

York University - Picos de Europa 1985

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With our main objective, Pozo de Cuetalbo (M2), still going at - 650m and others still going at - 300m, - 225m, - 200m and - 190m the 1985 YUCPC expedition to Vega Huerta has been our most successful trip so far.

M2, discovered in 1984 (see Caves and Caving 29), had previously been pushed to 250m and the first week saw both surface camps established and the cave rigged to its previous limit. Our first new pitch was 50m, to a platform we called the Motorway Services. This was to prove a useful "kitchen" for future trips. A small stream enters in

one corner and continues down narrow passage. Unfortunately the only way on is Play the White Man passage; a longer, tighter and more slippery version of 'No Eighth' further up the cave. Having found a way through, I returned to the Services and remarked to Simon "It's still going, but you won't like it!". He wasn't the only one: after one trip

I returned to the wrong side to hear desperate cries for help! The two Spaniards who had been surveying behind us were lost in the maze of man-sized passages connected by impassable rifts and corners! Next trip the correct route was liberally marked with carbide.

Following Play the White Man, two short wet pitches lead to an impressive wide ramp rising at around 30°, whilst the stream disappears down a narrow trench below. A squeeze leads to the muddy Non-Stop Pitch, then a further 30m descent back under

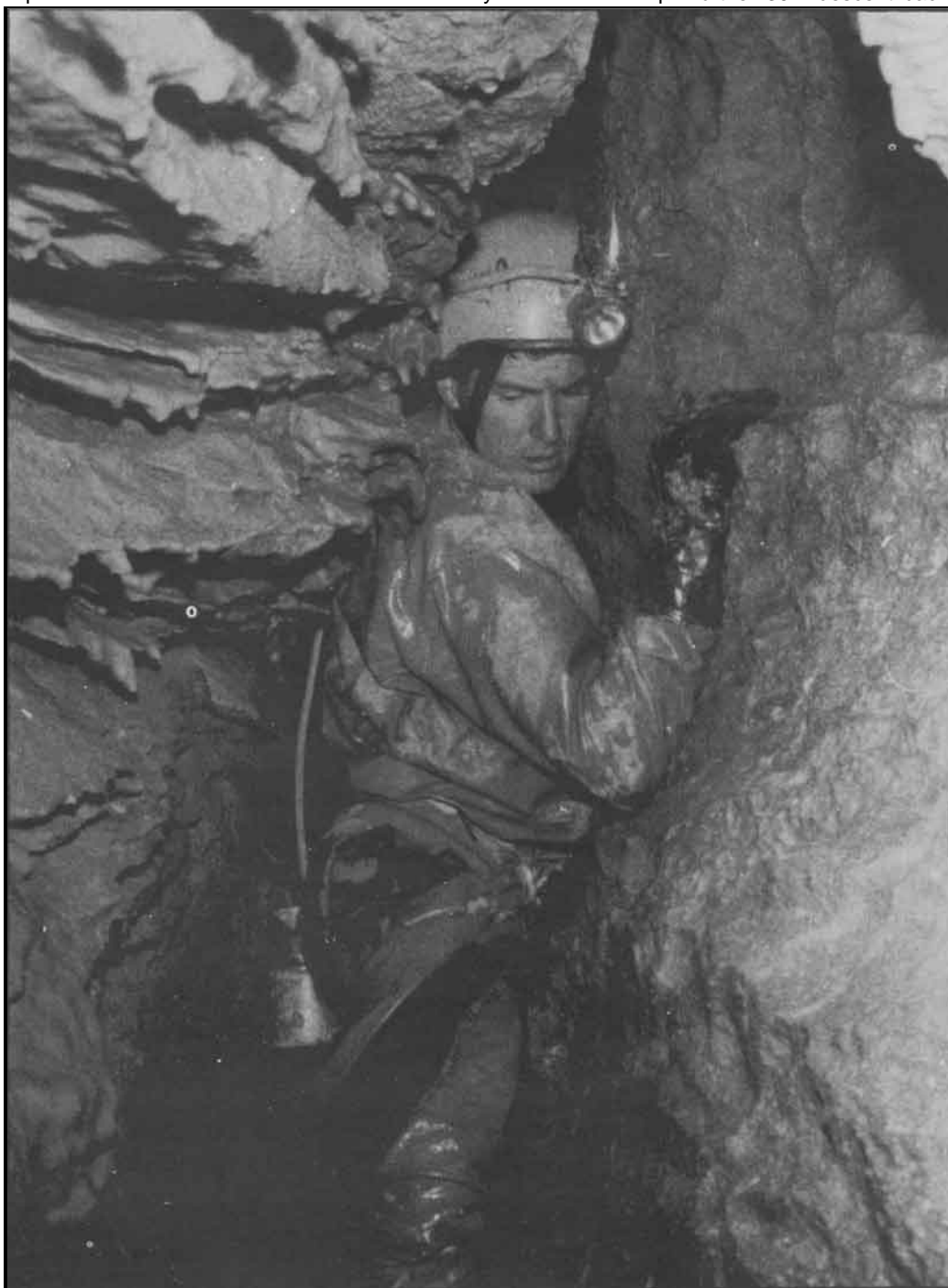
this regains the stream with an impressive waterfall. The way on here is too tight, so traversing forwards from the foot of Non-Stop Pitch you arrive at a further series of dry pitches and climbs descending 80m. Following an obvious climb up, a roof-level phreatic passage reaches a further pitch of 35m. The bottom became known as the Chamber of Horrors after an incident with a rather large boulder!

