

Matienzo Summer 2008

Report by Dan Hibberts

After hearing all about Torca La Vaca (Cow cave) at Easter from Andy Pringle and Johnny Latimer, it sounded like they were into a big system which was waiting to be pushed when we came back in the summer. Being among the first to arrive we went straight to exploring the upper series which had been found when we had left the previous Easter. There was about one and a half kilometres of passage found but all the main routes ended in large collapses or calcite. We had previously decided that my team would take charge of descending all the big shafts in the floor that appeared to be twenty or so metres deep. Meanwhile the other team would look at the smaller easier leads that needed ticking off. After a couple of bolts had been placed over a round vertical shaft three ladders were hung and a lifeline was attached. Johnny went down first, he got most of the way down then came back to complain that the ladders did not reach the bottom. Another ladder was added and Johnny was soon at the bottom. Not long after, there was loads of shouting and Johnny went out of contact. I went down next followed by Bob Toogood. Johnny was traversing over a big canal with deep water, which was crystal clear. I was only just able to straddle the two walls; it wasn't long before we found the end which was a sandy dig. Johnny with his short legs was unable to straddle the walls slipped and fell in much to mine and Bob's amusement. After surveying, the shaft was 36 metres deep and there were about two hundred and fifty metres of passage. We decided to change to SRT, as the ladders were a pain in the arse. We dropped loads of shafts which didn't really go anywhere but they were all pretty deep. We decided to focus on a draughting slot, which had a pretty impressive volume of air coming from within and it was on Johnny's to do list. This slot apparently wasn't draughting at Easter, maybe because the water was too high. Mandy Fu and Mike from the MUSC had come along to witness some rock removal techniques. Mandy being absolutely tiny managed to fit through the squeeze, where she was then able to climb down about three metres before walking along to the start of a steep slope. She then requested a rope to get down. We tied a rope around Bill Sherrington and Mandy descended the slope into a large chamber with a deep pool of water that she thought was a sump. Well, as that volume of air can't pass through a sump, we needed to remove some rock to find out for ourselves. On the opposite side of the passage there was an unexplored vertical slot which looked very tight. At the bottom a complex of tubes and rift passage led to more canals, which Johnny fell in while exploring. Toogood and Johnny went to survey these new finds. There was an odd survey error, as the water in this area seemed higher than in anywhere else. Toogood had measured the lot in feet and inches. This got named the Whitworth Series.

While Bob and Johnny were surveying I forced my way into the draughty slot, which Mandy had already been down. It needed a ladder to get down as it was very difficult to get out of. When standing in the passage at the bottom you could feel the air rushing past you. Very impressive. After a short distance I reached the slope that Mandy had needed a rope for. It was a twenty-five foot drop, which was vertical, and needed a bolt and a ladder, rather than a rope tied around Bill. Once at the bottom I quickly realised a wet suit was needed and that it was not a sump as there were waves being blown across the water from the power of the airflow. We all agreed to come back again better prepared the next day.

Wetsuits, flotation, bottles and rope for a dive were among the items that were requested. James Carlisle being a bit of a water baby went in first followed by Bill Sherrington while Bob and I got a bolt in for the dive line. I could hear very

large echoes coming from Bill and James's direction. The sump turned out to be two ducks in deep water with about three inches of air space, which were both about three metres long, with a large air bell between them. The other side of the duck was a very large impressive passage fifteen metres to the roof and about the same width. There was also a big passage that went up a steep slope. We decided to follow the water which took us along the main passage in waist deep water. We followed this for around two hundred and fifty metres to climb up into a dry sandy passage which looked to take water in wet weather.

The upper series (up the steep slope) led back around into the main passage through most of the avens that could be seen from below in the stream way. There are loads of leads here, still waiting to be pushed, which have not been looked at.

The next day we got out of the water and into a massive passage which trended southwards into the hillside for well over a kilometre. At the end of the passage was a massive choke, which Mandy and I got totally lost in trying to find a way



Matienzo. Photo by Bob Toogood.

through. After hitting the choke having spent all day surveying people were getting a little grumpy, we decided to come back the next day fresh, to explore all the side passages and hopefully bypass the choke.

A full day was spent pushing all the leads of the main passage, which turned to mostly be oxbows back into the passage. We had spent most of the ten days in Cow Cave and had surveyed two thousand five hundred metres in total.

