

Speleology

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Matienzo 2012

Juan Corrin summarises exploration in Matienzo in 2012

The main expeditions couldn't have been more different in terms of the weather. Over the main span of the Easter expedition there was one day without rain. Indeed, Santander had its third wettest April in the last hundred years. Despite the disheartening weather, the full range of caving trips was undertaken. Digs, pushing, diving and surveying trips were all successful, with over 3.5km surveyed and more than 90 new sites identified. Most new passages were surveyed in Cueva Hoyuca where more than 1.2km was discovered in the Sima Baz section of the entrance series and off Diversion Chamber further into the cave. Re-surveying in this cave and Cueva Ruchano / Espada produced many leads. Explorations in El Cubillón at Moncobe progressed slowly but avents were climbed and over 800m of passage were surveyed. Plans to enter the Matienzo valley main sink, Cueva Carcavueso, were scuppered when continuous rain sent water down the overflow channel at the main sink to drop down the entrance, perhaps 5m above normal water levels.

During a very dry summer, exploration occurred in Cueva Mostajo, where a passage was opened up at the end of the high level, dropping down to the middle level to head south-east towards Cueva Cofresnedo and Cueva del Sotarraña. The other main exploration was in Lenny's Cave at Secadura, where good-sized passage gives a tantalising glimpse of what may lie under the hill to the south of Secadura.

A major addition to the summer expedition was the participation of nine divers. Sites investigated included Cueva Comellantes, one of the Cueva Riaño resurgences, Torca la Vaca (through Cave of the Wild Mare), Surgencia de las Crecidas in Secadura and downstream in Cueva Llueva. A keen group from Manchester University Speleological Club was also an asset to the expedition.

Southern Sector

Although at Easter conditions started off well for Rupert Skorupka diving in Squirrel's Passage, in Cueva-Cubío de la Reñada, they deteriorated after the rain

started. In the end, he was able to progress downstream a short distance beyond last year's limit and surveyed back to the end of the 1982 survey. In the summer, Chris Jewell, diving in Cueva Comellantes, assisted by Laura Trowbridge, discovered the route upstream to Squirrel's Passage. The link was made when Rupert's line reel was discovered lying in a rock pocket. Rupert later continued investigating the resurgence looking for another source for the resurgence water, as the water in Squirrel's Passage cannot account for all the flow.

During the summer, on a separate permit, Chris continued the dive started by him and Artur Koslowski last year in Cueva Molino at Bustablado. Using a re-breather in a dive lasting over six hours, to a depth of 93m, he found the cave closed in at -6m after adding 40m to the length. The main water flow has been missed somewhere in the 925m traversed from base.

Below: Cueva-Cubío del Llanio: Bjarne Buchardt East Wing. Photo: Torben Redder



High above the possible connection between Vallina and the South Vega System, sites 1220 and 1340 were investigated during both main expeditions. The first was explored down a p6 to an excavated pitch top, descended in November to another draughting dig near the base of a 10m drop. Site 1340 was explored to a choke after pitches of 12 and 15m.

A small cave (site 2753), about 200m east of Torca de Reguilón, was enlarged at a constriction part way in, but the cave finished after 50m.

In Ozana, small extensions were made in the often-visited Cueva de Jivero 2 and Anderal 2 (not explored since 1975). The latter was also found to be blocked by silt along the main route.

El Naso Area; West to Las Calzadillas

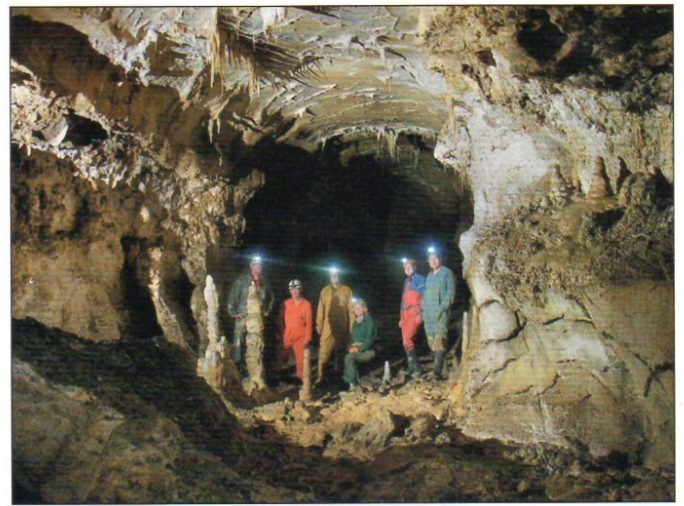
At Easter, Torcón de la Calleja Rebollo was tackled up as far as Girlies' Day Out and the aven noted in 2008 was climbed. The complex area was explored up 'lower active', 'higher active' and 'fossil' avens with the recommendation that a further 30m climb should be tackled up the 'higher active' section. Photos were taken in and around Cloud Nine and video filmed, revealing a very nice section of cave.

