

2016 MATIENZO EXPEDITION REPORT

Members of the DCC were in Matienzo from the end of July to mid-August. With Steve Martin (who was of course out for considerably longer), those present for shorter times were: Bill Booth, Richard Bullock, Pete Clewes, Nigel Dibben, Lauren Griffin, Tom Howard, Charlotte Meakin, Pete O'Neill, Anton Petho and Liz Taylor. We were also joined by Scott Bradley and Alex Ritchie.

As usual, we tended to work as a group but on several occasions, DCC members were working with others on the expedition including Juan Corrin, Phil Pappard, Pete Egan, Rupert Skorupka and Pete Smith. Numbers in Matienzo were down considerably, probably because of Eurospeleo and the absence of a MUSC team.

Three members had assistance from the Expedition Fund: Lauren, Charlotte and Anton.

Dig at 4407 in Garzón area

With directions from Phil, we went to an interesting dig near Garzón, up the hill west of Solórzano. The dig is in the bottom of a depression which looks as if it is a collapsed chamber. We dug down capping and removing several boulders which had been left during a previous dig. After two days' work, we could get into a narrow passage at the bottom but it did not continue. The draught appeared to be coming from the right under a rock roof and Phil cleared a few boulders but it would need another concerted effort to make more progress.

Picture: Looking down into the dig



Surveying and photography at Cueva de la Iglesia, Navajeda

Charlotte went with ___ to survey Cueva de la Iglesia (4463), a recent find.

The next day, she took Pete, Bill and Nigel to the cave and we photographed some of it. Charlotte completed a section of the survey notes. The cave appears to be largely phreatic with a lot of orange mud.

Picture: Pete and Charlotte in the "Main" Chamber



Dairy Dig (1189)

Having looked at the dig at the end of the 2015 expedition, we decided to return and have a serious attempt to push this draughting cave in South Vega. Two days were spent on the dig into sand, mud and boulders including some capping of rock in the floor. Twice, the wall of clay collapsed so we decided to leave the dig to stabilise. The draught was strong from the floor but appears to be coming up immature rifts below the main phreatic passage. After the second day of work which was Richard's first day in the valley, we relocated Dairy Dig 2 (1252) and Dead Fox Cave (1253) – see below. One interesting find was the presence of cave bear claw marks on the wall in the cave.

Picture: Bill at the entrance to Dairy Dig



Dead Fox Cave/Dig (1253)

Two and a half days were spent in Dead Fox. The entrance is a walk straight into a phreatic passage of good height. At the end, it bends left and hits a blockage of material that has probably come down from a surface shaft. There was a slight draught which seemed to come down over the blockage but a gap could also be seen underneath. We dug down below the jammed boulders and clay and, over three days, cleared about 3m of passage. It's a bit tight at present because the phreatic walls close in but at the end can be seen a clean washed wall of limestone.

Picture: Richard digging at the face



Orillón (0023)

Pete, Nigel and Bill had a trip with Pete S and Juan C into one of the early caves, Orillón, to try to clear a blockage at the bottom. Water from the cave has been traced to Riva on the other side of Cruz de Usano so potential exists for another kilometre or more of cave. The cave narrows down at the present end and blocks to the extent that flood water backs up hundreds of metres into the cave passage. The dig was worth a try but really rather futile as the depth of fill is probably massive.

Picture: Pedro filling the bucket and Juan holding the handle



Vaca photo and tourist trip via BigMat Calf Hole (2889 and 3916)

To give Richard a chance to see a bit of real cave and for Pete and Nigel who had not been beyond the BigMat Calf Hole dig, we had a trip along one of the main passages for Vaca. We dropped in down the dig and the short rope pitch below then went north along meandering passage leading to Ed's Birthday Passage until we reached the chokey area where we turned back. Several photos were taken of the passage and the gypsum crystals.

On the way home, the Euromedia Bar was opened up for us.