On one of the last days of the trip Phil Pappard had invited us along to push a tube in the bottom of a big hollow very close to a house. The owner of the house had made use of the draught by building a fridge around it! The owner of the house a Spanish lady came down to give us a good telling off, I don't think she was too happy with what we were doing to her fridge.

Matienzo – Last of the Summer Whine

24th August – 1st September 2008

Report by Grave Deadhill

Cavers: Martin 'Barny' Barnicott (EPC) & Grave Deadhill (EPC)

Due to various work-related schedules, we were unable to take the opportunity to be in Matienzo for the full push & grab squalor-fest that forms the UK expedition* to Northern Spain some weeks previous to this trip. We had therefore decided to opt for the last week of the 'season'. Although this late approach does not afford the same level of UK inter-regional bonhomie that is the trademark of this area (a nod here to Mr. Sparrow), the lack of focussed pre-planning & re-planning each morning/evening did actually enable us to get out caving well before noon each day. The story continues.....

(* Note – Barny says an expedition is not an expedition unless you've hired a little man to carry all your gear on his head).

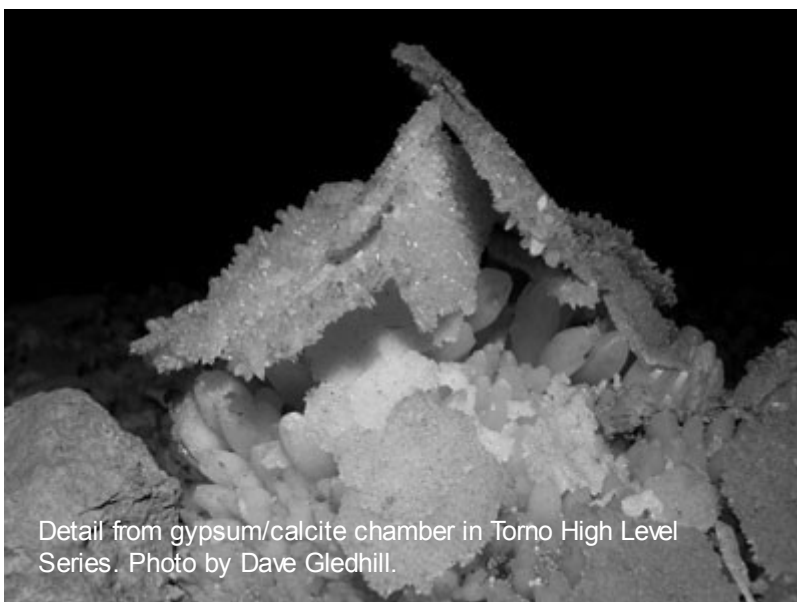
Day 1. Return to Regolfo

Regolfo is the site of a number of surface shafts and a small escarpment on the hill above the further reaches of a larger system (Torno) below. Easter saw us excavate a mud choked tube directly through the face of the escarpment, leading to a cobble filled crawl and then to a 15m pitch, complete with two waterfalls. The pitch-head was and still is rather awkward to negotiate, as it requires a head first flat-out squeeze out over the pitch before clipping in and swinging out onto the rope. Easter saw us reach the bottom of the pitch, only to find that the waterfalls disappeared down another cobble-filled crawl, which at the time was impassable, not least due to the sheer volume of water. There was also another less promising looking (but dry-ish) tube further back in the chamber. The pitch was still damp, but only enough to be a mild irritant. Excavation of the cobbles ensued, only to find that the solid looking floor was turning to liquid mud in a thixotropic (Dave – that's a very obscure word even for the more erudite members of the Eldon! – Ed) frenzy. A second look at the 'less promising tube' found it to be connecting with the cobble filled wet way on. Both were draughting strongly.

Both ways on meet after about two tortuous body lengths. Continuation will be possible although it will require some modification to allow this. Lying flat out in the tight water filled tube allowed water to be pushed forward and out of sight around the bend in a bow wave. The water could be heard falling for a short distance (2m?) followed by approx 5 second silence and then a further sound of falling water, this time much further down. To be continued...



The unassuming entrance to Regolfo. Photo by Dave Gledhill.



