

MCG NEWS

Number 364 November 2010



Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group

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ESPAÑA ESPECIAL!

CONTENTS:

1. **MCG Andalucia 2010**
2. **Christmas Party**
3. **AGM Advance Notice**
4. **Lava Tubing On Tenerife**
5. **Quiz**
6. **Library Additions**
7. **From the Past**
8. **Caption Competition**
9. **A Milestone For Ron**
10. **General News**
11. **Committee Post
Nomination Form**
12. **Bookings & Calendar**

Photo: John Crowslev in Sima de Cacao. Ed Waters

EDITORIAL

This bumper issue of the Newsletter has a definite Spanish flavour. It includes a complete report on the Group's highly successful summer expedition to Andalucia and a write up of a superb trip to Tenerife in June that Hayley and I were lucky enough to be invited on. As well as this Tony Knibbs has contributed a quiz, hopefully people will enjoy this, and Tony can make it a regular feature. To spice things up a little, I am prepared to offer a small prize to the first person to contact me with the correct answers to all of the questions.

I have to apologise for the late issuing of the paper copies of the last Newsletter. This was due to an unexpectedly busy time at work that saw me exiled to Falmouth for most of August and September. Hopefully I am back in control now, and the paper copies of this issue will arrive only shortly after the electronic ones. These events have also unfortunately delayed the appearance of this issue, for which I can only apologise once more.

Distribution of the electronic copies via email is becoming more and more difficult as my ISP identifies the outgoing email as spam and refuses to send. To get around this takes a lot of work and an unfeasibly large number of emails. This added to the number of "bounced" messages means that I would like to see the Newsletter hosted on the website for members to download. (note that I send out the Newsletter to the address that appears on the membership list, if you do not supply Karen with the correct address, you won't get the Newsletter). I would be very interested to hear what you all think of this approach.

I hope that you enjoy this issue, and as always please keep writing things for the next one!

Ed Waters



Ed the Editor pleased to be out of Sima de Villaluenga (see the Spain expedition report). Photo: Hayley Clark.

MCG ANDALUCIA 2010

Introduction

Almost since he first joined the MCG, Miguel Tome waxed lyrical about caving "back home". Whilst up to our eyeballs in mud and freezing water digging away in Battery Swallet he could be heard to exclaim, "There is no mud in the caves of Andalucia..." Finally in September 2010, he managed to cajole a group of MCG cavers over to Spain for two weeks to sample the delights of his caves.

A group of seven drove down to Andalucia in Biff's minibus, taking the ferry from Portsmouth to Santander. The crossing takes 24 hours, followed by about 12 hours driving to reach Villaluenga del Rosario on the Sierra Grazalema.

Sierra Grazalema

The first week of the expedition was to be based at the Escuela de Espeleologia in Villaluenga del Rosario. We arrived in the minibus at about 11pm, to meet Chris, Russ and Kev who had flown to Malaga and hired a car. Having arrived the night before, they had planned to stay in the Motel at Venta el Navasillo where we were to be based in the second week. Unfortunately the Motel was locked and they could raise no answer. Unable to get into their accommodation, they drove down the road to the only "establishment" with signs of life, the Portobello. Realising that alcohol was not the only pleasure on offer, and that the rooms came partially occupied they had decided to try their luck in Villaluenga!

Our arrival coincided with the local Fiesta. Though this meant that the road up to the caving school was blocked by the fire brigade, it brought compensations. The village square was alive with music and dancing, with beer and tapas too it was quite a welcome.

Our accommodation at the Centro de Tecnificacion Deportiva de Espeleologia (Centre of sport technical training of caving) was simply superb. The building simply does not compare to a British caving hut. It is a four-storey affair, with a number of bunkrooms, classrooms, dining area and best of all an internal SRT practice area up the central stairwell. Add in that breakfast and dinner are cooked for you, and a good picnic lunch can be provided it is almost perfect for under €30 a day. Added to this, most of the caves are accessible with only a short drive, and/or walk.

Sima Pozuelo I

This cave, and the nearby Pozuelo II, both lie in a closed valley not far from Montejacque. Due to their proximity and relative simplicity they provided an ideal introduction to Andalusian caving, with one major caveat. This is due to recent intensive farming in the closed valley, leading to large quantities of organic matter entering the two caves. This manifests itself in a layer of brown slime on all rock surfaces, which makes the caves incredibly slippery. This unfortunate state of affairs severely detracts from what would otherwise be highly enjoyable trips.

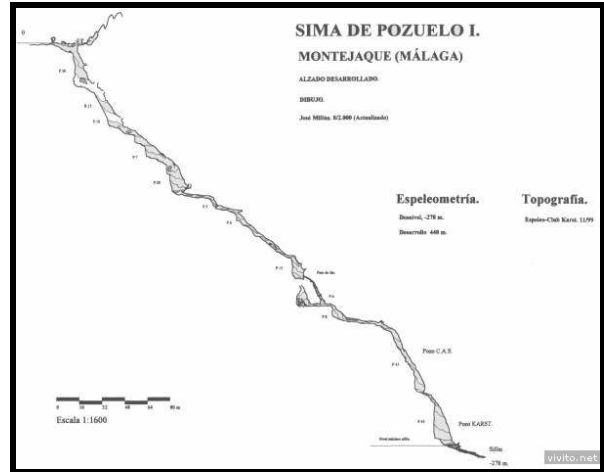


Buddy (right) & Biff (left) traverse out to the entrance pitch, Sima de Pozuelo I. Photo: Ed Waters.

Sima de Pozuelo I has a very scenic entrance, followed by a series of small pitches (up to about 20m deep) reaching a chamber at about 140m depth. This chamber shows obvious signs of floodwater backing up to some depth. A little up the wall of this chamber a squeeze leads to a steeply descending passage leading to further pitches. However, as this was very much a warm up trip, we did not descend beyond the squeeze.



Buddy in a short section of horizontal passage, Sima de Pozuelo I. Photo: Ed Waters.



Vertical section of Sima de Pozuelo I after Speleo Club Karst November 1999.

Sima Pozuelo II

The entrance to this cave is far less impressive than its near neighbour. A short vertical constriction drops into a small chamber where the pitches begin. Essentially the entire trip is on rope, with 10 pitches to a depth of 160m. The largest pitch being 25m.

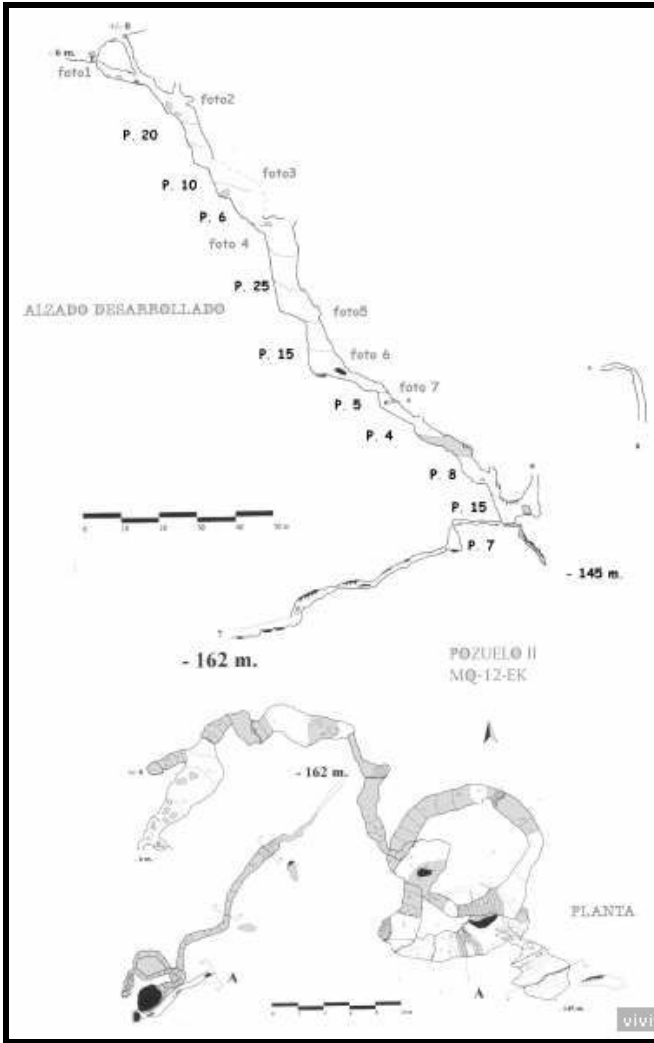


Miguel in the entrance to Sima de Pozuelo II. Photo: Ed Waters.

