

Speleology

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Expedition Report: Matienzo 2010

Juan Corrin reports on the ongoing exploration in northern Spain.

In 2010 we celebrated 50 years of speleology around Matienzo. After an excellent all-day event in June at the Dalesbridge Centre, the festivities started in Spain with a day out to the San Miguel factory and the World Heritage archaeological site of Atapuerca in Burgos (organised by Pablo from Bar Germán and the San Miguel rep., at no cost to the Brits). This was closely followed by a weekend fiesta in Matienzo which was both highly successful and well attended. Details of the events and memorabilia can be found on the Matienzo website.

A 320-page, dual language, full colour book (Matienzo: 50 Years of Speleology, see p33 for review) was published on August 7, just in time for the fiesta. Spanish and British contributors have created a comprehensive text detailing the past 50 years of cave exploration and documentation. Chapters include summaries of all the expeditions, cave diving, geology, geomorphology, and archaeology.

Caving virtually stopped for the two fiesta days although 18 children were taken

into Cueva de la Reñada on the Sunday morning.

Nearly 3.8km of new cave passages were surveyed at Easter. Most of this was to the north of the depression. In the summer, over 5.7km of new passages were surveyed, mostly in Torca de Peña Encaramada.

Southern Sector

In February, a team dug out and extended Cueva Tablons (A) by a significant 30-40m, adding another 15m to the

depth. The extension was surveyed at Easter taking the mega-dig to 44m depth and a length of 138m. This gives the base of the dig an altitude of about 260m and there is a major level in Torca de Coterón at a similar altitude.

In the South Vega System (B), the ends of the Easter 2009 Reñada dive were surveyed and, nearby, an inlet heading south (ending at a tall aven) was surveyed to provide 78m of new passage. On a trip to 'tidy up' the holes known below the entrance to Torca de Azpilicueta, sites

338 and 386 were explored along with new sites 3426, 3427, and 3428. Site 386 continues down a narrow drop.

Summer exploration in Sima Cupleañes (C) added 70m of decorated passage to the length after a dig from the main chamber.

The 140m-deep Sima Piluca (D) was revisited and the explorers declared the site finished down a p10 at the

end of loose meanders where a sandstone choke gives no hope and the stream disappears down a tiny tube.

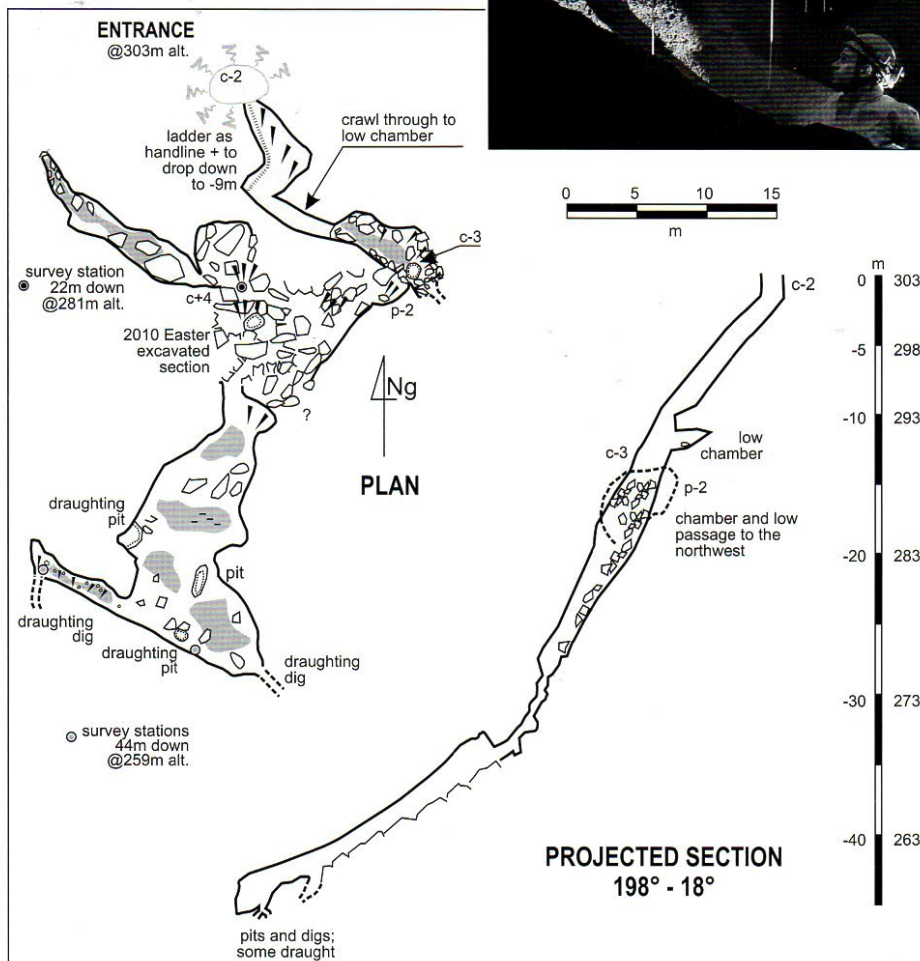
At about 495m altitude, a very strongly draughting area of the hillside (E) between the south-eastern end of Torca de Coterón and Torca de Cantones was excavated in a number of places. Work started at a 'fridge', site 894, and expanded to sites 3460, 3461, 3462 and 3463. Although no breakthrough was made, there are still possibilities for the future.

