



Number 269

June 1998

### *Cave Art in Northern Spain : Richard Carey*

There are 38 caves and shelters in Asturias containing Palaeolithic art and being mobile again, I decided to find out what the access arrangements are.

The first I tried was the Horno de la Pea, Los Corrales (Cantabria). It is closed to the public to conserve the paintings. Human pollution, body heat, respiration were causing irreparable damage. I was later told that there is a small cave with a narrow entrance and a single small chamber. Only archaeologists may visit.

Next, I went to Viesgo de Puente (Cantabria) to visit El Monte de Castillo. This is a much larger cave and the only restriction is to 200 visitors per day. Entry is free to European citizens and I was the only person at the time so I had a personal tour accompanied by a guide. Immediately on entry a large chamber is encountered and once I had explained that I was a caver, I was allowed a bit of time to admire the formations. The cave is large, multi-chambered and has many wonderful formations, columns, curtains and such like. Normally, the guide would ignore the formations and move straight on to the paintings. Here there are a large number of hand prints, the hand being placed against the wall and colour applied around it. There are also paintings in outline of deer, bison, fish and what is claimed to represent women. I suppose with a little imagination they might be right. I was later told that there is a mammoth but this area was closed for conservation. Even so, it was well worth the 45 minutes for the formations alone.

I had been told that the caves at Altamira required special permission for entry so I decided to find out exactly what needed to be done. On arrival, I was greeted by a security guard who told me that to gain access I would have to write to apply giving at least one years notice. I was told that it is fully booked until the year 2000. Given that it is considered along with Lascaux it might be worth the effort. They are currently constructing a copy so that this delay can be avoided. If anyone is interested, I have the address and fax number.

Moving west along the coast I stopped at Pimiango (Asturias) to visit El Pindal. A large cave with a single passage again with impressive formations. 300 meters are accessible to the public although there are another 600m of cave. Hands and knees are not considered possible for the GP. Here there are paintings of deer, bison and a mammoth in outline.

Further west is the town of Ribadesellas (Asturias) with the cave of Tito Bustillo. This is a large active resurgence and the visit takes place in a fossil passage again beautifully decorated. The entrance is through a mined passage into 1k of cave. I was not so lucky here and there were twenty in a group. The guide virtually force marched us past all the formations, some very impressive fine delicate columns, only pausing to point out previous flood levels above our heads. The paintings here are mostly of horses which are unfortunately not very distinct due to the flooding. However, it was still an interesting trip given the formations.

Heading inland I went to El Buxu (Asturias) but the limit of 25 per day had been reached. Feeling that 50% success rate wasn't bad for two days, I decided to go to Treviso for a pint. I had forgotten how scenic the road was. Its better than All Bran.

I shall definitely be going to the Picos again.

## Springtime in Fermanagh

*Tim Francis*

With that the usual winter jaunt to Mallorca was put on hold. This years theory was that it would rain less in March than it had last September. Mind you it would not be difficult to only rain six rather than seven days in a week! Steve, Penny and Paul from the CUCC had booked the traditional Fishguard/Rosslare ferry crossing whereas we chose to fly to Belfast and hire a car. Everything nearly went without a hitch except that on arrival in Belfast we discovered that the travel agent had booked the hire car for the wrong airport.

### Marble Arch System

Unbeknown to us the show cave was closed for extensive renovation so we were unable to pop into reception and complete the logbook in the usual way. Normal access to the cave is via a large shakehole just downhill from the visitors centre, then wander along the showcave section upstream before hopping over the barrier to rejoin the streamway. The sump 1 bypass on the left allows access to the Legnabrocky Way and the rest of the cave. Our aim on this trip was to investigate the choke at the end of Mexican Passage which we had given a cursory glance in the summer. This time we were sufficiently tooled up with digging kit to give the choke some serious attention.

