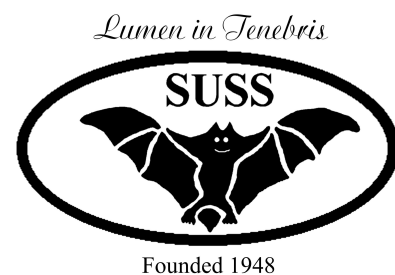


SUSS BULL 44(4)

JANUARY — MARCH 2005



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Bulletin of the Sydney University Speleological Society



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Drought Breaks

In the first week of February, Jenolan Caves experienced one of the most intense storms on record. The rain gauge at the Guides' office recorded almost 100 mm of rain in less than an hour; this was not an isolated fall and the storm appears to have covered the entire catchment area. Around the tourist caves, trees were brought down and boulders were removed from the hillside and deposited on picnic tables.

SUSS were at Jenolan two weeks after the storm. Here's what we found underground:

- Up the valley at Wiburds, there had been recent flow through Lake Chamber and down 22 Passage. Yawning Gulches was half full of water.
- Water had flowed into the northern entrance of Serpentine.
- In Mammoth, Central river was flowing for the first time in years. The Overflow sump is back – it's a couple of metres deep. When we surveyed through the sump at the height of the drought (end of 2002) it was dry sand. Lower river was back to normal flow levels, after being down to 1/3 of normal flow earlier in the summer.
- Spider cave was nearly sumped at Pirate's Delight. No-one attempted to pass the squeeze with 5 cm of airspace in it.
- Jubilee has sumped at Watercavern. The sump was brim-full and probably has closed for years to come.

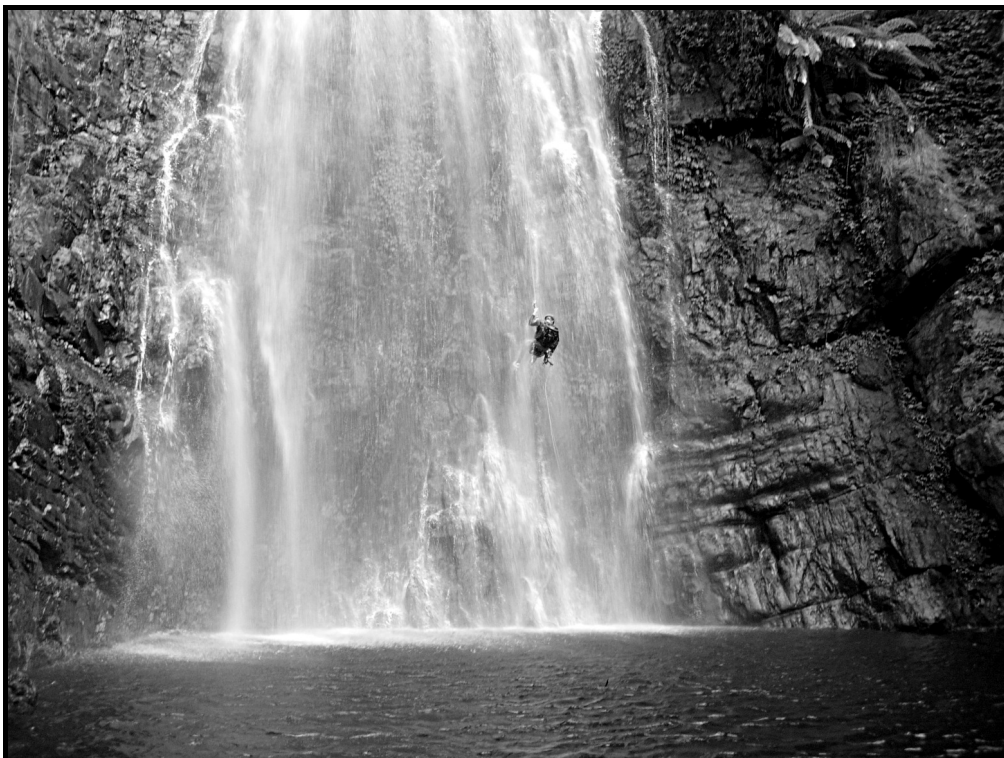
More storms hit the catchment later in February – it's the most significant rain at Jenolan since 1998. We'll just have to wait and see whether the lake comes back to Wiburds Lake cave for the first time since 1988.

Phil Maynard

Tugallella climbed

On the trip to Tugallella in March, the inlet aven at the back of the cave was climbed by Al Warild. The aid pitch took Al about five hours to climb with bolts, sling placements and lots of dodgy rock. At the top of the pitch, he found a tall, narrow stream passage which led to a further climb. We left the pitch rigged for a return trip to push the second climb.

Anyone who's been to Tugallella knows that tall, narrow passages are a bit scarce! Most of the cave is flat and wide, or just flat. The new passage looks like it takes a lot of water when the cave floods.



Kanangra. Photo Michael Fraser

FRANCE ON 1 KG OF CHEESE PER DAY

FRANCE (LANGUEDOC, PROVENCE, RHÔNE-ALPS), OCTOBER 5 – 10 2004

BY CHRIS NORTON

EXPLANATORY DIAGRAMS KEVIN MOORE, PHOTOS ALAN PRYKE

Participants: (in order of purported linguistic ability):

Don Matthews: Speaks French more clearly than the French, because he doesn't have an outrageous accent.

Chris Norton: Claims to speak some French but when he asked to use the internet was shown the toilets.

Kevin Moore: French is the language used to describe wine and cheese.

Mark Lowson: Studied French at school and so knows all the naughty words.

Megan Pryke: Can get a long way by pointing and saying "Un, s'il vous plait."

Andrew Matthews: Any awkward situation with a Francophone can be resolved by saying "Dans le cochon, tout est bon."

Alan Pryke: Isn't French that language they speak in Vanuatu and the odd part of Canada? So why would we need it here?

Special guests:

Caroline Curfs, François de Felix, Estelle Lifran: Who all speak French far better than any of the above could ever dream, even if they do have outrageous accents.

Prelude

"I'm afraid you're a little overweight, sir."

How dare she? But wait, there was more. "With all that baggage, that will be hmmm, \$68 per kilo? \$1,020 please." Chris almost fainted on the spot. It would be cheaper to buy a second seat on the plane and sit the pack on that.

However, salvation was at hand, in the form of Alan and Megan walking into the terminal. Goodness knows exactly what happened, but it involved the checkin girl leaving her post behind the counter, Alan taking her place, some hurried reorganisation of gear, Qantas donating Chris a small additional carry-on bag of the type very fashionable amongst the homeless on the streets of Sydney, and no additional money changing hands. The bags were on their way to the plane and we had our boarding passes. Did the checkin girl want to check our passports? Oh yes, perhaps she'd better. Alan, Megan, Kevin and Chris were finally on their way to France.

The long flight from Sydney to Montpellier involved about 22.5 hours of flight time and 3 hours on the ground. Chris spent the first seven hours in the same row as a claustrophobic woman who hated flying, and showed her displeasure with an out-of-stomach experience all over the carpet. Arrival at Singapore initiated a mad dash for the Air France counter which, as luck would have it, was in a completely different terminal about 15 minutes walk and a skytrain ride away.

The 14-hour flight to Paris was alleviated by playing games of Caveman on the inflight headrests. In Caveman, you need to guide a little caveman to the exit of a cave by moving boulders, breaking rocks and dodging mammoths. So this is what French caving is like. We remembered that we had not brought anti-mammoth gear with us and hoped we could borrow some from the French.

We stretched and limbered up as the plane taxied towards the terminal at Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris. Don, Estelle, Andrew and Claire had arrived a few days ago, and Don had called Chris with some words of advice along the following lines:

1. You will need to run to catch your flight to Montpellier.
2. Even if you run you will probably miss your flight.
3. Even if you catch your flight your bags will probably miss the flight – we had to wait 36 hours to get ours.
4. Don't get on the plane unless the Air France people can guarantee that your bags are on the plane.



Tufa fountain in Montpellier

Our sprint got off to a good start, but was stalled at immigration where they had what looked like five people dealing with European Community passports, and only one person dealing with the rest of the world, who was giving a very hard time to anyone who looked African or Asian. After waiting for about 25 minutes we signed a treaty on the back of a napkin declaring Australia as part of the European Community and hopped lines. A good thing, too. After a brisk walk/jog to the gate for our Montpellier flight we found passengers already lining up ready to board the plane.

But were our bags on board? A young man at the check-in counter who spoke only French provided Chris with his first opportunity to practice his schoolboy French, which had been in retirement since 1988. He refused to confirm or deny the presence of our bags on the plane, and insisted that we get on it whether our bags were there or not. He helped our mounting sense of unease by tearing our return tickets to Paris from our ticket books and we may well have left them there had not Alan checked his ticket carefully. We were soon in the air; although not before having a glimpse of the latest triumph of French engineering by seeing the shattered ruins of Terminal 2E which had collapsed in a pile of steel and glass a few weeks earlier. After punching through several layers of trademark European cloud, we emerged into brilliant blue sky shot through with the tracer bullet contrails of dozens of aircraft criss-crossing one another on their approaches and takeoffs from Charles de Gaulle airport. After 20 hours of night, morning had broken.

By some amazing stroke of luck, our bags had made it onto the plane. Montpellier Airport had obviously been tipped off to our arrival as there were a lot of guys in military fatigues with automatic weapons and big alsatians hanging around the baggage claim area. However, as they approached us, Kevin pulled the old “Look! Osama Bin Laden just ducked behind that aspidistra!” routine and we were soon through the gates and being whisked away by Don, Andrew, Mark, and Estelle’s brother Xavier in our newly rented cars, with only one wrong turn exiting the parking lot. And no-one ever prevented Chris from absentmindedly carrying nail clippers, a razor blade, fork and serrated knife onto three different planes.

Days 1 and 2: Steep Learning Curve

Our hire cars were a Renault Megane and a VW Touran. The Touran posed no particular difficulties; the Megane, however, was full of surprises. Aside from a key that looks like a credit card and a park brake on the dashboard, the headlights turned on automatically whenever the car thought it was getting a bit dark. The high beams also

often flashed when turning on the windscreen wipers, although that may be due more to driver incompetence than novel design.

We arrived at Clapiers, just north of Montpellier, at the house of Estelle's father Robert and his partner Mabe. A glorious although slightly odorous entry was made – after all, those who had just flown in had been wearing the same clothes for about 33 hours – so it was off to the showers straight away. Whilst the French have much to offer the world in terms of wine, cheese and culture, the world will be a much better place if they keep their showers to themselves. French showers usually consist of a handheld nozzle on the end of a hose (often with no bracket to hold the nozzle) and a drain that is perfectly calibrated to drain water at exactly 50% of the rate at which water flows from the nozzle.

We could now begin admiring our surroundings. Robert and Mabe live in a delightful converted monastery, complete with vaulted ceilings and a balcony with battlements looking onto the street below, inspiring the more Monty Python-minded to much taunting of the “feelthy English” and many bellows of “Fetchez la vache!”. Robert hastily bundled us out before an international incident was caused, and so we drove into Montpellier for some local culture.

The old town in the centre of Montpellier is mostly delightful, with lots of narrow old streets criss-crossing down a steep hill. As with many French towns, the back streets hide many small courtyards with restaurants and fountains. Looking down, the astute observer may notice small silver knobs set into the path, which are actually in the shape of scallops. This is the Scallop Pilgrimage Trail, walked by those who want to follow in the footsteps of St Jacques, the patron saint of scallops. (St Jacques was obviously missing the day they started handing out responsibilities of saints.)

These subtle reminders of food suddenly awoke Don with a start. “It’s 1:30, we need to meet Estelle for lunch!”. (All restaurants in France close promptly at 2pm – if you haven’t eaten by then, tough.) Tables out in the courtyard beside the fountain and pitchers of wine on the table gave things a French flavour, but in case that wasn’t enough, most people’s experience suddenly became much more real when a menu was stuck in front of them completely in French, accompanied by a helpful waitress who could answer any questions about things you didn’t understand in the menu so long as you asked, and were prepared to receive the answer, in French. Whether by true desire or lack of comprehension, people were soon munching on salads topped with thin slices of wild boar and goose gizzards. Mmmm.



Bridge at Clamouse

If you go to France, prepare to lunch hard and lunch long. Lunch can run to several courses, and it's not unusual to have entrée, main, cheese, dessert and coffee, not to mention several glasses of wine. It's also not unusual to feel very full and drowsy after lunch, especially after said glasses of wine. So if you've got anything really important to do, do it in the morning.

