

# Speleology

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# Expedition Report: Matienzo, Spain 2006

Juan Corrin reports on the exploration in northern Spain.

Our 36th year in Matienzo began with some worries about the permit – but it had turned up at the end of January. By the end of February, the Ghar Parau Foundation had agreed UK Sport funding of £450. So on the administration side, the year started well!

Caving occurred in February, over Easter, during the summer and for a few days in October and November. As usual the main explorations took place at Easter and in the summer.

## North-western Corner

Before Easter there was much discussion of a proposed optical brightener test from the bottom of the Sumidero de Cobadal. Many scenarios were considered regarding flooding, time for the OBA to come through, etc. With a lot of preparation and a bit of luck, the test provided a positive and intriguing result. The optical brightener came through to the Fuente Aguanaz resurgence (some 4.3km distant to the north-west and 75m lower) in a time of five to seven days. Fuente Aguanaz has an average flow of 951 l/s and a known passage length of only 1.7km – there are no known feeder systems. In comparison, the Four Valleys System with 43km of cave passage feeds a resurgence of 650 l/s. Hopefully, with thorough surface work, we will start to piece together the system that must lie behind Fuente Aguanaz up

to Cobadal and possibly up to Alisas. (Detailed results and the test methodology are available on the project website.)

During the summer, prospecting over the supposed Cobadal–Aguanaz route rediscovered Cueva Casillas (site 1163), a small resurgence cave which was explored for 43m.

There were high hopes of Cueva Collada at La Gatuna being a feeder to the Cobadal–Aguanaz system – the cave had been explored in November 2005 to a ‘12m damp pitch’ (see survey p18). This turned out to be 20m deep and the stream disappeared into a low bedding that is ‘not a good digging prospect’. There is a possible passage on the opposite side of the pitch, but for the moment that’s it for downstream Cueva Collada. The phreatic passages upstream were also revisited, but no new sections were added to those found during the initial 1982 exploration of that area.

The early days of the Easter expedition were partly focused on the depression at La Gatuna. Sandstone beds are abundant and form the roof or floor of a number of sites. Holes investigated included 2317, 2367, 2368, 2369 and 2370. One older member of the team thought he had discovered a new open hole, until the farmer presented him with a survey obtained from our website. (Cubio de la Gatuna). During one afternoon in the



Paul Dold in snagging rift passage, Cueva del Torno.  
Photo: Paul Fretwell.

summer, a number of holes were opened up in a small area. The holes (sites 2485, 2486, 2487, 2488, 2489 and 2490) included a number of draughting sites (including one where a goat needs to rot completely away) and possible digs.

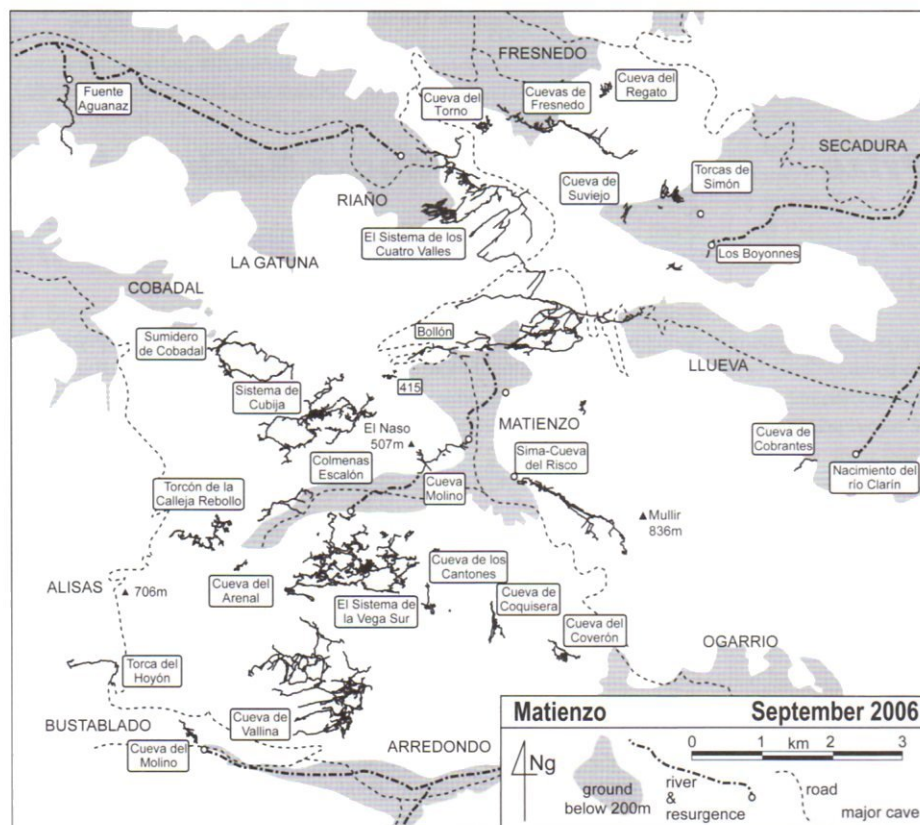
Several days were spent investigating shafts and holes above Cobadal around the Bosmartín area. Site 2408 was one of the longer holes at 71m.

