

## **VT62 (site 1176)**

This cave was originally explored by the Catalan's in 1989, when they reached a tight rift section which they were Hilti capping, they have not been back since?

Having spoken to them, they were happy for us to continue their exploration.

It is positioned quite nicely- near the top of the ridge (651m alt.), between the resurgence for the area (El Molino) and the Valline.

The grid reference for the entrance is accurate and it is marked with red paint "VT62". Most importantly is not too far from the car, with quite an easy walk of around thirty minutes.

This is a -340m deep pothole that is split quite neatly into two vertical sections (all on rope) & two horizontal sections.

### **DAY ONE- Helen Blyth & David Foxtan**

The first section is down to -140m, this split into 5 pitches.

The entrance shaft is around 35m landing on a slope of boulders, the home for a family of toads. The next pitch follows quickly with an "awkwardish" section at the top. This had been blasted by the Catalans.

You have to be careful at the top of this pitch because there are some small stones on the ledges that fall down the next two sections. At the base of this pitch the shaft continues, with a further two re-belays, landing you in the roof of a large chamber. Once on the floor, a slope of loose debris (around thirty feet in length) continues to what appears at first glance to be a solid floor. However this "solid" floor is nothing more than jammed boulders with a loose shale covering, suspended over a 40m drop. Consequently we continued the rope from the previous pitch, using some handy placed stals for belays.

This first section is very well bolted, with all bolts in exactly the right places (nice job by the Catalans)- which is a good job, as the top of some of the pitches are very loose, however with a bit of common sense you can get out of the way.

Two full bags of rope are required for this section.

Carbide & food were left at the base of the pitches for further trips.

With additional manpower we could have continued quite easily to rigged to the bottom, but we were unable to carry four bags of rope plus all the other equipment between two.

### **DAY TWO- Helen Blyth, Barry Edwards & David Foxtan**

Helen did not make it down the entrance due to a bowel problem & was left sunning herself.

So this left two again, but Barry did not want to continue past the top of the big pitch, due to his lack of fitness, & had stated this before leaving the campsite.

This meant we were short of people again.

The bottom of the first series of pitches is followed by about 300m of mostly stooping passage, with some sections of climbing over boulders. It is quite awkward caving and takes about 30 to 40 minutes to get through, (just like back home in Yorkshire).

About three-quarters of the way down this section, an inlet passage enters on the left-hand side. This was not explored. There is a strong draught present at this point.

As you approach the top of the next pitch- the floor of the passage has a small stream flowing over a covering of slippery calcite, with milled potholes in the calcite. This is very nice until you slip on your arse, falling in the lovely crystal clear water. We rigged the next two pitches; these are followed by a permanent rope leading to the top of the big pitch. I had agreed with Barry, before going underground that we would turn around at the top of the big pitch. The bag with the ropes for bottom series, was then left here as I did not fancy continuing on my own- call me a big girls blouse but I did not think it was wise considering the position.

### **DAY THREE- Helen Blyth & David Foxtan**

Then down a superb 60m shaft, then 3 short "pitches" of no more than 10m each.

These pitches/climbs all follow one after another, dropping in between the boulders at the base of the 60m pitch. (The climbs have permanent rope on, which appears to be ok so we used it.)

The water sinks through the boulder choke at the base of the pitch and you meet the water once again after the last short climb.

The passage now becomes quite immature, with less of a draught than in the horizontal passage further up the cave. Progress is made by crawling mostly in the water, with the roof of the passage lifting occasionally, where you find other larger passages above.

These larger passages generally continue a short way and then you have to go back to the lower level. On the wall above the stream, scribed in the mud, was "Adolfo" (the name of one of the Catalan's), we continued in the stream pushing a bedding plane.

We reached a point where we had to remove a portion of the wall to allow Helen to access a continuation of the passage. Once through the constriction the passage continued in a similar vein, low and wet. Great! Light was becoming a slight concern and as this was only a reconnaissance effort, we decided to call it a day, as we had no spare carbide with us.

