

A person wearing a red headlamp and a red harness is shown in profile, looking upwards. The background is a dark cave with several yellowish stalactites hanging from the ceiling. The person's face is illuminated by the headlamp, and the stalactites are lit from above, creating a dramatic contrast against the dark background.

Special issue

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underground
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Descendent
288



COVER: Judith Calford in Grotte de la Toussaint, Ardèche, France (see p30)
PHOTO: Chris Howes
BACK COVER CAPTION: See p47

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Above: Grotte de la Toussaint, Ardèche, France
Photo: Chris Howes

EDITORIAL

Getting from there to here

It was 1988, a time of postal strikes and fax machines; a time when computers were basic and mobile phones almost non-existent, other than as large brick-like objects. For us, it was the year that changed our lives when Chris became editor of *Descent*, with a two-week deadline looming. That first edition we worked on, number 84, came out in October 1988 and ten years later we purchased *Descent* from Gloster Publications, bringing it entirely under our control.

Now, exactly 34 years and 204 issues before we began, with *Descent* (288) for October 2022 our tenure comes to an end.

Lest that sounds too dramatic, it does *not* equate to the last edition of *Descent*, nor anything like it. Like caving, *Descent* is a constant, a magazine that has been in print for longer than some cavers have been alive. It is firmly a part of British caving and we hope that we have served the community, and you the reader, well. From the start we have seen ourselves as mere custodians of the title, responsible for its care and development, and it is time for a new chapter to begin, as new custodians are waiting in the wings.

If we have a legacy for the caving world, it is what we have developed with *Descent* during the course of our tenure.

Descent has grown from being printed in black and white to a publication in full colour and our website opened up online ordering. How times have changed. From typewriters to word processing and film to digital files. From layout based on galleys of text and photographs that were cut up, stuck down on card (yes, the origin of 'cut and paste') and used to make a printing plate, to now being a totally digital production. From the large team at Ambit that worked on *Descent*, now only the two of us edit, fact check, design and lay out the pages and distribute the magazine. Indeed, how times have changed.

We receive huge feedback about *Descent* from around the world, praising the quality and accuracy of its articles and breadth of its news; it has gained not only an international following, but is highly respected for its content and is increasingly seen in references. *Descent* is one of those success stories in the world of publishing, where a magazine in a minority sport is by default a niche production – but where the majority of indie mags have fallen by the wayside after only a few issues or years, *Descent* is still with us over half a century since its inception.

Yet it is all of you, the readers, that make *Descent* what it is. This is the only completely

independent commercial, caving-dedicated magazine in the world, setting aside club publications that are paid for by memberships of societies. It exists to 'entertain and inform', an ethos set out in 1969 by the then-editor Bruce Bedford, and that has never changed. From fine photographs printed to the highest standard, to articles and news about exploration and the sometimes esoteric, *Descent* has been there.

With over three decades of content, we must offer specific thanks to many cavers and give credit for their input. To all our current and past

In an almost a parallel universe to that of 1998, Chris is taking over the reins as editor in partnership with Carolina Smith in the form of the newly created Stalactite Publishing.

Both Chris and Carol are experienced cavers and they both possess skills suited to the publishing world (as one example, Chris is the author of the caving guidebook to Northumberland). It is hard to imagine a better team to become the new custodians of *Descent*. You will learn more at www.descentmagazine.co.uk or by e-mailing: editor@descentmagazine.co.uk;

the postal address is PO Box 297, Kendal LA9 9GQ. After 34 years with *Descent* embedded so firmly in our lives, taking the decision we have was a wrench, but the time felt right – and we are leaving the magazine in very capable hands.

To reassure subscribers, new and old, planning for this transition has been taking place over a period of months – this is no sudden cliff-edge move, and both of us will remain involved with *Descent* to help where required. All existing subscriptions will be honoured by Stalactite – renewals and new subscriptions up to midnight on 30 September may still be made via the Wild Places website, after which the data will be transferred and all your subscriptions should then be made to Stalactite. The Stalactite Publishing website will go live at that

time and, to keep up to date with their plans, do sign up to their newsletter.

