

Speleology

The Bulletin of BRITISH CAVING
Issue 13, May 2009

ISSN 1478-999X



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BCRA



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Formerly published as *Caves & Caving*

ISSN 1478-099X
Issue 13, May 2009

PUBLISHER

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Caton Road, LANCASTER, LA1 3QY
☎ 01524 841010 01524 841578
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Speleology is issued free* to members of the British Caving Association and the British Cave Research Association. (Article deadlines are the beginning of February, June, October. Short news items can be accepted up to a month after these dates). As the bulletin of the BCRA, it has been published continuously since BCRA's foundation in 1973; firstly as the *BCRA Bulletin* then, from 1979-2002, as *Caves & Caving* (ISSN 0142-1832).

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Hidden Earth 2008 Premier Trophy, selected photos by Rob Eavis.

Front: Clockwise from top left: Sam Townsend in Bagshaw Cavern.

Stu Gardiner negotiating Daren Cilau's entrance crawl.

Stu Gardiner in Cloud Chamber.

Inside back cover: Ali Mortazavi in Urchin Oxbow, Daren Cilau.

Back: Matienzo, Spain 2008 (see p18)

Clockwise from top left:

Jenny Corrin with formations in Torca La Vaca. (Juan Corrin)

Will Stewart in the Gour inlet extension of Cueva Hoyuca. (Mandy Fu)

Jason Lin in the Dambuster Series, Sima-Cueva del Risco.

(Torben Redder)

Expedition Report: Matienzo 2008

Juan Corrin reports on the ongoing exploration in northern Spain.

Easter 2008 was very early and the Matienzo weather seasonal — very wet with heavy rain and the Matienzo river flooding the fields. Many people predicted the weather and booked flats and hostels in the area. A record 82 cavers and associates attended the expedition meal. Despite the weather, there were more than enough speleological activities to get involved with: nearly 6km of new cave passages were surveyed, and 229 sites were visited, including 165 new holes. Highlights included almost creating the Five Valleys System and finding Torca La Vaca, a new system in the north-west sector of the permission area which may open up the elusive Cobadal – Aguanaz network.

Another 'milestone' was passed in June: over 3000 documented sites of speleological interest.

The weather throughout the summer period was generally excellent, with no repeat of last year's rain in August. The six-week expedition ran from mid-July and over 7km of new passage were surveyed, mainly in Torca La Vaca and Cueva Hoyuca.

The Four (or Five?) Valleys System

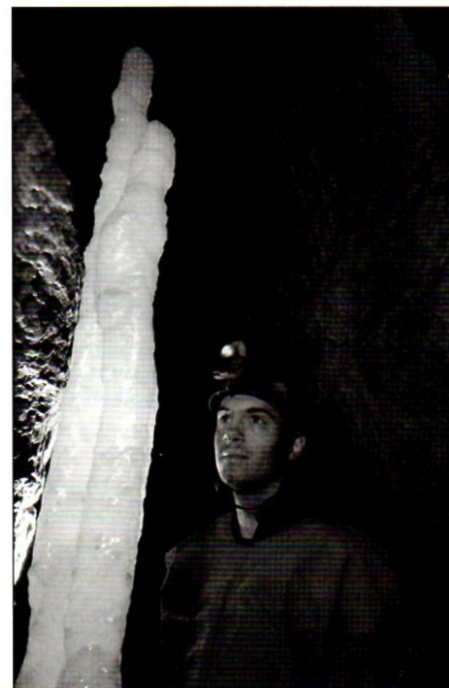
The Four Valleys System brings together the waters on, around and below the Riaño, Matienzo, and Llave valleys

and resurges in the Secadura valley.

At the end of Canyon Passage in the south-west area of Cueva del Torno at Fresno, an excavated low-level crawl through a boulder choke reached open passage. The size varied from 1.5 to 3.5m wide with the roof approaching 20m above in places and finished in another dangerous boulder choke, 50m from the Road to Torno in Cueva Riaño. An inlet near the end was bolted up during an 18-hour trip but the water emerged from a tiny hole. In all, 667m were surveyed in this section of the cave, including 120m in a high-level rift passage that heads south-east from the initial boulder choke. This was extended in the summer when 204m was added in a vertical mess above Torno Chamber.

At Easter, near the entrance, a climb up from the main passage gained a small, complicated series that heads out to the west. Surveying and digging out sections in nearly 1.1km of new passage provided several teams with a project over a number of days.

Site 2414 is perched about 90m above the Canyon Passage. In the wet weather, a stream was heard rumbling through the back wall of the entrance depression (which already has two entrances to short lengths of passage). This third hole was excavated to a small, awkward,



Translucent stal in Penguin Passage, Torca La Vaca.
Photo: Mandy Fu.

wet passage. A 14m pitch was eventually descended in a chamber with a waterfall. Digs require further enlargement.

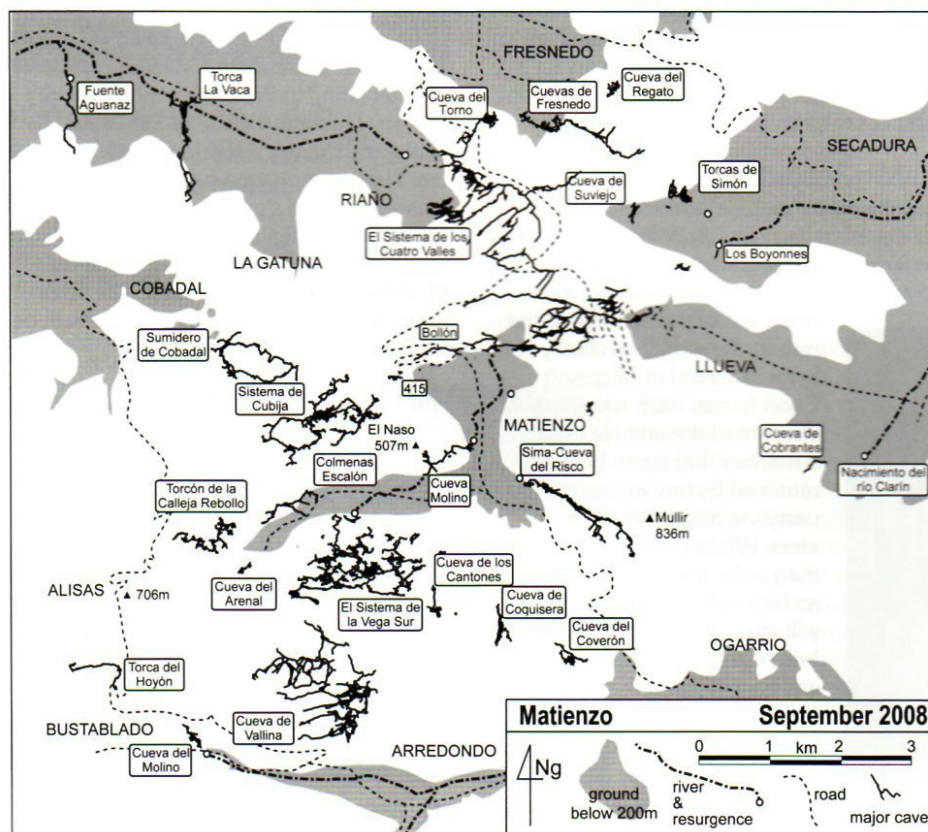
During the summer, on the northern side of Fresno, Slaves Cave was enlarged and a breakthrough made into substantial, steeply dipping upstream and downstream segments — nearly 100m and over 60m respectively. Further north, Coercion Cave was extended beyond a swinging slab into walking passage, a fine chamber and cross rifts, ending at a sump.