Water sinking at site 178, Cueva del Haya, reappears in site 477 where it sumps downstream. Site 3309 (F) was excavated last year to a small chamber and this summer the water from 477 was met in this site which reached a length of 43m in wide passage. Downstream, the passage becomes too tight.

To the west of the Cubija valley, Torca de Lastrilla (G) was tackled up at Easter and assessed for future work around the p24. In the summer, a dig at the base of the p40 was enlarged but no further progress made.

Central Matienzo

At Cubillas, Cueva de Tiva (H), being resurveyed by teams from the Sheffield University Speleological Society, was extended for nearly half a kilometre at

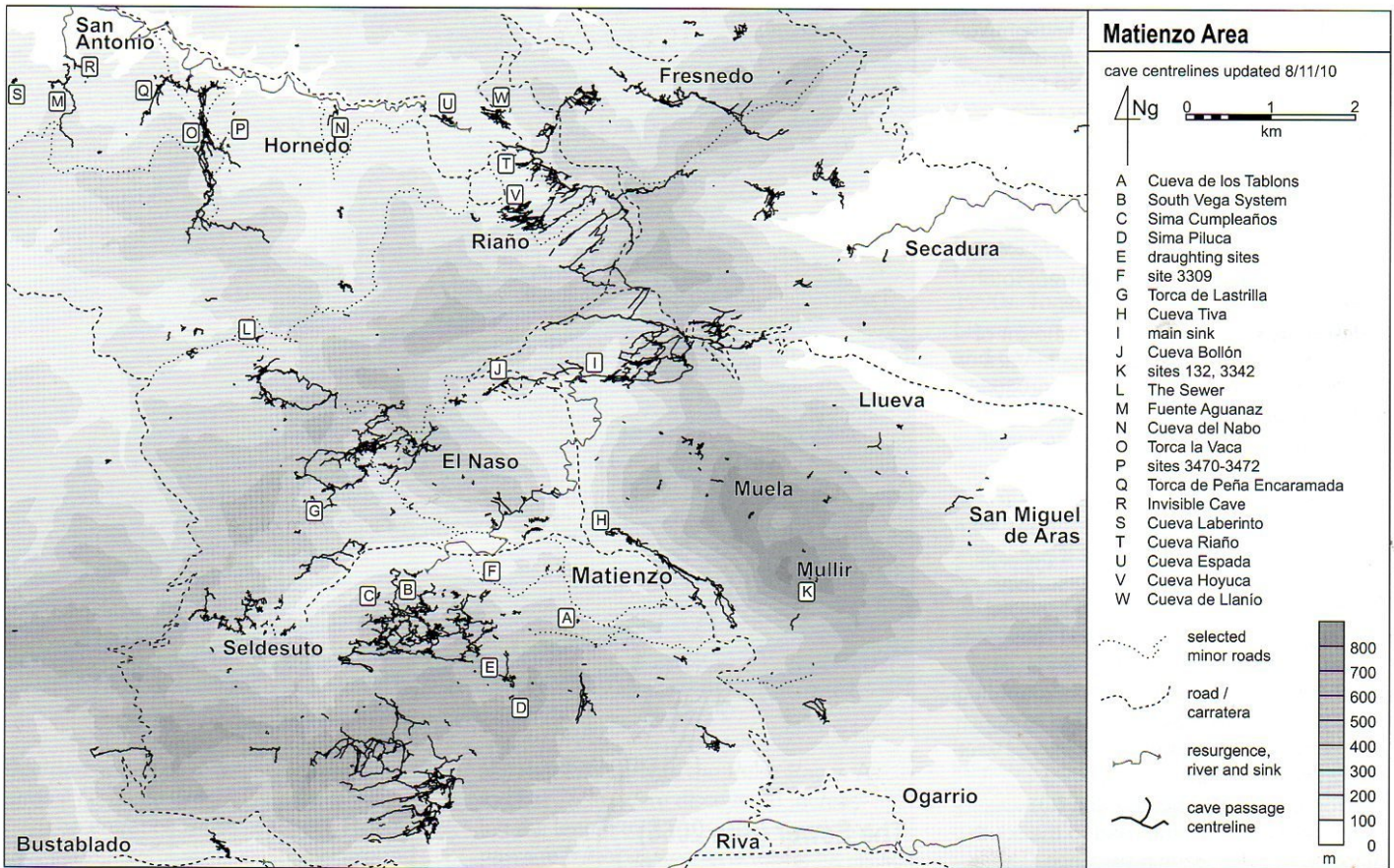


Cueva de los Tablons (Site 242)

Ozana 30T 0452618 4795191 Altitude 303m
 Surveyed 2006, 2010 to BCRA Grade 5C
 2009 survey carried out using DistoX

Length 138m Depth 44m

Drawn by Juan Corrin, Rebecca Neill, Phil Papard



Opposite page: Cueva Tiva. Photo: Tim Webber.
Above: James Carlisle in The Sewer. Photo: Tom Clayton.
Right: Jude Onions admiring gypsum formations in Torca la Vaca. Photo: Paul Dold.



the eastern end into the Rosado Series. Resurveying should continue next year. The route through into Risco was found to be blocked by a fridge and other domestic rubbish.

Above the Carcavuezo sink (I), draughting shaft 603 was enlarged through a boulder choke to end at a rift blocked with boulders that require more effort. In the Cueva Bollón/Hole in the Road system (J), cavers went down through boulders at the western end and, despite the good draught, reckoned that the site was now finished.

