

## MATIENZO '88.

Saturday 23rd July saw Bob and Julie crossing to Roscoff preparing for a non stop overnight drive to MIDDLE EARTH - the magic valley which some call Matienzo, home of the Manchester University Speleological Society, and in recent years many other clubs. We arrived at a little after 1pm, found cousin-in-law Carmen, and fell into the bar for some San Miguel. The following day was spent collapsed on the beach, and generally recuperating from work, the drive, the French...

Cousin Peter (who many call Pedro) was looking for a caving trip on the Tuesday. There was a bank holiday in Santander, so he did not have to go back to work. We elected to go to Cueva del Agua. He wished to review the area around the Prehistoric site. This seemed an excellant idea so off we went. The water level was - interesting - not at its usual placidity. The cascade was certainly tested for ease of return before both of us were on the downstream side! It is an impressive passage, and even after four or five visits I am still quite happy to go back again. Eventually we were in the deep water. Peter was not happy, and spent a lot of time going from hand to hand along the wall.

At the end we inspected all around the prehistoric 'altar'. Peter has found etchings in other caves and was wondering if there was any fresh evidence here. There wasn't. We had a good inspect of all the nooks and crannies, found some nice pretties, lots of snail shells and small rodent bones, but no other traces of human activity. A pity. Then came the return. Not as difficult as we had feared, suitably sporting on the sploshy bits. We returned - as one must - to the bar.

On Wednsday Julie and Bob again went to the beach - laziness will win! On Thursday July 28th Ali arrived in Santander having taken the Plymouth - Santander ferry. Bob picked him up (thanks!) at the port to save confusion, and having set up on the campsite (rather damp at the time, and containing several pools and streams of cowsh!). We then went to the beach for a few hours.

Ali Bob and Julie then decided to go down Cueva del Agua (59) for a few hours. This was a photo trip in the first section of this huge river passage— it even contained cloud layers in the entrance chamber. We met a party from the Haymarket Caving Club (Newcastle) who had found a high level extension (just before the 1m cascade). We photographed away merrily for a pleasant hour. Ali being clever and technical, and Bob being wildly optimistic with a tiny camera with a built in flash.

On Friday some Derbyshire had arrived, one or two known for many moons. A mixed party of Bob, Ali, Toby, Juan Corrin and Baz Davies went to visit Cueva de los Emboscados (87). The entrance is kept blocked with small stones and plastic sheeting to keep goats out. Once this is removed a 2m crawl pops out into a big passage behind a line of stals. A slope of soft gour pools leads down into the huge main passage, sandy floored, 12m wide and up to 30m high. After a short distance it ends at a strongly draughting choke.

Bob and Baz dug the right hand side, and Toby and Ali a passage which crossed over the other and into the choke. Toby pushed through a squeeze and passed a boulder behind which no easy way on could be made. Ali dug a passage behind this which may lead to a void visable above, but the mud walls began to trundle so we left it to settle. I then had a look at a number of side passages on the west wall further back, extending 30m or so to sand chokes. These have not been surveyed. They contain bones of a small rodent and many other bones were found including in the end choke. A number of ancient etchings of deer can be seen (now very faint) on the left hand wall. Toby and Baz attempted a number of other side passages and climbs.

Saturday 30th saw a visit to Toad in the Hole (258). You may notice that this is not a Spanish name, so it does not need translation. A party of Bob, Baz, Ali, Arthur and Pedro set off to investigate another draughting choke. This cave is on the northern slopes of the head of the Vega valley. A trudge up the hill in very hot brilliant sunshine with excellant scenery led us to the entrance, a sizable shakehole with attached oak trees. A handline descent of the entrance shakehole leads to a short pitch, the top being tight and awkward. Bob's ribs protested bitterly at this treatment, and to get through the pullover had to come off, the carbide lamp igniting this in the process. Ever had protesting ribs and a burning pullover in a tight squeeze? You don't chuckle. Once in this leads into the side of a big passage. A low section leads into more big stomping stuff with fine formations. Soon we came to a 10m bolt climb with a double rope fixed. We hoisted up a ladder andBaz placed a new bolt, as the existing one was somewhat dodgy. Beyond, the well decorated passage crosses several sandy bridges and passes a small side passage (which leads to a pitch and chamber etc.). Soon a 15m pitch is reached. As only the bottom 5m is vertical we used a handline with a ladder tied on the bottom. The head of the pitch had amazing twisty helictites all over the place.