In Cueva Riaño, 89 Cents Tinto chamber was pushed to where the route, apparently very close to the surface, ends in breakdown. The Pray Aven was also bolted up but not completed. The Acid Bath was bolted and passage entered.

Cueva Hoyuca

In Cueva Hoyuca, as part of the ongoing re-exploration and resurvey of the 51km-long Four Valleys System (coordinated by Paul Fretwell), Gour Inlet was climbed and pushed at Easter to a 369m extension heading east upstream. The route involved muddy crawling, walking in fine rift passage and passing a boulder choke. The original exploration and survey was carried out in very wet conditions and the passage ended at a 6m-diameter chamber (The Thunderdome) which was filled with spray, wind, and noise from above.

Three months later, a dry 25m-high aven greeted the explorers. The first rash of bolts met a slope to a large passage heading west. This was later pushed to the top of the original aven in 'old' Gour Inlet and, with various loops, the total length of this segment came to 816m. Fine fossils were discovered, including corals and also a set of vertically stacked fault chambers, where huge blocks have dropped off sandstone beds to create a 30m-high series of voids.



The streamway on the other side of the aven was entered and the explorers surveyed for over 550m on a north-east trend in walking passage about 2m wide and more than 20m high in places. The passage continued for an estimated 350m past grottos and up a set of half metre cascades where it changed to a hands-and-knees crawl. The water emerged from a choke of large, rounded cobbles. The whole of this streamway is on a very shallow gradient with a cream flowstone floor.

In the summer, much closer to the old entrances, resurveying of Roofers' Way, Quadraphenia, and Marathon Passage provided a small amount of new passage and gave information for the new survey.

Last year, site 2691 at the base of a deep depression was molephoned to within 7m of the top of rifts climbing up from the Gorilla Walk some 65m below. This Easter, the Giant Panda entrance was opened up and stabilised. This route in should now permit more working time in the far reaches of the cave.

Cueva Llueva

In Cueva Llueva, the main discovery was a new chamber down a 7m climb and tight p9 at the end of the high level western passages beyond the Big Red Knob Room. The chamber and side passages were surveyed for 280m. Conditions in the bouldery climbs up were very wet and prevented one trip to the new extensions. A roped traverse at high level has been installed from the bouldery slope below the entrance pitch to the following uphill boulder slope into the cave. This has allowed all-weather access even when the fields in Matienzo are in flood.

In La Secada, around the major southern input to the Four Valleys System, site 3003 dropped 5m into a well decorated, circular chamber and site 3004 was excavated to a 13m pitch dropping into a fine 20×15m decorated chamber. The enticing noise at the base of Torca J.R.

Matienzo Caves Surveyed in 2008

#	Cave Name	Area	Surveyed (m)	Length (m)	Depth (m)
2889	La Vaca, Torca	Hornedo	6,299	6,299	47
2366	Torno, Cueva del	Fresnedo	2,144	5,166	60
107	Hoyuca, Cueva	Riaño	1,862	51,642	100
258	Calleja Rebollo, Torcón de la	Seldesuto	516	7,902	118
733	Vallina, Cueva	Arredondo	453	31,654	157
114	Llueva, Cueva	Llueva	281	–	45
767	Wild Mare, Cave of the	Hornedo	248	594	14
613	Torcida, Torca de	Cobadal	206	673	24
2738	Slaves' Cave	Fresnedo	162	214	12
105	Riaño, Cueva de	Riaño	155	–	0
2739	Coercion Cave	Fresnedo	130	315	26
25	Risco, Sima-Cueva del	Ozana	120	9,979	25
2964	shaft	Ozana	86	86	65
42	Cefrales, Cueva de los	S Vega	80	554	54
2887	Hypocritical Cave	La Gatuna	78	78	
2916	shaft	Barrio de los Urros	64	64	51
2786	Three Idiots	Secadura	63	63	45
2813	shaft	Ozana	52	52	13
2414	cave	Solórzano	34	73	14
1930	Cobadal, Sumidero de	Cobadal	33	7,395	101
3011	shaft	San Antonio	33	33	17
3024	cave	Moncobe	20	20	
3012	CTB, Cueva	San Antonio	17	17	
2962	shaft	Fresnedo	14	14	11
247	Caracoles, Cueva de los	La Secada	8	28	
TOTAL			13,157		

was brought closer with some judicious excavations. Hole in the Road, an entry point to Cueva Bollón and, hopefully through to the Four Valleys System, was again found to be sumped off in the summer, thwarting efforts to climb up to a tantalising hole. A very long spell of dry weather is required before there can be any pushing trips in here.

