

THE BULLETIN OF THE BRITISH  
CAVE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

# Quivers & Gas

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**DISCOVERING**  
Water Tracing

**GRAHAM BALCOMBE**  
A cave diver's life: Part two

**MATIENZO**



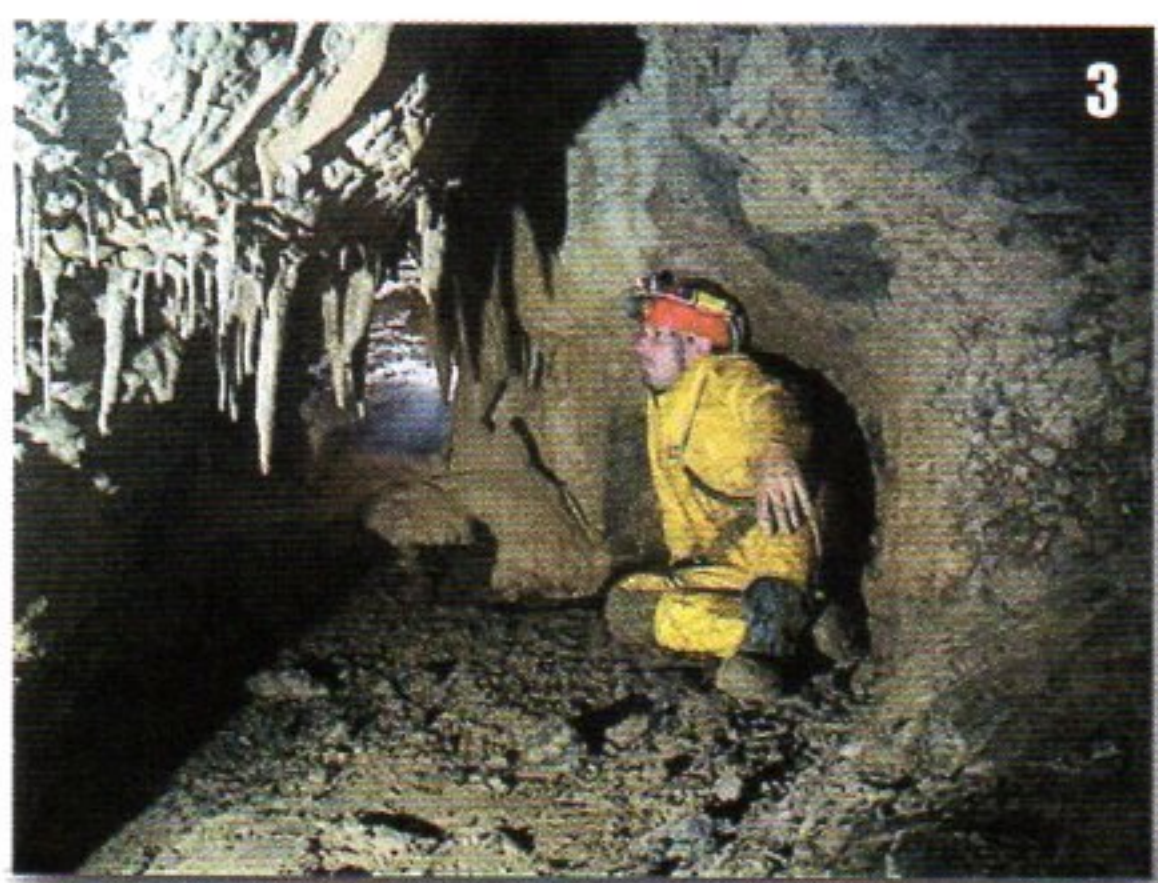
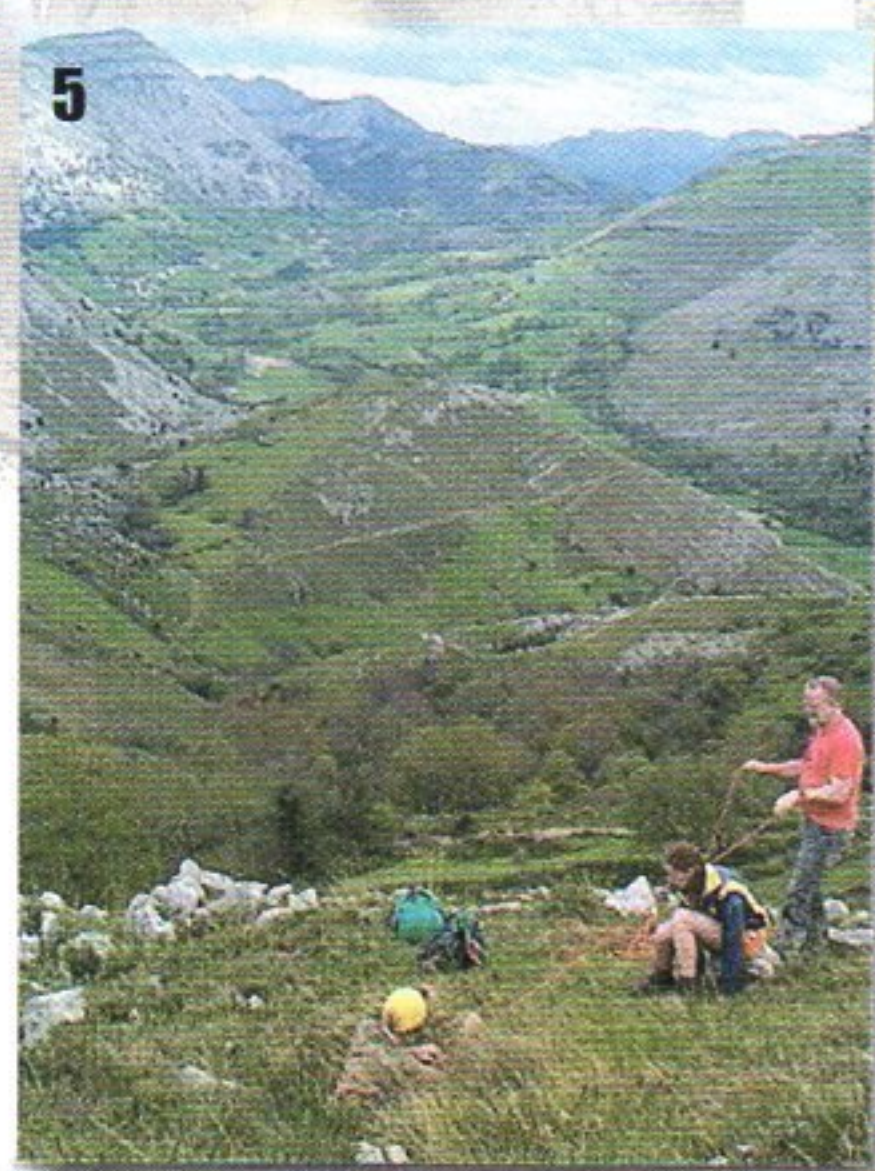
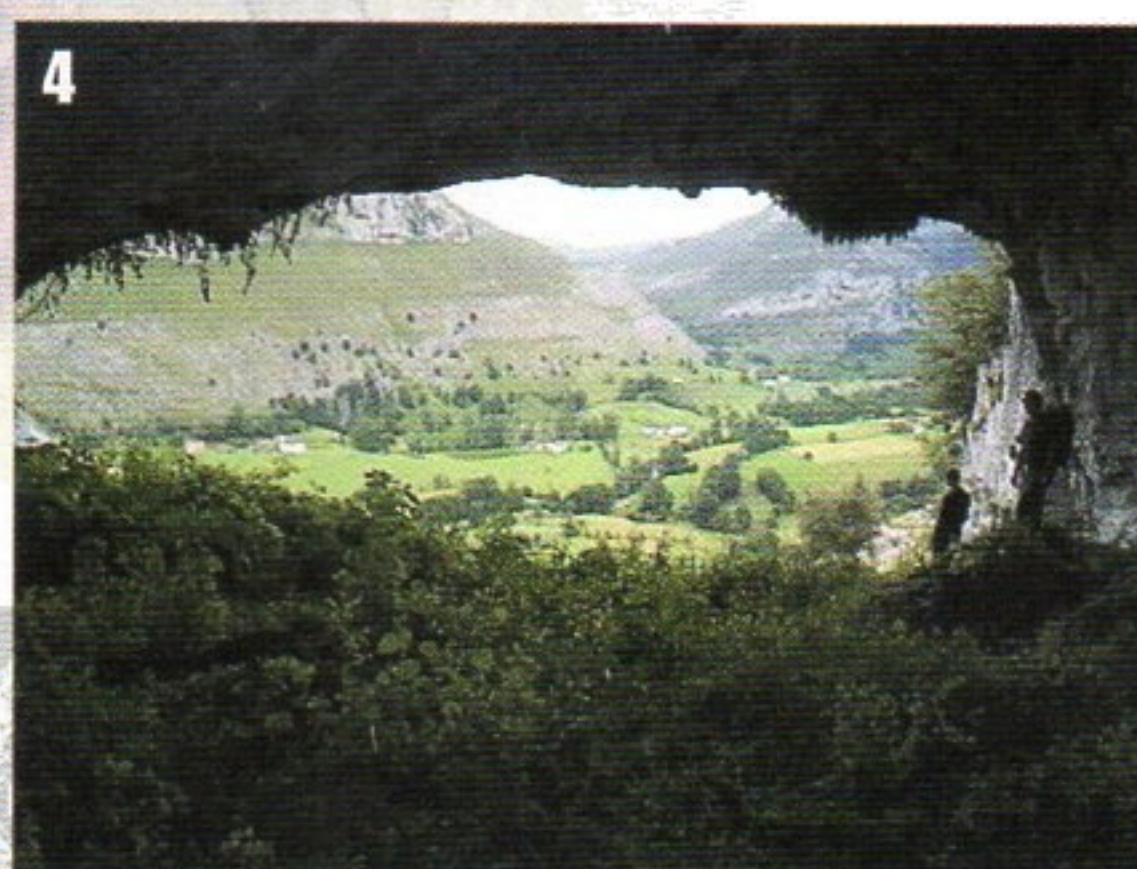
