

# CAVING IN THE FRENCH ALPS

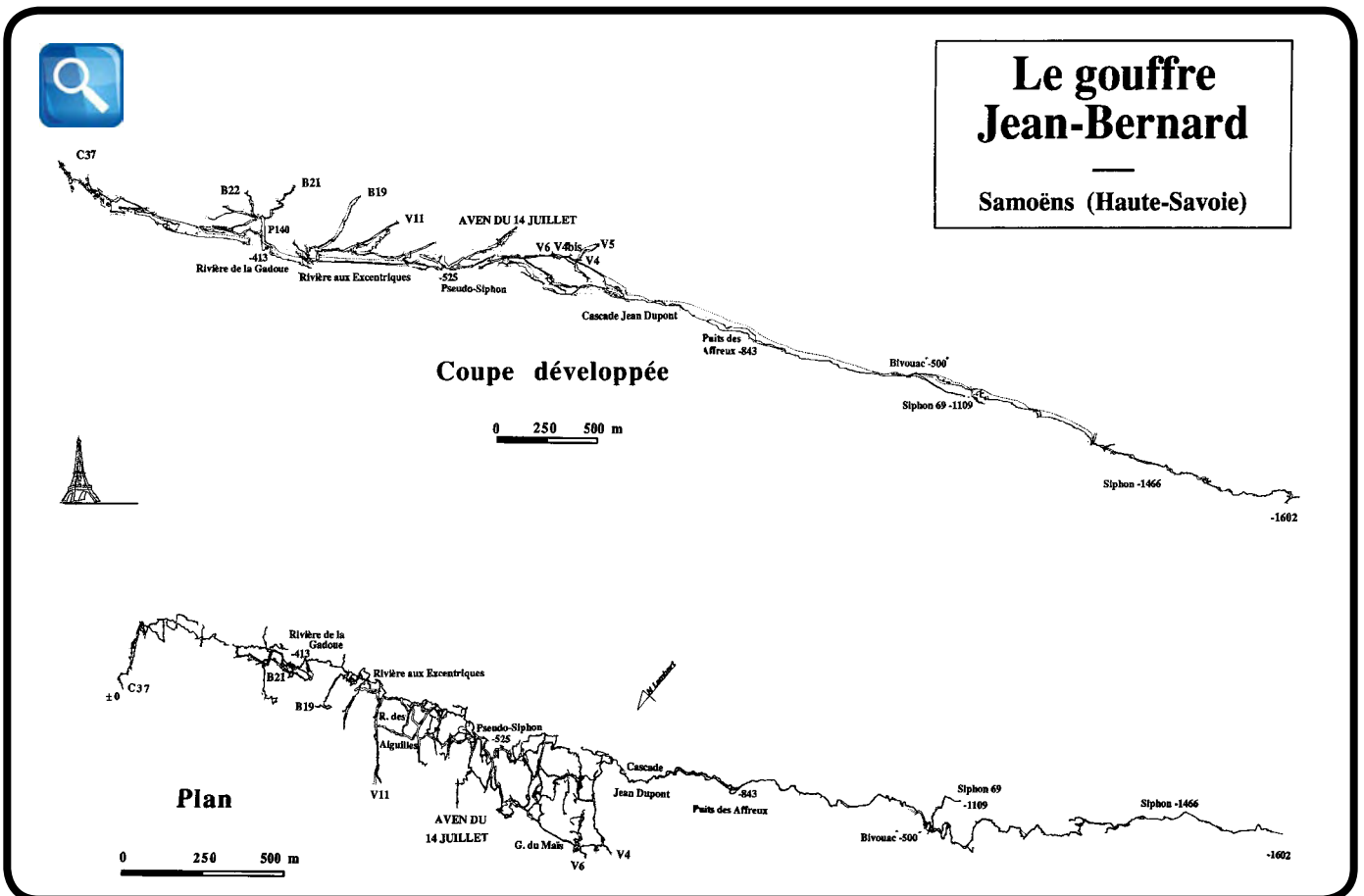
*by Michael Patton*

In July of 2008, I had the privilege of spending 9 days in France, caving with Groupe Spéléologique Vulcain in the mountains above Samoëns). The cave, exploration of which began in 1964, is named after two members of Vulcain who died in 1963, Jean Dupont and Bernard Raffy. It is currently the world's 5th deepest.





Pages 8 & 9, clockwise from below - a map of Jean-Bernard, currently fifth deepest in the world at -1602m after a long stretch as world's deepest, provided courtesy of G.S. Vulcain (zoom in to view detail); hiking a snowy pass in the fog on the way back to camp; camp was nestled in a grassy valley and surrounded by exposed limestone karren; sunset in the mountains over Samoëns; the view of the surrounding Alps from caver's camp; sheep on the grassy slopes of the mountain near camp.









Pages 10 & 11, clockwise from right - Cidric Chamber and Fred Alvarez smile triumphantly after making a new connection between two previously-known caves; Bernard Lips, former president of G.S. Vulcain, pauses on his way up the mountain; another spectacular view from the caver's camp above Samoëns; the refuge, where cavers slept on the trip up the mountain, with the Chalet in background; breakfast at sunset in the alps; the French group brought fresh, unprepared foods; floor space was at a premium during the overnight stay at the refuge; a semi-circle of cavers dig into a meal.







Pages 12 & 13, clockwise from above - Victor and Fred pose briefly before heading underground; Mike Patton on rope in Jean-Bernard; Mike in a chamber filled with snow and ice; This portion of the cave was filled with dramatic ice stalagmites; Victor again, ready to descend; Not often, in Arkansas, do we need to make use of a snow shovel in order to clear the entrance of a cave... Patricia demonstrates, and manages to smile anyway; Pierre keeps book during a survey of an alpine cave near Jean-Bernard.







Pages 14 & 15, clockwise from below - Mike managed to become briefly stuck in a tight squeeze while wearing his vertical gear; Victor pauses at a rebelay before having to ascend directly into a waterfall; Stephane Lips hauls rope while ascending; Mike Patton straddles a deep fissure; Mike and Pauline Evrard-Guespin prepare to clip in; Josiane Lips rappels down a snowy in-cave pitch; Pauline and Mike ascending one of the many drops in Jean-Bernard; Mike and an ice stalagmite in an glistening, fluted passage near the classic entrance to Jean-Bernard.





