

GOUFFRE BERGER

Le Edits

1st-10th July 2003

People present - A mix of clubs - Black Rose, Kendal, Pegasus, Craven

Well, here we are, the heavily edited version of a certain controversial Berger report!!!...*Ed*

There was a huge amount to organise and only 4 short months in which to do it.. Neither KCC or BRCC are large clubs and we only had 7 people who appeared to be interested. This is no good, we had agreed that between 15 and 20 were needed to have any chance of success. We crept up to 11 members, Paul, Richard, Ken, Julian, Henry, Mick Fox (KCC), Me (KCC & BRCC) Mike Bottomly (Craven) Jan (RRCPC & BRCC) Simon & Rupert (BRCC & Pegasus). We had quality but not quantity, then, great news from Simon, four members of Pegasus (Lee, Figg, Jo and Al) want to come, Lee and Figg have been before and bottomed it and Jo is a cave leader. we had enough people, 15 being the minimum number we had set ourselves.

It was extremely hot when we arrived in the Vercors and stayed hot until the Tuesday, the first official days of our permit, although we had sneaked in before that to rig as far as Aldo's.

TUESDAY 1st

Tuesday dawned with rain and grey skies and thunderstorms forecast (which duly appeared later on). We decided to spend the day transporting gear to the top of the cave so the day was not completely wasted.

WEDNESDAY 2nd

Richard, Julian and Henry started early, rigged down to Camp 1 and installed System Nicola which didn't work. We (myself and Paul, Ken, Mike and Mick) followed a few hours later. We rigged as far as Vestiaire (-650m) and moved tackle. I have never been so tired; it took an age to get out and the entrance pitches were sheer purgatory. I had read an account of someone being so tired on these pitches that he had fallen asleep whilst prussiking and couldn't understand how it would be possible - until this moment, I even had to sit down for rests on the walk back to the car. Arrived back in Autrans at 4.30am... Time taken to rig to Vestiaire and out - 15 hours.

THURSDAY 3RD

Richard reported that the Pegasus party had arrived and gone underground as had Simon, Jan and Rupert.

FRIDAY 4TH

After adding some more bits of wire on System Nicola, we finally had contact with camp1, faint but fairly clear, although the signal waxes and wanes a bit. Richard's party rigging that day with a possible bottoming attempt if the previous party (Simon, Jan and Rupert) had managed to rig to camp 2. Paul and I had to shelter in the tent late afternoon and we had a terrific downpour and some thunder, but it only lasted about half an hour; nothing that would be noticed underground considering the region is on drought alert.

SATURDAY 5th

Met Lee & co. and Richard's team at the bottom of Garby's, they had not bottomed it as not enough gear had been moved down the cave. This was a continuing problem because we were such a small team, but they had done a fantastic job to rig to just beyond Gaches at over 900 metres. This meant that we would have to take three tackle sacks full of gear with us down to Camp 2 and rig the final pitches if we wanted to bottom it. Lee asked us to not de-rig as Simon, Jan and Rupert were having one last bottoming attempt the next day.

We reached Camp1 in about 3hrs (from surface), carried down past Vestiaire and into new territory. We eventually reached the Grand Canyon, not making such good time by now. At camp 2 we stopped for a cup of soup and drink. We had a look at Gaches and decided to return as I was by then

very cold and tired. I offered to wait at Camp 2 as I felt so guilty at being so useless but they refused. So we retreated, reached camp 1 after a 14 hour trip.

Got up about 11am and left at 1pm after spending ages sorting out gear to be taken to the surface. Met Simon, Jan and Rupert on the way and wished them luck, it was the last chance of getting someone to the bottom and they had only had one days' rest but I thought they had a good chance as they are a very strong team.

We took 7 hours to exit the cave and both Paul and Richard were waiting for us.

Al approached me at dinner that night and thanked me for making it possible for him to reach the Hall of 13. He said that the Berger had always been a dream of his and thought it would never be realised when he had a heart bypass operation but he had now done it and he wanted to thank me for making it possible. I was very touched.

SUNDAY 6th

Mick and Julian were going out for the day to climb Le Grand Moucherelle and we invited ourselves along just for a day out as we did not want to spend yet another day mouldering in bed dead tired - we might just as well be dead tired in beautiful surroundings with magnificent views.

MONDAY 7th

Ed <BIG SNIP> It appears some time was spent this day having a heated discussion about who was derigging and has thus been removed..

TUESDAY 8th

Julian returned from dropping off Mike with the unwelcome news that there was no sign of Simon's party and no radio contact. This was the second night they had spent underground.

10.45 Julian phoned with the good news that they are all safe and well, 12.30pm and the would-be rescuers return with the great news that not only were Jan Rupert and Simon OK but that they had bottomed it too; Paul had asked Simon whilst on the phone and he had answered "absolutely". They had not had any particular problems apart from Rupert falling in the canal near the Pseudo Syphon and getting a thorough soaking.

10.15pm Tuesday and Jan, Simon and Rupert at last arrive back at the gite to many congratulations. Lee, Mike and Henry had done a good job and had taken all the gear from Camp 2 to Camp 1. (the bottoming party had de-rigged up to camp 2).

