

2015 - Povodni Mož

WITH 2.2km discovered in VRTNARIJA, all below 600 m, *Povodni Mož 2015* was another successful year of deep pushing. Significant work went into the extensions off SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS which led to the closure of an 840 m loop in the south, while COLARADO DUCK was passed with a further 270m of passage found beyond. Aven climbing at STRAP ON THE NITRO enabled the discovery of 294m of south trending passage heading towards WONDERSTUFF in the 'OLD SYSTEM'.

For the first time in MIGOVEC exploration two underground camps were operational at the same time: camp X-RAY at -650 m, a 4 berth camp setup in a central position, and camp DEEP CORE II at -850 m near RED COW, a 2 berth camp set up by divers Jarvist Frost and Connor Roe for future use as access to the WATERSHIP DOWN sump, and used this year by them as a staging post for the northern extensions. Camp X-RAY remained the main exploration camp. All leads however were then more than 2.5 hours away, raising the possibility of setting up another camp, closer to the southern leads in SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS.



Back to the Bivi

Expo has arrived. We sit around a fire, eating delicious slop, drinking ashy tea, listening to Saber's many opinions. The world moves fast but the bivi is still...

Rhys Tyers

Oli and I commenced the *Povodni Mož* caving. After about 30 mins of looking for the cave entrance and rambling through dwarf pine bushes we returned to the BIVI and were assisted onto the right path by Rhys.

Ben Honan

M10

It had been dry for days and we were out of water. Apparently it had been a warm winter and summer and there was no snow left in any of the standard shakeholes. After rigging a rather entertaining set of ropes across the top of M10 next to the bivi, Oli went down to gather snow. We hauled it up using several pulleys and a jammer (Figure 70), and found that hauling continuously is a lot easier than all together - keep the rope running and never let the static friction catch up with you!

After that, Rhys and I decided to go down to have a poke around. Rhys went down first and I quickly dropped onto the first rebelay. Searing unbearable pain stabbed at my crotch as my leg loop trapped

M10 Shakehole

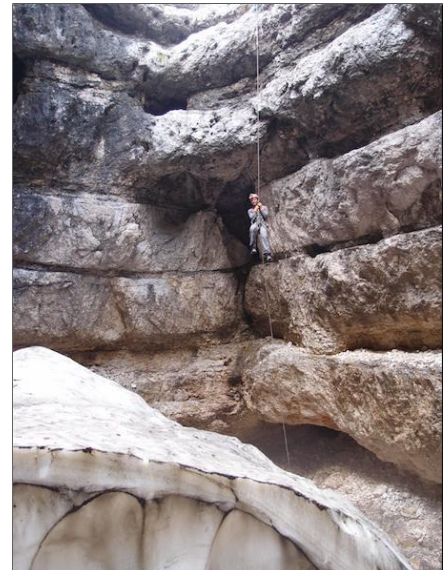
- Rhys Tyers
- Jack Hare



Figure 70: Jack Hare sets up the hauling system and we find an elegant solution to specifically send the pulley out over the pitch and retrieve it 📷 Rhys Tyers



(a)



(b)

Figure 71: (a) On hot and dry summer days, snow is hauled from the M10 shakehole, located metres away from the Bivi 📷 Jarvist Frost (b) In summer, the cook shakeholes are choked with snowplugs of varying thickness 📷 Cecilia Kan



Vitaminski Slushies

- Haul snow out of M10 or other suitable shakehole
- Put spoonful of Cedevita powder into mug
- Add ice and mix
- Enjoy while still cold

...It was a surreal place, cold and drippy, and the snow underneath kept threatening to give way...

an unlucky testicle and crushed it. As quickly as I could I sprang back to the surface, sprinted behind a small rock and knelt to perform a visual inspection. Everything looked intact, and with the pain receding I kitted back up, ready to plunge again into the unknown.


Rhys was waiting impatiently, but seemed placated by my amusing story of testicular trauma. There is a broad, rock strewn ledge on the south side of M10, and this year the top of the snow was just level with this ledge. The snow plug was melted all the way round, and Rhys wriggled down under the overhanging rock to the space between the snow plug and the rock. It was a surreal place, cold and drippy, and the snow underneath kept threatening to give way.

With a bit of brute force we made it about a quarter of a turn clockwise round the snow plug, and found a crawling height passage going off normal to the rock. This quickly lead to a tight downclimb, which was inhabited by a beautiful ice stalactite. We squeezed past and into a small chamber below, where the lead died in a tight, immature rift. Pausing only to take a photo we headed back up and continued to traverse around the snow plug.

Another half a turn clockwise we found another passage heading off. The snow was very close to the top of the rock, but with some digging we opened up a passage and put some bolts in. Rhys slid down first - it was a slick icy slope at around 50 degrees. Two thirds of the way down was a passage on the left that lead to a chamber with a boulder strewn floor and a nice ice stalagmite. At the bottom of the slippery slope the cave ended - the water must go somewhere, but it's frozen solid and the ice is as hard as the rock.

Who knows what wonders global warming will unleash in M10? It's unlikely to go any time soon, but the siren song of a lead next to the bivi will surely lure back more optimistic cavers for years to come.

Jack Hare

Figure 72: Shovelling snow at the bottom of M10 is hard work, but more important still is to establish clear communications between digger and hauling team, 20m directly above
 Gergely Ambrus



Coincidence Cave

Rhys and James returned to the bivi, buzzing with excitement about the new passage they had found, JETSTREAM. We entered the survey data into the OLPC, and found that the passage ran due south, towards the face of MIG. We could hardly have been more excited - the prospect of a lower entrance seemed clear, and the glory would clearly go to the ones who found it. With no prospect of going underground, I resolved to search on the surface, and on the next day, put my plan into action.

I spent some time learning how to use the survey software, and this provided a coordinate for the location directly above the end of JETSTREAM. It seemed reasonable to begin our search for the lower entrance there. After a great deal of anguish dealing with the conversion between Slovenian coordinates and the more commonly supported UTM, I realised that all I really needed was a bearing and direction from something we already had a UTM coordinate for, namely GARDENERS' WORLD. Our torturous calculations are included in the bivi log book. Spookily, the end of JETSTREAM is absolutely due south of GARDENERS' WORLD. I entered the coordinates of our prize into a GPS, and Rhys and I set off above ground to find it.

The day was ridiculously hot, and we had not brought enough water. We dropped down the east side of MIG towards GARDENERS' WORLD. Instead of following Janet's path to RAZOR, we decided to cut across a thicket of dwarf pine. I recommend against this route - almost anything is quicker than pushing through dwarf pine, and we became hot, sweaty and dehydrated in no time.

Eventually, we regained Janet's path, and followed it round to a junction with several real paths. We took the western route, back towards KAL - we knew we were still too far north, but we weren't aware of another path, and we decided we could always drop off the path to the south when we got to the right location.

As we walked, it became clear that the mountain was steeply sloping, and that it would be difficult to actually leave the path to go looking. We continued along, hoping for a break in the trees, and as we arrived at the point due north of our goal, we came across a canyon. This dry canyon runs directly south from the face of MIGOVEC, bisecting the path (see map 4 on page 121). It is not very deep, more of a scoured river bed, but it runs down over steep terrain. At the bottom of the canyon we could clearly see RAVNE.

We were hundreds of meters too far north, but the canyon was incredible - Rhys didn't remember anyone mentioning it before, though it was hardly hidden! We started to down climb it, scrambling over boulders and down short cascades for a few tens of metres. Soon it became too steep, and we worried we wouldn't be able to climb back up, so we retreated to the path.

At the point, we recalled a path lower down that followed a parallel path, contouring along the cliff face. It splits off just before the final forest that precedes KAL. So we headed to KAL, stocked up



Coincidence Cave

- Rhys Tyers
- Jack Hare
- Jim Evans
- Dave Wilson
- Dewi Lloyd
- Pete Hambley
- Katy Morgan

...the prospect of a lower entrance seemed clear, and the glory would clearly go to the ones who found it...

...We were hundreds of meters too far north, but the canyon was incredible...

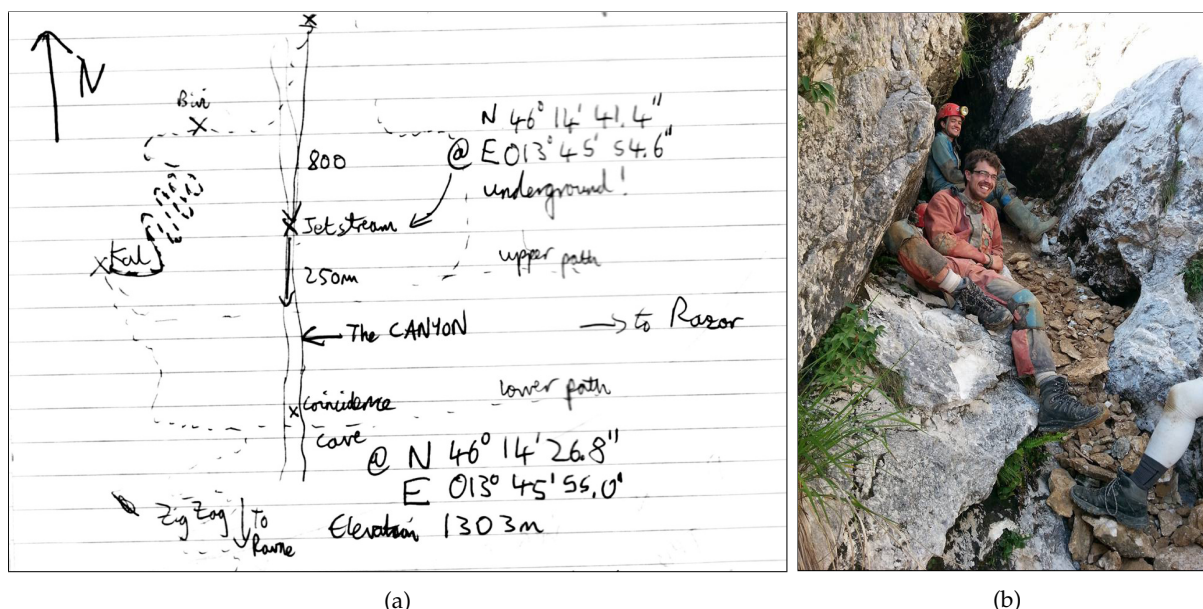


Figure 73: (a) A plan to find the way into the system from the south face of MIGOVEC resulting in the finding of COINCIDENCE CAVE Jack Hare, bivi logbook (b) After the discovery of COINCIDENCE CAVE and a short digging session, elation and disbelief fight it out on the cavers' faces Pete Hambly

on water and apple sours, and the continued down into the blissful shade. Very soon we refound the canyon, and could see it extend far north to the face of MIGOVEC and far south to KAL. We were very excited, and dumped our light bags to climb up the dry canyon. The free climbing seemed sketchy this first time, and I almost walked into a web with a huge spider waiting to devour me.

After checking a few obvious holes, we hit the jackpot around 40 metres up. In a vertical section of the canyon was a dark hole, just body sized, pushing horizontally into the rock. It smelled damp and the air coming out was cold. Sticking my head inside, the size of the draught was obvious. It was clear that this was a strong lead, and Rhys and I were very excited.

We made our way back to the path, resolving to look south down the canyon before heading back to the bivi to pick up digging supplies. As we drank our water and rested, we heard familiar voices approaching along the path. It was Dave W, Dewi and Pete, this year known as the Three Wise Men. They'd been hunting for the lower entrance for the past two weeks, and had been dragged up a terrible route by Pete's GPS. Pete confidently announced that he'd already GPS tagged our cave, but that it didn't go.

Dewi was unconvinced, and we led him up to the cave. He became immediately excited, screaming insults at Pete and pulling out huge chunks of rock with his bare hands. An impromptu digging party occurred, but without our kit we didn't make much progress. It did become clear that this was going to be a big job, and no easy breakthrough.

After some debate, we agreed to name the lead 'COINCIDENCE CAVE' in honour of the great coincidence that occurred. The name that Rhys and I proposed, 'Seren-fucking-dipity Cave' was not considered adequately solemn.

...He became immediately excited, screaming insults at Pete and pulling out huge chunks of rock with his bare hands...

