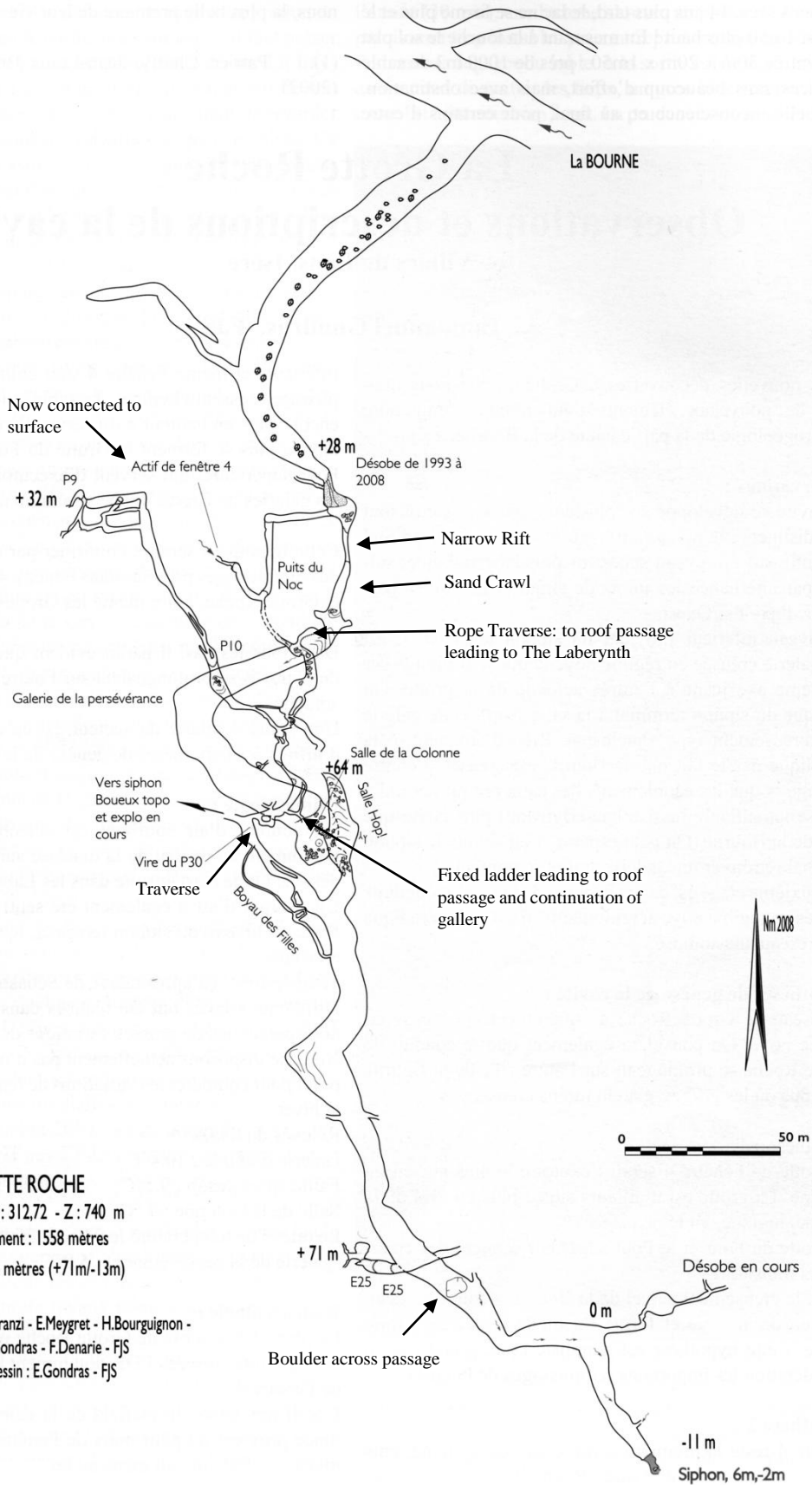
The traverse



Car sized boulder across passage



Passage on the way to the sump



**GROTTE ROCHE**

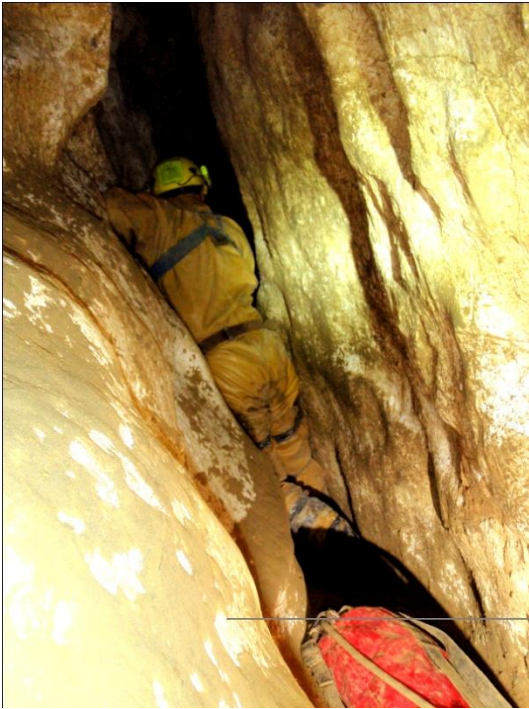
X : 848,86 - Y : 312,72 - Z : 740 m

Développement : 1558 mètres

Dénivelé : 84 mètres (+71m/-13m)

Topographie : J.L. Bret - V.Franzi - E.Meyret - H.Bourguignon -  
 B.Lepretre - E.Gondras - F.Denarie - FJS  
 Synthèse et dessin : E.Gondras - FJS