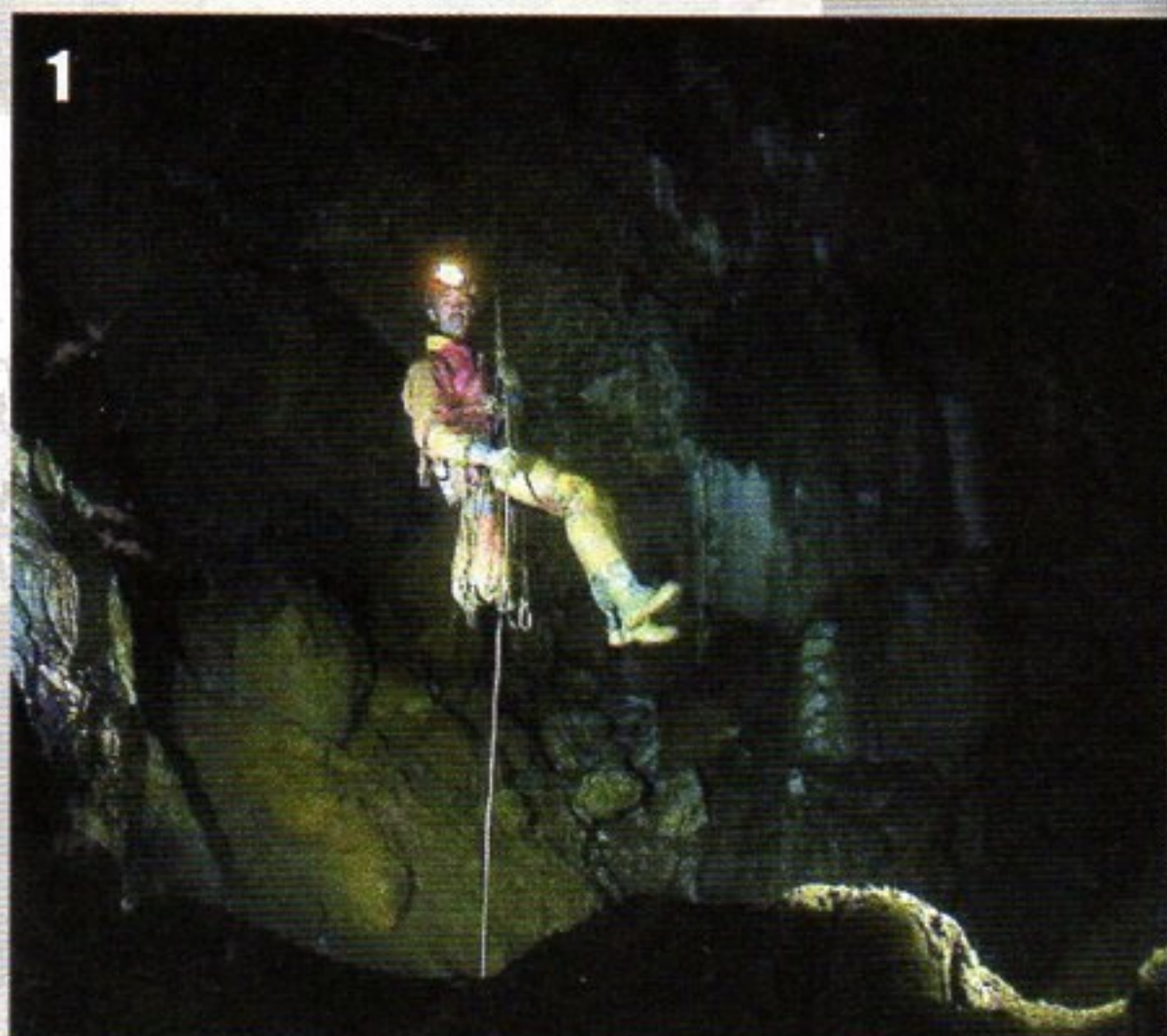
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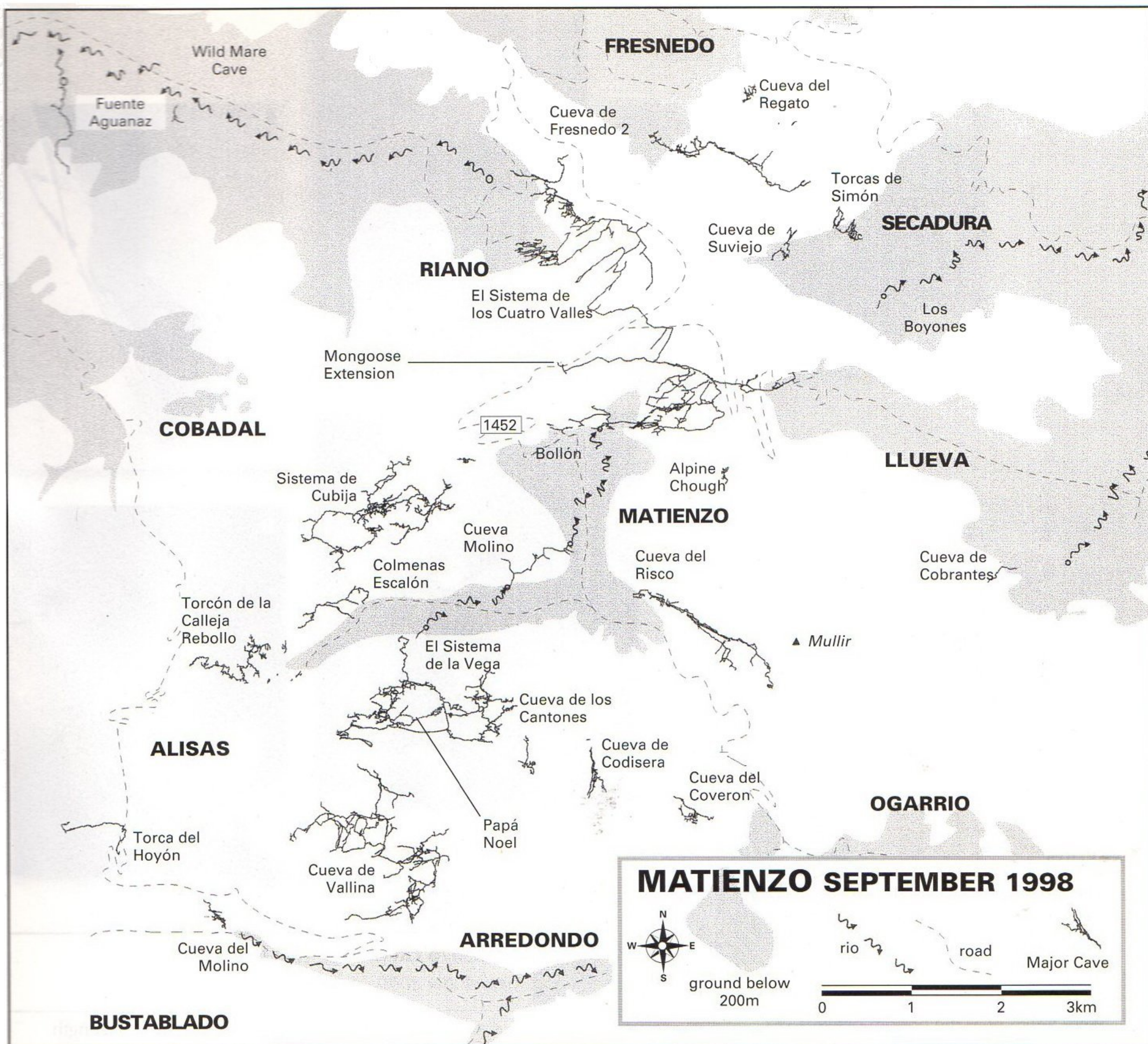
# Matienzo