From the bottom of the pitch more big passage leads to a flat out uphill squeeze into a chamber. Both ends of this are choked. The left end draughts strongly and had previously been pushed down into a chamber. However, the draught seems to come mainly from above so Baz and Toby pushed up here. The boulders are large and well jammed, and are either calcited in or leave the digger right in the target area. I had a dig at the other end-well calcited up with only a trace of a draught. I then had a look at the passage behind the pitch—superb helictites, but eventually choked, some big avens above, which presumably connect to the passages between the pitches.

I then went up a flat out crawl to an aven climbed for about 10m- it seemed to pinch out above, but draughted. The crawl continues to the main extensions made in 1987-extending under the valley towards Arenal and Renada. Over the next few days these passages were successfully located by Molephone. We came out without problems, looking at one or two of the avens in the high level connecting passage on the way. The trip lasted about 4 hours.

Sunday July 31st saw Terry Whitaker, Mike (Wing-nut), Rob, Nick and Ali setting off to Cueva de Carcavueso (81) (which no-one can actually spell). The entrance is a flood sink for the main river in the Matienzo depression. A series of passages, crawls and climbs largely in boulder choke reaches the stream which soon sumps. After many attempts it was not untill 1986 that major extensions were made; connecting the cave to Cueva Llueva (El Biggo) and Cueva da la Uzueka, linking three valleys of the four valleys system and making the 4th longest system in Spain. The route lies through some squeezes and climbs through loose boulders, eventually popping out in the Afternoon Stroll, a fine long straight tube, fine stomping stuff, with odd traverses and climbs. From here we passed through the Maze, Red Column Chamber, and then a boulder choke- the start of the Sewers of Doom. This is a 3-D maze, in which the previous explorers had only got out again by surveying a route through. They had found there were 3 levels to the Sewers, our aim was to survey the middle level and put a line along the easiest route through. However we in stead found a way into the main river and into a maze series of small passages running up-dip, leading to the river at several points. Mostly this was deep water, neccesitating a return with wet suits for exploration. Returning to a side passage the river was followed upstream to an awkward cascade and a climb up into big high level chambers. From here we found a route through to the Candy Shop in Llueva II a large boulder chamber containing some fine deep red gour pools perched up in the boulders. In subsequent trips the route from the old cave was by-passed by a 15m pitch, and much new passage was found.

Juan and Bob were out in the sunshine as Salford Phil, Dave and a couple of others were going down Toad in the Hole with the Molephones. We were to be at various points on the surface between 4pm and 5pm. We left them as they disappeared and now had several hours to kill. Firstly we stared to make our way diagonally towards the valley-tree line up-valley from Toad. As we came to the tree line we came across a small hole in a limestone cliff.

Juan consulted his map. It was not new. This was Cueva de Calleja Rebollo, a civil war refuge. The entrance which required stooping and a 1m drop led into a large chamber, wide with a flattish roof. Light came in from a shaft which was lucky really as the sole equipment we had was a tiny hand torch.

It took perhaps an hour to circle the chamber, and generally inspect what there was to be seen. There were various relics. An obvious cooking area had many rusted out tins, broken wine bottles and a huge pile of lamb bones. We even found remains of leather boots and a gas mask! There were a few pretties, a few pools, but no obvious way on. Eventually we made our way out, and on to the surface rendevous point.

Here we found a hole with an enormous fresh breeze coming out of it. Juin announced that we must number and mark the spot. This was due to the fact that often entrances were in such close proximity that confusions arose.

"Why, sometimes there are entrances only metres apart, and here's the next one". With this he moved two metres up, and two sideways, and there was an open shaft. A stone showed that this was not very deep. The entrance was designated number 685- yes theere were now 685 entrances in the Matienzo caving area. We set the Molephones up but to no avail. Not a sqeak. We tried various positions, moved around and tested various intervals- nothing. Eventually we packed up and left. It turned out that the underground party had missed their way, turned up late, and their Molephone had not worked...

Monday 1st. Cueva del Agua (again), Arthur and Ali. A trip to the 2m cascade and to look at a dig in the Haymarket extension. We looked at some other possible climbs-bolts needed. A furry suit is perhaps not to be recommended for Agua- particularly when carrying digging gear!

