



ULSA Newsletter

Editor: Kristian Brook

22/07/2023

Editorial:

Here's a nice bit of travel reading for you. Unless your not enjoying a summer holiday and contributing to your local economy, in which case lunchtime reading is here for you.

I'm sure lots of you are on caving expeditions after warming up with the ULSA holiday. I know several are currently with the Totes Gebirge expedition in Austria so I look forward to receiving writings about that. Still have yet to have anyone besides Alice write anything about the ULSA holiday but I'm sure that has simply been lost in the mail and will be with me soon. Not much in the way of caving trip reports this issue, but I made up for that. Plenty of diet ideas though.

Anyway. Next issue I'll hopefully have more events to introduce as silly/fresher season will begin or I'll hear something about an ULSA meeting. The world is an oyster and I need to remember about the pearls. Send me more caving articles or I will write about eggs again.

K Brook

Cavers Lament

Editor: Feckin poetry eh!

Sing a song of wet socks,
and wellies full of stones,
I'm soaking to my bollocks,
and I'm freezing to my bones.

I'm stumbling like a drunk man,
and I'm aching like I'm old,
my light is slowly dying,
and my hands are numb and cold.

My oversuit's in tatters,
my kneepads: wearing thin,
and warmth is all that matters,
when you're shivering to your skin.

So sing a song of wet socks,
and wellies full of stones,
and drink to all the cavers,
who should have stayed at home.

-- Charlie Crossley

The French Diet

I've been told that breakfast articles are required, so here's one about the average consumption of a French caver for a caving trip : croissants, lunch and post-caving pique-niques.

The standard is that anyone who isn't driving acquires some form of pastry/tart/cake. Either hand-made or bought from their local the same morning, allowing everyone to enjoy at least one buttery croissant before heading underground.

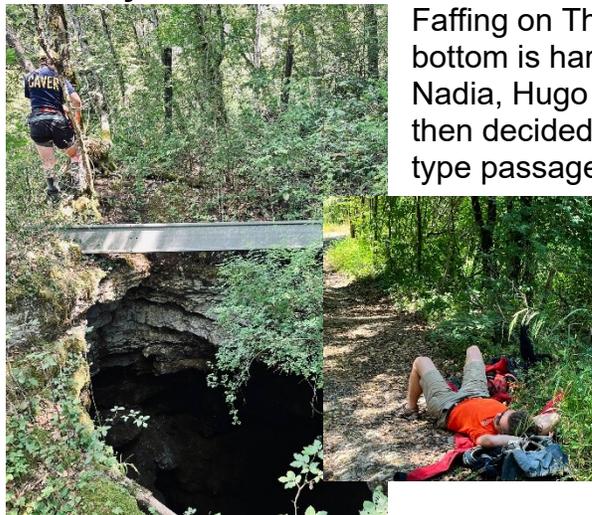
Lunch is considered essential if the trip is more than 4 hours long. A mars bar (or your favourite equivalent) is not sufficient. Everyone must have the appropriate components to create a sandwich. Now this doesn't necessarily mean that sandwiches have to be made, but a lump of cheese, some saussison, or other dried meat, and a baguette must be consumed as soon as the group decides it is lunchtime. Bring enough to share.

On leaving the cave, the other non-conducteur produces either cake, beer, or in the case of certain members of the club (and whether or not is was a digging trip), a full blown pique-nique, complete with tiny table and camp chairs. Hunger is not permitted.

Aluice Smith

Traversée du Reseau du Verneau: Biefs Boussets à Grotte Baudin

Thursday 15th :



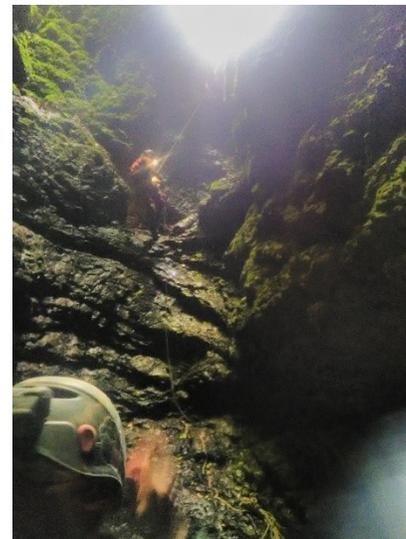
Faffing on Thursday included deciding not to pre-rig Biefs Boussets as the bottom is hard rigged, so it would be fairly easy to rig en route. This meant Nadia, Hugo and Sarah spent 3 hours looking for Grotte de Chaillets, found it then decided the second voûte mouillent was too wet (it's a ceiling sucking type passage), and Mike, Vincent and I went to do Gouffre du Chin-Chin, turned around fairly quick then went past the club to collect more carabiners for rigging Biefs.

Friday 16th :

The Brits were in Nans-sous-Sainte-Anne early, and the French 10 minutes late, this was followed by slightly more faff with Camille packing her bag in the car park before we put her and Thomas in the back of mike's van for going up the hill.

At 9h30 we (Thomas) were rigging the entrance, and got changed into wetsuits at 12noon, part way down the final pitches of Biefs Boussets (after (re)discovering how crap the meanders are).