After *Descent* has completed the move to Stalactite, our website at www.wildplaces.co.uk will see changes to reflect this. Articles that have yet to reach the printed page have been passed to Chris and Carol, so your work is still in the pipeline.

As for Wild Places, the company continues and we remain firmly committed to publishing quality caving books and other related items. We have one title in preparation (for which the author has been very patient) and more are planned. That's in addition to continuing to offer fine books for sale, both new and used. It's been a long road from there to here, but that road will continue far into the future.

To *Descent* and its new custodians, we wish every success. We are confident that Chris and Carol will enjoy their new roles as much as we have, bringing their own ideas and input to the mix, to keep *Descent* fresh and alive for many more years. To all our supporters, in reading and writing and photography and surveying and advertising and all, do continue with your input.

Fellow cavers, thank you. It's been a privilege. *Chris and Judith*



correspondents, we say thank you for putting up with our continued prodding for news, and Doug Lawrence must be singled out for supplying so many caving cartoons (with some appearing prior to issue 148 in 1999, his fine work has been in every issue since then).

For their support in other directions, thanks are also due to organisations such as BCA and Hidden Earth and clubs such as Gloucester SS, the Northern Pennine Club and Red Rose CPC (as well as many more for their donated journals). Other long-term supporters include Ingleborough Hall, Inglesport, Petzl (and previously Lyon), Scurion and Starless River, not forgetting along the way companies such as Caving Supplies, Hitch 'n' Hike and Up and Under. These are joined by Richard Jones and Victoria Fisher at Cambrian Printers. We give our sincere thanks to everyone across the board for your help and support; you have become firm friends.

By now, you will be wondering what will happen next – not only with *Descent*, but also your subscriptions. Both are safe.

If you look back over the past few years or so, in particular, you will find the name of Chris Scaife popping up in *Descent* with articles, reviews and reports – including in this issue.

Sweltering in Savoie

The closing days of July saw covers from around the world converge on south-east France for the 18th International Congress of Speleology, making the most of (or suffering from) the heatwave, as Chris Howes reports.

THE HUGE SPORTS FIELD spawned no sea of tents. Instead, a ribbon-like margin lapped around the edge where campers sheltered from the relentless sun using whatever shade was on offer. Everyone baked with temperatures up to or over 40 degrees; as soon as the horizon was breached at daybreak, heat and humidity drove everyone out to make use of the inadequate ablutions a short or long hike away, depending on where you camped. For many, who were in tents rather than a local hotel or b&b, this was reality for a week.

Just as was the case in the UK and throughout Europe, heat and humidity were factors during the UIS International Congress of Speleology, held in France from 24 to 31 July. The congress normally takes place every four years, though the pandemic delayed this 18th event from



Congress delegates. Photo: Philippe Crochet

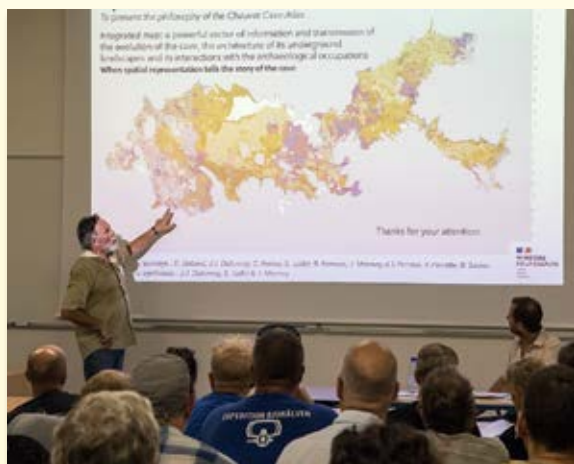


2021 to 2022 – which gave the organising group, the Fédération Française de Spéléologie an extra year to prepare, but also a series of accompanying problems.

