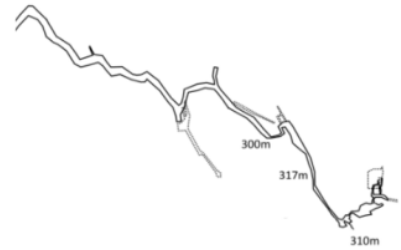


"Come my friends, it is not too late
to find a new world!"

Robert Heinlein



March 13, 2024

Dear friend,

I excuse for the lateness of my reply to your letter concerning why we cave, it had only been because of recent musings reminiscing on a birthday party in Daren Cilau, but also my recent caving life, had spurred me into writing a suitable reply: what draws us to caving? I jest with you above ground and underground that we are just simple plain nutters through and through. Perhaps, "a genetic fault" or an atavism of man which a good friend of mine once joked with me; and it can only seem to make sense, why would anybody spend their free time caving? It's horrid a lot of the time, as you are sure to agree, and we always are more keen to go to the pub than go underground.

I once held the belief of what drew us to caving was the exploration of the unknown; Earth's final frontier. Every generation had their own scope of the unknown: the exploration of the lands and the seas - but what did we have to quell the inquisitive of us other than these holes? Recent digging in Llangattock affirmed this for me, after all I had since an amore for the unknown - a fascination once stemmed into the exploration of space and cast down into the bowels of the Earth. But after all, what is exploration if nobody to share (or brag to you about) with? Perhaps it is the skill and sporting element of it all - the getting drenched and miserable, the incessant flat out crawling, the seemingly endless boulder hopping; our desire for hardship... but we could do all this in my back garden. Perhaps it could be a wanton act of rebellion against society, a push against the machine; an alternative way of living.

Alas, I believe it all stems from the desire for true heart-felt companionship. I pose this to you, who are your closest friends? Contemplate on that for a second. They might not be the friend

who sends you a text message daily, the friend you go out on the piss with (though you of all know us fellow cavers are not shy of booze). I can guarantee at least one name will come across your mind will share in your love of spelaeology, if not more.

Being a man of the armed forces, the concepts of unit cohesion or camaraderie are not ones I am unfamiliar with. The best friends I have in that life are the ones I have shared a ditch with at 5am pissing wet waiting for relief, the ones I have worked and lived side by side with on a vessel for months... the common denominator is one of shared experience; particularly hardship. Equally, the best friends I have in life are the ones that I have dug with, camped with, persevered with in southern stream way, the entrance series of Daren and of course partied hard at the Belfry with. I believe it is the hardship that forms the rock on which true friendships are build. Through these experiences, we have seen the individual without facade, who they are behind their mask, and we truly know what the other person is like. Only once this occurs can we begin to get to know somebody; there are no more obstacles to true fluency in communication and we begin to feel comfortable in revealing ourselves fully.

Caving is a dangerous environment. We tackle it with a group of similarly minded people of which all have to have an absolute trust in one another. We recognise this when we physically have their life in our hands when we belay them down the twenty in Valentine's Chamber. Caving is the litmus test for friendships and as such I ask: who do you trust with your life and who do you hold close?

Yours aye,



Marsrat