

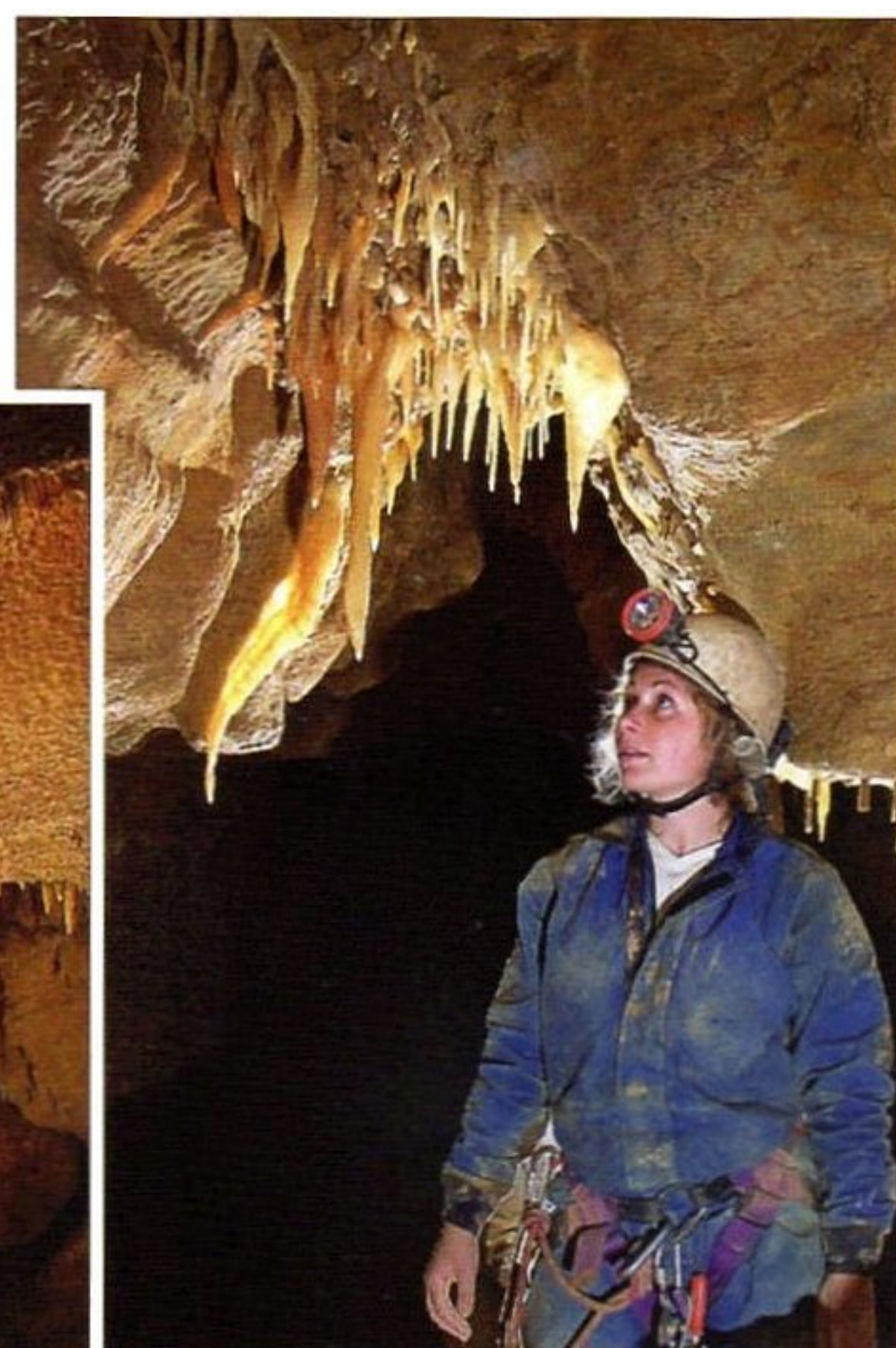
Speleology

Bulletin of the BRITISH CAVE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
Issue 6, April 2006

