

A black and white photograph of a handprint in ash, with a person's face in the background.

TEAM AWESOME ALBANIA

2024

FEATURING

Joe Buck
Luke Cafferty
Rob Eavis
Chris Hibberts
Dylan Kocher
Jon Pemberton
Sam Pemberton
Jim Thompson



INTRODUCTION | Rob Eavis

Following an unimpressive hiatus of Eldon trips since 2019, the exploration of the Accursed Mountains above Kelmendi has been kept alive by a keen group of YSS members muscling into these once purist Eldon territories. Led by Ade Pedley, and well supported by the Eldonite Dave Gledhill, these small trips were successful and well run expeditions, building on the work of previous years, and with good reports produced afterwards (minus any actual surveying of course).

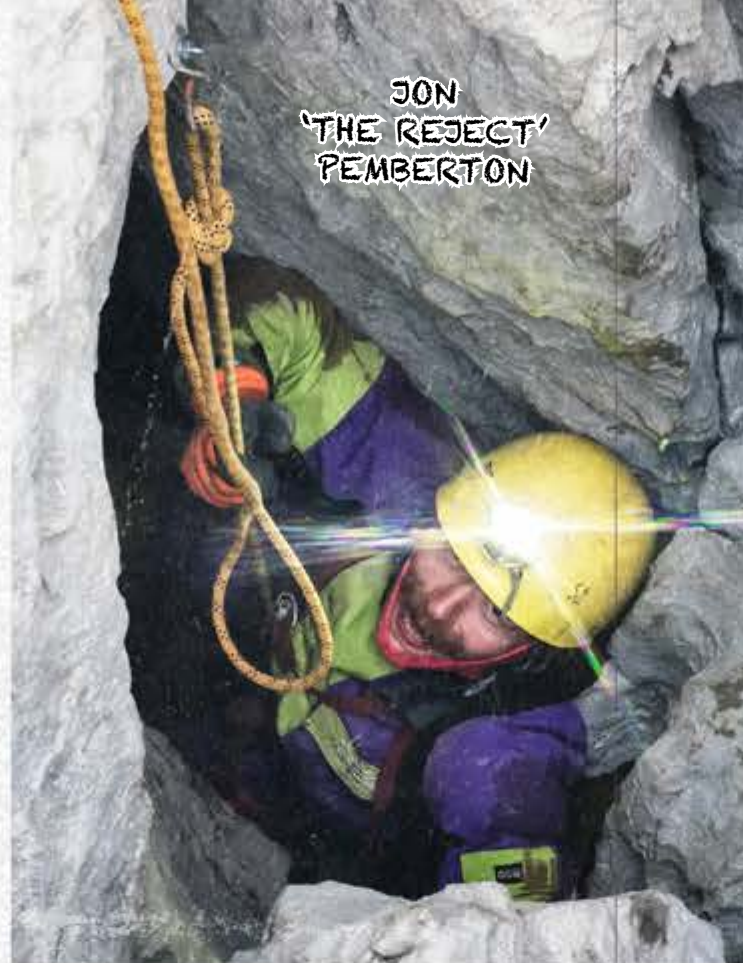
However the glory days of “proper” Eldonites ravishing the hills had to come around again, and so in October 2024 the 8 core members of “Team Awesome” set off to once again smash things up.

With most of the main caves now “finished” this trip was primarily to be a prospecting one, working a little-trodden area slightly further east of previous searches. However because this was later in the year than any other expedition, a strong backup plan was to inspect some of the previously found caves which terminated in snow plugs, hoping for a new way around.

Despite the Team’s smorgasbord of experience, 5 members had never been to Albania before so this was always going to be an eye-opening trip. Little did we know that by the end of the adventure we’d even gain a new gang member....!