Over the next few days I returned to the dig, commuting from the bivi with my caving kit. These were long, tiring days, and I joined with Dewi, Dave and Pete in digging shifts of around half an hour. Progress was slow and tedious, but I learned a lot about digging. At the deepest limits of the dig, a loud, low rumbling sound seemed to come from the passage ahead. At first I assumed it was thunder, but when I got out of the dig, I found that there hadn't been any. This noise would be consistent with a waterfall.

Jim Evans joined us on one day and showed a great deal of enthusiasm. On my last day on MIG, I waited with Katy Morgan for a smoke signal that Tanguy and Rhys were going to set, but we saw nothing. Later it transpired that they hadn't set the smoke signal, so that makes sense.

Further exploration of JETSTREAM found a passage that extends even further south than COINCIDENCE CAVE, and deeper underground. If COINCIDENCE CAVE is a lower entrance to the system, as I believe, then it enters into passages at a higher level than those we can push from underground. This alone is enough to tempt me back to the dig.

...At the deepest limits of the dig, a loud, low rumbling sound seemed to come from the passage ahead...

Jack Hare



Figure 74: Jack Hare, Tetley, Benjamin Honan, Oliver Myerscough and Chris Keeley rest at PLANINA KAL before the final ascent to the MIGOVEC PLATEAU

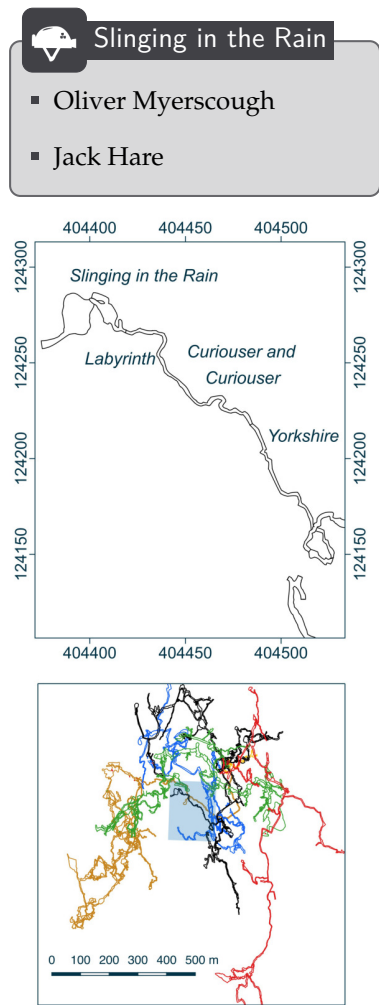


Figure 75: Plan view of the YORKSHIRE extensions and the lead' in SLINGING IN THE RAIN — Slovenian National Grid ESPG 3794

...I decided it was very free climbable...

Yorkshire

I'd missed expo in my first year, and deeply regretted it. After two years of hearing breathless tales of caverns measureless to man, listening to Black Adder in a camp buried in 600 m of rock and shitting in a small plastic bag, I couldn't be more excited to go underground. And who could be a more suitable and enthusiastic caver to go with than Oli? I'd had a busy day - pushing M10 at 6.00 am (surely the log book lies?) with Rhys, killed it by 9.00 am, a walk up KUK and some surface bashing, back to cook dinner and then heading off for UG with Oli at 7.00 pm.

We were going to set up camp, so we had a few bags with us and more to collect along the way. The previous bounce trip I'd done with Rhys we'd left ZIMMER unriggered, confidently assuming that neither of us would be involved in the next trip. Oli swung around in the darkness looking for spits and grumbling, but soon we were down, bags of comf and electronics swinging from my hips, into the drippy, bouldery chamber of ZIMMER.

Oli had gone ahead so I had no idea where to go from here, but he soon came back and showed me the way, pointing out the sights of camp X-RAY along the way. We got the camp set up, sorted out the rotten food from the good, unpacked the comf and lit some candles. Not as much work as I'd been lead to believe, but Camp X-RAY is a work of art and very well made. Quite soon I was asleep, and I have never slept more deeply.

I awoke with a start 10.5 hours later. Oli showed me how to make tea without getting out of the sleeping bag, and after an obligatory shit we were off, down a muddy slope from FRIENDSHIP GALLERY and into YORKSHIRE. I don't remember much of the route, classic fresher trying so hard to keep up that I didn't note any landmarks. I recall a grim vertical crawl into a winding rift that had apparently been dug, which then widened to the YORKSHIRE-esqe qualities I'd been promised.

Soon we were at the pushing front, a pitch that Oli had found two years before and wanted to bolt. Looking at it, I decided it was very free climbable, only 5 m tall and with wide ledges flaring out from the wall of the old streamway. Oli concurred and we were quickly down, greeted by a window into a chamber. A quick flash of the light showed the deviation sling for SLINGING IN THE RAIN, so we had killed this lead.

A bit disgruntled, we decided to go back up and round to check out the boulder at the end of SLINGING IN THE RAIN. Down the slightly wet pitch, and round the streamway into the little oxbow. Well, that was a rock alright, quite large and filling the passage. I couldn't see much passed it - at the time I thought it didn't look hopeful, but I have seen worse since that have gone. Oli and I wrapped a sling around it and tried all the tricks we'd learned in NZ for getting the boulder out, but we couldn't shift it. It needs bang or plugs and feathers.

We climbed back out and found a neat chamber off the side of the



main passage. It had clearly had a swirling plunge pool at the bottom, but what was neat was that half way up it had cut through an upward sloping phreatic passage. Oli backtracked and found a way into the phreatic. Lying there on his back he attempted to put a bolt in so we could try and climb higher into another phreatic entering at the top of the chamber. He quickly gave up, as the position was awkward. I attempted to hook some slings over spikes and get higher by progressively doing this, but it was a bit hopeless and we gave up after about an hour.

On the way back a side passage proved to be a long way to get back to the main passage, but it was at least entertaining. I suspect we didn't survey it, sorry.

Back at camp, a long sleep and then out. This was my only camping trip in 2015, as the lack of people to go with drove me towards digging COINCIDENCE CAVE (more information on page 113), but I vowed to be back in 2016 for longer.

Jack Hare

Figure 76: The jagged limestone peaks of the KRN massif provide the perfect backdrop for a day of hiking near KUK — In the foreground Jack Hare negotiates the tricky mountain path

📷 Rhys Tyers

...it was a bit hopeless and we gave up after about an hour...



Meridian Way

- Rhys Tyers
- Tanguy Racine

...The ambitious plan was to set off smokers at the pushing front, while a party waited for the appearance of red smoke at the surface...


The finding of Meridian Way

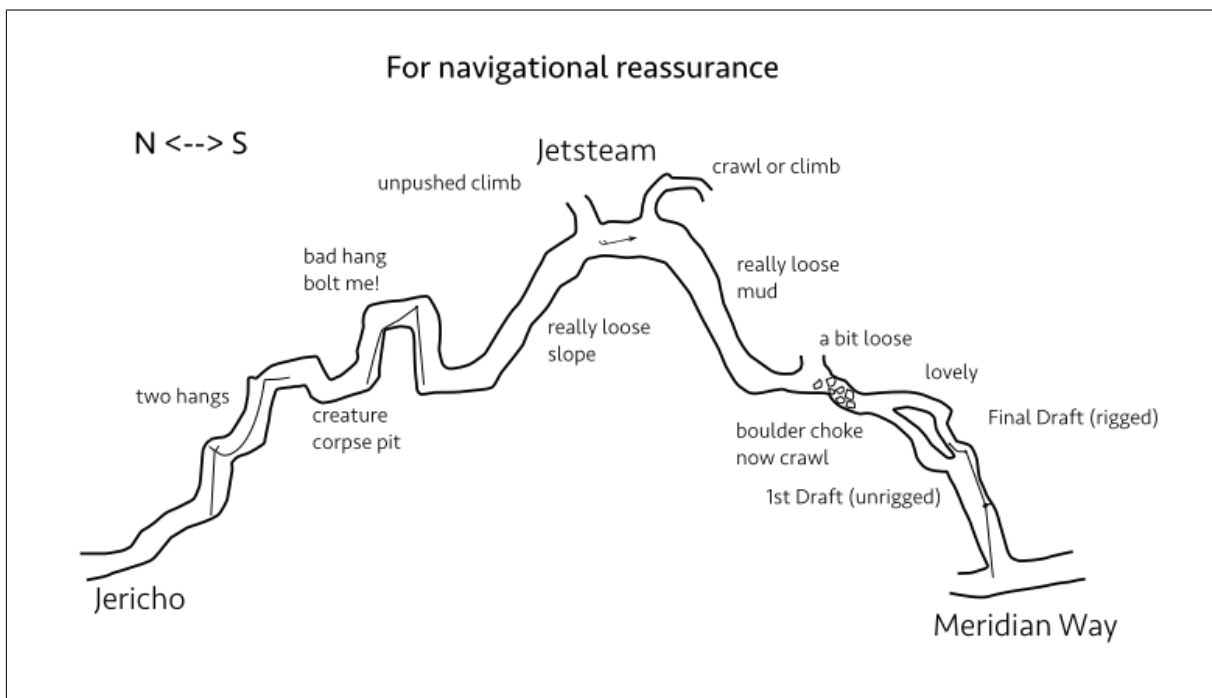
The quest of finding a lower entrance to the system is without any doubt a noble one and hasn't been completed as I write these lines. The JETSTREAM extension of the system was spearing south, well away from the main tangle of passages that make up SYSMIG. Less than 400 m to the surface, southwards and upwards, the chances of ending the push by popping out onto the sunlit forest floor were as good as any. In fact, they were better than that: the serendipitous discovery of COINCIDENCE CAVE earlier in the week (on page 113) had revived the belief that the entrance might exist. A draughting hole on the surface, the alignment of a large surface canyon with the underground passage. What are the odds?

Rhys and I checked in at camp X-RAY for three nights and two pushing days. The ambitious plan was to set off smokers at the pushing front, while a party waited for the appearance of red smoke at the surface thus proving the passage was connected. This would bring us much needed closure.

After an early start, Rhys and I set off from camp, along the now familiar KAMIKAZE extensions, the long silent passages of ATLANTIS. To our left, the offshoot of WE'RE NOT ALONE beckoned. With the limit of exploration so close, we could not help but have a look at it, to assess the feasibility of pushing the lead. The passage first trended east and bent to the south sharply before turning into a flat clean-



Figure 77: Where we hoped to meet the surface, somewhere in the lush landscape below the SHEPHERD'S HUT (PLANINA KAL)  Rhys Tyers



washed crawl. With the ceiling coming to meet the floor to a tight, awkward flat out squeeze, it was no wonder the lead had been left unpushed. Passage could be seen continuing beyond, but we left it at what it was: a lead for thin people.

It was almost eleven o'clock, we had been caving at a good pace, and the front was half an hour away. We pressed on, past the boulder field leading to SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS, along passages named and trodden since the previous year only. At the main junction to JERICHO, we turned left, upwind, up the rift. I passed the down climb to SQUIDGY GOODNESS where the corpse of the Creature was, and up the ropes Gergely had rigged in 2014. Rhys disappeared down the next pitch, which was the beginning of JETSTREAM and showed me the way up the climbs.

At the very apex of surveyed passage of JETSTREAM, the rift split into two routes. One was continuing directly upwards in the same fashion as the ten metre pit we'd just free climbed. The convenient ledges that had brought us this far disappeared quickly and it was deemed unsafe without a rope. Glory would have to wait. Instead, we slid down the slanting rift continuation, down the scree slope to a boulder choke. When faced with the pushing front, crowbar in hand and with a clear idea of what was to be done, a smile crept on my face: that was precisely what I'd signed up for and I was filled with a feeling of endless opportunities.

I levered a block of limestone out of the choke, then pushed two others to the side, and the way on was clear. I wriggled forward, both hands extended in front of me, getting a grip on the boulders on the other side and sat, looking, silent. Rhys followed quickly.

Figure 78: Helpful notes for future JETSTREAM explorers, drawn in the Underground Camp logbook / Rhys Tyers, underground logbook

...faced with the pushing front, crowbar in hand and with a clear idea of what was to be done, a smile crept on my face...

Grinning at the continuation, we stepped off to find the lower entrance. For about 30 m the dream was on because the cave didn't change nature: it remained an unstable chossy bedding plane descent. I heard Rhys commenting on the lack of easy walking passage.

