

MATIENZO 2019

Yet again the (in)famous five set off for Matienzo at the end of July for a three week stay at La Taberna, the apartments near the Baker's Bar. As last year and the year before we were Bill Booth, Pete Clewes, Nigel Dibben, Dave Dillon and Liz Taylor. Dave of course prefers to stay on the campsite behind Bar Germán but we keep in touch each morning by radio. As well as these five, the DCC was also represented by Richard Bullock, Tom Howard and Steve Martin.

The only specific plan this year was to carry on digging at site 2522 which Phil Papard reckoned only needed two days for a breakthrough. See later! Beyond this, we planned to revisit some of the earlier sites which may not have been visited for some years.

As well as the caving, digging and surface walking, we all went on a few "culture days" including museums, historic show caves and the Picos de Europa.

Site 2522

This site has been known for some years and it has always been thought that it could provide a back-door to Cueva del Torno. We had a couple of days on it in 2018 and went back to resume the dig. In 2018, we had dug down about 5 metres in a sink on the edge of a field with no active stream. In 2019, we found it had not changed so we re-erected the tripod over the entrance and carried on digging down, following the draught.



The dig at the end of Day 1 with the 4-legged tripod. When we started, it was still covered from the year before but we had to re-erect the tripod.



Bill was proud of his spoil heap and the dry-stone walling around it.

The technique was simple, one person at the bottom filled the bucket, one hauled up the bucket (which was installed on a 2 to 1 pulley system), one grabbed the bucket and one person emptied the bucket. Pete and Nigel rotated around the first two jobs and Bill generally did the emptying. When we had extra helpers, we were able to use a drag-tray to drag the spoil further away from the dig. One of the features of the dig was the number of changes to the design of the haulage system. We lost count after it had been changed about a dozen times as each new person arrived.

Over the three weeks, we went digging at 2522 on five days and extended the cave down by 6m from 4.6m in 2018 to 10.8m this year. In 2018, the length was insignificant as essentially it was just a shaft but by the end of 2019, Pete had surveyed a total of 22m in the cave. The first couple of days were spent digging down until we found a bedding plane roof going off on the east side. We ignored a filled

passage “straight on” even though there was a draught (and still is) because the flat roofed but filled up “chamber” appeared to offer better opportunities.



The flat roof and the way on. This was dug out by Juan and Pete to reach the current end. The scale is 10cm.



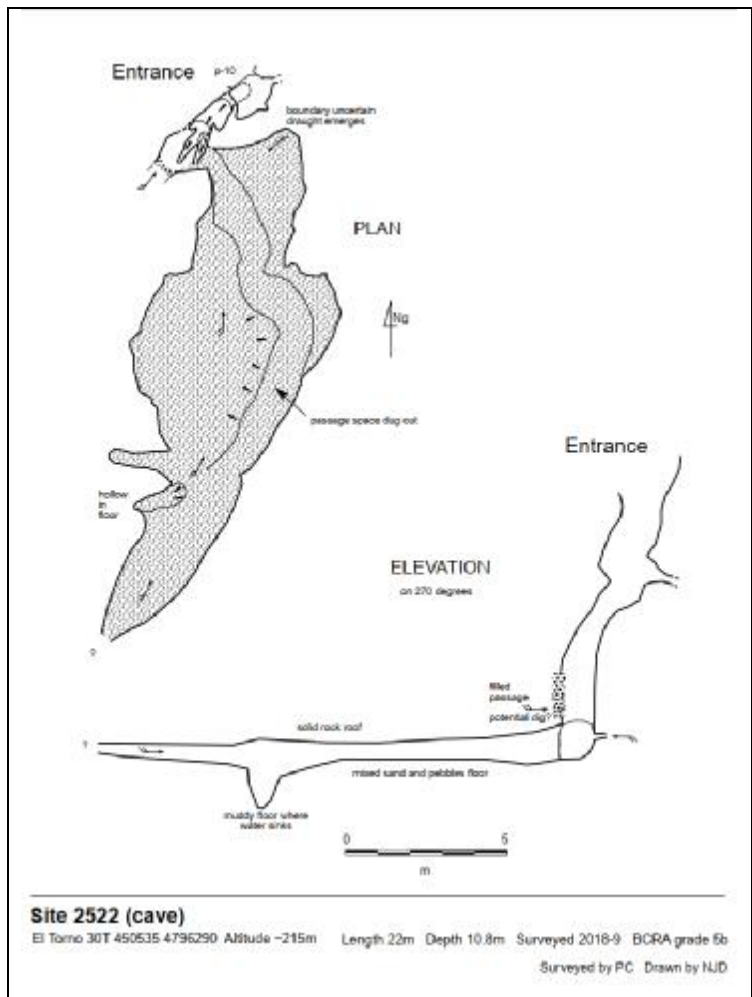
The digging system: (1) bucket raised, (2) bucket emptied, (3) spoil dragged away, (4) spoil dumped. Note the Egyptian-style ramp.

