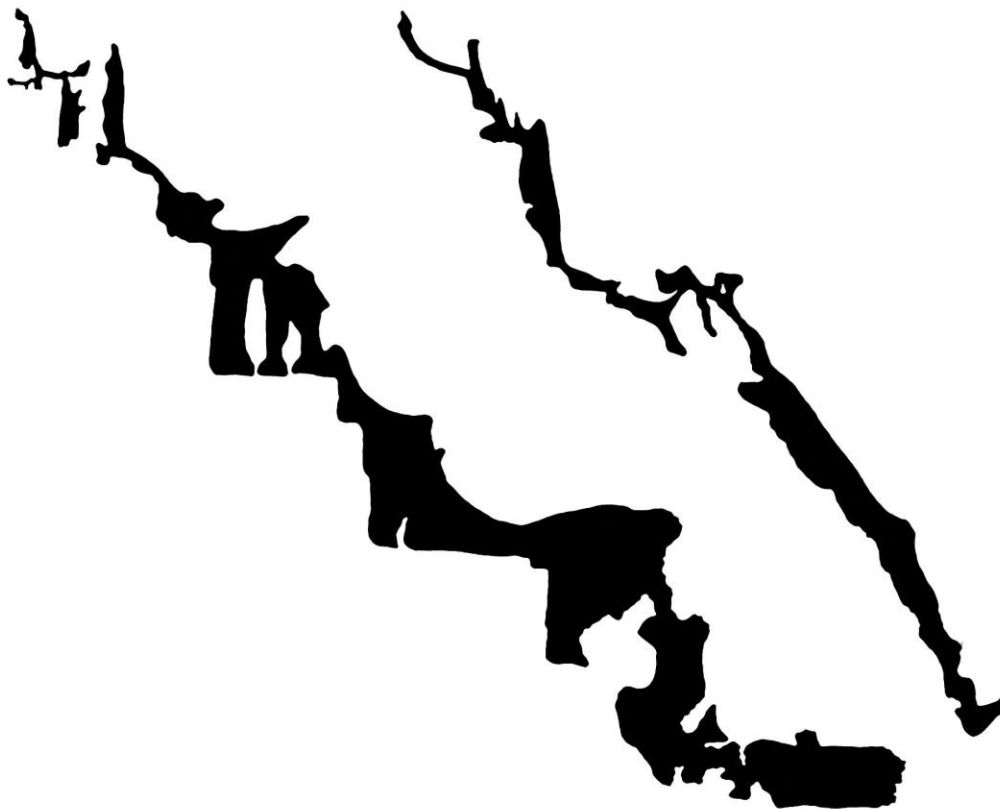


OXFORD UNIVERSITY CAVE CLUB
LA VERDELLUENGA 1994



Final Report

La Verdelluenga 1994

1994 proved to be another successful year of exploration in the Picos De Europa for Oxford University Cave Club.

As the 1993 expedition drew to a close, a small scale reconnaissance team carried out a series of prospecting trips in the Top Camp area. They found that the very low snow levels allowed access to previously impassable caves. Several very promising sites were noted. La Verdelluenga '94 planned to return to these sites and explore many more caves that we felt sure would no longer be blocked by snow and ice near the surface.

However, the winter of 1993-94 proved to be very severe, and although followed by a very hot spring and early summer, many of the sites we had planned to explore were still blocked with snow when we arrived in July.

The one cave that was still open, F64, was a going concern. As several members of the expedition were only in Spain for the first two weeks, groups rapidly pushed into the cave.

The entrance is located at about 1960 m on the NW shoulder of La Verdelluenga; A very convenient 20 minute walk from our camp at the Snow Pole. The cave starts as a series of friendly pitches dropping down about 150 m. At the bottom of Harmless, the Fierce Ladies of Cannock were met, and beyond a 7m pitch, Hlegless, Their Sisters. A climb up here led to phreatic tunnels which ended in a boulder choked area. The severity of the squeezes and the fear involved in pushing a virgin boulder choke slowed exploration in F64. Gavin Lowe used a scientific, survey based approach to search for a squeeze bypass, while Tony Seddon embarked on a series of solo pushing trips to the end of the cave.

Meanwhile the larger, more fearful expedition members set about finding a less scary and more sensibly proportioned cave.

C8 aroused a lot of interest; two pitches lead to a boulder choke, The Nasty Bit, over the top of a 50m pitch. Włodek Szymanowski re-engineered this by dropping most of it down the shaft. Below the nasty bit, the pitch opened out. Unfortunately, the strong draught that had been blowing into the cave up to this point disappeared into one of many possible high windows. While digging operations got underway at various sites, heroic bolting escapades proceeded in the final shaft 'Hot and Steamy' to try to find which window was the way on.

Returning from one such trip another cave was found: C9 (latter shown to be C3). Rocks, large rocks, bounded down the shaft for 12 seconds. This was big stuff.

At the bottom of the entrance pitches (-110 m) the passage narrowed briefly, and cavers were sucked through the Vacuum Cleaner. Big pitches followed, and although the way on in the streamway proved to be too tight, at a higher level, a way on was found back down to the streamway and more fine pitches. At the bottom of the Entertainer (60m), things took a serious turn, no passable way on could be found, and the bottom of the pitch was overshadowed by a 20m high wall of loose pebbles and bungalow sized pebbles. A 35m traverse over the top of the Entertainer, 80m up, gave a drop onto the boulder pile. Now, the way on lead down The Defenestrator, passing the Meat Cleaver on route. A series of tight rifts and squeezes lead to the head of a 30m pitch, The Klingon. On the final pushing/surveying trip the streamway beyond was explored to a nice sandy-floored inlet passage, a campsite for 1995, at -490m.

In F64 Tony's efforts in the boulder choke were rewarded with a fine rift passage, this dropped steeply down a series of thirteen pitches in Zodiac Rift, ending at -430 m, in a choked chamber. The draught had been lost somewhere on the last three pitches, so the F64 team are as confident as the C3 enthusiasts of further gains in '95.

Jim Ramsden

Expedition Members

Ilka Agricola	Andy Atkinson
Richard Barnes	Annette Becher
Judit Bolyan	Sharon Curtis
Chris Densham	Pete Gardner
Rob Garrett ¹	Tim Guilford ²
Alex Harding	Martin Hicks
James Hooper	Dave Lacey
Gavin Lowe ³	Paul Mann
Ursula Mead	Bill Naylor
Michelle Nickerson ⁴	Gerhard Nichlasch
Steve Phipps	Pivo (Károly Tompa)
John Pybus	Jim Ramsden ⁵
Steve Roberts	Tony Seddon
Harvey Smith	Włodek Szymanowski
Snablet (Pete McNabb)	Sara Varty
Chris Vernon	Wookey

1) Secretary 2) Medical Officer 3) Equipment Officer 4) Assistant Medical Officer 5) Expedition Leader

Sponsors

A large number of companies, organisations and individuals made valuable and important contributions to the success of this expedition. We are extremely grateful to them all.

GPF/Sports Council	Bat Products	Tate and Lyle
Oxford Society	Lyon Equipment	Sun Pat
Oxford University	Scout Shops Ltd	Morning Foods
A. C. Irvine Fund	Dunlop	Tunnocks

Special Thanks to; Joan Arthur, Richard Ward,
Juan Jose Gonzalez Suarez
I. C. O. N. A., F. As. E.,
J. M. Brown.

Expedition Diary

2 July		The van leaves Oxford and breaks down!	
5-6 July		"Top Camp" established at the Snow Pole	
6 July	F65	located and bottomed	JH CJD
	F41	snow digging trip	TSG AB PM
7 July	F64	pushed down the first 2 pitches	CJD AB
	Area F	F66, F67 and F68 located	TSG PM
	Area F	F70 and F69 located	PMM MN
	F64	surveyed then pushed They Come at Night	TSG JPNP JH
8 July	F64	surveyed and pushed Mostly	PMM RG
	Area F	F68 digging rocks, F41 digging snow	MN RB PM AH WN
	Area F	F70 explored	JH JPNP
9 July	F64	The Fierce Ladies of Cannock reached	TSG PM JH JPNP
	Area F	F70 pushed, F41 snow digging	WN RG MN RB
10 July	F64	hammering The Fierce Ladies	GL AH JH
	F64	survey trip	MN JH JPNP
	Area F	shaft bashing	RB
	Area C	C6, 7 & 8 examined	WN WS
11 July	Area F	F56 re-examined	GL JH
	Area F	F80 and F81 found	PMM
	F64	Fierce Ladies and first of Their Sisters passed	TSG CJD
	F64	various leads looked into	RG AB
12 July	C8	collapsed boulder choke	PM WS
	F64	surveying and second sister pushed	CJD AH TSG
		shaft bashing	RB RG
	F64	pushing up inlet	SJP MN
13 July	C8	through the Square Window	WS PM
	C8	in The Wiggly Bit and the Arched Window	WN RG
	C8	the Round Window	TSG AB
	F64	climbing above They Come at Night	RB CJD
	Area F	F71 and F72 examined	PMM SJP
14 July	Area F	F80 and F81 located, F81 bottomed	WS PMM AB SJP
	F64	Bad Habits surmounted	GL JH
	C8	surveying trip	CJD RB JPNP
	F71	more work on the squeezes	TSG SJP