On the return through the low wet section, we found a way up into higher level passages, Helen went one way I the other, for "a quick look, no more than five minutes".

Helen went in the larger passages & I followed the stream in a trench passage.

The trench passage is around 3m high & 0.5m wide with the stream at the bottom. The walls are covered in dark brown barnacle like formations; these fall off and crumble when you stand on them. It did not look like anyone had been through this section, as none of the formations appeared to be damaged. I turned around to rejoin Helen, as we had been gone around fifteen minutes. I had turned around at a point just before the stream went down a small cascade of around three feet.

On the way out, whilst on one of the climbs through the boulders; a foothold became detached from the wall, causing me to slip a little way. More importantly the rock then hit Helen on the knee but fortunately she was wearing mining kneepads which prevented any damage.

All the spare rigging gear, bolting kit, spare rope etc. was taken out to make it easier on the de-rigging trip. It was a good job as this weighed an absolute ton, much more than an average rope bag.  
We got out in the nick of time just as the light was fading, but with just enough to see our way across the pavements. (We had left our lights and caving stuff at the entrance to save carrying them up the hill the next day.)

DAY FOUR Tuesday 17/8/99- Helen Blyth, Dave Omeroyd, Richard & David Foxton

The trip started in fine style with Dave Omeroyd forgetting his harness.

The original plan was for Richard and Dave to continue to the bottom and Helen & I would start to survey. This was now shelved in favour of retrieving as much tackle as possible, so that we did not have to go back to the bottom to de-rig the entire trip in one day.

Helen decided that big strong Dave, was more suited to a big day out carrying lots of gear, than poor weak little Helen, selflessly offering her harness, to replace Dave's missing one.

Thus Dave's plans for sitting in the sun were scuppered.

(Important Point- Helen is 5ft 2" & about 7 ½ stone and Dave Omeroyd is considerably larger at 6ft ish and around 13 stone)

Eager Dave, rapidly made progress to the bottom of the cave, but both Richard & I could not be bothered and so we waited briefly at the top of the main pitch for the Dave.

This then was the start of the fun!

Soon the pitches were de-rigged to the start of the horizontal section, & the survey was started whilst carrying the two bags we already had accumulated. This was painful!

The clino became covered in mud/ sand at every second station, I managed to burn my face on my carbide flame whilst incompetently taking readings, and all in all it was not the most pleasant of surveying trips. (If there is ever a pleasant trip?)

We continued the survey to the bottom of the next pitch.

Richard and Dave started to prussic out with bags one and two & I then started to de-rig again, soon filling the third bag. The fourth bag was reached at the bottom of the second pitch, & I continued carrying both bags, until a hauling rope on the entrance pitch gratefully received the heavy bag.

I was so thankful we had completed it all in one day & I did not have to go back to the next day, now all that remained was to wash the rope before setting off back to England.

#### For the Future

There is a very strong draught present up to the top of the big pitch.

At the bottom of the pitch the draught diminishes as you get into the smaller passages.

This raises the question whether we are following the main route, but a closer inspection at the bottom of the big pitch is required.

Once we reached the bottom the problem was a lack of man power, what we needed to do was spend longer looking for the way on, but were not able to do that in the time available. At the bottom the Catalans had previously been using explosives at a narrow rift section, we did not noticeably reach this point, but may have by-passed it (because some of the passages at the end had definitely not been entered before), or we were somewhere different to the Catalans. The Catalans do not have a plan survey of the system, only a cross-section.

At the bottom the passage is old and large, similar to some of the passages in Valline, but below this is a small immature streamway. The two sections of passage old and new are separated by a false floor (calcite floor which you can break through to get from small streamway to large passage).

If the cave were rigged, you could be at the bottom in 2 hours, then 3 hours out. This would mean around 3-4 hours at the bottom, for an acceptable day trip without killing yourself.

I have encouraged a larger group of people from Liverpool to come out at Easter, as this would be an excellent project for 6-8 keen enthusiastic people.

(It currently appears there will be a minimum of eight and a maximum of twelve out from Liverpool at Easter.)