

# OXFORD UNIVERSITY CAVE CLUB



## CHICA 2006

## EXPEDITION REPORT

# Oxford University Cave Club

Picos de Europa Mountains, Asturias, Northern Spain.

3<sup>rd</sup> July – 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2006

*'the attempted extension and connection of various streamway systems acting as feeders to the great Culiembro resurgence, lying at the foot of the majestic Cares gorge that dissects the Picos Central and Western Massifs.'*

Report Publication Date – 20 Dec 2006

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Accompanying Document – OUCC Chica 2006 Preliminary Report

<http://www.oucc.org.uk/expeditions/report2006/2006%20Preliminary%20Report.pdf>

*Friends depart, and memory takes them  
To her caverns, pure and deep.*

Thomas Haynes Bayly.

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# With Thanks..

An early thank you to those who made the Chica 2006 project possible:

Team members in the field and from home...

Corporate sponsors...

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Home and Spanish contacts...

*The ever-reliable Steve Roberts, and Juan Jose Gonzalez Suarez for continued diligent support and hospitality*

...and anybody whom the fallible editor may have missed. Gratitude abounds.

## Team Members

### *In the field...*

Chris 'Trucker Potential' Sinadinis (leader)	CS
Gareth 'Kneeds a Vacation' Phillips (treasurer)	GP
David '2 Rank Red Circles' Legg (deputy leader)	DL
Jill 'Flap Jack Kid' Drury	JD
Gavin 'Hive Agitator' Lowe (safety)	GL
Pete 'Likes it Tight' Devlin (medical officer)	PD
Chris 'El Sensai' Densham	CD
Michael 'Back 2 Square 1' Hopley (website)	MH
Thomas 'Non Comprendo' Evans (science)	TE
Richard 'Man on the Moon' Siddans	RS
Elisa 'Old Skool' Carboni	EC
Simon 'Spaniard's Pet' Goddard (gear)	SG

### *Committee from home...*

Rosa Clements (sponsorship)  
John Pybus (technology)  
Chris Cooper - 'Pod' (website)

# Expedition Log

Date	Caver/s	Activity
03/7/06	CS, DL, JD, GP	Travelled with Landrover to Spain
07/7/06	CS, DL, JD	Rigged entrance series to <i>Tacklesack Ledge</i>
08/7/06	CS, GL	Rigged to bottom of <i>Disposable Belays</i>
09/7/06	DL, JD, PD	Got lost in 3-way rift at foot of entrance series
10/7/06	CS, GL	Rigged to 2005 limit – top of <i>Wart Hogs</i> pitch
11/7/06	CS, JD	Explored rift beyond foot of <i>Wart Hogs</i>
12/7/06	GL, PD, GP	Rigged to bottom of <i>Isle of Dogs</i>
13/7/06	CS, DL	Rigged pendule and <i>Monkey Panic</i>
13/7/06	PD	Shaftbashed in Area 4 – refound 38/4, found 75/4
13/7/06	GL	Shaftbashed at Ario – found 79/5
14/7/06	PD	Shaftbashed in Area 4 – killed 75/4
14/7/06	GL	Shaftbashed at Ario – abandoned 79/5
15/7/06	GL, GP	Rigged to bottom of <i>Boys are Back in Town</i>
16/7/06	DL, JD	Rerigged at foot of <i>Boys are Back in Town</i>
17/7/06	DL, CD	Rigged to bottom of <i>The Crystal Ship</i>
18/7/06	GL, GP	Rigged to head of Shaft Series
19/7/06	GL	Shaftbashed in eastern Area 4 – found 76/4
19/7/06	DL, MH	Rerigged <i>Monkey Panic</i>
21/7/06	CS, CD, MH	Rigged to bottom of <i>Vamos</i>
23/7/06	GL, GP	Rigged to 2006 limit of exploration at -520m
26/7/06	CS, GL	Shaftbashed in eastern Area 4 – 29/4, 60/4, 77/4 found
27/7/06	CS	Ferried science kit to foot of <i>Laissez Faire</i>
29/7/06	CS, TE, MH	Shaftbashed in Area E – E18 and E19 explored
31/7/06	CS	Derigged from limit to head of <i>Vamos</i>
31/7/06	TE	Caved to foot of <i>Disposable Belays</i>
31/7/06	TE, EC, RS	Photography to <i>Wild West Passage</i>
02/8/06	CS, RS	Shaftbashed in eastern Area 4 – refound 77/4
03/8/06	CS	Derigged to top of <i>Boys are Back in Town</i>
04/8/06	TE, RS, SG	Caved to foot of <i>Disposable Belays</i>
05/8/06	CS, RS, EC	Explored 77/4 to -40m
06/8/06	CS, TE	Derigged to bottom of <i>Laissez Faire</i>
07/8/06	CS, SG	Derigged to top of <i>Disposable Belays</i>
09/8/06	TE, SG	Derigged to Chicago entrance rift
10/8/06	CS, SG	Explored 77/4 to -55m

## Leader's Word

Spirits were high as a small group of Oxford cavers departed from the Valley of the Orange Rock, heading northeast from their regular OUCC camp on the western massif of the Asturian Spanish Picos. Three weeks into expedition, their target cave was changing in character and starting to drop at an exhilarating rate. Chicago, or Fissura de Chica to give it its 'official' Spanish title, had remained a small player on the Oxford expedition scene subsequent to its discovery by young cavers in August 2003. Relegated to second slot by such monsters as Tormenta and Asopladeru, the cave had a history of questionable student rigging and painstakingly slow progress. Tight rifts below the entrance series had represented a formidable barrier to the uninitiated. This had finally seemed set to change, however, with the discovery of a high-level continuation in 2005, and with further pitches through narrow sections dropped the previous week. The rift was relenting and they were excited. But little did they know that Chicago was about to live up to its name... and hit the big time.

