FUSSI Newsletter

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Committee

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Front Cover Photo: Bear skulls in Krizna Jama, Slovenia.
Top skull is of the modern brown bear, *Ursus artos* and the bottom skull is of *Ursus spelaeus.*
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CAVERS WANDERING AROUND EUROPE

Clare Buswell and Heiko Maurer

What follows is a brief summary of some of the ten or so caves we visited in Europe during the latter part of 2008.

Gouffre Berger. Pre Vercoors08 Conference trip.

"Ok we know where this cave is and it will take about 2 hours for us to walk into it", Heiko says, as we plan for our first overseas bit of caving in a while. The cave was Gouffre Berger, the first cave in Europe to reach minus 1000 meters. It takes an hour to get to minus 250m and the bottom section is wet and requires neoprene. The in-cave temp is around 4 degrees. So an early start would be very useful. OK, eight in the morning saw the two of us in the car driving out of Autrans, a little village in the Rhone Alps, France, famous for hosting the cross-country skiing section of the 1968 winter Olympics. About ten minutes down the road it was discovered that the map and route description of the cave was having a grand ol' time back at our Gite, sitting on the kitchen table and by now into its second cup of coffee. So turn around and start again!

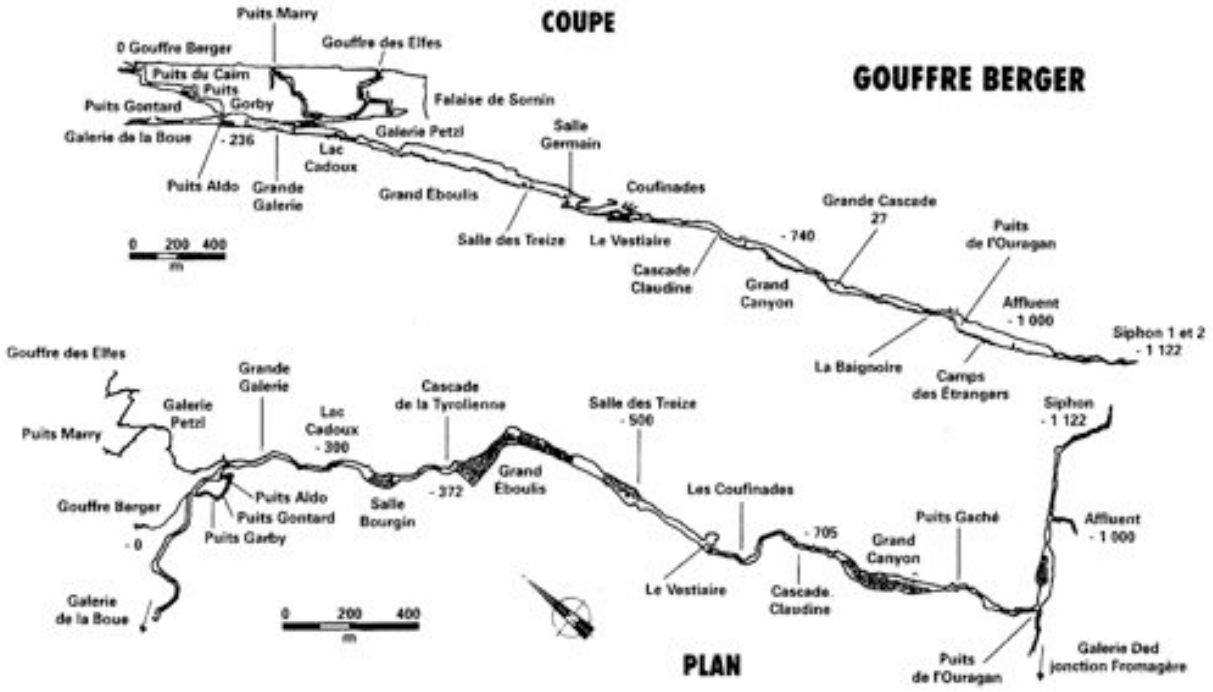
We started the walk in, with all the usual Tasmanian type caving gear (heavy packs, etc), and after about twenty minutes of uphill slog the words "have you got the topo map?" were mentioned. This was in the vain hope that the intersection we were standing at would be marked and we would go in the right direction. (If you change hemispheres, you can be assured that your direction finding duck will be wrong, wrong, wrong!) The answer to this inquiry was "No"! So I returned to the car and collected the map. By now we are an hour behind schedule. We worked out where we were and then trundled off in the right direction only to spend the next four hours tramping around some very fine bush (I don't think the French call it bush, but well ...). However, we missed a couple of important turn offs! We finally reached the cave entrance at 2 pm. By the time we had lunch, got into the caving gear and dealt with the questions asked by small groups of walkers who wanted to know about the cave, it was an hour later! Mind you, Heiko got to practice his three languages!