The congress venue was the Savoie-Technolac, a university campus and business park at Le Bourget-du-Lac in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region within reach of a number of caves (it was originally scheduled to be run in Lyon, which became unavailable and prompted a change). Part of the campus, it turned out, had been mothballed during the pandemic and this seemed to have affected the lecture theatres. Participants offered an immense range of talks, each typically twenty minutes long (forcing lecturers to make them apposite and concise), but it has to be said that without air conditioning (other than the basics of propping the doors open), the sight of delegates slumping in a heap

of sweat was common. That's aside from one cool outlying theatre used for films and slideshows, which became very popular. *Il Buco* – the much-praised film reported in *Descent* (287) – was also shown on two evenings in the local cinema.

The talks generally were good, though language barriers existed for some attendees. Scientific sessions were organised into 'symposia', themed with such titles as 'cave deposits', 'history of speleology', 'cave diving' and the like. In total, this amounted to 635 talks so something was certainly on offer for everyone. Details were provided in a congress program, with delegates also given a special edition of *Spelunca* in French and English – a publication packed with information both specific and local, as well as general and country-wide: it's a highly useful reference work with plenty of interest in the 128 pages.





Many cavers opted to spend their days underground, switching the surface heat for a cool 12 degrees in one of the many pre-rigged systems on offer, with the rope sponsored by Petzl. Surveys and descriptions were posted at reception and it became a simple matter of signing up and heading off; 827 cavers took advantage of this, with yet more caving independently. Otherwise, not to be underestimated were the poster and other displays, as well as the salons and traders.

The trade hall seemed immense. Of course, here were vendors selling hardware and caving clothing, and a stand promoting the next congress in three years' time in Brazil (thus reverting to the schedule – that team is shaping up well for a great congress, though costs are not yet revealed). The overwhelming impression in the trade hall was one of an abundance of books. That's new books, old books; used and thumbed books or the latest printings – they were everywhere in heaps and in boxes and on laden tables. For many bibliophiles this became a case not of buying a book or two, but of working out how to ship box-loads home internationally.

The photo salon took up about half of a large sports hall, where rows of black-clad stands displayed high-quality images that were judged by a team of six before the awards were presented on the Thursday evening (a smaller room accommodated the art and many excellent surveys). The other half was filled with a fascinating



Far left: The latest Grotte Chauvet survey
Mid-left and above: The Spéléolympics traverse, which was won by Liliya Kioseva (22 min 46s) and Paco Clary (15 min 14s) in the female and male categories

Above left: The winning art competition model
Left: The Spéléotruck, a mobile artificial cave
All photos: Chris Howes



The trade hall and Rolf Siegenthaler on the Scurion stand, one of the event's sponsors

display of children's books and games based on Jacques Choppy's collection now with the karst documentation centre at Laboratoire EDYTEM. Between the two sat SpeleoMedit, a comprehensive showcase of caving in 24 countries and

territories in the Mediterranean area (the panels can be viewed at: www.tetide.org/speleomedit, which is well worth a visit). The Italian contingent set up a superb exhibition in a separate building, 'Casa Italia', presenting what might best

A QUESTION OF TIME

ONE of the congress projects was entirely innovative: to prepare and install a time capsule as part of the International Year of Caves and Karst. All the UIS member countries were invited to contribute an object, which would be sealed inside the capsule and only opened in 2091. The duration is symbolic, being the same time between the first congress and this – as the capsule text noted, 'It will be a gift from the cavers of the present to the cavers of the future. ... What will our children and grandchildren see in 69 years?'

The capsule was designed in two sections to make it easier to transport and shaped like an hourglass to represent the passage of time. Each portion was welded shut during the congress and the capsule was installed a few days later at –200m in the Fitoja chamber in Fitoja Express in the Bauges massif. Although the contents were recorded, this list will not be published – though the UK donation is known.

