

MCG

en chartreuse



Mendip Caving Group

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Expedition members : Charlie Allison
 James Allen
 Joan Goddard
 Tim Francis
 Zoe Hammersley
 Lee Hawkswell
 Julie Hesketh
 Reggie Pain
 Martin Rowe
 Yvonne Rowe
 Marcus Ward

Edited by : Tim Francis

Cover Design : Tony Knibbs

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 Bristol
 BS18 6XW

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Introduction to The Chartreuse Massif

Timothy Francis

The Chartreuse Massif is located to the north of Grenoble and to the south of Chambéry. Geographically it is bordered by the Isère to the east and south, and by the floodplain of the Guiers to the west. Spelaeologically its main significance is that it contains two of the largest resurgences in France: Réseau de l'Alpe and the Guiers Morts. The area is best known for the dramatic cliffs of The Dent de Crolles which rise steeply to a height of 2060m above the Isère valley. This forms the southern half of a long mountain chain which runs down the eastern edge of the Chartreuse. Rainfall in the Chartreuse is relatively heavy throughout the year (2000mm pa) with peaks in April and October. The high plateau of the Chartreuse is essentially a limestone scrub whereas the lower slopes are covered by a thick coniferous forest. The two principal rivers of the Chartreuse are Le Guiers Mort and Le Guiers Vif, draining areas of 112 sq km and 101 sq km respectively. More than six hundred caves have been recorded in the Chartreuse, with two hundred sites longer than 100m. The deepest cave is Réseau Ded (780m) and the longest is the Réseau de la Dent de Crolles (54km). The resurgence with the greatest volume is the Réseau de l'Alpe.

The Dent de Crolles System

The system is extremely complex and can be accessed from seven entrances: Guiers Mort, Trou de Glaz, P40, Grotte Thérèse, Grotte Annette, Grotte Chevalier, and Grotte des Montagnards. The total length is currently around 55km. A wide variety of through trips are possible between the entrances, all of which can be reached from the road in less than two hours even with kit. Most of the important exploration was undertaken by a team of local cavers, primarily Pierre Chevalier and Ferdinand Petzl between 1936 and 1947.

Further Sources of Information

Chevalier, P (1975) Subterranean Climbers, Zephr Press, Reprint Edition, PB.

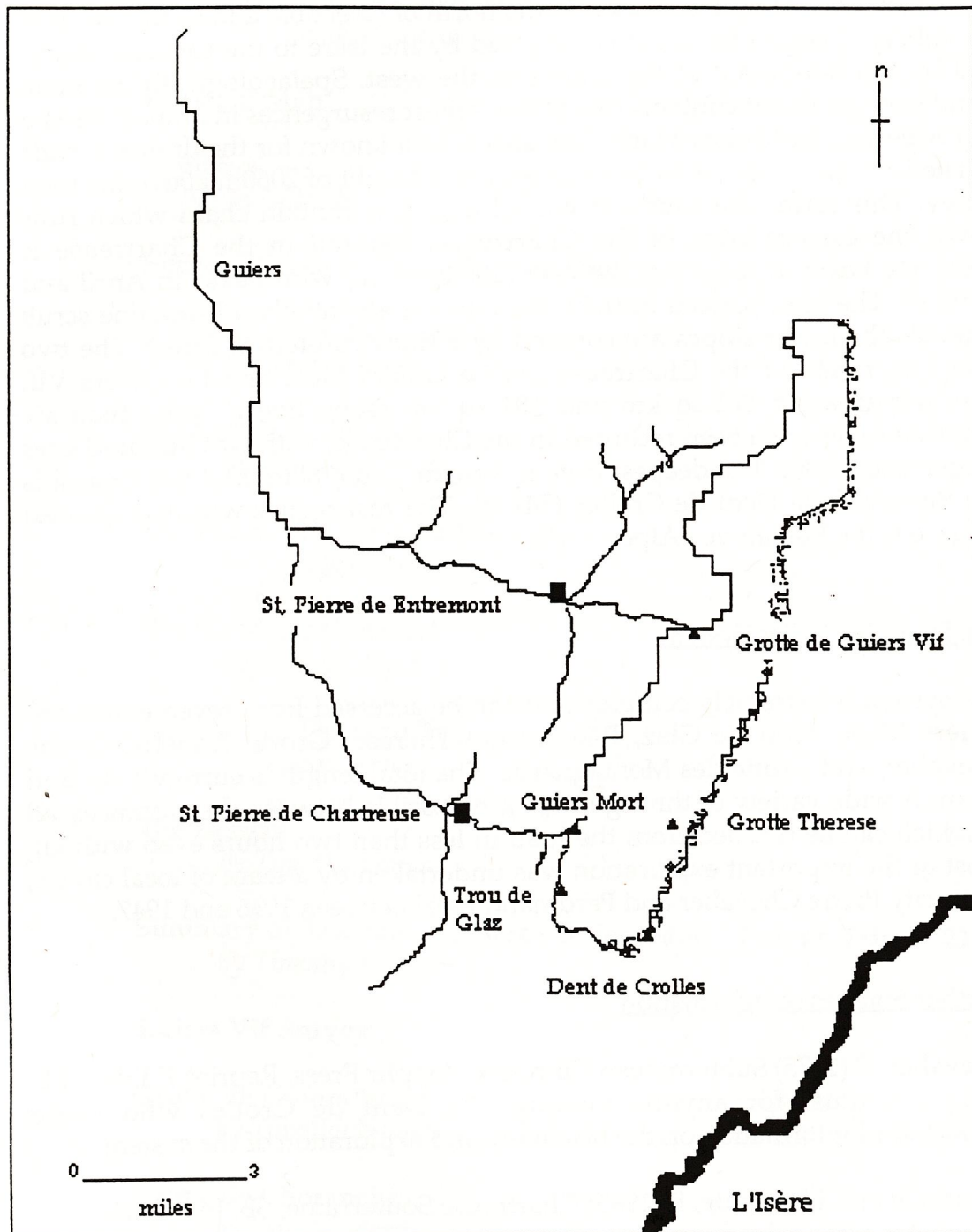
A must for anyone visiting The Dent de Crolles who wants background information on the discovery and exploration of the system.

Drouin, P and Lismonde, B (1985) Chartreuse Souterraine, SB. In French.

An extremely comprehensive guide to the caves of the Chartreuse. It covers every cave in the area with plenty of surveys, geological information, history etc. Rather expensive but worth it for the detail.

Riley, M (ed) (1991) Bradford Pothole Club Bulletin, Volume 8, Number 4.

This volume contains a description of a BPC trip to the Trou de Glaz. We found the cave descriptions and pitch lengths to be accurate.



The Dent de Crolles Region of The Chartreuse



Logistics

Julie Hesketh


As in the Alps, we chose to hire a RHBNC minibus as this was the cheapest available and Royal Holloway Student's Union is used to muddy cavers and high mileage. The Union have also very kindly, for both of the years we have previously used the bus, forgotten to charge us a mileage excess, but who are we to remind them?... This year's bus was up to the usual standards as we arrived to find that the roofrack had been vandalised two days before. Negotiations at the Student's Union on the day of our departure and a hasty trip into Staines to get a replacement roofrack saved us a very uncomfortable journey through France.

The bus seated 14 and we fitted 11 in comfortably with a very dodgy skiing roofrack lashed onto the bus for the caving gear. The high costs of ferries meant that even if more people had come, we probably would have wanted to fill the bus up completely before forking out on an additional car, the ferry costs for which incidently would have been more than the bus! As with any bus hire company we were expected to buy AA Five Star insurance. Many ex-Holloway students are already insured to drive the bus but we were allowed to name as many additional drivers over the age of 21 as we wanted for free. Much to Marcus' relief (and to that of everyone else) he fell short of the age limit by days and so took advantage of the situation by guzzling a crate of beer en route which inevitably made the poor sods who were insured thirsty as hell!

