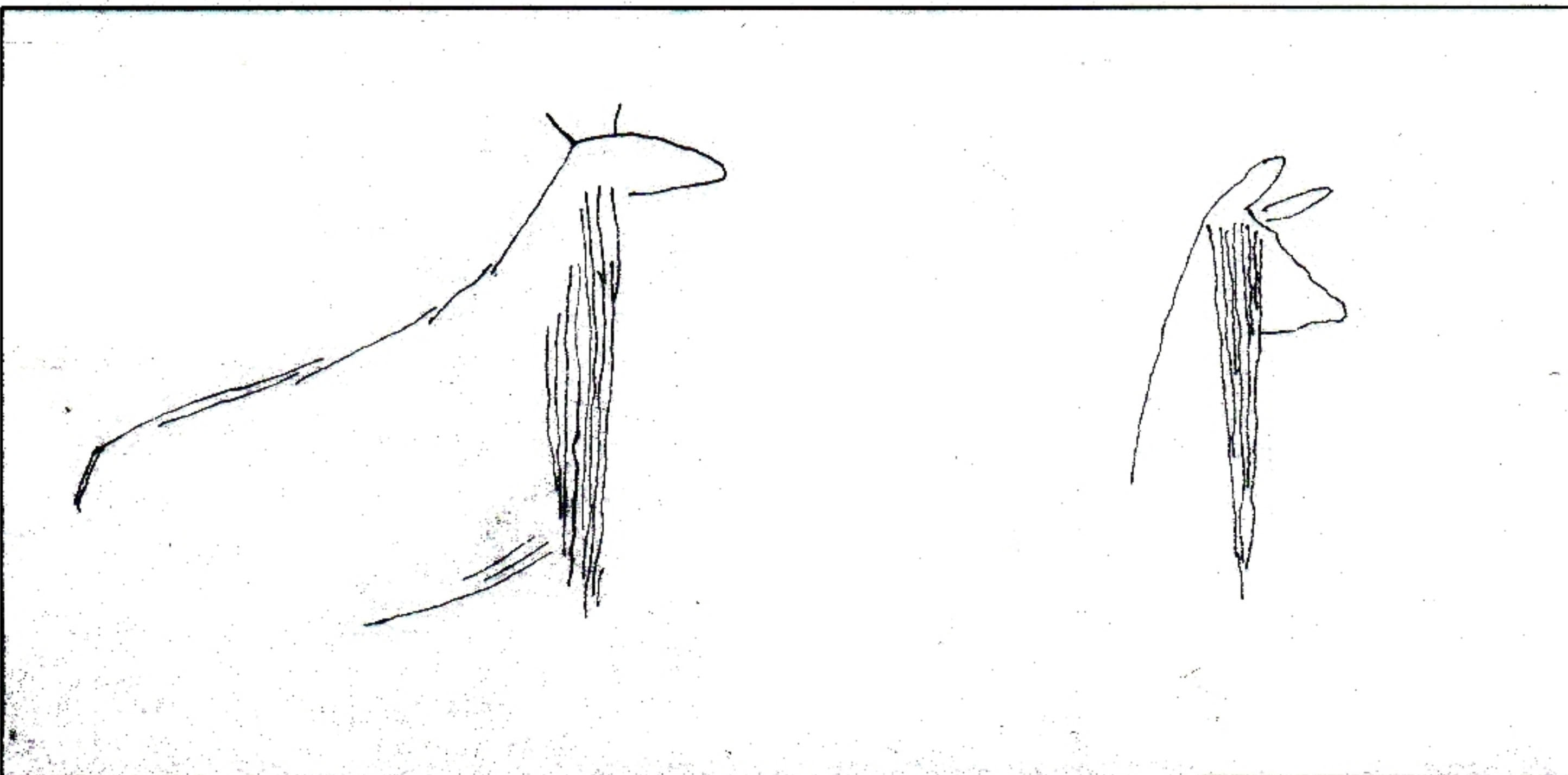




MATIENZO
1979



THE 1979 BRITISH EXPEDITION TO MATIENZO, SANTANDER, N.SPAIN

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Surveys drawn by Juan Corrin, Tony Fifield.