The cave has three entrances with the surrounding limestone being grike ridden. This certainly aids waterflow into the cave and the warnings about watching the weather are more than warranted. The prominent, Puits du Cairn entrance had been rigged by the Vercoors08 conference organisers. They had double sets of ropes to facilitate the number of people who would visit the cave over the two weeks of the conference. The first pitch had a nasty, attachment point and re-direction halfway down. Heiko did not like the look of the redirection and I was

Heiko, near the top of the entrance pitch of Gouffre Berger.

to discover why tallness is a problem, a bit later. The beginning of the first abseil, required a boulder scrabble and then a drop into space. The re-direction was obviously set up by a tall person and if it had been set just an extra couple of inches longer, I would not have had to convince my legs that they needed to grow a bit so I could reach a small ledge and not to end up crashing into a wall, if I lost hold of the re-direction tape whilst crossing it.

At the bottom of the pitch is a dormer window followed by a narrow (chest hugging) chimney passage, which leads to the next pitch of 28 metres. The pitch was rigged so that it required going half way down the chimney, then along it to reach a wooden platform and then clip on in space for the next abseil. For Heiko, the latter was not a problem. He looked at the dormer window and the narrow chimney and had very serious doubts about getting out of it once he was in it! (As I said, it was a chest hugging variety chimney).



Route Notes on Gouffre Berger

Time for exploration 20 – 30 hours. The system is very flood sensitive. The cave system is divided into 3 sections. 1) The pits area, 2) the second section – dry, and finally 3) the last part – very wet and requires wet suits.

The standard timeline on Gouffre Berger goes like this: entrance to -250, 1 hour: -250 to -500, 1hour 30: -500 to -860, 3 hours: -860 to -1122, 2 hours 30. Return: -1122 to -860, 3 hours 45, -860 to – 500 4 hours, -500 to -250 2 hours 35 and -250 to the exit 2 hours 40. Total time underground is 21 hours. Plus walking to and from the cave.

The notes handed out for the cave description state that 6 people have died recently in Gouffre Berger from flooding and statistically the cave averages one rescue per year. There is a plaque near the entrance honouring 2 of those who died in Gouffre Berger in 1975.

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Discussion ensued! It went like this: For Heiko to be concerned about getting out of a constriction is unusual, as he knows what his limits are. There are only two of us in the party, other people are in the cave, somewhere, certainly nowhere near us. The first hour of the cave is all vertical (that is an hour of descent). It is late and we have at least a 2 hour walk out to our car. On top of that we are not in Australia and if things go wrong you are up for major hassle. So, the result of the discussion? Be boring, play safe and exit. We did!

Major disappointment? Well of course it was a lost opportunity. We packed up and walked out having to be content with the fabulous walking and scenery that forms other reasons for coming to the Rhone Alps. We did a couple of other little caves in the area, Grotto de la Ture, which reminded me of Considines cave in the Lower South East of S. A. except the in-cave temperature was 10 degrees. A further interesting cliff-face was found on the walk to Gouffre Berger, which contained cave "paintings". Etchings really, drawn by animal herders who sheltered near the cliff-face. They scratched crosses, dots arranged in triangles, and circles on the cliff-face. No-one knows what any of it means. The Musée Dauphinois in Grenoble holds exhibitions on the early inhabitants of the area and their movements through parts of Europe. We are talking of a period of at least 18,000 years ago, which is when the cliff etchings were made. Interestingly, very early humans used to force animals over the steep cliff faces of the Rhone Alps. In the Grenoble region there is an area that contains the remains of thousands of animals that were herded over a prominent cliff face. It is assumed that these animals were used as a food source.

