

# Mendip Carving Group

# NEWS

EDITION 222

AUGUST 1992

# MCS

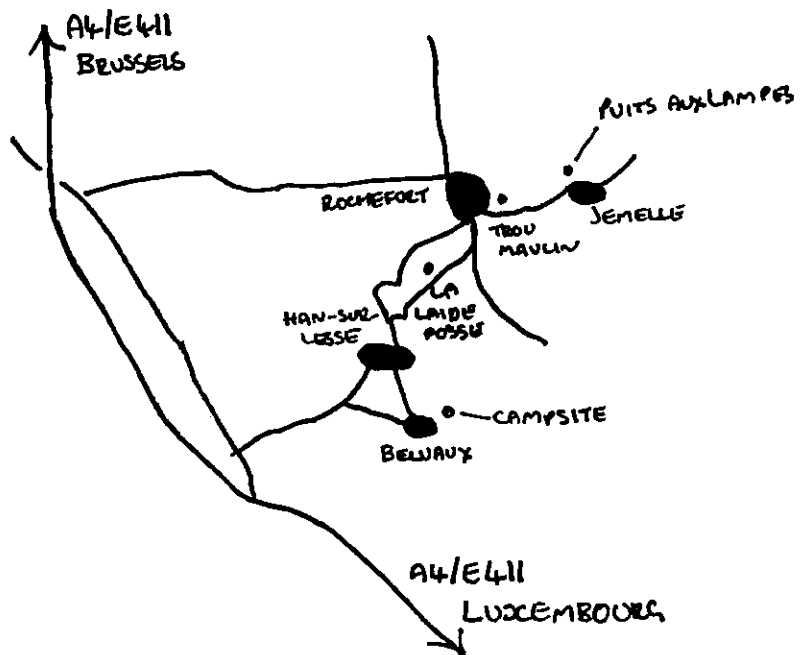
## Abroad

**BELGIUM '92** by Charlie Allison

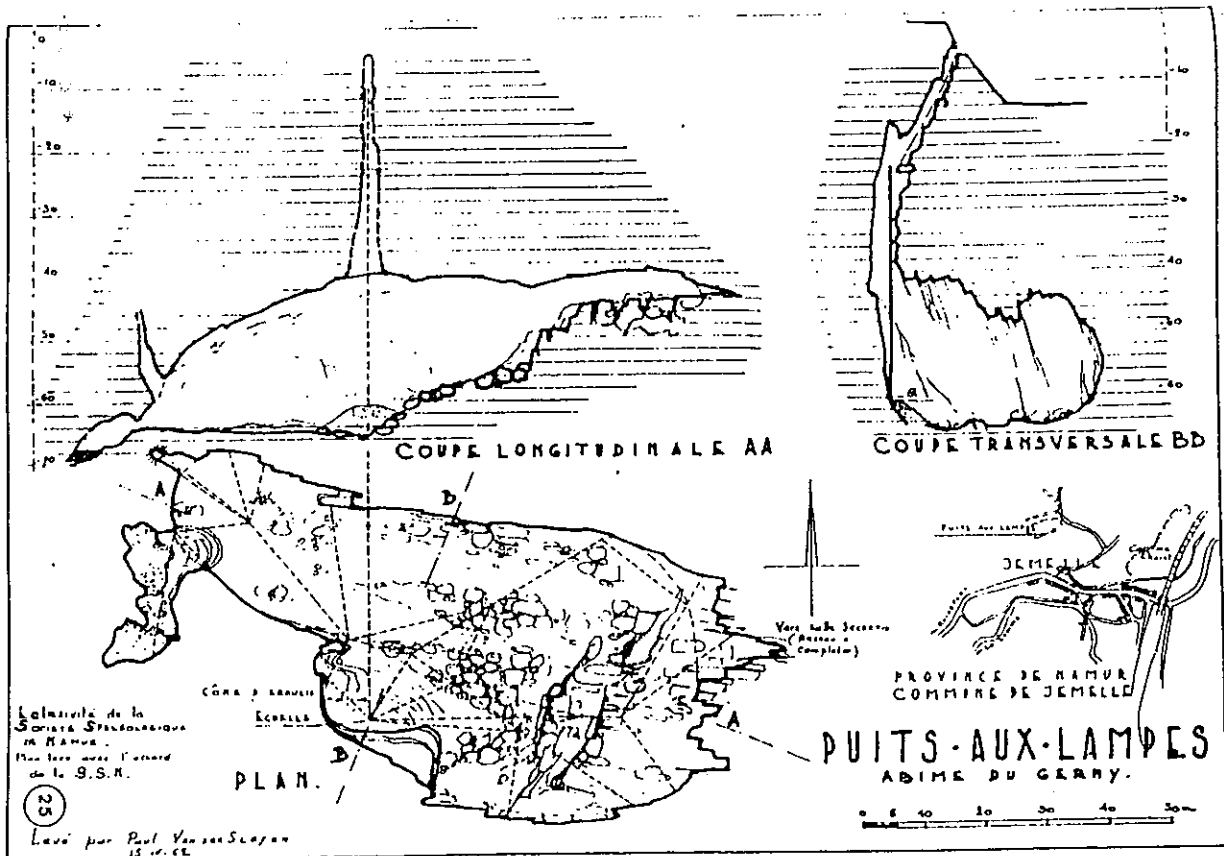
On Saturday 23rd May, horribly early in the morning, myself Tim Francis and Ralph Diment left for a reconnaissance trip to the grottes and gouffres of Belgium. It must be said that the party was leaving in an air of mystery, as available information in the UK seems a bit thin to say the least. Despite lots of letter writing, phone calls, faxes, and many hours piecing together the patchy info, I still didn't really have a clue what to expect. Well, we had obtained permission for Puits aux Lampes, we did have a campsite booked, and we did have a meeting with a caving club at a place called Jemelle...

