

MAGAZINE / REVISTA



VOL. 7 - Núm. 4 - SUMMER / ESTIU 1998

CLUB INTERNACIONAL D'ANDORRA

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ALL THE ABOVE ARE MEMBERS OF THE CLUB BOARD.

COFFEE MORNING IS HELD EVERY WEDNESDAY (10.30 - 12.00) AT THE HOTEL PARIS-LONDRES, COME ALONG FOR A PLEASANT MORNING.

CLUB ADDRESS: BOX 291, CRÈDIT ANDORRÀ, ESCALDES.

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Quarterly Magazine

June 1998

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EDITOR: MARGARET SHAIDA

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NEWS FROM THE BOARD

Tony Hooper

The 1998 Annual General Meeting was held at the Hotel Paris-Londres on 11th May. A change in the Statues was made to delete reference to the President being Andorran, a change that brought us in line with current Andorran law which requires Andorran nationality for presidents of Sports Clubs and Associations only. Following this change Su Downham, President for the past eight years, announced that she would not be seeking-election. Tony Hooper, nominated by the Executive Committee, was elected to the position. This will enable us to once again combine the roles of President and Chairman, a position which existed until four years ago. In appreciation of her long services to the Club, Su Downham was unanimously elected as an Honorary Member.

Four members of the Board sought reelection, and since there were no other nominations for office, were re-elected. Maria Teresa Raurell who was co-opted during the past year stood for election and became an official member.

Once again there were no new members put forward for election to the Board. In fact there has not been a direct nomination during the past four years, and any new faces during that period have come to Board by co-option. Whilst this does give



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a vote of confidence in the serving members, the Club does need new people who are prepared to serve our community. In fact, at the present time, there are still three vacancies on the Board. The Committee will continue to look for people to fill these spaces.

Prior to the A.G.M. a meeting of Group Leaders was held. We are concerned that the Bridge Group in St. Julia appears to be very short of members. We supported this group for two reasons: firstly, this was our first group to be based in St. Julia, and secondly, it was to provide a group where beginners and less able players could join in with experienced players to play bridge for fun and enjoyment. Marianne Smolders (84 20 67) would b very pleased to hear from any member who is interested.

For the seventh year in succession, the Treasurer was pleased to announce that there would be no increase in subscriptions, a fine achievement in face of inflation. We are pleased that the majority of members now pay by Direct Debit, which makes life much easier for Brian. However, he is very concerned that some members who are not renewing membership fail to inform him before the debit is due. If a member informs the bank after the payment is credited the money is returned but the Club is charged 750 pts. for administrative costs.

EDITORIAL Margaret Shaida

t time of writing, summer had finally arrived - which seemed odd to me as I have just returned from autumn in New Zealand. There, the days were getting shorter and darker - so the long light evenings and the warmer weather of Andorra were a real joy on our return.

I found it strange to celebrate Easter in the autumn - shop windows were filled with Easter eggs, artificial daffodils, falling autumn leaves, warm tweeds and sturdy raincoats.

Even stranger was to celebrate the Iranian New Year which falls on 21st March, the vernal equinox. This is a very ancient festival which has been celebrated in the spring in Iran for thousands of years. All the ceremonies relate entirely to the rites of spring the house is decorated with blossoms, hyacinths and fresh spring herbs, while the festive meal is rice with fresh herbs. The whole twelve days of the New Year are marked with customs relating to spring and new beginnings. None of this tied in with the chill autumn evenings of New Zealand!

We have another bumper issue this time, with a variety of penmanship from many of our members.

I was delighted to hear from Joan Spiller who has also been "Down Under" - though Joan was entirely in Australia. She spent a magical evening of opera in the mountains there, and she has written to tell us all about. I am probably not alone in being surprised to hear that Australia has mountains - well, other than "Hanging Rock" and the Blue Mountains near Sydney! After reading Joan's article, I felt that Australia seemed rather like Andorra (see page 10).

I'm also grateful to Joan for her fascinating information on "Aids among Senior Citizens" - see page 12!!

We have another report from distant shores - this time from Peter and June Wong. They were in Hong Kong during the hand over celebrations last June/July. It's a delightful first-hand account of an emotion-filled occasion which can be found on page 18.



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Roc Propietats, C/General, La Massana, Principat d'Andorra. Tel: 835346 or 838169. Fax: 836674 When I read Dan Parson's exciting tale of media distinction, I thought at first that Dan's fame had been a result of his giving an address to the Club (at the 1996 'dinner-withguest speaker" activity) or - even more exciting - because of the report appearing in our magazine! But no, it seems the reason for Dan's fame had had nothing to do with C.I.A. You can read all about it on page 20.

I was also very grateful for another

restaurant review (see page 21). This one comes from Georgina Tennyson, and is about a restaurant I have long thought about visiting - it looks so inviting from outside - "El Rusc. It sounds inviting from inside too! I was also intrigued by the fact that when their daughter/sister, Davina (who had previously spent six months on a small island in the Indian Ocean, living largely on rice and fish) had visited "El Rusc" with them, she had chosen a fish dish!

We also have two reports on activities - on the dinner at the Lycée, and the other on the tour of Ordino. Both were clearly great successes. Had I been here, I would certainly have gone to the dinner at the Lycée, but now that I've read Denis O'Shea's report, my weight-watchers group are glad I was away!

We were happy to receive a report about Ordino from a non-English speaker and glad that Aubrey Weatherbe sent it on to us! And lastly, we have a short tale of terror (see page 22). I hope this won't deter anyone from visiting these fascinating caves. Just go better prepared than me: do not expect a pretty grotto dotted with fairy lights - and don't forget to wear comfortable non-slip shoes and take a spare torch or two.

I do hope you all have a wonderful summer!



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NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

CAR BOOT SALE

s you know, our Annual Car Boot Sale will be taking place on Sunday, 28th June in the Arinsal village car park, from 9 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. If you have anything to sell, new or scond-hand, here is your chance - and it is all good fun!

A sales pitch costs only Pts. 1,250, which go to charity. For bookings and further details, please ring Caroline Colvin-Smith on 837315.

Alternatively, you may want to donate items directly to the charities taking part:

Helpline

ring Dinah Baxter on 836980

AND (Environment)

ring Ann Matschke on 841279

APAPMA (Animals)

ring Delfi Roca on 828348

English-Speaking Church

ring Jo Mills on 841817

Caritas La Massana

ring Mossen Joan on 836450

Caritas La Vella

ring 820709

If anyone would like to take a pitch for selling hot or cold drinks or for organising a raffle, it would be much appreciated.

NEW PATCHWORK GROUP

he CIA are hoping to set up a new group to learn and practice patchwork.