The only real obstacle being the tight and awkward top of the 3rd pitch that caused some entertainment for the larger members of the party. The end of the cave is supposed to be a sump, but Tim managed to push a tight crawl for some distance at the bottom without finding the sump or a definite end.



Russ Porter descending the third pitch in Sima de Pozuelo II. Photo: Ed Waters.



Survey of Sima de Pozuelo II (source unknown).

Sima de Villaluenga

This enormous chasm lies only a few minutes walk from the caving school where we stayed in Villaluenga. The huge open pot was visible from the school, and is quite clearly the main drain for the entire closed valley of Villaluenga. A footpath leads along the stream to the entrance, where there are various information boards about the cave.

A few yards inside the vast entrance arch the floor drops away into an awe-inspiring pitch of some 50m+. Not only is it deep, but the walls on the far side are only just visible. The cave is permanently rigged by the caving club Alta Ruta from Jerez who are pushing the cave at present¹, however the traverse line to the main hang is not rigged to prevent the curious from placing themselves in danger.

¹ Since the expedition, Miguel has heard that this group have successfully passed Sump 1 in this cave to reach the second sump. The first time this has been achieved for 15 years.



Chris Binding rigging the entrance pitch, Sima de Villaluenga. Photo: Ed Waters.

We were told that 15m of rope would suffice for this traverse line, in fact 25m is closer to the mark. We decided to use our own ropes instead of the schools. Care also has to be taken to prevent tangling the rope with the large power cable currently rigged down the cave in order to run pumps for draining the sumps.

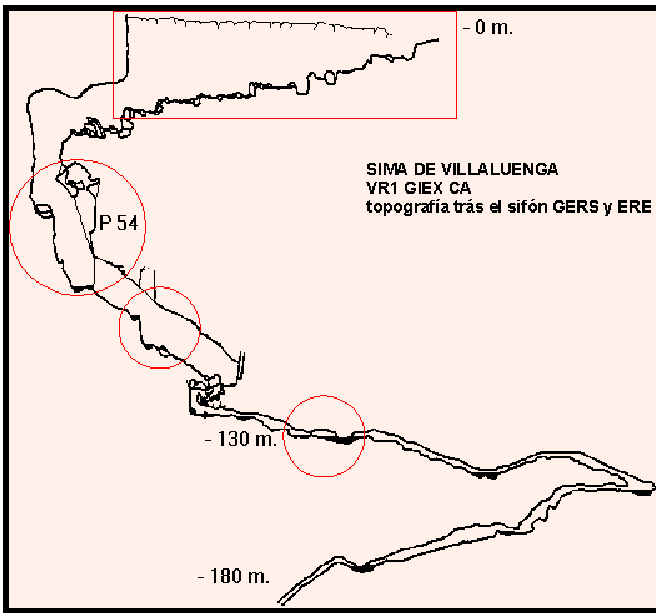
We rigged two routes down the initial part of the cave. From the top of the entrance pitch we rebelayed about 30m down at a ridge of rock. This is known as "The Horse" as it is necessary to sit astride the rock to pass the rebelay. From here two routes diverge, meeting up in a large chamber about 50m below.

The "normal" route follows a traverse out to the left, to drop down a corner of the shaft via a series of rebelays. Alternatively, clambering over the horse leads to a fine free hanging 50m pitch.

From the large chamber a further series of pitches drops to the sump. At the time of our visit this sump had recently been passed to find another sump that local cavers were in the process of pumping out. We were advised not to pass through the first sump due to the risk of bad air. Above the sump a series of fixed ropes ascend to some recently discovered passages and avens. Tim pursued these to the bitter end, only to discover himself on the surface, halfway up a cliff and upstream of the main entrance!



Hayley ascending the 50m pitch, Sima de Villaluenga. Photo: Ed Waters.



Survey of Sima de Villaluenga, After GIEX.

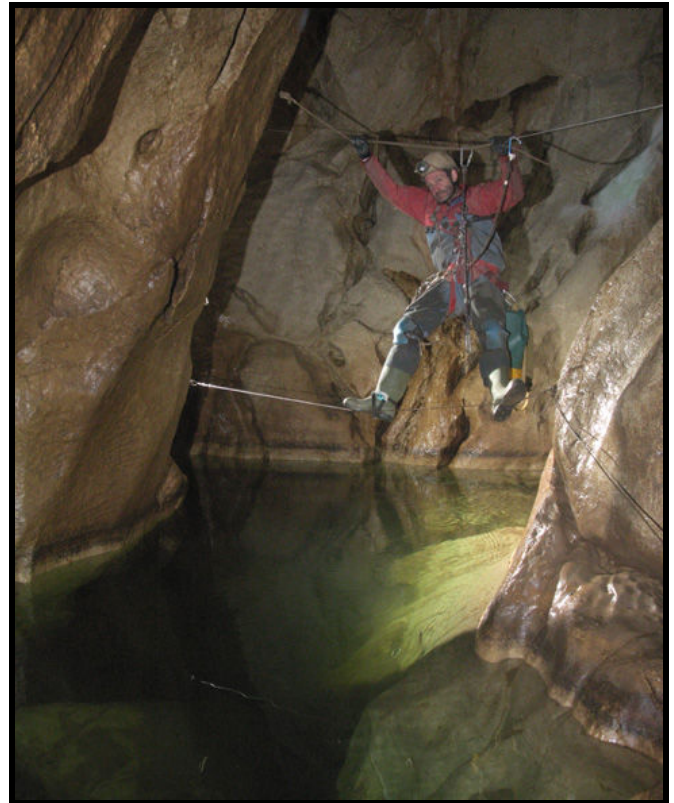
Sima Republicano

This cave is another example of a drain for a closed valley. It lies in the closed valley between Villaluenga and that at Montejacque (containing the two Pozuelo caves). In order to get to the cave it is necessary to drive a considerable distance off road.



John Crowsley (left) and Kev Speight (right) in the entrance to Sima Republicano. Photo: Ed Waters.

The entrance lies at the end of the obvious stream. Care needs to be taken when traversing over the entrance to Sima Cabito that lies in the streambed. A fixed chain is provided for this. For our visit the cave was fully equipped by local cavers, with the exception of the entrance pitch. This was a major relief, since the cave is steep rather than vertical and requires a huge amount of tackle to rig the many traverses and short pitches. There are also a substantial number of wire traverses for which steel cowstail karabiners are essential.



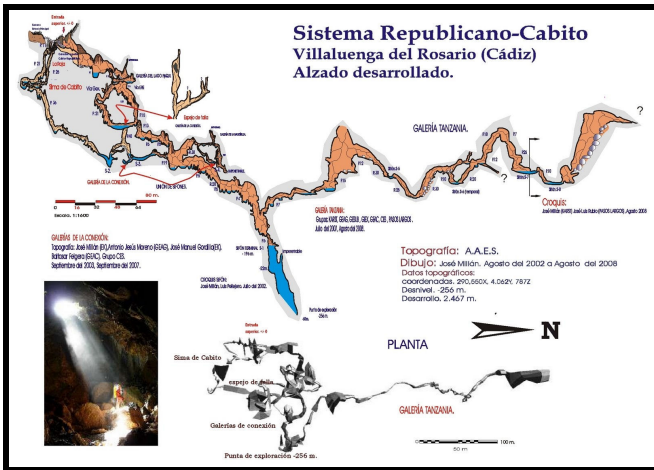
Biff on a wire traverse over deep water, Sima Republicano. Photo: Ed Waters.

