

Polish caving 1997-2000

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Abstract

Traditionally the most spectacular explorations were done in the Austrian Alps. In the Leoganger Steinberge PL-2 cave was joined to Lamprechtsofen and thus it became the world deepest cave. Other fruitful expeditions worked in the Höher Göll and the Tennengebirge. Polish teams carried out exploration also in Spain (the Picos de Europa), Italy (the Julian Alps), Slovenia and Turkey. Other numerous outside expeditions, not only to European caves, were mainly the training activity.

Some interesting explorations were done in Poland too. The deepest and longest Polish cave - Wielka Śnieżna reached 22 km in length, and now has five entrances.

Introduction

At present there are about 1000 cavers in clubs belonging to the national federation - the Polish Alpine Association. The Western Tatra Mountains - the limestone part of the Tatra range is practically the only region in Poland where large and deep caves are encountered. Because of that the everyday activity of Polish cavers, both exploration and training, is concentrated in this area. In recent years there were also many expeditions abroad, not only the usual exploration of various karst massifs of the world, but also numerous training trips. All the more significant successes, both at home and abroad, were the outcome of long, sometimes lasting for many years, conceptual and field work. All the activities were described in Polish caving quarterly journal *Jaskinie (The Caves)* which is systematically published.

Expeditions abroad

The Austrian Alps were traditionally the goal of numerous Polish expeditions. Some of them yielded spectacular exploration results. The activity in this region was possible thanks to the friendly attitude of the Austrian hosts who provided our cavers with invaluable assistance.

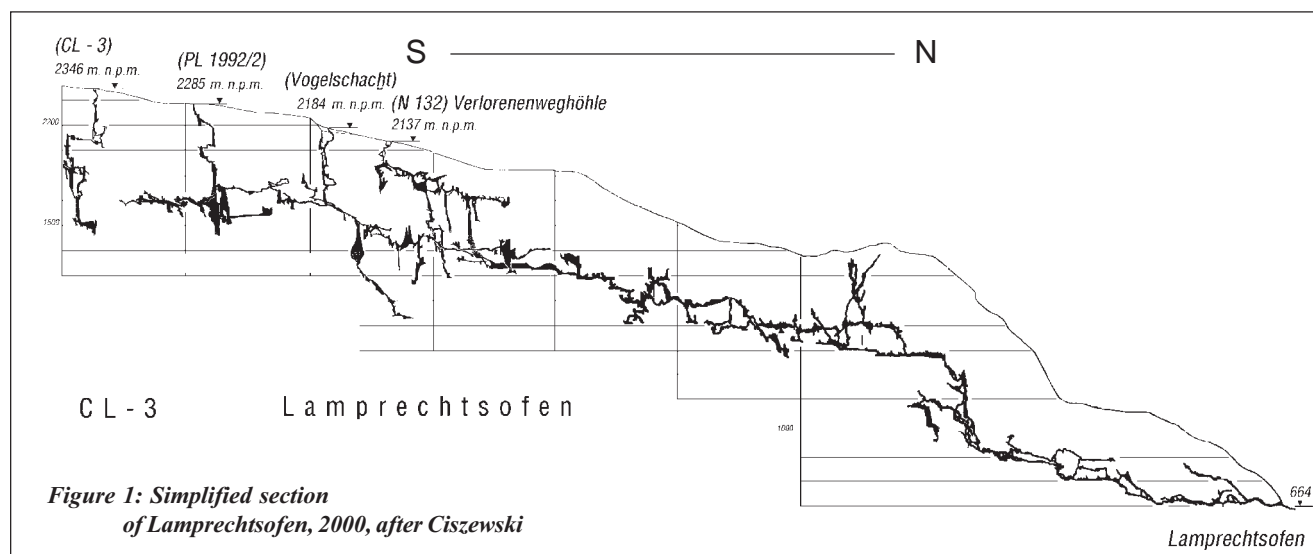
Four expeditions (in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000) to the Leoganger Steinberge were led, as almost always in the past, by Andrzej Ciszewski. Their goal was the linking of PL-2 (situated in the Nebelsbergkar) with Lamprechtsofen. In 1998 more than 1200 of a

