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Rupert Skorupka sets off into the upstream sump in Cueva del Molino

SPAIN

Matienzo 1997

by Juan Corrin

The 27th year of British Speleological Expeditions to Matienzo surveyed over 4km of new cave passage, taking the total of explored cave in the area to nearly 209km, with 1272 catalogued sites of speleological interest. The explorations occurred during Easter, a few days in June, over a five week period in July and August and few days in the autumn. There were no major discoveries this year, some loose ends were explored and various leads found to explore next year. The main discoveries are listed in the table.

MATIENZO September 1997



The North Vega System provided the greatest length of new passage with over 800m. Extensions were made around the end of Hedgehog Passage in Cueva de Mostajo and, in Cueva Morenuca, pitches provided further links with Regaton below. A traverse to unexplored passage remains to be pushed.

The Four Valley System was 'consolidated' in a number of places. In Cueva Carcavuezo, the Draintester, first entered 10 years ago, was finally surveyed through small, grotty passage under the Trident series in Hoyuca. In Cueva Hoyuca, the Zoological gardens at the end of the Gorilla Walk were finally surveyed as was a small inlet at the start of the Far Stomps. At Easter, a 10m pitch at the end of Wardrobe Passage was linked into a chamber first entered 11 years ago through God Knows Passage.

Cueva de German was entered above Volvo. A living room size entrance chamber had a small hole at the back which revealed Bronze Age pottery before entering 100m of passage, the latter section in large breakdown. Unfortunately, this site appears to be an isolated fragment in the possible link between Regaton/Mostajo and Carcavuezo. With nearly one kilometre of passage at about 480m altitude, Alpine Chough is the longest length of high level cave on the Muela / Mullir limestone mass.

The length now includes a short series

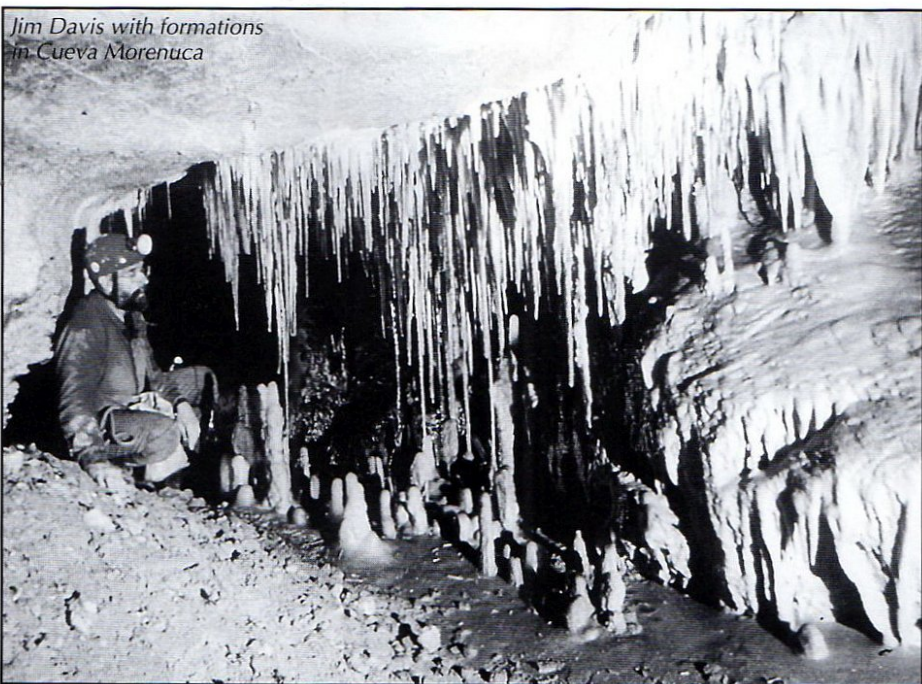


Ramón Quintana



Hannibal Lector's Fingers

Ramón Quintana



Jim Davis with formations in Cueva Morentuca

Peter Engan

Site	Surveyed '97	Length
North Vega System	869	17892
4 Valleys System	572	41420
Vallina	536	25726
Molino	411	1620
South Vega System	294	25209
Torca Lorca site 1250	179	179
Alpine Chough	144	954
German's cave site 1232	109	109
site 1235	108	108
site 1211	103	103
Torca XLS site 517	92	92
Regato site 672	80	1562
La Cuvia de Seldesuto	70	287
site 1212	65	65
Toad site 258	63	5566
site 693	62	62
site 1264	61	61
site 1241		c30
site 979	56	56
Cueva del Pico del Hayal	49	49
site 1248	48	48
Cueva de Pino site 1175	46	46
site 1265	31	31
Vaca Loca site 763	20	54
TOTAL		4068m