	C8	Smarty Run examined	WN KT JB
15 July	F64	Old Bore's Hill climbed, choke examined	TSG GL
	C8	window cleaning	PM JP NP KT
	F71	hammering squeeze	RB SJP
	Area F	shaft bashing	SC JB
	F64	trying The Ladies	CV JH MN
16 July	F64	survey trip	GL JH KT
	F71	passed squeeze (again)	SJP JB MN
	Area F	F82 located	SC
17 July	F64	surveying trip	UM ADS JH
	C8	trip abandoned due to chopped rope	MN AH SJP RG
	F71	squeeze passed (yet again)	MN RB SJP JP NP
18 July	F64	an attempt to pass the boulder choke	ADS JP NP KT
	C8	C9 "found" (C3 rediscovered)	WS PM JH
	F71	cave bottomed	JB SJP
	F80	quickly ran out of rope	RB PMM RG
19 July	C3	explored to boulder choke	WS PM JH
	Areas C, 9, 6	shaft bashing	GL
	F64	boulder choke attacked	ADS
	Area F	F75-78 located	JAR RB SV
20 July	C3	entrance rerigged, Anethical descended	PM WS RG
	C3	tourist trip	JB UM KT
	F64	tourist trip	SV ADS
21 July	C3	Good Night Vienna and Bullseye examined	WS PM RG
	F64	boulder choke finally solved	ADS
	F71	detackling and photo trip	PMM CV JB KT
	F64	quicky trip	KT JB
	C3	survey trip	UM AH MN
22 July	C3	Moose Hole to 65p Streamway explored	WS PM RG
	C3	surveying	AH JH MN
	F64	pushing the rift beyond Tony's pitch	GL DL
	C3	rerigging	PMM JP NP
	C3	Snickers descended (Snab in the Dark)	UM ADS HS
23 July	C3	descended the Wet Pitch (She Rises)	WS JH
	C3	survey trip	DL CV KT JB
	F64	survey trip	JH MN SJP

23-24 July	C3	Night Games	WS PMM JH
24 July	F64	further down into Zodiac Rift	GL JPNP RG
	C3	survey team	MN SJP HS
	C3	pushed through Tony's wet crawl	ADS KT
25 July	F64	checked out loose ends and tidied up a bit	GL MN
	C3	surveying	AH UM DL
26 July	F52	small extension	GL
	C3	rerigging and surveying	WS JH PMM
	Area F	F75-78 all bottomed	JAR SV
	F79	bottomed	KT JB
27 July	C3	jolly trip	JH SV
	Area G	photo trip	JAR
	C3	Wet Crawl bypassed, pitch beyond examined	ADS DL KT
28 July	F80	surveyed, photographed and derigged	PMM SJP
29 July	C3	"100 m" pitch traversed over	WS JH
	F80	gear recovered	PMM
	F64	further work in Zodiac Rift	GL JH AH HS
	F64	inlet climbed	RG SJP
30 July	C3	photo trip	PMM SJP
31 July	F64	further down the rift	GL JPNP
	C3	a jolly	DL MN
	Area C	C 10-12 located	WS
	Area F	F48 re-examined	AH HS
	Area F	prospecting	SC
1 August		Cavers Holiday	
2 Aug	C3	survey trip	MN HS JPNP
	C3	Meat Cleaver and Defenestrator examined	WS DL JH
	C10	bottomed	AH SJP GL
3 Aug	Area F	F70 and 72 re-examined	GL SJP SC
4 Aug	F64	deeper in Zodiac Rift	GL AH
	F64	photography trip	JH SJP
	Area C	surface survey	MH WS
5 Aug	C12	cave bottomed	JPNP AH SJP
	C3	The Klingon reached	WS JH
6 Aug	Area F	F24 and 27 re-examined and 83 bottomed	GL SC

	C3	photo trip	JH PG SJP
	C11	cave examined and dug a little	AH MN DL HS
7 Aug	F64	deeper still in Zodiac Rift	GL JPNP
	F64	tourist trip	MN PG
	C11	little progress made before the site was abandoned	AH SJP
8 Aug	Area C	shaft bashing	IA GN
9 Aug	C3	final pushing trip potential campsite found	WS AH JH
	F64	bottom of rift reached	WS JPNP
10 Aug	C3	photo trip	PG SJP (AA)
	Area C	C13 and 14 located	IA GN
11 Aug	F64	derigged	JH GL JP SGR
	C3	derigging	DL HS WS MN
	C13	going down, ran out of time, derigged	IA GN
13 Aug	C3	derigging	SGR PG JH AH
14 Aug	C3	derigging	JH DL HS GN IA JPNP
15 Aug	C41	snow plug re-examined	GL
15-18 Aug		Top Camp dismantled, carried down the hill	
19 Aug		Beach Party	
22 Aug		The red van returns to Oxford	

Cave of Fire

Initially I thought it was my tuba de plastica. Then I started coughing. Looking up I saw big sparks and thick black smoke being carried down on the strong draught. My carbide must have caught the bush at the top on fire. My first thought was to swap to ascending gear and put it out, but I started feeling asphyxiated, coughing with the smoke in my eyes. Outside a mile high smoke column was beginning to form. All I could think of was to go down. Down to fresher air. Down to the rebelay (the bush was under the Y-hang). Suddenly the theme tune from "London's Burning" streamed through a small fissure in the rock and Alex appeared from the smoke a bare four feet away. "Come on, let's keep going down."

James Hooper

A Typical Morning at Top Camp

"We need to drop more pits", Gavin suggested.

"Where?"

Gavin Pointed towards old top camp, now shrouded in clag. Bill, the Gower Pot Man, always ready to try any new caving technique, threw his sleeping bag in aforementioned direction. There was a dull thump, and Bill started digging in the spot.

"Nice soft caving this", Steve blurted too fast for anyone to understand.

"What?"

"Nice soft caving this", Steve repeated, almost, but not quite, too fast for anyone to understand.

"That", Rob interjected pedantically.

"Eh?"

"That. Nice soft caving that. Not this, Steve. You aren't doing it; Bill is. So it's that, not this", explained Rob

"Look at that", squealed Annette, holding a strange millipede in her hand, fascinated as ever.

"This, not that", Rob muttered.

"It's got a furry tummy", observed Tim.

"No it hasn't", said Annette. "It's got hundreds of legs".

"Oh", said Tim.

"Thousands", said Rob.

"Why, have you counted them?" asked Ben.

"Just because I haven't counted them, doesn't mean there aren't thousands", Rob replied with his usual remarkable insight for the vital.

Meanwhile, Bill had given up digging with his sleeping bag and had found a clean, flat bit of rock. Flat, sound, safe.

"What is it?"

"A rock, I think", said Bill (real Bill).

"Wow!", said James, and rushed off to melt snow on top of the snow pole.

It was indeed a rock. That is until Włodek got involved. Then, within moments (well, five minutes), and a frenzied bolting bonanza later, a hideous loose and dangerous boulder choke had appeared with Włodek half way down it.

"F---! Oh F---!"

"Tea's up", Michelle cheerfully

"Where?", said Rob.

"What?", said Michelle.

"Up where?", said Rob.

"Oh, up yours", retorted Michelle

"So who's going caving?", Gavin tried again worriedly.

"Everyone", said everyone.

"Even Tim?"

"He hasn't decided yet.", said everyone

Tim Guilford

The Initial Exploration of F64

Beautiful sunny day - just right for an alpine start to go exploring. At 1:30 p.m. we raced off to find F64. Having got there, a small (2 hour) delay was caused by having to collect the ropes which were left at F65 the night before. At about 4:00 p.m. I started putting in the first bolt of my life into the rock at the front of the rift, where, combined with some tape hanging off a nice pointed boulder opposite, Chris was going to construct the perfect Y-hang. Just before he went down he kicked this boulder to test it - and it nearly went down the entrance shaft with its tape, rope etc.. So we re-rigged a less perfect Y hang.

At 5:30 I finally lowered myself down the first pitch. Given I had only done one S.R.T. trip before I was glad that Rob had arrived to talk me through the first rebelay. Apart from that, he told me exactly what he thought of Chris' rigging. The first pitch opens out into a wide (~ 4-5m) shaft with beautiful white marbled walls. The second rebelay is about 20m down and is a hanging one - which again I had not done before. No problem though, at least not while going down. Facing toward the camp, there is a wide rift leading into the mountain away from E2 which awaits exploration. It's too far away to swing in while going down, but could be climbed from the bottom of this pitch(?).

Annette Becher

The 'Whistle Stop Café' is beautiful and banded with white. A wide rift led round a corner to an almost choked pitch - plenty of ammo. Rigged down the 15-20m on naturals, landing in the middle of a 1m wide rift. Downstream was choked, a too-tight squeeze beneath the choke appeared promising, and was hammered for a few minutes. I thought I would then check above it - climbed up and over the top of large wedged boulders, the way on completely choked. But, lo, 10 minutes of rock removal and the choke prolapsed, leaving a loose 45 degree sloping tube heading down 10 m, only one spear-shaped boulder poised tantalisingly at the lip, waiting for someone to breathe on it to send it down. Do not touch, except under the supervision of a responsible adult. Beyond the choked tube - a car sized boulder sat at the top of a slope, 2 second drop beyond. Passage 2-3m wide, 5m high. Its all going to go and go! Out of rope, we made a generally relaxed and contented exit, except for Annette's first hanging rebelay. A wonderful trip. Shouting down to camp yielded a night-time survey pushing team. Read on . . .

Chris Densham

F64 (Description)

The cave is located on the north-west ridge of La Verdelluenga, at an altitude of about 1990m. From the Snow Pole, walk up the left (true right) hand side of the ridge, passing several large shakeholes on your right. Just above the last shakehole - where the ridge suddenly becomes markedly steeper and near E9 - a traverse right and a scramble up reaches a ledge; alternatively, cross the shakehole lower down and traverse in from the right (true left). The entrance is a shaft on the right hand side of the ledge, approximately 2m long by 1m wide. Bearings: Conjurtao, 298°; Snow Pole, 342°.

Entrance series

The impressive 42m entrance pitch, *Whistle Stop Café*, lands in a reasonable sized chamber. Two thirds of the way down the pitch, an obvious inlet can be penduled into; this is best rigged as a deviation for the return. The passage to the left chokes quickly, but ahead is an ascending, silt-bottomed passage, which leads for 25m, to a series of short climbs up, with popcorn walls, at the top of which the passage eventually gets too small.

At the bottom of the pitch, a small inlet enters, and the passage turns to the right and leads to two slight constrictions, beyond which is the top of the second pitch, *Olé, Olé, Olé*. Descending to the bottom, the passage is blocked by a choke, but from halfway down it is possible to traverse onto blocks; a slot, *Spearmince*, leads to a clamber over a large boulder, to a boulder slope leading to the top of the 35m third pitch, *They Come at Night*. The top of the pitch is very loose - care!