There was the usual awkward scramble down steep hillside to the entrance. A narrow, concealed fissure in the rock, Chicago opened its secrets to the world discreetly, like so many of the region's recent deep finds. Situated above a notable subterranean streamway, that of the Spanish-explored Muxa cave, the potential for progress towards the foot of the nearby Cares Gorge was firmly in place. They donned their gear in a slanted recession rarely visited even by the climb-happy local goats. The plan was to continue the pushing effort from the foot of a 50m shaft – '*Boys Are Back In Town*' – 250m beneath the surface. The route involved passage through the entrance series, including the awesome 70m *Don't Stop!* pitch. Tacklebags swung into black open space, karabiners occasionally touching hollow sections of wall with a resounding clink. One often recalled the excited ramblings of one of Chicago's discoverers as they abseiled into *Wild West Passage* window, 45m further down the shaft. "It's amazing!", this bumbling first-time expeditioner had rumbled at camp. "Stones rattle for 12 seconds – it just doesn't stop!"

It didn't.

Some 16 hours later, they were descending through shafts in which one could barely see the opposite walls for most of their length. They were humbled by the rare, condensed shot of vertical descent. Icy water rained upon heads and trickled down the back of weary necks, but shivers were more from excitement than the cold.

Regrouping in a large, bouldered chamber at the foot of a final shaft, they somehow knew, after all of the earlier doubt, that the cave wouldn't stop there. Stones vanished into another pitch with a heart-thumping silence and they gazed tantalisingly into the dark limit of exploration. Out of equipment and out of breath with exhilaration, they reluctantly commenced the journey home. Theirs had been an awesome adventure, a 200m nosedive in so short a time. They emerged triumphant but exhausted in the morning light after almost an entire day spent beneath the mountains.

Sat near the entrance in the sunshine, one of their number pondered as to whether Chicago would now receive the amount of attention that had long been hoped for. Of course it would, he concluded with an inward grin. Of course it would.

C. A. Sinadinos  
Nov 2006

# Pozu Chicago

## Location

On the slope leading towards Ost'on, best reached by following the path past the Roca Naranja depression, then skirting above and around a double bowl, before descending a steep hillside. The cave is located in a slight gully with a small tree in a cliff. The entrance is hidden by a small overhanging cliff. GPS 0344791 4790105.

## Entrance Series

The entrance is a vertical slot at the back of the indentation in the cliff. The cave starts as a rift, narrow, but not tight, which soon opens out at the top of the first pitch, *Deja Vu* (P10). The bottom of the pitch is blind, but swinging onto a ledge 4m from the bottom reaches the top of the second pitch, *Adrenalin* (P26). This lands on a boulder-strewn ledge, at the edge of which is the top of *Don't Stop! Pitch* (P71).

[At the bottom of *Don't Stop!* are several routes. [A climb up to the left (facing away from pitch) leads in to a parallel shaft with nothing at the bottom.] To the right is a short climb down to a rift. [Climbing down to the bottom of this rift leads to a small stream-way crawl which quickly becomes impassable.] The way on is reached by an awkward traverse along the rift at a mid level until a bolt signals a short climb down followed shortly by a pitch of approximately 30–40m, *Windy City* (P35). The chamber at the bottom of this pitch contains a narrow, unexplored, unpromising rift off to the left (which probably reconnects) and a slippery climb up a slope to the bottom of *Disposable Belays* (see below).] The normal route is to swing into a window 45m down *Don't Stop!*, leading to the fossil *Wild West Passage*. The passage begins with a rift with a calcite and boulder floor. Soon a lined traverse past a large column is reached. Continuing past this leads to another traverse, lined off boulders; the traverse continues past an impressive column leads to the top of *Disposable Belays Pitch* (P40). [To the left, the passage continues for about 30 metres with occasional openings into tight, deep rift; after passing a fist-sized crystal formation, the passage drops down a short climb (10m handline) into a small section of rift blocked by calcite at the far end.]

[About 35m down *Disposable Belays* is a large ledge, *Tacklesack Ledge*, from which a small passage quickly turns into an unpromising tight crawl. Following a traverse opposite this ledge leads to a blind pot.]

The normal way on from the bottom of *Disposable Belays* is to scramble 5m to the right, and then descend a handline climb down a muddy rift. This opens out slightly, and just round the corner is the top of *Laissez Faire* (P30).

[Alternatively, going left from the bottom of *Disposable Belays* soon reaches a three-way junction. [Going straight on leads down a slippery rift to the bottom of *Windy City*.] Going right descends a rift to a small chamber. [Climbing up from here reaches a traverse, leading back to *Disposable Belays* in one direction, and to a blind pot in the other.] Doubling back under the route just taken leads to a lower level of the three-way junction. [Going right here leads to a climb down to an aven.] Going left is tight and meandering, before opening out at the top of *Laissez Faire*.]