This is a fantastic cave, both visually and as a sporting challenge. The cave slopes steeply down to a deep sump at almost 200m depth. This involves a large number of small pitches and traverses over deep water in an environment of superbly sculpted rock.



Biff in the passage leading towards the sump. Photo: Ed Waters.

Recently a new series of passages have been discovered by traversing over the pitch leading down to the sump. These passages are well decorated and very wet in places, including several ducks.



Survey of the Cabito-Republicano System (After AAES).

Sima de Cacao

This cave lies high on the mountainside above Villaluenga, about an hour's steep walk up a small footpath leaving the town near the bullring. The entrance is easily identified by the stainless steel memorial plaque to a caver killed by incorrectly threading their descender.

The descent route starts with a squeeze though boulders that must be done on the rope as it opens directly onto an 85m pitch. Note that the rebelay bolts just inside are installed onto a loose boulder and should not be used! Instead we used a deviation followed by two rebelay and a pendulum to reach the large gallery leading off the shaft at about 60m below the surface.



Kev Speight ascends through the constricted entrance to Sima de Cacao. Photo: Ed Waters.

From the pendulum a sloping pitch drops down into a huge gallery that slopes down steeply to a further pitch and more large passage. Finally a well-broken pitch/handline drops into the final chamber.

It should be noted that the entire passage from the pendulum down is superbly decorated with enormous sparkling formations and great care should be taken to avoid further damage.



Biff (foreground) and Miguel in the huge main passage of Sima de Cacao. Photo: Ed Waters.

As stunning as the main passage is, the final chamber is simply awe-inspiring. The chamber is huge, and formations of every kind can be found in all sorts of odd corners around it. A photographer could spend years in here!



The amazing final chamber of Sima de Cacao. Photo: Ed Waters.

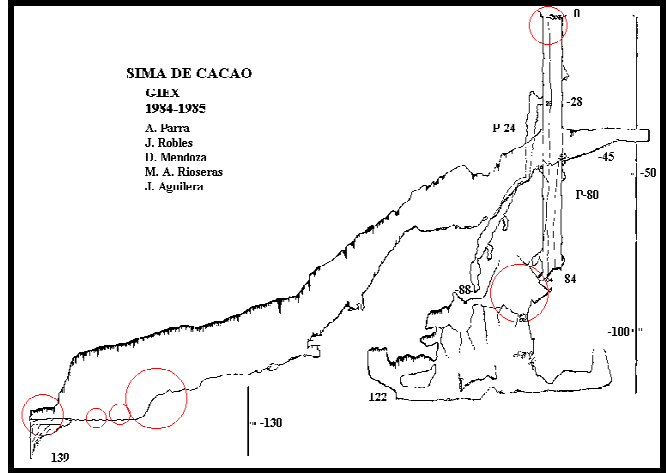


Kev Speight admires helictites, Sima de Cacao. Photo: Ed Waters.

At the bottom of the terminal chamber is a narrow drafting passage that would be a very worthwhile dig site. This will be an objective for future visits.



Tim Francis in Sima de Cacao. Photo: Ed Waters.



Survey of Sima de Cacao after GIEX.



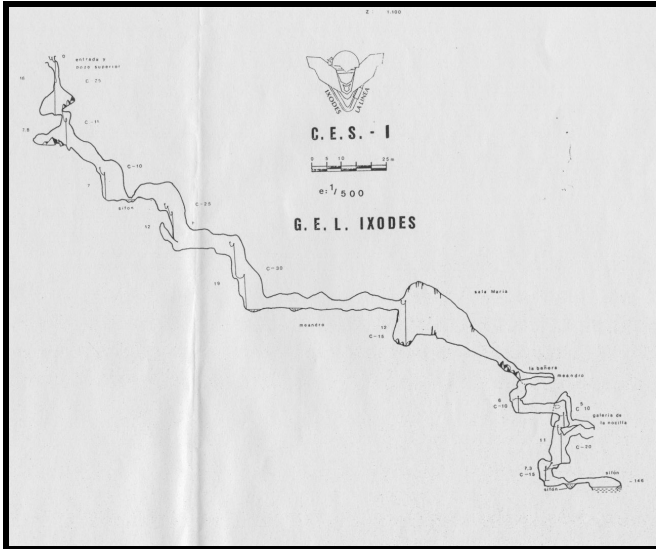
Chris Binding ascends the 85m entrance pitch of Sima de Cacao. Photo: Ed Waters.

Cueva de la Pileta

A small group visited this show cave on our day off. The cave is famous for its prehistoric paintings and well worth a visit. We were somewhat pleasantly surprised to find a very old MCG sticker amongst a large collection of caving club badges behind the ticket desk. This was the only UK club so represented. I wonder who left this and when? Was it from the previous MCG Sima GESM trip in 1988?

Sima CES 1

This cave lies another half hour's walk up the hill from Sima de Cacao. The cave consists of a series of small pitches in an active streamway. The cave has recently been extended beyond the survey shown, and includes a few squeezes and ducks. As well as being a fine sporting trip, the cave has considerable potential in both length and depth for further exploration.



Sumidero del Guante

This cave is formed at an active sink at an altitude of over 1600m above sea level. This sink is the only drainage for a large closed valley surrounded by some of the highest peaks in the area. As such it holds considerable potential for new discoveries.

The cave was first explored by IXODES la Linea [including our own Miguel – Ed] who dug open a 4-inch diameter hole at the sink leading to a passage formed in a huge boulder choke down to a depth of 45m. Subsequently another entrance was engineered providing a vertical descent to the end of the cave.

This year the sink entrance was found to have collapsed, barring access to the cave. The pitch entrance was found to be open however. Below the well-decorated pitch, the upstream passage (leading towards the sink) was found to be blocked with boulders up to 3m in diameter.

At the lowest point of the cave is a boulder choke piled against one solid wall. This obstacle has thwarted all previous attempts to pass it. It was hoped that by using some "advanced Mendip digging techniques" that a breakthrough could be achieved. Though a breakthrough was not achieved, about 15m of progress was made down through the choke. Prospects at this cave are very good indeed, and our Spanish friends were very impressed with the digging techniques demonstrated here. Equipment has been provided to the Spanish cavers to allow them to continue to dig this site, and hopes are high for significant extension here next year.



Formations in Sumidero del Guante. Photo: Miguel Tome.

Cueva de Hundidero – Cueva del Gato

This classic traverse is a must for any caver visiting the Grazalema area. The trip involves following the river all the way from the sink at Cueva de Hundidero to the resurgence at Cueva del Gato. In total this comprises about 4.8km of generally aqueous fun, involving a number of short pitches, jumps into deep water and lots of swimming.



Biff in the Cueva del Hundidero Entrance. Photo: Ed Waters.

As well as the sporting fun, there is much of interest to the industrial archaeologist due to the remains of futile attempts to harness the river to make electricity (including the huge dam outside the sink). These efforts included building a walkway for donkeys through almost the entire cave!



Chris Binding in Cueva del Hundidero. Photo: Ed Waters.



La Plaza de Toros (the Bull Ring) in Cueva del Gato. Photo: Ed Waters.



Buddy admires the remains of a cable bridge, part of the donkey walkway. Cueva del Hundidero. Photo: Ed Waters.

On top of all this fun and archaeology, the trip also includes some huge passages and chambers, and the odd formation or two as well. Combine this with a very salubrious restaurant and bar at the Cueva del Gato end, it is almost the perfect caving trip!

It should be noted that this trip should not be underestimated. Though it is immense fun, the swims in particular are very serious for anyone but very strong swimmers. Wetsuits and buoyancy aids are highly recommended. At the time of our visit, some of the pitches were equipped with ropes of dubious vintage. A couple of 30m ropes are sufficient to rig for pull-through from the in-situ resin anchors. All of the traverses are well equipped with robust chains for protection.



La Gran Estalagmita (the Great Stalagmite), Cueva del Gato. Photo: Ed Waters.

Sierra de las Nieves

At the end of the first week we relocated from Villaluenga to the motel at Navacillo on the Sierra de las Nieves range. The motel provided twin rooms along with breakfast and evening meal. During the relocation we met up with local cavers to pick up the various permits and sort out activities for the week.

