



Siberia 2000

Hobbits Caving
Club

*Expedition Report
October 2000
By John Sherry and Tom Toomey*

Acknowledgements

The trip to Siberia would not have been possible without the help of the following, for which we are very grateful:

School of Cosmonautics - Zheleznogorsk

Dmitri Perliev

Pilgrim Caving Club

University of Limerick Caving club

Adrian Thomas

Speleological Union of Ireland

Cover Photograph: Tom Toomey in Stolby National Park, Krasnoyarsk

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Mud "Formations" in Oreshnaya.

Introduction & Preliminary Organisation

Two weeks holidays where?? Mention Siberia to most people and images of Russia during the cold war spring to mind. Drab Russian cities belching out smoke, queues for a loaf of bread, but mostly they think of the cold. Now mention to those same people that you are voluntarily taking time off work, using up precious holidays, to go to Siberia. When others are heading to their well earned 2 weeks on the beach in the Costa Del Sunshine, your drooling over the plan to spend 10 days underground exploring, pushing, surveying and photographing a 51km cave system in Siberia in October. The men in the white coats are only 2 steps behind, but you'll probably lose them going through the next squeeze.

So how do an otherwise sane group of cavers become involved in a plan to explore the speleo delights of Siberia? Well the initial idea came from the Cavers Digest, delivered on a regular basis via email from Jim Olsen. One Adrian Thomas (who shall stand accused for starting this madness) noted a request for international participants in an expedition in July and August by the Pilgrim Caving Club of Krasnoyarsk. So contact was made and an enthusiastic response was received from Dmitri Perliev the Pilgrim club member dealing with inquiries. The expedition was in 2 parts; to start with 2 weeks in July followed by a further 2 weeks in August. The aims of the expedition were to explore, survey and photograph the caves of the Khabzas area, a caving region north of Minusinsk for the purposes of a book being written about the area by Pilgrim. Joining the expedition in July would have been much too short a notice for all of us and so it was decided to aim for the August section of the expedition.

International caving contacts provided by Dmitri gave excellent reports on the Siberian experience. Maarten Poot and Alex Harris had participated in the previous year's expedition and provided some good advice along with a cautionary tale or two.

"The only thing that counts in Russia is cash, US dollars. And you'll have to take plenty of it for emergencies (for instance: on the way back the plane from Krasnoyarsk to Moscow didn't go because there was no kerosene at the airport.)." Maarten Poot

"..if you want to find virgin caves, then this is the place. The caves are very cold however, the average temp being about 5 degrees C. The warmest were about 8 and the coldest, about 0 C." Alex Harris

"The Russians cook good food from a nutrition point of view, but the taste may be a bit different from what you're used to. I thought it was OK, but Alex Harris lost quite a bit of weight on the trip." Maarten Poot

"Their tents look like they were used in WWII, and they smell like they were packed wet after the war was over. I doubt that they're waterproof, and they're pretty heavy too. They don't have any tent poles or pegs, so you'll have to make these from branches." Maarten Poot

Having expressed interest in the expedition the next step was to sort out Visa's, not as easy a task as you might expect. We required Business Visas, as this was definitely not your usual tourist trip. To get a business visa you require an official invitation from a Russian government organisation to be sent to the Russian Embassy in Dublin, only then can you apply for the Visa. Dmitri arranged for the School of Cosmonautics to issue the invitation. This school is a regional centre for bright kids -kind of a very good high school for very smart youths ages 14-17. In return all the visiting cavers would give a quick talk to the school on their education and job.

As the expedition approached the well-laid plans started going awry. John Sherry's requests to be released from the bondage of a regular job for two weeks in August were regrettably declined. Then trips to the Russian Embassy by Adrian and then his wife Sue revealed that the first invitation had come from the local desk of the ministry of the interior (later corrected by Dmitri and the School of Cosmonautics) and was not correct procedure for a business visa. Then an attempt to collect the visas for Tom and Adrian was turned down because "apparently" Adrian's photos were a bit dodge and Tom's name was not on the invitation.

The disappointment was however short lived as Dmitri suggested that we might join a club expedition to Oreshnaya cave (officially 51km long) close to Krasnoyarsk. Adrian was counted out of this unfortunately, as the extensive holidays of a university lecturer didn't cover the month of October. Careful negotiation of dates and the promise to promote the area to cavers at the symposium meant the date for the expedition were set for the 8th to the 21st of October. A new invitation was issued by the School of Cosmonautics located in Zheleznogorsk and copies of the visas were forwarded to Dmitri as they are very important as part of the application packet to be allowed to enter Zheleznogorsk.