Clare near the exit of Gouffre Berger

Whilst on the topic of cave paintings, we visited the Grotto de Niaux. near Foix in the Ariege region of the Pyrenees. This cave is noted for its paintings of ibex, horse, bison and deer. The paintings in the Salon Noir, which visitors see, are 800 metres from the entrance, and found along a small section of one wall. There are two other sites of art deeper in the cave, about 1500m in, but problems with water and constrictions prevent access. It was an incredibly humbling experience to see these paintings. The artists made use of the veins of calcite in the wall to add definition and movement to their subjects. The artists also made engravings on the floor of the cave, making use of small holes caused by water droplets to mark eyes etc. There are fifteen red claviforms (a vertical stroke with a bulge at the end, sort of club-shaped), and

red bars at the entrance to the Salon Noir which seem to indicate either a guard on the chamber or as markers indicating direction. No-one knows. However, these claviforms are specific to the Magdalenian period and the Ariege region of France. The paintings have been dated to 13,000 years ago and seem to have been made over a few centuries. Also in this cave, on a sand dune, are footprints made by a child. These are also attributed to the same period.

There are heavy restrictions on visitation levels and airflow and temperatures are constantly monitored in an effort to both protect these paintings but also to allow people to see them. This is not the situation with those other famous cave paintings at Lascaux, which are now closed to the public due to damage done by high levels of visitation. (Lascaux cave paintings are now viewed as replicas in a specially designed visitation centre.) The cave paintings at Niaux can also be viewed as replicas in a Pre-history Park nearby, as the cave is closed in winter.

At right:
Grotte de Niaux.
Tete de bison, detail.
Salon Noir.

Periode Magdalenienne. Named after a rock shelter in the Dordogne Region of France. This period was the last culture to exist in the upper Paleolithic era in Europe. The period extends from 18,500 to 10,500 years ago. It is characterised by the specialisation in objects made of bone and *cervidae* (deer) antlers, the diversification of weapons and tools and the proliferation of art inside of caves and on objects.

Photo is from a post card.

The next cave we visited was Krizna Jama, in Slovenia. A wonderful stream passage cave, with 47 lakes and emerald green water. There are two hundred people per year allowed into the section of the cave we visited. We navigated the stream via a rubber dingy crossing fifteen lakes, and seeing about a third of the cave system. Its total length is 8km. The cave is split into two passages, the Blata Rov (mud passage), going north and the Pisani Rov (coloured passage), going northeast. The trip, through classic stream passages, took 4 hours and was an utter delight. We paddled past rim pools, halls of speleothems, navigated around protruding stalagmites and bosses. Where the water level was low we exited our boat, put it on our shoulders and trod very carefully on the edges of gour pools. (As in Croesus cave where there is nowhere else to go). When we reached the area known as Calvary, our turn-around point, the cameras got a thorough workout. We spent a good three quarters of an hour clicking away, our guide taking photos for a geological publication and cursing the lack of definition that digital cameras sometimes give.

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Heiko contemplates which boat to take: the matching trog suit red one or the rubber boot matching white one!

Our guide was passionate about cave conservation and education. He is having major problems with water pollution in this cave and has spent lots of time trying to get the Slovenian Government to do something about it, with no result. He has finally resorted to contacting the parliament of the European Union in Brussels to get some sort of action.

In the river itself you can see lots of what looks like soap foam. He has, with the help of a PhD student, set up a number of monitoring stations to analyse water chemistry and crystal growth. His concern is that the pollution is eroding the delicate speleothems and killing troglobitic fauna.

This is compounded by the fact that they are not sure where all the water in this cave is sourced from. Slovenian karst is complicated, and the lack of hydrological research doesn't help matters. Two kilometres from this cave is the large Cerknisko Jezero (Cerknica lake). Slovenia's second largest lake. It covers approximately 26 square km, being 10km long and 5km wide. The lake fills in winter and disappears in summer. (How weird is that? I mean this is no small, insignificant pond.) Then the surface becomes hay fields and the locals graze cattle on it. When it is full, it is home to a wide variety of fish and 250 species of migrating birds.