Most of the caves visited lie high up in the mountains, and a long drive (about an hour) up the winding track to the top of the mountain, through two locked gates was required. The wardens for the national park take their job very seriously indeed, and we were challenged by them on every trip up and down the mountain.

Sima de las Lepiotas

This was to be our introduction to caving in the Sierra de las Nieves. The cave was discovered by the club Ixodes la Linea in 1999, a certain Miguel Tome being the first into the cave! The cave is named after the striking mushroom-like formations that adorn the walls of the second pitch.

The cave lies only a few hundred metres from the car park at the top of Sierra de las Nieves, the entrance being a narrow shaft with a small spiky shrub² growing from it.

This 10m shaft lands in a tiny chamber with a small window leading out onto the second pitch, which lands on a wide well decorated ledge at the top of the third pitch. This lands in a pleasant chamber with well calcited boulder blockages preventing further progress.

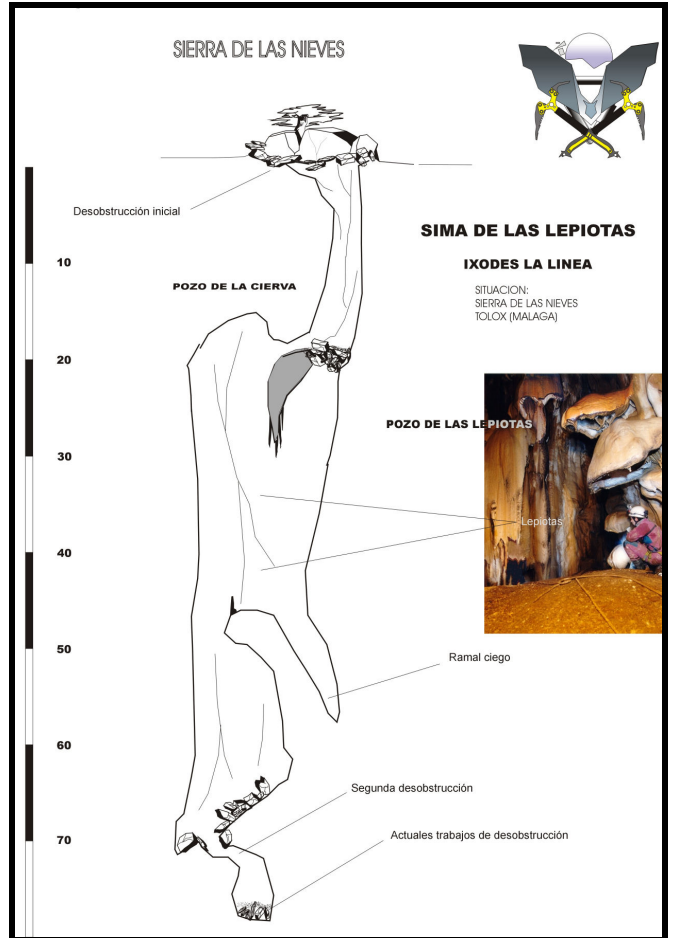
An 8m climb was made up the wall of the terminal chamber to what appeared to be further passage, but this turned out to be nothing more than an alcove.

Close to Sima de las Lepiotas is another narrow shaft. This was descended to about 12m depth, where an earth choke and the skeleton of a goat prevent further progress.



Kev Speight descends into Sima de las Lepiotas. Photo: Ed Waters.

² This shrub, a type of fir called the Pinsapo is native to Morocco and the only places it can be found in Europe is in the Sierra Grazalema and Sierra de las Nieves.



Survey of Sima de las Lepiotas after Ixodes la Linea.

Sima Erotica

The cave was supposed to be about 45 minutes walk from the car park at the top of Sierra de las Nieves...

In fact it took our group almost 3 hours to reach the cave in the hottest part of the day. The entrance to the cave lies on top of a ridge, and is marked by a conspicuous gendarme that lies close enough to the entrance to have the hang bolts in it.

The rather fine 27m entrance pitch lands in a small chamber. The route we were expecting lies down a narrow crawl, with a very awkward 3m pitch. We failed to find sensible belays for this pitch, possibly due to an attack of apathy brought on by the epic walk in. However, there was another obvious way on not shown on the survey immediately at the bottom of the entrance pitch. This was descended to a narrow and very sharp series of pitches festooned with small calcite formations, and probably reached a similar depth to the bottom of the 53m pitch on the traditional route.



Chris Binding descends into Sima Erótica. Photo: Ed Waters.



Russ Porter ascending a tight pitch, Sima Erótica. Photo: Ed Waters.



Hayley descends the 27m entrance pitch of Sima Erótica. Photo: Ed Waters.



Survey of Sima Erótica after GES de la SEM.

Sima de las Perlas

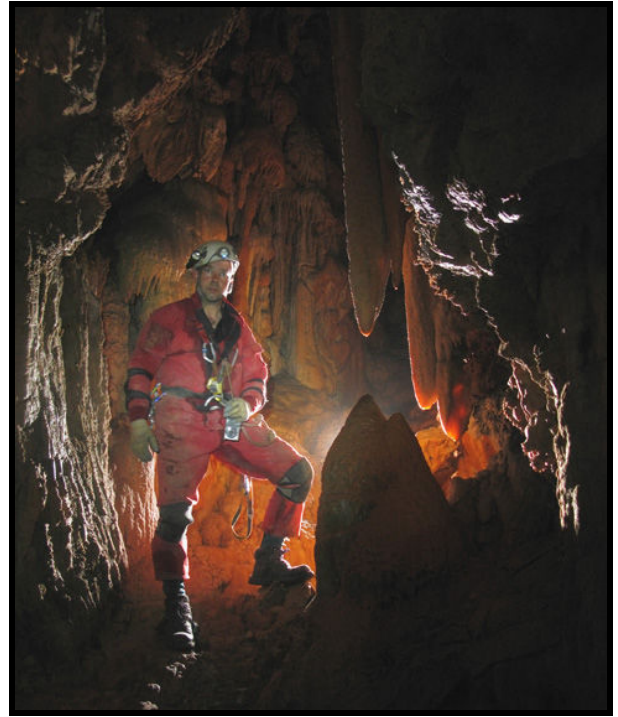
This cave lies about 1 hour's walk from the road a couple of kilometres away from the motel at Navacillo. The entrance is conveniently located in the shade of the only tree for several kilometres.



Hayley derigging Sima de las Perlas. Photo: Ed Waters

The top of the entrance pitch is sloping and provided with liberal quantities of ammunition. Much care is required to minimise the amount of debris dislodged, and to ensure that people below are well out of harms way.

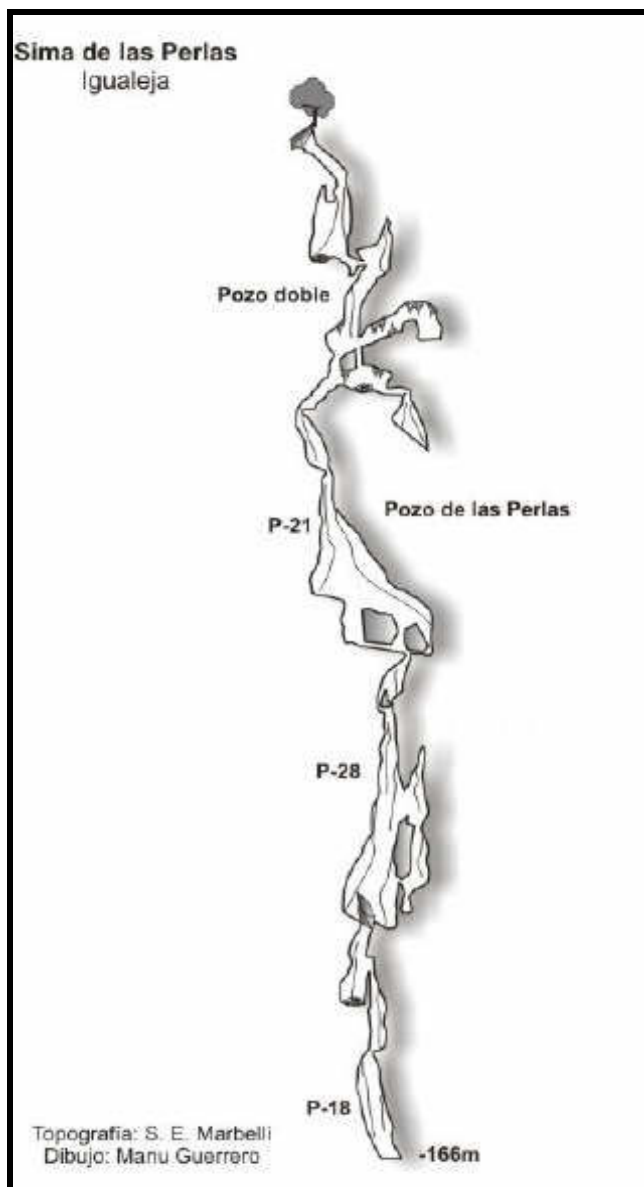
Below this pitch is a series of well decorated chambers separated by short, narrow pitches and squeezes. At the base of the 21m Pozo de las Perlas the cave changes character radically. From here the decoration ends and the rock becomes extremely friable. Due to the distinct unpleasantness of this, our trip was curtailed here.