While these explorations were in progress, an open shaft (above Calleja Rebollo) close to a property being rented at Las Calzadillas by some members of the expedition was revealing a going system. Unfortunately, the initial excitement in site 3638 was short lived after crawls with chokes were discovered 55m down. Another open hole at Las Calzadillas, site 2923 first noted in 2008, also choked. This pot finished the day after exploring to 'a

balcony overlooking a large chamber'. The chamber was choked where a small trickle of water flowed into muddy boulders at 35m depth.

The spacious high level in Torca del Mostajo (part of the 20.8km-long Cubija System) heads northeast towards site 415 then appears to end in a boulder-floored chamber. Holes down just before the end were pushed in 1986 but not fully explored or surveyed. Another look this summer took explorers through a tight section into 'stompy passage' which heads south-east away from site 415 but towards, and on the same level as, the large and ancient passages in Cueva Cofresedo and Cueva del Sotarraña. Near the end, the "passage gets smaller but continues through into a chamber maybe 7m in diameter. We left a survey station with a note and surveyed out." There are "many leads left to check".

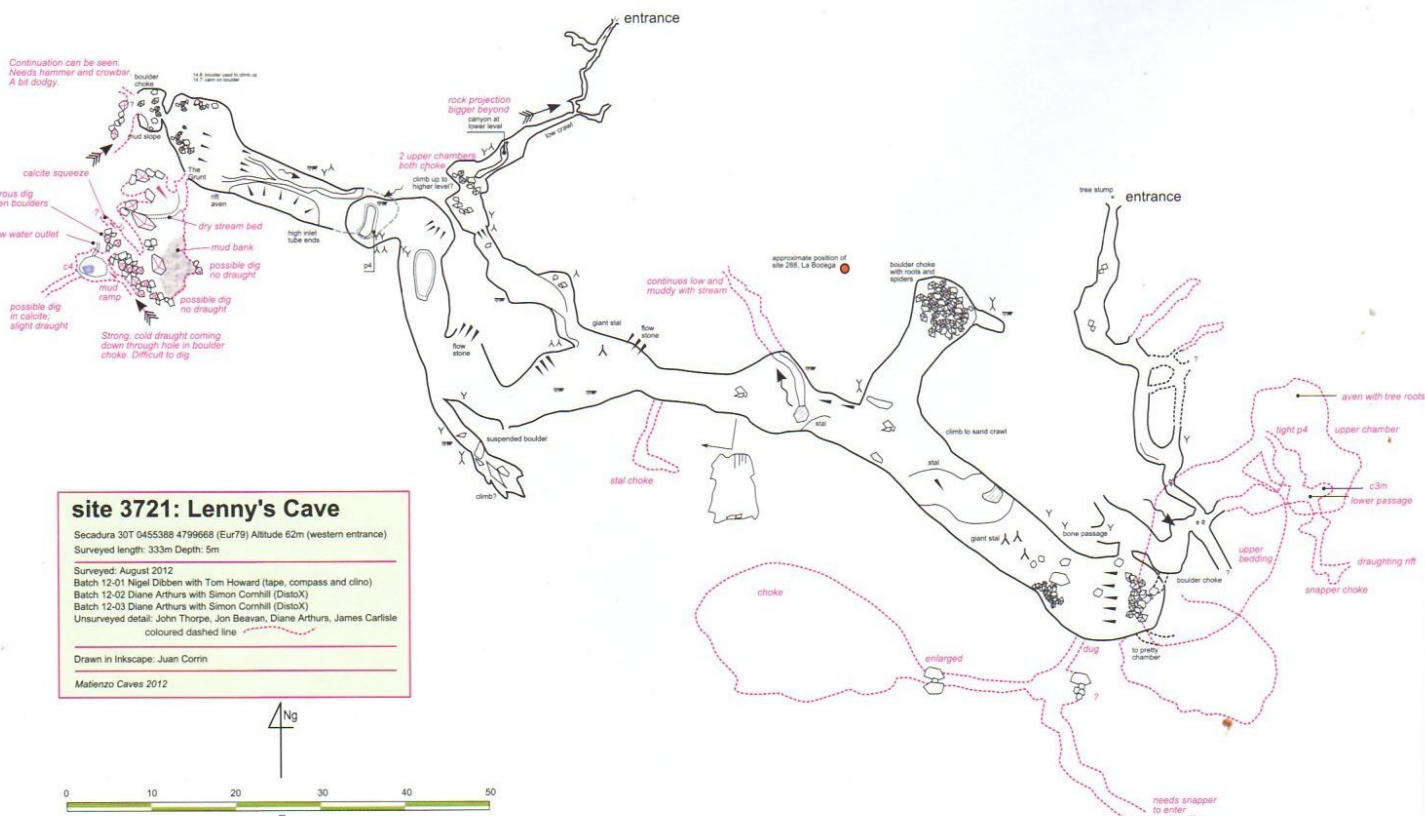
On the opposite side of the Cubija Valley, Simas del Picón (another fragment at the same altitude as the higher level in Mostajo) was investigated in a couple of places. North of the Music Box, a 1m wide hading rift was descended to a small draughting hole which was Disto'd down 50m. This appeared to link directly into passage in Torca del Regatón. The hole was enlarged but narrowed in again 15m down where it seemed that the Disto distance had been a very (un)lucky shot. The second work site was in Mega Bat