Meetings will begin in September in La Massana and be held on Thursday afternoons from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Membership of the group will be

limited to thirty people and is only open to CIA members. There will be a small weekly charge to cover expenses.

Gill Furmston has volunteered to be the group leader and instructor. You will be welcome whether you are a complete beginner or an experienced Patchworker - or even if you have only ever dreamed of doing it!

Obtaining the necessary materials in Andorra is difficult, so an inaugural meeting is proposed during the summer when information about mail-order supplies, etc. will be available.

If you wish to have further information or would like to join the Patchwork Group and create a Magical Kaleidoscope of Colour, please call Gill Furmston on 836060 or Ann Price on 836653.

HELPLINE

on't forget that Helpline is there to help you in the event of an emergency, accident or illness. We listen, give advice, help where possible, provide transport, food, translations, flowers, various aids during ill health (wheelchairs, crutches, bedpans, walking sticks, etc.) and organise shopping assistance, and pay for professional care in an emergency. All in confidence.

If you wish to receive help or if you wish to help us - in raising money, providing information over the phone or with occasional "meals on wheels", then call Dinah Baxter on 836980 or Lilias Grassie on 838349. (See also the weekly Newsletter for contacts when our Helpline organisers are on holiday.)

And don't forget, we still have copies of

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our "Helpline Book of International Recipes". It makes a marvellous gift, and costs only Pts. 1,000, and is available from Estil Nordic, Stella Madden (on 837681) and at the Coffee Mornings in the Paris-Londres Hotel.

Lastly, Helpline will have a large sale at the Car Boot Sale on 28th June. We hope we shall see you there.

The Red Cross Connection

The CIA and Helpline have recently formed an association with the Andorran Red Cross to create the basis of an International Section within that Organisation.

The Andorran Red Cross is involved in several on-going schemes in the Third World, both in raising funds and participating in a practical way. Here, in Andorra, they provide ambulance services which also extend into France and Spain. We have seen this in action recently when the service took a patient from home in Andorra to Barcelona airport with considerable kindness and efficiency. They also arranged for the assistance of the British Red Cross upon arrival.

Helpline are especially anxious to cooperate in the setting up of a "Panic Button System" here in Andorra. The Red Cross in Spain are already operating such a system. To facilitate this we at Helpline would like to encourage CIA members to join the Andorran Red Cross. If you have not received an application form, please phone Lilias Grassie on 838340 or Ann Price on 836653. They can answer any questions you may have about the proposed "Panic Button Scheme".

The Telephone Contact Group

n the meantime, the Telephone Contact Group

is already up and running - a support group for all those who live on their own and would like to receive or make morning calls. These are NOT hour-long chats (although the last one of your list may become that!), but just a quick check-up call to ensure that all is well with the world. Further information from Lilias Grassie, 838349.

THE COFFEE MORNINGS

p to forty members (and not always the same ones) turn up each week to attend the Coffee Morning. The Club meets over coffee every Wednesday morning, 10.30 to 12.00, at the Paris-Londres Hotel. The hotel offers pleasant surroundings, ample parking, and a constant supply of coffee and drinks.

At least two members (usually more) of the CIA Committee are on hand to offer advice and guidance on the activities of the CIA. Bookings for activities may be made at the Coffee Mornings, and the Weekly Newsletter is on sale (a bargain at 25 pts each), which means you get it at least two days (and up to a week) earlier than by post. Englishlanguage magazines are often on hand for anyone to take. It's a pleasant morning, and entrance is ABSOLUTELY FREE! So do come along, meet other Club members, catch up with the news, and find out what's happening around town.

COMPUTER ADVICE GROUP

he Computer Club of the International Club of Andorra now has a list of about seventy numbers who are interested in using computers. There are forty members active on the Internet., and most of the others are thinking of joining. It is now possible to join Internet and not be on the E-Mail system. It seems there are another twenty members who use

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Agència

ielsen s.A.

Britt Nielsen

Immobiliària - Real Estate - Ejendomshandler Sales & Rentals throughout ANDORRA the computer as a Word Processor and have no intention of getting on the Net. There are also some members who wish to start and we try to help them.

The Club now holds regular meetings every other Tuesday - the next two meetings will be on 2nd and 16th June at 11:00 a.m. at the Hotel Costes de Giberga, La Massana. This hotel is on the right going from La Massana towards Ordino, 100 metres past the La Massana Fire Station and across the bridge.

Attendance varies between ten and fifteen persons. Around cups of coffee we discuss various computing problems. Brian Keep has been exceptionally helpful, and seems to know the answers to all our problems. In addition, there is a wealth of knowledge which can be shard between the attenders. New members are always welcome.

Contact Stanley Jones at Edifici Trini, Esc B 4-1, C/General, La Massana, or tel. 836 972 or Gil Lamb on 835 258.

ACTIVITIES

TRIP TO FRANCE

he June trip till be to France. Leaving on Wednesday, 10th June, we lunch at Bastide de Serou, then on to St. Girons and Salies du Salat, a visit to the Museum of Gers Country life at Espaon, a look at the memorial to the Resistance at Mielan, and finally to the Hotel de Lac at Mielan.

On 11th June, we depart for Auch to visit the old town and the cathedral. After lunch, a free afternoon in Auch, then we leave for Condom where we shall visit a winery at the Chateau de St. Puy, and return to the hotel in Mielan.

On Friday, 12th June, we leave Mielan for home, stopping at St. Lizier where we shall explore and have lunch, then depart directly for Andorra.

CLUB CELEBRATIONS

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Club, a dinner is planned in November. Further details later.

And on 21st January 1999, we shall be having a Celebration Coffee Morning to mark the 10th anniversary of the Coffee Mornings - the first one was held on 19th January 1989.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR 1999

January

Dinner and Entertainment (the Santa Anna Dancers) at the Holiday Inn

February

Shopping trip and lunch to the C-op in Guissona

March

Day trip to Cava Cordoniu Factory

April

Andorran History tour

May

Week-long trip to Crete

June

Several days in the Dordogne area

July

Charity walk within Andorra (probably round and round the Pal "loop"!)

August

Paella lunch at Engolasters

September

Trip to the Costa Blanca

October

Two-week trip to Egypt

November

Dinner with guest speaker (Hassan Shaida)

December

Christmas Shopping Weekend to Barcelona

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THE INTERNATIONAL SINGERS

The choir continues as busy as ever with new members joining us almost monthly which is wonderful. Since Christmas we have been practising like mad for our part in Jackie and Maite's "Una Nit de Musica i Dansa".