Chris Binding in Sima de las Perlas. Photo: Ed Waters.



Impressive panoramic photo of the base of the second pitch, Sima de las Lepiotas. Photo: Paco Hoyos



Survey of Sima de las Perlas after SE Marbella.

Sima GESM

One of the primary objectives of the expedition had been to aid local cavers with exploration work in Sima GESM. This is the most famous cave in Andalucia, as well as being both the deepest (1,101m) and longest (currently about 12km explored) cave in the region.

A full description of the cave is impossible to provide in this Newsletter whilst keeping it to a manageable size! However, a trip to the bottom of the cave takes 3 days (there and back) with the cave pre-rigged.

We had met with Manu Guerrero who coordinates all exploration activities in the cave. He explained that he needed a permanent survey station installing at – 996m at Lago Ere, and some equipment retrieving from one of the deep camps. Due to the limited space at the camps, the trip was limited to three people.

John Crowsley, Tim Francis and Kev Speight held the group's end up by volunteering to carry out this work.

The trip took them below the magic 1km depth over three days. The trip involved visiting passages only recently found, and it is fair to say that exploration potential is still fantastic, though the logistics of pushing trips have become horrendous. With three days required just to get to/from the interesting parts of the cave, realistically a week underground is required to achieve significant discoveries. As a consequence there are currently few pushing trips into this cave each season.

The cave includes a bit of everything, squeezes, big pitches and formations and is highly recommended as a sporting trip, if the correct permissions can be obtained.

Sumidero de Rascayu. (Brother's dig)

This cave is a long-standing dig of IXODES and is located at the major stream sink of a closed depression a couple of kilometres from the Motel at Navacillo.

The entrance to the cave is located in a 15m diameter depression, and a 6m abseil down a cascade is required to reach it. The cave is active for most of the year, but was completely dry at the time of our visit in September this year.

Once inside the cave there is a choice of routes. The first a series of tight vertical squeezes, the second a pitch. Both descend into the main chamber, where the water disappears into the final rift.

Once again "advanced Mendip digging techniques" were applied to boulders in this rift. This rift yielded a tight 4m descent, meeting an important inlet. More digging at this point opened up about 10m more passage that unfortunately looped back to the chamber before the "Final Rift".

In total the cave was extended by about 25m, including a new "round trip". However, a breakthrough is confidently expected at the next opportunity to dig at this site.



Team MCG (left to right) Miguel Tome, "Buddy" Williams, Chris Binding, John Crowsley, Motel Waitress (front), Hayley Clark, Ed Waters, "Biff" Frith, Kev Speight, Russ Porter & Tim Francis. Photo: Hayley Clark.

Expedition Members

Tim	Francis	MCG
John	Crowsley	MCG
Miguel	Tome	MCG / IXODES
Ed	Waters	MCG
Hayley	Clark	MCG
Kev	Speight	MCG
Russ	Porter	MCG
"Buddy"	Williams	MCG
"Biff"	Frith	MCG
Christopher	Binding	UBSS / CSS / SCG
Paco	Hoyos	Sociedad Excursionista de Huelva (SEH) & IXODES
Nuria	Fernandez	IXODES
Pedro	Lara	IXODES
Miguel		GAOT
Agustin		Grupo de Espeleologia de Montejacque
Javi	Jimenez	GAOT
Jose	Luis	Sociedad Excursionista de Huelva (SEH)

Some Notes on Caving in Andalucia

Firstly caving is a controlled activity in Spain. Failure to obtain the correct permits for tourist caving trips or exploration could land you in serious trouble. Luckily Miguel sorted all of this out for us. Be warned, our permits were checked more than once on this trip!

Most of the caves we visited were well equipped with bolt belays for SRT. A few of these were resin type anchors and old style 8mm spits. However the vast majority were 10mm stainless steel stud anchors (through bolts) which leave a male thread sticking out of the rock. Some of these had hangers fitted, but more often than not we had to install them. This requires a good number of 10mm bolt hangers and the nuts required to secure them. In turn this requires a 17mm spanner to tighten the nuts.

The caves tended to be very warm. Most of us wore thermal underwear rather than full weight furry suits, and lightweight oversuits. For some of the caves a cotton boiler suit would be more comfortable.

Miguel Tome & Ed Waters**MCG CHRISTMAS PARTY & BUFFET**

SATURDAY 4TH DECEMBER @ NORDRATCH COTTAGE

COST £8 PER ADULT

LIMITED SPACE – PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF YOU ARE ATTENDING
social@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

THERE WILL BE SOME BEER @£2 DONATION PER BOTTLE

Jenny Plumb (Social Secretary)

ADVANCE NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2011

The MCG AGM will be held at the Hunters Lodge on Sat 26 March 2011 at 10.00 am. Nominations for Office and proposals to change the Constitution and Rules must be submitted in writing by first class post to the Hon. Secretary's home address (Clevelys, Upper Radford, Paulton, Bristol BS39 7PU) with the signatures of full members proposing and seconding at least 25 days before the meeting (28th February). A nomination for Office must be accompanied by a signed agreement to stand for election by the nominee. Nominations are sought for all posts. Be advised that both Mike Richardson and Dough Harris will be standing down. Job Descriptions of all Committee posts will be available from Bob Templeman, Librarian Recorder in due course.

Mike Richardson, MCG Hon Secretary

Note: The committee post nomination form is included on Page 21 of this Newsletter.

LAVA TUBING IN TENERIFE

Back in June, Hayley and I gate crashed what has become a regular Wessex Cave Club holiday to Tenerife. Under the guidance of Andy Morse and Les Williams, they have got to know both the caves and local cavers on the island very well over a large number of visits over the last ten years or so. Knowing our interest in volcanic caves, Les had invited us to join them.

For those who are unaware, Tenerife boasts the longest lava tube caves outside of Hawaii. Unfortunately access to many of the best caves is severely restricted for conservation reasons. However, Andy and Les's contacts ensured that we would be able to gain access to many of these sites. As with the MCG Spain expedition, caving without the correct paperwork can end you in serious trouble.

As well as the caves Tenerife has some spectacular volcanic scenery

Cuevas Samara

These caves lay conveniently right next to the road between the airport and our accommodation. This allowed us a brief introduction to Tenerife's caves. Cuevas Samara consists of a number of linked caves, Les and Andy's knowledge came to the fore in showing us a couple of entrances that are deliberately obscured with boulders. An hour or so's fun was had clambering into each of the entrances and exploring the couple of hundred metres of cave passage, some of it quite large at 3m high and wide. In a couple of places the passage is well decorated with spiky sharp splash stalactites.

