

Speleology

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Expedition Report: Matienzo, Spain 2007

Juan Corrin reports on the ongoing exploration in northern Spain.

A number of fly-drive visits augmented the usual Easter and summer expeditions and the results at the end of August confirmed that Matienzo is still the place to find new cave! Nearly 9.3km were surveyed over the two main trips, 5.8km in the summer and 3.5km at Easter. The major discovery was a new series of tunnels in Cueva Llueva. Nearly four kilometres of new passage lies to the north of the lake and is on three main levels, heading towards Cueva Cillarón and the Trident Series in Cueva Hoyuca. The lower level is an overflow streamway where the water could come from Cueva Hoyuca.

Other highlights for the year include high level routes in the northern sector of Cueva Riaño, a new northerly direction for Torcón de la Calleja Rebollo (Toad in the Hole) and the removal of a prehistoric human skull from Cueva del Torno.

Locations & Centrelines in Google Maps / Google Earth

The Matienzo website at matienzo.org.uk has been updated with new features. Paul Fretwell has provided code and files for using Google Maps from within the website. Here, pins on the satellite photos show the cave entrance positions and allow descriptions to be seen when the

pins are clicked. Cave centrelines are also shown.

I've provided a Google Earth file that combines various layers, e.g. entrance positions, maps, cave centrelines and cave surveys, with all the usual Google Earth features, so you can now fly around the Matienzo landscape with various cave sets shown, e.g. archaeological sites, digs, etc. Unfortunately, although Google Earth drapes satellite photos over a terrain model, it (currently) doesn't allow any object below the ground to be visualised — so the cave centrelines and surveys can only be sensibly viewed when the terrain in Google Earth is turned off.

The Google Earth aspect of the web site will be increased with other layers to view, e.g. hydrology.

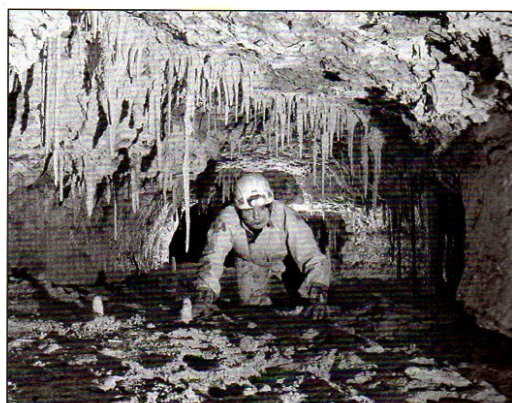
Arredondo

Little new exploration has been carried out in Cueva Vallina (site 733) this year. The maze next to Shatter Passage, near the bottom entrance was surveyed generating 110m of passage to include in the length

of 31,201m. The survey has been updated, various levels have been coloured to aid interpretation, and it is available on the Matienzo website.

South Vega

In Torca de Papá Noel, Hanging Death Chamber was revisited and the 30m pitch down was found



Top: The Matienzo depression. Photo: Juan Corrin.
Above: Extension in Cueva Riaño. Photo: Paul 'Footleg' Fretwell.

to choke at the base. However a climb up turned out to be a 65m high ramp. Explorations around the entrance passages and pitches of Cueva de Juan Lombrero added about 100m to the length.

Continuing the explorations of the Cuenca caving group from a number of years ago, Torca Kunka (site 2437) near Cueva Coquisera was forced through to a streamway. A number of digs were passed and the route remains possible at 44m depth.

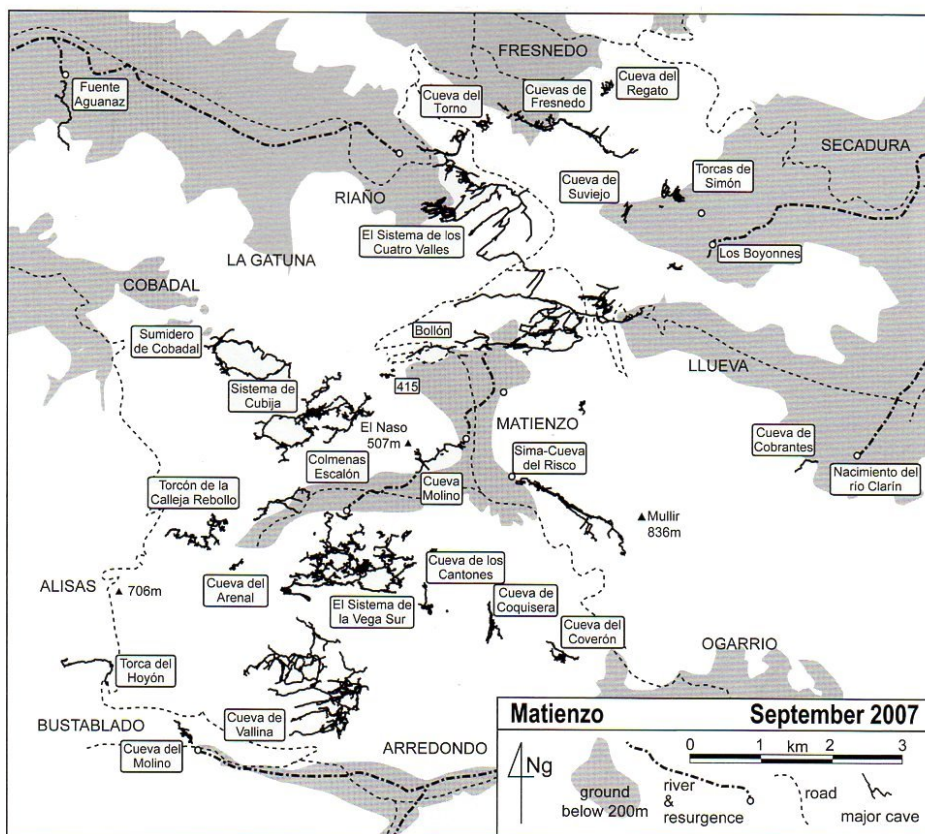
Also at the eastern end of the valley, Torca de Mega Mujer (site 413) was pushed and surveyed around the base of the 53m entrance pitch, opening up possibilities for extensions.

