



ICCC Easter Tour
Ronda - Andalucia

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1 Introduction

A grim winter of cold, ice and snow had taught the cavers of ICCC to revel in the masochism of caving. Each and every trip involved treacherous journeys through blizzards to cold and flooded caves. They vaguely remembered the autumn, a few trips where the yellow orb warmed the cave entrances. Was caving pleasant then?

The decision was made to venture outside the boundaries of Yorkshire. They had heard tales of far off lands where the caves were warm and the wine was cheap. This 'Not Yorkshire' place was Andalucia, in Southern Spain.

A term of furious emailing, reading poorly translated Spanish websites and sending money to surely legitimate people overseas lead finally to their Easter Tour.

2 Aims

1. To continue to practice caving to prepare our cavers for the summer expedition.
2. To introduce members to Via Ferrata; a sport not commonly available in the UK and which uses similar traverse techniques as caving..
3. To introduce members to Canyoning; a sport not commonly available in the UK and which uses similar rope techniques to caving.
4. To foster a friendly environment to allow members to bond.

3 The Team

Rhys Tyers



'El Presidente'

Oliver Myerscough



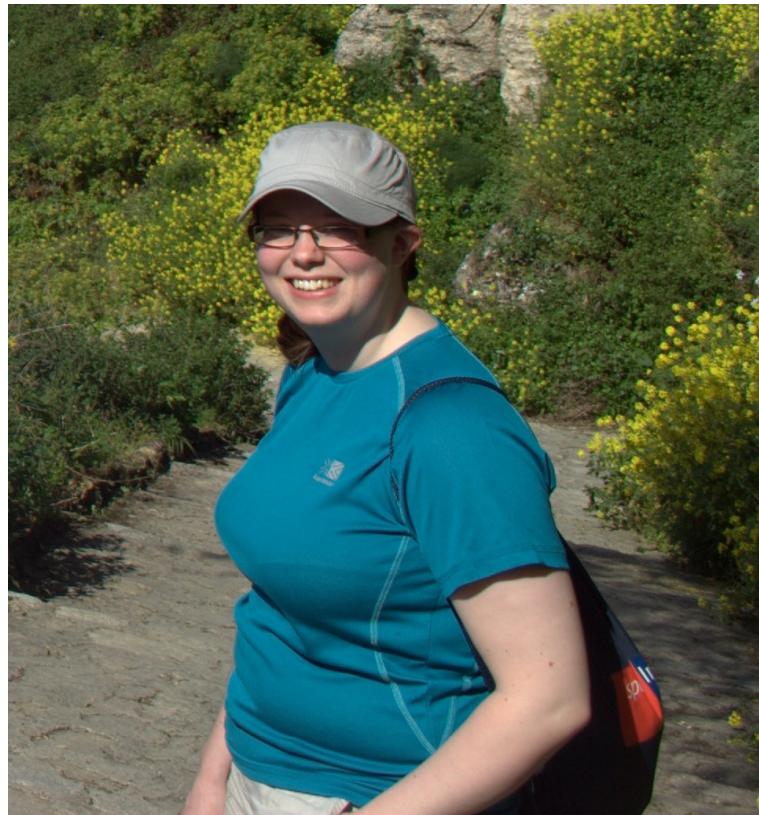
'Bolt-breaker'

Sam Page



'Garden chair brawler'

Fiona



'Surface recon'

Dave



'Reckless driver'

4 16th April 2013

They packed efficiently and carefully throughout the night, checking that nothing was forgotten. Not a single battery, krab, or sling went undocumented. With some time to spare (due to aforementioned efficiency) they brushed up on their Spanish;

