A person wearing a red helmet, a yellow jacket, and a red and yellow bag is rappelling down a dark, textured rock face. The person is holding a rope and has a headlamp on their forehead, which is turned on, casting a bright beam of light. The background is a clear, light blue sky.

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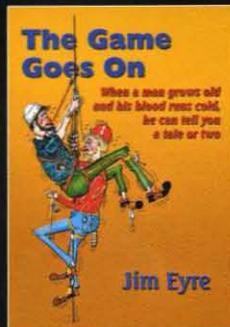
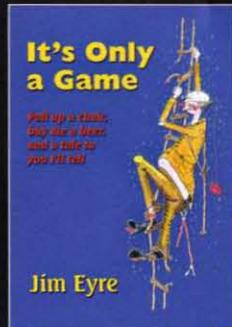
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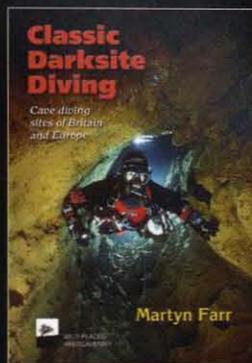
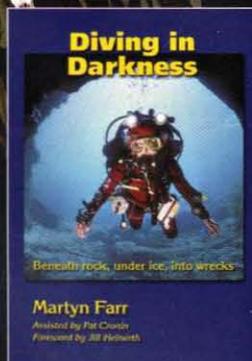
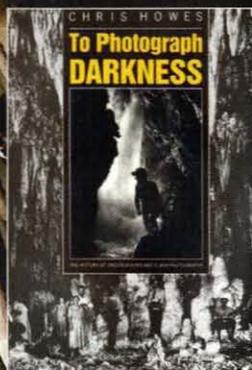
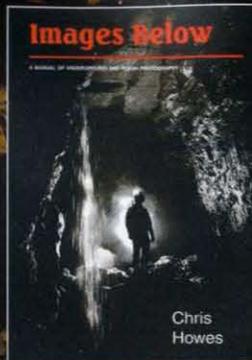


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COVER: Erin Lynch 240m above the floor in the thick mist of Cloud Ladder Hall, Quankou Dong, China
PHOTO: Robbie Shane
BACK COVER CAPTION: See p38

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How do you not only tempt newcomers into the underground caving world, but also set them up to continue within the community? CHECC's latest meeting has brought more students into the fold.

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Descent (234) asked for help in identifying people in a photo – with great success.

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The Three Counties System has been extended yet again – the diggers have entered a huge and significant passage in Large Pot.

The Lady Behind the Scenes 24

Elsie Little did not discover new passages, did not appear in films or write books. But she *did* work hard on our behalf and we pay tribute to her life.

Gear Review DistoX2 26

The electronic DistoX used in cave surveying has seen new developments: cavers, meet the DistoX2.

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A Data Set for the North 32

Cave surveying has entered an era of sharing data, an element at the core of surveying and archiving projects in Northern England.

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The annual Irish caving symposium took cavers overground and underground and into the bars, and even included a film premiere.

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If the unexpected happens and you think you might need help, don't hesitate ...

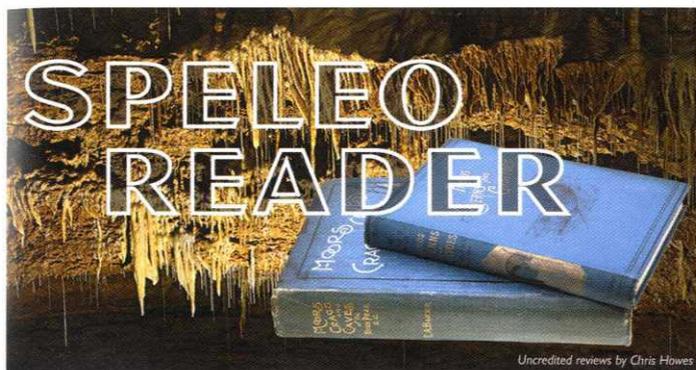


Mike Futrell in an unnamed Chinese cave (see p27)
Photo: Hazel Barton

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Uncredited reviews by Chris Howes