Almost as an answer to our expectations, the passage opened up almost instantly into a dry, walking height phreatic passage and better still, led to a junction! Rhys quickly stepped to the right, I to the left. The passage on the left twisted down and up before resuming its southern course, but the fault control, pervasive in that part of the cave meant it was going down, ever so slightly towards the west. Occasionally I would point out to Rhys where the fault planes were exposed, they were beautifully smooth.

...Occasionally I would point out to Rhys where the fault planes were exposed, they were beautifully smooth...

When the passage wormed its way to the top of a sloping pitch, we knew it was almost a game over for us. We were too deep, or not far enough south to intercept the surface. Descending the pitch meant we had to find more horizontal distance! Still, we decided to descend, first by free climbing the 55° slope, using the various ledges covered by white sand. About 5 metres down, the slope increased and it dawned on us that we would have to bolt it.

Having left our rope and bolting kit at the start of the squeeze, we doubled back to retrieve them and set about driving the anchors for a Y-hang. I put in the first one, far above the pitch head as it was easier for a left-handed person. Rhys put in the other, and rigged his descender. Down he went until he reached the stopper knot. The end of the pitch was in sight, but the rope was a good ten metres short. It would also need to be deviated.

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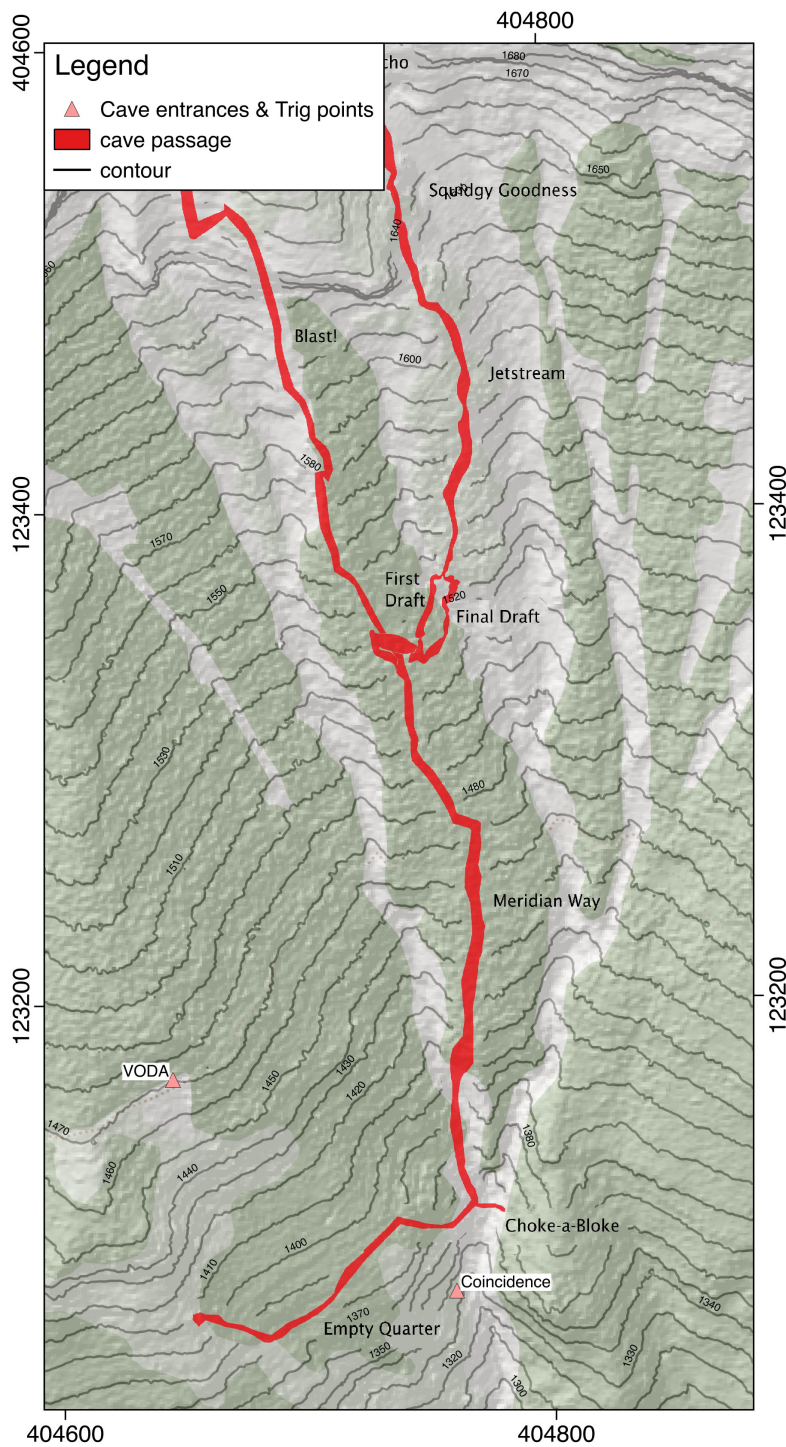
We considered our options: there was rope at the junction at the start of JERICHO, but the horror of JETSTREAM (PENITENCE-like crawl, loose climb, muddy slope etc.) had to be passed again and again. As it was approaching two o'clock, we resolved to abandon the plan to set off the smokers and instead to simply reach the bottom of the pitch and see what was there.

At JERICHO junction, after a soupy-fishy-couscous mix, we retrieved the longer rope and turned back towards the pushing front. At the pitch head, I descended slowly, watching the rope carefully to avoid rub points on the various ledges. I had put a deviation two thirds of the way down which ended up swallowing 5 metres of green tape. This done, my feet touched the floor once more on virgin passage. I stayed silent as Rhys descended.

Below the pitch, the passage opened up, intercepting a 5 × 2 m horizontal passage trending south. This was our way to the surface (Map 4 on the facing page)! Then followed the best minutes of exploration along a seemingly endless horizontal passage. I thought of ATLANTIS, of FRIENDSHIP GALLERY, of all the reports, stories, tales even, of glorious easy walking passage and felt immense pride in walking alongside Rhys in this gallery.

...we noted several interesting features: bits of hair, excrements, scratch marks...

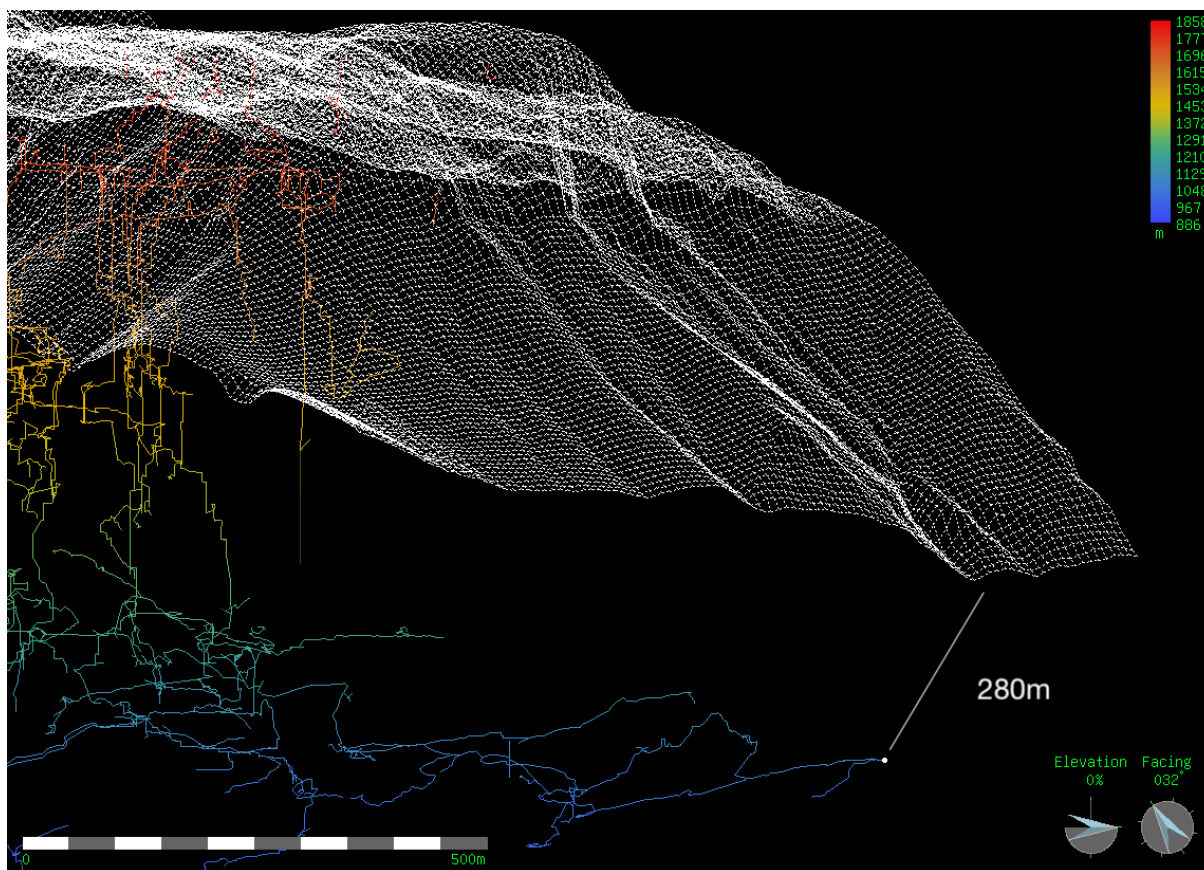
Along the way, we noted several interesting features: bits of hair, excrements, scratch marks, bones! It was all there, the proof that mammals of some sort have been here before. To the best of my



Map 4: Topographic map with superimposed cave passage showing the ATLANTIS extensions heading towards the surface, and in all probability a dormouse sized entrance at least. Interestingly, the fault controlled passages of FIRST DRAFT and the FINAL DRAFT pitch line up with a conspicuous surface canyon, running down the face of MIGOVEC, in which COINCIDENCE CAVE was found — Slovenian National Grid, EPSG 3794

knowledge, the Creature is troglaxene, its presence only explained by the ease with which it could move from a lower entrance to this passage. Indeed, the fact that one could have made its way to HAWAII doesn't seem as remotely incredible as it once did. The majority of passage from the end of our gallery to HAWAII is simply horizontal!

We turned round and surveyed the 'MERIDIAN WAY' when a



Survey 15: The following view shows the closest approach between EMPTY QUARTER and the surface to be ≈ 280 m — produced on *Aven*

boulder choke prevented the easy walking. The passage goes on - to the lower exit - it must! Back at the pitch base, the passage also disappeared into darkness towards the north. Another long gallery! We would have to wait for another team to explore this particular passage, as for us time pressed on: this was the beginning of a long survey, and an even longer return journey.

Tanguy Racine



Push Your Luck

- Rhys Tyers
- Tanguy Racine

Pushing our Luck above Cuckoo's Nest

We'd overslept a lot I decided as I saw that it was already past ten o'clock. It did not surprise me, since we'd only come back from MERIDIAN WAY just before midnight. Then we'd collapsed into bed. In the darkness of the tent I sat upright in the snug sleeping bag, furry hat on. My breath turned to a silvery mist by the light of my head-torch. The fairy lights had dimmed so much I could hardly make them out. I left the comfort and warmth of the Nitestar 450, put on the largest crocks I could find, and lit the church candles. One, two, three dancing lights.

'Where are we going to push then' I asked Rhys, whilst tucking

into a rich soupy couscous mix. 'I know of a lead Clare pushed in 2013, up CUCKOO'S NEST' he replied. 'I've never been down that way. How do you get to the passage? Is it past the traverse at the top of BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAIN' 'Yeah, that's it, you traverse and then drop into a chamber. There'll be a rope on your right, the one from EUPHRATES. It's a grim bit of cave, which is why no one's ever gone back to retrieve the rope after surveying. It connects back to XANADON'T and the hole in FRIENDSHIP GALLERY.' 'Fascinating, so fairly close to camp then. Shall we?' 'I'm going to put our call out as 7.00 pm then'.