An early exploration team in Lenny's Cave at Secadura. Photo: Nigel Dibben

passage where the end was opened over Easter and summer to allow access to the roof of a possibly 5m-high chamber. This was later explored into a 6m-diameter chamber with no exit, although there is a draughting window in a side chamber. This appears to be close to the Picón Pie area of Cueva Morenuca. One explorer sustained head injuries when boulders fell on him while descending a short pitch near the base. He was treated at the Ramales Health Centre with four stitches and a large dressing. In the autumn, a team enlarged the route through. They also re-explored a French extension from 1994. After a re-bolted 15m climb the ASC Extension was entered then extended through a dig at the end into the Melted Wax Candle of Doom Chamber with a diameter of 12m and some roof and floor formations. The bolt climb was also bypassed with an excavated route through.

To the west, continued excavation in site 3622 revealed a small crawl into a



chamber. Subsequent exploration dropped three pitches to a depth of 59m and length of 122m. More ancient human remains have been found in site 3153 and the permit authority has been notified.

The Northeast Sector Including the Four Valleys System

Cueva Hoyuca was the focus for a number of persevering cavers at Easter. By concentrating on small sections of cave while re-surveying, smaller passages and leads are being investigated. Some may start small but recent finds have broken into large extensions. As well as substantial amounts of re-surveying at Easter, over 1.2km of new passages were surveyed in the Sima Baz area and off Diversion Chamber. In the summer, small surveyed extensions were made in Cueva Riaño in the south-east extremity. A push at the end of Cueva del Torno failed to find a route through to Cueva de Riaño. It is now probably best to have teams in both caves (with radios / radio location sets) if the Five Valleys System is to be realised.

Also in the summer, a number of underwater explorations were made in site 575, the western resurgence for some of the water in Cueva de Riaño. This site and a static pool 30m to the east were dived by Fred Winstanley in 1985 without success. This year, mostly in poor visibility, Dan Hibberts and John Taylor dived steeply down to -14m where the passage gently rises to -2m and continues. Over 200m were surveyed heading towards the downstream sump in Cueva Riaño, now about 180m away. Progress was stopped by lack of time and very poor visibility in slow water flow.

