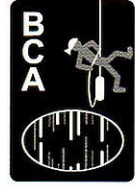


# Speleology

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BCRA

# Expedition Report: Matienzo, Spain 2003

Juan Corrin reports on the exploration in northern Spain.

The Easter '10 days' brought good weather and more than 21 cavers based in Matienzo, including four from Denmark. Members of the International Society for Speleological Art (ISSA), based at Ogarrio, were also active and gave a generous contribution to expedition funds. Most passage was discovered in Cueva Vallina (463m), Snottite Cave (403m) and Torca de Serruco (207m). Over 1.2km were surveyed with the number of cave sites rising to 1922.

More than 40 cavers (including Catalans and Danes) came out for varying amounts of time during July and August, discovering over 2.4km of passages. Cueva Vallina, Cueva Bollón and Torca de Papá Noel produced the main extensions of 1075m, 252 and 244m respectively. Torca de Papá Noel was also linked to Torca de Coterón and to Cubio de la Reñada down a 138m drop – the *Tumbling Dice* pitch. The length of the South Vega System at the end of the summer had risen to more than 29km.

After further explorations up to the end of December, the number of cave sites had risen to 1968, with passage length in the area of some 241.8km.

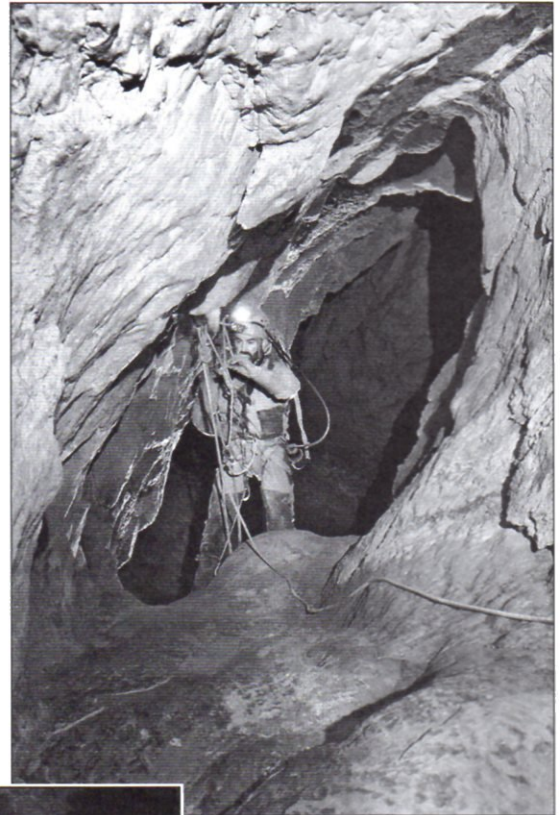
## Muela / Mullir

The February 'flying visit' had found site **1856** in the jungle below the

farmhouses on the southern side of Llueva. A 60m booming shaft, below a 4m climb down from the surface, required a bit of tidying up and this was the objective for the first day out at Easter. The shaft was descend to the estimated depth, past some hanging rocks just below the entrance.

Some 23 years ago a farmer mentioned that **Sima del Canado** was 30 to 50m deep and in the jungle below the farmhouses. It was only this Easter that the shaft (site **1822**) was actually discovered and then descended down a steep gully to a depth of 53m. Up the hillside from Sima del Canado, a couple of 10m shafts were descended in mossy pinnacles (site **1857**).

On the Muela / Mullir high level, site **1871** was explored down a 22m shaft that split and choked. Site **1872** has two



Above: Santi Urrutia on a high level pitch in Cueva Vallina. Left: Hugh Browning in the crawl out of the top entrance chamber in Cueva Vallina. Photos: Peter T Eagan.



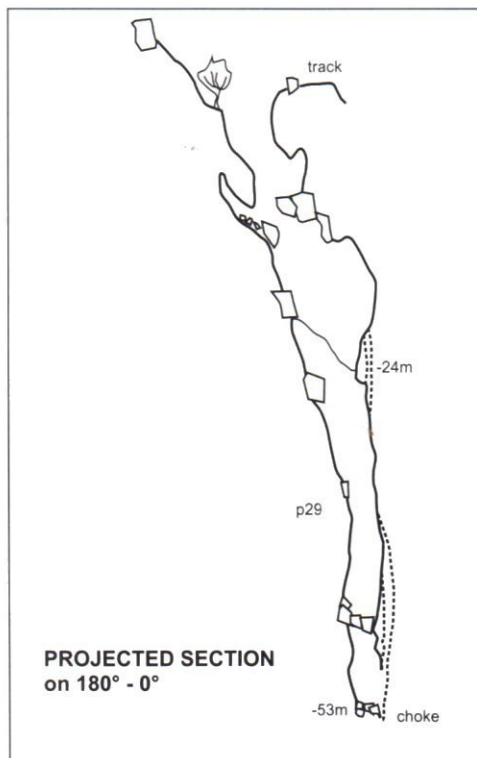
small, 3m long caves.