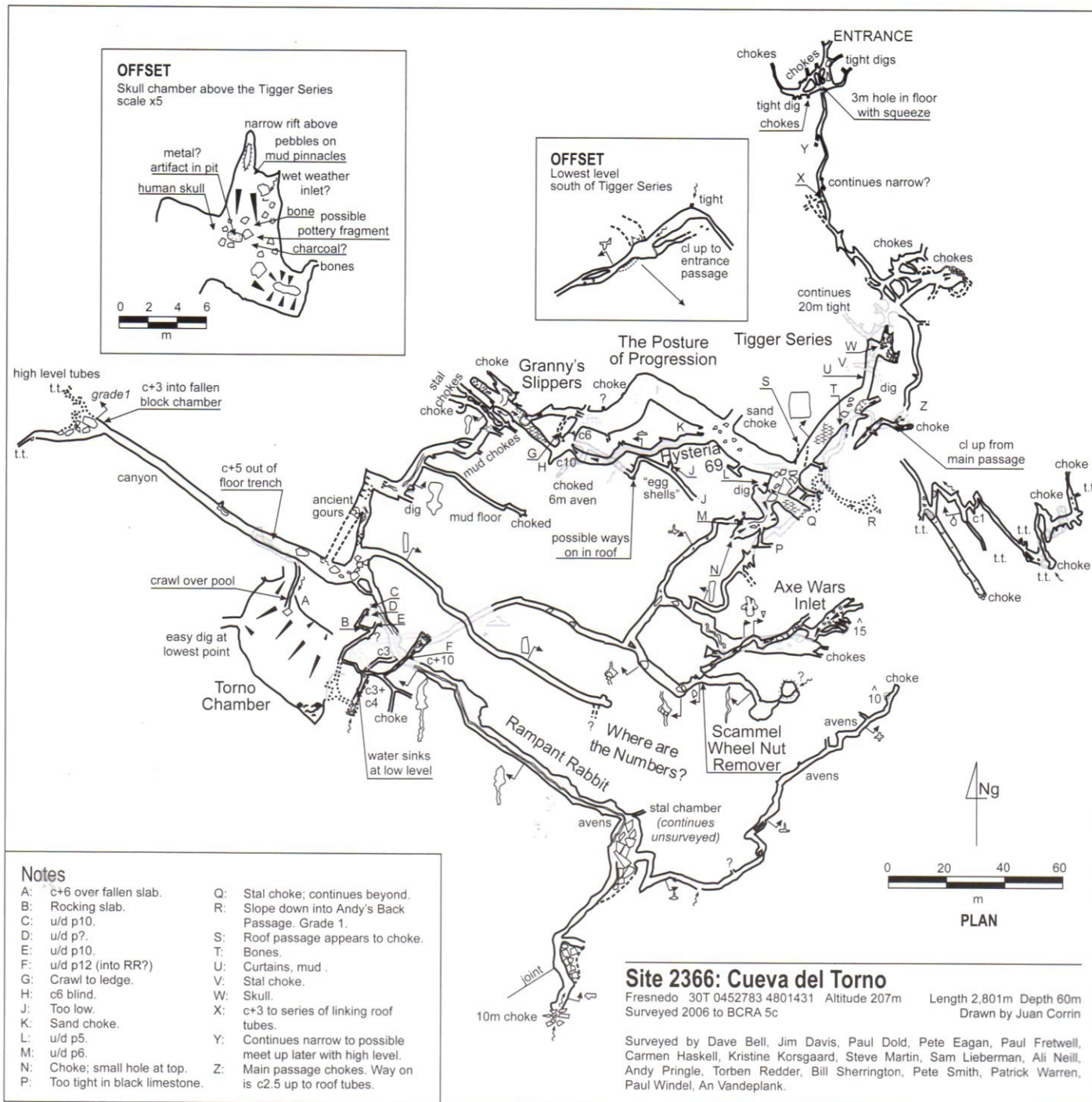
## Solorzáno and Riaño

The highlight of the Easter trip was Cueva del Torno (site 2366) – a classic discovery, found in the bar when locals started talking about a draughting entrance. The following day, at Fresnedo, the open entrance was eventually found, backing up childhood reminiscences, and exploration started into large walking passage with many junctions. Further trips were eased by enlarging an awkward squeeze and turn, but essentially the cave was there for the finding! Downstream, digging was required to reach a 50m-long chamber with some fine formations. At present, the lower streamway seems likely to drain to the resurgence Nacimiento del Campiazo (site 1102) at the head of the Solorzáno valley. Upper level passages may head south-west to pass under the hill to link with the Four Valleys System in Cueva Riaño.

As well as finding over a kilometre of higher level passage in the cave during the summer, a human skull was discovered in a passage apparently heading to the surface. A hunt on the surface for a possible entrance led to site 2523 (Pig Nut Pot), which was excavated over a number of days. After a 6m pitch the site yielded about 100m of large passage with much infill. Another, apparently human, bone was found in this cave.

The discoveries in Torno precipitated further exploration in Cueva Riaño. The





**Notes**

- A: c+6 over fallen slab.
- B: Rocking slab.
- C: u/d p10.
- D: u/d p7.
- E: u/d p10.
- F: u/d p12 (into RR?)
- G: Crawl to ledge.
- H: c6 blind.
- J: Too low.
- K: Sand choke.
- L: u/d p5.
- M: u/d p6.
