


PLYMOUTH
CAVING
GROUP

NEWSLETTER AND JOURNAL



PLYMOUTH
CAVING
GROUP

NEWSLETTER AND JOURNAL

BOATYARD HOLE, CREMYLL, CORNWALL.

Boatyard Hole is a new cave which was broken into during work at the boatyard of Mashford Brothers Limited at Cremyll. This was at about the beginning of March 1987. The back of the main slipways consisted of a limestone outcrop containing some impenetrable holes. This outcrop was quarried back, resulting in the opening of an entrance to the cave.

The cave was explored and surveyed on April 21st by Mark Vinall and Alasdair Neill. It consists essentially of a phreatic rift. The surveyed length is 20m and the vertical range 6m, making it the longest and deepest limestone cave in Cornwall.

The lowest point is a mud choked tube, which must be not far above high water, heading towards the Tamar.

The cave contains some fair formations, various bones probably of recent age, and some bat droppings.

There seems to be some potential for further minor caves in the small limestone outcrops around Cremyll, where nothing has been recorded before.

For access contact Mashfords (phone Plymouth 822232).

Alasdair Neill.

MATIENZO '87.

Quote number one: Matienzo is now 18 years old and therefore old enough to drink. I wonder what MUSS have been doing there for the past 17 years?

Julie and I drove 600 miles in 11 hours from Bilbao and then crept for 4½ hours to the beach at Noja famous for where the expeditions sunbathe or the PCG camps (whimps). We arrived at about 2.00 and had a good collapse. Several expedition members were also sun-slugging- including cousin in law Carmen.

We then drove up to Matienzo- and it wasn't raining. In severe shock we went straight to the bar. Here Carmen offered us a room in their house for the week- was this an offer we could refuse?

Day one was spent very severely collapsed on the beach. 700 mile drives make you want to sleep or drink beer.

In the evening it was "hunt tomorrow's caving trip", and sure enough Lank Mills (a fellow ex- MUSS/UMIST Chemist) was thinking of a bit of surveying work in Cueva Riano. This is a 5.5 km cave in the Riano valley which is close(-ish) to Cueva Uzueka, and has a connection to it discovered in 1986.

While arranging this and checking that there was nothing difficult, no climbs, squeezes etc., Julie suddenly volunteered to join us. So the party of Lank, girlfriend Liz Walton, Julie and I were to be found changing at around 1.00 pm the following day.

The entrance series is described as 50m of crawl to inlet and 200m to stream. This is insufficient description, as it proved quite tight and unpleasant for both Julie and I, neither of us having done a long (distance or time) trip for some time. In fact we nearly had to give up. 20 ft in at a squeeze which my ribs refused to go through. Some gardening was definitely required!

After 1 hour of flat out crawling, hands and knees in stream, shuffle, and occasionally walk we had a small climb to a high level passage which led to a chamber with many exits. We were supposed to cross this, walk 1km or so along big passages and then survey a possible connection to Uzueka. This was not to be; Lank started ferreting. Eventually he came back with the message that he had found a footstep free passage. We decided to explore. It was more or less a passage but boulder fall had amended obvious continuity. Some times we crawled, we had the odd traverse and climb, the occasional walk.

After half an hour of this Lank dived down a sidepassage and discovered 'footprints' - our virgin passage was no more.

It then became survey time. We surveyed our way back. In doing so we saw one or two pretties, including some quite good botryoidal (splash) stalagmites and mud formations.

At one point Julie said "there's a passage here", reply "off you go then"- disappear! When Lank arrived with the compass suddenly there was another 50m of quite new passage. Unfortunately it was only an oxbow of what we had already done. In completing the route back we found another rifty sort of oxbow. We had found perhaps 200m of new passage, or just over half of Radford.

The exit was led by Liz, losing brownie points for every false turn. We had a small delay at one point with Lank kicking rock out of the rifts in the roof looking for a big high level chamber. He didn't find it. Eventually we emerged to sunshine, and, soon after, beer. We then spent the evening reminiscing and watched Juan (also ex MUSS) plot the survey by computer- very impressive.

The next day we had already decided to look at a small cave in the evening, and spend the rest of the day on the beach. In the discussion Julie complained that what she had seen was somewhat akin to the less salubrious parts of Bakers Pit, and that the 'propagander' of caverns measureless to man had failed. We were then given instructions to find Cueva de Cobrantes, clever instructions like: turn right just before you get to San Miguel and look for four eucalyptus trees. Believe it or not we found it at the first attempt! The walk to the cave was a little disconcerting, along the valley floor and then up a meadow which was the steepest field imaginable, the grass roots nearly stuck out sideways!

The entrance was two or three hundred feet up the side of the valley and is some 20m wide and 4m high. Inside it is bigger. It took us twenty minutes to walk around a rocky floor to lose sight of the entrance. In doing so we passed some amazing fossil stalagmite bosses. We followed the wall for most of the time because the passage was too big for one cell and one carbide. Walking in the middle of the passage gave you severe agrophobia! It was huge- the walls were barely visible the roof lost in haze. This was almost a cave big enough for it's own weather. Towards the end of the passage the calcite floor slopes down sufficiently to become on one side an 80' pitch. We decided to stop at this point where the passage was dissected by a gigantic lump of stalagmite. The base was bigger than a Wimpy house and the top was lost in the gloom. We could not tell if it was a stalagmite or a column.