In the summer site **489**, at an altitude of 617m, was revisited to enlarge a tiny draughting hole. The successful venture extended the high-level fragment by 100m through well decorated sections. The cave currently ends at another

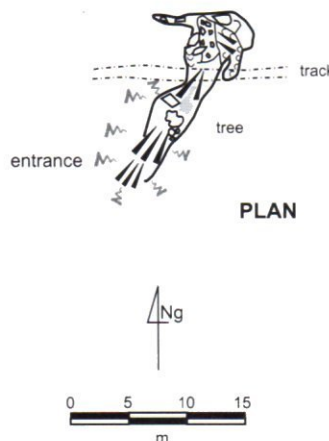
draughting hole.

Another major venture was the survey of site **116, Torca de Yusa**, first explored by the British in 1975, then more recently by the Spanish caving group Sociedad Espeleológica Alto Duero. The survey published by the SEAD was an unlabelled projected elevation so a more informative drawing was required. Although not finished, the recent work shows the entrance 117m pitch dropping into a 90m x 30m chamber that skirts the north-western side of the 500m wide and 200m deep depression of Hoya de Yusa. Further pitches have the cave finishing at -190m with a traverse length of 352m.

About 1km to the east of the Hoya de Yusa, shafts were explored at sites **1946, 1947, 1956, 1957 and 1958** being 5m, 15m, 14m, 5m (undescended), 2m (undescended) deep respectively. Site **1959** is a draughty dig in the base of a



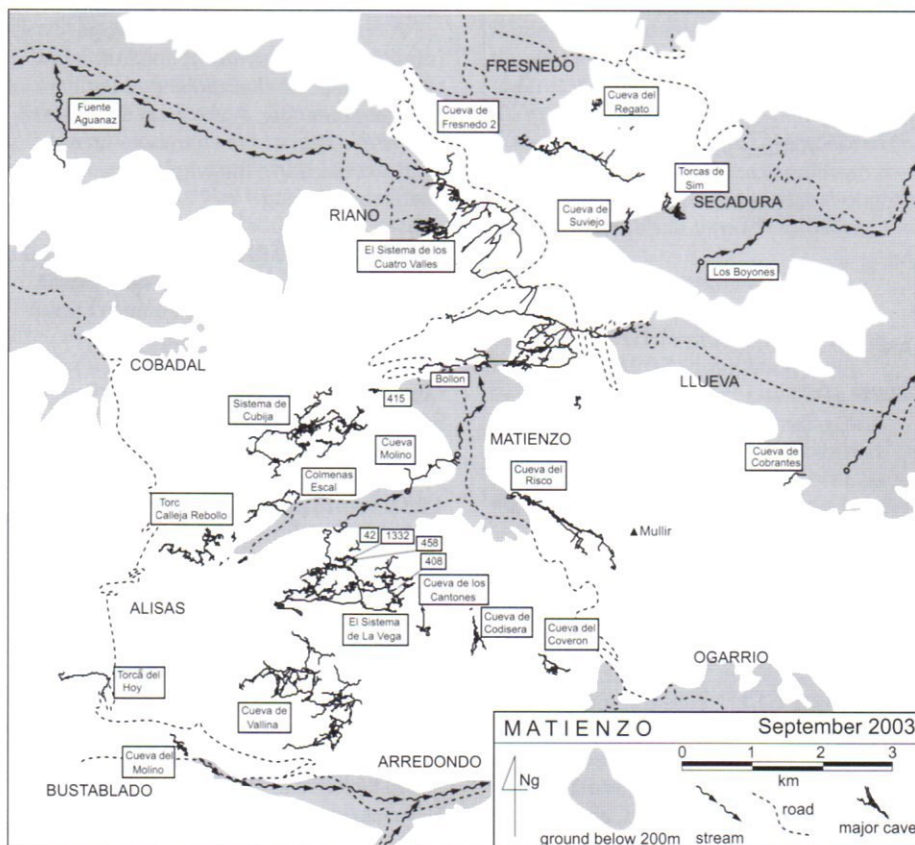
PROJECTED SECTION  
on 180° - 0°



PLAN

**Site 1822: Sima del Canado**  
Muela VN5537(7) 9723(1) Altitude 340m  
Surveyed 2003 to BCRA 5c

Length 63m Depth 53m  
Drawn by Phil Papard



followed down-dip to a roomy 18m pitch. This choked at the base but it may be worth enlarging the narrow passage at the bottom if a draught is detected on a warmer day.