John Oliver's Postojnska Jama of 1856

Trevor SHAW (intro)

ZRC, Ljubljana. 2013. 185pp, 24 illustrations plus facsimile pages. E-book, free download

ISBN 978-961-254-472-0 (pdf)

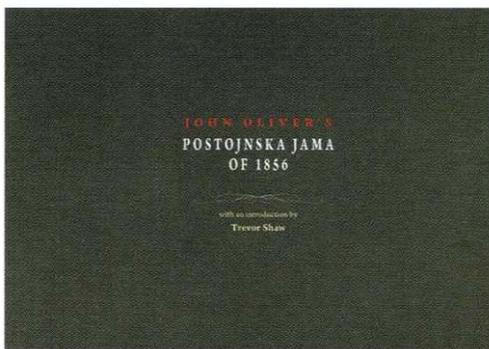
IN 1837 and again in 1852, one John Oliver visited the renowned showcave in what was then called Adelsberg and today is known as Postojna in Slovenia. On his first visit, British-born Oliver would have seen an 1834 guidebook written by Alois Schaffenrath, the civil engineer who built the cave's paths and bridges and, in 1821, had painted a set of superb watercolours in the cave. Following his second visit Oliver, now a priest, created a beautiful manuscript volume which mostly contains his English translation of the guidebook with many illustrations physically cut from other sources and mounted in his book. Oliver added his own comments as footnotes in a separate appendix in the form of a bound-in notebook.

For many years that was the extent of things: the Schaffenrath guide was well known, though today scarce, but Oliver's volume – although known of – almost disappeared into history. Following research by the eminent speleohistorian Trevor Shaw, we now have access to a facsimile of this amazing and unique work of art, complete with his new introduction.

The book's provenance is in itself of interest, in that when Oliver died in 1883 it passed to his son William, but today bears the initials J.W.P in a margin. These turn out to be written by James William Puttrell, known for his cave explorations in the early 1900s, presumably added as a mark of ownership when he acquired the volume. After Puttrell, the equally infamous Eli Simpson owned the book until he died in 1962, since when it passed through dealers' hands and into Trevor's and hence to now reside in the Karst Research Institute in Postojna.

This new book is only available in electronic format as a pdf, the main part being a faithful copy of John Oliver's volume comprising 121 pages of his two-column original pages, including the blank ones (the reverse side of the plates, for example) and the covers that complete its structure. A further 35 pages represent the double-page spreads of the appendix, so that the original specification of 185 pages is misleading, given that some are blank and some represent two pages in the original.

Trevor's introduction spans 22 pages, again two-column to match Oliver's style, containing his analysis and historical documentation. This goes far beyond a mere description of the guide and manuscript: Trevor not only presents what is known about Oliver's life, but sets his visits into context – what was it like to visit the cave at this time, what new information did Oliver add beyond his translation, how did he fare with the local distinguished speleologist Adolf



Schmidl? As it turns out, Oliver often refers to Schmidl in a critical fashion, with the impression given of a lingering strong dislike. Of course, all of Trevor's discussions are backed by notes and references.

The current facsimile publication is downloadable from: <http://tinyurl.com/o5kjcjn> (it is a large file at 75Mb), though its lack of existence in physical format is a great pity. While its production would no doubt be a costly exercise to do it justice, a printed version would have been a treasure to leaf through, but nevertheless the digitisation is excellent and the research immaculate. When this comes to a computer near you for zero cost, there is little to complain about and even non-historians are likely to enjoy paging through the work. Take a look.