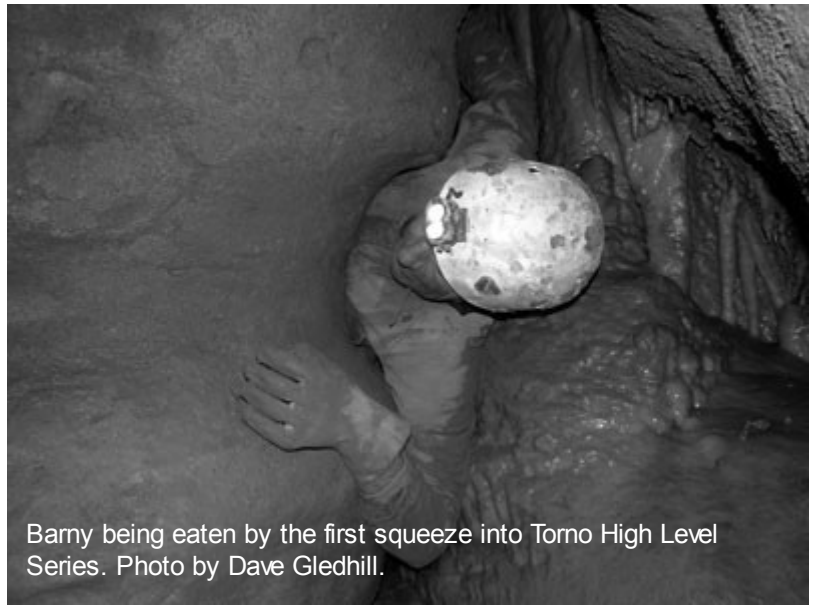
Detail from gypsum/calcite chamber in Torno High Level Series. Photo by Dave Gledhill.

Day 2. Torno High Level Series

A return to the newly discovered complex of passages found at Easter. Torno is a cave that was first discovered a few years ago after talking with a local farmer in a bar. Initially, a large amount of cave was found but further progress became rarer as leads crapped out or became too committing. One such lead was through an incredibly frightening looking boulder choke that emitted an incredibly strong draught, but would require a bit of manipulation. Various clubs had looked at the site and retreated very quickly, never to return. Enter the Eldon...

I'd made some progress the previous year with lump hammer, chisel and bar, but it was obviously in need of more persuasive means, preferably whilst sat a safe distance away from the 'action'. Dan & Mike Salt rearranged things to a satisfactory conclusion earlier in the year and the way on was now wide open (see Dan Hibbert's report from Summer 2008 earlier in this newsletter – ed). In the rush down the big passage after the choke, a side passage had been given a cursory glance but was reported to crap out with no leads. A more 'robust' examination revealed a thrutch up and through into a whole new network of draughting passages above the previously known system. It was this that we intended to explore and survey.

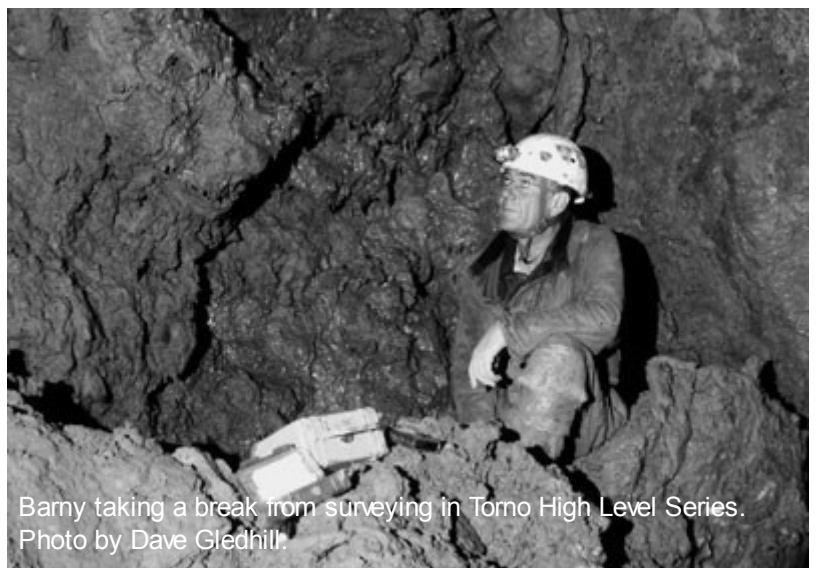
The series starts with a couple of highly entertaining squeezes through calcite windows, leading into traverses in dry meandering rifts with a stream far below until a slope up to a complex junction is reached. Initially we followed the right-hand passage. Again this is traversing at high level in tortuous rift passage. There must have been extensive amounts of false floor because at times it appeared to be around 2m below and at others around 15m. Breaking out into a high rift chamber revealed a potential way on up a wall and under a large wedged boulder. The disto revealed this to continue up for at least 20m with tantalising glimpses of white helictite covered stals appearing from the blackness. Return with bolts and dynamic rope is already pencilled in. The chamber was left via a wonderfully exposed climb up a wall of fallen blocks, emerging in a larger chamber with an excellent rock arch running the length of the area. This chamber also had a possible climb up into a black space beyond a series of worryingly perched blocks. Climbing would theoretically be easy – if you could rely on the blocks staying in situ. Descent (in a condition fit to leave the cave unaided) would be trickier, as all the holds sloped down and out – that'll be another rope then? Across the chamber, half-way up the sheer wall, a passage led off and round a bend. As this involved a climb up above the previous climb up, a slip would result in a good 10m + fall – rope etc. The roof of the chamber had a tube inlet heading up from which there emitted a small but steady flow of water. The positioning of this chamber and the type of rock etc. gives a strong indication that this could well be the bottom of the Regolfo inlet, although this is as yet unproven. We surveyed back to the junction.