We at *Descent* are both honoured and humbled by the UK's choice of what to place in the capsule to represent British caving – a copy of *Descent* (284), one of our 'special' extra-page issues. It was accompanied by the following letter:



ON behalf of the British cavers of 2022, we are pleased to send you, the cavers of the future, a copy of *Descent*, our leading magazine devoted to underground exploration. In this magazine you will learn how cavers came together to rescue a fellow caver who had experienced a very serious accident. This was the biggest British cave rescue for decades and included the longest ever continuous stretcher carry. We hope that this record will never be broken, although undoubtedly there will be other rescues. During the 50 years or so that we have been caving there have been huge advances in techniques and equipment both for general exploration and particularly for cave rescue. We have no doubt that if this accident had happened in 1972 the victim would have died before he could be brought to the surface.

We wonder what exciting developments will have taken place between now and when you read this note and while it is our hope that our sport will be safer we also hope that you will still be able to enjoy the thrill of exploration and discovery that makes caving different from other sports. Elsewhere in the journal you will read about activities and discoveries in the different regions of Britain, on the island of Ireland and elsewhere in the world where British cavers are active. Current estimates are that around 1000 km of cave passage have been explored and surveyed in Britain, the majority in the last 50 years, and that British cavers have explored even more cave passage in other countries. However, we are sure that there is much for future generations to discover! The themes of cave access and cave conservation are very important in 2022, as they have been in past years. We hope that you will still have the freedom to explore caves, to appreciate the beauty of the speleothems, sediments and passage shapes and that you will still be studying them and making exciting new scientific discoveries.

John Gunn (BCRA Chairman), Russell Myers (BCA Chairman) and Andrew Eavis (Hon. President of the UIS)



Above: Part of the photo salon

Left: Petzl's challenge: build a crate tower (the joint winners were Héliène Burckel and Quentin Fron, each completing 22 crates before the inevitable collapse)

Below left: Pierre Strinati (aged 93), present at the first and now 18th congress

Below right: Wednesdays are traditionally given over to excursions, this one being to Grottes de Saint-Christophe

All photos: Chris Howes

Competition results

Art

The art contest was judged by delegate vote

WINNER: François Caffin

Surveys

An overall Grand Prize winner was selected from all entries, plus a category for 'innovative topographical research' (shortened to 'originality'), a separate award for large system surveys, and a delegate vote award

JUDGES: Andrea Croskrey, Rainer Straub, Tudor Tamas

GRAND PRIZE: Thomas Arbenz

DELEGATE VOTE: Thomas Arbenz

2ND: François Landry & Jean-Paul Heriel

3RD: Jacques Nant

LARGE SYSTEM PRIZE: François Landry & Jean-Paul Heriel

ORIGINALITY: Guy Van Rentergem

HONOURABLE MENTIONS: Mike Futrell, Nancy Pistole

Photography

Entries were made in five categories, with an overall Grand Prize winner selected from all entries, plus a delegate vote award

JUDGES: Kasia Biernacka, Luc Henri Fage, Peter Gedei, Satoshi Goto, Robbie Shone, Leda Zogbi

GRAND PRIZE: Chris Howes

DELEGATE VOTE: Chris Howes

2ND: Yvan Grossenbacher

3RD: Mirjam Widmer

Karst landscapes and entrances

WINNER: Kevin Downey

2ND: Jean-François Fabriol

Underground landscapes

WINNER: Kevin Downey

2ND: Rainer Straub

Macrophotography

WINNER: Mirjam Widmer

2ND: Chris Howes

Action and exploration

WINNER: Jeff Wade

2ND: Mirjam Widmer

Offbeat photos

WINNER: Vincent Gerber

2ND: Dave Bunnell

Sami Karkabi Photography Award from the Spéléo Club du Liban (see p5)

WINNER: Dave Bunnell

be described as the 'rare and quirky of caving', with examples of historical material that ran into the strange and weird but always entertaining.

