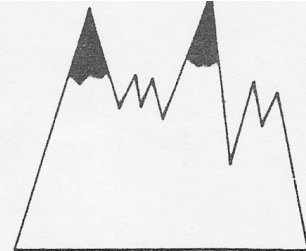




PICOS 89



PATROÑ - LORD SWANN

A BRITISH UNIVERSITY CAVING EXPEDITION TO NORTHERN SPAIN

YORK UNIVERSITY
CAVE AND POT HOLE CLUB

EXPEDITION
TO
THE PICOS DE EUROPA,
NORTHERN SPAIN

28th JUNE - 18th AUGUST 1989

EXPEDITION LEADER - PAUL THORLBY

c/o ATHLETIC UNION, LANGWITH COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF YORK, HESLINGTON, YORK, YO1 5DD, ENGLAND.

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"Beneath Vega Huerta"

Introduction

York University Cave and Pothole Club (YUCPC) returned to the Picos de Europa National Park in Northern Spain during the summer of 1989 for its seventh year. The team this year consisted of eight YUCPC veterans of the area, two members of Salford University Cave and Pothole Club and four newcomers.

Background

Following the discovery of a sump (traced to Caul de Cgrozo in the Cares Gorge) in M2 (Poza de Cuetaibo) in 1987 (-985m) SENIOR: 1987) the 1988 expedition, under the leadership of Bruce Grieve, returned to pursue a lead in B3 (then at -240m) in addition to ongoing shaft bashing. The expedition saw the arrival of the SEG (Saccin Espeleologia Geologica) working alongside our established partners the SEII (Saccin Espeleologia Ingenieros Industriales). After a slow start, Steve Harrop and Dave Hetherington whilst shaft bashing in the far reaches of the B area discovered an entrance which they labelled B47 (Poza de la Garita Cimera). B47 was pushed in a very short space of time to an estimated (undescended) pitch of 50m at -360m. This cave was not looked at in 1989 although it still warrants serious attention. Whilst B47 was being pushed, B3 was also being explored.

Poza del Llastral (B3), first discovered in 1984 and marked bottomed in 1985 (effectively snow-plugged at -30m) was looked

at again in 1987. It lies on the same fault line as M2 (about 250m west) although the entrance is 50m lower. Snow plugged shafts also on the same fault, may provide higher entrances. The amount of snow around Vega Huerta changes from year to year and in 1987 the snow in the entrance of B3 had melted sufficiently to allow progress.

The cave was pushed down an 80m snow ramp - an entertaining descent combining abseiling and glissading, to a short section of narrow rift (with more than its fair share of overfalls to answer for), a 7m pitch followed shortly by a 35m pitch a ramp, a 7m pitch, another ramp which you drop down through to land on a large block wedged across the top of a 22m pitch. A trickle of water enters here down an aven.

A short section of rift and a 14m pitch is followed by another ramp and a narrow meandering rift. The rift is passable by a 30m descending body-sized tube in the top of the rift, made awkward by two constricted bands, finally emerging over a 20m pitch. This tube is gained by traversing high up the ramp preceding, and passing a U shaped pitch (abseil to the U in the rope and prussik up the other side). Meander of the Elephants, or more simply "The Squeeze" represents the only major obstacle in the cave and would pose a serious problem if ever an injured person needed to be evacuated from beyond it. Following the squeeze, another set of straight forward pitches (and a trickle of water) leads to the 1987 limit at -240m.

The story resumes in 1988 when the level of the snow ramp had changed which meant major re-rigging of the entrance series. The snow ramp was broken by a pretty ice chamber - Santa's Grotto. The cave was pushed from its previous limit down several more straight forward pitches to a superb 52m free hang in a circular

sheft (Alicia) 10m in diameter. This marked the start of massive open rift (50-60m high, 10-15m wide). Continuing down a 10m pitch and a 60m pitch (Poza Negro) descended initially against a sloping wall and three rebelayes. The bottom of Negro marked the end of work done in 1988 and is what we returned to in 1989.

which served as cooking and communal tents. An attempt by these to blow away was foiled by two English covers hanging onto the steel frames, which were finally repaired using some bent cutlery (you have to improvise).

The Expedition

Top camp established, rigging in B3 commenced. The snow ramp again required some re-rigging to accommodate the still receding snow level in the cave. Seven days later B3 was rigged to the 1988 limit and with the arrival of four more covers pushing by started in earnest.

Pozo del Llastra

The (third/fourth ?) YUOPC landrover left York one miserable wet lunchtime in June, with the advance party of five, heading for Plymouth Docks, carrying expedition equipment, tents, members' kit, 1.5km SRT rope and the essential Mornflake Oats. It arrived two days later at Vega Barro, the Alpine meadow at the head of the Valle de Sajambre which houses our Base Camp. We were horrified to discover that the local watering hole (in the form of the Hotel Pena Santa) was closed for refurbishment and wasn't due to re-open for some weeks.

Dave B. and Henry Pushed a 55m pitch, Steve, Steve and Chris dropped a 7m pitch to the edge of a 'rather deep pool', beyond which all that could be seen was a large flake, 'beyond which lie caverns measureless to man'. Approaching the edge of the flake revealed a friendly but black hole (later named 'Thunderdome'). The rift could be clearly seen soaring into the roof (drain!) and the approach to the pitch was rigged with many backups and re-belayes finally reaching the pitch-head and a 70m hang broken only by one re-belay and a sporting deviation to land in a small pool.