On 21st June we will again join Andorra's massed choirs in the National Auditorium to celebrate the International Day of Music, and then, on 29st June, we have been asked to give a concert a Pas de la Casa's Festa Major to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of their church of St. Peter. It will our first full-length secular concert for some years. I know it's a long way to go but we do hope lots of you will come and support us.

With the recent expansion in the choir we have really grown too large to sing comfortably in a private house though we're sincerely grateful to Binnie Segal, Jean Axten and Jeanne Lodge - to say nothing of Joe, Charles and Hans - who have put up with us rehearsing in their sitting rooms all these years.

We are now searching for a permanent practice room. Once found, we will probably look for a second-hand, transportable piano.

Our final excitement is thanks mainly to the Drama Group who, when they disbanded, gave us a most generous part of their funds. We decided to spend the money on smart, uniform blouses. Pyrenees have been most co-operative in ordering them and in giving us a handsome discount. So watch out for our new, improved look next time you come to one of our concerts.

Anyone who can sing in tune and who would like to join the Singers do contact Clare Allcard 836 269 or Brenda Ross 836 886. We'll welcome you with open arms.

THE SCOTTISH DANCERS

The Scottish Dancers suffer from Andorra's perennial problem, a very mobile membership. We have about sixteen people on our books but seldom more than twelve together at any one time.

With so many away over Christmas we got off to a late start but thanks to an excellent new book of instructions, we've made up for lost time in improving our style. We sent out scouts to the monthly folk dancing sessions in Andorra la Vella and plan to join them next season. As always when we get together, we've enjoyed ourselves a lot. We do hope that when we start up again next winter we can persuade some more of you to come and try us out.

Anyone interested, do contact Brenda Ross on 836 886 or Clare Allcard on 836269. Beginners are always very welcome.

Please Note: the deadline for reports on Group Activities for the September issue is 7th August.





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Reports on Activities

ORDINO - NOT SO ORDINARY

Last month's tour of the tiny village of Ordino revealed its rich variety of entertainments to members of the CIA. One of the participants, Pierre told Aubrey Weatherbe all about it.

Pierre, the International Club of Andorra will be enjoying the Museums and Gardens of Ordino on 7th May. Would you and your wife like to join us? There will be a lunch at the Hotel Coma afterwards."

"I would like, yes, but my English is not good."

"Don't worry about it; you won't have a problem. English is almost a foreign language in London these days..."

So, we drove through the tunnel from Andorra la Vella to Ordino. Pierre, as usual, only used two wheels of his car. He dreams fondly of the Indianopolis 500 with absolutely no chance of being accepted.

At 9.30 a.m. we joined the others in the car park at Ordino. Our charming hostess and the organiser of this outing, Doctor Dinah Baxter, counted twenty-four eager souls and therefore, off we went to visit the Museum of Miniatures.

There are numerous adjectives which may be used successfully to describe this exhibit. May we start with "fantastic"? The Museum of Miniatures is the incredible work of Nikolaï Siadristy. Is 'incredible' too strong an adjective for you?

I don't think so! Siadristy passes a whole file of camels as well as a palm tree and a pyramid through the eye of a needle. The artist had to work on his creations between heartbeats, otherwise his hands would have moved with each heartbeat.

According to the pamphlet at this museum, Ordino is now the permanent home for the microminiatures of Nikolaï Siadristy. He has shown his work in more than eighty countries...

"Well, which miniature did you prefer?"
"For me, the spiral of life. And you?"
"The one of the Pope was fascinating."

After the Museum of Miniatures and before we entered the Plandolit Museum, Dinah Baxter led us on a walk around the village. The visit to the d'Areny i Plandolit house began at the original entrance door from which we had a guided tour in Spanish, Catalan, Dutch and English! All of us sympathised with the story of the unfortunate wife of Guillem d'Areny i Plandolit who was slain by an unrequited lover. I felt morbid curiosity in the painting of an Inquisitor: apparently he had decreed that after his death there should be another but smaller painting of his skull! This smaller painting is now under his portrait...

"Pierre, what do you think of the Inquisitor?"

"His skull was more attractive!"

After we had explored many of the rooms of the Plandolit Museum we went outside. We really enjoyed the warm sunshine and fresh air as we walked to La Pleta. It was a pleasure to enjoy coffee and biscuits in the lovely home and garden of Dinah Baxter. We strolled through her garden and our eyes captured the natural beauty of the pastoral scene. A few metres up the road is the home and garden of Michael and Susan Payne. Another beautiful and restful area which was made amusing by two playful dogs.

Once again, dear friends, down to the centre of the village, this time to the Icon Museum. A young lady with great class lectured us on the priceless and private collection of icons which are owned by an Andorran. The icons of Christ are many and very moving. St. George and the Dragon put on a display in a number of the icons. After the interesting lecture we at last sat down in a small room and watched an unusual video on the churches of Ukraine and Russia.

(Continued on page 13)



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Reports on Activities

HOW ABOUT THIS FOR STARTERS?

When Denis O'Shea was offered Mousseline deTurbot et Saumon à l'Aneth, Beurre Blanc au Safran at the CIA activity last March, he knew he was in for a good evening! Here, he tells us all about it.

ere we dining at a two- or three-star restaurant, somewhere in the South of France perhaps? Not quite - in fact, rather closer to home, in the functional but pleasant

surroundings of the trainingrestaurant attached to the Lycée Comte de Foix in Andorra la Vella. For one of the many educational options at this impressive school is a of professional training in the principles and practice of cookery and hotel management à la française. Moreover, the restaurant is open not only to students and staff but also, on certain days of the week and by prior arrangement, to members of the public.

Hence it was that, one evening in March, forty or so members of the International Club - capably organised by club members Brenda Ross and by Mme. Anne Cailleteau, who is both a club member and a senior member of the Lycée staff - assembled at the above premises in expectation of a memorable dinner. And so it proved to be.

We were greeted on arrival by a glass of sparkling Kir, this time in its version, with the dash of black currant nicely judged. This gave us time to admire the elegant chinaware of our place settings, and the attractive flower arrangements. At this stage, we were also warmly welcomed (in French) by M. J.L. Guilhot, headmaster of the Lycêe, who indicated that, following the dinner, Mme. Cailleteau would be addressing us at length, in English, on its history and organisation.

The opening dish was a generously flavoured tubot terrine, marbled with salmon and coated with a saffron-tinged variant of a classic sauce from the Loire Valley. The accompanying white wine was, also classically, a tasty Muscadet.