In the evening we went to Bar Thomas for a meal. It was Bob and Julie's 7th Wedding anniversary. Ali and Arthur won the eating competition, by a substantial margin.

Tuesday 2nd. A party of Nick, Lenny, Howard, Bob, Ali and Rob went to the area around 685. On the Monday Juan had put a ladder down the shaft at 685, but it was blocked. They had also found a shaft opposite (690). Lenny and Howard dug at the bottom of 690, and Bob attacked the rock blocking 685. After nearly an hour the rock had a very severe headache and fell to pieces. The hole led to a loose 4m pitch to a chokestill draughting mightily.

Ali and Rob found a number of small holes, including:

691- a small draughting hole, some digging done.

692- a 'n shaft in a scar, about 30cm wide. Not descended.

693- a 10m shaft, undescended, draughting, opens out below.

After finishing digging at 685 and 690 we went on down the valley to Arenal. We had a good look at the side entrances. The right hand side closes down almost immediately. The left hand side goes in a fair way, and draughts but also ends in a choke. It might prove easy digging.

That night we were entertained by an excellent electrical storm, which was followed by 12 hours of heavy rain, flooding many people out. Others saw the same storm in the Picos Wednsday Aug 3rd. Not much was done - most people were drying out as best they could. Bob, Ali, Lenny, Colin, Baz, Jill and Arthur returned to Cueva de los Emboscados. More time was spent digging, but the choke was still mobile. A little time was spent unsuccess

-fully looking at side passages again, and taking photographs. Bob then departed as he and Julie were leaving that evening.

Baz, Ali, Colin and Arthur then moved on to Cueva Vecina (96). This is a little right of the entrance to Emboscados. A short crawl leads to the foot of a shaft leading to surface. A fair flow of water down this- did some digging in the floor, the water just seems to sink into a gravel choke. There was a short passage beyond, with a tight 20m shaft below- no sound of water in it.

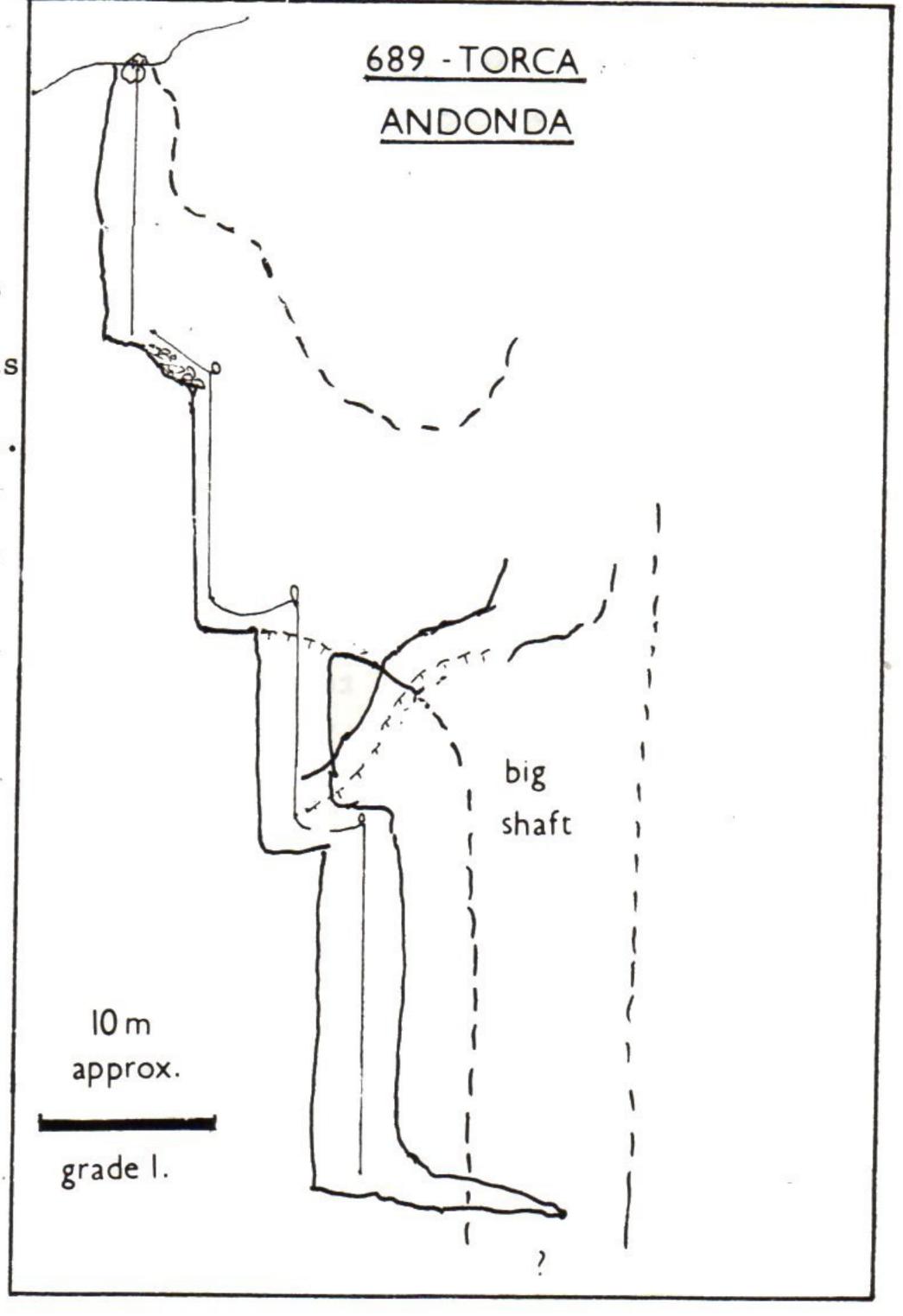
We then carried on to look at the entrance to Cueva de Carcavueso. Water was backed up behind the entrance in a lake about 200m long and 50m wide. The track leading back