During a very dry summer – two showery days in five weeks – **Cueva Bollón** was entered down **Hole in the Road** and the normally sumped, bouldery region to the west entered. This route was pushed through a boulder choke into good sized passage ending after 250m at a 15m high boulder choke and avens with possibilities for continuation. The passage has turned from the usual western trend to a more south-west direction and currently ends 250m from the 415 and 715 area.

A ten-minute walk from the campsite, site **1941** was excavated over three days through a draughting slot into a couple of decorated chambers connected by a tight, muddy crawl. The northern direction of this 55m long cave shows it heading towards the area where the Western Series in **Carcavueso** and **Cueva Bollón** come close to each other.

### North Vega, El Naso, Las Calzadillas and Cobadal

At Easter, a half day out on El Naso resulted in a few finds – surprising given the amount of time spent up there. Site **1880** was finally given a number. This 80m long rift, open to the surface along its whole length and up to 6m deep in places, has been known for years. On closer investigation it appears to have a digging site just inside the northern end. Other small holes looked at were **1881**, **1882**, **1884**, **1885**, **1886** and, the largest, **1883** where a 9m climb down between boulders entered a small 'chamber'. In the summer site **1881** was entered down a tight rift to finish after 6m and site **1953**, with a 4m by 3m shaft top, was descended to finish at the usual rocky choke 10m down. Other small holes investigated

shakehole and site **1569** was dug in sand in a tube to where the continuation can be seen. Site **1578** was revisited and a small extension increased its length to 15m. Site **1581** is a continuing draughting dig through large boulders.

To the west of the Hoya, around the peak of Muela, site **1949** is a small cave with a continuing crawl, while site **1954** is unexplored through a tight entrance but has stones dropping for 1–2 seconds then rolling for 5 or 6 where it appears larger. On the western side of La Colina, overlooking Matienzo, site **1033** in an ivy-clad depression was re-investigated at the end of the year and excavated at the base of a low passage over boulders. This would appear to be a major dig that could produce interesting results.

In a separate venture, Rupert Skorupka continued his deep dive in **Peter Plummet** (site **239**) near to the **Nacimiento del Río Clarín**, the supposed resurgence for at least some of the water on Muela / Mullir. The flooded shaft continues down past the previous limit of –72m to hit the floor at –81m. About 20m of line was then laid to –83m, with the cave 'definitely continuing downwards'.

### Four Valleys System

Continuing the work of 2002, some potentially interesting sites were revisited or found this Easter. Sites **1804** and **1805** appeared to be coming together within about 15m of the supposed downstream continuation of **Cueva Riaño**. Plugs and feathers and battery-powered drill were used to aid the investigation of site **1805**, where a descent was opened up down a tight rift and a squeeze between

blocks enlarged to a chamber that did connect with **1804** – but with no sign of **Cueva Riaño**.

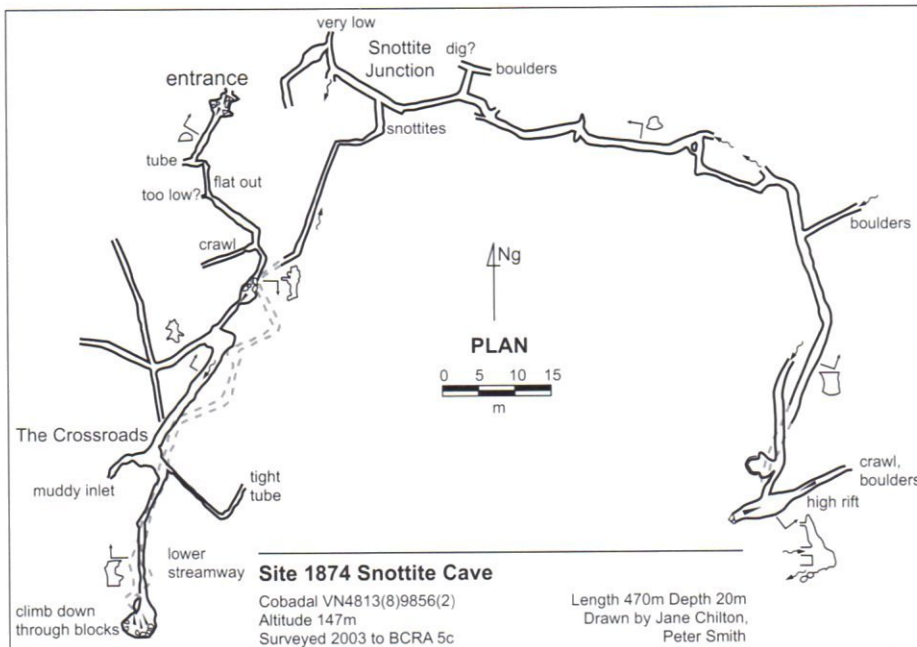
The friendly locals brought a couple of nearby sites into the open by clearing the undergrowth: site **1867** has a walk-in entrance that soon lowers to a bouldery dig. This has an aural connection with site **1866**, a narrow rift to a bouldery chamber. Digging at this point looks reasonably promising. Site **1870** was also mentioned by the farmer. After removing the large block covering the entrance the site was found to be an 8m deep hole with short lengths of passage in each direction.