-Dave ha sido comido por los perros rabiosos,

-Dave has been eaten by rabid dogs,

-Dave ha ahogado

-Dave has drowned

-El vino no es lo suficientemente barato

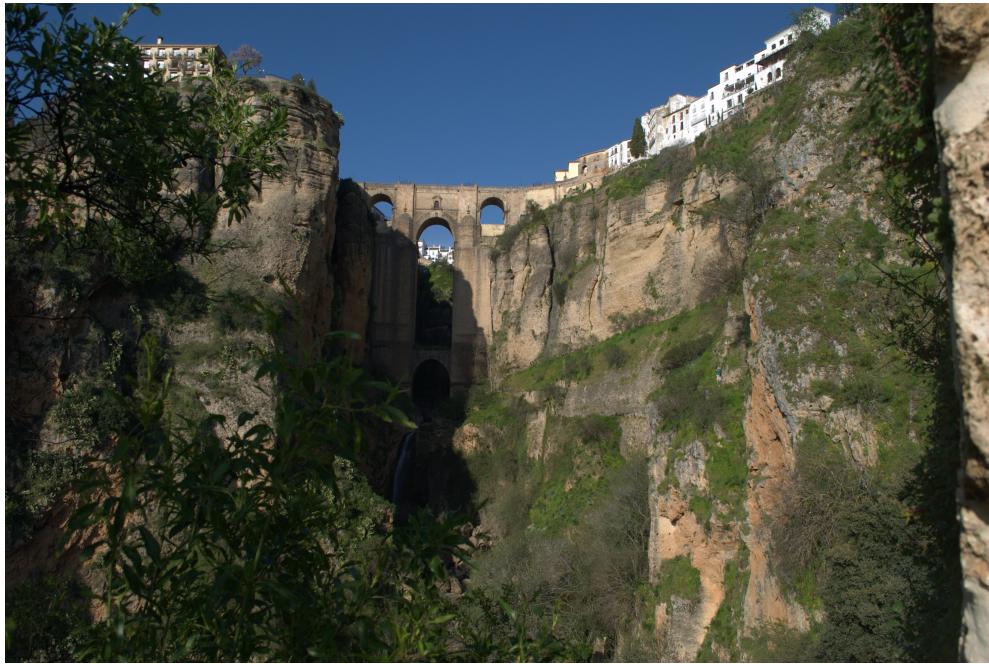
-The wine is not cheap enough

They eventually left stores in the early hours, trekking through the orange lit London night to get to their easyBus and ultimately the airport. They went through the usual check in procedure (nobody commenting on the large amount of strange metal objects they were carrying), had a surprisingly cheap pint of 'Hoptimus Prime' at Weatherspoons and boarded the plane. The journey was smooth despite a threat from the pilot to divert them to Granada due to 'fog'. On arrival they picked up the car, a 4x4 look-a-like. Hopefully the roads would be fooled.

The hot Spanish sun smiled on them as they attempted to find their villa. Strange conversations over the phone with the villa owner eventually resulted in her finding them and leading them to the villa. A picturesque country home on the fringes of Ronda, with spacious rooms, patios and even a pool. The pool they were told was 'trepidado' though subsequent efforts have failed to translate this word. The perfect base of operations for hardcore caving. They arrived to the chorus of dogs barking from the kennel next door. The low price of the villa made more sense now. It was 4pm, they had ventured to the local market, 'Supersol', and had eaten lunch. Everyone was excited to go 'Via Ferrata-ing'.

Dave expertly drove the car through streets that would have been decent squeezes were they in a cave and they arrived in the centre of Ronda at the cliff edge. Ronda is built around a large canyon, with cliffs hundreds of metres tall. It is around these cliffs that they hoped to find the first Via Ferrata route. Remembering what he had read on the internet, Rhys ensured that everyone had put on their climbing harnesses and lanyards on correctly. The team ventured down the steep canyon walls, quickly finding a path that lead under the spectacular bridge around which Ronda is centred.

]On the wall was a ladder, the beginning of a VF route. They, showing no trepidation, climbed the unsecured ladder to find a second ladder. Again they climbed. The route ended. We were on a supporting level of the bridge. A lovely view from the platform but not the epic cliff scaling adventure the team was looking for. Satisfied with their introduction to VF and now confident in their abilities to conquer any ladder based obstacles the sport could throw at them, they went looking for another route. They found one just off the original path. This was more like it. Iron rungs set into the wall lead down the cliff face, disappearing below lips of rock. They ventured down, the Andalucian country side spreading out below them. Two of the party, Fiona and Oli, decided to turn around and head back up. Three continued and found the end of the rungs shortly below. Dave, Sam and Rhys followed a walking path up the cliff and arrived back at the top to see Fiona and Oli emerge at the top of the VF route.