Picture: Richard looking at gypsum crystals



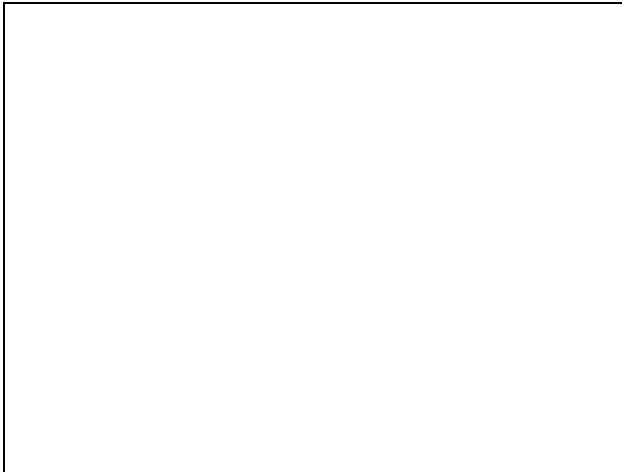
Cueva Las Cosas search and finds on the Cueto hillside

This was Nigel's bright idea for a "quick look" at an old site, Cueva Las Cosas, a 60m diameter chamber just up the hillside. Armed with GPS and grid reference we found – nothing. Instead, we relocated 0616, found that 1247 represented two caves (now numbered 1247 and 3619), found a new rift (4470) and re-found 3930. Nigel found 0616 top entrance when he dropped his helmet and light into it by accident and then had to retrieve it in the dark while Pete went into 0616 bottom entrance following the draught. We proved the connection and adjusted the GPS coordinates for these a couple of days later. Richard went down the new rift (4470) and between us we found the two caves which were previously logged as one. All in all, it was a hot and sweaty hillside! The one thing we failed in was finding Cueva Las Cosas – it is obviously not where the coordinates put it. We even tried further round the hill in jungle but failed. It looks like we were not far off but maybe we need to go back in winter to get an accurate fix on it.

0616 and the two caves were surveyed for the expedition records.

Pictures: (1 and 2) 0616 bottom and top sections, (3) Pete in 1247





South Vega (3980)

Juan recommended this undescended shaft to us. After cutting away the holly bush, Pete got down to an earth and boulder floor. A shaft a few metres away proved to be the same with no draught in either. Bill found a draughting hole a hundred metres or so away and got quite excited until Nigel spotted a bolt – it was Hammered Hole.

Picture: Pete in 3980



Cueto area (3004 and 3640)

To finish off the trip, we were taken by Steve to an old find which needed further research as it allegedly contained a bottomless sump of huge dimensions which Jim Lister was planning to dive. The shaft, 3004, was just off a track by a green bath not far from La Cuvia. After getting the wrong track and then finding the green bath had moved, we found the entrance and soon had it opened up. Charlotte volunteered to go down first which was just as well as she was the only one who could get down on the first day (Nigel got stuck). The following day, we returned and Bill capped it open so we all went down (Pete, Nigel, Charlotte, Steve and Phil) and took some pictures and a quick survey. The sump turned out to be a muddy pool which dries up in the summer!

Pictures: (1) Charlotte bolting the pitch and (2) Pete in the main chamber





Cueva de La Loca II (0020)

Continuing with Pete Smith's project to resurvey the entire cave, we surveyed approximately 135m of passage, part of which appeared on older surveys where the original survey data had been lost, but there was some newly surveyed passage as well. We found the station "0" at the previous limit of resurveyed passage and then explored further in with the aim of surveying our way out. After a long flat-out crawl including one very tight squeeze, we dropped down a hole into a dry stream bed which led to the main streamway. We headed upstream to a convenient place where another inlet joined and started surveying back downstream. Charlotte took the readings and Richard took notes and tried his best not to get the notebook too mucky whilst crawling along the streamway. After a short while we found a downstream sump, which our new survey suggests is at more or less the same altitude and only 30m away from the upstream sump in the Cueva Oñite (0027) end of the Risco system (0025) and had been dye traced through. Pete has suggested that it might be possible to lower the level of the sump at the Risco end to make the breakthrough. Surveying back up the dry stream bed we then had to survey up the flat-out crawl, which made things a bit tricky in places. We also found a couple of unexplored passages which were a bit too snug to fit in, but must lead somewhere.