The Matienzo cave explorers enjoyed summer weather for most of the time at Easter and in July and August. About 5.4km of passage were surveyed during our 30th year, split more or less equally between both periods, including nearly a kilometre of surveying in the Catalans site VT62 (site 1176) and 2250m in the new site, Torca de Papá Noel (1471). Various groups augmented the usual expedition members including Adolfo, Jordi and friends from the Espeleo Club Tortosa & AA. EE. T de Valls, Santi Urrutia from ADES (Gernika) and members of Liverpool University Potholing Club & Sheffield University Speleological Society. The number of speleological sites increased by 142 at the end of the summer, giving a total of 1602: containing over 223km of cave passage. With the recent removal of the GPS inaccuracy, we were able to start repositioning some sites to their correct places on the maps.

In summary, and described within the various cave areas, the highlights of exploration follow. Further details of all the sites, with photos and surveys (as they become available!), can be found on the Matienzo Caves website at <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/staff/gyaaq/page1.htm>







### Four Valleys System

At Easter, a substantial length of stream passage (264m) was entered via a 10m aven at the end of *Shrimpbone Inlet* in Cueva Hoyuca (site 0107). Two long trips to the far end of the cave were needed. On the first, the ladder at the end of the Armageddon boulder pile was replaced (after 25? years). A line was placed through Duckhams "Sump" and 9 hours of free climbing and hand bolting found the explorers at the source of the water - a letter box slot at the top of a 10m climb, blocked by 2 flakes. The second trip was 5 hours shorter at 15 hours and involved surveying in passage "slightly smaller than Shrimpbone Inlet". This "finished" where the passage divided at a number of avens. Shrimpbone Inlet trends west on the Matienzo side of the Matienzo-Riaño ridge: the Mongoose Extensions head north and the final avens are under some 250m of limestone. Equally enticing is the "massive calcited boulder pile that continues on up with several black spaces visible for 15m or

so". And there is some more unexplored passage remaining to be pushed.

During the summer, work was concentrated around the entrance passages where the unexpected, low-level *Wildlife Series* was entered down a pitch, 10m from the squeeze into the start of *Quadruphenia* on the main route. About 300m was surveyed here, bringing the total length of surveyed passage in the Four Valleys System to 42,853m.

Site 1496 is a draughting low crawl, in an interesting position over Hoyuca in Riaño, and this was partially excavated in a wide bedding.

