

**Ario 2025 - Long abandoned
leads in the Picos de Europa
Becka Lawson**

Overview

- introduction: Picos de Europa + Ario
- expedition aims
- exploring a deep cave system
 - Bill's Cave (27/9)
 - Cave of the Witches Eye (2/7)
 - Tras La Jayada
- prospecting for new caves and re-exploration of old caves





OXFORD UNIVERSITY EXPEDITION
TO
NORTHERN SPAIN

1960s OUCC to Picos
1979 Explore Xitu
2013 Ario Caves Project



Camping at the Refugio Vega de Ario

Photo: Becka Lawson



Photo: Chris Curry







Photos:
Bartek
Biela



THE ARIO *DREAM* Spain

Sistema Hitu - Cueva Culiembro

11km long, 1264m deep
40th deepest in the world

1,800 m +

La Texa (-1,060 m)



1,264 M

Xitu (-1,148 m)
connected to Culiembro 2010
creating 1,264 m deep cave



1,472 M

2/7 (-811 m)
currently ends in major
boulder choke,
choke Egbert



1,564 M

C3 / C4 (-644 m)
ends in sumps likely
to link into upstream 2/7



1,800 M +

F20, F80, and
various draughting
shafts

??

~600m gap

Cueva Culiembro

Resurgence at altitude ~430m (water emerges at ~340 m)
Major stream passage continues up towards 2/7...





Expedition Aims

- push pitch in Cave of the Singing Pasteur/Bill's Cave (27/9) - could this be a sump bypass giving a dry route to Sistema Verdelluenga (C4)?
- revisit upstream in Cave of the Witches Eye (2/7, last visited in 1998, 1999, 2000) including
 - Canals on Mars (drysuits)
 - Full Moon Rising sump (dive)
 - high tube in Buy the Ticket, Take the Ride (bolt climb)
- connect Tras la Jayada to upstream 2/7 (Holier Than Thou)
- prospecting for new caves and re-visiting old caves



The team



Photo:
Bartek
Biela

A much more diverse team in 2025!

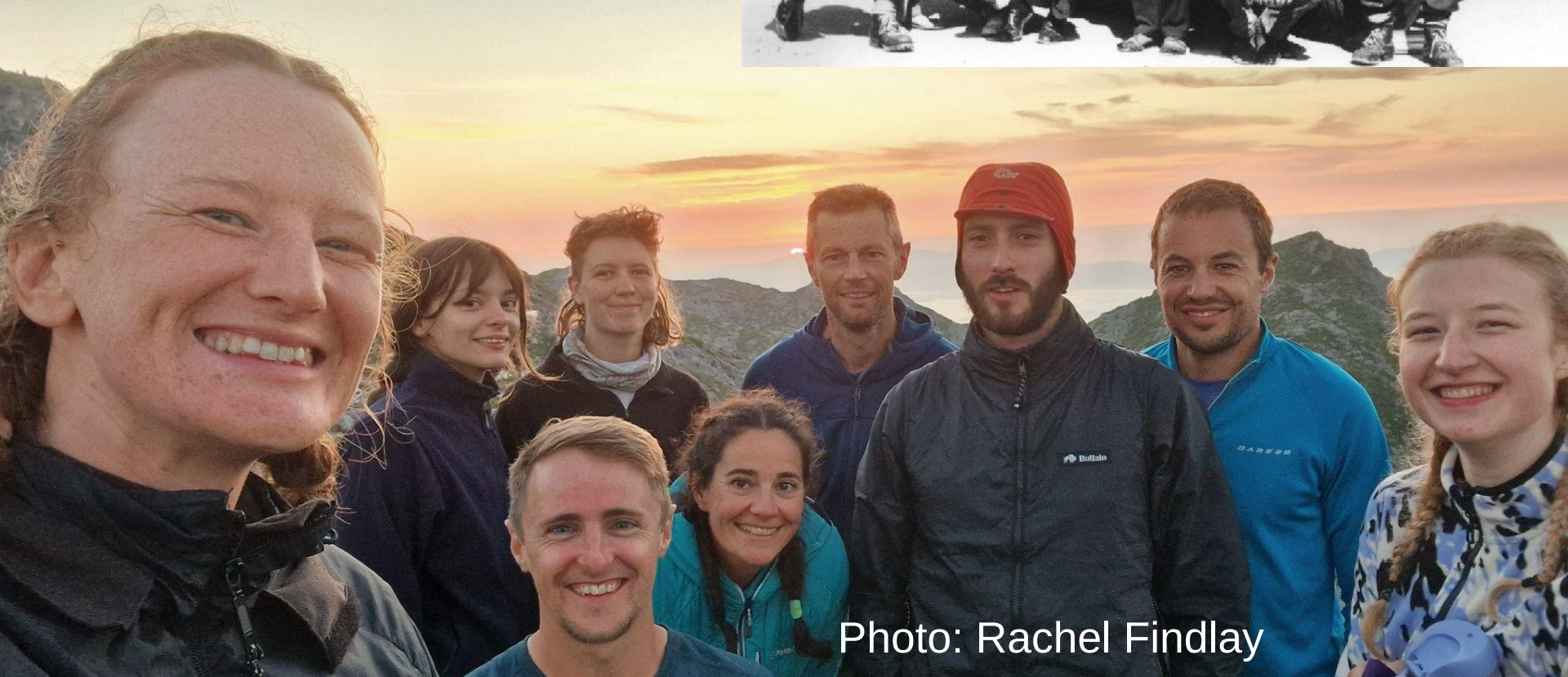


Photo: Rachel Findlay

A much more diverse
team in 2025!