Cuevas de San Marcos & Cueva de Punto Blanco

The first real day of caving was to be down on the coast, in the sea cliffs above the town of San Marcos. The caves are located along a small footpath that follows the bottom of the cliff from the edge of town, with climbs up to each cave. We walked past the climb to Cuevas de San Marcos (aided with a strategically placed scaffold bar) and headed round to Cueva de Punto Blanco first.

The 3m climb was awkward enough for us to rig a ladder for the return. Apparently this had been "rigged" with a dodgy wooden ladder in previous years.

Though only a short cave, of perhaps 250m in total length, it is well worth a visit. In particular it has some fine passage forms, and a superb lava cascade complete with eroded rafted block at the top of it. We also took time to crawl round and look out of the second entrance, about 15m up the cliff face.



Dave Cooke (Wessex CC) climbs up into Cueva de Punto Blanco. Photo: Ed Waters.



Hayley with a finely eroded rafted block, Cueva de Punto Blanco. Photo: Ed Waters.

Heading back round the cliff we then clambered up into the far more extensive Cuevas de San Marcos. The low entrance crawl soon opens out into a fine large passage, including some impressive lateral benches. The cave contains about 2.5km of passage with several oxbow loops, and a passage climbing to a second (gated) entrance. Perhaps the finest feature in the cave is a lava pool upon which a thin surface layer had solidified before it drained. The unsupported skin then dropped back into the pool, frozen in time.



The drained lava pool, Cuevas de San Marcos. Photo: Ed Waters.



Hayley in Cueva de Hoya de San Felipe. Photo: Ed Waters.

Cueva de Hoya de San Felipe

The low entrance to this cave lies alongside the hard shoulder of the dual carriageway through Icod de los Vinos. The cave was discovered during construction of the road, and surveyors from the civil engineers mapped about 800m of passage. However, there is considerably more passage in this cave. We surveyed another 500m or so beyond a rather nasty squeeze, and there is more still to do.



Andy Morse negotiates a squeeze in Cueva de Hoya de San Felipe. This leads directly onto a 2m drop, which adds a little spice! Photo: Ed Waters.

The cave is fairly sporting for a lava tube, involving some interesting squeezes and climbs in addition to some fine large passages. Route finding presents more than a few challenges too, as high level crawls are used to bypass blockages between sections of a fine large trunk passage. In places the trunk passage displays a superb lava trench in its floor, akin to a keyhole passage shape in a limestone cave.

Cueva del Viento (Cueva del Sobrado – Cueva de los Breveritas Traverse)

The Cueva del Viento system is the longest lava tube cave outside of Hawaii, with over 17km of passage mapped to date. The system has evolved through the linking of a number of formally separate caves namely Cueva de los Breveritas, Cueva del Sobrado and Cueva de los Piquettes. It is a complex labyrinthine system descending steeply underneath the town of Icod de los Vinos. Indeed it manages a respectable “depth” (vertical range) of 560m.

Due to the notoriety of the cave (it was for a time considered the longest lava tube in the world) the cave has suffered much damage from careless visitors. For this reason the Breveritas section is gated a few hundred metres from the entrance. As the Sobrado section has been developed as a show cave, this too is gated meaning that the vast majority of the system is only accessible with the correct permission – which is rarely given. However, due to the contacts built up between the Wessex group and the local Benishares club (who also run the show cave) we were very privileged to be allowed to carry out the traverse between Cueva del Sobrado and Cueva de los Breveritas. The trip had to be made after the show cave had closed for the day, so we arranged to meet the Benishares group at 6pm. It was clear that this was a big event, with a large number of Benishares and other Canarian cavers joining in too. In total there were 26 in the party! Somehow sorting out the caving managed to take three hours, we didn't get underground until 9pm.

Alfredo (the local head honcho as far as caving is concerned) had told us to expect a 9 hour trip, and warned us of three desperate squeezes en-route. He explained that he was not sure whether he would still fit through the squeezes, as it was five years since he (in fact it turned out anyone) had been through the connection.

The trip starts easy enough, with a gentle walk upflow in the Sobrado show cave, quickly reaching a gate. Beyond the gate is initially easy walking to the furthest upflow reaches of Cueva del Sobrado, where a short traverse leads to a climb up into a low roof tube that is part of the upper series. This leads to a series of flat out crawls on sharp lava in an extremely complex maze of passages.



Main gallery in Cueva del Sobrado, note the roots in the ceiling and flow marks on the wall. Photo: Ed Waters.

Soon the first squeeze was reached. This is a flat out passage, about two body lengths long and about 30cm high. In limestone this would be no real obstacle, but on the sharp floor and a roof festooned with razor sharp mini-stalactites it would have been a serious proposition if Alfredo had not brought a length of kitchen lino to lay on the floor. This is a top tip for lava squeezes!



Typical flat out crawling in the upper level linking Cueva del Sobrado and Cueva de las Breveritas. Photo: Ed Waters.

Beyond the first squeeze is a series of boulder chambers which contain the actual link between Cueva del Sobrado and Cueva de los Breveritas. The link had been filled in some years before due to the danger of vandals entering Cueva del Sobrado from the (then) ungated Cueva de los Breveritas. Alfredo told us that no one had been through the connection in 5 years, and as part of the honour of being on the re-opening party we could dig it open again!

This connection proved to be the second squeeze. Much bigger than the first it is however very loose and great care needs to be taken when passing through the choke. In addition further care is required passing a fine display of pure white secondary formations at the end of the squeeze.

Once out of the squeeze, the way on is to drop down into the main trunk passage of Cueva de las Breveritas. This is mostly easy walking, and after a lengthy stop for dinner we headed off thinking that we had cracked it.

Soon the passage contracts down to a nasty little crawl with a particularly painfully lumpy floor. The long snake of cavers came to a halt, and we stayed like this for maybe 30 minutes without moving. Eventually word made its way back along the queue that we had reached the final squeeze. Alfredo was through (just), but one person had failed to get through after much heroics and stripping of clothes (and flesh). Several people questioned whether I would fit through, so I was forced towards the front to test my girth.

This squeeze is particularly nasty, a vertical slot in the roof of the flat out crawl. The walls are razor sharp, but again Alfredo had come to the rescue with two sheets of lino to take the edge (literally) off the squeeze. From above Les encouraged me, "Bloody tight this, I counted every rib through, not sure you'll make it".



Hayey with a fine set of flow levees in Cueva del Sobrado. Photo: Ed Waters.

With my confidence thus reinforced I attempted the squeeze with more than a little trepidation, but found it relatively easy – much to Les's disgust!

With all but one through, someone now had to go back the way we had come as the unfortunate Brit did not know the way back. It then transpired that in fact only Alfredo knew the way well. He was obviously not keen as apparently he had really struggled to get through the squeeze coming up. However, he is made of stern stuff, and stripping down to bare skin on lava ignored the pain and the flashes of numerous cameras.

The squeeze emerges in the floor of a large passage that leads down to the Cueva de las Breveritas gate. The gate lies several hundred metres of easy caving from the entrance. Beyond the entrance the cave continues to a concrete wall that blocks the passage between the Cueva de las Breveritas and Cueva de los Piquetes down flow.

We finally emerged from Cueva de las Breveritas at about 2am; the trip had taken about 5 hours and is truly great fun. It is believed that we were the first British party to have carried out this traverse, which is the longest in a lava tube cave outside of Hawaii.

A return trip was made the next day into the Sobrado section as the show cave was closed. This allowed us to take some photos and explore more of the upper series in a vain attempt to find the elusive lower level "Galería de los Ingleses".

Cueva de Felipe Reventon

This 3km long cave is in reality part of the Cueva del Viento system, but as yet no passable connection between the two has been found. The entrance is securely gated and the key (singular!) is held in the Cueva del Viento visitor centre. Permission to visit the cave is extremely difficult to arrange unless you are known to the Benishare group.

To say that the cave is securely gated is a huge understatement. Firstly a nasty crawl underneath spiky vegetation is required to even get to the wide entrance arch. Once inside a narrow passage leads off the bottom of the entrance chamber where the gate is located. The lock is located inside the gate, which is solid except for a 100mm hole through it at the hinge end. In turn the lock and bolt is hidden under a loop of steel. Thus to open the gate an arm has to be pushed through the hole until the elbow is on the other side, and the hand pushed under the loop of steel in order to undo the lock and retract the very stiff bolt. Sounds easy doesn't it – it took us over an hour and a half!