MATIENZO '79

Our 10th annual onslaught on the caves of the Matienzo district was held during August 1979 with over 15 cavers camping in La Secada. Although over a mile of new passage was discovered, it was spread over a number of caves. Most effort was once more, put into linking the caves of the Four Valley System, and the work done in and above these caves will be related first.....

Cueva Uzueka

The speleophones and the new 1:5000 maps were invaluable in checking the accuracy of the Four Valley System Survey..The 'phones were first used at the end of the Gorilla Walk about 2km into the cave. Contact with the surface was quickly established with an error of less than 20m. The more exacting test occurred when two memorable hours were spent on a hillside near Carcaveuso in pouring rain thrashing through gorse bushes. Contact here was established just 5 minutes before the transmission time was supposed to end. The underground team were at Rocky Horror, 130m below and 7km into the cave. The survey was found to be accurate to within about 30m in 7000.

By adjusting our surveys to the aerial maps, we found that the upstream end of Cueva Llueva was 400m from the end of Uzueka. Efforts were made to extend Uzueka beyond Rocky Horror and some progress was made.

Barry Davies wrote about the final trip of the expedition in the log book:

Set off at 1.30pm after the statutory beer at Riano bar, and made good time to the Astradome. After the customary period of 'oohing' and 'aahing' we set off for the end. Armageddon boulder choke provided some entertainment for a while and then it was all plain sailing to Shrimp Bone Inlet. (The ladder at Armageddon was still in good condition after two years.) Rocky Horror proved to be the most difficult part of the trip and could definitely do with taping, as we probably wasted two hours here.

On reaching the previous end and pushing straight on and to the left we were unable to locate a way on. However, Pete located a draughting passage on the right hand side. The stream was reached here, but disappeared into a draughting

choke, which proved impassable. However a slot in the left hand wall above stream level led into a small chamber and then down a hole back to the stream. Whilst Pete pushed on down the small stream passage, I turned left and followed a large passage in a loop back to the previously mentioned encounter with the stream.

Where one drops down through the hole, there is a choke with a draught vanishing straight up which could possibly lead into a downstream continuation. Also I found an old phreatic tube with a howling draught heading back towards the main passage. I stopped at a choke being low on light, but it looked possible and could lead into a continuation of the main passage.

Two attempts were made to make Uzueka a shorter trip: Fuente las Varas Pot on the hill above Uzueka was pushed to an 'impossible' draughting hole, and inside Uzueka a 500m long bypass to most of Armageddon was discovered. The following account by Tony Fifield makes it clear that the cave has not been made any easier.....

Starting from the '95 Inlet', the passage is clearly of vadose origin, but after about 50m, there are signs of some phreatic development when the caver is forced to climb up into an elliptical tube with the stream flowing through a narrow but deep trench.

About 150m into the Bypass, a small inlet is encountered accounting for most of the flow back towards the main passage. From hereon - perhaps the most interesting point about the passage - the Bypass begins to gradually drop in level with all subsequent inlets flowing towards Armageddon.

As the level drops, the cross section of the passage begins to change, becoming increasingly phreatic, and setting the trend for the remainder of the trip to Armageddon. The caver finds himself wading through an almost static canal with knee-deep mud. All the surfaces of the passage are covered with an abundance of mud indicating that it spends a fair percentage of the time completely submerged. At one point, perhaps 100m from Armageddon, a small chamber is encountered conveniently bypassing a sump. Returning to the canal via a muddy tube, the passage begins to

slowly ascend until a 5m climb is made up into the boulders of Armageddon.

Cueva Llueva

Two teams at the end of the expedition went into Llueva to try to continue the push upstream - Phil Papard dived in the sump finding the way on still open, and the second group looked around in the large fault chamber 200m from the sump.