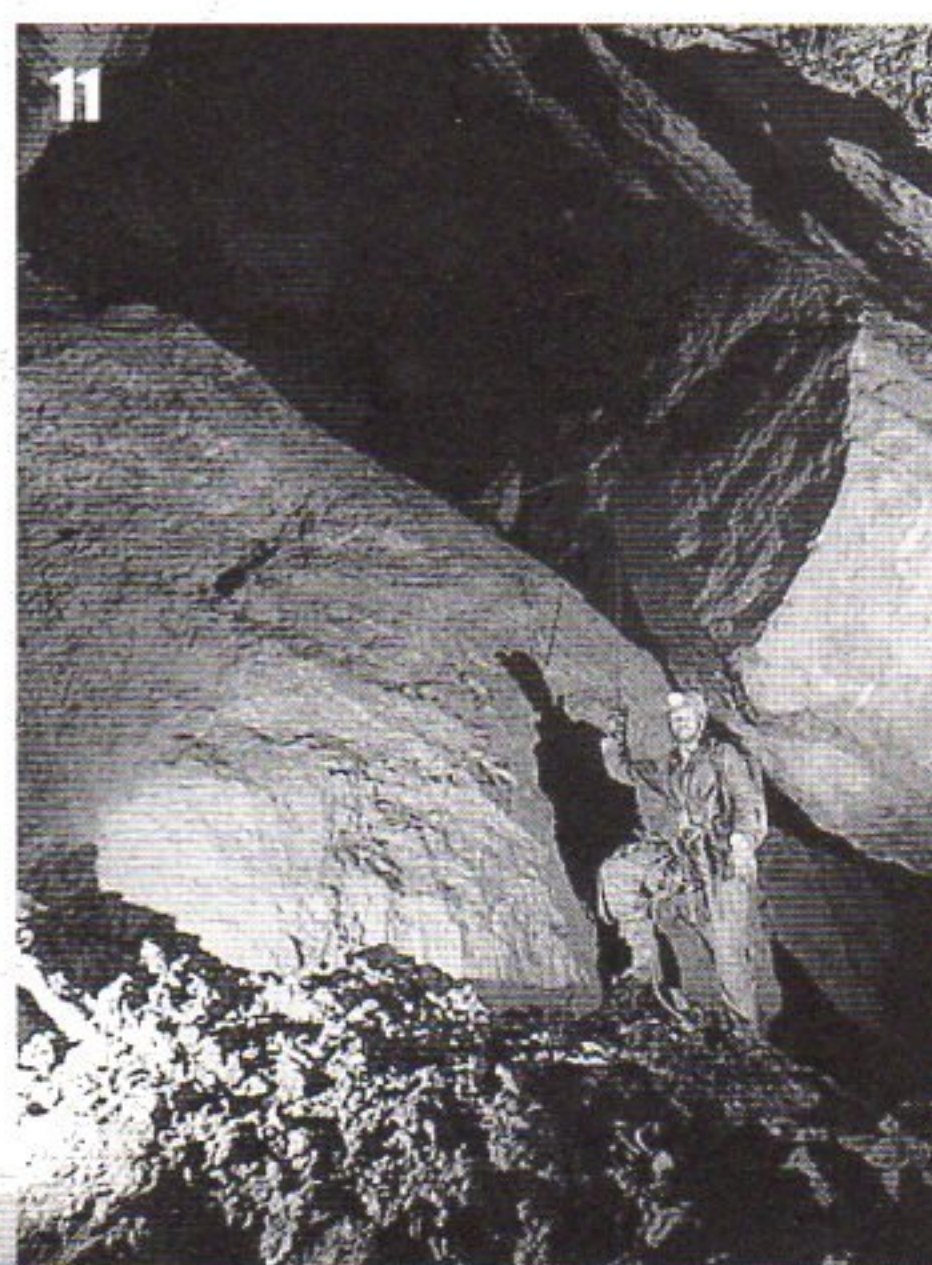
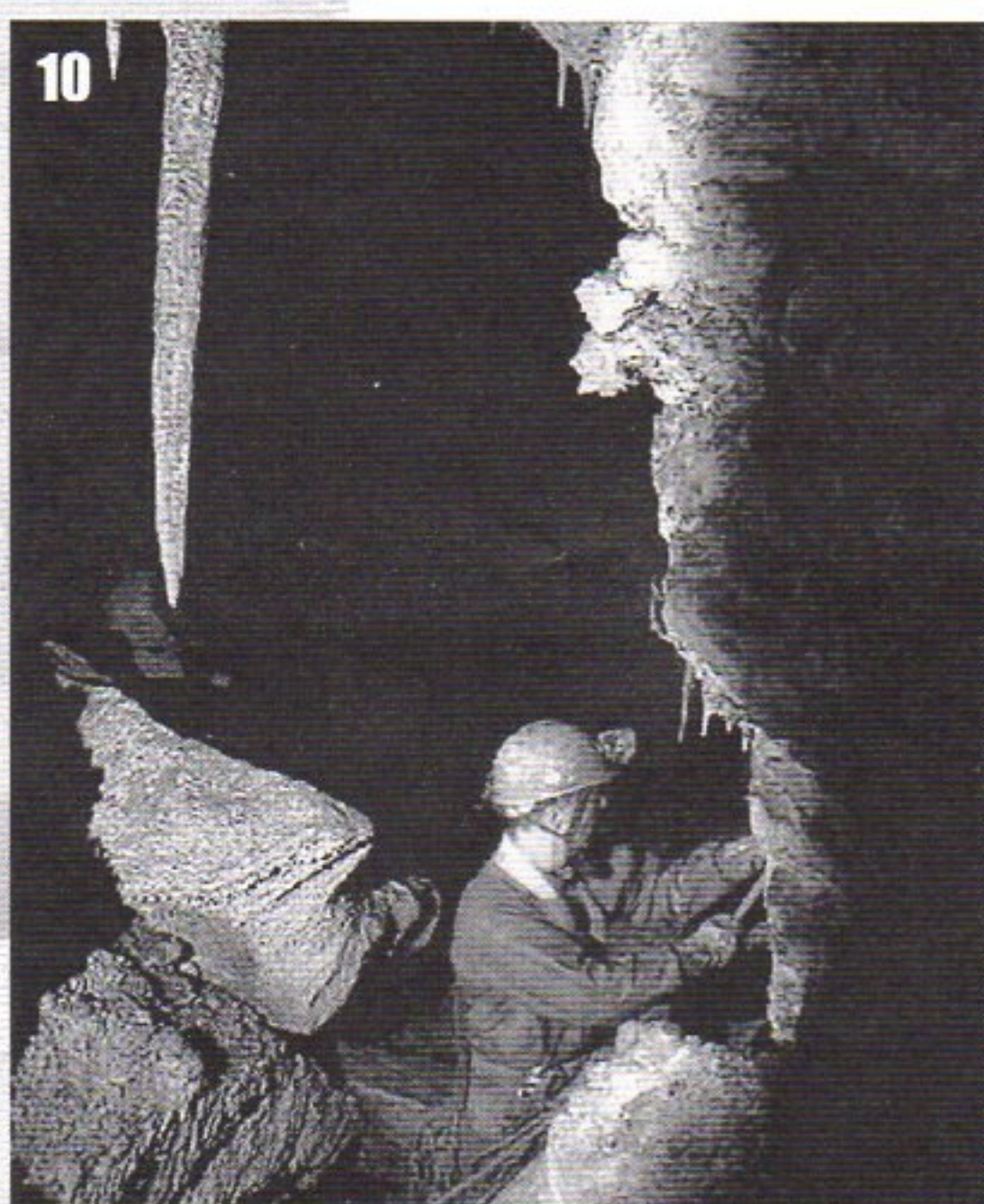
Over the last couple of years, the main road improvements through the Matienzo depression have cut back into the limestone in many places, exposing a number of interesting holes. The road-side slot, site 1452, was enlarged at Easter to the head of a 70m pitch that dropped into Cueva Bollón (0098). Upstream exploration was attempted during both Easter and summer, but the water levels

appeared too high. A prolonged period of dry weather is required to make progress through the aqueous boulder choke. This