At a higher altitude, and in a prime spot to link the systems on each side of hill, The Volcano (site 1391) finally 'went' for a short distance before halting at the usual boulder chaos. From the entrance boulders a 3m climb down and 6m pitch has entered a 5 x 5m chamber with large blocks on the floor. About four beds of sandstone have been passed through, one is 1.2m thick. The remaining rock appears to be mainly a type of limestone / sandstone conglomerate.

Another 25 holes (mainly shafts) were explored or discovered over Easter on South Vega.

At Whit, a previously explored walled up bedding cave, site 2587, was surveyed for 28m.

In the summer, the entrance to Cueva del Zorro was enlarged for normal-sized



people and the cave re-explored — the first visitors for 25 years. Photos were taken of the large passage and some work was carried out at the terminal boulder choke, but the draught remains elusive. The Dairy Dig was excavated as was Dead Fox Passage. These underground, draughting digs are close to each other in an area where there is little known cave and both are draughting at the end of short lengths of 1.5–2m high 'proper passage'.

Higher up the hill lies the entrance to Cueva Lammas. The new mobile phone mast (Matienzo now has mobile phone access!) has been built just in front of the entrance shakehole and half the depression has been taken up with a wall of large rocks. The entrance itself appears to be still open. Site 1342, at the end of the TV mast track was revisited and recognised as a potential dig. Site 2360, situated about 100m WSW of Cueva Lammas, was opened up to allow exploration down a 17m pitch to a choke.

Lower down, behind the old Vega Bar, the goat shelter to the east of La Cuevuca was finally explored to a length of 12m and given a number (site 2682). Also noted was a small, 4m long shelter below here (site 2637) and a small, second entrance to La Cuevuca.

Cueva Tablons (site 242) was excavated at the base of the final climb down.

About 100m downstream of the Comellante resurgence (site 40) some of the water was seen as a tiny whirlpool sinking in the streambed (site 2755). Last year, during low water conditions, all of the water disappeared at these points. The farmer tries to keep the sinks blocked so that water flows all the way to Cueva del Molino.

Seldesuto

Seldesuto hosted a number of activities over the summer. In Cueva Arenal, a trip down beyond the Foam Dome reconfirmed the complexity of the boulder chokes and the difficulties of progressing in this draughting enigma. The right hand cave was confirmed as a prehistoric site when flints and bones were discovered by Spanish archaeologists. A permit from the Consejería de Cultura may be asked for to allow excavation.

After the Foam Dome was re-explored, interest was rekindled for searching the area beyond the end of Arenal. As a result,

site 2740 was excavated over a couple of days and explored down a 12m pitch to a choke. Site 2741 was also discovered in the jungle below — a walk-in entrance to a chamber with ancient bones of two human infants. The excavation and dating of these remains will also need a permit.

Higher up the hill, a draughting sink (site 2743) was discovered and remains a good dig. A couple of other sites (sites

started on the resurvey of Cueva Risco (site 25).

Cobadal – Fuente Aguanaz System

The search for caves associated with the Cobadal – Fuente Aguanaz system continued.

South-east of Alisas, site 2629 was explored to a choke at –26m (on a trip to retrieve a dropped Disto). A number of holes discovered in February were descended at Easter and all choked. More holes were also found at Easter and these also choked, although there were some large features, e.g. site 2677 where a p10 dropped into a 20m long and 4m wide rift.

In the 'new' area of Idepuerta and Moncobe, site 1972 was descended 12m to a choke. Various digs were noted (sites 2749, 2750 and 2751) and two caves (sites 2771 and 2796) and a shaft (site 2772) remain unexplored.

The brambly jungles of La Gatuna were braved for a day when site 2486 was explored for 21m in passage running over and beyond a dead cow that guards possible lower passage. Site 2672 was explored over the bodies of dead sheep where two routes require a ladder to enter a lower, unexplored chamber.

