

The South Wales Caving Club Expedition To The Pierre Saint Martin

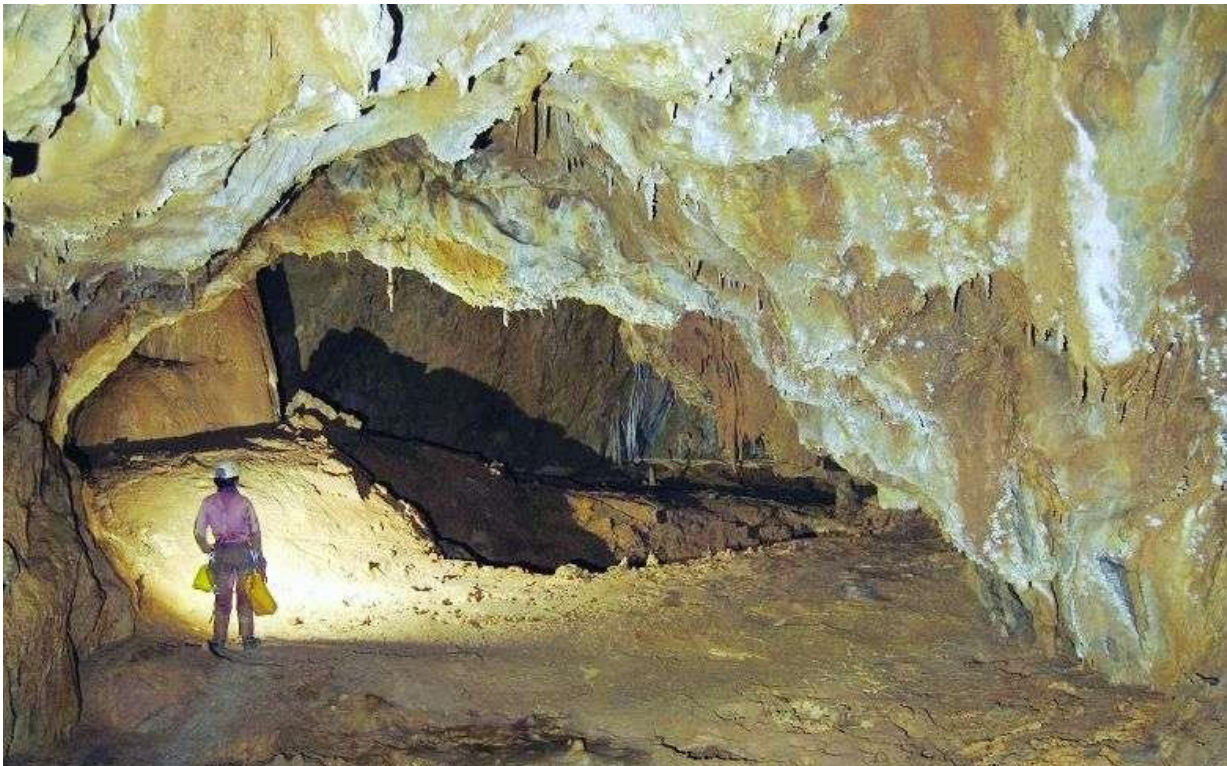
29th July - 12th August 2017

First Circular

Dear all

This is the first circular for a South Wales Caving Club Expedition planned for the summer of 2017. The intention of this circular is to give you an overall feel for the trip, what we hope to achieve, where we will be camping, how much it will all cost etc.

Those of you reading this who have been on previous expeditions will be familiar with how things work and what to expect. My aspiration here is to inspire new faces to join us next summer and see what it is about these summer trips to world class cave systems that sets them apart from the week on week domestic caving that we do in our own backyard.



As I believe to be true with most of what 'life' is about, the more you put in, the more you get out. I am taking time out to write this promotion because I believe that there are so many more Members and friends of members who would be bowled over by the caving on offer in 2017. I shall paste a few photographs here and there to make the point about just how good this cave is but if you want further insight please talk to anyone of the 30 or so people who attended in 1995 to get their view of the trip.