### Colour Plates

1. Peter Eagan in site 1338. (photo: Phil Papard)
2. Peter Eagan in site 1338. (photo: Phil Papard)
3. Max Dobey in the Wildlife Series, Cueva Hoyuca. (photo: Juan Corrin)
4. The view across La Vega from Overhang Cave. (photo: Juan Corrin)
5. Exploring site 1499 - a choked 18m shaft - with the Vega valley on the right and the mountain of Mullir in the left distance. (photo: Jenny Corrin)
6. Paul Stacey in Snowbat Passage, Torca de Papá Noel. (photo: Peter Eagan)





#### B/W Plates

7. The phreatic tube in site 1514. Stones stacked on the side contain fragments of prehistoric pottery. (photo: Juan Corrin)
8. Looking towards Brown Sugar in Torca de Papá Noel. (photo: Peter Eagan)
9. Peter Smith near the bottom of site 1512. (photo: Juan Corrin)
10. Peter Eagan in site 1338. (photo: Phil Papard)
11. John Stevens at the bottom of the 30m pitch over Belcher's Slab in Torca de Papá Noel. (photo: Peter Eagan)

#### Matienzo caves over 1km in length

September 2000

Cave	Name	Length
0107	Hoyuca, Cueva	42,853m
(0733	Vallina, Cueva	26,284m)
0333	Azpilicueta, Torca de	25,304m
0892	Regaton, Torca del	17,922m
0025	Risco, Sima-Cueva del	9,046m
0841	Fresnedo 2, Cueva	7,045m
0258	Calleja Rebollo, Torcón de la	6,470m
0122	Suviejo, Cueva de	3,500m
0002	Coverón, Cueva del	3,230m
0363	Colmenas, Fuente de las	2,688m
0766	Simón 2, Torca de	2,416m
0039	Codisera, Cueva de	2,380m
1471	Papá Noel, Torca de	2,250m
0734	Humo, Cueva de	2,160m
0059	Molino, Cueva del	1,968m
0567	Hoyón, Torca del	1,885m
0865	Cantones, Cueva de los	1,716m
0713	Aguanaz, Fuente	1,691m
0727	Molino, Cueva del	1,620m
0672	Regato, Cueva del	1,562m
0075	Picón, Simas del	1,441m

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top entrance will be preferable for attempting to extend the cave rather than the old, bottom entrance route that needs diving gear to pass three small sumps. Site 1452 has great potential to the west.

Just 100m up the road from 1452, "The Road Show" (site 1506) was entered at the end of the Easter expedition. This 50m segment has good formations and a possible extension.

Cave of the Six Shafts (site 543) was finally relocated and partially re-explored after being "lost" for 23 years.

### North Vega and El Naso

Cueva Cofresneda, with its prominent entrance and large passage above the resurgence on the eastern slope of El Naso, has been known and probably used since humans first encountered the enclosed depression. Various artefacts and human remains have been found in the cave and Spanish archaeologists now have permission to excavate. The passage with visible human and animal bones and pottery was inspected in the summer so that digging could start in the autumn. This revealed more ancient material, some of which has been sent for carbon dating. (This is the latest activity for the *Recent Prehistory of Matienzo Project*, which involves Peter Smith with Jesús Ruiz Cobo and other Spanish archaeologists with occasional assistance from Matienzo regulars. A major work-in-progress for the RPMP is the production of a British Archaeological Report about the various finds made over the last thirty years.)

A fair amount of prospecting work was carried out on El Naso and various new holes were descended. There are some areas where complete re-exploration and re-positioning will be needed as the GPS is showing up discrepancies.

Site 1572 was first spotted while sitting outside the Vega bar looking at the southern side of El Naso. High up in cliffs above Cueva Rascavieja, the prominent entrance seemed to be rather difficult to get to. As it turned out access was via an easy climb down a stepped limestone pinnacle. The cave has a 5m high and 3m wide entrance, with phreatic passage rising to a crawl and choke after 30m. To the east, a number of small animal shelters all choked.

Some digging was carried out in sites 813 and 815 where good draughts promise a link with the North Vega System below.

### Muela

Shaft 320 has had a chequered history since 1981, from being a 90m undescended pitch to a 4m climb to a draughtless choke. Last year and this saw the site finally being pinned down, lumphammered and explored. Despite enticing noises from falling rocks, the shaft turned out to be only 27m deep.

Various small shafts were explored and site 169 resurveyed. In two "new" areas, in and near the woods a kilometre down to the east of Mullir, some interesting draughting digs were investigated. Nearby at site 1570, 40m of walking-size passage was entered,

and Mistletoe Pot (1575) was explored below an 18m pitch into a 16m pitch lined with soft calcite with a low, well decorated crawl halfway down.