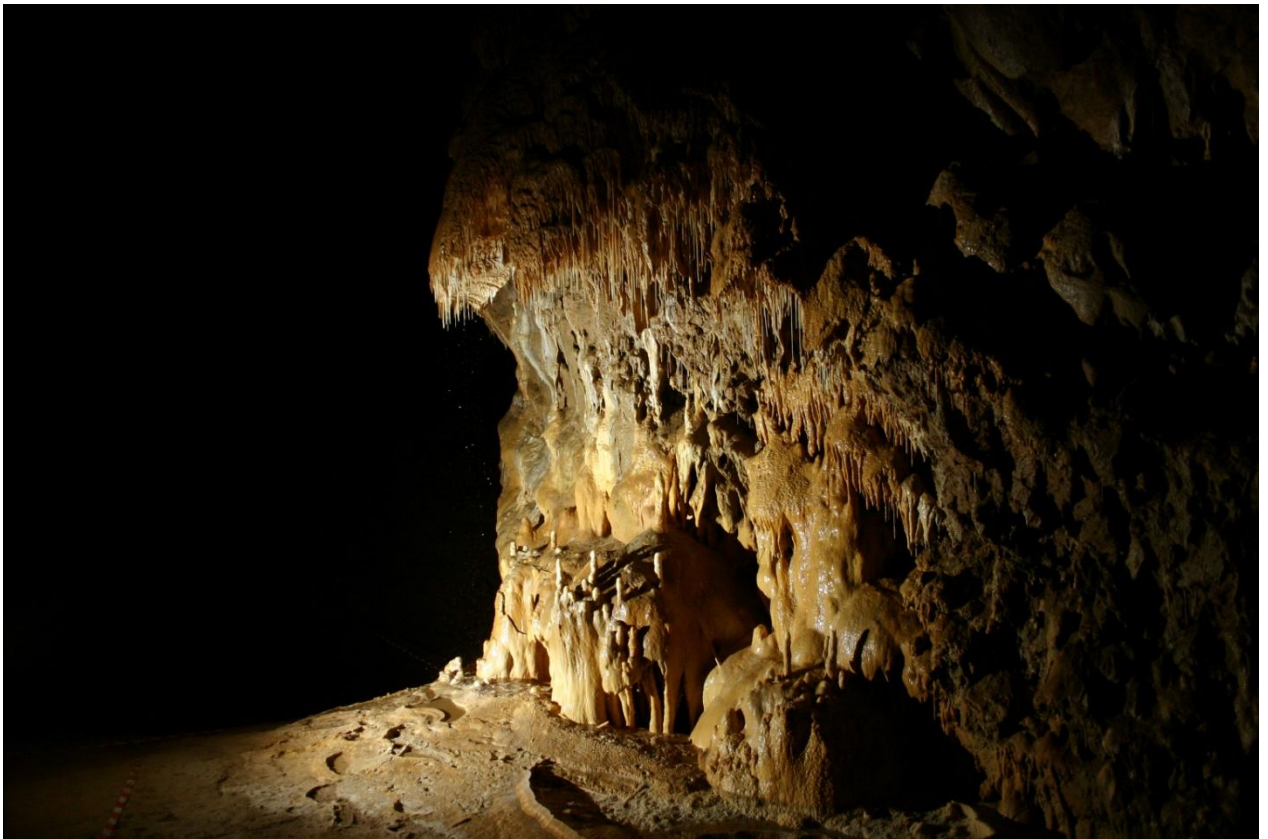




The breakthrough rift



The “other” end of the ladder tube



Formations in the Gallery of Perseverance

## Grotte Roche - Explo Log

**1 - 27/08/2009:** Never having been in Grotte Roche before, I had a quick trip to check out the breakthrough area. It is quite obvious, but didn't expect to find the narrow descending rift that is the way on...

**2 - 25/10/2009:** Had a nice 2 hour trip there this afternoon. The slight obstacle encountered in August is not so bad, it's a narrow, descending rift that's a snug fit, but not tight. It leads to a crawl through a sand dig that eventually pops out into a huge gallery - very impressive. The way on is taped to protect the excellent mud and calcite formations of which there are plenty. Eventually you come to a climb up and around a fantastic stal column and then the way on becomes confusing. There are several low crawls through boulders that look like digs, but the description I have (from Speleo Magazine) indicates that you climb the ladder! Climbing the ladder leads to a roof tube that looks a bit small, and also, I'm not sure how you get back on to the ladder on the return, basically, you will pop out of the roof, head first, 5 or more metres above the floor - I've left it for next time! I spent some time taking photo's but it really deserves more time and a proper photo trip (my Nova would not supply enough light for the Olympus to focus as the passage was so big - it's a definite Scurion cave!)

On the return, the ascending rift is more interesting - not difficult, but I worked up quite a sweat!

**3 - 21/02/2010:** Had another 2 hours in Grotte Roche today. The first objective was the roped climb at the start of the big gallery. Harness and cowstails are all that is needed. The climb leads into the Labyrinth - aptly named! It's a series of roof tubes that, according to the survey, lead to the other side of the ladder climb tube. A very confusing area, and I did not find the way on, although re-reading the survey, I think I know where I'll try on the next trip.

Then I had a look at the tube at the top of the ladder - it's not very big! I figured that I would get into the tube to see how easy it would be to reverse. There is a rope that you can clip into, so it's not too bad, but you cannot get back onto the ladder if you approach it head first, so the entire tube has to be reversed if you come out that way.