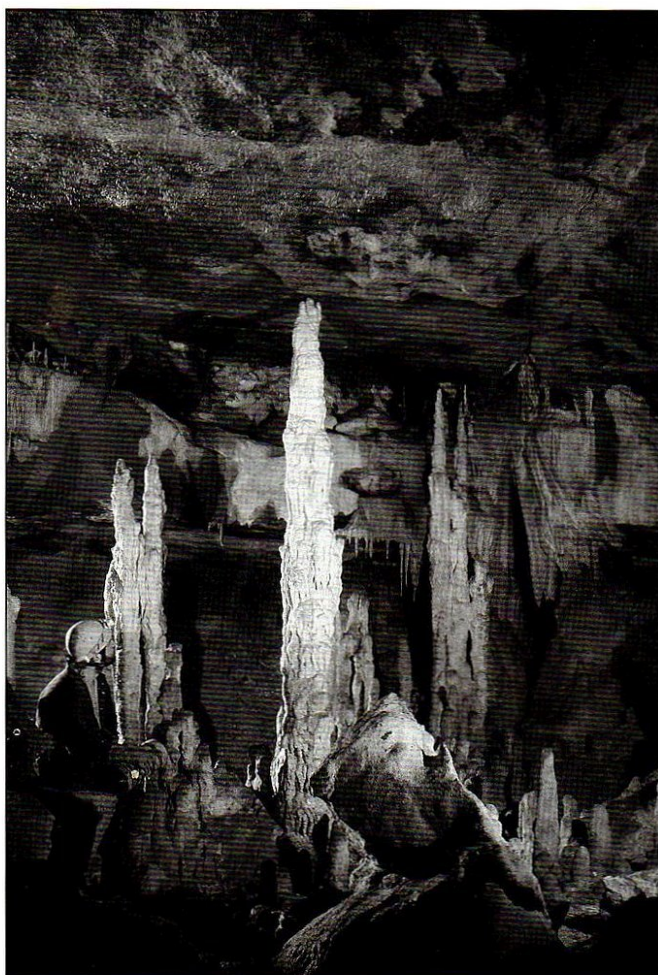
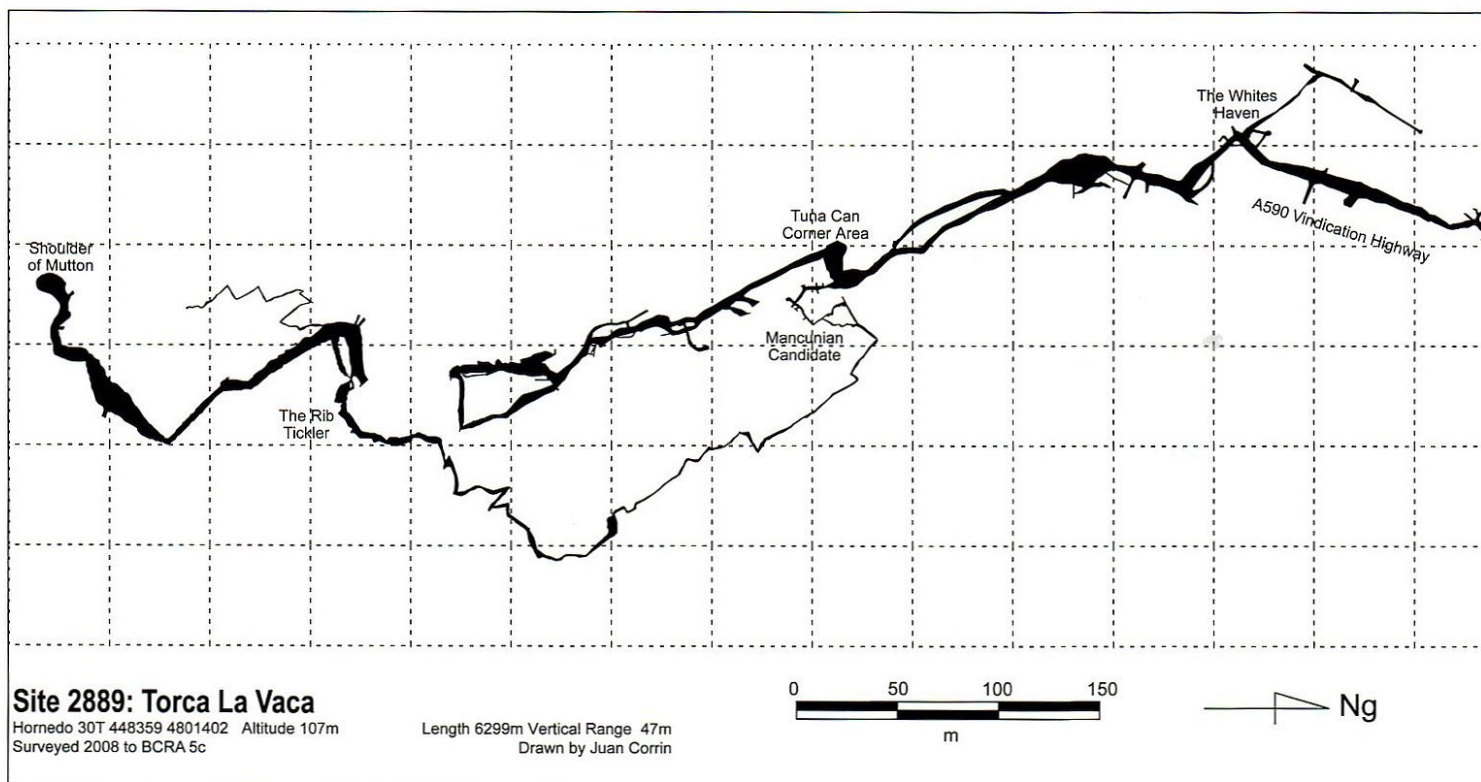
Fuente Aguanaz – Cobadal System

This potentially huge system is starting to reveal more underground passages. Torca La Vaca provided 2.1km of cave in various levels under the slopes south of the village of Hornedo near the end of the Easter expedition. The site was first explored down 32m of climbs and pitches into a streamway and then into higher levels with old, large phreatic passages and narrow rifts, very well decorated in places. The location was not published immediately — a noble gesture that allowed original explorers (who had a boat to catch after surveying the grotty streamway) a chance to catch up later in the year and push leads deliberately left in the higher levels. These included open walking passage and 30m drops with the sound of running water.