ISSN 1478-999X



Matienzo, Spain 2004



Shannon Cave Reopened
Kruber / Voronja : Exploration and Rescue
Titan: Photographing the Largest Natural Shaft in the UK
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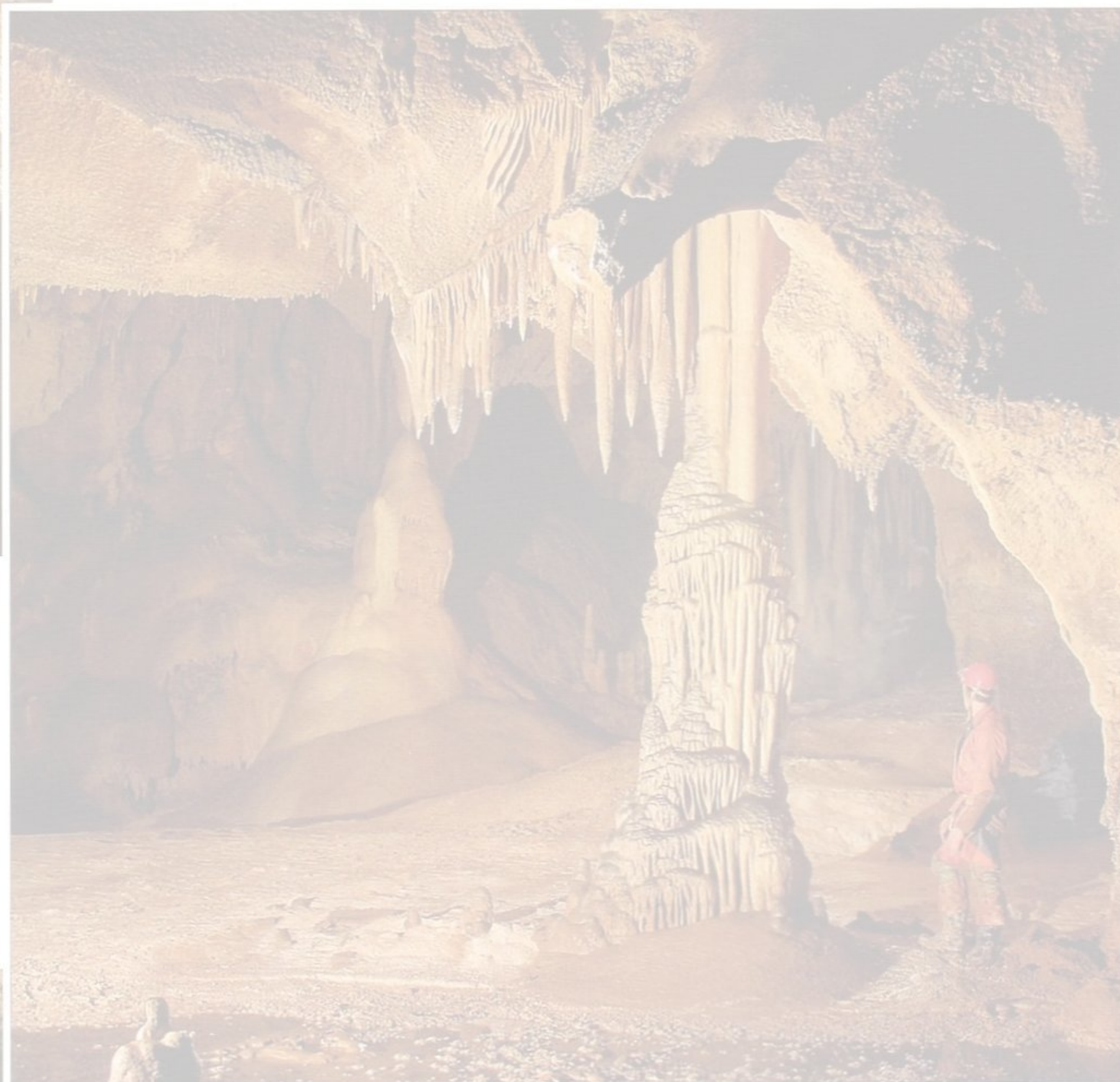
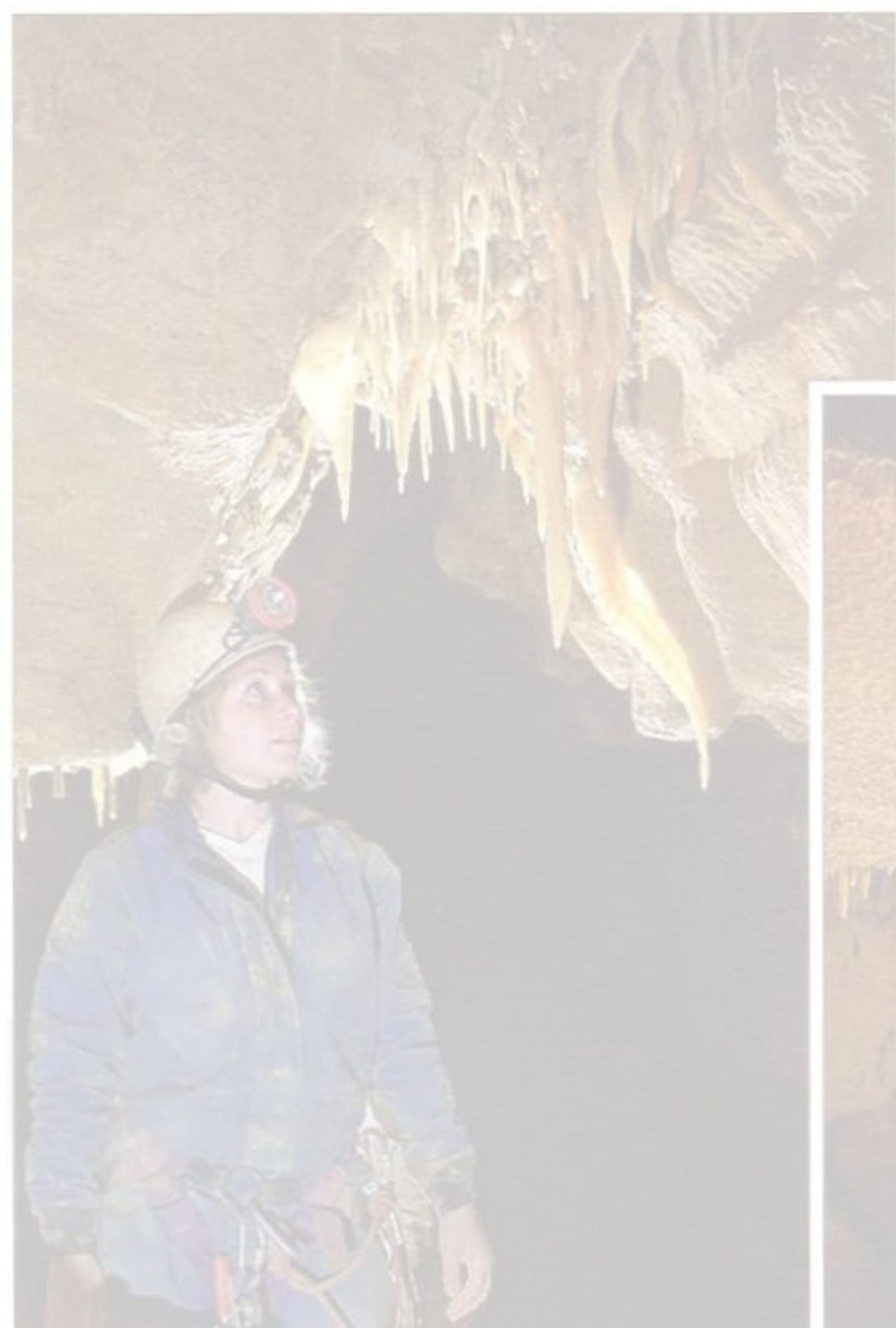
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COVER PHOTOS