The Channel Tunnel not yet being open for minibuses, we had to opt for the midnight Dover-Calais ferry which allowed sufficient time for a takeaway and a beer on the way. We finally arrived in France and headed south, driving through the night, stopping only for petrol and to sample the delights of the French aires and the expression on Zoe's (who had never been to France before) face when she saw her first "squat and drop" type toilet.

Accommodation and Amenities

Before we departed, we had tried to find out details of campsites in the area and had found details for only one: the municipal site of "La Martinière". The site required a large deposit in french Francs so we decided not to bother, opting for turning up on spec. On arrival at St Pierre de Chartreuse we cruised around for half an hour or so looking for a suitable pitch. The two other campsites on the map had closed down and so we were left with La Martinière as our only choice. Discussions with local shopkeepers revealed however that a grassy patch of land by the river between the small town of La Diât and Camping La Martinière was available free of charge. The facilities here were more basic than at the municipal campsite with an old toilet block and a river for washing in. We chose the more comfortable and more



expensive option and were given two plots at the far end of the campsite.

The site itself was a little more civilised than we expected with excellent showers and washrooms, a laundry (which proved particularly useful for one member of the trip who for some reason or other felt the need to launder the entire contents of his and his partners tent during one fine day off following a trip into town to stock up on food and beer and wine and more wine and ...) a small shop and a restaurant next door. This did mean that noise had to be kept to a minimum though for some reason, the site which was almost full on our arrival practically emptied within about three days...

The nearest village to the campsite is La Diât, a tiny row of restaurants which we did not really bother with as the slightly larger village of St Pierre de Chartreuse is only half a mile away, up the hill. St Pierre has just about all you might need for a two week stay with a small supermarket, a bakery, numerous restaurants and a Tourist Information office. We did however do a few trips into the nearest major town of St Laurent du Pont to stock up with diesel and provisions from the bigger supermarket which had a much better choice than the small shops in St Pierre and a very comprehensive selection of alcoholic beverages.

Budget

Expedition Income	£2200.00
Minibus Hire	£ 500.00
Ferry (Dover-Calais)	£ 220.00
Insurance (AA Five Star)	£ 087.00
Diesel	£ 193.43
Road Tolls (Péage)	£ 098.82
Campsite	£ 433.64
BCRA Insurance	£ 345.56
Miscellaneous (car wash, commision)	£ 076.71
TOTAL	£1955.16
Refunds	£ 244.84

RESEAU DE LA DENT DE CROLLES

Chartreuse — Isère

COUPE PARTIELLE

Alt 1925

Gouffre Thérèse

Alt 1935

P 40

Dent de Crolles

Trou du Glaz

Alt 1697

Métro

P. Moulin

Grand collecteur

G. Thérèse

Guliers
Mort
1332

603

Grotte des montagnards

1766

Grotte Chevalier

Grotte Annette

1685 m



Trou du Gallois

Grotte Patzi
G. des Montagnards

GUIERS MORT

G. Chevalier
G. Annette



TROU DU GLAZ



A Guiers Mort Experience

Yvonne Rowe

The preparations for the through trip took place on Sunday 20th and Tuesday 22nd August. The rigging was completed without any serious hitches with ladder and line used in Guiers Mort and SRT in Trou de Glaz. Most of the pitches in Guiers Mort had some sort of *in situ* rigging, but we were glad we had taken our own tackle. Most of the ropes were rotten with some severely damaged in places and there were some dubious bolts. We used naturals wherever possible.

On the Sunday, Joan Goddard, Zoe Hammersley, Lee Hawkswell, Reggie Pain, Yvonne Rowe and Marcus Ward started to rig the lower entrance of Guiers Mort. The expected howling draught produced by a system 54km long with six entrances was encountered as soon as we got beyond the huge entrance and inner chamber. What I did not expect was the freezing cold! This was ironic because as I struggled for an hour up the steep path to the entrance, in the hot sun and with all my caving gear on my back, I had wished earnestly for a nice cool breeze. Then after less than an hour inside the cave I was so cold I kept thinking how nice it would be to be that hot again.

The first pitch, Le Balcon (17m), had a permanently rigged ladder but we did not like the look of it. We rigged our own from a different point and I think this was probably a wise move. At the bottom of the existing ladder I found a maillon that had appeared to have failed drastically: it had opened up into an elongated 'c' shape! It is now an exhibit in the geology cabinet at Nordrach cottage. The most spectacular pitch for me was Cascade Elizabeth (6m) which as its name suggests is a cascade of water, but rather than flowing directly down the pitch the water came out of a wide fissure to the left. I was able to climb into this fissure which very soon closed down to a duck on the other side of a beautiful deep, turquoise pool of freezing cold water. I was thankful that this was not the way on!

While all the rigging was taking place us "girls" took advantage and had a bit of a nose around. Joan pointed out interesting geological features which were numerous. La Plage (12m) took a bit longer to rig than the others and where we had to go back to wait was a low, narrow passage with a strong, freezing draught. We got so cold that we started to shiver violently. We decided to slowly make our way out whilst the riggers continued onto the Stalagmite Traverse to see what was involved there. They caught us up about half way out and we exited together after an eight hour trip. Five pitches were rigged in all, finishing with La Plage. We exited feeling quite satisfied with the days work and wondered how the Trou de Glaz team had got on.



Rigging Trou de Glaz

Timothy Francis

Both entrances of the through trip were rigged simultaneously with some overlap of personnel so that several people knew both ends. Trou de Glaz appeared to be the more serious undertaking primarily because we would have further to carry the gear. Initially we made the mistake of lugging all the tackle via Perquelin, the hamlet above St. Pierre de Chartreuse, and past the entrance of Guiers Mort. This took about two hours and virtually knackered us out before we had even entered the cave. Take note that it is considerably easier to approach Trou de Glaz from the Col du Coq where the walk takes only an hour and is relatively pleasant.

A reviving lunch in the cold blast of air from the entrance refreshed us so on into the cave we strolled. The first rigging team were Julie, Tim, Charlie, James and Martin. Our first task was to find a suitable place to stash gear out of reach from the massed hoards of tourists, but not too far that the trip in would trash our rucksacks. This duly accomplished, it was on to the rigging. The first four pitches were straightforward enough with the bolts all in good condition. We were glad of the assortment of rope protectors we had brought, as belays were not always rub free. The traverse above P.36 caused a few complications with an alternative route to the exposed traverse eventually found on a broad ledge over to the right of the rock bridge. We called it a day at this point for the first trip and dumped all the rope on a broad rocky slope. An extra length of rope was used on this traverse so we would need to bring up a bit more kit to reach the bottom.

The biggest surprise on this trip were the visitors that greeted us on the way out. Charlie and James were the first to dekit and made it outside to see the sunset. Coming up the valley below them they saw a mountain rescue helicopter. This spotted the two of them and came in for a closer look. The other three of us unable to see the helicopter could only hear a huge roaring noise echoing around the cave. Arriving at the entrance we were greeted by the unusual sight of a helicopter framed by the cave mouth. A man in the helicopter yelled something through a loud hailer but this was drowned out by the rotor blades. Any way Charlie's thumbs up response seemed to the trick and they flew off. A shame really as it was chucking it down with rain and we had to walk all the way back to the camp site. Well Charlie and James did as the rest of us got a lift for the last quarter of a mile.

The second day of rigging came all too soon and the team was whittled down to three: Tim, James and Julie. This time we elected to walk up from Col du Coq and walk down to Perquelin to the minibus rendez-vous. Rapid progress was made to the far side of P.36 where we picked up the bags. The big pitch, Pendulum Pitch, was an easy rig. We made good use of a monster natural low down on the right as the bolts looked a little suspect. Give me a bomb proof natural instead of a cluster of French bolts anyway! The meanders proved to



be the the most awkward bit of the rigging trips and especially when you have a bag of rope in tow. We were pretty tired by the time we reached the last group of four pitches but were determined to reach the junction with Guiers Mort.