Aside from what appeared to be almost continuous caving films, outdoor activities included the Spéléotruck (a mobile artificial cave) and Spéléolympics – a rigorous ropework traverse against the clock that included a descent through pipes and ended in a zipwire – plus a challenge: how high could you build a stack of beer crates while climbing them at the same time, albeit protected by ropes? That proved hugely entertaining to watch.

It was very evident how much effort over 200 volunteers put in – colloquially, they worked their socks off. On the other hand, not everything went as it should – for example, some cavers lost out on pre-booked excursions that changed or did not run, to the detriment of those affected, and it seemed easy to become lost or misdirected by signage. Other difficulties involved finance, with refunds reportedly not offered and prize money payments delayed.

Food and drink could be 'purchased' using prepaid plastic tokens, which were not refundable. Such grouses may seem nitpicking over detail for a massively enjoyable event, but enough mutterings were made directly to *Descent* with specific requests to mention them in this report, that it is impossible to ignore.

Every evening entertainments centred on the 'big red tent' (a circus marquee) which housed the SpeleoBar and stage. The action ranged from a gypsy band through electric folk and jazz and rock, with a Petzl Party to set Tuesday's mood by serving a free aperitif for everyone. The final night was taken up, as is traditional, with the gala dinner and this scored highly for the quality of food and number of bottles of wine provided (the only folk who lost out were the last to be served, whose meals were delayed when the 'kitchen broke down' and any vegetarians whose main course was the same as everyone else's but with a space where the chicken used to be ...). The service by yet more caver volunteers was outstanding.

The amount of preparation required to run such an event, at all levels, is staggering to consider and thanks must go to all involved, especially





The circus big top used as the main evening gathering point and for the Petzl Party

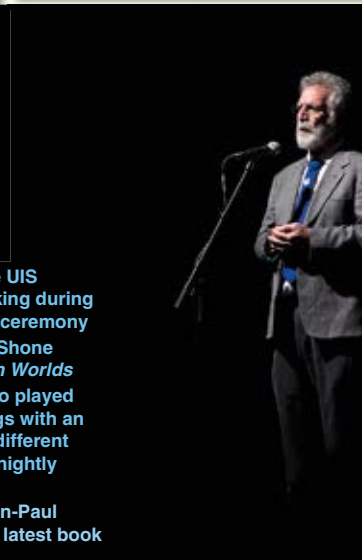
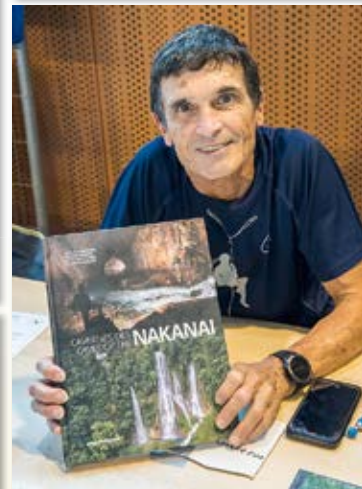


Above: The traverse ended with a zipwire descent
Below: Michael Laumanns with his publications on obscure caving regions of the world

Speleology was held in Paris in 1953 and this was the first time since then that the event had returned to France. The team in the Savoie certainly made sure that this 18th occasion was memorable.

those on the ground who, sometimes tucked away behind desks, spent the week working rather than enjoying what was on offer. Also to the many traders who brought in so much stock, not only to sell but also to generate conversations and promote new ideas. Underground or at the congress, this is the real reason for success: to have a gathering point for cavers from around the world, to see old and make new friends, to spend time caving and talking into the small hours.