Chris Howes

The Labyrinth of Osiris

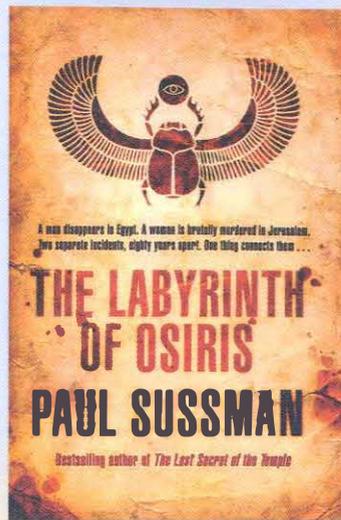
AS a title, *The Labyrinth of Osiris* by Paul Sussman made me want to find out how much of the story takes place underground. The answer is: not a lot.

The plot deals with an investigation into the murder of a journalist in Jerusalem's Armenian Cathedral and becomes connected with mysterious well poisonings in the Egyptian eastern desert. There is much play on the unlikely cooperation between two detectives, an Israeli and an Egyptian, and they are drawn into 'a sinister web of violence, abuse, corporate malpractice and international terrorism'.

At the heart of the story is the three-thousand-year-old mystery of the lost labyrinth, which is revealed to be an ancient Egyptian mine in which one of the detectives becomes lost. I did not find the description of his ordeal in total darkness believable – perhaps a mine, with flat floors and smooth walls, would be easier to negotiate in pitch blackness than a cave, but the narrative really stretched the imagination. Would anyone care to comment on the reality of making their way out of a mine with no light whatsoever?

Like most novels of this type, the plot was complicated and excessive, but I felt it held my interest – I did want to read it to its end. Published by Bantam in 2013 (ISBN 978-0-553-81874-1), *The Labyrinth of Osiris* runs to 768 pages.

Joe Duxbury



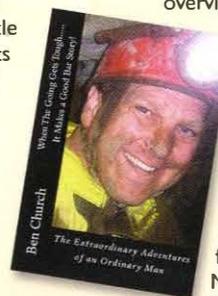
Publications

ON the book front, 2014 opened with the availability of a new book by Ben Church:

When the Going Gets Tough

... It Makes a Good Bar Story! As the title suggests, the contents

comprise a series of stories, essentially autobiographical events that include caving and a review will follow in a future *Descent*. For details of this print-on-demand book, see: www.benchurch.com.



for anyone wishing to build a bat detector that will also log its findings, the opening part of a useful overview of state-of-the-art

caving lamps, and lighter reading in the form of a historical look at early underground radio tests. These, surprisingly, were successful as far back as 1922 when clear signals were detected and two-way communications established from the Rotunda in Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, 110m beneath the earth.

The most recent edition of BCRA's transactions, *Cave and Karst Science* Vol. 40, (2), has a bias to northern England with papers about hydrology beneath the Swaledale and Wensleydale watershed, comparisons of Malham Tarn core samples with the diatom flora of today, the gulfs of Greenhow Hill and, for historians, the early 20th century speleological activities of the Manchester-based Rucksack Club. In addition, the editorial raises a discussion point concerning high-altitude caves and, in particular, asks for feedback about large, extensive caves at altitude in addition to those known in China and Peru.

The *Cave Radio & Electronics Group Journal*, (84), looks at the Pinger radiolocation system for mapping underwater passages,

The UIS produces an annual bibliographic publication with a database approach, documenting all useful references to caves that have appeared in print along with a résumé of their contents; typically, these can run to between 4,000 and 5,000 references per year. The next edition of these *Speleological Abstracts* will be a double volume (51-52) covering 2012 and 2013 and, when finished, this will be published as a book with an accompanying searchable CD-ROM.

This will be the final publication on paper, with future editions only published electronically. The Bibliography Commission hopes to scan the early volumes from 1 to 27 and make these available online, but needs a volunteer – if you are able to help, head for: www.ssslib.ch/bbs.

When to bellow!

HAVE YOU noticed anything?' Tony shouted over the noise of the water.

I looked at him blankly.

We had tried to visit Meregill Hole several times and always been rained off, but on this day the weather was only miserable. We had come in through Aven Entrance, a few metres from the depression holding the mere that gives the cave its name. A short crawl breaks into a narrow rift which we had rigged with a ladder. We had then split into two parties – three people rigging the early pitches and two of us overtaking them to rig deeper down.

