



## Dachstein 2000

*Tim Francis*

It's been a good few years since I've done any serious Alpine caving. So the invitation to go on this year's Dachstein expedition was a good opportunity to see whether the old bones were still up to the job. The arduous nature of the caving had been hyped up in the caving press so I was somewhat apprehensive of what we were about to undertake. The 1999 expedition had concentrated upon pushing Eisturnenhöhle (G5) to approximately 500m and hence revealed the potential of a connection to the Hirlatzhöhle (85km long).

Base camp for this, and previous expeditions, was at the Wiesberghaus, a climbing hut on the edge of the Dachstein plateau. It's about a three-hour hike up to the hut from the village of Halstatt but fortunately we were able to put our heavier rucksacks onto a material cable car (seilbahn). This starts only a few kilometres outside of the village so the walk in wasn't too bad. Our base was actually in a small storage outbuilding (glöcken) that is located a few metres to the side of the main hut. Quite cosy really. I had arrived a day late due to an unforeseen stopover in Salzburg. This was the result of the baggage retrieval system at Vienna mislaying the luggage from our flight. But hey this was an opportunity to do a spot of cultural stuff, watch the "Sound of Music", that sort of thing.

*"The scenery here is excellent and the hospitality is first class. I'm sure an excellent two weeks is about to be had".*

*(Greg Brock)*

### Surface Furtling

As I had arrived a little late the rigging of G5 was progressing well, if a little haphazardly. So I spent the first few days doing what I like best – rummaging around, looking for caves and pushing promising leads. The first site looked at was *Wiesberghöhle*. This was a J'rat dig from years ago that had been temporarily lost.

*"And here you see the delicate negotiations of the bunda: the Greater Spectacled Quackers!" (Snablet)*

Armed with a couple of vague descriptions and a GPS, Quackers and myself spent a merry couple of hours thrashing through the undergrowth looking for the thing. Eventually it was found and a decent GPS fix taken. I managed to find a few bits of tat and an old rope lying around the glöcken so went for a quick solo-caving trip. The cave was rather pleasant but it doesn't particularly draught. I located an unclimbed traverse, which was looked at later on in the week. Unfortunately this didn't go.

*"Find more Cave!" (Snablet)*

After a trip down G5 (see later) our next designated task was to try and locate and explore *G10a*, a lead left from the previous year. Although the day dawned bright enough it soon developed into a wet, miserable afternoon. Ideal for walking! On the way to *G10a* we GPS'ed a few other 'possibles' to build up a better picture of the area. After plenty of wandering around we eventually found the right hole. Just inside the entrance was an undescended pitch. A bolt was placed and a fine 15m pitch descended, but only after the driver had decided to dismantle itself. Peter Hübner and myself bimbled around the bottom for a bit. The cave draughted strongly but both of us declined the offer of descending a desperate boulder funnel in the floor. This was too dangerous a prospect to follow. Off to the right I followed a rift and free'd a couple of pitches but all ways on were blocked with rocks. On exiting the cave we found Rob Garratt, who had elected to stay on the surface, huddled underneath a waterproof in the midst of a torrential downpour. So not a pleasant walk back!

*continued on page 4*

DACHSTEIN 2000 = *continued from page 1*

## C33

*"Hideous place. We have looked Satan in the eye and it's not a pretty sight..." (Joel Corrigan)*

Ah yes, C33, the esoteric highlight of Dachstein 2000. Finding myself at a loose end after having been washed out of G5 the day before, my attention was caught by a small entry in Snablets 'to do' list. Apparently, a squeeze at the end of a cave only ten minutes walk from the Wiesberghaus needed attention. So armed with a hammer, chisel and Joel, who had managed to cobble something akin to a caving kit, it was off to C33. The result of this apparently innocent entry in the reports was the most desperate find of the expedition and prompted numerous quotes and sketches in the logbook.

*"You have to throw your caving kit away after a passage like that because: 1. It's f..... and 2. You never want to go caving again". (Tim Lamberton)*

It starts off ok with some pleasant crawly stuff and a nice 9m pitch. But beyond we found some pretty claustrophobic passage. The whole thing is obviously hideously flood prone so that gave the cave that extra bit of spice. Somehow I managed to push on beyond the previous limit of exploration by forcing a desperate squeeze. Undoubtedly keen to follow (or perhaps because reversing the crawl would have been a tad awkward) Joel made an impressive assault on the squeeze. A few ridiculous manoeuvres and we were both through. The squeeze was called the Buffalo Breach on account of Joel's attire. Beyond was plenty more bone-wrecking meandering passage ending in a 4m climb.

*"We got to the pitch but couldn't get down it head first". (Joel Corrigan)*

With some difficulty this was descended with the aid of a bit of sash cord, and an Eastwater type canyon discovered. Unfortunately just as things were looking interesting we were forced to turn back at a pitch. It was quite a slog to get out of there and we were mightily relieved to get back to the bar.

The promising draught and excellent location meant that another group of keen tigers had to go back and take a look:

*"An awesome cave, a real Austrian classic with sporting squeezes, cascades and climbs. I am so glad that Joel and Tim persuaded us to go and push it. Not only have I looked Satan in the eye but we have also grabbed him by the balls. Unfortunately he has fought back" (Mike Alderton)*

This team managed to push on down the pitch but entered another area of tight crawls. A nine-hour trip of this sort of stuff was enough for anyone so the way on was left open. Apparently it's still pushable but no one seemed keen to pursue this particular line of enquiry. One day, maybe.

