



The South Wales Caving Club Annual Cantabria 'Easter Trip'

(Typically mid-April and giving two clear weeks to the AGM)

Lead contact: Gary Vaughan

Phone: 07836 727131

E-Mail: gary@dorsetland.co.uk

Dear all

Introduction.....

As the club continues to welcome new young and dynamic members there is a good possibility that some are unaware of the club's recent history with respect to Easter away trips. This Circular comes to you part by way of background and history and part by way of sales pitch. I know that I am not alone in thinking that caving overseas is an important part of the club's activities and that it helps members to grow their skills and interest in the sport.

In 1997 the Club secured a permit to explore a mountain in Spain near the town of Ramales de la Victoria. The mountain in question was called Pico San Vicente a steep rocky limestone outcrop separated from another large karst area known as the Sierra de Hornijo. The 1997 summer tripped proved very popular with those who attended and there was the lure of finding new cave seemingly tantalisingly inches away. Prior to 1997 a good number of South Wales members had traditionally headed up the M5 to the Yorkshire Dales every Easter for a week based in a house in Ingleton. Faced with the prospect of new cave discovery in Cantabria and a whole list of known caving trips which were of a world class nature, a small band of dedicated members headed south in the Easter of 1998 for what was to be the first SWCC Cantabria Easter trip.

These trips have continued every year since 1998 without fail so next year April 2019 we will be coming of age at twenty one years which I'm sure entitles us to some sort of accolade 😊.

Attendance has been variable over the twenty one years. One particular year saw only four members attending but in recent years the mid teens has been a minimum and the last couple has seen us regularly entertain twenty or more members.

Accommodation.....

Before we broke the number of 15 people attending accommodation was very simple. We have our own tackle store at a small restaurant / hostel / pension, called the Anjana. The Anjana has seven guest rooms on the second floor of the building. The ground floor is primarily a restaurant and bar and is very popular with the locals for a particular style of cooking, a traditional Spanish style which is done on an impressive grill suspended over red hot coals. The tackle store is in a small galvanised steel outbuilding alongside the main building and we keep a stock of about 400m of SRT rope stored there together with tackle sacks, rope washers, crow bars and hammers. The food is very good and very much loved by the regular attendees. Vegetarians are not so well fed in Spain as a rule but Carlos and Julie go out of their way to provide a vegetarian and a fish option (for these pescatarians amongst us) each evening. Breakfast is a very simple affair. Bread, butter, jam, orange juice and coffee. Beer is typically consumed in quite large quantities after the day's caving activities are completed. Vast quantities of wine are consumed at the dining table each evening. There is an un-written 'What happens in Spain stays in Spain' protocol and in my experience everyone messes in and gets on with it. The rooms have central heating. Three of the rooms have en-suite, the other four rooms share communal showers and WC on the second floor corridor. The hosts Carlos and Julie, are absolutely lovely people who are very helpful and accommodating. If I was to pick the weakest selling point with the Anjana it would be the lack of a garden area to sit in away from the road. The photo below was taken a few years back before the tables and fence were put up in front of the bar. There is now a seating area directly in

front of the main entrance where you will normally find people gathering before dinner. The sun goes behind a hill at about 7.30ish in April. The drive into Ramales is about five minutes and there are three or four supermarkets in Ramales.



So, in recent years we have exceeded the capacity at the Anjana. The rooms at the Anjana are grabbed up on a first come first served basis. There are three options for 'overflow' accommodation. Option one is the campsite which is about ten minutes walk from the Anjana. Camping La Barguilla is an excellent site with a choice of mobile homes and more plush converted stables. The main difference between staying at the campsite is that you can choose to self cater. In the past members staying at the campsite have joined in with the evening meals at the Anjana and this makes for a vibrant close knit group. Plans for the following day are typically formed around the bar or the dinner table each night.

The website for the campsite can be found here..... <https://campinglabarguilla.com>