After digging enough out of the shaft to get under the roof, we were able to make a way into the “chamber” until on the last day, Pete was able to stand up in a hollow at its southern end where water had washed out the sediment. There is still a draught but it is hard to find where it is coming from.

Bill is well-known for his complaint about the number of DCC digs that have ended up with us “kissing frogs” but, for once, we had a real cave – but not the backdoor – yet.

The cave was surveyed by Pete and a small scale copy is shown here. By the end of 2018, we had only reached half way down the shaft where it starts to become vertical.

During the digging, we were helped on different days by Richard, Tom, Juan, Phil and John Southworth.



Cueva de Gonzalo (0014), Cueva de Tiva (0026) and Cueva del Transformador (0032)

These three sites are within easy walking distance of the apartments and The Baker's so we had a walk up to them to explore and to re-survey Cueva de Gonzalo (the old survey had one leg 180 degrees out!).

Tiva was the first site which was easily found as it is a large resurgence which is usually dry but obviously acts as an overflow resurgence for the Risco system in high water conditions. There was no entrance picture on file so one aim was to supply this to the expedition website.



Composite picture showing main entrance to left and minor entrance to right

The main passage turned out to be quite impressively large and then off it is a dry series. Part way in, there was a platform in the roof covered in cheeses! The source of the milk for the cheese became apparent when we were joined by a very friendly goat which took a particular liking to Pete but was offended by Nigel's camera box and ended up trying to eat and then butt it. We returned to Tiva a second time to take some photos and a couple are shown here.



Main passage



Cheese store

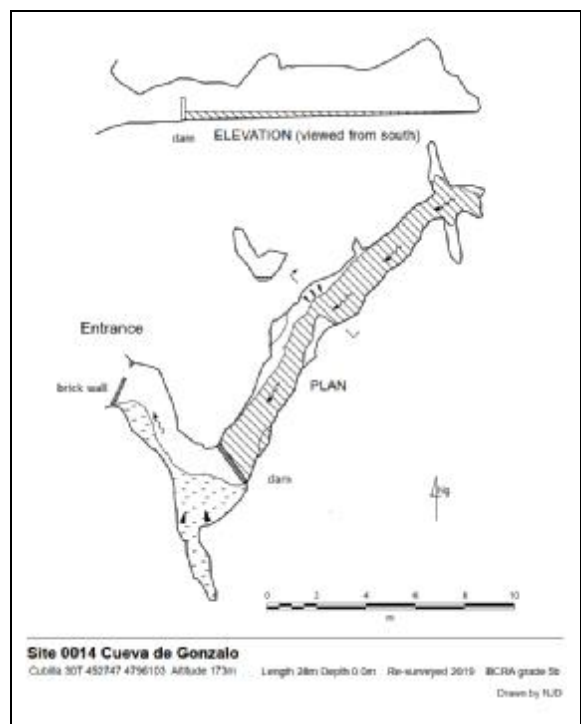
When we returned to photograph and explore further, Pete and Nigel climbed up into the sump by-pass leading to the continuation but were blocked by a flat-out awkward squeeze between boulders. A bit of work with a hammer and chisel or with some caps would make the route much easier.



After Tiva, we went to Cueva de Gonzalo (0014) which is a small cave with a stream emerging and used as a water supply to the goat farm. The old survey had it turning right after a few metres whereas the cave really turns left. A quick survey was carried out but no photos inside. The end of the cave is pretty well blocked with stal and by the water dammed up in the floor. The Matienzo website talks of the sump as being a potential dive but there seems to be no record of it being dived.