Front: Matienzo, Spain 2004 (See p20).
Top to bottom:
Jenny Pinder in Cueva Vallina (Peter Eagan)
Bill Nix in Marvin's Marvels, Torca de Coterón (John Forder)
Miranda Sandys in the South Vega System (John Forder)

Back: Titan, Peak Cavern (See p26).
Robbie Shone

Expedition Report: Matienzo, Spain 2004

Juan Corrin reports on the ongoing exploration in northern Spain.

The 2004 series of expeditions and trips to Matienzo (our 34th year) were the most successful for a considerable time: over 10.7km of new passages were surveyed, mainly in the Sumidero de Cobadal and Cueva Vallina. The number of sites of speleological interest rose to more than 2,160 and the total length of documented cave passage in the Matienzo region reached 253.5km.

At Easter over 50 people braved the rain, hail and campsite quagmire with others staying at Bar Tomas in Ogarrio. The major discoveries were in the Sumidero de Cobadal, Torca de Papá Noel and Cueva Vallina. More than 7.2km of new cave passage were surveyed. The summer expedition was favoured with better weather, and about 60 people turned up over 6 weeks. The main focus was again the Sumidero de Cobadal where the cave length grew to over 6km. There were a number of trips in Cueva Vallina, exploring a major extension. New cave passage surveyed over the period amounted to nearly 2.7km. During the autumn week over 40 sites were visited in one way or another and 409m of new passage were surveyed.

The year was not without sadness, as on August 12, the man who gave his name to Germán's Bar passed away peacefully at the age of 91. Germán Solana Gomez had always welcomed returning cavers since

our first visits in the 70s and in recent years was often seen sitting on his chair at the end of the bar or strolling up and down the road in the warmer weather.

Expanded Exploration Area

With the arrival of the 2004 permit and exploration area map, we realised there was an unvisited corner of the permit area. We had assumed that the south-western edge of the area was defined by the Alisas road but the map showed a grid line a couple of kilometres further west. This enlarged the area by around 9 sq km and precipitated an attack of 'new exploration fever'!

The new area, centred on the hamlet of Ideopuerta, includes a number of valleys draining down to the north and east from the ridge west of Alisas. The ground drops from 700m to around 100m where a stream sinks (site 1976). This is particularly interesting if it picks up water from Cobadal and heads north under the next ridge to resurge at Fuente Aguanaz. Over the 600m height range there is a mixture of horizontally bedded limestone and sandstone visible, and some shafts appear to start in the sandstone. A lot of the ground is farmed and a number of entrances must have been covered over and 'lost'. However, the limited contact with locals has shown the usual friendliness and amusement that anyone should want



to descend the holes. One farmer took time to show us a shaft and the people have said that nobody has explored the area in the past.

The potential could be considerable in any or all directions of Matienzo, Miera, Bustablado, and Fuente Aguanaz to the east, west, south and north respectively!