Possibly the toughest cave gate in the world!
Cueva de Felipe Reventon.

Photo: Ed Waters.

Once inside, trying not to think of the epic that locking the cave back up again is going to be, it is a rather fine cave. There is a large trunk passage and a number of intriguing oxbows. There are some fine lava features, and a couple of boulder chokes to negotiate. However this really is not a place for arachnophobes!



Tommo (Wessex CC) in Cueva de Felipe Reventon. Photo: Ed Waters.

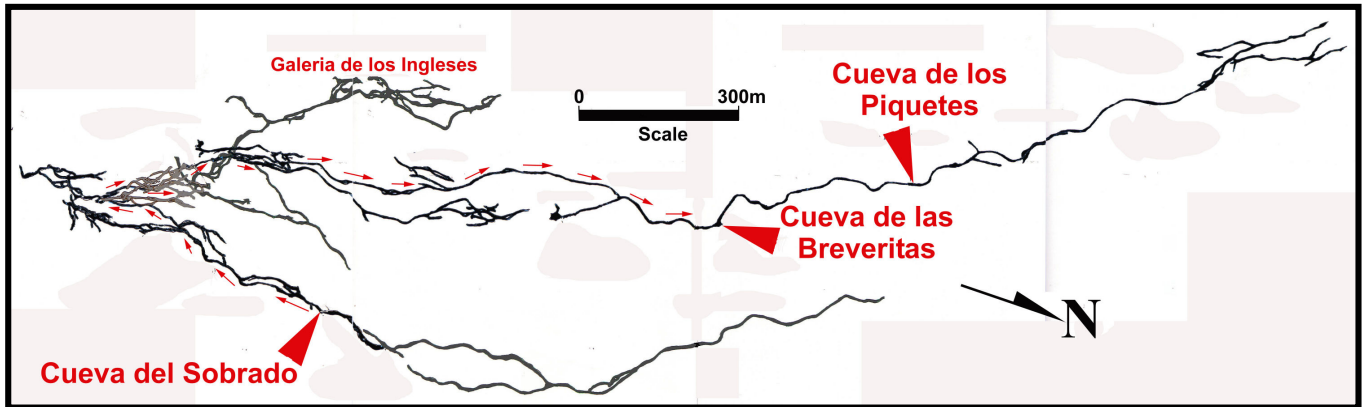
Cueva de los Pajaros

Our final outing was to Cueva de los Pajaros high up in the pine forests on the flank of Teide. It required an exciting off road drive that would have really upset the car hire company if they had seen what we did with their vehicle! The cave is very different from those around Icod, consisting of several hundred metres of a single very large trunk passage. In all a fine end to a great weeks caving.

Ed Waters



The impressive passage of Cueva de los Pajaros. Photo: Ed Waters.



Simplified survey of the Cueva del Viento system showing the main entrances. The red arrows show the approximate route taken on the traverse from Cueva del Sobrado to Cueva de las Breveritas. Note that it is not currently possible to get from Cueva de las Breveritas to Cueva de los Piquetes due to a wall built across the passage. After Hernández et al.

NEWSLETTER QUIZ NO.1 (MENDIP)

1. Question: in which cave were the remains of an Upper Palaeolithic hunter found?
2. Question: Which British monarch is commemorated in Stoke Lane Slocker?
3. Question: What was extracted from the mine at Compton Martin?
4. Question: What metal is associated with calamine?
5. Question: What animals might once have grazed on Piney Sleight?
6. Question: What is the highest point on Mendip?
7. Question: Who was the first diver to pass Swildon's Sump 1 in 1936?
8. Question: What was the name of the Wells alderman after whom an overpass in Swildon's is named?
9. Question: Where did the "Local Bloke" come from?
10. Question: What is probably easier down than up in Eastwater Swallet?

Tony Knibbs

LIBRARY ADDITIONS

Venturing Underground, the new speleo's guide by *Ben Lyon, 1983* (donated)

Northern Caves, Volume 4 Whernside and Gragareth by *Brook, Davies, Long and Sutcliffe, 1975*. This completes our set of the first series of Northern Caves (donated)

Colorado Caves; Hidden Worlds Beneath the Peaks. Text by *Richard Rhinehart, photos by David Harris, 2001*. A lovely book with plenty of excellent photographs. Chapters include Explorations, Subterranean Science, surveying, history, development of commercial caves, Conservation. At the end are three useful appendices (Caves open to the public, Caving organisations & websites, Related reading and videos). The book is attractively laid out - short 'stand alone' sections within the main text which make the publication easy to dip into. Anyone holidaying in Colorado would find this book a useful starting point (donated)

An Unconventional Guide to the Caverns of Castleton and the Surrounding District by *Francis A. Winder (& J.W. Puttrel), 1938* (Photocopy). Chapters on Peak Cavern, Speedwell, Blue John, Treak Cliff and Bagshawe Caverns, Oxlow Caverns & Nettle Pot, Eldon Hole and Caverns of the Great Fault. Also surveys for most of them and numerous illustrations. An intriguing read if you are interested in the history and development of Castleton Caves (donated).

MCG Went Wild in Andalucia (DVD) by *Chris Binding*. If you want to know what went on this Summer, this DVD will tell you all about it. Thanks to Chris for donating a copy.

Mid Rope Rescue (DVD) Produced by Ralph Johnson, IntroAct Films, 2010/. This video comes with a strong warning that the techniques described should only be used if no other means of rescue are available and only if you have practised and practised the method you are going to use. The emphasis is on self preservation - don't make a difficult situation worse by adding to the number of casualties. The film lasts 47 minutes and is divided into three sections. I cannot judge the quality of the production as I'm SRT illiterate but the filming and text appear to be clearly presented. This is not a film to watch for entertainment but as a training aid. Mid rope rescue should only be used if you are totally proficient in its use.

Craven Pothole Club 'Record' No.100 (Oct 2010) is accompanied by two surveys, **Stump Cross Caverns/Mongo Gill** (in colour) and **Sell Gill Holes**. These will be filed in the plan tank in the library. In the *Record* is a description of how the surveys came into being and also a number of other interesting articles.

Joan Goddard

FROM THE PAST

40 Years Ago – MCG Newsletter No.86 (November 1970)

SUBS UP, BUT ONLY FOR ACTIVE MEMBERS

Subscriptions for full and probationary members over the age of eighteen are to be increased to £2 from January 1971. All other subs remain at 15s 6d.

30 Years Ago – MCG Newsletter No.135 (November 1980)

Leaning on a dead branch of a beech tree until it broke, Bernard hurled himself at the bottom of the shakehole to strike the earth a mighty blow with his full weight. This flying bundle of enthusiasm and photographic equipment narrowly missed bystanders and diggers as he landed up to his knees in squelchy mud – the Icarus of Mendip.

20 years Ago – MCG Newsletter 213 November 1990

I'm glad to report that most of the ladder and some of the rope has now been accounted for. 13 ladders were missing. One is in Bone Hole, one in Daren Cilau, four in Eastwater, one in Rod's Pot and three were left in the loft...

NEW MEMBERS

The following new members have been accepted into the group since the last Newsletter. Please give them all a warm MCG welcome.

John Botham
Peter Dennis
Michelle Gigg
Stephen Liam
Steve Fearnley

Contact details will be found in the membership list which will be included with the next Newsletter.

CAPTION COMPETITION

A new (and hopefully regular) item for the MCG Newsletter is a caption competition. The picture below shows an MCG member enjoying the superb vista of the Sierra Grazalema in Andalucia. The editor will provide a small prize for the best caption submitted, which will be published in the next edition. The editor will also be more than pleased to receive pictures for further editions of this competition.



