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1)) The Trip

Following the successes of the 1974 and the 1975 British Expeditions to the Matienzo depression, in which members of the Kendal took part, it was felt by interested members that the club should look at other possible areas away from Matienzo.

After the usual "Yeah! I'll go" "Cor Winner, all that sun", we were left with six. John Yeadon to lead and negotiate the permits required.

The others taking part were Geoff Yeadon, Tom Holden, Mike Whitelock Stuart Davey, Dave Hartnup and chief cook and bottle washer (emptier?) Wendy Yeadon. The party was made up by sun worshippers Ann Yeadon and Alistair Younger. Dave unfortunately could only stay a week.

John, Geoff, Wendy, Mike, Dave, Ann and Alistair travelled out together in a Transit van, crossing the channel by hovercraft and then through France to Matienzo. Tom and Stuart travelled out a week later choosing Portsmouth - St. Malo as the crossing point. Though more expensive, it is a very comfortable way of making the crossing.

Matienzo was chosen as the convenient meeting point as it was known to both groups. Only Dave and Mike were new to the area, the others being old hands from 74 and 75.

Whilst at Matienzo, Geoff went into Cueva Uzueka (1) with one thing in mind, to push it to the end. And this he did, and rightly so, as John and himself had explored and surveyed so much of the cave in 75. He added 500 meters to its length.

Geoff also dived the upstream sump in Cueva Lluvia, but with no success. This cave was discovered in 1976 by the MUSS.

With Tom and Stuart's arrival, a very pleasant meal at German and Cuka's bar at Matienzo was enjoyed before leaving for our area. There the hospitality, as usual, was not found wanting.

The area allocated to us was to the north-east of Matienzo, covered by maps No. 60 Valmaseda and No. 36 Castro Urdiales.

As in the past, much help was forthcoming from the Museo de Prehistoria in Santander, and our thanks are due to them for the understanding way they dealt with our questions, requests and the permits required.

During the week previous to Tom and Stuart's arrival a preliminary survey of the area had been made, looking for suitable camp sites etc. Caving progress was made in a large depression near Sena, but time prevented further progress on this very promising dig.

A possible camp site was looked at on the coast at Sonabia, but was rejected as fresh water was not readily available. The search for a suitable site led us to Limpias, and a very pleasant site in a hay field between Limpias and Sena was located. It had drinking water from a nearby fuente and a small stream running through it. The local farmer readily gave his permission to camp, as the hay was already in.

On the coast at Sonabia, Geoff had seen some obvious fresh water resurgences in the sea, and dives into these were contemplated but with the lack of suitable boating equipment these were not made.

But the huge piece of limestone that makes up the Punto Sonabia proved interesting, and some small caves by the road from Orinon to Sonabia were looked at, some of these were exposed by blasting which was taking place to build a new road.

On the beach at Orinon was an old and what must be a very large abandoned resurgence, almost completely filled with sand. An army of diggers and a JCB would be needed to obtain entry into what could be a large cave system. It is a pity that the small caves by the road were not pushed as these were above the resurgence on the beach, but the strong draughts experienced in the past were not in evidence.

The size of the party prevented no more than a cursory examination of the area. It does show promise but not, it was felt, on the scale of previous finds around Matienzo.

Also a public relations exercise with the museum's caving group was agreed on and this was to take more time, as they mentioned that perhaps the diving team might like to look at some sumps for them. These were to prove slightly elusive, but it did pay off as we were given almost "carte blanche" and permission to work in other areas. They asked us to attempt the final sump in Cueva de Cullevera at Ramales de Victoria, a cave at Novales; the cave is the rising for the river Saja which sinks at Cobijon, fifteen kilometres away. The other was the Ruente village resurgence, the sink to which is not positively known. These last two were miles from our area, almost into the Picos de Europa.

During a rest at a bar in Ramales, before one of the trips into Cullavera, one of our Spanish caving friends met an acquaintance, a past caver, and being a local his knowledge of the area was put to good use. He showed us Cubio de Jose and the hydrology of the area. Several sites were noted for further investigation in the future.

