

Matienzo – Summer 2015

This is a report of some of the activities by DCC members in support of the Matienzo Caves Project. The expedition was joined by over a dozen members of the DCC, some for one week and some for two and of course Steve is out there for longer still. Accommodation ranged from tent to apartment and there was plenty of socialising with the rest of the expedition in the Baker's, Pablo's and Bar Tomás.

Digging, exploring and recording

Lennie's Cave

Lennie's Cave was our first call for Pete O'N to carry on work at a rift on the western end (marked "gap may open up" on the survey). After a bit of drilling and snapping by Pete O'N, Pete C, Billy, Tom and Anton, the rift was enlarged slightly but did not lead on any further. While this was going on Dave, Lauren and Nigel were taking photos elsewhere. After a while, Pete O'N gave up on the rift and Tom used the drill to attack a vertical rift in the stal'd boulder choke just to the east of Pete's rift. No success. Then Pete O'N pushed Lauren into a rift off the main passage (between the fork to the second entrance and the streamlet) where she managed to gain another 2 m before risking getting stuck. Tom and Anton had another look in the muddy gravel in the eastern boulder choke (the Frenzy) but could not get further. It looks like it would be useful to enlarge the Frenzy so that more people could get in and dig. That was about it for the day so we retreated to a bar in Badames.

To see the survey, go to <http://matienzocaves.org.uk/surveys/3721-current.pdf>.

Cueva del Espino (0489), Cueva Chica (0083) and Cueva de las Bardalones (0094)

Having planned a trip to 489, to pay our respects to Roy Hayes, we decided to try our luck at descending the Risco waterfall path and also taking a look at a couple of caves on Cueto which needed photographing and surveying (0083, 0094). We had also spotted what looked like a cave entrance from the apartments and wanted to check it out. The team was Pete C, Billy, Nigel and Dave. We reached 489 by a different route – again – and had a quick look around and then crossed the valley below it to attack Cueto from the Matienzo valley side. It turned out that recent fires had tamed a lot of the gorse so the walk was not too bad. Round at Cueto, we contoured down until we reached first 0083 and then 0094. After scaring a few horses out of 0094, we went in and up to the end where we found that it was possible to go a bit further through an easy squeeze between stal. Inside the extension, there were some bear scratches on the wall. Returning out and photographing as we went, Dave looked up a side passage to a second entrance. We found that 0094 was the cave we had seen from the apartment and its alternative name: Cueva del Triangulo is a pretty fair description of how it looked from below.

Turning to 0083, again we went in to the end but this time Nigel and Dave surveyed out as there was no decent survey in the expedition records. In an alcove off the first branch of the cave, we found bear paw marks again, this time on soft clay on the wall. A number of photos were taken and we left the cave.

Dave had a look at a black hole on the hillside above 0083 and 0094 but the climb too it was too challenging without aids.

On the way back down, which again proved to be fairly straightforward, we spotted a shaft right by the track which had not been descended. This is covered in the next section.

Above Risco (Shaft 4215, Cave 4216)

We went back up the footpath from Sedo to the top of the Risco waterfall. Leaving for the moment the shaft we had found previously, we looked in the field above for a shaft (0185) which was

supposed to be near the barn and had not been descended. After a good look around, we could not find anything and thought that maybe the farmer had filled it in or covered it. Meanwhile, we found a small cave, about 4 m diameter chamber with a faint draught, which was later numbered 4216. Giving up 0185 as lost, we went back to the shaft found previously – now numbered 4215 – and after clearing a load of gorse, Nigel got into the top of the shaft on a pile of horse bones, plastic bags and barbed wire fence. A few bashes with a spade cleared enough space to drop a ladder and a descent was made of the 8 m shaft landing on more bones and plastic bags. The site turned out to be a rift with some formations but no way on wide enough to follow. At each end and in the floor, there were narrow ways on – but too tight for any normal human – even for Lauren. After taking more photos and some measurements, Nigel came out and the shaft was left.