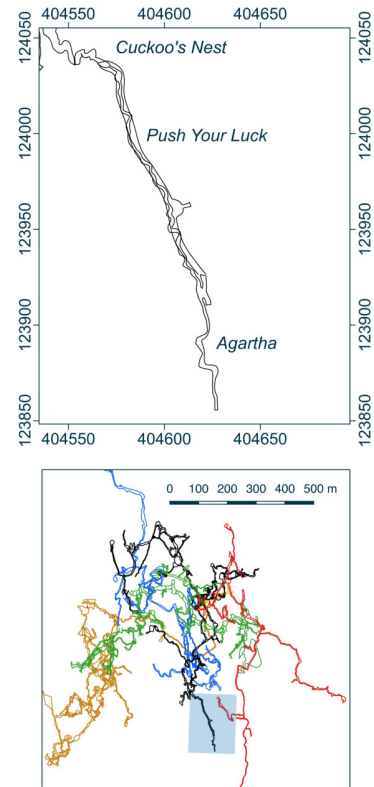
Half an hour later, we left camp, along FRIENDSHIP GALLERY, towards the head of BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAIN. There we kept to the right, traversed on the muddy pitch head, until a short succession of small hangs brought us into a chamber overlooking the massive drop. After a small climb down, we followed a sinuous muddy rift until we had to climb up again using a greasy in situ rope. From then on, the rumble of flowing water could be heard distinctly, and we soon came upon a fork in the passage, with the way to STRAIGHT JACKET and REJUVENATION RIFT to our right. The way on to the end of CUCKOO'S NEST was to the left, with the passage descending slightly until we reached the water at the bottom of the rift.

Past a few meanders, the rift widened to an oval shape and a cascade three metres high draped the far wall. A PSS was left underneath a egg like pure white limestone cobble: CUCKOO'S NEST station 3. Rhys and I contemplated the pushing front. The only viable way on was up, and could be reached by bridging our way up, away from the water. Several ledges were seen to protrude, giving steady footholds about two and a half metres from the floor. Feet and back against the scalloped walls, Rhys climbed up gracefully and I followed.

At the first ledge I started removing the majority of loose rocks I could reach, while Rhys gained more height. Ledge by ledge we climbed until we reached the top of the traverse, dry, muddy, and loose. There we steadily traversed in the upstream direction, until we dropped into the streamway again. We were faced with a similar second climb. Further traverse enabled us to gain the top of third cascade, after which we continued almost a stream level on a meandering rift heading steadily southward.

Our progress was not hampered by any further climbs or constrictions, and soon I lost count of the twists and turns. We arrived a boulder collapse. Navigating our way in the vertical maze we eventually reached the roof again, but to our surprise, a flat out crawl lead off back in the opposite direction. Instead of following it we negotiated the way past the collapse, and regained the stream. From then on, the rift enlarged particularly on the occasion of three meanders, where the base was very much wider, the stream lazier and where sediments had deposited on the shelves: granules and small pebbles of white limestone and black haematite. This was a delightful sight, the finest photogenic cave sediments I'd seen on MIGOVEC yet!

After the meanders, the rift resumed its course and after a further



Plan view of the CUCKOO'S NEST extensions, Slovenian National Grid ESPG 3794

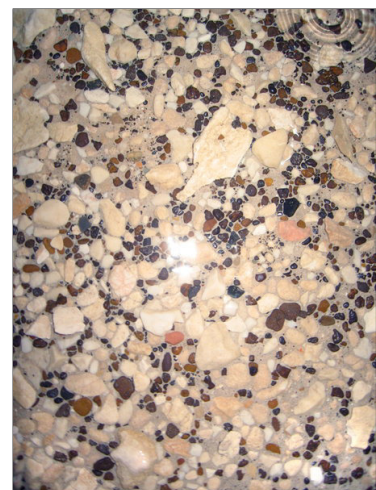


Figure 79: Pebbles similar to those found in PUSH YOUR LUCK streamway can also be seen at the bottom of ALCHEMY pitch in the entrance series of VRTNARIJA
 📷 Jana Čarga

collapse Rhys and I called it day. This was more than enough rift to survey. Doubling back to the start of the passage to get survey paper and instruments, we tried to gauge the length of our find. With the 350 m discovered a day earlier at MERIDIAN WAY, would we reach the 500 m of passage found in one camping trip'

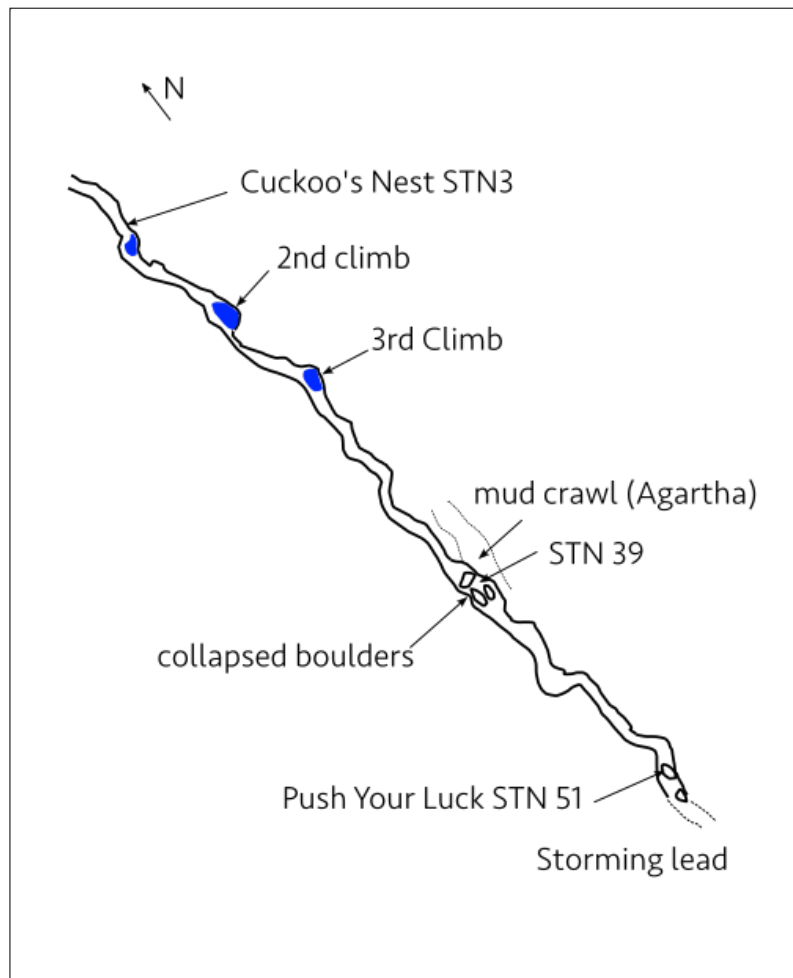
As I took the survey notebook and pencil, I stuffed my gloves inside my oversuit, and we started the survey. After the climbs, we started the meanders. As I sat, writing down the lengths and angles Rhys dictated the gloves fell down to my navel and made a noticeable bulge underneath the suit. 'Tanguy, are these your gloves, or are you just happy to see me?' asked Rhys. 'It's the passage' I answered, and we both had a good laugh.

After fifty or so survey legs, we arrived at the boulder collapse. I ate a chocolate bar while my partner in crime added up the legs. 'About 250 m in the book, what a lovely tourist trip - that's what you call pushing one's luck'.

...'Tanguy, are these your gloves, or are you just happy to see me?'...

Tanguy Racine

Survey 16: The plan view of the PUSH YOUR LUCK streamway, an active underground stream which journeys northward all the way to HIGHWAY 32. *Tanguy Racine, underground logbook*



A first Night Train experience

Revisiting the Esoterica streamway

William had only come three days past, when I proposed to go with him down to camp. As it was proving rather crowded on the day train, we resolved to take the night train shifts. The leads close to camp were still open as far as I was concerned. I had my eye on the front of 'A PUN TOO FAR' in particular: it had been left unpushed since the previous year despite its relative proximity to X-RAY. PUSH YOUR LUCK was another option.

It took a lot of convincing to depart from the BIVI when the night was young but before midnight William and I were getting changed by the entrance to GARDENERS' WORLD. The excitement at pushing once more soon replaced any tiredness I'd felt. As I clipped into the first traverse rope, I was wide awake, conscious of every move, perhaps more than I had in the day train. I led the way down the entrance pitches, and then down to the big ones. In the PINK series I heard voices of exiting cavers rising from farther down. I let out a loud 'Eh Oh!'

'Eh Oh!' came the answer. Soon the lights of Jim and Dave appeared. 'Eh! How's it going? Luck in your push?'. 'We went to PUSH YOUR LUCK, you and Rhys have a different conception of easy walking passage it seems and we were quite confused.' Dave explained. 'Tell me about it.'

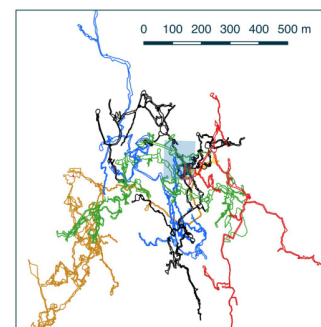
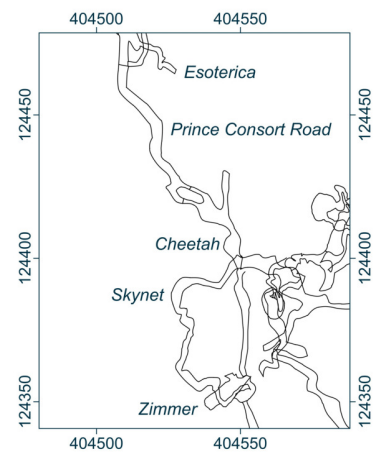
'Well for a start we didn't find the end PSS's. We surveyed from a waterfall where we couldn't go up anymore, then took the high level to the roof until we dropped into the streamway again. There we found PUSH YOUR LUCK STN 39 and the compass broke down. We tied in there but we couldn't survey the passage from the end of CUCKOO'S NEST to STN 39.' 'Is it the very high level passage, the dry crawl?' I asked. 'It's all that same dry crawl yes, there is a chamber before we dropped back into the stream, there might be leads off it'. 'I think I understand, Rhys and I probably didn't go ALL the way up to the roof to gain the entry to the crawl from CUCKOO'S NEST. We surveyed the bottom of the rift. What did you call it?' 'AGARTHA!' 'Ah, the mythical subterranean kingdoms! MIG isn't a myth though...'.
* * *

It seemed like the easy lead at the end of PUSH YOUR LUCK was out of order so I proposed that William and I push the ESOTERICA streamway. In 2014, an additional pitch had been rigged by James O'Hanlon and himself. William approved and we carried on downwards, wishing the others good speed and fair winds.

From ZIMMER, the way to ESOTERICA, via PRINCE CONSORT ROAD was plain sailing. At the lead I checked my watch: '4.00 am'. I wedged myself into the muddy rift, rerigging with a tape the backup¹². From then it was a smooth descent into a small pitch, followed by

Your Mum

- William French
- Tanguy Racine



Plan view of PRINCE CONSORT ROAD and ESOTERICA— Slovenian National Grid EPSG 3794

¹² the previous back-up had been broken upon loading the year before

a traverse on top of chockstones, wedged into a particularly narrow part of the passage, leading to the second pitch. I abseiled next to the waterfall, reached a rebelay and descended once more. The water pooled at the bottom, before escaping from a small aperture in the centre of the large bowl. To the side, the take off for YOUR MUM pitch awaited.

...Mustering all the will to explore I could, I spidered my way down in seconds, kneeled to have a look underneath the lip of rock and proclaimed the lead dead...

At the bottom of the last pitch, the water ran its course to a gash in the southern wall. The lead was a narrow opening, water splashing and spraying in all directions. There seemed to be a continuation at the very bottom, in a small pit where the water gathered before disappearing from sight. Mustering all the will to explore I could, I spidered my way down in seconds, kneeled to have a look underneath the lip of rock and proclaimed the lead dead. Without further ado, I climbed my way up as fast as I could, cursing the curiosity that got me wet. At the top, I discouraged William to have a look, instead I dropped the end of the tape over the pit, measured it to be about 7 metres deep and recorded it in the notebook.

I looked at the watch again when we emerged in PRINCE CONSORT ROAD. '5.20 am'. I sat on the sandy floor, shivering. My legs were still damp from the ascending in the proximity of the waterfalls. William confirmed the water levels were quite high compared with the previous year. The passage was ever so slightly draughty and the water had slowly found its way to my skin. I grabbed a handful of sand and rubbed it on my forearms and shoulders hoping it would help the drying process. The movement got me warmer at least, so I carried on until blood was flowing all around.

