

Starless River Quiz

Who is the caver, and what cave is this?

1. We passed quickly into clear water and travelled over beautiful smooth sand, passing a great fallen block with an eyehole right through it, then downhill, like trudging over a snowfield, until suddenly we halted in our tracks. Below and to the right was deep water of the palest green, such very deep water that it startled us.... We stood, awestruck at this spectacle. The whole character of the cave had changed, in fact we had passed out of the conglomerate into the limestone.
2. On and on he went, and down and down; and still he heard no sound of anything except the occasional whirr of a bat by his ears, which startled him at first, till it became too frequent to bother about. I do not know how long he kept on like this, hating to go on, not daring to stop, on, on, until he was tireder than tired.... Suddenly without any warning he trotted splash into water. Ugh! It was icy cold!
3. We were stunned. Before the expedition we had joked about the possibility of the cave closing down around the next corner. Now, after so much effort, we found it difficult to accept that the jest had become reality. Could this really be the end?
4. "Shall I follow?" Tazieff asked.

"No," called Loubens. "I would rather you stay where you are. It's wiser."

Tazieff had to content himself with listening to the sound of Loubens disappearing into the cave with shouts of "It's fantastic... It's fantastic..."
5. It is clear that this is a race against time: two boys and their coach are diagnosed as exhausted and weak. Some of the heaviest rain yet forecast is due over the coming weekend and is expected to last until Wednesday, but this is offset by pumping that drops levels by a centimetre an hour. The pressure is on to make decisions.
6. The landing was on a six inches wide ledge 10' above a precipitous chute which hurled the raging stream out into blackness. A small stone thrown into the chasm produced but silence and so, not fancying a long pitch under a swollen stream, the explorer cast about for an alternative. Under the waterfall the ledge widened but out over the shaft it narrowed to a single flake, the attainment of which necessitated a hard traverse to a blade of rock 3' by 7', which was jammed across the narrowest part of the rift....Before threading the ladder down between the blocks a stone was tossed down and 3 ½ long seconds later it was heard to hit the floor.

7. "Go back, Jim, go back," said Tony Waltham. "They're all dead."
8. There are columns of white and saffron and dawn-rose... fluted and twisted into dreamlike forms; they spring up from many-coloured floors to meet the glistening pendants of the roof: wings, ropes, curtains fine as frozen clouds; spears, banners, pinnacles of suspended palaces! Still lakes mirror them: a glimmering world looks up from dark pools covered with clear glass.
9. We... found a bypass directly over the river. This was very noisy with the water rushing past 45m below, but after about 200m we popped out under the skylight. Here, the passage became *really* huge and, as I struggled to obtain readings with my Disto, I started to realise that the giant shaft of Sotano de las Golondrinas ... might just about fit inside the passage at this point.
10. The German was clearly well off route and trying hopelessly to squeeze through a nine-inch slot with his back pack on. At one stage the two divers were actually able to shake hands in nil visibility and XXX commented later that he was convinced he was "shaking a dead man's hand".
11. We joyously stomped down this fine passage for several minutes, whooping and giggling childishly after each corner to see it still carrying on into the distance. After an estimated 150m we thought that surely it would end soon and Sump Four would appear out of the darkness to spell the end of the breakthrough. Then, suddenly, a miracle happened – we encountered a stream!
12. There was a local story about a secret tunnel that led to buried treasure and the boys thought this might be it. After dropping stones into the hole to get an idea of how deep it was, one by one they went cautiously down into what proved to be a narrow shaft. It led down 15 metres (nearly 50ft) to a cave whose walls were covered with astonishing paintings. Marsal said later that going down the shaft was terrifying, but the paintings were 'a cavalcade of animals larger than life' that 'seemed to be moving'. The boys were worried about getting back up again, but they managed it using their elbows and knees.
13. They are dark caves. Even when they open towards the sun, very little light penetrates down the entrance tunnel into the circular chamber. There is little to see, and no eye to see it, until the visitor arrives for his five minutes and strikes a match. Immediately another flame rises in the depths of the rock and moves towards the surface like an imprisoned spirit; the walls of the circular chamber have been most marvellously polished....