With lunch under our belts, it was time to hit the road northwest. 45 minutes of damp driving brought us to the small town of Canet, home of Estelle's mother Odile. Hungry travellers should note that Odile is extremely kind and loves to feed people and ply them with generous slurps of muscat. Travellers with finite stomach capacity should note that



Andrew searches for caves inside the cheese shop

Odile has no concept of 'full'. Visitors to Canet must accordingly ensure they always have an escape strategy lest they find themselves buried under mounting piles of biscuits, cake, bread and jam. Don, having visited France before, was an old hand at this, and during our many visits to Odile's over the next few weeks, whenever he could see an attack imminent he would tell us to back away slowly, get in the cars and start them up. He would hold Odile at bay as she advanced, teapot at the ready in right hand and a tin of marzipan chocolates under the left, whilst we scampered into the vehicles, gunned them, and then screamed off into the blue yonder with Don hopping into the open back door as we swerved past through a hail of pelted almond biscuits.

And so it was that, armed with a bunch of Odile's goodies, we arrived at the particularly insignificant town of Cartels, about 10 km from Canet. All that there is of any note in Cartels is an intersection and a post office – and the post office is no longer a post office, having been recently turned into holiday accommodation known as Le Relais des Postes. This princely establishment offered us two bedrooms, a living area-cum-dining-area-cum-convertible-bedroom, a dodgy French shower and cooking facilities to reheat Odile's goodies.

That night was marked by two unusual events. The first occurred whilst Andrew was in the shower (whether 'post hoc ergo propter hoc' is applicable here is anyone's guess). However, there was suddenly a surge of power through the unit, causing the lights to blaze brightly, and short-circuiting most of the electrical equipment plugged in. Don's mobile even coughed out an apologetic puff of smoke before turning up its toes. This was a particular blow for Alan, whose laptop and battery chargers were all plugged in, and all promptly deep-fried.

The second event occurred long after everyone had gone to bed. There were seven people to fit into six beds. Alan insisted that it was ridiculous to expect him and Megan to sleep in the sole double bed and the Prykes absconded to a twin room, causing Andrew, Don and Mark to eye the remaining double and single bed and start re-evaluating their relationships with each other – with the result that Andrew ended up sleeping on the floor. At around midnight, their fitful slumber was disturbed by Kevin, who wandered through the room on his way to the toilet, then back, then forward, then back..... Due to a smart piece of French interior design, the toilet had been located off a small anteroom in such a way that when you opened the door to the anteroom it cleverly concealed the door to the toilet. Eventually, however, Kevin worked things out without tripping over everyone. Peace descended once more over the room.

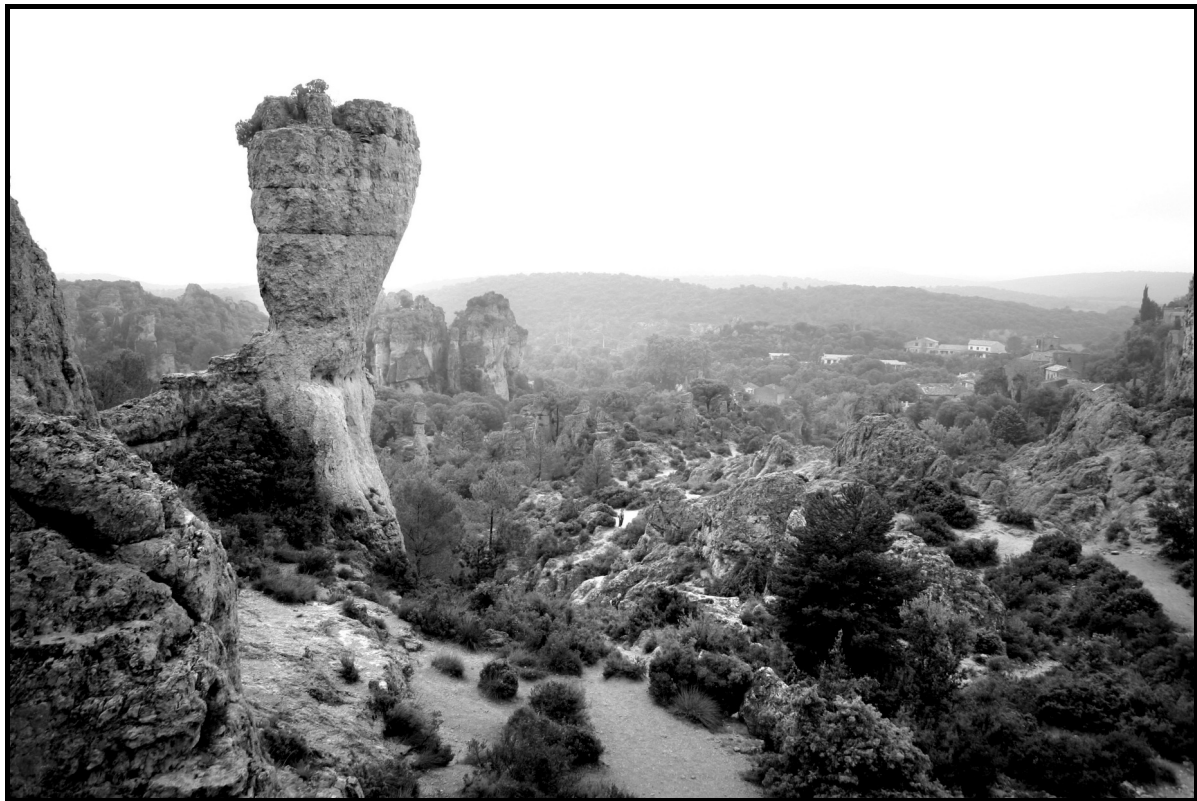
The next morning, hungry souls awoke to the smell of freshly fried electrical circuitry. After a quick breakfast, it was off to the nearby town of Clermont L'Hérault to browse the local produce markets. Here you can buy pretty much anything, be it twenty varieties of mushrooms, thirty varieties of cheese, or sausage of wild boar or donkey. Xavier had been trying to teach Andrew some basic French, and had told him that the most important phrase to remember was "Dans le cochon, tout est bon" (In the pig, everything is good.) The markets provided a practical demonstration of how literally the French took this expression. Besides the usual ham and bacon, one could buy trotters, ears, whole heads, tongues, brains, tripe, stomachs – basically, anything softer than bone was available for eating. Oh yum.

We wandered round buying food for a picnic lunch later that day. Being conservative types we passed on the pig's

stomach for the time being and loaded up with bread, pate, cheese, olives and meat. Alan had other things on his mind though – replacing his burnt-out circuitry, and having a doctor inspect his knee, which was still sore after a canyon trip the previous weekend. For this he needed to take Don to translate. (“Are you sitting down? Take a big breath in. I have something to tell you but I need you to be quite calm. If you have anything important to do, I suggest you try to get it done in the next two months.....”). In the meantime, Xavier led the others to the top of the hill above the town to play in the ruins of the 11th century castle.

Eventually, surgery was complete and we drove to the nearby Cirque du Mourèze, a valley filled with unusual dolomite formations. We threw on packs. Most of these were stuffed with goodies from the markets for a picnic lunch, but Megan’s pack was stuffed with Alan’s laptop. This was because something so expensive as this was clearly too valuable to leave locked at Le Relais des Postes, and even more clearly too valuable to leave locked in a car parked in a public place, so it had to be carried; and Alan suddenly remembered enough French to be sure the doctor at Clermont L’Hérault had clearly warned him that he would cause untold trauma to his knee if he carried something as heavy as a laptop computer.

We wandered up through the mist to the top of a nearby hill and found a ruined stone building. Speculation was rife as to what it might be, with lots of bets laid on a ruined chapel, but Xavier torpedoed the romance by announcing it was merely a shepherd’s hut. Still, a picnic in the ruins in the mist was wonderfully atmospheric. A picnic in the mist with a laptop was even more so. Xavier and Don assured us all that behind the mist, there was a fabulous view over the dolomitic formations in one direction, and over a large lake in the other direction. What a potentially scenic location. Xavier also diplomatically didn’t chide us for eating lunch after 2pm. What more could you ask for?



St-Guilhem-le-Desert

Well, maybe accommodation with a more reliable power source. However, we didn’t need to ask. Don had told Odile about the problems with the power, and by the time we got back to the Relais des Postes, someone had moved all our gear into another set of rooms. There was a note that was apologetic but mildly accusatory, warning us against plugging our strange Australian appliances with unusual voltages into their circuitry.

Tonight, Don was to initiate us into a strange brotherhood. Xavier had lent him a game entitled Les Colons de Catane, a strategy game very popular in Europe and best described as like Diplomacy meets Monopoly played in a barter economy, and over in less than 90 minutes. Many nights over the next few weeks would see the game brought out and the room echo with rolling dice, road and town building, frenzied trading, dastardly dealmaking and accusations of excessive slyness, most of which were normally directed at Mark because he was just too bloody good.

Days 3 and 4: To the End of the World, and Under it Too

Time for an excursion a little further afield. Heading out of Cartels, we first set our sights on Le Pouget, where there was a dolmen – an ancient stone structure. The dolmen is clearly the biggest attraction around Le Pouget, because the incredibly narrow street leading out of town towards it was marked with three signs right next to each other, all indicating the route to the dolmen. We wound uphill along a track that grew progressively muddy until we reached the short walk. After about 50 m walk we came to a large menhir lying on its side under a tree. “Behold, the dolmen!” he proclaimed, but the effect was ruined by a sign over his shoulder indicating that the real dolmen was just around the corner.

The actual dolmen wasn’t that much more spectacular. A large well had been cut into the ground and lined with stones, with a ramp leading down into it, and it had been capped with a few menhirs. The sign on the local farm read ‘Dolmen Farm’ so there will probably be a whole brace of them in the area before long. Alan was keen to turn it into a geocache, but was at a loss for an appropriate Pink Floyd song to name it after in line with his caching practice. As we wandered back to the cars, suggestions came flying in, including Shine On You Crazy Dolmen, Another Brick in the Dolmen, and the old fave Set the Controls for the Heart of the Dolmen. However, we had places to be.....

Up the valley of the L’Hérault River was a big chunk of limestone. The river, as rivers are wont to do, had cut a big gorge through the middle of it, and also quite a few caves off to the side of it. After lunch at the Bergerie Restaurant overlooking the historic Pont du Diable (Devil’s Bridge), and a bit of a clamber round the rocks, we took off for the nearby Grotte de Clamouse (Cave of the Screamer). However, everyone was having lunch (of course) and the screaming would not recommence until 2.00pm, in about 40 minutes time. We took the opportunity for a quick trip to the nearby town of St-Guilhem-le-Desert; established in the gorge of the Verdus River (a tributary of the L’Hérault) around an old monastery founded by St Guilhelm, who lived in the late 8th and early 9th centuries and was apparently mates with Charlemagne. The village is a little more recent, but is significant enough to be listed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Over the top, high on a cliff above the village stands the ruins of the Chateau du Géant (Giant’s Castle). A good 200 m or so above the valley floor, it would have been a long walk back to the shops if you’d forgotten to buy something.



Grotte du Clamouse

No sooner had we arrived, though, than we had to turn around and run back to the cave in order to be in time for our tour. Grotte du Clamouse was disappointingly quiet, as the screams after which the cave was named were the screams of a young mother who, as legend has it, witnessed the body of her son being swept out of the cave by the underground river, long, long ago. The cave contains some large chambers and excellent decorations, but cites three reasons why it's particularly significant. The first is that a caver called Michel Siffre, who for some reason enjoys going into caves for long periods of time without clocks, spent three months in the cave in late 1999/early 2000 in an attempt to study what happened to human biorhythms when deprived of external stimuli as to time (such as sunrise and sunset). The result? When he came out he said "Gee, those three months went quickly." So now we know. His stay is commemorated by a dummy wearing caving overalls climbing a rope in one of the chambers. Our guide pointed to the large railway tunnel from which the rope dangled, invitingly, and said "Beyond this point is the realm of the *spéléologue*". He told us the passage went for several kilometres and had fantastic decoration. But, of course, we could not go there.

Another claim to fame is the *proteus*, a cave fish-with-legs that looks a bit like an axolotl. You won't find a *proteus* naturally occurring in Grotte de Clamouse, so they have imported one from Slovakia. It now sits in a covered tank in the depths of the cave looking grumpy as people pull faces at it.

Clamouse's 'big thing', though, is the Son et Lumiere spectacle "Cathedral of Time". While you stand in one of the largest rooms, all the lights are turned off and then big spotlights flicker on and off and coloured and patterned lights buzz busily about the chamber, giving a kind of nightclub effect, which is marred a little by a very portentous soundtrack which consists of singers bellowing "Rock! Water! Time! Darkness! Light!" to a contemporary atonal operatic musical track. Alan found this very annoying as each formation would be illuminated for no more than about five seconds, which was just long enough to point a camera at it but not long enough to take a photo before the light turned off and it was time to look at the next formation. There were plenty of photographic opportunities elsewhere in the cave, though. As Alan lined up "just one more shot", a few French people on the tour with us were heard to mutter to the guide "Gee, it's worse than being at a wedding." We didn't see any mammoths, though they may have been hiding from the flashes.