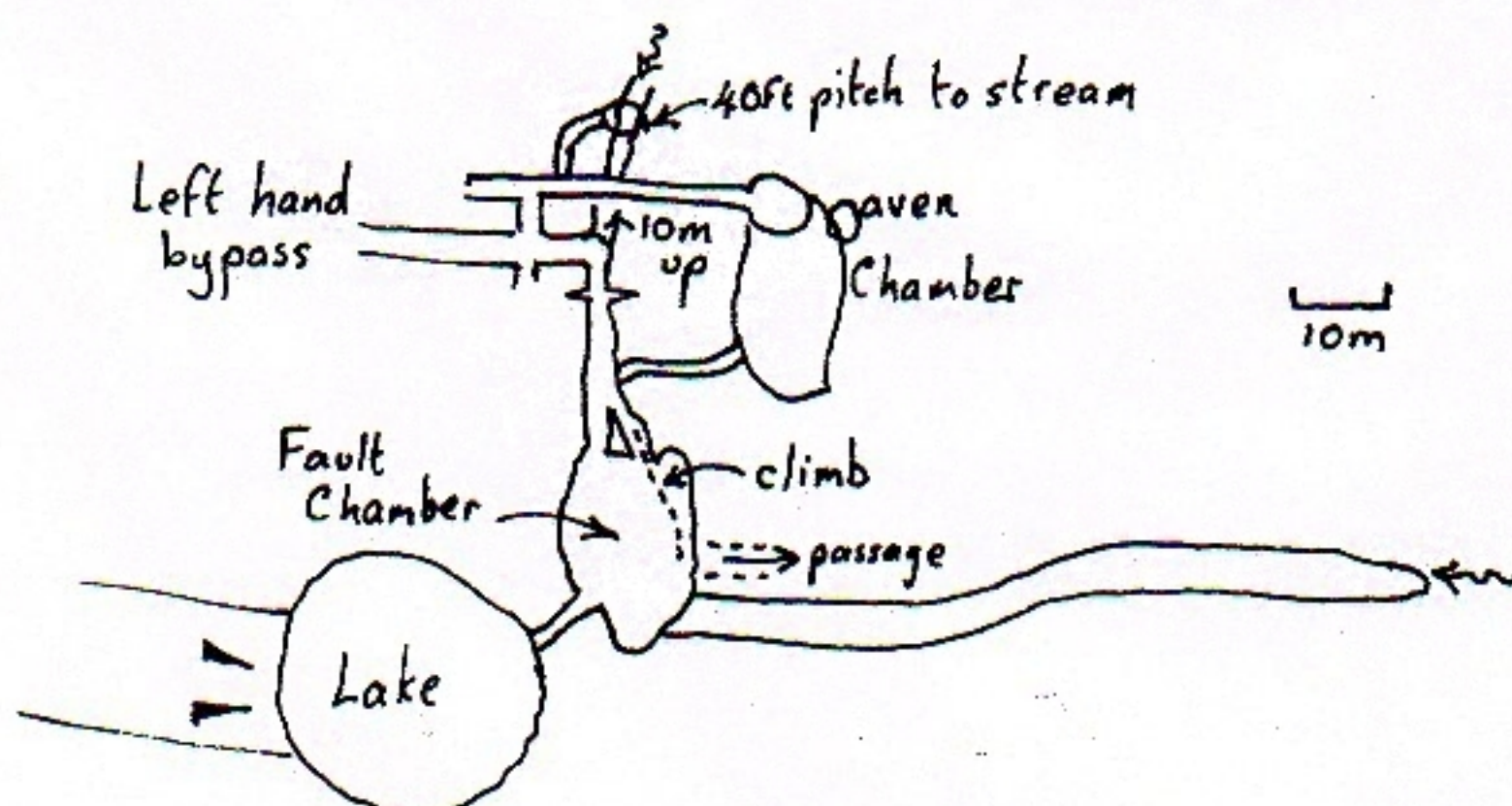
Barry Davies writes:

Patrick had free climbed to a ledge in the fault about 20m above stream level but his light had gone out. I climbed up to give him some support and when he got down I traversed to the right of the ledge to an immense jammed block. Up this some heavily stalled blocks led up easily to another jammed Herbert which looked decidedly unstable. Six metres above this was a large inviting black hole with the draught screaming up into it. To the left of the block is solid wall about 2m high to a solid ledge, but not having any bolts it has to be left for another day.

This passage is heading for the end of Uzueka. Barry continues....

Returning down the climb, we went to look at a passage Howard and I had seen earlier. We erected the scaling pole and Howard ascended into a nice little passage which he reladdered in an easy place. The whole team then went up to push. After half an hour we found a way up into a large chamber again on a fault. At one end was a high aven again with the draught whipping upwards, but it would probably be a more difficult scale than that in the main chamber. Down some large blocks from the aven we found some dumped carbide and footprints which we followed back into the main passage near the fault chamber.