Only the wall of the circular chamber has been polished thus. The sides of the tunnel are left rough, they impinge as an afterthought upon the internal perfection. An entrance was necessary, so mankind made one. But elsewhere, deeper in the granite, are there certain chambers that have no entrances? Chambers never unsealed since the arrival of the gods?

14. The chamber has a clean boulder floor paced out at 27m by 9m. Even powerful lights could not reach the top, and the clean white walls faded upwards into a distant blackness, perhaps 100m away. Someone suggested calling it "The Topless Pit". The stream falls down the east side of the chamber, and clearly becomes very large in wet weather. Not surprisingly, plans are afoot to begin climbing as soon as possible! This impossibly large shaft prompted a wonderful comment from ... the Speedwell car park, looking up at the hillside:

"It's so big, I'm surprised you can't see it from out here!"

15. A waterfall was thundering down from the roof into the Boulder Chamber, a thing we had not seen for years. This portent should have turned us back; but in the excitement we went on through the lower tunnel which is the connecting link with the lower series, and soon were at hand-and-foot work in the Canyon. There is many a ghyll on Scawfell and Great Gable steeper than the Canyon; but we do not try conclusions with Cumberland ghylls on a pitch-black night, with a candle in one hand, a coil of rope hitched over the other arm, and rucksacks of miscellaneous luggage to be slung from point to point at intervals. Our military friends learned that there are ways of marching in which the arms and divers muscles near the root of the spine play a more effective part than the feet. And when, in the course of time, we reached the lower tunnel, the sinuosities of which culminate in the S-bend, still wilder modes of locomotion were revealed to them.

16. The original plan was to reach a caving hut on the Marlbank Loop, set up all the gear – cylinders, cameras, lights etc., spend the night there and attack the cave early in the morning. But when we reached Florencourt the major flaw of that plan became apparent: the untreated back roads were like a glass and we would need something more than luck to drive up to the hut situated high on the Marlbank plateau. Since giving up without at least trying, no matter how daft the adventure would be, is against our deeply rooted national traditions (With saber against tanks - Z szablą na czołgi), we attacked the Marlbank Loop east route immediately. The car managed to climb merely a few hundred meters before its wheels started spinning around on the icy road and we started sliding backward down the hill. Not funny... In some crazy manoeuvre Waldek managed to turn the car around (which was even more impressive when you think that the road width matched the car's length) and we drove safely down to the main road. The plan had to be changed. We drove to the scouts hut and decided to attack the cave on the same day. Cladagh Valley was beautiful, capped under 20cm of snow.

17. Neck-deep in the water as I was, I nevertheless considered the rashness of persevering alone in so hazardous an undertaking. Several possibilities came to mind: I might find the water bathing the ceiling ahead indefinitely, run into a cul-de-sac, get to a pocket of foul air, fall down a shaft, be entangled in branches carried down by the stream, or possibly go down in a quicksand. . . . After weighing these various chances in the awful silence and loneliness, I still decided if possible to force the barrier, impregnable though it seemed.

Putting my candle on a projection of the wall, I inhaled air for an immersion of two minutes (to me a familiar procedure). Then I plunged, one hand ahead, the other touching the ceiling. I felt the bumps and contours of the ceiling with infinite care; I was blind, with finger-tips for eyes. I had not only to go ahead, but to think about getting back. Suddenly, as I was going forward in this fashion, my head emerged; I could breathe.

18. A chance meeting with a company of S.A.S. was the sort of luck we were wanting. Stories of the vast cave which must be somewhere under their feet soon sold them the idea that XXX would be the ideal spot for a demolition exercise. They returned a month later with a device known as a 'XXX Special'. This device succeeded in making a hole big enough to take 14lbs of banger. At first we thought the result of their bang was rather disappointing but it turned out that a lot of rock had been reduced to powder and had loosened the solid rock wall. On the weekend of November 5th Charles George continued the process of demolition and at 1 am next day we could see past the blasted bend into what looked like a chamber. A half pound of banger was used to remove the final obstruction and we returned to the cottages for sleep.

19. He squeezed and squoze, and then with one last squooze he was out.

And finally, a tiebreaker – we don't expect anyone to get this one, but you might award points for the most inventive answer:

These idiots were suspected of being cavers on the grounds that a) they were wearing wellies and b) they were idiots.