Not deterred, Base Camp was established. A barbed wire fortress was erected to discourage marauding Vacas (who have a tendency to trample tents and leave steaming piles) which worked very well until the end when someone left the gate open!

The work started installing Top Camp (alt. 2800m) four miles away and 700m higher. Tents, caving gear, food and fuel were carried up, each member having to do at least three carries before being allowed underground. The walk doesn't seem to get any easier and the spectacular mountain views soon become familiar.

Descending from the base of Thunderdome a narrow meandering rift is entered (reminiscent of Crab Walk in Giants Hole), with a small stream. This continues for 80m to a small pitch and small chamber, then a further 120m to a respectable 60m pitch pushed by Buitre, Javier and Miguel.

By this time pushing trips were lasting 20 hours or more, adding perhaps a single pitch each trip. Drawing on experience gained in M2 we therefore decided to install an underground camp to make more efficient use of our time underground. The initial camp was designed for two men to spend two nights underground,

The Spanish group carried up some substantial steel frame tents

allowing about a day and a half for pushing/surveying. The site chosen was a high even 15m in diameter gained by climbing up boulders from the base of Thunderdome. This consisted of a rubble floor, was dry and draught free apart from a substantial drip in one corner away from the camping area. Plastic

containers placed to catch the drips proved to be an adequate water supply. The area was split by a large rock in the centre ('The Rock of Gibraltar'). The floor was about 20m above the stream passage and the roof was well out of sight. The only disadvantage was the exposed feeling created by the high roof.

Steve B. and Dave B. established the first camp and pushed 'Gardners Question Time', a 50m pitch with a lot of loose choss at the top. They exited after one night, Steve learning that sleep is impossible in the single point hammock. This was replaced in later camps by a camping mat placed on the only flat ground, on top of the large boulder in the centre, fine if you don't roll around in your sleep!

Chris and Henry followed with a second camp, pushing death row, a traverse somewhere in the rift on loose blocks, with equally loose blocks above, requires care. At the end of this Bob and Andrea caught up (having come in on a day trip without tackle). Bob pushed the short pitch Tendencias Suicidas but then he and Andrea ran out of time and exited.

The pitch lends in a small chamber with a pool, opening out into a large rift. The rift quickly closes down and after scrambling over flakes a rope is seen disappearing through a small draughting hole, landing 3m further on a large block wedged in a rift. It is easier to climb over a block than to follow the rope which was installed for tackle.

Pushing continued along a very draughty rift (wind tunnel traverse), along a ledge in the roof, climbing down easily to regain the stream and the head of a 32m pitch. This was rigged and they continued to the head of the next pitch.

Pete, not wanting the hassle of camping, pushed el Otro Pozo del Conepiedras on a solo trip.

The Spanish increased the capacity of camp to four men and two overlapping camps pushed down a series of small pitches to a syphon at -944. A draughting pneumatic passage above the last pitch was reported which although awkward to get to will probably provide a sump bypass. The expedition had run out of time by now and derigging had to start.

Surveying was done in stages including two surveying camps (the meanders were time consuming, often requiring a survey station every 2-3m), and was a combined English/Spanish effort. A pocket computer was used at top camp to convert polar to x-y-z coordinates enabling depth to be calculated rapidly.

Three photographic trips recorded the snow ramp, the squeeze and camp, and several of the notable pitches.

The cave was derigged and top camp moved to base-camp over seven days (with only five members of the English team remaining), leaving time for a well earned day on the beach before catching the ferry home.

Four Ways Pot (K997/897)

B47 was not touched this year, we decided that with B3 going quite deep we would run out of rope.

Work was done by Carlos and the Spanish team locating entrances of the major caves with respect to peaks in the area. These have been plotted (see map). Also plans of E3, B47 and M2 have been superimposed onto a surface map.

Conclusion

Some good work has been done this year pushing E3 to -914m and K997 to -920m. Our knowledge of this caving area is slowly being pieced together. We have discovered two caves nearly 1000m deep and two are still going around -950m, demonstrating the importance of this caving area which will continue to provide a major challenge to cavers for a number of years to come.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the enthusiasm of the expedition members;

Dave Birks (landrover), Steve Brooks, Mike Edgington (treasurer), Chris Gibson, Pete and Andrea Hartley, Steve Harrop, Angus Higgins, Henry Hill (membership), Simon Mann (equipment), David Middleton, Bob Riley, Paul Thorlby (leader), Martin Williams, Andrew Wilson.

I would also like to acknowledge the valuable support given to us by our sponsors;

The Sports Council/Char Passy Foundation, University of York Athletic Union, University of York Vice-Chancellor, Bess, Ben Lyon, Barwick International, Coleman of Norwich, Crevers, Derwent Valley Foods, Ever Ready, Harcoaster, Hazlewood & Co., Morning Foods, Prestige, Pritchit Foods, Phoenix Mountaineering,

While prospecting in the K area (the eastern end overlooking the Cares gorge) up on the ridge bordering the Pi area (see map) Angus Martin and Steve B. found K997 and later K997 which proved to be an alternative and easier entrance to the same system.

The entrance to K997 is a hole 10' off the floor in the side of a cliff - a crawl leads to a rift opening onto a 7m pitch. A series of small pitches and ramps finally drops into Spitz cavern (15m pitch).