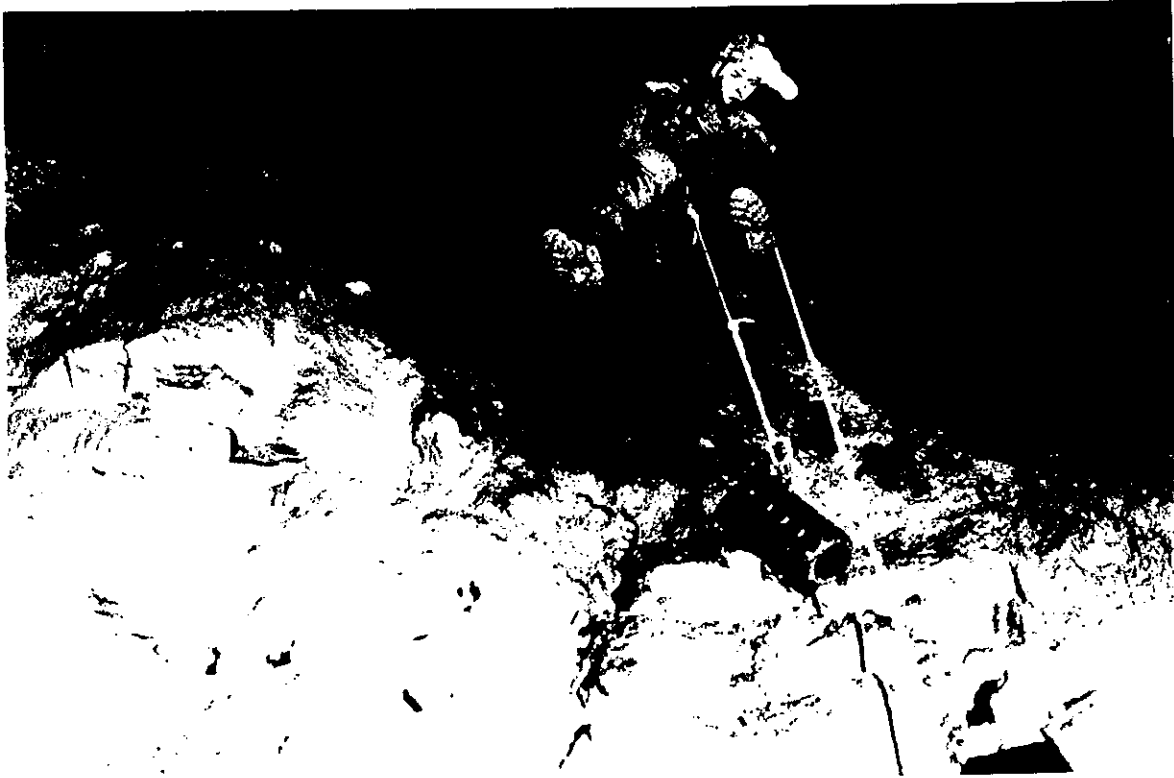
It was action, excitement and adventure from the moment we boarded the Stena Britannica bound for Hoek van Holland. From only a two beer warm up young Mr. Diment led the way with a super severe solo traverse of Perrier-Jouet NV and St. Emilion Grand Cru, culminating in a desperate scaling of Comatose Aven! We reached Holland and Ralph was enticed from his solo adventure, and in a fit of Euro-generosity he proffered his home pickled gerkins to all and sundry on car deck 3B.