Pictures by Charlotte: Exploring and surveying

Site 3627 Seldesuto

Site was visited first by Lauren, Phil, Hilary & Pete O'N.

We dropped several shafts on this first visit to the area; Site 3627 was by far the most interesting, described as a climb down a slope to a sharp right hand bend leading onto an undescended 4m pitch. The 4m pitch was free climbed and led to a 10m pitch with a good draught. Later on the same day, Lauren and Pete descended an 18m shaft which had been dropped before but not surveyed, we surveyed and pushed some passages to a conclusion. (Site number to be added.)

Two more visits were made to site 3627, with Phil & Hilary, Pete Clewes, Pete O'Neill, Pete Smith, Alex. Anton, Tom, etc.

The fine 10 m shaft was descended, and led round a corner to a tall rift passage, too tight to pass at the moment. The rift leads on to the head of another pitch which is presently too tight to descend. Rocks thrown drop a debated 10-20 m. We started snappering our way too this next pitch, but a cock up with the equipment, and a faulty snapper meant we ran out of time. This site is in a very good position in the blank area beyond Cueva Vallina, it also draughts and is well worth a re-visit.

Shafts at Alisas (0722, 4239, 4240) freefall practice

Pete O'Neill, Phil Pappard, Hilary Pappard

The three of us went the Alisas area to drop the undescended shafts at sites **4239** and **4240**. Phil had walked the area previously and located the entrances. Walking down the steep hill from the road, the first entrance we came too did not locate with any known cave on the oryx GPS map data. The cave had a spit bolt just below the 15m entrance, so we knew it had been descended, but the question was what happened at the bottom. It was decided Pete would go down, so Phil tied the rope round a dodgy flake and thinking this wasn't good enough drilled and fitted a stud bolt to what looked like limestone pavement. Pete described his experience: "I descended. About 5m from the floor of the 15m shaft, the base could clearly be seen to be blocked with the rotting remains of many dead animals: cows, sheep, etc. so noticing a parallel shaft I dropped down the 5m to the floor. A gap could be seen over boulders so I de-kitted and dug, until the overpowering stench of dead animals became too much. Setting back off up the shaft, I'd got about 3m off the floor when I plummeted back down hitting the deck,

immediately. I realised that the rock the bolt belay had been attached to had detached from the surface and made a mad scramble to hide from the large TV sized block which was plummeting towards me. The rock hit the sharp arête edge separating the two shafts and split with a loud crack; luckily I only got hit by a dinner plate sized piece of rock, the main bulk of the boulder went down the other side of the shaft. Eventually the rope was re-rigged (the damaged section of rope cut out) and then, somewhat sore, I re-ascended. The hanger plate was too distorted to get a bolt back through, and the rope was badly deformed, the full weight of the boulder dropping had pulled the bolt clear out of its hole. The original belay round the dodgy flake had taken all the weight.”

This site turned out to be site **0722** which had been placed on the map in the wrong position (pre-GPS).

Having used up enough lives for one day, it was now Phil’s turn. He dropped the previously undescended site **4239** which was about 8m deep and blocked. Then we went in search of site **4240** which took 1/2hr to find, despite being only 2m from where we’d dropped our sacks. Site **4240** turned out to about 20m deep in a rift and blocked at the bottom.

The pub in Arredondo beckoned.