- N: Choke; small hole at top.
- P: Too tight in black limestone.
- Q: Stal choke; continues beyond.
- R: Slope down into Andy's Back Passage. Grade 1.
- S: Roof passage appears to choke.
- T: Bones.
- U: Curtains, mud.
- V: Stal choke.
- W: Skull.
- X: c+3 to series of linking roof tubes.
- Y: Continues narrow to possible meet up later with high level.
- Z: Main passage chokes. Way on is c2.5 up to roof tubes.

**Site 2366: Cueva del Torno**

Fresnedo 30T 0452783 4801431 Altitude 207m Length 2.801m Depth 60m  
 Surveyed 2006 to BCRA 5c Drawn by Juan Corrin

Surveyed by Dave Bell, Jim Davis, Paul Dold, Pete Eagan, Paul Fretwell, Carmen Haskell, Kristine Korsgaard, Steve Martin, Sam Lieberman, Ali Neill, Andy Pringle, Torben Redder, Bill Sherrington, Pete Smith, Patrick Warren, Paul Windel, An Vandeplank.

entrance had to be dug out (the cave is believed to have been last entered in August 2001) and an inlet at the northern edge of the cave was pushed for 245m. The passage is heading east rather than north to Cueva del Torno, but there are still leads to explore. Further explorations in the summer yielded another 128m of passage, unfortunately not heading through to Torno.

During the summer, a new cave to the north-west of the Fresnedo 1 and 2 caves was opened up and explored to a canal. Cueva de Huerto Rey (site 2519, see survey p19) has some walking passage and a generous supply of sediment. The high level runs to the north-west and ends at a dig with passage visible beyond. The lower level is reached down a 12m pitch; to the north-west the passage ends at a low, draughting duck and in the