Sarah managed to calm the fear about sumps enough to get through the Siphon de Patafouins, resulting in me being greeted by a relieved look when I followed. Not long after, 1:30ish, food came out for the first picnic in the Salle du Bivouac. The connection to Vielle Folle was pointed out, and a description of how it could be turned into another easier way to get dive



bottles down into the main system (it currently has 2, 20m sumps). Mike discovered that his Darren Drum decided not to be waterproof through the sump which resulted in slimy Haribo Crocodiles (the taste was better than the texture) a sopping wet furry and a saussison skin which peeled off so easily that a translation of foreskin was asked for (prépuce if anyone is interested).

We started moving again once Thomas started shivering too much, and not long after, dropped down to Le Collecteur briefly. We saw where the drier route drops down too, before a climb up to the right took us into the Côté Jamais (not part of the classic route, but done because a different route has to be taken any time anyone repeats the traverse obviously). This took us through a tight mini pitch head, a crawl which was too small for me to get through without digging, a pitch and a hole in the ground before we rejoined The Collector.



In the Bassin Merdique I gave encouragement to Mike who swam a rope back to Thomas who was re-bolting a traverse line for the basin, while Sarah and I busied ourselves eating soggy crocodiles. Mike asked if he needed his harness before we got to Salle de la Corniche to which Thomas' response was "les anciens ont fait sans, mais je sais pas comment" (the oldies did it without, but I don't know how). Mike took this as a harness isn't required until we got there and he saw the drop back down to Le Collecteur.

The following passage was fairly simple, passing the Salles des Bon et Petit Negro, arriving at the Salle de la Tremie (next to the tripod) to change out of our wetsuits and for 3 of the group to see the tripod. More food was eaten and progress was fairly steady up to the Bouyau Du GSD. Mike slipped over, Camille made it across some stepping stones without completely falling in the water.

Getting across the wire traverse before the Boyau Du GSD passed nearly without incident, then Sarah put on a good show of getting off the pitch head due to not moving the tackle sack from her harness to the traverse line.

The crawl out of Grotte Baudin seemed to take a while due to whacking my elbow at the beginning of the trip, but we managed to get out 10h50m after we went in.

Good trip.



Oh and of course a beer at the gîte at the bottom of the hill was required too.

Alice Smith

A response to 'Javed Bhatti's Insane Diet'

Editors note: Rob wrote this not long after the last newsletter being published. So would like it pointed out that he had totally predicted the upcoming Musk vs The Zucks Armageddon cage match

It was with some interest that I read of Javed 'carbs will kill you' Bhatti's dietary exploits, and though I feel he covered an impressive amount of ground in his advice, he neglected several emerging breakthroughs in evidence-based biohacking which I will outline below.

1. Extreme fasting (not anorexia, I'm a man)

As is common knowledge, when men announce they are depriving themselves of sustenance for insane periods in an attempt to sell their self-image in the 'personal brand marketplace' created by the hyper-consumerist, techno-cuntalist society in which we live, it is not a mental health disorder (as it would be classed if a woman or girl did the same), but a personal quality to be championed. I adhere to the 'null by mouth' principle regularly underground, where I have been known to refuse food for an entire multi-day underground camping trip in my quest for moral superiority. Indeed, with continued climate breakdown this is going to become a more and more necessary skill: we regularly ran out of water on the Loser plateau in Austria on expedition last year, forced to seek refuge underground at the tap.

Financially prosperous (yet intellectually challenged) men from whom I have drawn inspiration on this include former Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, who became so successful as a result of avoiding food and water for 3 days that he lost his job to Elon Musk, a man whose understanding the perimeter of the public square is so limited that he boasted to a news company about hiring a convicted con man to try and prove his claim that Vern Unsworth was a paedophile, a comment which caused Tesla's stock to immediately drop 4% (which pales in comparison to the losses he has incurred after taking over from Dorsey). Sadly no one at Twitter has gone postal on Musk yet, though maybe he will instead die when he has to compete in the surely-upcoming Silicon Valley MMA Tournament, where Zuckerberg etc al flaunt their recently-acquired pecs in an attempt to distract from how little their visions of the future chime with the rest of humanity. At least Zuck seems to be coming to understand that his brain is weaker than his biceps, something Elon still hasn't grasped.

2. Raw Water

When I do allow myself to indulge in guilty pleasures such as water, one of my go-tos these days is consuming untreated water from the rivers and springs of the UK. I got into this after reading about the exploits of such visionary US business ventures as Live Water, whose founder got ahead of the COVID-inspired antivax curve by claiming that public water supplies were a vector for social control. This makes sense: after all, what else would Nathanael and his evil colleagues in the MOD do with their time not spent either on the toilet, or discussing toilets?

3. Avoid Salt (unless its in something tasty like olives or crisps)

Here I diverge from the Dorsey Doctorine in favour of the Dinny Doctorine. I'll attempt to outline the differences in ideology via a fictitious dialectic engagement as follows, imagining Dinny has become a barefoot tech bro by creating a marketplace app aimed specifically at hoarders like himself (selling and delivering boxes of computer parts from the 90s and the like), and bumps into Dorsey while parading around Oakland CA:

Dorsey: Wow! This raw seawater sourced direct from the halocline in a mexican cenote tastes fantastic! I think I'll start using it as an ingredient in my daily salt juice portion.

Dinny: I haven't added salt to food since 1989. Though since I'm a compulsive hoarder I still have a vast amount of salt-related infrastructure in my kitchen. Would you like a salt seller?