The Cueva Ruchano / Cueva Espada / site 3222 complex may finally have been completely explored and surveyed (although upstream could "go"). First explored in 1975 (when a Bronze Age sword was found in the underground stream) the system now has a pitch entrance and an old, high level series. The system is over 2.1km long and the through-trip connection from top sink to resurgence is through a tight, unstable, bouldery section. The site was dug at a muddy section that may reveal a separate streamway coming from the Cueva Llanío area.

In February four Danes spent four days in Cueva-Cubío del Llanío, pushing leads discovered on their autumn 2011 trip. Part way down the Crossroads Shaft, the West Wing was surveyed 60m to a choke. Across in the East Wing, the team dropped 13m down Eels Shaft to enter a passage that headed south through a grotto to break out into the side of a shaft with the passage continuing on the far side. Unfortunately, the eight-bolt traverse was not worth the effort as the passage soon closed in. The Eels Extensions produced 164m of hard won passage.

Three hundred metres north-west of Llanío, the awkward shaft 3451 was excavated down into (eventually) a stream



Cloud Nine in Torcón de la Calleja Rebollo. Photo: Carmen Smith

passage with inlets. Over 140m were surveyed to a depth of 22m and there are possibilities for extensions.

In August, in the Four Valleys System, at downstream Cueva Llueva, Chris Jewell dived in poor visibility for 120m to -15m depth following one wall. (Phil Papard was the last to dive here in 1977 and 1995. In both dives visibility was very poor and the way on was not found.)

Also in the Llueva valley, the walk-in entrance at site 3691 quickly gave way to crawls. One was excavated in a number of places adding about 80m to the length. The work continues. The entrance depression to Cueva Llueva has become a dump for tyres and road contractors' material. The protruding bed edges appear to be coated with limestone dust and the base has a layer of mud. Open holes in the depression were documented.

The water in Cueva Llueva resurges at Los Boyones about 1.5km away in the Secadura valley and it was near Los Boyones that a lot of time was spent in a number of caves in the summer. La Bodega was re-examined and a new entrance found which gave a small amount of new passage with a complete, probably modern, pot about 25cm diameter across the widest point. Simon Cornhill dived in site 124, Surgencia de las Crecidas extending it underwater to a boulder choke. Cueva 77A was also re-explored and pushed through to two new entrances.

The main summer find in Secadura was number 3721, dug into from the surface through a constricted entrance series. The cave was explored over a number of days through large passage on a north-west/south-east line. More than 330m was surveyed with extensions probably taking the length to over 500m. A larger entrance was engineered when another passage approached the surface and both ends of the cave have

possibilities for extension. The cave was named Lenny's Cave in memory and appreciation of Lenny Gee, a Derbyshire Caving Club member who had been part of the Matienzo Expeditions since the mid-seventies. He was particularly fond of digging and would have been delighted to have been involved in the excavation and exploration of site 3721.

Slightly further up the hill from the previous sites, cave 289 was re-explored and excavated up into a higher level chamber where possibilities for extension stopped.

On Muela / Mullir, site 3504 was explored through a tight section above a short drop to a choked chamber. Site 730 was explored down a p5 and p15 into a 30m diameter choked chamber. Site 811 was finally explored, 22 years after first documenting it. An 11m pitch dropped to an ascending passage and another 11m drop that choked. Cave 170 was surveyed along its 47m crawling length.

Northwest Sector

Shafts seen high above and to the south of Cobadal at Easter were all quickly written off when 3681 was explored to 25m choked depth, 3682 to 6m depth and 3683 to 3m. A large, open shaft at 500m altitude (site 3664, near Las Calzadillas) was descended to a depth of 20m before ending at a draughting dig.

After the main Easter expedition period finished, Jim Lister and Colin Hayward pushed upstream (in flood conditions) in Cave of the Wild Mare at Hornedo through Sump of the Wild Eels into the known chamber containing Sump 2 and a possible connection with Torca la Vaca. On the fifth day of diving, this time from the downstream sump at the base of the Buttermere Pitch in Torca la Vaca, the pair pushed through a large breakdown area to join with Wild Mare. Jim and Colin also

dived upstream at the bottom of the Buttermere pitch breaking through into the downstream Whitworth Series. They continued their campaign in the summer, diving the Upper Whitworth sump. This led to a large chamber and a 51m dive through Elephant Sump to Lake Bassenthwaite.