Julie elected to wait at Puits Petzl whilst James was volunteered to accompany Tim to the top of Chevalier II. Piège pitch gave us a real soaking as the rebelay from a large natural lies right underneath a waterfall. No fun for the rigger! Once at the bottom of Chevalier II I dumped the final tackle bag clear of the pool of water and had a quick scout round for signs of the other team. I completely missed the orange string made into the shape of an arrow. An unusual landmark at this point was a hat that looked like a First World War helmet. I thought it was a tin one but the other group had touched it and found it to be cardboard.

A long haul out via the meanders and Puits Pendule meant that our trip lasted about 12 hours. An extremely slippery descent down the narrow path to Perquelin meant that we were several hours late for a lift in the minibus but by this stage they were used to overdue parties. A quick sleepy chat with the other group confirmed that the link between the two caves had been made. The stage was set for the through trips. Time for a well earned sleep.




The Short, The Bag and The Ugly

Zoe Hammersley

As a caver with only a few Mendip experiences I was a little apprehensive about the huge Dent de Crolles system I was to undertake on this caving holiday. On our first day in the Chartreuse we decided to start the rigging trips. Joan Goddard, Lee Hawkswell, Reggie Pain, Yvonne Rowe, Marcus Ward and myself were to rig Guiers Mort. Caving gear was packed into rucsacs and we each took a tackle bag of rope and ladder. The Trou de Glaz team did likewise and we all set off together to find the footpath that took us up the mountain to the Guiers Mort entrance.

We thought we had found the path but it petered out after a while. We found ourselves scrambling up steeply through trees and vegetation. It was slippery and particularly awkward with heavy bags on our backs. I got very hot and tired and thought we would never get there. After a while we came across a draughting cave with digging equipment in the entrance. I was disappointed to learn that it was too small to be Guiers Mort. We stopped for a rest anyway, and as Marcus took his rucsac off he dropped it back down the slope! It went quite a long way before getting stuck against a tree stump. When we finally got to Guiers Mort we had to negotiate a steep path leading to a rickety old bridge at the side of the cave entrance. We then had to cross the stream coming out of the cave over very slimy rocks to get to the other side where it was possible to change into our caving gear. We could feel a very strong cold draught coming out of the cave. We donned our caving gear and set off to rig the cave after saying goodbye to the Trou de Glaz team who followed a dodgy path on up the side of the mountain.

The first thing once inside the cave was to find a suitable dry place to hide the empty rucsacs. Once the gear was stashed we set off up a big passage until we came to a crawly bit that we named "The Windtunnels". There was such a gale at this point that I could not keep my carbide alight and was forced to resort to my electric backup. After this there was lots of rubbly crawling (which did my knees in) leading to Balcony Pitch where we had a chance to rest for a while. Lee rigged the pitch with ladder and line whilst we read the description of the way on. It said that at the bottom of the pitch we were to head towards the sound of falling water. We had no trouble finding it which was handy as my carbide needed refilling with water. Marcus tried to catch drips falling from the cascade but this proved impossible. Lee then let the drips fall onto the sleeve of his oversuit where the water ran down and into a carefully placed generator. We couldn't find a way on here and soon realised that we had followed the wrong sound of falling water. The other, correct sound of falling water, was up a passage in the opposite direction. This led to Elizabeth Cascade where we found a big pool of water to fill all our carbides. This is where, being short, I could not step across the pool to the ladder so filled my wellies as well. The description said that the pitch was free-climbable but we felt that it was too exposed and the fixed handline looked



pretty rotten. Reggie was the bravest and managed to free climb it. A ladder was rigged for the rest of us, but this was removed as we would need it later on.

The route on was upstream through deep water (for me anyway) and, as before, I could not straddle the gap like the others. I got my feet wet again and I had only just warmed up my feet from the last time. Next we came to a rope traverse which was the first time I had ever done anything like this. I clipped my cowstails into the rope and Lee talked me across with Marcus following close behind. I did not actually need any help until the end where I had to cross an unprotected bold step. This was followed shortly by a spirally free climb up which did not look too difficult or exposed.

We came out into a passage and on to a 3m free-climb up with a fixed handline which was not much help to me. As I launched myself off, holding onto the rope, I found myself falling backwards and sliding down it again. Reggie gave me a shove from below and Marcus grabbed me from above. Next we came to the Syphon Galleries pitch which took a while to rig. Marcus and I sheltered from an icy draught in a deep, dry pothole. The pitch was in a long crack in which the ladder was twisted and jammed making it difficult to climb. The way on led very quickly to a long, low passage and the head of La Plage pitch. This also took a while to rig, so myself, Joan and Yvonne decided to make our way out whilst Lee, Reggie and Marcus went on to check out the Stalagmite Traverse.

The jammed ladder on the Siphon Galleries pitch was no less awkward on the way up, and unfortunately once at the top we realised that we had left our personal tackle bags at the bottom. Yvonne volunteered to go back down again and grab them on the bottom of the rope. We hauled from above with Yvonne freeing them from below when became jammed in the crack. Soon we were back at the 3m rope climb with Joan descending first followed by me. I hung onto the rope and tried to get my feet onto the only little ledge. I could not reach it or go back up either so I ended up whizzing down the rope landing on Joan's back at the bottom. When we had all safely reached the bottom we realised that we had yet again left our bags behind. This time Joan was the heroine who went back to retrieve them.

We then came to the spirally free-climb that didn't seem a problem going up, but it looked a bit different coming down. Suddenly I found myself sitting on a jutting rock overhanging a two metre exposed drop with a further drop beyond. Yvonne left our bags hooked over a stal boss so that we would not forget them, and tied two long slings together to make an improvised lifeline. Yvonne went down first to guide my feet whilst Joan held the slings from above. At one point my oversuit became snagged on a flake of rock. I was almost hanging in mid air, literally by the seat of my pants! I managed to



release myself and Joan quickly followed me down. Then guess what? We had left our bags hanging on the stal boss. A bit of swearing followed but this time no-one would volunteer to retrieve them, so we decided to wait for the others who we knew would not be far behind. After only a Mars Bar break it was quite soon that we heard Marcus exclaiming "look! The lazy sods have left their bags for us to carry out!" Then he appeared at the top of the spirally climb and with his long legs was down in one step which really annoyed me. By this time my craving for the cookies I had left in my rucsac near the entrance had grown immensely, and I was keen to have a wee! It did not take too long to get back to the bold step and rope traverse which was no problem on the way back. Then it was cold, wet feet again in the streamway before Elizabeth Cascade. We had removed the ladder but had left the lifeline in place for an abseil. Between us we had three 'figure of eights' but I was doing my first ever abseil. I was scared to go over the edge but once over I was quite happy with the descent. Yvonne caught me at the bottom and swung me over so that I did not land in the pool again. By Balcony pitch I was quite tired and was craving for my cookies even more. We made our way quickly through the rubbly crawls (which did my knees in again) and the Windtunnels which blew my carbide out once more. At last I found my rucsac with the cookies, some clean dry socks and my faithful cigarettes. This had turned out to be an eight hour trip, the longest and hardest I'd done, but I had enjoyed it.

(You know who the short one is; you know what the bag is about; but who is the ugly one?).



No, It's Not It Can't Be!

Marcus Ward


We had decided upon Thursday 24th August as the day to do our through trip but during the night before it thundered and rained torrentially. At 7.30 in the morning Martin went to check the water level in the river and later on he was accompanied by Yvonne, Joan, James and Charlie to go and look at the waterfall below Guiers Mort. Neither seemed to have significantly more water than on previous days and certainly nothing to get alarmed about.

