



ULSA Newsletter

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Editorial:

I been thinking about so many good openers for this editorial. But now I've sat down and this is the best you get.

The time has come again where I have procrastinated enough to actually get these articles together in a publishable format. It's mostly the younger folk sending me stuff to copy and paste so the old guard need to start tapping away in their keyboards or start dipping the quills in their inkwells and send me something or we're all going to think you're boring. I already knew you were boring but the facade needs to be kept up so get on it.

I've probably forgotten loads of stuff. But don't worry. I've bought a diary, and I've promised that I'm definitely going to write in it on my next holiday.

Upcoming Meetings

23/03 – ULSA AGM

25/03 – ULSA dinnermeet (Nidderdale)

26/03 – Northern Explorers forum

31/02 – 02/04 – NCHECC

10/04 – Irish Student Caving Forum

Dinnermeet and AGM

Dinnermeet is this weekend and the AGM is (checks notes) tomorrow.

AGM sounds thoroughly boring but if you don't attend it you might end up being editor. The meeting link has still to be sent out but John Holloway emailed out an agenda on the 9th of March so go there to figure out what's going on.

Dinnermeet is at the Crown Hotel in Middlesmoor (not Lofthouse) this Saturday. Dinner is buffet style (details below). The Brook brothers will be in attendance from 6:30PM onwards. Dress is Fancy being any outfit that has a theme that starts with G, O, Y, D, E or N

MAINS - Chicken Casserole; Beef Chilli; Sweet Potato Thai Style Curry (GF); Vegan Cottage Pie - served with a selection of rice, chips, mash and vegetables.

DESSERTS - Fruit Crumble; Lemon Cheesecake; Chocolate Brownie (GF) - served with custard and cream.

Berger Antics – July 2022

The seed for this audacious act of piracy was first planted in the fine ship Berlingo as we sailed down the autoroute toward the UIS Congress in Chambéry, pastries in hand and slightly too warm because there was no air conditioning and Becka would only allow us to have one window open (it apparently improves your MPG, though the increase quoted varied between less than 1% and over 10%).

‘I hear the French have hard-rigged the Berger to coincide with this conference.’

‘I’ve always wanted to do a nice tourist cave in the Alps, rather than that chilly muddy shite I usually get forced into’, proffered Peachey between mouthfuls of pain du chocolat.

‘No way’, interjected Julian forcefully from the drivers seat. ‘This is my one chance to unleash TunnelVR onto a bunch of people who might actually value it, and Becka is going to be there to help and not be down some fucking big scary cave.’

Becka said nothing, not wanting to cause another near miss with directions at a different unpredictable French junction (Becka and Julian refuse to look at a sat nav and the road simultaneously, instead making the other deliver directions verbally to ensure maximum stress and argument). But, once she was sure our course was true, she turned round to Peachey and I and her eyes screamed ‘PLEASE TAKE ME TO THE CAVING!!!!’

And so we began to scheme. It soon became apparent that the traditional route to obtaining a permit to descend the cave (writing to a French man called Remi) was not open to us, and had not been for some months. Peachey and I are not known for our advanced planning abilities. However, we are known for being very cheeky in the face of adversity. So I rang Brendan Hall, who was at the Berger camp with SUSS, who had in fact written to Remi (or at least had made friends with some actually organised cavers that had) and thus were permitted to descend.



Illustration 1: Man with Chipolata Eats Cheese



‘Brendan, I’m sure that some of your SUSS party will have decided they couldn’t be arsed to go down the Berger. Which three people do myself, Peachey and Becka need to pretend to be to be allowed in?’

‘As it turns out, there is an exact match in the gender mix of the absentees and you three. I can do you a James Deakin (hasn’t been caving in some years to my knowledge), a Natalie Greenwood-Sole (broken leg, fair enough), and a Rostam Namaghi (actually at the UIS congress with us, too much wine and good company for him to consider leaving).’

The differences in physical appearance between us and our new identities only added to the appeal of this plan. Everything was in place; Peachey had even had the foresight to bring a copy of his will along with him to France. Game on.

