

Mendip Caving Group

NEWS

NUMBER 219

JANUARY 1992

CZECHOSLOVAKIAN DIARY

Friday and Saturday

Afternoon start, picked up everyone yet decided to return to Heathrow with transit van as the thrust bearing was noisy. After discussion with Hire Manager we continued to pick up our last member, JP.

Arrived Dover in plenty of time for ferry to Zeebrugh so had food and drink. Checked in with ferry operators by 20.30 when informed of need to go to Calais instead; this was a problem as we weren't insured for France.

Arrived Calais at 02.00 during disembarkation met group of cavers going to Dolomites. Rearranged gear on top of transit at dockside and then headed for Belgium and our original route.

Drove through Belgium into Luxembourg where we stopped to change money and eat. Rest of day spent driving through Germany. Stopped at service station where JP tried to fix 2CV for German woman, something was overheated? Situation spawned first saying of the trip, 'What's it all about?'

Spent the evening in Germany at where had many beers. Spent evening under the stars in a field nearby. This took a few hours to locate. Woke to the sound of rain and then thunder and lightning at 05.30.

So up at 05.30, everyone pissed off, dirty and hungover.

Sunday

Arrived at border at 06.00. German police waved us through with a look of disbelief. Czech customs looked at passports and realised a search would take hours so there we were in Czechoslovakia after 36 hours travelling. Changed money at border and then on the road to Pilzen in the rain.

Stopped for breakfast in a roadside shack with Gypsies and smelly loos. Had ham and eggs, from the size of the portions and the state of the food, we all thought we might starve, albeit cheaply.

Arrived Prague by 11.00 and tempers were frayed to say the least. Phoned Lada Benz and given address to head for in Sporilov, a suburb of Prague. Found Ladas (address!) after asking locals and finally looking at the map. One fellow even drove with us to the correct place, which we'd just driven past.



AMISCAR CAVE

Proceeded to unpack and then make a mess. With eight of us sharing three rooms the size of cupboards.

Saw David Heurlcheecks mother who showed us round the house and the local shops.

So after a shower and shave each; the first in two days, we went to Prague for a drink. The eveing saw the invention of 'Oh my Gaw'd' a new saying relating to the scenery kept seeing!

Came back to Sperilov to finish off the day in the local bars which were drab but had cheap beer.

Monday

The original diary says 'Power struggle - ego trips' I wonder why? Anyway we split into two groups to go sightseeing. Exchanged money for Petrol coupons in very ornate bank. Spent another hour or two 'wobbly watching' or should I say sight seeing. Then all of us went for a meal. This was a bit of a feast. Four courses of traditional Czech food plus appetitifs plus beer, Avo (Billy's only Czech word), all for the equivalent of £7 each.

Tuesday

No sign of Czech cavers so we spent am sightseeing in Prague and then later went to 'M' Borilslav for lunch. Caviar, bread, cheese and champagne. Dodd bought us all liquourice, he almost bought the whole 1 kilo box, she was that good?

Found place called Yrain with a map of Sid Me Harche (sandstone climbing area) in a shrine in the market square. Found the area in late afternoon after driving through a locals back garden. Spent a few hours climbing, walking and had first through trip. 60' cave by Kevin and Steve. Dave and Lee spent time climbing.

Drove back to Sperilov via two bars, one where we had dinner, the other in the middle of nowhere.

Wednesday

At last we see our first Czech cavers. Firstly, Lada Benéz who gave us maps, updated us on why Dave 'H' wasn't around, (ie. skoda broken down in Italy) and briefed us on itinary for next week.

Then second caver arrived, he took us to first cave area. At first he didn't understand our sense of humour, but he soon joined in! We obviously didn't understand his sense of humour regarding caving. The kerjstein caves (Charles Castle caves) where he took us were not a simple walk through as he'd described them. Luckily we all decided to abandon the shorts and flip flops. The cave is the largest in the area, very 'mendips' in character and notable for its pre 1968 revolutionary shrine, with anti-communist caricatures. This shrine was in small chamber with tight entrance squeeze, entrance was blacked out by police, destroying caricatures, these have since been re-modelled in a cruder fashion.

1st cave

Climb up to quarry. Awkward 6' climb up to entrance with 60' crawl with 10' descent to silt hall. Short climb to passage 20' on right, then 15' drop down and 20' crawl to double letter box squeeze; too tight for Bill without push and pulling. Drop down along bedding plane 20' to first chamber, this had shrine in small antichamber with tight squeeze off to left attempted by D.T.

Beyond first chamber up 100' along bedding plane to second chamber. Above was 120' shaft too loose/steep to attempt.

Returned to base of bedding plane and then to upper chamber and exited cave by steep climb up and over unstable scaffold poles.

Viareel climbing and traverse practice site for Czech caving club in same quarry. Then lunch and off to a show cave. On the way drove over prohibited wooden bridge with wobbly bits at railway crossing. The gates wouldn't open because the keeper was asleep.

Show cave called West Bohemia's largest. Saw top two free of charge and without the guided tour, we were also allowed to take photos. Centre for forgery in medieval times, display of Pleistocene fauna, Human included. This cave had abundant algae caused by lighting. Exited (ODCHOD) and returned to Sperilov for few beers and a meal.