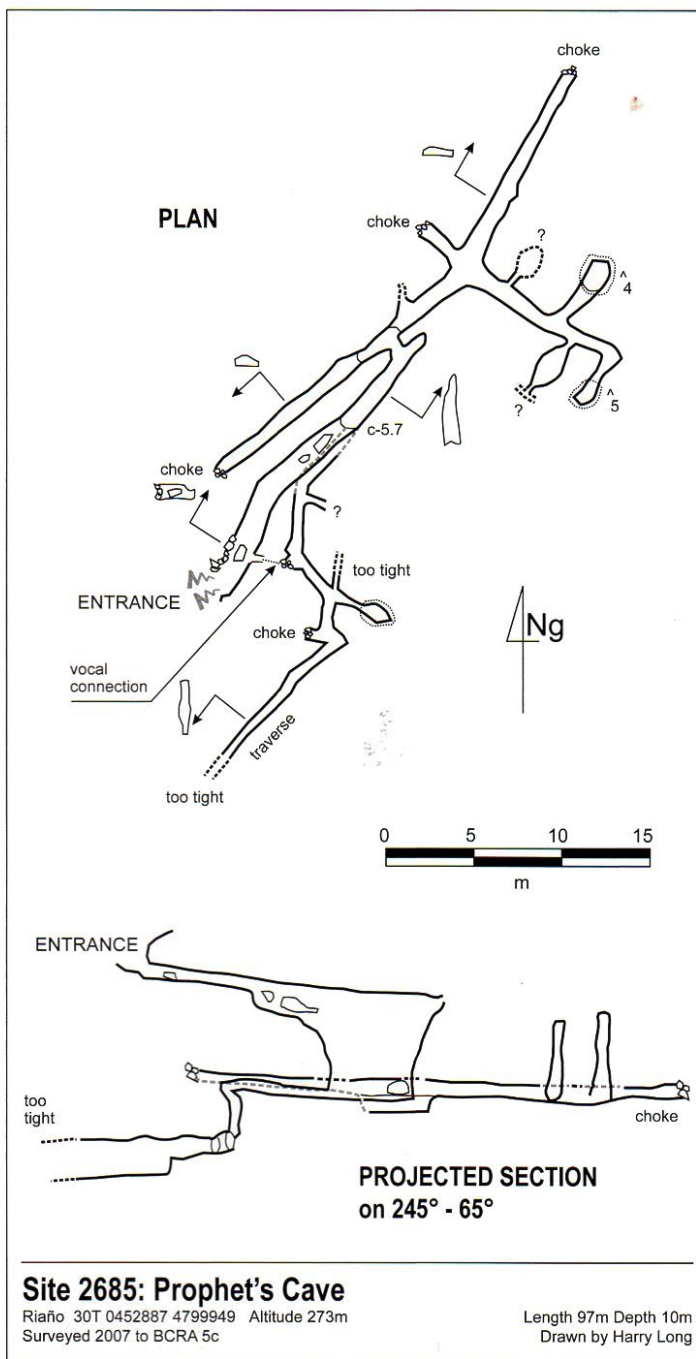
On the surface between La Gatuna and Cobadal around the Alto de Collada, 16 shafts and digs were documented over a couple of days.

The areas of San Antonio and Barrio La Mina lie over the end and to the west of Fuente Aguanaz. Site 2784 is a 10m-deep excavated pitch with a good echo into a choked chamber. Site 2781 is a tiny cave under sandstone and site 2782 is a large shakehole filled with hundreds of tyres. There are obvious implications here for the quality of the water supply from Aguanaz, especially if the tyres are set ablaze. There is a small cave on the south side that continues for about 4m.

Various sites were worked on in and around the Cobadal depression. The dig in a prominent depression at site 921 was opened up and a 52m long remnant entered. A number of small caves and digs were noted — sites 2774–2779.

In Snottite Cave (Cueva de las Esquimaduelas), work to enlarge the end took place over a number of days through Owl Neck Crawl. This currently ends, after a 5m high rift, at a 15cm high crawl.

During Easter in the Sumidero de Cobadal, Birthday Passage was extended above the streamway for about 200m. In the summer, further inlets were pushed



2744 and 2753) were also dug.

On the other side of the valley, high above Torcón de la Calleja Rebollo (Toad in the Hole), site 2744 — in a shakehole with a 10m high scar — was recognised as a good digging site.

Ozana

The dig in Cueva Subterránea was drained using a high speed manual pump and further progress made into the hill. The excavated route is now being forced down as the roof lowers. Work has also

off Just an Inlet and a small passage was pushed from near Loop Pitch nearly to the entrance. A maze off Meander Passage was also pushed and surveyed. The pitch was bypassed by following a hole on the right wall part way up the rift before the pitch. More than 830m of new passage was explored in the summer making the total 1.1km for the year, taking the length to 7,362m.

San Miguel

The area high up above the Nacimiento and Cueva Cobrantes was revisited. Site 2693 (length 114m, depth 23m) was explored into chambers with fine helictites.

Cubija, Lastrillas, & the North Slopes of La Vega

As always, new faces and enthusiasm leads to new passage and this was true in Torcón de la Calleja Rebollo (Toad in the Hole). The end of the cave was visited on a number of occasions with a view to systematically working back from the end.



Delicate 4m high columns and exquisite straws in Cueva Lluvia. Photo: Paul 'Footleg' Fretwell.

However, passages were found near the end that kept the explorers occupied for the duration. The main find was 600m of descending passage heading north. The lower levels at 218m altitude (and 205m altitude down a pitch) have lots of mud and may still be affected by the valley bottom water table at about 200m even though they are a good 1,200m away and under 300m of limestone. The water from here could drain anywhere — the 200m contour to the north is over 2km away. (The survey can be found on the Matienzo website.)