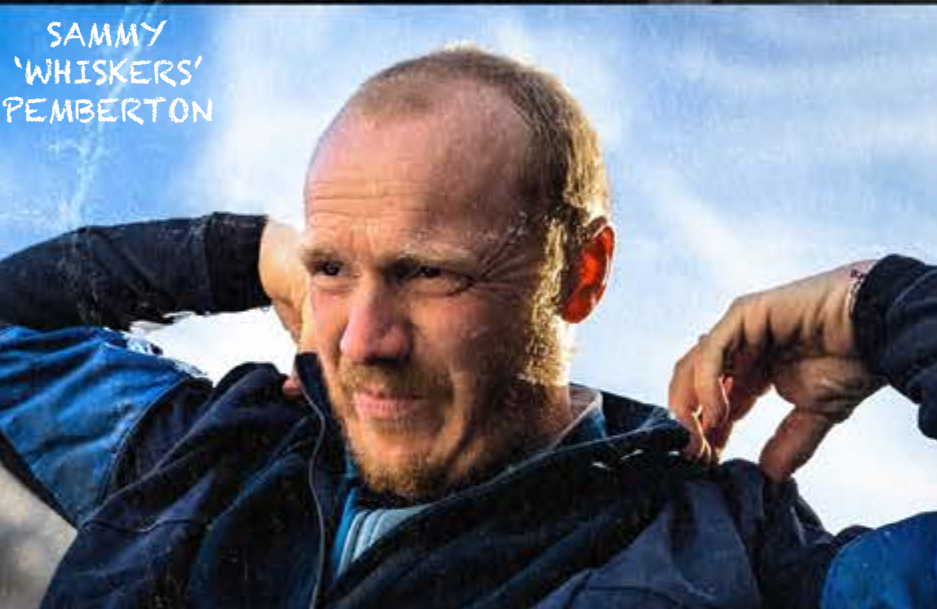
LUKEY
'BABES'
CAFFERTY



JON
'THE REJECT'
PEMBERTON



'BIG DICK'
ROB EAVIS



SAMMY
'WHISKERS'
PEMBERTON



PUD
PUD



'THE ALL AMERICAN'
DYLAN KOCKER



JIMMY 'UNDERGROUND' THOMPSON



'SOULESS'
JOE BUCK



CHRIS
'THE PISS'
HIBBERTS

TEAM AWESOME

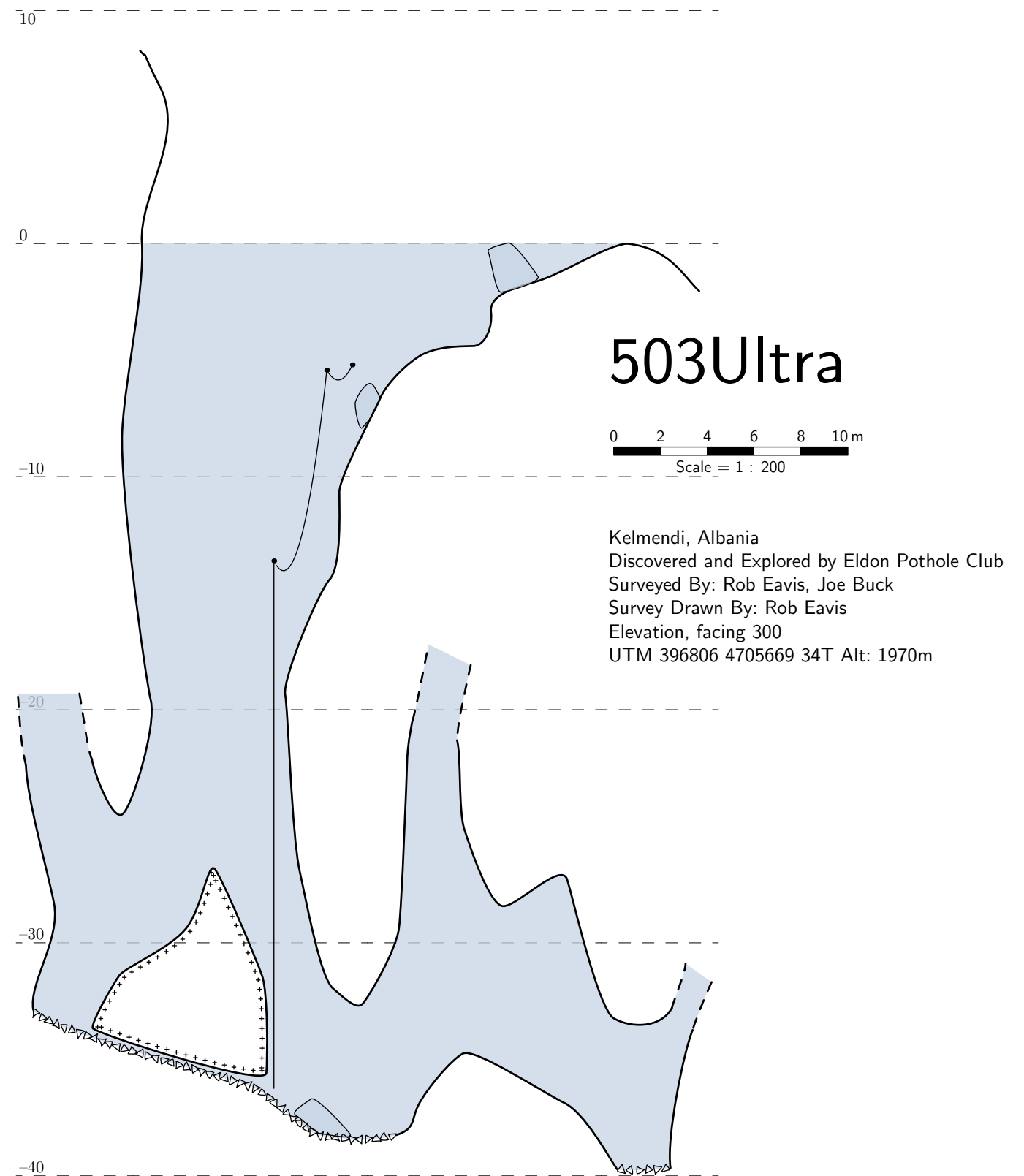


503 ULTRA | Joe Buck

Having spent most of the first day of the expedition lugging all our gear up the mountain and sourcing the stashed gear near Wolf Cave, we headed over the plateau towards Bari which was decided would be a suitable location for stashing gear. This was near 503, which Luke had intended to return to to have another look, and the stash was conveniently located next to a couple of promising looking holes (rocks went ‘bang, bang’, rather than just ‘thud’). One of these was a large slot located above the stash with a bouldery slope towards a pitch head.

We returned for the second day (21st October) with a slow ascent up the hill. It was decided that Rob and I would tackle this one, as he was still nursing a dodgy shoulder and this looked like a relatively simple and roomy drop, and most of the rest of the group would go for a wander to try and find 503. The entrance was just over a blunt ridgeline and was accessed through a vague hollow full of boulders. I rigged a y-hang across the two walls which then descended onto a steep blocky slope into the blackness beyond. A rebelay was placed to offer a straight hang into the depths, which from the edge of the slope appeared to be blocked by a large pointy snow plug.

Fortunately, after descending around 20m, a gap between the wall and the snow was found which allowed access beyond. From the bottom, a tight rift heading approximately north up an awkward rubble slope led to a roomy chamber, unfortunately with no way on. While Rob was making his way out again, I found a crawling-sized hole underneath the icy plug to the opposite end of the rift, mainly to confirm what we already knew – there was no way on. We swiftly derigged and surveyed out to see what the others had been up to.



THE SUCK ZONE | Dylan Kocher

21/10/24 | Walking down the karst a small drop (when facing the valley leads right into the gully. Here a boulder allows a traverse when rigging off natural to the first pitch. Once I reach for the drill arcing it upwards instantly realize the first issue. No drill bit. Jon receiving the message disappears, returning with... the wrong drill bit. This can sum up the rest of the afternoon, as I press the drill into the rock the hammer activates the lackluster drilling. Changing all three batteries then swapping back to the second the drill is working at I would say 30% efficiency. Enough to keep going. With a Y-hang into the first Reblay I get the first look at the pot before us. A sharp entrance to The Suck Zone with walls snagging your suit you'll do well not to cut yourself and more importantly the rope on this initial drop (10m).

Once in the main pipe a visual could be established. Cool and dark the walls bore smooth shoot down an additional (10m) below leading to Snow. Hearing from the team I knew this was not the best of signs. With a final bolt in the wall dropping to the plug the walls bell out. Feet reaching the ice plug I slip and begin to smash my boots into the ice with hopes to steady myself on the steep ice bank.

The initial look gave the impression of a possible lead below the plug however upon further inspection a ledge reveals an enticing way on when compared to the initial impression. Smashing a bolt into the wall next to the landing spot allows me to clip in and have Jon descend above me taking the rope and drill swinging into the lead confirming another 20m drop.

A note should be added that once Jon and I had reached the snow plug calls from Luke above, albeit distant, let us know that the group wanted to leave. With some kick back from Jon for them to wait there was a simple “love you” or rather possibly “f*ck you” followed by silence. Needing pushing and feeling ever more alone as our friends march back down off the mountain we head out careful not to unleash the most likely cause for rescue or death, loose shit. Having once kicked a boulder onto Jon I was extra cautious to make sure this would not be a problem.

Once out the shadows of the valley beginning to grow, and we jaunted down happy with today’s push given the dying drill situation. With the evening threatening to show is dark chilly face we were able to reach the slate hill opposing half dome with an epic sunset into the valley of Nikc.

22/10/24 | Armed with a new drill I push the lead down Jon on the ledge above me. Our team faster than yesterday not only due to a healthy SDS but I can feel personally much more organized in terms of bolting as this was still rather new to me. A nice pitch leads to a solid ledge (10m) than a floor bottom (10m) below. With no way on we exit to the Snow plug here Jon decides not to push my lead in the floor rather from my perspective traverses over to a blank bank and then disappears up and out of site, rather remarkable as it really looked dead to me.

A call from the other side of a shelf is reached with a pitch of (20m) exciting! Stranded once again on the snow plug the rope above me arced over to the hidden shelf. Once tied onto the next bolt we tried to swing the rope back, as I may be able to grab onto it. This had numerous unsuccessful attempts, however with no better option we pushed on, and finally I was able to catch it and traverse over to the following lead. Once next to Jon he drops, reaching yet another pitch (10m) to a floor.



Above him now able to take in the rift I look up. The most imposing boulder is jammed right above us holding with it could be endless carnage behind it. This for the first time actually had an audible shutter from myself and thus decided that looking down rather than up was the best course of action. Pretending to be ignorant can achieve some bliss. With the day waning we head out as a 3rd and final day will be used to take pictures and survey as well as push the last pitch even though it sounds like it may have come to its natural conclusion.

23/10/24 | The first day of Pud Pud. Walking up to half dome was filled with a much more palatable atmosphere as we had acquired a furry friend. Upon Reaching half dome it was the general consensus that the dog would die if it ventured into the karst given how steep and varied the climbing can be. With my own role in this matter requiring me to scare Pud Pud in hopes to halt its accent further. This however did not work and the consequences of such actions weighed heavier on my mind than I thought would. This staging the prelude of the latter events, I now can understand why we may have gotten lost.

