

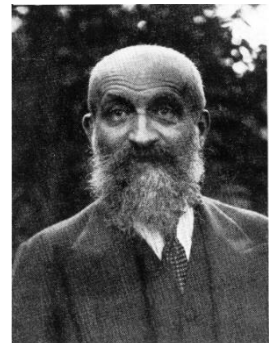
UIS History of Speleology Commission

Program of the Online Symposium Speleology in Authoritarian Regimes

Saturday, March 15th 2025, 19:30 CET

This online symposium aims to explore the intersection of speleology and repressive government regimes, examining how authoritarian states have influenced and, in many cases, oppressed speleological activities and researchers.

It is inspired by the legacy of Dr. Benno Wolf (1871-1943), a pioneering German speleologist whose life tragically ended due to the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime. The upcoming symposium will delve into the various forms of repression that speleologists have faced under authoritarian regimes, including imprisonment, surveillance, and theft of valuable research.



Program:

19:30

Basque Speleology: Among Dictatorships and Transitions

Oier GOROSABEL LARRAÑAGA, ADES Espeleologia Elkartea, Spain

20:15

Dr. Benno Wolf (1871 – 1943) – a Retrospective Look at European Caving and Nazi History

Friedhart KNOLLE; Vice President UIS History of Speleology Commission; Editor of the German Speleological Federation, Germany

21:00

Hidden Frontiers: The Strategic and Scientific Role of Italian Caves in Wartime and Beyond

Silvana MAGNI-CARS; GGS Gruppo Grotte Savona, Italy; Faculty of Science, Charles University, Prague,

The presentations will be streamed live on 15 March 2025 from 19:30 CET
and will then be available for download on the VdHK YouTube Channel:

<https://www.vdhk.de/youtube-symposium-2025-03-15>

During the live stream, it is possible to ask questions in the YouTube chat.

Later on it will be available for download at the UIS YouTube Channel too.

<https://www.youtube.com/@internationalunionofspeleo6201/featured>

Organizers:

UIS History of Speleology Commission: Friedhart Knolle, Bernard Chirol

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ABSTRACTS Online Symposium Speleology in Authoritarian Regimes



Basque Speleology: Among Dictatorships and Transitions

Oier GOROSABEL LARRAÑAGA, ADES Espeleologia Elkartea, Spain

The Basque Country is the name given to a region located in the western Pyrenees, straddling the border between France and Spain on the coast of the Bay of Biscay. It comprises seven provinces: four of them are included in the kingdom of Spain (Álava, Biscay, Guipúzcoa and Navarre) and three in the republic of France (Labourd, Basse Navarre and Soule). This region has a vernacular language (Euskara), although French and Spanish also are talked extensively. Since the rising of scientific speleology, several authoritarian regimes have ruled in Spain and France. So, in this time, speleology in Basque Country has been affected by dictatorships in several ways, mainly relating to prosecution of independentist and leftist people. In this presentation, we will run along this period, giving a context to the different situations that our speleologists have had to face: there was repression, exile and retaliation; there are stories of fight and resistance too; and in some cases, speleologists stood resilient and managed to follow with their scientific work adapting to dictatorship's authority.

Dr. Benno Wolf (1871 – 1943) – a Retrospective Look at European Caving and Nazi History

Friedhart KNOLLE, Vice President UIS History of Speleology Commission, Editor of the German Speleological Federation, Germany

The work, net-working and far-reaching efforts of the German Speleologist and Honorary Member of the British Speleological Association, Dr. Benno Wolf, who was exterminated by the Nazis and subsequently nearly forgotten, is described. His library of cave literature was confiscated by the SS for armament purposes. 1942, aged 71, he was arrested by the Gestapo and deported out of Berlin to the Theresienstadt concentration camp. There he died half a year later as a result of inhuman imprisonment conditions. None of his cave research colleagues at home or abroad were able to help him – they did not even know where he was. Dr. Benno Wolf provides, in his work in speleology and nature conservation, a link between the pre-1933 and post-1945 German caving societies and many countries around the world. The German caving award named after Dr. Benno Wolf symbolizes this fact.

Hidden Frontiers: The Strategic and Scientific Role of Italian Caves in Wartime and Beyond

Silvana MAGNI-CARS, GGS Gruppo Grotte Savona, Italy; Faculty of Science, Charles University, Prague

Speleology played a multifaceted role during authoritarian regimes, particularly in wartime Italy under Fascist rule and later during the Cold War. Caves were exploited for military purposes, serving as refuges, depots, and industrial sites, while post-war periods saw their documentation and exploration revitalized, highlighting their dual role as tools of conflict and cultural treasures. During WWI, regions like Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto, and Trentino-Alto Adige saw extensive use of caves. The Karst regions, pivotal for their strategic geography, included sites like the Grotta Azzurra and Krompirjeva jama, repurposed for depots and troop shelters. In WWII, caves in Veneto, such as the Alfa Romeo factory in Costozza, served industrial purposes, while Naples' underground in Campania protected civilians from bombing. Liguria's coastal caves likely had similar functions, though documentation is scarce. Notable figures such as Franco Anelli safeguarded Italy's speleological heritage, preserving crucial records during wartime. His work included protecting the Catasto delle Grotte d'Italia under German occupation. Similarly, Giovanni Spangar, despite his military duties, contributed to the exploration and documentation of Karst caves, ensuring their scientific value endured. The post-war period marked a renaissance in speleology. Groups like the Società Alpina delle Giulie spearheaded efforts to document extensive wartime use of caves, while regions like Liguria renewed interest in these natural sites for scientific and cultural purposes. During the Cold War, caves continued to play strategic roles, such as Veneto's "Site Pluto," which housed nuclear weapons, emphasizing their military relevance. This historical interplay between authoritarian regimes, wartime needs, and speleology illustrates how caves bridged military strategy and scientific curiosity, evolving from tools of conflict to preserved symbols of natural and cultural heritage.