Thursday

Had final sight seeing in Prague. We all went to Hippy bridge and then split up to go into town square for final view of wobbly bits and then money changers. Left Prague for Brno at 11.15, filled up with petrol en route. The journey was rapid so we stopped at riverside for swim, pivos and sausage just outside Brno.

Brno town centre at 1700 asking for directions of every pretty woman along the way. Found flat more by good luck than judgement, as they are all identical multistory blocks. Met Otta and

his wife then Robert arrived.

Problems! This caving group didn't want an exchange visit just funds for their next expedition to Greece. The misunderstanding, which was caused by D Havlicheck caused embarrassment on both sides. And as DH wasn't available we made our own arrangements, ie. donate £250 to their expedition fund and pay our own expenses in exchange for accommodation and guides to caves in maravian karst.

Once contact sorted out they were all very hospitable. Robert took Dave, Lee, Barry and JP to his house, the rest of us stayed with Otta. We were all fed and watered very well by respective hosts.

Friday

After excellent breakfast we were taken to caving cottage near Rudice, the cottage has no facilities and we've had something of a culture shock, as were washing in the local lake. The cottage is alpine style with only one convenience the latrine. Used by squatting over a precipice and being eaten by killer ants from behind!

Second caving trip

Climb down through wooded vally and over slag deposits from old iron smelter. Crossed over river after changing at caving hut. Cave entrance 20 m climb up opposite bank. Entered wide rift and after 50' climb down came to bolted door. Then first laddered (all caves were rigid some weren't fixed) this wasn't fixed, it was rusted and unstable. Even so it was fine compared to some on the 130m descent into 1st chamber. The ladder here was approx 60-70' and entered chamber at low angle with views of water fall and stream way beyond.

Split into two groups at this chamber, one went straight on, taken by Robert, the other a photo trip was guided by Otta.

The streamway was narrow and meandering, which with wetsuits was unnecessary. These Czech cavers don't like to get wet and we didn't see one in a wet suit. Come to first siphon and bypassed by climb over via more unstable fixed ladders with very 'iffy' Climb down into streamway was 30' plus. Passage was becoming smaller but more decorated, with notable calcile encrusted wooden ladder and flow stones with goure pools. Passed several inlets and character changed to wider and lower passage after fresh water inlet, this was the older part of cave, filled with Deronian sediments. Cave continued in series of stoops and short crawls to Dragons Chamber and another beyond in which we rested up and filled carbides with H₂O.

Started to make way out and met second group. Returned to exit enmass.

That evening we met local alcoholics in Rudice bar, like a working mens club, invited to a sing song on Saturday night.

Saturday

Two caving trips today, both within 1 hours walk of caving cottage. The first was to sink hole for vertical SRT cave. The second to horizontal cave with Helectites.

Sinkhole cave

Cave of series of sinks following the regional strike. At cave entrance Otta descended first followed by Lee and (Barry lost more hair by burning) Dave. Kevin was about to descent when decided rope hang from old piton and snap crab with fig 8 to 2" square hold in drainage pipe was chaffing rope and dangerous. Still everyone descended first pitch. Group decided to exit cave as rope was untrustworthy and guide couldn't speak good english. This cave had narrow entrance rift leading to second largest cave in this karst area.

Second cave this day

Robert and Steve continued walking another 30 plus minutes over fields through forests and over cliff faces to cave. Cave entrance easy 30' climb up from road in limestone canyon, very much like cheddar gorge. Cave on two levels. Second level found by digging up into brecciated fault and into calcified joint system. Displays of moan milk Stalagites and Helectites. Climb down to lower series by very unstable ladder. Cave extended by digging into ORS deposits and involved very slippery climb up day bank to upper level where varied Helectites (see diagram for correct description of route).

That evening had swim and wash in lake and then off to a vinyard owned by Roberts father. Visited cellar under the house where we chose Red and White wine for the evening meal of sausages and cheese etc. Sausages cooked over open fire and served with mustard and brown bread. Slept outside on the grass after a great evening.

Sunday

Woke up to a good breakfast with tea and coffee. Today we had a tourist day scheduled and this started with visit to fine restored Baroque church. The early morn service cut short our visit. Went into Eves cave and iron smelting industrial history tour.

Visited resurgence of cave we explored on Friday. Also invited outside Bulls cave where Germans had aircraft parts factory during war.

Bulls Cavern

Cave entered by two iron doors, immediately in large chamber; the old factory floor. Then through second door into main passage, this led to lake which was pumped to remove sumps. Bill tried to walk on water but as this wasn't 'confident Bill' yet, he failed. JP at same time was caving in flip flops and shorts. Returned to caving hut where we saw full extent of mapped cave. A pity we had no equipment with us but the chance of seeing even this much cave was so unexpected that Robert only came here on the off chance! The guide was very interested in the tee shirts so he got one when Robert took it that evening.

After lunch saw sand quarry with geodes, then onto Robert's club's dig. with shaft and windlass. Lastly onto the Abyss a 130m hole in the ground with lakes and trees in the bottom.