17922

entered from the bottom of the entrance pitch by maypole.

In Cueva Vallina, jointly exploring with the Catalans cavers from the Espeleo Club Tortosa and AA EET de Valls extended the length to 25,726m with surveyed extensions in the Hale Bopp passages. A bolted climb in Toc Gallery met a tiny inlet. The cave remains tantalisingly close to the South Vega System but the link will not be found without more effort. Eight Catalans were stranded at the bottom of the 30m Double Dutch pitch for 20 hours by a nameless Brit inadvertently partially pulling up the rope while leaving the cave.

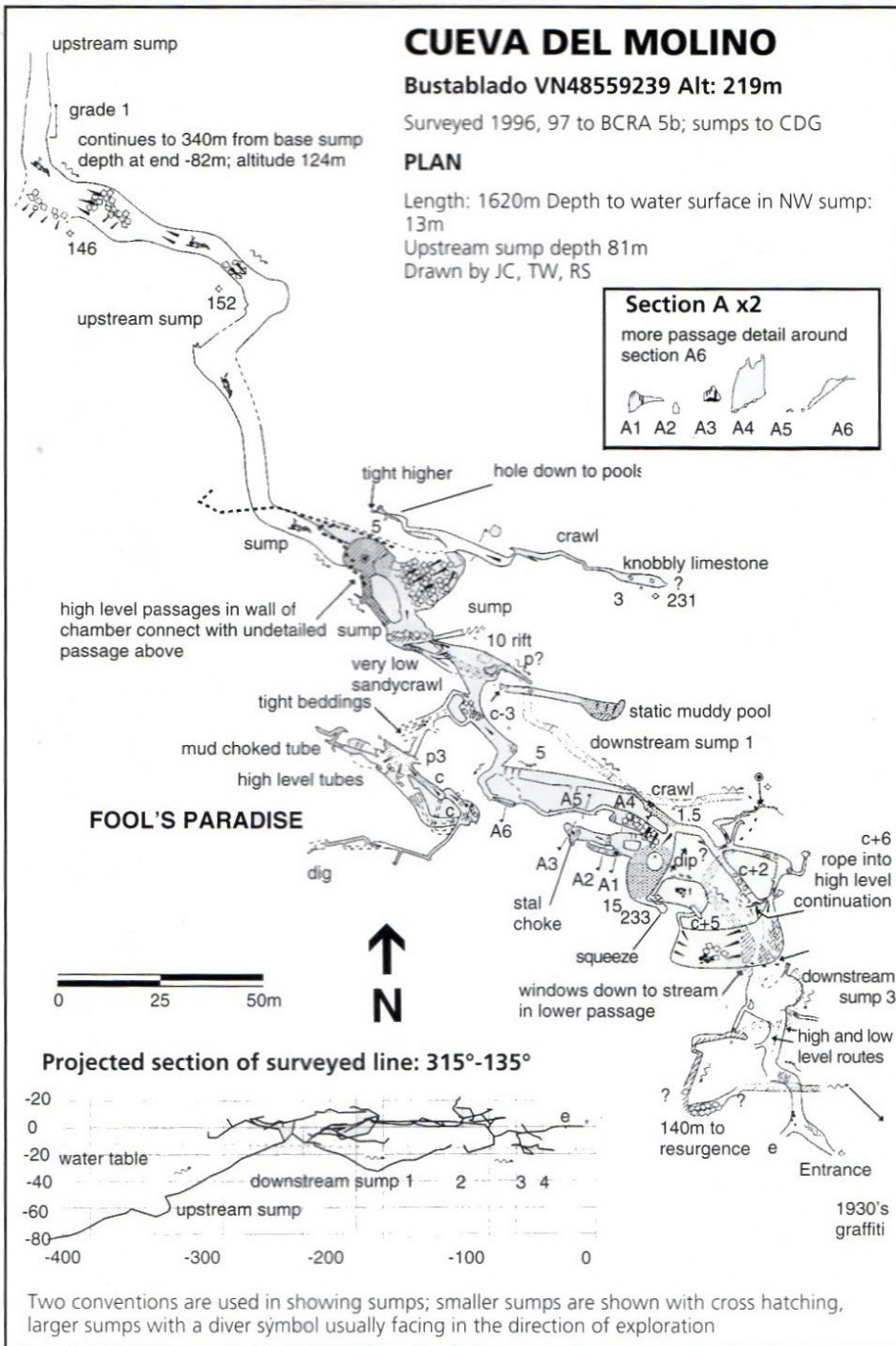
In Cueva del Molino, Fool's Paradise was entered as a series of dry passages before the final sump chamber. Above the upstream sump, a bolt route high on the northern wall met boulders and was pushed through only to end above the southern side of the sump chamber. Under water, Rupert Skorupka continues to push the frontiers and has now reached a depth of -82m (beating the Spanish record) with the large passage rising in front, about 340m from base. As Rupert says in his report, 'the fact that these dives were possible in a location which requires climbs, squeezes and crawls to reach is a tribute to all the members of the Matienzo 1997 Expedition who helped carry, as well as Swedish cavers, Catalan cavers and my wife, who made 26 trips in 22 days without one visit to the beach!'