In the Cubija valley, a small series of holes and digs were explored up-valley from Cueva de Arturo (sites 2632–2636).

In Cueva del Campo in the Cubija valley, a close look at the gours and low overhangs revealed a number of bones and pottery sherds on the surface. Some of the sherds seem to come from a pot similar to one from Cueva AER in the Soba valley, with dots and lines on the black pottery surface. On the exploration front, a small passage at the entrance of Cueva del Campo was excavated to link with the

nearby site 1403. This in turn was re-explored and a hidden 15m drop revealed along with other leads to push. In early April further explorations and extensions took place where the depth was increased by 15m and length by 30m.

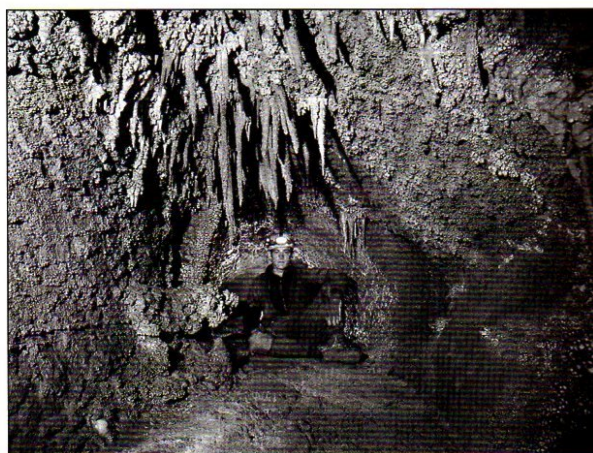
Sima de los Hoyos was re-explored, photographed and detail added to the survey. This shaft is something of an animal trap with bones found in the decorated chambers at the bottom embedded in and crusted with calcite — including at least bear and dog remains.

To the west of Cubija, three small shafts were explored. These open sites (site 2622, 17m deep, site 2666, 8m deep with formations and site 2667, 6m deep) lie only a few metres from well trodden routes, reinforcing the axiom that every metre of hillside should be walked!

Further to the west, in the Lastrillas area, sites 2661, 2662, 2664 and 2665 remain to be pushed. Site 2663 was descended 4m to a possible dig. Exit from the hole was made up a rift that linked in another entrance. Other small sites (2734–2736) were also discovered in the area.

In Cueva del Agua, the bone breccia on the route to the second entrance was re-examined. The site could be an ancient hyena den, occupied over many years, rather than a natural animal trap or stream sink and wash-in. In the main chamber, some red and black pottery was discovered up a climb near to the bone breccia passage.

Cueva del Bosque at the end of a blind valley was re-explored, extended and surveyed, although some of the original 1982 explorations were not entered. The cave is in an excellent position — in the 'middle of nowhere' about 200m



Decorated passage in Cueva Lluvia. Photo: Paul 'Footleg' Fretwell.



The dry low-level overflow stream passage in the Cueva Lluvia extensions. Photo: Paul 'Footleg' Fretwell.

above Torca de Regaton and Fuente de las Colmenas — but has yet to realise its potential.

On El Naso, three sites (Cueva de Asiul, Cueva del Sotarraña and site 993) were repositioned using GPS and photos were taken in Cueva de Asiul. Two new small caves were also documented (sites 2689 and 2799).

La Secada

A small extension was made in Cueva del Anio where a tiny chamber was entered under the right hand wall. Cueva de la Orilla Mijeo was relocated and re-explored. Torca de JR was re-explored and a vent off the shaft looked at. At the base of the hole is a draughting continuation that could be enlarged. The draught can be heard in the distance.

Mustard Pot, some 120m south-east of site 415, was opened to reveal a sloping 9m pitch with a small chamber and a possible dig. The site has a covering of yellow lichen.