A fairly lengthy section of traversing and climbs ends at another phreatic section, the Carrot Patch, along which the formations are excellent, then two further short pitches reach a dry stream-way. This is pleasantly reminiscent of Yorkshire and leads to Blind Pot, a 20m pitch, soon followed by the wet 65m "Roo's Pitch". At the bottom is a very uninviting sump at -650m.

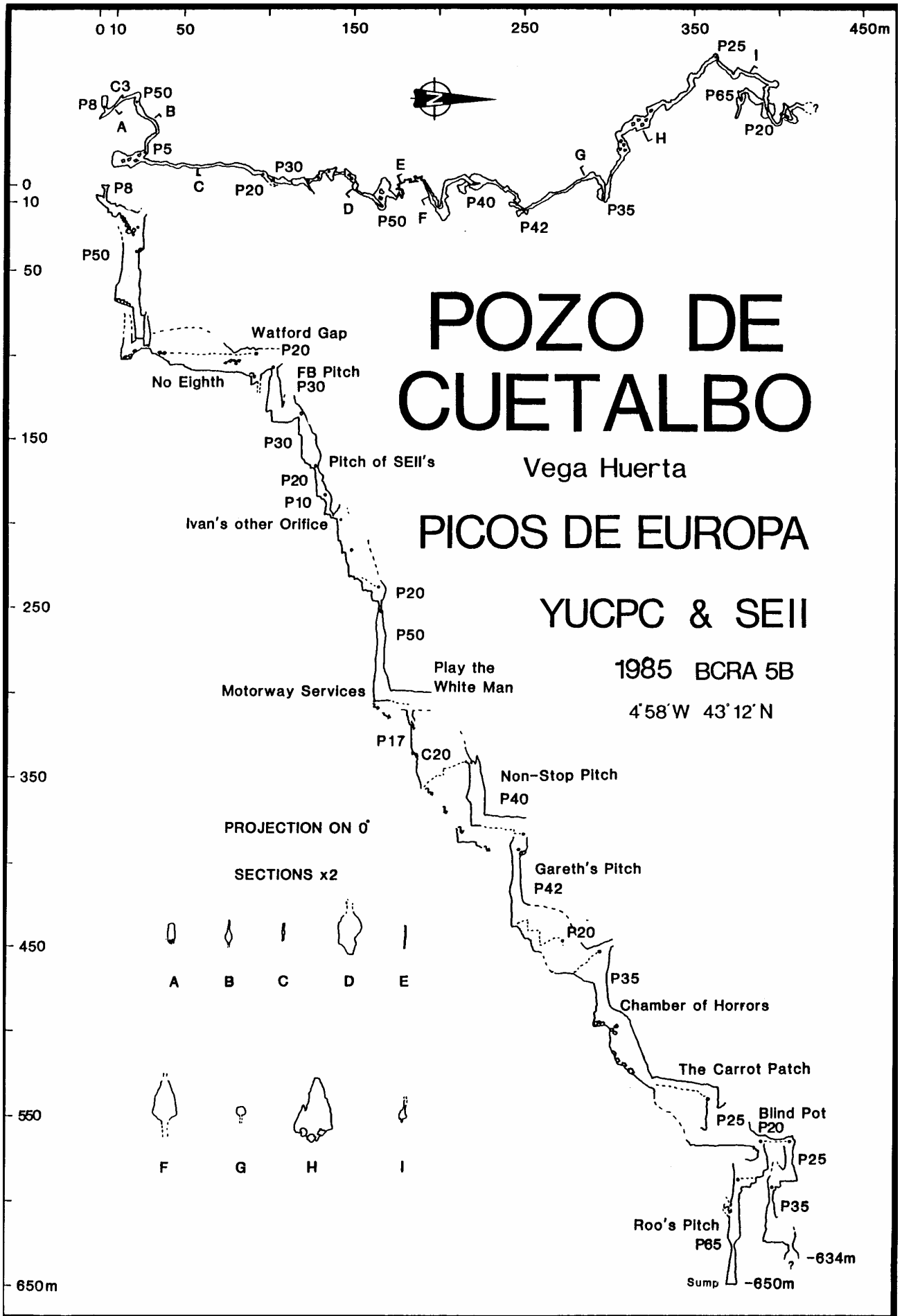
I was on the trip which discovered this, and as we made our way out with the spare tackle, I noticed a (now) obvious continuation above Blind Pot! This soon reaches a 25m pitch, then another 35m, to an area similar to the Motorway Services. At first glance the way on is about the same too! In fact we found an easier route slightly higher up, and another pitch. This is undescended but has an accurately timed diop of 4½ seconds then a huge boom! The head of this pitch is surveyed to 1.2km length and 634m depth, so the first pushing trip in 1986 should be on for 700m.