K997 - 8m pitch leading to 31m pitch (HSPM pitch) complete with hanging death also into Spitz cavern. In the bottom corner of this chamber a 4m climb and 7m pitch lead to Hope pitch. However the rift becomes too tight. Climbing up above Hope pitch Steve B. found a small chamber and a one second drop. Martin (a rare cave creature) rigged this 15m pitch. It is followed by an 8m pitch and a small chamber. The way on, through a hole in the floor into a scrotty rift, is followed by a two second drop. This was rigged as a 20m pitch and 18m pitch into Babylon - a large chamber with a loose boulder floor. The way on appeared via a loose climb down. Having run out of time they surveyed out.

As we were nearing the end of our expedition by now the cave was de-rigged only to be re-rigged by a newly arrived group of Spanish and French cavers (from the Speleo-Club de Paris). The cave was pushed from -190m to -920m where it is still going. Being so close to the Cares - a probable resurgence? (Some water was seen in Babylon).

Entrance Location

Photo Science Ltd., Saunders, Tate and Lyle, Thornton, Troll,

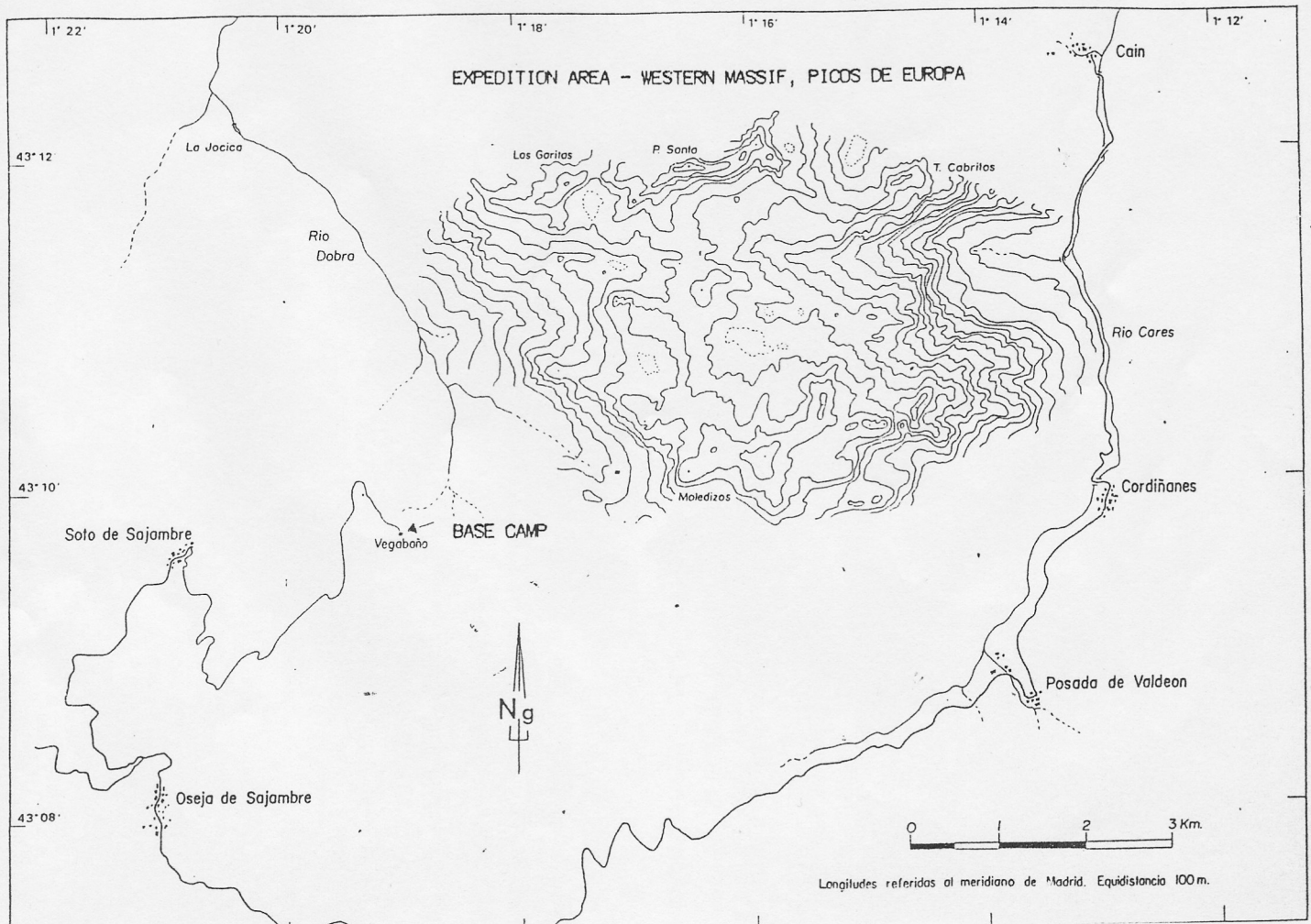
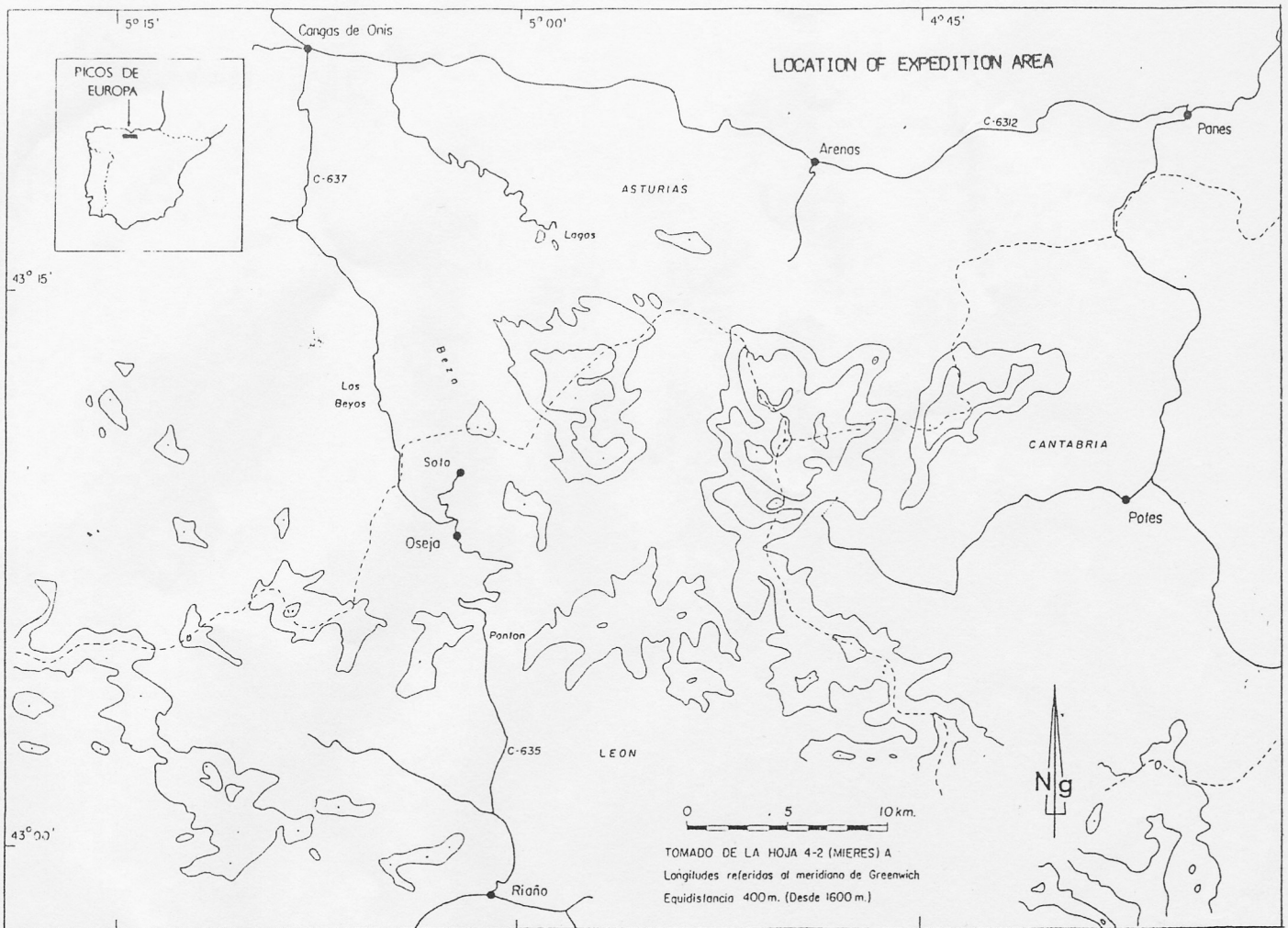
Ultimate, York Survey Supply Centre.