After the cave, Don was keen for us to do a little bushwalk behind St-Guilhem called the Cirque au Bout du Monde (Cirque at the End of the World). "It's fairly simple, you just go along that track to about halfway up the cliffs, around that bit at the end, and come back along the treeline on the other side." So even though it was getting on for 4pm we decided we had plenty of time to do the walk, even with Megan carrying Alan's laptop.

We reached the end of the valley and crossed over, thinking we were about half way. However, contrary to our expectations, the track on the other side kept climbing up, and up, and up. Before too long, rather than walking back down the valley, we were over a mountain pass and heading off into a completely different valley. Off in the distance was a strange building with a lot of towers and antennas sprouting from it, looking suspiciously like the base for some evil genius from a James Bond movie. It seemed that the end of the world wasn't actually the end at all (unless we had crossed over into a new world, but as we hadn't brought our passports we didn't want to dwell on that thought). It was truly spectacular, with vast sweeping expanses of limestone and rugged cliffs, but we could see the road we were on winding off for some distance, around the big valley and towards the evil guy's base. Some were starting to feel a little anxious. Was that a slight gleam of madness creeping into Don's eyes? Was he planning to lure us into the wilderness and steal our saucisson? Surely he couldn't be that annoyed at losing at Colons de Catane?

At long last, however, we reached a mountain pass and found St Guilhem below us..... a long, long way below us. Out in front of us, a narrow ridge presented a jagged sawtoothed profile capped with the ruins of the Chateau du Géant. Very spectacular. After a brief pause to eat some strange French fruity wafer biscuits at some very unusually sited picnic tables, we set off. Mark streaked off ahead, jogging nimbly down the roughly cobbled track. Chris, keen to get to the Chateau and take artistic photos whilst it was still lit with the golden light of the setting sun, tried to keep up in a style best described as barely controlled stumbling. The others took a more leisurely approach. Climbing the ridge to the castle was a very Umberto Eco-esque experience. Of course, just as Mark and Chris arrived, the clouds decided to lurk in front of the sun for while, but they still had the joy of searching for secret passages (albeit unsuccessfully), followed by the fun of peering over the edge of the cliff and contemplating how much fun it must have been for the removalists to carry all the furniture up whenever there was a new resident – and how tempting it would have been for them to chuck the old resident's stuff over the edge.

It was a pretty short trip to descend the zig-zags down the cliff to the cars, passing en route the sign saying that the local authority had closed access to the Chateau because of the great risks posed by the odd bit of falling furniture. When you've walked to the end of the world and back, you work up quite an appetite which needs to be sated before playing Colons de Catane, lest you idly eat your grain crops and sheep. So we stumped up for some pizzas with extra roquefort.

The next day we were packed and ready to leave by 9am. The owner turned up to check that we hadn't connected any more of our strange Australian appliances to the electricity and ended up being most apologetic about Alan's

roasted circuitry. And then we were off towards Provence, first returning to Montpellier, then hooking onto the autoroute.

Navigating along the autoroute was extremely easy. The same could not be said, though, for navigation when we got off the autoroute at Avignon. At first we thought the fact that Don kept navigating us back and forth over the same bridge was because he wanted to get a better look at the Pont d'Avignon in the distance. Eventually, he admitted that in fact despite having a Michelin guide he didn't have the foggiest idea where he was going. Chris, with a really annoying air of superiority, produced his Lonely Planet guide and declared that it was really easy – all we had to do was cross the Rhône again, hug the walls of the city and then veer southeast. Don told Chris that since he clearly knew what he was talking about he could go in front. Back across the Rhône we went. Of course, Chris immediately got lost, but eventually we abandoned our attempts to go southeast, headed north, and somehow ended up in the right direction for our destination, the famous Fontaine de Vaucluse.



Fontaine de Vaucluse

The Fontaine de Vaucluse may be a well-known cave, but we couldn't go into it. This is because it is full of water. The Fontaine, which looks like a calm blue pond at the foot of a cliff, is actually a big water-filled shaft that drops over 300 m, pretty much straight down. Over the years it's attracted the interest of the likes of Jacques Costeau and Jochen Hasenmayer.

Although we thought we had left Estelle 300 km away in Canet with her relatives, who should come wandering down the tourist path to meet us but Estelle? She wanted us to come in and meet her aunt, Vanessa Lifran, who ran the visitor centre. Another strategically placed relative! Estelle's aunt had arranged for us to be given a tour by Roland Pastor, president of the local caving group. Of course, since we didn't have dive gear with us and, not having watched *The Big Blue* recently, weren't feeling up to any deep freediving, the tour consisted of standing at the edge of the pool and gazing fancifully into the 300 m deep waters whilst Roland told us, in French, via Don, that the Fontaine was one of the greatest sauces in the world.

"Uh, resurgences", said Chris smugly.

This gained a dark look from Roland. "NO! Not a resurgence. This is the first time you see this water. So it's an exsurgence. Or, if you like, a sauce." So, now you know where Fountain sauce comes from. Still, it can be

pretty impressive. The Fontaine is actually the source of the Sorgue River, which in normal conditions, like today, appears magically about 100 m downstream of the pool, water having percolated out through a series of fissures. However, when the winter snows melt on top of the plateau, the outflow exceeds the capacity of the fissures and the pool starts to rise. When it reaches its lip, some 23 m above the normal level, the waterworks start. According to Roland, the peak flow can exceed 100 cumecs. According to Mme Jordan, who runs the local museum (EcoMusée du Gouffre), the peak flow is around 150 cumecs. According to the good folk at Lonely Planet, the peak flow can exceed 200 cumecs. So now you know.

Roland had to dash off as he's actually the headmaster of the local school and he had spied plumes of smoke rising from the direction of the science lab. In the meantime, we toured the museum. Because there are no dry caves accessible from the tourist precinct, in the museum they have actually built a cave to show people what caves are like. The cave is quite extensive and has a series of different chambers to display different features – so there's a stal room, a room with a river running through it over gour pools, a cave art room containing careful forgeries of famous cave paintings from around France, a squeeze, and an underground campsite. The crowning glory of the museum, however, is Norbert Castaret's stal collection. That's right, folks – a whole room of stals, straws, helictites, aragonite and shawls lovingly broken off by Norbert himself. It was a truly inspiring display – what a shame we were prevented from fulfilling our inspiration by a lack of any dry caves nearby to vandalise.

We concluded our time in Vaucluse with lunch, which we were taking dangerously late at 2:45pm. Fortunately one of the local restaurants was used to dealing with rude foreigners with no concept of the proper hour for doing things. Lunch was pretty basic though, consisting mostly of burgers, and bottles of 'Pschitt!' lemonade (yes folks, it really does taste like Pschitt!).

Back on the autoroute. This time we were following Xavier and Estelle closely to try to work out how Estelle could get places so quickly. After a couple of hours of driving past interminable hills topped with castles, we finally turned off the autoroute to embark on the last little bit of our journey to Villard de Lans, in the Vercors, by what Xavier described as the 'scenic route'. However, he told us that this route was not for the fainthearted as big rocks occasionally roll down the cliffs and squash cars, and if we wanted to be purse-carrying nancy boys (or girls, in Megan's case) we could get back on the autoroute and take the non-scenic way.

Of course, being bold types, the thought that by merely driving along a road we'd be cheating death made us all the more keen to take the 'scenic route'; although secretly we all suspected that this was all a bit of hyperbole and the last car squashed was probably some horse-drawn carriage in 1864. The reality was brought home to us when we got to the small town of Choranche, where Estelle and Xavier were stopping off, to find the continuation of the road to Villard de Lans was closed. A couple of days later we found out the reason – a bloody big rock had rolled down the side of the hill and squashed a car, including the two occupants. Ooh-er. We had to take a detour that added an extra 45 minutes to our trip, all the time wishing we'd opted for the vehicles with the armour-plated roof.

It was a shame we were taking this trip as night was falling, since we were deprived of the full spectacle of the Grands Goulets (Grand Gorges), a series of deep canyons with the road running perilously through a series of ledges and tunnels high up on one side with only a low stone wall preventing out-of-control cars from doing an involuntary canyoning trip. In fact, at the top of the Grands Goulets, the road runs through a Blue Mountains-style canyon complete with ferny vegetation, small waterfalls and scalloped meanders.

Finally we reached Villard de Lans, which is an alpine village in rolling hills on top of the limestone plateau that probably does most of its business during the ski season. It may not have been ski season now but you could have been forgiven for mistaking it as such, as the temperatures frequently dropped below zero at night. Upon arriving in town we were met by a very cold-looking François and Caroline, who had booked a restaurant for our evening meal.

This meal was a fairly lavish affair. Like most restaurants, there were several multi-course banquets to choose from. François eagerly recommended the regional specialties menu. A quick read revealed some hints as to what the regional specialties might be. To start with there was a choice of blue cheese or goat's cheese salad. Next up was a mains list that included a pot of cheese fondue, or tartiflette, a dish made with sliced potatoes and reblochon cheese baked in an oven until the cheese goes all runny and creamy. This was followed by a serve of after-dinner cheese. Dessert options included a cheese platter. However, most of us settled on chartreuse ice cream with chartreuse topping.

François was particularly happy to be able to indulge in tartiflette, as he considered that the ingredients to make proper tartiflette (in particular, proper reblochon cheese) just weren't available in Australia and he had been hanging out for a tartiflette for several months. Megan chose the fondue and was quickly informed of the time-honoured tradition that if you drop your bread in the fondue you have to run around the block naked. However, people seemed to suddenly forget this tradition when Alan decided to help Megan out with her leftovers and lost his bread into the cheesy mass. We were awaiting the chartreuse ice cream with mixed feelings, particularly given Andrew's graphic stories of how chartreuse tastes like petrol and how much he'd thrown up after drinking some previously. Things were not looking up when the ice cream arrived and was a rich green colour, but in fact

chartreuse and ice cream go together like chilli and chocolate: not something you might immediately think of, and not for everyone, but not nearly as bad as you might think.

We adjourned to our humble accommodation for the next week. This was in fact a four-storey ski resort that had shut down for the off-season, but had opened specially to accommodate a bunch of us cavers for a few days. And as the first to arrive, we entered a deserted building. There was much running around trying to turn on the power and work out how the place operated.

As we prepared for bed in some very cramped rooms with very dubious shower facilities, François informed us that the next two days were going to be very full on, involving early starts, and lengthy trips in sporty caves. Oh boy.

Day 5: Stuck in a Vat

Les Cuves du Sassenage (“the Vats of Sassenage”) lie at the foot of the Vercors, beside the town of Sassenage which, whilst hundreds of years old, is now pretty much an outer suburb of Grenoble. Les Cuves du Sassenage have been known for many years – certainly since before the 17th century – with people having penetrated some distance into the cave and tours being run for the brave of heart to places like the Passage of the Tombs, the Descent into Hell, and the Styx. In fact, some have even suggested that some of the terminology used in Dante’s *Inferno* derives from that used in the Cuves. The so-called ‘Cuves’ themselves are in fact two basins which, hundreds of years ago, were thought to gauge the likely success or failure of crops in the coming season due to the level of water in them. But there is much more to the cave than just these basins.

A substantial stream runs through the Cuves, known as the Germe. For many years its origins were unknown; but now it is known to be the resurg..... – er, sorry, exsurgence – for water from the Gouffre Berger. The Cuves are also significant as being, in the 1940s, the site of the first proper cave explorations of some of the young teenagers who would later go on to discover and explore the Berger and solve the riddle of the Germe. Today, the known portion of the cave is many kilometres long and some 400 m high – that’s right, high, because you enter it from the exsurgence and have to push upward.

The cave is fairly easy to access. One drives through the narrow streets of Sassenage, and then after circling the obligatory town fountain, ducks off down a narrow alley that the cars could only just fit down (and dings on the walls testified to the many cars that hadn’t quite fit) to emerge in a tiny parking lot next to a nondescript local park. If you’re hungry, the nearest boulangerie is about 100 m walk away. A steep walk through the park brings you to the entry to the tourist section. Joining us on this trip were François, Caroline and Erik, a local French caver who is a gear tester for Petzl and thus gets given lots of free gear which they want him to push to its limits. Although most of us were suited up, Erik wandered through the tourist section in his green bear suit with kneepads over his knees. Once we left the path, we thought Erik might pull on a cavesuit – but no, it seemed the bear suit was the order of the day.

In some ways, this cave is reminiscent of a larger, upside-down version of Growling Swallet in Tassie. There are substantial streamway passages, but you can’t follow the stream forever, and from big vaulted halls one climbs into awkward side passages that wind through rifts, rockpiles and fossil passage. One of these sections has been appropriately named ‘Gruyere’ because, like Swiss cheese, it’s full of holes.

This cave was where we came into close contact with the desire of the French for helpful little modifications to make your caving experience a little easier. In some of the narrow rifts, little stemples had been placed across the rift to serve as footholds. Many of these, however, looked like they’d been placed by the explorers of the ’40s, being small chunks of rotting wood that occasionally flexed fitfully underfoot.