I went about two body lengths into the tube, it bears left, goes uphill, and gets even smaller! I did not feel confident to push the squeeze on my own, so I came out, admiring the formations with my Scurion!

A further update in May.

**4 - 18/05/2010:** No May update. They are blasting above the Bourne Gorge and I was turned back by a man in a high vis vest at Pont Goule Noir\* - bugger!

\*Even though the road is not "closed" until Pont Valchevriere

**5 - 23/06/2010:** OK, so I psyched myself up for the tube at the top of the ladder! It's about 8m long, mostly ascending and becoming smaller all the time. It's at its smallest just as you pop out into a larger cross passage. It's not desperate, but it is a snug fit in places. The description in Speleo says to take the left passage to (apparently) cross the 30m deep Puits le Vire, just using cowstails. Bollocks! There is a traverse across the top of the sloping rift, but it goes nowhere. The arrow scratched on the wall points down. It is not free climable! Bollocks, bollocks, bollocks. Will I ever get to the end of this bloody cave?

So, on the way back, I decided to check out the alternative route which avoids going feet first down the tube, and faffing about feet first to descend the ladder - 'cos it just ain't going to happen head first!

The Network Anastomoses is described as a labyrinth. That's correct. It's a three dimensional puzzle of interlinked roof tubes, cross rifts and beddings and if it was not route marked with tape, I suspect I would still be in there. It reminded me of the more esoteric parts of OFD. (It was not taped in February).

I will take a rope and SRT gear on my next trip and hopefully my next report will see me into the 700m of huge and well decorated gallery, or more than likely it will throw something else at me....