At Easter, Torca de Luna de Miel, a possible top entrance to Torca la Vaca, was stabilised and the bottom pitch cleared then descended to a choke 10m down. In the summer, an alternative descent at the bottom was not enlarged or descended as parts of the hole started to disintegrate, defying a polyurethane foam solution. Nearby, site 3668 turned out to be a 30m long, well decorated through trip, very tight in the middle. The very strongly draughting site 3719, 250m northeast of Honeymoon Pot, was opened up and descended. All leads in the 49m long, 12m deep hole either closed in or choked.

At Easter, in Cueva del Nabo, at the base of the La Gatuna depressions, the high-level passage above Sump 2 ended in "a very small stream passage where "no way on looks any good". Upstream Sump 2 was dived by Martyn Grayson and Dan Hibberts to -14.6m where a steep, sandy, tight incline needs digging.

At San Antonio, site 3703 was opened

up into about 20m of maze cave. In site 3283, Invisible Cave, Martyn Grayson and Dan Hibberts extended the system upstream at Easter by surveying nearly 250m beyond Sump 2 to Sump 6 and exploring a further 30m or so through to the start of Sump 8. Between Sumps 4 and 5, a large aven and possible passage were seen which might eventually be joined to nearby holes above, e.g. site 3011.

Among a number of sites found in the recently cleared woods around Maze Cave (site 3268), site 3660 was explored down a very loose p23 into a 20m long rift. Higher level routes choked.

Washing Machine Hole, at Ideopuerta, has an impressive entrance rift, which was excavated at Easter and surveyed for 134m down to 24m depth. In the summer this was re-excavated of silt and other washed-in debris. (This site will not be visited if there is any sign of rain.) Passage



Pete Smith and Juan Corrin at one of the choked ends of Lenny's Cave.
Photo: Phil Papard

to the south was surveyed and a traverse over a couple of pits revealed a third which is estimated at 50m deep and has yet to be descended.

The highlight for Easter in the north-west area was the exploration in site 2538, El Cubillón at Moncobe. Over 800m of new passages were surveyed, taking the length to 1584m. A number of avens were climbed but the hoped-for higher level passages have yet to be entered. A number

of leads remain; not least a downstream sump. The cave is in the middle of nowhere and has apparent potential in all directions. The leads were not pursued in the summer.

At Moncobe in the summer, Cueva de la Casa Vieja was opened up and explored. Pitches of 4m and 14m ended at a rift of boulders down to the head of an 85m drop. A 5m climb up at the base reached a 20m drop and a low, muddy and obviously often flooded section. Of interest is the unexplored passage that goes off on both sides of the main shaft, about 40m down.

Acknowledgements

Thanks must go again to Pablo and family at Bar Germán – using the restaurant as a base during the larger expeditions is greatly appreciated. The Ghar Parau Fund committee awarded £400 to Matienzo 2012. In applying for our annual permit, we are grateful for the support of the Federación Cantabra de Espeleología.

As usual, only the larger finds have been mentioned above. Nearly 6km of new passages were surveyed and further details with surveys and photographs can be found on the Matienzo Caves website. Follow the link at the top of the page to the 2012 finds. ■