Dorsey: Kitchen? Who needs a kitchen now that I can simply pour uncooked vegetable slurry like Soylent into my mouth - when I allow myself food that is.

Dinny: Ah, singing from the Adam Metcalf hymn sheet I see. I couldn't possibly allow myself to eat something as hyper-processed as Soylent or Huel, it would contain far too much salt. Would you like some crisps? Don't eat them in a sandwich though, a single slice of bread contains the recommended daily serving of salt for adults.

4. Not being poor

Finally, and most crucially, the single biggest contributor to effective, cave-appropriate nutrition is wealth. If you aren't a 'feckless, sponging waste of space' (I'll let you guess who I'm quoting there), then you are far more likely to be able to afford not only the \$37 needed to drink untreated water from Oregon, but also the inevitable medical bills accrued when you fall ill from Dysentery, Guardia, e. Coli, Chronic Fatigue, and other conditions associated with drinking sewage and malnutrition (not to mention your mental state hanging by a thread due to depriving yourself of the enjoyment of big slices of cake).

P.S. I had hoped to include a section on the benefits of a carnivorous diet to caving, but when I contacted our resident expert on the issue he claimed he was still recovering from being canceled over last years Dinnermeet and refused to engage.

Knob Chopson

K Brooks Trip to Mexico

Flying to Mexico

It's leg day. It's always leg day. Packed and ready I spent the night at R Turnbull's flat in Manchester before my flight as it was a way to get a free lift to the airport. Bonus was a free meal as well. After fighting our way down the incredibly windy streets of Sale we decided on Scottish/Indian tapas. Very good, very spicy. We barley finished the meal due to the sheer amount we ordered, and the deep fried nature of the cauliflower. 8/10

The next day however I realized the mistake of eating that level of grease and spice before a flight, so with the assistance of two cups of coffee, purged myself before leaving the flat. That was my second mistake, but we made it to the airport without incident. However it did felt close at points with plenty of danger farts which R Turnbull braved without complaint.

Now I risked it for a biscuit when it came to book outbound flights and booked third party so could not do online check in for my flight as the flight numbers were not recognised. This understandably made me nervous and questioned whether I had even been booked on the flight correctly! The other worry was that I had to change flights at Cancun to get to Mexico City and had two hours to do this. This would involve crossing the border, picking up my bags and rechecking onto the new flight with my non existent Spanish. If I missed that flight because of checking out and back in it would be my fault and I'd be up shit creek.

After a delayed trans Atlantic crossing I had now had 1 hour to change flights. This made me nervous, however the flight staff were nice enough to let me to the front of the plane so I could book it off the flight straight away.

When those plane doors opened I ran to customs, however when I got to the immigration queue there was a flight from Panama in front of me and they had produce load of documents to cross the border on account of not being from a better country. The Panamanians let me to the front when they saw how distressed I was and after I gestured to my watch to indicate my lack of time, I'm sure I came across as an idiot. With a sigh the Immigration official took me through the process.

Official: "UK?"

"Yes"

Official: "Holiday?"

"Yes"

Official: *Stamp* "Bienveinedo Mexico"

After picking up my bags I battled my way through the taxi rank and loads of taxi drivers offering me a lift to the departures gate no more that 50 meters away. For check in I was a bit more imperious and just went to the front of the queue in this as I only had 15 minutes left to departure. One again the staff realized my distress and checked me in, and then ran after me as I left my passport at the check in desk. I was rushed through security I got to the flight just in time to find I had not been allocated a seat properly. Booking third party is fun and stressful.

Still got on the flight, and got to Mexico city. Uneventful night at a hotel recommended by the Americans. Had my first Mexican food (I think it was tacos) and a good night sleep in quite some luxury. I was meant to meet up with a Russian man living in America to travel to Huautla, but it turned out he had to back out of the expedition last minute. I found this out just as I was leaving the UK. Yay, solo travel!

Overland to Huautla

New leg day and it's off to the bus station for the 9 hour bus journey to Huautla de Jiménez. Started well by following a travel guide the Americans had made that had a confusing map that sent you to a parking garage for the hotel first of all. 30 minutes wasted I got to the bus station and found the bus company to take me to Tehuacán, then to Huautla de Jiménez. I found out later there is actually a direct bus but I was following the american's guide religiously, plus I thought I'd see more this way.

Buses in Mexico are quite comfy and are pretty much just like a Megabus, minus the toilet. The lack of toilets is made up by stops at roadside corner shops that also have street food. Fuckin eh! Although it's 5 pesos (20p) for toilet roll.

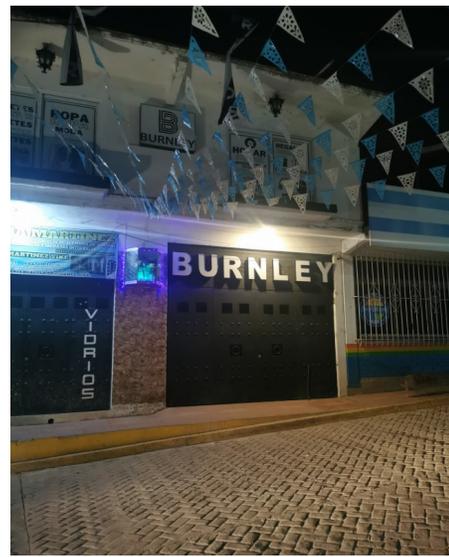
Only one motorway the whole way. The rest of the journey was all on double track road that had speed bumps every 50 yards when going through a town. Slow going but my butt survived. It took a total of 12 hours to get the Huautla de Jiménez with a 4 hour lay over in Tehuacán that I used to sample the local food. Arriving late in the dark I could not get a taxi to base camp in the village of Plan Carlota so another hotel was employed and I walked around the town and ate Tamales. The morning revealed the stunning beauty of the Oaxacan Highlands and the stay in the hotel was well worth the rest in a bed.