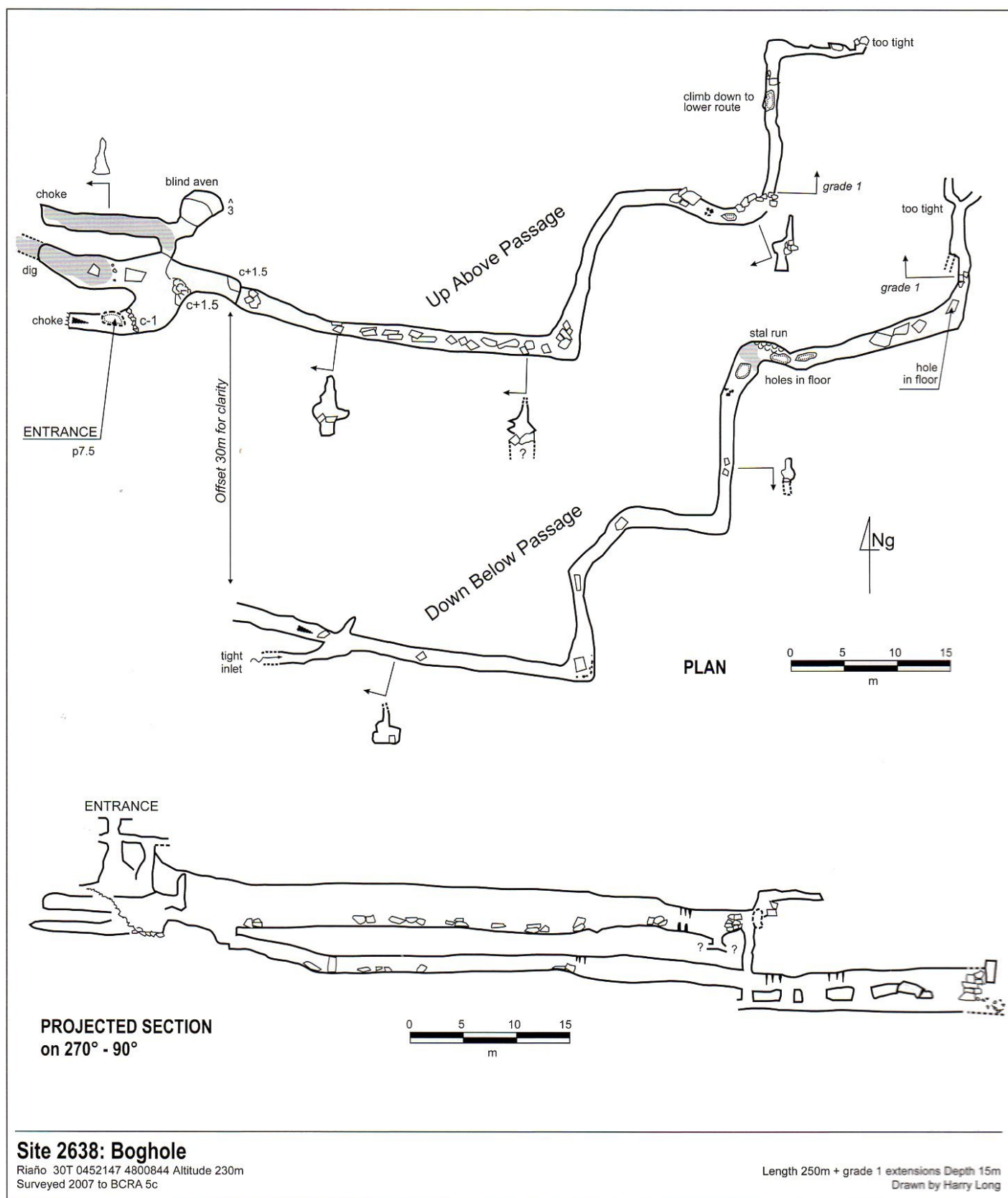
Fuente Ramera, below La Colina, was finally numbered (site 2800). Another smaller resurgence was documented near to El Camino (site 2801).

Fresnedo

Activity was high in the Fresnedo valley to the north of the Matienzo depression. The caves associated with the Fuente de la Virgen (sites 838, 839 and 840) were reinvestigated and repositioned. Cueva de

la Virgen III was surveyed and linked to Cueva de la Virgen II. The nearby Bumble Cave (site 2692) was excavated to give 10m of passage to a draughting dig.

In Cueva de la Huerto Rey (site 2519), side passages in the entrance series were pushed as was Cascade Chamber at the end of the upper level. Here, a 4m climb requires a ladder. The canal at the bottom of the cave was pushed with an airbed to a blank wall. The tight passages before here were surveyed for 633m.



In Cueva del Torno, various goings-on occurred with aim of engineering an easier and less lengthy route for the removal of the human skull found there. In Kings Dig, bad air prevented any concerted excavation in the clay. Molephoning nearby and at the site of the skull was more successful — cavers at the latter position were heard with a combination of hammering, handheld radios and shouting on the surface, although none of the numerous surface digs were successful. An underground dig enlarged an alternative,

shorter route for the skull's exit, linking with the traverse beyond the entrance series and in the process discovering 90m of passage. The skull was removed by a team of four including Dr Jesús Ruiz Cobo, the archaeologist with the government permit. Initial cleaning of the skull brought to light that the person had sustained a substantial head injury with bone damage that appeared to have partially healed over. The skull is being studied by Pedro Rasines, the specialist in human remains at the Altamira Museum.

A hole up near Granny's Slippers was pushed for 127m into passage at the same altitude as the entrance.

Above Cueva del Torno, the bone discovered last year in Pig Nut Pot and thought to be a human femur was checked out by Jesús and found to be a bear bone.

In an area 500m to the north-east of the church, a number of sites were explored. Sites 2737 and 2738 (Slaves' Cave) were nearly connected in dip and strike passages, reminiscent of passage control in the nearby Cueva de Regato.

The total length of these holes was 164m reaching a depth of 20m. There is still a digging possibility in Slaves' Cave. A nearby dig (site 2769) requires a return with a ladder.

A number of sites were documented above the Nacimiento del Campiazo. Sites 2760–2765 are all digs with encouraging indicators, e.g. strong draught or passage visible beyond a boulder. Next to the main road, some rocks were removed from the draughting dig 2415. This site is also giving encouraging signs and should repay further work.

Further up the hill, higher and to the west of Cueva del Torno entrance, the walk-in entrance to site 2766 proved a disappointment, choking with calcited boulders after 11m. Along the same scar, site 2767 requires more digging to enter a low crawl. About 200m south of the church, site 2773 was described as a

bramble-filled rift with a squeeze down into the unknown.

To the north of Fresnedo, site 2739 was surveyed in phreatic passages to a length of 185m and a vertical range of 20m.