...I was humbled by the large dimensions of the blocks, and sketched out by their lack of obvious support...

I knew it was still too early to come back to X-RAY despite William's assertion that anywhere between a half-and hour to an hour early was acceptable, and that anyway the pairs still sleeping at camp should make us dinner! Still, it was very early. Being on PRINCE CONSORT ROAD it seemed a pity not to stop by the ALBERT HALL, which was found very quickly past a boulder collapse. An enormous void space, with footsteps leading up a boulder field. I was humbled by the large dimensions of the blocks, and sketched out by their lack of obvious support.

Back at ZIMMER we were quite damp, tired and not very warm. We used GAMMA-RAY's foil blankets to keep hypothermia at bay until it was nearer 8:00 am. Underneath the blanket I left my light on, and closed my eyes, lying down on a tackle sack, with a bundle of rope for pillow. At quarter to eight, William couldn't bear it any longer and stomped down FRIENDSHIP GALLERY to wake the day train, while I emerged from the half-sleep I'd got.

William started cooking food, while the faces of Rhys and Ben appeared one by one from the tent. Oli and Clare had slowly shifted from the night train to the day train. After several hints, Rhys and Ben started to get changed for their own pushing trip to SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS. I collapsed on the bed in my undersuit. I knew I had to wait a little for it to dry so I opened the logbook and started reading what had happened in my absence. Eventually I snuggled inside one

of the Nitestars and fell asleep within minutes.

I woke up at three in the afternoon, but managed to fall asleep again. Only William's soft breathing interrupted the low, deep rumble of ZIMMER. We were alone in the tent since Oli and Clare had departed for the surface, after deciding not to go pushing 'A PUN TOO FAR'. Their trip seemed to have been a cracking one, with several hundreds of metres of passage found off MERIDIAN WAY in either direction. Rhys and fresher Ben were pushing in the same region, far to the south.

Tanguy Racine

More misery in a flooded streamway

I longed for a trip close to camp that didn't involve getting drenched through waterfalls. A PUN TOO FAR seemed, at the time a good option, though the lead was in a streamway. That statement doesn't make any reasonable sense: depth, isolation, tiredness and hopes of glory are the best drivers for irrational decisions. We knew we were in the middle of an apocalyptic rainstorm and we'd seen first hand its effects on the ESOTERICA streamway. Why persist?

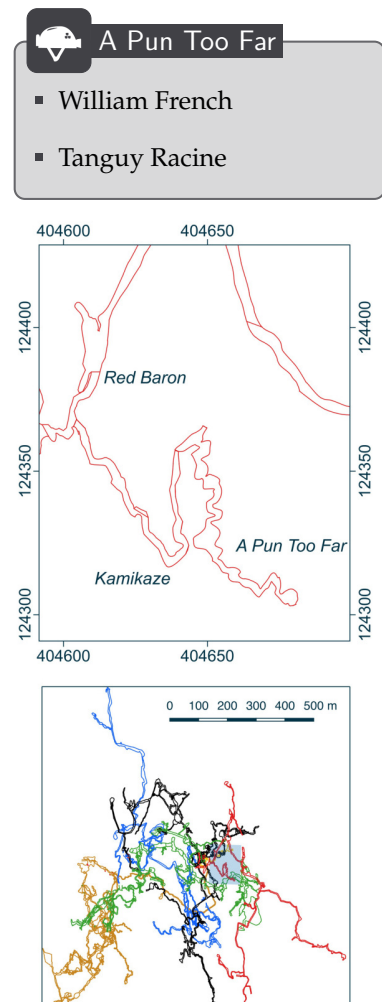
It was also a perfectly good lead, with plenty of depth potential, no obvious sign of closing down and a sizeable amount of water flowing through. It was also my first proper lead: I alone during the expedition knew how to get to it, negotiate the tight sections and the awkward pitch heads. So that was decided: we would go back to A PUN TOO FAR.

Unfortunately, this trip was dogged with bad luck. We arrived at the KAMIKAZE crawl all right, then started the slither to the big squeeze past the boulder at the end, got through and started riggering the three pitches of A PUN TOO FAR. Once we got to the pushing front however, it became clear that there was a lot more water than in 2014, and that the levels were rising. One of the down-climbs had to be rigged to be passable, which slowed us down a little.

We quickly put some bolts in and I descended onto a spray lashed alcove: the water disappeared in a narrow crack under the far wall, while some narrow, muddy looking squeeze, quite in keeping with the spirit of the cave so far beckoned. I cursed our ill fated trip, and in a fit of anger at the cave, decided that I'd had enough and turned around. I was wet again, tired and irritable.

Little did I know at the time that more trouble was on its way, as meanwhile on the surface, my tent was being battered by the apocalyptic weather. When we finally got out the next morning, I found my half my belongings in a pool of water, one tentpole broken, the outer shell of the tent torn along a two foot gash. It was blindingly sunny, but I shivered in the mercilessly cold *burja* winds. Time for a change of scene ...

Tanguy Racine



Plan view of A PUN TOO FAR streamway — Slovenian National Grid EPSG 3794

 Shithole

- Benjamin Honan
- Oliver Myerscough



Figure 80: A musical night in the Bivi, with Ben Honan and James O'Hanlon 📷 *Jarvist Frost*

...Oli and I were not as suicidal as whoever placed that sling and decided that we needed to place a few hand bolts...

¹³ This was the HOTPANTS crawl, later pushed by Jim Evans and Dave Kp

...When we returned to underground camp we listened to Blackadder non-stop and munched on some delicious fish and cheddar noodles...

My first underground camp trip - discovery of 'Shithole'

After numerous carries and three progressively tougher bounce trips, I was physically and mentally prepared for my first underground camping trip. After probably forgetting some of my kit and faffing on the surface the time had come to enter the abyss, an abyss now more familiar to me. On both my underground camp trips I was surprised by the relative ease of getting to camp compared to the demanding ascents on the way up.

After reaching camp we were met by Rhys and James who had explored '100's of meters of walking passage'. Initially I thought they were joking, having heard Rhys going on about finding walking passage past a lead in Yorkshire on countless previous occasions. But it was true! Needless to say I was impressed and congratulated the humble team.

During my first UG camping experience, the dark environment seemed familiar but also psychologically counter-intuitive. It seemed strange that if I were to misplace my head-torch after waking up, that I would have no alternate means to 'switch on the lights'.

Oli had told me there was a lead close to camp which would be a good first pushing experience. After a short climb and some rapid descents, we reached FALLS ROAD. We explored one of the 'leads' for a bit but soon realised that there wasn't any realistic opportunity for discovery at the far reaches of FALLS ROAD. Everything became far too narrow. The second lead was a short squeeze which was preceded by a short traverse. We initially couldn't figure out how the traverse was done in the past. There was one acrobatically placed sling around a natural but other than that, there were no bolts. Oli and I were not as suicidal as whoever placed that sling and decided that we needed to place a few hand bolts. We forgot the bolting kit and Oli decided to quickly go back to camp by himself to fetch it.

During this brief period of solitude, the psychological strangeness of the experience hit me again. I couldn't help myself to make out the sounds of distant voices in the echoing drips of water that occupied my attention. I kept on thinking that Oli was calling to me and I was almost convinced to respond either by going back or shouting.

The arduous, labour intensive nature of hand bolting was soon revealed to me. Oli suggested I do my best to keep myself warm to prevent the onset of hypothermia whilst I waited for him to place the bolts. After maybe an hour I was starting to get quite cold.

After passing the traverse, the lead was clear. A very tight squeeze. The squeeze seemed promising as there was quite an echo beyond it, however we decided to return to the squeeze the next day as at least I wasn't in the mood for tight spaces. When we returned to underground camp we listened to Blackadder non-stop and munched on some delicious fish and cheddar noodles. The night was cold.

The next morning we pushed a lead a bit further on in the cave (I forget the location) ¹³ and spent quite a lot of time hammering at

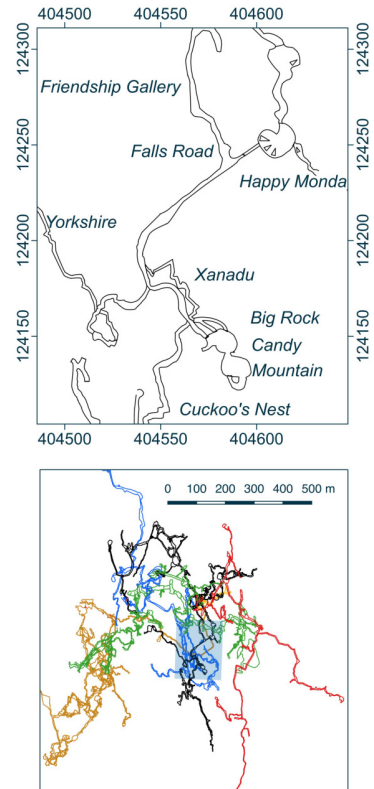
the walls of a very tight tube. I kept imagining the prospect of rocks falling on me whilst in the tight tube at 600 m underground. I wasn't that keen to continue pushing it, I don't think there was much of a draught anyway. We left and returned to the previous day's echoey squeeze.

After taking my SRT kit off, I managed to wriggle my way through the obstruction, and... wow! It was really quite an impressive chamber, about twice the cross sectional area of caving stores and about as high as the Union building. But alas, there was no draught or anywhere to continue, so this was it.

There was something interesting about this place though - on a spikey stalagmite about 3m above the ground were the remnants of a plastic biodegradable bag - a shit bag which ended up being the namesake of our find, SHITHOLE. Back at camp we listened to more Blackadder and had more cheesy, fishy noodles, hmmm...

The next morning was an early start to make sure we didn't miss our call out. I remember it taking about 6 hours to get to the surface, we sang the Blackadder theme tune the whole way out: 'Black Aaaadder, Black Aaaaadder, na na na na na naaaaaa, ...'.

Ben Honan



Survey 17: Plan view of FALLS ROAD



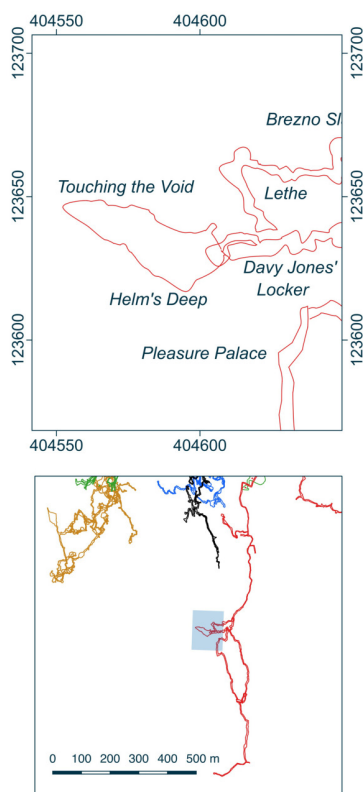
Figure 81: Sitting around the stone circle, Alex Seaton, Oliver Myerscough, Tanguy Racine and Rhys Tyers take part in typical BIVI activities 📷 Cecilia Kan



At World's End

- Rhys Tyers
- Tanguy Racine

...After the desolation of the windswept, grey skies of the plateau, I thought it was time to come back down in the valley and enjoy the grapefruit beers and meaty pizza...



Survey 18: Plan view of the passages below SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS — Slovenian National Grid EPSG 3794

¹⁴ Editor's note: This is only the author's reproduction of a half-forgotten conversation. Rhys Tyers doesn't actually use this syntax in speech.

A photo trip to Sic Semper Tyrannis

The breeze made the leaves rustle, their shadows dancing on the white carbonate sand. The air was cooler by the SOČA river, and the sound of merry children splashing about in their inflatable dinghies upstream was a welcome change from the BIVI conversations.

After the desolation of the windswept, grey skies of the plateau, I thought it was time to come back down in the valley and enjoy the grapefruit beers and meaty pizza. The sun was a nice addition too, so Jarv drove a team of us to MOST NA SOČI, where the IDRIJCA river joined the SOČA. The beers were left in the cold water while I blew air into side compartments the boat.

I enjoyed then a few rides on the river, mainly trying to enforce coordination in the paddling, which enabled Rhys and I to turn the boat round and maintain our position with synchronised movements, prow against the current. The beauty and complexity of the manoeuvre was lost on the bystanders unfortunately so we ran our proud ship aground lower downstream and carried the boat back to the take off. Then I sat on my towel and enjoyed the sight.