Directly above the large boulder at the head of *They Come at Night*, a small aven can be climbed to a constriction at a height of 6m; beyond is a blind chamber. Alternatively, it is possible to rig a pendule across the pitch head to a high, one metre wide window. A ramp leads down into a draughting shattered chamber, 10m long by 5m wide. Opposite the window, a short rift leads to a 1m diameter, 7m deep undescended tube. A large rift leading off from the far right corner of the chamber was not investigated due to its unstable nature and close proximity to the head of *Mostly*.

At the bottom of *They Come at Night*, a short traverse leads to the top of the 40m *Mostly*, landing in a boulder-floored chamber. A ledge is visible 5m above the floor on the left; from this, a narrow rift continues, but gets too tight at a corner; alternatively, a further climb leads to another ledge, but this appears to be only an inlet. The way on is straight ahead, where a slight constriction leads to a descent in a rift, where a ladder is useful for the way back. Just round the corner is an 8m pitch *Harmless*, landing in a round, drippy chamber, with a tight rift leading off: the bottom is too tight, but climbing up a few metres and traversing in reaches the start of the squeeze series.

Rigging

Whistle Stop Café (P42)	45m	Two bolt Y-hang; spike deviation at -4m; spike rebelay at -20m.
Olé, Olé, Olé (P6)	20m	Spike backup; spike and bolt Y-hang; traverse on two bolts and thread at bottom.
They Come at Night (P35)	40m	Huge boulder back up (needs backing up further back); spike and bolt Y-hang (deviation needed to give better hang); spike deviation at -20m.
Pendule above They Come at Night	30m	Y-hang off two naturals; bolt rebelay; bolt rebelay; two bolt Y-hang on far side
Mostly (P40)	45m	Three bolt traverse; two bolt Y-hang; thread deviation at -8m; spike deviation at -11m; spike deviation at -20m.
Rift Climb (C3)		4m ladder rigged to chock stone.
Harmless (P8)	15m	Thread back up; spike and bolt Y-hang.
Climb to ledge (C5)	10m	Large thread.

The Squeezes

The first squeeze, *The First Fierce Lady of Cannock*, is best approached on your left hand side; after two metres it is possible to squeeze up and round a corner; some people are able to get their legs straight out from here, but others find it easier to slip their left leg round the

corner and then to come out. On the way out, the squeeze is taken feet first, being careful to keep high.

Beyond the squeeze, a climb - on which a ladder would be useful - drops 4m into a rift. Immediately round a corner, the passage lowers to a tight crawl, *The Second Fierce Lady of Cannock*. This is best taken feet first; after 4m, keep high above a hole in the floor, before dropping down, through a squeeze, a little further on. The bottom of the rift is then followed to where it suddenly opens out at the top of the 8m *Hlegless*. On the way out, the squeeze is passed head first, taking care to avoid dropping tackle down the rift.

At the bottom on *Hlegless*, a tight rift continues. The bottom can be followed through two squeezes, *The Sisters*, but becomes too tight. The way on is to climb back to the top of the chamber, and then squeeze through a hole at the top; this is easiest if a ladder is rigged, which gives a useful foothold to help push through the squeeze. Beyond the squeeze is a small chamber, about 3m long, to another squeeze: this is passed feet first, to the top of a short climb.

Rigging

Climb between (C3) Fierce Ladies (C3)	-	4m ladder
Hlegless (P8)	15m	Thread backup; spike and bolt Y-hang; needs ladder.
Bad Habits (P8)	15m	Spike backup; thread; bolt with ladder

Bazd-Meg's Holiday and Old Bore's Hill

The passage from the last squeeze descends two short climbs, before suddenly opening out into a large passage *Bazd-Meg's Holiday*. Above and behind, a large tube leads steeply upwards, but has not been fully pushed. The passage continues as a 3m diameter tube. The floor is false, with a stream passage below. It is possible to climb down part way along the passage. Turning left leads, after a few metres, to an inlet with a pool - useful for filling carbide generators. Alternatively, turning right, the passage can be followed to where it narrows at a traverse, before opening out at the top of a 20m, splashy pitch. At the base, after 10m of horizontal passage, the stream flows into a tall, too-tight rift. To the left a 5m climb up a boulder slope leads to the base of a large draughty aven.

Continuing along *Bazd-Meg's Holiday*, another hole in the floor is passed, which is believed to connect with the aven in the stream passage, noted above. Ahead, the passage leads to the base of a 16m climb, *Old Bore's Hill*. Turning left leads to 10m of passage, passing an undescended hole in the floor, before ending at the base of a 10m aven. This point is very close to the bottom of *Harmless*, and so it may be worth climbing this aven in the hope of finding a bypass to the squeezes.

Turning right at the top of *Old Bore's Hill*, a short traverse leads to the top of a 45 degree descending tube, descended on rope. Part way down, is a hole in the floor, the top of a 14m pitch. This lands in a chamber, with a further 11m pitch continuing into a shattered, choked chamber with no apparent way on.

At the base of the descent from *Old Bore's Hill* is a choked area; to the left is an aven. Straight ahead, the passage passes under an arch to a chamber. A route up through a choke to the right (care!) eventually opens out into a reasonably large chamber. A further climb leads to the top of an undescended pitch, although this is believed to drop into the aven described above. Alternatively, it is possible to look through a too-small gap into a black space.

Rigging

Stream pitch (P23)	25m	Chossy boulder
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Old Bore's Hill (C16)	20m	Two spikes
Traverse and descent (Tr5, C9)	20m	Belays shared with ascent; bolt; optional bolt deviation.
Over the Hill I (P14)	40m	Back up to descent rope; bolt; large thread deviation
Over the Hill II (P11)	“	Bolt

Descent to Zodiac Rift

The way on from the bottom of the Old Bore's Hill descent is to the right, where a vertical rift can be descended for 5m, into a 6m diameter chamber. To the left, behind a large boulder, a muddy 3m climb, brings you down to the top of a vadose passage, which descends steeply for 5m to a 5m pitch. Beyond the way on is blocked by boulders.

The way on from the chamber at the bottom of the vertical rift is at the lowest point of the chamber where a slot was dug open. This can be passed into a tiny chamber where a squeeze through another slot is best passed using a hand line. Beyond, the passage enlarges and descends to the top of a 3m climb, beyond which is the top of the 20m *Eton Rifles*.

Eton Rifles descends along the side of a choke to land on a large ledge. A short roped climb leads to the top of another pitch, *Cool for Cats* (P24).

Rigging

Slot through choke (C4)	5m	Bolt
C3	40m	Boulder (needs a better boulder or a bolt)
<i>Eton Rifles</i> (P20)	“	Two bolt Y-hang; spike rebelay (needs bolt); spike deviation (needs moving further out); large boulder rebelay on ledge.
<i>Cool for Cats</i> (P24)	35m	Two bolts with rope protector; bolt and spike rebelay with two short rope protectors; two spike rebelay at -5m.

Zodiac Rift

Cool for Cats lands on a platform of boulders in a large rift, *Zodiac Rift*. Turning right, a narrow rift can be followed to the base of an aven; a large passage can be seen to continue about 10m up. A short pitch, *Aries*, can be rigged through a hole in the boulder platform, to the base of the rift.

The rift descends at 45 degree, with five short pitches following in quick succession: *Taurus* (P6, C4) *Gemini* (P4), *Cancer* (P6), *Leo* (P5) and *Virgo* (C5, P2). The rift continues to descend steeply, with a couple of short free climbs, before it opens out at the top of another short pitch, *Libra* (P5). A roped traverse leads to the sloping top of a somewhat longer pitch, *Scorpius* (P14). Below, a short traverse to a chock stone leads to the top of *Ophiuchus* (P8); halfway down is a ledge with a traverse continuing, but this is avoided by a deviation. Another short pitch, *Sagittarius* (P4), is followed by a traverse and a climb down into a chamber.

At this point the cave turns sharply right and the draft seems to be lost, so it may be worth traversing from either here, or from the traverse partway down *Ophiuchus*, in the hope of finding a way on.

From the chamber, a clamber down leads to the top of *Capricornus*, a 24m pitch down the rift, following the steeply descending base of the rift for the final 8m. The pitch lands on a ledge from where the next pitch, *Aquarius* (P27), follows immediately, again following the

base of the rift. A final short pitch, *Pisces* (P5), lands in a chamber marking the end of Zodiac Rift.

Rigging

Aries (P10)	25m	Bolt; bolt deviation at -1m.
Taurus (P6, C4)	"	Two bolt Y-hang.
Gemini (P4)	35m	Bolt.
Cancer (P6)	"	Bolt.
Leo (P5)	"	Two bolts.
Virgo (C5, P2)	"	Spike.
Libra (P5)	80m	Spike and bolt Y-hang (needs bolt for traverse line at top).
Scorpius (P14)	"	Needs bolt for traverse; chockstone for traverse; 2 bolts (needs bolt on right wall); chock stone rebelay at -4m.
Ophiuchus (P8)	"	Bolt needed for traverse; two bolt Y-hang; bolt deviation.
Sagittarius (P4)	"	Two bolt Y-hang.
Traverse	"	Needs bolt.
Descent to chamber (C3)	"	Spike; spike.
Capricornus (P24)	75m	Needs bolt; spike; main hang off thread; chock stone deviation at -6m; bolt deviation at -9m; needs another bolt deviation; bolt rebelay at -21m.
Aquarius (P27)	"	Two bolt Y-hang; bolt deviation; needs another bolt deviation.
Pisces (P5)	"	Two spike Y-hang.

The Lower Cave

From the chamber at the end of Zodiac Rift, another pitch, *Skittle Alley*, continues. This drops along the side of a vertical boulder choke: the rope should be rigged well clear of the choke to avoid dislodging boulders. Another choke is visible at the same height, 10m further along the rift. At the bottom of the choke, the pitch follows the base of the rift steeply downwards to a drop onto a ledge.

From the ledge, a 16m pitch, *Picture Palace*, can be rigged down a circular shaft onto a large, bouldery ledge. The final pitch, *Myxomatosis* (P28), follows immediately, down the side of a boulder choke into a very large chamber, 15m long by 5m wide. A steeply sloping gravel choke can be ascended with care (trowel useful for digging footholds) to a window into a final chamber with a choke. Lack of time prevented a proper examination of this choke, but there is no obvious way on: the best lead seems to be the traverse from part way down Zodiac Rift, noted above.