The expedition was marred by a bug which all members succumbed to, it even kept Stuart out of a bar for two days. The weather also was not what we had come to expect of Spain, in fact it disproved the theory that the rain falls on the plain, by our reckoning most of it fell on us!

The social life, of course, centered around the various bars, both in Limpias and Sena. Because of the length of time spent travelling around, investigations into the social habits of the local fraternity were not of the scale of those that had taken place on previous expeditions but were pleasant all the same. Geoff and Stuart did manage on one occasion to end the day 'terminal'.

The expedition returned from whence it started, Matienzo; Lank Mills (MUSS) mentioned two possible diving sites near Secadura, and another wet day was spent diving these. (See the joke, wet day - diving, oh, never mind) Geoff remarked "that it was the first time that he felt that a valve and bottle might be an advantage for a walk on the surface."

We all left Matienzo for England after another of Cuka's huge meals to which we invited Lank and Hilly. Wendy might agree that inviting Lank was a mistake because of his impersonation of someone vomiting, but the joviality in the bar afterwards was reminiscent of previous times together, all knowing, providing providence allows, we would return to that land of caves, vino and, sometimes, sun as well.

(2)

The Caves

River Saja Resurgence

We had arranged with the museum's caving group to meet them at the museum itself for the purpose of showing us this, and the Ruente village resurgence for dives to be made at both sites.

Whilst waiting the party had the opportunity to examine some of the exhibits, including those archaeological items that were found by the '75 expedition. The attire worn by the members of the group raised a few eyebrows.

Those who have been to Spain will understand the 'siesta' and 'manana'.... for those who have not, roughly translated they mean 'why do today what could be put off until tomorrow - or the day after.' We had planned to be away from the museum by about 5p.m., but the Spaniards thought we were staying the night and the dives would be attempted the following day. The explanations over, we set off for a conducted tour of Santander during the rush hour, so our Spanish friends could collect their caving gear from their homes. We only witnessed one accident during the thirty minutes spent on this errand, how we do not know, because one hundred and one could have taken place. After this delay some members were slightly peeved and after two hours driving to somewhere near the first cave,

and then our guides were not quite sure where the cave was, they were even more peeved. At last the cave was located near the workings of the Spanish equivalent of 'Tilcon'.

Stuart changed and, having prior experience of Spanish reports, set off along the deep canal equipped with mask and fins, etc. to find Ah, no! Yes, again the elusive sump had once more outwitted the Kendal, and changed itself into a boulder choke. (We ought to try to sell this game to Bruce Forsyth)

Stuart on his return to the entrance found Geoff ready in his 'dry' suit, and, after hearing the report, Geoff set off to investigate for himself, duly returning with the same story.

The explanation to the mystery is perhaps thus; Spanish cavers do not wear wet suits because of their incredible cost in Spain - a two-piece is roughly the equivalent of £90 - which coupled to a comparatively low rate of income means a wet suit is low on the priorities of Spanish cavers. So, when low airspace is encountered, perhaps they can be forgiven for mistaking the existence of a sump.

The low airspace section matches the description and the location of the sump as given to us, it would appear we unwittingly extended this cave by 200ft.

The potential is there, the river sinks fifteen kilometres away and the Spaniards have discovered fourteen kilometres of passage from the sink. A slight draught was detected at the top of the choke, but a way through could not be engineered, besides some of the boulders were not very stable. At the base of the choke the 'roof', even if it was a large slab, did meet the water, but the chance of diving a way through is about nil.

The cave, like a good many in Spain, supplies the local village with drinking water, but the removal of the dam at the entrance would be unlikely to lower the water level further into the cave.

Reuenta Village Resurgence

After another short 'hunt the sump' game, during which the execution of our leader was mentioned, the cave was located. It lies almost in the centre of the village.

A short section of cave above water is enterable, but the roof soon meets the water. Geoff kitted up and dived to the right just inside the entrance, to a depth of seventy feet where the slanting ~~rift~~ became too tight for comfort. He went further into the cave to dive again, only to be stopped by the same problem.

