

Trapped cavers in France found safe and well

Three cavers who spent four days trapped deep underground in the Pyrenees mountains in southwestern France were found safe and well on Saturday, a rescue official told.

The two French and one Greek caver were trapped in the Romy chasm, a mountain cave 700 metres (1,540 feet) underground, on Wednesday when a sudden rise in water blocked their only exit.

They were able to make their way out on Saturday thanks to a fall in the water level, and as they climbed towards the surface they met rescue teams coming to their aid, the rescue official said.

The men were at an underground camp 450 metres beneath the surface on Saturday evening and were "tired but in good health", according to Steve Oliny, the head of the local fire and

rescue service.

They were expected to rest before resuming their climb out of the cave with the rescue teams at 4:00 am on Sunday and should reach the surface between 10:00 am and 11:00 am, he said.

The trapped cavers were part of a seven-member group from a club based in Lille, northern France, who descended into the cave on Monday to

carry out mapping work.

The three, aged around 35 to 40, had been in a different part of the cave to their colleagues when they found themselves trapped by the surge of water.

Around 20 rescuers, including specialist cave rescue divers, explosives experts and porters, had begun a descent into the cave to try to get the men out.

The lure of the cab

"IT'S a beautiful day," Michael says as he opens the door. "Let's sit outside." His dog, Felix, eyes the escape route and considers his options before accepting defeat. Michael makes coffee. He is 62 and his silver hair is immaculately combed. Felix trots around an oval-shaped lawn, where explosions of flowers surround an empty Hills hoist. Birds sing from every direction.

"The garden's my wife's design," Michael says. "I don't even know what's in there." He makes himself comfortable. "It's good what you guys are doing. You'd be surprised how many drivers want to write something down, but they don't know how to go about it." But he doesn't agree that there appears to be a need to raise the profile of cab drivers in the community.

"I must admit, my experience shows that the majority of people - not everybody - think that we're doing a damn, bloody good job. It's very rare that I get a negative comment."

Born in Athens, Michael was good at school. He finished at a very young age. His teachers "either wanted to get rid of me, or I was a brain, so they pushed me through quite fast". He became a cadet officer in the Greek merchant navy, and arrived in Melbourne as a "young, foolish and adventuring kid" in 1963, at the age of 17. Like many cabbies, he had a varied career before driving cabs, including working in computing. The lure of driving a cab was strong because "there was this idea that you go and drive a cab and buy a fleet and you make lots of money," he says, recalling the mid-seventies. "What a bloody joke that was."

When he started, training was much more stringent than now. "Half the [new] drivers don't even

know where bloody Collins Street is." Trainee taxi drivers had to know every landmark in Melbourne; they had to be able to describe precisely which roads to take to go from one place to another. They also had to know all the suburbs in sequence.

"They used to put you through the wheels," he says. "But there were advantages: the owners were very, very careful about who they picked to drive their cabs." Michael quickly became an owner-driver, and with the support of his sponsor, quickly bought three cabs. More importantly, he adds proudly, he was one of the three men who started Australia's first taxi insurance company.

For the past 20 years, though, he's been driving for friends five, sometimes six nights a week. He feels legislation has been introduced into the industry "for its own sake", which makes the job harder, and likes to imagine a world where cabbies are responsible for regulating themselves. He is sure this will never happen.

He also takes a dim view of police who don't care what happens to cabbies. He comments in his matter-of-fact way that he was assaulted recently by a passenger who tried to get into his cab with an open bottle of alcohol. Michael refused to drive him and the man became violent. Michael informed the police, and they asked him if he had any injuries; when he said no, they told him to forget about it. "I said, no. I won't forget about it."

Other anecdotes point to Michael's modesty and guarded optimism. He recalls a female student at La Trobe who had to get to the university to do an exam. She had no money, there was nobody at home, and all the neighbours were out. He drove her there even though she had no cash. She promised to pay him and took his details.

"To be honest I didn't expect the money," he concedes. Three days later, the control base called and told Michael the girl had been in and left the money for him. He counts that as the greatest moment of his career.

Other moments are not so uplifting - he was once sent to collect a bride and groom from their reception. The manager came out and asked where the other cab was. The manager explained that a guest had made an offensive comment, causing the reception to descend into chaos, and that the bride and groom were leaving - separately.

Michael left the groom to wait for another taxi and pondered the couple's inauspicious start to married life as he drove the tearful bride to her mother's house.

Michael now owns an investment company but still drives for a friend at weekends. "I can't stay at home and do nothing," he says.

CHRIS SCHOLTEN SMITH
Article from *The Age*



Jennifer Aniston among the Presentors at Golden Globes

Greek American Golden Globe winner Jennifer Aniston will join Mickey Rourke and Julia Roberts to present "The 67th Annual Golden Globe Awards" on Sunday, January 17. The show, hosted by Ricky Gervais, will be broadcast live coast to coast on NBC from The Beverly Hilton. They join previously-announced Robert De Niro and Leonardo DiCaprio who will present the Cecil B. DeMille Award to Martin Scorsese. "The 67th Annual Golden Globe Awards" will be seen in more than 160 countries worldwide and is one of the few awards ceremonies that span both television and motion picture achievements.

The special will be produced by dick clark productions in association with the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. Philip Berk is President of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. Orly Adelson, president of dick clark productions, and Barry Adelman will executive-produce the special. Chris Donovan is the director and Bob Bardo is the executive in charge of production.

Xerxes: The Sequel to Frank Miller's 300



Greek mythology continues to inspire film making in Hollywood. To name a few, *Troy*, *Alexander*, and of course Frank Miller's, *300*. Miller is currently developing the sequel, *Xerxes*. The film will highlight the battle of Marathon that takes place about ten years before the Battle of Thermopylae in 300. The battle of Marathon was the first Persian invasion of Greece. Miller has decided on the plot, and working on his vision of the story through a graphic novel. Next he will go through the creative process of interpreting his novel into film. Zach Snyder who directed *300*, has showed an interest in directing the sequel.

When Miller was asked about the allure of the ancient Greek culture, he said, "Every generation returns to ancient Greece because, well, the stories are so damn good. The fact and the myth are inseparable and, believe me, when you go sailing for a while in the Aegean Sea, you start believing in Poseidon."

The film is expected to be released in 2011.