



The South Wales Caving Club 2013 Cantabria Expedition.

Tour of the Ten Traverses.
27th July – 10th August 2013

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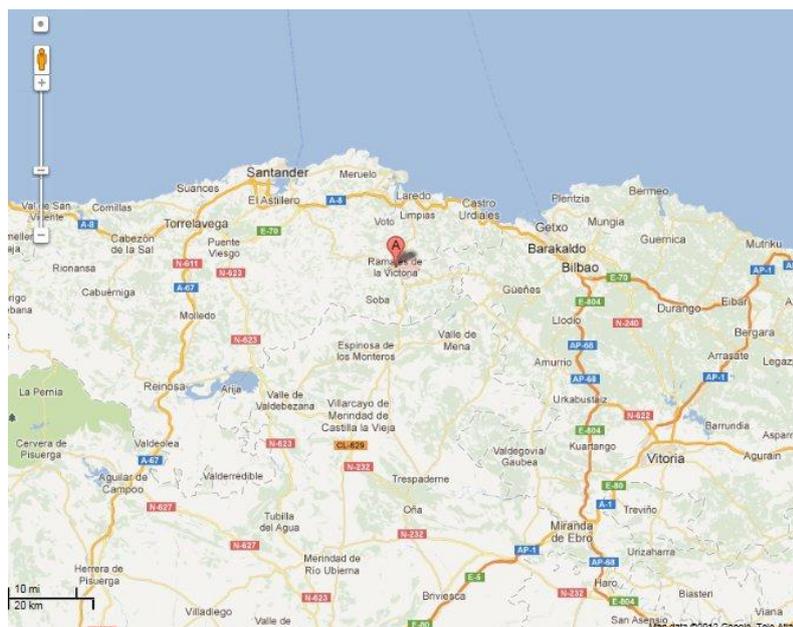
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Dear all

Introduction.....

This is the first circular for the SWCC 2013 expedition to the Cantabria region of Spain. The trip will offer participants the opportunity to not only visit the best caves in the world but also the challenge of completing no less than ten world class traverses (through trips) ranging in duration from a one and half hours sojourn to a full on sixteen hours epic. For a full description of the caving please see the section below labelled 'Caving'.

Cantabria is a very special caving area with which the SWCC enjoys a close relationship. Nestled half way between Santander and Bilbao, the main area of cave interest lies about 15km south of Spain's fabulous northern coastline at a small town called Ramales. The club's association with Cantabria commenced in 1997 with the club's first major trip to the area which focused on exploration of the Pico San Vicente but at the same time a traverse of one of the world's most renowned traverses, Cueto to Coventosa. The 2013 expedition will offer an opportunity for the club to renew its acquaintance not only with the many promising leads discovered in 1997 but also to once again descend the spectacular Cueto shaft and re-visit the spectacular Coventosa system with its cavernous passages and thundering river.



In terms of location Ramales is a short fifteen minute drive from the Matienzo expedition campsite. Santander with its historical buildings, parks and port is a fifty minute drive to the west. Bilbao with its bustling streets and museums is about an hours drive to the east. Directly north of Ramales is the small town of Laredo which sports a large popular sandy beach ideal for small children. The nearby fishing village of Santonia with its marvellous fish restaurants and small streets also sports another fabulous beach.

Organisation.....

I am planning to make an application to the committee for support with SRT rope. Tackle sacks and hangers we already have in stock. I am not anticipating any expedition costs other than covering the cost of the pitch for the control / cooking tent as we have done in previous years. I've already booked the weather!!! All I need now is lots of enthusiastic cavers who would like to see some of the best caves in the world and who might enjoy the odd caving challenge. For anyone who feels especially keen may I say that there is a free expedition Tee shirt (paid for by me) for anyone who completes all ten traverses in the fourteen days!

The holiday cost will, by in large, be what you choose to pay in respect of accommodation and travel. We fly down every Easter from Stansted to Bilbao. It's about a two hour flight and typically a return air fare will cost £100. Car hire is about £100 a week. It's quite reasonable split three or four ways. The drive takes a good 12 – 14 hours from Calais and it's always busy in July / August.

I will be hoping for some level of commitment by Christmas this year. There's no limit on numbers but there is a limit on accommodation at the campsite, bungalows and mobile homes. SRT training and practice trips will start later this year, October half term and spring half term. The usual Easter trip runs 20th -27th April 2013.