This was followed by a hearty main course of beef braised with red wine, onions and carrots -

the classic touch here being that, with this dish, we were served exactly the same wine that had been used in the cooking, in this case a more than respectable Corbières. Nor was the juxtaposition



(From left to right) Sarah Dawtrey, Clare Allcard, Pop Goldsteen, Brenda Bennett, Mme Guilhot and Brenda Ross

merely academic; the dish and the wine, each very good in itself, tasted even better in combination.

Next and last, but not least, came an assiette gourmande which impressed even those among us who do not usually bother with dessert - a kind of showcase for the greedy but discriminating sweet-tooth. This took the form of four different

(continued on page 20)

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OPERA IN THE AUSTRALIAN "ALPS"

If you think that Australia is flat, hot and dusty, then think again. Here, Joan Spiller tells us about a magical operatic evening she spent in the cool green mountains Down Under

uring a recent holiday in Australia, I enjoyed a wonderful evening of operatic music. High in the Australian Alps in the state of Victoria in the south east of the continent lies a natural amphitheatre called Dingle Dell. During the southern winter this is a popular skiing resort, but in the height of summer, in January, a unique presentation was held to commemorate the Centenary of Australian National Parks. Dingle Dell is at the top of Mount Buffalo. over 1700 metres high surrounded by snow gums, wild flowers and gigantic granite tors. Mount Buffalo was discovered by the explorers, Hume and Hovell in 1824 and so named because it resembled a buffalo.

I was staying at El Dorado, a small village 25 kms from the country town of Wangaratta. We drove 30 kms in the opposite direction to the township of Myrtleford which is situated at the base of the mountains. Catching a bus there in the early evening we were transported up the winding road, arriving at Dingle Dell one hour later. For the first time in three months, the skies were overcast but the sun soon appeared and the weather remained fine. A small item in the programme stated "If we do have a rain shower, the concert will be temporarily halted until the rain ceases - these short falls are typical of this

season and will not last long." Therefore, not to worry, or as they say here, "No Problem".

Grassy Slopes and Chilly Nights

An enormous stage had been erected at the base of the amphitheatre and the grassy slopes facing it were covered by over 2,000 people - all having brought their own chairs plus jackets and blankets for when the sun set and the night chill set in. Part of the admission price included a gourmet hamper and this really was gourmet in every sense of the word, comprising chicken, ham, marinated fish, a luxury salad of asparagus, sun-dried tomatoes, artichoke hearts, olives, grapes, etc. followed by miniature cakes, cheese and biscuits. Temporary bars were set up selling all types of wines, beers and soft drinks.

As the sun set behind one side of the mountain, a lone piper stood at the highest point behind the crowd and played a medley of Scottish tunes as he mingled with the crowd on his descent to the stage.

The performance started with David Ashton-Smith, a former singer with the English National Opera, compering and introducing the various items. The choir consisted of 100 voices, male and female, the youngest being only 12 years of age and the oldest 70. There were fifty members of the



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C/ VERGE DEL PILAR, 6 - ANDORRA LA VELLA - PRINCIPAT D'ANDORRA TEL.: 864 664 - FAX: 821 872 Alpine Symphony Orchestra. With such a natural setting the acoustics were phenomenal and every note could be heard.

A Varied Programme

The programme consisted of works by Mozart, Verdi, Pucchini, Rossini, Wagner and Bizet, some the orchestra alone, the majority with chorus and orchestra but a delightful solo was performed by Margo Cory (singing "One Fine Day" from Madame Butterfly) and other solos by Domenico Canizzaro. studied and performed extensively in London and on her return to Australia she continued an active career singing major roles with the Victoria State Opera Company with regular concert performances in Melbourne. She is a mother of four, all of whom participated in the Opera in the Alps. Domenico is a Sydney Sun Aria winner where he received lavish praise from Joan Sutherland. He has performed regularly in Italy with an international cast led by the world renowned Ruggero Raimondi. He performs regularly for solo concerts in Australia, Italy and England.

I was delighted to be one of only a handful of people who obtained an autograph by Nicholas Braithwaite, the London-born conductor. He has conducted most major orchestras in Australia and has also been a frequent guest conductor for all the major orchestras in the U.K., appearing at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, the Welsh National Opera Company, the Hamburg State Opera and the Norwegian Opera to mention a few. He made a special trip from England to

be the guest conductor for this performance.

Australia's Birthday

As this was the start of the Australian Birthday Weekend, the evening was brought to a rousing conclusion with choir, orchestra and *everybody* singing new patriotic words to the tune of "Waltzing Matilda".

Although the musical items were of course of a serious nature, many humorous interludes were introduced including the entire choir, orchestra and audience spontaneously joining in singing "Happy Birthday to You" to a young member of the crowd.

At the end of the evening, the crowd dispersal was extremely well organised. We were on one of the first buses to leave and it was fascinating to see the headlights of dozens of other buses and cars both in front of us and behind showing through the trees as we drove round the many hairpin bends.

The scenery in this area contradicts the mistaken image many people have of Australia being flat, dry and boring. It is anything but, and leaves one quite breathless.

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HERE AND THERE

ou will all have received a copy of the latest book produced by the Andorra Writers Circle - "ANDORRA - Festival, Myths and Legends". This is a splendid book, full of interesting information about the country we live in. All the articles have been written by members of the International Club, and they cover a wide range of subjects. Peter Dunkley (who has often written articles for this magazine) and Clare Allcard (another frequent contributor Intercomm) have written about the frequent festivals celebrated in Andorra, while Judith Wood has related many of the legends that have grown up in these mysterious mountain regions in ages past. Alan Hadden and Margaret Shaida (our editor) have written a couple of articles of historic interest, while Ursula Ure has contributed by relating some memories of her life in Andorra going back to the fifties. The book was designed and typeset by Margaret and the sketches drawn by Hassan Shaida. Credit Andorra contributed to the costs of production of the book.

This would make an excellent gift to give to friends and relatives who visit us here - not to mention a useful Christmas present. All profits go to local charity.

The price is 1,500 pts, and copies are available at all the usual outlets, or contact any of the authors. It is hoped that a record amount of money will be made for local charities.

Spencer in Barcelona that I understand a second branch is planned to be opened in plaça Catalunya - perhaps next year. Christmas shopping trips to Barcelona will now be twice as good!!

Overheard at the Coffee Morning:

heard Joan Spiller telling a small group of interested "coffee drinkers" one morning last month that "Senior Citizens suffer from Aids more than any other group of the population!"

....

She went on to explain to her incredulous audience that it's because "they tend to have more hearing aids, band aids, walking aids, medical aids and even government aids...!!"

"Yes," added one of her audience, "and what about the monetary aids to their kids?!"