Rigging

Skittle Alley (P37)	65m	Two bolt Y-hang; spike deviation; bolt deviation needed to avoid dangerous boulder choke; bolt rebelay; spike rebelay
Picture Palace (P16)	"	Two bolt Y-hang; may need deviation.
Myxomatosis (P26)	40m	Spike backup; spike for traverse; bolt; bolt rebelay; natural deviation (needs improving).

Gavin Lowe

A few Pearls of Wisdom from Rob 'Horsley' Garrett:

"You're more likely to be hit by a rain drop than lightning"

"Statistically speaking, you're as likely to die as be born"

An assertion from Gavin;

"There's a difference between siesta and fiesta"

and another

"No documentation without exploration"

And a few words of truth:

"This is Hell, nor are we out of it"	Faustus	Christopher Marlow
"I'm fairly out of it"		Steve Phipps

The F64 Story

As early as my second week in OUCC, I was being enthusiastically told about the expedition which would be happening that summer, and persuaded to join its ranks. In many of these conversations the name F64 featured prominently, an undescended entrance, found on the last day of the previous expedition. Stones rattling off into the dark crevice in the side of the La Verdelluenga peak, for almost eight seconds.

It was enough to convince me and eight months later, my exams over, I was standing at the new Top Camp looking out towards the mountain after which our expedition was named.

It was nine p.m., and Chris Densham and Annette were just emerging from the F64 entrance, two dots against the grey limestone. We shouted up, "Does it go?"

"We've run out of ROPE!" the reply came back.

While they were getting changed on the ledge conveniently situated next to the entrance, Tim, James and I were packing our gear. Tim had decided to leave straight away on a late trip to survey the new discoveries, and I was eager to get on my first trip. As we got the surveying gear together, Tim added a bolting kit, and a 50m rope.

It was about 11.30 by the time we had climbed up to the entrance and quickly changed into our caving gear. James and Tim started the surveying of the first pitch, while I played with my brand new carbide lightset. Soon the rope was free, and I was descending into my first Spanish cave.

At the bottom of the entrance pitch I had my first opportunity to help with the surveying as we continued, on down the second pitch which Chris had rigged. Here, almost at the end of the known cave, we stopped surveying. In front of us was a climb over a large boulder with a drop down through a slit the other side. Not too difficult, until you consider the rather large spear shaped rock past which you had to squeeze on the way down. It seemed unlikely enough that it was balanced there in the first place, and the fact that it would rock at the slightest touch didn't inspire confidence.

We squeezed past "Spearmince" one by one, and came out at the top of an undescended pitch. This was my first taste of exploration, and as Tim belayed the rope to an unmoveable rock, all three of us were beginning to get excited.

Tim chose a place to put a bolt into the rock and started to hammer away. He was hanging out above the drop, held only by the rope, with an unknown drop beneath him. It took only 15 minutes to drill the bolt hole, but it seems as if it was for much longer that James and I sat above shouting encouragement, and hearing his replies of, "I've got the FEAR."

Finally, Tim descended what we had decided to call "They Come at Night." It turned out to be a 40m drop, larger than any pitch I had ever done before. I followed him down, and at the bottom we turned the next corner to find ourselves at the top of another pitch. We threw stones down, they dropped for almost 4 seconds. It looked as if we'd hit a big shaft series.

James started out as Tim and I made our way up the newly rigged rope. We were soon back on the surface, and headed back towards the campsite to finally crawl into our tents at 4.00 am.

It was two days later that we returned, this time with Snablet. A trip had been down the day before in which Paul Mann had rigged the traverse line to the pitch-head, and then dropped all his bolts down the pitch. So Snablet had only one more bolt to place before we were going down. At the bottom Tim and Snablet decided to let James and me have a go at leading the exploration. James went on first and F64 immediately turned into a tight rift. We slid down this to come out at the top of a small pitch - "Harmless". I was the first to descend this pitch and found at the bottom a tight rift leading off. I stuck myself as far as I could into this, only to come to a right-angled corner which was physically impossible to negotiate. Tim

however noticed that half way up the 10m pitch a way lead off, and the first of the "Fierce ladies of Cannock" had been discovered.

Over the course of the next few trips, the first lady, a technical right-angled squeeze, and the second lady, a long tight rift squeeze were pushed. The cave's open shafts had become tight rifts and small pitches. After "Hlegless", an 8m pitch, there were two more squeezes, "The Sisters". The second of these had even Alex beat, and Tim and Chris were on the verge of starting the derigging when Tim spotted a possible climb. It looked totally without promise, but saved them carrying rope back through the fierce ladies, so they left it to be checked.

The next day while Chris and Richard Barnes checked a traverse - a possible bypass to the Fierce ladies - at the top of They Come at Night, James and I wanted to see the other side of the squeezes and decided to try the climb. After I had my first tussle with the Fierce Ladies, we reached the bottom of "Bad Habits". There hadn't been any available bolting kits, so James had to start the climb armed only with a handful of tapes and slings.

There was a convenient flake which stretched up about half of the height of the climb. Bit by bit James managed to make his way up, using slings looped in cracks in the flake to manufacture footholds where needed. After he'd spent a fair time at one particular spot, he asked me to lower him down on the rope I was belaying him on. At first I thought he'd given up, but he started to root around in the stream below, and soon stood up to show me the selection of small rocks he'd chosen.

He considered these carefully before finally choosing one, which he tied a tape around. With this clipped to his harness, he started back up the climb. When he'd got as far as in his last attempt, he got out his chockstone and started to try to wiggle it into the crevice. Finding a position where it would jam firmly, enabling him to stand in the sling, and get up to the next ledge.

He called down when he thought he'd got it in the best possible position, and after assuring me several times that it was perfectly safe, stepped up into its loop. From his new position, the remainder of the climb was straight forward, and soon he was standing on a tiny ledge, eight metres above. As he looked about him he gave a shout, "It goes, John. It Goes!"

There was a tube of significant size leading of from his head height, however it would be a squeeze to get into, and need a bolt putting in for protection. So, elated by the fact that the cave was still going, we called it a day and turned around.

Ascending They Come at Night, we noticed some strange loops of rope, heading off across the chamber and up towards the roof. This was the fruits of Chris's trip, and was to become known as the "Tagliatelle". It led across the top of pitch and, since no one else went across to check its leads, a few weeks later it was derigged to provide more rope.

The next day a bolt was put in and "Bazdmeg's Holiday", a large passage was entered. So called after Pivo (one of our Hungarian expedition members) who spent a long time struggling in the squeeze just before it, shouting "Bazdmeg" at the top of his voice. This had many good looking leads, but after a few trips most of them had dried up. Tim had made a long climb "Old Bores Hill", which lead to a large boulder choke, and the passage of the stream had become too tight. On top of this, the discovery of C9 a bigger cave, going like the clappers, and without any severe squeezes, meant fewer people were eager to spend time on the unpromising boulder choke.

Not quite everyone however. Over the course of the next week, Tony at least continued to retain his interest in the cave, making solo trips when volunteers were lacking, he continued to check the leads, and explore the boulder choke. This eventually paid off as he managed to dig a way down through the boulder choke and came out at another pitch. F64 was not dead yet.

Up until this time Rob, one of the people who had found the entrance almost a year ago, had not been further than the bottom of "Harmless". Now the cave looked promising

again he wanted to see the rest of it himself, and joined Gavin and myself on a trip to survey the section through the boulder choke.

The first challenge was the Fierce Ladies, It took a lot of effort from Rob, and the removal of his wellies, to get through. While Gavin went on to rig the pitches that he and Dave Lacey had climbed the day before, Rob and I started our surveying. Neither of us had been through the choke before, so weren't quite sure of the way. Adding this on top of the trouble it was to survey the tight sections of the choke, it took us quite some time to get through.

The pitch which Tony had found led out into a very large rift. As Rob and I surveyed down the 25m pitch into this rift, and could see Gavin's light as he worked further on down, we got the impression that this would take the cave to a significant depth. The rift was making its descent in a series of small pitches a few metres at a time, some could be climbed, but most warranted a rope.

By this point on the expedition, however manpower was short. A lot of people had gone home, and with two caves to explore there were not enough people prepared to do long pushing trips. So the pace of exploration slowed down. Whenever Gavin could find a partner he went, and with various people he kept the cave creeping deeper, down past 250m, . . 300m, . . 350m. . .

I joined him on several occasions. We would head down to the squeezes separately, and then head together to the end of the rift. In the few hours we got before we had to turn around, we would rig a couple more of the 13 pitches which made up "Zodiac rift". I enjoyed the chance to practice putting bolts in, and it helped to drive off the cold which invaded when we slowly surveyed. After a tin of peaches as refreshment, we would head out, meeting up only at the squeezes, and usually arriving back on the surface well after dark.

By the middle of August we were at the bottom of the rift. Gavin and I had come to a chamber, which had a wall of rocks across it. When we threw stones into the blackness over the top, they dropped for three seconds, the cave was already about 400m deep.

Time however had almost run out, there was only one more days caving before we had to start derigging. As I sat at top camp the night before, I tried to persuade someone to come with me and rig this last pitch. Gavin had gone down to base camp, and everyone else wanted to do a trip down C9, which in the end I decided to join. Just as we were about to have an early night, a group of people arrived from base camp in the last light. Among them was Wookey, a latecomer to the expedition from Cambridge University Cave Club. He welcomed the chance to push some Spanish cave before the derigging began. I'd soon signed him up for F64 promising a cave with character. I excused myself from the C9 trip.

The next morning, while team C9 got up at seven o'clock for an early start, Wookey and I had a lie in and left camp in the early afternoon. We had a good trip down to the end of the surveyed section. Wookey enjoyed his first Picos cave, and had fun with the Fierce Ladies of Cannock. Within three hours of the entrance, we were at work.

We soon finished off the few survey legs needed, and were at the last pitch. Wookey did the rigging, backed the rope up to a large boulder, and disappearing over the piled up rocks. He said that we must be in a very large chamber, as he couldn't see any far wall. I sat and waited while he put in some bolts, and then descended the pitch.