BigMat Calf Hole (3916), Torca la Vaca (2889) and Cuba Libre (4182)

The plan was to help Phil and Juan install some support into the horizontal section of the dig at BigMat Calf Hole. Phil set up a generator and power drill which he used to break off rock at the bottom of the dig in order to fit segments of a plastic tube. The work was slow and he resorted to using caps instead of the drill. Meanwhile, Anton, Tom, Lauren, Dave and Pete O’N went in via BigMat Calf Hole to explore and survey in Vaca, particularly aiming for Deep Rifts Passage.

After some time on the dig, we were surprised to find Anton returning over the surface with a big grin on his face saying that he and Lauren had just emerged from another entrance to Vaca, not previously known. They had had to push a couple of boulders out of the way but otherwise it was quite an easy route in to Deep Rifts Passage.

Phil, Juan, Anton and Nigel immediately set off to look at the entrance which was found after some time in woods – fortunately, Lauren stayed there to give us some help finding it. Anton and Nigel went back down to take some pictures while Lauren and Juan looked at the obvious pot in the same depression (3470). Obviously, this was an important find but it did leave Phil a bit peeved to find that his work at BigMat Calf Hole might have become unnecessary. In the end, though, it was agreed that BigMat Calf Hole still provides an important entrance to the system and still needs to be reinforced. The new entrance was named Cuba Libre in honour of what had become the staple drink for certain members of the expedition.

Digging at 1438

Pete O’N dragged us off on a misty evening to have a look at an area near but not over 415. Some work had been done at the site about 3 years ago but Pete felt it warranted another look. So the next day when the mist had turned to rain, we set off armed with digging tools. The team was Pete O’N, Pete C, Billy, Lauren, Dave, Anton, Tom and Nigel. Initially, Nigel, Anton and Pete O’N concentrated on 1438 but Tom got excited about a dig a few metres away which was blocked by a large boulder. Some capping work eventually got rid of the boulder and Tom, Dave, Billy and Pete O’N went down into a new cave/shaft that was given the number 4189. The bottom of the new cave draughts slightly and will warrant a return trip some time.

Valline

Originally, this trip was billed as a working trip to take in a rope to a pitch near the streamway. However, for a number of reasons (such as leaving the rope with the wrong person), it developed into a photographic trip for Tom, Lauren and Dave with Nigel and Bill in support (i.e. holding flashguns). Pete C was also there but had to turn back after a while to help Donna and Sheryl out of the cave when it became a bit too technical for them.

Reñada

This trip was a mixture between tourist and working. Nigel, Lauren and Sheryl went in with Ali who wanted to do some surveying in the Stuffed Monk area. He was also keen for Lauren to take some pictures in a side passage that runs parallel to Stuffed Monk Gallery. We also had a group of three French cavers with us who wanted to see further in the cave. After the usual route-finding mistakes, we got into the main section of the cave relatively quickly and Lauren took a number of pictures. Sheryl was getting a bit cold so we exited with Ali after about 3 hours. After coming out,

we walked along to Comelliante to wash of the mud and also for Ali and Nigel to have a look in some side passages. The same day, Bill, Dave, Anton, Pete O'N, Pete C and Tom went shaft-bashing.

Digging above the Mushroom Field (4131 and ?????)

Led by Phil and with Juan, we went up to two sites above the Mushroom Field which draught a bit with the aim of opening up routes into the back end of Uzueka. Both digs took a hammering but clearly would need more concerted effort so we abandoned them after a few hours.

Tourist trips

As well as the working days described above, we also did a couple of touristy trips to Jivero II, Coventosa, Arenal, Agua and Comelliante.

Other activities

Apart from the caving, Nigel, Liz, Billy, Dave and Pete C had a day out at Castro Urdiales along the coast towards Bilbao. Lovely sunny day but it was windy and the beach was too crowded so we stayed on dry land. There were also the usual trips to Bar Tomás and a BBQ at the apartments as well as an expedition dinner of Russian salad followed by goat stew.

In conclusion, it was a very productive fortnight with caving and digging almost every day adding at least four more sites onto the Matienzo index.