On the hills to the south-east of the depression (K), a couple of days were spent documenting, exploring, and surveying known and new sites. Site 132 was surveyed for 53m to an echoing slot which may be worth pursuing. Site 3342, found in February, was explored down 26m but a calcite wall climb was not attempted.

North-west Sector

At Cobadal, the draughting site 2066 (The Sewer - L) at the base of a steep shakehole which lies over a possible

drainage route to Fuente Aguanaz (M) was pushed and extended. Downstream was forced over a couple of days through widened squeezes in a tiny, sandstone-floored stream. A breakthrough was made into much larger passage, through three chambers (one with a blind, 15m high, free-climbable aven) to further crawls on sandstone as the only way on. At this point the cave "smells horrible" and contains "a collection of very large worms". The route downstream currently ends in a loose, bouldery chamber where the stream can

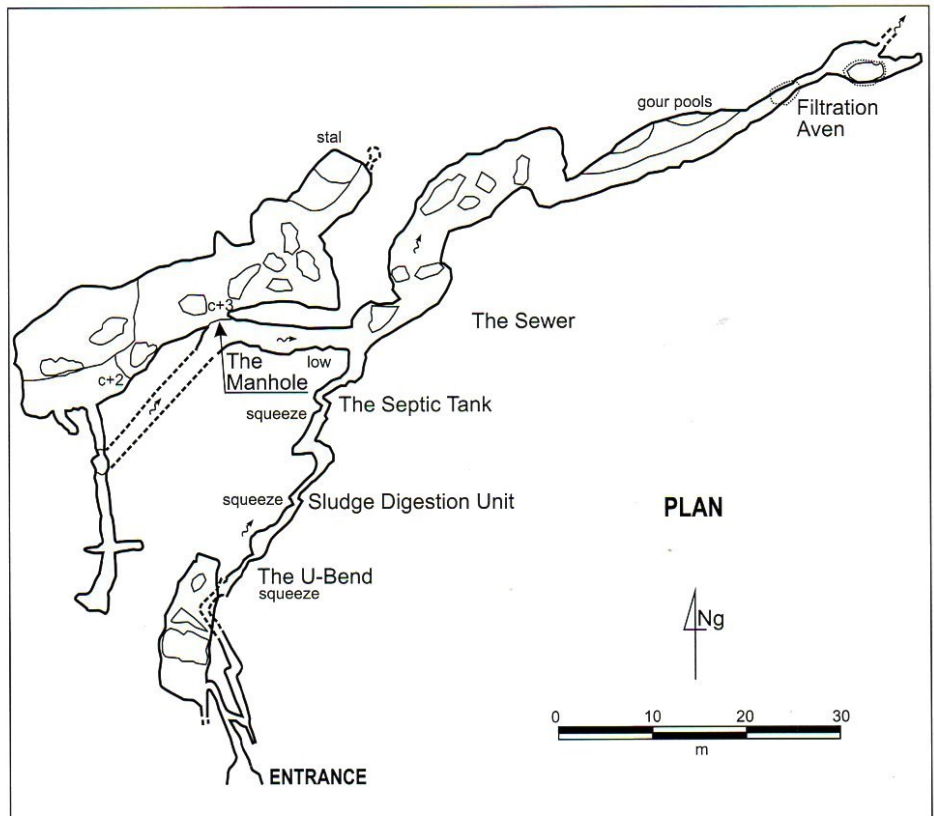
be seen continuing below. Further capping is required to get down and the passage is seen to continue tight. An inlet leads up into a much larger, older passage some 10m by 8m which closes down in both directions (west and east) despite some digging effort. The length of The Sewer is now 252m with a depth of 21m.