Thanks go to our hosts the Seccin Espeleologia Ingerieros Industriales through whom permission to cave at Vega Huerta is obtained, and to the Seccin Espeleologia Geologicas for their friendship.

An expedition report is available c/o YUCPC, Athletic Union, Langwith College, University of York, York, YO1 5DD. Cost £2.50 including p/p.

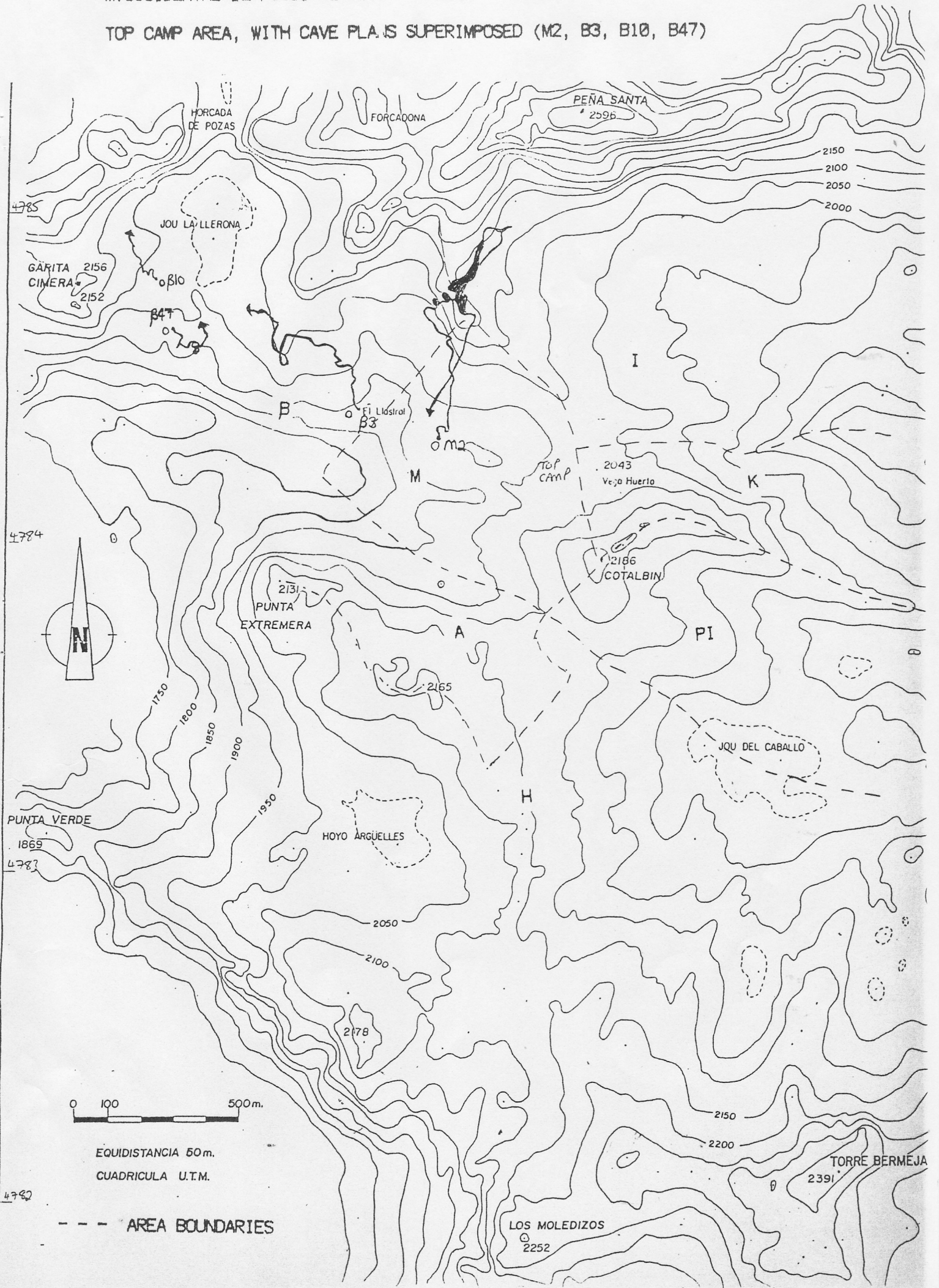
A YUCPC Journal is currently being compiled covering the years 1983-89 and will hopefully be available shortly.

Paul Newby



VEGA HUERTA - SIERRA CABALLO
M. OCCIDENTAL DE PICOS DE EUROPA - LEON

TOP CAMP AREA, WITH CAVE PLACES SUPERIMPOSED (M2, B3, B10, B47)

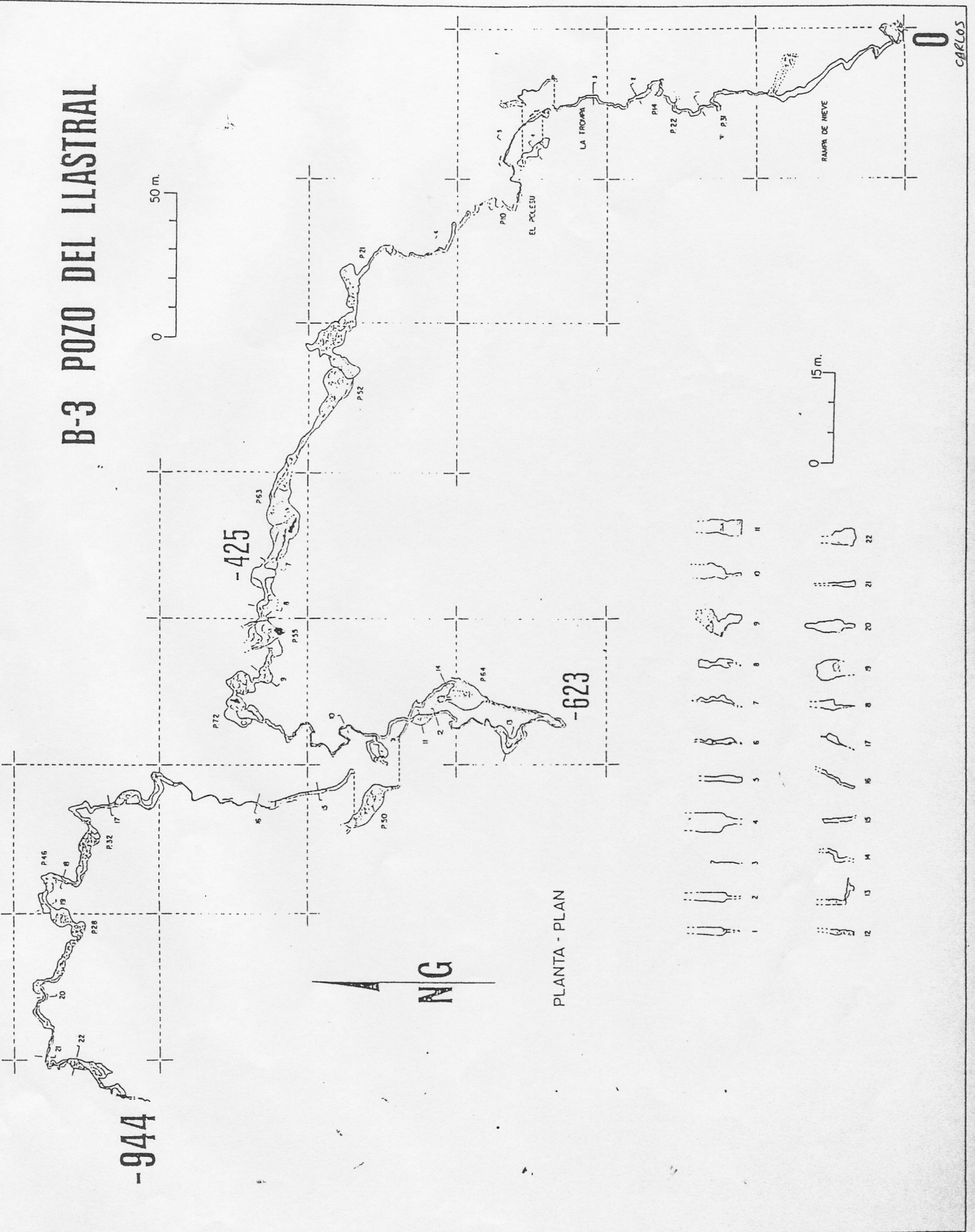


0 100 500m.