One of the major features of Krinza Jama is the fact, that it was visited by bears during the Palaeolithic period. You can see rubbing marks made by these bears on the cave walls. Excavations revealed the remains of at least a hundred different bears. Also on display are the sculls of two bears. One *Ursus artos* comes from recent times and the other, *Ursus spelaeus*, is of the mega-fauna variety. (See front cover.) The cave is home to seven different species of bats which hibernate over winter in the cave. The most common bat is the lesser horseshoe bat, *Rhinolophus hipposideros*. Krizna Jama and the nearby Nova Krizna Jama are home to the largest colonies of these bats in Slovenia.

Although the cave was first documented in 1832, it was not until 1926, that it was first systematically explored by cavers. The exploration continues with divers in 2003 reaching a depth of 70 meters in an outlet siphon. Krizna Jama has a magic all of its own, maybe it was the water or was it that the guide was in a position to be passionate about caves and karst and it was a pleasure to encounter it. Our next cave trip, in Austria to the Eisriesenwelt Cave, was quite the opposite.

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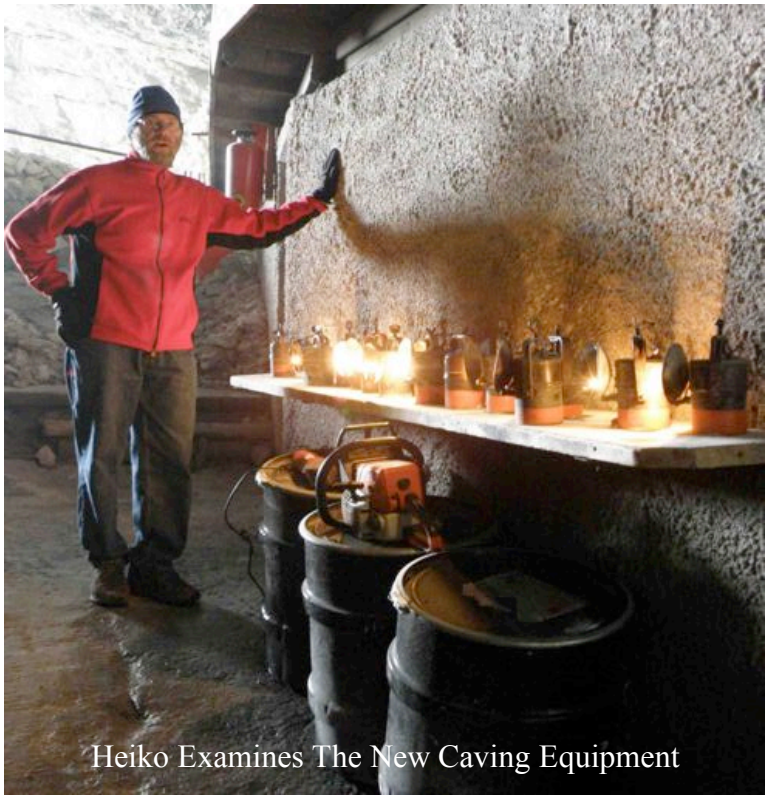
The Eisriesenwelt visit is a tour experience that combines hand-held carbide lights, magnesium flares, darkness and COLD. Oh, yes! there was one other thing: STAIRS, 1400 of them. Each year between 160000 and 190000 people visit this cave.

Tours run every six minutes in the high season. The trip essentially consisted of being marched 'up the hill and back down'. Our group consisted of about 50 people, with two languages being spoken, German and English.


Heiko Examines The New Caving Equipment

The lighting distribution was around one carbide lamp to six people. Heiko managed to snaffle an extra one from a group going out, so we managed a bit more illumination. Even so, lots of the time, on climbing stairs and on the very rare flat bits, those without lights or not near one were walking in the dark. I can see the lawsuit coming. Anyway, the cave itself is closed due to ice and snow during late autumn and the winter months, October till March. Then guides spend 2 months digging out the stairs with chain saws so as to make the place more agreeable to being a tourist cave. The use of magnesium flares was a bit of a party trick but also allowed us to actually SEE something apart from our feet and stairs. The tour itself lasts for an hour and covers the first 600m of a known 40km of cave passages. You start at 1641m and climb to 1775m, hence all the stairs. It is, of course, truly beautiful, being surrounded by glacial walls, ice stals, magnesium flares and stories of early exploration.