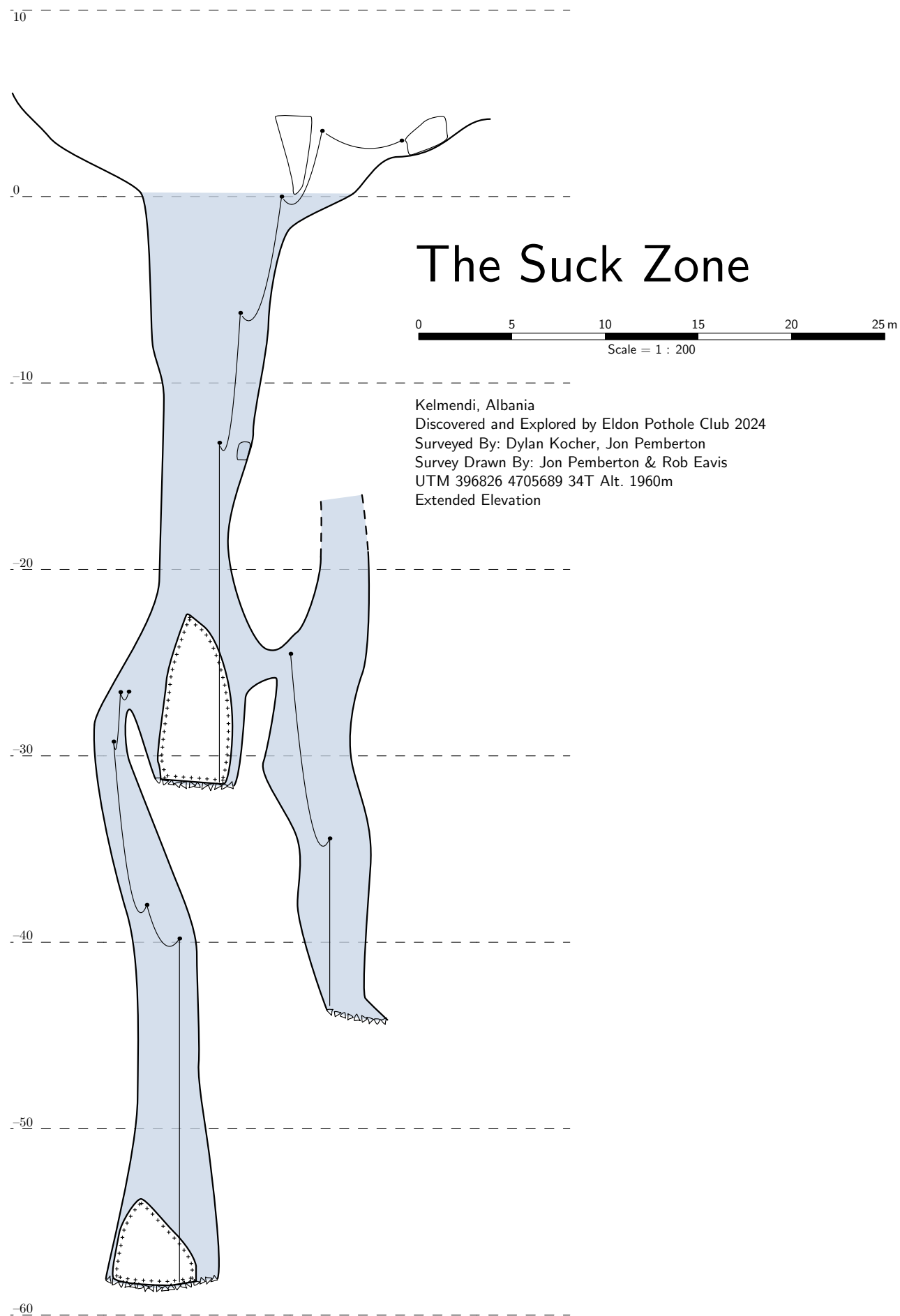
Jon and I had decided that we should try to split from the group and b-line straight to the Suck Zone in attempt to smash out the last requirements of bottoming, surveying and taking photos. Making a good start, we hastened our movement aiming initially high on the karst. This had the effect from how I remember of bringing us left of the cave and ever so slightly above it. The limestone bowl is extremely varied and navigation here can be trying at the best of times. To Jon’s benefit, I am willing to take the fall for this. Jon kindly did not push that it was for the remainder of the trip. I’m sure some members would have been much harsher.

Nonetheless, I reckoned we needed to push further east as Jon thought we may have passed the cave. The kiss of death was that below us, we could spot Pud Pud whom I was eager to ditch as if it was not near and out of sight than my perceived responsibility for the thing would cease. At least this is how I thought at the time. This spurred our decision, and we pushed above the suck zone and found ourselves at a top bowl of the mountain range. A place we were sure that there had been little and in more probability zero travelers before us. Hitting the top of our bank you could say that we were “cliffed out”. Looking above it was an unfamiliar scenery. The mountain range lay before us has no resemblance of any we saw so far and therefor had no bearing on where we had come from or the direction to choose coming. Honestly this could not have happened to better people as I did enjoy this.

Actually it turned out to be one of the many highlights of the trip. Getting lost is a luxury for myself and I don’t get a chance to do it often in such remote places. Jon being his usual fit self as welll meant we were in high spirits with our stupidity knowing full well that we had very much fucked up. Being very clearly above the desired location the only option was to go down checking all possible leads that we passed. Once down we managed to spot the rest of TA who noticed us below them and set us back on track. Finding a good lead we then back up a cliff face and finally back to the gear stash effectively an hour behind though remarkably arrived at the same time as the day previous.

Descending The Suck Zone Jon shooting splays and legs as I hold marks in front in order to maintain an accurate survey we reach the last pitch. From here Jon passes me a flash. Stuffing it into my suit I head down to the floor. Passing an ice boulder around 7ft tall I land on the pebble foundation. Taking a peak around it’s not hard to verify that this is a way of no further tiding’s. Taking pictures all the while out whilst I derig a sense of accomplishment, rather a full stomach with our adventures so far and made a mental note that I could go home happy even if this was the biggest find of our expo. However, fate would have it that the other members had bigger plans that week...







A PUGS TALE | Jim Thompson

On day 1 of our expedition / holiday hiking up mountains and throwing rocks down holes, whilst scrambling about with Chris I’d spotted a vaguely interesting dark space nestled at the back of a chossy-looking gulley at the back of the target area for the day. Since this day was mainly spent orientating ourselves with the area and stashing kit at a high point, we made a vague memory of where it was, took a photo for rough GPS coordinates and I forgot all about it immediately, as is my habit when dealing with anything location or route related.

Fortunately Chris isn’t so spatially afflicted so we returned on day 2, and despite going WAY higher than where we needed to be on the approach, found ourselves peering into what turned out to be an actual hole complete with c. 5m deep pitch and a sensation of a draught emitting. Certainly the cooler air coming out of the hole was enough to create a mist of our breath and sweat in the aperture. We regrouped for lunch and returned re-energised with Rob and some kit and I got the entrance rigged with a drill that had all but given up on life, and dropped onto an uninspiring sloped floor of scree. Fortunately, said floor led down in short order to a thrutch through a horizontal hole and I was into a further small chamber.

Up led to a rubble-filled aven and was clearly the way up to the higher part of the gulley, forward led nowhere other than snagged clothing, however I was delighted to find that just above head height, and parallel to the gulley, was a sharp-eroded lip of an almost font-like structure, but instead of contents being holy water, peering over revealed a further pitch that a thrown boulder managed to rattle down far enough to convince me that the way on was ‘going’. Alas a lack of enthusiasm from the drill meant an early retreat, but left anticipation as to what the next day would bring.

Day 3 was epic in every way. Perfect weather, the best company, complete with our adopted trail dog Pudpud who joined us for a relaxed lunch in the sunshine, nice snooze and relaxing tunes courtesy of The Avalanches, and almost reluctantly we ventured into the sunlight-deprived gulley in search of depth and glory.