Barny being eaten by the first squeeze into Torno High Level Series. Photo by Dave Gledhill.



Barny and 'toys' surveying in Torno High Level Series. Photo by Dave Gledhill.



Barny taking a break from surveying in Torno High Level Series. Photo by Dave Gledhill.

A 2m climb/step up and back from the junction leads to a dry canyon passage and scramble up over blocks into a marvellously decorated chamber. One wall is completely covered in flowstone. It may be possible to climb but would wreck some of it. We think it may lead into the same area as the first chamber/rift so will wait and check that out before wreaking destruction in this part of the cave. The chamber ends at a very large boulder choke with no immediately obvious way on. Surveyed out.

At the junction again, a very bold climb / bridge up (10m) and to the left over some very loose looking slabs saw Barny gain a higher series of passage. Joining him, we proceeded to squeeze through/step over/run along/climb up a series of passages and avens. One passage ended in an excellent chamber with the lower section covered in gypsum flowers and a dog-tooth crystal floor, which was very painful on the knees. Another passage ended in a climb up an ascending rift – progress blocked by loose perched blocks above. Yet another easy crawling passage led to a draughting aven from which there emitted a good inward draught. We were surprised to find the slabs at the bottom of this aven covered in scratch marks and paw prints. It was obvious that some large animal (badger / fox?) had obviously spent considerable effort trying to get up the aven. We also found other similar scratch marks in other areas of this section, although no obvious sign of bones (other than a mouse and a caddis fly) or piles of sh**t. Had the animal got out? We suspected we must be fairly near the surface and so concluded that it probably had. (We later found that we were around 90m below the surface so have revised this opinion slightly. Surveyed back to the junction.



Barny climbing up the entrance rift in La Collada. Photo by Dave Gledhill.

From the junction we headed left along a rift which then turned left and descended sharply. Various twists and turns found us back in the passage leading up to the 'complex' junction. We surveyed round this and closed the survey leg.

Exiting the cave, we had a poke around a few other bits and pieces to try and tie things together. We also retrieved a blue 'edelrid' drybag, a couple of 12mm drills and about 20m of electric cable. Can't possibly think who might have left these items here? They are now back in the Matienzo tackle store.