The third visit was to Cueva del Transformador (0032). This cave is another of the Risco resurgences but lower down the hill and is an active spring. Looking in, it turned out to be sumped almost straight away. A couple of photos were taken and a Disto measurement to the visible end.

After this, we headed back to the Baker's for a debrief and decided to return to Tiva another day. The photos here were taken on both trips.





The entrance to Cueva de Gonzalo



Bill in the entrance to Cueva del Transformador

Cubija Valley

Pete and Nigel paid another visit to the area on the west side of the Cubija valley and north of the Vega valley. We had looked at some sites in 2018 and returned to the same area for another look. Although we spotted a few known sites and found one draughting spot, nothing dramatic was found.

Dig 0874

On one day, we gave Patrick and Phil some help with the dig at 0874, just a few metres away from 0880. The entrance is a tight draughting rift and time was spent capping and breaking up a large piece of flaky rock, probably country-rock, which narrows the rift. The picture to the right shows Phil preparing to cap the troublesome rock. Note double safety-specs (see 2018 report).



Phil preparing to cap the rock

Cueva del Torno (2366)

This was a serious trip to support Si and Di in finding and pushing the connection to Riaño Cave. A few days before, they and others had managed to link Riaño and Llanío caves adding to the total length of the Four Valley System so it was only right to have a go at closing the 50m or so gap between Riaño and Torno. Nigel and Pete went along armed with various copies of surveys and together we managed to find our way to the largest chamber – Torno Chamber – and from there to the old end of the cave in a boulder choke. This was as far as the detailed survey went as the remainder was only represented by a Survex centre-line. Si and Di were rapidly through the choke but Nigel found it too tight (fat old b*****) and reversed out painfully and he and Pete started out. Route finding was still difficult despite Di putting markers at a few strategic points but we eventually made day to our great relief. It was on the way out that Nigel slipped and bruised his right thigh but more of that later. Next day, we were both complaining of aching leg muscles following all the traversing and awkward climbing in the cave. We would not recommend it as a sporting trip! Si and Di did not find a way through and they lost the draught so it sounds like the job may wait for another couple of enthusiastic explorers. If we can open up 2522 as a back door, then it might make access easier but we reckon the boulder choke will need further enlargement.

Dig 2831

Phil Papard took us to a site above Aguanaz in San Antonio. Here there was a small resurgence and large sink – in fact a lot of large sinks – and the one in question was draughting out. You can just about get underground into what really seems to be nothing more than a boulder choke so we chose instead to dig down in a draughting rift outside the ‘cave’. Some hours were spent on this but to no conclusion. Most of the digging was by Pete and Nigel so Bill, Dave and Richard scouted around the rest of the area and found a couple of other draughting holes, including one which seemed to go down beside a tree trunk. In the end, we gave it up as a long term dig. Perhaps we’ll come back another day and look at some of the other features in the area.

Cuevaca 0177

Following on from the plan to look at some of the older caves, we went to Cuevaca, a remnant cave in the South Vega. We were joined by Liz for this trip which explored the first half of the cave and resulted in a number of photos for Nigel and Dave. Later we decided that it would be worthwhile paying another visit in another year as one point in the cave is on the same level and not too far from Marvin’s Marbles in Torca del Coterón.



In Cuevaca showing the size of the old cave



Team photo!

Around the South Vega

Pete, Bill and Dave had a look at some old sites including 0495 which had been dug in the 1990s by the DCC. On the way round, they found a hole in the field large enough and deep enough to take all of Pete up to his shoulders. These were logged but just missed the accolade of being site number 5000.