When I followed, the pitch turned out to have a nice hang of about 35m into a huge chamber, the biggest I'd seen that expedition. As is so often the case in cave exploration however, this didn't mean a big way on. The chamber was half filled with a sloping choke of sand. Wookey had climbed up this, and it didn't look like there was a way on. We'd set out earlier that day to extend F64 to an even deeper lead for next year, and ended up killing the cave.

Disappointed, we headed out. It was a long prussic to the surface. This was the deepest point I'd ever been in a cave, and by the time we clambered off the top of the last pitch it was almost four in the morning.

As I got changed on the cold limestone, wet after recent rain, I thought back to the last time I'd been at the entrance that early in the morning. That had been my first pushing trip of the expedition, and this was my last. I'd seen the cave go from a crack in the side of the mountain, to an important piece of the Picos jigsaw, almost 450m deep. We walked back to the campsite beneath a clear starry night, electrical storms lighting up the horizon, my first expedition was drawing to a close.

But the story isn't over. Later when the survey had been drawn up, it turned out that Zodiac rift has a marked change in direction half way down. This corresponds to a point where the draft in the rift diminishes, and there are a number of leads in that area which were rushed past as the way lead on down. I for one will be back...

John Pybus

C8

The entrance is located on a north facing slope high on a ridge that is directly East of and parallel to the main La Rena ridge which heads NE from the summit of La Verdelluenga; co-ordinates from C3: x = -68.27m, y = -6.85m, z = 17.92m.

Cuvicente 268 °, declination -5 °, ~1950 m.

A free climb down reaches a boulder floor, which leads round a right hand bend to the head of a small pitch, landing in a small boulder floored rift. The scale of the cave increases significantly below the following pitch head, which bells out to form *Virtual Reality* (P26). From the foot of this pitch a large rift heads eastwards, but this rapidly chokes.

The way on is reached by penduling across to a large window 6m above the floor of *Virtual Reality*. A short ramp leads to a 12m pitch, which drops down the wall of a fault chamber. Two small holes in the floor are choked. However, on the left a climb leads up to the *Smarty Run* passage. After passing beneath a probable connection with the rift heading off from the floor of *Virtual Reality*, a short free climb down a hole in the floor leads to a possible continuation. The *Smarty Run* ends at a large aven (unclimbed).

Once more, the way on is a pendule, this time into a rift half-way down the fault chamber. A short crawl then leads past some precarious boulders to a small chamber with a slot in the floor, which is the head of a 42m pitch called *Hot & Steamy*. From the chamber, a boulder strewn ramp leads on the right to a small choked chamber. A belay for *Hot & Steamy* was originally sought here, before the intended belay descended the pitch. To the left of the pitch head, a crawl leads to another chamber with a climb up to a choked window at the far end.

Following the pattern of the rest of the cave, the bottom of *Hot & Steamy* is choked. 12m down from the pitch head, a bolted aerial traverse leads along the right hand wall to a climb up to the *Round Window*. This climb was uncompleted since one of the walls comprises a slightly overhanging wall of loose rock. Descending a further 10m it is possible to pendule to the *Square Window*, a clean-washed inlet which was climbed until a constriction prevented further progress.

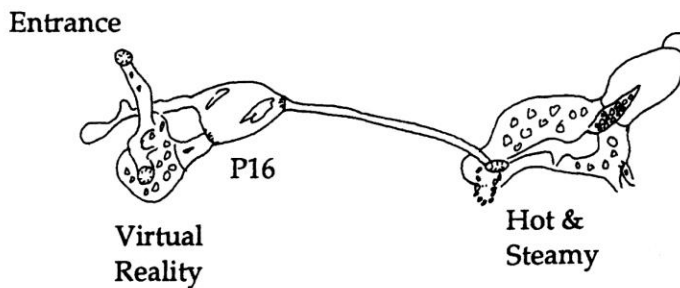
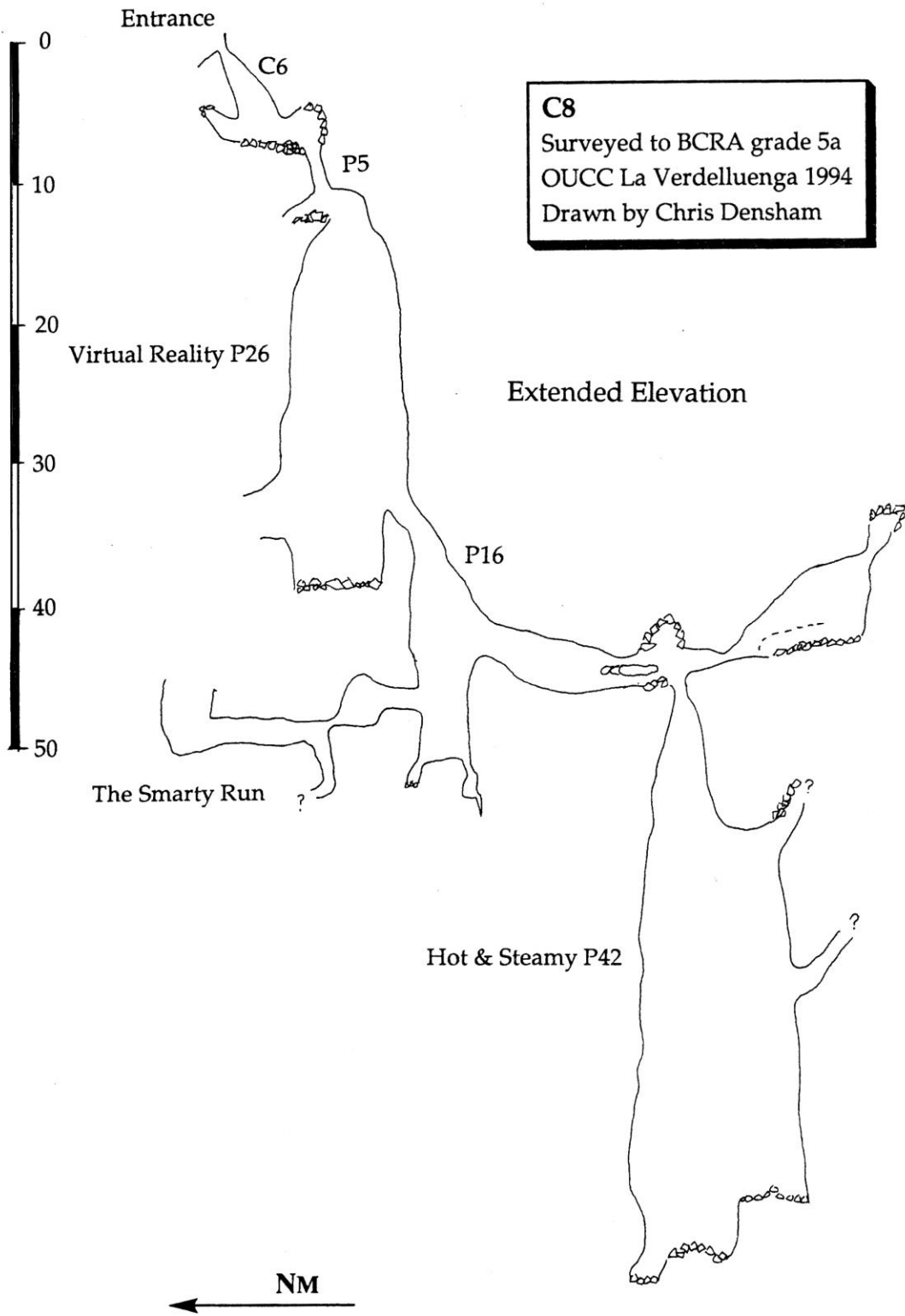
Chris Densham

Bouldering in C8 with Włodek

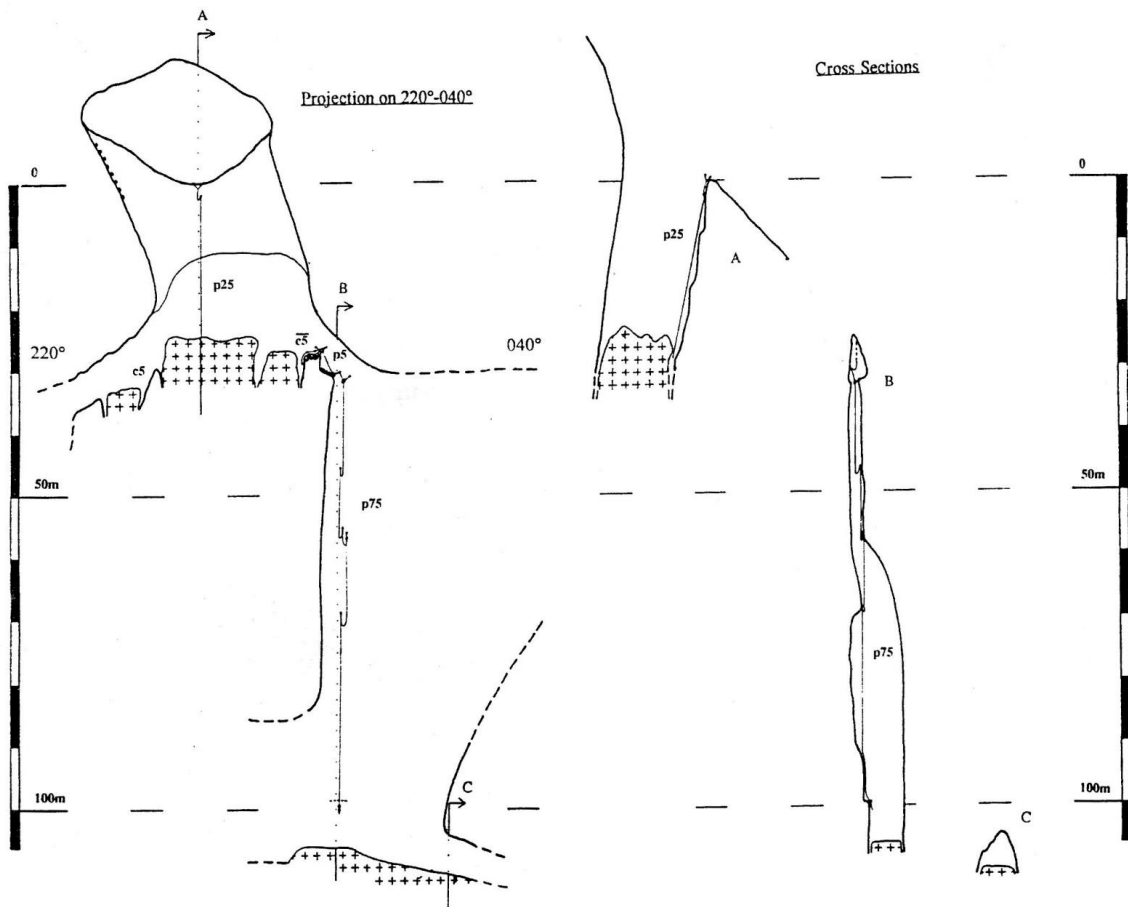
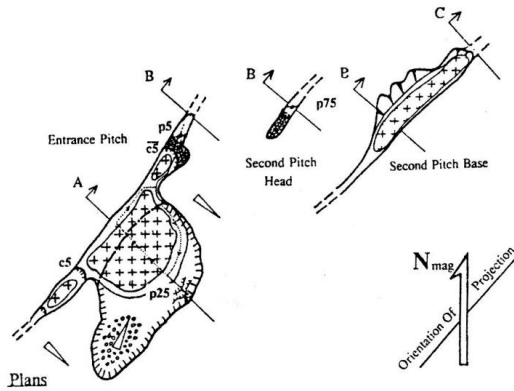
Further investigation of the pitch revealed a small window, so far unentered, and a phreatic tube which lead to a small choke at the head of a 50m pitch. Włodek attempted to climb over the choke to garden the pitch head, unfortunately the choke decided to collapse down the 50m pitch. Włodek managed to run up the choke while dodging the roof collapsing to get to a ledge and to some degree of safety. The 50m pitch was dropped down to a choke. A couple of hours digging revealed a small passage. more digging is necessary.