The only visits to the '415 corner',

to the west of the Carcavueso sink in Matienzo, were to the **Pants dig**, where the draughting site was left needing more shoring, and to site **715**, where small extensions and clarifications were made around the p18, about one third of the way down the 110m deep hole. At Christmas, the Climbing Wall dig became the **Climbing Wall Cave** (site **1504**) when the entrance (3m above the shakehole base) was enlarged and a bedding

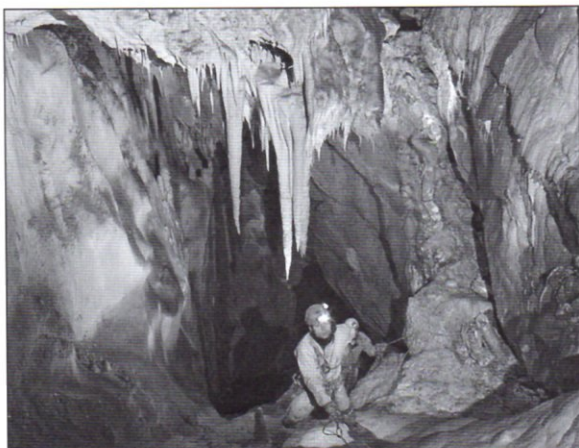


Jenny Plucknett beneath an array of helictites in Torca del Picón.  
Photo: Martin Holroyd.



included sites **1950**, **1951**, **1952** and **1940**.

The most interesting finds came as part of the ongoing reinvestigations in Cobadal. Over a distance of 150m, a series of wooded shakeholes below a farmhouse contain **Orchard Cave** (site **618**, known since before 1986), an apparently unpromising shakehole and a large rift filled with rubbish. The latter was investigated at Easter (site **1873**) and happily the disgusting hole quickly choked with rubbish down a short pitch. The middle depression (site **1874**) had a strong, cold draught coming up through the floor of soil and boulders. This was excavated over a couple of hours to provide an easy slide down into the cave. A short dig was required through a flat out section but then the passage was open. It continued downstream to where it became too small at about 20m depth. An upstream passage mirrored the first section, ending at about the same altitude as the entrance. One visit was made in the summer to push the smaller passages. **Snottite Cave** (length 470m) was named after some roof formations seen at the main junction. The altitude of this fairly immature system is lower than the large, 467m phreatic remnant (**Torca de**



Shaft exploration in Torca de Papá Noel. Photo: Jonas Binladen.

**Torcida**, site **613**) just to the south and heading towards Snottite Cave.

Other holes in Cobadal were investigated. The entrance to site **1868**, next to the road between La Gatuna and Cobadal, was excavated to a crawl that ended at a wide 10m pitch with apparent tunnels left and right of the drop. The truth quickly emerged when tackle was brought back the next day: a choked pitch, one tunnel that quickly rose to the roof, and the other went out to the surface.

In the summer **Cueva Candenosa** was subjected to a number of digs, but only the sandy flat-out crawl at the back of the main chamber appears to be a possibility.

The sink area at the head of the Cobadal depression received a lot of attention during July and August. The sumidero (site **553**) was surveyed and a rift at the end enlarged. The draughting bouldery mess around the cave entrance was also dug. About 50m to the north and some 15m higher, a draughting rift (site **1930**) was enlarged to allow entry into a tight pitch and constricted tube that needs enlarging. **Green Pepper Cave** (**1931**) was discovered and enlarged just inside the entrance to pass a crawl into a stream passage that choked with calcite after only 12m.