EQUIDISTANCIA 50m.
CUADRICULA U.T.M.

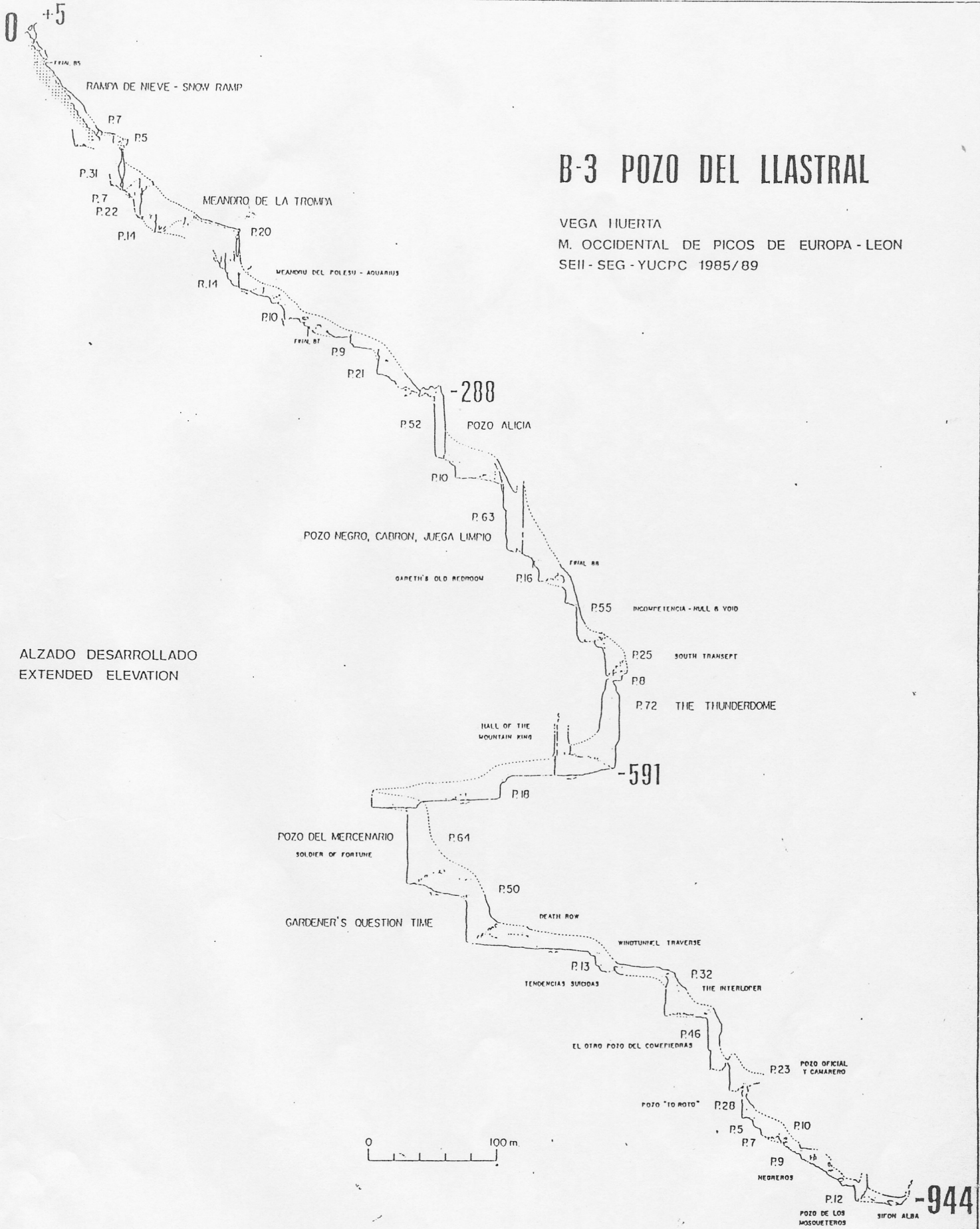
--- AREA BOUNDARIES

B-3 POZO DEL LIASTRAL



PLANTA - PLAN

CARLOS



CARLOS

447

POZO DE LA GARITA CIMERA B 47

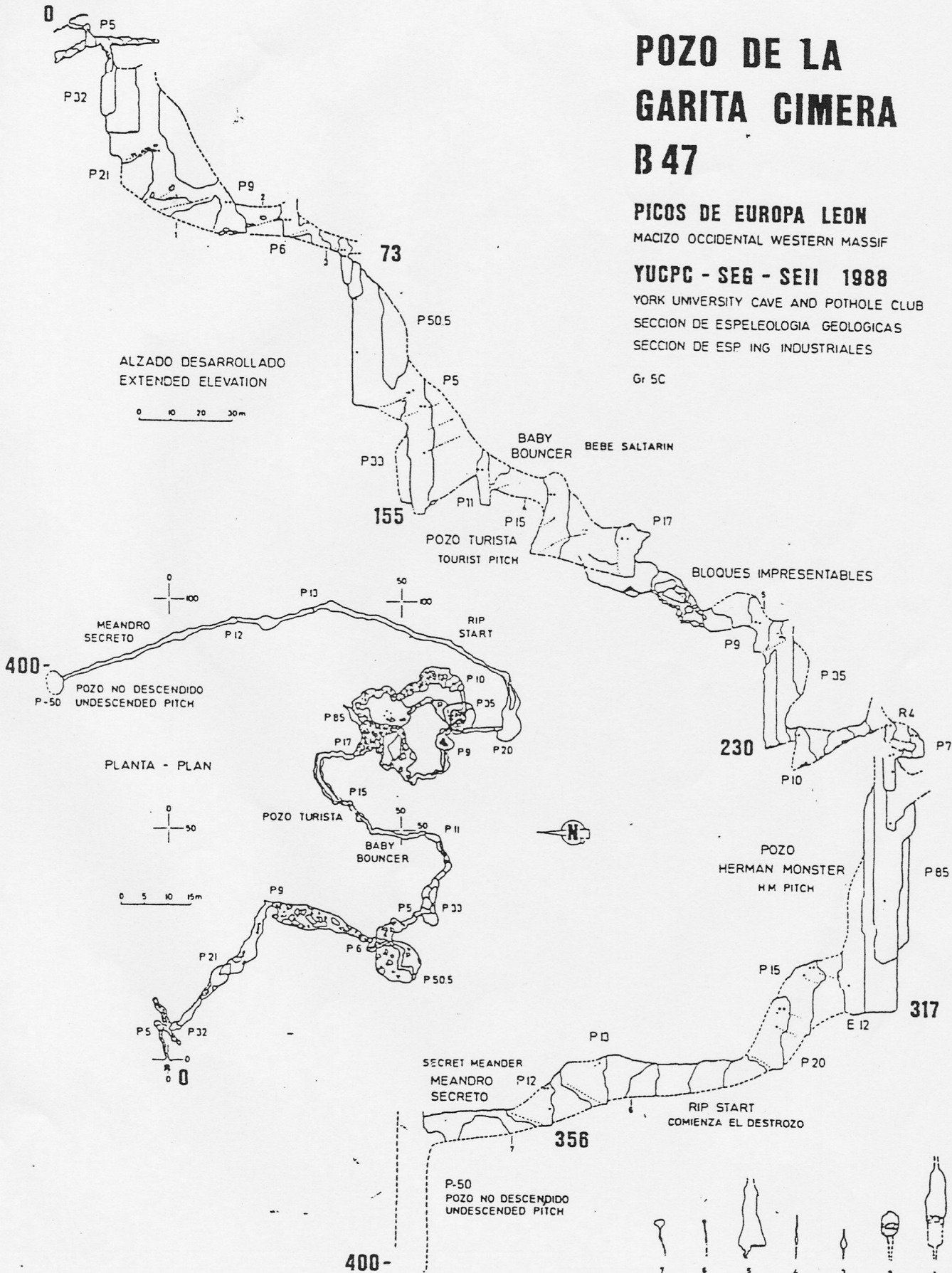
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YUGPC - SEG - SEII 1988
YORK UNIVERSITY CAVE AND POTHOLE CLUB
SECCION DE ESPELEOLOGIA GEOLOGICAS
SECCION DE ESP ING INDUSTRIALES

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ALZADO DESARROLLADO
EXTENDED ELEVATION