On exiting from the cave a window was spotted 7m below the rebelay which seems to take the draught.

Snablet



F80
 Surveyed to BCRA grade 3b
 OUCC La Verdelluenga 1994
 Drawn by Paul Mann



Finding C9 (now known as C3)

On the surface we found another entrance probably to this same cave, very, very close to C8. It's possible that this cave will be a bypass of windows in P50, and maybe we will find a way to heart of massif in this area.

Włodek

C3 (Sima Verdelluenga)

The entrance lies just over a subsidiary ridge on the Ario side of the NE ridge of La Verdelluenga roughly halfway between Boca del Joon and the summit. Bearings: Cabeza Llambria, 67.5°; Cuvicente, 94.5°; El Regallon 355.5° (bearings taken in 1982?). The original description and survey can be found in OUCC proceedings 11.

The 67m entrance pitch, *Incoming*, follows a winding rift down to a boulder lined floor. On the left, at ground level, an inwardly draughting crawl can be followed to an unascended climb. The way on is along a 5m high rift, through a squeeze, *The Manx Manoeuvre*, to a 5m drop. Following the rift down an awkward climb leads to the top of a wide 33m shaft, *Death Wish*. At the bottom a large chamber is seen on the left, needing protection for the 8m climb down to the boulder floor. A second high shaft is situated above.

On the far side of this chamber a strongly draughting crawl, the *Vacuum Cleaner*, breaks out after 20m into a large passage. Continuing ahead, a small pretty aven coated with moonmilk can be seen. To the right is *Reopen Investigations* a 14m pitch drops into a large meander, the *Piña Columñada*. Following the meander leads to a chamber from which a short piece of rift comes out at the head of *Anethical* a 27m pitch. The walls of this pitch are covered with a particularly fine coating of moonmilk. At the base of the pitch a small streamway comes in from up on the left. This soon disappears down a 70m shaft on the right, *Good Night Vienna*, at the bottom of which a tight rift is found. The shaft is bypassed by traversing, using protection, along the left hand wall. A bold step is crossed which again provides access to the small streamway below.

Following the roomy passage in the same direction soon gains a pitch head. After a 5m descent an obvious mouse hole (the *Moose Hole*) is reached by a 5m traverse. This leads down 20m of rift to a ledge. On the left the narrow streamway can be reached by a further descent. The way on is through a window 5m up on the right hand wall. Immediately, a 15m pitch, *Didn't Drink*, leads down through large boulders. Around the corner to the left a 20m shaft, *Don't Drive*, is then descended to the start of another rift.

After going around several corners a short climb down in the rift gains the base of a little chamber with water entering from an aven on the left. Following the water along the *65p Streamway* reaches a second small chamber from which the rift gains both height and depth. Continuing at the same horizontal level leads to the head of three classic successive shafts, all of which are wide and free hanging. The first two are *Snab in the Dark* (P34) and *She Rises* (P33), joined by a short section of passage. The stream, which is normally a slight trickle, can become very wet after heavy rain. Traversing along the right hand wall provides the best descent of the third, 47m pitch, *Smoke Me a Kipper*.

At the bottom, the water disappears into the choked floor of a fairly large chamber. A small passage on the right hand wall soon closes down. A bolted 8m climb on the opposite side of the chamber reaches a loose steeply sloping incline that leads 30m up to the left. At the top is *Night Games*, a large boulder choke. Water can be heard on the left, entering from an inlet above, but it soon disappears into a tight rift, 13m below. Scrambling over a large boulder on the right leads to a 15m pitch. A large aven can be seen above.

At the base of the pitch, a boulder floor dips 20m down to the right to a low wet streamway. This can be bypassed by following the slope up to the left. From here, a short section of rift ends up at the top of a 14m pitch. At the base, a passage to the right leads to a T-junction. To the right connects back with the bottom of Night Games. The left, an initially narrow rift opens out into a meandering stream passage. Eventually a 5m drop is reached and 30m further on is the *Entertainer*, a spacious 80m shaft.

As the bottom of the *Entertainer* is choked, a 12m climb up to the top of the streamway, half way between the 5m pitch and the shaft reaches a wider ledge. From here it is possible to traverse, with protection, for 30m along the left hand wall. Continuing down along this wall, a boulder lined slope is reached 56m below. This slope is followed up to the top of a large boulder choke. Several avens come in from above and a small animal bone was discovered here. A 10m pitch to the right soon chokes off. A descent on the left hand wall, behind a huge boulder, leads after 5m to another small slot. A loose floor then provides access to a 10m pitch. EXTREME CARE must be taken here as the floor is very unstable. The pitch leads down beneath the *Meat Cleaver* a precariously balanced tonne boulder with the rest of the floor balanced on it. Escape would be impossible should it collapse and the way on would possibly be blocked. The *Meat Cleaver* is currently 'secured' by two tensioned wires, each attached to a bolt.

A short traverse along the right hand wall gains a pitch head the *Defenestrator*. On the right a large quantity of helictites can be seen. The *Defenestrator* is a funnel shaped pitch which first shelves down for 30m on a sand floor. A straight 80m descent then reaches the stream below. The streamway immediately becomes impassable but a ledge 15m up from the bottom provides access to a rift. From here it is possible to traverse above the stream, initially at the same horizontal level and then taking the easiest route through the rift, following the slight draught. The sound of the water is quickly lost and several non-draughting holes are passed.

A hammered ground level squeeze is finally reached. Through here a short climb up leads to a constricted horizontal opening in the rift. Continuing in the same direction, a short drop down gains the *Klingon* a 23m pitch with the stream below. The streamway again closes down. To the right of the *Klingon* a large unexplored inlet carrying water comes in. Ahead, the draughting rift continues at the same level, heading NNW, 460m below the entrance.

This point marks the end of the surveyed cave. Ahead lies the possible camp site *No More Heroes* and the continuation of the rift *N,N,N,19* (the average age of a caver left behind by Włodek).

James Hooper

C3 Rigging Guide

Incoming (P67)	80m	spike and bolt Y hang; bolt deviation and bolt rebelay, bolt deviation and bolt rebelay, bolt deviation and bolt rebelay, spike deviation, spike deviation.
Manx Manoeuvre P8	10m	natural and bolt back up, bolt belay; bolt deviation at -3m.
Annoying Drop	---	4m ladder to a natural.
Death Wish (P33)	35m	natural and 2 bolts back up, bolt belay, bolt rebelay at -8m
Traverse and (P8)	20m	bolt at start and end of traverse; same bolt for 10m ladder, (another bolt needed).

Vacuum Cleaner		
Reopen Investigations (P14)	20m	bolt backup, bolt belay; bolt rebelay at -5m.
Piña Columñada		
Anethical (P27)	30m	natural and bolt back up, 2 bolt Y hang; natural deviation at -1m.
Good Night Vienna		
Traverse	30m	natural back up, 7 bolts on left hand wall, rope left in place.
Moose Hole (P19)	40m (+15)	natural and bolt back up, bolt belay; bolt rebelay above slot at -5m, wire rebelay at -10m, bolt rebelay at -30m, 15m tyrolean left in place from rebelay to window, bolt in window.
Didn't Drink (P15)	20m	bolt belay and bolt back up, (bolt deviation needed).
Don't Drive (P20)	25m	2 bolt back up, bolt belay; bolt rebelay at -7m.
65p Streamway		
Snab in the Dark (P34)	135m	long wire on natural back up, 2 bolt Y hang; spike deviation at -4m.
She Rises (P33)	"	5 bolts for traverse and Y hang; bolt deviation at -3m.
Smoke Me A Kipper (P47)	"	2 bolts; one wire from each for rebelay at -2m.
Climb up to Night Games (C35)	35m	bolted climb, 2 bolt rebelay, tape round huge boulder at pitch head; (rope left in place).
Night Games		
P13	20m	bolt back up and bolt belay; bolt deviation at -5m, bolt in window.
P14	15m	2 bolt Y hang.
Big Vamos		
P5	10m	2 bolt Y hang.
The Sting (C12)	20m	bolt belay backed up to traverse (rope left in place).
Traverse	30m	5 bolts and wire on left hand wall (rope left in place).
The Entertainer (P56)	70m	2 bolt Y hang; 5 bolt rebelay successively further from the pitch head.
The Meat Cleaver	20m	Back up to huge boulders, 2 bolt Y hang.
traverse	10m	4 bolts on right hand wall.
Defenestrator (P105)	125m.	back up to traverse; wire around large boulder for rebelay at -5m, bolt rebelay at -35m and -70m
Gotta Have Faith (traverse)	10m	3 bolts on left hand wall (rope left in place).
Klingon (traverse)	10m	4 bolts on left wall (rope left in place).