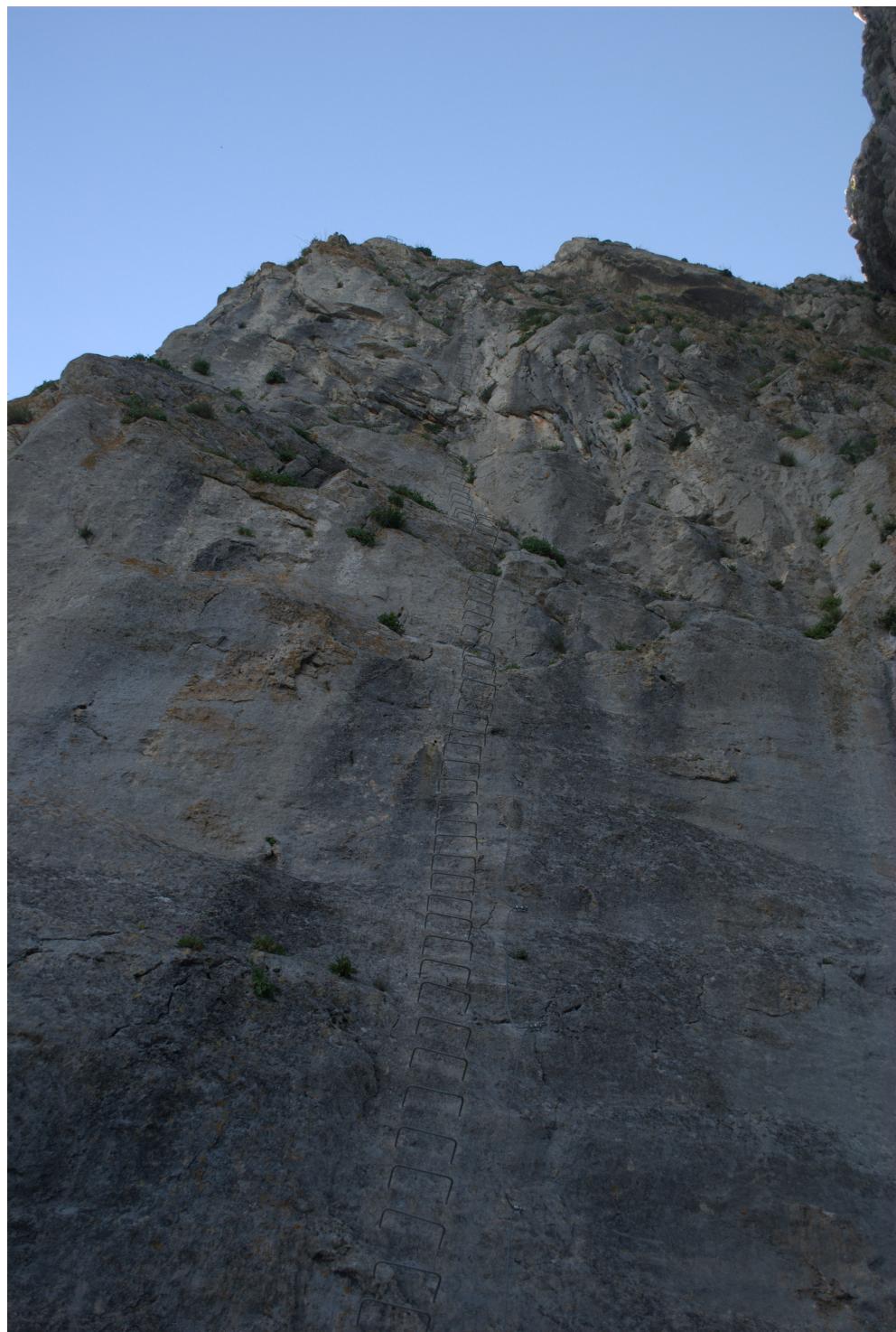
'Fiona can be seen on the VF route'

5 17th April 2013

Today a meeting was supposed to happen with Manu, a local caver who, for unknown reasons, had agreed to go caving with ICCCers. In a fit of previously unseen enthusiasm all 5 of the team were awake by 9.30am, awaiting the arrival of Manu. Despite the best of intentions and a few awkward phone calls with Manu (neither side speaking much of the others language) he was unable to find the villa and instead the team agreed to meet him at a local plaza in a few hours. This time they met Manu and his wife and followed them back to their house where, with the aid of Google translate plans were made for caving. Manu decided it was too late for caving today and so provided some information on VF the team could do.

Not ones to waste a day, the indefatigable cavers went VFing. The first route, in Benaojan, leads up a sheer cliff face by a road. It was a single unbroken series of rungs up at least 30 metres to a ledge. The rungs lead round a lip of rock, requiring the climber to lean out backwards and almost crawl horizontally, upside down, on the bottom of the rock lip. This section defeated a couple of our cavers. Dave managed it but decided that he would turn round and go back down it immediately. Only Oli and Rhys made it to the ledge. Leading off from this ledge was a Tibetan bridge. A collection of wires that an intrepid explorer can cross like a tight rope (with the added benefit of extra wires to hold onto). Above this was an easy climb to the plateau on top of the cliffs. The second route, in Benalauria, was a vertical climb of 100 metres or more. No Tibetan bridges or ledges, an unbroken climb up 100 metres. Easy stuff, completed by 4 of our party.