During the following days, Becka was especially accommodating of Julian, making him food, hassling people to enter his VR cave simulation and even granting him sole use of the only hire bike while she walked to the conference centre in the 40 degree heat. Shortly before my presentation on Tuesday (which went well enough that I felt in a holiday mood), she informed him of her plan to abandon him for a cave, as usual. His look of dejection was practiced yet also knowingly in vain, well aware that nothing he said or did would be able to sway her from her chosen path. So we threw our caving gear in the car, bought half of the food in Intermarche to appease Becka's insatiable gluttony and dispel her fear of our perishing from starvation in the cave, and sailed off again through some amazing scenery, the towering limestone cliffs of Mont Granier, Dent de Crolles and Chamechaude rolling over us in waves one after another.

After the predictable navigational mishaps and associated shrieking from Becka, we eventually arrived at a rather empty campsite - the SUSS cavers had all decided to make their attempt on the Berger that day. This meant there was no one to cover for us to the French, something that had been causing Becka more and more agitation as we approached, though on exiting the vehicle the negative temperature gradient as compared to Chambéry brought us considerable relief. We prowled furtively around the field perimeter, over to the sign in tent to look at the call-out board. Then, after waiting for the cover of dark for some reason, we decided to test out our new personas on the unsuspecting young woman who was managing the permit sheet, though Becka declined to be present for this.

'Bonjour, we're here to sign in for the Berger. We are with SUSS.'

'Oh, OK, I thought all of you were here. What are your names.'

'Rostam Namaghi...'

'Oui, I have that name...'

'Natalie Greenwood...'

'Oh...'

'And James Deakin.'

'Your friends said that Natalie and James would not be coming?'

'Yes, it was a last minute change of plan. We are here now and we would like to descend the cave tomorrow if that's OK?'

A silence that seemed to last an age followed while she stared unbelievably at me.

'OK, yes, that's fine with me. I will just need 20 euros each for the fixed ropes please.'

A small price to pay for such an excellent ruse.

We deliberated for a while regarding the call-out, which had to be left on the board at camp with the French. Obviously, leaving a call-out with our real names would have been preferable, but then the game would be up before it had begun and more confusion could ensue. Leaving a call-out under assumed names was deemed to be the best choice, with a further one left with Julian (using our real names) as a back-up and written details of our plans conferred to Brendan and Jack Dewison, including the location of Peachey's will.

A further concern was the realisation that none of us knew where we were going once in the cave, having not quite expected to get this far (though directions to the entrance had been obtained from Brendan). However, the arrival of Danger Benn and friends, who also hoped to descend the next day, saved the cakes for us: they were prepared with multiple laminated topos of the whole cave and were happy for us to have their spare one. Our luck knew no bounds, it seemed. To prevent things from going wrong now that it had all fallen into our laps, we decided to go to bed before we rose at 5am the next day. We slept in some unoccupied SUSS beds, confident that they would not be returning in time to use them. When confidence alone has got you so far, its tempting to continue to rely on it until something blows up in your face. It wouldn't be the first time...

When we awoke, the air was crisp and hung dark around to hide our escape. We scuttled silently around the car, boiling water for coffee and frying up some mushrooms and cheese on toast. Becka was simultaneously requesting that we stay put to cook more food to fend off our impending starvation underground, while also whispering hoarsely that we needed to pack up as she glanced anxiously around the field in case we were discovered by the French cave police, with ensuing consequences sure to be severe. Possibly not as severe as the retribution that might face Ian Peachey, however, as he noticed that Jack Dewison had returned to camp and left his SRT kit outside his tent, complete with pantin. Peachey had forgotten his pantin, and allowed naughtiness and giggles to consume him as he pocketed Jacks equipment.