We had been in the cave for around 90 minutes when all the groaning woodwork became a bit too much for Kevin, who suddenly remembered some shopping he really needed to do in Grenoble. Alan, whose deep-fried electric circuits were still giving him problems, decided to join him and look for an electronics store. They turned to Don, who had also been contemplating an early exit to buy some boots (he was caving today in his hiking shoes). Don said he was having too much fun and didn’t want to go. Alan and Kevin revealed that actually they hadn’t been paying much attention and didn’t know that they could find their way through the Gruyere. And plus they would need Don’s superior translation skills in the shopping centre in order to ask for odd items that might not be on display. Oh well – next time. Don sighed and turned back towards the cars, leaving Megan, Mark, Andrew and Chris to continue with our three French hosts.

The cave seemed to get substantially more sporting after the others departed, at a place called the Hall of the Beaches. The cave dropped down (yes, down) pitches of 20 m and 13 m to a jumble of boulders which marks the limit of cave mapped in the ’40s. A hole had been dug through the boulders, with a gate propping the rocks open. A narrow squeeze pops one into a small streamway in the base of a network of rifts. Contributing to the sporting nature of the cave was the fact that it was replete with pitches, and although we were supposedly climbing upward there were a substantial number of ‘down’ pitches. The pitches were generally short, but nonetheless getting constantly on and off rope and having to disentangle carefully packed away SRT gear keeps you active.

THINGS AL'S BOOK DIDN'T TELL YOU ABOUT...



Aside from the pitches were the traverses. Upon hearing of our trip to France, Al Warild had highly recommended that we do some traversing practice, and had even joined us at one of our training weekends at Bungonia to rig some awkward horizontal lines along the rocks above Hogans Hole so that we had a vague idea of what we were doing and didn't completely disgrace Australia's reputation. This was a very good thing. The French love their traverse lines. Often, they are used at the top of pitches to put you in a good position for a freehang. This means that when you get to the top of a 40 m pitch you may well have to sidle along a fair way against the wall dangling from your cowstails on dubious muddy tatty rope attached to straining, ancient bolts. There were a couple of doozies in Sassenage, including one where an up pitch ended in a very loose jumble of boulders with a traverse line snaking for about 20 m around an awkward series of muddy ledges about 15 m off the ground; and another which involved a large step of faith from one side of a cleft about 10 m above a crashing waterfall to the other side. The greatest use we found for traverses, however, and particularly in Sassenage, was for keeping your feet dry. On this particular trip, extensive traverses were often rigged to keep you just clear of the stream. Some of these seemed a bit silly and us Australians would sometimes calculate the effort necessary to perform the traverse and decide instead to unclip and wade through the stream. However, Erik kept muttering that the water was lower than he'd ever seen it in the cave, and one could certainly imagine that some sections of stream passage would become difficult and dangerous in high water levels.

We stopped at one point in a mud-floored chamber which was equipped with a big plastic sheet for camping. Here, we ate lunch. Our tiny hotel rooms at Villard de Lans were costing us a substantial 50 euros each per day, but that included breakfast, lunch and dinner. Being French, the meals – at least, lunch and dinner – were pretty princely (the French still haven't got breakfast right). Each day we would collect a plastic bag which would be packed with a substantial serve of salad, big hunks of bread, paté, fruit, various cheeses, chips and sweets. These lunches were about three times the size of what most of us would normally take caving (although, to be fair, most of the caves were many times the size of what we'd normally do).

THINGS AL'S BOOK DIDN'T TELL YOU ABOUT...



2. MAKE SURE YOU ACCOUNT
FOR THE EXTRA STRETCH
IF A ROPE HAS BEEN IN A
CAVE FOR MORE THAN
FIVE YEARS.

Under way once more. Up and down a few more pitches, until we were stopped by a strange sight. We'd been caving for about five hours, and Erik had pulled from his pack a cave suit. "The walk-in has ended", he announced. "Now, the real caving begins." Oh boy. What could the cave have in store now? It turned out it was a series of squeezey bedding planes floored liberally with gritty dirt through which we grunted and groaned before popping out at the top of a short pitch down into a substantial stream passage. The rest of the trip was spent following this beautiful passage upwards, prussiking up beside waterfalls and traversing around round flushing pools. We eventually arrived at the base of a large black shaft with a rope disappearing upwards into nowhere. Erik told us that we had ascended around 240 m above the entrance, and you could keep going up another 10 – 12 pitches or so to reach 400 m up. The good news? The cave is still going. The bad news? You have to bring diving gear to get any further. Now that would be one heck of a tank carry job.

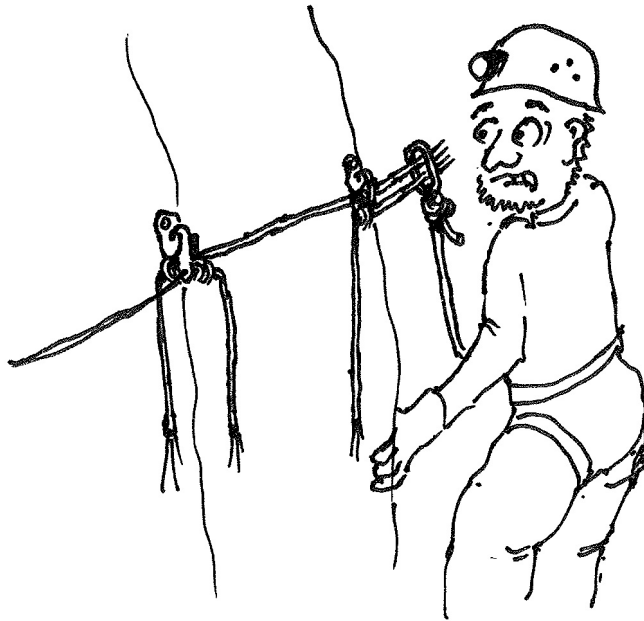
We turned around and raced out. We Australians were in the lead, and I'm proud to report that collectively the four of us were able to find our way almost all the way back to the tourist track without having to be rescued by Erik. Our record was spoiled whilst we were looking for the final turnoff out of the main streamway only 100 m or so from the tourist track, only to have Erik arrive and direct us around the corner.

We were back at the cars about 10 hours after setting off. Given that this was our first day's caving for some time we were feeling pretty puffed. Mark asked Erik how this trip compared to other trips in the area. He said "It's a good trip in an easy cave." Oh dear. However, when we repeated this to François, he said "That's just Erik. He's an animal."

We drove back to the hotel in time for the first of many fabulous five-course dinners (plus wine, of course), which were just the thing we needed after a tough day of caving. We felt a bit better when François said that he and Caroline had found the day pretty demanding too. In fact, for my money this was actually the most physically demanding trip we did – although the fact that we were still acquiring our caving legs probably added to this impression.

Time for a break, then? No such luck! François took great glee in telling us what a monster trip he had planned for the next day. It involved over an hour's drive to the Haute-Chartreuse region on the other side of Grenoble, ascending a mountain side on a steep slope known as the Killing Fields, a ten-hour through trip, and then an awkward traverse through a mountain pass where "If you fall, you die". Kevin immediately started inquiring about good walks in the region.

THINGS AL'S BOOK DIDN'T TELL YOU ABOUT...



3. IF THE FRENCH RIG TWO
ROPE ON A TRAVERSE,
CLIP INTO BOTH OF THEM.

Day 6: Dentistry

Le Grand Réseau de la Dent de Crolles (the great system of the Tooth of Crolles) is one of the jewels in the crown of French caving. At over 50 km long, this cave is the 5th longest in France, and the 46th longest in the world. The system is all the more remarkable for being located in a sharp towering fang-like mountain, the Dent de Crolles, with entrances on either side and on top, facilitating trips from one side of the mountain to another and making this one of the most cavity-ridden teeth you're likely to see in a fluoridated area.

We got up at about 6:15am, and groggily ate breakfast, packed and jumped in the cars. As we were driving through Grenoble, we realised that some were clearly more groggy than others. I had totally forgotten this incident, but recently received an email from Megan that suggested she was very keen that the incident be recounted, so here is Megan's version:

"In case someone else has got about to this, I would like to establish a correct version of events. After all, it was not our (Alan & me) fault that we got up late and consequently the usual pfaing became frantic pfaing resulting in me forgetting to check on lunch (which I had queried in the morning before it was out). We had mentioned that we did not have an alarm clock as Alan's watch alarm does not work, but unfortunately others forgot this in the morning."

Yes, it seemed Alan and Megan did not have their lunch. We needed to stop in Grenoble, and although it was Sunday morning, we somehow found a chink in the normally impregnable French bureaucratic armour and convinced the man in the BP station to deign to sell us some food five minutes before the officially designated food-selling time of 8am. The other colourful incident on the way to the cave was a slight collision between the VW wheel and the kerb, causing the jettisoning of one of the hubcaps and an interesting dent in the rim. Oh well, hopefully we were insured for that sort of thing.

Crolles is a small village in the Chartreuse which is probably most distinguished by being the site of the Petzl factory. Above Crolles looms the Dent de Crolles, (the Tooth of Crolles – so all you people wondering how Petzl's toothy chest ascender got its name need look no further. In fact, Fernand Petzl himself was one of the major

explorers of the Dent de Crolles). Thick cloud prevented us from seeing its full mass, but as we wound higher into the mountains we caught occasional glimpses of its formidable flanks and towering rocky spire. We also caught glimpses of the very steep grassy slope running up one side of the mountain. Oh dear. These would be the Killing Fields. François had banned Alan from taking his camera, so you will just have to imagine our consternation as we parked the cars under an angry sky that would occasionally pull back the clouds to reveal the rocky cliffs above. At the carpark we met Eloise and Gerard, two more local cavers who were to be our guides for today and who were to round out our party numbers to ten (plus François and Caro, but minus Kevin).

THINGS AL'S BOOK DIDN'T TELL YOU ABOUT...



4. THE FRENCH ARE FOND OF HILTECAPS.

Although we had a reasonable view up the Killing Fields as we started our climb, they started to draw in and we were soon isolated in a foggy blanket. This was probably a good thing, for as we left the main field, crossed a saddle and started sidling round the mountain the fog hid the sharp drop down into a deep abyss. It started raining lightly but fortunately it wasn't far to the Trou du Glaz (Ice Hole), which was our entry point to the system at an elevation of around 1700 m. The Trou du Glaz is so named after a pool of ice that once upon a time permanently occupied the entrance, whatever the weather; but according to Gerard global warming has taken its toll, and today there was no ice rink.

There are many possible through trips in Dent de Crolles, due not only to the number of entrances but to the substantial amount of permanent rigging in the cave. The guide to Chartreuse caving calls the traverse from Trou du Glaz to Grotte Chevalier "One of the most beautiful traverses" and sums it up thus: "From the grand passages of the second level of the [Trou du] Glaz, to the more confined ones of the Anette Rift, followed by a set of magnificent pitches and some easy meanders finishing at the bottom of the immense passage of the Grotte Chevalier". That's a pretty good description. What a shame I can't write so economically or you'd have a much lighter SUSS Bull.

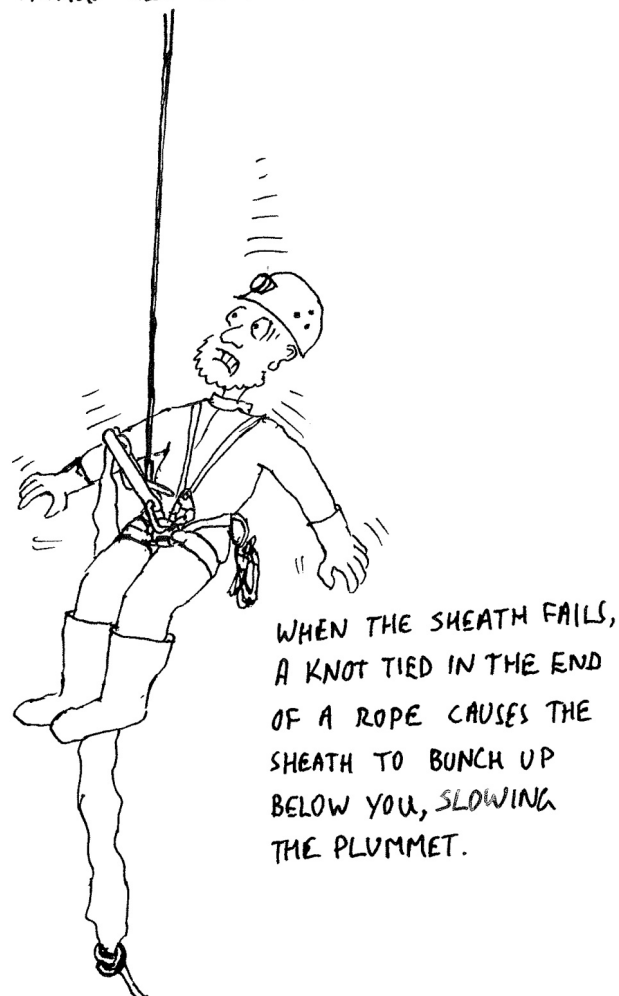
The first part of the trip was reminiscent of some of the great alpine caves in New Zealand like Nettlebed and Exhalibur, only more complex. After three pitches of 10 – 13 m in quick succession, we crawled through a short low section into a maze of borehole passageways. Pitches led off in every direction, interlacing in a complex network with the horizontal galleries, but Gerard expertly navigated us through the maze of ropes. Often we would find ourselves clipped to a line traversing tentatively round a ledge over a pitch of unseen depth to reach the continuation of our passage. At one point, Gerard gestured at a shaft that we had just traversed and said "60 metres down. 120 metres up." And most of these were no small fry either, being 10 – 15 m across with beautiful cylindrical walls. Alan was wearing a watch with an altimeter, and reported that we were about 106 m below our starting point.