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One of the more interesting diversions from visiting caves was a visit to the French Museum of Speleology near Carcarsonne in Southern France. The Museum had a small exhibition at the Vercoors08 conference so we decided to follow it up en route to Spain a couple of months later. Although the museum is small we spent an hour or so wandering around its two rooms. The displays are explained in both French and English. It was something else to see equipment used by caving legend Norbert Casteret. On display was all sorts of speleo equipment: hemp ropes, the first nylon ropes, early descending and ascending gear, karabiners of all sorts of shapes, thickness and thinness, kero lamps, candle lamps, carbide lamps and the first electric lamps. The museum also had an extensive display of troglobitic fauna, different types of speleothems (cut to show crystal development), and the use of speleothems in understanding climate change. The Museum is, of course, next door to a major cave, the Grotto de la Deveze. So you visit one and then the other!

Norbert Casteret in a classic pose. Writer of many books on speleology who, often accompanied by his wife Elizabeth, was a fearless cave explorer. If you have not read his, *10 Years Under the Earth*, then get hold of a copy and do so! Photo held in the Musee de Speleology. France.

In 1892. E. A. Martel founder of French caving, drops his carbide lamp in the chasm of Vigne Close. R. de Joly recovers it in 1926. Now in the Musee de Speleology. France.

So that is a brief view of part of our caving sojourn. On our walks around the French Alps, the Pyrenees and Slovenia we encountered a vast array of karst landscapes and their uses. Everything from show caves to wild caves, via ferratas, (the “iron way” used in WWII to move armies around the mountains in Italy and Slovenia), the weird karst landscape of the El Torcal Nature Park near Antequera in Spain, karst platforms, grikes, blind valleys and disappearing rivers. During the time we were in Europe, the European Union of Speleology actively lobbied the European Parliament to pass a bill to protect Europe’s karst. They set up a stall outside the parliament building to talk to passers-by and politicians about the state of caves and karst. They also made macaroni in the shape of a stal and gave away 2000 packets of it, all clearly labelled “Cave Macaroni” with an explanation of why cave and karst matters so much that it must be protected. For further information check out the web site: http://protection.eurospeleo.org. Also see: http://eurospeleo.org

NOTES AND NEWS FROM THE ASF

The ASF is about to hold its biennial conference; this time it is in Victoria at the town of Sale near to the Buchan Karst area. ASF conferences are always good to go to, at the very least as you meet fellow cavers, but importantly because you get to see what ASF members do around the country. Below are some of the issues that will be looked at during the conference.

In terms of karst management lots of issues are on the boil. There is constant lobbing of both State and Federal Governments to place sections of karst in Western Australia, notably parts of Cape Range and Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia, and the Nullarbor onto the World Heritage list. There is a mining lease granted for parts of Cape Range, but the boundaries of the lease are still being determined. The ASF is advocating the creation of karst investigation officers or karst project managers to be established within sections of National Parks or other land management bodies, to help manage Australia's caves. In the meantime, speleological clubs continue to make submissions to management plans, give advice to government committees, and run education workshops in conjunction with science weeks or schools water awareness days.

Importantly the longest running conservation battle in Australia, the Mt Etna Caves battle, near Rockhampton, Qld. (Yes, far longer than the Save the Franklin River campaign in Tasi, or the Gippsland Forests campaign in Victoria) has finally ended with the owners, Cement Australia, handing control of the Eastern Quarry over to National Parks. As reported in the last issue of *Caves Australia*, the campaign consisted of lawsuits, sit-ins, media battles and the shear bloody destruction of caves and the bat roosting sites that some of the caves contained. It is now finally over but caves and important areas of karst around the country are still seen as places to be mined, or used as rubbish dumps, or as a water supply, or overrun by tourist in the need to make a buck.