The evening was passed with a barbecue and sampling the copious varieties of sub 2 euro wine available at the supermarket.



'VF ladder heading straight up'

6 18th April 2013

Once again all cavers got up at an unreasonable hour to meet with Manu. He arrived at the villa at about 10.30am and with few words exchanged everyone was off. Dave, Rhys, and Oli in the hire car, Sam and Fiona with Manu in his car. Dave followed him down the main road, down a country road and onto a dusty track. The track wound up into the mountains of the national park eventually becoming just wide enough for one car, with a precipitous drop on one side. At one point a large boulder forced Dave to drive close to the edge. From the passenger window the road couldn't be seen, just the steep dusty cliff to the valley below. As they neared the cave Dave drove the car into a ditch. The car was balancing on the back bumper and its front wheels. Manu lead the reconstruction of the road, many times lifting the car so rocks could be piled under the wheels. Eventually the car was driven out with only a small dent on the bumper to show for it. The national park will be billed for the infrastructure repair.

The cave itself was the definition of pleasant caving. 'Rio Verde' begins with an entrance next to a shallow pool of water. Ducking under a waterfall on the way in the cave follows the boulder strewn streamway. The cavers took every opportunity to dip into the water. It was entirely possible to stay warm in underwear, an oversuit and a wet cotton tshirt in the cave, something that would surely lead to hypothermia in the UK. The IC cavers got to demonstrate their SRT prowess as the first pitch was reached. It was perhaps apparent that a few of them were a little rusty. Beyond this was a point where Manu needed to take photos. He had a rather impressive set of photo gear, occupying three tackle bags in total. Fiona stayed to help whilst Rhys, Dave, Oli and Sam continued up a pitch. The rigging was expedition style i.e. just enough to get you up the pitch. This led into a small chamber with pretty stalactites and stalagmites. The way out was as pleasant as the way in and all cavers exited into the glorious sunshine.



'Sam at rebelay in Rio Verde'



'Dave standing next to a huge spout of water'

7 19th April 2013

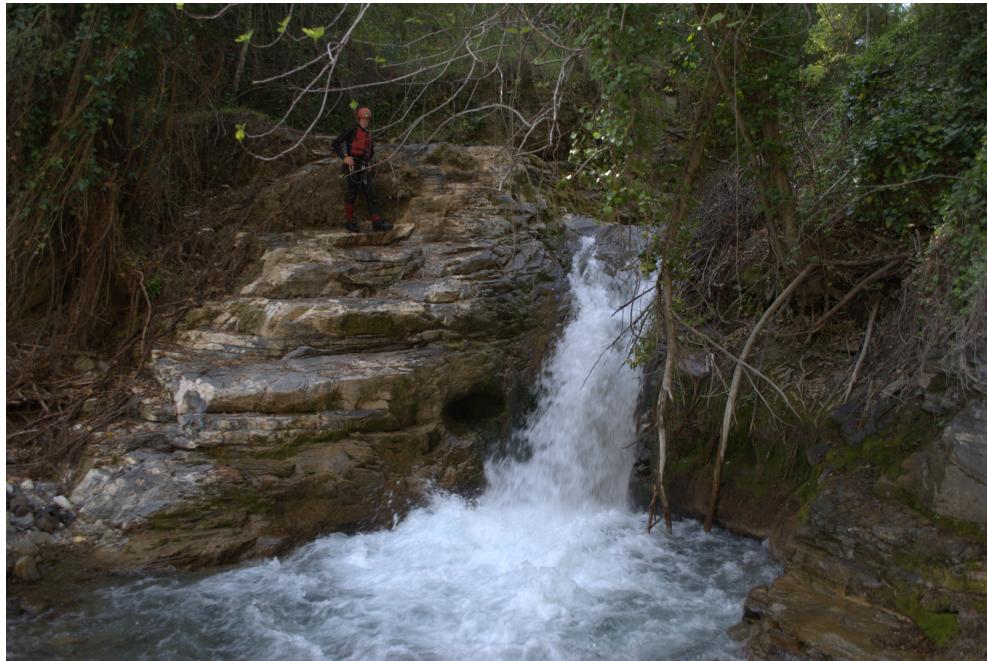
It was decided in the morning that everyone would quite like to go canyoning, especially as it is something that it is not possible to do in the UK. Unfortunately, despite the efforts spent packing equipment back in London, it was discovered that only four buoyancy aids had been brought to Spain. To try and resolve this, the car headed into Ronda with the aim of finding somewhere to hire an extra life jacket. The location of a shop was obtained from tourist information, and the next couple of hours were spent traipsing around town. Ultimately, the shop was near Supersol, but was closed. After all this, Fiona admitted that she would be happy to take the afternoon off, and so the remaining four, each equipped with a buoyancy aid, headed off to the canyon. Amusingly, this was located by a town in which every building was painted Smurf blue; a tourist-friendly remnant of when the town had been used as a location for the Smurfs movie.