"Zheleznogorsk is a limited access city founded in 1950. Stalin was the one to start it and it was built to accommodate the workers of GHK - a plant producing weapon plutonium. They no longer do that there, and out of 3 reactors at the plant, there is only one still working to produce heat and electricity for the city. The city is also well known for NPO PM - this plant produces unpiloted space satellites. Now that times have changed they also produce ground antennas for satellite TV reception and satellites for civilian purposes. But it used to be all-military before. So you are getting a chance to visit a so-called "closed" military industry city, that no foreigners were allowed to visit until very recently. It is not even on the maps, because it used to be so secret." Dmitri Perliev

- No need for carbide on this trip, a few lumps of decaying plutonium should do.

Russian Efficiency

As an initial introduction to the legendary Russian efficiency the following suggested itinerary was received from Dmitri.

SCHEDULE FOR OCTOBER 9-21, 2000

OCTOBER 9, 2000

08:20 YOU ARRIVE BY KRASAIR FLIGHT 147 TO KRASNOYARSK
WE MEET YOU AT THE AIRPORT (4 OF THE TEAM ARE WITH US)
WE GO TO ZHELEZNOGORSK
11:00 WE ARRIVE TO ZHELEZNOGORSK
WE SETTLE AT THE STUDENT HOSTEL OF THE COSMONAUTS SCHOOL
13:00 WE HAVE LUNCH
14:00 WE GO FOR A TOUR OF ZHELEZNOGORSK
17:00 WE COME BACK AND MEET THE DIRECTOR OF COSMONAUTS SCHOOL
18:00 WE HAVE DINNER
19:00 WE MEET WITH THE STUDENTS OF COSMONAUTS SCHOOL
YOU TELL THEM ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR EDUCATION, YOUR EMPLOYMENT, AND ABOUT
THE PROCESS OF GETTING HIRED (HOW YOU DID IT). IF THERE IS SOMETHING YOU CAN'
T DISCUSS - IT'S OK TO SAY SO.
21:00 TIME TO GO TO BED

OCTOBER 10, 2000

08:00 WAKE UP.
08:30 BREAKFAST.
09:00 WE START DRIVING TO "ORESHNAYA" (4 HRS OR SO).
13:00 WE ARRIVE TO "ORESHNAYA" AREA AND HAVE SOMETHING TO EAT.
THEN WE START WALKING TOWARDS THE CAVE ITSELF (3 KM). THE SCHEDULE OF OUR
UNDERGROUND LIFE IS NOT FINISHED YET.

WE SPEND OCTOBER 10, 2000 - OCTOBER 20, 2000 UNDERGROUND WITH VISITS
TO THE SURFACE AS NECESSARY

OCTOBER 20, 2000

08:00 WE GET OUT OF THE CAVE AND WALK BACK TO THE BUS STATION (3 KM).
10:00 HAVE SOMETHING TO EAT THERE.
11:00 OUR BUS COMES AND PICKS US UP.
15:00 WE ARRIVE TO ZHELEZNOGORSK.
UNPACK, TAKE SHOWERS AND SO ON.
18:00 DINNER.
19:00 PRESS CONFERENCE FOR STUDENTS OF THE COSMONAUTS SCHOOL ABOUT OUR TRIP.
21:00 THE DAY IS OVER

OCTOBER 21, 2000

05:30 WE WAKE UP AND IMMEDIATELY GO TO THE AIRPORT.
08:00 WE ARRIVE TO THE AIRPORT AND YOU CHECK IN.
10:00 YOU DEPART FOR MOSCOW BY FLIGHT 148 (KRASAIR).

Booking a flight with Kras Air proved to be rather difficult. Aeroflot were the only agency that would quote a price for it, and by strange coincidence had a flight at the exact same time to Krasnoyarsk for \$100 cheaper. As it turned out it was the same flight and we could have got it at half the Aeroflot price if we had bought it in Russia. For future reference a word of caution on the internal flight: in the week before departure the flight time for our return trip had changed twice.