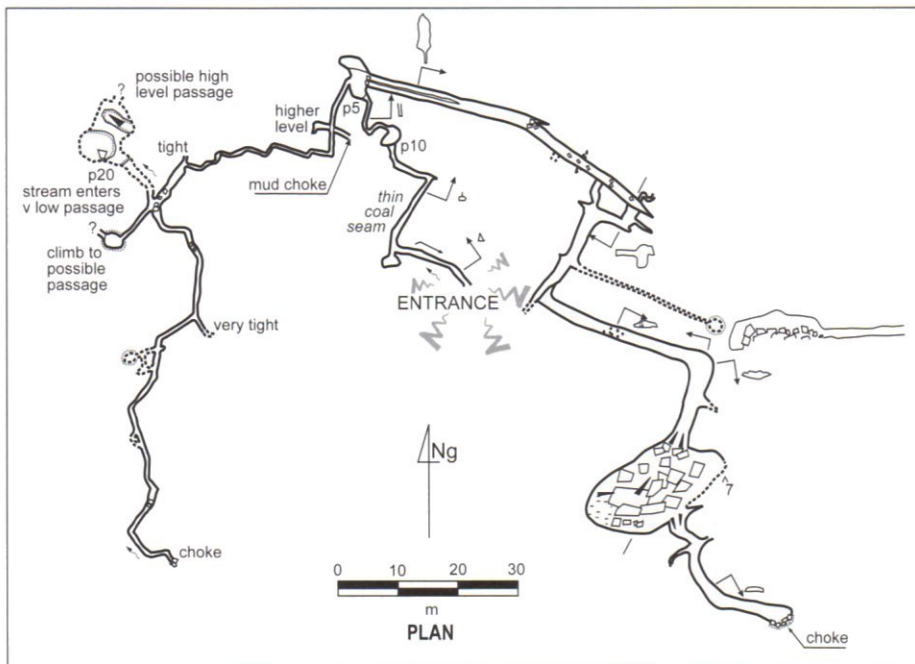
John Clarke emerging from the excavated entrance to Cueva de Huerto Rey. Photo: Peter Eagan.

opposite direction, a 4m pitch reaches the unexplored canal. This water is probably at the same level as a possible resurgence (Nacimiento del Campiazo, site 1106) over 1km away. In Carcass Cave, site 2476, a hands and knees crawl ended at a dig after 20m. This was passed to another draughting dig after 2m.

Numerous other sites were found around Torno and Cueva Riaño – for example, Trackside Cave in Riaño, a draughting hole with 86m of passages including a 9m pitch, and site 2414 on a fault above Torno where 39m were surveyed to a gravel floor at the deepest point. Others are listed on the website.

**South Vega and Arredondo**

Cueva Vallina keeps providing passage to explore – this time over 650m were surveyed at Easter. Bird's World Upper Levels had probably been entered previously but were not on the Catalan survey. During the summer four trips into the system took place. The Rio Rioja was re-investigated and nothing new found. The Man Trap (probably previously explored by the Catalans) was surveyed. The passage parallels the



**Site 394: Cueva Collada**

La Gatuna 30T 0449920 4799053 Altitude 183m  
 Surveyed 1982, 2005, 2006 to BCRA 5c

Length 457m Depth 50m  
 Drawn by Juan Corrin, Torben Redder, Pete Smith

strong east-west trends in the higher level passages and over 800m was surveyed. In a trip beyond the boulders into Vallina 2, a Disto was used to find the height of Tocadome Aven (75m) and Kingsdale Passage was extended by 120m. Cueva Vallina's new, adjusted length is 31,050m.

**Torca de Papá Noel**

In Torca de Papá Noel, Shafted Oyster passage was surveyed off Snowbat Bypass and the deepest point in the system was reached when holes off Floorless Chamber were pushed down p17, 9 and 22 followed by a couple of short climbs and a p10 (see survey p20). The tiny draughting streamway continues flowing on at about the same altitude (168m) as the resurgence, 600m away.

On the same trip as the extensions were made, Bjarne Buchardt tumbled five

or six metres down boulders in the Paper Plane area. By the time the first rescue team reached the top of the Coterón entrance pitch, he had been assisted to the base. He was hauled up the 45m to the surface. Over 20 Spanish cavers then arrived and they were turned away with thanks. An enthusiastic and speedy turn out! Bjarne was taken to Loredó hospital where his broken rib was strapped up – very lucky!

In the summer, one trip in Papá Noel pushed beyond Hole in the Wall to discover Hanging Death Chamber, with a slope down to undescended 30m pitches and a long 'diving board' rock with another possible 30m pitch. The survey showed this area to be close to Anastomoses Hall in Cubio de la Reñada some 50m below. A search through the card index showed that avens beyond



Caroline Fretwell in Cueva del Torno.  
 Photo: Paul Fretwell.

Anastomoses Hall had been looked at in 1989, and partially bolted.

A number of days were spent bolting up one of these and exploring the passages at the top. Fine helictites and other formations were found, including one slanting 1.8m-long straw that has attached itself to a vertical stalagmite. Over 350m of passages were surveyed and they were linked to Papá Noel, not near Hanging Death Chamber but near Floorless Chamber, further east.

Along the same hillside, further east, site 2563 was found near a stream sink and explored through low passage for 104m to a small but diggable end. The cave is on dipping sandstone similar to site 574 with a shaft entrance which is nearby.