Filler images: Highland Panorama, Shit Talking, The Gear Store



Huatla's main government building



The Fancy shop in town



Plan Carlota



Base camp with the local shop

Taxi found in the morning I made it to base camp and the shit talking commenced. The base camp very luxurious, consisting of five buildings. Two used for sleeping, one for the gear store, one used for an admin/computer building and the main one having two floors with kitchen/common room and store on the ground level and more sleeping upstairs for those who don't mind noise. No caving trip the first day but a visit to a local town for supplies and a walk up the local river to climb some waterfalls, during this we found the river sink in the town where there is currently no known cave, as well as a higher resurgence which had not been explored but the town's water supply came from there so we decided not to push it without permission.

The Americans were eating the shit talk out of my hand, and the local kids loved my dancing. We did have the idea to go see a cave very close to the camp that was used to calibrate Distos but there was a 3 day camp group coming out of an entrance called La Grieta that was slightly over due so we were on standby to go help them if needed.



Shit Talk Central

Luckily this group turned up last minute and started drinking immediately. The group that came from La Grieta were a bunch of Texans that were the owners and staff of a show cave called Natural Bridge Caverns. They were up for a good time and we had a good sesh before retiring for the night. I found that the boys like to put load of salt of top of their beer cans of Modelo as they drank, this was a valuable lesson in how to keep drunk and salty for the sweaty environment.

Nita Nishi

Morning came and breakfast ate. We headed off to Nita Nishi in order to derig the cave as far as 300m. It was connected to the main system last year so we needed the rope and hangers elsewhere. Team was Micky Manning, from Georgia and Martin Hoff, from SWCC and I. We were particular reverend about this cave as there has been issues with the locals in the past. The locals are superstitious about cave spirits. Some believe that we disturb the cave and the spirits that inhabit them. If they have a bad crop or someone gets ill we can be blamed for it, so it helps to be respectful. Anyway we knelt at the cave entrance and we were quiet on the walk in (which was a challenge for me). Personally I found this quite nice as it helps ground oneself for a short time before the torture starts. Suited and spiritually fulfilled we headed in and my first experience of Mexico was had.

The attitude of the cave it that is running along the strike and the dip is between 30-40°. Like Mendip, but good. Entrance series is a series of short pitches, largest being around 15m. This continues to about -300m depth when it levels out an carries along a stream passage as the same level until you hit a vast chamber called the Supai Room. The Supai room is a massive GG sized chamber with some large formations and gypsum crystals on either side. Good to visit for your first trip

Below this point it was wet and minging so it was decided to abandon the rope below this point as it was agreed it was likely trashed anyway. I derigged most of the pitches and half of the god dam through bolts spun so I could not remove the hangers, so they are in that cave till they rot. Good trip, only took 10 hours. Walked back along the roads to a wifi point we had paid for earlier that day to inform base camp we were out. We continued to walk back along the road to be picked up by the truck back to base camp. We had rocks in our hands incase we were attacked by dogs.



Miki Manning on rope in Nita Nishi



K Brook at Camp 1

Returned to base camp, ate, drank, talked, slept.

Rigging in Ka

Next day I tagged up with the keen bean Alec Matheus to rig a cave called Nita Ka. Ka is about 500m deep and only 70m from being connected to the rest of the system. So the objective was to connect it to the system during this expedition. We were not only rigging the cave but moving the bolts as some of the rigging placement was haphazard. The team consisted of Myself and Alec and two Arizona Cavers Belinda Norby and Jessica Pruitt who had just arrived the day before. Also tagging along in the trip was a Tennessee caver Matt Tomlinson who was only joining us for half the trip to take photos as he had a bus to leave the expedition that day. Hardcore! We got some cokes to leave by the entrance as offering for the cave spirits/field workers (you walk through a corn field to get to the entrance) and made our way by foot to the entrance in the next valley over from basecamp.

Now at this point I'll pause to describe the general conditions in the caves and how most people dress. The caves are about 12°C but very draughty so most wear a single thermal layer and an oversuit. I found a single layer of thermal tops and bottoms matched with oversuit trousers does nicely, with a fleece and oversuit top for surveying or incase it gets wet. Wellington Boots must be worn as you are a British caver and must represent.



More filler(I know how to edit): Texans and explosives, Ethan in Elysium



K Brook and Alex Pre Cave



Gear for Ka

For this trip I forgone the oversuit bottoms and regretted it. The make up of the cave was similar to Nishi with loads of small drops, but Ka run with the dip not the strike so there was a lot of 45° progress. The dramatic change was the arrival to Crumbling Canyon a 30x7m drippy canyon passage going down at a good rate, which is dropped into via a larger pitch. Matt took photos of us going down the pitch and proceeded to fuck off. I was the last down and on the final drop I noted something different go through my descender. Turned out the rope had been completely sheathed at that point. Spicy!