After another few short pitches, the cave became more rifty. The Anette Rift is tight and awkward in parts, leading to much swearing from Alan even though he wasn't trying to force his camera box through. The exit from the rift occurs when the floor suddenly drops out from under you and it's necessary to abseil down through a tight chimney. After detaching from the rope, there's a very interesting further drop down a short chute from which a fierce wind is blowing into a long low tunnel. We had to stop here a while to wait for everyone to catch up after the pitch, and although pretty darn cold sitting in the breeze, we kept ourselves occupied by watching feet dangle from the ceiling and flail around trying to find purchase. Alan was particularly vocal, with loud cries of "Holy shit!". Eloise asked us what he was saying. We struggled a bit but decided that "Sacré merde!" was probably the closest available French translation. Eloise and Gerard furrowed their brows. "We do not say anything like that", they murmured. Alan checked his watch. We were now 102 m below our starting point. This seemed a bit dodgy, but we decided it was probably explained by the fact that between the abseils we'd been doing some climbing up as well. [*A howling wind equates to a dodgy altimeter reading. ed*]

The passage opened up briefly, but rather than lead us down the inviting borehole Gerard dived off down a small slot in the floor into a narrow, serpentinous passage. For the first time we considered that Kevin may actually not be too disappointed in having missed out. At the end of the meanders, a rope led up into the roof; the only up pitch in the cave, about 10 m high. On the other side of this short climb was a handline running around some deep holes to the top of the Puits Maurice, a fantastic 55 m drop with a couple of rebelayes which, Gerard informed us, was initially ascended from the lower levels in a great feat of climbing.

There's no doubt about the French – they love their food. Eloise had been nagging Gerard for a while about a lunch stop and he decided that this was as good a place as any. Never mind that we were sitting at the base of a funnel below a 55m drop down which could come flying a rock knocked by a careless caver, or even the careless caver himself; when the stomach calls, the food bag must answer. Out came a fuel stove and Gerard began cooking a hot meal for himself and Eloise, followed up with some coffee. When Alan arrived, we asked how far down we were. Apparently, about -106 m. Gerard chuckled. We couldn't compete with Gerard's cooking so had to settle for mere baguettes with paté and roast beef. Life is tough.

THINGS AL'S BOOK DIDN'T TELL YOU ABOUT...

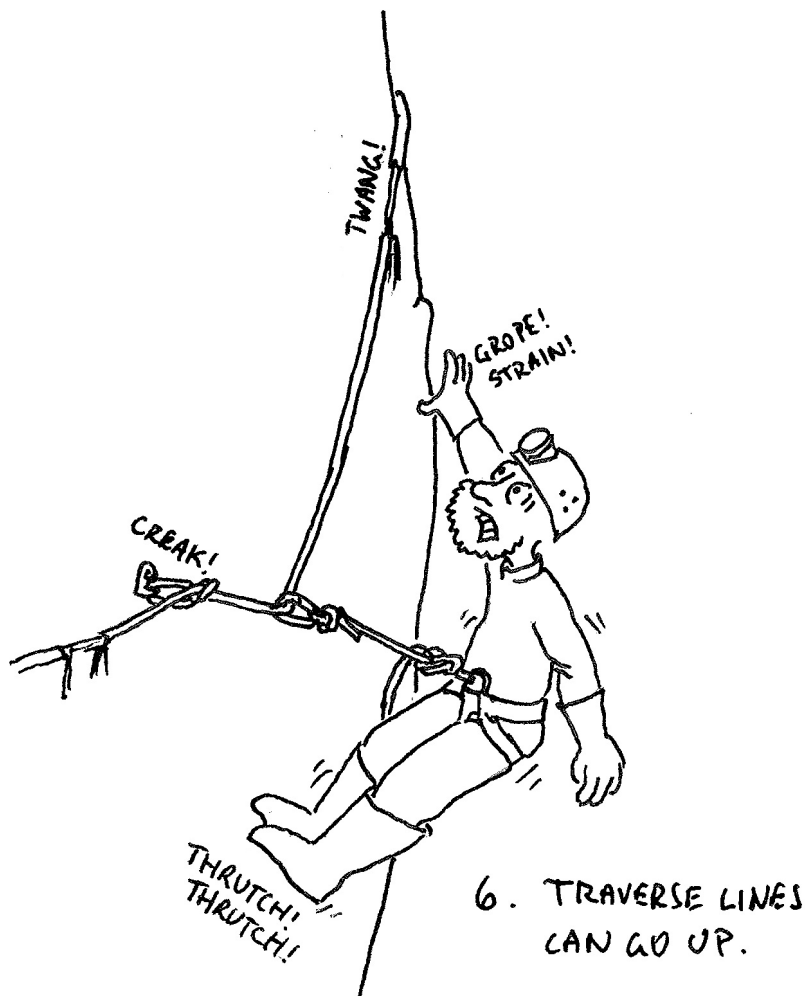


Under the Puits Maurice, a short drop led into the Meandre Nadine, another thin serpentine passage, that culminated at the 30 m Oubliette Pitch. Here, we met the most difficult obstacle of the trip. You don't want to go to the bottom of the Oubliette Pitch. Instead, you clip onto a traverse line, which plunges about 6 m before sharply turning a corner around a nose of rock and leading you around the side of the pitch to a side passage. This little manoeuvre is psychologically daunting. It's only a short drop down to a ledge below the traverse line, but that ledge slopes pretty steeply into a deep black maw reminiscent of the weird creature in the sand to which Jabba the Hut tried to feed Luke Skywalker in Return of the Jedi. Possessing neither the Force or lightsabres, we would have to be careful.

Eloise led the way, with Megan following. It was a long and disquieting wait for those above, as the extent of your vision was down the Oubliette Pitch and to the edge of the nose of rock. Each caver would descend carefully down the traverse line, clip into the next stage, breathe a sigh of relief as they rounded the corner..... followed by a sharp intake of breath and scramble for cowstails, ascenders etc. What went on around the corner was a matter for much conjecture but generally involved lots of grunting, gasps and clanging of metal.

For all those of you who have ever snarled and cursed your long, gangly legs as they jammed up in Mammoth Squeeze, or gazed in envy at the way short people whizzed through the Watercrawl in Ian Carpenter Cave, I can recommend a trip to France where you will get your revenge. Traverses are generally rigged with those 6' and over in mind. Short people often have to reach substantial distances with feet splayed wide on footholds that are sparsely scattered whilst resisting a pull in the wrong direction from a cowstail hooked to a rope some impossible distance away. For these poor souls, inevitably ascenders are detached and a humiliating grovel up to the level of the rope begins, generally accompanied by moaning, huffing and puffing.

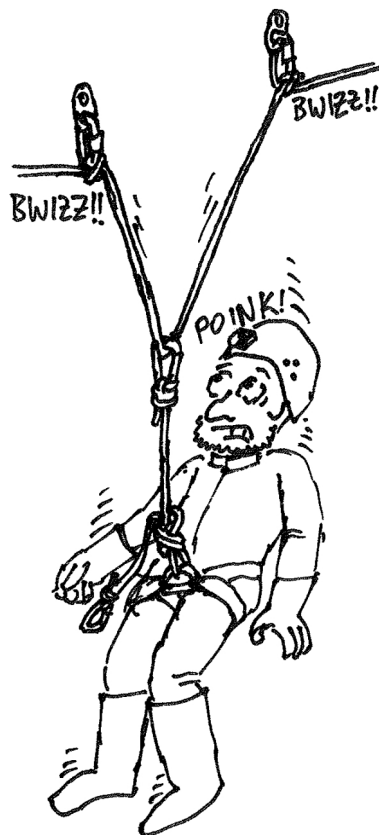
THINGS AL'S BOOK DIDN'T TELL YOU ABOUT...



This was not the hardest traverse we encountered but Megan, Chris, Caroline and Alan were all heard muttering imprecations – the first three under their breath, but Alan somewhat more loudly with a number of comments of the “Sacré merde!” variety. Suffice it to say that if anyone was lying forgotten at the bottom of the Oubliette Pitch they would have been well aware of our presence. (Of course, Mark, Andrew, Don, Gerard and François stepped adeptly across in a hop, skip and jump so that they could put on broad grins and ask “Where’s the tricky bit then?”) Aside from the awkward manoeuvres, adding value to the experience was the state of the rigging. The crux of the traverse featured two ropes. Upon reaching the corner, one could appreciate why. Whilst one rope seemed reasonably intact, if a little muddy, the second rope would have made a good exhibit in any gear shop to demonstrate the inner workings of kernmantle rope. The sheath was almost completely stripped and was only in evidence as a small raggy agglomeration at either end of a length of some three metres. Not only was the core exposed, the three main strands within had become disentangled and were each starting to fray. This was not an encouraging sight. Eloise was adamantly telling everyone to clip into both ropes. Chris wasn’t sure about this. Did he really want to be putting any stress on the completely cactus rope, enhancing the risk of it breaking and putting a shockloading on the other rope, which was probably only slightly less dodgy in ways we couldn’t see? However, when in Chartreuse, he figured, eat the ice cream. So both ropes it was.

The passage ascends steeply once more until the top of a 35 m pitch is reached. As we watched Gerard checking the rigging from a beautiful Y belay in the centre of the rift, Alan informed us all that we were now at about – 109 m from the entrance. We were beginning to get somewhat skeptical about these readings.

THINGS AL'S BOOK DIDN'T TELL YOU ABOUT...



7. THE CLOVE HITCH IS A CONVENIENT KNOT FOR THE MIDDLE OF A TRAVERSE LINE, THAT REDUCES POSSIBLE SHOCK LOADS BY SLIPPING.

After descending through a tight rift, one suddenly emerges on a balcony overlooking an enormous gallery, floored with huge boulders, about 30 m wide, and running off in either direction out of sight. This is the Grotte Chevalier, the last stage in our through trip. Once we reached the passage floor, Don asked Alan whether we were about 106 m

below the entrance, but was surprised to hear that in fact we were now at about – 160 m. A quick jog downwards takes one to almost -200 m, and the lowest point in the through trip.

I must now use a little delicacy to describe a moment that, had the editor of some dubious caving gossip mag been there, might have prompted a headline such as “LOVE QUADRANGLE SHOCK! SNOGGING AT -160 m ROCKS SUSS!”. [*But the editor of the SUSS Bull would never do that. ed*] Chris and Don were engaged in a fruitfully meaningless discussion about an undeniably trivial topic when Don suddenly noticed a red-suited figure sneaking up behind Chris. Arms extended from the darkness and wrapped themselves tenderly around his waist. Chris could feel himself being pulled into an ample, heaving bosom. Of course, he said later, he would have struggled, but the power of those arms ensnared his and there was nothing he could do (yeah, right). As Chris succumbed to the mysterious succubus, sinking to his knees, Don was amazed to see that the mysterious assailant was none other than – Megan! What had overtaken the mild-mannered Mrs Pryke? Was it the shock of eating service station lunch rather than baguette with paté? Was it that spending too long at around -106 m does something to the amorous centres of the brain? Was it fatigue from carrying the laptop? Had the hotel staff accidentally swapped Chris’ sanitary towelette with a pheromone wipe?

With her action, Megan set hearts aflutter. The first to get incensed was Don, who was somewhat miffed that after he’d been calling Megan “Darling” all day, she’d gone and lavished her affections on another man. “Explain yourself, woman!” he bellowed.

“Er, yes!” added Alan.

Megan came to with a start and, upon realising what she was doing, recoiled from Chris with a carefully disguised look of horror. The best she could come up with was “Well, I was looking for Alan, and saw this bloke in a red suit looking slightly pudgy.” With this comment Alan and Chris both uttered cries of indignation as they joined the ranks of slighted suitors, and pondered the vagaries of the female sex on the long slog up the rockpile that followed.