After changing into their wetsuits by the side of the road, the team headed down towards the river; a short, but steep, walk away. Fortunately, being Spain, the afternoon was very warm and hence entering the river was refreshing. The water flowed at little more than ankle height for close to half an hour of stumbling over rocks, with the odd slide into slightly deeper water. The stream had a slightly off putting smell, having an undisclosed amount of sewage running through it; they had all been warned not to drink the water...

Upon reaching the first cascade, of which there were three, Oli immediately set about rigging. Oli and Rhys had been canyoning the previous year, and so had at least used a Pirana before; for Dave and Sam this was completely new. Oli went down first, to show the others how to do it; apparently, this consisted of letting go halfway down and falling into the water. Dave followed and too appeared to become unstuck towards the bottom where there was a particularly strong flow of water; luckily Oli was on hand to fight the water. Once the other two had reached the bottom, they all remarked that none of them had descended very competently; nevertheless, they had all had a taste of canyoning (and a mouthful of stream water) and were keen to proceed to the next waterfall. Upon reaching this, the team were daunted at the increased size and apparent force of water compared to the previous

cascade. Oli was eager to have a go, and scouted around the top edge to check it out. The others were more perturbed, peering over the edge to try to glimpse the bottom. The two first-timers in particular were less than confident as to their abilities, and as a group they decided to head back upstream. Fortunately, they remembered that beside the first cascade, it looked easy to climb up the rock.

Not wishing to finish their canyoning experience quite yet, each of the team had another try at descending this, each with perhaps some more skill than previously. It was Dave who appeared to demonstrate the best method: to descend half way with one foot on each side, and then swing onto the left hand side where was a ledge which continued towards the bottom. This avoided the worst of the powerful burst of water, and with it, the fear of getting stuck under the water at the bottom. The others each tried out this new technique, and felt that even if they had not had a full canyoning trip, they had at least mastered this one cascade(!). Heading back for Smurf-town was easy going, with the steep climb back to the car proving only a minor annoyance. After changing, and checking out the playground, the team were disappointed to find the bar had closed since they had arrived. If time had permitted, they would have returned to the canyon later in the week and had a proper day of defeating the canyon; this was not to be.



'The cascade'



'Sam in the waterfall'

8 20th April 2013

The plan for the day was to go it alone and attempt to cave. The cavers decided to use their recently acquired permits and head to Sima Cacao which translated is Cocoa Chasm. The walk up to the cave is spectacular. The path winds up the mountainside above the village of 'Villaluenga de Rosario'. The path is well worn and obvious most of the way after about an hour of walking arrives at a plateau. An idyllic field stretches out, full of wildflowers and trees and (may not be a permanent feature) picnicking schoolchildren. Over a ridge and up a final incline (past a bottomless well with a bit of floating moss big enough to be sentient) leads to a collection of rocky outcrops. In amongst this is where our cavers found Cacao. There are two openings and Oli chose to rig in the one with the plaque above it remembering the death of a caver in the 80s. A rough initial translation using the team's expert knowledge of Spanish suggested it said:

He had a passion for life, not any more.

However it was later translated to:

He filled his years with life, not his life with years.