Again with the Catalans, a large, joint exploration was conducted around the avens at the end of the China Syndrome in the South Vega System, trying to find the best spot to start bolting – to a possible link with Vallina? A dive in Two Sumps Chamber unfortunately brought Fred Winstanley back into known passage, although leads exist underwater. In Breakdown Chamber in Reñada, bolting and climbing has started to try and forge a link with the East Wanders Series in Torca de la Cabaña.



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Beneath Matienzo



Sites between the South Vega System and Toad in the Hole were pushed: Vaca Loca continues to be dug but a new hole, a couple of hundred metres up stream with an even better draught (Torca Lorca) was dug and pushed down in a complicated loose area to a depth of 35m, with a length of 179m. Further progress was made in the digs on the track up to Azpilicueta. Along with Arenal, the big draughts on this hillside suggest a large system behind – perhaps the missing link to join Vallina with the South Vega System.

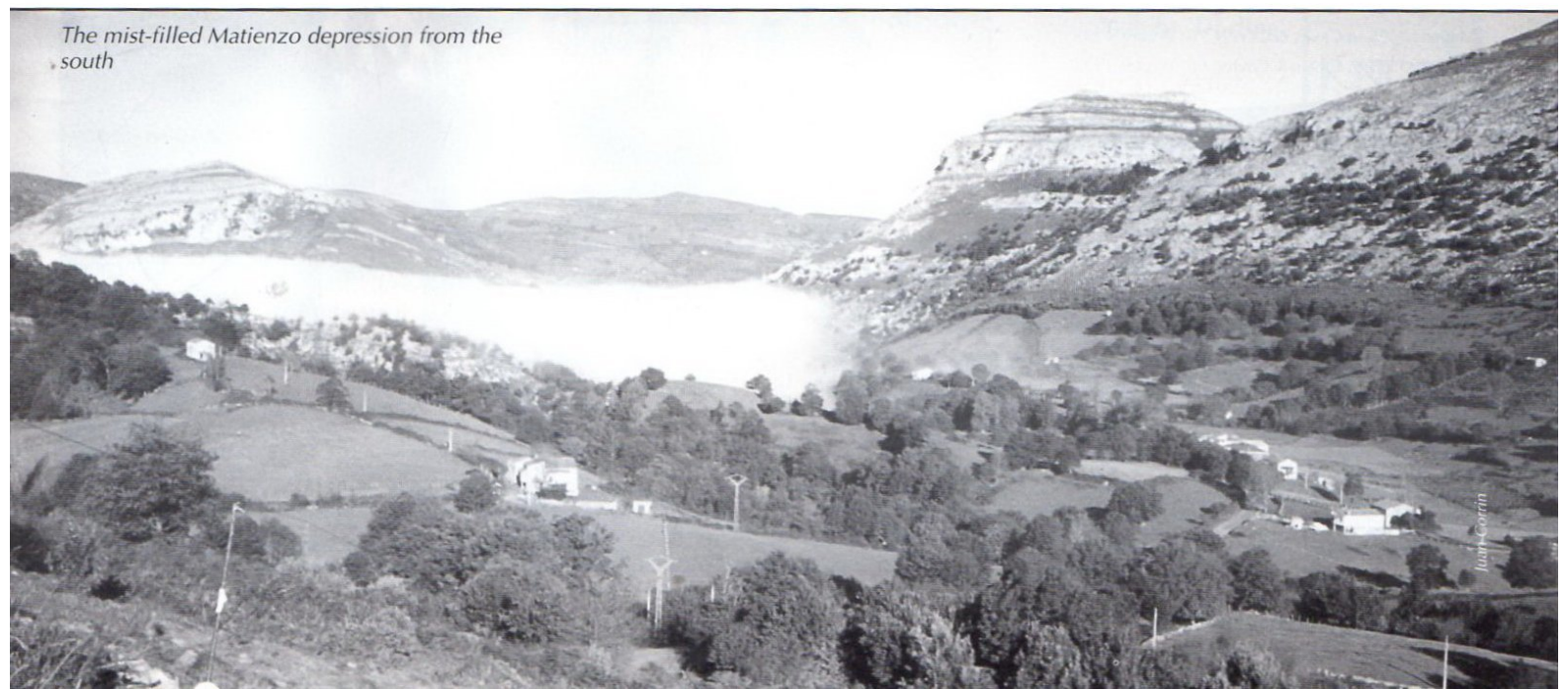
Torca XLs was enlarged using Hilti caps and surveyed to a depth of 74m. Between downstream Codisera and upstream Coverón, it was hoped that the draughting shaft would provide the key.

An unknown site (1235) was entered through a 'walk-in' hole and about 100m of roomy passage was explored with good formations (including a column), gour pools, bones, charcoal deposits and charcoal wall markings. Only a few metres from a cavers 'trade route', the find shows that every square metre of hillside must be visited! The exploration and survey of two shafts (sites 1211 and 1212) was completed. Above and to the north of Cueva Fresno, the shafts may be feeders.