Day 3. La Collada

Bob Toogood had found this cave entrance during a day of prospecting the previous year. The site was not recorded 'officially' (GPS etc.) as we assumed we would be returning for further investigation but for some reason we never got round to it. The cave was 'rediscovered' (although not entered) last month by Phil Pappard, (local semi ex-pat, cave diver and bicycle stunt man). This site had generated interest again as the area survey shows it to be placed directly above the further reaches of the newly discovered cave Torca la Vaca (Cow cave – see later). A smallish entrance quickly finds you wedged at the top of a descending rift. The rift was free-climbable but a handline is reassuring. There were a stack of very precariously positioned boulders in one end of the rift and great care had to be taken not to dislodge these. An 8m descent found us in a small chamber with a draught coming up through the floor. We had cleared a way on down through the floor the previous year and a squeeze round and under a large slab gained an awkward step down into a larger chamber filled with many old stals and flowstone. At this point I remembered why we had not returned the previous year; the entire roof was a large boulder that was perched precariously on not very much at all – don't look, don't look, don't look, ah that's better – its gone away. At the foot of the sloping floor of the chamber was a silted/calcited wall beyond which was a calcite/moonmilk covered 3m drop down to what appeared to be a shaft in the floor. Above was an impressive white calcited aven containing many very large boulders. This was the limit of the previous years exploration. Barny climbed down the drop and then disappeared through the hole in the floor. The descent continued, not as a shaft, but as a rock/boulder covered slope, disappearing again through a squeeze under a very large slab. A further rocky slope down led to another squeeze into a tight rift, the way on draughting out but blocked by rocks. Barny started passing rocks up the rift to where I was wedged directly above, grabbing the rocks in one hand and carefully transferring to the other being careful not to let it fall back down onto Barny. I was unable to turn round at this point which made the blind wall-building / rock-stacking interesting. A way on was cleared into hands and knees crawling, enlarging to waking size passage. This headed off into the hill but became too tight to go either on or down. A return to the original rift and the extraction of more rocks revealed that the way on down continued, but it would not be today. We left the pushing at approx -40m, all free climbable with care. It appears that we are at the edge of a large boulder choke with one solid wall to work from. The cave is draughting out, although this varied from very strongly to barely discernible over approximately a 5 min cycle. Further progress would require scaffolding etc to engineer a way through. Definitely a goer in the Peak or the Dales, but too long a term project for Spain at present.

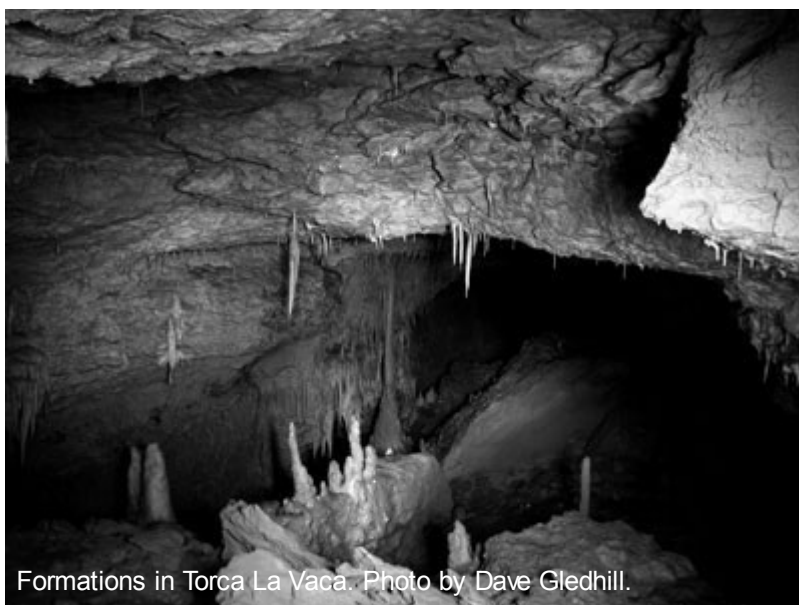
Attempted to survey but found that the SAP was not giving consistent readings. It later transpires that the laser had become misaligned – I think.

Day 4. Torca la Vaca (Cow cave)

This cave was discovered earlier this year and has been the focus of many pushing/grabbing trips in that time. We saw no reason to buck this trend. Due to reasons that never became totally apparent, a lack of precise hand/eye/legs/body spatial co-ordination had developed, necessitating the need for an easy day. We'd already planned to look at this new cave, partly because some of it is very pretty and also because there were some definite leads I wanted to check out from my initial visit earlier that month.

