

# BCRA



TRANSACTIONS

BRITISH CAVE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Volume 8

Number 2

June 1981



Cueva de Cellarón, Secadura

**Matienzo**



BRITISH CAVE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

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ISSN 0305-859X

TRANSACTIONS OF THE  
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MATIENZO, SPAIN

Volume 8 Number 2

June 1981

CONTENTS

Caves and Caving in Matienzo

L.D.J. Mills ..... 53

Geomorphology of the Matienzo Caves

L.D.J. Mills & A.C. Waltham ..... 63

Prehistoric Remains and Engravings discovered by  
the British Speleological Expeditions to Matienzo

P. Smith ..... 85

Matienzo Underground

J.S. Corrin & P. Smith ..... 87

Cover picture: The massive high level segment of  
Cueva de Cellaron, Secadura : photo by J. Corrin

Published by and obtainable from:

The British Cave Research Association

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ISSN 0305-859X

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Volume 8 Number 2

CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Caves and ...                                     | 53 |
| Geomorphology of ...                              | 63 |
| Prehistoric Remains and ...                       | 65 |
| The British Speleological Expedition to Matizenzo | 65 |
| P. Smith  | 65 |
| Matizenzo Underground                             | 65 |
| J.E. Corrin & P. Smith                            | 67 |

Cover picture: The massive high level segment of  
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# PREHISTORIC REMAINS AND ENGRAVINGS DISCOVERED BY THE BRITISH SPELEOLOGICAL EXPEDITIONS TO MATIENZO

P. Smith

## ABSTRACT

A possible hand axe, a human skeleton, a bone arrow or spear head and a bronze sword have been discovered by the expeditions. Six engravings have also been found, although some doubt remains about their authenticity.

The British expeditions to Matienzo have made some significant additions to the original discoveries made by the Spanish cavers to the area and described by Begines (1966). His article is mainly concerned with Bronze Age pottery found in Cueva de Cofresnedo. Recent visits have revealed more pottery in nine different places within the cave which still remain to be studied.

The main discoveries by our expeditions have been in four caves.

### Cueva de los Emboscados

A possible hand-axe was found in the form of a large iron-ore nodule. This is an oval stone, 125mm long, 90mm wide and maximum thickness 40mm, which weighs some 645g. Both ends display fractures, although it is hard to say if these are intentional or due to use by man, or to natural causes. Also, as with all the archaeological finds within Matienzo, it is difficult to date as it was found on the cave floor without stratigraphic remains which could establish its chronology.

### Cueva de Rascavieja

In this cave, where the Spanish cavers found Iron Age pottery, a human skeleton was discovered in a low alcove off the first chamber. Probably belonging to a male youth, the bones - part of the skull, the jaw and teeth, vertebrae, ribs, etc. - were separated among boulders. Possibly they date from the Bronze Age. They were collected by Regino Rincon, and will be described in his forthcoming publication on the Bronze Age in Santander.

### Cueva del Risco

A bone arrow or spear head was found near to the end of the Galeria de Pinto in this cave. Although 88mm long, it is scarcely 5mm in diameter, reaching a fine point. The base has been bevelled where it fitted on to the shaft. It must come from the Old Stone Age, either the Solutrean or Magdalenian periods. The arrow head was found close to where the Spanish cavers discovered remains of the giant deer, *Cervus megacervus*, and where we encountered antlers, probably of red deer, in 1978. All these finds, a kilometre into the cave, indicate there must have existed another entrance which is now blocked.

### Cueva de la Espada

In 1975 a bronze sword-blade was found in the stream passage near to the lower entrance. This is 610mm long and still contains two of the rivets with which it was fitted to the handle. It was studied in detail by M. Almagro (1977) who dated it in the Late Bronze Age. Currently on display in the Museo de Prehistoria (Santander), it is considered one of the finest examples discovered in the province, although in the past three swords were found in Cueva Collusa, Ogarrio.

The dry entrance to the right of the resurgence was inhabited by early man and contains substantial prehistoric remains. A trial dig here revealed several flints, probably belonging to the Magdalenian period.

### Cave engravings in Matienzo

During the last two years we have found two caves in Matienzo with what appears to be Prehistoric Art. (Plate 6, Figs. 2 & 3). Neither of them has



been studied by a qualified archaeologist, which explains the reserved opinion about their authenticity.

The first examples were found in the Cueva de los Emboscados (La Secada), a cave which had first been explored by the Spanish cavers in the 1960's - their report includes a sketch survey (1966a).

We returned to the cave in 1975, producing a survey in our report of that year (KCC/MUSS, 1975). Nevertheless the engravings were only noticed in March 1979, when the three drawings in Panel I were recognised. On a later visit with J. Leon and M. A. Puente (Asociacion Cantabra para la Defensa del Patrimonio Subterraneo) the two drawings of Panels II and III were identified.

The second cave was Cueva del Patatal (La Vega), which had similarly been explored by the Spanish cavers in the 1960's and by us in 1975. The single engraving it contains was found in July 1980.

#### Cueva de los Emboscados

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 I 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 57cm high. The front of the chest is drawn with multiple parallel lines, giving the effect of shading. The second drawing is of the head of a deer 52cm high, and the third is more difficult to interpret, but it is probably another deer or horse, 58cm long by 54cm high. This is different from the other four drawings in that it is shown looking towards the left. These three drawings of Panel I are similar in that the fronts, necks and chests are represented by the multiple lines.

Panel II is found a little further along the same wall. Here there is a single drawing of a deer, 53cm long by 28cm high, being drawn with single lines representing the back, chest, head and antlers. Panel III lies on the opposite side of the passage, in a small alcove, and the drawing is similar to Panel II - a deer 42cm long by 40 cm high.

All the drawings have been done with light scratches on the wall, probably with a stone. In technique they are similar to the engravings in Cueva de Cobrantes (San Miguel de Aras), and their style - of multiple lines - is typical of engravings found on the walls, and on bone objects, in many Cantabrian caves, including Altamira and El Castillo (Puente Viesgo), where they are attributed to the Solutrean or early Magdalenian Age.

#### Cueva del Patatal

The engraving is found in an alcove on the right at the end of the main passage. About 25cm long, it possibly represents the body of a deer, although this is hard to say as it has been drawn without a head. Also a vertical line down from the centre of its body could represent a spear.

It is different to the engravings in Emboscados both in technique - it is drawn with a deeper and firmer line - and in style, remember that the engravings there especially emphasise the head.

Perhaps the spear was drawn for magical purposes, to demonstrate the vulnerable point of the animal, in which case the head would become less important and so be omitted. Following Leroi-Gourhan's classification, this engraving can perhaps be included in his style II, within the Gravethian or early Solutrean periods. This means that it is somewhat older than the engravings in Emboscados.

#### Conclusions

Regarding their authenticity, the drawings the Emboscados lack the 'patina' usually found on prehistoric engravings, and differ very slightly from modern scratches made on the wall. Nevertheless, it is a cave which has never been visited very much, unlike Patatal which is one of the caves most frequently visited by the locals. On the other hand the engraving in Patatal does have the patina, taking on the same appearance and colour as the rest of the wall. One point in common between the two caves is their position. Both their entrances face south and are about 50m above the valley floor, close to a river.

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February 1981

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