## Pitch Rope Rigging

- *Deja Vu* (P10) 60m Bolt backup; bolt and chockstone Y-hang; thread deviation at –3m; bolt rebelay at –6m.
- *Adrenalin* (P26) Bolt backup; bolt and spike Y-hang; bolt rebelay at ledge at –10m; stal deviation at –13m.

- *Don't Stop!* (P45) 80m Spike where Adrenaline lands; boulder half way down ledge; bolt backup; two bolt Y-hang; stal spike rebelay at -5m; bolt rebelay at -35m; spike rebelay at -40m; spike belay at swing into *Wild West*; bolt for traverse; natural backup.
- *Windy City* (P35) 40m Natural backup, natural Y-hang, bolted Y-hang.
- First traverse 10m Boulder belay; large stal boss; boulder belay.
- Second traverse 55m Two boulders; stal spike; stal boss.
- *Disposable Belays* (P40) Backup to traverse; Y-hang from bolt and thread; spike deviation at -6m; spike rebelay at -35m. [If *Disposable Belays* is descended fully, it is 71m deep and requires a 95m rope]
- Rift climb (C10) 15m Backup to Disposable Belays; spike for approach; spike belay.
- *Laissez Faire* (P30) 35m Backup to rift climb and thread; bolt; bolt rebelay where it opens out.

### Big Rift Series

*Laissez Faire* lands at the lowest level of the three-way junction encountered at two higher levels. [Two ways lead immediately to avens.] The way on is to ascend a ramp and then a roped climb. A lined traverse continues to where it is possible to climb down to the top of a 10m pitch.

This lands in a rift, where an ascending ramp leads to two short climbs up (best laddered) past stal into a small chamber at the top of a 23m pitch, *Still Warthogs After All These Years*. *Warthogs* lands in a chamber at the start of a meandering rift, consisting of ascending ramps interrupted by a 2m handline climb, an 8m pitch, and another 2m handline climb. Eventually the rift widens at the top of a pitch, *The Isle of Dogs* (P25). Halfway down the pitch lands on a traverse level in the rift, where a slight constriction is passed, before it opens out again. [The bottom of the pitch lands in a chamber, from where a too-tight rift continues.] The way on is to pendule from part way down the bottom section of the pitch onto a prow, and then to traverse to a climb up, *Monkey Panic*.

An ascending ramp continues along the rift. Just after a prominent stalagmite, it is possible to descend in the rift. [Above, the traverse steepens before closing down.] Another ramp soon leads to a climb down to the top of a 58m pitch, *The Boys are Back in Town*. The pitch lands in a large rift passage. The way on is to traverse forward a few metres and descend a 4m pitch to land on a solid floor, the first solid floor since *Wild West Passage*. [Doubling back leads to an undescended pitch down the rift.] Walking forward soon reaches a 4m pitch, followed immediately by a 40m pitch, *The Crystal Ship*, where an inlet enters from above. A 5m pitch follows immediately, which leads to a traverse, passing above a blind 8m pitch. Ahead, an ascending ramp leads to a traverse to the top of a shaft.

### Pitch Rope Rigging

- Climb up (C8) 12m Two bolts at top; bolt rebelay half way down; spike deviation for bottom section. Traverse 15m Bolts at top of climb; bolt rebelay; spike belay. Alternatively, four bolts for higher traverse.
- P10 15m Spike at end of traverse for climb down; bolt rebelay; deviation off boulder at -7m. Alternatively, traverse further for easier hang (needs bolting).
- Climb up (C7) 15m Rope belayed to false floor and stal; ladder belayed to large boss.
- *Still Warthogs After All These Years* (P23) 30m Thread and spike backups; spike and bolt Y-hang.
- C2 5m Spike backup; spike belay. P8 10m Spike and bolt Y-hang; spike deviation.
- C2 5m Stal spike belay.
- *The Isle of Dogs* (P32) 45m Stal boss backup; spike and bolt Y-hang; bolt rebelay at -4m; spike deviation at -10m; bolt rebelay at traverse level; bolt rebelay over shaft; bolt on prow.
- *Monkey Panic* (P5 up) 15m Bolt on prow; bolt for traverse; 2 bolt Y-hang; bolt backup.



- *The Boys are Back in Town* (P58) 70m Spike backup; stal belay; spike belay for climb down; 2 bolt Y-hang; stal deviation at -20m; spike rebelay at -35m.
- P4 10m Bolt at bottom of previous pitch; bolt for traverse; bolt.
- P4 60m Natural backup; bolt and spike (high up) Y-hang.
- *The Crystal Ship* (P40) 2 bolt Y-hang; bolt deviation at -10m.
- P5 10m Spike at bottom of previous pitch; bolt and spike Y-hang.
- Blind Pitch (P8) 15m Thread backup; two spike Y-hang.