This march was not, of course, without some comic relief. Eloise asked us if we would like to see the Galerie Invisible (the Invisible Passage). Chris made some lame joke about doubting whether we could ever see an invisible passage. However, Eloise led us confidently up the rockpile, only to hit a blank wall, and look around in bewilderment: “I can’t see it!”. Chris wondered what the French was for “Told you so.”

And then, the exit. Climbing up the steep rockpile a small chink of light can be seen filtering in from above. The rocks are close to the roof at this point, but one can scramble through the scree to a magnificent sight. The rainclouds of the morning had disappeared and the oval entrance of the cave, which emerged from the mountain on the side of a cliff, framed a picture-perfect view of the Chartreuse valley, with Crolles in the foreground and the craggy snowcapped and cloud-ringed peaks of the Alps in the background stretching for miles. Gerard told us that if there was a little less cloud we would be able to see Mont Blanc from here. Not for the first time, Alan swore many times about not having his camera with him.

What surprised us more than anything was that it was still broad daylight. Although we had been told this could well be a 10hr trip, we’d made it through the complex maze in about six hours, which is apparently about as long as it usually takes groups of six people. Not too bad for a pack of Aussies using weird descenders.

Of the drive back, the less said the better. With our four French companions not returning to the hotel, we were left to fend for ourselves. We had travelled only a couple of kms when Andrew, Mark and Chris stopped to search for their hubcap and promptly lost the others. Then, as they were motoring along the freeway, they whizzed past Don, Alan and Megan, who were very kindly waiting at the side but completely oblivious to their passing. As a consequence, both cars got pretty damn lost in central Grenoble but somehow tumbled out the other side and made it back to Villard de Lans just in time to stop a very hungry Kevin (who had spent a rather eventful day hiking in the pouring rain) from devouring the group’s dinner.

Tonight, the hotel was jumping. Cavers were pouring in from all over for the coming week’s big event. What would the next few days hold? Will our team get over their silly Australian vertical techniques and buy some proper French equipment? Will they make it into the fabled Gouffre Berger, and will they take their cave duck and/or the laptop? Who is the mad English nuclear scientist who wants to lure SUSS to a cave with the unremarkable name ‘Blowing Hole’? Will we find a cave with mammoths like in the ‘Caveman’ game? Will Alan actually be allowed to take his camera into a cave? Who will regret that decision? What do French firemen get up to on a ‘Boys Only’ caving trip? What will Kevin do when the Australian wine runs out? And what is the minimum safe distance from an entrance pitch to park your car? All those questions, and more, will be answered.....

Handy French phrasebook

For the assistance of future French travellers, we include this collection of phrases:

French	English
Boulangerie	Breakfast bar
Fetchez la vache!	Pass the milk, please
Tomme de Savoie	Smelly cheese
Roquefort	Very smelly, very mouldy cheese
Rebarbe	Poison
Royale with cheese	Quarter pounder with cheese*
Andouillettes	A sort of pig haggis cunningly disguised as sausage
Salle du Treize	Toilet
Sacré merde!	Holy shit!
Connard	Um.....just don't take him on the trip, OK?
D'accord	OK
Espèce d'idiote!	I think you are going about that the wrong way
Plus de vin rouge, s'il vous plait	I'm thirsty
Trois bouteilles de vin rouge	I'm quite thirsty
Je ne peux pas trouver mon canard du grottes	I can't find my cave duck
Voulez-vous couchez avec moi ce soir?	Geez I'm bugged, is there space on your living room floor?
Voulez vous manger la tartiflette?	Your cholesterol count seems rather low, let me help you raise it
Corde libre	Free rope (so take as much as you want)
C'est une grotte tres facile	It's an easy cave (ie only 19 pitches or so)
C'est la royaume du spéléologue	It's the realm of the caver (ie the best 98% of the cave)
C'est une caverne très intimée	We had to blast out most of the passage so that people could fit through
Pour cette main courante, utilisez DEUX CORDES!	At least one of the ropes on this traverse is likely to break while you are on it
La grotte, ça n'est pas si mauvais qu'ils disent	The cave is every bit as bad as you've heard, and then some

* apparently it's because of the metric system

“LOVE QUADRANGLE SHOCK! SNOGGING AT -160 m ROCKS SUSS!”



Don, Megan, François, Mark, Chris, Kevin, Erik and Andrew at Sassenage

30 THINGS TO DO AT JENOLAN

or – HOW TO OCCUPY YOURSELF UNDERGROUND FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

BY MARK STARAJ

The 1954 List

Back in 1954 when organised caving clubs began to run the exploration show at Jenolan Caves there was instituted a Jenolan sub-committee to pursue, coordinate and report on various projects. It was formed, disbanded and reformed a total of three times over the next decade.

A list of 26 “Problems to be Solved at Jenolan” was published in 1954.

How have speleologists fared in the last 50 years in tackling this list?

Here is the list with my commentary:

1. Mud siphon in the Jubilee.

This is of course the ‘Watergate Sump’ in Water Cavern. Bailed and dug through in 1994, around 250 m of passage has been mapped and in 2004 this area was connected with Spider Cave, giving cavers a bypass of the sump altogether¹. On that basis this case is *closed*.

2. Passages at the end of Water Cavern.

In an effort to bypass the Watergate Sump these were intensively looked at by SSS in the 1950s. No noteworthy finds unless you count the rediscovery of Wilson’s 1895 passage down to the river by CDAA divers in 1979. This passage is at the start of Water Cavern. *Case closed*.

3. Problems associated with Diggin’s Diggin’s, Serpentine.

Unsure these days what this problem was. However in 1992 SUSS published a Serpentine Bluff edition of the Bulletin with complete maps of these caves and a connection². Info included exploration history, geology, hydrology and speleogenesis. Whatever the question, it was surely answered by the information therein. *Case closed*.

4. Shifting rock in Lucas.

Impending collapse of one of the huge blocks in Lucas Cave? A bypass needed to River Cave? It hasn’t happened yet. Monitoring equipment has been installed to detect any movement. The tunnel of Binoomea Cut provides the bypass. There is no more to be done: *case closed*.

5. Linking of the Northern Tourist Caves with Frenchmans.

With the linking of Spider Cave to the ‘Tourist Caves’ in 1988 the gap closed from hundreds of metres to just around twenty. So near but yet so far. Until a voice connection can be made with the rockpile in Frenchmans it will probably remain unattainable. *Case open*.

6. Investigation of holes around McKeown’s Creek.

In the 1950s this was very much an agenda item. Subsequent discoveries of Wiburds Lake Cave and Spider Cave being prime examples of what remained to be done. Fifty years later it is hard to envisage any section of the Creek with undiscovered leads. There are known caves that require determined pushing to make something of them. These would include J202 & J56 on Wiburds Bluff, Blowing Hole on Century Bluff and dolines such as Playing Fields, Adrians Folly and others located at South Mammoth and Century Bluffs. However, vanishingly small prospects exist for any new holes to be found at creek level. *Case closed*.

7. Mammoth Lake No.2

This is Ice Pick Lake. There was originally confusion in references between this lake and Central Lake which was subsequently cleared up. In terms of exploration the lake was crossed more than once to explore the other side without much luck (particularly for the individual whose clothes and car keys sank to the bottom and were never recovered) and more recently diving has led to around 200 m of submerged passage heading southwards with more awaiting follow up³. There is unfinished business. *Case open*.

¹Jubilation as a Last Resort – The Long-Expected Party”, SUSS Bull 44(3).

²“The Caves of Serpentine Bluff, Jenolan Caves NSW”, SUSS Bull 33(1).

³“Mammoth Cave Progress and What’s Next”, SUSS Bull 44(2).

8. Linking of underground rivers (in Mammoth).

This refers to Central River and Lower River. Dye tracing and water chemistry proved that a connection point exists downstream of Lower River. Further analysis of floods in the 1980s indicated that Ice Pick Lake is a part of the Central River network and based on it being at a similar depth to Lower River and some distance to the east then a connection point may lie hundreds of metres to the south of Lower River. The recent diving discussed in 7. follows the route of Central River downstream and is a possibility to intersect the flooded caverns in the vicinity of Slug Lake, around 150 m downstream of Lower River. *Case open.*

9. New route to River Cave series.

As per 4. the Binoomea Cut was tunnelled from the surface to Orient Cave and Temple of Baal thus providing access to the furthest end of River Cave. A new route – *case closed.*

10. Linking of Rho Hole, Aladdin and Glass.

In the 1950s an additional cave was found in the area. Ian Carpenter Cave was subsequently connected through to Rho Hole providing the beginnings of an integrated cave system. Not much progress has occurred otherwise. Interestingly the key to connecting all these caves may well prove to be a common cave between all rather than separate links between each. The discovery of stream passages trending east and upwards beyond the Watergate Sump gives rise to the possibility of the Jenolan System lying between all 3 caves. Rho Hole would be the most likely cave to be connected first, based on its intense cold draft from two entrances. *Case open.*

11. Dyeing of Blue Lake.

Dye tracing was first used in the early 1950s to show that Lower River in Mammoth Cave was connected with Imperial River in Imperial Cave and ultimately with Blue Lake. Further tracing connected caves as far up the valley as Wiburds Lake Cave with Lower River and finally tracing done in the late 1980s showed the drainage basin for Blue Lake extended kilometres north of the Main Sink where tributaries on the western side sank in karst to feed the Jenolan Underground River before reaching the Jenolan River in McKeowns Valley. *Case closed.*

12. Siphon in Right Imperial.

SUSS, and then SSS commenced diving the upstream sump in Imperial Cave from 1952. Ultimately in 1958, after 4 sumps and some magnificent open stream passage they were stopped by a massive rockpile later dubbed 'Rubble Trouble'. One of the more spectacular feats of exploration at Jenolan. *Case closed.*

13. Mystery of the 'Lily of the Valley'.

Not sure what the mystery was but early reports from the 1950s referred to searches at the north end of Imperial Cave for this 'Lily of the Valley'. Passages were well explored with some new bits found and it's presumed the Lily was located with or without the help of Trickett's map (which can be found gracing the cover of the 'Blue Book'⁴). *Case closed.*

14. Exploration of hole to left of Mammoth Passage 'D'.

What is passage 'D'? No one knows but since Mammoth has been mapped and is the most intensively explored cave at Jenolan it is reasonable to assume this hole has been looked at probably a dozen times at least. *Case closed.*

15. Digging in Temple of Baal.

One of the 7 Ancient Wonders of Jenolan. This dig was apparently begun in the 1920s (or earlier) and runs for around 100 m! In the end this amazing feat of persistence plunges into a sump pool that is rarely dry. In 1998 it was dry and SUSS managed to pass the sump and a tight rockpile to explore some 50 m of new passage ending at a further rockpile. It's thought that this underlies one of the stream sinks in the Southern Limestone. A survey is required but the sump stubbornly refuses to dry up. Unfinished business: *case open.*

16. Problems concerning entering the Red Cave.

It's assumed this refers to Red Cave, an offshoot of the Jubilee Cave. The problem is unknown although the area has been mapped. Was entry being considered for tourists? If so, the idea has been dropped. In fact Jubilee itself is rarely shown to tourists these days due to levels of staffing and/or fall off in tourism. *Case closed.*

⁴"The Caves of Jenolan 2: The Northern Limestone", ed Bruce Welch, 1976.

17. Possibility of rediscovering vast and innumerable caverns on the South side allegedly discovered by J.C. Wiburd.

Can it be more ill-defined and vague than this as an objective? What it really reflected was the collectively poor knowledge amongst cavers of the Southern Limestone. Other than Bottomless Pit no major caves were known. SUSS did a lot of work in the late 1970s/early 1980s to document the Southern Limestone⁵. This was followed up by BMSC in the late 1980s/early 1990s and a manuscript was prepared by Troy Magennis but has not been published to my knowledge.

The longest cave can still barely muster a couple of hundred metres. Numerous surface indications exist of major underground drainage but it seems cavers have only managed to scratch the surface of what may lie underneath. Unfinished business undoubtedly but it seems unlikely that any find of J.C. Wiburd has been overlooked. *Case closed.*

18. Pros and cons of driving a tunnel into south Tourist Caves, either into Skeleton Cave from Grand Arch or into Orient Cave.

Every now and again this still rates as a fireside topic. It's all rather moot as the tunnel – Binoomea Cut – was built in the 1950s to connect with Orient and Temple of Baal. *Case closed.*

19. Exploration of Jersey Cave & Gem Cave.

Uncertain of the exact need for exploration of these branches of the Northern Show Caves but since it has all been remapped as a part of the 1988 Jenolan System resurvey then presumably exploration is complete. *Case closed.*

20. Solving the mystery of the skeleton.

The skeleton of an Australian Aboriginal was for a long time a tourist attraction until growing sensitivity to Aboriginal concerns led to the renaming to Pool of Cerberus from Skeleton Cave. Washed in or fallen in? Explorer or careless unfortunate? Victim even? Unlike say, the caves of Kentucky USA, there is no evidence to support the view that aboriginals regularly entered the caves. In fact there is evidence that they instead viewed the caves with deep suspicion and avoided them.

