

MCG NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MENDIP CAVING GROUP

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MATIENZO '97 by Kerry Howard

This was the destination of the RHBNC CC for approximately two weeks this summer. MCG members who went along were: Malcolm, Norma and Sonya Cotter, Lee Hawkswell, Kerry Howard and Reg Pain.

We took the Portsmouth - Le Havre ferry, and travelled through France and Spain. We arrived at Pablo's Bar and campsite around lunchtime on the 22nd June. Tents were erected, frisbee played, dinner cooked and sleep had. The next day we went cave spotting. In the morning Phill (who had been there before with his uncle) showed us the resurgence sump from Cueva del Agua - it was very impressive. The next idea was to follow the stream down until a swallet was reached. A cave was only 200m further along from here. However the obvious route down was severely overgrown. Therefore, after two and a half hrs of jungle bashing by Lee, Sonya, Malcolm, Norma and Kerry the cave 'Carcavuezo' was found - part of the Four Valleys system. A much easier route was found back to the campsite. The rest of the group had decided to wade down river, couldn't get very far, and ended up in the bar!

After lunch we decided to take the minibus to find Cueva Lluvia - the Four Valleys System resurgence cave on Juan Corrin's recommended list. The description put us in mind of an extended jungle bashing session, with reports of 3hrs to find the cave, not being found at all, and having to abseil over the limestone cliff from a field above, in order to gain access! But after a mere 10 mins, we found the very impressive entrance. A huge limestone cliff was nestled in jungle, with vines hanging over the side, ferns on floor etc, etc. It took about 15 mins to find the actual entrance (a small muddy hole 3m up from the floor in the cliff), as the obvious holes did not go anywhere. We all donned zooms, and had a quick bumble to the blow hole and pitch, before returning to the minibus with definite plans to return and do the cave proper (which unfortunately was not to be). We found one more unimpressive entrance - Cueva de Riano. This was draughting strongly, due to it being the western entrance to the Four Valleys System.

Now for the actual caving part!

Cueva de carcavuezo (Four Valleys System)

This was the first cave we did, as it was only 10 mins walk from the campsite. We aimed to stagger the party into two groups, as a party of 11 was quite large to take down a cave of which we had no surveys or descriptions of what to expect. The first group (Phill, Reg, Kerry, Andrew, Aggy and Andy) took a couple of ladders and set off. After a short crawl, the cave opened out into a fair sized chamber, with a couple of ways on. The passage to the left was a nice shaped sandy stoop which closed off at a choke. Back in the chamber, we met up with the other group. Malcolm and Norma went down the first passage, while the rest went to explore the second main passage. This passage zig zagged into a rifty climb down, ending at a series of dead-end crawls, which contained some cave shrimps and millipedes. Meanwhile, Malcolm found the way on, while waiting for the rest to climb back up the tight, awkward rift, in the first passage through some boulders on the left hand wall. A climb down using a fixed handline dropped us into the streamway. The stream sumped to the left. Reg, being the only one wearing a wet suit, explored down stream, and advised us that it was not worth exploring, being 'slippery and miserable, with deep bits in places.' All in all a disappointing, scrabbly cave, with lots of flood debris, and not a pretty in-sight! So much for our first taste of Matienzo caving!