### South Vega and Seldesuto

Extensions in Arenal were surveyed and pushed beyond the Foam Dome over Easter, Whitson and the summer, working with the cavers from the Catalan caving groups.

A number of sites were explored on the South Vega hillside during Easter and a couple held exciting prospects for the summer (1338 and Torca de Papá Noel 1471). As it happened, site 1338 was tackled up but not pushed and efforts were concentrated in Papá Noel.

Over 2.2km was surveyed in this 225m deep system. The entrance series lies over the hub of the South Vega System where Torca de Coterón links with Reñada and it was thought at one stage that a boulder choke could provide a link down into Coterón. However, the cave has headed west and is apparently very close to the *Coffin Levels* in Torca de Azpilicueta. The cave has some large and impressive sections and may eventually provide routes to different sections of the South Vega System. There are a number of leads left to push.

More prospecting and shaft descending was carried out during the summer. For example, site 1538 has a shaft and cave entrance into a small chamber with a descending rift that chokes. In another hole (1542) 30m of stooping and crawling ended in a low chamber with gour pools.

One of the draughting digs up the Azpilicueta track at Seldesuto was continued and another couple of promising roaring holes were discovered only 60m away.

At Easter, Martin Holroyd carried out a couple of dives in upstream Cueva Vallina - breaking surface into a short canal at the end but then meeting the next sump. Some 230m was surveyed.

In Cueva Coquisera (Codisera 0039), the top shaft entrances were finally surveyed though to the main cave, but this exposed a glaring error in one of the original (British) surveys.

Cueva Abono was linked to a top entrance (1470) after climbing up an aven.

Cueva Tizonas (0078) was "finished" at the high-level, adding 156m to the length.

Jivero 1 was dived upstream and linked to site 246.

At Easter, Sima de la Garma de los Trillos - site 1176 or VT62 - was explored and resurveyed after an invitation from the Catalans. The cave is draughting strongly and is in a prime position to link into Vallina or the South Vega System. In the summer, efforts were diverted elsewhere and this site remains to be pushed.

In Torca de Reguilon (0046) a bolt route was started part way down the 70m entrance pitch to a possible passage.

In Cueva Copudia (site 0265), close to Torca de Coterón, a descending rift was explored along a joint at the back of this very large fragment. At one point, a draughting

30m deep yet very narrow crack was seen.

In site 311 a draughting dig was pursued above a previously exposed 30m pitch, eventually leading to the route dividing at a flake. Above site 311, site 1512 involved a crawl to a pitch into a damp chamber where the water disappears down a narrow meandering passage that requires enlarging.

Cueva de los Cantones (site 865) was explored in 1991 with some going leads over its length of 1,716m and 285m depth. This year the site was "given" to the Catalan group to explore. After tackling up the pitch down through the main, loose, bouldery chamber and returning the following day, they found that the rope had been cut by a falling rock. Enthusiasm dropped to zero and the "gift" has been returned!

Below the Cantones depression, Cueva Adillos (site 34) was rediscovered and re-explored (after 34? years). The new site 1514 - a phreatic fragment - was explored through 3 entrances in 2-3m high and wide passages. In places throughout the 112m length, the bouldery floor deposits had been stacked on the side and fragments of old pottery were found.

Overall and once again, there were more questions raised for 2001 than were answered in 2000!

### Socials

The Asociación EcoCulturas (<http://ecoculturas.cjb.net>) held a series of meetings over a fortnight involving the villagers, trying to understand and preserve cultural activities and the countryside around Matienzo. As part of their fact finding, the group asked to be shown a variety of caves. On one afternoon the group was introduced to the geomorphology of the Matienzo depression, taken through Cueva Jivero 2 (with its population of crayfish) and shown Cueva Molino, as an example of an old and large cave sink - also with a level of calcited bones. On a second afternoon a large group visited La Cuvia as an example of a cave currently being used by a farmer and as a typical fragment of Matienzo dry tunnel. The second site visited was Las Grajas, a site excavated by Spanish archaeologists, with pottery and charcoal in hearths.

### Acknowledgements

We were welcomed by Pablo and Anna at Bar German and the expedition is grateful for the use of part of the restaurant for accommodating the Matienzo library and computing equipment, and providing a quiet drawing-up area.

Matienzo 2000 was given a £550 UK Sport award through the Ghar Parau Foundation. We would like to thank both organisations for their consideration.

Juan Corrin. January 2000

2001

### Recent references

- Matienzo '99 in Caves & Caving 87, Spr/Sum 2000
- Matienzo '98 in Caves & Caving 83, Spring 1999
- Matienzo '97 in Caves & Caving 79, Spring 1998
- Matienzo '96 in Caves & Caving 75, Spring 1997