to German's Bar was up to 1m deep in water in places.

Thursday 4th. A party consisting of Paul, Charlie and Fran (Red Rose CPC) and Toby and Graham (NCC) and Ali went to 689- Torca Andonda. This had been found a few days before in a prime site, right over the line between Cueva Llueva and the resurgence of the Matienzo river at Los Boyonnes. Three successive pitches of about 20m each had been descended. A ledge between the second and third pitches led into a big shaft down which boulders would trundle for a considerable distance.

The next pitch was descended, from which the small stream led on to sink in fissures- worth digging. An inlet passage above this pitch led awkwardly to a chamber and a shaft.

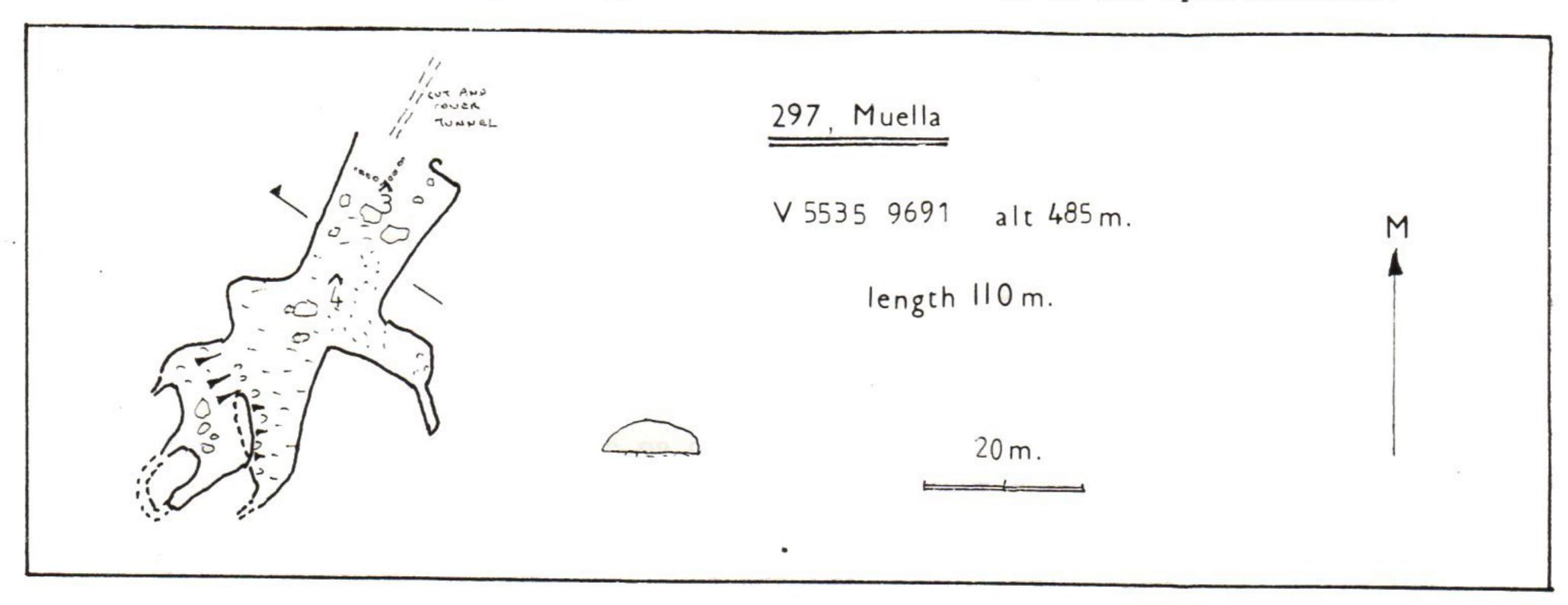
The top of the second pitch is overhung by a very loose boulder slope. Toby and Paul had returned to the campsite to get a bolting kit so a traverse well clear of this could be rigged, but meanwhile the rest of us decided to let them carry on with this and to survey the cave. Charlie and Fran exited safely, followed by Graham. As he was traversing off the top of the second pitch a large quantity of boulders decided they were bored and went for a trundle, leaving him suspended from the belay. The boulders crashed down the next two pitches, fortunately missing Ali who was hiding up the inlet. Graham exited,