The inaugural International Congress of



George Veni, the UIS President, speaking during the closing gala ceremony
Far left: Robbie Shone launched *Hidden Worlds*
Centre: Liam Duo played well-known songs with an electric twist; a different group provided nightly entertainment
Above right: Jean-Paul Sounier with his latest book



The caves of the Ardèche

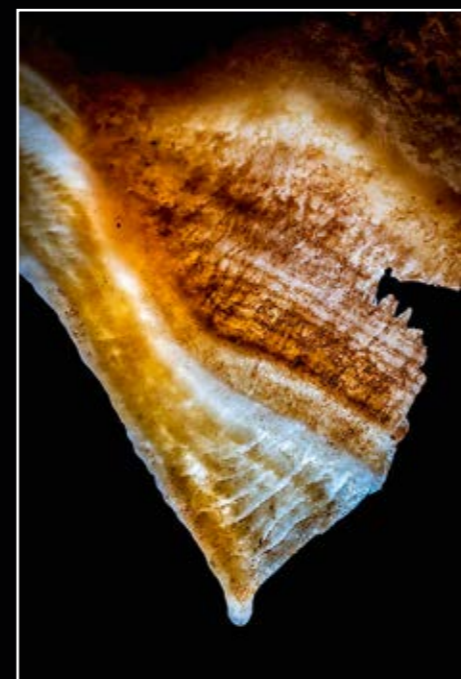
THE ARDÈCHE in southern France is a region seemingly filled with richly decorated or interestingly formed caves and, as such, is a perfect centre for a week of cave photography. *Descent* readers will no doubt recall the series of photo-based articles featuring the caves of different areas of the world as part of organised international camps – from Japan to the USA, Italy and Slovenia and Turkey, these have been immensely successful.

The gathering near Vallon-Pont-d'Arc in the Ardèche from 17 to 24 July represented the first group to return to France since the inaugural

event in 2011. This was a pre-congress camp (see p18) that followed the same format as the previous international meetings: a week of caving and cave photography, sharing ideas, tips and results, culminating in a public showing of what had been produced, all while staying at a four-star campsite with cabins and close to the canoe-laden river.

The organisers – principally Philippe Crochet, Annie Guiraud (regular contributors to *Descent*) and Judicaël Arnaud (caving instructor and deputy president of the French caving school) – did us all proud, as did the eight guides:

- ▲ Stalactites in Grotte de la Toussaint
Photo: Chris Howes
- ▼ Grotte de Saint-Marcel. Photo: Csaba Egri
- ▶ An amazing roof in the Évén de Midroï
Photo: Matej Zalokar
- ▶▶ Far right: Fragile formations in Grotte de la Toussaint. Photos (top down): Justin Wilkinson, Dave Bunnell and Chris Howes
- ▲ Bottom left: A curtain in Grotte de la Toussaint. Photo: Chris Howes
- ▼ Bottom right: Formations in Grotte de Saint-Marcel (compare this image with those on page 38). Photo: Satoshi Goto





◀ Aven de Noël. Photo: Mü Widmer
 ▼ Grotte de Saint-Marcel
 Photo: Chris Howes

▶ Aven d'Armédia
 Photo: Matej Zalokar

We were nearly convinced by our guides to turn back near the end because 'the last chamber is full of mud with nothing interesting to see'.

Thierry Aubé, Gérard Cazes, Gilles Etienne, Claire Goudian, Jacques Gudefin, Jérôme Loire, Philippe Monteil and Michel Serfati, many of whom gave up their free time for the entire week, plus at Grotte de la Toussaint Jocelyn Lacroix, Clément Vansoeterstede and Michel Wienin. In the midst of an extreme heatwave that produced sweltering conditions in the humid apartments, the cool 12°C found underground was a blessing.

Fifteen caves of varying difficulty were available during the week (though permits or popularity restricted the number of visits or caver numbers for some). Everyone explored beyond the showcave in Grotte de Saint-Marcel at some point, with divided attentions elsewhere from the filigree formations of Toussaint to the scalloped walls of Grotte de la Cocalière.

The Wednesday included a real treat: a tour of Grotte Chauvet 2. This is a replica of the cave that is so filled with ancient art that it takes your breath away, even as a copy. Topping that was the fact that the visit was privately organised and in the company of Jean-Marie Chauvet (the name is a bit of a giveaway for his involvement in the discovery in 1994), who said that when he is inside the replica he feels as though he is in the real cave, so faithful is the reproduction. A new theatre at the site was also used for



▶ The Violin Bow in Grotte Flandin. Photo: Dave Bunnell

▶ A shield formation in Grotte de la Toussaint
 Photo: Csaba Egri

▶ The roof is red in the further reaches of Grotte de Saint-Marcel. Photo: Kevin Downey





Saturday's presentation, where the photographers showed three images each and spoke about why these were their favourites.