matienzo.org.uk

MATIENZO CAVES – new passage surveyed in 2012

Cave	Name	Area	Previous Length (m)	New Length (m)	Extra Length (m)
0107	Hoyuca	Riaño	54456	55792	1336
2538	El Cubillón	Moncobe	761	1584	823
0048	S Vega System (Comellantes dive linked)	S Vega	32003	32951	560
0071	Cubija System (Mostajo)	Cubija	20446	20780	334
3721	Lenny's Cave	Secadura	0	333	333
3283	Invisible Cave	San Antonio	459	704	245
0075	Simas del Picón	Cubija	1441	1673	232
3420	Washing Machine Hole	Ideopuerta	0	226	226
0103	Cueva del Ruchano / Cueva de la Espada	Riaño	1974	2185	211
0575	Riaño resurgence (dive)	Riaño	0	209	209
3649	Cueva de Casa Vieja	Moncobe	0	165	165
3638	shaft	Las Calzadillas	0	152	152
3451	shaft	Riaño	0	144	144
767–2889	Wild Mare (594m) – Vaca (14512m) joined	Hornedo	15106	15271	165
3622	cave	N Vega	0	122	122
0733	Cueva Vallina	Arredondo	31654	31742	88
2923	shaft	Las Calzadillas	0	58	58
3691	cave	Llueva	0	52	52
0811	shaft	Muela	0	50	50
1340	shaft	S Vega	0	50	50
2753	cave	Seldesuto	0	50	50
3664	shaft	Ideopuerta	0	50	50
3719	shaft	Hornedo	0	49	49
0170	cave	Muela	0	47	47
3504	cave	Muela	0	35	35
0017	Jivero 2	Ozana	250	284	34
3645	cave	Hornedo	0	24	24
Total new passage surveyed					5844

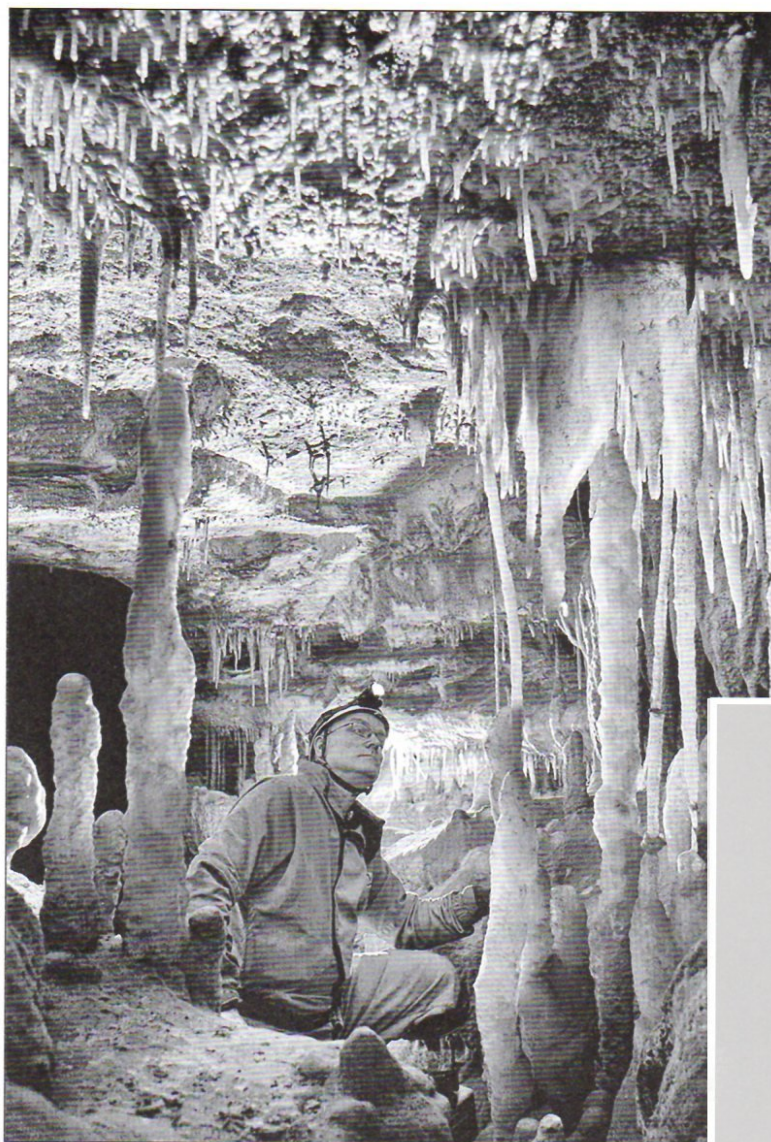


Photo Salon 2013

Monochrome Print Winners (selection)

Clockwise from left

Formations in roof tube in
Torca La Vaca
(Andy Pringle, Merit)

Billy No-Mates
(Nicky Bayley, Merit)

Grotte de l'Ascension,
France (Chris Howes,
Distinction)

Vertical view in Xinu Attic –
China (Robbie Shone,
Winner)