Some people spent Wednesday afternoons in Cueva de los Tablons, digging down in the hading rift. Over Whit, the site 'went' into a small chamber with further draughting digs in the floor which should be stabilised. In the summer, a couple of other nearby draughting sites were opened



Panoramic view of Torno Chamber in Cueva del Torno. Photo: Paul Fretwell.

up to tiny draughting holes and filled in again. (Sites 2491, 2492, 2493).

Several other shafts and caves were explored on South Vega / Ozana during the year. Site 2290, the resurgence above Tablons was pushed for about 70m and can be extended. Site 2424 was dropped for 17m in an enlarged clint. At site 2437, a 25m pitch remains to be explored. Other sites are listed on the website.

**Alisas**

The current highlight of the Alisas area is the vertical development in site 2264, which appears to have reached a partial conclusion in the summer with the base at about -140m. To the north-west of Alisas, the hills and valleys around Moncobe were investigated. This area is at the extreme south-west of our permit and could provide some feeders to Fuente Aguanaz. Although the area still seems to have good potential, a number of days were spent prospecting without resulting in any major finds. The sites discovered are listed on the website.

**Mullir / Ozana**

Some digging was carried out in site 12, Cueva Concebo and site 0029, Cueva Subterránea. Both are large passages which irritatingly close down. Surface

prospecting in the summer revealed a couple of interesting holes to return to – sites 2570 and 2572. These were visited in October: the former site choked at -24m but the latter has yet to be bottomed and is at least 43m deep.

**La Secada**

There were a number of days out, as usual trying to find a connection between Carcavueso–Bollón system and caves to the west. Pants was dug a number of times and the connection between Hole in the Road and Bollón was finally surveyed. The Apprentice Cave (site 2108) was pushed and surveyed, giving a length of about 40m.

**Conclusion**

2006 was a classic year with nearly 7km of new cave surveyed. Significant caves are still being discovered (Torno) and known caves are still providing significant extensions to those who want to push, e.g. in Vallina and Papá Noel / Reñada. There is plenty of cave to be explored and dug; new cavers and teams are very welcome to come and join in!

There were many other finds and explorations. In total the passage length surveyed at Easter was 3.3km, in the summer, 3.5km. A full list with descrip-



Bill Sherrington in the low streamway of Cueva del Torno. Photo: Paul Fretwell.

tions, surveys and photos can be found on [matienzo.org.uk](http://matienzo.org.uk).