The passage at the end of Mexican Passage subdivides into several small inlets. A large cobble choke has filled all possible ways on from above. We dug both the top and bottom of the choke with those at the bottom rather perturbed by the crashing of rocks above. After an hour or so it looked like we were making progress at the bottom so all three of us (Duncan, Pete, Tim) focused our efforts on a small cobble filled tube. About 20 foot of passage was excavated before we squeezed through into virgin passage.... but it wasn't to be. Unfortunately we had opened up a pointless loop of passage which only serves to bypass about 50 feet of crawling. Investigating other options we nosed around in a much older section of choke which consisted of sand fill and larger boulders. I think this may be the best prospect so until next time...

### Cascades Rising

It was yet another fine sunny day so the stroll from Agnahoo, downvalley, was extremely pleasant. We had heard good things about Cascades and we were not disappointed. This proved to be an excellent trip. The entrance series consists of lots of crawling and wriggling through a bouldery streamway. Routefinding is essentially just a case of following your nose as there several ways through. Once through this section the streamway is lost and the Boulder Series is entered. Initially one does a spot of boulder hopping at the top of the choke before following a route through the boulders at a lower level. Relief finally comes when the boulders open out into a fantastic piece of streamway, the Brandywine River. This is well decorated in places and well worth the effort of dragging a camera through the entrance series. After some fine yomping passage the water gets increasingly deep. We turned back at the junction with the sump 8 bypass as no-one (apart from Steve) was too enthusiastic for a complete soaking.

### Noon's Hole

The next day, called for something more vertical so Noon's was the obvious choice as it is described in "The Caves of Fermanagh and Cavan" as "probably the finest pothole in Ireland". The entrance shaft is an active 81m pitch which makes for an airy descent. Parallel shafts keep the hang out of the main waterfall and the pitches are well bolted right to the bottom. We dekkitted at this point as the rest of the cave requires no equipment. Initially the cave starts off rather gloomily and heads downstream to a sump. We noticed the rather unusual lichen that adorns the walls well out sight of daylight. Not far downstream a pleasant thrutchy bit, Crucifixion Crawl, breaks into High Noon's Right and the main cave. For some reason Duncan did the crawl feet first on the way back which made things a little more awkward!

The next section consists of muddy crawls with some nice bits of stal and then a short section of canal. This looks worse than it is and is easily passed. From here a shallow streamway is followed passing several flowstone inlets. The way on to Chamber Passage and the Arch Connection is through a choke off on the right hand side of the fifth inlet. We were running out of time at this point so went through the choke as far as Chamber Passage and then turned back. The pub/club scene in Enniskillen beckoned!

### Springwell Rising

Armed with some decent digging kit and a dose of optimism it was thought that the choke at the end of Springwell might yield. Unfortunately this was not to be. This cave is a real oversuit wrecker and our knees and elbows didn't fair much better. At first we tried to dig over the top but the roof kept going up. Some progress was made around the right hand side where a route was excavated to a low crawl. This was too full of rock to continue. By this stage we were all chilled to the core so decided to head out. On the way back we hammered and chiselled twenty feet of horrible crawl to make a visual contact with the main passage. This section had been virtually sumped off last summer. Really the only plus point for this cave is that it lies within five minutes walk of the cottage.

### Prod's Pot

This was the final trip of our visit to Fermanagh and is only a short drive from the Agnahoo cottage, just off the Marlbank Loop. The entrance is a tight series of five pitches ideal for the Mendip caver. From here we had a choice of either upstream or downstream so elected to wander downstream first. This was all large walking sized stuff, some well decorated. A group blouse ensued at the canal with Steve doing the honours and wandering on a bit further. On the way back upstream we took in Papist Passage as far as Sump 1 which was certainly worth the detour. Finally, after abandoning all hope of keeping our kit dry for the aeroplane journey home, a trip was made up Cascade Inlet. For me this was the best part of the cave. After a low wet crawl a delightful series of cascades leads to a perched sump. A superb end to a fine week in Fermanagh and no doubt we'll be back.

MCG members:                   Pete Bennett, Tim Francis, Steve Jones  
 "I'm not in the MCG": Duncan Horne  
 CUCC:                           Penny, Paul