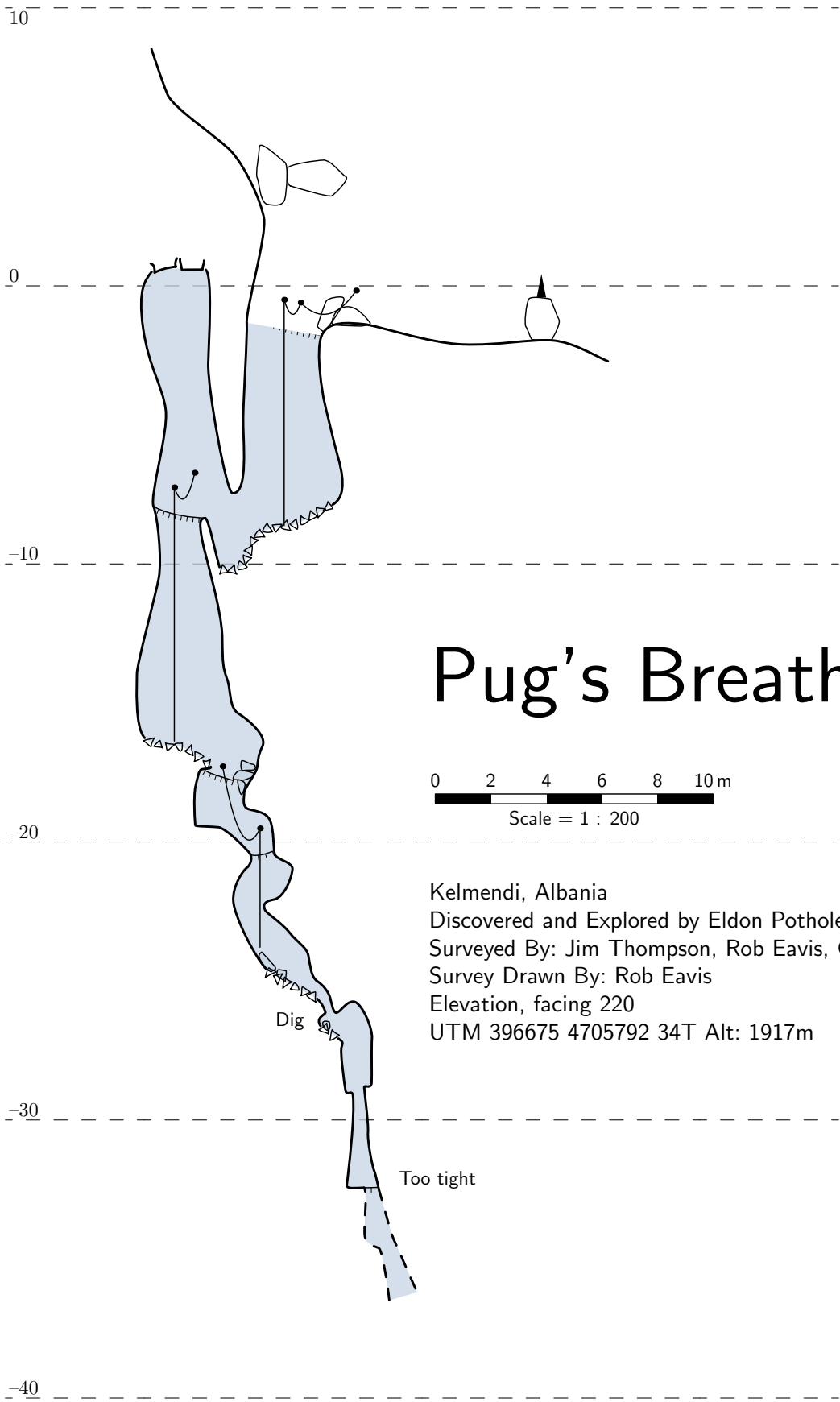
The drill behaved, bolts placed precariously high up, and in short order I was on my way down the font. It wasn’t an insignificant pitch, with a handy natural thread for a deviation that provided a perfect hang, and once again landed on a scree slope. The way on was through a small window, but the position provided the luxury of

seated bolting, and once again I dropped through into a proper pitch, albeit a short one.

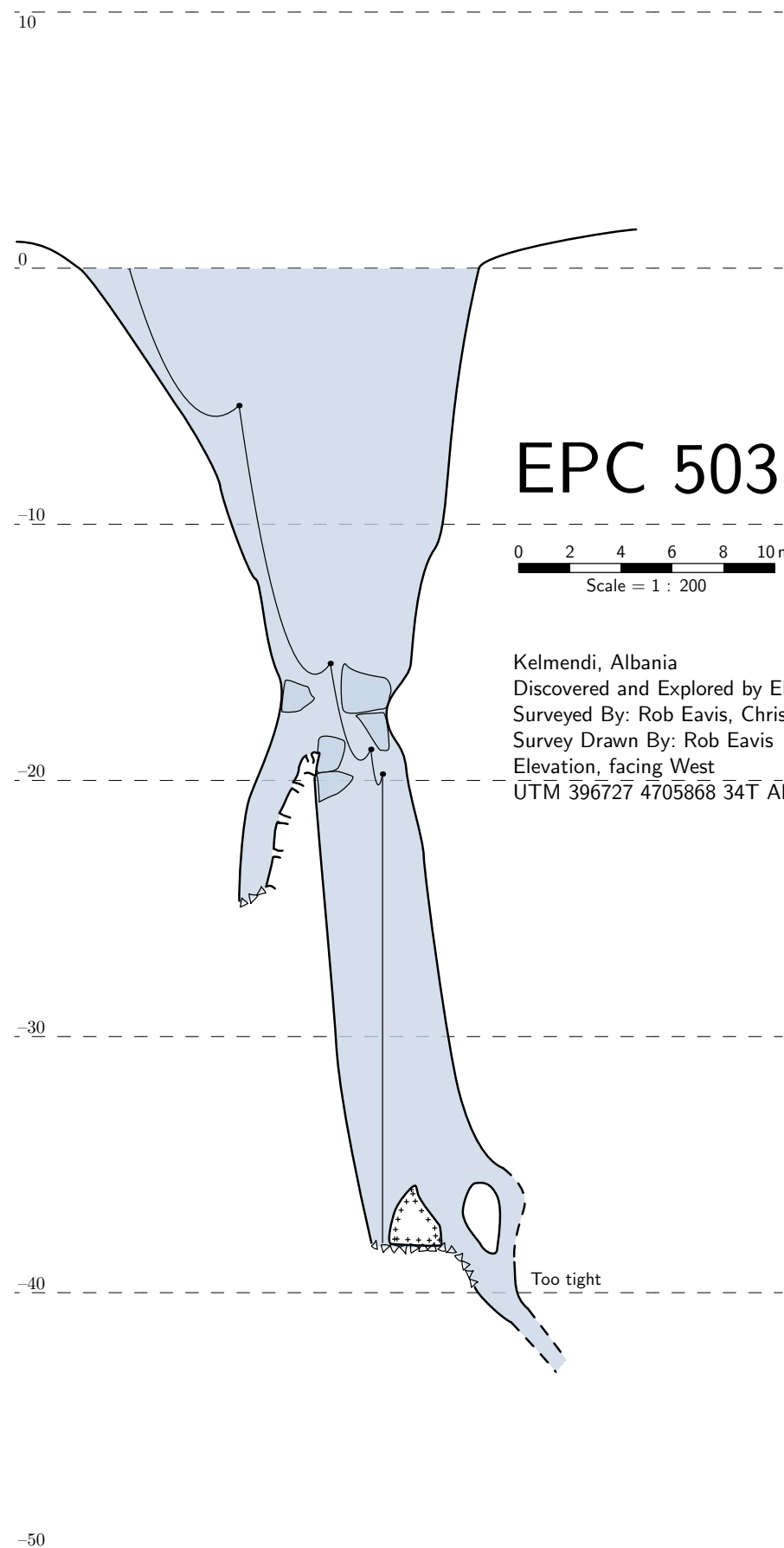
A protrusion on the way called for rope protection rather than a rebelay, and once again I found myself landing on a scree slope with a view into a less favourable progression. Snug, down-dip and full of rocks and I could see my ‘overt musculature’ would prove a hinderance to progress, so called on Chris (also ‘overtly muscular’) and Rob (also overtly muscular in the actual sense but also a midget) who had no qualms poking himself in for a look.

He chucked a lot of rock, even reaching for Joe’s brand new bolting hammer (which he also subsequently forgot to bring out) for use as a digging implement, before we all decided that, although in Derbyshire we’d be launching a full-on digging project, there were just too many holes and too much hiking to justify a dig in such a remote location.

Nevertheless, a nice little find and we had fun on the way out, Rob taking photos, me modelling for the same and laser-splaying the pitches for the survey, Chris bringing up the rear and derigging.







EPC 503 | Chris Hibberts

Day 1, following the initial hike up to where we had found a suitable place to stash gear and have lunch, the team split up into 2/3 groups to scout for prospective cave entrances with Luke, Sam and Myself trying to find the entrance to 503. Luke had been to 503 on a previous expedition and was excited to see if the snow plug, he had previously seen, had diminished at all to allow access to the floor he could see below.

With No GPS location we were relying on Luke's general sense of direction and memory of the cave entrance. After about 2 hours of scouting round which included throwing many rocks down many holes in the karst, Luke's memory of the entrance was somewhat sketchy at best and now after treading the same ground several times we decided that we needed to obtain GPS information if we had any chance of finding the entrance.

Day 3, now armed with GPS coordinates Luke managed to finally locate the Entrance to 503 which turned out to be a scree slope that Chris had climbed down partially on the first day. There was no snow plug in the bottom and it was decided that the following day Rob, Jim and Chris would take a look if Pug's Breath, which they were exploring, crapped out.