Perhaps a little more sombre. Oli descended initially but after 30 metres had only found one unusable spit (anchor point) in the wall so he came back up, unwilling to go much further on 9mm rope. Rhys descended and found a usable spit shortly below where Oli had turned round and continued. The next spit was on the opposite side of the cave wall. Rhys did an upside down superman pose to reach it, pushing off the wall he was on and completely outstretching to screw the hanger in. Down another belay and Rhys decided to go for it and head to the bottom. It occurred to him as he approached this 'bottom' that the cave continued further down and he was merely reaching a ledge. However, they had been told to swing into a window rather than continue to the bottom and window was just by the ledge. Rhys tied off the rope and rigged a traverse round into the window. Oli had been following, one belay behind. He called down,

”I’ve broken the hanger”

He’d broken the hanger. Whilst tightening the bolts so the hanger did not swing he had overtightened and sheared the bolt head off leaving the thread in the hole. As Oli swung about, searching for another spit nearby, Rhys wandered about further into the passage. It was obvious pretty quickly that this particular window didn’t go anywhere. It just lead to a wall of formations. Confused, Rhys headed back to the pitch and looked across the chamber. On the other side was another window that clearly continued downwards. Unfortunatley he had swung into the wrong window. By this time Oli had found another bolt and was on the ledge. Dave and Sam were following. There was not enough time to rerig to the correct window so instead some photos were taken and the team headed out.

They arrived on the surface just in time to follow the group of schoolchildren down the side of the cliff. This route was far quicker and they were back at the car less than 30 minutes.



’Oli and Dave look at formations. The cover image is also from this cave.’

9 21st April 2013

Once again at Manu’s direction the team awoke at the obscene hour of 8am. They were to meet Manu at a restaurant down the main road. The team had very little idea of what to expect when they arrived at the restaurant. They parked and waited. A little while later another car turned up. As people unloaded from the new car, looks were exchanged. It was obvious that both groups recognised each other as cavers (psychic bond shared by all cavers?) so a few minutes passed awkwardly. Luckily Manu turned up before anything kicked off and introduced the ICCC to the other cavers. They would all be heading down GESM together. One unexpected breakfast at the restaurant later and three cars were trundling towards the cave. Luckily the roads were far better than for Rio Verde and Dave handled them admirably (despite calls for ’power slides round the corner’).

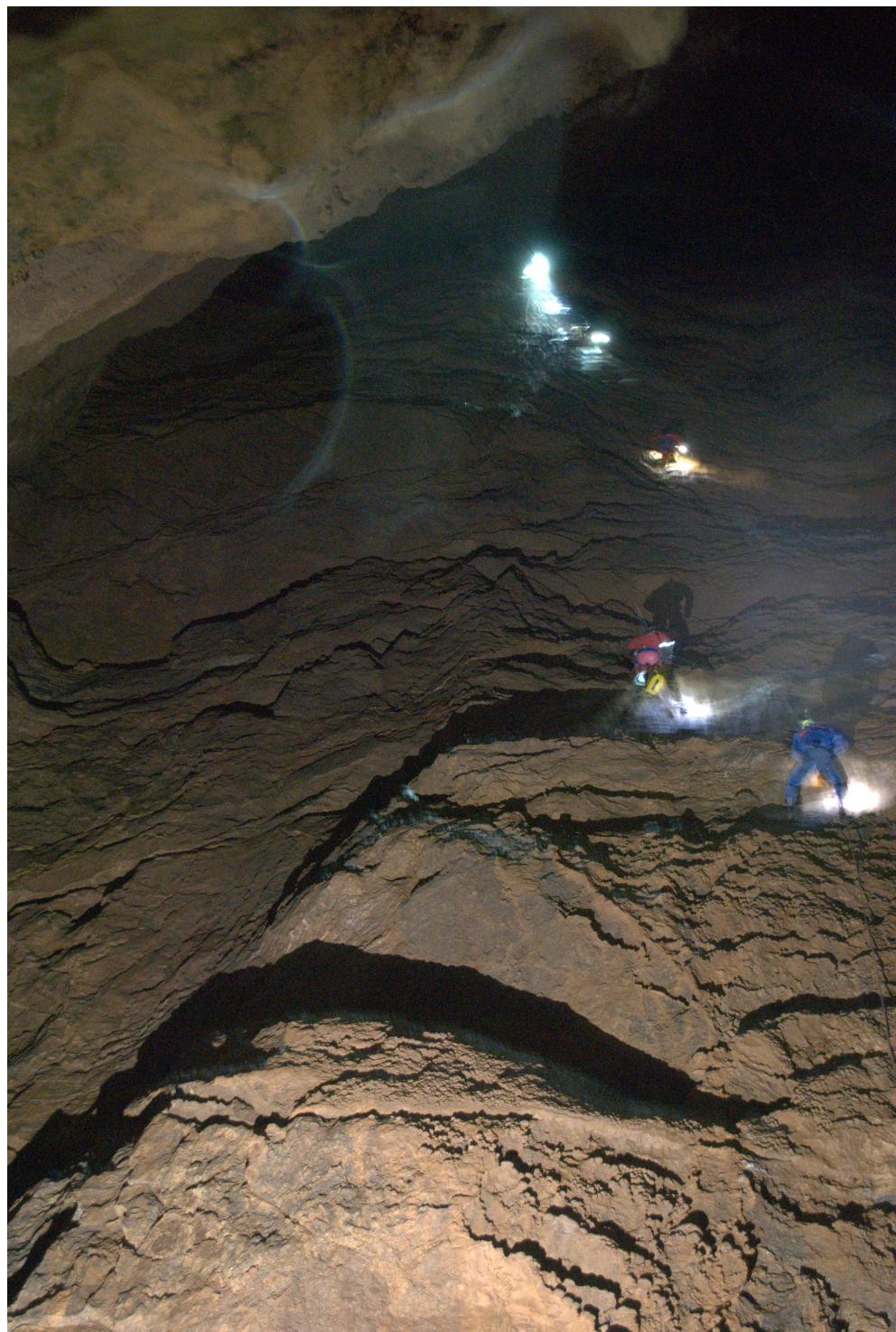
There was a bit of car shuffling at the top of the mountain (incidentally the best car park in the world) and the cavers all headed off on the 30 minute walk to the cave. Rhys, due to stupidity, wore sandals and managed to cut his toe on a rock. Luckily the Spanish had better first aid kits than us (and some idea of how to use them) and he was soon mended. He put on his walking boots and caught up to the

