



PLYMOUTH
CAVING
GROUP

NEWSLETTER AND JOURNAL

MATIENZO 1984.

We had promised to return to this caving spot in Northern Spain and were rather surprised to find it only took one year to do so! For the record it is just 34 miles of driving from the Santander Ferry Terminal to Matienzo, or around £10 by taxi! (or one can get the train or bus to Baranga and walk / hitch 15 kilometres).

The party was even more mixed than last year, a few MUSS, only one original - Barry Davies, some Northern Pennine, some Derbyshire CC, Bradford FC, Disley, Birmingham University SS, about half the Ingleton CRO 'A' team, and very quietly in the corner - me. We had a couple of days in the sun acclimatising; August 1st was our wedding anniversary so 16 of us went up into the hills to an amazing restaurant. After wining and dining we returned to the Snows Bar where a game of fizz-buzz developed with penalties being drunk in Soli-Sombre - a lethal Brandy / Anis mix.

The following day - clutching our heads - a small party of Barry Len and I decided on a quiet easy trip to CUBIO DE LA RENADA (The Foxes Lair). On hearing that it was a post-hangover trip two other cripples, Martin and Rick decided to join us. Unfortunately one Frank who had missed the party and was all fresh and healthy came and gave us a list of instructions of things to do and search for, and the tackle needed, etc. etc. Eventually we were ready, a 3 - 4 mile drive, we changed and had no excuses left.

The snag was that only Barry had been there before, and in a post - alcohol stupor, and mindlessly following someones boots, it took us a quarter of an hour to find the entrance which was only one hundred yards from where the car was parked. Eventually we found it and were into the old part of the cave, 400 metres long, consisting of 6' high, 20' wide, flat sandy-floored passages with the odd big chamber and side passage. We came to the point marked 'FIN'. Even in the wettest weather (water flowing out of the entrance) this would have meant a pool 4' deep in a passage 10' wide and 12' high. You can see that the Spanish and the English definition of 'FIN' of a cave are markedly different. In dry weather one walks past the 'FIN', up a gentle slope and the chamber inside the upper entrance, fully ten metres square is entered. In searching for the way on we found most of this three or four times, eventually resorting to common sense and looking for the draught. This was located in a chamber below the upper entrance, emanating from a slot / crawl in the floor.

This is about 10' long and in it the draught coming out was easily strong enough to extinguish a King carbide lamp. I, being electrically lit, was sent through first. It led into a highish flat floored rift. A few stooping sections, one or two climbs up and down slippery slopes, walking along wide, high sand floored passages and - we were lost again ! We had discovered a climb down bypassing a 15' pitch, and had found a bypass returning us to the start! There were some muddy bits in the floor and Ric lost his wellies in a couple of places.

The elusive draught had in fact split, one crawl over pebbles led us up a climb to the head of a 30' drop. A second crawl, parallel and not ten feet away led around and down to the bottom of the same drop. This led to a rope pitch, an easy 20' slither and slide to a vertical 10' drop. More walking along nice easy passage led us to the next obstacle - the duck. Barry cocooned in a nice furry suit etc. had assured me - in jeans and boiler suit - that this was definitely not a wet suit trip.

The duck was only 20' long with three feet of water and one foot of air space so who was I to complain? Walking in large wide passage, a couple of short hands and knees crawls, and we were into the large passage. One could now ignore wondering where the roof might be. A long slope upwards past a cairn led, after about a hundred feet, to a junction; straight on was 'Blood Alley', and to the right was our route.

This was Eagle Passage, fully 20' high 10' wide and containing some quite big stalagmites, stalactites and columns. This led after about 150 feet to Stuffed Monk Passage, which was really big - up to 30' square. This contained even more spectacular pretties. We wandered along for 400 or 500 feet looking for our route - a right hand junction. This turned out to be 3' wide, 20' high and steadily descending. It too contained pretties, and we had to be carefull in places to avoid damage.