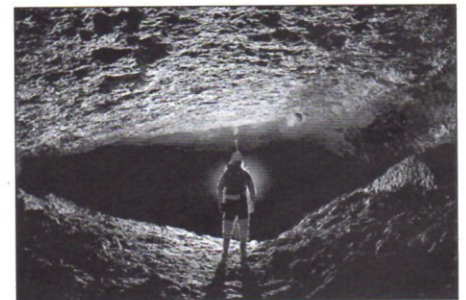
In the Bosmartín area, site **1893** is a 4m shaft 'going into blackness' and other small caves are **1889**, **1890**, **1891**, and **1892** (a rock shelter). While searching for the large, obvious entrances to **Sima del Picón**, a rather smaller site was found further up the hill in Cubija: site **1894** is a 20m choked pitch. A few small holes were investigated in the Bosmartín and Cubija areas during the summer: sites **1932**, **1933**, **1934**, **1948** and **1961**.

A visit to **La Cuvia de La Vega** (site **360**) at Christmas opened up a low, bouldery alcove after digging at the base of the main chamber. A climb up the eastern wall at the start of the chamber entered a calcited section. The whole cave now needs resurveying.

### South Vega, Seldesuto and Alisas

At a low altitude, **Mega Moll Shaft** was partly re-explored with some drops in the floor still undescended.

A number of sites up to 100m above were found: **1513** was explored down a 9m shaft; site **1929** was enlarged from a small draughting hole to a 3m deep shaft that looks promising under one wall; site **1935** was found hidden behind a tree and bush – a short crawl ended at a 2m climb down and a 5m pitch led into a chamber that choked in a rift, giving a total length of 33m and depth of 13m. Two hundred metres to the east, site **1936** was explored down a small pitch to a choked passage. Sites **1942**, **1943** and **1944** were documented: 3m, 4m and 3m deep respectively. One kilometre south and 300m higher than Mega Moll, **Torcon de Beralta** was re-explored, surveyed and extended by a few metres to give a length of 88m and depth of 50m. Nearby, site **1698** was explored down a 20m pitch to a slope and too-tight rift; site **1960** is a tiny chamber reached through a small



Top level, Cueva Vallina. Photo: Peter T. Eagan.

entrance; site **1962** had rocks removed to reveal a 10m drop in a passage that immediately became too small, and site **1237** was excavated to reveal a small, choked chamber.

Just below the vineyard on the TV mast track, site **1847** was found in February as a draughting muddy patch with boulders. This was later dug out to an 8m climb down to a small chamber and dig in a crawl. In the summer the draughting crawl was excavated to a short section of low passage and a boulder choke. This was passed to a too-tight rift. The total length was 26m, depth 12m.

An enlarged track has been bulldozed through from the top of the TV mast track to end at a high level above Seldesuto. It is now possible to drive (in a 4-wheel drive vehicle, or hire car) to within 30m of the entrance to **Torca de Azpilicueta**. This convenience has come at a cost – some limestone pavement has been destroyed and the wide, muddy route is not an attractive addition to the wilderness on

South Vega.

A fair amount of work was carried out to the east of Azpilicueta entrance. In **Torca de Serruco** (site **50**) this has paid off. Serruco has an obvious high-level entrance, although somewhat hidden by a large block, and it was first descended in 1977 and 1978 when ladders were used down the entrance slope and pitch. The description mentioned a 55m deep hole. During Easter 2003, a passage just below the entrance hole was 'walked' into and headed west for 40m. This was visually connected with site **341**, which had been left in 1982 as an open slope. Where site 341 entered the new Serruco passage, large fragments of prehistoric pottery were found. On the eastern side of the ladder pitch, the continuation of the high-level passage was entered, ending after 15m at a pitch, later dropped in two places, one a blind 10m pit, the other two 10m pitches that gave a visual connection with the SRT route down. Beyond the top of the pitches, a traverse entered a passage with mud floors, crystal pools and gour. This finished after 40m when a calcite choke was met.

The initial vertical explorations this year were SRT-based and down a small side pitch at the back of the eastern side of the entrance chamber. Pitches of 3, 20 and 10m entered the chamber at the base of the much roomier ladder pitch. At the bottom of a bouldery slope, a 7m pitch was excavated and descended to end disappointingly at a too-tight, but draughting, slot. Higher up the bouldery slope a descending, bouldery rift was entered to end at a squeeze that was enlarged. Unfortunately, the continuing high and narrow rift ended at a mud floor with no way on at any height in the rift. Tantalizingly, water can be heard falling or flowing in the distance.