Cow cave is reasonably easy going. A 6m handline/ladder scramble into a typical carcass/rubbish filled 'pot' followed by a quick duck down under the low entrance and into the bone-dry passages. First 100m is a step up then hands and knees crawling until stepping down into a sand floored rift. By this point you will have lost about a litre of body fluid as the cave is seriously hot. The upper section of the cave has sandstone sections that are well weathered and also a little 'friable'. Parts of it resemble old collapsed mine-workings rather than natural cave. The rift passage contains many fine formations although unfortunately some of these are already showing signs of damage due to increased traffic. Luckily, the anorexic porn-star has all its faculties intact and has not succumbed to excessive 'banging'. A complex series of tight rift passage leads past more pretties to the head of the first pitch. A 12m laddered route drops down an aven that enables a reassuring back rest when on the ladder. Further enlarging passage at the bottom of the pitch leads via gours, columns and stals of impressive size until what was until recently the final chamber is reached. Standing in the chamber you can actually hear the wind blowing from the narrow rift in the left hand wall. Standing in front of the rift leaves you with no doubt as to the way on. A squeeze down followed by a 5m-ladder pitch landed at the base of a chaotic boulder choke, the top of which forms the floor of the chamber we had just left. A further 8m ladder pitch found us standing on the shore of Bassenthwaite lake. An interesting bit of caving this, swim out across a chamber and the turn left to go under the low roof. The low section requires the helmet removal to allow you to keep your nose above the waves created by the howling wind blowing through this narrowing which goes by the name of the 'Penrith historic market town duck' (don't ask). There's around 10m of low section to be swum before emerging on the far shore of Bassenthwaite. There are two main routes on from this point. I had previously been along the lower streamway and so we decided to have a look at the dry upper section, which neither of us had seen before.

From the beach at the edge of Bassenthwaite, we climbed up the sandy mud/rock slope heading up into a very impressive aven that appeared to be getting even larger the further it went. After around 30m-height gain, the passage levelled out and continued onwards with no signs of stopping. We had a copy of the survey with us and proceeded to follow up some of the sections labelled with question marks. I entered a rift to the left of the



Formations in Torca La Vaca. Photo by Dave Gledhill.



The Anorexic Porn Star - Torca La Vaca
Photo by Dave Gledhill.



Barny swimming through the Penrith Historic Market Town Duck.
Photo by Dave Gledhill.

main route. This had a set of footprints for about 20m but these stopped at a boulder blockage. A climb over the block revealed virgin mud ahead. The rift was followed at varying heights for approx 100m. At places it appeared to be at least 20m high and between 3m to 0.5m wide. The rift eventually swung round to the right and had a set of footprints in the floor. It had obviously been visited from both ends but never explored properly. This was around 200m of largish passage but there was no mention on the survey. There could well be leads off this bit, especially at a higher level when it swung right. I thought I'd arrived back in the main passage and waited for Barny who I thought would walk along the main route to meet me. To my surprise, I saw Barny but he was around 8m below me. I was in a section of large passage directly above the main passage itself. Both sections of passage were incredibly well decorated with large columns, stals and walls heavy with flowstone. The upper section only appeared to have one set of footprints along it at this point. Barny scrambled up to the upper level and we proceeded to explore the passage, looking for more elusive ways on that may have been missed in the initial excitement of the original exploration earlier that month. A climb up and 'iffy' sloping traverse into a roof level passage marked on the survey as 'appears to close down' found Barny in a series of well decorated passages and chambers although with no obvious way on at present.

Returning to the main passage, we continued along and found that there was in fact a number of parallel rifts, not just the one indicated on the survey. As one rift closed down too much for easy progress, a short backtrack would inevitably lead to an opportune window into the next rift. These rifts also tended to be different in character too. One would be clean dry sand; another would be covered in yellow flowstone whilst the next would be gnarly scalloped limestone that snagged at oversuits with great regularity. We arrived at a very large opening in the passage where the floor dropped away, the roof gained height and the width increased dramatically. Combined use of fenix torches allowed us to inspect an aven high up in the roof (30-40m?) from which a small amount of water was falling. It appeared that at the highest level there were signs of passages heading parallel to that which we were in. Could have been shadows though. This would be incredibly difficult to bolt up, as the higher parts of the aven appeared to be in an overhanging sandstone band that seem intent on self-destruction. This area was like being in the top of a massive funnel filled with large precariously placed boulders, all poised to move downward taking everything else stupid enough to be there with it. After debating as to the wisdom of further progress at this point (it looked do-able with care) we felt that due to the diminished co-ordination referred to earlier, a leisurely exit would seem prudent. We took yet another route back to the top of the slope leading down to Bassenthwaite. This time it involved crossing over very obviously false floors of calcited nothing – very pretty though.