Sketch:



Prospects in the Four Valley System

Obviously the Uzueka-Llueva link-up is (at last) becoming a probability with only 300m to go. Within this 300m is the entry of the water from Carcaveuso and its attendant unknown passage. Above the probable water course downstream of Cueva Llueva, Cueva Cellaron could be of significance. The bottom end of this 93m deep pot (found in 1978) is only about 40m above the stream level. Many depressions in this area are shown on the map. Draughting holes above the sink at Carcaveuso were once more attacked but with no success. Further efforts are needed here.

Fresnedo

The hole, near a low point in the depression, was discovered last year and could well be the back entrance to Solviejo in Secadura. Frank Addis writes:

In 1978 a large, dry sink entrance was noted, about 3m wide and 1m high sloping away over a boulder floor with a strong draught emerging. This year, the team was soon crawling about in a maze of fox shit, boulders and flood debris with the draught disappearing up a short sandy climb in the roof. This proved to be one of many sandy holes and the team soon became separated with occasional shouts of 'I can see your light.... I think..... but where are you?'

The way on was eventually found by pulling aside a few boulders behind which the draught disappeared. Squeezing up into a hading rift passage immediately led to a roomy walking passage and visions of eternal glory. This dead straight passage soon emerged into a roomy mud-coated phreatic maze with several short (5 - 8m) clean washed shafts leading down to an impenetrable bedding. Clambering about in the roof of the maze revealed another chamber above the phreatic zone and contained the only formations seen in the cave. A ramp down through boulders led to another small series of choked passages. Attempts to regain the lost draught failed, so the return journey was

started. After passing the squeeze and crawling along a sandy passage, wondering where the exit could be, daylight was seen in the roof of a loose shaft. This was reached by an easy traverse over yet another sandy passage. The shaft was soon climbed amidst a hail of pebbles and soil, bringing the explorers out in the middle of a bramble-filled shakehole surrounded by eucalyptus trees. This was a short distance from the original entrance and provided a much simpler method of entering the cave, especially if a ladder is used!

Thus ends the sum total of underground exploration in the Fresnedo Valley which, so far, is certainly the least promising area looked at.

No survey was attempted, but the strong draught means that this maze will have to be looked at again.

Cubio de la Renada

High above the supposed continuation of Renada, 3 new pots were explored. Torca del Avellano was the most significant, having a length in excess of 100m and a depth of some 43m.

Frank writes:

The search for a back door to Renada has produced another short but interesting cave. The considerable distance between this and Renada entrance suggests some radio location work in Renada is necessary in order to cut down the area being searched.

Torca del Avellano is best reached by poking about at the end of the Sel de Suto road and toiling up the track through the trees until a large meadow is seen through the trees. This is reached by normal jungle bashing. Crossing the meadow and ignoring a large shakehole full of trees and fallen blocks, a dry valley is seen above with one or two isolated trees. One of the nearest trees has a fence around it, guaranteeing the presence of a shaft, which is in fact 8.6m deep at its far side.

Five metres of ladder or rope is sufficient to climb down onto a steeply sloping rubble heap.

This soon leads to a short scramble down some boulders into a short section of old vadose passage, which immediately leads to the head of a 7.6m pitch. The explorer lands in a wide, steeply inclined bedding with a short section of blind passage reached through a slot in the floor. Strolling down the bedding leads to another pitch of 7.3m in black limestone landing in a roomy but short passage. This now continues as a series of lowering passages running down-dip to the inevitable flat-out crawl with a powerful inward draught.

The crawl was subsequently pushed along a series of cross joints and through various interesting squeezes to terminate in a tight low pool with 4cm airspace and a strong draught.

Salamander Pot, a short distance from Avellano, was explored in two trips. The first pushed the pot 'via 5m and 3m pitches to boulders through which could be seen a walking sized passage - a lumphammer will guarantee easy access to spacious caverns'. The second trip reported that they 'cleared sufficient debris and calcite to squeeze through to the walking sized passage to find an immediate, impassable boulder choke.