Other investigated (newly descended or revisited) sites in the area include **339**, **854** (boulder removed and descended to 15m depth), **1854** (10m pitch), **1858** (choked chamber opened up by the side of the new track), **1859** (deceptive entrance that dropped down in a nice rift to a choked undercut), **1860** (roomy pitch ends 10m down) and **1865** (4m long slot).

Work in **Torca de Papá Noel** (site **1471**) extended the cave by 76m near the *Plaza de Concorde* to 2557m, and was left at a 30m undescended pitch. The main discoveries however were the two connections into the South Vega System. At *Tumbling Dice* at 329m altitude in Papá Noel, a 138m pitch drops to meet **Cubio de la Reñada** just beyond *Ghost Lake* in a north-heading passage discovered ending in avens in December 2002. A series of trips in November by the Danes discovered two deep shafts in a chamber beyond an excavated crawl at the end of *BBQ at Saucepan Street*. These await exploration during Easter 2004.

Torca de Papá Noel was also connected with **Torca de Coterón**. This link is down through the boulders in *Paper*

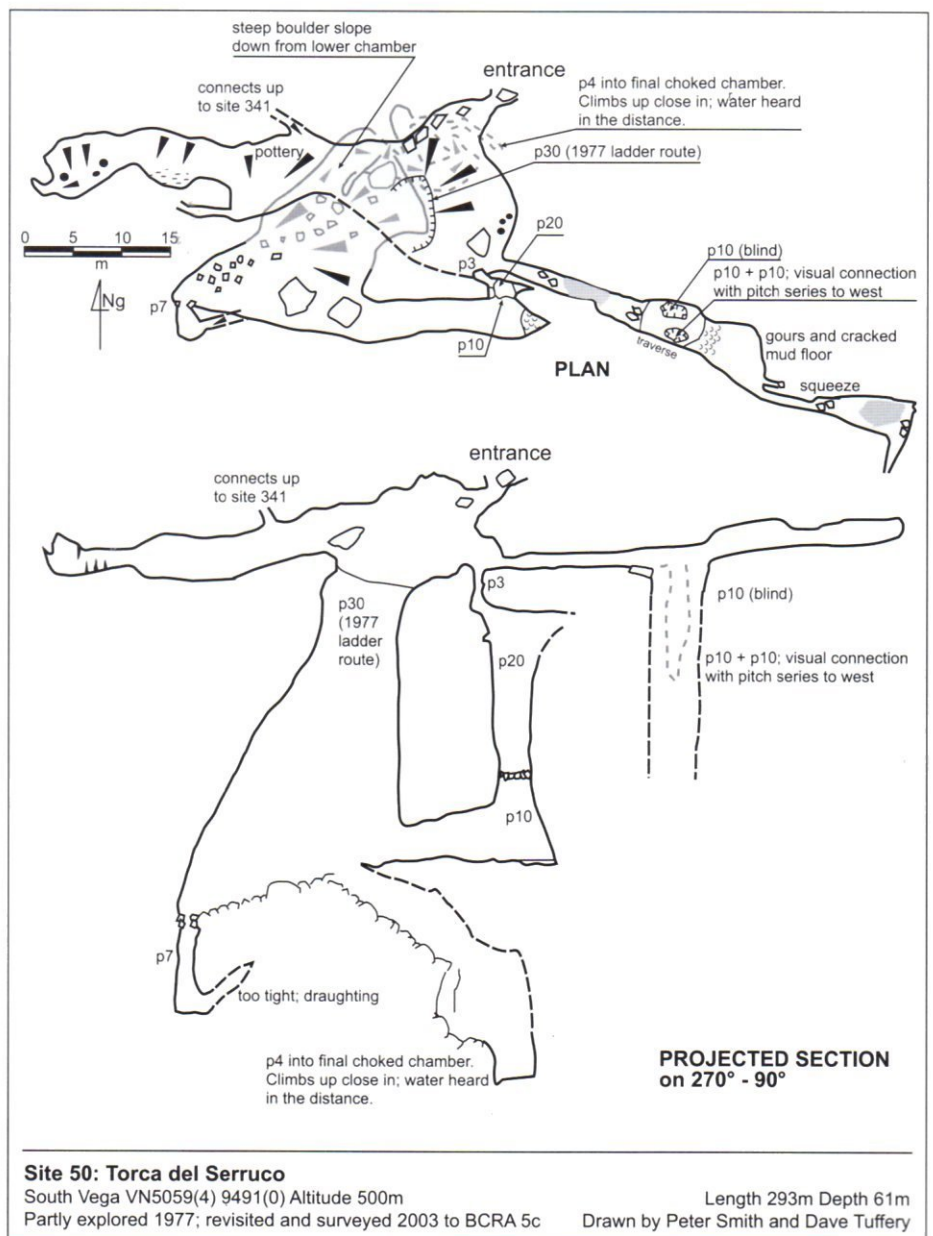
Plane to emerge through a choke very near the end of the *Reñada Arm* in Coterón. Extensions down *The Rodeo* pitches (67m) and along a traverse and continuing draughting passage (43m) at the northern end of Papá Noel were explored from the Coterón entrance, as this is now thought to be the easiest route through to the depths of Papá Noel.