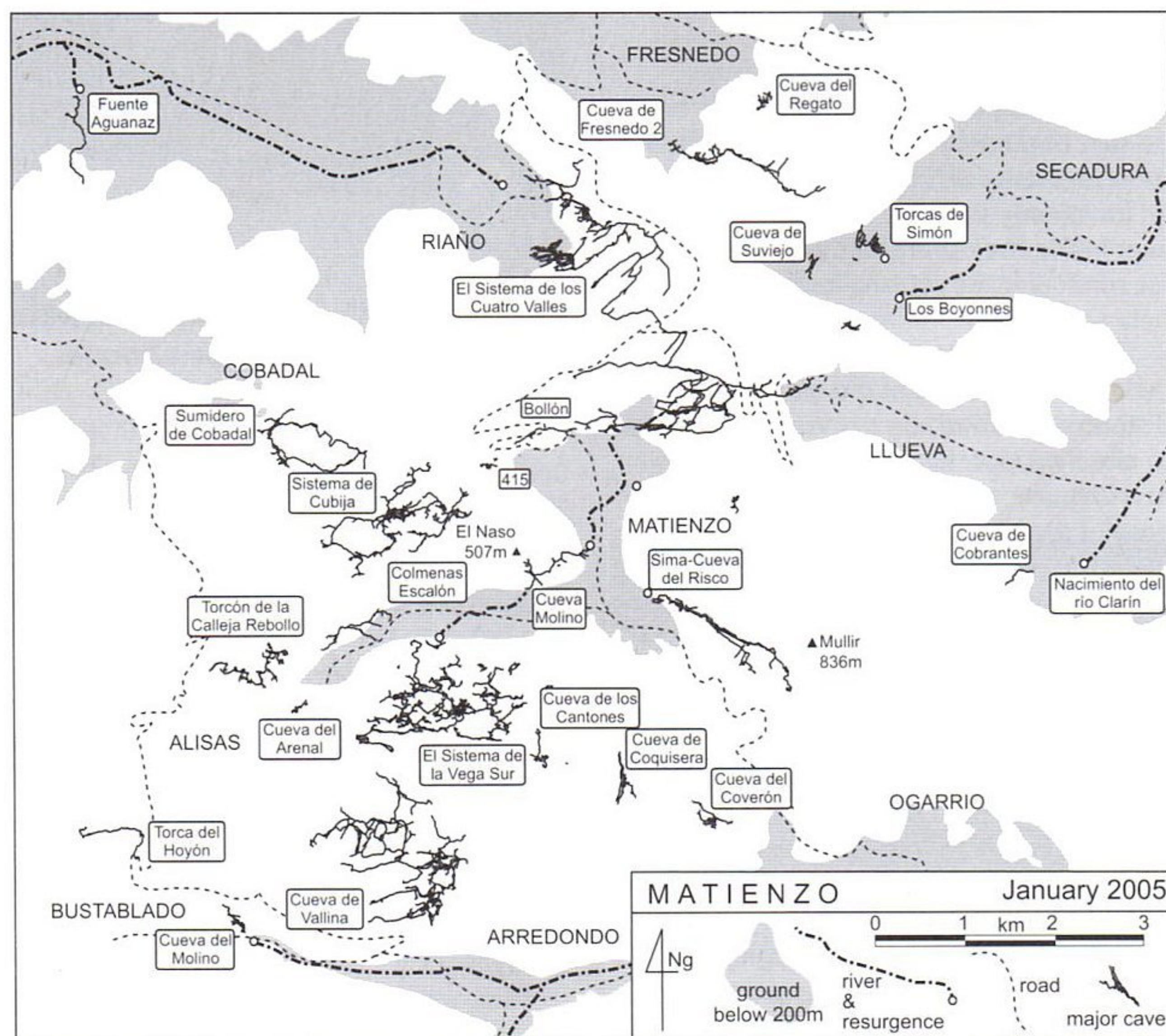
A few days in February spent prospecting the new area uncovered some holes. In March, Torca de Mortiro (site 1975) was descended two pitches of 30m into a chamber where it was possible to see at least another 20m and hear running water.

At Easter, Torca de Mortiro was the 'star' of the new area. A number of trips pushed the cave to 356m long and 103m deep with two series of pitches dropping down beyond the entrance pitch.

Over the summer some more work was put into the Alisas / Ideopuerta area, although large areas around here have still to be looked at. At Alisas, shafts and sinks 2035, 2036 and 2037 were descended. The largest, site 2035, was dropped to a depth of about 20m where the various holes in the floor are blocked with rocks, sediment and domestic rubbish. The wet weather sink in the streambed at site 1976 to the west of the Cobadal depression was found to be dry with no sign of any draughting holes or other prospects.

Sumidero de Cobadal

In 2003 a rift was opened up in the enclosed depressions at Cobadal (site 1930). Over Easter it was pushed down a 17m, tight slot into a stream sinking 50m away. Subsequent enlargement of another tiny hole near the sink allowed much easier entry to the cave.



