



GUE Cave 1 Course France August 2005

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Instructor: Christophe Le Malliot

Students

- John Kendall
- Rick Huggins

Report by Rick Huggins (foreword and edited by John Kendall)

Foreword

Back in May, I heard about spaces going on the GUE Cave 1 courses in France this summer. I have wanted to do a cave course for a very long time, and have been working on getting my Skill level high enough to do it for a while too. I was lucky that the course I could book onto already had Rick booked on. Rick is someone I have spoken to and met due to the increasing community of DIR divers in the UK (in fact I was one of the Video guys on his DIR-F course). This is an awesome course, and worth every penny spent.

The Cave Dive

We arrive at the Ressel, one of Europe's most well known caves and start analysing our gas, we then start building our equipment and give it a thorough checking over prior to carrying it down to the waters edge. The air temp is a sticky 36 degrees and the water a steady 12 so we wade in without kit in order to cool down. Once cool, we whip out our wet notes and go through the dive plan. Once we've ran through this we don our equipment and return to the water for our pre-dive checks, bubble check, equipment check, valve drill, S-drill then ascend from the 1.2m pool we commonly carry these drills out at. We review the dive plan again and work out our 3rds/ 6th's and 35bar allowed for penetration and swim towards the entrance of the cave.

We okay each other and begin the descent. Rick unclips the primary reel and makes the primary tie-off to a tree branch then the secondary to a rock in the cave, soon the gold line is upon us and He ties off to it, John checking his work as we go. Check gas, time and do a flow check on the fly and were on our way into this beautiful cave. We reach the first T in around 8 minutes, which normally takes us 12 so were doing pretty well. Rick drops a cookie on the exit side of the T then signals to John who is already removing a clothes peg from his pig tail to re-confirm the exit. We take the right side of the T and progress into the cave. We start up the slope and see team two who are exiting so we move over to allow them to pass without hassle. It appeared they were dealing with a failure or 6!

We ascended the slope which soon levelled off and dropped into a large chamber. The HID's illuminating the walls, ceiling and floor. We dropped down almost like free falling down into this chamber and I remembered thinking to myself that this was like being what I imagined a space walk to be like. We soon hit 16m where the cave started to ascend again to around 14m and again revealed a deeper chamber at the drop off much like the first one but bigger. Rick reached the edge of the drop off which was at 19m and had 1-2 bar left before He hit his 35 bar limit. The depth limitation for the dive was also 20m so He signalled the thumb to John who returned the signal and we began to exit with John out in front and Rick in 2nd.

The penetration went well with good progress being made from previous dives (270m penetration), but we knew the exit was Chris's part of the dive. Soon after we turned the dive Rick's primary light failed so He deployed and activated his backup. John had already noticed the lack of light and turned to see if He was ok. We re-positioned on the fly and carried on with the exit with Rick now in front. John's primary failed and Rick turned around to see his backup come on so we continued out of the cave. Rick saw John's light disappear so tuned to see him deploy his second backup light, so we re-positioned and moved out. Suddenly Rick's right post started spewing bubbles, so He referenced the line, stabilised his position, signalled John and shut down his right post. John arrived as he was shutting down the post when he lost my back up light. He continued with the shutdown, deployed his last backup and communicated to John that he needed to check Rick's right post. John tried to fix this 3 times, but told Rick it was well and truly humped so Rick moved into position 1 and we carried on with the exit.

Next Chris appears at Rick's side telling him "you're OOA", so he turns around signalling to John that "I'm OOA", John deploys his longhose and we move into touch contact and continue on the line with the exit. After the remainder of our light failures, we're exiting the cave in touch contact with no lights what's so ever. We pass our reel and make our way to the daylight zone where we need to carry out min deco 2@6, 1@3 so we shake out as best as we can in the limited space available at Ressel. John is then entrapped in the line so Rick gives him the hold signal and tries to untangle him, which is luckily successful. Rick is then asked for his mask which He dually hand over to Chris. John hands Rick his back up which He dons then am immediately asked for yet again. John guides Rick through deco and we eventually surface erupting in laughter!