Needless to say things did not go according to plan, but this does serve to show the attempt at over planning on the part some. This however was not always the case and all the people we caved with were very relaxed and any semblance of a plan was soon forgotten about (to the point that we missed the bus back from Oreshnaya because we got up too late).

Cavers Log

Compiled by Tom Toomey

October 7th

We departed Shannon Airport on an unusually bright sunny October morning for Moscow via London. Neither of us had ever been in Russia before so it was a whole new culture to see. On arrival at Shermetova-2 we got our first taste of the culture and the Taxi Mafia. There was as many taxi drivers there then I had hot dinners, each quoting between \$70 to \$80 fare to Moscow city centre. With a bit of haggling we agreed on a fare of \$50. This seemed reasonable at the time as we had no where to stay and really hadn't got a clue where we were going. At the hotel the receptionist at the hotel quoted us \$50 for the room. When we tried to pay in dollars they wanted it in local currency. A small problem as we had just arrived in the country and did not have any rubles. So the hotel organised an agency to take the payment. (It is illegal to use any foreign currencies in Russia). The hotel room was for 24 hours, which was good in the sense that we did not have to check out early, and try to look after our luggage all day (our flight to Siberia departed at 11.30pm). So with no local currency to be got until the following day it meant an early night and no beer.

October 8th

Up bright an early, collected our passports, changed some money (about 30 rubles to the punt), and set out from the hotel to see where exactly we were in Moscow. Low and behold we were just a stones throw from the Kremlin walls (if you were in the mood for throwing stones with a few hundred policemen wandering around with nothing better to do then hassle people for money). Went for a walk around the Kremlin, outside the walls, through Red Square. When Moscow was being built the engineers must have had the foresight to foresee the number of cars (I meant the number of Ladas) that were going to be using the city streets. The motorway/road/street from the airport at it narrowest was 3 lanes and in other parts it was 5 lanes each way, with no divide. It a pity that Russian drivers have no lane discipline, they will pass you on any side, so every few minutes you hear the screech of rubber, but surprisingly no bangs.

Later that evening we arranged for a taxi to pick us up at the hotel and take us to the airport. The cost was 500 ruble's (about \$18) a big difference from the day before. Arrived at the airport to check in for our flight to Krasnoyarsk wondering if all the horror stories we'd been fed about Russian domestic airlines would prove true. The aircraft that we were travelling on was an Ilyushin-86. Just to instil a bit of confidence they were repairing one of the engines on the plane as we were boarding. At this stage it was all or nothing. We tied our selves in to the very shaky seats and tried not to think about it. 5 hours on board a Russian built aircraft on an internal flight to Siberia was not as bad as I thought it might be, even if I did not sleep.

October 9th

On arrival at Krasnoyarsk airport it was our first feeling of the Siberian weather it was a warm -3(. The arrivals lounge of Krasnoyarsk airport is the best air-conditioned places in the world. You just walk off the plane and out of the airfield. After about 10 minutes they open the door in to the baggage reclaim hall. It is almost as cold in there as it is outside. We were met at the airport by our contact Dmitri Perliev. At this stage we were reliably informed that the snow does not come until mid-November, which give the light sprinkling on the ground we did not believe. We headed off to the Cosmonauts School in Zheleznogorsk (alternatively named Krasnoyarsk 26) approximately 2-hours drive from airport. This is or was a closed city that requires a permit to get into. The city was built in the 1950 mainly by the army and prisoners after Stalin selected 7 sites around Russia for the development of nuclear power. The 3 reactors were all constructed underground. Currently only one is operational and is due for decommissioning in 2002. However with a lack of alternative employment in the city this may be delayed. The other main industry in this city is a factory that designed, built and tested all satellites that were put into space by the Russians.

At the school we met the director Dr. Nikolai Noskov and the English teacher, Mrs. Likhtina. Straight away it was off to the English class to talk to the school kids. After lunch it was into the hall to talk to the whole school, they wanted to know how our education system works and what life was like for young people in Ireland. Following this experience I would not like to be a famous person, as all the school kid were looking for our autographs after the meeting. For all of them this was the first time meeting an Irish person. In an attempt to keep with the detailed schedule it was then it was off for on tour of Zheleznogorsk. At this stage I badly needed to catch up on some sleep (the flight had been overnight and the lack a sleep was taking its toll). Later that evening we met up with the entire staff of the school in the director's office (the only time I was ever invited to the principle office was when I was in trouble).