Torca La Vaca was the prime focus through the summer and over 4km was surveyed in the cave. The various levels of the entrance series were confirmed as being mostly truncated by sandstone chokes or clusters of formations. One early trip had an original explorer cutting tape at the start of the Dingle/Pringle Pretty Pushing Passage, left from Easter, only to meet a sandstone choke 70m in, after traversing past columns and calcite flows. At a number of places on the top level, pitches were dropped about 35m to the



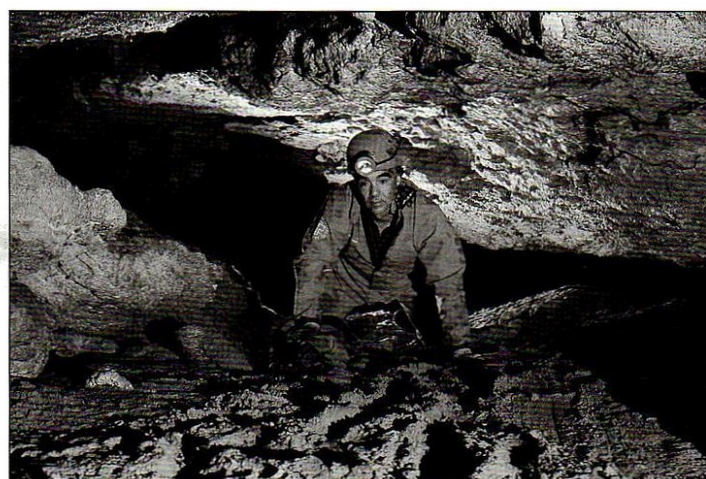
Jason Lin in the Dambuster Series of Sima-Cueva del Risco. Photo: Torben Redder.



Dave Bell with columns in Torca La Vaca. Photo: Peter Eagan.

base level, often meeting segments of the underlying stream passage. The roomy, tall middle levels heading south were a temporary stopping point with more sandstone. Pushing down a tight p5 and a larger p6 (past a 1m-thick bed of coal) on the far side of the sandstone reached the water at

passages, the routes reunited at Can You Hear the Buzzing, a complicated chamber with an inlet from the west. The route from here headed south at high level in generally walking passage with some loose boulder climbs. After passing through the A590 Vindication Highway, a junction was



Peter Eagan on the sandy deposits in Cave of the Wild Mare, the resurgence for Torca La Vaca. Photo: Torben Redder.

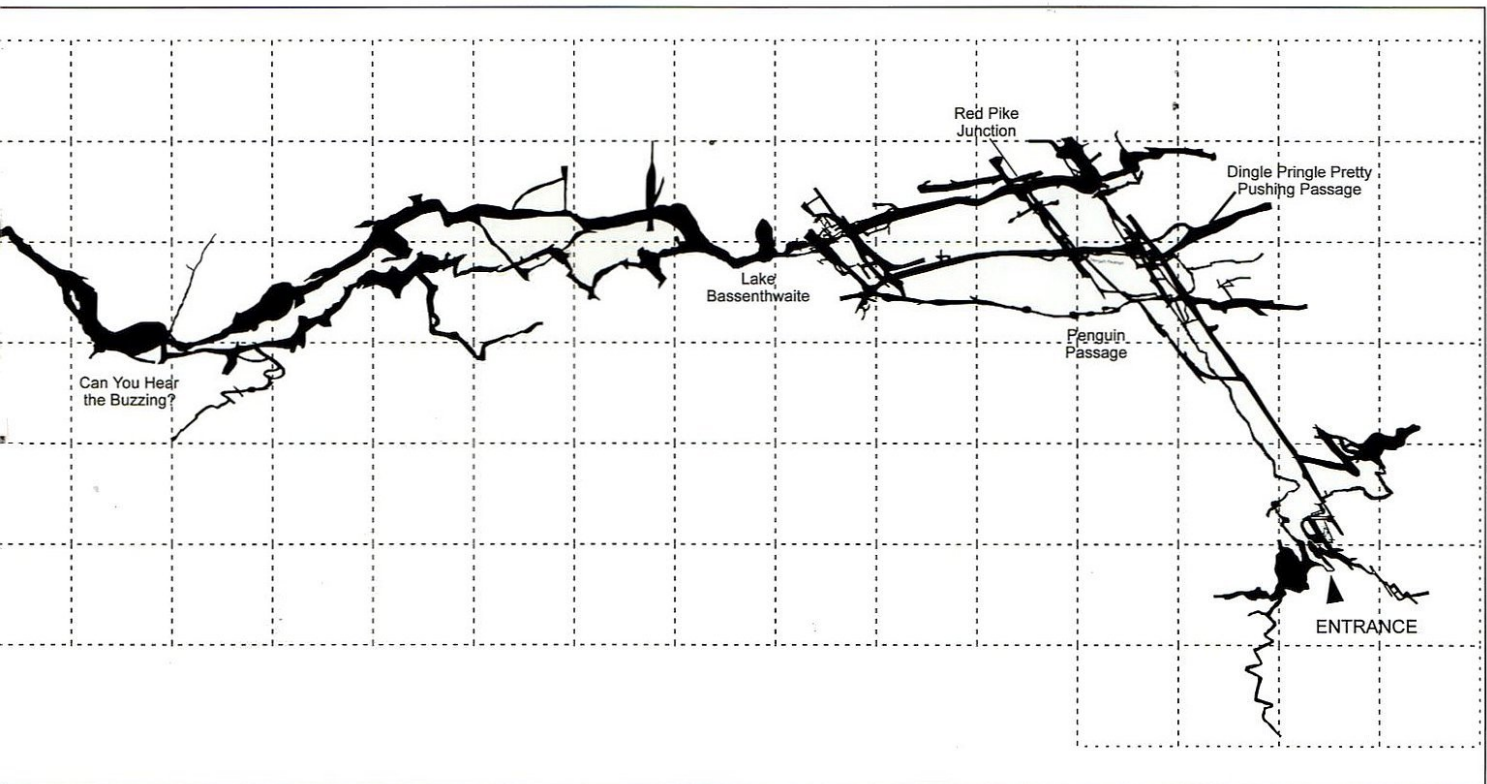
Lake Bassenthwaite where the immediate first hurdle was a spacious 10m-long duck in out-of-depth water with the wind whistling through.

The route south then split with watery passage upstream and a high level up a climb to the right. The following few days were a fever of pushing and surveying. After 300m of exploration in both

met at the Whites Haven (a dry, tall side passage, well decorated with gypsum) half a kilometre south of the duck.

More boulder piles were traversed and a loop to the right was found with (possibly) a kilometre of passage to survey in a joint-controlled network. Tuna Can Corner was another focal point, where the water was regained in a series of smaller passages called the Mancunian Candidate.