Sumidero de Cobadal

Sites 0553 / 1930 Cobadal VN4876(7)9801(8) (top entrance) Altitude 215m

Length 6,015m Vertical range 101m

Surveyed Easter, Whit, summer 2004 to BCRA 5c

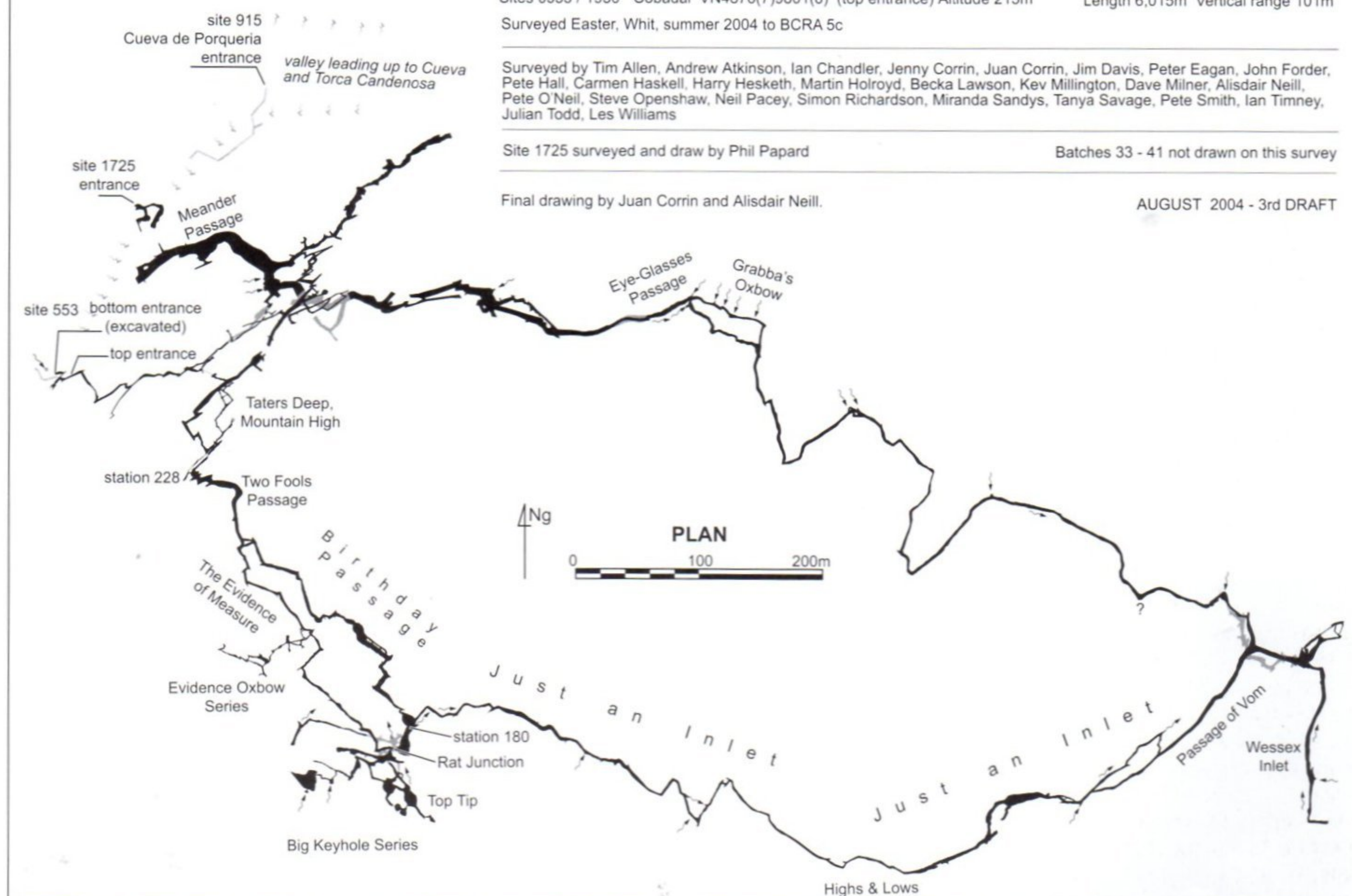
Surveyed by Tim Allen, Andrew Atkinson, Ian Chandler, Jenny Corrin, Juan Corrin, Jim Davis, Peter Eagan, John Forder, Pete Hall, Carmen Haskell, Harry Hesketh, Martin Holroyd, Becka Lawson, Kev Millington, Dave Milner, Alisdair Neill, Pete O'Neil, Steve Openshaw, Neil Pacey, Simon Richardson, Miranda Sandys, Tanya Savage, Pete Smith, Ian Timney, Julian Todd, Les Williams

Site 1725 surveyed and draw by Phil Papard

Batches 33 - 41 not drawn on this survey

Final drawing by Juan Corrin and Alisdair Neill.

AUGUST 2004 - 3rd DRAFT



The passage was quickly explored downstream to a small climb and 5m pitch. The streamway – typically 4m high and 2m wide – was then followed to a boulder chamber. At a number of places, a higher level was surveyed. A large proportion of the length was found in inlet passages, not all of which were pushed. The longest inlet (Just an Inlet) enters the cave just before the boulder chamber and was followed up into a higher level which approaches the entrance passages. By the end of the Easter expedition the trip back to the entrance from this end took 2.5 hours.

At the downstream end of the cave, the passage heads straight for the draughty Powerhouse / Peaky Passage area of Torca de Regaton (site 892) in the Cubija System. Speculation has the combined waters either heading back to Fuente Aguanaz, or being a feeder to the Four Valleys System through Bollón / Carcavueso.

Whit

During the Whit expedition, after giving the farmer at Cobadal a photo album of shots taken in the Sumidero, a lead half way up a rift on the right about 150m from the entrance was visited. At Easter, this had been left over an exposed drop into a passage. The pitch was quickly rigged with a bolt and 5m ladder. To the south-west, 80m of walking in Pinnacle Passage lead to a small boulder pile and station 228, the final survey point from Easter. The first