October 10th

Called at 8.00 am for breakfast then pack the caving gear and head off a do what we really came for. Just as we were get into the bus we were interviewed by the local television channel. So we're now famous in Zheleznogorsk. First it was back to Krasnoyarsk to pick up our two caving guides and a translator. A 3-hour bus trip of which half of the journey was on un-tarred roads made us feel at home. Our journey ended at a small bridge that our driver failed to get over. He then managed to burn more rubber than Michael Schumacher does in a whole race just trying to get the bus out of an attempted bypass of the bridge.



End of the Road, Oreshnaya Village

So it was on with the rucksacks and on our merry way, carrying 15kg of carbide and food to last 10 days (even though at this stage the plan had changed and we were only going underground for 5 days instead of the planned 10). After an hour walk we came to what looked like a campsite. Off around the forest to collect some firewood. About an hour later we were eating the first hot meal that I got in Siberia. Before this I had resigned myself to cold food for the next 2 weeks. Then it was a 600-metre climb to the cave. The climb was on about 60 deg gradient. (I knew I should have done more training before). At last I could see a dark cavity in the side of the hill. (Oh I meant at the top of the hill) it was Oreshnaya the cave. At this stage it was time to change into caving gear, the sky was starry and the temperature was about 0°C, time to say good-bye to the sky, as we would not see it for a few days. Within a few metres from the entrance it was plain that this was not like any Clare cave. The rock was conglomerate limestone. After about 2-hours caving with our entire food and fuel supply we arrived at our campsite. This was the 2 longest hours of my life. I was carrying 6 litres of petrol for the stove, but my light was a naked flame. I kept thinking to myself that they would have a new passage to survey on the entrance section and couple of charred bones. At about 2am we set up camp and went to sleep.

October 11th

I woke to darkness not realising where I was I just turned over and went to sleep again. A short time later I was woken up for breakfast, or was it lunch. After putting on another thermal layer and a furry layer and I could still feel the cold, the cave temperature was around 4°C. After a hot meal of something, it was time to re-light the stove for tea. At this stage I thought once again there would be a new cavern to be put on the surveys. I've had experiences with Coleman's petrol burners before, but this was a Russian design. Not a toy for playing with if you valued the hair on your head. After several attempts we got the water boiling for the tea. At this stage we were introduced to the skills and secrets to drinking Russian water (vodka). Suitably warmed up, after a bottle of water, it was time to refill the carbide generator and off to explore the system. After a small few crawls and a little climbing we were at one of their other campsites in the cave. The only sign of pretties in the cave was a lot of man-made formations. Come to think about it these were the only type of formations that I had seen in the system so far. After a 6 hour caving trip it was back to our humble abode for more food and more sleep. Living in complete darkness does affect your body clock.

October 12th

Yet another late start, but I was not feeling the may west. (Maybe the lack of sunlight, no it was the lack of using the facilities). I had a small brunch and did not feel well; I opted to go back to bed. At least in bed I could stay warm and if there was any movement I was not far from the toilet area. John headed off with the others to the lowest section of the cave. On their return, Jane (translator) was feeling very ill. For someone that had never being caving before it was a baptism of fire having to stay under ground for a couple of days.

Despite being approximately 40km long and deepest point in the cave is about 250m below the entrance. No pitches or even ladders were required in the cave. Apart from the stream at camp the only other water encountered was a small stream in the lower section. Currently there is only one way into this section,

which was dug open in 1994. On this trip we spent several hours attempting to find an alternative route out of the lower section only to get temporarily misplaced, very cold and very tired. In general the cave is complex maze of passages formed in conglomerate Limestone at an angle of about 35 deg. The region around Oreshnaya does contain several caves, in fact during a summer a speleo camp is held here for school children, but does not however have any surface karst features that would indicate a 40km cave system. In Russian Oreshnaya translates to Pine Nut.

October 13th

Yet again, it was the same as the day before; some thing has to go.



Tom's Abode for 2 ½ days, Underground Camp

With Tom still laid low and Jane recovering from the efforts of the day before, it was a fairly lazy day until about 9.00pm. By this stage Yura, Natalia and John managed to drink enough of tea and eat enough stale bread to feed a small army and so to work it off decided to try and find the second entrance to the cave. This involved finding a passage called the "Chimney Sweep". The name was very appropriate as it involved at various stages, climbing very narrow tubes, crawling up 35 deg slopes, traversing high in narrow rifts and of course the odd tight bit. Eventually emerged to a full moon and a very cold night on the opposite side of the hill to that which we had entered several days previous. A quick jog across the hill by the light of the moon and it was a welcome return to the relative warmth of the cave.