I proceeded to calmly fix my hand jammer above the damaged point and ascended above it. I isolated the damage and looked for the culprit of rock that could've caused it, but nothing obvious presented itself so I carried on down, keeping an eye on the area above to see if there was anything further rubbing there. This process left me soaked as the damage was typically in the wettest section of the drop.

Another note on general conditions. Rope. This expedition uses 9mm American pit rope. This is not like the 9mm we use back home and is tougher and stiffer so it can take some rub before showing damage. It's a bastard to tie and untie and horrible to bag up so half the time you wrap it into a 'Cavers Coil' in order to transport it. People do use bobbin descenders on it but I find a rack is the way to go on them as with a simple I could never move if I used my breaking carabiner or I had to C rig it. I initially used a Petzl aluminum rack but the bars showed significant wear after two drops! I asked one of the Texan cavers who was leaving one day if I could borrow his and post it back to him. He just gave it to me and told me to keep it, which was very nice considering it's a \$105 piece of kit.

Back to the cave, and I joined the others further down the canyon and we started rigging. Alec started the event, showing us how it's done. This expedition uses a combination of expansion bolts and concrete screws. The pitches we were rigging used concrete screws so that meant when we replaced the bolts we could just take them out of the existing holes and replace them into new positions. Alec started and I switched with him rereigging in the drippiest position I could find due to the quality of the rock I was dealing with. The others stayed back and were nice and dry while I was getting soaked again.

Jessica rigged last under Alec's watchful eye while Belinda and I watched, getting colder and colder. Eventually Jessica dropped and declared the next section even drippier. I was starting to shiver quite badly so me and Belinda left, while Alec and Jessica finished up. Alec explained that we were to head out a different way and gave us some directions but did not explain exactly where these directions started, so me and Belinda went to the head of the canyon passage, got lost, and just went back down again. This did warm me up however.

Rejoining our comrades Alec showed us where he meant and we started making our way out. The different way out was theoretically easier so Alec wanted to check it out to see if it was. We started by completely missing a climb out of a very crumbly loose canyon passage. Alec did a couple of dodgy climbs and we all accidentally scooped virgin passage trying to find the way out of this choss piece.

After an hour of looking and nearly getting to the point of retreating back the way we came in we found the climb up and the rest of the navigation was straightforward (to Alec at least). This way out was much more arduous than the way in as it involved more passage that snagged your tackle bags and SRT kit. Alec agreed and it did not seem that people were going down there unless they were to look at the leads that were all over the place. It was however very decorated and pretty.

We exited the cave at 1am to a rain storm and untouched coke bottles. We changed and made our way back down to base camp drinking coke all the way. Just as we got into Plan Carlota however I received a call at my back door. I did not much think of it at the time and wanted to save it for camp as it would be rude to shit by the side of the road in the village. This idea changed when the knock turned into a battering ram and my trousers dropped in record time. Alec was with me when this happened and by the time Belinda and Jessica caught up I was merrily squatting away and emptying a sizable content from my guts. A typical expedition sight.

Buried my crap and got back to base to find a good meal waiting for us and a lone drunk Texan. Hung our gear to clean in the rain, and dry by morning.

My Detox Days

Woke up in the morning and my arse exploded. This would be the case all day, and on average I went to the toilet 2 times an hour. Quite frankly I expected this and I didn't feel too bad, just needed to dash every now and then.

Toilet situation in Mexico has a couple of points to bring up. In Plan Carlota we had normal flushable toilet and you'll find this in most of Mexico although a seat is not always guaranteed. Main thing to remember is not to put your used toilet roll down the toilet as the sewage pipes are too small to handle it, and it will block if you flush toilet roll too much. I often forgot out of habit and there was not serious repercussions. Instead you put your used bog roll in a bin that is next to the toilet and something happens to it. I did not stick around to find out (it's most likely burned). Outhouse situations are differ as well, as most places in the world will provide you with a hole in the floor. Not Mexico baby! Instead you get a filthy toilet pot without a seat which means instead of a nice squat you have to awkwardly hover over this bowl, praying to god you don't accidentally touch it or your turds don't land on the side of the bowl which means you need to push them in with a stick. Crapping in these toilets is like aiming on the Death Star trench run.

This was my main hobby for two days.



Camp Legends: Steve the Cook, Blake: General Handyman/Truck owner, Brother Bob the Storeman

I was not alone in camp as the old people who turned up are around all the time helping out around camp. I helped sort gear and Jessica and Belinda were resting after the Ka trip. Alec could not find anyone to go underground with so he was about, begging me to go back into Ka. The Texans had also bought a bunch of fireworks and were letting them off in the middle of the village. These rockets were loaded with much more black powder than the stuff you get in the UK and have no particular colourful shine. They just explode and echo throughout the valleys. They let off about 20 before being told to stop before the locals got too pissed off.

Another night, another sesh

Next day my guts were still not in good shape, so another surface day for me. But I could tell it was ending and I had still been eating well this whole time. Bill Steele proposed me, Jessica, Belida and Ethan would go up to the other camp at Plan Escoba in order to help out with the work in Cueva Elysium. I was told Elysium was the prettiest cave on the expedition and if I was offered the chance to go there, I should take the offer with both hands. Fuck Ka, I'm off to Escoba!