After a moment I spoke with Rhys. 'There are very few photos of the southern extensions of the system' he remarked. There was a faint smile on his face, and his eyebrow travelled up his forehead. That was true.

'You intend to take some?'

'Probably.. Yes'.

'How was the pushing with Ben' How about the pitch you found' Does it go?' I replied.

'We followed the water from Sic Semper Tyrannis, and stopped at a pitch...yes, that would be a good trip wouldn't it?'

'Yes, go down, photograph then push. I'm interested in this business of taking photos of Helm's Deep chamber and the rest, it could be impressive'

'Sure, RT and TR again'

'Count me in then!' I said, looking at the blue green waters rushing by. On the morrow, we bid farewell to TOLMIN and ascended to the plateau once again. The weather turned, temperatures rose, and the sun came out as Rhys and I prepared our kit.¹⁴

* * *

Two days later, we were descending to X-RAY with a good plan, three nights, two pushing trips. The first would be to ATLANTIS and its extensions, to document the finds from the last three years with photographs.

We started the photo session at the RED BARON chamber traverse, and worked our way to STUCK IN PARADISE. After the pitch, some quick photographs of the ATLANTIS stalactites saw us reach HELM'S DEEP chamber. A rope led up to TOUCHING THE VOID, at the top of a loose rubble slope, underneath a fallen slab of white limestone. Ascending up there I gained a good view of the chamber some 20 metre

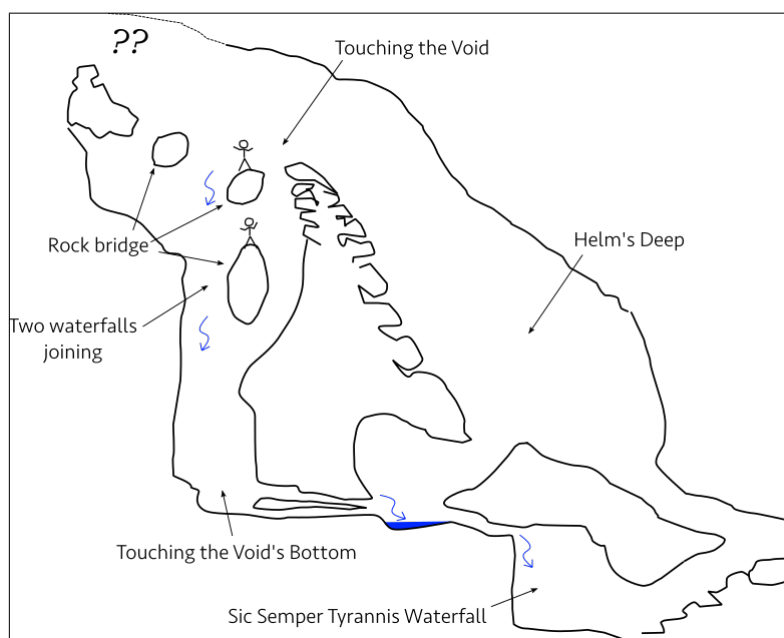
higher than Rhys. I slid underneath the slab and carried on climbing, until I popped out onto a pitch head. Water from two streams could be seen joining into a waterfall, and a climb up led to another vantage point overlooking the pitch. The top of the pitch was again a loose slope, disappearing into the darkness above. A lead for bolt climbers which could be reached by traversing over the rock bridge I stood on, then over the drop, and further up still for another 15 m.

The sight of the water however reminded us that exploration needs to be thorough, as well as exciting. Caver legends such as Norbert Casteret were, after all, hydrogeologists as well as speleologists. Where did that water go? Where did it come from? The former question was more easily answered, so we climbed down to the bottom of HELM'S DEEP chamber, where an opening in the slope led to a water chamber of modest dimensions.

A small stream emerged from an obscure fissure which enlarged to an anthropic opening on top. Rhys climbed up into the rift a metre above the water and followed the passage leading off upstream. At every meander, sharp prongs of rock remained, catching on our suits, forcing us to negotiate the climb with care. A few twists and turns followed, until a flat out, damp crawl connected with the base of a large pitch. The rumble of the water rushing down resonated all around, and a slight drizzle dusted Rhys's shoulders with glittering droplets. This was the bottom of the two-waterfall pitch, underneath the pile of cave sediment that make the floor of HELM'S DEEP chamber.

The first piece of the puzzle fell into place. Back at the water chamber, we could see the stream disappearing into a tube. This almost certainly leads to the lower water chamber which is the termination of SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS. In the latter, the water flows underneath boulders to DAVY JONES' LOCKER passage. Swiftly, we caved to-

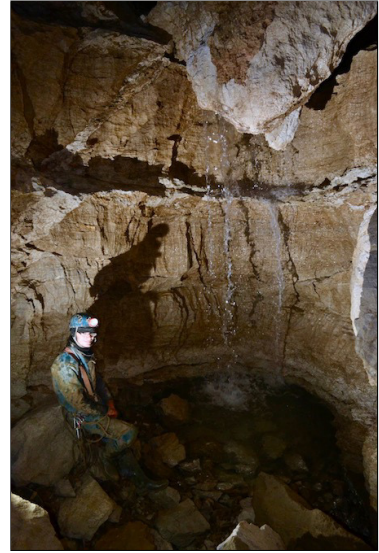
...The sight of the water however reminded us that exploration needs to be thorough, as well as exciting. Caver legends such as Norbert Casteret were, after all, hydrogeologists as well as speleologists...



Survey 19: An extended elevation view of HELM'S DEEP chamber and adjoining TOUCHING THE VOID extensions // Rhys Tyers, underground logbook



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 82: *a* Water chamber below HELM'S DEEP *b* In HELM'S DEEP chamber *c* The top of the climb in TOUCHING THE VOID, where a 30m pitch takes in the active waterfall 📷 Rhys Tyers

wards the pushing front, trying to piece together the hydrology of this region of cave.

Following the water, past the sump bypass flat out crawl, to the undescended pitch Rhys and Ben had found earlier. At the head, I put in a bolt, backed-up by two sling anchors and tied up a Y-hang knot. When I looked at the remaining length of rope available to descend,



I let out a loud curse. Either rope we'd brought was too short on its own after the knots were tied.

I had learned how tie two ropes together beforehand; whether I'd trust my life with it was another matter. After a few minutes deliberating however, we'd satisfied ourselves that if it had been done to descend 'GODZILLA', with not one, or two, but three knots, then surely it could be done again. Not that our own pitch was such a monster, but soon after the take off, the pitch belled out, and after the knot pass, a smooth descent brought me on top of a boulder pile, in a dry chamber. Rhys came down soon after. There was no obvious way on, though the rumble of water could be heard, so we searched for man sized openings between the carefully positioned boulders. Dropping down a few metres brought us to a tight rift, heading west. 10 metres further, the rift opened onto a small balcony overlooking a sizeable pitch, where the sound from a cascading streamway could be heard. To our left, the spray from the DAVY JONES' LOCKER almost reached us, while to the right, the morphology of the pitch suggested a far larger inlet of water down below.

We were running out of rope and time so we left this last piece of the puzzle for another time. It is probable that the larger inlet is the water from BREZNO SLAPOV, and that the water we followed came down in one of the wet avens of LETHE. Only descending the pitch would prove it, but nonetheless, it was satisfying for us to solve one small mystery of SYSMIG.

Tanguy Racine

Figure 83: The dry, abandoned pitch named 'AT WORLDS END' which is found downstream of the SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS 📷 Rhys Tyers



Andrea Bocelli — Heading towards the Old System

Booze, dope, woman. Such a perfect day. After that endless 230m of passage we bolted a traverse across a pitch (not pushed, too wet), we found another 20m of that passage which ended in a... hmmm... prelom? Full of water. It continues in the same direction (N-> S) on at least two levels. We pushed some 50m but stopped before a small pitch because we left the gear behind. There you can hear water around the corner. We returned to the gear in the big "prelom" and followed the water. We made a descent (cc 30m) turned back south and squeezed through a needle hole and came to a big

pitch (30m+). We could not see the bottom. We only had 15m of rope which we left on an anchor. Then we turned back and lived happily ever after. O, yeah [sic] ... no surveying today. At least 5 times more water than yesterday !! Still we would like the last pitch we found to be named 'Time to say Goodbye'.

Grega Maffi

In life we must do only one thing: die. So, who the hell came up with caving?

Tjaša Rutar



Lazarus

- Rhys Tyers
- Tanguy Racine

A new lead in the north

It was three weeks in the expedition, I'd had a break in TOLMIN, and was about to set off for a photo-trip with Rhys to SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS, followed by a visit to the northern reaches of the system and maybe COLARADO SUMP. The bivi was full of cavers, some actively descending surface shafts nearby, others keen to dig K12. I had a plan to make the washing area somewhat salubrious again. Decades worth of edible matter had piled up over the scree, and penetrated deep underneath the rock cover, slowly turning to an impermeable layer of miasma clogging up the interstices between the cobbles.


It was decided that a good way of draining the water from this area where, after all, mess tins and cutlery were supposed to be cleaned, was to dig a deep trench, removing scree and sediment alike, and to fill the space with fresh scree. I took a shovel, a digger's jerrycan (the lateral face being cut out to resemble a miner's waggon) and a tacklesack.

Getting the first inches of depth was hard work, filling the tacklesack half-way up, carrying it out of the bivi, and starting again. Very quickly, a foul stench emanated from the hole, hydrogen sulphide from decomposing matter. On the way, I unearthed some old bits of tat and string along with a healthy dose of coal-black slime. After fifteen tacklesacks or so, the hole had a capacity of almost 100 L. I stopped then, as the sun beat down on the hole, giving the vapours an even fouler smell. I also had to prepare for the underground trip, but secretly hoped to get back to it later...

'I'm quite excited about visiting the northern bits of the cave' I told Rhys as I put my wet socks on. The camp was silent, even ZIMMER could not be heard which meant it was dry on top of the mountain. Oversuit, SRT kit, helmet. A last check and we blew the candles, squeezed the rubber duck and left the shadowy alcove where the tent



Figure 84: Rhys Tyers picking his way through the complex boulder choke of SMASH

 Jarvist Frost

was pitched.

I descended BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAIN and followed Rhys to PLAYBOY JUNCTION, through the LEPRECHAUN series, down MEMORY LANE to RED COW camp. From then on, it was discovery for me, in the dry sandy passages of NO MORE POTATOES. On the way, Rhys pointed out a rope disappearing up an aven 'STRAP ON THE NITRO' he said. Without further ado, we went through a pebbly crawl, up a very long slope, culminating at the start of SMASH, a series of breakdown chambers connected by free climbs. Thanks to Rhys's route-finding, we soon broke into Miles Underground, a spacious rift with a boulder floor. This passage was very reminiscent of Wales caving, especially the entrance to OGOF FFYNNON DDU.

Soon, Rhys spotted a gap in between boulders from which a small stream emerged. The stream almost immediately dropped into a clean washed chamber. From an alternate route, we made our way down into the water chamber, where a rift in the far wall could be seen to swallow the stream whole. We cautiously had a peek from the top of the drop, and decided it was a promising lead, got busy putting a bolt and tied in a Y-hang. This time I let Rhys descend first. While the higher section of the 15 m drop was rigged well away from the water, the bottom third was exposed to the drips, which pooled at the base of the rope. A quick abseil from both of us meant we stayed relatively dry but to our dismay the passage closed down almost immediately.

I prussicked back up and waited for Rhys, who on his way up scouted for a higher traverse and possible lead. After spotting a likely alcove towards the top, he proceeded to reach it by bridging the rift. When that technique failed, he resorted to swinging across, but the rope was dangerously close to the wall so it was abandoned.

We left it at that and continued our route northward to the very end of dry exploration: at COLARADO SUMP, which had recently been passed by Jarvist Frost and Connor Roe. Just before the silt banks that herald the end, Rhys took a turn to the right to have a quick look at the HOOVER DAM lead, a sizeable aven with numerous holds. It was no surprise that Connor had gotten quite high before turning round. At the bottom of the aven through, Rhys then spotted a cleft in the wall, 'a true *chattière*' he exclaimed.

