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Twenty New Pence.

'EXPEDITION' 1971

The 1971, annual M.U.S.S. expedition again visited Spain. The purpose of the expedition was to continue the speological exploration of the valley of Matienzo, in the province of Santander, which had been started by the 1970 M.U.S.S. expedition. This is a totally enclosed valley, and thus the river that drains it sinks, at a place called Carcavueso, in the bottom of the valley, to resurge about 5 km. away at San Miguel. The 1970 expedition had discovered an entrance near the sink which led to 500 ft. of passage which reached the main drain, but they could not continue due to a boulder choke in the stream. The pushing of this cave was our top priority.

Sounds good doesn't it? This is what really happened ...

We set out from Manchester on 31st. July in a "very reliable" Ford Thames van. In fact there were no signs of trouble for six hours when, passing through Oxfordshire, we ground to a halt. A quick change of cylinder head gasket by the roadside had us on our way again.

By the evening of the 4th. we just made Southampton in time to be the last vehicle on the boat. One night on the boat, the next near Bordeaux and Spain was in sight. The border crossing had a deleterious effect on the internal workings of our transport. Diagnosing broken valve springs, we had the vehicle towed back to France where the garages were not effected by the siesta. Three festerous days and an infinity of border crossings later, we picked up the van again.

Meanwhile we had hired a Chrysler from a garage, this being the largest vehicle available. Unfortunately, although

an expedition can fit into a Chrysler, the fact that the body work is only 3" off the ground, makes life very difficult as was experienced leaving the garage. Transport-less, we stayed in Irun.

On the 10th., with high hopes again, we set out. Within five miles rattles, black smoke, salad cream in the oil, gloom, despair, stropo tempers, football in a garage forecourt, where shall we go to? What to do? - Bilbao and the boat ferry.

Determined to enjoy our holiday, we abandoned our semi-mobile machine at the ferry terminal and, after two days camping on a Spanish rubbish tip, set off on Spanish public transport.

By train we got to Ramales de la Victoria. Limestone at last! And caves. Gigantic holes in the mountain side. In all we spent 5 days around Ramales, in which time we visited most of the large caves in the valley above the town and Steve got a reputation for wearing tortillias.-- (For those interested in demonstrating cookery, it is not good practice to toss tortillias with a frying pan with a hinged handle !)

The largest cave in the immediate area is Cueva de Cullevera, 8 km. long, but like all other Spanish caves, which have prehistoric drawings in them, this cave can only be entered if one first obtains the key.

We did however visit Cueva del Muro, a cave with an impressive entrance set half-way up a sheer cliff-face, with a giddy path over to it which makes Victoria cave look like a chip out of the rock, a cave which it resembles from outside appearance.

On the 16th., the great day arrived and we accomplished the last part of the journey to Matienzo. At this time we were approximately 14 days behind schedule. We quickly re-established our links with the people at the bar and put our tents up on the

common land under the oak trees. The next five days were enjoyably spent learning how to play pasa-bola, indulging in the cheap red wine (12pts!), lying in the sun, or rain and also loads of caves. We visited most of the large caves in the valley, Cueva del Agua, Cofresnedo and Cueva Quenta. We reopened the sink to the main river cave (Carcavueso) which had been blocked by flood debris and managed to find a way through the boulder choke at the end. The main passage was followed for 500' until the cave ended in a large deep lake. Since we only had carbide lighting the passing of this obstacle was left for another day. (See Rog's letter following)

On the 20th Dave Grey and Jane arrived having had a certain amount of trouble with their car!... Many a pleasant hour was spent with them festering either in the bar or at the campsite. It was in doing just this one day that a local farmer came walking past the tents carrying a large sack over his shoulder, from which loud squeals were emanating. Suddenly, out of one of the corners of the sack, a piglets nose appeared, followed by the rest of its head. The squealing stopped. With a quick look round him to see if the coast was clear the little porker seized his moment, leapt to the ground and made a dash for it. With a shout, the farmer, followed hot foot by several english cavers, made close puruit. With our experience of Yorkshire sheep stalking we had no trouble in retrieving the beast and returning it to its owner. A pity really, as there was probably bacon for breakfast the next morning for one family in Matienzo.