The far end of the passage contained our objectives, chambers leading off to the left which were reputedly not explored fully. We had a quick look at the first and third. (Do not try to understand Frank's numbering). Having decided we were in the right place and that time was against us we set off out. We left the tackle in a suitable corner for a return trip. The exit, now that the route finding had been 'sussed', was quite straight forward, and we emerged into slight rain after some five hours.

The following day - Friday 3rd - was designated beach day, sun and sand and one or two tiny sea caves. We had however decided to return...

CUBIO DE LA RENADA Sat Aug 4th.

A larger party of ten of us chugged over to the Vega valley in the Derbyshire Caving Club truck, a BMC thing of possible GPO parentage. The party - Barry Davies, Len Gee, Martin Delamere, John New, Helen Gould, Phil Boardman, Pete Ward, Pete O'Neil, Ian Roland; mainly DCC, some MUSS - was to be followed later by another five including my cousin Pete Smith. Pete, now known as Pedro, is also ex-MUSS but is now married and resident in Spain. Our object was once again the chambers off the passage leading from the end of Stuffed Monk Passage.

Frank looked at them in order 1-2-3-4 on the survey, the second (diagrametically?) in order had not been spotted. So in fact they are met in the left hand wall in order 1-4-2-3 (groan).

The first (as met) took the most attention. It is met up a side passage, some 50' from the main passage.

The attractive feature initially of the three largest chambers was the existance of enormous gaping voids in the roof (in Northern parlance - aircraft hangers in the sky). Sure enough, on inspection, the first chamber we looked at had a completely out of sight ceiling. One possible route lay up the left hand far wall. Hand and foot holds there ere aplenty, but the rock was very fractured and the climbing was not exactly safe. One lunatic pair reached a height of about thirty feet before finding some small phreatic side passages which divided and became smaller.

We had also been sent to inspect pitches going down in a rift in the floor. After some widening a suitable descent was made. This turned out to be 35' deep, ending in blockage on all sides. To the right the chamber was some 10' wide and the way on up over a big boulder. Flakes in the wall were suitable footholds untill they too fell off. Over the boulder the passage continued for all of 15' before reaching another pitch in the floor. The way up into the roof gloom was quite unclimable. The way down was depth tested. Boom! Over one hundred feet deep. Across the pitch was a bit of a ledge, and arch, and again blackness. From being in a nice friendly 20' x 30' passage with lots of pretties we were suddenly in something 200' by 10' with loose rock everywhere.

I had a look at the next junction. A window 4' up in the wall led to a small passage which went for perhaps 50' before closing down. A crawl off to the left had a draught coming out of it, but was heading straight for the 100' pitch. Not useful!

We reassembled and went to the next junction. Here a short crawl led to another large chamber, again with an aircraft hanger in the sky. Climbs up would require scaling poles. We did find a hole behind a boulder in the left hand wall which looked promising. A few minutes work with a lump hammer gave access to a small chamber.

This had a hands and knees crawl leading off! We were away - after 40' back to the main passage. Yet another disappointment.

We had tied up a number of loose ends, found perhaps 100' of passage and a promising 100' pitch. It was time to go. We collected up the tackle and set off out. Instead of going directly out along Eagle Passage, we decided to go further along Stuffed Monk Passage and across into Blood Alley.

This was amazing. In the first place the rock was very water worn, and cut and scalloped into fantastic shapes. In addition many of the stalagmite formations had deep red iron staining in them, and it was virtually blood coloured. Some of the pools were lined with this and looked most impressive.

After a couple of hundred feet of this we retraced our steps to Eagle Passage and set off out. The crawls, duck, rope pitch etc. were passed without incident. We emerged - not into rain, and returned to camp.

MOSTAJA

A cave up on the hill had been receiving some attention, it was barred to me by a squeeze and a 100' pitch. Investigations of second pitches were made and one by one they proved blind...

Untill a 120' pitch led, down a scree slope, into....something big!! By the time we left over 2 km had been surveyed, and a further 2 km found. Parties of two became frightened by the size and got lost in one chamber 50 m. across with house sized boulders.

It seems that they ignored most of the turnings and just kept to the 10 m. wide passages....