Continuing along the high level, a major, complicated bouldery, draughting mess was met which stopped progress for some time. The bypass was found down at water level in the Mancunian Candidate. An aqueous route upstream was pushed to the south to end at a boulder pile just beyond the major collapses at high level. A squeeze up through the Rib Tickler brought the explorers back into the high level. To the west and south the way on was open in large tunnel which eventually rose up to the roof at Shoulder of Mutton Chamber, some 1.1km due south of the



Lake Bassenthwaite duck. Surveying from here on the way out, the exuberant explorers made a wrong turning at the bottom of the Rib Tickler and surveyed upstream instead of down, adding another couple of hundred metres by mistake.

Following the Water

The system is by no means finished — there are holes down near the current end, streamways need pushing in various directions and inlets, avens and smaller passages need exploring. The survey above (and in more detail at www.matienzo.org.uk/surveys/2889-v2_05-mq.pdf) shows the current leads and the end, almost under the summit between Hornedo and the large depressions in Cobadal.

All of the water met in the cave is believed to emerge in Cave of the

Wild Mare, eventually resurging in the main river. Cave of the Wild Mare was thoroughly explored and pushed over the summer providing new leads at high and low levels, all of which petered out.

The potential for the Torca La Vaca system is huge. About 1.5km to the west, Fuente Aguanaz is the major resurgence in the area and in 2006, optical brightener was used to prove a link from the Sumidero de Cobadal, 3.5km to the south-east. There are various possibilities for the drainage, involving discrete or connected systems. See the diagrams on page 23.

Fuente Aguanaz could also get water from Alisas and from the Miera. It is worth reiterating that the Los Boyones resurgence with $c0.6\text{m}^3/\text{s}$ average flow is fed by the 51km-long Four Valleys System (and further upstream by the 30km South Vega

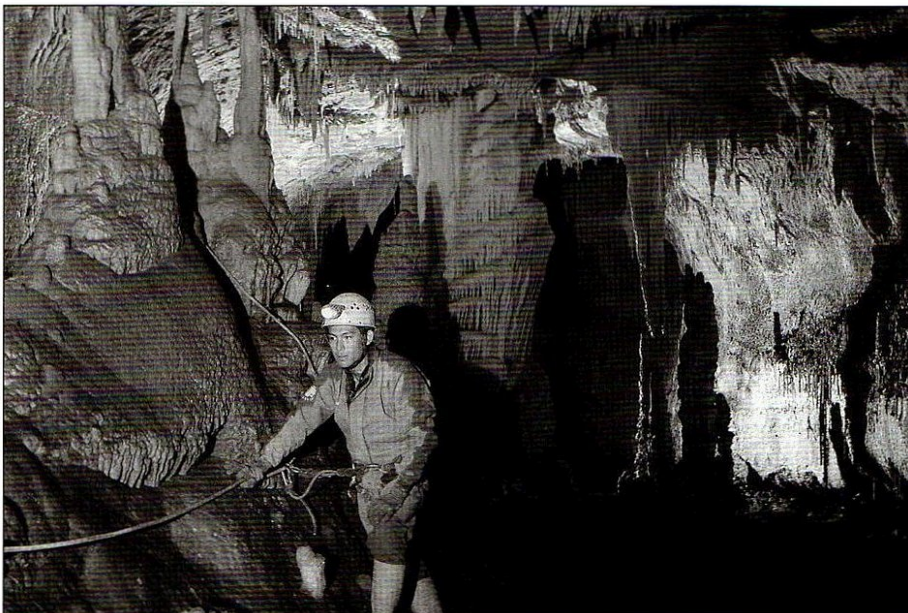


Martin Barnicott negotiating the out-of-depth, 10m-long duck at Lake Bassenthwaite in Torca La Vaca. Photo: Dave Gledhill.

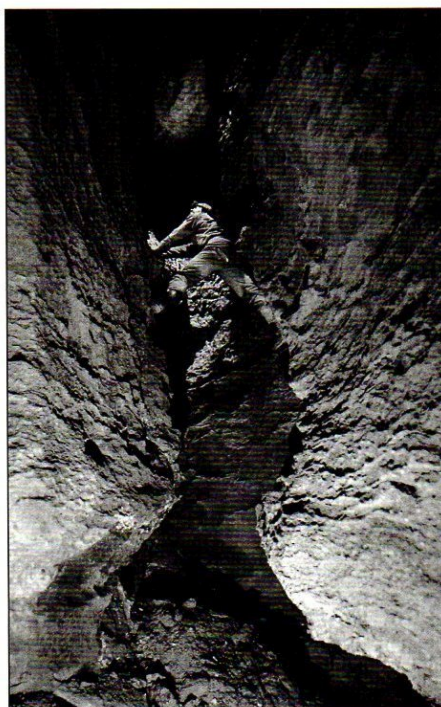
System and the Risco System, etc). Fuente Aguanaz (1.7km explored length) has an average flow of $0.9\text{m}^3/\text{s}$.

There was much surface activity in the search for 'top entrances' over the Torca La Vaca, Fuente Aguanaz and the northern Cobadal areas. Just a couple of examples: site 2916, a shaft with a powerful draught eventually reaching -51m where a narrow rift and mud choke prevent further progress and the strongly draughting Pallet Hole which descends through boulders to a boulder slope and ruckle. A large number of digs were also undertaken in the areas.

The large, complex depressions of Cobadal, a proposed 'top sink' area for at the current streamway in Torca La Vaca, were also visited. At Easter, Snottite Cave was pushed at the bottom end crawl, but progress was halted by too much water. In the summer, Orchard Cave was entered and a way on enlarged between boulders into more boulders with a possible route through. The water disappearing in this cave would be interesting to trace. The large remnant, Torca de Torcida was re-explored, pushed and completely surveyed in roomy high levels and tighter rifts. The cave may well drain beyond Snottite and on to Torca La Vaca.



Jason Lin on a traverse in the Dambuster Series of Sima-Cueva del Risco. Photo: Torben Redder.



Will Stewart climbing in the Gour Inlet extension, Cueva Hoyuca. Photo: Mandy Fu.

At La Gatuna, a resurgence cave (Hypocritical Cave, site 2887) was surveyed for 78m with a possibility for extension.

At San Antonio, around Fuente Aguanaz, site 3008 is an open, walk-in cave that closed down after 45m. In the same area, site 3011 is a short drop onto a chamber with a p12 to a tight rift with a draught and good echo. Site 3012 ends in a chamber after 17m and site 3014 is a flat-out crawl under a rock face to a standing chamber. From here a set of draughting pitches is met. The site is currently about 100m long, 30m deep and ends at a very small draughting tube.