Dutch road signs do not cater for English drivers, and after a false start we were off towards Rotterdam and thence the autoroute to Belgium. With a severe deficit of traffic we sprinted the 181 miles to the campsite in only 2hrs 10minutes. Mr. Man at the campsite was quite friendly, and spoke good English, which was rather useful as we don't speak good French. We therefore settled down to a curry, washed down by Joseph Perrier NV and Moreau Chablis.



Sunday the 24th dawned reasonably warm, the campsite was in Rue du Gouffre, we had a meeting at 11 am with the Speleo Club de Gerny, the omens had to be good! Off to Jemelle. Unfortunately we spent the next hour wandering up and down the appointed avenue to no avail, wondering if my French was worse than I thought and had got the address completely wrong! However a nearby shop-keeper directed us behind one of the houses, and lo! a knackered wooden shack. We had found the Speleo Club de Gerny! Trouble is the bods I spoke to had forgotten to tell the chappie there that we were coming. The man at the hut showed us to the entrance of Puits aux Lampes, and we proceeded to explore. Basically the cave is a 180 foot pitch, the last 130 being a free hang in to a whoppingly huge chamber. It was now horribly hot and I was about to earn the "meathead of the expedition" award for only having brought my wetsuit, and Ralph had "all the hangovers I should have had years ago rolled into one". Needless to say motion was not very rapid! The first 50' we (well Tim) installed 4 re-belays; the Belgians seem to prefer none and there were many fine examples of shockingly suicidal rope-grooves, even in an iron pipe that served as a rather good re-belay. Despite the vast dimensions of the cavern Tim and Ralph managed to find a tight muddy bit for a good wallow. We then left a contact address at the club, and returned to the campsite where we started to wash the gear and then started to get rained on. It rained a lot that night with some amazing thunder storms, and Leffe and Ciney beers are rather good.



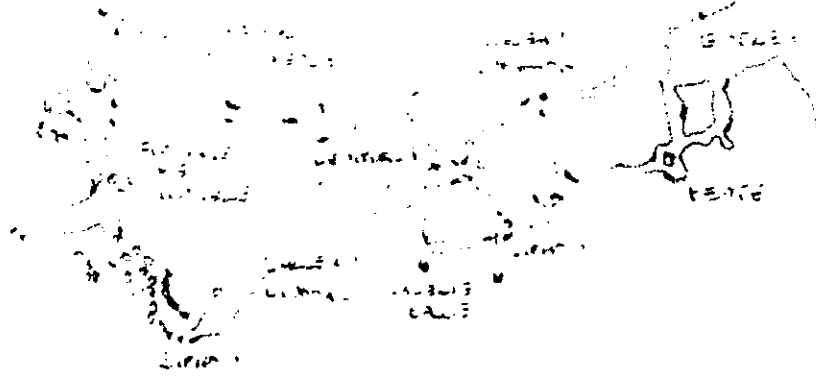


Ralph Diment on the free-hang, Puits aux Lampes.  
Photo: Charlie Allison.

Monday 25th was again bright and sunny, and our objective for the day was to be Trou Maulin (a cave, not a local wine!) However first we had to go to the caving shop as Tim was desperate to spend some money. We stopped off in Han-sur-Lesse for a look and to get the obligatory postcards, then we were off to Sport Nature in Jambes. There was a slight problem though, it was closed on Mondays! Still the Cotes du Rousillon and the pate at lunch time was rather nice. Thus we drove back again and found the Trou Maulin with no difficulty what-so-ever, hardly surprising really as it is signposted from the road. The next bit is rather embarrassing 'cos I had a large amount of hassle getting up a slippery tube, and eventually got hauled up by Ralph and Tim. To add insult to injury I almost immediately found a rather simpler by-pass, aargh! Feeling rather cheesed off I strolled round the Upper series, while Ralph and Tim strolled round the lower series. Our next task was to jump in the river to remove the muddy exo-skeleton and to go to the local Spar for the obligatory Belgian chocolate and some more wine. That night we dined on chilli and some nice vin de pays that I can't remember the name of. A visit to Mr. Man at the campsite cafe was decided upon and we made sure that the Super Mario Bros. and Gauntlet games were working. However Mr. Man was having lots of hassle with a couple of drunken yobs and gave us lots of free beer to hang around as witnesses for when the police turned up. And so to bed.