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Property rentals and maintenance. INVICO, S.L. Casa Areny P.B.1, Av. Al Traves, (Carretera d'Ordino), La Massana Tel: +376 839241 Fax: +376 839243 pparently there has been a suggestion about the Club setting up a new skiing group. It seems that there used to be one many years ago, but it fell by the wayside when the organiser left. This seems a good idea, and it seems that its activities could include advice and the exchange of information on the splendid skiing facilities here in Andorra. There might also be skiing trips to other nearby ski resorts in France and Spain.

nd speaking of the CIA Groups, don't forget the Tennis Group. The main purpose of this group is to put new members and visitors who want to have a game of tennis in touch with each other. Most years there is a tennis championship. If you're interested and would like more information, please call Ivan Stansby.

....

e saw so many C.I.A members at the market in Seu d'Urgell this last week that it seemed more like a C.I.A. "Activity". We wondered if Ann Price had "returned" to her activities and organised another day trip to Seu d'Urgell.

But no. It seems that a lot of us had all had the same idea. Indeed, the car park was filled to over-flowing with cars with Andorran number plates - and market stalls filled with delectable fresh summer vegetables. Continued from page 8
"Ordino - Not so Ordinary"

Lunch at the Hotel Coma followed the Icon Museum. We sat at a long table with ample supplies of red, white and rosé wines. The food was excellent, the service first rate and the conversations of twenty-two persons in at least four languages were most interesting...

"Pierre, what do you think of this event?"

"Do all British women work as hard as Madame Baxter?"

"Pierre, if it weren't for women our society would still be in the jungle and our religion confined to the desert!"

"Is so?"

"Truly, is so!"

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FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

Once again, we thank Maria Teres Raurell for providing the following list of events being organised in the various comus during the next three months.

Andorra la Vella

JUNE

5th June

22.00: Teatre Comunal

"Dacarisma - Jaleo"

(Rock, Jazz and Flamenco music)

23rd June - St. John's Eve

Arrival of The Flame from Mount Canigó to be received by Els Fallaires of the seven parishes. 24.00: bonfires in various places followed by dancing in Plaça del Poble.

22.00: Gardens of Casa de la Vall, Summer Concert by Orquestra Nacional de

Cambra d'Andorra.

AUGUST

1", 2nd, 3rd August

Andorra la Vella Festa Major (main festival) Sardanes at Plaça del Poble, evening dancing, and entertainment for children.

8 September - Andorran National Holiday

Canillo

TUNE

23rd June - St. John's Eve

22.00: Bonfires, dancing and traditional "coca" and wine.

29th June - Feast of the Village St Pere del Tarter

St r cic u

JULY 11th and 12th July - Soldeu "Festa Major" 18th, 19th and 20th July - Canillo "Festa Major"

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25th and 26th July -

Ransol, Aldosa and Elsa Plans "Festa Major"

7 July

a.m. International Sheep Dog Competition Planells de Mereig

AUGUST

? August

a.m. Canillo-Ordino Meeting (Mass, lunch and sardanes)

? August

Photography Competition "Marathon"

16th August

St. Roc's Day, Patron saint of Canillo

? August

"Florim la Parroquia" Campaign (decorate the parish with flowers)

24th August

St. Bartholomew's Day, Soldeu

30th August

"Travessa de Muntanya" (mountain excursion in Canillo area.

Encamp

JUNE

6th, 7th, 8th June

A Journey to Mojacar (Spain) with participation of the Casal del Poble, organised by A.P.A.E.

11th June

p.m. "Primeres Jomaades Intergeneracionals d'approximaco a l'Art Contemporani". Lecture on "The importance of Design" by Angel Calvente.



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C/. Unió, 4 Telèfon: 826 259 ANDORRA LA VELLA Principat d'Andorra 21" June

Celebration of Silver and Golden Weddings with High Mass in Sanctuary of Meritxell, with Encamp Choir.

25th June - "Festa Major"

22.00: Sardanes at Plaça des Arinsols

29th June

25th anniversary of laying the foundation stone of St. Peter's Church in Pas de la Casa.

11.00: High mass (Goig singing by Encamp Choir)

p.m. Concert by the International Singers of Andorra at St. Peter's Church in Pas de la Casa.

- Every day in June, after school hours, Miss Júlia tells fairy tales or short stories to children
- There are several interesting art exhibitions every month at Centre Esportiu in Pas de la Casa, and in Encamp in the Comú's building, at Complex Esportiu and also at Casa del Poble.

JULY

2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, 30th July

Sardanes at Plaça dels Arínsols

4th July

18.00: Sardanes Competitions at Plaça Arínsol 6th to 13th July

A trip to Greece organised by Casal del Poble and open to all. Discount for Encamp residents over 65.

10th July - Feast of St. Christopher Afternoon snack organised by Casal del Poble

High mass with Goig singing. Afterwards, the Blessing of the Adorned Cars.

13th July - St. Henry's Feast

a.m. The Traffic Police of Encamp will celebrate their Patron Saint's Day with High Mass and Goig singing at St. Eulalia's Church 15th July

Exhibition about Cousteau at Comú's Exhibition Hall; open till 30th September

16th July

p.m. Finale of Casal del Poble activities with exhibition of works made during the year, and recognition of volunteers' work during the year.

? July

International table tennis competition at the Sports Complex

- Throughout the month the Comú is organising activities for children and young people "Cortals Aven Tura"
- Popular dancing at 21.00 each evening at Plaça des Arinsols.

AUGUST

6th, 13th, 20th and 27th August

22.00: Sardanes at Plaça des Arinsols

15th and 16th August - "Festa Major"

The Encamp Choir will participate in all religious services and Goig singing, at St. Eulalia's Church

15th August

Special programme of Sardanes

- · Sports Events at Sports Centre
- International Course of Karate at Sports Centre
- Throughout the month, activities for children and young people.
- Popular dancing at Plaça dels Arínsols at 22.00

SEPTEMBER

1" September

a.m. and p.m. Aplec de la Sardana

3rd September

19.00: Sardanes at Plaça dels Arínsols

22.00: Sardanes at Plaça dels Arínsols

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La Massana

JUNE

1st to 15th June

Exhibition of works from the IX Fast Paintings Competition at Poliesportiu of l'Aldosa

16th to 30th June

Exhibition of works from the Art School

at "La Closeta: Hall

20th to 21st June

Celebration of X anniversary of Esbart "Els Esquirols" (Traditional Dances Group of La Massana)

23rd June - St. John's Eve

p.m. Descent of Fallaires (men carrying bundles of wood down the mountain, followed by bonfires and dancing) in the Farre Negre Car Park.