As the morning light began to creep above the pleasantly forested hills and plateaus, we finally completed our campsite faff and wombled off, sleepily following Google's unquestionable blue line towards the car park. However, it soon became apparent that the algorithm desired us to take a track over the mountain which soon ceased to exist, instead of following the ski road which we had diverted from a while back. After some shrieking from Becka we turned around and rectified the issue, though not without further displeasure from our chauffeur regarding the condition of the road. The sun was fully up by the time we pulled into the car park at the top of the hill which lifted the mood, and we headed off following the gps tracks that Brendan had given us.



After about 20 minutes walk, I rounded a corner only to stumble upon a fallen soldier slumbering upon the path, whom I identified to be Max Kenworthy, one of Brendans Boys. A short distance further on the full party was encountered, and Peachey decided not to push his luck and swapped Jacks pantin for Brendans. Brendan informed us that the rope on the final pitch had been cored badly, and that a number of SUSS were still underground. We parted ways and continued our plod through the lush forest, which made a reassuring change from the distressingly brown and burnt looking hillsides that we had been surrounded by in Chambéry. We soon arrived at the entrance to the cave, which had a scattering of gear about the place along with a sign in book, which we completed with a snigger.

The entrance series of pitches is wonderfully straightforward and clean, and as it was rigged with double ropes we progressed swiftly. The rigging throughout the cave was a thing of beauty, with not a bolt in sight, only naturals and drilled anchors threaded with dyneema. Soon we were in the Grande Gallerie, which was grand indeed. Absolutely humongous, in fact. It ramped down steeply as well, like Swindon's on steroids, and after some fine boulder romping we arrived at Camp 1 and le Salle des Treize (Hall of the Thirteen) just under 1.5 hours after getting underground. Leo, Andi and Glen were just awaking in Camp 1, along with Tom Spriggs and Rosa who stayed sleeping. We had a quick chat and then proceeded through le Salle des Treize, which makes you feel like you've drunk a potion of the sort encountered by Alice in Wonderland, such are the dimensions of the gour pools and stal bosses. Incredibly impressive, though I did feel a slight pang of sadness that I wasn't there to see them before thousands of cavers trudged all over them.

A couple of short drops followed interspersed with further romps and slides down calcite slopes, and then we were at the crux of the trip: the Grand Canyon. A narrowing of the passage concentrates the water into a 250 m descent down a series of cascades, which have been the scene of multiple fatalities in the cave in the past. Becka had earlier been telling us of her only previous visit to the cave in 1996 with OUCC, when Nicola Dollimore and a Hungarian caver tragically lost their lives in a major flood. Becka had described her memory of the water in the Grande Gallerie, which had barely been a trickle when we passed through, as a raging torrent which she and Chris had been unable to traverse during their exit from the cave, waiting for some hours for the water to subside. That must have been a truly awful ordeal. Even though we were descending in the midst of an unprecedented drought and with a clear forecast, I definitely felt a degree of trepidation as I entered this narrowing of the passage and remembered Lee Knight's drunken appeal to "treat that cave with respect'."



Illustration 3: Spout



Illustration 2: Thirteen Wankers

A prolonged traverse line had been installed above the water, and we were making steady progress along this when we heard heavy breathing accompanied by what sounded like the 'Black Pearl' theme from the Pirates of the Caribbean soundtrack approaching rapidly behind us. I turned around to see a young french guy swinging like an ape along the traverse line towards me having already bounded past Becka and Peachey. "Ave a nice day" and he was gone. We pondered the purpose of his flying visit, and concluded that he must be replacing the damaged rope on the final pitch. We pressed on at a far more reserved pace, and after negotiating a series of tensioned lines the cave opened out again and the drops became deeper. We continued down the nylon highway only to encounter the youthful racer ascending ropes almost faster than we were able to go down them. Once he had disappeared again we continued to the bottom of the pitches, through the 2 m crawl that had caused Glen to turn around, and along a nice stream way until we encountered a major inlet cascading down from a slot up high on the right into a deep plunge pool. This water originates from the Gouffre de la Fromagère, and apparently the exchange between this cave and the Berger is a classic, with them having been connected in 1990. One to return for.