Torca del Omoplato, the third of the pots above Renada, was partially dug to give a cave of 25m depth, although the tight passage at the bottom proved impassable and offers no hope for a continuation.

Cueva Cobrantes

This huge cave (average cross section 30x30m) situated at the head of San Miguel valley was the scene of a scaling trip. Twelve cavers with 9 poles spent 6 hours scaling and climbing at every conceivable site at the end of the cave, but to no avail. Bolting was discounted because of the thick layers of mud under calcite that covers much of the wall at the end.

Cubio de la Gatuna

The last find of any significance. Situated at Hornedo and (probably) well away from any connection with Uzueka, the cave was explored and surveyed in two trips.

An initial chamber leads into a series of loose cross-jointed

passages, which were pushed into a sandy crawl. This was followed by a length of nicely decorated passage. The cave ended in two large chambers with nasty holes between the boulders in the floor. One hole is 19m deep and was aptly described as 'tight, muddy, horrible and sharp, with small rat holes at the bottom and no draught.'

Total length is 164m.

Future explorations in the Matienzo area

Our general aims for the future should include:

The linking of the caves in the Four Valley System.

The search for the stream passage beyond the second sump in Renada.

Exploration of the shafts to the east and south east of Matienzo - passage from this area will have drained to Cobrantes in the past.

The Engravings of Cueva de los Emboscados

Pete Smith

The cave was first explored by Spanish cavers in the 1960's and their report in Cuadernos de Espeleologia 2 includes a sketch survey. We returned to the cave in 1975, producing a survey in our report of that year.

Nevertheless, the engravings described in this article were first noticed only in March 1979, when the three drawings in Panel 1 were recognised. (Two of them are illustrated). On a later visit with Jose Leon and Miguel Angel Puente (Asociacion Cantabra para la Defensa del Patrimonio Subterraneo) the two drawings of Panels 11 and 111 were identified. Further visits in the summer, especially with Brasso (Bolton Speleo Club) have added more information and suggestions.

All the engravings are found in the second passage of the cave which, apart from the entrance crawl, is high, wide and comfortable to explore. Panel 1 lies on the left hand wall, near to a large boulder which stands in the centre of the passage. It represents the body and head of a deer, 79cm long by 57 cm high. The front of the chest is drawn with multiple parallel lines. The second drawing is of the head of a deer 52cm high, and the third is more difficult

to distinguish, but it is probably another deer or horse, 58cm long by 54cm high. This is different from the other 4 drawings in that the left flank of the animal has been drawn and it is shown looking out towards the entrance. These three drawings of Panel 1 are similar in that the fronts, necks and chests are represented by the multiple lines.

Panel 11 is found a little further along the same wall. Here there is a single drawing of a deer, 53cm long by 38cm high, being drawn with single lines representing the back, chest, head and antlers. Panel 111 lies on the opposite side of the passage, in a small alcove, and the drawing is similar to Panel 11 - a deer 42cm long by 40cm high.

All of the drawings have been done with simple scratches on the wall, probably with a stone. This has led J. Leon and M.A. Puente to doubt their prehistoric origin, as they lack the patina usually found on prehistoric engravings, and differ very slightly to modern scratches made on the wall.

Circular pits in the passage floor are said to be bears' beds, and the other scratches on the boulders and walls are also attributed to bears. These are undoubtedly old, and yet they look similarly fresh to the drawings, with same lack of patina. Perhaps the dry conditions inside the cave, and the very small entrance, have caused the scratchings and engravings to be so well preserved.

Furthermore, these drawings are very similar in technique and style to those in Cueva de Cobrantes, where a series of engravings were attributed to the Solutrean or early Magdalenian Age. A worked flint was found in the entrance to Emboscados, but further small digs have failed to turn up any more artifacts or bones, which might have supported the authenticity of the engravings. And a final, but important, point is that the cave has never been visited by the locals - the more usual kind of graffiti is missing, and most of the formations remain unbroken.

So without any conclusive evidence either way, the most satisfactory explanation remains that the drawings might have been done in Paleolithic times, by men coming to Matienzo, perhaps from the Aras valley, to hunt deer like the ones they pictured inside the cave.

References

MUSS Journals 7,8,9.
Matienzo Journals 1974, 1975

Acknowledgements

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