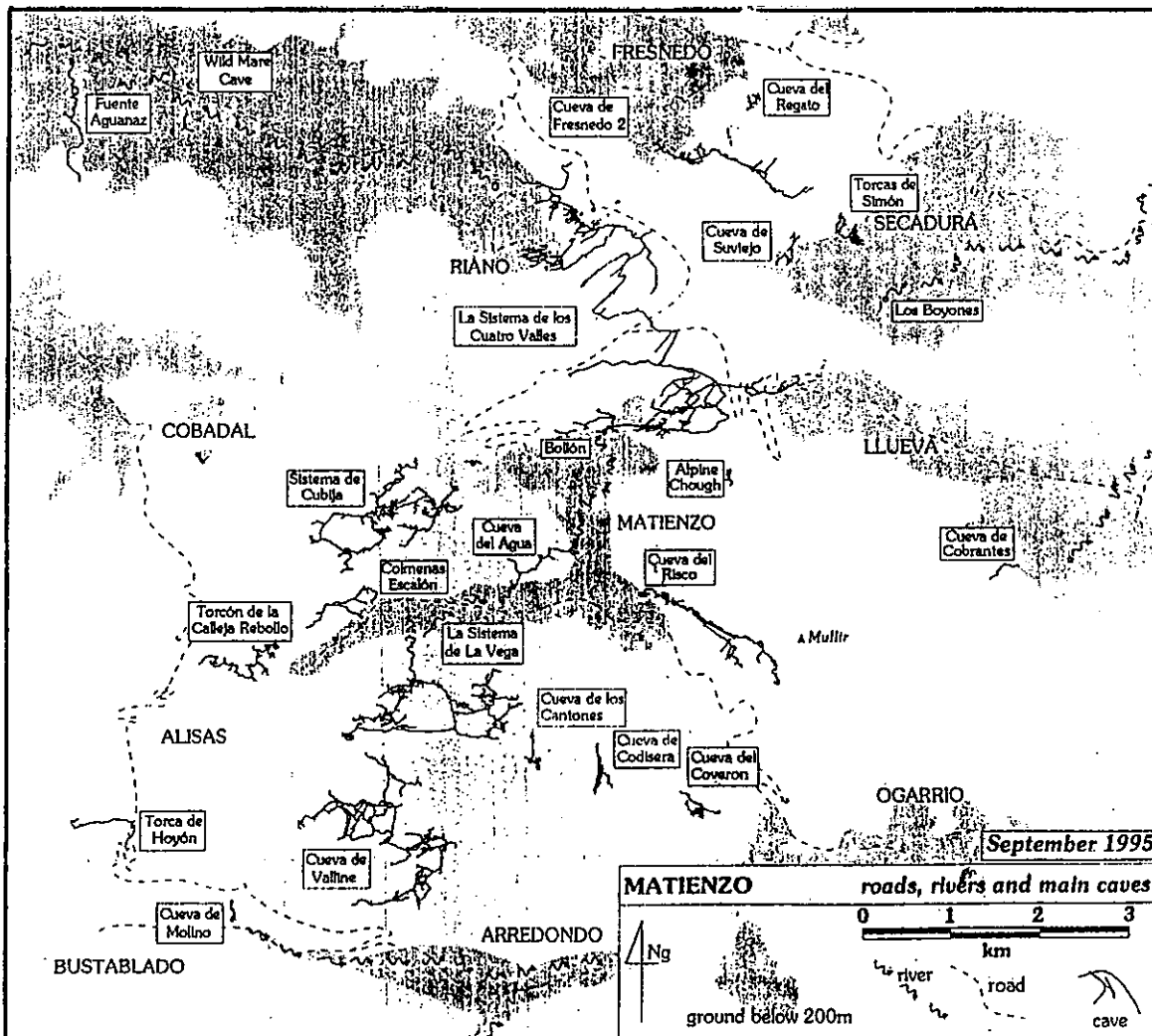
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MATIENZO '97 continued

Torca de Mostajo (Cubija System)

We again split up into two groups, this time with both groups doing separate caves. One group consisting of Reg, Kerry, Lee, Sonya, Malcolm, Norma and Big Tim went down Mostajo, which more than compensated for the misery of Carcavuezo. This cave had a 27m entrance pitch, which was easily rigged, with one simple deviation. Immediately after the pitch it was apparent that there were many pretties. A dead end chamber to the left contained many straws and curtains, as well as many fossil flowstones and gower pools. Off to the right were more pretties, and after scrambling over more large flowstones, a huge chamber was reached. This had a finely decorated ceiling, which we could only just see courtesy of Malcolm's spotlight! We emerged in this chamber about halfway up, and the gaping hole at our feet was navigated via two fixed traverse lines along the left hand side of the wall, passing many more fine formations.

After the traverse, we reached a sand covered ledge which provided a magnificent view of the chamber and traverse line. From here, a short hand and knees crawl ended in a sandy chamber, which led to a short flat crawl in sand. This brought us to the first of two very pretty chambers. Some stunning helactites, straws, columns, crystals etc etc, made for a great photo opportunity. This chamber was followed immediately by another of equal beauty. At the end of this, a short fixed ladder brought us up to a very tight crawl (Big Tim had to be dug through!). This split off into two ways. The right ended in a small stooping sized chamber with some excellent crystal formations. The left opened out into a huge passage, with some more stunning stalagmites and columns. What ensued was a case of follow the yellow brick road, a fine sandy trail leading the way. This took us passed many more formations, although the ceiling was too high to fully appreciate them. We turned back at a traverse line off the right which passed over 'The pit', due to time considerations. Reg and Kerry headed out first, digging the tight crawl a little wider for Big Tim to follow. An (almost) speedy exit was made, and every one on the trip agreed it was the best cave we did throughout the two weeks.



Map courtesy
of Juan Corrin

More from
Matienzo next
month!