On the Thursday when we went to do the through trip, the walk up to the entrance was all new to me. Being lazy, I had decided to mope around the camp site on the day that everyone else had gone to look at the Trou de Glaz entrance. I had been told that it was a mere twenty minutes stroll up to the cave, but it turned out to be an hours hike up what seemed to be a nearly vertical path. This was despite Zoe, Martin, Joan and Yvonne helping out as sherpas.

The stomping passageway that leads towards the Lantern pitches gave me the impression that this would be a straightforward and easy caving trip. This impression was soon to be dashed! We arrived at the group of Lantern pitches which was more like a very steep slope broken up by ledges. Charlie led and was followed by Lee, myself and Reggie. The only problem that occurred in this section was at an awkward deviation near the bottom of the third Lantern pitch. The deviation was in the roof which meant that it was easy to get tangled up in the rope whilst passing it. Then there is a short stooping passageway to the fourth and last Lantern pitch. This is reached by a traverse where you are left a bit exposed whilst loading your Stop. Once down, and before going on, we took off our SRT gear as it would be a little while and a few squeezes before we needed it again.

As you go towards the first meander you pass by P36 pitch which is rigged, as is a 6m pot which we traversed over. There seemed to be rope everywhere! The traverse is extremely exposed with little in the way of footholds, leaving you to put much of your weight on the traverse line. After this point the cave becomes a bit GB-like. A steep and slippery climb up muddy stal is followed by a large fossil gallery and an exposed traverse around lake shaft. We then followed a trench in a large passage keeping an eye out for a cairn marking a small hole on the left, which is the start of the first set of meanders. This is easy to miss as the obvious way on seems to be to continue up the large passage.

The first set of meanders took about fifteen minutes and is like a long tight rift. At the end of this you come to the head of Pendulum pitch (60m). There is only enough room to get kitted up in SRT gear one at a time, and then it is right at the head of the pitch. This is not, as the name infers, a pendulum pitch, as this name is the result of the first method of descent by Chevalier. He




descended a length of ladder only to discover that it did not reach the bottom. Rather than climb back up he pendulumed over to the side of the shaft to reach a ledge. A further length of ladder was added to allow Chevalier to continue his descent to the bottom.

Once everyone had reached the bottom of Pendulum Pitch we headed off down the second set of meanders. These take about forty-five minutes of hellish pushing and shoving, but for all that I quite enjoyed it. After that you abruptly come to Petzl Pitch which is relatively straightforward. As soon as you land from Petzl Pitch you are standing at the head of Piège Pitch. The main rebelay lies directly underneath the only waterfall on this route through the cave. This flows nicely down the back of your neck! After the rebelay you have to pendulum onto a platform then continue for another two metres to the head of Chevalier (I). Whilst I was abseiling down Piège pitch my carbide failed so I resorted to my electric. Unfortunately this had a very low battery and promptly failed at the rebelay on Chevalier (I). I abseiled blind from here and had to wait at the bottom to be assisted by Lee. After Chevalier (I) you arrive immediately at Chevalier (II), the last SRT pitch in Trou de Glaz. This was nice and easy with only one rebelay. We then came to a very tight squeeze: the "U-Tube". This involved a quick thrutch and pops out into Guiers Mort.

After a short crawl and a few climbs you come out into the Grand Collecteur. This is an impressive abandoned streamway riddled with pools, some of which you have to traverse around. One of these pools, La Piscine, is 2m deep and 3m across with a handline. Altogether it is very difficult to keep your feet dry as you jump from pool to pool. At the end of the Grand Collecteur there is a 15m stal covered pitch which requires donning the SRT kit once more. Our description noted that this pitch is free climbable!

This brings you almost immediately to the start of the Stalagmite Traverse which is an awkward stooping and crawling section. There are handlines in place on the more exposed spots, and there are also some oxbows which bypass the traverse in places. This is one of the most highly decorated parts of the cave on this route but unfortunately much of it is badly damaged. Further traversing, stooping, crawling and walking end at the Bivouac Gallery. A quick yomp downstream and we were at La Plage sump. La Plage sump obviously backs up a long way as we found flood debris well over a metre up the ladder. This had only been rigged a couple of days earlier. The siphon galleries above La Plage pitch draughted strongly which was rather uncomfortable for those sitting around waiting for others to ascend the pitch. We quickly carried on up the Siphon Galleries pitch where the ladder hangs in a narrow crack which makes it b***** awkward to climb. A small handlined climb, which is more of a jump if you are tall like me, and a spiralling climb took us back down into the streamway. An amble downstream lead to Elizabeth Cascade Pitch which can be bypassed by a very cold duck, and




beyond to the base of Balcony Pitch. As I found out the hard way it is advisable to stand well clear of the pitch when someone is climbing the ladder above you, as the slope is covered in loose rock. By this time we were all extremely tired and were looking forward to that beer we had been dreaming off for the last eight hours.

Reggie and I started to make our way towards the entrance whilst the others were still climbing the pitch. I felt that this was the worst part of the cave for me as it was mainly hands and knees crawling which does not suit me. We came out into the first of the large entrance passages and headed towards what we called the Wind Tunnels. Curiously this was not windy. Ahead of me I could hear Reggie shouting "No, its not! It can't be!". I caught Reggie up and could not believe it when he threw a stone into a 10m wide pool of water that was blocking the way on. This pool must have been approximately 7m deep. When Lee and Charlie turned up they had pretty much the same reaction as myself.

We knew that we had religiously followed Lee's orange markers that he had laid along the route during the rigging trip. We checked and double-checked but still came to the same conclusion that this was the correct way out. We had two options: a 16 hour slog back up Trou de Glaz involving prussiking up nine pitches, one being 60m; or wait for the water to drop. We decided to wait for thirty minutes to see if the water level was rising or falling. In that time it dropped by 4cm. After a quick calculation we reckoned that it would take it least twelve hours for the sump to drain! We got settled down to wait but as it was freezing we got the trusty survival bags out. I snuggled down with Lee, with Reggie and Charlie in another.

The first hour passed quickly enough but the water dropped by only another few centimetres. What kept us going were promising gurgling sounds from the sump and the sounds of running water. However arguments were soon waged as to whether the sounds were actually the sump or our stomachs rumbling! We decided to tell jokes but I couldn't remember the punchlines to any of mine. Then Charlie and I needed a pee but we weren't going anywhere near that sump. After a couple of hours of this Lee thought there might be another way out and so decided to wander back to the labyrinth with Reggie to see if they could find a route through. Charlie and I guarded the sump and hoped that our intrepid band of sherpas would come and rescue us. Another thirty minutes passed before a very optimistic Lee and Reggie returned with the news that they had found a possible way out. Charlie and I found it very hard to get moving by this stage as we were frozen stiff.

Lee guided us along a series of low crawls to the head of a short SRT pitch. I was so excited that I did not totally kit up, but just snapped on the Stop and went for it. Reggie had already descended and gone ahead to look for "life". We quickly followed and found a very happy Reggie standing at the Guiers



Mort entrance. It was amazing to feel the warmth of what to anyone else would have been a cold night. We more or less ran back to the car park where we hoped the minibus was still waiting. Charlie was nominated to do the explaining as we knew that we would all explode with our own versions of the story. We did anyway! After our epic we were a bit disappointed to find everybody in the minibus fast asleep. With hindsight this was reasonable enough as it was 2.10am. Thankfully Zoe had remembered to bring Crunchie bars which were all devoured in an instant. We then returned back to the campsite for a bite to eat and more than a few beers, thankful for Lee finding the way out otherwise we would probably still be there now.