Day 4, Pug's Breath did eventually crap out, so Jim Rob and Chris moved gear from the stash down to the entrance of EPC 503. Following a very pleasant lunch, a spot of afternoon sunbathing (this almost felt like a holiday) and some Choice tracks from the groups 'Albania 24' Playlist, armed with 100m ish of rope, Rob started the descent of EPC 503. Rob started off rigging round a large boulder at the top of the scree slope to offer protection as a hand line (not that it bothered Chris much on the first day).

The slope was very unstable and looking at the vast amount of loose rock one misplaced foot and the lot would come crashing down on the person below, so caution was exercised. About 15m down Rob placed the first bolt to allow safe descent down a further 10m to 5 large boulders which were well lodged into the entrance. The way on, from a high vantage point, looked to be a dark hole on the right-hand wall which we had managed to get a couple of rocks down from higher up. To reach this safely a bolt was placed on the right-hand wall and a short 4m drop gave a better view down. This was soon disregarded as the way on when Rob reached the hole and a choked floor could be seen, this disappointment was fed back to Jim now descending to the first bolt. However, enthusiasm soon regained as Rob had spotted

a potential way on to the left. This was under the 5 large boulders perched to the right. At this point Chris joined Rob at the top of what sounded like a decent pitch down.

Rob continued over a loose slope at the top of the pitch head and proceeded to garden some of the loose rock. The 5 large boulders would have offered some protection from rocks falling down the pitch and the team were optimistic that the way on could be clear below, with dreams of further pitches offering a way on. After placing a bolt in the right-hand wall of the pitch head it was obvious that in order to get a clear drop to the bottom of the pitch an immediate deviation was required. Rob made quick work of this using a natural thread round one of the 5 large boulders and quickly descended what was described as a beautiful 14m Pitch.

At this point Jim had decided that the morning's breakfast needed to evacuate his body and had to retreat at a rather hasty pace back up the scree slope to take care of the situation. At the bottom of the pitch was a substantial snow plug around 3m thick but, disappointingly, no obvious way on and that was the end of the dream of multiple pitches. Rob and Chris proceeded to survey on the way out which took around 40 mins. By the time the top of the last pitch was reached Jim, now changed out of his caving gear, had obviously been enjoying some late afternoon sun with our newest gang member 'PudPud'.

Caving gear off and all the gear packed up, with PudPud in tow, the team decided to head down the mountain to the other two teams to see what their day had entailed.



PUD PUD MEMORIAL HOLE | Dylan Kocher

23/10/24 | Jon and I, having finished The Suck Zone, now had to haul gear and stash it lower down the karst for the following day. With our heavy packs, we navigated down the complex area doing our best to choose a path of least resistance whilst also heading generally to Half Dome. About an hour in or so, we carefully navigated the gully's sections requiring vertical down climbs. Here we dropped the bags one by one and threw them at each other; of course then climb down yourself. Cutting right off one gully, a hole in the side of the karst showed itself. Jon caught eyes on it first, chucking rock. It was arguably free climbable but we decided that with the sun beginning to set the best course was to stash our gear here and come back the following day.

24/10/24 | Now rigging off a bowline tied from the left hand, the right hand bowline is too hard (says Jon), I drop first to check out the Pud Pud memorial hole. A large chamber separated into two sides by a steep slope. Both ended up being dead ends. Jon ventured down to the right to look at a break in the rock and was able to get into a further section. Unfortunately, this headed upwards and out. There was a lead directly ahead. This was a small break with a roof passage, and required a flat out crawl. Once wedged in enough to chuck some rocks to the end wall where it seems to turn left and decline, I start chucking. Each rock lands sharp and flat. No draft was present and we both agreed that this was not worth the crawl. We decided it was better to venture over to Luke, Sam, and Joe with our gear for the next day of our expo.



DYL'S SLIDE | Dylan Kocher

25/10/24 | Our last day of surface exploration due to Mountain Goat being found in the afternoon. Arriving at 'Team Turtles', I could definitely tell the fatigue was settling in. Perhaps the sun was even hotter that day? Situated at the bottom of the valley, left of The Suck Zone, a flatter bowl could be seen.

Deep at the bottom, banks of limestone climb steeply when facing up the mountain. Here, we continue our natural rigging and descend down below a roof into a hole covered by a banking floor of ice. The way down was loose, forcing care, or rather I just slid down! Keeping it simple we reached the bottom which was only 5 or so meters from the exit. The chamber widens and becomes approachable whilst standing. We traversed over to the left, quickly hitting a dead end.

We both agreed the pocket to the right is our best bet. This cave was loose and the whole ceiling gave the impression that it could give way and collapse. This was the same to the right hole, and being that it was smaller and required a more intimate approach. I was certainly on edge! Once inside, it again shut out, very unfortunate! It was a cool little obstacle course with the collapsing ceiling and banks of ice at the exit. It should be noted that we found a much bigger hole above Dyl's slide. Almost directly vertically ahead of it, however, rigging off natural features was just dumb. Despite our efforts, we both agreed that it may be slightly too ambitious. However, our instincts both told us that it was just a rather big gully, but hey ya never know.



MOUNTAIN GOAT | Joe Buck

Luke, Sam and I had an initially spotted GOAT when we'd headed down the valley below the Bari stash on a surface bashing reconnaissance mission on the Tuesday (22nd). Unlike all the other holes we'd been finding up until this point, which were largely in the bottom of depressions, the cave was in a small pot around 10m up the cliff above the valley base. Between a few jumbled boulders a small hole into the darkness could be seen, which when a depth tester (rock) was thrown down, seemed to have a modest drop below. Unfortunately we had only come prepared with a short rope, and owing to a shortage of drills on the expedition, no drill or bolts so we were relying on natural only for the day. We resolved to return the following day with a drill.

Making good progress up the hill on the Wednesday (23rd), the group splintered, with Jon and Dylan deciding to carry on ahead and continue in Suck Zone. A rather cataclysmic navigational blunder by Jon and Dylan subsequently ensued, which owing to them having a combination of both drills and batteries meant we all had to wait around while they returned. Over an hour later...

We headed down once again now armed with a drill, but still only one short rope. I descended the entrance pitch from a flake and bolt into a fantastic and solid walled chamber. Luke came to join me and we investigated the way on down a rocky slope into an awkward climb in a rift which entered into another small chamber. This had a rocky sink in the corner and another squeeze heading off to the head of a clean round pitch. As utterly tantalising as this was we were once again thwarted by the lack of equipment, and with everyone else on different parts of the mountain with all the gear, we had to continue with our surface exploration continuing further east.

The following day (24th) the three of us all returned with a primary objective of descending the next pitch, and a secondary objective of actually getting Sam to go underground at least once on the trip! Luke rigged while Sam and I surveyed behind. The second pitch was a 17m drop into a roughly circular shaped pot. The cave had initially been named Mountain GOAT because Luke and Sam had been impressed (annoyed?) by my scrambling skills as we traversed around the mountain. At the bottom of this second pitch you can imagine our delight when a Chamois skull was found amongst the rocks – a proper mountain goat!

From here the cave descends between some large, jammed boulders, the easiest but tightest way is underneath through a tight squeeze and

a short down climb through a rift which continued through another tight squeeze and a low crawl into a generously sized chamber.

There are some large boulders jammed between the walls which can be downclimbed to the base of the chamber with an obvious way on straight ahead. Luke and Sam rigged a hand line on here (we were running out of bolts at this point, so this wants rerigging to provide a proper hang) so we could investigate the way on.

Beyond the chamber a descending slope leads off to the left, which could be traversed over to the edge of a drop with a ledge and some black holes beyond. We deployed some more depth testers which when thrown at the right angle, seemed to never stop, crashing all the way to the base of what we presumed was a massive pitch! At this point we had run out of bolts and so were unable to continue further.

With just one day left to bottom this thing, Sam and Luke decided they were pleased with this find and were happy to step aside and let some others take over. So when we returned on the Friday, Jon, Rob, Dylan and I came armed with every bit of gear we could find. If we had to turn around, I wanted it to be because we ran out of time and no other reason! What with it being our last day, we had limited time available as we had to get back off the hill with all our stashed gear, and more importantly make it back in time for beer and raki. Rob set off rigging while I surveyed to him and Jon and Dylan trailed behind occasionally stopping for photos.