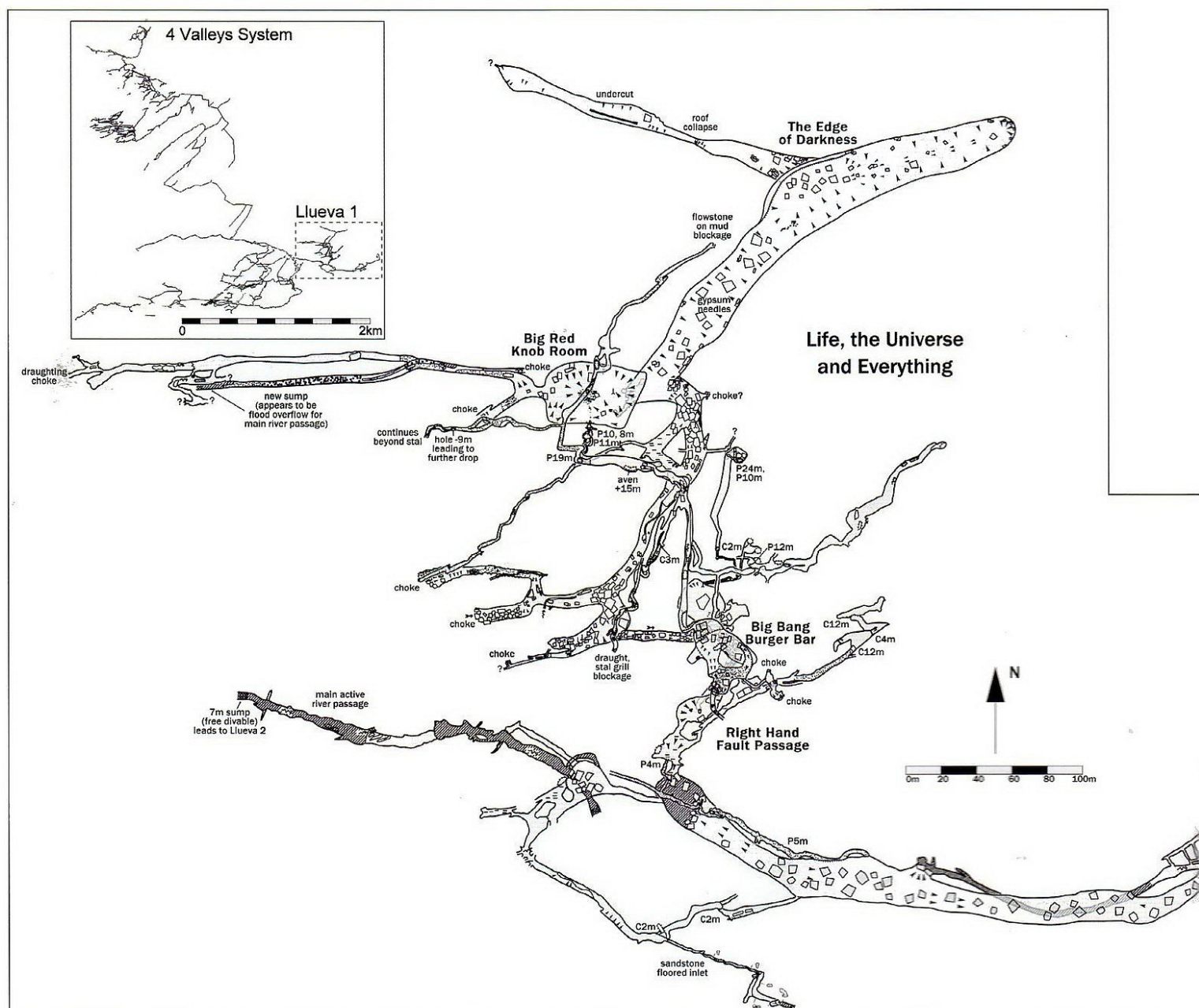
Muela and Mullir

For a week at the end of May, a small team spent most of their exploration time on La Colina and Muela, linking site 897 to site 2588 by opening up the latter shaft, exploring it, then seeing daylight above — which proved to be the earlier discovery; eventually reaching the base of a 51m deep shaft, 2572, leaving a couple of good digs; finding an easy dig in a small cave, site 2731 and investigating the archaeological potential in site 489 and in small shelters and overhangs on the surrounding hillside.

Later in the year, site 299 was repositioned, re-explored and photographed.

