PHOUHIN NAMNO 2020

Summary

Region: Laos, northern Laos, Vang Vieng and Kasi districts

Clubs: EEGC (Val-de-Marne, France).

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The nine members of the 2020 Phouhin-Namno expedition continued explorations of the Nam Fuang karst system and Phato massif (Pha Koy and Pha Lay) in the Kasi area.

On Pha Lay, surveying of Tham Phato 4 (discovered in 2019) continued and ended in a sump. Four new cavities were discovered and began to be explored: Tham Lom (length 305 m), Tham Pha Hony, Tham Pha Hok as well as a small cavity at the foot of the massif: Tham Phato 8. An observational cave biology study was undertaken in Tham Pha (Tham Phato 2) to supplement the 2019 study and describe a new species of a stygobite beetle. At the foot of Pha Koy, a small cavity known as Tham Nam O (length 122 m), was discovered near a resurgence that supplies the Nam Kham in the dry season.

A new mining road from Ban Houaytangnai made access to the valley in the south easier, and a team was able to reach the Nam Fuang inflow point into Tham Pha Ka (elevation 920 m). The surveying of this cavity, initiated by the EEGC from the resurgence (2014, 2016 and 2019), was thus continued via another route. However, the team did not make it far enough to join up with the southern part of the network; this will be an objective for 2021. Several dry sections were discovered, including a large gallery heading northwards beyond the current inflow point. In the same sector, an opening identified on a satellite image turned out to be a new cave that was then explored: Tham Thom (elevation 755 m).

Another part of the expedition focused on the central valley of the Nam Fuang system, exploring Tham Pha Yem via the resurgence, which led to the discovery of new dry upper galleries, for example, following some underground climbing. These explorations allowed us to reach the cave's highest point (140 m above river level at the resurgence point). This new terminus might give onto a through passage, given the presence of dead leaves and sprouted seeds found on the ground of Chamber R2D2. We did not see any daylight, but a dark streak along the wall of the main chamber suggests there may be water entering through the chamber ceiling. It should be noted that this year was a particularly dry one, and the underground river in Tham Pha Yem was not flowing. This intermittent presence of water meant we were able to proceed along the dry (muddy) riverbed. Only the terminal sump did not seem to be affected by this period of drought.

The inflow point of the second underground section of the Nam Fuang – Tham Loynam – was explored and surveyed. Despite an active sumped passage, it was possible to cross by taking a dry passage that emerges higher up, just near the resurgence (around 50-70 m above it). The Nam Fuang river was flowing much faster here than in Tham Pha Yem, and most of this water was from the Tham Pelleteuse resurgence (NFR1-2). We did not have time to survey this resurgence, but it looks to be the main active branch of the Nam Fuang, while Tham Pha Yem seems to be a secondary temporary branch that is only active when the network overflows.

Several attempts were made to reach the Go Tham sinkhole overlooking the northern valley, but these were unsuccessful due to dense vegetation, a steep incline and lack of a water source. The attempts did however result in finding a few cavities along the way: Tham Kob, a temporary resurgence (that soon sumped); and a 40m-deep Vauclusian spring in the Nam Yunan canyon (name given by a hunter) on a clay slope obstructed by tree trunks with a deep pool at the bottom and no dry sections.

Topographic measurements were taken using DistoX1 and DistoX2 paired with Android devices with the application TopoDroid installed. Data processing, compilation and mapping of the caves explored were done with the German application CaveRenderPro.

We have 6,505 metres of new topography in total and have added nine caves to the list of cavities recorded in our previous expeditions.

All our expedition reports have been published at https://eegc.org/.