Next year, after trips up to 24 hours long, we need a campsite at the top of the ramp after Play the White Man. This is the lowest section along the going route with water and also a suitable place to sleep. Since the cave is heading almost due North under the main Pena Santa ridge we may meet drainage off this at some stage.

Back to the rest of the expedition. The best of the bottomed caves is I41, Sima de la Forcadona. This is a fine trip down to 240m with hardly a foot on solid floor all the way. Apart from the bottom chamber you only unclip from the rope at one point! This was largely explored by another Madrid group from the Geological University. Later on we acquired two Italians so, as usual, YUCPC managed a multinational expedition. Last year's second going hole, I8, was thoroughly blocked with snow for most of the summer despite several efforts at digging. By the time we finally uncovered the shaft and rigged it we needed the rope elsewhere. By this stage we were very short of tackle. I8 is



No Eighth





The Bypass to No Quarter

▶ something to look forward to next year; a much easier trip than M2.

Two other caves are still going, though in a very unpleasant way. (Sounds about right for the Picos). I34 begins as a tight rift-controlled cave, in which you descend around 100m of the first 150m by climbing. It has huge ice and snow piles at 150m depth before finally reaching a fine freehanging 40m pitch, into a bouldery chamber. Unfortunately the way on is a narrow vadose passage with walls which crumble as you touch them. This descends about another 50m, to a total of -225m. The continuation is similar; definitely a cave to be avoided!

We were soon bored with the English alphabet. M15 descends about 200m, a series of short

itches and rather devious routes through squeezes and out of chambers. This ends at a pitch guessed at 25m.

Our final going cave is B10. This was mainly explored by the Spaniards, not all of whom appreciated M2 and its narrow sections. Its depth is 300m, with easy traversing and pleasant pitches.

This year we attempted for the second time to trace the main Vega Huerta stream, as well as the water in M2, using lycopodium spores. Nets were placed in the upper and lower Dobra, and in the upper Cares near Cain. Not all the samples have been fully checked yet, but we have no positive traces so far. The tests were, partially hindered by a very dry summer and low underground water levels.

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The 1985 expedition was considered a success by all who went. Having a going cave all the time was good for morale, even if we were sometimes reluctant to go underground on sunny mornings! Relations with our Spanish friends have been strengthened, as have those with the people of Soto de Sajambre and in particular the Hostal Pena Santa. My thanks to all concerned, particularly our sponsors whose donations were very welcome: Adams Foods Ltd., Direct Foods Ltd., Inglesport, Lucy Foods, Morning Foods Ltd., Professor Saul, University of York, Rowntree Mackintosh plc, Sprayway Ltd., Tate & Lyle, University of York Athletic Union, Weetabix Ltd.