

# MCG News

Newsletter of the Mendip Caving Group



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**[www.m-c-g.org.uk](http://www.m-c-g.org.uk)**

**Founded 1954**

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Merry.  
Christmas

A small illustration of holly leaves and berries is placed over the word "Christmas".

## Cantabria Spain, September 2002

By Bill Chadwick

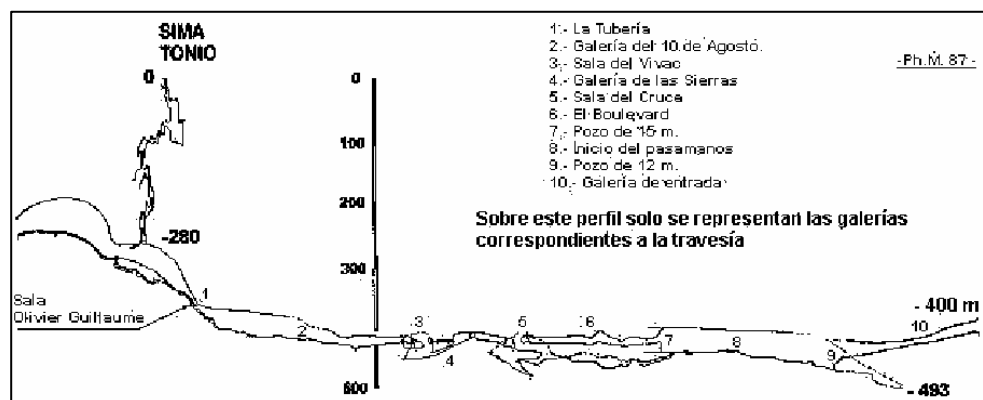
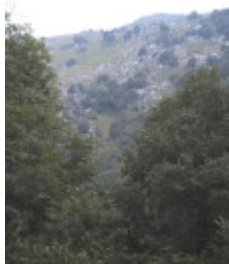


Mick Norton, Doug Harris and Bill Chadwick (MCG/BDCC), together with Biff Friith, Karen Goodman, Mark Pearson, (BDCC), made a two week trip to Cantabria in Northern Spain at the beginning of September 2002. Simon Kay, also of BDCC, joined them in Spain for the first week. Thanks to Richard Carey of MCG for liaising, in Spanish, with the hosts of our accommodation before our trip.

**Local details** We stayed at the Casa Tomas in Oggario (tel 00 34 942641120, where they speak a very small amount of English), close by to Ramales. This is a Bar / Restaurant / Rooms establishment, used to cavers. There is a caving shop in Ramales where the staff are very friendly and speak a little English. They lent us their own local cave guide books which we photocopied in a shop in town. They have some interesting own brand under- and over-suits. Their address is MTDE-Espana, Barrio El Mazo, 14 39800, Ramales de la Victoria, Cantabria, <http://www.mtde.net>. The local caving club can be contacted via their web site at <http://www.aer-espeleo.com>, some of which is in English. Access details will be found there. None of the caves we visited had controlled access.

**Caving** We visited a number of caves. The four larger ones are described in the following sections. None were far from Casa Tomas.