The Toad in the Hole area also saw some work with small extensions in the Saville Row area and a new shaft (site 1248) explored above the cave which dropped 41m but failed to connect. At Easter, La Cuvia de Seldesuto (site 370) was pushed to large passage. The extension contains deposits under calcite with apparent bear bones.

Other small sites included 1241, a cave near 415 with elephant tusk formations, ending in a boulder floored shaft; digs in the same corner of the depression are progressing; Cueva del Pico del Hayal, a large collapse chamber near the oldest houses in Llueva; 46m surveyed in Cueva de Pino, below Codisera; the Dairy Dig and Dairy Dig II, draughting sites at the main Coteron level which are not proving easy to crack; site 979 near Hornedo where Phil Papard

The mist-filled Matienzo depression from the south



Site 1235



Juan Corrin

dived on a mini bottle to a possible continuation; site 1258, a dig at a tight shaft top in Llueva which corkscrewed down 15m to end; and finally, site 1259, a 40m long open cave, close to the supposed human burial cave of Peñarobra. At Easter, in Camargo, caving with Carlos from the G.E.I.S. Carbollo/Rada, a small but impressive gorge entered a 10m high entrance with pitch which closed down after 123m.

The 4km discovered this year has been found mainly through extending known systems, with no dramatic break-throughs. A quiet year in terms of amount of cave discovered, but hopes remain very high that another big find will soon be entered, probably through digging.



Acknowledgements

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Recent References

- Matienzo '96 in Caves & Caving 75, Spring 1997.
- Matienzo '95 in Caves & Caving 70, Winter 1995.
- Matienzo '94 in Caves & Caving 66, Winter 1994.

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Anastomoses in Cueva Morenuda

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Site 1235