new series of meanders and pitches were discovered. The series lead to PL-2 cave, to the series called Wielkie Galerie (Huge Galleries) situated at the depth of about -400 m. The first team which achieved PL-2 did not realize this. Later, on 19 August the next team recognized Wielkie Galerie. The new depth of Lamprechtsofen is 1632 m (figure 1). Thus, Lamprechtsofen became the deepest cave in the world. This achievement crowns the 24 years of Polish exploration in the Leoganger Steinberge massif. Further works, carried out by the same and next expeditions, were aimed to link other caves, situated higher than PL-2, to Lamprechtsofen. The main explored object has been CL-3 cave. The linking of this cave to Lamprechtsofen would result in a vertical extent of about 1690 m.

The prolonged and systematic exploration of Höher Göll by KKS (Speleoclub Katowice) and WKTJ (Speleoclub Poznań) expeditions (leaders Zbigniew Rysiecki and Piotr Tambor) concentrated in 1997-2000 around the eastern branch of the massif. The most interesting achievement was the discoveries in Kammerschartenhöhle, where more than 2 km of new passages were found. A possible link with the long known nearby Gruberhornhöhle would create a system deeper than 1000 m but dozen of meters still separate both caves. Several smaller caves were discovered too. Jaskinia Gadających Kamieni (more than 300 m deep) seems to be the most significant of them.

Expeditions organized by SG KW Wrocław and SKTJ (Speleoclub Sopot) led by Marek Wierzbowski explored the eastern part of the Höher Göll in 1997 and 2000. Their main target was Ogrschacht (discovered in 1995). Besides, the Schnee Höhle was deepened about 40 m.

The Tennengebirge massif was the target of the expeditions organized jointly by Speleoklub Żagań and Speleoklub Gorzów led by Rajmund Kondratowicz, Halina Zyzańska and Daniel Oleksy. The former teams visited the eastern part of the massif. In August 1997 Bleikogelhöhle (discovered in 1988) was deepened from -1011 m to -1021 m, and in 1999 the cave P-77 (-440 m) was discovered. Besides in P-19 and the cave Pod Śnieżnymi Korkami long horizontal galleries were explored. The team of AKG Kraków (leader Marcin Krajewski) explored the southern part of the Tennengebirge massif in 1997. They concentrated their activity in Schnee



Maria Höhle and Ariadna Höhle. The former cave was pushed down from -817 to -935. They also discovered some smaller caves. The Poles (team of STJ KW Kraków) explored also the Steinernes Meer massif in 1997.

A new area of speleological exploration was opened in 1998. The team from Kraków led by Andrzej Ciszewski went to Kitzsteinhorn massif (the HÖhe Tauern). The massif is built of metamorphic rocks - marbles and calcareous shcists. The main goal of the expedition was Feichtnerschalthöhle, which had been previously explored by an Austrian caver to -520 m. In 1998 the cave was deepened to -623 m, in 2000 to -698 m and in 2001 to -1025 m. The exploration was carried out only in winter due to high water level within the cave in summer.

In recent years the expeditions of Speleoclub Wrocław (leader Marek Jędrzejczak) continued exploration of El Cornion massif of the Picos de Europa Mts. in Spain. In 1998 a cave named Pozu del Porru de las Garapozales was discovered and pushed down to -432 m. The expeditions in 1999 also carried out a series of water dying tests.

The Poles also explored the Canin massif (Italy/Slovenia). Several expeditions, in summer and winter seasons, organized by Speleoclub Aven and led by Marek Kozioł explored the Compelssso del Foran del Muss. They concentrated in the new discoverd cave called Point 5 which was jointed to the Complesso in 1998 and in Abisso Carlo Seppenhofer. In 1999 and 2000 the expeditions organized by STJ KW Kraków led by Maciej Tomaszek went to the Slovenian part of the massif. They explored several small caves in the southern slopes of Kanin. In 2000 a team from Żagań and Gorzów carried out exploration in the Velebit massif (Croatia). The cave Lubuska Jama (-330 m) was the deepest one. Several expeditions visited various karst areas of Romania. They explored some small caves. The diving exploration were conducted too.

There was also some activity outside Europe. The cavers of Speleoklub Częstochowa visited the Bolkar Mountain in Turkey in summer 1997. They deepened caves Pl-5 to -160 m, and Pl3 to -235 m. Both caves were discovered by Poles in 1995. A Polish team explored several small caves in Java island in 1999.