Partway down the pitch I was rigging there was supposed to be a rebelay. Could I find it? After prusiking up and down

and swinging from side to side for a while, I'd had enough and came back up to let Tony give it a go.

'It was quiet when you started rigging.'

Tony was right. Where we stood it had been peaceful; now, it was near impossible to hear each other.

'Come on!'

We set off upstream in a hurry, and met Andy on his way down to find us and get us out. At one point we encountered a small waterfall, no more than a metre and a bit high; I was last in the group and after several attempts I realised that there was no way I could ascend it against the force of the water. The others shouted to me to move to the right, where it was

possible to climb in a small, calm alcove. My struggle at the waterfall had shown me the power of the main stream.

Tony pushed on ahead to tell the others we were coming, while Andy and I followed, derigging. The torrent in the stream passage near the top was fearsome and we traversed on the sloping walls above it. We knew that were one of us to slip we would be swept straight over the pitch behind us.

When we entered the short entrance rift a substantial, new waterfall lay between us and the ladder. Julie was still climbing the ladder, so we waited on our side of the waterfall until she had disappeared, then Andy ducked through the water only to make an unexpected discovery: the ladder had seemingly vanished. Looking up, he saw the end of it dangling out of reach – Julie had caught the ladder with one boot as she crawled out and had dragged it up with her.

I joined Andy at the side of the waterfall where the ladder should have been and we waited, chatting casually, for someone to notice we were missing. When nothing happened after several minutes (which, under the circumstances, was a lot longer than several normal minutes), we decided it was time to shout. We could hear the others talking on the surface and so we thought they ought to be able to hear us.

On a count of three we both bellowed: 'Hoy!'

The surface team fell silent. After a minute or so we heard



Write it Down!

Write it Down! is an occasional but very popular series that presents your short caving stories and anecdotes about life underground to a wider audience than your friends in the pub. If you have a story to tell from the underworld that really shouldn't be lost to the mists of time, now's the time to entertain us. Go on, write it down ...

someone shuffling along the crawl, then a lamp appeared above us. As the suspended ladder was picked out by the light we hoped to see some semblance of guilt on the person's face, but what we received was a big smile followed by the end of the ladder giving us blows on our heads.

Outside, it was raining like it always had when we tried to visit Meregill before – that is, in very large buckets. We found Tony building dams in an attempt to limit the flow into the cave, which was probably a good idea.

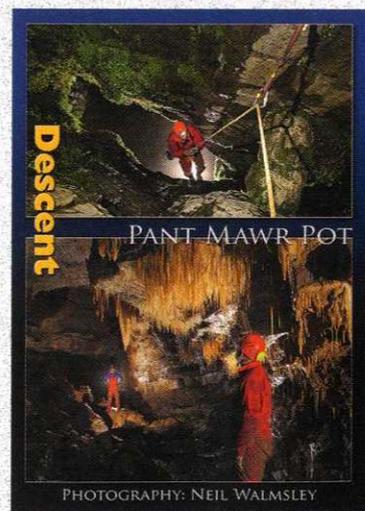
'We wondered why you didn't come out,' one of them said. 'We could hear you chatting and thought you were just busy with something.'

Reader take heed: when in dire circumstances, do not gossip amiably. Either stay dumb, or howl like anything for rescue!

Showcase

Pant Mawr Pot, South Wales: Ivan Hollis on the 15m entrance pitch, and Ivan with Estelle Sandford in the finely decorated Sabre Passage
Photos: Neil Walmsley

THE back page showcases a photographer, artist or even a group, using a single photo or a set of pictures on a theme. This doesn't have to be of exploration or a breakthrough, simply any image or set of photos that work well together. If you think you have what it takes and wish to see your best pictures in print, make contact with Descent.



Descent

PANT MAWR POT

PHOTOGRAPHY: NEIL WALMSLEY



JULIE HAD CAUGHT THE LADDER WITH ONE BOOT ...

Jon G



Descent

PANT MAWR POT



PHOTOGRAPHY: NEIL WALMSLEY