JULY

5th July

10.00: IV Mountain bike Comptition at Pal Ski Station

10th July - Anyós Festa Major

11th and 12th July

"Roser" de La Massana (games and entertainment for children)

14th July

Folklore evening

18th and 19th July - Erts Festa Major

21" July

22.00: Evening dancing at Prat del Colat

 Throughout the month, sports events and games be organised for children

AUGUST

I" August

22.00: Concert by Cavall Bernat Group (Habaneres and songs) at Prat del Colat

6th August



Ferran URTEU ROCA

c/- Bonavista, 15 - Tel. 829 933 ANDORRA LA VELLA 22.00: Evening dance at Prat del Colat 8th and 9th August - L'Aldosa "Festa Major" 22nd and 23rd - Arinsal "Festa Major"

 Throughout the month sports events and games will be organised for children

Ordino

JUNE

21" June

p.m. International Music Day at the National Auditorium

23rd June - St. John's Eve

22.00: Bonfires and dancing

28th June

Parish Feast, Sant Pere del Serrat-Ordino

20.00: "Costellada popular" (grilled meat for all)

21.15: Fireworks

22.30: Dancing, with a Musical Trio.

29th June - St. Peter's Day

Fishing competition of St. Peter's Day

12.00: Mass followed by

13.00: Refreshments and appetisers at Sant Pere del Serrat

JULY

5th, 6th and 7th July

"Roser" d'Ordino - Games and other activities specially for children

13th to 17th July

Summer Ten Pin Bowling Championship

11th and 12th July

Botanical Exhibition

Outdoor cinema

12th July

Meeting in Port del Rate with people from

France.

Lunch, Shows and Entertainment in the streets

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Club Internacional d'Andorra June 1998

AUGUST

2nd August - Llorts "Festa Major"

Travessa de Muntanya (Mountain excursion from Ordino to Sorteny

Blessing of horses and cattle

9th August

a.m. Meeting Ordino-Canillo in Col d'Ordino with Mass, lunch and Sardanes

15th and 16th August - Sornes "Festa Major" Throughout the month there will be outdoor Cinema, shows and street entertainment; theatre

SEPTEMBER

4th and 5th September -

La Cortinada and Arans "Festa Major"

St. Julia de Loria

JUNE

1st June

775th Anniversary of Canolich, Sant Julia's Patron Saint

23.00: Fireworks

23.30: Dancing in a marquee at Prat Gran, with Grupo la Moda and Jarabe de Palo

6th June

22.00: Concert by "Coral Verge de Ribera" from La Pobla de Segur in the Auditori Claror (with collaboration of "Coral Rocafort" and Petits Cantaires Lauredians. Admission Free.

10th to 28th June

Exhibition of Ceramics by Montserrat Riu

22.00: IV Theatrework presents a play in the Auditori Claror

20th June

18.00: First Children Theatresork presents a play in the Auditori Rocafort. Admission free.

23rd June - St. John's Eve

27th June

22.00: Concert "End of Year" by the students of



Cuina Tradicional francesca English spoken Tancat diumenges nit i dilluns ARANS (Ordino) Telefon 850 830 Music at St.Julia in the Auditori Claror

JULY

1st TO 19TH JULY

EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS

BY MARIE DUNKLEY at the Cultural Centre

22nd July

Photographic Exhibition of "Festa Major" at the Cultural Centre, organised by "Club Fotografic Lauredia".

24th to 28th July - "Festa Major"

Entertainments, activities and dancing for everyone.

Escaldes/Engordany

JUNE

6th June

Poliesportiu: "Twelve Hours of Basketball"

13th June

Last day of the Patchwork Club exhibition at the Cultural Centre.

17.00: Meeting of Patchwork Club members p.m. Concert of songs by Di Diango at the Cultural Centre

14th June

Parish Feast

17th June

Opening of the Exhibition of the Art School (watercolours) at the Cultural Centre (open till 20.00)

18th June

p.m. Festival by the Dance School at la Carpa car park

23rd June

St John's Eve - Bonfires, dancing Continued on page 19



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THE HONG KONG HAND OVER FAREWELL UK ...WELCOME CHINA

Last year, Peter and June Wong were present during the hand over of Hong Kong from Great Britain to the People's Republic of China. Here, they tell us of their moving experience.

e were there! Sensing the tingling excitement and expectation of a great surge of history, we wondered with many others what it would be like, after the long-awaited hand over of Hong Kong to its original owner, China, after 156 years of British rule, had

taken place. Would it be better or worse? Memories of the excesses of the communist regime in China lingered in our minds. Would there be a curtailment of civil liberties and rule of law? Would there by major changes in life-style? These thoughts raced through our minds.

Arriving in Hong Kong about two weeks before the hand over, we found it a hive of activity preparations underway. The workmen were busily removing the last vestiges of colonialism - the royal coat of arms from government offices, the courts and public buildings. Organisations were deleting the word "royal" from their names, such as the "Royal Hong

Kong Police Force" and the "Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club". Professional institutes incorporated parallel self-governing institutes whilst retaining the British standards and affiliations.

The world media (larger than at the Olympic Games) was gathering to focus on the Convention Centre and Tamar naval base where the main ceremonies were to be held. The workers were frantically putting the last tiles in place on the

specially built extension to the Convention site. Still it was not completed. Organisers hoped rain drops would not fall on the official party as torrential rain poured down. (But it did, by the bucketful!)



Preparations went into high gear. Chinese and new Hong Kong flags festooned the streets. Large slogans patriotically proclaimed a joyous return to the Motherland. At night Hong Kong glittered with a myriad of lights including enormous, brightly coloured dragons which glowed in the darkness. The stage was set.



At the stroke of midnight on 30th June 1997 as the British flag was lowered and the Chinese flag was hoisted at the impressive, dignified ceremony, a heady mixture of pent-up emotions tumbled out - tears and laughter, sadness at the end of British rule, jubilation at the end of a humiliating period in

Chinese history. The moving Hand Over Service at St. Andrew's Church drew together the elements of the pain of the Chinese people, and the need for reconciliation on the part of all for the healing of an old wound.

There were parties galore, not only in Hong Kong, but also in other parts of the world. The celebrations lasted for days. Parades with prancing lion dances and drum-beating, troupes of smartly dressed marching girls, kung fu experts energetically demonstrating their art, traditionally gowned women elegantly manipulating their fans in perfect rhythm - and more!

What has made Hong Kong with its 6.3 million people such a unique place? It is the people - hard working, adaptable and entrepreneurial, combined with British expertise and sound administration who have made Hong Kong "the pearl of the East". The colonial era commenced with acrimony and resentment as Hong Kong was wrested from China at gunpoint. It gradually blossomed into a harmonious relationship of the local Chinese, British and other nationals, united in establishing a dynamic and prosperous society. Then came the grand finale as Britain returned Hong Kong to the sovereignty of China. It was symbolised by the Royal Yacht Britannia gracefully sailing out of the harbour into the night.