Camping.....

The expedition will be based at Camping La Barguilla which can be found at the following web address.....

<http://www.campinglabarguilla.com>

The campsite is located about three minutes drive from Ramales or a leisurely fifteen minute stroll. It has a small number of bungalows for hire. These are converted stables with a very plush level of fitment, polished stone floors and the like. There are also a number of mobile homes for hire. These are the pretty standard two bedroom, kitchen diner, shower room and toilet type homes that you find on most European campsites.



The campsite sports a large bar and restaurant for those wishing to grab an easy meal or drink without a drive. There is also a small public park a couple of minutes walk away alongside the Ason River. The park also has a bar which serves snacks and light meals and the river is ideal for cooling your feet on those hot steamy Spanish afternoons.

I have discussed with the owner the camping area for the expedition and he has offered us a well shaded area that is not divided into formal pitches. The area is big enough to take about twenty small tents or ten large tents. We are welcome to hook up to electricity and the area is about thirty metres from the toilet / shower block. It's ours for the taking if I can guarantee at least twenty campers.

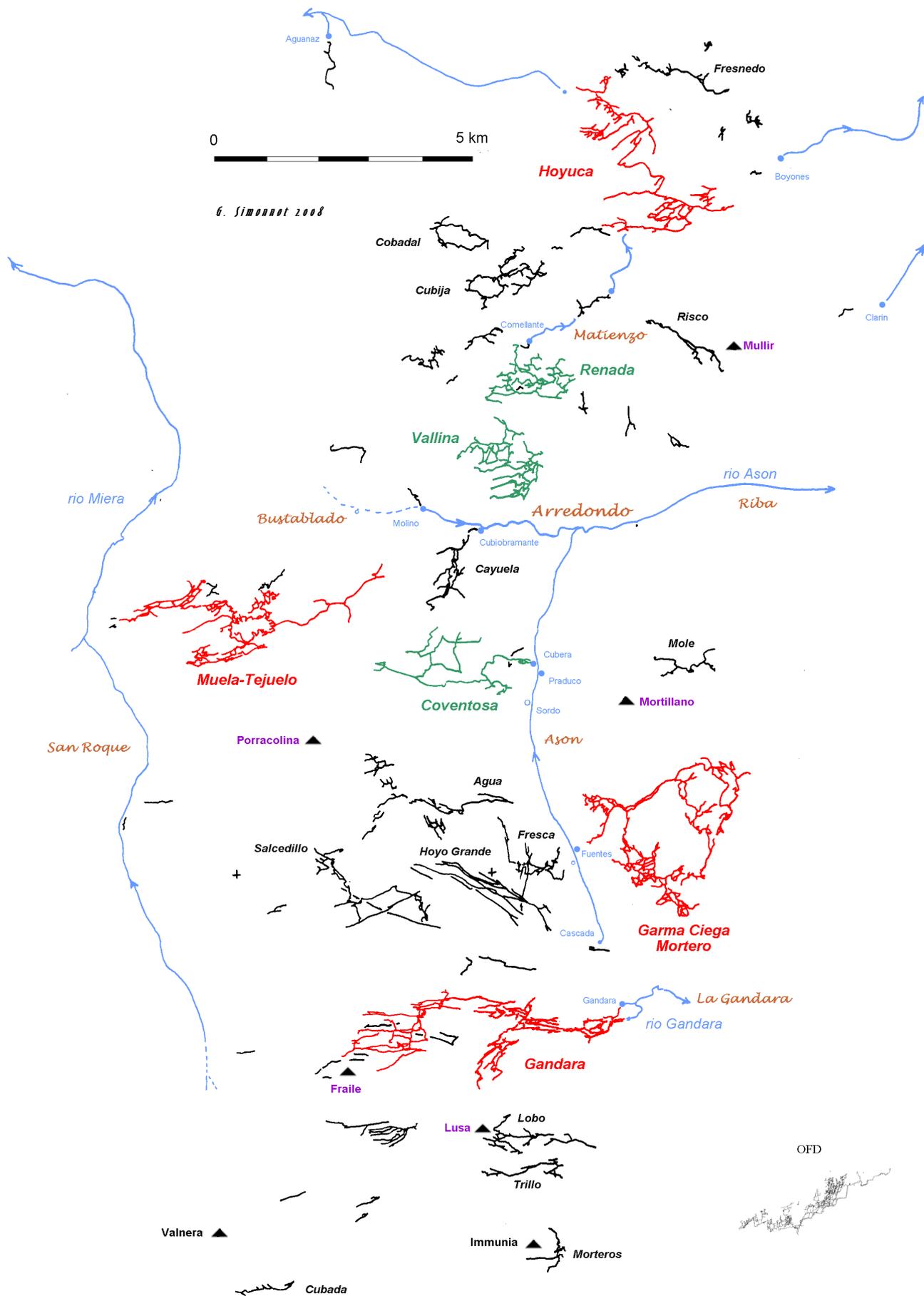
In order to reserve this area I need to know who is intending to come. Please help me with this, it is quite important. If you can tell me what size tent you are intending to bring and whether you wish to share a tent and with whom. ie small two man, medium sized four / five man or giant space dome. I also need to know how many chalets or bungalows to reserve.