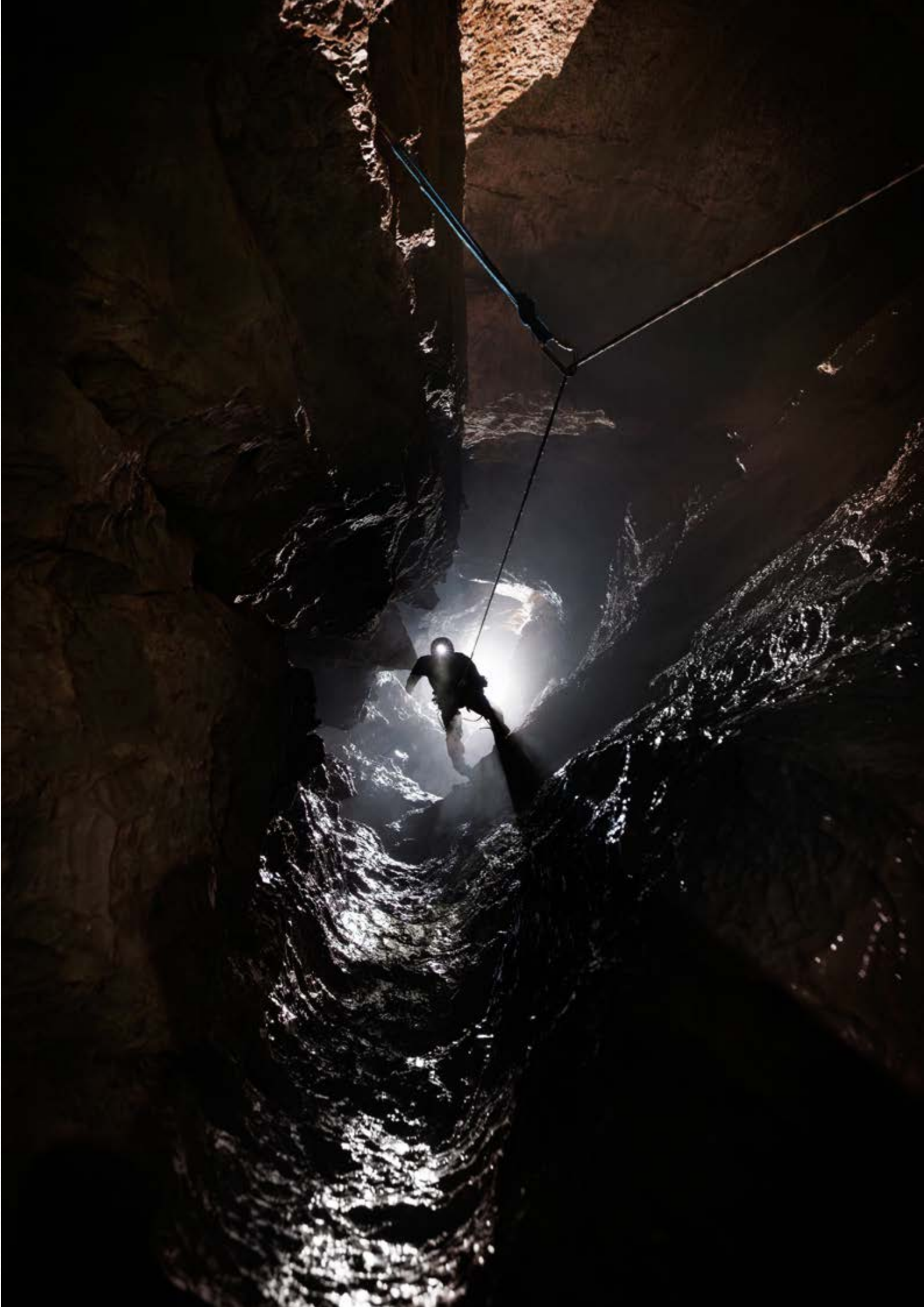
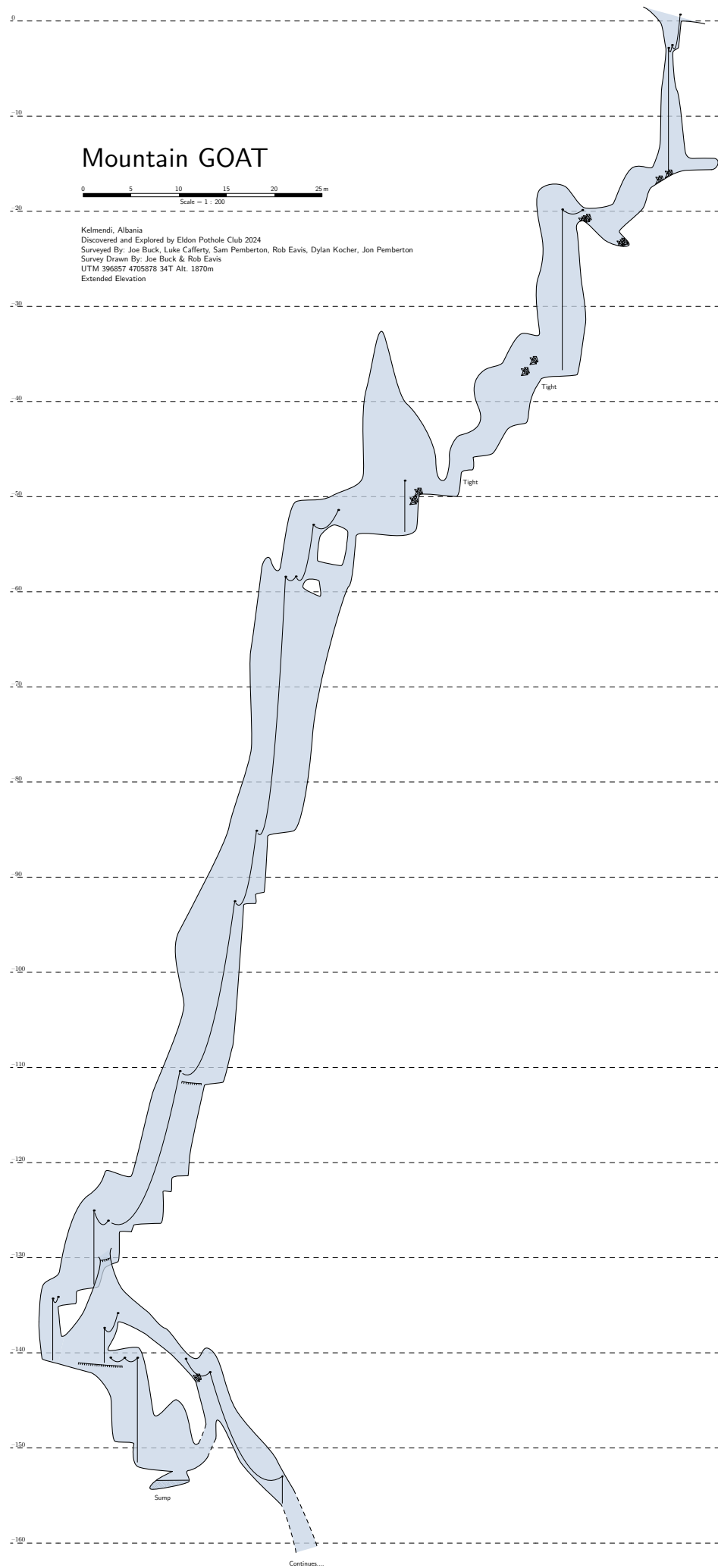
The initial pitch off the ledge was a 25m freehang into a generously sized chamber which just seemed to keep going – with ledge after ledge down a huge, clean washed and solid vertical canyon. After 5 almost continuous pitches, I finally received a call from Rob that he had run out of the red rope and needed the blue one passing forward to rig the next pitch. Round to the right was a winding traverse above a 10m drop – it felt like this was going to keep going forever... Alas, minutes later Rob reached a sump near the base of the pitch which prevented us going any further...

Time was ticking on and we now had a reasonable derig to complete in the dwindling hours available. At this point, in the small chamber before the final pitch, Dylan was absolutely intent on finding a way forward, and so began to make a spicy French free climb into a window which could be seen straight above. I was convinced this would just connect to where the sump was and was essentially a waste of time, but Dylan marched onwards with increasingly enthusiastic descriptions of what lay beyond. The three of us joined

him in a descending, hading rift to the edge of another pitch. The call of raki was strong and so I promised Dylan I would return with him and keep going if we left it for next year.