'I bet it's been looked at before' Rhys exclaimed, 'but let's have make sure nonetheless'. Soon we were both on our hands and knees, crawling up. The bowel did not close down immediately, and after ten metres it really looked like a small tube, connecting two large passages. Things were looking up, and we switched places so I could lead as well. After a sharp turn, the passage dropped into an incredibly tight rift. I reckoned that I could fit through the slot without SRT kit and any regard for personal safety but we turned around, and left this thirty metre long tube unsurveyed.

I was caught short then and it became evident that I'd contracted a gut disease whilst digging the trench in the Bivi. Finding a suitably dark corner, I let the tide wash over the rocks.

Rhys and I then had a look at the duck, going as far as the now well



Figure 85: Tanguy Racine driving a spitz in the hard limestone wall - although lightweight, the complete handbolting kit comprises hammer, driver, spanner, spitz, hangers, cones and maillons - it's easy to forget one item!

📷 Rhys Tyers

...it became evident that I'd contracted a gut disease whilst digging the trench in the Bivi. Finding a suitably dark corner, I let the tide wash over the rocks...

trodden silt banks. We turned around, climbed the smooth bedding plane to INFINITY AND BEYOND junction, whereupon we tried to reach a greater height in the aven. After reaching a suitably exposed vantage point, we decided not to put ourselves in an unnecessarily dangerous situation, and climbed back down. As if to comfort us in this decision, one of my footholds gave way and I slid two metres down the rift, back against a muddy slope. Rhys was well out of the way, but it served to remind us not to trust the rock anywhere. Caves are after all a hostile environment.

Our spirits were somewhat dampened. Were there any more long horizontal offshoots to be found far below MIGOVEC? We started the long trudge back up to SMASH with heavy hearts.

As we were approaching the start of the SMASH breakdown, Rhys climbed up on the western side of the boulder slope and cursed as the way on could not be found. Instead, a seemingly insignificant alcove opened underneath a protruding knob of rock. A small pit could be seen beyond. 'Probably doesn't go anywhere right, ...right?'. I did not answer straight away, I looked at the beckoning darkness.

Slowly I undid the straps from my tacklesack and left it on the rocks. I jumped into the small pit, at the bottom of which a tight flat out crawl led off. A few potato sized rocks lay here and there along the plane of bedding, which I shoved across. The crawl carried on downwards for five metres, beyond which I could not see a continuation. The plane of smooth rock disappeared underneath a pile of small pebbles, stacked up to the ceiling. 'There nothing here' I said, but I didn't wait for a response: as soon as the words came out, they reverberated across the plane, amplified. 'Wait?' I hummed loudly to ascertain that there was a great resonance in the passage. 'There's an echo, there must be something beyond!'

I crept forward and extended my neck and saw what I had missed: an anthropic opening, and void space beyond.

'I'm going to dig a few of the pebbles and then go through, take the instruments' I instructed excitedly. 'Really, Are you sure it's worth it?' came the answer.

I grabbed pebbles by the handful and dug a way through. Two minutes later I stood on virgin passage in a modest chamber with a rounded vault of solid rock. When Rhys emerged we shook hands on the discovery. At the far end of the chamber, the ceiling came down to meet the white sandy floor. A small opening led to a squeeze I asked Rhys to attempt first.

After he went through I followed, with my chest compressed by a nodule of rock in the middle of the constriction. The rest of the body followed, and we stood in a second chamber, very similar in its shape. Going further along, we were faced with a pebbly dig. A small air opening perhaps ten centimetres high was spotted and Rhys insisted we start digging it out.

He persuaded me to give it a real go, as it was draughting significantly, so we carried on digging the sand and pebbles until the opening was passable. Rhys attempted it first and I followed. The ceiling



Figure 86: Rhys Tyers near COLARADO SUMP in a large phreatic trunk route 📷 *Jarvist Frost*



Survey 20: A plan view of LAZARUS - *Tanguy Racine, underground logbook*

was still low, and the way on was through tight passage on pristine sandy sedimentary formations where the small drips had collected into ephemeral streams. We crawled some more, carefully avoiding the stream and deeply conscious of the damage we were inflicting on this hitherto undisturbed sandy bank. Finally, we emerged into a third chamber of bigger dimensions, a storming lead!

We stopped there ¹⁵: I wanted to give us a reason to come back to this lead the following year. Rhys came round to my opinion and we surveyed back to MILES UNDERGROUND passage. This new lead headed towards the north west, and looked morphologically separate from the main rift leading to COLARADO SUMP. Where would it go?

¹⁵ A stop on nothing. I regret it because we haven't come back

Tanguy Racine

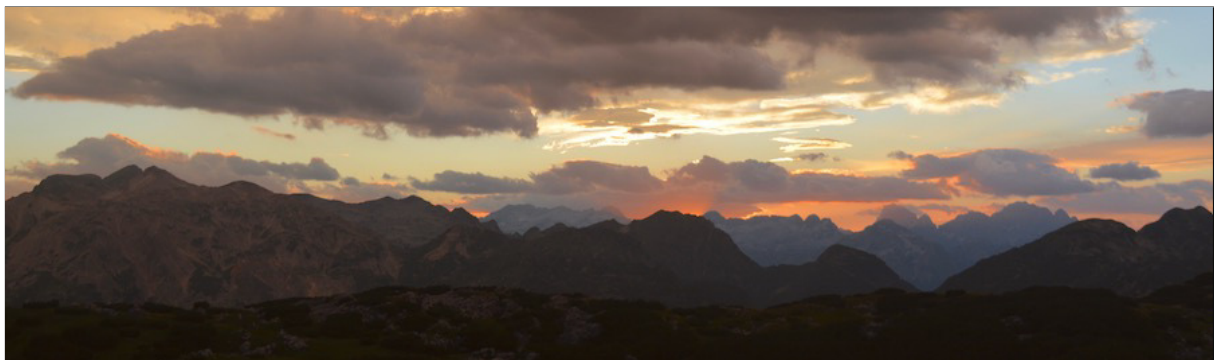



Figure 87: We got out to another gorgeous sunset over KRN  *Tanguy Racine*



Couscous for 10

This will take about 30 mins:

- Melt 2 tbsp margarine/oil in pan
- Add 500 g couscous
- Cook for 2 mins
- Add 800 ml boiling water
- Bring back to boil
- Boil for 2/3 mins – should resemble a slurry
- Leave for 10 mins. Fluff.

...The far end of the galleries lie some 300-350 m from the surface at the closest approach, and are found near vertically underneath COINCIDENCE CAVE ...

...Rhys Tyers managed to slither past the squeeze (helmet off) and confirm that the passage indeed continues. To this day, this tight, but tantalising lead remains unpushed....

Additional findings around Migovec

Closing a loop beyond Sic Semper Tyrannis

At the beginning of the expedition, Rhys Tyers and James O'Hanlon carried on in the JERICHO rift where it had been left the year before. Dropping ten metres, they found a southerly continuation of the passage, and after several climbs following the howling draught they reached an apex, where ways on both level and upwards beckoned. Snubbing the exposed climb, they carried on over a muddy slope to an area of breakdown.

This was later passed by Rhys Tyers and Tanguy Racine, yielding many metres of walking passage in the MERIDIAN WAY. The open lead received further attention when Clare Tan and Oliver Myerscough pushed further south, past a constriction (CHOKE-A-BLOKE) into more near horizontal gallery (EMPTY QUARTER. There, they sighted a dormouse specimen. The far end of the galleries lie some 300-350 m from the surface at the closest approach, and are found near vertically underneath COINCIDENCE CAVE .

The pair also connected the northern end of MERIDIAN WAY to the PLEASURE PALACE, through a 300 m long crawl. They observed a couple of leads branching off, but they were not investigated due to time constraints. The connection thus forms a 1.2 km roundtrip beginning in SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS.

Atlantis and beyond

Rhys Tyers and Ben Honan explored the streamway issuing from the far chamber in *Sic Semper Tyrannis*, a trip which coincided with a particularly severe flood pulse — Tanguy Racine and William French reported similarly high or rising water levels in the ESOTERICA and A PUN TOO FAR streamways. They found a sump and its bypass before carrying on into a deeply cut meandering canyon (*Davy Jones's Locker*). Their push ended where the waterfall disappeared into a noisy pitch below. Further traversing led to a pitch later descended by Rhys Tyers and Tanguy Racine. On this particular trip, the waterfall of BREZNO SLAPOV could be heard rumbling as far as from the SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS junction.

The pair also paid a visit to WE'RE NOT ALONE, discovered back in 2012 by Tetley and Dave Wilson. The small passage had then seemed to continue past a flat out constriction, around a sharp left hand bend. Rhys Tyers managed to slither past the squeeze (helmet off) and confirm that the passage indeed continues. To this day, this tight, but tantalising lead remains unpushed.

Roaring - the muddy window

A trip to the ROARING window with Chris McDonnell, Oliver Myerscough and Andrej Fratnik resulted in the blasting of a vast quantity of rock in order to open up the lead. None could fit through yet, but

they reported the ongoing continuation of this draughty, exciting lead at the bottom of HAPPY MONDAY.

Agartha

Dave Kirkpatrick and Jim Evans investigated the upstream end of PUSH YOUR LUCK, found about one hour from camp X-RAY. Owing to some confusion regarding the actual pushing front (Rhys and Tanguy had left PSS's just above stream level, not in the high level muddy phreatic) and an ill-working compass, there is some doubt as to the status of this lead. The pair found the stream forking where two similar sized inlets came together. Pushing one of them upstream, they hit a too-tight waterfall and turned back, tying their survey to the middle PSS (stn 39) of PUSH YOUR LUCK. In the high level crawl passage, they spotted a likely lead in modest chamber but left for others to investigate.

Andrea Bocelli - climbs off Strap on the Nitro

Further to the experimental drone flight up the NITRO aven - by Jarvist Frost and Rhys Tyers in 2014 - Jarvist Frost and Connor Roe made progress on the aven bolt climb, discovering DINNER SERVICE, a large boulder floored chamber. Another smaller, higher aven taking significant draught remained unclimbed. The presence of delicate mud and calcite formations was noted on the higher ledges of the climb.

Towards the end of the expedition, Grega Maffi and Tjaša Rutar both camped at X-RAY and finished the bolt climbs up STRAP ON THE NITRO, eventually surveying 200 m of crawls (named ANDREA BOCELLI) before breaking out into a larger, more complex area of rifts, which at the time took lots of water from an ongoing storm. These extensions at the far west of VRTNARIJA came extremely close to WONDERSTUFF in the old system, but failure to survey the last 100 m or so of passage due to the adverse conditions means the possible connection was called off. It is yet to be surveyed as of 2017.

Surface exploration

Alex Seaton and Cecilia Kan spotted a likely snow plugged shaft not far north from the BIVI. Due to fluctuating snow and ice levels from year to year the investigation of such ice filled shakeholes remains a vital part of the annual ICCG expeditions.

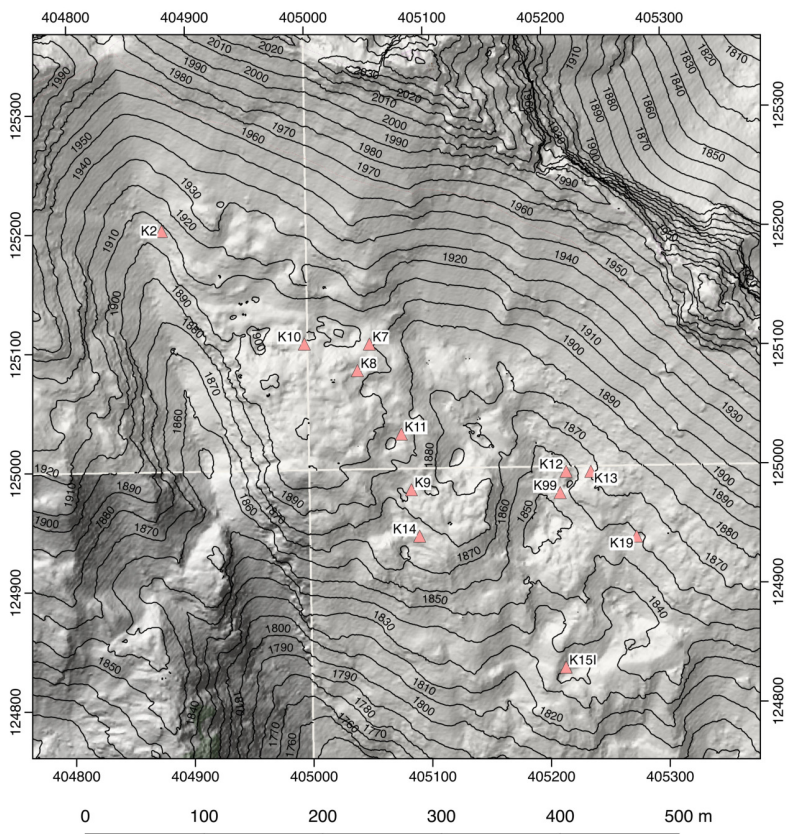
Thus, over the course of a couple of days, the shaft was rigged for SRT, a way on into a darker recess below the main plug was found. Although the lead was ultimately proclaimed dead at a choke of mixed gravel and ice, receding ice levels might one day reveal another way onwards.