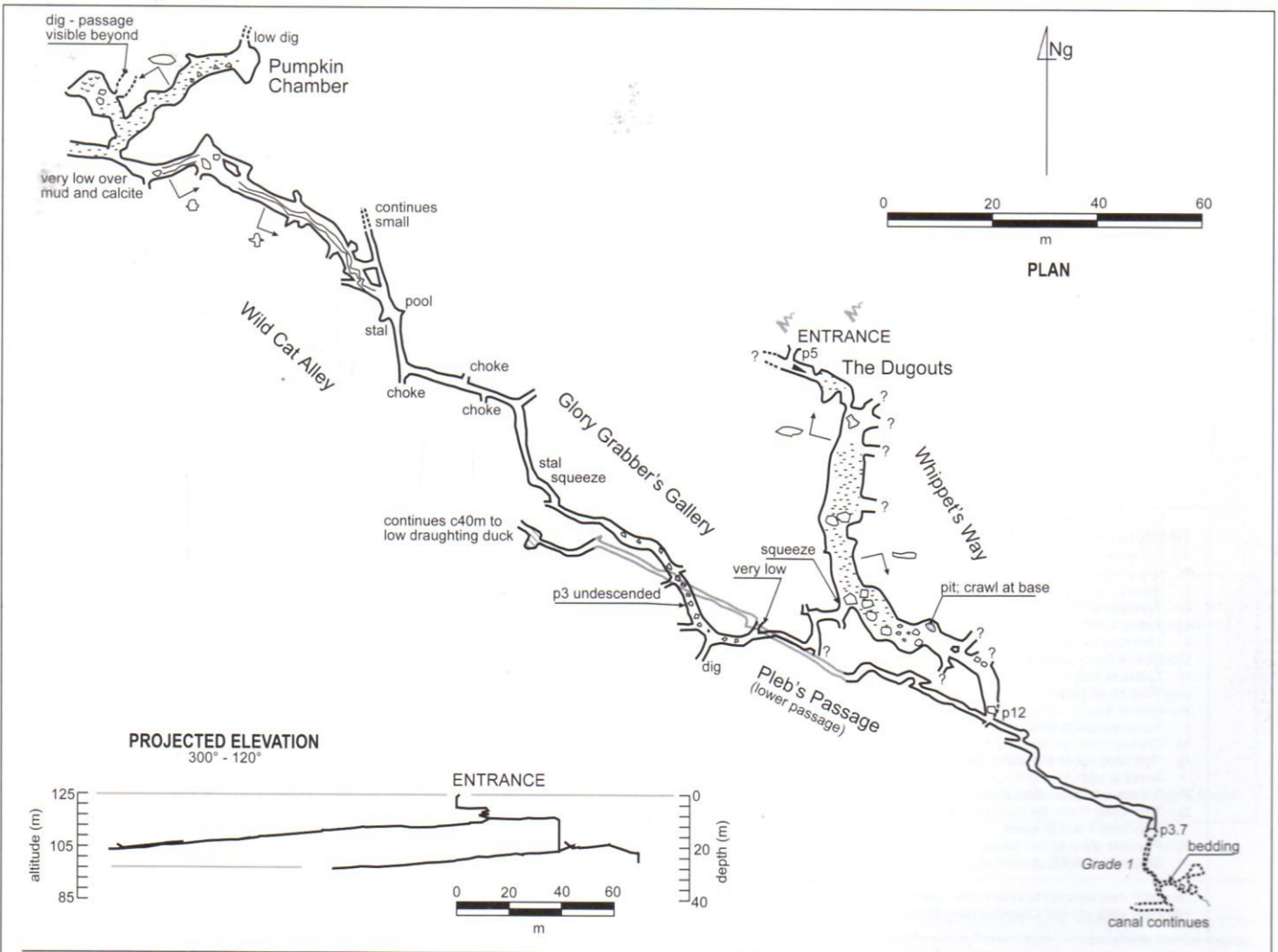
**Acknowledgements**

Our thanks, as usual, go to the Ghar Parau Foundation and the Consejería de Cultura, Turismo y Deportes with the Federación Cantabra de Espeleología for providing and endorsing the annual permit.