The Cave leads ever on and on,
Down from the hole where it began

James Hooper

What Light From Yonder Window Breaks

"A great story needs a good beginning," I said grinning but out of breath as I finally caught up with Włodek and Snablet at the entrance to C8. Seventy metres below there were two openings in a large shaft to investigate. For me, caving in the Picos was still new and the passion for discovery was growing stronger. After twenty minutes work however, the windows both closed down so I abseiled to the bottom of the 100 metre deep cave. "We start digging here" Włodek said, pointing at a small choked streamway. Two hours later we'd made two metres of passage. Bored, disappointed, angry we gave up and left. At the entrance Włodek walked away muttering, "I'm going to find bypass." Before long a shout was heard across the barren rocky landscape. "Six seconds." Snablet and I looked at each other then ran over to where Włodek was frantically throwing rocks down a gaping hole. Boom. Boom. I took my watch off. Six seconds he'd said. 1,2,3, crash, 4,5,6, the large rock kept thundering down, 9, 10, the soft rumble rose up, wrapping us in a moment of timelessness, 11, 12, boom. Twelve seconds we'd got. yes, we had our bypass our beginning.

I woke at 7 o'clock the next morning, rubbing my hands together. Boom. The word captured the image, the image conjured the excitement. As the camp slept we made our way across the ridges in the early morning sunlight. Snablet and Włodek derigged C8 while I set to work hammering in my second bolt at the entrance to "C9". Fully armed with over 300 metres of rope and rows of bolts Włodek posed for a photo and set off down.

Eventually Snablet's faint cry of "rope free," echoed upwards. How deep was it? What was at the bottom? The black unknown chasm beckoned. Attaching myself to the thin rope I descended down and down. I finally saw a dim light below me. Lost for words, I followed the other two down the draughting rift that led further into the cave. Good, the bottom wasn't choked. Through a squeeze, down a short pitch we went until we reached the top of a large shaft. I was overjoyed, but Snablet was visibly down hearted. Our 200 metre entrance pitch was seventy metres. And someone had been here before. A rusted bolt gave it away. Unbelieving I still felt elated as I abseiled down the next pitch. A further short descent then reached the floor of a large chamber. Footprints. Damn. But the chamber was huge. Perhaps there would be a way.

On the far side of the chamber a small choked crawl had a strong draught blowing into it. we spent half-an-hour digging out loose boulders and sand until it was just possible to squeeze through. Taking off our harnesses and rope work we inched forward as the sharp popcorn looking sides of the squeeze shredded our oversuits. If we can just get through this bit. The wind was so strong it kept blowing our carbide lights out. This has to be called the "Vacuum Cleaner," I thought. Something must lie beyond. Suddenly the crawl broke out into large passage. To the right was a large smooth shaft and the sound of water babbling below. Ahead lay another white aven and another shaft. The cave was big, and we were the first to marvel at her hidden vaults. Before we had luck and then disillusionment. Persistence had made it ours.

For the next few days I set about carrying supplies up to Top Camp, collecting snow, fixing my oversuit, with one pervading thought always in mind. In the evening the cry of "It Goes," came bellowing across the valleys as other teams returned victorious. Smiles broke out on peoples face as I danced about. Wild exaggerations came back but we all knew OUCC were going down. Vino Tinto. Cheap red Wine. The snow pole turned depthometer moved up to 250 metres.

As the cave became deeper the trips became 24 hours long. We'd routinely wake up at seven, go to the loo, fry some eggs and onions, wait fifty minutes for the tea to boil and then set off. At the top of the last ridge before C3 we rested and contemplated the trip ahead. Scanning the valley below we speculated on the direction of the cave. Xitu? Impossible. Upstream 2/7? A third system? With work to be done we'd then walk to the cave, get

changed, fill our tackle bags and leave the easy comfort of daylight behind. For most of the way down our only contact would be the shout "rope free." Beyond the "Vacuum Cleaner" two well decorated pitches led to an exposed traverse 70 metres above a stream floor. A further pitch led down to the "Moose Hole" a mouse shaped hole where (as became custom) I'd let go, make my hands into antlers and cry "Moooooose." The cave was huge. Never before had I descended pitch after pitch in such a manner as this, the glow of my acetylene lamp illuminating the grand scale of the cave around me. Two small pitches "Don't Drink" and "Didn't Drive" were followed to the start of another rift, the "65p Streamway". The thoughts of my return would start to creep persistently into my mind. I'd never been this deep before.

Beyond the "65p Streamway" there were three awe-inspiring shafts. At the bottom the water disappeared into a choked floor. The only way on was up the opposite wall. I started to yawn. It was eleven o'clock. I began to lifeline Włodek while he slowly bolted himself up. As soon as I sat down however, my head seemed to become heavier and heavier and my eyelids kept dropping. I struggled to keep awake, Włodek could fall at any moment. After ages of fading in and out the call came to follow. I was wet and the cold cruel draught had chilled me to the bone. Fighting the gentle hand of sleep, clenching my teeth together to prevent them from chattering, I slowly prussiked up the rope, till I reached the large boulder choke 30 metres above the floor of the chamber. This we decided was "Night Games". Enthusiasm drained out of me as I huddled, shivering in a survival bag while Paul hammered bolts in. All I wanted was sleep. I didn't know anymore. Didn't care.

Exhausted, I decide to head out before hypothermia set in. Our call-out time approached. I inched my way laboriously up the three pitches, not seeing the bottom, the top rarely in sight. I could make it out, come on James. In the "65p Streamway" I stumbled about. Was it this way? or up there? I was lost. My mind kept playing tricks. Voices, but it was just the flow of the water. Or had the others passed me, leaving me? "Beep, beep", "Beep, beep," My alarm went off. Seven o'clock. I'd been going for 24 hours.

Getting a grip I went back to the last pitch and waited for the others. When they caught up the worst was over. "Vamoose, let's go". I kept moving, doing everything rigidly by the book. Two hours to go, come on. "Moooooose", the Vacuum Cleaner. Up the final pitch and out to the morning sun. Smiling, happy, we changed and strode back to camp for breakfast. One minute late.

I slept late, muttering, "Am I in C9" and then staggered down the mountain. The next day I carried food up, rested my aching muscles, read some trashy paperback, and prepared for another journey into the deep, naming the next bits of passage. I knew I could get out now, and the cave, the adventure, the story went on, binding us closer together. More and more people made it down C9. Michele, Alex and others kept the surveying up to date. Our "45 metre" pitches were found to be rigged on 40 metre ropes, but the cave caught up with our crazy estimations. Steve Phipps took photos. Orders went out for more bolts and hangers. The club kept going down until we knew we had only one pushing trip left.

At the end of the previous trip I had pushed along a tight squeeze "The Crunchy Frog", and found "The Klingon", the next pitch. Alex hadn't been near the bottom before and had decided that his birthday was the day to do it. Yes, I was going back. "let's name a passage 'N,N,N,19'". I went ahead down the cave and moved swiftly to the "Entertainer". To increase the amount of spare rope, I spent an hour rerigging the 30 metre traverse and dramatic 60 metre pitch. As Włodek and Alex completed a missing part of the survey, I brewed some tea on a stove I'd brought down, put on warm clothes and sorted out our last lengths of rope.

Slowly, slowly we passed the "Meat Cleaver", a precariously balanced boulder that threatened to fall down, crushing us without a hope of escape. I then abseiled 90 metres down the "Defenestrator". "What the...." loose rocks came flying down from above. "be careful". Struggling with a full tackle bag I made my way along the next horrific rift. After some hammering and undressing we squeezed through "Crunchy Frog". Time was running out.

Alex and I fettled our carbides and surveyed the cave while Włodek rigged the Klingon. At the bottom it was a stream... and a rift that closed down. Damn. Włodek had already gone for a window. I derigged, investigated a large inlet and then sat down with Alex and waited.

Eventually we heard a muffled cry. "I have no light." His electric had broken, his carbide ran out. Precious time was slipping away. Using my light we pushed ahead in the rift. After a squeeze, the passage widened, On the right was a chamber with a smooth sandy floor. An ante-chamber had a small glistening waterfall. On the last trip we had found the much sought after campsite for next year, "No More Heroes". Ahead the rift continued open, "N,N,N,19".

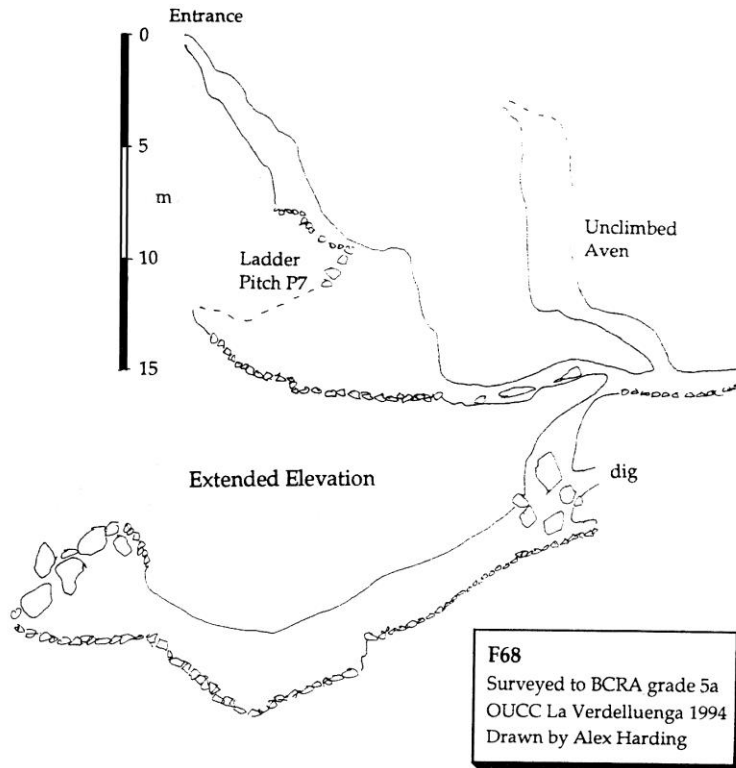
We turned back as Alex's light failed as well. This could be serious. He started to stumble about, exhausted, lost. I called it the time between times. "Come on we can get out". Ever so slowly we made it up the Defenestrator and back to the brew kit on my one working light. There was no way we'd make our call out. Włodek and Alex coaxed their headlamps back into action. It was decided that I would head out while they cooked a meal, and followed out in their own time. "Take care, I'll see you on the surface". I went out as fast as I could, on automatic, ignoring the silent voices crying "rope free". At the entrance I shouted to the rising sun, "It goes!", and prayed that the others would be alright. They made it out exhausted a few hours later.