October 14th

This was half a rest day as the caving trip the day before went in to the early hour of today. It was the plan to depart the cave around 3am the following day so sleep was required. But at this stage I was ready for caving. Maybe it was the thought of seeing the sky again that was helping my body along.

October 15th

In true caving fashion nobody got up in time. We had been due to rise at 2.30am to give ourselves enough of time to get to the bus in Oreshnaya village. However no movement was made from the sleeping bags until 3.30am. Broke camp and cleaned up the area that we had been living for the last few days. Started to head out and got to the surface at about 5.00am. It was still dark out but the temperature seemed to be warmer than in the cave. I thought so anyway as it was the first time in 5 days I could feel my toes again. Down the hill and off to catch the 7 o'clock bus. At the campsite we were able to dispose of our rubbish and break the ice in the river to get a drink of water. Headed to the bus stop only to be about 10 minutes late. Fortunately staying in the village for the weekend was a group of caving students from Zheleznogorsk and we managed to hitch a ride on their bus back to Krasnoyarsk. On our way down from the cave there was a group of the students heading up to it. The only students that I know of that will get up early to go caving.

At 2 o'clock we bailed our muddy gear on to the bus, but we had to walk a bit because the bus driver would not go over the timber bridge with everyone in the bus. Having seen the bridge I did not want to even walk over it. The next 3 hours were filled with many pit stops, I think it was the roads that were shaking all the liquids out of our systems. Arrived in the outskirts of Krasnoyarsk and now it was our first taste of public transport in Siberia. Got on one of the local buses that headed in the direction of Dmitri's place (wherever that was).

Now was the time for my first wash in 5 days, having washed ourselves our host had prepared some hot soup for us. While having dinner four of us polished off a bottle and a half of that Russian water. I think I could develop a taste for this Russian water. While having the soup Dmitri asked us did we want some meat with our soup, before I knew it there was this animal knee joint in my soup? There was not one ounce of meat on it, but boy was there some fat on it. At this stage I was slowly thinking of becoming a vegetarian for the rest of my time in Russia.

October 16th

It was a late start after that Russian water but no hangover. Today was the day to be real tourist in Krasnoyarsk. Krasnoyarsk is not a tourist city and the only 2 things of note are a bridge and a church as seen on the 10 ruble note. After visiting we promptly went to the pub. The pub was a very up market yuppie place that had a cinema, pool tables and a karaoke bar in it. At least I did not get too drunk and want to sing. The place would have emptied if I started to sing.

October 17th

At a bit of loose end today, as our guide did not have anything planned. We were to be going to his hometown, Minusinsk. But that fell through. In addition we had been due to go to Torgashinskaya but that also wasn't looking too positive. Eventually Dima's organisational skills paid off and he arranged for another local caver to meet us the next day and to head for Torgashinskaya.

October 18th

Up at 6:30 and left the flat at 7:00 with our caving gear. We were going to Torgashinskaya cave, there most technical one in the region (about 180m deep with a wicked traverse on glass walls in the middle section). I was not running at full speed as I had developed a taste for this Russian water. I was also not told that the cave was a 6km walk from the bus stop. After a 2-hour hike up a snow-covered hill we final arrived at that cave entrance. Having not done much caving in snowy conditions I was not aware of a few problems that cropped up. I empty my caving gear out of the bag so that I could pack my clothes in without getting snow on them. This was a very good plan, but in the few minutes that my caving gear was out it froze. I eventually got into my frozen gear and went to put carbide into the generator. First of all my hands stuck to it, so armed with a pair of gloves I still could not open it. Two of us could not open it. (It was back to electric) eventually it was time to rig the cave and do some vertical caving. Yes we were putting our lives on Russian ropes and rigging. Just tie the rope around a tree with a bowline and off down the 40m pitch. The rest of the rigging was done very fast and efficient. It was also safely done. It was an eye opener to see the amount of bolts and rope rub points on the rock. There were grooves about 10mm deep in the rock. On return to the surface there was about 2 inch's of snow covering our gear. This is where you change your clothes very fast so that you can stay warm.