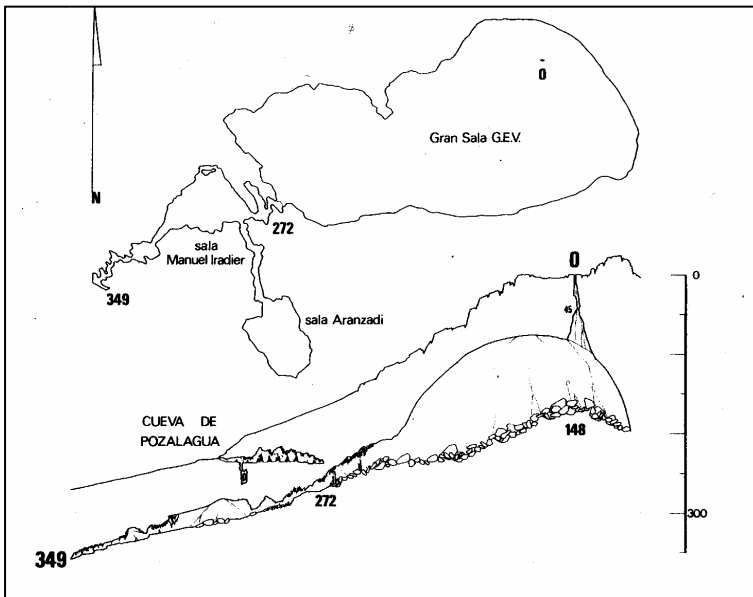
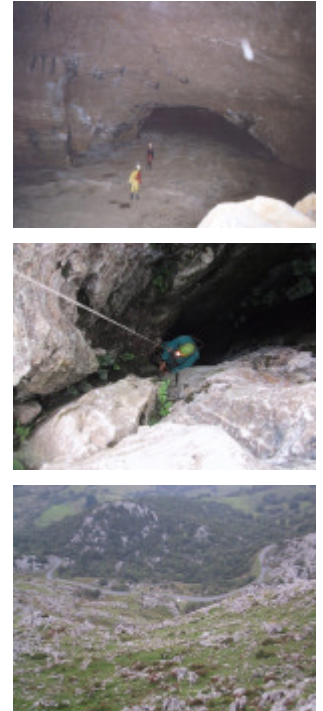
**Cueva Canuela or Cayuela** The entrance can be clearly seen from across the valley but is hard to find. It's the black hole at the top of the steep grassy slope in the middle of the picture (left). The co-ordinates of the cave are 30T 449660 4791720 at an altitude of 305m. We parked by the south side of the Arredondo to Bustablado road at 30T 0449195 4792133 where the photo (left) is taken from. We asked permission from the house up on the left just back down the road towards Arredondo. We crossed a bridge over the small stream at the bottom of the valley side and climbed a well-worn path diagonally up the side of the hill. Then we went wrong. We could hear the woman from the house shouting at us and see her waving but understood nothing. As if my magic, a herdsman appeared and offered to show us the way. We passed around two cowsheds and then regained a small path that led horizontally along the hill. Finally, we turned a corner to be hit by the enormous cold draught that blows from the entrance. The route is roughly marked by the yellow line on the photo. The cave is not near the bottom of the cliff seen in the middle of the photo. The entrance is the 'Galeria de Entrada' on the survey below.



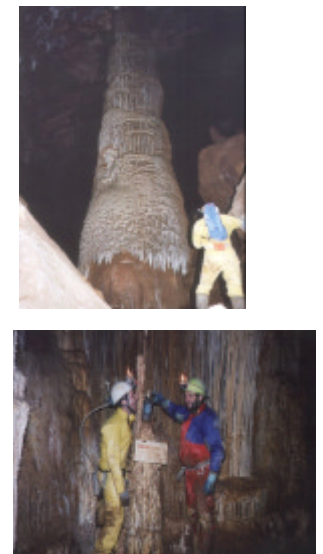
Once at the entrance we had to don our harnesses straight away as a grand traverse appears almost immediately. This had a fixed line in good condition. After the traverse, the going was all easy. Fixed aids are installed wherever needed, at one point there is a 15m climb up a good but very thick rope. This needed a figure of 8 to descend, as it was too thick for our Petzl Stops. Progress and route finding were not hard, with way-marking reflectors appearing often.

The climb up in to the final large chamber was quite strenuous. We observed a very dubious looking bit of rope hanging down from where the Sima Tonio through trip enters high up in the roof. On the way, there are some spectacular formations and enormous passages. The trip to 'Sala Olivier Guillaume' and back took us about six hours with plenty of photo stops.

**Torca Del Carlista** This was the hardest of the caves we visited. It boasts the largest natural underground chamber in Europe, some 500m x 200m x 120m high. The entrance is near the top of the hill named Picon del Carlista. There is a good approach road, which has recently been resurfaced. It leads to the Pozalagua show cave. This itself is well worth a visit. It has a large area of flat roof covered in the most amazing helictites growing in loops that descend a foot or more. We parked in the lay-by, just next to the start of the path up the hill. There is an ageing wooden sign at the start of the path. We followed the path up the hill until we reached the saddle. Then we turned left and traversed around the hill. Finally we followed some cairns and climbed up a slot in a small limestone cliff. The entrance is a small chasm a little below the top of the hill towards the saddle. We needed lights for the walk back down the hill, which we made in the dark. At one point, the path passes close by the edge of a deep quarry! The view, right, is of our van in the (very distant!) lay-by from the top of the hill and a shot of the entrance. The cave descends well below the level of the van. The published coordinates are 0468465, 04790150 (700m) but we recorded 0468456, 4790288 (707m).



There are about three simple pitches to the head of the big one. We used an 80m rope for these, a little longer would have made for an easier changeover to the main drop. At the small ledge at 45m there are two beefy bolts for the main 100m drop. For a man on the big drop rope, the

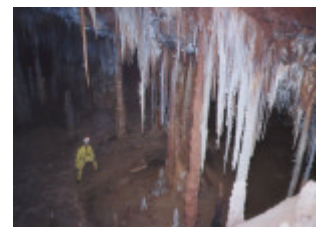


ledge is big enough to wait at,. We used an 110m rope for the big drop, which reached the floor with a bit to spare. The pitch hangs in free space and is awesome.