Approaches were varied, so that some photographers worked in stereo, others with a mobile phone or experimented with new equipment or techniques. Incidents? There were a few ... Walking down the showcave's internal steps, one assistant slipped, dislocated her shoulder and ended up as walking wounded. And commiserations must go to the Japanese team, whose activities were curtailed by Covid-19 (everyone recovered well in the end).

Yet again, on behalf of all the photographers and their assistants, thanks go to all the organisers and helpers for creating and offering us all such an utterly memorable week in a beautiful setting.

Nothing can be better than to take cave photos all day, enjoy fine food in wonderful company and sleep and repeat. Now, turn the pages and enjoy the results.
Chris Howes



- ◀ *Left, top down:*
Grotte de la Toussaint. *Photo: Dave Bunnell*
Grotte Estevan
Photo: Mü Widmer
Évent de Peyrejal
Photo: Chris Howes
- ▶ *Double tunnel in*
Grotte de Saint-Marcel. *Photo: Philippe Crochet*
- ▶ *Centre: Grotte de*
Trabuc. *Photo: Justin Wilkinson*
- ▶ *Grotte du Raid*
Photo: Csaba Egri
- ▶ *Far right: Grotte de*
Saint-Marcel
Photo: Matej Zalokar

ÉVENT DE PEYREJAL



It is fascinating at the end of such a meeting to discover how different photographers, on different trips, have used the same location to different effect. This awkward traverse in the Évent de Peyrejal was one such place, with a mixture of techniques coming into play, ranging from backlighting to underwater flash.

◀ Kevin Downey and his support team shooting the photo below
Photo: Chris Howes



▼ Lucas Padoan de sa Godinho silhouetted on the traverse, taken with an iPhone 11
Photo: Leda Zogbi

▲ Jacques Gudefin from above, using an underwater flashbulb triggered with a radio slave
Photo: Chris Howes

▶ Larissa Kenney ascending
Photo: Ed Schultz

◀ Lucas on the traverse, with an electronic flash fired below water by an optical slave
Photo: Kevin Downey





