



Mendip Caving Group Newsletter

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The Massed Hoards in Mallorca

By Tim Francis

The 1999 jaunt to Mallorca was the sixth visit by the MCG to the island in recent years, and the largest group so far. Of the eleven intrepid holiday cavers six had been before and five were Balearic beginners. So many people meant that the villa was packed to the gunwales, and indeed Ralph, Bellez and Cookie slept outside. Temperatures were ok but I think their sleep was somewhat disturbed one night by tables and chairs being blown around the patio. We hired three cars to give us the flexibility of visiting more than one cave at the same time. However the warm weather meant that other attractions proved more appealing for some.

Cova de sa Campana

As it is the deepest cave on Mallorca and also has the largest chamber, the Sala des Gegants, Campana is a must on any trip. However this year some of us wanted to explore the lower levels which are reputedly rather grim. Just in case I brought along the bolting kit. We split up into several small groups with some just bimbbling around, a few doing a spot of photography and the rest of us doing the pitches. On previous years I'd looked at the various pitches off the last chamber and had assumed that the drop hidden behind the huge stal boss was the main way on. This is the lowest of the three pitches and is adjacent to an occasionally used camp site. It is apparent that the local cavers use the pitch as a rubbish bin.

This pitch only has one bolt in flowstone so that gave us bundles of confidence. I engineered a couple of naturals as back ups and then it was over the edge. The pitch begins as a steeply inclined rift with all walls consisting of flowstone. A rub point is passed at -4m and a ledge reached at -9m. At this point it became apparent that local cavers merely abseil to the floor ignoring the hideous rub point. Not overly keen on this idea I elected to put in a rebelay. The natural in the roof looked hideous so I proposed putting in a bolt. Lack of time meant that we left the pitch rigged for a return visit later in the week.

On the second trip there were only four of us so we made fast progress back to the pitch. I abseiled back down to the ledge and attempted to place a bolt. Unfortunately there was no solid rock just flowstone so no bolt could be placed. So there was no alternative but to rig from the natural in the roof. This was dead sharp and not overly solid looking. But what the hell. A couple of rope protectors gave added confidence and we were off. The pitch is about 25m and lands in a large chamber. The floor is littered with boulders and well decorated in places. Judging by the lack of damage (apart from rubbish that has been thrown down the pitch) the chamber is infrequently visited. We thrutched down a delightful Eastwater type rift in the floor which ends at an enticing hole at the bottom.

So despite doing the wrong pitch we were rewarded by seeing a nice chamber. Perhaps next year we'll check out the other pitches.

Cova Sa Foradada

Another return visit and a few more loose ends to tie up. In the lower levels there are two small streamways that meet up just before a sump. One streamway is an extremely sharp rift to a perched sump. I'm sure in summer this will beailable but this year a small stream was still flowing. The other inlet is much longer but also ends at a sump. There are two alternatives to bypass the sump. Above the sump is a small aven. Whilst I was putting in a bolt to protect the climb Ralph bashed away at a tight squeeze with a lump hammer. The aven almost certainly doesn't do although across the other side there is another intriguing opening. Ralph managed to open up the squeeze and I pushed through. Immediately beyond is a tight duck. Bailing was difficult so a return is planned with a siphon pipe.

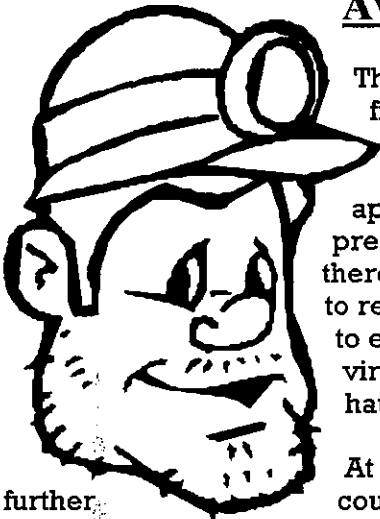
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More on Mallorca....

Cova Tancada

This was visited on three occasions during the week not least for its dramatic views over the bay of Pollensa and the Cap de Pinar. Bellez did the trip twice! The walk to the entrance is a gentle stroll through pine woods and ideal for a light excursion. The cave has been used on and off as a wild show cave but is relatively undamaged. However this year it was a pity so see that there were candles positioned on many of the stalagmites. Many have a thick coating of wax.

Avenc del pla de les Basses



This was a new cave for all of us. Unusually for Mallorca it is easy to find. The entrance is located directly underneath a lone pine tree at the bottom of a large doline, the Pla de Les Basses. Six pitches (30m, 15m, 33m, 10m, 6m, 13m) lead to a sump. The whole cave appears to be rather flood prone so is best avoided if rain is predicted. The interesting stuff starts just before the fifth pitch where there is a Mendip style squeeze. Larger members of the team needed to remove their SRT kits to pass through. From here rigging moves on to expedition style with naturals and rub points in abundance. I virtually ran out of kit at the end with one bolt to spare and using the hauling cord to rig the last section.

further.

This is still

slightly above sea level so may be worth a dive. After consulting a survey it seems that a traverse across from the head of pitch six bypasses the squeezes at the bottom. An alternative pitch can be rigged to descend directly into the chamber.

Whilst looking for Les Basses we came across a potential entrance nearby which has not been recorded elsewhere. Lack of time meant that we could not check it out thoroughly although Julie did a spot of digging.



Conclusion

Another great year and I think everyone had a thoroughly enjoyable time. As well as caving, team members went on a day trip to Palma, visited the beach and went for a few walks. We indulged ourselves at various restaurants as well as doing a barbecue at the villa. I have some more material for the journal and will make sterling efforts to get it finished this year. We also have some more loose ends to follow up next year.



Team: James Allen, Andy Bellamy, Andrew Eacott (Old Moles) Dave Cooke (Wessex), Ben Cooper, Ralph Diment, Tim Francis, Julie Hesketh, Laura Hughes (Old Moles), Rupert Knowles, Kirsty Stroud (Old Moles).