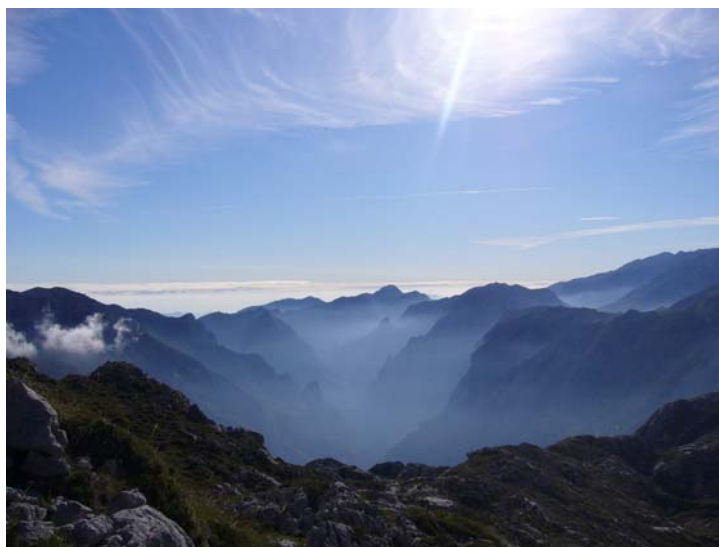
### Shaft Series

The shaft starts with a 45m pitch, landing on a ledge from where a 40m pitch continues. The bottom of the pitch lands in a large passage, doubling back under the approach route, and containing several pools. Pitches of 4m, 5m and 10m continue. These are followed by a free-hanging 56m pitch, *Vamos*, to a ledge, followed by a 31m pitch. This lands in a 6m wide by 10m long, boulder-strewn chamber, a possible site for a camp (using hammocks). Clambering down to the right reaches a continuation of the shaft, a 48m pitch to the ledge. The shaft continues undescended below the ledge, estimated as a pitch of 80m.

### Pitch Rope Rigging

- P45 60m Bolt and natural for traverse; bolt and spike Y-hang; bolt rebelay at -5m; spike rebelay at -27m.
- P40 45m Backup to previous pitch; spike belay; spike deviation at -2m; spike deviation at -17m; spike deviation at -35m.
- P4 25m Y-hang off two spikes (needs a traverse line).
- P5 Backed up to previous pitch; spike belay (needs a better backup); spike deviation at -1m.
- P10 20m Backed up to previous pitch; two bolt Y-hang.
- *Vamos* (P56) 60m Backed up to previous pitch; spike for traverse; two bolt Y-hang.
- P31 35m Backed up to previous pitch; Y-hang off two spikes; spike deviation at -13m.
- P48 60m Backup to boulder; boulder for traverse; boulder belay; bolt rebelay at -5m; bolt rebelay at -34m; spike rebelay at -42m (could be replaced by deviation).