The Second Through Trip


Yvonne Rowe

Back at the camp both teams discussed their day and planned the through trips. I had heard tales of the long back-and-forth Stalagmite Traverse, constantly switching sides, which took at least half an hour to get across; the Meanders which went on relentlessly and took up an hour to get through; and the 60m pitch. Now a "Crusty" I had previously descended and ascended a 120m pitch but that was years ago. (*Editors note: Oxford English Dictionary: Crusty (krusti), a. ME. [f. CRUST sb. + -Y 1. Of the nature of a crust; hardlike a crust. spec. Scabby; crusted (of wine). 2. fig. Short of temper; harshly curt; not suave 1570. In this context: Speleospeak: Crusty (krusti), n. mod. 1. A caver approaching, or past, forty years of age; circa 1995).*

I was beginning to have a few doubts about the through trip, especially as I had not had the opportunity to see or try some of these more daunting parts of the cave. The younger members said that they did not think that I would have any problems, but I kept thinking that I no longer bend and stretch as freely as I once did. In the end the thought of my own potential disappointment and regret was greater than any doubts I had about my own ability. I decided to go for it.

Friday 25th August dawned and James Allen, Tim Francis, Julie Hesketh, Martin Rowe, and myself set off to do the through trip. I was full of apprehension and excitement. I passed the snow pocket in the entrance of Trou de Glaz and remembered how bitterly cold the rigging team had said their trip had been. I hoped there would not be too much hanging around. The rigging was good so consequently I had no trouble on any of the pitches. I thoroughly enjoyed all of them including the 60m Puits du Pendule. The only problem, if you could call it a problem, was the 11mm Bluewater rope on the last two pitches. The rope had become muddied and hence was difficult to persuade through my Petzl Stop, 'stop' being the (in)operative word!

After what seemed like no time at all we arrived at the first meander which



took about 15 minutes and did not pose any problems. The longer set of meanders after Pendulum Pitch was another story. It was tight, extremely bendy, you could not put your feet on the floor to help yourself along, and there were very few opportunities to rest - everything I had hoped it would not be. I would describe it as going through a very long, very narrow, horizontal, winding chimney, where using arms and thighs are necessary to thrutch your way along. Here's where I give my only bit of advice to future through-trippers: do not use a PVC oversuit unless you want your own personal caving sauna! I got extremely hot, sweated buckets and consequently I lost a great deal of energy. The bits that stand out in my mind next were the Grand Collecteur, The Stalagmite Traverse and the Galerie des Marmites (Pothole Gallery). The Grand Collecteur had, among other watery surprises, La Piscine, a small lake that is traversed using a fixed rope. The theory being that you haul yourself along this rope trying to keep your body out of the water. To my surprise I succeeded in keeping dry although why I bothered when I was still so hot. The next obstacle, the Stalagmite Traverse, was not at all the daunting feature I had expected. It was neither difficult nor tiring as there were no wide sections. At the points where it was necessary to change position to avoid formations there were narrow ledges to enable one to do so. The Galerie des Marmites was a beautiful long section of old streamway that has been reduced to a series of potholes. Most of the pots are filled with water, and it was just a matter of stepping or jumping from pothole lip to pothole lip trying not to stumble into some of the larger ones. I was tempted to do just that!

Eventually we reached the bottom of La Plage pitch and I was now on familiar territory. Although I was now quite tired I had no problems going up and down the remaining ladder pitches. That was until I tried to ascend Le Balcon. The ascent and descent of the other pitches was facilitated by the ladders hanging against the rock. This allows the legs to do nearly all the work. Unfortunately the bottom third of Le Balcon was free hanging and consequently I soon discovered how tired my arms really were. I admit to having a few problems here and my short cowstail came in handy on a couple of occasions. Once on the ladder-against-rock nearer the top I was ok but glad that this was to be the last ladder. We exited from Guiers Mort thirteen hours after entering Trou de Glaz. Although very tired I had enjoyed the trip immensely, apart from the Meanders.(Oh, and Le Balcon). I exited with a great sense of achievement and thought to myself: "not bad for a Crustie".



The Derigs

Timothy Francis

Once everyone had had their fill of through trips all that remained was for the gear to be removed from the cave. Not suprisingly nobody fancied hauling loads of stuff back up through the meanders and out via Trou de Glaz. It was therefore proposed that we would derig the cave in two distinct sections. This was done over three trips allowing those who felt inclined to go for a wander around the system to do so.

The aim of the first derigging trip was to bring out the stuff from the pitches below the meanders. We had approximately 80m of rope left at the camp and it was proposed that this would be used to pull through on the derig. Tim and Reggie entered the system via Guiers Morts and made rapid progress to the base of Chevalier (II). We prussiked back up to the top of Puits Petzl and commenced the derig from there. Tim dropped the rigged rope down to Reggie to be packed and then doubled up the 80m length to abseil back down. The pitch heads were rerigged as we had found them to facilitate through trips. A thorough soaking was had at Puits Piège as water levels were quite high. This pitch proved to be the most awkward as we had to avoid dropping ropes and ourselves down the Trap! Chevalier (I) was annoying because of the vast amount of tat, and the abseil a little disconcerting when you have to trust the belays not to break.

At the top of Chevalier (II) we dumped the ropes and traversed around a fixed series of ropes which lead off around the pothole to the right. A long thin rift was entered with a passage leading off on the right. We opted to follow our noses in the next bit where there were a couple of options. We believe that a steeply descending climb in the floor must lead to the top of the fixed electron ladder which Reggie had seen upstream of the U-Tube in The Grand Collecteur. We opted to stay high and headed off down an exceptionally straight rift, "Galerie du Facies Souriant". After a section of fine formations this leads to huge hole in the floor. Luckily there is an in-situ traverse line running around the left hand wall. This looked to be in good condition but you still have to hang all your weight on your cowstails. Beyond the rift continued for another five or ten minutes before arriving at the head of large chamber. A fixed rope rose above our heads to a passage in the roof and also down to the floor of the chamber. A huge passage also appeared to intersect the chamber at an even higher level. I am unsure from the survey as to where we actually wandered off to but it made for a brilliant detour.

We elected to go down the rope and into a tortuous passage in the floor. This was extremely fractured with huge broken pieces of chert strewn all over the place, almost like a bomb had gone off! This could be "Galerie du Facies Grimaçant"? This dropped extremely steeply and meandered all over the place. We eventually turned back at a the base of an awkward 20ft climb. Back



at the chamber we prussicked up the fixed rope, past a horrendous rub point which Reggie kindly pointed out once I was committed to the ascent. We entered a walking sized passage with sharp walls but turned back after a couple of minutes. From here it was back to Chevalier (II) to pick up the rope, finish the derig and head out. We opted not to carry out the rope from the Grand Collecteur as well as we were both weighed down enough as it was. A satisfying ten hours caving.

The bottom section was finally cleared by Lee, Julie and Yvonne on the following day with no problems encountered. At the same time Tim, Martin, Charlie and Joan went up to Trou de Glaz to finish off the rest of the derig. Tim and Martin went ahead to remove the ropes whilst Charlie did the photographics with Joan as the model. We were glad of the previous derigging trip as all that was required at Puits du Pendule was to pull the rope from above. No long thrutch throught the meanders or even a huge prussik. No problem! A little rerigging was required so that the pitch head tat was left as we found it and then it was back out for supper.



The Trou de Glaz-Guiers Mort Through Trip

Timothy Francis

The following is a detailed description of the classic through trip from Trou de Glaz to Grotte du Guiers Mort. The route described is one of a number of traverses possible between the two entrances and not necessarily the easiest. The cave was rigged using SRT rope in Trou de Glaz and ladder and line in Guiers Mort. The method of rigging the cave was determined by the nature of the pitches and the logistics of carrying tackle through the system.

Most of the pitches are rigged with tat or fixed ropes primarily aimed at allowing through trips with the minimum of equipment. Many of these are of uncertain age and dubious quality. We therefore chose to rig the cave in the traditional way and backed up fixed aids wherever possible. Most of the spits mentioned in the description already contain hangers and maillons. We chose not (were unable) to remove the hangers but did use our own maillons for added confidence! Some of the earlier pitches have fixed Petzl resin bolts and there are a few naturals here and there.