We strolled out amazed at the size of the place, and returned to the car, to the bar, to eat and to plan the next trip...

Howard Taylor was complaining that he seemed to have lost both a day on the beach and a trip to Cueva Agua due to someone else changing their mind; my ears pricked up - 'if Lank isn't needing a surveying party I'll go to Agua'. Lank wasn't so the next day we did together with Kate from MAUUS (the new university MUSS to distinguish it from the old lags and non student MUSS - very confusing). The usual not very prompt start saw us driving the short distance and then walking alongside the river to the entrance.

No doubt Agua will be described in the next PCG journal. We had a very pleasant three hour paddle, wade, swim with the odd scramble and duly inspected the pretties and the prehistoric altar site at the far end. It's huge- but Cobrantes, although less fun was much bigger!

After a lazy day on the beach we planned the next trip. Some six or seven miles down river from Riano Lank had discovered a huge draughting resurgence. So Steve and I went with him to inspect it. The only snag was that it was part of the main water supply and we couldn't stir up any silt. The upper entrance was a slight squeeze into a low dry chamber, the exit squeeze past a dead deer and then down a rift. This led into a steeply sloping chamber, quite long, one wall being mainly boulders, the other being solid limestone, and at the bottom of the slope- the river. Ten or twenty feet wide, six foot airspace with steady draft, an absolute dream. The snag was the floor was super fine instant disturb silt. Lank found a side passage but it didn't go so we had to leave it undisturbed. Cueva de Boquerones we discovered later was its name - highly illegal!

We then carried on wandering to a cave entrance discovered years ago but not pushed, it ended at 'knee deep water'. In we went, all dressed in dry gear. Two walking size rifts, one dry and the other with the stream. The dry way met the rift, soon we were in the knee deep water. This got deeper and deeper and... soon we were in water of unknown depth, using underwater ledges, chest deep and complaining about the cold. Then after 50m the sneaky thing sumped! We had to abandon it.

We continued our drive and went up into the hills behind the Matienzo valley but SW. where Lank had spotted some closed depressions, closed meaning underground drainage. They were in a bowl of land perhaps half a mile across. After several dolines had proved fruitless we eventually came across a cave. It was quite pokey and more in sandstone with a limestone roof. As we had not changed a third time we left it for future reference and drove back to the camp.

As it was Friday evening Peter and Carmen were due back from Santander after their

weeks work. I had already suggested a trip with him and once they arrived the planning started. Eventually we settled on joining Lank for the Cueva Riano trip planned for Monday, surveying at the far end passage discovered by Lank and Peter two years previously. This heads towards Cueva Uzueka with which it had already been connected at a different point. We left the bar at about 1.15 as Peter and Carmen's daughter Carolina is only three.

In the ensuing three hours the Guardia arrived and instructed the bar to.... stay open! At one point Juan the expedition leader was jumping on their toes to see if they had steel toecaps! At another Lank was examining the loaded guns, dismissing them as pathetic compared to the machine guns they used to carry...

The party ended in the early hours- nearly dawn. When we, unknowing, came to collect Lank at 11.30 the camp was strangely quiet and deserted. It took us 1½ hours to get Lank behind the wheel of his car, after forgetting / losing boots, helmet, surveying gear, etc. etc.

We eventually arrived at Riano, changed, and were in the cave by 2.00pm having promised Julie and Carmen that we would be back by eight to go out for a meal.

It took 20 minutes to get to the climb out of the stream, and another 10 to reach the chamber which was our previous stopping point and the scene of the discoveries on Monday. The way on was along a straight passage which was not high enough to walk along upright but too high for neat hands and knees slow crawling. Needless to say I was the slowest along this!

The stream in this part of the cave deserves a mention- it resurges in the Riano valley. The other stream, met beyond where our turn off was, flows into the Uzueka system. The Uzueka entrance is on the other side of the valley. The Uzueka drainage is through the hill under the Matienzo depression and into the Secadura valley. Hence: an underground watershed.

However we were looking for a right turn along a passage to a chamber. Neither Lank nor Peter had been this way before as it was a new connection. The previous connection involved an exposed traverse climb at the top of a pitch.

The state Lank was in we couldn't find the passage. We had several backwards and forwards looking upwards and downwards with the occasional lie down for a groan. Eventually we were there, the turning being around the entrance to Catprint Passage.

The connection involved pulling a rope around a loop of rock to lift our ladder and then, at the top of the 15' pitch, a climb of 10' to some more climbs and traverses. After a few minutes this led to the 'Big stuff'. This was Spanish passage at its best, 30' by 50' high, sometimes walking, sometimes climbing up and down over boulderspiles. It was huge. Sometimes the roof was barely discernable. It had taken 2½ hours from the entrance.