In a bare three week romance we had used over one hundred bolts and 750 metres of rope. From the entrance "bypass", through the Moose Hole to the bottom of the Klingon, C3 and I had grown together. The depthometer rested at 485 metres. Vino Tinto. Depth through thought. The end is still to come, far, far, away.

James Hooper

Other Small Caves Examined.

- C6 Gustuteru 328°, Jultayu 263°, Robliza 173°. A 17m shaft to a choke.
- C7 Gustuteru 352°, Jultayu 286°, La Verdelluenga 118°. A snow plugged shaft.
- C8 See Above.
- C9 This cave is now known to be C3 Sima De La Verdelluenga. See Above.
- C10 The cave is located down slope from C3, there is a small knoll containing a depression, the cave lies inside this. A narrow slit leads, after 4m climb, down to small chamber two 2m climbs lead to the head of a 13m pit into a boulder filled chamber.
- C11 Regallon 028°, Cuvicente 268°. A man sized hole was opened in a bouldery rift, but the rift is choked.
- C12 200m lower than C3
A big hole filled with snow, no way on found.
- C13 Cab. Julagua 044°, Cab. Llambria 071°, Cuvicente 114°, La Verdelluenga 214°. 40m SE of Regallon.
The entrance shaft drops down past a rock spur onto snow (P10, C3). Descending further down the side of the plug reaches the start of a bolted traverse. This leads over a blind pit to the head of an undescended pit (~ 20m). Falling snow levels may put the bolts out of reach.
- F64 Snow Pole 343°, declination -22.5°, ~1985 m
See above.
- F65 Snow Pole 326°. Top left La Verdelluenga ~ 10m below the ridge. 30m Shaft past a snow plug. A sloping 13m pitch beyond ends in boulders.
- F66 Snow Pole 008°, ~1895 m.
A rift in a complex of rifts on the west edge of a large shattered bowl. On the large ridge heading WNW of F64.
An 8m climb down followed by a squeeze through boulders and a 10m climb down into chamber. A passage at the far side has a skylight opening but way on is blocked by boulders.
- F67 Snow Pole 018°, Old Top Camp 256°, ~1895 m
A lozenge shaped shaft 30m west of F66. drops 15-18m to a choke.



- F68 F13 190°, Old Top Camp 277°, ~1930 m
 Dry Shaft in top of a scree filled shallow hoyo to the right of the shoulder of La Verdelluenga.
 A 5m loose climb leads into a tube at the head of a 7m pitch into a chamber.
 Right leads past an awkward corner to a low chamber and down to two large boulder chokes. boulders draughting strongly.
- F69 An 8m climb in a 1m wide rift to a bouldery floor.
- F70 150m from the Snow Pole on a bearing of 200°.
 A 25m shaft. a second shaft in the NW corner is blocked with snow.
- F71 Snow Pole 310±10°, La Verdelluenga 155±10°.
 A small entrance close to the grass-limestone boundary on the NW flank of La Verdelluenga. A spiky 6m climb leads to free-climbable 6 and 5m pitches. A draughting tube at the bottom leads into a phreatic tube. The tube leads to a 3m pot with the ways on being too tight. Alternatively, squeeze down into 5m high rift, way on is too tight, but draughting.
- F72 An 8m climb in a rift followed by a further 8m drop in the rift becomes too tight.
- F73 Heading away from the snow pole camp to the south leads into a shallow valley, about 50m up this valley a series of rifts can be seen about 30m south of the valley F73 and 74 are located here (entrances are tagged).
 A 25m deep narrow slot, no way on.
- F74 A 10m shaft drops down onto a snow plug.

- F75 Snow Pole 081.5°, La Verdelluenga 135°. Major landscape gardening exercise revealed a 7m shaft blocked with boulders. No draught.
- F76 Snow Pole 081°, 5m E of F75. A 6m open shaft with no way on.
- F77 5m N of F76
A 4m shaft with a further 4m deep rift on the S corner, blocked.
- F78 Snow Pole 080°, La Verdelluenga 128°, "Thrift Rift"
A 10m deep fissure, 1-1.5m wide. At the NW end a small inaccessible chamber can be seen.
- F79 Vega Aliseda (orange rocks) 025°, La Verdelluenga 126°, Snow Pole ~065°. "The Great System of Nothing."
A dug out hole amongst boulders leads down into a rift open to numerous skylights.
- F80 On the Asturia side of the watershed very close to the summit of Punta Gregoriana.
25m shaft to a rocky snow plugged floor.
- F81 Alt. ~ 2150 m. From the summit of Punta Gregoriana head along the NE ridge for 400m. The very large entrance is just below the ridge.
A 25m entrance pitch drops onto snow and boulders. The rift to the SW was only given a cursory examination. To the NW an 80m pitch was descended for 75 m. the way on at the bottom looks wide open.
- F82 343° from the Snow Pole.
Head down the shallow valley from the Snow Pole and bear left toward the orange rocks in Vega Aliseda. a massive collapse area with a pale orange back wall. A possible way exists down in the bottom of the large boulders.
- F83 10m on the true right and above the Brown Gully, opposite F34 rift. 350 ° to lump *en route* to Ridge Cave.
8m Shaft and a 4m climb down into rift with fossils.

Expedition Medical Report

Preparations

Pre-expedition preparations were extensive this year. A practice rescue, OUCC's first ever I believe, was held in Cuckoo Cleaves on the Mendip, and about 20 people participated. Much was learnt about the difficulties of, and techniques for, bringing a stretchered casualty out from underground. We thank the MRO for their advice, and for lending us a stretcher.

An Expedition First Aid Course was held in the Department of Zoology by Richard Ward, and about 8 expedition members attended. This was a practical, informative, and well targeted course of considerable use and relevance to expedition caving.

Many medical supplies were generously provided through the Occupational Health Officer, although it is becoming increasingly difficult to rely on donated resources to build adequate medical and rescue kits. Three kinds of kit were produced. Personal underground first aid kits (for carrying in a prussik bag) were designed and made for about 10 expedition members. Two emergency rescue kits (Daren drum size) were built for front-line rescue. Three camp medical kits (tool kit size) were made largely to specifications of previous years (one was kept as a spare). Lists were included in each kit to show contents of all three kits (so that spare items could be easily retrieved from other kits). A stretcher was hired from Ghar Parau, but the club has now bought a stretcher with the generous help of the Oxford University Clubs Committee and the Special Projects Fund.

Incidents

There were few incidents on expedition requiring medical attention, and none requiring serious attention. Dehydration, and sometimes heat-stroke, was a frequent problem after long shaft-bashing trips at high altitude, and the kits contained too little Rehydrat or equivalent. Sufferers may also have taken the condition too lightly. One gastric-related ailment struck several expedition members during the expedition, although this record is encouraging and indicates that camp hygiene was generally good. Minor cuts and bruises were common, and most serious in one incident when a someone fell on the surface while carrying snow. One caver sustained burns to his stomach after carrying spare carbide inside his oversuit. One caver fell during a short climb, and strained his back, but sustained no significant injury. Several cavers sustained blisters to the feet, generally from surface walking, and one was out of action for many days as a consequence. One unplanned incident involving sexual intercourse proved that the provision of expedition condoms had been a sound policy.

Recommendations

I recommend that future expeditions repeat the pre-expedition preparations of 1994. The kits used on expedition were generally good, although more zinc tape and more Rehydrat than were taken was clearly needed. Expedition members should consider the risks of heat-stroke more seriously.

My thanks to Michelle Nickerson for acting as Medical Officer during my absence.

Tim Guilford, Medical Officer.

Expedition Accounts

Income				Projected Further Income
Donations	1057.07			
Gear Order	2736.80		Gear Order	117.00
Deposits	3325.00		Deposits	44.00
Insurance	921.04		Insurance	78.00
Van Travel	975.00			
Sundries	89.85		Sundries	18.19
Sale of T shirts	190.00			
		9294.76		
Expenditure				Further Expenditure
Equipment	3225.92		Expedition Report 1994	150.00
Ferries	282.00		Oucc Publications	250.00
Van hire	700.00		Hire of Trailer	250.00
Rope	376.00			
Insurance	819.00			
Van Gear Box	352.50			
Kitty	101.16			
Donation	300.00	(1995	Oucc expedition)	
Sundries	140.09			
T Shirts	348.10			
Fuel	226.87			
Radio Equipment	132.52			
Medical Supplies	131.43			
Camping Equipment	244.80			
Caving Food	96.99			
Photography	133.64			
Stationary and Copying	82.66			
Postage	40.46			
Gear Hire	95.00			
Report (1993)	139.50			
		7968.64	balance 1326.12 6/1/95	
			Projected Surfeit	933.31

Living expenses in Spain are covered by the Kitty, Each member paid 4000 Pts per week. The expenses are given below. Approximate income £ 2000.00.

Approximate expenditure; petrol, 363.25; tolls, 20.36; camping fuel, 42.27; calcium carbide, 1000.0; food, 1341.36; sundries, 101.18; total, 1968.42

The surfeit is due to the original budget being based on 25 people. As 32 people took part in the expedition the income derived from deposits was higher than anticipated. The surplus will be transferred to the OUCC Special Projects Budget c/o S. Roberts, Materials.