October 19th

Today was a trip to the ice cave. Again it was another 7km walk in deep snow. The entrance to this cave has a 10m waterfall that is iced over all year round. On arrival to the entrance we lit a campfire, after spending an hour collecting firewood. Again we ran into problem with gear freezing over. This time it was the camera box; at least we had the campfire to thaw it out. After all the food it was time to go caving. The Russian girls did a classic abseil down the iced over waterfall. I played it safe a used an Italian hitch. On the way down I was trying to figure out how the hell I was going to get out of this spot. The ice at the entrance is permanent as the entrance section to this cave remained at 2°C and the rest of the cave was 4°C. This was a short cave but the shape of the cave was very unusual with many short passages of square cross-section .



Natalia on the Entrance slope to Ice Cave

On return to the entrance of the cave I wished I had brought a pair of crampons to climb the iced waterfall, but on closer inspection there was footsteps cut out on the ice so that it was climbable. Again it was another trek on the snow back to Krasnoyarsk.

October 20th



Krasnoyarsk, Siberia.

It was our last day in Siberia. So it was on to the tourist thing again and we went to Stolby National Park. Dmitri was a bit worried about us at this stage two and half days of snow and we still wanted to go for a walk in the National Park. Stolby National Park is where all the rock climbers from Krasnoyarsk go. The granite columns are ideal for climbing with some pitches in excess of 300m. It was a nice park only for all the graffiti on the rock; conservation is not a high priority among the outdoor enthusiasts in Siberia. This was also the only place that I've seen that a wild bird will take food from your hand. They are used to been feed by visitors to the park in winter. After the days walk it was back to Dmitri's flat for a final party before a few hours of sleep and then off to the airport to catch a flight back to Moscow.

Conclusion

While we had been due to go out to Siberia in August and because of unforeseeable circumstances this fell through, this trip in October gave us good taste of caving Siberian style. All the cavers we met know of some area with excellent potential. Perhaps in the future a return visit can be made in the summer months to visit the Khabzas area. The Pilgrim Caving club sees the summer expedition to this area as an ongoing project and are doing all they can to promote it and travel to the area in general. Without international aid they can only achieve so much towards the writing of the book on the area. An interest in the long-term co-operation between the SUI and Pilgrim Cave Club has been expressed by both parties. This co-operation can only be of benefit to the Irish caving community and any interest in joining an expedition next year can be directed towards Adrian, Tom or John.

Financial Report

So in brass tax terms how much did it all cost?

Visa cost x 2	£180 (1)
Airfare return x 2	£1250 (2)
Expedition cost x 2	£780 (3)
3 nights in Moscow	£135
Taxis in Moscow	<u>£100 (4)</u>
Total	<u>£2445</u>

Notes on the financial report:

- 1) This is the cost of processing Business Visas on the same day. Considerable savings can be made here by allowing sufficient time to have the completed Visa posted out.
- 2) Flying with Aeroflot to Moscow is by far the cheapest option. If possible direct flights to and from Shannon will mean a saving of between \$60 and \$100. In addition buying the domestic leg of the flight in Russia will also mean considerable savings, particularly if you have native Russian speaker with you.
- 3) This is the cost of the major portion of the trip in Siberia. Dmitri estimated that this would be considerably reduced during the summer expedition as economies of scale and borrowing transport from club members is easier.
- 4) The taxi situation in Moscow for the unprepared is a bit of a baptism of fire. However given we paid from \$45 for the 1st taxi ride and \$13 for the last one (all going on the same journey to and from the airport) this cost would be considerably reduced by being with someone who knows the language or at the very least knows what to expect to pay.

Team Profile

Dmitri Perliev - Local Contact

Dmitri did unfortunately not get to go caving during the 2 weeks we were in Siberia. However his organisation skills did ensure that although the plan was often altered plenty was achieved during the trip and for this we are very grateful.

Natalia Torgashina

A crazy woman, she runs around a cave as if there was no obstruction. She had to get us to turn off our lights on a few occasions to see with way on.

Yura

Another crazy caver from Minusinsk. Yura wanted an Irish name and so the closest we could get to a translation was Sean Nail. A name that did suit him very well.

Jane Korvakina

The translator for the trip to Oreshnaya. It was her first time caving and really had a baptism of fire however did do an excellent job in very difficult circumstances.