As the celebrations died down, the people of Hong Kong began to realise that a new era had dawned with its hopes and aspirations, its challenges and opportunities. As a Special Administrative Region (SAR), it would now be governed by Hong Kong people for the next fifty years under China's "one country, two systems" policy. We wish you well, Hong Kong!

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desperately need help in caring for their animals even two hours a week to exercise the dogs and care for the cats Please call:

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Forthcoming Activities Continued from page

EVENTS IN ESCALDES/ENGORDANY

JULY 15th July

p.m. Gospel concert at St. Pere Martir Church 17th July

p.m. Jazz concert in the Plaça Co-Princeps 17th and 18th July

p.m. International Jazz Festival at La Carpa

23" July - Festa Major

20.00: bell-ringing followed by a "Passacaglia" with the recently elected "Pubilla" and "Pubillets".

24th, 25th and 26th July

High Mass in honour of St. Jaume and St. Anna.

Entertainment for children, Concerts, Sardanes, Balls with orchestral music, Castellers (Human castles), traditional dances, Tourist Day, Habanes, a foam feast, Sevillanes (Andalusian dances), Passecaglis with the Rio Samba Show, Taekwondo exhibition, and much more, finishing on 26th at 22.25 with beautiful fireworks and the evening ball.

 Sports and games for children from 6 to 14 ears old throughout the month.

AUGUST

Sports and games for children from 6 to 14 years old throughout the month.

If any individual members are involved in any events during the coming autumn, please let us know. The deadline for the September issue is 7th August - to Margaret Shaida, Editor on 860043 or fax: 866540. Thank you!

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THE STORY OF THE ASWAN DAM - PART TWO!

We all remember the talk that Dan Parsons gave us in November 1996 (reported in the March 1997 issue of Inter Comm. Well, he didn't realise that Story of the Aswan Dam was not yet finished. Last summer, a strange thing happened - Dan continues the story...

n 3rd July, the phone rang:
"Is that Dan Parsons?" "Yes."
"Were you on the Second Heightening of the Aswan Dam?" "Yes."

"Did you know Sir John Norton Griffiths?" "Yes," again.

"I am Anne Morgan, Sir John's grand daughter, and I am writing a book about him. With me, in London, is Peter Barton, my research specialist."

Sir John Norton-Griffiths was the main contractor for the Second Heightening of the Aswan Dam, started in September 1928 and completed in December 1933.

Ann and Peter asked many questions about the work, eventually stating that they wanted to come to Andorra to see me!

On 10th July, the phone rang again:

"We're arriving in Barcelona on Monday, the 14th, at noon, and expect to reach you in the late afternoon. We'd like to meet you on Tuesday morning, as we catch the evening plane back to the U.K."

Despite our surprise, we manage to book a hotel for them, and to arrange for "our" taxi to pick them up and take them back to Barcelona the next day. We meet them on their arrival.

Over dinner, Peter plies me with questions, while Anne scribbles in her notebook. After coffee, we agree on an early night, but they ask to start again at 9 a.m. the next morning. When I arrive at 8.30, they are already waiting, baggage at the ready. There seemed a lot of it.

We hadn't understood the seven aluminium boxes which they unpacked at the end of the lounge - but suddenly, here I am, facing a Cine Production Unit. They ask me questions, which lead me into a series of stories surrounding the Heightening of the Dam.

We start at 9.10, and with a seven-minute break for coffee, we finish at 12.15. They said later that they had never had such a production apparently I never repeated myself once.

How did they discover me? It seems that my brother, Dick, has some old friends in Bath whose daughter went off years ago to marry John (Anne's brother) in Kenya. Two years ago, they invited Dick to visit them to see the wild life there. During their many conversations, they talked about John's grandfather, Sir John - and Dick recalled that his brother had been working on the Aswan Dam at the same time.

Since their visit to Andorra, Anne and Peter have turned up some amazing old records of specific conditions and events which they have referred to me, and which I have been able to confirm, or in many cases, demonstrate to be completely untrue!

(continued from page 9)

but equally delicious dessert items, meticulously prepared and beautifully arranged on a large plate a fitting finale to an exceptional meal.

Over our coffee, Mme. Cailleteau told us more about the institution whose students and staff had delivered the goods, gastronomically speaking, with such flair and assurance.

The origins of this complex establishment comprising about 1,450 students and 145 staff - go
back to 1956. As demand, the new "college"
expanded steadily upwards through the secondary
levels; and also outwards, moving up the hill, then
finally down to its river-side location in 1972.

Since then, the purpose-built premises have been through much expansion in response to increasing size and diversification. As well as the more traditional baccalaureate options, with specialisation in the physical sciences or language/literature, the Lycée now offers professional training in electronics, business and office management - and hotel management.

Restaurant Review

DINING AT "EL RUSC"

I was delighted to receive this restaurant review from Georgina Tennyson, our of our members, who wrote to tell us how much she had enjoyed her meal at "El Rusc".

ur daughter/sister, Davina, had been living on a small island in the Indian Ocean for six months, when she visited us here. She was eager to try something other than her diet of fish and rice, so we took her to "El Rusc", a traditional Basque restaurant, having heard many good things about it.

The decor was bright with Persil white linen table cloths and gorgeous burnished wooden beams. We were shown to our table by the pristinely dressed maitre d'. The restaurant offers silver service and prompt attention.

While we were scanning our menus, we were brought some aperitifs: hot spicy Spanish sausages, fresh tuna in herbs on little sesame Melba toast, and a variety of hot home-made bread. All so delicious, that we simply chose to share two starters of grilled seasonal vegetables - a nicely charcoal-grilled selection, including asparagus spears, aubergines and tender artichokes.

Had we not been so full of aperitifs, we could have sampled a scrumptious selection of entrées such as warm lobster salad, hot seafood soup and home-made foie gras paté.

We chose for our second course sea bass on a bed of langoustines, hake surrounded by clams, and two steaks, one with a red wine sauce and the other with a green peppercorn sauce. The wine was a white Muscadet, which was not wildly exciting but pleasant. Having had our fill of Vitamin 'C', we were impatient to have a go at our proteins. The fish came first. The cook had had an artistic eye for the thick slices of sea bass were riding rodeo style on the langoustines, with a saddle of creamy seafood sauce.