Being in the centre of the village, our activities soon attracted an audience; one villager was not the least bit interested in the activities of the 'ingleses supidos' and the caves they were seeking, but only in the size of the fish the cave contained.

Like the Saja cave, this was also dammed to provide the necessary head of water to supply the village. We wonder if the people of Litton would raise no objection if confronted with the same situation in Litton risings? We doubt it.

The party retired to the nearest bar, the Spaniards satisfied that at last they had witnessed a dive taking place, so the P.R.O. exercise had been a success even if caverns measureless to man were not encountered.

Cueva de Cullavera

Ramales de Victoria

At the request of the museum's caving group it was agreed that an attempt be made to dive the final sump in this very large cave. The possibility of this had been put forward to Geoff and Stuart in 1975, but had come to nothing.

The entrance lies at the base of a massive limestone cliff only ten minutes walk from the centre of Ramales. To give some idea of the size of the cave, it was used in the civil war to hide lorries, men and ammunition. Three hundred feet from the entrance a wall, almost to the roof, has been constructed, topped with barbed wire, to prevent access and possible damage to the cave paintings further inside.

We were informed that it had been some time since anyone had explored the cave and that we were being accorded an honour in being allowed to do so. This was to prove rather dubious as recent residue from others before us was seen in the cave. In MUSS journal No. 6 it mentions Cullavera as 8 kilometres long, but 3 kilometres is nearer the mark.

The whole team gathered, assisted by two cavers from the museum, and carried the diving equipment to the sump. The first problem was to open the steel door in the wall. The key which had been obtained from the cave custodian would not open the door but the lock proved no problem for the lock picking experts of the KCC.

The first trip proved fruitless in the search for the sump but Stuart and Geoff explored a side passage which ended in a tight tube almost filled with glutinate silt, but with a howling gale blowing out. The next day, whilst Stuart, Tom and John went to have a look at Cubio de Jose, Geoff, Mike and one of the Spaniards continued the search for the sump. When they located it, it was dismissed as undivable so a start was made digging the side passage. Two more trips were needed, before Geoff and Mike broke through to discover 1,600ft. of passage ending in a large aven, which must connect with the surface, as a skeleton of a dog or fox was found on the floor. This was not followed up as four days had been spent on the cave.

The side passage that Geoff and Mike had pushed had been known to the Spanish, but they had dismissed it as too tight, and afterwards our friend from Ramales remarked that he did not particularly like the English but admitted that we were not bad at caving.

The cave generally is a bit boring in that it is, for the most part, a long walk underground.

Cubio de Jose

Ramales de Victoria

This cave was shown to us by our acquaintance from Ramales. and John, Tom and Stuart went to have a look while the others were digging their way to glory at Cullavera.

The entrance lies just off the road Ramales to Helugreo, about 2 kilometres from the town. The cave is probably the flood resurgence for the active resurgence further down the valley. This feeds the Rio Asom, there is a cave here, but it is the water supply for Ramales and we were discouraged from entering - well, have you seen Yeadon's feet after a fortnight in Spain?

The mention of a grande siphon brought enthusiasm from Geoff and Stuart, but not from the others after Cullavera, but as we were told the sump was just inside the entrance they were persuaded to assist again.

The entrance is a small bowl-shaped opening, bricked up to form a goat shelter, the floor covered with the residue from generations of goats. The way on was at the back of the bowl-shaped cavity to the left and was some twelve feet long. It emerged at the base of a block collapse. A short climb up to the top, then down the other side to a sandy floor fifty feet below was accomplished, but again no sump. Shorts and a 'T' shirt were not considered suitable attire for further exploration.