Hole in the field (photo by Pete)



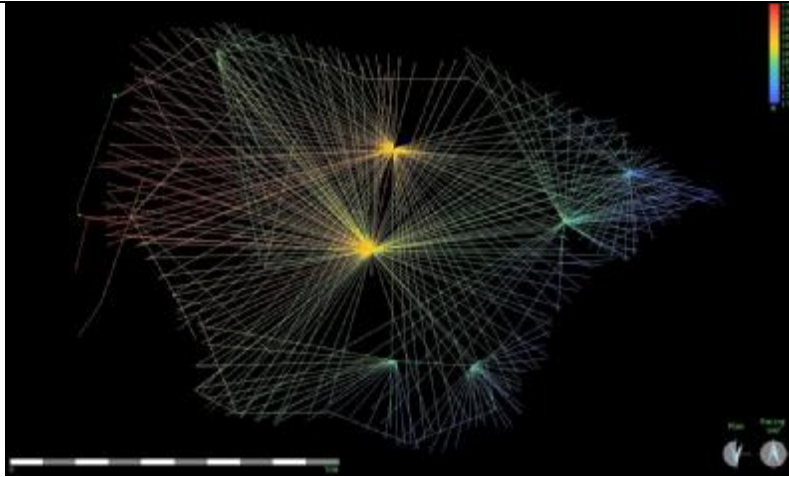
After opening



Unknown cave (photo by Pete)

Las Cosas (0084)

Richard and Tom took a trip into Las Cosas with DistoXs to do some underground calibration and to get some extra survey data to complete the survey started a couple of years ago since there was a large closure error in one of the legs from last time which made the drawing up a bit confusing. This was one of Richard's 'objectives' for this year's Matienzo visit. He took over 300 splays from multiple points to get the shape of the chamber, where possible utilising his original survey stations. The survey drawing is not yet complete, but below are the survex file showing all of the new splays added into the 2017 survey and a photo of Tom doing some drawing on the PDA just below one of the rock pinnacles (survey station 1).



Survex file of the splays in the main chamber showing the outline of the walls



Tom drawing up the plan details

Fresnedo II

Tom went on a trip with James Carlisle. Further details are awaited. Dave had been trained to say "No" and managed to avoid a trip this year.

Cultural tours

As part of the tradition of the DCC visits in recent years, we make visits to places outside the valley. This year, we visited:

- Prehistoric painted caves at Puente Viesgo (El Castillo and Las Monedas)
- Santander archaeological museum – allow yourself at least 2 ½ hours!
- The Picos de Europa – Sotres, Covadonga, Cangas de Onis
- Ramales historic car festival!
- Laredo old town (Nigel and Liz)



At the entrance to Las Monedas cave



A faithful reconstruction (?) in Lego of the Roman invasion of Spain



Historic cars in Ramales. Bar Germán was represented by two old SEATs



Looking down the road from Sotres in the Picos

Other activities

We cannot forget the hard work Liz did in keeping us alive and well. She cooked most nights and also did washing and – would you believe it – ironing. Without Liz, the holiday would definitely have been duller. Liz also joined in two art sessions with Penny and Hilary, one on water colour work and the other with pastels. To cap it all, she also designed the winning logo for the 2020 expedition (60 years in Matienzo).

In the evenings, we usually went to Bar La Panaderia – the Baker’s – as it is close and friendly but we also visited Bar Germán a few times as well as having meals at Bar Tomás and the ‘tapas’ bar in Ogarrio. As usual, one evening we had a barbecue at the apartment where Steve and Susie showed off their skills. We even managed a visit to Arkwright’s on the way in and twice to the Euromedia Bar at Hornedo

although this should probably now be called the 1.2 Euromedia Bar as the price has finally risen! Of course, there was also the traditional expedition dinner and on the last Saturday, the Horticultural Competition.



Injuries

Well not too many except that Nigel's bruise (see Cueva del Torno above) turned a bit nasty after about three days with what was probably internal bleeding so he and Liz spent most of the final Saturday and Sunday at Laredo Hospital A&E. They treated the problem quickly and efficiently. However, after the first visit, the doctor sent a text (in English) asking Nigel to return as they had reviewed the X-rays and were unhappy with what they saw. As a result, he ended up in a borrowed wheelchair and on borrowed crutches going home a day late. Fortunately, the NHS were satisfied a week later that there was no fracture and he resumed walking and flexing the leg. Thanks go to Liz and all the ex-pats in Matienzo for their support and assistance over those final couple of days.

Acknowledgments

To conclude, it was another worthwhile year and we must acknowledge the hospitality and support of the resident expedition members in the valley including Phil, Juan and Steve, and also all the residents of the valley. Special thanks to Miguel at Bar La Panaderia who is still trying to teach us better Spanish and to the three sisters who own and run the apartments at La Taberna.