Trou de Glaz

Access: The cave is best approached from the Col de Coq with the walk taking 45 to 60 minutes depending upon fitness and loads. We did our initial carry to Trou de Glaz from Perquelin via the Guiers Mort entrance. This took around two hours, is a real slog and not recommended.

Head towards St. Pierre de Chartreuse from the Martinière campsite and take the first turning on the right in the direction of St. Hugues de Chartreuse. The Col du Coq is well signposted from here, and the drive should take around fifteen minutes. Drive over the Col past the Ecole d'escalade and park at the first layby on the left. From here take the obvious large footpath on the left before the next bend in the road. Follow the path up the imposing slope of the Dent du Crolles where a spring and cattle trough are soon passed. Take the zig-zag path that trends to the right at the Col des Ayes and continue uphill. Turn left at the wooden sign post on the 1650m contour and follow the path to the Trou de Glaz entrance. Eat your sandwiches several metres away from the entrance to avoid the huge cold draft.

Cave description to Puits Chevalier II: Note that there is nowhere in the entrance section to fill up your carbides apart from a few muddy puddles in the crawls below Puit de la Lanterne III. That is unless you want to melt some of the ice in the entrance.

From the entrance walk along the large stomping passage, stooping only briefly at strongly draughting left turn. Continue on taking an obvious passage to the left where a rocky slope is descended. Walk past the route to

Puits Martel on the left and head straight on upslope where the roof lowers slightly. Climb up the slippery rift on the left to enter a small chamber. This chamber is an ideal spot to stash gear: it is beyond the limits of the inquisitive rambler and has plenty of room in which to change. From here go straight ahead through a rift or the crawl in the floor to enter a further chamber. Turn downslope to the left and then climb up 1m into a passage on the right. (Straight on is the Galerie de l'Ours which is a long bypass to the first three Puits de la Lanterne). The head of the first pitch is immediately met.

Puits de la Lanterne I (10m, 17m SRT rope). Two 8mm spits on the right hand wall provide an excellent traverse to a y-hang at the pitch head. This has a one fixed Petzl resin bolt and an 8mm spit.

Puits de la Lanterne II (12m, 22m SRT). This follows on immediately from pitch I, and is rigged from an 8mm spit on the left hand wall. A skimpy natural is also available as a back up. Descend slightly to a y-hang on the left (one 8mm and one Petzl resin) where both arms will need rope protectors. An 8mm deviation bolt on the right hand wall, above the final vertical section, allows a decent hang. Scramble down a small slope to the next pitch.

Puits de la Lanterne III (15m, 30m SRT). Begin from a large ring on the left wall and then a large y-hang; Petzl resin on the left and 8mm on the right. From here the pitch is a steep slope with a small vertical section at the end. Use a rebelay on the left for the last bit. At the base of the pitch follow a series of crawls to a section of muddy, walking sized passage.

Puits de la Lanterne IV (10m, 18m SRT). The head of the pitch is soon reached, and begins as a traverse along a wide ledge on the left hand side. A fixed rope is in place. Traverse to the end of the rope and rig from a fixed Petzl resin and 8mm spit. A rebelay is found 3m below the lip (8mm). Continue downslope to the top of a 6m drop.

P.36 traverse (20m rope). A fixed traverse line is currently in place. Climb up onto the ledge on the right which divides the 6m pot from P.36, and along a fairly exposed traverse to the far side. Alternatively the first caver across can rig a rope down, from bolts and a natural, onto the wide ledge above P.36. This avoids the most exposed section of the traverse for the rest of the party. (Descending P.36 one enters a section of meanders and onto the route to Grotte Annette and Grotte Chevalier).

Further upslope a climb with a fixed handline (in good condition) is reached. A handjammer is useful as the slope is rather slippery towards the top. A short section of walking passage leads you to the top of Puits du Lac. A fixed handline assists the traverse around the left wall. Beyond a pleasant section of walking passage follows a small trench in the floor. Look out for a rock plaque and marker tape on the left which mark the start the first section of




meanders. Climb down into the vadose trench and follow the meanders at floor level. This section takes only 10 minutes and is spacious enough for SRT kits to be left on. Watch out for an awkward 2m drop in the earlier section. A small rope sling rigged from a miniscule natural on the right is useful for the return.

Puits du Pendule (60m, 65m SRT, 70m including approach traverse). A fixed traverse line assists the climb up onto a moderately spacious ledge at the pitch head where two or three people can just about move around. There are 8mm bolts on either side of the rift giving a good Y-hang. At least one of these bolts looked a little suspect so we chose to use the large thread lower down on the right as a third arm of the rig. Take a fairly long sling for this. From the narrow pitch head the drop opens out into fairly impressive proportions and makes for a fantastic abseil.

At the bottom the fun begins and is where the Mendip cavers in the team come into their own. Take off all extraneous items of SRT kit before entering the way on in the floor. This is the second and main section of meanders and can take anything between 30 and 60 minutes depending on how much kit you are carrying and how tired you are. The meanders are not particularly difficult but just go on for a bit longer than is necessary.

Puits Petzl (18m, 25m SRT rope). Yet another Puits Petzl but this one is in the Chartreuse. A straightforward rig from two 8mm bolts gives a nice Y-hang. 3m down on the left hand wall a further 8mm bolt should be used for a deviation. Only a short sling should be used and there may well be a length of tat in situ. The pitch lands in a large puddle in a pleasant chamber which makes for a useful carbide refill spot. A small sandy gully in the floor leads immediately to the next pitch. The Petzl rope can be tied off on a natural and used as a further back up.

Puit du Piège (15m, 24m SRT). This pitch varies from being drippy to extremely uncomfortable in wet weather, with the rebelay right underneath a heavy shower. A sharp natural set back from the pitch on the right requires a rope protector. This is a useful back up to a 8mm bolt on the sloping rock face on the left. Use a spare tackle bag or rope protector below this bolt as the rope tends to snag on the rock. Two metres down is a rebelay on a large flake of rock which is the main hang for the pitch. A long rope protector is vital as the necessary pendulum below could easily damage the rope. Abseil down until you are slightly lower than the large ridge of rock to your left. This divides the shaft into two: Trap Shaft below and Chevalier I on the other side. Kicking off from the rock and a spot of acrobatics does the trick. Watch out for a nasty rub on this ridge of rock. The rope can be tied off on the first bolt of Chevalier I.



Puits Chevalier I (35m, 41m SRT rope). This pitch contained the most impressive selection of tatty rope slings and belays to be found in the whole of France. A wobbly bolt on the left assists the traverse to the pitch head. A further bolt can be found on the left if you can manage to see it through all the spaghetti. A y-hang is obtained by using the large natural on the left and an 8m bolt on the right hand wall. Use a rope protector for the natural. 5m down an 8mm bolt in some knobbly rock on the right provides the anchor for the only rebelay on the pitch. Chevalier I opens out into a large dark shaft and lands on a wide ledge above Chevalier II.

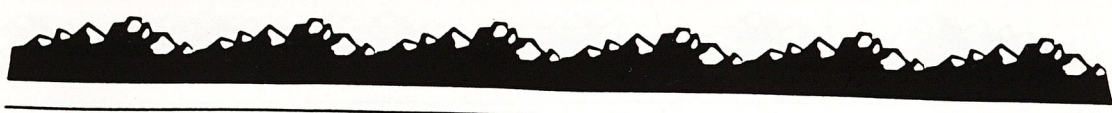
Puits Chevalier II (20m, 30m SRT rope). This is the final pitch of the Trou de Glaz section and is relatively straightforward. Start from the large slab of rock in the floor with a long rope sling. Descend the gully in floor following the fixed rope. This drops onto a convenient ledge where two 8mm bolts give a nice y-hang. From here descend 6m to a rebelay bolt and a bouncy abseil to the bottom.

