

M C G NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

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MORE MALLORCAN ADVENTURES

by *Tim Francis*

As a result of a plea for help from Joel and his gang for porters we decided to return to Mallorca (for the fifth time) six months early. And as expected May proved to be a bit too hot for lugging caving gear around the scrubby hills of Mallorca but we survived! One day we'll get a Mallorcan journal together so it's all good research.

Penja Rotja This was chosen as the ideal introduction to those in the party who hadn't been to Mallorca before. The weather was fantastic so the views across to Formentor were spectacular. We all had a good wander around the lower levels of the cave taking in the sites. Charlie was in his element for a spot of photography although he was temporarily incapacitated after trying to electrocute himself on a slave unit.

Cueva Sa Foradada We first looked at this cave last November and it is unusual for Mallorca in that it has an active streamway. I was keen to finish off the trip as the cave has three undived sumps so persuaded Bellez and Charlie that it was worth a look. The entrance is located on the side of a small gorge near to the Cuba reservoir. It is speculated that the water resurges in the Soller area, perhaps even from Font des Vergers. The entrance sections consist of dry, dusty crawls with some fine formations. Water levels were much lower than in November so the calcite duck was completely dry but the downstream sump was still at the same level. This is an excellent dive site and the carry would not be too bad. Two streamways meet at the sump and we elected to explore the right hand branch first. This ascends gently but the passage is tight and sharp. It appears to head back underneath the entrance passageway with one vocal connection between the two.

After ten minutes of thrutching the passage appears to end at a calcite barrier. The way on was a squeeze over the calcite and one then enters the base of a 40ft high aven. The small stream emerges from a minuscule sump which would be a challenge to dive. Just above the sump I spotted a desperately awkward tube which must be a sump bypass. The problem was that I couldn't negotiate an awkward bend and we only had a lump of rock to hand. Above the sump an aven rises for about 40ft. A way on can be seen and I attempted to climb into it. A rather desperate move out over a section of flowstone was needed which I left for the next trip. We'll definitely be back with a hammer for the squeeze and a bolting kit for the climb! I suspect that the water at this point is connected in some way with the streamway in the gorge above.

The second inlet back at the downstream sump immediately degenerates into a nasty sharp squeeze. Just beyond we found the upstream sump which looks diveable although kitting up would be a bit of a fiddle considering the nasty squeeze before it.

Font des Vergers One day was spent carrying tanks for Joel Corrigan, Ian Williams and Neil Weymouth to this resurgence on the 600m contour. Locals from the town of Soller believe that water seeps through from the Cuba reservoir and resurges at Font des Vergers. At the least the cave must be fed from potholes which must exist on the high plateau several kilometres away. Three of us (Bellez, Julie, Tim) walked up to the top of the hills above Font des Vergers to check out the terrain. The area is definitely worth a look at although the walk in would be easier from Cuba. We didn't wander around in the heat too much as we only had half a bottle of water between us.

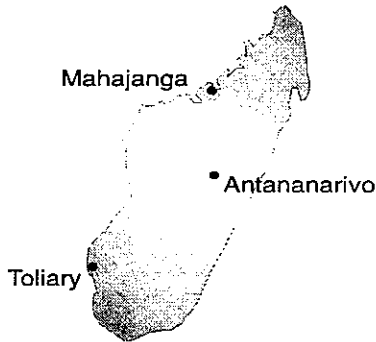
Back at the cave the divers gave us a description of what things were like underground. The first two sumps are relatively short and easily negotiated. The streamway intercepts a fine section of passage with a few unclimbed avens that need investigating. The modern resurgence seems to have captured its water so there should be evidence for an old entrance somewhere. The third sump is a more serious affair than the first two and its size is similar to that of the trunk passage. It quickly drops to -30m, and Joel was able to lay an additional 300m of line in some roomy passage. This heads straight into the hillside at a consistent depth. The water must be flowing along an impervious layer so perhaps the locals theories have some substance after all!