We were packed and set off for Escoba at midday. We stopped by the town of San Andreas to do some shopping and I got me a pair of Hippo's (Mexican Croc's knockoffs) and for \$5, their a bargain.



Views of Escoba: Village and Camp Buildings

The Plan Escoba camp had three buildings and an outhouse for a toilet. Two buildings for sleeping and the third being the kitchen as well as the landlords chapel. There was an altar in there which we were not allowed to put stuff on under any circumstances, that's gods table. The others at this camp were Tommy Shifflet the expedition co leader, Jim Smith, Jessiaca Van Ord (JVO) and Bob Alderson (Super Bob). We set ourselves up and ate cabbage stew that night which was a welcome change as it was not a spiced meal for once. Although JVO was less keen as they had been eating this same cabbage stew for 2 weeks straight!

Enter Myo

Woke up in the morning to the news that JVO was not feeling to well. This meant that Bob need someone to go into Nita Myo (I Must explain at this point that Nita is the local Mazatec language for Cave where as Cueva is Spanish for cave, cave is also English for cave). Me an Ethan volunteered to follow Bob. Belinda and Jessica went with Tommy to blast a blowing lead in Elysium near the underground camp.

A sweaty walk into Myo ensued. Objective was to go to th deepest known pitch and push a parallel shaft. Myo had recently been connected to Elysium via a passage just above of this deepest pitch which had been dropped 60m to a sump. Hopefully this parallel shaft would provide a way beyond.



The team at Myo Entrance



Ethan Descending a typical Myo Pitch

Myos attituded is a sporty multi pitch trip similar to Ka with a blasted crawl partway through that leads into the larger passage past the entrance series

We ate lunch just above the deepest pitch and made our way across the traverse to the parallel shaft. The shaft had already been rigged as Bob had pushed it earlier and was back to survey it. I was surveyors dog on this trip as I was for all surveying trips this expedition, as I can't draw surveys for shit. We dropped another small pitch climb down to a sump. There were other leads off this climb, such as a climb upward which lead to a very, very dusty chamber with load of break down and crawlways galore. We focused on the climb down which lead to a sump which was assumed to be at the same level as the one found at the bottom of the final pitch. Another blowing lead away from the sump to a breakdown chamber with more sumps around the edge at the same level as the one found.

There was a stream coming from the breakdown but no obvious way on. We surveyed the chamber and by the time we were done it was midnight and our energy had run out. We made our way to the surface at got back to camp for 4am. Amazingly JVO was still awake working on stuff for the NSS Vertical Section. We entertained her with stories of the day, ate cabbage soup and went to bed.

A nice thing about Escoba was that Jim Smith bought all the beer, where as in Carlota you had to buy your own from the shop. I showed Bob, Ethan and Jessica the Salty Modelo technique and while they were dubious at first, were converts to the new way of drinking within the hour. My Relationship with Myo had been cemented and I was not allowed to end it.

Rest Day

Got up somewhere around midday. Only me and Super Bob were left in camp as the Elysium trip was still underground and due to come out the next day. Ethan, JVO and Jim had set off with a paleontologist from Puebla to collect some bones in Elysium. We found that some colleagues of the Paleontologist had come with him and were heading out that night to collect pit vipers from around the cave entrances. They showed off the lizard they had already found but had to wait till the evening to collect the pit vipers.

I set off for the Elysium entrance with a book and just sat in the field all day reading till night fell. Good day. I found the others change of clothes near the entrance and stole them. I thought I would be fair however and left them some of my own. This was a risky proposition but I thought it would make for a good story.



Elysium entrance

Back at camp we found that we suddenly had to cook for all these extra guests. I had no plan and neither did Bob, as Jim was the camp cook. We waited for Jim to return and he simply told me to figure it out myself. Out comes Chef KBrook with JVO serving as my Sous-Chef. I accused her of not knowing how to boil water, and constantly questioned her intelligence. Despite this she performed her duties admirably and we made a fine meal with the meager provisions we had. I rationed out the first course to make sure everyone ate and there was plenty left for seconds. Well done me! I won't tell you what the meal was. It involved tomatoes.

Aborted Myo

Woke up and shit talked all morning. Nothing particular to note beside that everyone cooked their own breakfast as Jim was enjoying a break and we were enjoying JVO's french toast. We thought we had Maple Syrup, but Ethan grew up on a Maple Syrup farm and informed us that it was in fact High Fructose Corn Syrup while he proceeded to drink a gallon of it with his toast.

Ethan had a rest as he was expecting to go on an Elysium camp the next day. Super Bob and JVO and I set off in the midday heat to keep working on Myo. This walk in killed me. For anyone who knows me you know that I do not respond well to heat and this day was no exception. My whole state deteriorated on the way to the cave and when we got there I was broken due to overheating. I cooled down somewhat in the cave while we got changed but I was on the first pitch and while waiting for the others I closed my eyes.

Sometimes you lie down at the beginning on a trip and feel like you should at the end of the trip. When this is caused by a hangover, you suck it up and carry on as the day can only get better. When it is caused by overheating and general exhaustion, you have to reevaluate your life. I called an end to the trip and the others were all too happy to oblige as it turned out stoke was low that day and everyone was waiting for someone else to break. I was all too happy to play the part of the broken.