Caver and National Parks relations continued to receive attention, in particular in the area of information and access to each other's databases. For caving clubs, that usually translates as the cave survey data that they acquire through hours of arduous cave surveying. Typically Nat Parks don't want to pay full-tote odds for this data and cavers in return want unfettered access to caves on Nat Parks land. Therein lies the problem. So everyone sits down and talks and talks and ... hmmm.

The national karst index database (KID), rolls along at its usual pace, complete with the urgent need to update its computer systems to be GIS user-friendly. In his report to the Council this year, the convenor of the commission states:

> When is was originally conceived the KID was decades before its time - no other environmental and/or cultural data was really collated into a database until the early to mid 1980's. However since then the KID has become a relic from a past age. All other comparable environmental and cultural databases used in NSW, (Aboriginal, threatened species, plant and fauna cultural sites) were converted in the 1990's to GIS based databases, the KID remains the only national environmental database that is not either GIS based or whose data is not able to be projected into the GIS software. ASF has made no investment into the KID structure (programming etc.) since it was web based in the mid to late 1990's.

He goes on to state that there is now so much data to update that it requires a full-time paid person to undertake it. Even then it will take one and a half years to update the NSW data

alone! No doubt similar situations exist for the rest of the country. From his report it seems glaringly obvious that funding for such a position must be sort as soon as possible.

The ASF Insurance Commission has now got a new convenor and he raises some concerns re the ASF's public liability coverage. This is of importance to FUSSI members as our club insurance is with Flinders University and not the ASF. For FUSSI a conflict exists between the understanding of what and whom is covered as third parties in the University's PL insurance and the ASF's PL insurance. It is further complicated by outside party's interpretations of these PLI policies. These two issues run to the detriment of FUSSI members and cave access. It is great to see that the Commission now has an active chair. We may finally see a resolution between Uni PLI policies and the ASF PLI policy.

In particular, in his report he notes:

Some concerns that I have noticed or been advised of, regarding caving generally includes: (Note that most do not relate to ASF clubs but other cave parties).

- Very large and inappropriate groups caving at places such as Britannia Creek in Vic and Wee Jasper in NSW
- Large dependant groups with only one leader
- People caving without helmets
- People and groups using bike and other helmets. Even in Vertical caves
- People caving with hand or slung torches (Including in Vertical caves) i.e., Scouts in Victoria do not use headlamps when vertical caving at Buchan
- Lack of safety and environmental information at some cave areas
- Poor laddering practices
- Laddering without belay or safety lines
- Ladders attached to a single anchor without back up (and also no belay lines)
- The use of Assumption of risk forms by clubs for members to protect against litigation (In particular re introductory short memberships)
- These forms are not applicable to members AND MAY ACTUALLY MAKE THE CLUB OR ASF LIABLE (provision of incorrect information or expectations) as the members are not able to sue anyway (The policy PROTECTS them from litigation by a third party)
- That some clubs are running caving for school and other youth groups under the guise of membership drives
- Might be doubtful if taken to court as no parents are involved and may also be outside of ASF membership rules and PL cover
- Issues with not using UAA standard helmets, may also contravene ASF insurance policy.

The commissioner is going to have a busy year, as all the above needs clarification.

The ASF's National Cave Rescue Commission has had a quite year, although the NSW Cave Rescue Squad was very involved in the recent rescue at Wombeyan caves, NSW. The commission is in the process of standardising rescue training resources and developing in-cave communication systems. It aims in the future to get these resources out to all clubs so that they can be on top of self-rescue methods.

Lots of other interesting events and work has been undertaken by ASF members over the year. You can read the 2008 ASF Annual report by accessing the ASF website at: caves.org.au. FUSSI members will be represented at the Council meeting this year by Joe Sydney as our rep is too broke to go (damm the drop in the OZ$ and overseas travel!)

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Zuiderduin Sylvia	Known to sometimes inhabit Flinders Uni.	

WHAT'S ON

Yarrangobilly Caves NSW. Dec 27 – Jan 4

Australian Speleological Federation Karstaway Conference. Sale Victoria. Jan 5-9

New Years Get Together Venue to be announced. Saturday Jan 17th

Library clean up and other fun and frivolity. (A visit to Gloop) TBA.

15th International Congress of Speleology. Kerryville.Texas. USA. July. 2009