Cueva del Yoyó (3812)

Work by Tom, Anton and Alex

Tom and Alex had visited Yoyo a year ago. Tom had bravely climbed 30m up an aven and reached a phreatic tube carrying a small stream. The plan for the day was to re-bolt the main 90m pitch so that there were a few rebelays to it split up and then push this phreatic tube. Big Steve and Charlotte tagged along too to lend a hand. Heading down we made it to the top of the 90m pitch, where Anton decided due to the effects of the night before that he would stay at the top along with Charlotte and Big Steve. Tom and Alex then began taking it in turns to re-bolt down the main pitch. This proved more difficult than initially thought and so it was decided that rebolting the main pitch would be the main objective of the day. Due to talk of a meal at Bar Thomas and time pushing on Big Steve, Charlotte and Anton decided to head out taking the old rope from the 90m pitch back out. Tom and Alex would carried on re-bolting the pitch. They then detackled the rest of the pitches back to the entrance as the ropes had been in there for three year!

Shafts near TV Mast (4416 and 4417)

Anton writes: "Due to the long drive through the night [from the Vercors], although I slept for most of it, we decided a chill day was in order. While a group were planning a return to TV mast hill to descend an undescended shaft, Alex was keen to look at a few holes he and Tom had found at Easter. I was sold when the word strong draft got banded about. There were two holes we looked at, the first was a non-starter and was boulder choked rift that would require some serious popping to get into it. The second was more promising, which after having an argument with a large boulder we manage to open up the entrance and were looking down a narrow sloping rift. This again was too tight to enter but had a strong draft and with some capping would be accessible."

Mostajo (0071)

Tourist trip into the beautiful Mostajo, one of the better decorated caves in Matienzo.

Lauren, Charlotte, Scott, Big Steve, Richard, Pete O’N. At the changing area we were met by two bored and very friendly dogs who wanted to follow us up to the 22m entrance pitch. They had to be chased off for fear of them falling down the entrance. Once we were all down the entrance pitch we carried on in the impressive large entrance passages for 200m to the pit. The pit is bypassed by a 60m long rope traverse which is great fun with 30m drops below. The ongoing passage is superbly decorated (the cameras were out already) with the odd crawl and walking to a 3m climb up. Beyond the climb the passage lowers to a 20m, very strongly draughting, flat out crawl (the breakthrough dig in 1983). At this point Scott and Big Steve turned round Scott has back problems and didn’t want to push his luck in the tight crawls. As soon as you’re through the crawl, the passage becomes large again and the formations are great, easy walking carries on for 300m to another pit, which is very near the end of the main drag at this level in the cave. The Golden Void pitch is passed shortly before the final pit. (The extension below the Golden Void pitch was first dropped by members of the DCC.)

Plenty of more photos were taken on the way out.

Great trip followed by beer in the Baker’s Bar.

Fresnedo II (0841)

Exploration trip for Lauren with James Carlisle.

We got to "The Howling" mud duck in record time (every bit as lovely as it sounds!), and on to where the current survey ends to start new exploration and surveying. Crawled into a small yet high chamber, which initially looked to have good potential with ways on. James climbed the C.10m loose boulder pile while I hid under a ledge avoiding any likely rock fall. Once James was up, I crawled out and found a short climb down into a lower section, and heard water. I shouted up to James that I had a streamway in a rift and was climbing down to it. The rift passage is very loose in chossy limestone, I started chimneying down to the streamway, around 8-10 metres or so below. I gingerly placed my toe on a boulder wedged in the rift, which started moving so started backing up looking for a better place to climb down, when suddenly without any warning the boulder came crashing down and the whole passage collapsed around me. At this point James had climbed back down the boulder pile, deciding it was unsafe to continue alone, and he found me climbing out of the streamway looking and sounding rather shaken. Fortunately I came out of the fall with a couple of scrapes only.

We started surveying the small chamber, and then both climbed up the boulder pile one at a time. At the top were two big slopes, slippery looking and very loose, it reminded me somewhat of the slopes filled with deads I have seen at Nenthead. James started climbing/crawling up the first one, and was almost at the top when he shouted "BELOW LAUREN MOVE" or something to that effect. I jumped out of the way in time to look up and watch a TV sized boulder come rolling and sliding down the slope, with all the loose sandy stuff running in behind it. It tumbled down the boulder pile we had just climbed up, and took some of it out on its way.