Camping will cost 5e per person, 5e per tent, 5e per car with a 3.50e supplement for electricity. So for example two people sharing one tent and one car with electricity would cost 23.5e per night or about 12e each. The bungalows sleep 4 and cost 79e plus tax per day. Seven day week would cost 553e. plus tax. i.e about 150e per person. The Mobile homes sleep 4 and cost 66e plus tax per day. Seven day week would cost 462e. plus tax. i.e. about 130e per person.

Caving.....

For those unfamiliar with Cantabria allow me to demonstrate why I return every Easter to the same small family hotel. The plan below shows several cave systems in their true spatial relationship and to their true scale. One of the cave systems however is false. One of the cave systems on this plan is Ogof Ffynnon Ddu. All cave systems are plotted at the same scale as the other systems but obviously OFD is not in its correct location. Can you spot OFD?



When I say there is a shed load of caving in this valley I mean a mind boggling collection of labyrinths and passages. We are not talking Cwm Dwr entrance series sized passages either. We are talking passages which make gnome passage look tiny. There are caves here that will blow your mind.

The main objective of the trip is to complete as many traverses or through trips in the area as we feel comfortable. No doubt some keen fit person will attempt all ten but with so much cave to see there is ample to occupy cavers of all ability within just two or three of the listed caves. With the exception of Systema Gandara all of the traverses are well documented and recorded in publications and journals. Systema Gandara however is something of a new traverse that SWCC members (and probably British cavers) have yet to complete. Gandara was discovered in 2005. It currently runs to about 120km of passage. The regular Easter crew have been linking and learning the passages since 2007. With the exception of the passages within an hour from the entrance the cave remains pristine and in many places still crystal floored. You may think you have seen well decorated cave passage but Gandara will take anyone's breath away both in terms of sheer size and majesty but also in terms of pure class. It is easily every bit as impressive as the Berger and indeed having returned to the Berger recently I was struck by how modest my impression of the cave was when compared with the Gandara system. Gandara offers a challenge to every level of caving ability. With a ten minute walk in, if you can cave you can explore this new and exciting system. Easy walking passage is predominant throughout the system broken by the occasional pitch, traverse or short crawl. This cave really is a must for any self-respecting caver and the traverse (which we have yet to route find our way through) offers a world class valley to valley style 12 – 14 hour through trip equal to any other in the world. I kid you not.

Here is a taste of what is available to do.....

Cueto to Coventosa..... One of the world's most famous traverses, 700m vertical range with the infamous 300m Juhue entrance shaft. Stupendous cave. Incredible through trip with a very much reduced walk in to the top entrance (about 1 hour, used to be 2.5 hours) Ten minute walk out. Through trip duration of 12 – 14 hours.

Red Del Silencio..... Another world renown caving through trip. 500m vertical range with a traverse through a 50km system so varied and constantly changing in nature from 2 hours of Yorkshire style SRT to 2 hours of Mendip style river passage to 2 hours of Gournier style pools and marmites to two hours of fine OFD style canyons and galleries to 2 hours of fine clean washed river passage. A classic trip for every kind of taste. Thirty minute walk in and two minute walk out. Through trip duration of about 12 – 14 hours.