The way on to Guiers Mort is downstream via a sharp rift in the floor. Continue downstream to where the stream disappears to the right. The way on is via a sandy squeeze: "The U-Tube" and the thinner members of the team were able to keep their SRT kits on for this. Immediately after the U-Tube turn left and take the route onto Le Grand Collecteur. This is the point where Trou de Glaz and Guiers Mort were linked in 1941 by Ferdinand Petzl and Pierre Chevalier.

Guiers Mort

Access: From St.Pierre de Chartreuse take the road to the hamlet of Perquelin and drive as far as the end of the metalled road. There is a large parking area, popular with walkers, on the right. On one occasion we were unable to get as far as the parking area because of forestry vehicles. Walk up the forestry track. After a straight stretch the track crosses a stream and becomes steeper. Take the next track on the right after the stream gully. This path crosses over the concreted entrance to the resurgence of Fontaine Noir. This resurgence pulses every ten minutes or so and makes interesting gurgles! The path narrows at this point and zig-zags up the forested slope. After a wider, less steep section the path rejoins the main forestry track. Take a steep path on the left soon after; if you start to cross the Guiers Mort stream then you have gone too far. The steep path subdivides all over the place but all routes eventually unite at the wooden bridge at the cave entrance. You will hear the resurgence before you see it!

An interesting detour is to walk up the Guiers Mort gorge starting from the main forest track. It is rather steep in places but provides fantastic views of




the Cascade de Guiers. We also came across a dig at the base of a small cliff. Complete with an intricate hauling system this crawling sized passage emits a huge cold draught.

Cave description to Puits Chevalier II: The entrance to Guiers Mort is a large phreatic passage which emits a huge quantity of water. In normal conditions the water wells up from a small crack in the floor just inside the cave portal, but in times of flood the whole entrance passage contains a river. From the entrance follow the huge boulder floored passage which heads off to the left. Hide surplus rucksacks and clothing out of sight in the first large chamber. The passage swings to the right into a fault controlled rift and through a squeezey bit emerging at La Salle de l'Escalade. From here the way on is decided by the water levels in the cave. In dry conditions it is possible to continue straight on and down through a sandy U-Tube which opens out into a large chamber. The way on is an easy climb up the opposite wall of the chamber and along a low crawl. Head straight crossing over a small dry wall. Take note that the U-Tube may be dry on the way in but can rapidly fill with water after moderate rainfall. This is shown as a sump on the survey.

Puits de l'Escalade: (8m, 12m SRT rope). Under normal conditions it is necessary to climb up the fixed rope on the right hand wall of La Salle de l'Escalade. If necessary rig your own rope from two 8mm bolts at the top and a single bolt rebelay. (An interesting looking traverse headed off from this point but we did not investigate). Continue upslope taking the obvious left turn at the end of the rift. After a straight section take the next right and from here it is very much a process of following your nose to find the way on. All the wrong routes are marked off with dry stone walls so route finding is relatively straightforward. After a series of crawls the route emerges at a nasty looking boulder choke. Take care! Once through the choke head downslope before taking a sharp left turn. The left wall of this crawl is still made up of part of the choke. Further grotty crawling will eventually lead to the pitch head of Le Balcon.

Le Balcon: (12m, 17m ladder). Rig the ladder using a long tether from an obvious natural on the right. There is an 8mm bolt on the right for lifeline/pulley. The pitch head contains plenty of loose rock and gravel so those below need to take cover round the corner. The ladder hugs the rock for most of the pitch and is only truly vertical for the last 6m. Alternative hangs can be obtained further round to the left but we thought these were too much hassle just for the sake of a slightly shorter ladder. Once down the pitch head upslope towards the sound of water and a pleasant streamway.

Elizabeth Cascade (6m, 8m ladder). This can be bypassed by an extremely cold duck but we chose to avoid the thorough soaking which it would entail. A fixed handline assists a difficult climb up for the first person. Ladder and line or SRT can be rigged to two 8mm bolts. We found hangers and tatty rope




already in place. The rope was in a poor condition! There is plenty of room at the top for lifelining and Mars Bar breaks. A short section of dry passage leads back to the streamway, and soon after the stream is met an easy traverse is passed. A fixed handline is in place and there are plenty of ledges. Continuing upstream take the first passage on the right, a walking sized inlet, just before a large pool. Follow the inlet as far as a large rock bridge which spans the passage. Walk under the arch and immediately climb up and onto the bridge. Continue up and to the right to enter a high level passage. A 3m fixed handline is soon met and assists a climb into a strongly draughting phreatic passage.

Siphon Galleries Pitch : (8m, 10m ladder). The siphon galleries are broken by a small scrappy pitch. The ladder can be rigged from an obvious natural on the right and an 8mm bolt above the pitch head is ideal for a pulley. Back up from a natural. Hauling tackle and returning the lifeline can be a little awkward. A further section of fossil galleries leads to the next pitch.

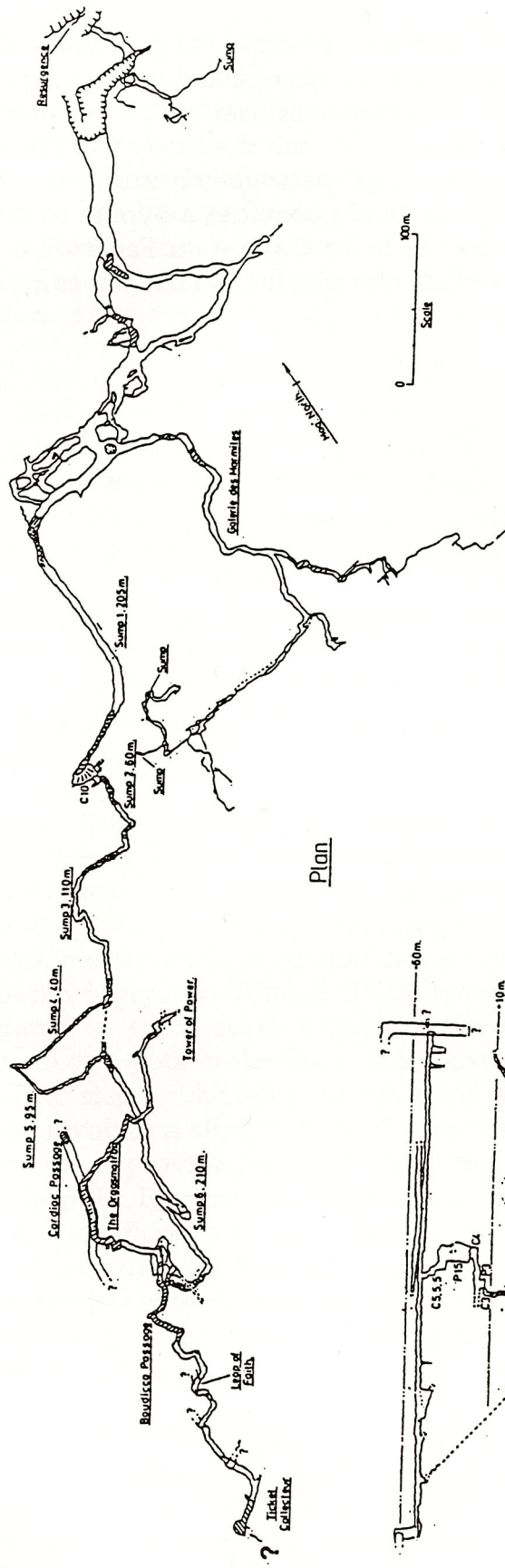
Puits La Plage: (12m, 17m ladder). Two 8mm bolts on the left hand side can be used for the ladder and pulley whilst a solid natural on the right is a good back-up. The pitch is essentially a steeply sloping rift which can prove awkward with tackle. The ladder lands back in the streamway just upstream of La Plage sump.