On the 22nd we left Matienzo, having spent two weeks getting there it seemed a good idea to leave at least a week to get back in. From Bilbao we all made our seperate ways back. Lank and Hilly taking the van on the ferry the rest hitching from Irun.

All in all it is advisable to go on an 'expedition' with a vechile one can repair. In England we never dreamed of taking a spare cylinder block with us. We did little new caving of any significance

but one can get some sort of wry satisfaction out of the fact that little more could go wrong. Praises be to 5star R.A.C. travel!

Bill Beardmore
Steve Lenartowitz

Rog set off for S.Africa soon after our return and said he would visit Carcahueso if possible on the way, the following is part of a letter.

"Well we got down Carcavueso, Chris, Noddy and I went down on thursday, Brian was going to come with us but couldn't get through the squeeze. In my usual forgetful manner I couldn't remember Bills description of his route apart from little bits and pieces. Anyway we went off down the right hand passage off the big chamber near the entrance which turns through 180 degrees into a descending rift. This drops down into a phreatic region where I followed a very wet crawl for about 150' and gave up, no draught. Back up the rift at the top is a large bedding plane about 15' across. Through this we found a wide rift passage blocked at both ends and a crawl which Chris went up a long way but reckoned it was going uphill. We returned to the big chamber near the entrance and went up the left hand passage right to the end and spent some time messing about in the boulder choke. Chris and Noddy eventually found the way down to the stream and Chris and I went down to the upstream sump and had a grot about in the boulders. Then Noddy found the carbide marks showing the way down past the boulder choke and I went steaming off down the passage in the water which ends in a dead low bedding plane. Anyway we decided to call it a day as I was getting v. cold and tired and Noddy's torch was packing up. Got mucho pissado in the bar that night, playing pontoon, the winner of each hand having to drink a short. We had to play until everyone had been once and I seemed to have a winning streak that night with many shorts and litres of wine.

Anyway recovered sufficiently next day to pluck up enthusiasm but Chris reckoned he wasn't up to it. Brian said he'd have another go at the squeeze but still couldn't get through and he was really trying hard. In the face of such enthusiasm Noddy and I with the help of a piece of wood managed to remove the constriction and Brian got through. We found the high level chamber over the point I reached the day before and got into the high/wide stream passage, really impressive. Eventually reached the lake 80' long we reckoned. With a touch of the Casterets I stripped off down to the waist, my trousers were p.w.t. anyway and plunged in, muy frio! Got to the end of the lake to find no way on. There's a slight hint of a passage but it's all completely filled with mud and no floor to stand on. A good place for a dive. Still not managed to trace the draught. There's a passage off to the right before you get to the lake which might be worth a look at, as well as the two crawls I mentioned previously. There might be a high level route over the lake but unlikely, the chamber that the lakes in is quite high.

Had a chat with the locals about the cave and the flooding problem in Matienzo. This bloke wanted to drive a tunnel into the cave to help the flood water subside and said he'd take us to some flood sinks. Needless to say we went straight to Cacavueso. I went into the cave and into a high level inlet in the big chamber near the entrance, (just on the right as you enter the chamber, about 7ft. above the floor). You could shout through to the surface and the others got digging but a big log prevented us from getting in. The bloke wanted to get 100 litres of petrol and burn off all the drift wood and then enlarge the entrance with explosives. Then he said could I take him in the cave, so we equipped him with a cello and helmet and I took him down. He shot through the entrance squeeze and we went all the way to the upstream sump. I was more puffed than he was when we got out, and he goes on to say he's 60! He then showed

us Cueva de las Cosas which took him an hour to find. Its a hole in the rock face which is the top of a 100' slope down to the floor of a vast chamber full of stal, 30' columns etc. a bit like Cueva Orraca. He was very impressed with English drinking habits and another of the locals told us about one of Bradford P.C. who was really pissed one night and went staggering off down the road singing and falling over."

Rog has written in other letters of also doing some caving in the Ruwenzori Range in the Congo paying 80p entrance fee they explored 8kms of cave and there are a reported 28 other caves in the area. After breaking numerous springs, dils etc. the have now reached S. A. and Rog is caving with the local club. This seems to be small and mainly of ex Y.R.C. members!

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