El Naso & North Vega

Cueva Caracoles, first documented in 1981, was finally surveyed to a length of 28m. The cave must have been an entry

point (now blocked) to a ramp from the streamway at the far end of Cueva Molino. Flints and shells suggest the cave was a temporary shelter of Mesolithic age; calcite on a low wall at the top of the connecting ramp in Molino has been dated to 10,900–35,000 years ago.

Muela / Mullir: Mountains to the East

The newly located track from Cruz Usano up to the north-east onto the slopes of Mullir has given a new impetus to prospecting and exploring. A number of sites were relocated with a GPS and some, such as site 209 with its impressive surface features, deserve a re-exploration and survey. In 2004, site 810 was left as a tight pitch head opening up to 8–10m width with water heard and looking very promising. This was dropped at Easter as a p40 with a possible p20 beyond another constriction that requires enlarging. A number of unexplored holes were also located.

On the north side of the mountains, the new track for installing pylons continues to chew up the limestone and ruin the landscape. Fortunately, the track and pylon footings appear to be obliterating very few shafts: site 1780 is one that may have disappeared.

Cruz Usano

Site 2813 was discovered in January to the west of Cruz Usano as a short drop in a shakehole. At Easter the cave was explored through an excavated crawl, down a p5 into a calcited chamber with a wet crawl and boulder slope closing in — a

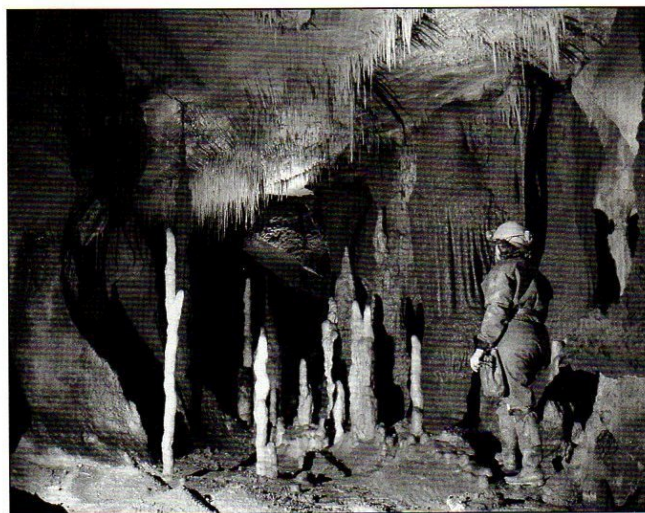
total length of 52m. Other holes explored include site 2848 where a p15 leads to a short length of passage and 3060, a choked 14m deep shaft.

To the east of Cruz Usano, site 2964 is a 65m-deep series of shafts, explored in the summer.

In Cueva Jivero 2, it was noted that the crayfish population appeared to be thriving.

Torcón de la Calleja Rebollo & the Seldesuto / Las Calzadillas Areas

Torcón de la Calleja Rebollo (Toad in the Hole) received a six day onslaught over Easter. The trips included pushing the end of the Move It extensions. A drop down a 20m pitch landed in lots of mud, suggesting 'a pretty terminal area'. Draught testing



Jenny Corrin admiring a group of columns at Red Pike Junction, Torca La Vaca. Photo: Juan Corrin.

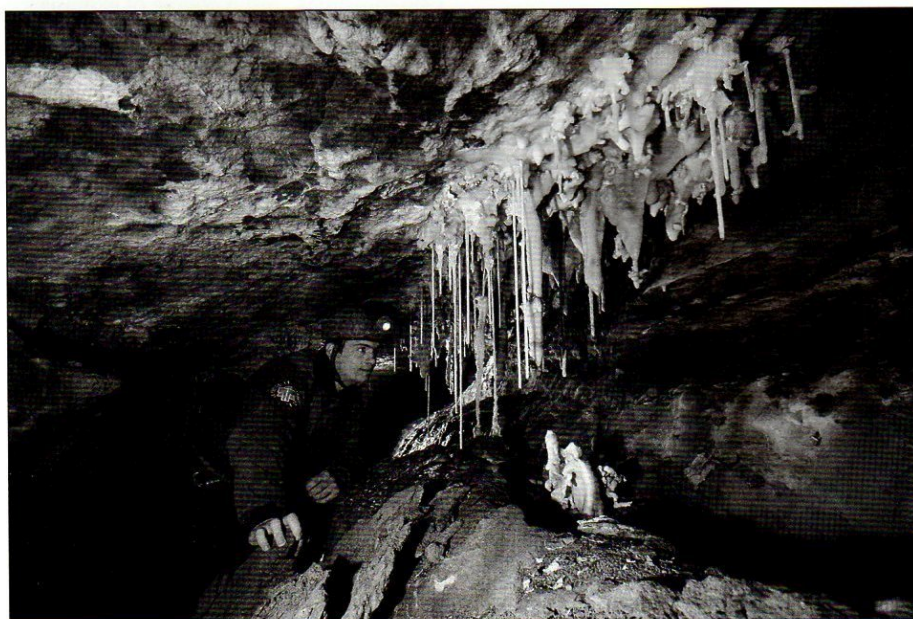
in Man Down showed a route through dodgy boulders and a climb down a 25m pitch to a very muddy chamber which sumps. A couple of the avens at the end were also climbed but no passage gained.

Closer to the entrance, between Cloud Nine and Cargo Rift a phreatic maze was entered and surveyed in Girly Day Out. The sound of water comes from a large aven with a big waterfall coming in from above. Water sinks in a tight rift but the roof of the aven cannot be seen and this area is a good lead for next time.

South Vega

In Torca de Coterón, a traverse around to the left of the Edge of the Universe (p70) entered a passage which closed down after 15m. The boulder choke at the end of Cueva del Zorro was poked and the narrow passage at the base of the nearby site 1512 was enlarged. Some unexplored sites were 'ticked off' and others were documented but undescended — see the website for details.

Cueva de los Cefrales was reinvestigated and extended around the top entrance where phreatic rifts were explored. This cave is now over half a kilometre long and very close to Hidden Hole, itself an isolated 1km fragment, and both good prospects for linking into the



Mike Topsom admiring formations in the Gour Inlet extension of Cueva Hoyuca. Photo: Mandy Fu.

South Vega System. Cueva Grasienta was refound as Cueva Chispas (26 years later) and surveyed to 90m length.