followed (nervously) by Ali once he had emptied his trousers out, without further incident. Toby and Paul descended a few hours later, but found that rocks were again falling, and also rocks were falling from the head of the entrance pitch, so they left the cave to settle down a bit. It is uncertain if the big shaft extends any further down, so prospects are uncertain.

Friday 5th. Caves on the east side of Muella. Rob, Ali, Terry Whitaker, and two HCC. We split into two groups, hoping to keep in contact by radio-but the batteries on my radio hadn't been charged! .

Ali and Rob surveyed 297, a large entrance at the bottom of the open hillside.



The entrance contained a walled enclosure in which it seems drips from the cave roof were once collected and conveyed by a man - made tunnel to a nearby barn for water supply. The impressive passage is evidently used as a shelter by cows- it is full of Cowsh! One side passage contains broken pottery, and we found an impressive chamber, over the end of it, and some climbs and small passages worth investigating. We then unsuccessfully tried to locate 321, a cave recorded as being just above 297- we later found it to be 100m to the south east. It is a roomy chamber 10m long. We then joined the others on the hillside- hot sun, but fortunately enough wind to keep cool. We explored a number of undescended caves.

653 is a 5m pitch leading to a 20m crawl.

Another shaft recorded to be "about 100m deep, undescended" proved to be 30m deep, choked-typical of the many shafts in the area. This was on the side of a huge shake-hole on the saddle between Muella and Mullir, being 500m in diameter and 100m deep, with a very impressive echo!

The high ground is largely Lapiaz, razor- sharp limestone flakes, making progress very difficult, and good for destroying wellies!

Saturday 6th. Muella again, covering an area south of that on the 5th. Pedro, Salford Phil, Patrick, Terry, Graham, Ali. Checking out various shaft locations. A number of holes were descended which were shallow and didn't go. A new shaft was descended which was about 50m deep. The radios which worked today proved very useful for contact between different groups, checking out cave descriptions, ordering beers at the bar ready for our return, etc.

Today it was much hotter with no wind, resulting in a lack of enthusiasm, mild heat stroke, and millions of horse flies. One shaft, reported as being undescended, proved to be the top entrance to Cave of the Wild Horses. This consists of some very impressive, large and well decorated chambers, leading to a crawl leading to a second entrance on the lower slopes. This had been found some years ago by the DCC and was subsequently "lost". Not surprising, as it's reputed position was half a mile wrong! Pedro was given some quick lessons in SRT to do this cave. We surveyed this cave, and looked at some other shafts in the area, one 110m deep.