John Sherry

John's caving experiences have been in Australia, New Zealand, Spain, Wales, and just a little here in Ireland both North and South. John will fit through the eye of a needle, and the bigger the pitch the better. John has also done most of the organisation on this trip (from the Irish side).

Tom Toomey

Tom's caving experience is not as much travelled as John's. That is he has "only caved in France, Spain, Wales and in Ireland both North and South. Tom is not the fittest and also has a few lbs. on John. However that doesn't seem to slow him down in getting to the bar.

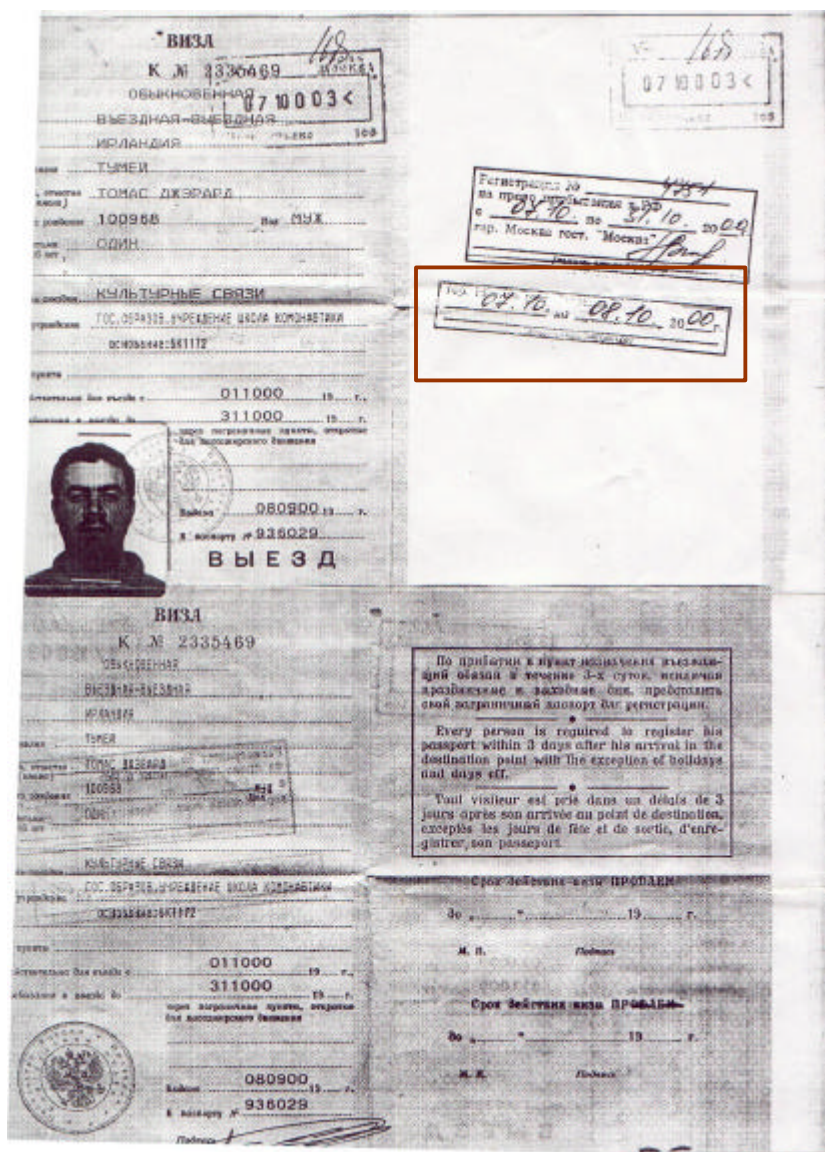


John, Natalia, Yura and Jane in Underground Camp, Oreshnaya

The Russian Visa

One of 3 types of visa are required entering Russia. A Tourist visa; normally obtained when entering as part of an organised tour group, an Ordinary visa; requires knowing someone in Russia and takes quite a long time to arrange so planning well in advance is needed, and finally a Business visa; this requires an invite from an official Russian organisation. The Business visa is the quickest to obtain once the Russian organisation issuing the invite has all your details.

Upon entering the country you then have 3 days in which to register your visa (more bureaucracy). Fortunately if you stay in a hotel on your arrival they will “register” the visa for you. All this entails is a stamp to say you stayed at the hotel.



Russian Business Visa with Registration Stamp