We pressed onwards, knowing that the pseudo-siphon couldn't be far off. A waist-deep section of narrow passage ahead led me to resort to some Dawes-esque contortions to avoid the water, and around the corner I was surprised to encounter a rope heading upwards. There was no mention of this in the rigging topo, but we decided we would have a look anyway to see if it would allow us to avoid the swim we could see ahead. After ascending around 30 m there seemed little sign of this stopping, so we decided to grin and bear the wetting in the main passage. We learned afterwards that this rope was new for that year and that the french cavers had pushed over 1 km of new passage there. It's quite incredible that such an established classic could yield that amount of new cave just by climbing up a few metres at the end!

After descending the pitches back to the stream way and continuing a short distance, we found the route onwards apparently blocked by a significant unrigged drop. Up to the left a length of tat invited us to press on, however it was decided that we didn't want to risk pushing Becka's hunger too far so we began our exit from the cave. We learned later that this tat does indeed provide the route to the true pseudo-siphon, so none of us actually made it there, which we suspected to be the case. Peachey and I reconciled ourselves with a quick skinny dip in the excellent pool at the base of the Fromagère inlet while Becka ate a chocolate and looked unimpressed.

And thus began the lengthy journey retracing our steps. I won't bore you with the details of most of it because its quite a long way and the journey was pretty uneventful. Just before re-arriving at Salle des Treize, we encountered Danger Benn and her comrades and in quick succession some cavers from Crewe CPC. Only two of the Crewe group were continuing past Salle des Treize; the other seven had descended to Camp 1 and then decided to have an impromptu nap. We continued out, passing Rosa Clements and Tom Spriggs as they exited carrying all their camping gear. Becka kept trying to race me up the double ropes, eager to get the option with the most rebelays so as to have less bounce. I don't recall who actually won but she certainly became the most irate of the pair of us so I think I did.

We exited the cave at around 10:30pm, meaning it had taken us 13 hours of steady plodding on the fixed ropes. A very enjoyable way to do alpine caving, would recommend. We were very glad that we had decided to leave a loaf of bread at the entrance, which was devoured very swiftly along with the remains of the wheel of cheese. Then we meandered back to the car and rolled sleepily down the hill to arrive back in the field, put up tents and stumble into a fine slumber.

Epilogue:

the identity of the young french racer in the cave was revealed to us the next day to be Edouard the Rocket, and his surface-to-surface time on that re-rigging mission was 5.5 hours. Outstanding.

Also, Peachey's will is still in the Berlingo.

Rob Watson



Illustration 4: Unnecessary
Navigation Cairn

Top caving tunes:

No one has given me pause to believe 'That's a banger!'. Given that this section is fueled by my taste alone I have sourced inspiration from deep within to suggest the following.

1. Horse Bastard, I can't figure out the song title
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXnpV3WhfLw>)



Feel free to send in your recommendations that don't suck

Moel Fferna Slate Mine, Corwen, Wales

5am is the earliest I have ever got up for a caving trip. Once we got down the short entrance pitch and dekkitted. Chris left his bag most importantly with his lunch in, he was blissfully unaware. As we explored the tunnels the bats weren't too happy at being woken up. We found a cool bridge that we were going to cross but the line to clip into had fallen off! We headed to the waterfall to get some photos. While Clive was setting up his camera people had their lunch (something I learnt on this trip was older people like comfort and lunch while caving). On the way back to the pitch we were talking about what the weather would be the selection ranged from snowy to sunny! Once back at the pitch Chris once again left his bag at the bottom, I'm getting the feeling he just wanted someone to carry it for him. Steve then followed, when he got to the top he announced it was hailing and to hurry up as he forgot his gloves. I went to ascend and couldn't move. Turns out I put my chest jammer on upside down! On the way back we had heavy hail. I've never been so glad to have a tail wind for a 40 minute walk back.



Kai Trusson

Paul Pot Memorial Trip – 12/03/23

The Paul Pot memorial trip was upon us and we ended up with a team of five heading down Lost John's: Luke, Kristian, Nadia, Mike and I. This was not ideal given we had 6 bags of rope but Mike did the good thing and said he would carry two. A fitting call out was left with Rob Watson as we intended to head down Monastery and Dome routes, convening around battleaxe traverse before carrying on down Valhalla and the final pitch to the bottom.