As there is presently no known influx penetrable by humans it seems unlikely that he was washed in, even though the remains and that of a possum lie mired in the sediment of a passage at stream level. The other theory is of an inquisitive individual falling in from say the Sole of the Boot entrance into Cathedral Cavern and thence further falls to finally come to rest in Pool of Cerberus. There seems to me to be plenty of places such a person could have ended up instead of the sequence of events that would place them in the Pool. The more natural explanation would be to be washed in during a flash flood. Although I explained above how such an event does not seem possible today this did supposedly occur some 4-5000 years ago. Not much time in respect of cave passage formation but plenty of time in terms of shifting sediment and blockages, rockfalls and major changes in rainfall patterns (eg. Ice Ages). There may once have been a swallet in the Grand Arch (almost above the Pool) since blocked by roof collapse and flood debris. Will we ever know for sure? Unlikely. *Case closed.*

21. Exploration of Blackberry Hall in Rho Hole with scaling pole.

Blackberry Hall is an early alternative name for the Mulberry Tunnel. Additions near there at a higher level were found in the 1950s but were later not relocated during the 1970s mapping. Surveying over the last two years has brought to light these and other recent or rediscovered finds. No need for the scaling poles. *Case closed.*

22. Ways and means of cleaning dirt from formations, eg. Minaret.

SUSS was involved in pioneering a new technique in steam cleaning formations to remove the build up of lint etc. It was quite successful although no longer in use today. *Case closed.*

23. Determining rate of flow of water in Mammoth Cave and finding exact time for dye to flow from Mammoth Cave to Blue Lake.

Both of these goals are complete and the results were published in the Hydrology paper contained in the Jenolan 'Blue Book'⁴. *Case closed.*

24. Investigation of hole in cliff face near False Frenchmans Cave.

This is believed to be The Roost which was entered by abseiling. No potential in that short cave. There are however other difficult-to-reach holes to be seen in the cliff face and I can only guess whether any of these have been looked at. Unfinished business: *case open.*

⁵"The Southern Limestone: A Bottomless Paradox", SUSS Bull 31(2).

25. Thorough exploration of central level in Mammoth Cave.

Imaginative names applied and stuck to Mammoth Cave from early on. Lower level contained Lower River and all of Southern Section. Central level contained Central River and Central Lake and everything off it such as North West Passage. Presumably Upper Level would have been the Railway Tunnel. The cave was last mapped and published in 1978⁶. By this time discoveries off the central level totalled in the kilometres with the discoveries of North Tunnel, Can't Get Lost, Railway Tunnel Extension and subsequent finds. The full route of Central River still remains to be mapped, especially north and south of Twiddly Om Pom. Many more discoveries may still await. *Case open*.

26. Discovering vast and innumerable unknown caverns.

Ah! It is possible to be more vague than 17! Although this would not score a pass mark in Objective Goal Setting Course 1.1, the Jenolan 'Blue Book' appeared in 1976 and catalogued some 250 karst features⁴. Around another 100 have been added since. Since the 1950s a number of major caves have been rediscovered – Hennings, Dwyers, Wiburds Lake Cave and one truly new find in Spider Cave. *Case closed*.

My goodness! That's a total score of 75%! Passed with Distinction. Congratulations!

Actually the pass mark is more like 150% for results, 2000% for effort. A number of goals achieved in the past 50 years had not even been thought of in 1954!

Supplementary list of achievements:

1. Discovery of Hairy Diprotodon.

Spider Cave found 1975 and the Hairy Diprotodon section of the Jenolan Underground River in 1979⁷.

2. Southern Limestone Master Cave a.k.a. Hirsute Hippotamus.

Barralong Cave found off the Show Caves in 1964. Sumps dived upstream as far as Sump 4 in late 1980s. Diving continues today^{8,9,10}.

3. New survey of the tourist caves.

Begun in 1988, the previous estimate of around 10 km has blown out to almost 23 km today.

4. Mammoth Cave survey.

Finally compiled in 1971 (and updated in 1978) after more than 10 years – resulted in 3.5 km of published survey⁶. Being resurveyed today with the expectation that 10 km will be surpassed.

5. Wilson's lost 1895 passage to the river from near Water Cavern.

Eventually brought to light after work in 1979 by divers from the CDAA.

6. Extending the underground drainage basin around 4 km further north of the main sink.

Earlier excursions in the 1960s/70s brought to light karst features further north than the Main Sink. Dye tracing in the late 1980s confirmed the once-unlikely drainage to Blue Lake from tributary sinks up to 4 km further north.

7. Serpentine Bluff documentation.

1991 saw the completion of a 3 year project to remap and document the caves of Serpentine Bluff². The Serpentine System now comprises former Little Canyon, Diggins Diggins and Serpentine Caves – resulting in around 850 m of integrated passage. Included in the publication was hydrology, geology and exploration history.

8. Diving Southern Show Caves.

Work in the late 1990s and early 2000s achieved a continuous dive from River Lethe in River Cave and out via River Styx into Blue Lake. In the process a comprehensive map of the new passages and additional 350 m of passage clarifies the complicated relationship of pools and streams in the Southern Show Caves¹¹.

⁶"The Exploration and Speleogeography of Mammoth Cave Jenolan", John Dunkley, Second Edition 1978.

⁷Special edition – Spider Cave, SUSS Bull 38(4)

⁸"Barralonga", SUSS Bull 43(1).

⁹"Come for the caves. Stay for the BBQ!!" SUSS Bull 43(3).

¹⁰"How Far is South?" SUSS Bull 43(3).

¹¹"Slippery When Wet – River Lethe, Jenolan Caves", SUSS Bull 43(1).

9. World of Mud, Mammoth Cave

In 1988 exploration with a scaling pole near the lowest point above the water in Mammoth Cave burst 100 m vertically upwards to find the highest point in the cave. Added to the deep dives in Slug Lake it made Mammoth Cave the deepest cave on mainland Australia.

The 2004 List

Now I believe it's time to formulate a new set of goals for the next 50 years. I have thought of a list of thirty but invite readers to suggest their own. So here are the candidates that I could think of...

1. Woolly Rhinoceros

This in theory represents the single biggest piece of missing cave at Jenolan. It is the path of the Jenolan Underground River upstream of Mammoth Cave and downstream of the main sink nearly two kilometres to the north.

2. Mammothodon

This is the name given to the connection between Mammoth Cave and the Jenolan System. It is the biggest connection currently on the cards and would take the System from nearly 23 km to nearly 35 km in length.

3. Southern Limestone Master Cave

Hang on! Wasn't this in the Supplementary list? Well, expectation has it that an extensive portion of the system underlies the Southern Limestone Valley. The discoveries so far have pushed a portion of this way along the river but passage is mostly submerged with no prospects yet for additional passage above water level such as was found in Barralong.

4. World Underground Sump Depth Record – Slug Lake

The deepest fathomed underground sump is presently around 200 m. If you count risings where access is directly from the surface then it is around 350 m. Almost all of these are Vaclusian, meaning they are fed under pressure by water sinking hundreds if not thousands of metres above in large mountain ranges. You won't find any of these factors at work at Jenolan but by some lucky chance Jenolan already has the deepest underground sump in Australia in Mammoth Cave. Divers have descended almost 100 m and the bottom continues to slope away out of sight! The limestone belt here is tipped vertically on its side so the ultimate depth is still anyone's guess.

5. Publication of the Jenolan System Survey

It appears that the thousands of man hours invested in the survey is nought compared to the effort required to draft the map of over 20 km of cave! Perhaps some sort of authority similar to the CRF in Kentucky, USA is required.

6. Discovery of Wiburds Lake Cave

But there already is a Wiburds Lake Cave at Jenolan! It is possible that the naming of J58 as WLC was premature. Observations and investigations over the last 30 years have not been conclusive either way. One counter-theory suggests WLC in fact lies under South Mammoth Bluff. The discovery of a large and very deep water-filled cavern beyond Slug Lake and underlying the northern portion of South Mammoth Bluff suggests there may be some truth to this. Seismic surveys of Playing Fields also detected what may be a large cavernous area beneath this Bluff.

7. South Mammoth Bluff System

This is the largest Bluff in the Northern Limestone Valley without an explored system within it. Diving in both Spider Cave and Mammoth Cave has encroached the boundary of the Bluff and a way in seems just out of reach. No evidence yet of a way in from the surface however.

8. Century Bluff System

This is the other largely untapped Bluff in the Northern Limestone Valley. The longest cave is Century Cave – and that is too high and has the wrong genesis to lead into a major system. Blowing Hole however is near a large doline and gives every sign of being the way in. However apathy, tight squeezes, scary rockpile and scarier spiders [*A funnelweb in the middle of a squeeze. ed*] have kept explorers at bay to date.

9. Dwyers Dig

One of the 7 Modern Wonders of Jenolan. One of the most difficult caves to explore is the 87 m deep Dwyers Cave. One of the most infamous digs can be found at its base – reputedly 23 m of mostly dug-out, body-sized

tube with no place to turn around. Its location upstream of Lower River in Mammoth puts it slap in the middle of Woolly Rhinoceros territory and about deep enough to find it. But not yet. Dwyers mud is of the carnivorous variety and its contents (if they ever could be recovered) would be a Cave Museum Curator's dream come true. The time-capsule of Jenolan.

10. Henrys Dig

To be found in Wiburds Lake Cave, this too-small and tight passage swallows vast amounts of water sinking in the south end of the cave. It must of course be a gateway to the Woolly Rhinoceros. But not yet.

11. SSS Extension downstream

This dig is the northern counterpart to Henrys Dig in Wiburds Lake Cave and possibly takes even more water¹². Again, no banana.

12. The Infinite Crawl

Can there be a more inspiring name for would-be explorers? Of course it's kybosh. It's not infinite but should instead terminate at Serpentine Cave and providing a one kilometre extension to the ten or so being mapped in Mammoth Cave. It's also a lie that it's a Crawl as anyone who has managed to return (a good portion of it feet-first) can attest. For most, the first 150 m of crawling is enough.

13. Mammoth Cave (re)Survey

Ah – lucky thirteen! What more appropriate number for the cave labelled J13? The first survey found 3.5 km of cave. The current survey³ already has around 5 km and is projected to finish with more than 10 km. It will need luck to avoid the fate of the 20 km Jenolan System survey.

14. A River in Glass Cave

Yet another legend/myth/good story arose with the publication of the Northern Limestone Book. A caver from the 1930s/40s wrote to say that the map of Glass Cave did not seem anywhere near as large as he remembered it. On a multi-hour trip accompanied by scouts Osborne says that they explored a lengthy extension to both espy a river and also a tourist track. Needless to say numerous visits to Glass Cave found nothing at all and despite the additional details that supported Osborne's statement that he had visited Glass Cave some have concluded that the river had crept in from a half-remembered visit to Mammoth, or from static seepage pools at the lowest level. And then in 1979 divers indeed found a small stream underlying the area near Glass Cave - the Far Country stream. Was there truth in the story after all? Everyone remembered that Wilson's river was eventually found just where he said it was. Just maybe ...

15. Linking of Rho Hole, Aladdin and Glass.

Was number 10 on the original list. Prospects look to be recently revived.

16. Linking of underground rivers (in Mammoth).

Was number 8 on the original list. With some luck this may be bagged by the current diving in Ice Pick Lake (was number 7 on original list).

17. Linking of the Northern Tourist Caves with Frenchmans.

Was number 5 on the original list. May still be here in 2054.

18. Thorough exploration of central level in Mammoth Cave.

Was number 25 on the 1954 list. It seems to me that persistence will lead to new major breakthroughs to the north. Prolonged digging in Twiddly Om Pom is required. Who wants to undertake a new Modern Wonder at Jenolan?

19. Investigation of all holes in cliff face near False Frenchmans Cave.

Was number 24 on the 1954 list. Would take some coordination, skill and guts to swing safely into each of these. The upper levels in both False Frenchmans and Glass give reason to believe something more can be found.

20. Publication of the Wiburds Lake Cave Book

The second attempt to do this is well underway. Cross fingers!

¹²“Wretched – a new piece of streamway in Wiburds Lake Cave, Jenolan”, SUSS Bull 42(3)

21. Baal Dig survey

The dig was completed in 1998 (we think). But getting a survey of the new section may take just as long as it keeps being sumped. Cross toes and fingers!!

22. Naked Lady Chamber climb, Mammoth Cave.

All have wondered just how high the roof is of this deceptively tall cavern. It does look as though an upper level exists beyond a flowstone shelf. The nearby World of Mud discovery proves that extensive upper levels do exist in the area. Can a new highest point be found here in Mammoth Cave?