Our turn tomorrow.

Woken in the early hours of the morning by loud singing followed by a big crash 'bottoming party'.

WEDNESDAY 9th

Paul, myself, Mick Julian Richard and Ken went underground to move the tackle from Camp 1 to the bottom of the entrance pitches. There were about twelve bags at camp 1 and considerably more as we detackled, as there were some personal sacks and things like the boat (which was never used, as Lake Cadoux had not so much as a trickle of water in it). It took us 10 hours to move the gear and de-rig

THURSDAY 10th

The last day and everybody went underground for the final push. Rupert had devised a rough plan which worked well. Everybody did a fantastic job.. Due to excellent teamwork this only took 8 hours -much shorter than expected.

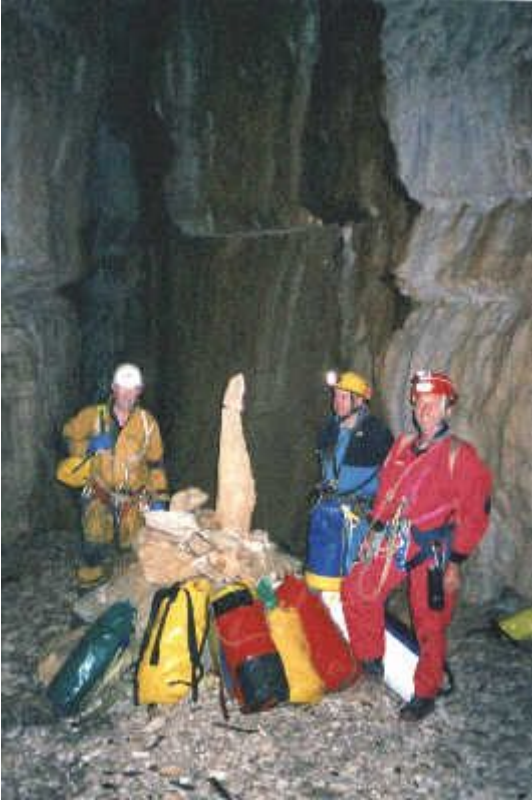
FRIDAY 11th

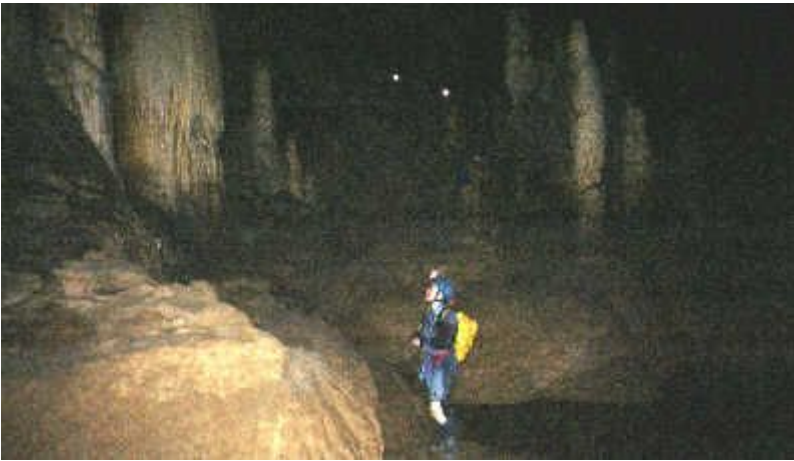
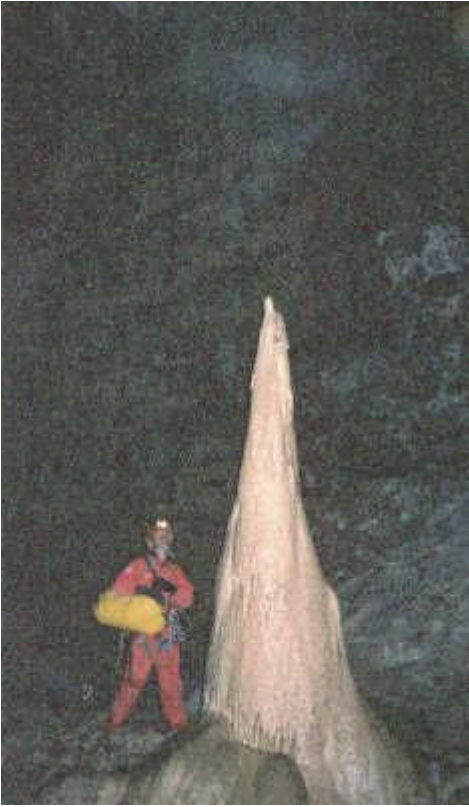
Everybody back to top of cave to ferry bags to van, very hot again. No sign of next group; perhaps we could have had an extra few days.....

A Few Last Thoughts

Despite a few minor problems, this was a successful expedition. We got three to the bottom, and some below 900m and some just short of 900m. There were no deaths or serious injuries, no one needed rescuing and we got nearly all of the gear out of the cave on time. We did have very good

weather; without that, we would have got nowhere, and everybody came back alive; that is all that matters in the end.





Rose East (pics courtesy of Rose also)

A [Black Rose Caving Club](#) trip report.