To the south, and accessed from Arredondo, Cueva Vallina was entered on three occasions — it would have been four but the team was put off the walk by driving sleet and snow. Passage to the south of Clapham Bypass revealed 96m but the main focus was on climbing in the same area. Smelly Hat Aven yielded 275m of passage and it would appear to be very close to the base of site 753, Torca de Rotura where a sandy floored chamber has a 10cm-wide fissure emitting a cold draught.

Two trips were made into Cueva Vallina during the summer. Beyond the middle boulder choke, a long trip to

Elephant's Passage found that to push a lead noted a few years ago actually needed a ladder.

Other Areas

Cueva de Tali 2 was 'lost' as the entrance was illegally covered over with soil and building rubble early in the year.

The resurvey of the 10km Risco System (coordinated by Pete Smith) is continuing: this summer, the Dambuster Series was revisited and extended by 120m.

Conclusions & Acknowledgements

This year has seen more than 13km of new cave surveyed, the best effort since 1989. Cumulative survey totals for Easter and summer appear in the table on page 19; surveys can be viewed on the website.

Many smaller sites and explorations are not mentioned here — for full details visit the Matienzo website.

Thanks must go again to Pablo and family at Bar Germán — the use of the restaurant as an expedition base during the larger expeditions is vital and greatly appreciated. The Ghar Parau Funds committee awarded £300 to Matienzo 2008. ■

matienzo.org.uk

Matienzo 2002: *Speleology* 3, September 2003.
Matienzo 2004: *Speleology* 6, April 2006.
Matienzo 2005: *Speleology* 7, August 2006.
Matienzo 2006: *Speleology* 9, April 2007.
Matienzo 2007: *Speleology* 10/11, August/December 2007.

See the back cover of this issue for more photos from Matienzo 2008.

Torca La Vaca: Possible Water Routes

Possibility 1

- A: Water travels from the lowest point in the Sumidero de Cobadal (128m ASL) to Aguanaz (as dye-traced in 2006) along with the water draining from the depressions. Torca La Vaca is fed by local percolation and other sources.
- B: In flood, water may overflow into Torca La Vaca, possibly accounting for the large amounts of water seen emerging at high stage.

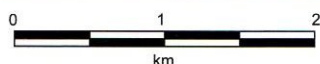
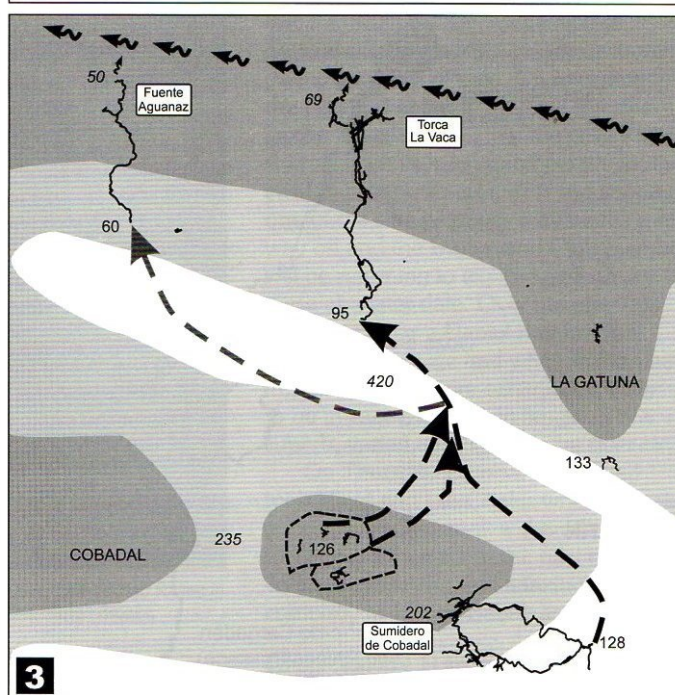
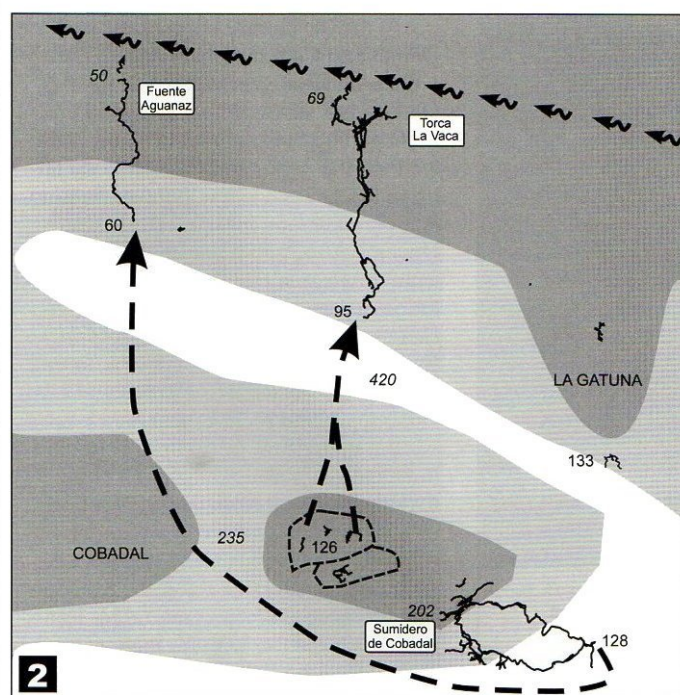
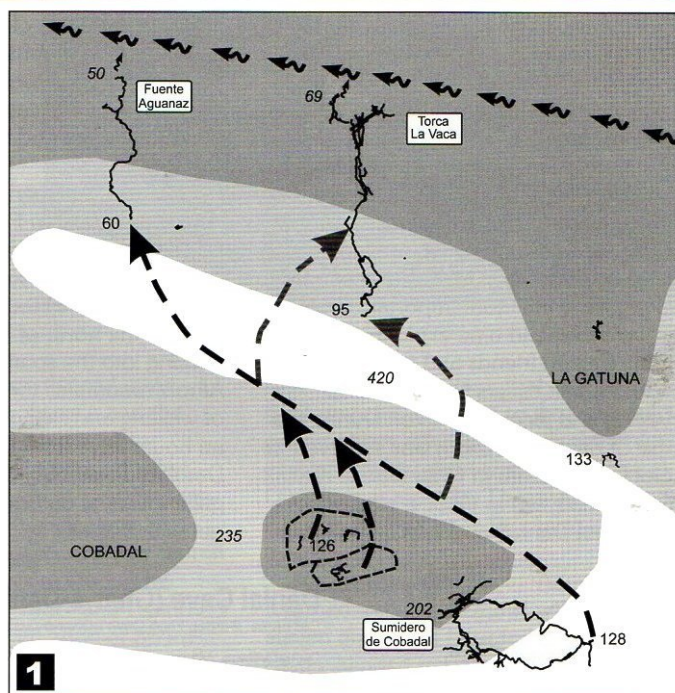
Possibility 2

- A: Water travels from the lowest point in the Sumidero de Cobadal to Aguanaz. Water from the Cobadal depressions drains into Torca La Vaca.