CUeVA LLUEVA - EL BIGGO.

The far end of Llueva lies beyond a sump and is only 300m. from the far reaches of Cueva Uzueka. To reach the end of Uzueka and back is a 12 hour trip with good route finding.

To reach the sump in Llueva is a two hour trip. The combined efforts of smoke - bomb testing in Uzueka, radio location on the surface, and diving in Llueva, were being put together to see what could be done.

I was one of the 12 going into Llueva to carry diving equipment in, and then look at one or two side passages.

The entrance is in a well hidden depression in a jungle. Apparently it was discovered from aerial photography. Inside is an arch similar to and twice Pridhamsleigh in size. In small stooping, hands and knees crawl passages with a couple of squeezes and howling draught. After a couple of hundred feet a blow hole leads to a flat out crawl which gradually widens and gets higher untill the pitch - 15' on a slope, 30' vertical.

This leads out into the main passage and lands on a pile of boulders. One can barely see the far wall, or the bottom of the pile of boulders. I deliberately hung on untill last to get an impression of size from the string of lights in front. At one point I was looking along 600' of passage up and down over piles of boulders. The stream is occasionally glimpsed under the rocks. To avoid either a pitch or a sump a bypass is used. This involves mainly walking size passages, and a couple of climbs before a shorter section of the main passage is rejoined. At the far end of this an awkward climb along the apex of a flake, and then up over a slab, leads to a nice phreatic tube. After perhaps 100' this leads to a drop into deep water.

Here the divers kitted up. The water is 8 - 20' deep and leads along phreatic passage to an underwater ledge at the sump. We stayed and watched the preparations untill slosh Phil and Steve went in and started ferrying equipment to the diving line.

We set off back to look at some of the side passages in the left hand bypass. Most of them did not do a great deal but one led for some two hundred feet along a walking / stooping size passage. The floor was obviously water washed. A right turn met a cross rift, with phreatic tubes in the roof. This was climbed for a few feet but did not go. At the end a crawl led to a pool. This may be the source of water for a wet weather overflow. The pool led after some 35' to a sump. It made glooping noises and definitely did not close up immediately.

We returned to the main passage, were suitably impressed by the size and went on to the pitch. After a pleasant five hours underground we emerged into bright sunlight.

The only success in the combined operation was in radiolocation, which pin - pointed the end of Uzueka accurately, and at a depth of 90 m. The smoke - bomb testing did nothing, and the divers managed to loose the new line in the deep water.

The next day was a beach day followed by a barbeque.

What a grand affair! 72 of us were now on camp and ate our way through 35 kg of steak, and large quantities of rice, potatoe, and traditional salads. We also consumed 4 dozen litres of wine, a punch containing 5 litres of spirit, and 6 crates of beer.

RESCUE FOREIGN STYLE.

The next day, after the barbeque, we were woken by a hooting of horns and shouted requests for a French speaking translator. A party of French / Spanish had gone down a cave near Ramalez le Victoria some 15 km away the day before. A French diver had gone into the sump at 2.00 pm and had not returned.

It took till 3.00 am to raise the alarm. Two divers were flown from France to Bilbao, and we were requested to help. Our two divers and a back - u p team were soon on there way. There was then 24 hours of chaos. The cave - four shortish pitches - was rigged for S.R.T., and our ladders were not allowed in. The distance involved lengthened from 4 km to 7 km.

The French were very good at preparing meals, and packs to carry underground weighing up to 70 lbs. Diving sets (twin 100s) were assembled on the surface. Dry gear for the dry caves, wet gear for the river section. Food, sleeping bags, more and more time wasted.

The stretcher eventually went in 12 hours after the first team. Parties were sent in including one non-English speaking Frenchman with two broad Yorkshire non-linguists.

We kept getting bits and pieces of imformation as cavers came and went, returning exasperated and disbelieving.

He was eventually found in an air - bell, apparently the victim of bad air. Dont expect prompt rescue in France! (or anywhere other than GB perhaps).