A hasty retreat was made, including a speed descent through the switchback woods (probably a stupid idea in hindsight) back to the container bar for celebrations.





FINANCE & LOGISTICS | Jim Thompson

The expedition was self-funded by the 8 members, with two notable exceptions for which the team are grateful:

- 1. Funding for metalwork (Petzl bolt hangers and maillons) via the Eldon Pothole Club’s Cave Discovery Fund
- 2.Trade discount on the aforementioned Petzl gear arranged by an EPC member, in addition to various personal kit purchases by team members.

HIGH-LEVEL LOGISTICAL PLAN

Home-Airport-Flight-Tirana to Lepushe Transfer and vise-versa.
Since team members are roughly equally distributed at:

- 1. North-Eastern Peak District
- 2. Western Peak District

It made sense for the team to travel as two groups of four in two separate vehicles (Eastside and Westside Boyz), with fuel costs for to-and-fro airport journeys being split equally per vehicle. Airport parking was arranged separately by the respective driver of each vehicle.

FLIGHTS

There were two obvious route choices from UK-Albania (Tirana) available at the time of booking; Manchester (Easyjet) or London Stansted (Ryanair)
Whilst the most obvious choice of departure airport for Peak District based cavers is Manchester, with a roughly 75 minute journey time from home, flight times indicated that an overnight hotel stay would be required on arrival at Tirana – hence the team opted to take the latter route which, although requiring a journey time of 3-4 hours to the carpark, gave flight times enabling an early-morning start from home, and sufficiently early arrival time in Tirana to facilitate same-day transfer to Lepushe, reducing costs and critically, providing an entire additional day to enable a first-day equipment portage and orientation on the mountain.

AIRPORT TRANSFER

Courtesy of the ever-helpful hosts at Hotel Alpini, we were met at Tirana by Levander who transported us and our kit to Lepushe in his trusty party bus. We paid him on arrival in cash (Euros) with the Westside Boys sharing the cost of the Tirana-Lepushe journey (and conversely the Eastside Boys covering the Lepushe-Tirana journey

seven days later). Given the road conditions (particularly after dark, a travel sickness inducing swoop of dimly lit Armco barrier being the only notable reference point from within) this is a completely hassle free, convenient and relatively comfortable option.

ACCOMMODATION

As in previous years, accommodation was provided by [Hotel Alpini](#) in Lepushe, at a cost of 35EUR pppn on a full-board basis in two spacious communal bedrooms above the dining house, comprising 11 beds in total and two rudimentary bathrooms. Perfectly adequate conditions were enjoyed by 8 smelly cavers, bedding was clean and the rooms were warm by virtue of being above the kitchen and log burner.

Affluent individuals or couples in search of privacy and luxury may also wish to consider one of five small villas, subject to availability.

It should be noted that mains power in the valley is less reliable than we are accustomed to in the UK, possibly by virtue of the remote location and Albania’s reliance on coal fired generation. On two occasions we experienced total power outage both at the village bar and the hotel. Notably, Lepushe now has an array of brand-new, solar powered street lighting which is surely welcomed by residents, but does somewhat ruin the nighttime dark sky ambience to a small degree.

Fortunately Alpini has a bank of back-up lead acid batteries and inverter, and also is able to hook up a petrol generator when required. It is recommended that personal plug-in items are removed from the supply at such times as high current surging from the generator during refuelling may fry non-resilient electronics such as cheap USB charging plugs.

As is common in Europe and beyond, hot water for ablutions is obtained via small, independent water heaters per bathroom, the capacity of which is likely to fall short of the demands of 8 sweaty cavers in need of showers after a hot day on the mountain (particularly when at least some of them are seemingly tolerant of near-boiling water) *aka very selfish and inconsiderate*

This situation was further exacerbated by one of the water heaters being identified as the cause of repeated MCB trippage and so disconnected for the remainder of our stay.

The author sensibly favoured an earlier alarm clock to mitigate the risk cold showers, and recommends this approach as a way to avoid staying half asleep all day.

FOOD

Alpini provided all of our dietary needs within the per-night cost and we didn’t go hungry. Meals are home-cooked at breakfast and dinner, with a basic packed lunch provided to select from at breakfast time.

Breakfast items remained the same for the duration of the expedition, as did the packed lunch items; dinner was largely similar throughout the duration with slight variation in the protein and vegetable provision from day to day.

A selection of alcoholic and non-alcoholic cold drinks, commercial and locally made wine and ad-hoc coffee is available at all times prior to bed time at an additional cost.

A typical day’s menu:

Breakfast; Bread, Curd. Warm Milk, Coffee, Water, Honey, Fig Jam, Fermented Berries, Cheese, Fried Egg, Albanian Fried Dough (Petulla)

Lunch; Bread, Cheese, Tomato, Cucumber, Home cured Salami, Hard Boiled Egg, Fruit (various)

Dinner; Fish, roast meat or sausages, Bread, Potatoes, Pickles, Veg or salad, Cheese, ‘crème’ – a yogurt like dip flavoured with eg piquant peppers

CURRENCY

Albania’s national currency is the LEK – however it is not possible to exchange GBP for LEK outside Albania. Therefore all members opted to purchase EUROS prior to travel. Whilst it is possible to exchange EUR for LEK at TIA, this proved difficult and is not recommended, particularly since the currency is not useful outside the country.

In the supermarket outside Shkoder, prices were quoted in LEK and EUR and appeared to equate to a 100:1 basis, in Lepushe, we just handed over our euros and hoped for the best. Change was given interchangeably in EUR,LEK or both. It’s worth spending the LEK when the opportunity arises as it’s not useful outside Albania.

At the time of writing, exchange rates are as follows:

- 1GBP=1.19EUR
- 100LEK=0.86GBP

ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS

THERE IS NO SHOP IN LEPUSHE. All team members had packed additional mountain snack food from the UK. Any sweets, chocolate or special dietary needs not listed above and so on will have to be packed from the UK. It was possible to make a stop en-route from Tirana at a small supermarket in the vicinity of Shkoder, primarily to obtain beer for the journey, but once you pass Shkoder there is nothing significant available.

There are two bars open in Lepushe for post-hike refreshment, beer, soft drinks, coffee and crisps/nuts are available:

- [Bar Restorant Logu i Bjeshkeve](#); aka the container bar
- [Restorant](#); aka the posh bar

The team invariably descended to the container bar and were greeted by Lena and her incredible hospitality – we were cordially invited to join the family for an evening meal and plenty of drinking of raki ensued. Given the relative levels of poverty clearly encountered in such a remote Albanian village, we were touched, humbled and extremely grateful to be treated with such kindness and generosity.







On a couple of occasions during the daytime towards the end of the expedition some members visited the posh bar for coffee and it proved a nice place to relax in the sunshine. No such warm welcome and hospitality as per the container bar, but a pleasant visual experience and reverie nonetheless.

COSTS


In summary, each member had a personal liability of 175 GBP prior to travel, and a fixed liability within Albania of 300 EUR. Most expedition members purchased in the region of 350-400 EUR in the UK; this is likely to be plenty but will be somewhat dependent on beer and raki thirst at the end of each day.

