

# L'Aven d'Orgnac

## Tim Moore

In my experience of show caves, L'Aven d'Orgnac is significantly deep. Tours commence by descending a direct line of stairs (no landings) to a point some 120 m below the entrance. The cave tour winds some further 30 m or so downward. I undertook this Cave tour while my 15-year-old son undertook an adventure caving activity known as Souterrain Vertige (Subterranean Vertigo). The reason for this will later become apparent. For reasons which also will later become obvious, undertaking this adventure caving activity is limited to a maximum of four participants plus the guide. There were only two participants when my son, Luke, undertook the activity.

The alternative entrance to the cave is via the original discovery point, a hole in the roof, followed by a freefall abseil of some 60 m, a matter relevant as will later be seen.

The cave tour was an entirely conventional one with the guiding conducted entirely in French. As noted in the preceding article, I was able to follow a deal of what was said. Perhaps because there were a number of teenage or younger children in the group of about 25, there appeared to be a deal of old-style description identification in the guiding patter. In addition to hearing conventional karst related words, I also heard Mickey Mouse and Snow White!

Shortly after we exited the foyer at the foot of the stairs, the guide indicated that we were to be the beneficiaries of an acrobatic display.

We were invited to turn and observe the hole in the roof. Suddenly, two figures in red overalls appeared, descending down a pair of ropes. It was Luke and his tour companion. I was not concerned, as my son is a competent abseiler. However, the next entrant, after these two had got off rope, was the guide who descended headfirst doing back flips as he went (this being the acrobatic display for the tour party).

Although there was, at least at this point in the cave, a deal of natural light, photographic opportunities were limited given a ban on flash photography. However, for purposes of this Journal, I was able to take three photographs that did not suffer from the wobbles (as a consequence of the time the lens needed to be open). The first of these appeared earlier and the while the next two illustrate the following interview with my son.

L'Aven d'Orgnac's website contains a short video of this adventure caving activity. It and my son's brief description of it to me made me decide that a short piece might also be of interest in this Journal. Given the communications skills of teenage boys, I concluded that the appropriate way to obtain relevant material was to record and transcribe an interview with him!

The photo at the top of the next column shows the original entrance through which the abseil occurred.



### Interview with Luke Moore

ED: What sort of briefing did Stephan give you before you started the activity?

LUKE: Stephan told us how to put on the safety equipment and, after we put on the safety equipment, he checked it over. Then, once we got to the top of the abseil, he secured us into the abseil and secured us together so it had a more controlled pace.

He also, once we were about to start the climb, he told us how to connect the clips and always to have one clip connected at all times.

ED: How did it feel doing that long, diagonal traverse across the face of the main chamber, about 40 metres above the floor?

LUKE: The traverse was fine, exhausting and a little bit scary. It was pretty high off the ground, but there was always a ledge before the floor, the very floor of the chamber, so it wasn't 40 metres from the ledge. So not as high as it would seem from the ground.

ED: Where did you go after you got to the top of the traverse?

LUKE: At the top of the traverse there was some, a little bit of mild caving, where we just walked and did some minor climbing through a 20-30 metre area and then we arrived at a second cave room and there was some more walking before we reached a second traverse that went towards a decline.

ED: How far away from the end of that traverse was the zipline?

LUKE: We circled around the second room and got to the zipline. It was probably, I don't know, 50 metres or so of traversing, but there was also probably 50 metres of walking on rocks as well.

ED: Did you have to do any crawling or squeezing?

LUKE: There was no crawling, but you couldn't walk at full height in that part of the walk through to the second area.

ED: How long was the zipline across the cave and how far was the drop below it?