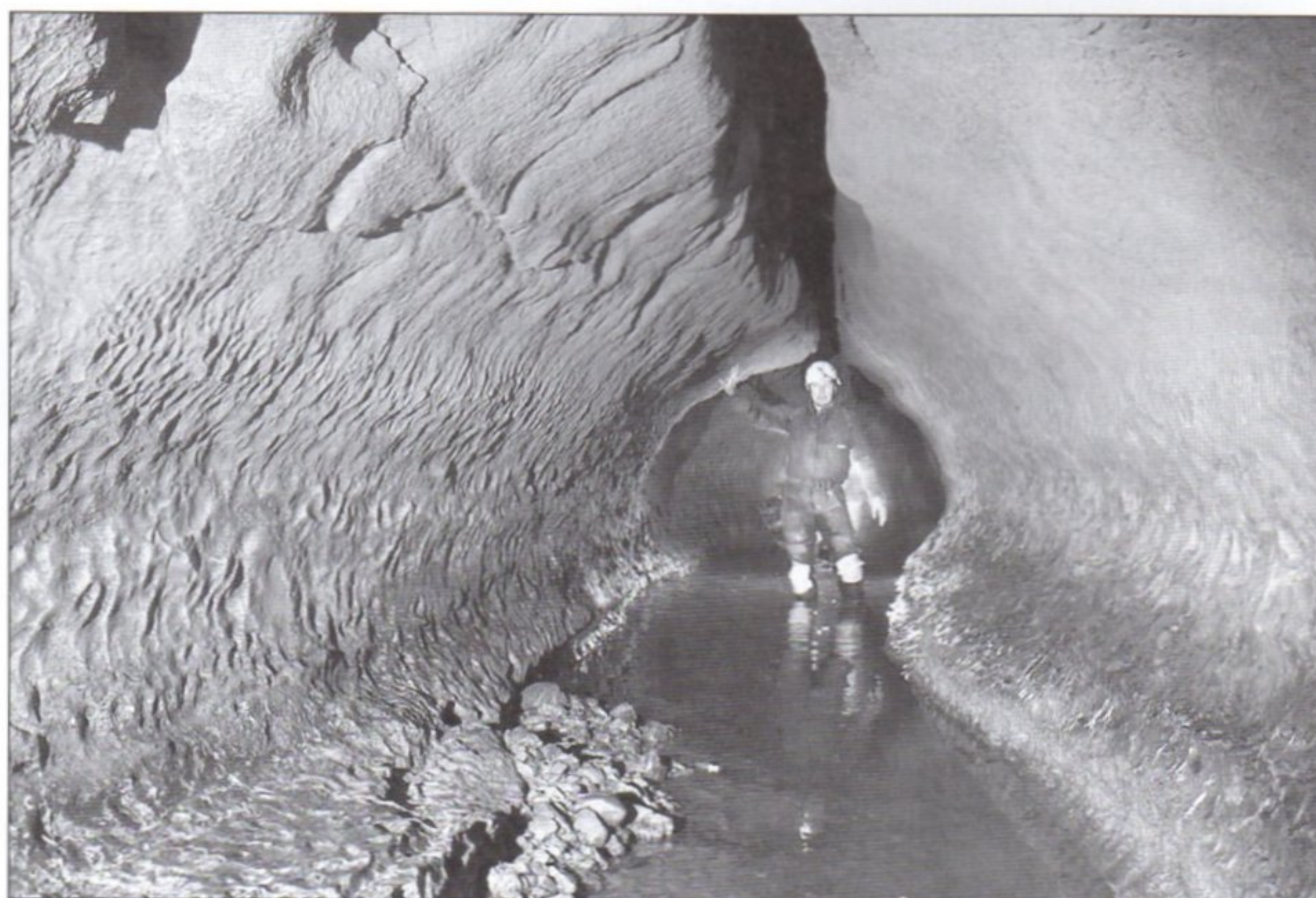
'good lead' on the east of the passage was then looked at. Birthday Passage is mainly walking passage up to 5m wide and high that 'ends' at boulder breakdown. This was linked to station 180, just above where the Easter explorers had climbed out of the water.

Back at the ladder, a short amount of walking passage to the north-east 'ends' at a calcited surface run-in boulder choke

that seems to have holes to look at. About 400m was surveyed in total and the pitch has been left laddered, as it reduces travel-time to get to the boulder pile from 2.5 hours to 20 minutes!

Summer

Downstream in Cobadal, a route following the water between boulders from the boulder chamber was followed,



Opposite page: Santi Urrutia in Just an Inlet, Sumidero de Cobadal. Above: Harry Hesketh in a classic section of the Sumidero de Cobadal streamway. Photos: Peter Eagan.

reaching the top of an 11m wet pitch. At the base, the way on was found under the deluge and down a boulder slope. The bottom levelled out and the water sank in sediment near an apparent fault. 'Upstairs' in the boulder choke, spaces have been enlarged and boulders removed. The possible route onwards appears unstable with boulders in clay. The streamway route from the 5m pitch in the water to the boulder chamber was also surveyed and the Wessex Inlet pushed a few metres to a sump which was subsequently lowered and allowed to start draining during the autumn expedition. A good draught is coming through small passage. Another 29m was surveyed to an 'airbell' and more digging is required.

Along the main stream, various oxbows and higher routes were surveyed and a number of small inlets looked at. Passages around the maze area near the start of the streamway were extended and one came back towards the entrance to end in a



boulder choke which must be the one seen at the north-east end of Pinnacle Passage.

In the Evidence of Measure and Rat Junction areas a 'big keyhole passage' had been left unexplored at Easter. A series of sandstone chambers with inlets were entered here. These all close in although there is a lead in Top Tip. The inlets appear to be associated with the valley to the south and a number of surface holes await investigation. A small passage was forced downstream of Rat Junction. This streamway / high-level area, with the junction of Birthday Passage and high rifts part-filled with boulders, is confusing and more exploration is required in the region near station 180.

To the west of Rat Junction, an 8m climb was passed to gain 50m of rift passage that closed in, while further to the

north the Evidence Oxbow Series was entered revealing a set of small, draughting passages that continue.

Near the start of Pinnacle Passage, Taters Deep, Mountain High was entered near station 228. These higher level rift passages bypassed Pinnacle Passage to emerge 5m above the floor opposite Loop Pitch.

Attention was given to a number of draughting surface sites that may join into downstream Cobadal and provide a link between the Cubija System and the caves in La Secada (Cueva de Carcavuezo, Cueva de Bollón, etc.). Walks over the new cave on the Cobadal hillsides indicated nothing wide open at a higher level, but a number of holes were investigated.