*"I don't want to push C33, it might go somewhere" (Tim Lamberton)*

## G5 Eisturnenhöhle

## Introductory trips...

My introductory trip down G5 was a porting session down as far as we wanted to go. So Tangent and Peter Hübner and myself were to carry a load of kit down to Insane Worms and Gheckos. Peter was carrying a monster sized "Hirlatz" bag, which somehow managed to make its way all the way down to the camp despite its size. He called it a day in the entrance series leaving Tangent "The Mendip Numpty" and myself to carry on without him. This trip proved to be a relatively straightforward carry despite the strange canvas bag, nicknamed "The Slug" and normally resident at the Belfry, that I was portering the kit in. The highlight of the trip turned out to be the dramatic thunderstorm that chased us back to the Wiesberghaus.

*"Is it going to be ordinary rain or electrical rain?" (Tangent)*

We had to bound across the sharp limestone and 'bunda' with only a fading Mightylight to guide us. Apparently, a group of cavers were hit by ground lightning in the same area a few years ago. Very reassuring!

My second trip was cut short by the high water levels. Lev Bishop, Rich Gerrish, Tangent and myself were scheduled to do a two day camp and pushing trip. The weather didn't look too good when we set off from the hut and we were soon sopping wet. Tangent bloused straight away at the entrance after having compared the normally dry entrance passage to the sound of the Swildon's streamway. The rest of us pressed on to below the big 47m pitch, Action Reaction, but thoroughly soaked and miserable we decided to dump the kit and head out.

*"It's a classic. A real f..... classic. Not sure if I like it though!" (Rich Gerrish)*

And so to camp...

So finally on my third effort it was off to the sharp end. This time I teamed up with Joel to make an 'old duffers' trip. The plan was to cave in over the evening to arrive at camp in time for supper. Things went more or less to plan and despite the hype the caving to be had in G5 is all rather pleasant. Basically its lots of pitches broken up by Mendippy bits. For those not used to such Somerset delicacies, such as the West End, the awkward bits and in particular "Fit For Insane Worms and Gheckos" proved to be most troublesome. As I hadn't been very far it was fun to hear Joel reel off the names of various sections: Sweaty Betty, Fabada Run (remember the Picos?), Charlie Don't Surf, The Numpty Trap, Oi Oi Wobble Wobble Thrutch Thrutch etc. My favourite pitch was High Flyers, a fine bit of old fossil passage.

It takes about 4hrs to reach camp, which is located on the only flat bit of ground in the cave. A small area of rocks behind a huge boulder had been levelled off in a chamber called the Hall of the Mountain Numpty. It was quite a home from home. As soon as we arrived at camp we came across the detritus of previous residents. Whilst clearing up and looking for something to dump the rubbish in I looked rather too closely at an innocent looking BDH. We soon had everything washed up and had a meal on the go just as the culprits, Lev and Rich, came back from a pushing trip. A delightful supper for 4 was created and so to bed. Well almost, except for when Joel managed to roll a large rock onto Lev's leg - it took three of us to lift it off him. Fortunately he only had bruising and Joel cut his hand in the rescue attempt.

The pushing trip...

The next day, after a hearty Bearfeast, we said farewell to the others and headed off down to the end. We took photos as we went, as Joel needed something for the sponsors, Total Access. After a few pitches and the delights of the Birth Canal the best bit was a 50m pitch that had been first descended a few days before. At the bottom we had been given a rough description of the geography so decided to initially head off downstream to look at Lev and Rich's bit. They had bolted a fine traverse, pushed a horrible muddy tube but had left a possible climb at the end. The main streamway had not been followed as this would have entailed a soaking in freezing cold water - not a prospect to be undertaken lightly at such a remote location.

We felt that they had missed the main way on so we returned to the spray-lashed ledge at the bottom of the 50m. Behind a huge boulder we found a parallel streamway. A small pitch was descended and a fault-controlled rift followed (Tortilla Rift). This soon became high and narrow. Progress was hampered by having to climb up and down on small ledges that were liberally coated with mud.

*"...more like some slobbering Jabba the Hut manifestation of hideous plastic clay" (Tangent)*

We pushed it for a short distance before calling it a day. We knew it would take some serious caving to pass this obstacle. So it was back up the 50m, along the Birth Canal and back to camp. More washing up (!) and supper for 6. Four others had arrived and so it was quite a jolly scene at camp. Unfortunately two poor souls (Paul and Greg) had to carry on down to the bottom, as there were only four sleeping bags. We were hotbedding, which is a bit grim until your body dries out the damp sleeping bags and thermals.

*continued on page 6*

## DACHSTEIN 2000 - *continued from page 5*

Back to the Wiesberghaus...

The prussic out the next day was relatively straightforward. Our only problem was forcing tackle bags through the Numpty Trap. We were out and back to the Wiesberhaus in the early evening in time for a few welcome beverages and some decent food. A few more pushing trips were done in the rift in G5 along the "1000 spits traverse". The disappointing nature of the passage and the arduous caving required to get there meant that it was eventually abandoned. A few avens were also climbed but nothing significant found. So it would seem that G5 would not be connected to the Hirlatz. Indeed a perusal of the known hydrology of the area leads us to think that this part of the Dachstein drains to another resurgence entirely. We need to be looking on the other side of the watershed - i.e. closer to the Wiesberghaus. Which leads me back to C33. Oh God.

## Back Home

*"An end to three weeks of unremitting toil. I look forward to never coming back unless I get Alzheimers and forget how horrible it all was". (Chris Densham)*

For me this was the last caving trip, as I needed to catch a flight back from Salzburg via Vienna to Heathrow. I headed back to Salzburg via foot, ferry, train and bus accompanied by Annette and Quackers. With a hostel booked at Salzburg it all went rather too swimmingly until the Vienna baggage retrieval system decided to lose my luggage again. So my recommendation is if you're thinking of going to the Dachstein next year don't travel via Vienna.