*Compilation - Gavin Lowe*

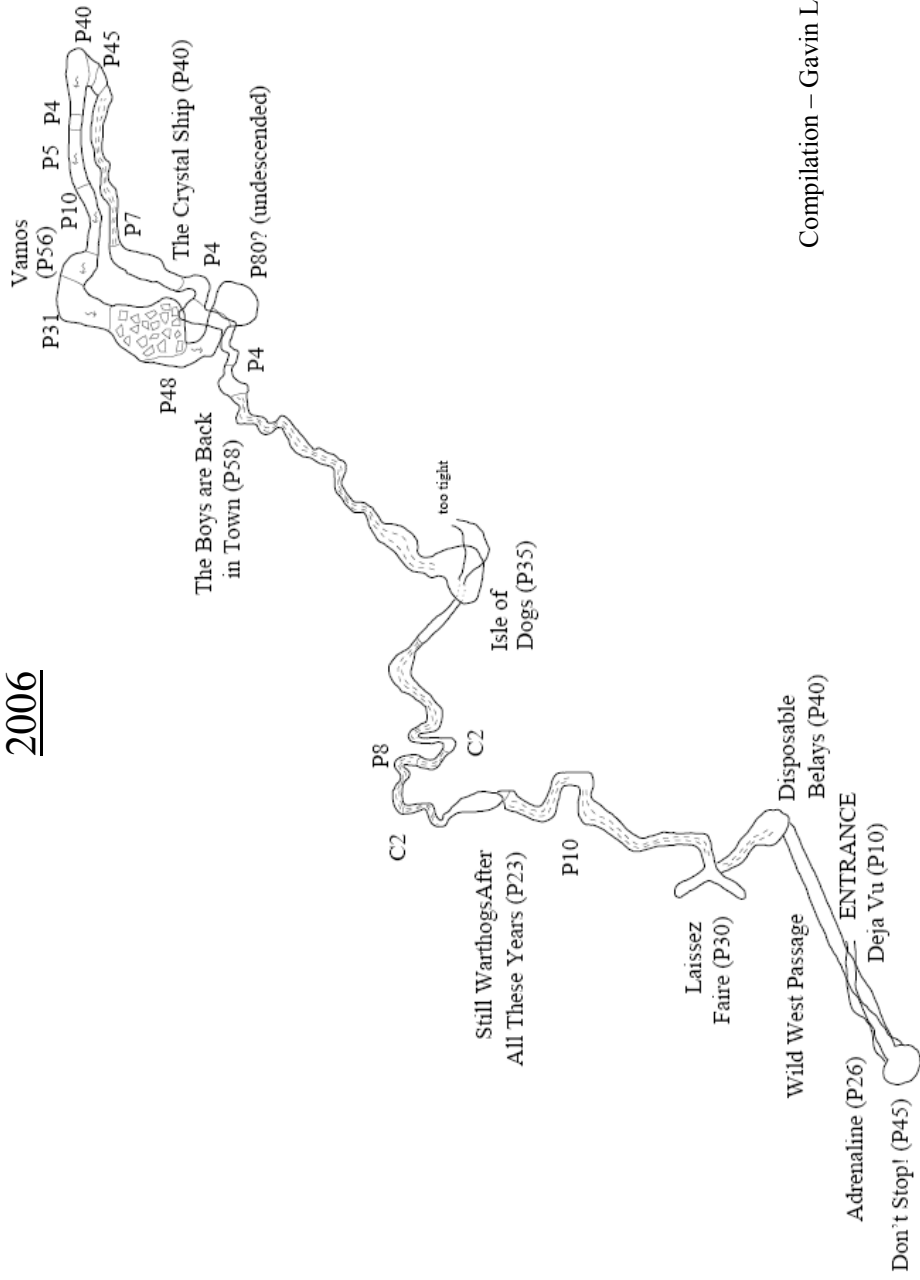


From the Chicago Entrance, August 2006

*Photograph - Simon Goddard*

# Chicago Survey

## Fissura de Chica 2006



Compilation – Gavin Lowe

# Sanity Departure

*OUCS Spanish expeditions have a history of 'eventful' journeys  
to and from the Picos. As Dave Legg describes, Chica 2006  
certainly didn't disappoint*

Having agreed to go out at the start of expedition as a result of a misplaced sense of duty, I found myself rapidly trying to tie up a lot of loose ends as the departure date loomed. A room to vacate, work to hand in and admin to complete, all these things occupied my mind as I struggled to get things in order before I put Oxford life on hold for one whole, glorious month in favour of slumming and sunning with the Oxford University Cave Club expedition in Fissura la Chica and then with my girlfriend in Barcelona, who had handily arranged her holidays so that I wouldn't have to spend too long away from the dreaming spires (or out of Spain, depending on your perspective). Departure day arrived all too soon/far too late, and as I typed, filed and fettled well into the small hours I was filled with a nagging dread: what if I couldn't do it all in time? Famous for last minute and beyond organisation, even I was dismayed by the prospect of packing hundreds of books and CDs in the 3 hours before we were due to depart, and I decided to take the expedition leader up on his rash, worried promise. So desperate was he for help at the start of expedition that he had agreed to help me pack at any hour of the day or night (technically morning, but who's checking?), if only it would get me into the Land Rover and out of Britain on 3 July 2006. So at 4am a bleary expedition leader was rudely woken from his slumbers, to promise that he'd be at my place for 5.30am at the latest, to help cram stuff into any available bags, following which I was to prevail upon my housemates for the next academic year to move the stuff in my absence, should our fearsome college hostel warden get restless and demand that my possessions leave with my body and spirit. He packed whilst I typed and e-mailed, and when he departed at 7am I still had enough to do to seriously consider departing late.

Chris Sinadinos (for it was he) returned in the Land Rover, trailer in tow, at 7.40am. He had been put through an emotional half hour or so, with one driver arriving late and the other suffering from knee pains, which he feared may prevent him from going to Spain at all. Somehow, Chris worked his charms on us two recalcitrant types and got us underway, only to take a wrong turning (after stopping to check a possibly deflated tyre) and drive us to Shotover Park. Inauspicious beginnings, especially as we had to be at Dover by 1.30pm to catch our ferry. Never fear! With Chris driving enthusiastically we were able to reach Dover with minutes to spare, despite another wrong turning after we had driven off the motorway in search of fuel. We had no tickets, but Chris assured us that our booking number, written in pencil on a scrap of paper, was all we needed. It was, but first we had to find the right ferry company, as Chris had forgotten that ferry services across the channel were not a monopoly provision of discountferries.com. Having failed at the first try, we pulled up at a small office and asked P&O if it was their booking reference. We were told 'No', and that 'It can't be Sea France, either, because their numbers don't start like that.' We swiftly headed out of the terminal and back round for another pass at the ferry companies who didn't have desks in the office, with Chris grinding his teeth in frustration – our ferry was minutes away from departing – and accidentally chewing up the bit of paper with the booking reference. Calamity! None of the booths we tried recognised the number. The only option left was the Sea France desk back in the office, unless we'd been taken for a ride by cyber-criminal entrepreneurs. Back to the office, up to the desk, 'Oh yes, that's one of ours. We're the business office for freight shipping, that's why she didn't recognise the number over there. Oh, and your ferry sailed at 1.30am.' Luckily for us, the man behind the desk also recognised that we were driving, 'One of Solihull's finest,' and booked us onto the next convenient departure for no extra cost. Next stop, France, where sleep deprived I would have to navigate Jill, Chris and Gareth for 36 hours...this was shaping up to be an interesting experience, yet despite the setbacks we were still enthusiastic about the caving to be had.

# A Shaft Too Far?

*Tom Evans recalls a trip to investigate the distant and long neglected Area E*

Staggering up the Ario path (once again telling myself that I would pack lightly next year) on a rainy evening mid-expedition I was looking forward to finally seeing those Picos views and going caving, after hearing how well the exploration of Chica was going. But arriving at camp things went down hill, it was still pouring with rain, with no chance of seeing 10m in front of you, let alone the central Massif. Then the next day, to make things worse, I went down with food poisoning (probably from that dodgy prawn sandwich from Bilbao coach station). So I was camp bound for a couple days, reflecting on the irony, and typical nature of it; that it is in 'civilisation' that you have to be most careful.