Cueva Sa Campana This is a must for any caving trip to Mallorca and requires very little equipment (see previous articles for pitch lengths and rigging details). Hopefully Charlie was able to take some excellent photographs particularly in the entrance chamber. Most of the cave is well decorated with stal and in

addition has some fine cave art specimens similar to those growing in Daren Cilau. Reggie spotted a huge helictite about three feet in length not far from the camp site which we had not seen before.

Other holiday highlights Obviously on a trip to Mallorca one must take in some of the other highlights that the island has to offer. The less speleologically inclined members of the group took in the delights of several beaches, Aquaworld, and snorkelling whilst Julie indulged in some diving at Dragonera. The local cavers had mentioned a well on the island of Dragonera which supposedly connects to a resurgence at -20m just offshore. Unfortunately the diving team were unable to locate the resurgence. All of us did a quick showcave at Arta on our day off. Other highlight included roasted suckling pig at the restaurant of Torres de Canymel and a barbecue of octopus and salmon at the villa. *See you next year? Tim*

(Team: James Allen, Andy Bellamy, Tim Francis, Julie Hesketh, Kerry Howard, Laura Hughes, Reggie Pain)
(Divers: Joel Corrigan, Ian Williams, Neil Weymouth, Dean ?, Stefan ?)



Madagascar 1998

Following the presentation and question and answer session at the AGM here is an update on the situation. It is difficult to do justice on a double spread - please call one of us for more information.

Charlie

Negotiations are proceeding and are looking positive. The purpose & scope of the expedition is now further defined. Our objective is the Tsingy de Bemaraha area of karst. Here is a synopsis of the current thinking based on our current best possible information.. A dozen or so members have expressed an interest following the request for subs in January. We are still open for participants, however you should contact us ASAP. These notes are based on the AGM discussion.

The Tsingy

"My second cave yielded greater depths, five storeys down, with chinks of light illuminating galleries and stalagmites. The largest cave was a yawning mouth with a stumpy row of stalactites hanging across the entrance, blunted by the annual floods that pour into the cave and down its throat. As I prepared to go down it I noticed the tonsils, a great bulbous calcite form, encrusted with floret shapes, glistening.

The lower chambers were vastly tall, far beyond the beam of my torch, though occasionally the beam caught curtains of stalactites. In a higher gallery I could see crusty stalactites dropping thirty metres down a root system while free-standing roots had been encased in calcite to form pillars..."

An extract from Madagascar Travels by Christina Dodwell

☞ Personal Qualities likely to be required:

- **Fit** The trip will be fairly arduous - it is not impossible that 60lb+ packs will have to be carried for some distance. Essential work may also have to be carried out in adverse & stressful conditions. Team members will be required to carry a fair share of expedition equipment as well as their own personal kit.
- **Flexible** The situation may alter rapidly when we are out there, and the location we visit may change so the team must be prepared to modify plans with little notice.
- **Cave Proficient** Time will not permit polishing of techniques in the field. All persons must be confident of their caving and SRT abilities.
- **Work: before, during, & after** A lot of work and research still has to be done - it is not a 'turn up & go type expedition'. Planning for most eventualities and research is vital and a team task. Help & input will be required on the writing of reports etc. upon return.
- **Speak French / Malagasy** A smattering of French will go a long way - very little English is spoken. In the remote areas very little French is spoken.
- **A liking of rice** Essential - this is the staple diet!

The Karst

'Trees' growing from the base of the karst - derived from of the UNESCO report and portrays the unique nature of the landscape.



A previous expedition found over 60 miles of passage in the North of the Island. The Bemaraha area of karst is considered to have very good potential for some sizeable caves,

As indicated in the last newsletter training and team building weekends will be organised. We need to get things moving - September 1998 may sound a long way off however time is our adversary.

We are also aiming for RGS approval / sponsorship.