We exited the cave and picked blackberries and looked for more caves on the way back. It was much happier time walking back in the sun in the full knowledge that I could enjoy this sunny day as opposed to die in it. Got back to camp and had cold beers. Ethan had not been idle in the mean time though. He had explored the corn field just under the camp and found a going cave entrance with a hell of a draft. was right on the edge of the field with sticks crossed across the entrance to bar the way like some Ominous X (name of the cave now). We rigged off a tree growing from the entrance and Ethan dropped about 100 feet and the pit was still going when he ran out of rope. Called it a day there and we decided we would return tomorrow to push this pit properly as that seem easier than returning to Myo.

The Elysium camp had returned late that evening to report that the blasted lead was still going, and needed more blasting before it enlarged. Although an enlargement was in sight and promised caverns measureless to man. We drank to this knowledge and retired for the day.

Aborted X/Myo Returns with a Vengeance

Ominous X was killed!! Not by us though. Tommy explained to us the situation with a group on Mexican cavers that also come down to the area from Mexico city. Some politicking had happened in the previous years and an arbitrary drainage line had been written of which Ominous was just on the other side. With this sad news we went back to Myo with our tail between our legs. No abseiling from the camp kitchen.

Present on this trip was Myself, Ethan and JVO.

The lead to push in Myo was in the connection between Myo and Elysium. It was a wet hole on your left as you are heading to Elysium from Myo. We progressed down and the passage split in two main ways that were found on this trip (more may be about). The way left connected to a window on the other side of the 'final' pitch in Myo which leads to the before mentioned sumps. This way has not yet been surveyed and properly pushed.

Right leads to a small crawling passage with constriction that was encouraged with a lump hammer. This proceeded to a pitch which I rigged while Ethan and JVO surveyed behind. This dropped into a splashy hourglass chamber where the water dropped into a promising descending rift in the floor. I reported this to the others above and had a good look at the rift from the rope and saw it was free climbable. After I was done I turned my head 180 degrees to head back up, and smacked my face into a sharp rock protrusion coming from the wall. I walked into it with so much force it broke off and gave me a deep cut on the ridge of my nose right between my eyes. Typical of a face wound, this bled everywhere without it being serious. I humbly waited, dripping blood from my face and onto the floor and walls.

When Ethan descended he made a comment on my face and took a nice photo of me for our dried meat sponsor. This was well received and guaranteed sponsorship for next year (so much bacon jerky!!). JVO came down and kept yelling something about there being blood everywhere down the rift lead. We climbed down and found the water ran into some narrow channels that were too small to follow. This was a bit of a let down,

Ethan however had found good airflow coming from the boulder choke which made the upper section of the hourglass chamber. This was pushed and we found the jackpot! Big ol' dry trunk passage trending north south, about 15m wide by 20m high in certain sections. We terminated the survey in this passage and decided to scoop some ways south in order to scout what we were certain we would survey the next day.

Fucked Over For a Rock

Steele fucked me! Ethan aswell. While we were sleeping off our latest exploits he was on the blower to Shifflet and he wanted the 'strongest' cavers available to help retrieve of some items in La Grieta. One item being a drill in a lead called Sister Midnight. Now me and Ethan were selected for this as we were men, whilst JVO was sat there as a quite strong caver who knew where this lead was as well as being one of the last living people to see this fabled drill. But no it had to be me and Ethan.

Ethan had been in this cave before to Camp 3 and had fond memories of it. This was that he hated the cave but he loved the dinner mix at camp. I had no opinion on the matter and if it was 'needed' by the expedition and it got me in another cave I was amenable to heading out.

We packed our gear and waited for Steele to pick us up from Escoba and take us back to base camp. This happened, and we got to see the Sunday life for the Mazatec on the drive back. They like to get wasted. This does not apply to everyone but it seems the Sunday activity for some is to buy a bottle of the local drink, Mezcal, which you can get a bottle of for 50 pesos. Then drink it all to yourself. A full bottle of this spirit will get the most seasoned drinker paralytic and it shows. Passed dozens of boys all stumbling about or passed out by the side of the road.

One case of a lad who was trying to drive home after a midday sesh then abandoned his car diagonally across the road, left it, and passed out on the other side of the road. Luckily we managed to pass by this scene after I closed his drivers side door.



The Offending Party

Arrived back at camp and ate spice again which was a welcome change after the diet at Escoba. Slight sesh that night with Fernando Hernandez and Angela Farmer who would be also on the La Grieta Team. Objective would be to get to camp the next day and then the day after me and Ethan would retrieve the drill (a very nice Bosch one) and Fernando and Angela would get some scientific materials which would be analysed after the expedition. Fernando was with the USGS (United States Geological Survey) so had some contacts who needed data. We were there for the data and it was heavy stuff, not the heaviest but enough to make you complain after 11 hours of carrying it.

To Camp 3 and Beyond

Morning we packed after having a massive discussion of what was underground already and what we needed to bring. I packed a small amount of snacks for myself and a sleeping bag while others carried roll mats and other apparatus which has escaped my mind.

The journey to camp 3 typically takes 12 hours. It involves a 400m descent of a shaft series and 300m of ascent up a sloping river series. It feels a bit irritating doing a 12 hour trip to be only 100m from the surface but hey ho, we did it, and it only took us 9 hours!