On Sunday 7th Andy Hall, Fran, John and Ali went over to Cueva de Covalanas, a show cave south of Ramales, but this was shut. It was situated beside a huge limestone cliff containing fragments of huge fossil passages. We then drove across to the Ason Gorge, very impressive with some large resurgence caves. We then drove back via the bars in Arredondo and Matienzo.

Meanwhile, 250 miles or so to the west, Bob and Julie had resumed the search for the painted caves of Mondonedo. This time we found Mondonedo - but it was shut! We could not even buy a sandwich! What was worse their Spanish was incomprehensible! Even the phrase book did not help, they did not even refer to Galicia (the provence) but called

it Gallego. On the final night in the camp site bar we were assured by the locals that the painted cave of Mondonedo exists....

Bob, Julie and Ali all having left Matienzo, Carl, a member of the Croydon CC and a newly joined member of the PCG followed to Matienzo from August 8th to 28th. Caving was limited to days without hangovers. But CCC managed to survey 0.7 km of new passage in Toad in the Hole, found by the MUSS, and went on to find another 0.75 km of new passage from these extensions, including some superb formations called Cloud Nine.

Apart from numerous reccies and shaft bashing, which produced minimal results, the other major push was in a horrendous cave (can't remember the name) with a horrendous walk to it, opposite Toad in the Hole. After 2 trips it was rigged to an undescended 3 second drop which remained so due to there being no where to rig gear in the mud covered walls.

The whole month was generally most successful, but next time we'll remember the cookers!

Bob Cawthorne, Alasdair Neill, Carl Gibbs.

## A BAD TIME TO GO CAVING IN THE ALPS....

It was, on the face of it, not a good time to go caving in the Alps. It said so in all the guide books; the snow would be melting and there would be floods. But it was the only time we could go.

We debated wether to take a tent; would it rain or snow? People just said the weather would be 'changeable'. In the end the truth was the tent wouldn't fit in the car, so the problem was solved; much like any other caving trip we would go and find a hut somewhere.

Our first objective was the Dent de Crolles, near Grenoble on the edge of the French Alps. This limestone range contains the famous systems of the Trou de Glaz, explored in the '30's and '40's by Pierre Chevalier. Here the prospects of a 24 hour through trip lured us...

The second objective was the Vercors, a few miles to the south. We crammed our trusty Metro with enough ropes and ladders to take on all the deep systems described in the new guide book to the area, and lurched off on a Thursday night to Portsmouth. 24 hours later....

In second, we ground our way up the steep, winding road beneath cliffs which seemed to meet overhead in the dark night. The drizzle turned to snow, and it was with relief that we finally arrived at St Pierre, beneath the western flank of the Dent de Crolles. Nearby there was supposed to be a refuge; we drove up and down several times before stopping to enquire at a large, new, fully occupied school holiday centre. This, it turned out, was the refuge and we were not welcome there.

Lee and Charlie started looking for a bus shelter or ledge to kip in, but I persuaded them to lower their sights a bit when I dug up a Hotel room for only £10 a night all in. We would need a more permenant base however, so next morning we decided to drive around to the eastern side of the mountain, where there was another refuge we had heardcabout by post.

We first had to drive up over the 1300m high Col de Porte, which was well covered by snow, and involved the Metro in some graceful pirouettes until we dropped down into the green and wet Isere valley by Grenoble. From here we soon began to climb again, up endless hairpin bends. Again the rain turned to snow, the trees and then the road becoming heavily laden. At 1430m we reached the Col du Coq, with the dramatic shear cliff of the Dent de Crolles rising up to over 2000m.

At the alpine, wooden refuge, we were warmly welcomed by the owners who were well accustomed to cavers, though usually at other times of the year. Right now, their few visitors were all there for the skiing! We were given a large dormitory all to ourselves, and permission to use the restaurant kitchen for cooking our own food. We felt we had arrived.

After lunch we set off to make a recce trip to locate the Trou de Glaz entrance, so that we could start the trip early the next morning. Upon leaving the road, we soon found ourselves in deep snow which made for hard going on the steep slopes. Lee (he's hard) made tracks, and in less than an hour we reached the Col des Ayes. Ahead was a steep drop to the head of a heavily wooded valley. Up to our right, overlooking the valley, rose steep snow covered slopes, and several hundred feet higher began the