Eventually we reached our target- a high rift passage, very well decorated with pretties. Stal, columns, helectites, bunches of splash stal: the works. After a couple of hundred metres this led to the surveyed limit: the top of an awkward looking 12' climb down. Beyond this Peter had investigated 50m or so straight on, and Lank a few metres along a sandy crawl to the left. The passage had a draught in it- a good sign.

Straight on the passage was a high rift, with lots of formations. This continued more or less to a point where the floor was blocked by a stal barrier. Beyond this the floor rose and the roof lowered. Eventually we were on a calcite floor and the way on was a crawl past stalactite. Soon the mass of them and columns was the barrier in a 1' high passage with no draught. Lank thought he could remember a similar passage in Uzueka and thought the connection might be made by digging.

We surveyed our way back to the climb. A junction to the right was investigated but did not seem to go. We then set off along the crawl. This was obviously an old water way by the number of meanders. Time was against us so we stopped after a while and started surveying. On the way out we spotted a dry stream bed. A junction high up to the left connected with the passage we were in previously. One thing- the passage still had a draught in it!

At the bottom of the climb we were about 1.2 km from the surface which had taken 3 hours to reach. It was 6pm- Peter and I could be in for big trouble by being more than a little bit late for the meal. The trip back to the big passage did not take more than a few minutes, we then took the 'Bypass', a short cut in which, half way along, Lank discovered a passage off! Then Peter disappeared so I sat

with tape and ammo can 'conserving energy' (euphemism for 'close to knackered') for 15 minutes while they had a ferret about. Result: led back to main passage. After this episode the only slowing up was caused by me creeping along in the rear. In spite of this, having left the 'Bypass' at 6.30 we were down the traverse and ladder, along the stooping bits and through the crawls and stream to the entrance in just over the hour. After the change and the drive back we were in the bar in Matienzo by 8.01 precisely. Hooray!!! no loss of beer tokens.

At the meal we were entertained by Lank teaching Jenny and Carolina, Juan and Penny's daughters, both 3-4 years old, to sing Baa Baa Black Sheep to the assembled, unbeliving, Spanish audience.

After a very pleasant evening we had to pack for the next part of the holiday was beach based, some 15 miles from Ribadagella, but still not far from the Picos de Europa mountains (home of the Treviso expeditions). We were intent on at least looking at the surface features....

After two or three days of beach we decided to try and post the postcards (try buying stamps of more than 1 pta denominations - we needed 40s) and then visit the Picos. In the nearby town of Colunga we were successful with the postcards and then a señorita in a Seat 124 went 'bang' into the back of the Ambassador. No obvious damage but the unlocked hatch back would not open - mucho problema. Ah sí... After a fair amount of Spanish twitter a Seat garage proved useless but at a second a mechanic undid the lock from the inside, bent the panel straight and we were on our way.

The scenery became more and more splendiferous until eventually we parked at the foot of the Cares gorge. Very steep limestone mountains on all sides. I suppose in three hours we saw a quarter of it. Amazing - a ledge in the side of the hill 2-6ft wide, the river 50-100 ft below and the top of the gorge 1000 ft above. We took the lower path which eventually led down to a stream. An upper path follows a canal for a hydro-electric scheme. The heat was amazing - after only 1½ hours I had a new suntan line where my trainers were.

We returned to drink copious quantities of anything cool. Then we set off in search of Amieva. Here the MUSS had camped in 1968 and one had married one of the local girls. The road up to the village had the car boiling. After much hopeless questioning it seemed that Chico lived 'at the top of the village'. The road was tight, tortuous and steep. After throwing a boiling car up several one in three hairpins where a slip would mean a crunched wing, I opted for cowardice at the first place to turn round. Then our informant (a hitch hiker) told us the same people did not live there any more...!

We slithered back down the hill to normal Spanish country roads, admired the Roman bridge at Cangas and returned to drink beer at Anís.

The only other caving bit of the holiday consisted of an abortive attempt at a showcave, Cueva el Buzo. It was shut. Only 25 people a day were allowed in. We retired once more to the beach and the bar. There was always another day, another year, manana, manana...

Bob and Julie Cawthorne.

COLLAPSE AT LOWER GOODAMEAVY FARM

At the beginning of May we were informed of a collapse into an old mine shaft which had occurred on Lower Goodameavy Farm, near Shaugh Prior. Mark Vinall, Mark's friend Dane, and Alasdair Neill went to have a look on May 7th. We were shown the collapse by the owner, Dr. Lunna. A tractor had caused the collapse whilst hedge trimming.

The collapse is at the top of a field leading down to the River Meavy, at grid ref. SX 5286 6510. A vague gully crosses a field above (once a wood) which may indicate old opencast workings.

There are no records of mining here known, but the Roborough Down Mine (a trial for wolfram during World War II) is a few hundred metres away on the other side of the Meavy. 500 metres to the north there are traces of ancient tin stream workings running off Wigford Down to Hoo Meavy Bridge.