Fixed Costs prior (GBP)		
Item	Total	Per Person
Flight	£ 1157.76	£ 144.72
Airport Parking Long Stay	£ 133.30	£ 16.66
UK Fuel (approx)	£ 100	£ 12.50
		Total Per Person
		£ 173.88
Cash Requirements within Albania (EUR)		
Airport Transfers	440 €	55 €
Accommodation, 7 days	1680.00 €	245 €
		Total Per Person
		300 €
	GBP Rate	£ 252
	GBP Total Fixed + Cash	£ 426
Beer, 500ml	1.50 €	
Crisps/Nuts per serving	1.00 €	
Pizza near Tirana	7.00 €	
Fridge Magnet, TIA	9.00 €	
Bottle of Water, TIA	1.80 €	



Qty	Description	Container	Location	Location Details	Location Photo	
60m	Red rope 9mm	Loose	Dragon	On Uneventful horizon		
40m	9mm rope	Loose	Dragon	Spare rope at the bottom of the furthest point in Fri 13th, no bag		
20m	9mm rope	Loose	Dragon	Spare rope at the continuation rift from Fr 13th, this was used to carry on from the rift dropped my AP and DG IN 2015, this has been left coiled up at the pitch head, it may just get to the bottom of the window which has not been bolted yet		
	8maillon, 4 hangers	Loose	Dragon	Left on pointy rock at bottom of first set of pitches after entrance chamber		
1	Full bag rope red bag, approx 200 m in 2 lengths	Red bag	Dragon	Entrance chamber		
1	Empty tackle bag- black		Dragon	Entrance chamber		
35m	Orange rope for entrance in bag	Bag	Dragon	surface stash, usual place above entrance		
34	Mallions	Yellow bolt bag	Dragon	surface stash, usual place above entrance		
21	Hangers	Yellow bolt bag	Dragon	surface stash, usual place above entrance		
	Some through bolts, not many-	Yellow bolt bag	Dragon	surface stash, usual place above entrance		
4	Tackle bags- medium size		Dragon	surface stash, usual place above entrance		
	Few bits of rope		Dragon	surface stash, usual place above entrance		
90m	9mm in bag	Red bag	Vaso	at the top of the first big pitch 4th		
40m	11mm rope for entrance	loose	VasoRift close to entrance, see pictures	Rift close to entrance, see pictures. (Bolts in place for entrance, take three krabs rather than mallions for 11mm rope)	 	
30m	9mm rope	Loose	Vaso	before the meanders at the bottom of 40m pitch		
30m	9mm rope	Loose	Vaso	At top of the last pitch		

Qty	Description	Container	Location	Notes
3	3 ladders	Black/orange bag	Alpini	
2	2 pairs walking poles	Black/orange bag	Alpini	
1	1 single walking pole	Black/orange bag	Alpini	
1	saw	Black/orange bag	Alpini	
1	Black/orange bag		Alpini	
4	Ice screws	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
?	8mm drill bits	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
2	12mm drill bits	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
1	10mm drill bit	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
1	6mm drill bit	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
10	10mm Hysk screw 100tg	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
1	Double pulley	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
1	Single Pulley	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
1	Ropeman	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
1	Bag spit bolts	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
1	Chisel	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
2	Rolls gaffa tape	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
30	Approx spits and wedges	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
1	Neoprene gel	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
1	1 bag cable ties	Bdh bottle	Alpini	
2	Rope protectors	Green/yellow small bag	Alpini	
20	Maillons	Green/yellow small bag	Alpini	
200	Through bolts	Green/yellow small bag	Alpini	
3	Screw gates	Green/Yellow small bag	Alpini	
4	Snap gates	Green/yellow small bag	Alpini	
10	8mm raumer double hole hangers	Green/yellow small bag	Alpini	Only to be used for upwards bolting
50	10mm steel hangers		Alpini	
4	Aluminium hangers			
	20m dynamic rope	Red bag	Alpini	For bolting up
1	900 sling	Green/yellow small bag	Alpini	
1	Petzl bolting hammer	Green/yellow small bag	Alpini	
50 m	11 mm rope	Red bag	Alpini	Covered in bird poo
50m	11 mm rope	Red bag	Alpini	Covered in bird poo
35m	11 mm rope	Red bag	Alpini	Covered in bird poo

Qty	Description	Container	Location	Notes
1	Entrance rope	loose	surface stash	
1	Wire strop	loose	surface stash	
1	600 sling	loose	Bottom of Mountain GOAT	
2	900 sling	loose	Bottom of Mountain GOAT	
80-100m	9mm rope	blue tackle bag	Bottom of Mountain GOAT	



TIMELINE | Rob Eavis

Day 0 - Saturday 19th Oct

Flew from Stansted to Tirana, then minibus to Lepushe, stopping at the Fefa Supermarket just north of Shkodra on the way. Evening meal at Alpini.

Day 1 - Sunday 20th Oct

Big taster day for all. Up the normal western route. Collected all equipment from Wolf Cave and took across to Bari. Found quite a few entrances on the way, including, Suck Zone, 503 Ultra, and 503 (without realising). Left gear in a stash near Bari. Took gulley route down then continued down next gulley to Vaso and across summer village then down the eastern route.

Day 2 - Monday 21st Oct

All up eastern route. Then across to Shpelle Tulula (#EPC 502) cave, lead by Luke. Then up to join normal route to base of Half Dome. This is a poor route. Rob and Joe descended 503 Ultra. Jon and Dylan descended first half of Suck Zone. Jim, Luke, Sam and Chris went to find 503 and may have again, accidentally. They also found Pug’s Breath. Then down Bari gulley. Jim did epic free solo route while everyone else took the safer normal route. All went back the western route home, Jon and Joe arriving a little later.

Day 3 - Tuesday 22nd Oct

All up western route, now with PudPud. Gear collected from Bari stash. Jon and Dylan continued pushing Suck Zone. Jim, Chris and Rob went to Pug’s Breath, dropped down the first pitch and stopped at the top of the second. Luke, Sam and Joe went east, down gulley by Bari. Found Mountain GOAT entrance then continued further east. All back western route home. Dinner in the Container Bar, courtesy of Lena.

Day 4 - Wednesday 23rd Oct

All up western route. Jon and Dylan went ahead but went straight passed Bari and up a nearby mountain by accident. Eventually surveyed and derigged Suck Zone. Chris and Jim also got lost on their way to Pug’s Breath. Rob, Jim and Chris bottomed Pug’s Breath and surveyed out. Sam, Joe and Luke dropped Mountain GOAT to head of second pitch. All back western route.

Day 5 - Thursday 24th Oct

All up western route. Rob, Chris and Jim finally found 503 and descended, surveyed out then took gear to Mountain Goat. Joe, Luke and Sam descended Mountain GOAT to head of big pitch then surveyed out. Jon and Dylan surface dropped some caves to the east. All met at

Mountain GOAT then headed back, although Jon and Rob returned to Bari stash first to retrieve Jon’s Pantin. All back western route.

Day 6 - Friday 25th Oct

Rob, Joe, Jon and Dylan went up western route and to Mountain GOAT. Rob rigged from start of the big pitch, whilst Joe surveyed and Jon and Dylan followed behind surveying. Reached sump then found bypass. Left it rigged, Jon taking more photos on the way out. The others went jogging with PudPud. Significant celebration in Container Bar.

Day 7 - Saturday 26th Oct

Breakfast at Alpini then minibus to Tirana, via Pizza just south of Lezhë. Tirana to Stansted and long drive home.

MEDICAL | Luke Cafferty

As stated in previous expedition reports there is a serious lack of official medical care in the region, any serious injury or illness would be very difficult to deal with. The nearest hospital is in Shkoder which is two hours drive away.

There are also no organised cave or mountain rescue services in Albania which really highlights the fact that if an injury happened in a cave the members of the expedition would be the only help the injured person had. With all this in mind it only emphasises the fact that an expedition to Albania could be a very dangerous undertaking.

With Dave Gledhill unable to come out with us, this expedition was lacking a knowledgeable medical person, however each member did have their own personal first aid kit and a good supply of paracetamol and ibuprofen. Fortunately, we had no serious medical issues, the only thing was one sore knee which was managed by a few ibuprofens.

A small note on taking ibuprofen, obviously hiking up that hill everyday does take a toll on your body and things start to ache, taking paracetamol and ibuprofen helps manage the aches and pains however taking ibuprofen whilst dehydrated can cause serious health problems especially in your kidneys. We were extremely lucky with the weather this year, hot and sunny everyday which is great for surface bashing but not so good for staying hydrated. Something to be mindful of is just how many tablets you are taking relative to your water intake.

CONCLUSION | Rob Eavis

Whilst most of the caves ended quite prematurely, the team certainly did not. The fact that all members got up the hill 6 days in a row (and loved every minute) is an outstanding feat. The fact that they are all raring to go back next year is more than I could have expected. On these grounds alone, this was an incredibly successful expedition!

Add on to that we have a going concern down Mountain GOAT, have identified 4 more caves which need descending, and even starting pushing into a whole new area to the east which has hardly been touched by cavers....

Team Awesome, living up to their stupid name.