90TH BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS TO HONORARY MEMBER RON SAUNDERS

Many members will remember the weekend in September, thirty years ago, when Ron celebrated his 60th birthday in style down Swildons Hole. He described it in Newsletter 134:

"...just imagine being about three quarters of the way to Sump 1 and then quite unexpectedly coming upon some twenty of your friends gathered round a table on which were a birthday cake with lighted candles, filled sherry glasses, plates and a knife (what, no napkins!) and Don Vosper in a waiter's shirt, and then being joined by some ten more members from the rear"....."It was such an overwhelming surprise. I doubt if any of you gave a thought to loosening boulders in the roof with your sturdy rendering of Happy Birthday".

I might add that it was my job to delay Ron while the party was being set up. This proved to be extremely difficult as he wanted to be caving up-front with the 'youngsters'!

That evening in the Hunters Ron had organised a party for the whole club. It was a generous and unforgettable occasion.

Ron and Margaret are in fine fettle and enjoy following MCG activities via the newsletter.

Joan Goddard



Celebrating Ron's 60th Birthday at the Hunters. Photo: Joan Goddard.

GENERAL NEWS

New Sump Discovered in Upper Flood

Mike Richardson, and I went to have a look at the dig in East Passage; the one on the left just before Zebra Aven. The squeeze in the roof yielded on inspection and it gets larger beyond. The squeeze marks the high point of the passage as it slopes away steeply on the other side into a sort of rifty affair. It then gets a bit lower and drops into a sump.

I gave this a good splash with my wellies but it seems to go deep. It's certainly diveable and there is plenty of space. We'll just need to bash the squeeze a bit with a hammer to get tanks through. The whole thing backs up – there are lots of muddy globules festooned on the passage walls – so I think the pool at the start of the dig that is usually there is where water has risen up out of the sump and then over the lip in the passage (at the squeeze). The extension was only about another 20ft from the squeeze to the sump. We've called the passage "The Waterworks".

A few water level observations after all the heavy rainfall. Upper Flood Passage was running and the Lavatory Trap only had a snifter of air. However the Trench Rising – Threadneedle Stream flow was only just running (hypothesised water from Blackmoor Swallet), and there wasn't much coming in at Brian's Eye (I didn't bother with Charnel Passage as a result). The East Passage area was low – no stream, The Waterworks was very low and East Passage Sump was very low. But Ben saw that South Passage had backed up at the end and there was a bit of stream in West Passage. So it seems that the base level of water hasn't yet recovered after the dry Summer /Autumn so any flows associated with that haven't yet 'filled up'. **Report: Tim Francis**

Fairwell "Fish"

Many older members will be saddened to hear of the death of Mike "Fish" Jeanmaire. He was a well known Mendip and Derbyshire caver, renowned for his many cave diving exploits.

No More Speleo Technics

Keith at Speleo Technics has decided to retire, and as such the company has ceased trading. For 26 years they produced a series of revolutionary lamps specifically designed for caving, starting with the FX2, 3 and 5 which used sealed Ni Cad cells mounted on the waist. In the 1990s the introduction of the "Headlite" made us all wonder why we had been carting around huge batteries on our waists, and with the Nova Keith introduced the first of the LED mega lamps that are so de-rigueur today. I think all of us who have benefited from Keith's products will wish him well for his retirement.

Kidnap on Mendip

The BEC's mascot, Bertie the Bat, has been kidnapped from his usual perch on the Belfry Porch. To date his whereabouts remain unknown, despite a series of comical ransom demands appearing on the web.

Caving Secretary

As you will no doubt be aware the post of caving secretary has been vacant for some time. It is therefore great news that Kevin Speight as volunteered to take the job on. Knowing Kev I think we can all look forward to a very full and exciting trip list!



Headquarters: Nordrach Cottage, Charterhose-on-Mendip, Blagdon, Bristol. BS40 7XW

MENDIP CAVING GROUP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Nomination Form for Honorary Committee Post.

Position:

Nominee:

Signature:

Proposed by:

Signature:

Seconded by:

Signature:

Note: Nominations for office must be submitted in writing by first class post to the Secretary's home address with the signatures of Full Members proposing and seconding and at least 25 days before the meeting. A nomination for office must be accompanied by a signed agreement to stand for election by the nominee.

The following additional details are required for submission to the Charity Commission. The preferred name will be published on the website. Additionally, you are required to acknowledge that you have read "CC3a – The Essential Trustee: An Introduction". Copies are available from the Group Recorder Librarian.

Title:

Honours & Qualifications:

Personal Names:

Family Name:

Preferred Name:

Other names used now or previously:

Date of Birth:

Address:

Telephone Number:

Email Address (not essential):

If you feel that you have a good reason **NOT** to have your name published on the public register, please explain overleaf. The commission is not obliged to concur with a request for a waiver and will normally only do so in the interests of the safety of the individual concerned.



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Mendip Caving Group

Reg. Charity no.
270088

Custodian

Trustees
Pat Walsh
Jonathan Roberts
Pete Matthews
Ben Cooper

Examiners

Roy & Fiona Kempston

Cottage Bookings

All groups (guests and members) should be booked via Mike Richardson, email bookings@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

MCG News is published by the Mendip Caving Group, Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse-on-Mendip, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7XW

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Material for MCG News can be submitted to the Editor, Ed Waters, via email, editor@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

Or via the cottage address above. Submissions are preferred in electronic format, but any material, in any format, is always welcomed.



Group Information

Monthly Meeting: At the Group HQ, usually on the first Fri/Sat/Sun of the month.
Online Meeting: <http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/mendip-caving-group/>
Websites: www.m-c-g.org.uk & www.mendipcavinggroup.org.uk
Cottage Fees: MCG members, members children, SWCC, NPC £2.50 per night. Guests £5.00 per night. Camping at same price as cottage fees.

2010 Caving & Social Calendar				
Date	Location	Activity	Contact	
Dec 03/04/05	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage	
Dec 04	Mendip	Christmas Dinner	Jenny Plumb	
Dec 04	Mendip	Beginners Trip	Kevin Speight	
Jan 7/8/9	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage	
Feb 4/5/6	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage	
Mar 4/5/6	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage	
Apr 1/2/3	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage	
Apr 8/9/10	Dales	Northern Dales Meet	Contact Jeremy Gilson	
May 6/7/8	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage	
Jun 3/4/5	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage	
Jul 1/2/3	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage	
Aug 5/6/7	Mendip	Members' Weekend	Meet at Nordrach Cottage	

Nordrach Cottage Bookings							
Booking Group	Arrive		Depart		Nights	Beds Booked	
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 03/12/10	to	Sun 05/12/10		2		
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 07/01/11	to	Sun 09/01/11		2		
Steve Tibbert	Fri 28/01/11	to	Sun 30/01/11		2	24	
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 04/02/11	to	Sun 06/02/11		2		
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 04/03/11	to	Sun 06/03/11		2		
Majendie-Steeple Scouts	Fri 18/03/11	to	Sun 20/03/11		2	11	
MCG AGM & Dinner Weekend	Fri 25/03/11	to	Sun 27/03/11		2		
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 01/04/11	to	Sun 03/04/11		2		
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 06/05/11	to	Sun 08/05/11		2		
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 03/06/11	to	Sun 05/06/11		2		
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 01/07/11	to	Sun 03/07/11		2		
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 05/08/11	to	Sun 07/08/11		2		
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 02/09/11	to	Sun 04/09/11		2		
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 07/10/11	to	Sun 09/10/11		2		
MCG Members Weekend	Fri 04/11/11	to	Sun 06/11/11		2		

COMMITTEE CONTACTS:

Secretary – Mike Richardson
Treasurer – Karen Fendley
Tacklemaster – Brian Snell
Recorder/Librarian – Bob Templeman
Cottage Warden – Doug Harris
Editor – Ed Waters
Caving Secretary – Kev Speight
Social Secretary – Jenny Plumb
Rescue Warden – Miguel Tome

The above can be contacted via the email addresses to the right, or via the contact details included in the membership list circulated to group members with this Newsletter.

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Cottage bookings	bookings@mendipcavinggroup.org.uk

"I don't want to be the best cave diver in the World anymore; just the oldest!"

James Cobbett recalling his rescue from Porth yr Ogof in Alan Thomas' "The Last Adventure", 1989.