

## MIGOVEC 2000 – Cave Exploration On The Migovec Plateau, Slovenia

The Unknown Thrills Of Gardeners' World  
by Jan Evetts

*An exciting account of cave exploration with two of the members of Imperials Caving Club. This expedition is part of the clubs regular summer tour. Six weeks are spent camping in the dramatic and beautiful limestone peaks of the Julian Alps in North-West Slovenia, part of former Yugoslavia.*

I like to be sure everything is in order before embarking on a task. Which is why I fuffed around for half-an-hour making sure I had everything. Drill, check, battery, yep, extension cord, yes. Harness done up, good, descender, uhuh, jammers, maillons, spits, cones....etc. etc. Right. Now I am ready...hold on hammer and driver, and spare rigging tape, and some karabiners. Perfect. Why was I being so cautious? Or was I? Hold on where's my helmet...on my head, hmmm. Well to be honest I think I was stalling, and with good reason.

It all started 2 days back when Pete had come back from the cave known as Gardeners' World, to say he'd discovered something big, B.I.G. big, definitely not slightly big. I eagerly volunteered to return to 'big', now named, Pico Pot with Pete and see if we could descend it to find the bottom. He described Pico Pot as being a 10m wide, circular shaft, which when you threw a stone down it didn't land for about 4 seconds. With the help of his caving partner they had already traversed around the side of the shaft and descended down 10m where, abruptly, the walls of the shaft had disappeared. He found he was dangling below a rock bridge and there was no sign of the bottom, and it was here, that I found myself. I was about to descend into the unknown with all sorts of rigging paraphernalia dangling off me and getting in the way. The situation wasn't helped by the drill and battery, which weighed 5 kilos alone.

I looked around for a place to drill a hole, to make a belay. I knew where I wanted to put it, but, close inspection of the rock was worrying, it didn't look strong. I swung around looking for some more solid rock. Eventually I gave up and started drilling in the original spot. The grating thudding noise of the hammer action reverberated up and down the shaft as the drill dug in, it took a good minute to make a hole 12mm wide and 3cm deep, suitable for a bolt. When I was done, a maillon was attached to the bolt and my rope tied into the maillon. At which point I relaxed, its always a relief to know there's one more fixture holding you up. My relief was short-lived however as I started to descend again, I looked up to check my new bolt and was shocked to see the rock had split directly beneath it! This scared me, I quickly had to prussik back up the rope, to get my weight off the bolt. Repeating the whole process again before I could safely descend. I put in another bolt about 15m further down and from there I finally descended to a ledge and stood-up, this let blood circulate in my legs, which was a relief after a good hour hanging in a harness. I drilled a final bolt to back myself up, then shouted up to Pete to come down. I gave him all the rigging stuff, I had lost my enthusiasm for doing any more and just wanted to sit down.

Pete took over the bolting, unfortunately the drill battery went flat almost straight away, and he had to finish the job by hand, with the hammer and driver. Luckily he was able to get to the bottom without putting any more bolts in. I felt a little annoyed, as I saw his light disappearing off down a passage, he had got to the bottom first. If he came back to say the cave ended, which I half expected to happen, then when I reached the bottom I would just have to go straight back up again and that would be the end of an exciting lead. When I reached the floor of the shaft I could see it was strewn with huge precariously balanced boulders, these varied between a reasonable car sized lump, to sofas and TV sized chunks. I immediately scrambled off in the direction Pete had gone, gripped with the excitement of discovering huge passage ways. I met Pete coming back.

"Does it go?" I asked. "I think I can see a way on!" He replied excitedly. "And there's a howling draught." There was a strong draught going into the cave, caused by differences in air pressure in the cave and outside. This increased our excitement as it can indicate the presence of a large chamber or a passage somewhere further into the system. We followed the path of some water through a narrow rift. We were approximately 150m underground and it was interesting that the cave was so active (active, as in having a streamway) at this relatively shallow depth, in Slovenia where the limestone can be upto 2000m thick and incredibly fractured, water doesn't start to converge and form streams until you are a lot deeper. We stopped at the top of a waterfall, about 10ft high. Pete slung a bit of nylon rigging tape around a dubious looking lump of rock and we descended down, no problem. We continued following the streamway, the passage was high and narrow and meandered downwards. Then the streamway disappeared below us and we were looking down another large hole, perhaps 30m deep.

We had just one 25m length of rope and two bolts. In the excitement we dropped one bolt and it fell down the pitch, which was unfortunate. We poked at the rock, which looked pretty solid, put the second bolt in and then looked in vain for some natural flake we could back-up our single bolt with. Failing to find anything, we had a brief discussion and decided it would be alright. But I volunteered Pete go first, as it was his bolt.

It wasn't until we both got to the bottom of the pitch that we realised it was getting really wet, and we could hardly hear each other speak over the noise of the water. When we had walked to the cave entrance in the morning, it had been beautiful sunshine, but we suddenly realised that there must have been a short sharp alpine storm on the surface, and the cave was now in flood. We were now worried that we wouldn't get back up the big pitch, Pico Pot. We had no idea if the route we had bolted down happened to be a waterfall when the water levels rose. We decided it was time to go, yet despite our concerns, we surveyed the cave on our way out (surveying is measuring the length, bearing and inclination of the cave, so it can be plotted and visualised in 3D, using computer software). I suppose we wanted to know just how deep we had gone.

We were lucky, Pico Pot was passable where we had bolted. While the other side of the shaft was a massive 60m waterfall. Enormously relieved and tired after the excitement of our discoveries and fears of flooding, we exited to a kaleidoscope of colours as the sunset over the Julian Alps. We headed back to camp for hot drinks and food. We were soon joined by other cavers, and that evening sat around a fire, drinking the local firewater – Zganje - and recounting our tales of discovery and daring to the others.

The next day survey data was put onto the laptop computer. This confirmed we had found 150m of passage mostly vertical, and the cave, Gardeners' World, was 250m deep and 450m long and looking very exciting for future exploration.

For more information on the Caving Clubs exploits contact Ben (bogborne@aol.com) or Andrew (andrew.jurd@ic.ac.uk). Or visit the website ([www.su.ic.ac.uk/caving](http://www.su.ic.ac.uk/caving), a survey of Gardeners World can be viewed at [go.to/iccaving](http://go.to/iccaving)).