Systema Gandara.....As described above, new cave in pristine condition. About 100m vertical range. Through trip yet to be completed but projected to be about 10 – 12 hours duration. Walk in about ten minutes, walk out about forty minutes to nearest road or 120 minutes return to entrance.

Mortero – Rubicera..... An excellent and challenging trip. Mortero is a fine daylight shaft which makes Alum Pot look insignificant! The traverse to Rubicera takes between 5 and 6 hours with opportunities to observe the pitch head to the lower Mortero system (180m) as the river thunders down in an impressive style. The traverse avoids the 180m pitch to connect ingeniously over the head of the 90m pitch. An airy roof rift (a little like flyover in Rowten) brings you to the Rubicera stream way without the need to drop the 90m pitch. All pretty exciting stuff, ask my fifteen year old son Joshua. Walk in about 10 minutes, walk out about 60 minutes from the most impressive cliff face entrance you will find in Europe.

Tonio – Canuala..... The classic Cantabria traverse. Tonio drops 400m pitch after pitch directly over the Sala Olivier Guillaume, Europe's second largest chamber behind the Verna by a small number of cubic metres. I've seen them both and Olivier Guillaume is more impressive by my estimation. Through trip time of about 4 – 5 hours depending on party size (faster when rigged). Walk in of about 15 minutes, walk out of about 15 minutes.

Tibia – Fresca..... Another classic Cantabria traverse dropping from high up on the spectacular side of the Ason Valley to immerse some 400m lower down near the valley floor. The traverse through this 25km system includes the famous Vira de la Arana (spider traverse) a yawning chasm across the floor of the passage crossed by an airy rope traverse across the passage roof. Totally awesome stuff. 120 minute walk in and a thirty minute walk out.

Vallina top entrance to lower entrance..... Just ask Stevie West about this one! A challenging duck which requires bailing leads to a series of fine galleries and pitches which eventually connect down to the lower series of the system affording an exit from the lower entrance. A simple introduction to European through trips. Duration about 2 – 3 hours. Walk in about 1 minute, walk out about 15 minutes.

Coteron – Renada..... One of Matienzo’s finest. A fine through trip with 200m vertical range. Duration of about six hours or nine hours depending on route. 15 minute walk in and a 5 minute walk out.

Cueva del Agua.....A super little caving trip, no SRT required. A short up handline at the entrance (2m) A series of galleries and a short crawl lead to a climb down into a sporting clean washed stream way with fine deep pots and scoops. A fossil high level passage connects through to a separate streamway which grows ever more impressive until it breaks into the large exit gallery with daylight visible some 200m off in the distance. Duration about 3 hours. 150 minute walk in with a 45 minute walk come scramble come free fall back down to the valley floor. (reported by the Dobsons this Easter as connected to proper path now)

Sima de la Cuivo - Mortero..... Another fine trip of 270m vertical difference with a through trip duration in the order of 5 hours. Lots of mud and water on this one! Walk in time 30 mins, walk out about 10 mins.

I’m hoping I’ve wetted your appetite with some of the above. Myself and the regular SWCC crew would love to see some new faces this year so once again let me say that all are welcome, all levels of ability and experience. The biggest draw back!..... once you’ve seen these caves you will never want to cave on Mendip again!

We will be rigging all caves for SRT with 10.5mm static rope using conventional European rigging techniques, ie deviations and re-belays. You should be confident in your ability to deal with most normal rigging including if needs be a knot pass but we do hope to avoid that situation. You do not need to be an ‘SRT god’ to enjoy caving in Cantabria and indeed some of the traverses involve little or no SRT at all. Some of the traverses we shall rig for several days at a time allowing through trips without the need to lug 100’s of metres of rope with you on the through trip. Others will be down pull through trips (a la Diau). Gandara will be rigged as will Cueto entrance shaft and Red Del entrance series as far as the base of the forty. Mortero will be rigged for connection to and from Rubicera and Cuivo.

We will be having training meets and refresher meets to build confidence and blow away a few cobwebs. Yorkshire hopefully this Autumn half term followed by another bash in Spring half term. Myself and a few other regular Spain attendees are more than happy to chat through what to expect and to organise a few simple SRT trips here and there. If you have half an idea that this could be super trip to try out caving abroad come and talk to me and I will run through any detail or practicality that may be in the back of your mind.

Look forward to hearing from you.

Gary

For more info also see <http://www.clipstone1.plus.com/>