THE CAVE

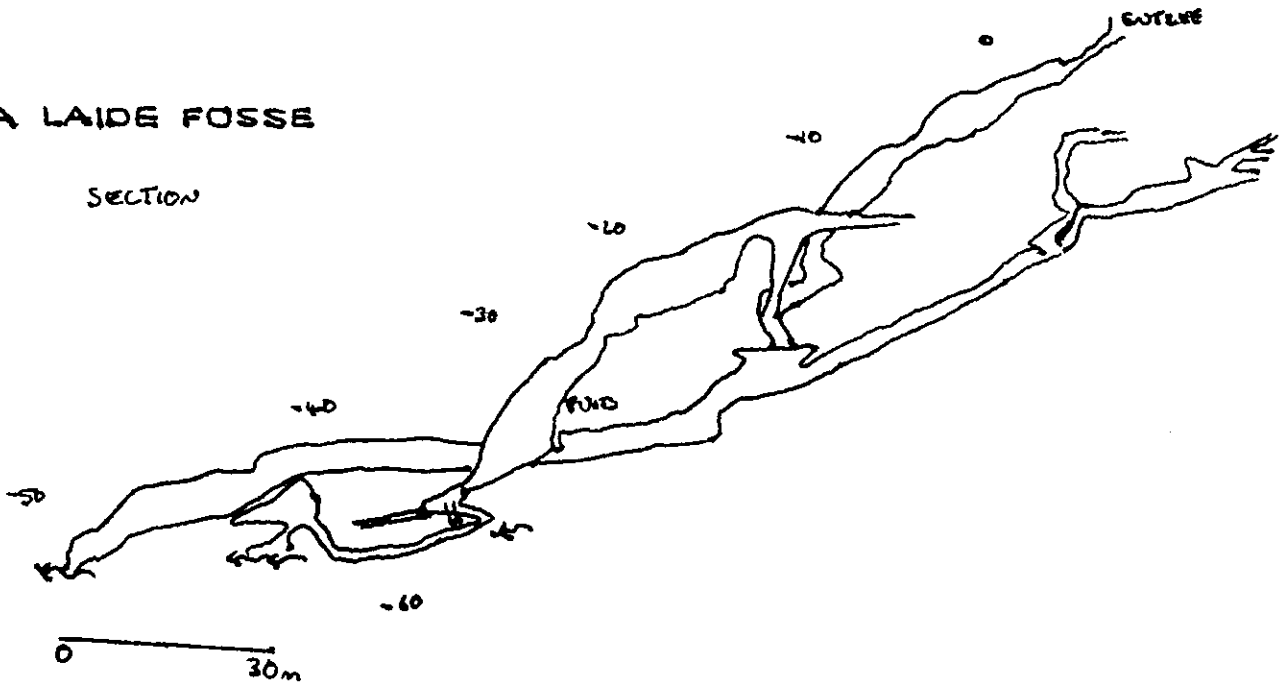
PLAN



Tuesday 25th was believe it or not nice and sunny! Today we were off to La Laide Fosse, via Han-sur-Lesse for some more shopping. The cave is very Mendippy in style and rather good fun, with a short pitch and a few climbs. A pose for the team photo and then off to Jambes to visit the caving shop, which this time was open. Interestingly there was very little stuff on Belgian caves, the vast majority of the stuff being on France. But we did find a couple of Journals, and at last I found a map of the area, pity we were on our way back to the ferry! Leaving Jambes was rather entertaining as the Belgian riot police seemed to be having a day out. There were lots of buses blocking the roads, and in one side road there were at least twenty vans of riot police plus the odd water cannon and armoured personnel carrier. After several moments deliberation we decided to visit the supermarket in Wavre instead. The drive back to the ferry was uneventful, apart from a death burger in Wavre, until we hit Antwerp. By some strange turn of events I found myself negotiating the rush hour traffic, rather than skirting around the city on the autoroute, a most disconcerting experience. On the ferry there was a poor excuse of a curry, and an even poorer excuse for beer, then off to our cabins, and back to Blighty at a quarter to seven in the morning

# LA LAIDE FOSSE

SECTION



Well was it all worth it? Of course it was! There are still quite a few interesting caves to be done, and its dead easy to get to the caving areas: easier than Yorkshire is from London. We now have a few contacts in Belgium and will return for another visit. The landscape is very picturesque, the people are fairly helpful and friendly, the beer's good, but the wine is better in France!

A considerably more detailed version will appear in the journal, but I must thank Tim Stratford, Jean Marc Mattlet, and Michel Druine for their help and advice in making the trip run very smoothly, RHBNC Caving Club for the loan of the SRT rope and tackle, and me for organising it all !!!