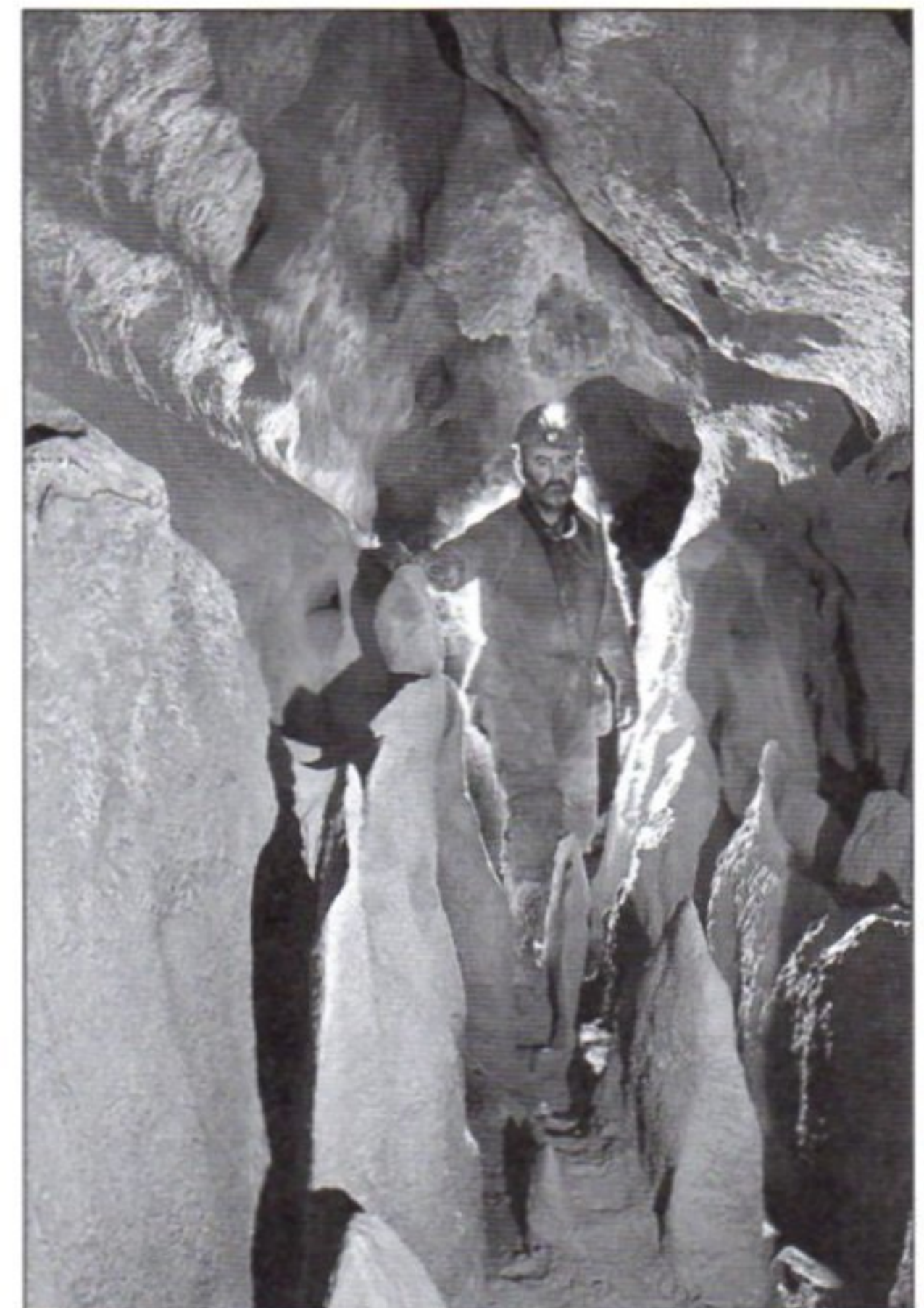
Future Work

The Sumidero de Cobadal appears to drain the water from the east of the Cobadal depression taking it east and south towards the north-west corner of the Matienzo depression. To the west and north of the cave, there are a number of digs and caves that have been investigated in the past and it is possible that the further west in the depression the more likely the water is to drain north-west to Fuente Aguanaz rather than feed the Sumidero de Cobadal. An interesting site (2066) which could go either way is at the base of a steep sided basin that takes water in wet weather. Other sites to the west investigated in the summer include 2089, 2090, and Cueva del Campizo (site 2121), a 180m-long remnant. The Cubija System could drain into a downstream continuation of Cobadal, join with the water from Carcavuezo



Left: Ian Chandler on Loop Pitch, Sumidero de Cobadal. Photo: Peter Eagan. Above: The connection that linked Torca de Papá Noel with Torca de Azpilicueta. Photo: Torben Redder.

and Riaño and then resurge at Secadura, a sink to resurgence distance of over 7.2km. The Four Valleys System would then be approaching 70km in length. One aim for 2005 is to tackle up Torca del Regaton to reinvestigate the northern passages in the Cubija System.



Santi Urrutia in the top level of Cueva Vallina. Photo: Peter Eagan.

Torca de Papá Noel

In Torca de Papá Noel, new passages included the Cheesecake Series which rose up from the base of Belcher's Slab, the CIC Series (pitches around the Plaza de Concorde), and the Floorless Chamber was explored to Torture Grotto where routes come close to the Coffin Levels and a chamber called At the Opera in Torca de Azpilicueta.

During the Whit expedition trips in Papá Noel to the area beyond Floorless Chamber, surveyed 181m, putting the cave within 4m of At the Opera in Azpilicueta.