Beyond the northern edge of La Gatuna, sites 978 and 979 (Fuente de Culebro), were re-examined with some success (N). Site 3357, Cueva del Nabo, was opened up at Easter and explored

down a drop to a clean-scoured streamway which ended upstream at a sump and aven. Downstream, the cave also nearly meets site 979 and does connect with site 978 which now provides the easiest entrance. In the summer, the upstream sump was passed by Simon Cornhill who surfaced after a shallow 36m dive into a canal and continuing passage. 61m were added to the length giving a current total of 461m.

At Easter a relatively small amount of new passage was found in Torca la Vaca (O). Some high level inlets were surveyed for 363m. Site 3300, to the east, which may provide another entrance, was pushed but no link through found. In the summer, nearly half a kilometre was added to Torca la Vaca taking the length to 13,774m. The most interesting route was a passage heading north-east towards the surface from Ed's Birthday Passage. This ended in draughting rifts and prompted searching on the surface. Sites 3470, 3471, and 3472 (P) were all discovered as draughting holes and the first was descended to a draughting boulder choke. The others wait for further attention.

Torca de Peña Encaramada (Q) was discovered 5m from the road to the south of the Wild Mare Cave resurgence. The entrance was excavated and the cave explored over three days at Easter in not particularly large passages. At the eastern, downstream end of the 543m-long system, close to Wild Mare Cave, eels were seen in the sump water. This find, of course, precipitated more surface prospecting: site 3406 is a 40m shaft from a bouldery dig which appears to go deeper. Other sites in the area include 3413, an 82m long cave with a walk-in entrance. Inside, a stream sink was excavated in the summer to



The Sewer (Site 2066)

Cobadal 30T 0448857 4798415 Altitude 196m
 Surveyed 2010 to BCRA Grade 5C

Length 252m Depth 21m
 Drawn by James Carlisle

levels, some draughting and requiring more work to enlarge the way forward. The current combined length of the probable Peña Encaramada System (Vaca, Wild Mare and Encaramada) is 17,284m.

Around San Antonio at Easter, Fuente Aguanaz (M) was the main focus where high level, small passage was met at the top of a 40m climb. The length of Aguanaz was extended by 153m.

bouldery entrance started to collapse as the divers climbed out, making for an 'interesting' exit.

North-west of Cueva Laberinto (S), the sump at site 3214 was found to have dried up in the summer but the route forward in meandering passage requires a small person. The nearby site 3422 was surveyed and various leads pushed to short conclusions.

Half a kilometre south of Maze Cave, Torca El Suto was explored after removing tyres from the entrance. After a 10m pitch into a chamber, a p35 was explored down to a bridge at -29m when an old bolt (presumably from a Spanish club) was found at the top. Nearby holes 3452 and 3453 were excavated in blocks. About 800m west-south-west of the end of Aguanaz, a small resurgence (site 3459) was described as continuing "low, wet and smelly".

The North-east Sector Including the Four Valleys System

In February, a team of three extended Cueva Riaño (T), mainly in the entrance series, by 349m and carried out some resurveying in Cueva Hoyuca.

