

PART TWO OF THE CZECHOSLOVAKIAN SAGA

Trout Supper

We saw a great deal of the Moravsky Kras. This is a Jurassic plateau. The principal features are two deep valleys. The Pusty zleb and the suchy zleb. These two valleys carry the two main roads across the plateau which meet, conveniently, at Skalni mlyn.

We also did a fair amount of caving with Mike visiting some of the smaller numbered caves. We also saw something of the work carried out by one of the professional caving clubs. They were constructing a tunnel from the Pusty zleb into the lower passages of Amaterska Jaskyne. This system is the largest in Moravia. With a few link-ups it is potentially the second largest in Europe with a possible 80km of passage. Unfortunately, access to the cave is very tightly controlled and is administered by the University of Brno. With the chaos of the impending Congress, it was not possible to obtain the necessary authorisation for a visit.

During our sight-seeing tours we visited a local trout farm, which we thought was one of the best we had seen. Best of all, though, was the few dozen fat trout that Mike was able to scrounge for an evening barbeque. This took place a bit later than planned. After we had met up with a local caving club and were somewhat delayed over a swift half. The lateness of the hour was demonstrated by the fact that we had to go round and get most of the other guests out of bed.

The trout were split in two, gutted, filled with butter and dipped in caraway seeds. They were then ready for roasting over the bonfire on the end of a stick. The fish were consumed with a vast amount of beer.

Rudickeho Propadani

This large cave is situated in the tree covered hills near Rudice, some way South of Skalni mlyn. It is quite separate from the main Moravian drainage of Sloup-Bila Voda - Punkva System.

On a hot and perspiring sort of day we drove up to a timber yard with Mike. After some while stomping through the forest we came to a sunny clearing in the trees. At the head of the clearing stood a small wooden chalet where we met "Malcolm and Wolly" from Speleologicky Krouzek, the local club responsible for the discovery and exploration of the cave. The woodland headquarters was greatly used by the club during exploration. Since those days, exploration had ceased and digging was no longer feasible with a two day return trip to the end without doing any work there!

Well, we didn't have two days so we changed rapidly. More accurately, our Czech friends changed rapidly putting on a boiler-suit over their clothes and pulling on thigh waders. We thought this was really smart caving, and struggled into our wet suits.

We entered the cave through a dry tube, one of many holes in the grotesquely sculptured cliffs above a sluggish stream. The stream dragged itself some way past the entrance to disappear in foam and spray deep in a cleft in the cliff. The entrance series was a roomy rift some 150m. deep and varying in width from one metre to ten. Descent of the rift was achieved by a string of fixed ladders. Most of these were made of rough timber and were wet and slippery. The last and longest ladder was of steel and dropped the final twenty metres to the streamway.

Cont/.....

During our trek along the stream we met numerous wooden ladders. Each one seemed to be considerably more difficult than the obstacle if was intended to by-pass. The finest of these, though not ascended these days, is a feature of the cave. It is a ladder erected by the first explorers forty years ago. The passage of time and the constant drip of cave water has left a petrified stalagmite puzzler for future geomorphologists. We struggled up and down slimy wooden ladders, and balanced our way along jammed baulks of timber. Every so often a warning from Mike "attention, attention" as we cavorted from a pair of steel wires slung across a black bottomless lake. The cave was arranged more on the lines of an army assault course with timbers and wires on every stretch which might otherwise have been a bit too easy. Perhaps, all these "aids" were for the benefit of the Czech style wader-caver. The black bottomless lake which we sweated across turned out later to be knee deep. At least we reached as far as we were going, about one third along the stream and a distance of about one kilometre, excluding side passages and detours. By coincidence the water here was thigh deep. This is just one restriction to the wader caver. Another we found was splitting your wader and getting a leg full of water.

Byci Skala

Since abandoning work in the impossible Rudickeho Propadani the Speleologicky Krouzek had turned their attention to the resurgence at Byci Skala, some 4 km away from the sink as the bat flies, with 1 1/2 km. separating the ends of the two caves. Here, between Krtiny and Adamov the club have their new headquarters just a short walk from the cave.

There are in fact two caves here at Byci Skala, or Bulls' Rock. The left hand entrance is dry and roomy, and was the scene of a number of archaeological digs during the last century. The principal finds included a number of magnificent bronzes and the remains of mass human sacrifices. Today the cave is used for the storage of heavy digging equipment. The dig we were to visit was in the right hand cave. A section of dry roomy passage led to a deep lake some 100m across. This might have been an obstacle, but now it can be crossed on a large steel boat. More walking on the far side of the lake and we were at the work face about one kilometre from the entrance. A permanent airline had been laid through the cave and is used to power pneumatic drills. A conveyor belt is used to remove spoil from the work face. The compressor is stored in the old archaeological dig and is brought out once a month for massive digging sessions. At the time of our visit a drive was being attempted through solid rock following a fault line, in an attempt to by-pass a meandering sump. We found the work face ready drilled awaiting explosive. The face was six feet high and five feet wide. A dozen shot-holes had been drilled each about nine feet deep and wide enough to load with your arm.

In Conclusion.

After our visit to Byci Skala we bid our farewells to 'Malcolm' and 'Wolly' and the rest of their group and downed our beers, bid another round of farewells, downed another round of beers, drank the health of someone's daughter... said goodbye... drank the health of the club president's car... bid another round of farewells... downed

Czechoslovakia Cont/....

drowned around a beer...around another beer...and somehow woke up back at Skalni-mlyn.

The next morning we drove East to the High Tatras where we did a bit of walking before being forced out by the crowds. Then South to the Low Tatras which are being developed as a skiing resort. Here we took in two more caves the Demanoska Slobody (freedom) Jaskyna and the Dobsinska L'adova Jaskyna. The Latter is an ice cave.(The different spelling is Slovak rather than Czech).

And, then home via Prague and the border town of Cheb where we couldn't find an extinct volcano, but did find an exhibition of petrified tree trunks we weren't looking for. Then our last plate of stew, a full tank of petrol, and another attempt at crossing Germany without stopping.

THE END

Pete Mathews. .