Ever hopeful of more entrances and the connection to the South Vega System, a number of excursions were carried out during the summer on the hill over the supposed link area. One trip into Papá Noel pushed the Whit passages and connected The Hall of Tubes with Torca de Azpilicueta in At the Opera, first explored in 1992. In Torca de Coterón, the base of a 20m pitch in Frank's Passage was excavated into a small chamber. And a number of sites were explored above the system.

Cueva Vallina

Exploration continued in Cueva Vallina (site 733). Over Easter the Shatter Passage area was surveyed and pushed along Barney Rubble's Uranium Mine, and the high level Skyhook / Albert's Passage extension was surveyed across a 20m pit into 130m of high-level passage that closed down.

During the summer expedition a major extension at the end of Barney Rubble's Uranium Mine was explored. This is mainly crawling over sharp rock, with a tight section at the start, and excavated in places following a fair draught. At the end larger, unstable passage is entered which chokes to the right, and to the left leads to a large chamber with pitches in the floor. At the far end of the chamber, the continuation is followed for 170m with a pit traversed

round on the left, and is followed by two 20m pitches. A few metres beyond the two pitches, the main passage ends at The Bridge of Khazad-Doom, overlooking a large passage, Galería de Germán.

The passage was followed to an aven where a route on the left reaches a larger section, ending at undescended shafts to the left and a chamber to the right. Galería de Germán continues along steep mud slopes requiring traverse lines. In autumn this was pushed beyond the mud walls to a parallel series and a streamway. Also, some exploration and surveying of passages previously explored by the Catalans off Swirl Chamber was carried out. By the end of the 2004 expeditions the length of Cueva Vallina had grown to 32,954m.

Torca de Corcada

Above Seldesuto, Torca de Corcada was re-explored and surveyed after Catalan cavers had explored it some years ago. A tiny entrance in a field is normally blocked by a rock. A 4m entrance pitch drops onto a steeply sloping passage which drops to a 9m pitch. From the base two routes go off. The Active Route leads to a 5m pitch in a meander passage, which continues narrow but which might be pushed further. The Fossil Route leads to a 7m pitch, followed immediately by an 8m pitch. The way on to the right is in a steeply descending bedding with an abandoned stream trench in the floor. Traversing off to the left reaches the head of a 16m pitch. At the foot a short passage leads to a narrow rift. The length is 134m, the depth 64m.

Torcón de Riaño

In Riaño, the Torcón de Riaño (site 106) was re-explored. The 93m shaft was first (and last) descended on ladders on August 8 1975. Twenty-nine years later, the 30m-wide, echoing and wet shaft was rigged for SRT and photographed. No ways on were found beyond the sump,



Alasdair Neill negotiating a lower part of the streamway, Sumidero de Cobadal. Photo: Peter Eagen.

about 100m along a narrow, meandering passage at the base, but possible passages were noted on the descent of the free-hanging 80m section, where the shaft seems to cut through passages at -15m and -35m. Nearby, sites 1991 and 1992 were investigated and might continue with more effort.

Bronze Age Artefacts

Site 2139, about half way up the north-eastern slopes of the Cubija valley has a metre-diameter entrance onto a gentle earth slope to the head of a roomy 9m pitch. It is possible to climb across the drop and climb between boulders to the bottom. One of the original explorers did this while the other elected to drop the pitch on a ladder. Meeting at the base, they explored the short length of 4m-wide rift passage with a possible high level continuation and a low, decorated chamber. Some Bronze Age (2-3,000 years old) black pottery, including a rim piece with finger indentations, was noted on the floor, along with unidentified bone.

While climbing back up the ladder a

ledge was passed about 5m up and lying 1m from the edge was a human skull. This is probably the first substantially complete Bronze Age skull to be found in a Matienzo cave, despite over 70 of the caves having archaeological artefacts, including skull fragments. More black pottery was found near to the skull.

A proper excavation in the cave, with carbon dating could reveal or confirm Bronze Age funeral practices in the region.

Other Sites

During 2004 numerous other sites were investigated. Near Fuente las Varas, a 15m shaft (site 2084) was explored to a short choked passage. On Muela and in Lluva sites 489, 1987, Cueva del Tunel, 2100, and a number of others were investigated. Various new and old holes were looked at above Cueva Vallina, including Torca de Muesa where the old British survey was found to be 180 degrees out. On the South Vega hillside, various leads were finished, including the 50m shaft at site 2127. A few new holes were found on El Naso, some of which await exploration in future years' expeditions. ■

Notes

Only some details of the 2004 activities are shown here. Readers should note that exploration during 2005 has altered some of the descriptions and hypotheses. A more comprehensive account for 2004 and subsequent expeditions is found on the Matienzo website.

Acknowledgements

The Ghar Parau Committee recommended a welcome grant for Matienzo 2004 of £400. We are always grateful to the Federación Cantabra de Espeleología and the Servicio de Patrimonio for giving us yearly permits to explore and document the caves.

Expedition Members

The 2004 expeditions included cavers from CCC, CDG, CPC, CUCC, KCC, MNRC, MUSS, NCC, NPC, Plymouth CG, RRCPC, SUSS, SWCC, University of Wales and Wessex Cave Club, and cavers from Denmark, Sweden, Slovenia and Spain.

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☞ Matienzo 2003: *Speleology* 5, December 2005.
Matienzo 2002: *Speleology* 3, September 2003.
Matienzo 2001: *Speleology* 2, May 2003.



Miranda Sandys in Marvin's Marvels, Torca de Coterón. Photo: John Forder.