The cavers from Speleoclub Żagań and Speleoclub Gorzów „collect” the deepest pitches of the world. They visited Sotano del Barro (Mexico) in 1997, Vrtglavica (Slovenia) in 1998, Brezno pod Velbom (Slovenia) in 1999 and 2000 as well as Patkov Gušt (Croatia) in 1999.

Many small groups went to large cave systems for training. In 1998 Gouffre Berger was visited in cooperation with some French cavers. Besides, numerous teams chose as their target some caves in Slovakia, the Czech Republik, Hungary, Romania, the Ukraine as well as Sardinia and the Canary Islands.

Exploration in Poland

The most spectacular exploration activities in Poland were concentrated in Wielka Śnieżna - the Polish deepest cave (vertical extent 814 m). The length of the system reached 22 km. It was the final results of long work carried out mainly by the cavers from Wrocław, led by Marek Wierzbowski and Rafał Mateja, from Sopot led by Darek Bartoszewski and from Warszawa led by Marcin Gala and Stefan Stefański. The most spectacular achievements in the cave

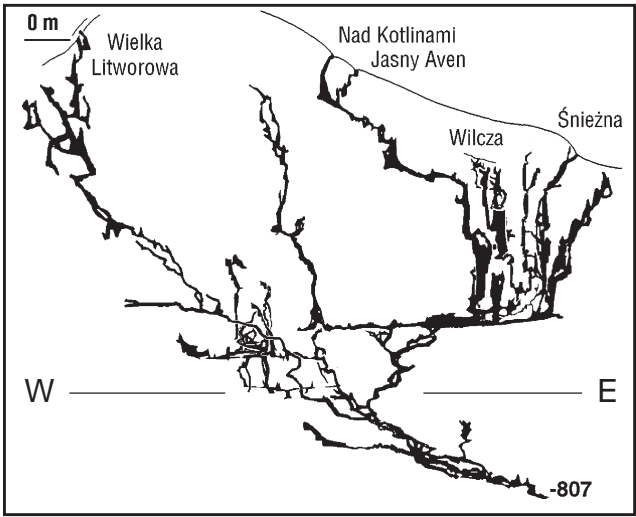


Figure 2 : Simplified section of Wielka Śnieżna cave, spring 2000, after epimenides cave page

was the discovery of the new, the fifth, entrance. It was found in 1999 by joining Wielka Śnieżna, with the small cave called Wilcza. Several hounded meters of vertical series (Partie Animatorów, Partie Amoku) was climbed up in the cave too. A small exploration was also conducted in other Tatra caves (e.g., Śnieżna Studnia).

The intensification of diving activity in the caves of the Tatra Mts. should also be mentioned. Wiktor Bolek dived the 70 m deep sump situated at the bottom of Ciasne Kominy series in Miętusia Cave. Thus, the vertical extent of the cave was 305 m. Another sump was dived through in the same cave by Krzysztof Starnawski who discovered a small series beyond. Other sumps in Bystra, Zimna, Wielka Śnieżna and Mokra Dziura (the Slovakian Tatras) were the aim of diving activity too.

Numerous discoveries were also made in other karst regions of Poland. Some caves of the length of more than 500 m were explored in Cracow-Wieluń Upland (Brzozowa Cave) and Świętokrzyskie Mts. (Pajęczka Cave).

Table 1 : The longest caves in Poland (all situated in the Western Tatra Mts.)

1. Wielka Śnieżna	22 000 m
2. Wysoka za Siedmiu-Progami	11 660 m
3. Miętusia	ca. 10 500 m
4. Bańdzich Kominiarski	9 550 m
5. Śnieżna Studnia	ca. 8 166 m

Table 2 : The deepest caves in Poland (all situated in the Western Tatra Mts.)

1. Wielka Śnieżna	814 m	(-807; + 7)
2. Śnieżna Studnia	763 m	(-726; + 37)
3. Bańdzicho Kominiarski	562 m	(-546; +16)
4. Wysoka za Siedmiu Progami	435 m	(-288;+147)
5. Kozia	389 m	(-376; + 13)