Possibility 3

- A: Water travels from the lowest point in the Sumidero de Cobadal to Torca La Vaca along with water from the depressions. Aguanaz derives its water from elsewhere.
- B: In flood, water overflows into Aguanaz. There was a flood episode in 2006 during the dye trace.

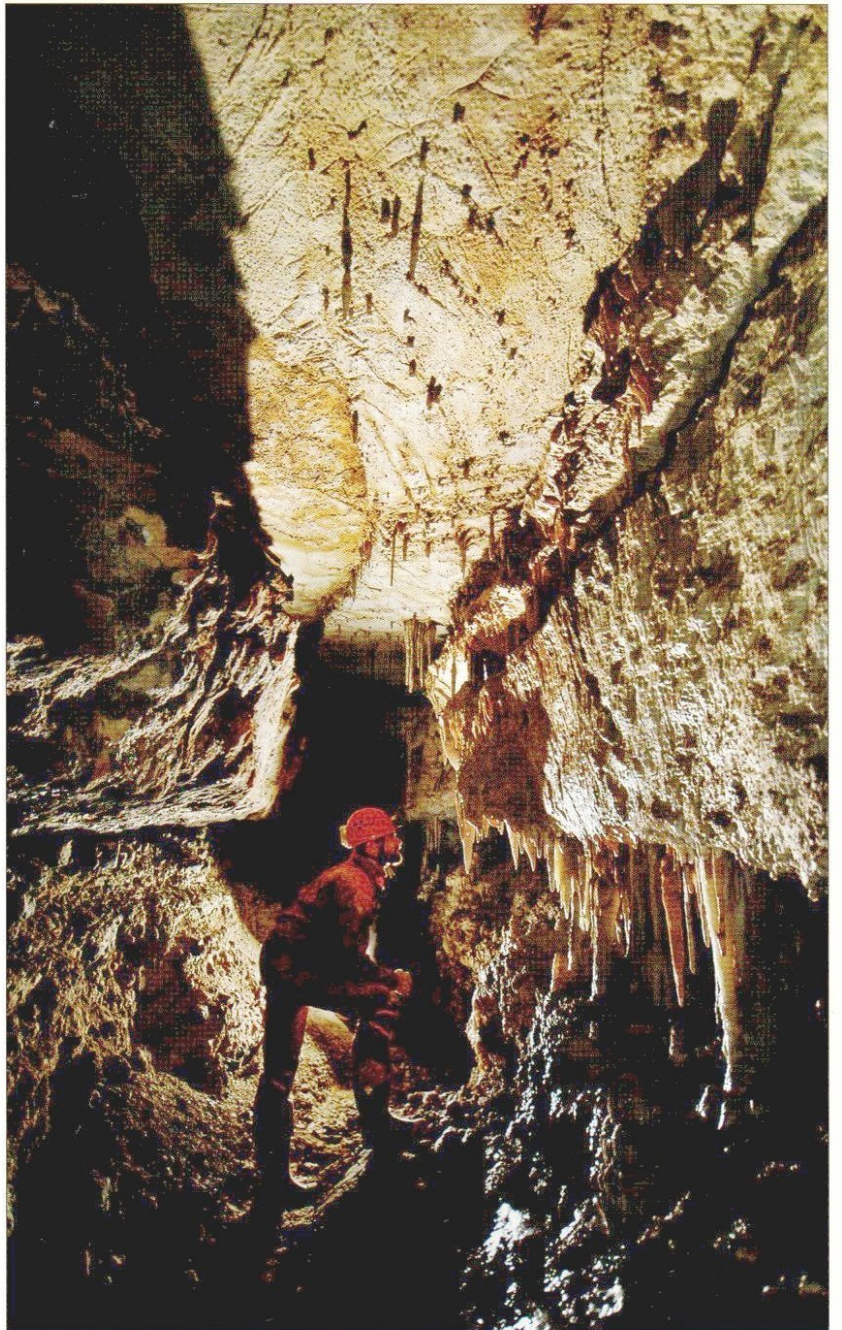
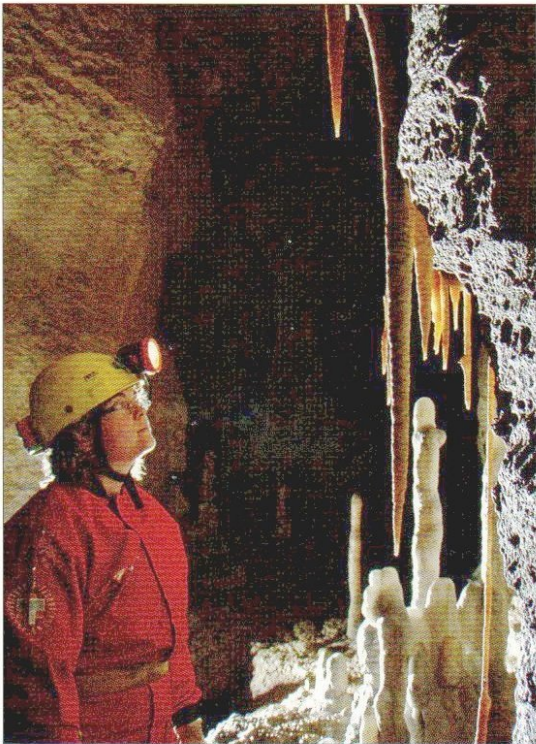
The questions remain: What are the other sources of the water in Aguanaz? The total average output of the resurgence is 0.95m³/s. What were the drainage routes in the past?



Surface flow
Cave passage

200 Underground altitude (m)
200 Surface altitude (m)

Flow route, A
Flood flow route, B



Matienzo 2008