Camp 3 was a cozy setup of 4 beds and after a bit of a bedding panic we setup pits for all 4 of us. I was complaining somewhat about the weight of my pack compared to others and we found out why. I was carrying 3 times as much food compared to the others and this also included about a gallon of trail mix. My mission over the next couple of days was to eat this stupid amount of food.

Sat down to dinner which consisted of dinner mix for Ethan and boil in the bag foods for Me, Fernando and Angela. We looked at a survey from 2017 to locate Sister Midnight and Fernando pointed to a location a foot away from the edge of the paper and says "I think it's here". Neither me or Ethan knew this place and neither did Fernando or Angela, doubts were raised concerning our ability to find this drill so we agreed that we would spend 12 hours to try and find it, and if it was not found we would return to camp and sacrifice this item to the cave. This is going well.

Both Fernando and Angela then said how they hoped that me and Ethan would say no to this trip when we were asked about it. Out of all 4 people on this camping trip, none of us wanted to be there! Additional misery was added on over the night as Fernando developed diarrhea and had to go to the toilet, and Angela's period started and she had not brought down any items to deal with it. The trip was quickly deteriorating and it appeared that half of the team needed to leave before anything useful happened. But after a quick dig around camp we located two tampons for Angela and a dose of Imodium™ for Fernando.

We parted ways and Ethan and I set off for this drill at 11AM. It was a cluster fuck. Ethan had been to the Velvet Underground before (which leads to Sister Midnight) but was led a year ago and could not remember the way. There were some markers saying "Way to Sister Midnight" but they only existed in the part of the cave covered by the 2017 survey. So they were ultimately useless. After 2 hours of trying to find the way on from the end of the 2017 survey, at a location called Turkey Falling, we found some traverse lines that Ethan remembered. Followed them to a choke which lead three way junction in a large passage. The way to the Velvet underground was from this junction but we didn't know which one. Followed one way till we noticed we were going through virgin passage, so that's a lead that needs to be pushed. Returned to the junction and followed an easy but exposed climb until we reached a rope that lead up a shaft that was at least 60m. We evaluated the time and it was nearly 11PM, well past our agreed time so it was time to head back with no drill. The name of a particularly nice caver call Scott was cursed and we agreed that he would have to pay for a new drill and his profession is well paid and he can afford it.

Returned to camp to find Fernando and Angela already in bed. We ate dinner mix, and I can see why Ethan likes it. No matter what is going wrong in your life dinner mix provides relief, and I can say that I have been converted to the way of the mix.

La ReGrieta

Set off in the morning after a session of Breakfast Mix. Angela had run out of tampons and Fernando's multiple trips to the toilet had used up all the toilet roll so we were using rocks at this point. Ethan was generally miserable as he hates La Grieta and knew what was coming. Being surrounded by all this misery I was ecstatic and was having the time of my life.

We set off, and I left a lot of food behind as I had failed in my mission to eat my trail mix, so I will have to return next year in order to eat it all up. For the conservationists amongst you it was sealed in a double bag. We picked up our packs which were bulky and weighed about 12kg. Not that heaviest load but we had 10 hours of carrying them ahead of us.

Nothing much to say about progress back, steady going interspaced by the occasional shit and one meal. I tried carrying out my bag via a sling hung through my harness loops in an American death triangle. This resulted in my D ring inverting and my kroll hanging on the gate. Would not recommend. Returned to the surface at 10PM to the usual feeling of elation of smelling plants again after 3 days. La Grieta is not the worst cave in the world but is just crap enough to make you loose your sense of security and do stupid things with your logistics. It has earned the name La Regrieta well.

Farewell Plan Carlota and Huatla

We had one day at basecamp in order to get our admin done. We repaired and cleaned the kit we had trashed, sorted out our return journeys, packed away the base and had some time for relaxation. The next day we packed what was still out and cleaned the building under the watchful eye of the landlady. Then we left for Huatla de Jimenez and checked into the same hotel I stayed in at the beginning of my trip. There was a mixture of a boys dorm, a girls AND old farts dorm and the honeymoon suites, I was with the boys. Some shopping time was had for us to eat tacos and buy souvenirs such as vaquero hats and mushroom shirts.

The evening was the final expedition dinner which had the trappings of any other with speeches and puppet shows. Meal was Chicken Mole. Imagine Chicken in spiced chocolate, strange sounding but I can recommend. Got wasted that night at the local gay bar and got shown some dancing moves, pulled my cock out much to the shock of the local gay boys and then finished the night in the brothel as it was the only place you could get food at at 4AM (pot noodles).



The two faces of the Brothel. Pride and Shame

Buses home and tourist crap

Got the direct bus back to Mexico city in the morning. 7 of us got the same bus and had a very nice journey. Stayed in Mexico city for a couple of days and went to the anthropological museum (a must see) and Teotihuacán. Not caving related so I won't go into detail.



Huautla de Jimenez



Alec with Town Garb



White men: Bill Steele, Jim Smith, Bob Alderman, Petie Barrie, Ethan Perine (death stare), Steve Zeman

Good expedition. I would recommend for anyone considering it. It is well established and the expedition provides loads of detail on how to make your way there.



Montezuma's Revenge



The Myo Borehole



K Brook at La Grieta entrance

K Brook