Digging in K12

On the 20th of July Jack, Katy, Chris and I went to explore leads in area K. K2 did not go but K12 looked promising. We all did some digging for about one and a half hours then Jack and Katy left and Chris and I continued to make solid progress for another 5 hours or so. A few days later, Chris and I went back with James in tow. We made slower progress as the crawl narrowed and we were more apprehensive about trying to go through it and spent a lot of time attempting to squeeze through the hole to see if it goes further when the time would have been better spent actually digging. The dig itself is at the bottom of the scree slope so going is slow but the lead is still promising.

Rosanna Nichols

Map 5: Topographic map of the little PODRTA GORA PLATEAU, AREA K Slovenian National Grid ESPG 3794





(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 88: (a) Alex Seaton by the ice and rubble choke at the bottom of the snow filled shaft (b) Standing before the entrance to the cave proper, looking up the shakehole (c) Rigging the snow slope into the cave proper, Oliver Myerscough on the rope 📷 Cecilia Kan



Figure 89: The team at the end of the 2015 expedition. From left to right: the Klobučar family, Janet Cotter, Oliver Myerscough, William French, Rosanna Nichols, Rhys Tyers, Chris McDonnel, Cecilia Kan, David Wilson, Tanguy Racine 📷 *Rhys Tyers*

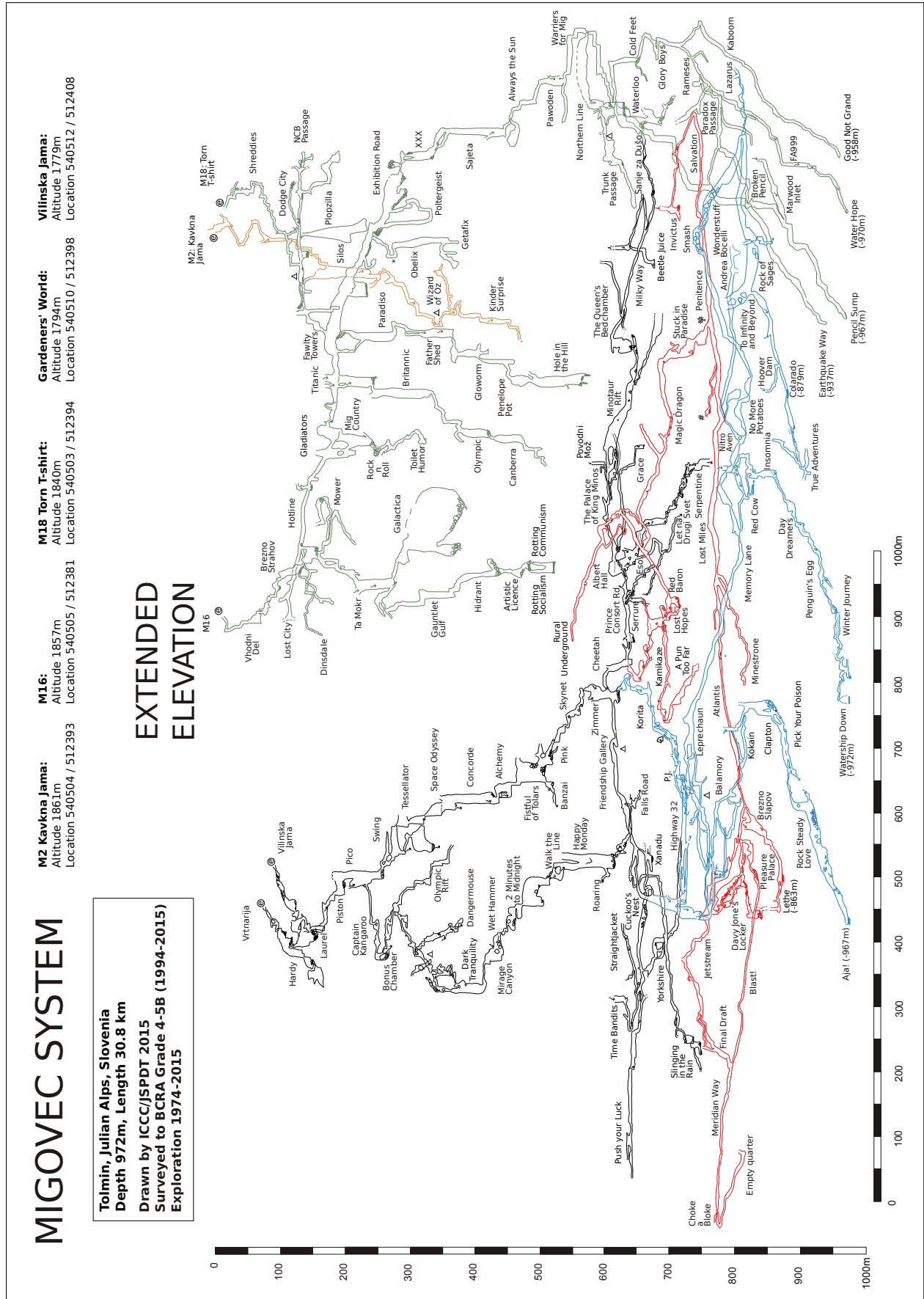


Number Crunching

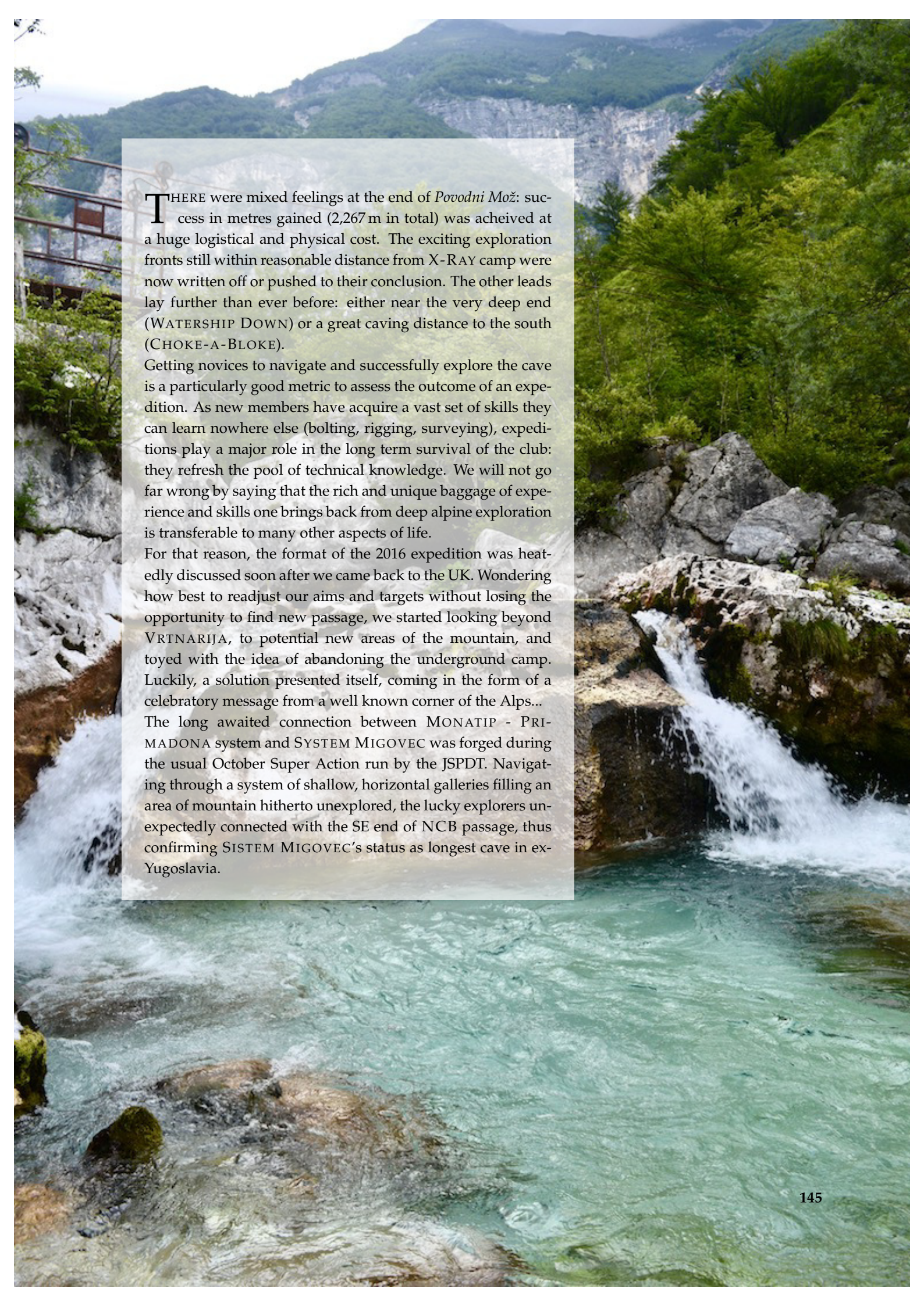
Sector	Passage name	Survey length (m)	Stations	Average leg (m)
Atlantis	At World's End	33.03	10	3.67
	Blast	289.26	37	8.04
	Choke-a-bloke	65.69	10	7.30
	Davy Jones Locker	55.04	16	3.67
	Empty Quarter	166.04	21	8.30
	Final Draft	92.27	13	7.69
	First Draft	77.18	16	5.15
	Jetstream	158.22	25	6.59
	Meridian Way	186.06	19	10.34
	Touching the Void's Bottom	23.36	9	2.92
Esoterica	Isdead	10.26	4	3.42
Friendship Gallery	Shithole	20.37	6	4.07
Miles Underground	Formative	30.98	6	6.20
	Lazarus	96.13	27	3.70
	True Adventures	270.03	53	5.19
Strap-on-the-Nitro	Andrea Bocelli	234	39	6.16
	Dinner Service	60.28	8	8.61
	Void	35.76	7	5.96
Xanadu	Agartha	131.85	33	4.12
	Push Your Luck	231.53	52	4.54

Total

2267.34



Survey 22: 2015 Extended Elevation



THERE were mixed feelings at the end of *Povodni Mož*: success in metres gained (2,267 m in total) was achieved at a huge logistical and physical cost. The exciting exploration fronts still within reasonable distance from X-RAY camp were now written off or pushed to their conclusion. The other leads lay further than ever before: either near the very deep end (WATERSHIP DOWN) or a great caving distance to the south (CHOKA-A-BLOKE).

Getting novices to navigate and successfully explore the cave is a particularly good metric to assess the outcome of an expedition. As new members have acquired a vast set of skills they can learn nowhere else (bolting, rigging, surveying), expeditions play a major role in the long term survival of the club: they refresh the pool of technical knowledge. We will not go far wrong by saying that the rich and unique baggage of experience and skills one brings back from deep alpine exploration is transferable to many other aspects of life.

For that reason, the format of the 2016 expedition was heatedly discussed soon after we came back to the UK. Wondering how best to readjust our aims and targets without losing the opportunity to find new passage, we started looking beyond VRTNARIJA, to potential new areas of the mountain, and toyed with the idea of abandoning the underground camp. Luckily, a solution presented itself, coming in the form of a celebratory message from a well known corner of the Alps...

The long awaited connection between MONATIP - PRIMADONA system and SYSTEM MIGOVEC was forged during the usual October Super Action run by the JSPDT. Navigating through a system of shallow, horizontal galleries filling an area of mountain hitherto unexplored, the lucky explorers unexpectedly connected with the SE end of NCB passage, thus confirming SYSTEM MIGOVEC's status as longest cave in ex-Yugoslavia.