Before descending to the lake, we decided to have a look at a tight rift passage that was heading off to the right. The rift was way too tight to attack at floor level, and the walls were coated in mud that made a simple thrutch up impossible. We resorted to throwing rocks into the tight section to use as stemples to climb up. There appeared to be an endless supply of rock, unfortunately they were virtually all calcited together and impossible to move. When the few rocks available ran out we resorted to me wedging in the rift as far as I could and then Barny standing on me to gain the height required. After much cursing and a bad case of cramp Barny gained the wider passage above. This led to a mud blockage that had come from what was now an open tube in the roof. This is reported as requiring 'a bit of gear' to ascend. To the left of the tube was a way on that led to a massive wide-open cave passage stretching for as far as the Sten could see. Unfortunately the passage came complete with survey stations and footprints – Barny was looking down from a roof level passage into the main section of cave from which we had just left (lets be honest -hands up who hasn't done this recently?).

Thwarted again, I had a look up another passage that the survey said required bolting – it didn't. A traverse up and into what initially looked a promising way on turned out to be a very wide but impossibly narrow bedding plane that extended for at least 30m. There was a potential way on via a small less narrow section, but this would require the use of a flexible eight year old on a string and a long pointy stick of encouragement.

Day 5 & 6. Surface Prospecting.

Due to a continuation of feeling odd & wobbly but for no apparent reason, we decided to have a proper look at the hillside above La Vaca to see if we could find another possible way in that would bypass Bassenthwaite lake. It is obvious that the water level rises considerably but to what height, for how long and at what speed are all known unknowns - as Rumsfeld would say.

There are a number of shakeholes of considerable size on the hill above La Vaca. Some of these tie-in with underground features that may indicate another entrance. The availability of napalm would have been welcome for some of the shakeholes, some of which are completely inaccessible at present due to many decades worth of thick brambles and other thorny creepers of phenomenal tensile strength. Needless to say we found at least a dozen excellent looking (and draughting) projects all of which were attacked with varying degrees of vigour. Most of them draughted in, but one emitted the coldest draught I think I have ever felt. Extensive earth removal revealed a very narrow rift (15cm) that unfortunately did not appear to alter in size for its length or height. There are still a couple of potentially very good opportunities here that only require the altering of a rock or two if anyone fancies a bit of practice with Mr. Hilti's products.

Late on in the second day, whilst driving back to the village, we decided to have a quick look at a hole called 'Needs another ladder' which is also located in the area above La Vaca. I had been down this earlier in the month with Bob Toogood. It did indeed need another ladder, several in fact, and fly spray. This had been followed up further for another

couple of pitches but was reported to get too loose and tight (can you get too loose and tight?).

There was another draughting site I'd found in this area and I wanted to have a quick 5-minute dig to see if it had the legs for another return. The cave entrance is a 2m-drop down between two sandstone boulders, landing in a chamber covered in very old bits of stal. There appears to be a hole in the floor but on closer inspection it is just a heap of sandstone blocks in a depression with no way on. Under one wall of the chamber is a gap of around 6 inches from which there emits a steady draft. The floor appeared to be sand and the way on seemed to open up into another chamber. I did not have the time or means on the previous visit to get through the gap, but a 2-minute scrape with the shovel allowed me through a tight squeeze into a large but low chamber with walls covered in very old stals and brilliant white flowstone. In the floor directly below my head was a hole of 30cm diameter down which I could see a wider shaft of around 10m depth. The draught was coming from the hole. To be continued.....

Day 7. Torca la Vaca Again

A return to la Vaca, this time to chase up some leads from a previous trip in the lower (wet) section of this new system. Arrived on the far shore of Bassenthwaite as before, but this time we headed left and into the gnarly limestone streamway. The first section of the streamway is in clean washed but quite sharp limestone that has a tendency to rip your gear. Progress is entertaining as the route is along a passage cut through a series of faults running at 45 degrees. This means that you are constantly stepping in and climbing out of pools, some of which are chest deep. We passed under a previously seen aven in the roof from which water was raining down. The aven has the appearance of a mineshaft and was initially thought to be a continuation of the aven in the high level series mentioned previously. After careful examination of both I feel that they are actually totally different avens, albeit very close together.