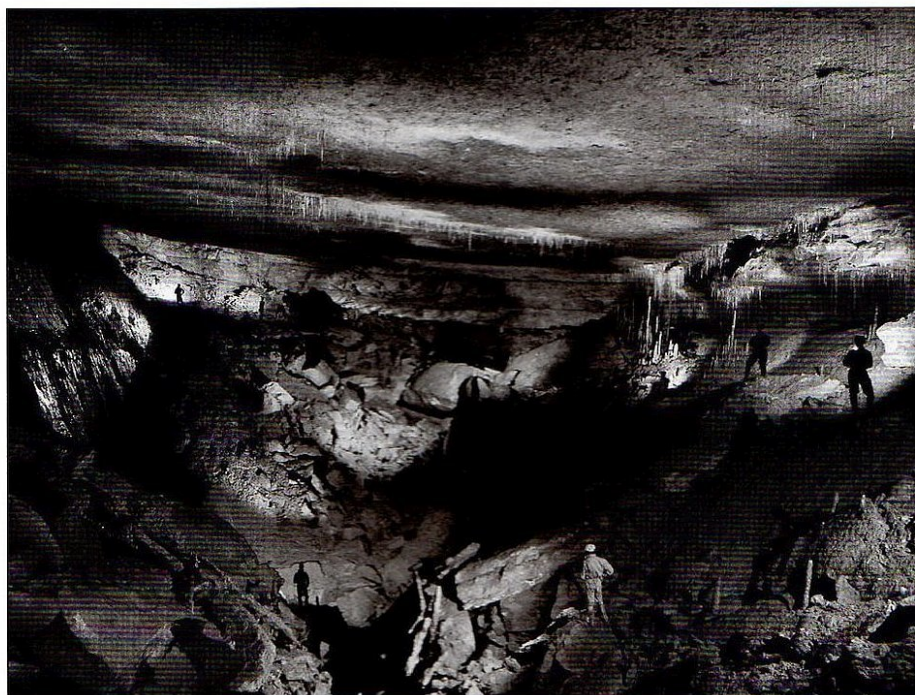
Two undocumented sites were discovered on a walk to the top of Mullir. Site 2797 is an unexplored 10m-deep shaft on the west side of the Hoya de Yusa. Site 2798 is an unexplored 5m drop within a few metres of the summit of Mullir. Horsefly Pot (site 2733) was dug out to reveal a choked 5m pit. On the lower, northern slopes of Muela, site 2747 is a small cave with bones and site 2748 is a choked 2m-deep hole.

A track is being built to provide pylons for a power line above the farmhouses near Tora Bora, site 1786. It currently comes to a dead end just past the top entrance to Cave of the Wild Horses (site 647). The shakehole containing site 746 has been filled in and it could be that site 299 has been obliterated. This track for 4WD vehicles would obviously aid the carry-in for further explorations on Muela and Mullir.



Site 0114: Cueva Llavea

Llavea UTM EUR79 30T 0454646 4798417 Altitude 146m
 Llavea 1: Length 6,154m (includes 3,534m surveyed in 2007) Vertical range 113m (−44m / +69m)
 Part of the Sistema de Cuatro Valles: Total length 49,344m Vertical range 133m



Composite picture of the Big Red Knob Room in Cueva Llavea. Photo: Paul 'Footleg' Fretwell.

Solórzano

About 3km north of our caving area, we were invited to explore Cueva Toca in the hills to the east of Solórzano. This system has two levels separated by a 10m climb. It is unlikely to be associated with the Fresno sites. The cave was surveyed for 266m.

Four Valleys System

The recent discoveries at the north-western end of Cueva Riaño were revisited at Easter and extended for over 600m. The high level passages are major routes and start to show a much more complicated history for at least this end of the system. Holes above Cueva Riaño were

also pushed revealing more substantial passage: Prize Cock Pot reached a depth of 13m; Cueva del Petirrojo, 14m deep and Mareserection Hole where a length of 110m was obtained through a 6m-long chamber and narrow passage that ended at roof collapses, extended in the summer to a hands and knees crawl ending at a squeeze. Further south on the same hillside, Blow Dry still requires lots of work to follow the draught. The longest new find on this hillside was Boghole where passage has developed on two levels some 60 to 80m above known routes in Cueva Riaño. The cave, currently with a length greater than 205m, was pushed on both levels in the summer to a big choke on shattered joints (see survey p21).

Above Gour Inlet, Shag Pot was descended 10m and explored for about 40m to various digs. Prophet's Cave was dug and nearly 100m of rift passages entered above the start of 3rd River Inlet in Cueva Hoyuca (see survey p19). Much lower down, over the downstream end of Cueva Riaño, site 2783 is a narrow slot with a very strong draught.

The molephones were again successfully used in Cueva Hoyuca where a bolt route up a 30m pitch at the end of Windy Inlet (near the end of the Gorilla Walk) was pushed as high as possible to a place of precarious boulders. On the surface, the molephone placed the team about 7m

down below a large and deep boulder- and sediment-filled depression, which takes water. The surface team confirmed a connection by lighting a fire and sending smoke down through a small draughting hole to the roped four-man underground team. Subsequent enthusiastic digging failed to provide another entrance to the system — indeed the hole collapsed after the excavations at Easter and some stabilising and shoring is now required before a connection can be made. The new entrance (site 2691) would allow a shorter trip to the far end of Cueva Hoyuca.

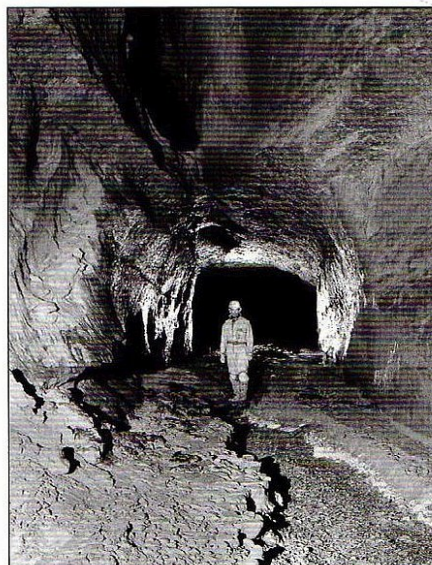
In Cueva Llavea, the passages above the base of the entrance pitch were finally surveyed (31 years after discovery). An inlet passage on sandstone off the Left Hand Bypass was also revisited but this time surveyed, providing 92m of passage to a sump. The Right Hand Fault Passage rising on boulders beyond the lake was re-explored but nothing new found.

