

Mendip Caving Group

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MALLORCA '92 : A TOUR OF INDIVIDUALS

by Tim Francis

In the past Mallorca has often been a haunt of the MCG over the Christmas period, so this trip was something of a revival. Once the broader details were ironed out at Staines railway station, one Thursday night in November, we were off. Myself, Julie Hesketh and Pete Hollings (WLCC) grabbed the cheapest flight possible, and despite such short notice Malcolm and Norma Cotter were also able to come along. Apart from the odd bemused look from customs, logistically things went without a hitch.

The cuevas de Mallorca are notoriously difficult to find with paths rarely trodden. Our first efforts were no exception to any rule. Upon recommendation we had decided to attempt Cueva Campana which was supposedly easy to find. No such luck! We spent several hours wandering the desolate limestone scrub at Sa Colobra looking for the damn thing. We have since found better references (ULSA) and it seems we'd probably followed the wrong indistinct pathway. Undeterred, we returned to the villa at Palma Sol, near Puerto Cristo.

Hangovers permitting our second choice of cave was Penya Rotja near Alcudia. The walk to this cave is fantastic with dramatic views of Formentor across the Bahía de Pollensa. Furthermore, for Mallorcan standards the entrance is relatively easy to locate. The description of the cave we had was vague and seemed to suggest that it was small. The upper levels are dry and dusty with the odd bit of stal. Whilst the others took the requisite holiday photographs I headed off to find the way on. Previous accounts suggested that the survey (Federacio Balear d' Espeleologia, Palma - FBd'E) would not be much help. Spotting a lead I dropped down a nasty Eastwater-type rift, 30ft deep. With the aid of a couple of slings Pete was also able to climb down. A handline is definitely recommended. Beyond, we followed a crawly section along a black flowstone "river". This appeared to suddenly end. Nosing around further we spotted another awkward hole somewhat reminiscent of "The Slot" in Pierres Pot. Dropping down, it proved to be relatively easy. The slot lands on a balcony overlooking a huge chamber, beautifully decorated. The pitch may have been 50ft deep. Crawling around we followed a series of squeezes and passed several pitches. Eventually we reached the bottom although a 20ft handline would make life easier. At the bottom we wandered through several large chambers with impressive formations. Things tended to get a bit dodgy in the lower levels with a few promising draughts. Reluctantly we had to return to the others after an hour or so.

The next couple of days were spent cave hunting in the vicinity of the villa, as well as the obligatory show-cave stops at Drach and Hams. The south east coastal area is rarely visited in comparison to the mountains in the north. Although there are dry valleys all over the place the limestone is not conducive to large caves. The terrain is rough and the vegetation unfriendly. However, whilst looking for Cuevas del Pirata we stumbled upon a classic shakehole in a field at Ca'n Fresquet. Technically the road was probably private but what the hell! The cave is eventually one large chamber, a collapse feature blocked with unconsolidated material. At the bottom the way on is sumped. However, we were able to crawl upstream for 50ft or so until things got too hairy. We then wandered down to the coast at Punta D'es Llevants. A few sea caves were spotted that looked promising - the Blue Holes of Mallorca!

At the same time we also bumped into the local landowner. Well, we were blocking his road. "Pointing in our best Castilian" we explained about Pirata. To our surprise he invited us on a guided tour on the Sunday. The cave is still gated with remnants of seats, lighting, and steps hewn out of the calcite still remaining. Essentially the cave consists of a couple of large chambers descending to a blue sump. Dived by the FBd'E it was finally connected to Cova des Pont in October 1989 by Cwmbran Caving Club. This makes a system of 2025m, second only to Drach (2400m). We were keen to explore further but our guide, Juan, was intent on sticking to the path. In our limited Spanish we discovered the name of the shakehole we'd explored before. I think he said Cueva del Mustic (Gloomy Cave), but the others disagreed. The farmer is not keen for any

other cavers so please don't go traipsing over his land without asking permission first.

The other cave visited was Cueva Coma Freda at Formentor. This impressive shaft is easy to find and excellent for SRT practice - 30m with one rebelay. At the bottom there are several large chambers with dramatic formations: a brilliant setting for photographs. Despite looking in every hole we couldn't find a way on.

In conclusion the week proved to be a useful recce trip. We'll definately return in the near future. Cheap flights and cooler weather mean that caving on Mallorca should only be attempted during the winter months. 1:25,000 maps can be obtained from Stanfords. The caves are extremely hot so take cotton boiler suits and the most apallingly thin furry suits you can find. There are no cave rescue facilities so you have to be totally self-sufficient. Thanks to RHBNC "Moles" for the loan of the rope.

Team: Tim Francis, Julie Hesketh, Pete Hollings (WLCC), Malcolm and Norma Cotter.

Ed: If anyone wants further details of caving in Mallorca, I have all the maps, surveys, grid references of all the caves, SRT rigging details, full descriptions of locations and details of caving groups on the island - masses of information as compiled by the MCG and Dave Elliot during our visits in the 1980's.