Thanks also to Pablo and family at Bar German for once again hosting the expeditions' main camping, storage, computing and drinking facilities!

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

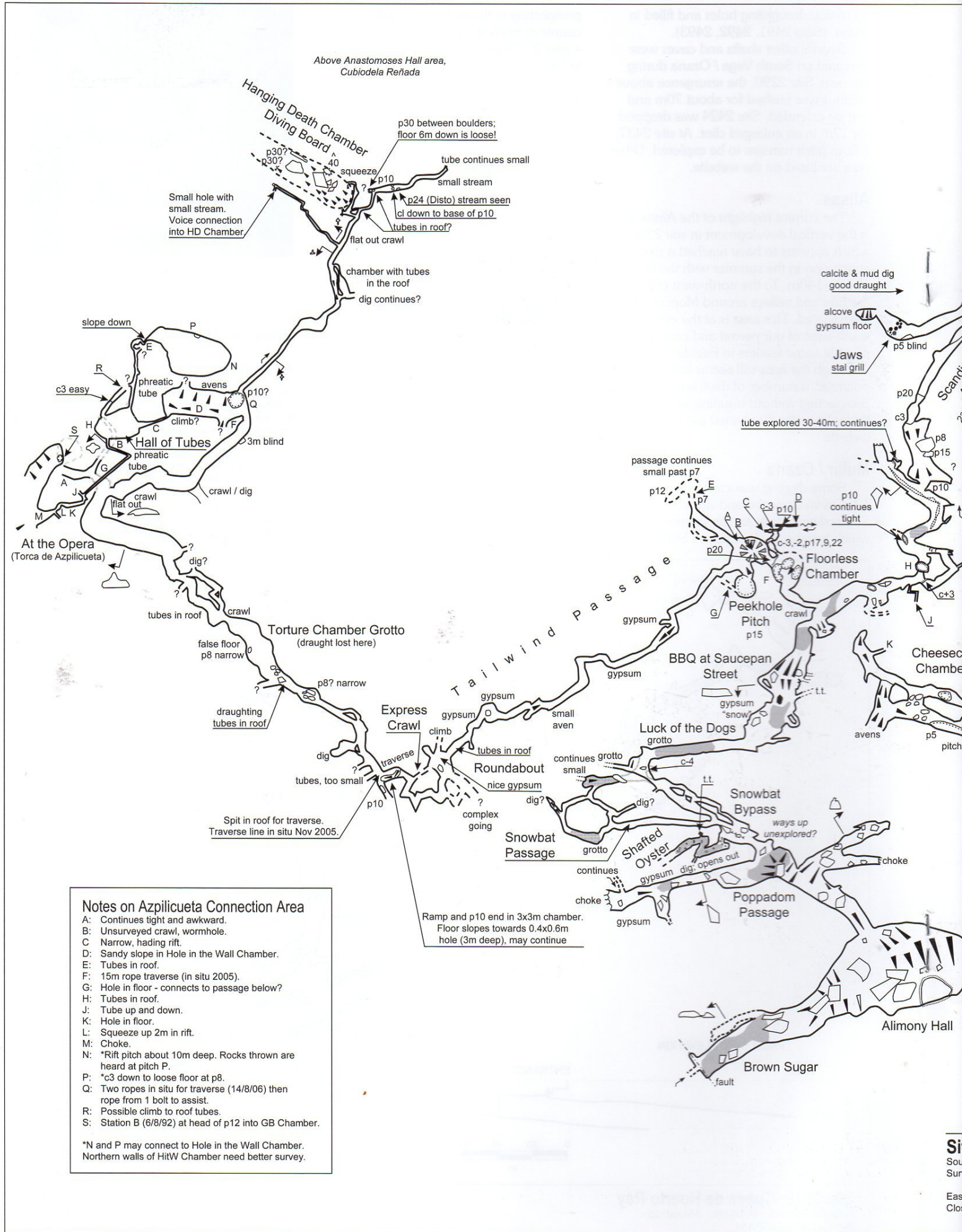
Matienzo 2005: *Speleology* 7, August 2006.