After all this and we aint dead, yee haa! Chris de-briefs us on the surface and we have a general chat then prepare to go back in, this time with John as Captain. All the dives on the course followed pretty much the same structure with different sequencing and failures so everyone involved had their fair share of captain/#2 and armchair positions. This was Rick's dive.

The Structure

Chris's team (Us) were up at 0630hrs daily to start lectures at 0700 outside on the pick nick table whilst Danny's team had the cosy luxury of the kitchen complete with filter coffee and warm croissants. After lessons and or line work in the park we would set-off for our respective caves to put into practice the theory and demos we covered in the morning. There were times we weren't getting to bed until gone midnight, but mostly 2100hrs at night would see us sat down in the kitchen as one big (tired) group sharing stories, pasta and bread.

The Contestants

Team 1 Christophe Le Malliot:-

- Rick Huggins, DIR-F (UK)
- John Kendal, Tech-1 (UK)
- Patrick Prasse, Tech-1 (DE)

Team 2 Danny Riordan:-

- Sawyer Kjell, DIR-F (NO)
- Didrick Veng, Tech-1 (NO)
- Harald Stene, Tech-1 (NO) aka the bad ass ganster divers!

The guys also promised to drop in on the forum....

The Course

As with most GUE courses, the layout follows the building block approach where skills learnt in day 1 are carried on throughout the course but merely added to so that everything is covered and well practiced. Before every dive, gas was analysed, pre-dive checks were carried out in 1.2m water in your respective team triangle and two dives were done per twinset.

We lost 1/3rd of the students on the course, both Tech 1 divers on day 3. Didrick from team two threw in his towel as he realised his skills were not up to scratch and that he was only holding back his two buddies. This decision IMO took big cahoonas, hats off to that man. We lost Patrick from our team who had problems with the cave environment, which again took muchos manhood to face up to.

The accommodation was set in a really nice quiet location giving all the piece and quiet we needed with excellent facilities for line work and it even had a river for the swim test. Set not far from the town of Carjarc, I would definitely come back here again. Bread and croissants were provided daily and the British owners were a very nice couple of blokes.

Changes to Cave 1 limitations: Since JJ, Chris, David and Danny arrived in France, there have been a few changes to the limitations cave 1 level divers can now dive to. We are now allowed to navigate one T or one Gap and a penetration of 35bar as long as you have at least 120bar in a set of 2x12ltrs.

Day 1:

Lectures: Cave 1 limitations, Gas Planning, Equipment Failures, Re-positioning the team, Communications, Accident analysis

- Demos: None
- Dives: 2
- Cave: Ressel
- Failures: Lights

Day 2:

Lectures: Geology, hydrology, Hazards, Lost Diver Protocol, valve failures

- Demos: Lost diver, touch contact
- Dives: 2
- Cave: Ressel
- Failures: Lights, valve failures

Day 3:

Lectures: Stress, Protocol, Awareness, emergency scenarios

- Demos: OOA on the line
- Dives: 4
- Cave: Laundenouse
- Failures: Lights, valve failures, OOA

Day 4:

Lectures: Lost line procedure

- Demos: Lost line
- Dives: 4
- Cave: Ressel
- Failures: Lights, valve failures, OOA, lost line

Day 5:

Lectures: Geology, hydrology, Hazards, Lost Diver Protocol, valve failures

- Demos: None
- Dives: 2
- Cave: Cabouy
- Failures: Lights, valve failures, OOA, lost line, lost buddy

The Instructor

Chris is truly a great instructor. From day 1 he made it clear that this game isn't for everyone and that he doesn't hand out cards willy nilly. I felt as if he was constantly quizzing us and trying to work out if I was genuinely interested in caves, diving, GUE and DIR. No matter how many questions were asked he always answered them fully and in depth. He is very passionate about both his caves and his diving, his attention to detail still amazes me and his almost perfectionism gives me a bar to aim towards. He has a good sense of humour and even understands the British humour (especially when I used his best red wine to make a Bolognese sauce). You can see more of what him and Danny do [here](#).

Conclusion

This course isn't for everyone but if you have even the slightest interest in caves and or want to continue your experience with GUE you won't be disappointed.