Now 2017 will be twenty two years on from our last visit which is indeed a sobering thought. It is my aspiration that the 2017 trip will go a little beyond what we achieved in 1995 and in order to do that we will need a team prepared to make contribution and to enjoy the benefits of that hard work. And so in no particular order.....

Dates and times..... The expedition will officially run from 12.00am Saturday 29th July 2017 to 12.00am Saturday 12th August 2017. As is usually the case I suspect a few of the team may arrive a day or so early or stay on for a day or so afterwards but the main thrust of what we are intending to achieve will occur between the dates indicated above. I am hoping that the main thrust of hard rigging will be achieved within the first two days leaving the cave hard rigged for caving over the following five or six days. This will enable participants to make several trips into or through the system, perhaps alternating between purely sporting / exploratory to photographic / scientific. We will hope to de-rig the big shafts mid week on the second week say around the 8th / 9th August in order not to increase the risk of bad weather forcing us to abandon rope.

Objectives.....

The Objective of the expedition is to allow as many participants as feel able to make traverses of the Pierre Saint Martin System via both the Tete Sauvage and the SC3 entrances and also to facilitate exploration of the lower part of the system by access through the EDF tunnel. In order to facilitate this objective both entrances will be hard rigged so that traversing parties do not need to carry large quantities of rope thus making the traverse faster, safer and more enjoyable.



For those who may not be aware the literal translation of ‘Tete Sauvage’ from French into Welsh would be ‘Penwyllt’.

Neither traverse is compulsory and as always the primary objective is safety. The traverse from Tete Sauvage has a height differential of 835m and the traverse from SC3 has a height differential of 1007m and thus breaks the magic height difference of 1 vertical kilometre. Either traverse represents a world class caving challenge. The Pierre Saint Martin is truly a stunning cave and offers both an excellent sporting challenge but also much insight into caving history.

Organisation.....

Those of you familiar with SWCC expeditions over the past twenty years will have a good idea of how things operate. Basically we are a collective, a team. Any issue that needs to be settled by a vote will be settled at the nightly camp meetings which are generally held in the control tent (or suitable location) every night after cessation of most of the days caving activities, usually somewhere around 8pm – 9pm ish.

We tend to plan the next day or two at such meetings. Teams are formed, tasks agreed and progress is reported on. All I ask is that everybody contributes as much to the team effort as they are able. Nobody is forced to make a contribution and the expedition progresses based on members volunteering to complete certain tasks. The hardest of these tasks is almost certainly the de-rig. If you were to ask me how best to contribute to the expedition I would ask you to firstly be around for the middle of the second week and secondly to commit to assisting with the de-rig rather than making a day trip to Lourdes. By assistance I do not mean dropping to the bottom of the rigged shaft but perhaps simply helping with carrying rope down the hill or hauling from the surface.



The entrance fo the EDF tunnel, the photograph give s no impression of the force of the air which escapes through these steel doors. Are those really flip flops?

Insurance.....

It will be a non negotiable condition of your attendance on the expedition that you hold suitable and appropriate insurance cover for the duration of your activities. In the past I have arranged such cover on a team basis for those who require it. I will require proof of insurance if you choose to arrange your own cover. I either use a company called 'Snowcard' who are very efficient, flexible and competitive. I may use a company called 'Dogtag' if they are able to offer better rates. If you are intending to come on this expedition your first action is therefore... ACTION 1. Please let me know if you would like me to arrange your insurance cover or research where you will obtain your own insurance from.

Camping.....