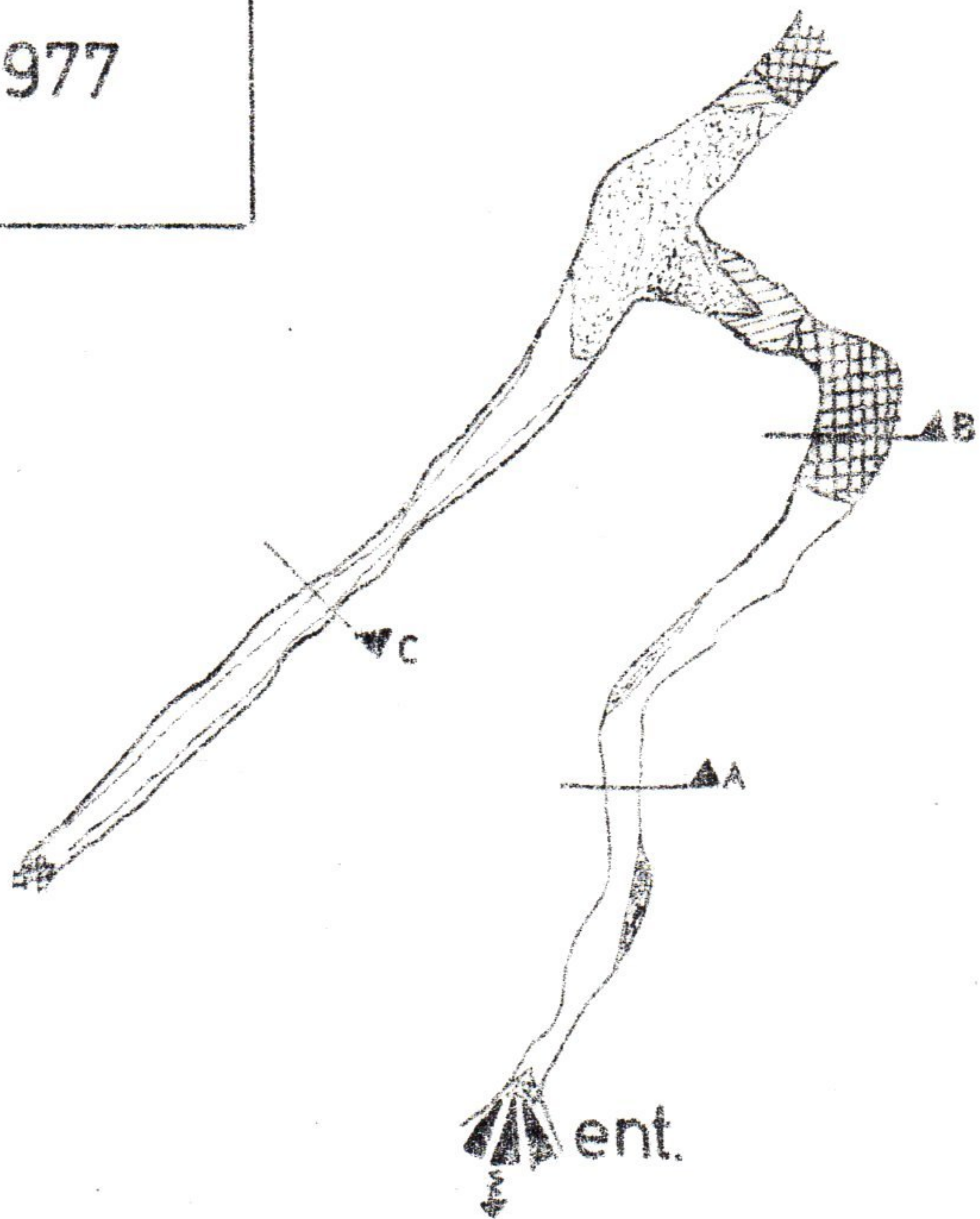
The following day the way on was located at the far end of the chamber. A climb down through a slot between boulders led to a short pitch of ten feet landing at the top of a steep ramp. Down this for fifty feet the passage led straight into a large, deep and sinister pool. Stuart swam round this with a mask and beam torch, slightly perturbed, looking for a floor, conspicuous by its absence, and a sign of the way on.

Back in the large chamber, a possible dry extension was noted and Geoff tried to climb a large stal run up to what looked like a large passage.