**6 - 13/07/2010:** You will remember at the end of last months exciting cliff hanger, that our intrepid adventurer was thwarted by an unexpected pitch, and with no rope, he spent the remainder of the trip sampling the delights of The Labyrinth.

This months episode carries on from the pitch head.....

Well, the pitch is a steeply sloping inclined rift of about 5m. It could probably be free climbed down, but as it is quite slippery, it would be an entertaining climb back up again. But the rift leads directly on to a vertical slot of about 10m which has re-bar staples fitted, and the description in Speleo suggests it can be descended just using cowstails in the staples - an underground via ferata! The slot opens on to an impressive and well decorated shaft, so all in, from the top of the rift to the bottom of the shaft must be at least 30m (as per survey) so you would not want to fall anywhere in this section.

I took a 25m rope, and did a rebelay from the second staple and abb'd down into the shaft. This is the shaft that is on YouTube, with cavers traversing across the side of it to continue into the next 700m of large well decorated gallery. The traverse is not rigged! There are a number of slings to use and the end of my rope reached the second sling, half way across the traverse BUGGER (again!)

So still not got passed this section.

I came out via the ladder tube - feet first. It's much quicker than going via The Laberynth, it's down hill nearly all the way - you just need to remember to be careful when getting onto the ladder.

So, still thwarted after all these trips. I have to say that the description in Speleo is total BOLLOCKS! I'll get it sorted in August.

Stay tuned for another thrilling episode.

**7 - 11/08/2010:** Cracked it (at last)! I took a 35m rope today, and thought I had run out when I pulled the knotted end of the rope out of the bag, but there behind a flake was the last sling, so I tied into that, put on my long cowstail and dropped onto the ledge at the end of the traverse. A breakdown passage leads back into the main, wide phreatic tunnel. Over on the left is an inconspicuous ascending crawl over blocks that leads into Salle Hopf - a very pretty chamber. The main way leads to bigger and bigger passage. There are some really pretty formations in the first third of the passage, but then it just gets bigger and bigger, passing under a jammed block the size of a family car, before finally closing down at the sump. There is some more passage above the sump, and there appears to be leads everywhere, but I wanted to take some pictures and time was running out on my call out!

I was in the cave for 3 hours, and I have to say it is a really good trip, with a variety of differing passage and difficulties and some really great formations.

**8 - 17/08/2010:** Photo trip to the sump with Les and Mike.

**9 - 25/08/2010:** Photo trip with Bev to Gallery de la Perseverance



## **About Speleo Vercors:**

Speleo Vercors is a UK based caving club that specialises in Vercors caving. Speleo Vercors was created in 1997 to formalise and document the experience of UK cavers that have been meeting (on an ad-hoc basis) in the Vercors for the best part of two decades. Membership is by invitation and prospective members must demonstrate a long term commitment to Vercors caving as well providing on-going support to the club.

## **Other SV Publications**

**Trip Reports:** Speleo Vercors has published the following reports:

Skiing '99 (paper)  
Caving '99 (paper)  
Skiing 2000 (paper)  
Caving 2000 (including a Speleovision report) (paper)  
Skiing 2001 (paper)  
Bigbang Doggiepoopoo (parchment)  
Skiing 2002 (CD or paper)  
Caving 2002 (CD only)  
Skiing 2003 (paper)  
Skiing 2004 (paper and DVD)  
Sun and Ski 2005 (DVD)

## **Guides:**

Scialet Cloches (DVD)  
The Mont Aiguille Guide (paper)  
Scialet II des Chuats (Draft - paper – translation)  
Trou des Anciens (Draft -paper – translation)  
Scialet du Combeau (Project description - paper)  
Scialet du Combeau Rigging Topo (Paper)  
Scialet du Chassillon (Draft - paper)

## **Long Term Projects:**

**Access:** We are developing a data base of all known Vercors caves. The data base will reference caves by name and grid reference and provide links to surveys and other publications.

**Guide Book:** We are developing an English Language guide to the Vercors for cavers, to augment the two French guide books currently available. (This project is now the new SV website).

**Speleo Dossier 1:** We are documenting all previous (caving) visits (by SV members) to the Vercors to date, which have been published previously in various journals.

**Contact Speleo Vercors:** <http://www.speleo-vercors.org>