Davina's hake was immersed in an atoll

of clams. Rather ironic since she had been diving with fish in the Maldivian atolls. She enjoyed the hake because the flesh was firm. Her father enjoyed his sea bass, for the sauce had not at all drowned the fish's tangy flavour. The steaks were gigantic, nicely grilled and juicy in the middle. The juices were beautifully blended with the sauces, so that after each bite a multitude of flavours mingled in your mouth. My only complaint was that even though we had asked for each steak to be medium, one seemed nearly well done while the other was on the verge of being rare.

The sin of every meal is the puddings, and this meal was no exception. The Rusc rightfully prides itself on its home-made puddings. The menu featured sorbets and ice creams, traditional profiteroles, chocolate mousse and exotic creations such as almond galettes with meringue ice cream. Our choice was millefeuille puff pastry with woodland fruits and vanilla ice cream, crème Catalan, pine nut and orange craqueline with raspberry ice cream and coulis, and a selection of sorbets. The ice creams were particularly delicious for they were tangy and fruity. The puff pastry was beautifully airy and golden, each strand layered upon itself and filled with luscious ice cream and fresh red fruit. The crème Catalan was good, nearly excellent which is how I'd sum up the El Rusc to be.

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A DAY TO REMEMBER

At the end of August last year, Margaret Shaida visited the Niaux caves near Ussat-les-Bains in France. Here she muses on the wonders of the world and the vulnerability of man.

those who don't. I recently discovered that I don't! It was on 31st August, my husband's birthday. It also happened to be the day that Diana, Princess of Wales died in a horrific accident in Paris.

We had planned to visit the caves near Tarascon - something my husband had long wanted to do. It was a hot sunny day, and the thought of visiting a cool, dark grotto was quite appealing. The cave we chose was Niaux above Ussat les Bains - which we understood contained some fine pre-historic drawings.

We joined a small group of nine, led by a guide. We were given torches (one for each two or three people), and thus armed, we set off for the centre of the earth.

We walked down a straight tunnel which

had clearly been relatively newly-hewn, then suddenly, it opened up into a large cave. We continued to walk downwards through this cave, sometimes over rough and rocky terrain, in places smooth and wet, in others sandy and dry - both equally slippery. It was totally dark, and we pointed our torches downward to see where to walk As a result, we didn't see the roof of the cave sweep down, and we biffed our heads.

A Bottomless Chasm

There were stalactites dripping from the ceiling, and stalagmites growing up from the floor over which we tripped and slipped.

We had to squeeze between rocks at one point, coming through to be greeted by a black bottomless chasm down on our right from which we were protected by only a rope loosely hung between



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For further information contact: John Gwilliam Barclays Bank P.L.C. 2 rue Alphonse Karr 06000 Nice Direct tel. 00 33 4 93 87 96 89 Fax no. 00 33 4 93 88 58 95 couple of wobbly posts.

I began to feel slightly panicky, as we continued onward and downward, the darkness total, the torches inadequate. And then, suddenly, our guide (a lithe, young slip of a girl) led us to a steep, narrow 'gorge', a sort of hole in what appeared to be a pile of rocks, through which she descended, closely followed by others in our group.

The Worm Turns!

As I saw them disappear down the hole, one by one, I found I could go no further. I hung back, my fear of the hole transcending my fear of appearing to be a coward. We called out to the guide that we weren't going any further.

"Why not?" she asked, mystified.

"I'm scared," I said, adding, "It's alright, don't worry, we'll go back."

"No!" she cried, "Don't! You'll get lost."

Our young guide sternly instructed us to stay exactly where we were and to wait for the rest of the group. She needn't have worried. Now that we knew we could get lost, there was no way we were going anywhere without her. She went on to say that she would take the rest of the group on (for a further twenty minutes), see the paintings and then come back - altogether some forty-five minutes.

We resigned ourselves to a long wait. We found somewhere to sit - on cold, chill, wet rocks, turning off our torches to save the batteries, just in case. To start with, we chattered and told each other stories and jokes, but slowly we petered out. In the end, there seemed nothing much to say.

We sat in total darkness and silence (except for the sound of drip-dripping). Thoughts of earthquakes crossed my mind. I thought that if Princess Diana, a shining star of fame and fortune, could die in a tunnel in the north of France, then what chance did we poor mortals have here in a cave in the south of France?

I consoled myself with the fact that the caves had been there for thousands and thousands of years. It seemed unlikely that they would collapse on us now - but stranger things have happened, haven't they?

After a long thirty-five minutes, we heard voices - but coming from the opposite direction, from where we had just come.

A young man, leading another small group of people armed with torches, looked astonished when he saw us sitting there.

"Are you lost?" he asked, curiously.
"No," we said, "Just frightened."

He shrugged, smiled quizzically, and passed on. He and his group also disappeared down the hole in the rocks. Within seconds, the comforting light of their torches and the sound of their voices had faded. It was as though they too had been completely swallowed up.

A Very Deep Darkness

It seemed darker and quieter than ever after they'd gone. But we'd been reassured by their passing. It seemed as though we were sitting at the side of a well-worn pathway, and that if our group got lost, there was a good chance that another group would eventually emerge from the hole in the rocks.

Fifteen long minutes later, we saw lights flickering from the hole. Our guide re-appeared followed by our group - who gave no hint of having enjoyed themselves. There was no greeting, no smiles, no chatter. It was as though the dripping, dark chill of the cave had quenched all cheerfulness. We joined them. They walked much faster going back up, grimly determined to make good time.



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Perhaps, like us, they were longing to see the daylight again.

Warm, Green Countryside

At last, we emerged - into the sunlit French countryside. It was warm and green and bright, and suddenly everyone was smiling again. We laughed, and watched with sympathetic wonder as another small group gathered to go down into the caves.

Later, we drove on to the Museum of Prehistoric Art (just outside Tarascon). It is an interesting, modern building set in lovely grounds. One of the rooms in the museum is arranged to simulate a cave - it is dark but subtly lit, and at the end of a curved, carpeted corridor, you come into a large dark hall with cave paintings on one high wall.

These are the paintings we had gone into

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Maite Castro Director - Holiday Apartments the cave to see. We gazed at them, pondering on the mystery of the ancient world and at the reasons why, so many years ago, these primitive humans had bothered to go so far into a dark cave just to draw a few mammoth-like animals - when they could see the real thing in the daylight.

What could have possessed them to go so deep into the mountains? Did they take torches with them? Did they feel safe? Did they get lost? Did they get satisfaction from creating these drawings? Did they smile as they did them? And did they smile as they emerged from the caves?

I don't expect answers to these questions. You could as well ask why on earth I went down a cave to see the drawings - when I could have seen them in a museum - and when I hate pot-holing! There are some questions in life that may never be answered.

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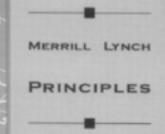
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