That evening JP and Bill both got falling down or falling out? drunk on the Czech national drink Bechel? a herbal short anyway.

Monday

Picked up by Robert at 10.00. The only people fit were Dave, Lee and Steve; the rest had sunburn, bad tummies etc. No one owned up to a hangover.

A 10 minute walk drive to an area just outside Jedovice brought us to where Amiscar cave should have been. We spent next half hour walking round trying to find it. This apparently was another cave Robert hadn't seen in twenty years.

Amiscar Cave

This cave was unusual in that the entrance was deliberately sought at top of hill and therefore wasn't blocked with mud. A previous dig in a swallet nearby was abandoned due to it being filled with the stuff.

Eventually found entrance, piping covered with very heavy lid. The original entrance was fissure with a memorial stone to two men, 26 and 27 years who died in 1970.

New entrance built to withstand military attack with lid made of quarter inch steel plate 4' square with two locks. Once in Robert led and Dave had dubious pleasure of lowering the 60-70lb lid at top of 40m shaft.

Shaft made of 1m sections of concrete pipe with fixed ladder which appeared to be in good condition. Half way down second door passed and also entrance to old boulder choke seen.

Small chamber at bottom. Nothing special yet apart from Lees gas pipe catching fire. Second set of piping 20m long descending at 60° with a bend at the bottom. This ended at top of second chamber which had the first of the decorations. Impressive curtains, stalls and bosses. Passing down through this chamber involved scrambling down entirely over defaced flowstone. Original cave discovered in 1960's was pristine white, while now it's muddy with footprints. Only large stalls and curtains are intact.

Passed catwalks and small ladders down into Streamway where we saw rubber dingies for later excursion.

In streamway took left hand fork to upper series, this lowered to a damp flat out crawl and then opened into long chamber with many decorations especially 'sharks teeth' curtain and false floor stalls. A series of decorated chambers were passed through until streamway sumped at point where cavers died in 1970.

Returned to dingies, these were inflatables with no paddles. Dragged down to water and through first 20' of streamway. Then short float to shallows where we dragged boats over to deeper streamway. Here we found rope attached to passage roof, this made dragging boats much easier. Pulled up to next shallows and then again into deeper water but soon shallowed to sandy beach.

Streamway continued as an awkward stoop to series of chambers with smashed foundations due to 70s flood. Halted by deep streamway and assumed sump around corner, but another low crawl for 30-40m found us in large chamber with Leopard skin stalls and decorations.

This was turn round point and we retraced our steps apart from taking correct route in dingies. From here to the way out the trip became a photo opportunity especially in the Hall of discovery (the second chamber). By this time everyone apart from Lee was low on carbide and so it was back up these fixed ladders.

Climbing these ladders was easier than expected, but raising the lid wasn't easy at all. First Robert and then Steve tried opening this too heavy lid. Eventually raised but not without strains and crushed fingers, neck, etc.

Went to Sloup for lunch, here we saw the local baroque church and burial ground for the salms, they came from the village of Salmon in Belgium and were the local industrialists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, involved in iron smelting in the area.

On to show cave in same village, just looked at cave description and climbers on nearby pinnacle. Next onto local disused rail quarry with derelict kiln (NB Show cave connects to

Palaeolithic settlement round corner), collected a few examples of vien calcite crystals.

Returned to caving hut at 6.30 to find the boys from Brno hadn't returned. So the cavers had three 5's and went to the local bar. Picked up the others as they walked back to hut.

Tuesday

10.30 start, with Otta and wife plus a Canadian called John. We visited three caves this day, all on the Abyss road from Sloup.

First cave SEDMNACTRA also called cave XVII, steep climb up wooded cliff face to entrance 70 feet above road. Walk in entrance rift closed down to narrow rift after 100 yards, passed second entrance in roof on way in. Tight crawl with two squeezes for 40 feet. Then traverse over 6 inch deep goure pool using plank!

Found very low and long decorated chamber with tall stals, this opened up into larger chamber with vandalised decorations.

After short crawl came to 3 foot drop into large end chamber with possible dig sites at far top end. Some reasonable formations but most vandalised or muddied. Took series of photos of decorations.

Second cave PUSTOZLEBSKA ZAZDENA this is next to car park by Abyss. Short walk through trees to another locked door. The whole passage was blasted and dug by paid workers in 1940s, in an effort to reach the Abyss. This was yet another prospect by Prof Absolom. The effort took three years to excavate 1000ft of passage to a chamber with many short stals, quite impressive. Cave still had signs of old railway, blast holes and chisel cuts.

On route to chamber passed over 10ft hole with slippery plank traverse then up extensive mud slides and over short step avoiding another small drop.

Coming out of the cave was rapid due to the angle of the passage and the amount of mud. Very slippery!

Third cave

Otta is a master of understatement. When asked if there were any decorations, he said there was one! Well there was one but it filled the end chamber completely.

End chamber was reached by series of stooping walks and short crawls through sandy cave with evidence of once having powerful streamway, series of small decorations passed and then short climb up into small yet very well decorated chamber.