23. Connect River Lethe, Barralong to River Cave.

Diving had already penetrated some distance towards River Cave. A connection would provide one continuous dive from Barralong through to the Blue Lake resurgence. A great dive and one for the purists who hate gaps on maps.

24. Connect Warbo to Wiburds Lake Cave.

Long considered suicidal, exploration in Warbo has recently gained some ground. Very strong breezes indicate a connection with Wiburds Lake Cave below but there is some doubt. A connection would push WLC over 100 m deep and 5 km long.

25. Connect Bow Cave to Mammoth Cave.

Of all the local connections to Mammoth Cave, Bow Cave is by far the most likely. Looks imminent but it hasn't happened yet. No real significance attached but is one for the purists.

26. Kia Ora Bluff System

Over the last few years work in J94 and J75 have shown substantial potential lies under this bluff. J75 is longest but has not yet yielded the cave that provides the strong breezes in both entrances.

27. Temple of Baal Upper Level

A favourite topic of tourist, guide and caver alike is – what is exactly up there where the stalagmite called Baal looks down 60 – 80 m to the humbled people below? Everyone seems to have given up on the idea of a direct climb to the top. Perhaps a way can be found through to here at a higher level? From the upper reaches in Barralong perhaps? Or the unstable rockpile in Mafeking?

28. Western Passage, Wiburds Lake Cave

On a map of Wiburds Lake Cave this passage cannot fail to catch the eye. Like a massive arm it reaches forth from the main body of the cave to the west and south and leaves almost a kilometre of cave in its wake. When discovered it doubled the length of the known cave. A high level passage pushing deeper into the bluff, it begs the question of just where is it going to? As a possible bypass of the tight stream level digs, it cannot be ignored. Past the tall rockpile in Pitter Patter Passage or via the still unfinished digs in the Western Sand Traps?

29. Hennings Cave

Hennings Cave is the black sheep of stream caves in the Northern Limestone. All stream caves on the western side of the valley take a flow from a nearby sink in McKeowns Creek and conduct the water either westwards, southwards or both towards the Jenolan Underground River. Except Hennings. The stream in Henning comes from the back of the cave and flows eastwards towards the entrance. Where does it come from? Why is it back-to-front? Hennings Bluff would be a worthwhile project to revisit in the same way as Serpentine was in 1991. In fact expansion of Serpentine to include Hennings and Kia Ora Bluffs (opposite Hennings) would be beneficial to both – Hennings is upstream of Serpentine and the geology and hydrology may prove to interrelate.

30. Waterfall Passage, Mammoth Cave.

This passage rises steeply to the east about halfway along towards the most northern point in Mammoth. A strong breeze and persistent outflow has taunted cavers for many years but the last scaling pole venture here almost ended in disaster. The discovery of World of Mud to the south and Streamway to Heaven to the north seems to back the view that substantial cave awaits a bold and lucky climber.

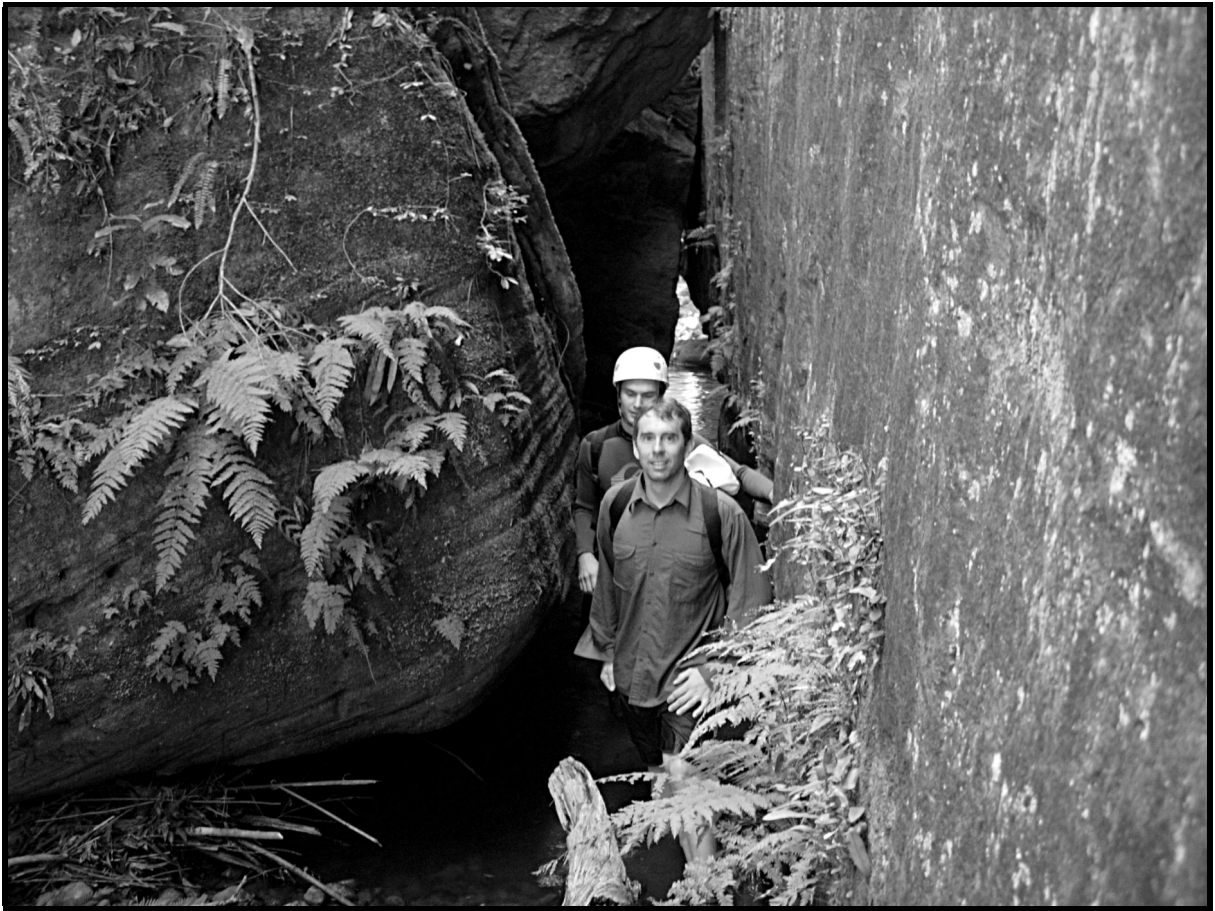
PHOTO GALLERY



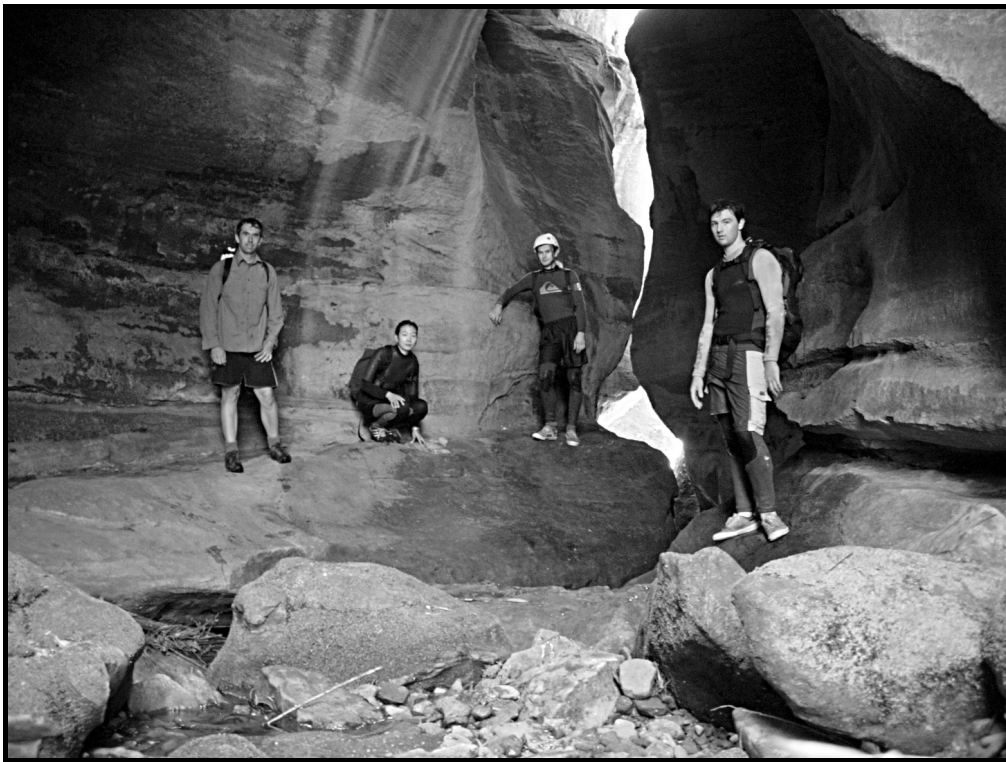
Kevin Moore and Don Matthews in Les Cuves du Sassenage

Photo Alan Pryke

PHOTO GALLERY



Richard Pfeil and Mark Lowson in Bell Ck Canyon



Richard Pfeil, Ling Lee, Mark Lowson and Neil Smith in Bell Ck Canyon

Photos Michael Fraser

TRIP LIST: APRIL 2005

SUSS General Meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month at 7:00pm (for a 7.30pm start) in the Common Room of the Holme Building at the University of Sydney. The Holme Building is close to the Parramatta Rd footbridge on the northern side of campus. The Common room is on the first floor (enter from Science Rd).

For updates to this list, check out the SUSS Website: <http://ee.usyd.edu.au/suss>. Detailed information on each caving area (plus other useful information such as what you will need to bring) can be found in the *Beginner's Handbook* section of the Website.

Please Note: it is YOUR responsibility to inform the trip supervisor of any relevant medical conditions which may in any way affect your fitness, such as asthma, diabetes and the like.

April

7 General Meeting. 7:00 pm Holme Common room. This meeting will feature a screening of Soft Rock Cafe, a DVD of the 1982 exploration trip to Nettlebed cave, New Zealand

9–10 Colong. Come and camp for the weekend in remnant rainforest, listen to the lyrebirds, ward off the scavenging goanna and/or help check out survey bits & pieces as we explore the cave. There is a bushwalk involved so that we can camp close to the cave on Saturday night. Contact Alan or Megan Pryke meganandalan@optusnet.com.au or 9524 0317 (home).

16–17 Mystery Canyon. Beginner trip to the popular Mystery Creek canyon. Contact Martin Pfeil martinpfeil@hotmail.com or phone (home) 9713 9460.

16–17 Advanced SRT Training, Bungonia. SRT training weekend for people with their own SRT gear and prospective trip supervisors. Contact Annalisa Contos annalisa.contos@commerce.nsw.gov.au or 9488 7742 (home).

23–25 Yarrangobilly. Anzac Day long weekend trip in the Snowys. Contact Brett Davis bdavis@ssc.nsw.gov.au or 9747 4818 (home).

30–1 Cliefden. Looking for a fun weekend in the country? Try Cliefden. Contact Martin Pfeil martinpfeil@hotmail.com or phone (home) 9713 9460, permit pending.

30–1 NSW Speleo Council Meeting. Venue is at Caves Beach, Swansea, south of Newcastle. On the Sunday after the meeting the tide will be right for exploring Caves Beach. More information and the agenda can be downloaded from the ASF website <http://www.caves.org.au/calendar.htm>

May

5 Annual General Meeting. 7:00 pm Holme Common room. Come and overthrow the current regime.

7–8 Wyanbene/Big Hole. Enjoy the stream cave and looking down The Big Hole! Contact Brett Davis bdavis@ssc.nsw.gov.au or 9747 4818 (home).

14–15 Jenolan. Palatial accommodation and classic caving. It is likely that this trip will feature a visit to one of the 12 unknown caves at Jenolan. Contact Phil Maynard Philip.Maynard@uts.edu.au or (home) 9908 2272.

21–22 Wellington. Head out west. Permit pending and trip supervisor to be announced.

28–29 Colong. Contact Alan or Megan Pryke meganandalan@optusnet.com.au 9524 0317 (home).

June

2 General Meeting. 7:00 pm Holme Common room.

4–5 Wee Jasper. Due to proximity to the long weekend, this trip should be relatively scout-free. Explore the unique features of Punchbowl, Dip and Dogleg. Contact Brett Davis bdavis@ssc.nsw.gov.au or 9747 4818 (home).

11–13 Colong. Long weekend trip. Contact Alan or Megan Pryke meganandalan@optusnet.com.au or 9524 0317 (home).

18–19 Jenolan. Extensive caves, luxurious accommodation, no mobile reception. what more could you want? Contact Phil Maynard Philip.Maynard@uts.edu.au or (home) 9908 2272.

25–26 A dry canyon in Newnes. The first canyon of winter. Contact Michael Fraser michaelfraser172@hotmail.com or 9988 3252.