I rigged the first pitch, Vestry, Cathedral (noting the horror I had previously endured at the top of the pitch, much to Mike and Nadia's annoyance no doubt) and the traverse above Dome along with the rope to the bottom of dome pitch. Generally I enjoyed most of this as it was dry, quiet and I kept warm carrying the bag and rigging. Overall I seemed to be going at a decent pace and although I received no praise, I believe my rigging was adequate. Nadia went down to carry on rigging to the bottom and Mike took over rigging and swung into the window on dome pitch.

Dome junction, Candle and Shistol were passed in good time and I noted the change in temperature and noise as we reached battleaxe. So as to keep warm I left Mike to rig and went back to the pitch before. After only a minute I heard Nadia above me. She showed off her squeezing skills with SRT kit on, at the bottom of the Candle & Shistol on a narrow section of cave and we went to join Mike. This was good timing as he was on to rigging Valhalla. I only had to use my foot loop once on the traverse so I consider that well rigged and a success. As Nadia followed we heard Luke behind us which was even more excellent news.



Illustration 4: The Man. The Unit. The Legend. Luke Prangroom on Dome Pitch

Mike had made a point of putting the tacklesack with the Valhalla rope in a puddle when he could, but despite this the rope was very dry and creaky which is always fun. I used an extra breaking crab because 8mm and I'm always scared. Everyone was swift down this and the final pitch and soon we found ourselves in the master cave. We had a minute's silence in the dark and then went upstream to look for how we would get to the students who were doing a trip in Notts 2. We didn't actually intend to do this and we'd left our SRT kits behind but we found the rope and contemplated what a joy it would be to surprise them. Then we turned around.

On the way back I timed Valhalla and managed 4 minutes which I was happy with though I feel there is room for improvement. Mike spent quite a while trying Nadia's squeeze below Candle and Shistol and eventually got there after taking his SRT kit off. (He denied this and claims he only "loosened it"). As we were waiting for the bag there was also some time for photos on Dome pitch. I made everyone faff lots and the results were meh. Mike complained it was counter intuitive taking an extra tacklesack further down into the cave as we descended another two pitches but one of the teams had to have it and we were the group of three.

Luke waved us goodbye as he removed the ropes and left us to our Monastery fate. Nadia and I watched Mike get soaked on the bottom pitch. His pantin kept coming off and it took so long to go up that I got numerous photos. Jokes were on me though as I had exactly the same experience despite trying to avoid it. I shouted to Nadia that the pantin was useless but apparently not using it was also just as bad. All round we got soaked.

Not gonna lie, I was exhausted when I got out. But I made it with the tacklesack in one piece. Luke & Kristian were already out and changed back at the cars. About 25minutes later Mike and Nadia appeared and it was an all round successful trip.

Alice Shackley

Aila Taylor Cooked an Egg

Editors Note: Aila is not a member but Hannah Collings provided the eggs. So we have her to blame for this breakfast food themed article. Write about your breakfast and I WILL PUBLISH IT!!

Hannah gave me a box of eggs at the NPC to try cooking. Having tried cooking eggs only once before, which didn't go very well, I have been restrained by a fear of cooking eggs for the last 7 years but I've decided it is time to master the skill. By the end of this box I will make an informed decision on whether I wish to continue interacting with eggs, or stay away from them for life

Yesterday was the first egg day. I tried frying it. This did not go very well, over half the egg was black and the rest was very overcooked. The yellow bit resembled cardboard and my frying pan was unhappy.

Today I attempted a boiled egg. I googled it and set a timer. The goal was for a soft boiled egg so the yolk could ooze into my cold bulgur wheat leftovers from yesterday. Google said 5-6mins but I was scared of getting poorly so I took the egg out at 6 mins and 13 seconds. This was when things became challenging. Getting the shell off was quite an ordeal, I had to painstakingly pick pink shards off the egg for 10 mins and burnt my fingers in doing so because it was hot. Unfortunately, the yolk was not runny though it resembled cardboard slightly less than yesterday's egg.

