With what does the writer compare the Gouffre Berger?

Cave exploration, or pot-holing, as it has come to be known, is a relatively new sport.

Perhaps it is the desire for solitude or the chance of making an unexpected discovery that lures people down to the depths of the earth.

It is impossible to give a satisfactory explanation for a pot-holer's motives.

For him, caves have the same peculiar fascination which high mountains have for the climber.

They arouse instincts which can only be dimly understood.

Exploring really deep caves is not a task for the Sunday afternoon rambler.

Such undertakings require the precise planning and foresight of military operations.

It can take as long as eight days to rig up rope ladders and to establish supply bases before a descent can be made into a very deep cave.

Precautions of this sort are necessary, for it is impossible to foretell the exact nature of the difficulties which will confront the pot-holer.

The deepest known cave in the world is the Gouffre Berger near Grenoble.

It extends to a depth of 3,723 feet.

This immense chasm has been formed by an underground stream which has tunnelled a course through a flaw in the rocks.

The entrance to the cave is on a plateau in the Dauphiné Alps.

As it is only six feet across, it is barely noticeable.

The cave might never have been discovered had not the entrance been spotted by the distinguished French pot-holer, Berger.

Since its discovery, it has become a sort of pot-holers' Everest.

Though a number of descents have been made, much of it still remains to be explored.

A team of pot-holers recently went down the Gouffre Berger.

After entering the narrow gap on the plateau, they climbed down the steep sides of the cave until they came to a narrow corridor.

They had to edge their way along this, sometimes wading across shallow streams or swimming across deep pools.

Suddenly, they came to a waterfall which dropped into an underground lake at the bottom of the cave.

They plunged into the lake, and after loading their gear on an inflatable rubber dinghy, let the current carry them to the other side.

To protect themselves from the icy water, they had to wear special rubber suits.

At the far end of the lake, they came to huge piles of rubble which had been washed up by the water.

In this part of the cave, they could hear an insistent booming sound, which they found was caused by a small waterspout shooting down into a pool from the roof of the cave.

Squeezing through a cleft in the rocks, the pot-holers arrived at an enormous cavern, the size of a huge concert hall.

After switching on powerful arc lights, they saw great stalagmites — some of them over forty feet high — rising up like tree trunks to meet the stalactites suspended from the roof.

Round about, piles of limestone glistened in all the colours of the rainbow.

In the eerie silence of the cavern, the only sound that could be heard was made by water which dripped continuously from the high dome above them.

On entering a narrow gap on the plateau, they climbed down and reached a narrow corridor.

They edged their way along and came to a waterfall which dropped to an underground lake.

They plunged into the lake in special rubber suits and let the current take them to the other side.

On squeezing through a cleft in the rocks, they discovered an enormous cavern where they saw massive stalagmites and stalactites.

All they could hear was water dripping from above.

One day last summer, Rob, a friend of mine, decided to go out for a day on his own.

He took a day off work and went to the beach.

He walked round the headland a mile from the town and found a deserted beach.

He couldn't believe it: there was no one else there.

He spent a marvellous, relaxing day there swimming, sunbathing and reading, and for the whole day he was the only one on the beach.

Then, late in the afternoon, he decided to pack up and go home.

He took his time drying himself, changing and packing his things into the shoulder bag he had brought with him, and then began to walk towards the headland.

As he was walking along the beach, he suddenly realized that the tide was coming in: it was coming in very fast, and he began to get a little worried.

He walked faster, but soon the tide had reached the headland and there was no way that he could walk around.

He looked round and saw a cave in the cliff.

As he hoped to climb up inside it, he went in.

Unfortunately, he just couldn't see a way out, so he started back.

It was too late: the tide was coming into the cave and as he looked down from the point he had reached, the sea was already covering the floor of the cave and beginning to rise up the chimney in the cave.

He turned round and started climbing again-and eventually found a smaller chimney that he managed to climb up to reach the top of the cliff.

He had never been so frightened in his life.

He promised himself that he would never do it again.

In undertaking the descent of a really deep cave, a pot-holer may have to spend as much as a week planning his descent.

The cave discovered by the French pot-holer, Berger, represents the ultimate challenge to any pot-holer who is truly dedicated.

On reaching the enormous cavern, the pot-holers lit it up by using the arc lights they had carried down with them.

After entering the narrow gap, they climbed down the steep sides of the cave.

To protect themselves from the freezing water, they wore special rubber suits.