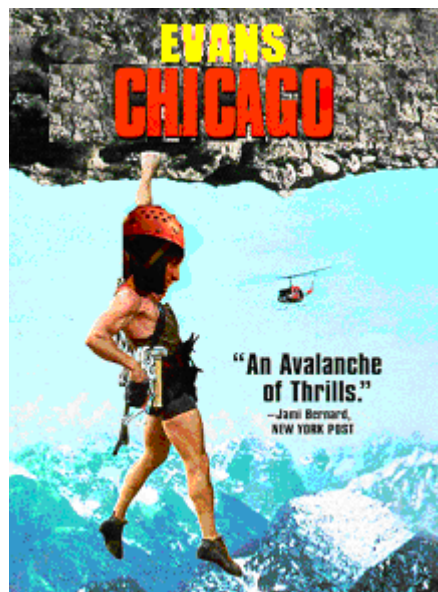
A couple of days later, whilst feeling fairly miserable at camp and trying to recuperate, Chris suggested that some 'gentle' shaft bashing would be a good idea. Not having been shaft bashing before, I didn't really know what to suspect; but I thought, it can't be that difficult, just walking around on the surface (but I should have remembered that route finding, on the surface, is not the easiest thing in the fractal karst landscape of the Picos). The plan was to climb up high above the Ario bowl towards La Verdelluenga peak, higher than I had ever walked before, to around 1800-1900 meters; looking for new cave entrances, that had never before been descended, let alone had their entrances logged. I had no regrets (except maybe forgetting to pack sun cream) with the sun drenched views of the central Masif that I had been longing for the last year. I was also very excited to be going shaft bashing for the first time, with the prospect of finding new entrances, and maybe even a new km deep cave. This was one of the things that I had missed out on, on the previous expedition. Spirits were high as we departed from camp.

After around half an hour following Chris and Mike, it became obvious that they didn't really know the way. After going round in circles, arriving at the same stone (or is it the same stone? they all look so similar), we realized that we were fairly firmly lost. Chris ever the optimist said he was sure we would find the way up soon, but Mike was doubtful that the next half hour would be any more successful than the last. I decided in the end to give Chris the benefit of the doubt, and agreed to carry on for half an hour, at which point I said I would turn around if we hadn't found the way, to which Chris agreed. Mike, who was fairly sure that we wouldn't find the way, trudged on back to camp.

We got the trusty GPS out eventually, and just put in the co-ordinates of a cave on the slopes of the Verduellenga peak which were going to look at. we followed our trusty GPS deciding to give up on the idea of finding a 'real' path. Thus we passed "o'er hill and dale", not quite so swiftly as Shakespeare's Puck, nor for that matter as the Rebecas, the mountain deer of the area, who appeared to think the land was flat. One minute they were forty yards away, the next time we looked up they were several hundred yards away; in which time we had only walked a few steps. We made our own sweaty progress, and it soon became clear why it is sensible to follow paths in the Picos, with the up and down landscape; ten steps forward, five down, five up.

When we got to the cave entrance things seemed pretty promising, with a powerful draft, and fairly large entrance. So Chris rigged it and started down, whilst I way-marked the entrance on the GPS. He got down to a pebbly floor after less than ten meters, the draft still blowing strong; but then on looking all around the chamber there was no apparent way on. Exasperated, we just couldn't figure out why the chamber was so darn cold and drafty. It was neither windy nor cold outside on the Verdelengua slopes. This cave will no doubt remain a mystery, maybe another entrance will be found one day, and the source of the draft will be discovered.

After logging a few more entrances, and descending a couple more ice-plugged shafts that global warming had yet to dominate, we headed back. We thought to ourselves, going back should be easy, we've been to camp so many times before. At first things did seem pretty straight forward, following the old Top Camp path, walking past the landmarks of Snow Pole, and the Martini pool. But at some point we must have come off the main path, finding ourselves confronted with a seemingly impossible barrier, of rocky cliffs. I got the GPS out; 'goto Ario' I told it, to which it decided Ario was only a couple of hundred meters away, but on the other side of the cliff! It was now my turn to be the optimist, saying that if camp is so close, 'I'm sure there'll be a way through'; Chris favoured turning round, and finding our way back to the path where we had been before. I persuaded him though that we should bash on. So I found a slight gulley, to climb up onto the top of the rocky prometry, at the top of which I saw camp! So the GPS was right, just needed to get there. The easiest route I decided was to climb down the other side, down a 10m cliff, from where it was a straightforward walk home. Chris looked dubiously on and selected a less direct, though altogether more sensible route to the bottom. The nickname 'cliffhanger' was suggested for me upon our return to camp that evening. At least we made it back in one piece!



