

Caves & Caving

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Vale: Giles Barker

MATIENZO DE RUESGA.

Giles Barker, aged 36, an English speleologist from Manchester, died on 10th August in a cave in Matienzo de Ruesga, Santander, after falling twenty metres. He was caving as a member of the British expedition to Matienzo.

Mr. Barker entered Torca de Azpilicueta at 12.15 with 2 companions from the Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club. They intended to explore and photograph some passages in the 20km long system and exit through the bottom entrance, Cubio de la Reñada, 305m below. Part way through the cave, his two friends descended a tight tube and Mr. Barker discovered that his camera equipment would not pass through. He decided to try an alternative route and it was while negotiating this on his own that he slipped to his death.

His companions, not knowing of his accident, waited and then searched for him, finally exiting the cave and raising the alarm at 21.15.

A search party descended Azpilicueta and discovered his body. He had apparently died instantly from a broken neck.

At 10.00 the following day, teams went underground at the top and bottom entrances to start the process of recovering the body which lay 1.5km from the entrance to Reñada. Five teams were involved throughout the day enlarging small sections, making safe slippery climbs, route marking and carrying the stretcher. His body was brought to the surface at 20.30 and taken to Laredo.

Twenty two British cavers were assisted in the recovery by 13 Spanish rescuers. Further valuable assistance was given by the civil authorities.

Giles Barker was an expert climber and caver having many years experience.

British cavers have been exploring the caves around Matienzo for the last 22 years and this is the first serious incident which has occurred in that time.

OBITUARY - GILES BARKER

To anyone who knew him, Giles Barker will probably be best remembered for his infectious enthusiasm for any project in which he or you were involved. He needed to know everything about any aspect of caving, climbing, photography, people and places that he could read or ask about. His knowledge of crags and caves that he had visited or wanted to visit, was awesome. He caved and climbed extensively in this country and abroad, always preferring the spectacular rather than just the hard trip, because he loved the shapes, textures and colours of rock scenery both above and below ground.

An unhurried and careful approach allowed him to observe much more than most, and he put this to good use in all his photographs, in which he adopted a professional attitude. He had his opinions on most subjects and sparked off many a lively debate, as he was not afraid to express his own views. There will be a lot of people from South Wales to the Dales who will miss him as a friend, climbing or caving partner, or just a drinking companion.

Ray Duffy