In Cueva Espada (U), a major new segment – old, high level – was found up a chimney climb. From halfway down the cave, the new route heads back south-east, almost to the top entrance. The cave was extended by over 700m. Site 3222 was hammered out and dropped down a p6 to link into Cueva Espada. The nearby site 3226 was enlarged in rift passage to solution tubes and a choked p6. Site 3442 was enlarged to solution pockets and a rift



Johnny Latimer surveying in Torca la Vaca. Photo: Paul Dold.

reveal bones of at least three *Bison priscus* and six *Capra pyrenaica*.

In the summer, Torca de Peña Encaramada continued to reveal new passages – over 2.3km. Upstream exploration revealed a number of routes on three

In the summer, Invisible Cave (R) was dived by Chris Camm, then by Chris and Phil Papard. The short dive is about 3m down under a rib of rock and the passage continues as a canal upstream to where the passage splits. Both routes sump. The



Cueva Hoyuca. Photo: Peter Eagan.

that descended to a 'large streamway' – almost certainly Cueva Espada.

The entrance series of Cueva Hoyuca (V) was again 'blitzed', especially around the Dog Series, over Easter and summer. In the summer, resurveying resulted in new passage being discovered including Goldie's Way, extensions at the end of 4th River Inlet, and high level climbs in Gour Inlet. The length of the Four Valleys System is now just over 54km.

Most new passage at Easter was explored in Cueva-Cubío del Llanío (W), the possible linking cave between Espada, Cueva Riaño, Cueva de Torno, etc. The streamway upstream at the base of the Blood, Sweat and Tears pitch was pushed into low and higher level passages eventu-

ally meeting up with the Pulse Racer. A total of 789m were discovered increasing the length to 2.3km. In the summer, passage by the aven was excavated through sand to end at a choked shaft after 88m; a complicated 122m-long series was explored at the south-east extremity, and the Playing Card House Pushover Extension was entered up a bolted climb to the west to interesting holes and future leads.

A number of holes were investigated in the Llanío area. Uphill, Cueva-Cubío del Llanío 2 (site 3454) was pointed out by the landowner and was surveyed to a length of 74m and depth 26m, ending at an 11m pitch into a 20m long chamber with a further 8m pitch through boulders to a highly unstable choke.

Microclimate Research

Lancaster University students under Dr Peter Wynn have started a programme of monitoring in a cave on El Naso commencing April 2010 to characterise cave microclimate (specifically temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide). They have also installed drip rate monitors to understand the nature of the hydrological system feeding the speleothem formations and have placed a rain gauge in a safe location on top of the cave site. They are also asking for permission to carry out a project called High Resolution Isotope Analysis of Iberian Speleothem Deposits.

Conclusions

By the end of the year, after the very satisfactory summer caving expedition and two day fiesta, the total passage length

had risen to 312km with 3483 sites of speleological interest in the database. The two main trips surveyed 9494m of new passages.

We were saddened by the sudden death of Bob Cawthorne in November. Bob was a long-standing member of the Plymouth Caving Group and William Pengelly Cave Studies Trust and had been caving in Matienzo since the early 1990s. Together with his wife Julie and son Lloyd he moved to Llíber near Benidorm and they regularly drove north to their 'second home' in Matienzo when the expeditions were active. Bob was an avid collector of stamps, and cave entrances, recently enjoying walks on the Matienzo hills with his brother Ted, where they would document and explore the smaller sites. He wrote a gently amusing piece for the Matienzo 50 publication entitled "Matienzo's Smallest Caves". Bob will be greatly missed. ■

Acknowledgements

The fund raising efforts, patronage, and sponsorship for the fiesta and the book are gratefully acknowledged. Individuals, clubs and organisations have been thanked on the website and in the book. The publication is available from juancorrin@matienzo.org.uk.



Bill Sherrington emerging from Torca de Peña Encaramada. Photo: Tony Brocklebank.

Thanks must go again to Pablo and family at Bar Germán – the use of the restaurant as an expedition base during the larger expeditions is vital and greatly appreciated. The Ghar Parau Fund committee awarded £200 to Matienzo 2010. In applying for our annual permit, we are grateful for the support of the Federación Cantábrica de Espeleología.

Further Reading

As usual, only the larger finds have been mentioned above. Further details with surveys can be found on the Matienzo Caves website, matienzo.org.uk and, in detail for 2010, at matienzo.org.uk/history/2010.htm

Corrin J (2009) Expedition Report: Matienzo 2008. *Speleology* 13, pp-18-23.

Corrin J (2010) Expedition Report: Matienzo, Spain 2009. *Speleology* 16, pp-12-16.



Sediments in Cueva Espada. Photo: Alasdair Neill and Peter Eagan.