It took us on average half an hour each to prussik out. We were all out by about 10:00pm having entered the cave at about 11:00am. Once at the bottom, the floor is littered with enormous boulders, some the size of houses. There is a guideline leading through this maze to the lower well-decorated part of the cave. It saved us a lot of time.

The great chamber is quite stupendous. After passing through the boulders of the main chamber, the formations begin. The very best are at the final chamber. There is no stream way in the cave. To make up for it there is a Soda Syphon and a sign reading 'Sifon Terminal Del Complejio Del Carlista', Sifon being Spanish for sump.

**Cueva Coventosa** This is a popular cave. A major SRT through trip exists from





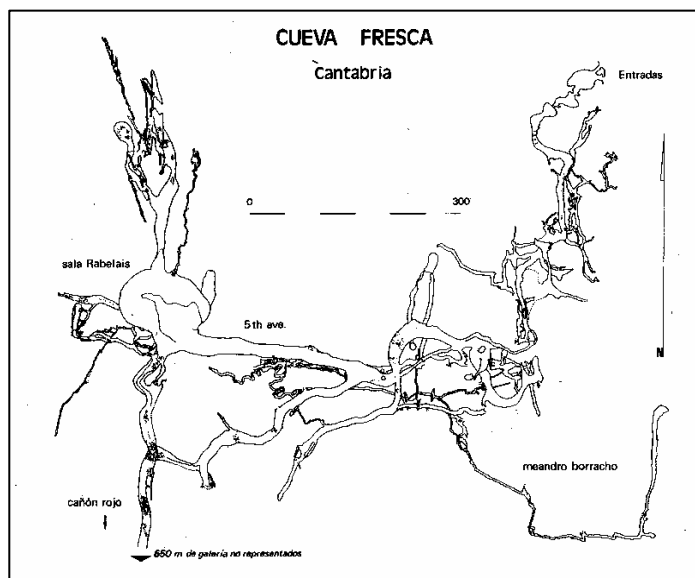
the high altitude Cueva Cueto entrance. Coventosa is easy to find. Take the right turn just before the road up the Ason valley from Arredondo crosses the river. There is parking at the hamlet of Valdeason at the end of the road. From there, a well-worn path along the side of the valley reaches the entrance in about 10 minutes (passing a few cow sheds oozing noxious slurry). A huge cold draught blows out.

We made two trips into Coventosa. On our first trip we went to the first of the lakes. These are on the Cueto – Coventosa through trip. They can only be passed by dinghy. There are various small climbs and traverses on the way to the lakes. All were permanently rigged. The streamway is splendid. The trip took us about 6 hours.

Our second trip was just to view the formations near the entrance (20 minutes in). Just inside the entrance there is a 10m pitch with a shallow approach. It needs SRT kit, though there is a place for a ladder.

After our first trip, Mick had Bill help him re-find a cave he had 'found' 10 years previously. He had been unable to explore its blackness at the time, alone and with no light. After much scrambling on the very steep hillside it was duly rediscovered. By UK standards it was a large cave with enormous chambers. It had been well visited by both man and beast, having many bones and fire remains on the floor. Mick can now rest easy in his bed without dreaming of caverns measureless to man awaiting him in Spain !

**Cueva Fresca** This is a hard cave to find. It took us all morning and the help of some passing local cavers (we did not have the GPS with us). It's main entrance is at 30T 0468465 4790150 and an altitude of 610m. We parked by the church in the hamlet of Bo San Antonio off the Ason valley road. Then we followed a track south, over the river and passed some meadows. After the meadows, we took a fairly indistinct path on the right, straight up the side of the valley, through some woods. This crossed a small gully before emerging at the large, strongly draughting entrance. It is quite an arduous climb.



We did not come across as many formations as in the other caves. It is more sporting however with a number of traverses and bold steps. There is a through trip from Sima Tibia, high on the hill. We reached the huge, deep Sala Rabelais chamber and then the junction with the through trip route. There are fixed aids in place wherever necessary but some were a bit old and worn. We spent about 6-7 hours in the cave. On our return we found three new born kittens ensconced in the bumper of the van! We returned them safe and sound to the farm next to Casa Tomas where we assumed they had come from.

*Ed: MCG visited the same area in the late 1980's with Dave Elliot, and completed the Cueto - Coventosa through trip, dinghies and all!!*