Sites found around the entrance include **1895** (a draughting diggable collapse), **1901** (a draughting 5m long fissure) and **1907** (draughting hole). To the west and north-west, site **1906** is a potential dig, site **1910** entered a 3m long chamber to another chamber and site **1911** is a 10m long cave with a large number of sardine cans, presumably left from the Civil War.

In the region below **Cueva de Helechales**, five small sites were explored: **1912** (3m deep and choked), **1913** (4m long ending in a choke), **1914** (unexplored rift awaiting removal of a block) and **1915** (5m long goat shelter). Site **1922** had rocks removed to reveal a tight rift leading off that requires enlarging.

Lower down the hillside, a number of trips in **Hidden Hole** resulted in the dig towards **Cueva Cefrales** being extended by a few centimetres and unexplored pitches being explored. In Cueva Cefrales, the opposite end of the supposed connection dig was continued.

Around **Cueva Adillos** – below the entrance of **TV Mast Cave** – a number of interesting holes were opened up. These are slightly off the usual routes across the open hillside but still come as a surprise. Site **1887** was dug out to about 40m of passage with a couple of continuing digs that may already be passable by a small person. This is on the same beds as site **1514**, which was also dug inside to a small choke. Site **1887** revealed a small piece of black pottery. In the same area site **1926** is a 1m diameter tube with a 5m pitch inside that may enlarge. This productive 500 x 200m rectangle of hillside also revealed a number of other sites. Site **1918** has a 'large entrance' (but chokes 5m in at a draughting slot), **1917** was a 4m shaft into a parallel rift that choked 9m down, **1920** choked 4m down and **1919** is a site that 'needs to be dug'. Site **1923**



is a 4m wide, low cave entrance under a cliff that chokes all round after 7m of crawling. Site **1924** was descended down a 7m pitch at the base of a steep-sided shakehole. Part way down the pitch is an undescended parallel shaft. Site **1925** was explored down a 3m drop into a small chamber. Some 200m east of Cueva Adillos, site **1921** was found to be a 5m long, choked cave.

At 600m altitude, some 200m higher, is the **Volcano dig**. This is 'work in progress' and was excavated over Easter and the summer.

Just downhill from Reñada top entrance, site **1955** was 'resurrected' from 1994 notes: a 6m length of excavated passage.

The South Vega System now has 8 entrances in its 29km length: site **675** (altitude 487m), **Torca de Azpilicueta** (480m), **Torca de Papá Noel** (445m), **Torca de la Cabaña** (433m), site **1338** (426m), **Torca de Coterón** (375m) and **Cubio de la Reñada** with entrances at about 200m and 180m altitude. The height difference between top and bottom entrances is 307m but the depth of the system is 317m as there is some lower level passage in Reñada. (The top entrance, site 675, has yet to be 'gardened' and surveyed.)

Another couple of surprises were found around the track up from Seldesuto. A draughting slot (site **1862**) where the track first splits was opened up and found to become too small after a short drop into an enlargement. The draught was coming along a narrow hading rift similar in appearance to that in nearby **Cueva Arenal**. Slightly higher up the track then down the vegetated hillside towards the streambed, a wide open hole (site **1861**) was discovered that looked promising with a cool draught, but quickly closed in about 8m down at a tight crawl.

In **Cueva del Arenal**, an ascending bedding beyond the *Foam Dome* was pushed to where it split and became too small. Fifty metres were surveyed, making the cave 488m long.

Above Cueva Arenal, site **1863** required one of the smaller expedition members to descend. This site also choked 6m down in a small chamber. Nearby, site **1864** involved a short climb down to a length of choked passage with a boulder choke to the surface and a possible dig.