# Chica 2006 Awards

Most Unstable Digestive System

**Tom Evans**

Most Psychological Torment

**MIKE HOPLEY**

Dodgiest Rigging Moment and Best Name For Part of Chica  
(*monkey panic*)

Dave Legg

Best Photo (*Chris and the dead cow, p19*)

*Rich Siddons*

Best Expo Quote

(*Regarding the oversized expedition sponsorship  
flapjacks: 'The thing is.. when I have one, even  
whilst caving underground, I tend to feel sick'*)

GAZ PHILLIPS

Most Foul Smelling Garment (*for the 'green socks'*)

Chris Sinadinou

Best Barter (2 lengthy baguettes, ham, 4 litres of water - €9.60)

**Simon Goddard**

# The Crystal Ship

*Dave Legg describes the discovery of one of the finest sections yet encountered in Chicago*

Whilst Jill and I had been underground Chris Densham had arrived at camp. Experienced and wily, I had enjoyed a fine couple of trips with him in 2003, when he had been part of the trip that connected Pozu Julagua to Asopladeru la Texa and the subsequent lengthy de-rigging trip. Gavin and Gareth, both early risers who disliked caving late at night or in the small hours of the morning, had decided not to go caving following the rescue. On the other hand, both Chris D and I were both itching for a trip. I was particularly eager as my time for departure was looming, and the only pushing I had done was Monkey Panic. So, having slept and eaten, Chris and I agreed to go underground that very day, with an a.m. call-out, meaning that if we weren't back in camp by about 8am rescue proceedings would begin. This also gave us plenty of time, something I was becoming concerned about as I reckoned that for me the round trip to and from the limit of exploration would now take about 8 hours, meaning either early starts (not my forte) or a.m. call outs. We made our way underground in the early afternoon, and made reasonable time down to the limit of exploration, pausing to re-rig a section of rift which had been negotiated by straddling above a drop, and which was gained by a rather unpleasant pitch-head from which one could easily swing into the middle of the rift and become stuck. Our re-rig did mean taking longer to negotiate the rift, but avoided this tiring and annoying grapple in favour of a higher level traverse along one side of the rift.

Upon reaching the limit Chris descended down from my bolts onto what we thought might be false floor in a rift. He disappeared round a corner, whilst I shivered on the ledge where the 60m pitch, *The Boys Are Back In Town*, landed. Misunderstanding Chris' calls I sat and shivered for almost an hour before getting curious and heading down to him. Unsurprisingly, he was bolting above a large drop, with a chamber nearby where I could have huddled in slightly more comfort. The rock in this section of the cave was a clean-washed grey, rather than the mud-stained brown above, and the floor looked more like that of stream-passage which regularly took water. Chris finished bolting, and I took over from him to place the other bolt of the Y-hang he had been making. I noted that I was straddling above a very large drop, and when Chris offered me the lead, some foolish, nervous instinct led me to decline. All that proud concern about getting a crack at a lead and then I passed it up because of stupid fear! Bah! Chris descended the rope, pausing to rig a deviation, before landing on a ledge near another shaft. By this point we were both tired and call out seemed oh so much closer than before. We surveyed back from Chris' lowest bolt to the bottom of *The Boys Are Back In Town*, then headed back as fast as we could for a paella and coffee breakfast. When I asked Chris what he wanted to call the pitch he named it the *Crystal Ship*, after the numerous fine crystals in the walls.

*Chris Sinadinos on his first passage down Crystal Ship pitch*

I tested the bolts in the rock and descended, marvelling at sparkling gems in the walls as I continued down some 30m of exceptionally striking vertical cave. I smiled, water drops tap-tapping at my helmet. *Wild West*, it seemed, had a serious challenger in the 2006 Chicago beauty pageant.

# Shafts Bashed

*In conjunction with Gavin Lowe's Total Picos Shaft Bashing guide -  
<http://users.comlab.ox.ac.uk/gavin.lowe/Caving/Spain/total.pdf>*

## AREA 4

29/4

**Location:** To the east of Cabeza Verde is a collection of interconnecting bowls. On the rim between the largest bowl and the next one to the northwest.

0345016 4789308 ± 8m. Alt 1557

**Description:** [unchanged].

38/4

**Location:** About 100m from main col into Area 4, on bearing of 020°, slightly higher than the cairn above the col, just below a rocky local maximum on the ridge.

0344250 4789732. Alt 1682

**Description:** 3m entrance pitch between boulders lands on a sloping chamber floor. A 10m clamber down to wider chamber section leads to comprehensive breakdown with no way on. Cave links with a small aperture to left of primary entrance.

Unnumbered cave

**Location:** Over the Cabeza Corvu – Julagua col NE into Area 4. From the ridge above 38/4, travel 100m NW to a rift on a vertical faultline. Below the peak rising above the col. 0344218 4789750.

**Description:** 1 to 2m wide entrance rift appears to be 10m deep. Rocks rattle no further than this and there is little draft.

Unnumbered cave

**Location:** From the ridge above 38/4, head down into bowl to north. Small entrance amongst boulders, at foot of 10m high cliff at bottom of the bowl. 0344263 4789854. Alt 1682.

**Description:** Estimated 10m entrance pitch.

60/4

**Location:** 30m west of 29/4. 0344981 4789318 ± 5m. Alt 1562.

**Description:** 10m pitch to wide-spanning boulder floor, past which rocks do not rattle at any of several points.

75/4

**Location:** From the ridge above 38/4, head towards large bowl to north but deviate left into smaller bowl. Large entrance accessed over substantial breakdown at foot of the bowl. 0344251 4789367.

Alt 1672

**Description:** 10m pitch descends through rift into 8x1m chamber. 2m climb down continues, doubling back below entrance, but this closes down almost immediately.

76/4

**Location:** In the highest of a line of depressions, north of Cabeza Llambria.

0344808 4789343. Alt 1584.

**Description:** Large, walk-in entrance and smaller entrance unite in large chamber used as sheep shelter. Stoop leads to off-shoot containing an undescended climb.