rest of the group, who upon seeing his more sensible footwear shouted "Intelligent!". They arrived at the cave entrance. A limestone shakehole in the ground, reminiscent of the ICCC camping site in the Slovenia. They changed into their kit and the 20 or so cavers descended into the cave entrance.

There was a tight entrance squeeze, oddly filled with thousands of mosquitoes. 'Extra protein' said the caver in front, laughing as Rhys and Dave spat the insects out of their mouths. There were several spacious pitches, descended rapidly by everyone. A small stream followed the pitches most of the way down. The sounds of rapidly spoken Spanish echoed constantly around. Eventually an airy traverse was reached. This lead to a 110 metre pitch in a massive chamber. The scale was truly impressive. Manu and Jose (apologies if the name is incorrect) lead the way, falling effortlessly down the ropes. The ICCCers attempted to keep pace.

After the massive pitch the cavers headed down several smaller pitches and then up a very dodgy climb into a rift. It was soon announced that this was unexplored territory. The team had been told they would be taken to the pushing front (i.e the limit of exploration) but it was still surprising to then go an a pushing trip. Dave managed to go the wrong way a this point so it is possible that he is the only person to have been in the airy rift he found himself in. Luckily he found his way back by following Rhys's voice. The Spanish ahead expertly pulled a massive drill out of the bags they had carried and bolting down the rift almost as soon as find it. Some cavers headed down but confusingly they did not want the rest to go down. Jose, patiently explained (with numerous hand gestures) that they needed to go back. It turned out the it was possible to simply climb down the rift at an earlier point, so everyone met up in a small chamber at the bottom.

The Spanish cavers then all retrieved the packed lunches they had carried in. They seemed surprised that the ICCC had not brought any. In the UK it is often to cold to stop and eat much more than a chocolate bar without becoming uncomfortable and the caves are not so deep so the UK cavers had not thought to bring anything. They kindly shared their lunches and everyone was soon refuelled and ready for the trip out. The task on they way out was to remove telephone wire. It had been laid to the underground camp at -700m but had stopped working. Oli went in front followed by Sam, then Dave, then Rhys. A few hours later everyone was back on the surface and drinking the Cruzcampo they had brought to the entrance.



'5 cavers descend the 110m pitch, each at a different rebelay.'



'Madman (Jose) + Drill'



'Don't get your feet wet.'

10 22nd April 2013

Exhausted from the epic trip out the day before, the cavers decided to have a doss day. Everyone got some much needed reading done. Dave benefited most as he was reading a self-help book he found in stores. He no longer blames himself for global warming.



'Showcasing our competence.'