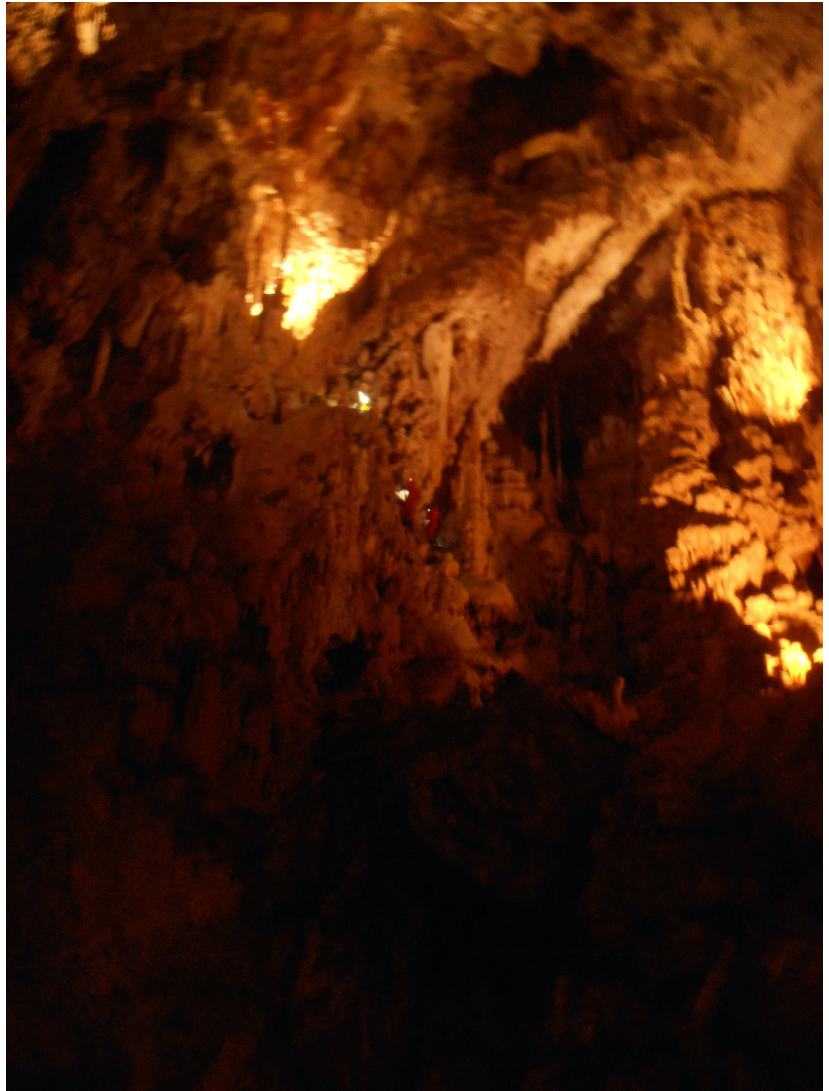
LUKE: The zipline was probably, in length of the rope, 10 metres maybe, maybe a bit more, and in height, across the cables, probably 10 metres, maybe a bit less.

ED: And what did you do after you got off at the far end of the zipline?

LUKE: At the end of the zipline, there was a walking down some rocks, may be a little bit of climbing. Just down rocks, not anything really, and then we joined in with the guided tour at the very end.

ED: And did that mean you made your way back up to the surface using the lift?

LUKE: Yeah, we made our way back up just using the lift.



Two small red figures in centre of traverse. Photo: Tim Moore

## Remembering Alan Costigan – Buchan Caves Reserve

### Dale Calnin

Alan Costigan sadly passed away in October 2019. He was one of the early Life Members of ACKMA and was a much loved and respected Cave Manager at Buchan Caves Reserve between 1973 to 1987.

Alan was my first Caves Supervisor when I first started work at the Buchan in 1974 as 15-year-old casual guide and then later when I became a full-time cave guide in 1978.

It was Alan or "Cossie" as he was affectionately called who first introduced me to the intriguing world of Cave and Karst Management and the importance behind it.

Alan was a funny man and there was never a dull moment.

He was an integral member of the local Buchan community and a very passionate supporter of the Buchan football team "The Cavemen". He was never short in letting the opposition know what he thought of them and umpires certainly copped their share of his advice.

He was well known for his wicked sense of humour but behind all the fun and laughter was a very clever mind and a pioneer in many environmental management initiatives.

Alan enthusiasm for caves was contagious that flowed through to his staff and the many visitors to Buchan Caves Reserve.

During Alan's time as manager, he forged a strong relationship between Victorian Caving Clubs, a growing interest in wild caving and the idea of opening less explored caves within the Buchan district.

He was instrumental in the offer of Adventure Cave Tours for visitors through the Murrindal, Lilly Pilly and Federal Caves.