However, in the summer, a team carried in a scaling pole to climb an aven on the left of the this fault passage. They found carbide at the top of the climb. A card index and log book search found that the aven had been free-climbed in 1979 to a boulder choke. This summer, boulders were removed from the choke allowing entry, some 80m above the original climb, to a large sloping chamber with plan dimensions of 20 x 30m and two passages leading off. Subsequent explorations dropped back down to river level finding an extensive set of tunnels includ-

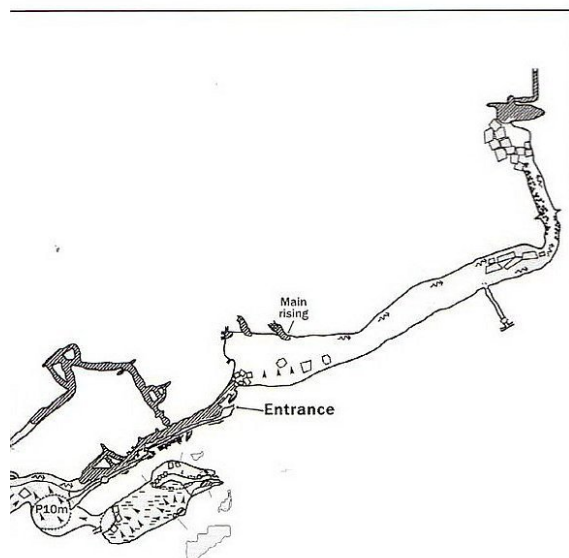
ing a parallel, wet weather overflow passage. High level passages entered are at the same level as the Trident Series in Cueva Hoyuca (site 107) and the 50m-wide passage at the bottom of Torca de Cillarón. In a middle level, a large, flat-roofed passage (up to 40m wide) heads east-west at an altitude 40m below the lowest point in Cillarón.

On a pushing trip in the lower level passages, near the end of

a traverse, a flashbulb was found just opposite where a small passage entered. This point was subsequently found by burrowing down through boulders near the columns in the Right Hand Fault Passage about 25m away from where the pole had been used two weeks before! Investigations are continuing into how and why a team, 28 years ago, seem to have wriggled through into an open rift, taken a photo and then returned without telling anyone and without exploring the open passages!



The dry low-level overflow stream passage in the Cueva Llavea extensions. Photo: Paul Fretwell.



Surveyed to BCRA Grade 4-5

Drawn by Footleg in TunnelX

Nearly 3.8km were surveyed in the Life, the Universe and Everything extensions and there are still leads to push. The length of the whole Four Valleys System is now just over 49km.

The pitch just after the entrance crawl in Cueva Lluvea was derigged after a couple of days of heavy rain, when the fields next to the river in Matienzo were about to flood. The river at the base of the pitch was a torrent with the route up the boulder slope into the main tunnel almost cut off. The water was seen to rise 5cm in half an hour. There was also a waterfall cascading down from above the entrance and sinking in the floor of the depression.

During walks over the top and to the north of the new extensions, site 689 Torca Andando, a 72m-deep pitch system next to an enlarged track, was rediscovered and GPSed and is connected to a nearby tight tube (site 2786). Site 2792 is a resurgence which may be diggable, but of more interest below is site 2793 a choked, 5m depression where the water sinks. Two hundred metres to the north-west, Hazel Cave is an unexplored crawl.

Other holes lying in the presumed catchment for the system were also investigated. In the Lluvea valley, site 2746 is a small unentered cave.

Secadura

At Secadura, the area around the Boyones resurgence was visited and site 2653 discovered: "One way seems to drop to water, the other at higher level continues open out of sight..."

Near The Fox Hat, on the northern slopes of the Secadura valley, site 2501 was enlarged and descended 4m to where further digs hinder progress. In The Fox Hat, progress is being made along a narrow, draughting rift with passage visible beyond.

On a day out with Spanish archaeologists, a number of caves were visited in the small hill containing Cueva del Otero, a gated cave which has important prehistoric deposits. Cueva del Otero 2 was entered, as was Cueva del Otero 4. Cueva del Otero 3 could not be found in the dense jungle.

Further down valley, Cueva de los Tres Rios was entered and surveyed for 18m. A number of oyster shells were found just inside the entrance, suggesting a possible prehistoric midden. A small cave (site 2790) around the side of the same outcrop was entered for 3m.

A small group in September opened up site 1103, against a significant cliff face and excavated along a bedding after a chamber.

San Mames

Cueva Domingo Lopez was visited with Spanish archaeologists. The prehistoric pottery was noted and an extension



Limestone and sandstone breccia mess in the Volcano dig. Photo: Phil Papard.

to the cave, previously explored by others using a ball of string, was surveyed in well-decorated passage. The total length of this site is now 287m. ■

Acknowledgements

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matienzo.org.uk

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