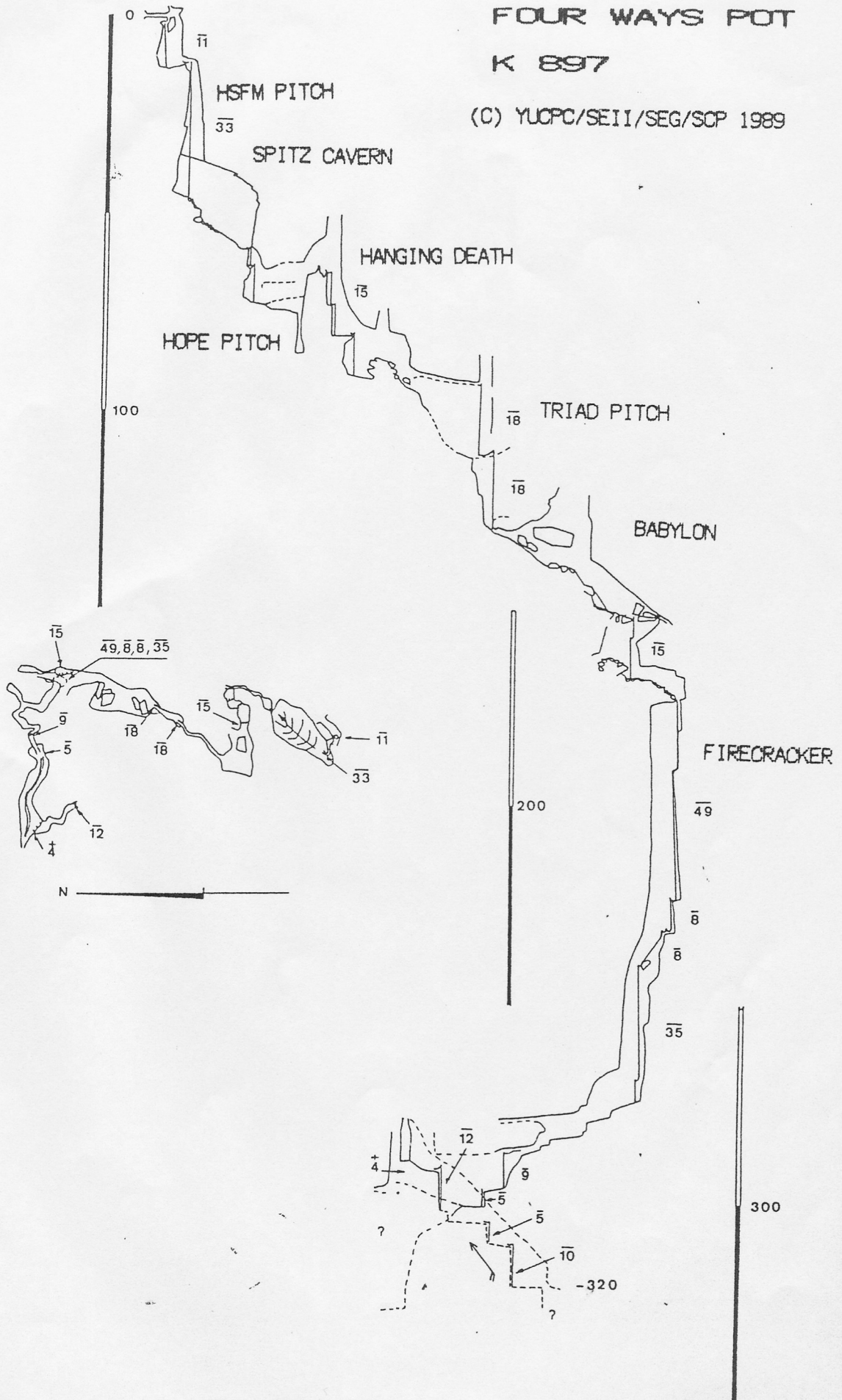
0 10 20 30m



FOUR WAYS POT

K 897

(C) YUCPC/SEII/SEG/SCP 1989



APPENDIX I
UNDERGROUND CAMP LOGISTICS

This is a summary of the kit we found to be necessary. The camp was designed for two people to spend two nights at a time underground.

SLEEPING

- 2 Hammock
- 2 Sleeping Bags
- 2 Alpinex suits (to wear in camp)
- 2 Gore-Tex Bivi bags.

COOKING

- 2 Peak Stoves (blocked pre-heat pipes were a problem, solved by using a lot of heat to melt the deposits, or unleaded petrol.)
- Fuel - petrol, carried in Cig bottles. Typically $\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 litre per trip.
- Lighters
- 2 Mugs
- Tin Opener
- 2 Pans
- 2 Spoons
- BDH 'rocket' tubes.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Bog roll
- Carbide
- First Aid kit
- Peak spares
- Large bin liners
- Small bin liners (for crapping into)
- Batteries
- Balaclava to keep head warm when you've taken your helmet off

FOOD (1 man-day)

- Mornflake Oats
- Tin Tuna (small)
- Tin Pate (small)
- Packet potato flakes
- Packet soup
- Dehydrated pasta or similar (main meal)
- Tube condensed milk (La Lechera)
- Mars Bar
- 2 bars Fudge

GENERAL FOOD

- Golden Syrup (to make porridge edible)
- Coffee
- Tea bags
- Sugar
- Milk powder
- salt

MENU

Breakfast - Mornflake
Golden Syrup

Lunch - Mars Bar
Fudge
Condensed milk

DINNER

Pasta + Tuna
Soup + Potato flakes
Pate

Guiding principle in choosing food for underground camp - high calorie to weight/volume ratio.

Camp in - 4 tackle sacks + 1/person personal provisions which are needed on each trip.

Obviously everything must be well packed for the trip to camp, with a priority on keeping sleeping kit dry.

YUCFC - PICOS '89
EXPEDITION ACCOUNTS

INCOME

CONTRIBUTIONS

12 members @ £100
2 members @ £75

GRANT

Ghar Paráu Foundation/Sports Council
University of York Vice Chancellor
University of York Athletic Union (via. YUCFC)

MISCELLANEOUS

Rent of Equipment

KITTY CONTRIBUTIONS

56 man-weeks @ £15.00 / man-week
Sale of Equipment

£	£
1200.00	
150.00	1350.00
360.00	
150.00	
690.00	1200.00
50.00	50.00
840.00	
15.00	855.00
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>£ 3455.00</u>

YUCFC - PICOS '89
EXPEDITION ACCOUNTS

EXPENDITURE

TRANSPORT

Ferry Ticket (Landrover)
Petrol
Maintenance

£	£
260.00	
271.00	
120.00	651.00

INSURANCE

Green Card
AA Five Star

29.00	
54.45	83.45

EQUIPMENT

Rigging Gear/Rope etc.
Base Camp Tent
Camping/First Aid
Prescription Charges

987.78	
100.00	
167.33	
10.01	1265.15

ADMINISTRATION

Pre-expedition
Report

115.00	
40.00	155.00

KITTY

Food
Gas
Petrol
Photography
Pots and Pens/Fence materials etc.
Underground Camp Provisions (16 man-days)

565.00	
20.00	
105.00	
60.00	
35.00	
70.00	855.00

MISCELLANEOUS

Returned Contributions
Carry Forward

95.00	
350.40	445.40

<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>£ 3455.00</u>
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