Two of my initial leads turned out to be nothing more than oxbows, albeit rather long and at a higher level than the streamway. The streamway comes to a point where we had previously been forced to climb up into higher dry passage. This had been due to not everyone in the survey team having neoprene gear and low-level progress would have necessitated swimming in canals. This section has apparently been surveyed now (another one off my list then) but appears to crap out at a muddy dig in water. As the wet surveying was no longer needed, we reluctantly climbed to the higher dry stuff and continued further into the system.

The survey showed a number of passages leading off the main drag, but none had any notes or clues other than '?'. The vast majority of these were ticked off and redrawn on the survey – usually as they were more oxbows or rifts to dead ends. There was an area I was very keen to get back to as it had appeared to be of a distinctly different nature to any other bits of the cave seen so far. At a significant left hand right-angle bend in the main passage (Vindication Highway) was a very small hole in the right hand wall at roof level (Whites-haven). A quick look in here previously had revealed a dry rift passage with pure white stals covered in helictites. For those who've been, it looked just like some of the passages in Smallcleugh mine at Nenthead. The passage continued as a narrow rift that become progressively more and more heavily decorated with gypsum flowers and crystals. The roof was completely covered by helictite-covered stal and straws. A squeeze up and around a rock-fall (just like Smallcleugh) led to a T-junction with a much larger passage. Initially I assumed (from previous experiences this week) that we had just oxbowe'd round back to the main drag. Climbing down into the passage showed that this was new stuff, not a cairn, tape or tuna fish tin to be seen. This passage was also very dry and sandy with lots of gypsum crystals on the walls (watch you nose in here as they're like razors, aren't they Barny?). A turn left ended at a solid rock wall, whilst right led along 90m of high rift passage to a sand/mud choke rising up to roof level. An acrobatic climb by Barny, which again involved standing on my knee, back, shoulders and head (Eldon state circus?), led to a high level passage that definitely continued but from which return would be virtually impossible unless there was some other gullible person to stand on at the other side. Passage surveyed and 'officially' drawn up to approx 200m.

Whilst checking out yet another random oxbow, Barny disappeared along a rift in the left wall. I had previously been about 100m along this on an earlier trip but had to return to rejoin the rest of the survey team. Around 15 minutes later I heard Barny's voice from way further down the passage. It transpires that he had been along a long passage with countless twists, turns and double-backs and had found himself back on the main drag. A return to the start of the passage meant he had to climb up and over a very large and very horrible bolder pile which included a couple of interesting moves to get down. We didn't survey the passage, but judging by where it came out it must be at least 500m long.

Proceeding to what had been the end of the original survey trip, we had a good poke around in the boulder choke from which there emits a strong draught. A good hour was spent climbing up, down, through and around these boulders, but no continuation of the passage could be found. At one point I thought I'd found the way back into proper passage, only to find myself having connecting a large loop back to the main drag, coming out around 100m before the choke – weird.

Various other holes/rifts/avens etc were pushed. Some draughting strongly, some not at all. A descending rift with an incredibly warm draught found us popping out back into the main passage. Why the air was so warm in that particular section we had no idea?

Overall we must have travelled through at least 3km of unsurveyed passage on this trip. There are oxbows on oxbows,

joint controlled rift mazes in which at one point you can see about 20m to water below. There was also around a similar amount of passage that we saw but did not go in, usually because it obviously connected through to a passage we had already been in (or at least thought we had). There are also the climbs up rifts & avens that have never even been sniffed at. If you want to go and get some practice at surveying in uncharted territory, this is the place to do it. There are many kilometres of passage just waiting to be recorded.

La Vaca Survey.

A pdf file of the cow cave survey so far can be found at: <http://www.geography.lancs.ac.uk/Matienzo/indexnf.htm>
Click on cave/survey number 2889, the current version is version 2 medium quality. This site will also connect you to descriptions, surveys & pictures etc. of all the Matienzo caves.

A final thought: Although we could have technically doubled the known length of La Vaca during our week here if we'd come in every day, the question is, if it is just a 5m dead-end aven, should it technically be counted in the total length?