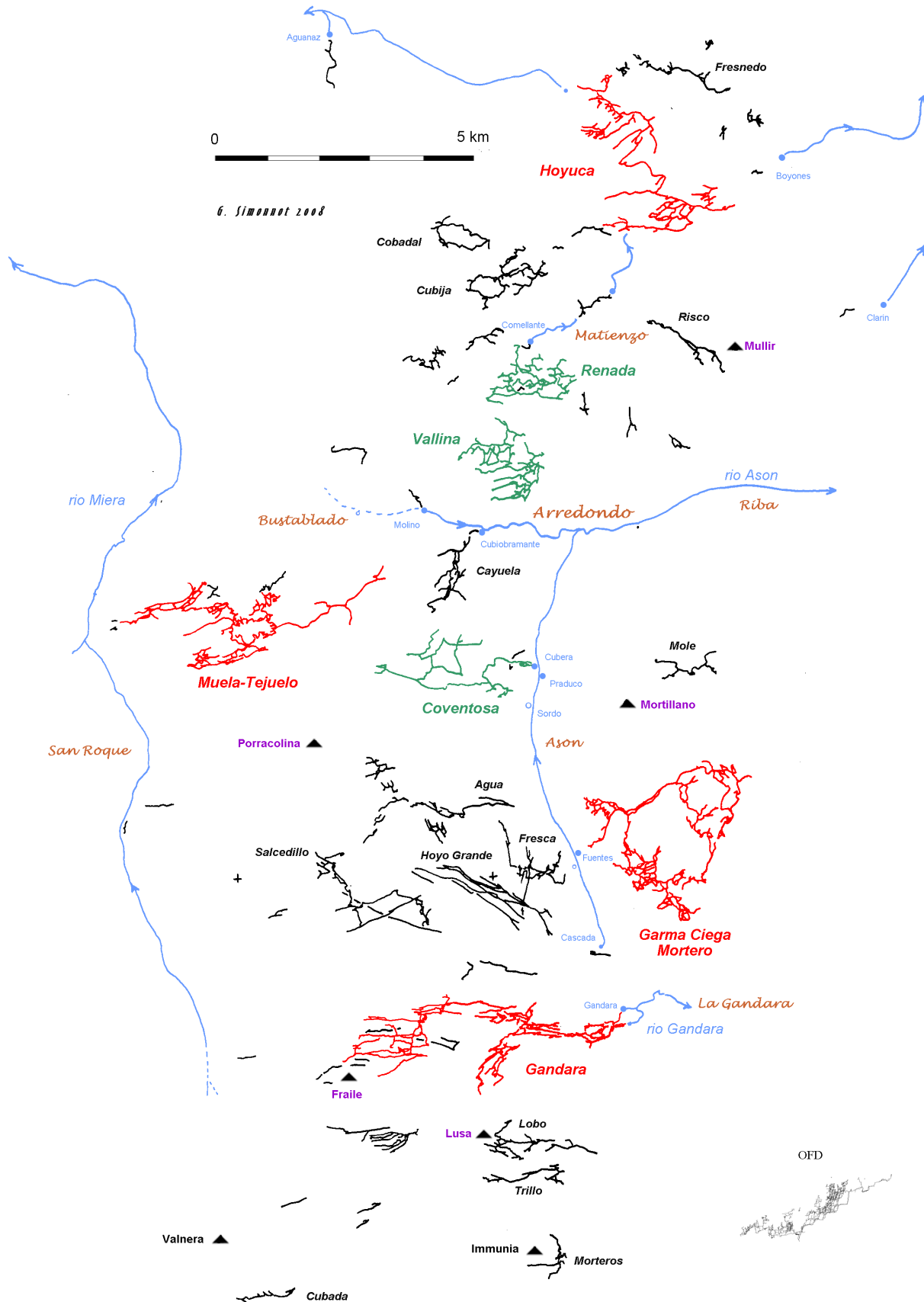


The second option is the sister hotel to Anjana called Casa Tomas. This hotel / restaurant / hostel is extremely popular with many Brit cavers, especially those with involvement in Matienzo which is just five or six kilometres away from the Casa which is based in the village of Ogarrio. It's about a ten minute drive from Ogarrio to the Anjana. Its not within walking distance after a large consumption of wine! For that reason members staying at Casa Tomas have tended to do their own thing perhaps dropping by for the occasional beer early evening.

The third option is apartments and hostels in Ramales itself. Ramales can be walked to from Anjana but it takes about thirty minutes and is perhaps not what you would want to do late at night on what is quite a fast road.

Last year I stayed at the Anjana for ten nights and my bill for all of the accommodation, coffee, beer and wine came to £395, so approximately £40 a night! The return flight Bristol to Bilbao cost £120. Car hire split between two people for eleven days hire cost £190 (note both myself and the hirer of the car last year considered ourselves overcharged on that figure)

The Caving.....



Cantabria is a very special caving area with which the SWCC enjoys a close relationship. 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 Vincente but at the same time a traverse of one of the world's most renown traverses, Cueto to Coventosa. The Cueto shaft is a spectacular 300m straight down and a traverse through

the system with its cavernous passages and thundering river requires careful planning and preparation. The hills in the area are literally riddle with enormous cave systems. Compare the size of OFD on the map above with some of the mega systems that we regularly visit each Easter.

Gandara was only 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. 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.

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, Europes 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!

The main week in 2019 is 13th April - 20th April. Many of us will fly out on the Thursday or Friday before to fit in with Flights from Bristol. Others fly from Stansted and others still from East Midlands. Some people stay a couple of weeks, others just the main seven days. It is entirely flexible. It would be great to get some new faces down there this coming April but please be aware that the places in the Anjana go very quickly.

Look forward to hearing from you.

Gary

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