

SOME CAVES AND KARST OF CENTRAL EUROPE

(summary only)

by

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In 1969 the author travelled extensively through Europe, Africa and Asia, visiting caves in South Africa, Rhodesia, Kenya, Lebanon, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia, and attending the 5th International Congress of Speleology in Stuttgart as Australian delegate.

An illustrated travelogue was given of the post-Congress field trips and further excursions. Visits were made first to such Swabian caves as Laichingen, Barenhole and Falkensteinhole and to the sinking of the Danube between Immen- dingen and Tuttlingen and its rising at Blaubeuren on the other side of the continental divide. The Swabian Alps were on the margins of the Wurm glaciation. Its caves are small and not very common; they appear of more interest to archaeologists, and the area generally to geologists, than to the speleologist.

In Switzerland several days were spent in the Jura, a geologically complex area containing many karst basins and lakes. Some karst aquifers have been tapped for hydro-electricity and water supply. There are some very deep pots in this area but the main interest is speleo-hydrology which occupies a whole department at the University of Neuchatel.

A feature of the alpine karst is the impressive and characteristic severely karren grooved limestone pavements, glaciated in the Pleistocene and often with caves blocked with glacial erratics. Examples were inspected at Tours d'Ai above Leysin, on the upper Muotathal Valley, and on the Dachstein and Tennengebirge in Austria. The 70-mile long Holloch at Muotathal was entered briefly and the phenomenon of *mischungskorrosion* was explained by the leader Dr A. Bogli. At Werfen the author was guest of the owners at Friz Oedl Haus, enabling a detailed inspection of the ice section of Eisriesenwelt. In Vienna he attended a meeting of the local speleo *Verband*, who organized a one day car trip to nearby caves and related features.

In Czechoslovakia an itinerary was prepared by the Director of Tourist Caves who met the author at Bratislava and conducted a brief trip around the city, an indication of the immensely good relations between speleologists and government authorities throughout this part of Europe. Visits were made to several Slovakian caves and to the Karst Museum at Liptovsky Mikulas.

In Yugoslavia the author stayed with Dr Ivan Gams one night and at the Karst Research Centre at Postojna three nights. On a conducted car tour, visits were made to a cross-section of typical karst features near Planina and Cerknica poljes, an area incorporating karst windows, ponors, potholes, blind valleys, arches and innumerable dolines. The best known cave in this area is of course Postojna Cave with its initial mile-long electric railway but by far the most impressive cave the author has ever seen turned out to be less well known Skocjanska Jama, which contains a roaring river and one huge chamber 900 feet long, 200 feet wide and 300 feet high.

Throughout the trip the author was overwhelmed with hospitality and impressed with the good relations between speleologists and cave owners. He was impressed more by the sheer size and grandeur of the great European caves than by their beauty. Only those in Czechoslovakia, especially Demanova, approached Jenolan in beauty.