77/4

**Location:** Heading east from Cabeza Verde and skirting north of Cabeza Llambria, drop north onto ridge between two shakeholes. The entrance is a NNE – facing cleft, not visible from above. 0344950 4789299.

**Description:** Entrance shaft (P8) lands on sloping boulder ledge and continues at north end (P18), dropping into circular chamber of 3m diameter. Short traverse through rift passes over narrow hole beneath an oval window before second hole (P6) drops into another chamber. Climb through window 2m above chamber floor passes into boulder-choked chamber. Crawl below large central boulders leads to 4-way junction. 10m low crawl to left drops into chamber, leading via brief climb into second chamber with very tight but potentially passable rift. To right from 4-way junction, hole after 2m crawl (C5) drops into chamber that connects back up with central route of 4-way junction via very narrow climb. Climb down from chamber into streamway pot of white rock intersects rift that passes via drafting narrow slot over undescended 5m pitch.

## AREA 5

79/5

**Location:** Shakehole in Ario bowl, just before and to the left of the snow shakehole.

**Description:** Slot amongst boulders opens up into small chamber with drafting holes in the floor that could be widened. An insect nest may prove problematic and require clearance.

## AREA E

E18

**Location:** [our gps] 0342191 4787794 ± 10m. Alt 1965.

**Description:** A 15m pitch to snow in rift. Snow lower but still plugged at south end, and receded to choked stone ledge to north, 2m below bulk of the ice. Currently no obvious way on.

E19

**Location:** 40m SW of E18, above previously snow-filled shakehole.

0342166 4787757 ± 5m. Alt. 1979, lower entrance 0342158 4787759. Alt. 1970.

**Description:** Entrance shafts appear to connect with a chamber, the latter accessible via a triangular hole at the foot of the shakehole. Strong shaft in chamber of non obvious origin.

*Compilation – Chris Sinadinis*

# Chicago Hits the Big Time

*Various impressions of the cave...*

*“The rigging is maybe not good... my bobbin no fit onto the rope.” (In response to suggestions that she borrow somebody else’s stop). “Stop? What is those? I no use stop.”*

**Elisa ‘Old Skool’ Carboni**

*“One of my favourite, and most visited parts of Chica was ‘Wild West’. This is around 50 meters of phreatic passage, decorated exquisitely with calcite, with curtains of white crystals. It is a nice easy passage after the 80 meter prusik in from the entrance, with a flat, almost reassuringly solid floor. Reassuringly that is until you come to the seemingly bottomless drop below the traverse half way along the passage; suggesting that the whole floor is really just a ‘false ceiling’ to a bigger chamber below. The passage was also a pleasant landmark on the way out, especially when you are pulling a heavy tackle bag. A place where you can have a little breifer, on the horizontal, before you make a last push for the surface.”*

**Tom Evans**

*. (Upon discovering the entrance series). “It’s amazing!! Stones rattle for 12 seconds – it just doesn’t stop!”*

**Matt Baalam, 2004**

*“The rift was scary and greasy... had an epic prussiking out as my chest harness snapped... and added insult to injury as I got stuck coming out of the entrance... my first, and possibly last, expedition trip.”*

**Pete ‘Likes it Tight’ Devlin**

*“It’s a bit rifty, isn’t it?”*

**Mike Hopley**

*“I steadied myself and lobbed a small stone across through the wider part of the rift ahead. We waited but heard nothing. Selecting a chunkier specimen to try again, I counted the seconds. 1... 2... 3... 4... 5.. Boom! I backed away and we danced in circles around the pool. Vamos pitch was a beast. It was later surveyed as part of an 87m shaft. You could barely see the opposite walls for most of its length. I descended in the darkness, humbled by this rare, condensed shot of vertical descent.”*

**Chris Sinadinos**

# Conservation Project

The planned Chica 2006 conservation biology study was not undertaken, primarily due to the lack of a suitable streamway for hydrological sampling in Chicago. Wetter passages with small pools amenable to net sampling were only encountered below 400m depth – a distance to which the ferrying of equipment was not feasible with the man power available. The pools were also discovered relatively late in the expedition, by which time a before-after comparison was not possible. Several translucent cave harvestmen were observed in the upper cave, although sittings became less frequent as the expedition proceeded. This suggests that our presence may have had a detrimental effect upon a fragile population and underlines the need for an assessment of such effects in the future. We would thus encourage a second attempt at the project in 2007 at the lower pools in Chicago, despite the cave's lack of organic matter and possible oligotropic nature. The search for a suitable cave entrance at which to compare the entranceproximal surface fauna, unsuccessful on this occasion, should also be pursued when time and resources allow.



**Cave salamanders were frequently encountered in the entrance shafts**



**Chris S – Cow Conqueror**

His unjust 2003 nickname, 'Cow Lover', is finally laid to rest  
Note – the animal was found in this state. No Bovine species were harmed during the making of this expedition.

# Caving Lyric

*Mike Hopley composes to the tune of 'The Living Daylights'*

## Disposable Belays

Hey caver, where you goin'?  
I swear, my nerves are showin'.  
Just one belay up so high;  
Living's in the way we die.

Come the prussic and the rope begins to fray:  
Thirty metre drop – you'd better start to pray.  
When you reach the top, the rock crumbles away;  
Did you really trust your life to that belay?

Oh – oh – ooh – oh, Disposable Belays!  
Oh – oh – ooh – oh, Disposable Belays!