After all of this, I felt somewhat attached to my egg, holding its warm, soft white body in the palm of my hand I was overcome by an urge to protect it. I felt sad that I couldn't lay one myself, and that my eggs are too small to hold in my palm despite my tiny hands. Nevertheless I knew that I must consume this egg to fully assess the situation. I would say that the boiled one was better than the fried one. As it was lukewarm, it was the only non-cold thing on my plate which was pleasant. Yesterday I paired my egg with garlic mayo, today I paired it with Nando's medium sauce and bombay mix. I have 3 eggs left in the box, in the coming days I shall attempt: poached egg, baked egg, curried egg. Thank you for reading my heart wrenching tale.



Editors note: But wait! There's more!

For my third egg I decided to try scrambled egg. I put some butter in the pan. Then I cracked the egg in. Then I added curry powder, liquid MSG, oat milk, and mixed it all together with a fork. This egg was quite catastrophe free and my pan was in a better condition at the end than it was after the fried egg. The final result didn't look very appealing but it tasted fantastic, I will definitely be making curried egg again. Next time I might put raisins in. I paired it with parsley, banana, garlic mayo and bombay mix (bit rogue). I think the scrambled egg itself was a bit lumpy and slimy and grey but as I have very low egg standards this did not bother me. Overall a good egg.



For my forth egg I thought I'd try my hand at poaching. However I did not have any vinegar, and I was scared of losing my egg in a poaching disaster. I therefore needed to construct a way to poach the egg whilst also drinking the liquid in which it was poached, lest there be any eggy stragglers floating around. First I fried up some garlic, onion, pepper, mushrooms and tomato paste. Then I boiled some noodles in some miso paste and polish chicken soup powder. Then I mixed these two together with some spinach, liquid msg and soy sauce to the mix. Finally I cracked an egg on top and let it work some magic. This turned out to be a very good egg, my first egg where the yolk has still been runny. It oozed into the noodles and was very pleasant. Overall a success.

For my final egg I was very lazy. I was hungry and needed to eat quickly before going to the pub following the CUCC expo talk. I had some noodles left over from the day before so I put these in a bowl, cracked an egg on top and put it in the microwave for 2 mins. The result was a strange lump that didn't really resemble an egg anymore and was overcooked on one side but raw on the other. Nevertheless it was edible. This marks the end of my eggsperiment. I didn't get it right all the time but I gave it my best shot. It was an eggcellent challenge and I am proud of myself for perservering until the end. I have learnt that eggs are very versatile things, and are just as good as they're cracked up to be. My curried scrambled egg was hard to beat. I will no doubt eat more eggs in the coming weeks as I fuel up for my final eggsams. Thank you for joining me on this journey of highs and lows, and appreciating my eggceptional yolks. I wish you all the best on your own eggventures. Amen.

Aila 'Non-member' Taylor

When is a Good Time to Order Chips?

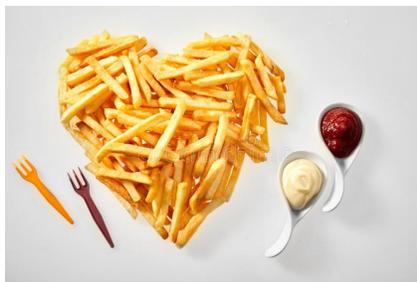
Ever been sat in Inglesport cafe wondering when to order food? Well it turns out there's no one set way. But Luke Stangroom observed several strategies during a trip and compiled them. Then he spat them in my face while telling me to note them down in ASL.

Luke's Option: When he turns up to Inglesport (this is the correct option)

Kristian's Option: After he's scratched his arse, had a cup of tea, and when everyone else's food is arriving.

Adam EJ's Option: When everyone else has eaten and is about to leave.

L Stangroom



Art!

Lea Giguère-Richards gone and drew us a picture. It's quite good.



If you're feeling creative. Send me your shit