The camping site is called Camping Ibarra, it is the same campsite as the one we stayed on in 1995. The website can be found by following this link..... <http://www.ibarra-chantina.com/>



The tariffs (from 2014!) along with general info on the site can be found by following the link supplied above. The costs from 2014 are very reasonable, 3.50 euros per emplacement per day, 1.60 euros per vehicle, 3.70 euros per adult per day. Electricity is an extra 2.0 euros per day. The facilities are very basic or certainly they were in 1995. There is no swimming pool. The pitches were un-constrained by hedges and the like and generally we just took over a large area of the site in a very friendly community style of camping which basically centred around the control tent. A control tent will I think be essential for the 2017 expedition and we will be providing gas rings and cooking trestles for those using smaller tents to sleep in. If you are in a small two man tent there will be a large community tent where you can cook and prepare food. The cost of the control tent pitch will be divided amongst all of the participants.

The booking is confirmed and the campsite owner seems reasonably laid back about numbers. At some point in time around Easter 2017 I will need to communicate your pitch requirements to the campsite proprietor but there is no burning rush at the moment.

Caving.....

The obvious main objective from a caving point of view will be to enable as many people as wish to make one or both of the traverses. We will be rigging the cave for SRT with 10.5mm static rope using conventional European rigging techniques, ie deviations and re-belays. You should be confident in your ability to deal with most normal rigging including if needs be a knot pass but we do hope to avoid that situation. Although the cave is deep most of the SRT is very straight forward single drop pitches with simple pitch head manoeuvres. You do not need to be an 'SRT god' to do this cave.

The Tunnel du Vent is a water obstacle, a lake that has to be crossed by boat. In 1995 the controllers of the cave insisted that nobody try to swim this lake due to underwater obstructions such as wires and metal objects. The expedition will again be providing quality flotation aids to get cavers from one side to the other.

At this point in time I am not envisaging the need to camp underground.

For those seeking something a little more gentle there is excellent caving available by access through the EDF tunnel. I seem to recall that it was about three hours of horizontal caving from



The EDF tunnel to the Tunnel du Vent through fine vast galleries and chambers with very little if not zero SRT.

Budget.....

The section above on camping deals with the various costs and considerations for the camping side of the trip. Transport to and from the Pyrenees will be your own responsibility as will be arranging local transit to and from the cave. The following is a rough breakdown of my estimated budget for the trip. I am hoping that the club will provide rope for the trip and that we do not need to buy any new. We have ample expedition tackle sacks and typically those participating have between us more than enough by way of karabiners and hangers.

The expedition will be administered on a non profit/loss making basis. If we loose rope or hangers we will have to replace them. The base cost of camping per head for the fortnight is likely to be in the order of £150. The cost of providing a control tent, replacing lost / damaged equipment, basic floatation aids etc is anticipated to amount £30 per head. Insurance for caving is anticipated to cost £50. Total anticipated cost to the expedition is £230. You will need to get yourself to and from the campsite and provide yourself with food and beer.

Training / Teambuilding Meets.....

It is my hope that before we all reach France in July, most of the team members will have attended at least one teambuilding event. The 'Training' meets are not about seeing who can and who cannot do SRT, they are about working effectively as a team to achieve a common goal, forging new friendships and creating better understanding of peoples particular needs.

The following is a list of planned events.

3rd December 2016 SWCC Headquarters.....9.00pm Slide show and general team chat. I hope to get some pictures from the 1995 expedition shown and hold an open discussion / questions and answers session for anyone interested in the trip. No doubt with a few team members present, there will be caving trips of lengthy duration going on.

14th / 15th January 2017 SWCC Headquarters..... SRT workshop. Basic pitches on the Saturday, Pwll Dwfn, and Swamp Creek pitch on the Sunday.

3rd / 5th February 2017 Yorkshire weekend. Brackenbottom or YSS Helworth Bridge To be confirmed.

3rd / 4th June 2017 SWCC Headquarters..... Stamina training. 1-3-1 OFD and Far North trips.

15th / 16th July - SWCC Headquarters Final gear packing and distribution for transport to France.

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