At a low altitude, to the west of Cueva Arenal, a number of sites were investigated. Two short caves choked almost immediately – sites **1898** and **1899**. Three others are flood resurgences, which could repay attention. Site **1896** has a cool draught with digging possibilities; **1897** is a hands-and-knees crawl for 5m to a draughting hole and site **1900** has been excavated to a rock rib that needs removing.

Site **580**, a roomy 20m shaft above Seldesuto at an altitude of 390m, was re-descended and there may be a parallel drop that was not explored back in 1986.

A number of draughting rifts (**1903**, **1904** and **1905**) were also documented below this entrance.

Higher up, a small 10m long cave (site **1879**) was entered and a number of undescended shafts have been documented – **1875**, **1876**, **1877**, **1878** and **1888**, where 'passage leads off'. Near here, the enlarging of the track has opened up another site: **1902** is just a 4m long fragment.

Near the top of the hill, **Torca de la Vacunación** was explored down a p14 and p8 part way down the system and, at the bottom, an attempt was made to drain a pool with a wide hosepipe in order to make progress along a small, draughting passage.

Below Alisas at 550m altitude a constriction above a draughting



Above: Kristine Korsgaard negotiating the duck (in low water conditions) in Cubio de la Reñada. Above right: Torben Redder at the Stuffed Monk in Cubio de la Reñada. Photos: Jonas Binladen.

pitch in site **1817** was enlarged. Unfortunately the pitch was only 10m into a choked chamber.

## Arredondo

New passage is very often found by looking at 'well known' caves in more detail. **Cueva Vallina** is a prime example: last year about 500m of extensions were made very close to the bottom entrance and at Easter 2003, 463m were surveyed around the pitches from the upper series.

In the summer 1075m of new cave passage was surveyed. Extensions around the *Chunnel* totalled 123m; *November Passage* off *Pita Passage* was surveyed for 126m with some fine formations in places; various passages near *Hole in Wall* totalled 220m; the bypass to the ladder pitch from the top entrance totalled 41m; the *Maze* and *Shatter Passage* was extended by about 100m; the *Catalan Climb* totalled 80m; in Vallina 2, new passage near the *First Abyss* was explored for 188m. Martin Holroyd continued diving the downstream sumps and extended the final sump westwards to a depth of 21m in passage up to 8m wide. At the end the floor is rising and prospects look good.

A bolt route around the top of a deep choked pitch at the end of *Albert's Passage* about 1km in on the eastern side



reached passage which is not completely explored. The length of Cueva Vallina is now 31,169m. ■

## Further Reading

Jesús Ruiz Cobo and Peter Smith have edited a 198-page volume entitled *La Cueva de Cofresnedo en el valle de Matienzo – Actuaciones Arqueológicas 1996–2001*. This details the archaeological work carried out by the *La Prehistoria Reciente de Matienzo* project in Cueva Cofresnedo. The finds in Cofresnedo are presented in the context of other artifacts found in other caves in the area. The A4 book is illustrated with many photos and diagrams.

Alasdair Neill is producing a 1:1000 survey of Cueva Vallina (all 31km of it). The survey is substantially complete on a PC but will need updating at least twice a year (!) as passages are discovered. The survey is available (in two files) from the website and paper copies may be available for sale, exhibition, etc.

A number of surveys from earlier publications have been scanned and are now available on the web site, in some cases as 'historical documents', e.g. the first survey in Cubio de la Reñada, carried out in 1965. Also now available are *Survex* files for caves and areas, e.g. Mostajo and the North Vega System. The address to visit is [matienzo.org.uk](http://matienzo.org.uk).

A report on Matienzo 2004 will appear in *Speleology* 6.

## Acknowledgements

We were welcomed by Pablo at Bar Germán and the expedition is grateful for the camping facilities and the use of the restaurant for computing and drawing up. Just before Christmas, Pablo also hosted the launch of the Cofresnedo book mentioned above. The event was attended by archaeologists, British and Spanish cavers, locals and local dignitaries, a TV camera and newspaper reporters, with speeches from Jesús, Ramon Montes and the Director of Culture from the Cantabrian Government. The Ghar Parau Committee recommended a grant, rather smaller than in previous years but nonetheless welcome.

★ [matienzo.org.uk](http://matienzo.org.uk)

☞ Matienzo 2002: *Speleology* 3, September 2003  
 Matienzo 2001: *Speleology* 2, May 2003  
 Matienzo 2000: *Caves & Caving* 89, Winter 00/01  
 Matienzo 1999: *Caves & Caving* 87, Spring 2000  
 Matienzo 1998: *Caves & Caving* 83, Spring 1999  
 Matienzo 1997: *Caves & Caving* 79, Spring 1998