A back up team including some of ours went in to retrieve the body.

CUEVA ARENAL.

As the news from Ramales about the rescue filtered back it became obvious that the second team would not be needed for some time. Barry and I decided to go ahead with our planned trip trying to push Arenal. Last year we had smashed our way through a squeeze, found a large rocky chamber and little else.

Collecting Ian Wood, as a thin man to push into squeezes, a lump hammer, crowbar and rope, we set off. The draught could only be felt 20 feet from the entrance - a bad day. We first went along the main passage. A walking size affair with one wade through a pool. This leads after 2 - 300 feet to dead ends filled with boulders. Someone had spotted a tube leading off from the top of a 15 ft. climb, but it needed digging. It was also quite tight.

Whi le Barry and Ian pushed at the digging for about an hour, I ferreted about. Nothing. Their dig got tighter, and where I was the draught ended up issuing from solid masses of small jagged boulders.

We decided to return to the site of last years efforts. A crawl in exceedingly squelchy mud leads to a couple of chambers and then a boulder choke. Through the squeeze, into the chambers of broken rocks and....we had left the draught. I eventually located it issuing from a bedding plane at floor level, just past the dig of last year. In the mean time we added a 30' by 20' chamber to the one found last year. This was done by removing a couple of loose rocks, but it did not lead anywhere. We dug at the bedding plane for a couple of hours getting about 8 feet in. It was still 'gging', it was still diggable, but it had not gone. The draught is still there but will have to wait a little while longer to reveal it's secrets.

We crawled out and returned to the campsite for a beer, to find Julie and Barry's wife Julie had got to the bar before us.

CUEVA TURISTO.

Julie and I left Matienzo heading for beaches, sea, sun and even more wine, on the way however....

CUEVA AGUA.

I had visited Agua last year in a trip to the far end so was determined to revisit it, if only a little bit. After we had struck tent (naughty tent) we went to the bar for a final beer with Barry and Julie. We then left, and instead of heading off west drove the one mile or so off the route to the track to Agua. The river sinks in shingle and boulders about one hundred yards from the entrance.

The entrance is about 15 feet high and 30 feet wide. It was raining (it had to be). We took a photo with little hope of success, and then went in to take another looking out. If it had been bright sunlight we might have got a viable picture, as it is we shall have to wait and see. After being impressed with the size of the entrance passage we left and headed off to the west for one hundred miles or so.

CUEVA TITO EL BUSTILLO.

We found this cave near the river bank at Ribadesella, a town 10 miles or so from our campsite. The obstacles near the entrance were fairly easy to negotiate and we found ourselves in a walking sized passage. After a couple of hundred feet of this we rounded a corner and ... hey presto and eureka - a massive chamber!

This was really huge, 30 ft square was an average sort of dimension, with quite spectacular formations. Just along the chamber - gallery would be a better description - was a column fully 30' high. We wandered on amazed. The sandy floor went up and down gentle slopes and more and more stalagmites appeared 3, 6, 10 feet high. We passed massive gours and a stalagmite flow fully thirty feet across.

After some twenty minutes of walking along this gallery in which we must have covered half a mile, we came to a fork. To the right closed down, but we did note some odd looking markings in the roof. To the left we came upon a hole in the floor. A river could be heard flowing below and we cursed the fact that we had left all the rope and ladder in the car.

Just past this we spotted more markings in the roof and wall, and sure enough, cave paintings!! When we stood back from the wall about ten feet and followed the torch beam it was clear that there were real paintings of wolf, horse and buffalo. Difficult to discern actual species to see if the horse was a deer etc, but we felt that we had the general idea.

In addition to regretting no tackle we fumed at having no camera with a flash attachment. As no-one knew where we were and we had left no note on the car we decided to leave the side passages, holes in the floor, etc. We went back out along the gallery enthralled by the pretties.

I don't think the guide to the show cave would have been impressed if we had left the beaten track. In any event we got 10 slides at the entrance (5p each).

A really worthwhile show cave - admission 55p, tour 45 minutes long.

Bob Cawthorne.