The next section appears complicated but is essentially a matter of following the main way on. Head upstream from La Plage and take the next right. This is a small climb up into the approach to Galerie du Bivouac. Head upslope keeping right at the first junction and continuing to traverse over the top of a narrow rift where necessary. This section can go on a bit, involves all the usual antics, but never gets too difficult. There are several oxbows so choose the least decorated to avoid further damage. Further crawling past stal eventually leads to two pots in the floor. Both have fixed traverse lines: the first involves a bold step on the left onto a flake of the rock; and the second, Puits du Nimois, involves a slightly trickier traverse around the right hand side. Stalagmite stumps provide the handholds. The passage eventually stops at the head of a deep rift. Extreme care should be taken to avoid standing near the edge as the false floor looks wafer thin! Just before the end climb up to the left to enter le Vire des Stalactites: the Stalactite Traverses. This follows a narrow ledge on the left with fixed ropes on the most exposed section. Take care not to hit any of the more vulnerable formations. Immediately after the last fixed rope the head of a pitch is met.

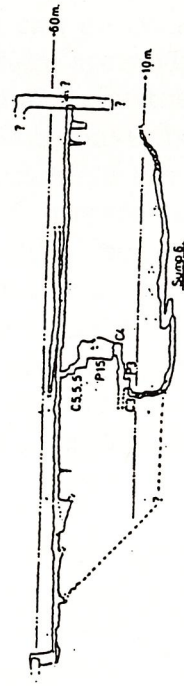
Puits du Grand Collecteur (10m, 14m SRT). A fixed rope may already be in place. A rig from two 8mm spits in the roof and a back up from a large natural give a nice free hang. Take care not too fall into the large deep pool at the bottom. From the base of the pitch yomp upstream to le Grand Collecteur, an exceptionally fine piece of passage. Particular fun will be had at la Piscine.



By leaning back on a fixed rope strung across the pool you should just keep your feet dry. The passage continues upslope and past a couple of awkward climbs, pools, and finally a bold step over deep pot. Soon after the bold step the junction with Trou de Glaz is met with the sandy U-Tube (marked Glaz) downslope on the right. (The main passage continues on passing a fixed electron ladder. This almost certainly provides a bypass to the U-Tube and Chevalier II to enter the routes to Le Galerie du Facies Souriant. In other words if the cave is so incredibly wet that the U-Tube has sumped you should still be able to get out).



Plan



Part Elevation

GROTTE DU GUIERS VIF.

Surveyed by AG. 92. by PH. AG. DE L'EP.



Grotte de Guiers Vif

Timothy Francis

An interesting day trip was made to the Grotte de Guiers Vif, one of the most well known cave sites in the Massif de la Chartreuse. Both Martel and Chevalier have explored the cave, a huge resurgence which drains a larger area of limestone than the Guiers Mort. The cave was extended by two British cave diving expeditions in 1991 and 1992 and in the process linked it to Trou des Flammes. The system is now around 20km in length with good potential for further discoveries.

The cave is located at the base of a large cirque at the head of the valley above Saint Pierre d'Entremont. We were able to park at the tourist car park at St. Même and from here it is a 2km walk and climb of 500m to the cave entrance. All the footpaths are well maintained and the cave entrance is signposted all the way from the carpark. The last section of the walk is a bit of a slog with some steep rocky paths. At the steeper points these are protected by metal handrails driven into the rock. The footpath eventually reaches the top of a waterfall and a broad ledge. A rocky scramble underneath a huge rock arch and up onto a further ledge gives impressive views of the cave entrance as well as the valley below.

The huge fossil entrance is 30m above the current resurgence and is a pleasant daylight yomp. Full caving gear is not required except in the further reaches, and not even there if you don't mind getting a bit grubby. The passage divides just inside the entrance on the far side of a clear pool. The left hand passage is healthy walking sized stuff which loops back to the main route after a couple of hundred metres. An interesting feature is the huge draft which emits from a passage on the left half way along. The entrance to this passage is a bit unstable and involves a crawl through a dustbin! We did not bother going to the end of this section as it looked too grovelly for jeans and T-shirts.

Back on the main route the passage gets larger. The floor is littered with rocks and quite wet in places. Apart from a few high level loops there is only one passage until a roomy chamber is met. A waterfall drops out of the ceiling at this point where the Galerie des Marmites heads off on the left. The main route drops down a steep slope on the right to sump 1, 60m beyond this junction. A series of six sumps leads to the 1991/1992 extensions, although sumps 4 to 6 can be bypassed. The way on to Trou des Flammes is through these extensions. The non-diver must return to a quick dash under the waterfall to enter the remaining passageways. Progress through the Galerie des Marmites involves some entertaining straddles over water filled potholes in the floor. The 'T-shirt and shorts' brigade made the best progress by taking the right fork at the next junction but we only continued as far as a sharp crawly section. Things get a bit low and aqueous to the left so this was also left for another day.



In summary the Guiers Vif makes an excellent day trip, and kept all the cavers, ramblers, photographers and cream-teasers happy.



Grottes de Choranche

Joan Goddard


Walking back from Trou de Glaz one afternoon it was possible, between the clouds, to see the outskirts of Grenoble beyond which lies the Vercors, an area renowned for its limestone gorges and caves. As we were so close, and had heard tantalising accounts of its attractions from those amongst us who had been there previously, we decided to have a quick look on our way back to Calais. In particular some of us wanted to see the show cave of Choranche.

As a crow would have flown on a calm day, Choranche was 45km from St. Pierre de Chartreuse but by road it was nearly twice the distance. With Tim navigating, Julie drove us through Pont-en-Royans, with its houses overhanging the river, and up the Bourne Gorge. Local landmarks were pointed out to us by Charlie and Reggie (bars and campsites frequented by RHBNC, and the entrance to Grotte de Bournillion) and after a few kilometres we turned sharp left onto a narrow road leading up to the Choranche cirque and show cave complex. A 300m walk from the car park brought us to the cave entrance, with a display of archaeological finds adorning the nearby cliff walls. The show cave is part of the Couvin-Chevaline system and was discovered in 1875 at the point where a spring emerges from the base of a high limestone cliff.

We entered through a short blasted passage which almost immediately opens out into a huge chamber formed at the convergence of two underground streams. The chamber is approximately 18m high and 60m wide and contains a lake averaging two metres depth. The left stream enters through the Siphon Gallery which is decorated with an incredible number of translucent straws up to three metres long, and which has numerous small inlet passages with fine stal flows emerging from them. Some of these were white but others were stained brown or grey presumably due to iron and manganese in the percolating waters. The way on into the remaining 28km or so of cave passages is through this gallery beyond the tourist trail.

The show cave route returned us to the main chamber in which are glass tanks containing olms (salamanders). They were colourless and blind, motionless, about 15cm long and appeared to be dead. However, closer inspection revealed that they were indeed alive but probably not very happy in the artificial lighting and with dozens of people gawping at them. They are not native to the cave but have been bred from specimens originally found in caves on the Italian/Slovenian border. (We do have evidence of current life in the cave as one of Lee's underwater photos has a fish swimming across it!)

We then followed the right hand stream which consists almost entirely of gours and cascades which have been effectively lit by bulbs positioned under the lips of pools. A flight of concrete steps leads upwards to another large chamber, the Cathedral Room, which was discovered in the 1950s. Here we



were treated to a sound and light show, not the sort of thing I like in a show cave but in this instance I was impressed by the effect achieved by illuminating some large, rounded stalagmites. Each had a constant drip landing on top of them and were a joy to watch. A short amble along the side of the lake in the main chamber took us back out to daylight through a low arch where the stream leaves the cave (the originally explored entrance). The visit was certainly worthwhile and has whetted my appetite for a longer stay in the Vercors another time. We had a quick look at Grotte de Gournier which is a few hundred metres west of Choranche along a gravelled path at the base of the same high cliff. It occurs but the way ahead is completely barred by a lake which extends from wall to wall. Cavers are allowed access, but a dinghy or inner tube is adviseable. Perhaps next time!