After obtaining a survey point, James told me to come up, as it was safer up there. At the top we were presented with a large chamber, and more loose climbs. We decided it was too much like "death on a stick" and cautiously climbed back down the pile, and went back to survey the streamway passage. This proved quite difficult as everything seemed to be on the move, and we did our best before calling it a day, and started heading out. The way out proved to be a lot more difficult than the way in, once covered in mud from The Howling duck, there is no dry sand on the other side to roll in and get the mud off, as is the case on the way in. The protected traverse was a comedy act of slippery feet and hands, then a long slog out with a stop for some food and

water in the "Ecstasy Chamber". Once out we met everyone at Bakers before a quick shower and typically fantastic meal at Bar Tomas.

Vallina (0733)

Pete O'Neill, James Carlisle, Phil Pappard, Pete Eagan.

Trip to end of downstream Rio Rioja sump bypass. This new extension bypasses the first 5 sumps, and provides a pitch down into the streamway between sump 5, and the not yet passed sump 6. Strategically it's important, as the bypass continues above and beyond the sump 6 and the window into the area between sumps 6 and 5 provides dry access for diving, this water has been dye tested to the Reñada system.

Phil and Pete Eagan bolted and rigged the 10m pitch down into the streamway between sump 5 and 6, then they surveyed the section of passage between the sumps. Pete O'Neill and James continued onto the dig at the end of the new passage. Approx. 20 minutes later Pete O'N managed to squeeze through, soon followed by James; we then surveyed on into new passage for approx. 150m, in a complex area with many open leads and some climbs down which need tackle. It's difficult at the end to know where the main way on lies. Concerned that the others may not get through the Squeeze we had dug through and for time constraints we returned back to the pitch head into steam between sumps 5 and 6 only to find they hadn't returned yet so we pushed another side passage, near the pitch head which was small and awkward for approx. 20m to a conclusion.

When the others returned, Pete E took me and James to another lead left by himself and others at Easter which ended at an iffy traverse across a large drop needing protection. The traverse didn't look too bad, so sensing that if I didn't do it first James would beat me to it, we went across with no protection climbed up a ramp and came to a short drop down into a large chamber were we called a halt for the day. There is clearly plenty to do in this area.

Great 10.5 hour trip.

Tom, Anton and Alex Ritchie

The final day for this team, as is always the way with expeditions, was spent finding some cracking leads in Vallina that unfortunately were just out of reach. Ali, who sadly was unable to make it out this summer, had told Pete about some promising avens upstream of the first downstream sump. It was also a good opportunity for Tom, Alex and Anton to learn the route into Vallina. Having found some French cavers confused about their route

<p>choices we helped navigate them to the start of the climb leading to the pitch that drops into the streamway. Having made our way to the pitch head we all headed down this truly awesome 37m pitch and landed in the main streamway. After following the water down until we reached a junction where downstream leads to the first sump, we instead headed up stream and reached the avens we were looking for. The first looked truly promising with a 10m bolt climb with visible passage at the top. The second carried a stream and although looking promising didn't look anything as good as the first. After pushing the end of the passage we made are way back down stream inspecting all the possible leads. This resulted in two further avens being located that looked promising for a project next year. Pete O suggested we go and have a look at the new sump bypass. After making are way up the ladders we arrived at a truly awesome but horrible bit of passage. The whole passage is angled at 70° and can only be described as feeling like you are doing a consistent push up along it. After getting a third of the way in we decided we had got enough of a feel for the passage and decided to head back.</p>	
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Trips out for the wrinklies

As well as the caving work, Liz, Pete, Bill and Nigel had trips out of the valley to get a bit of culture. We went to Santillana del Mar, Altamira prehistoric cave, Bilbao (the Guggenheim) and Cabárceno (zoo in an old opencast iron mine – Charlotte also came on this trip).