11 23rd April 2013

On the last day of tour, the morning was spent packing and cleaning up. The flight home was not until late at night, giving the best part of a day to do something before having to hand back the house key. Via ferrata seemed a sensible and desirable option, not requiring very much gear. Plus, the cavers had been enthusiastic to have a go on the zipwire that Manu had described earlier in the week.

Unfortunately, halfway through the drive towards the via ferrata, it was discovered that no one had remembered to bring the rope that would be needed to recover the pulley after each person had used the zipwire. Nevermind, the team continued onwards and soon the car was parked in a small town, beside a cemetery. The start of the via ferrata was a short walk uphill, beside an old church that was unfortunately located behind padlocked gates.

Dave and Rhys started off first, followed by Sam, Fiona and Oli. To start, the via ferrata was easy going, with a short descent. The beginning of the horizontal section was a little trickier, with a little bit of leaning outwards required. A small Tibetan bridge was soon reached - not particularly daunting. After this, the rungs continued across the rock face, with a couple of vertical sections leading downwards towards the next Tibetan bridge. This was scarier - long and exposed. Nonetheless, everyone made it across, even with the wind deciding to pick up at the exact moment that each person started the traverse. Of course, by this point everyone had absolute faith in their equipment, so were happy swaying in the wind, and posing for photos taken by Rhys, as long as they didn't look down. At the other end of the bridge was a small peak, the other side of which directly continued onto the zipwire. Rhys, Dave and Sam spent a while clinging to the side of the rock, with Rhys checking out the zipwire.

Despite his best efforts to rescue a piece of string from the bushes below, by the time everyone was crowded onto the rock, it was apparent that they would have to turn around. With just one pulley, only the first person would be able to do the zipwire, something which would have been a little unfair, and very brave of that one person.

And so the group headed back in roughly the same order as they had gone, enjoying what would be the last activity of their trip together. The via ferrata was not particularly challenging, although there were not many places where it was very possible to take a comfortable break. Once back on solid ground, and heading back towards the car, a little path was discovered which led towards the other end of the via ferrata. It seemed that after the zipwire and another Tibetan bridge there were only a few rungs left to climb - so in truth, they had done the majority of the actual via ferrata. Plus, the trip had lasted roughly the two hours that were suggested by the board by the start. All that was left was to get in the car, fuelled by water and chocolate brioches, and head home - first to the villa, and then home proper.



'Dave braves the Tibetan bridge'



'Sam, Fiona and Oli cling to the cliff face'

12 Conclusion

All aims were completed to different degrees of success.

1. To continue to practice caving to prepare our cavers for the summer expedition.

The group completed 3 caving trips over the week. One of which was to a depth of -300m, most of which was on rope. This magnitude of vertical cave is unavailable in the UK and is very useful preparation for the 1000m deep trips over the summer tour.

2. To introduce members to Via Ferrata; a sport not commonly available in the UK and which uses similar traverse techniques as caving.

Several Via Ferrata routes were completed and every member became exceptionally competent at traversing them.

3. To introduce members to Canyoning; a sport not commonly available in the UK and which uses similar rope techniques to caving.

One canyon was attempted but the team turned round halfway down, deciding that a particular cascade had too much water flowing to safely attempt it. There had been several weeks of heavy rain before the tour so this is likely the cause.

4. To foster a friendly environment to allow members to bond.

Everyone on the trip had a great time (see photos).

Considering the team was entirely composed of 1st and 2nd year cavers, none of whom had organised a foreign trip before, the whole experience was surprisingly smooth. They managed to do all three of the sports they intended. It is only canyoning where they would have really benefited from a more experienced guide to take them, and this is something to bear in mind for future trips. One of the more useful legacies of the trip, that can be made use of in the future, is the contacts the club now has in Spain.

13 Accounts

Euros were bought at a rate of 1.11 Euro per 1 GBP.

Outgoings	Amount
Food	252.66
Transport	869.96
Accommodation	313.45
Misc	28.74

Income	Amount
RCC Grant	260.99
Member Contributions	1,203.82

14 Thanks

This trip probably wouldn't have been nearly as successful as it was without the help of Miguel Tome. He provided much needed surveys, permits, and GPS coordinates for the caves the group attended. He also put the group in contact with Manu Guerrero. Manu took the team caving twice, to Rio Verde and Sima GESM. The Sima GESM trip in particular made a lasting impression on everyone. They were impressed by both the cave and the Spanish cavers, who were exceptionally friendly and fun. So finally, thank you Miguel, Manu and everyone the ICCC went caving with. Our trip was superb because of you.



'We'll be back'