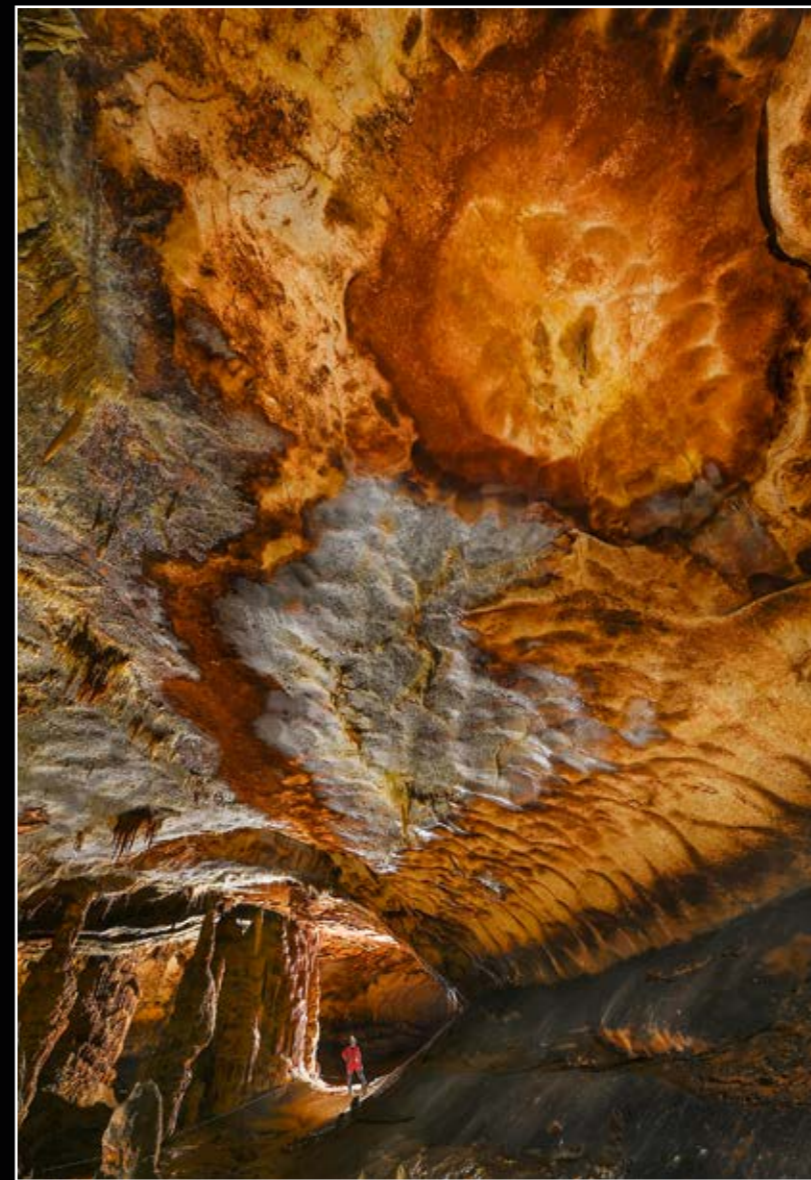
Just before the terminal, smelly sump we found some of the only water seen in any of the caves during the drought. Underwater lighting and creating reflections had to be tried, though the out-of-depth pool was as cold as ice.

▲ Événement de Peyrejal
Photo: Chris Howes

▲ Below left: Grotte du Raid
Photo: Mü Widmer

Saint-Marcel was filled with scalloped ceilings and large formations. One habit I developed after going digital is to always shoot a backlit-only image first, then combine it with a front light. I'm not sure which result I prefer: the more cave-like image or the documentary lighting.

▼ Grotte de Saint-Marcel
Photos: Dave Bunnell



▲ Grotte de Saint-Marcel
Photo: Kevin Downey

▲ Top right: Crystals in Grotte du Raid
Photo: Mü Widmer

▲ Mini-gours in Grotte de la Toussaint
Photo: Chris Howes

▲ Grotte de Saint-Marcel
Photo: Franz Lindenmayr

▲ Below left: Grotte de la Toussaint
Photo: Chris Howes

▼ The photographers and their assistants
Photo: Philippe Crochet



PHOTOGRAPHER WEBSITES

FOR more fine cave photography by those with images in this article, head for the photographers' websites:

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Dave Bunnell | www.goodearthgraphics.com |
| Philippe Crochet | www.philippe-crochet.com |
| Csaba Egri | www.caverna.hu |
| Satoshi Goto | www.gotospeleo.jp |
| Chris Howes | www.wildplacesphotography.co.uk |
| Franz Lindenmayr | www.lochstein.de |
| Rainer Straub | www.rainerstraub.de |
| Mirjam 'Mü' Widmer | www.mirjam-widmer.ch |
| Matej Zalokar | www.matejzalokar.com |

CAVE PHOTO MEETINGS

ALL the previous cave photography meetings in the series have been reported in *Descent*: Olargues in France in 2011 (*Descent* 223), Italy and Slovenia in 2013 (238), Turkey in 2015 (247), New Mexico in 2018 (266) and Japan in 2019 (271). For more about Grotte Chauvet 2, see *Descent* (244).



We send special thanks to the principal organisers Philippe Crochet and Annie Guiraud with (above) Judicaël Arnaud
Photos: Chris Howes

PHOTOGRAPHY: SATOSHI GOTO

Descent

GROTTE DE TRABUC