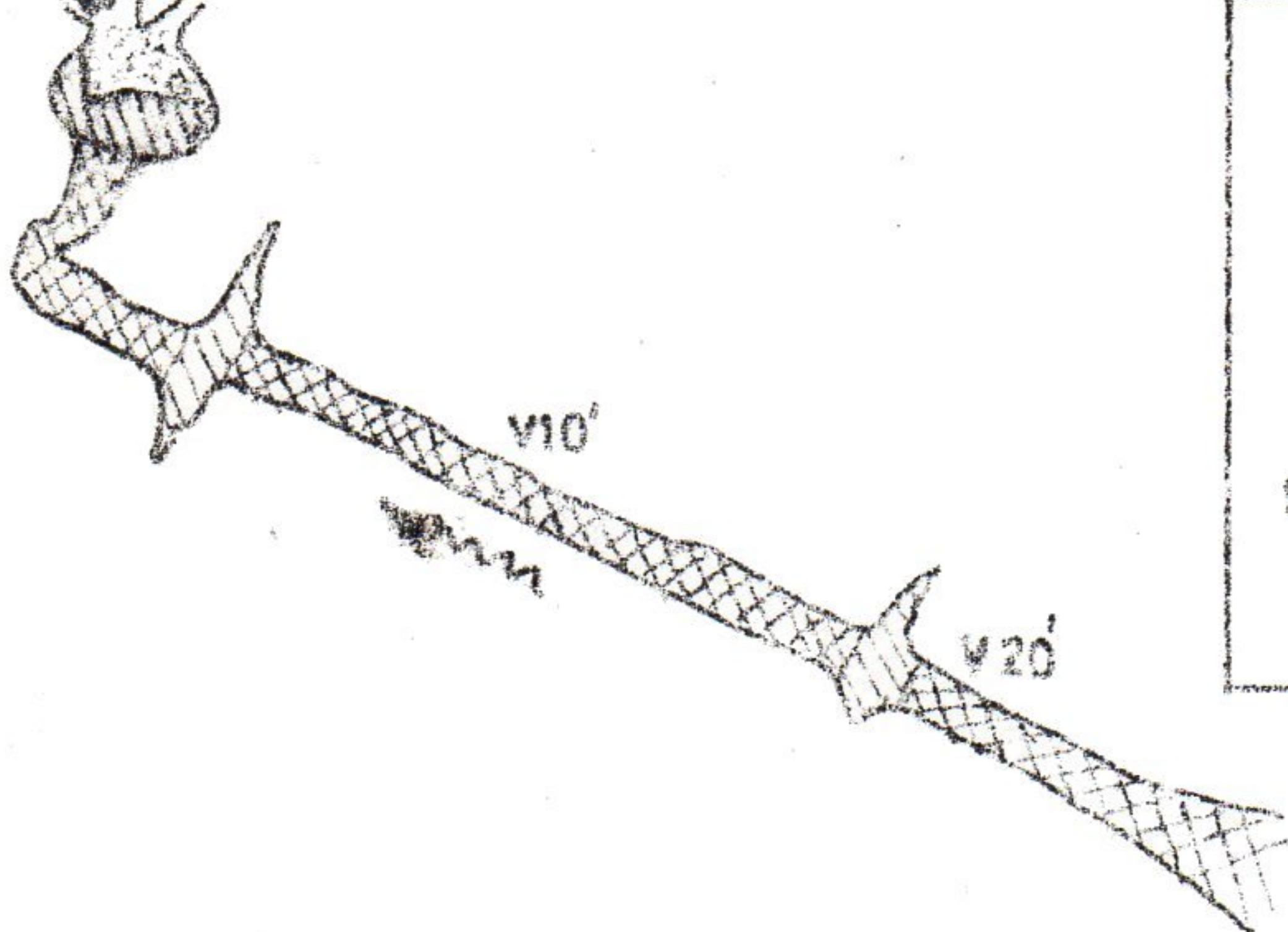
With no scaling pole of our own, a raid was made on the MUSS at Matienzo to obtain one. This was accomplished with ease as they were caving in the bar, as usual.

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Secadura Flood Overflow
SECADURA N.W. SPAIN
K.C.C. Sketch Survey 1977



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Cueva del Sifon Clarion
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