**Site 2519: Cueva de Huerto Rey**

Fresnedo 30T 0453104 4801583 Altitude 125m  
 Surveyed 2006 to BCRA 5c

Length 521m Depth 28m  
 Drawn by Alasdair Neill, Chris Smith

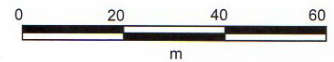


**Notes on Azpilicueta Connection Area**

- A: Continues tight and awkward.
- B: Unsurveyed crawl, wormhole.
- C: Narrow, hading rift.
- D: Sandy slope in Hole in the Wall Chamber.
- E: Tubes in roof.
- F: 15m rope traverse (in situ 2005).
- G: Hole in floor - connects to passage below?
- H: Tubes in roof.
- J: Tube up and down.
- K: Hole in floor.
- L: Squeeze up 2m in rift.
- M: Choke.
- N: \*Rift pitch about 10m deep. Rocks thrown are heard at pitch P.
- P: \*c3 down to loose floor at p8.
- Q: Two ropes in situ for traverse (14/8/06) then rope from 1 bolt to assist.
- R: Possible climb to roof tubes.
- S: Station B (6/8/92) at head of p12 into GB Chamber.

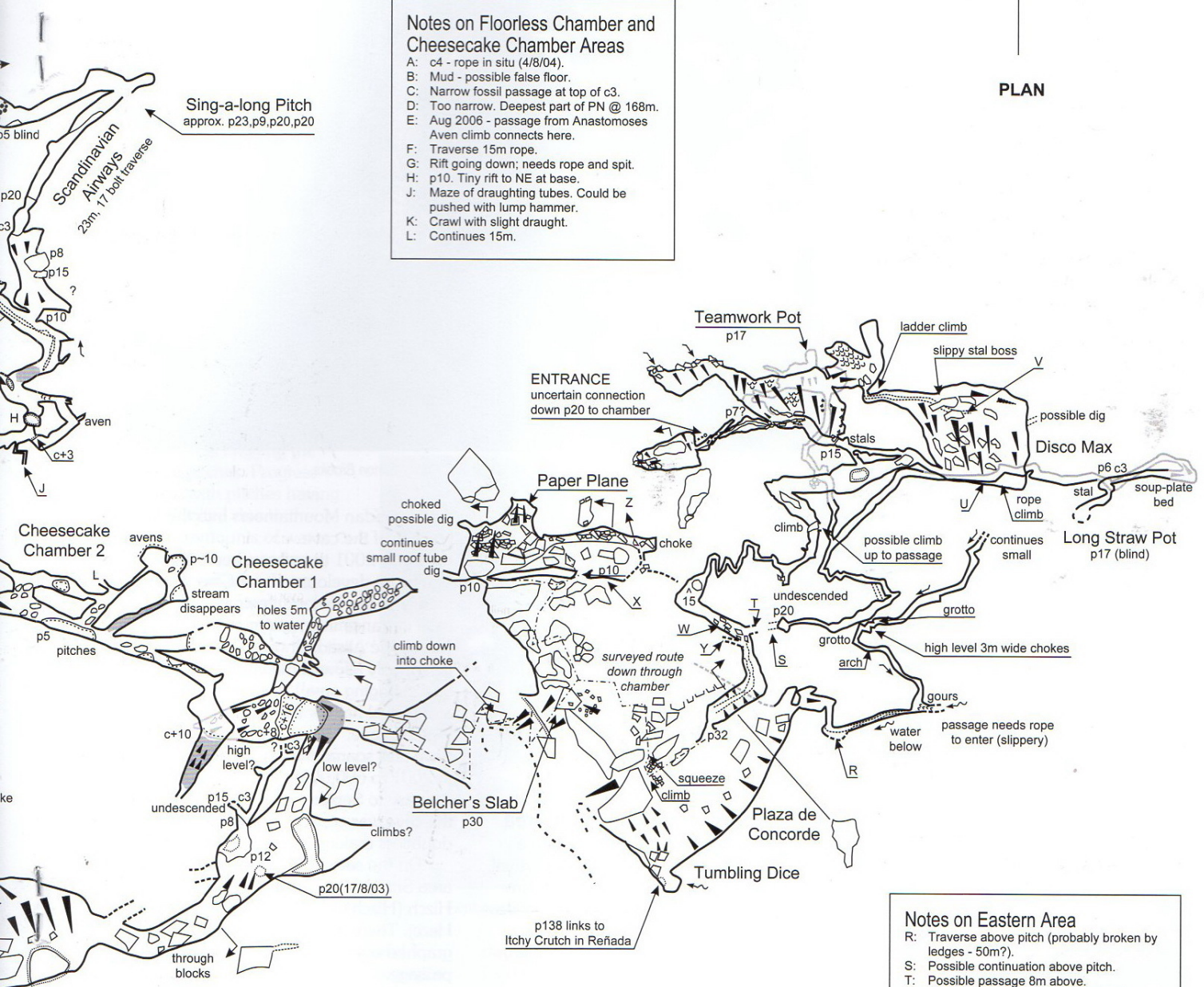
\*N and P may connect to Hole in the Wall Chamber. Northern walls of HitW Chamber need better survey.

Ramp and p10 end in 3x3m chamber. Floor slopes towards 0.4x0.6m hole (3m deep), may continue



**Notes on Floorless Chamber and Cheesecake Chamber Areas**

- A: c4 - rope in situ (4/8/04).
- B: Mud - possible false floor.
- C: Narrow fossil passage at top of c3.
- D: Too narrow. Deepest part of PN @ 168m.
- E: Aug 2006 - passage from Anastomoses Aven climb connects here.
- F: Traverse 15m rope.
- G: Rift going down; needs rope and spit.
- H: p10. Tiny rift to NE at base.
- J: Maze of draughting tubes. Could be pushed with lump hammer.
- K: Crawl with slight draught.
- L: Continues 15m.



**Notes on Eastern Area**

- R: Traverse above pitch (probably broken by ledges - 50m?).
- S: Possible continuation above pitch.
- T: Possible passage 8m above.
- U: Narrow inlet. unexplored lower level.
- V: Low level continues. p5 and narrow meandering rift possible.
- W: Rubble slope and climbs.
- X: Base of chamber.
- Y: 10m to choke.
- Z: Route down through boulders into Coterón.

**Site 1471: Torca de Papá Noel**

South Vega VN5089(5) 9502(7) Altitude 445m  
 Surveyed 2000-2006 to BCRA Grade 5c

Easter 2004 notes: CIC Series not drawn in; details above Belcher's Slab (Peter Eagan) from 2003  
 Closure errors not shown on this survey

Length included in South Vega System Depth 277m  
 Drawn by Juan Corrin after Jonas Binladen, Peter Eagan, Alasdair Neill, Torben Redder

.Connected with Torca de Azpilicueta 3 Aug 2004  
 Anastomoses Aven connection from Reñada Aug 2006