Students - Oxford Uni, York
Uni, Sheffield Uni and others
China, Poland, Spain, Ireland
Many first timers + others
coming since 1979, 80 and 89

Camping at the Refugio Vega de Ario



Photo: Becka Lawson



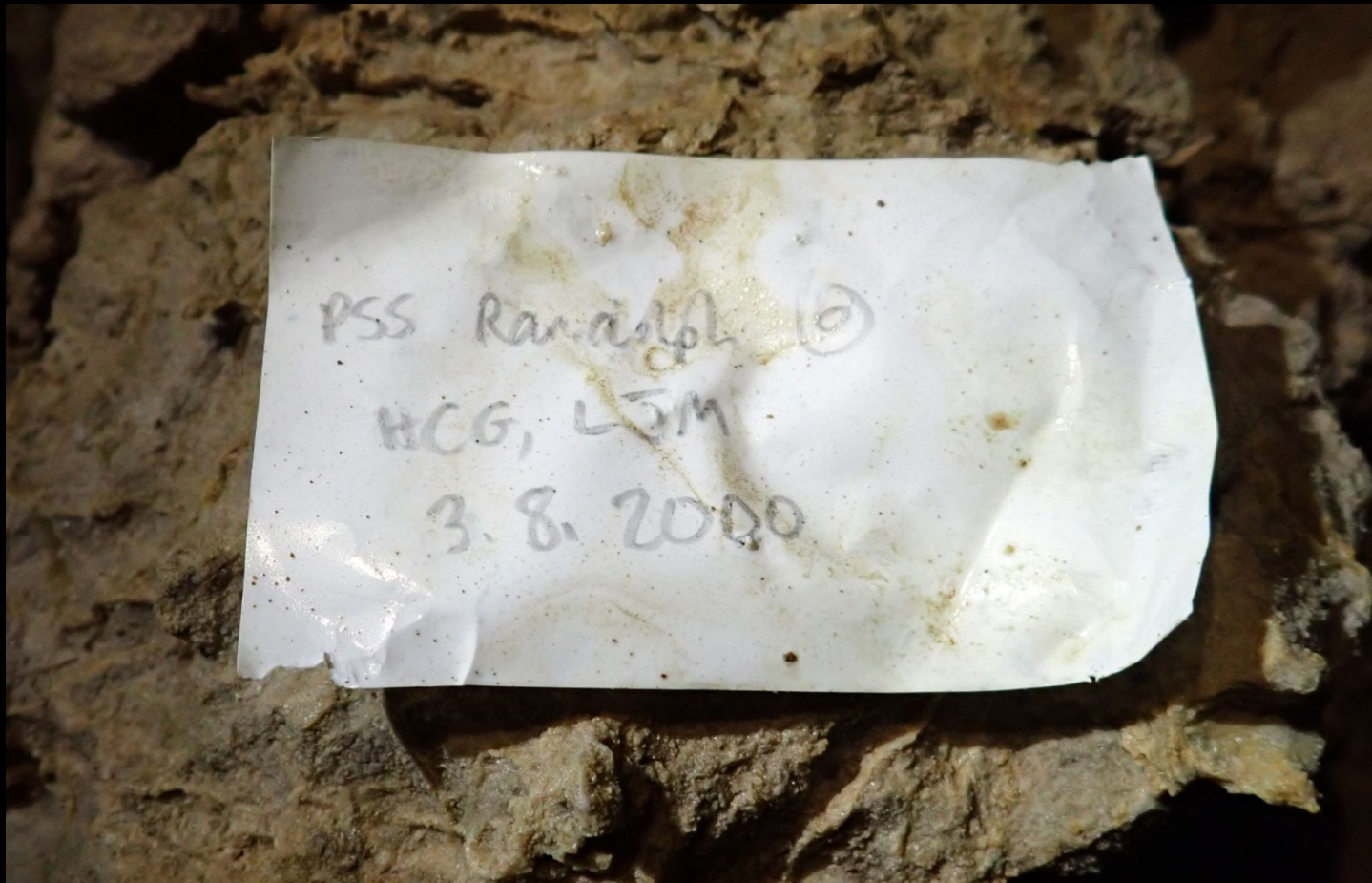
**Fleur Loveridge
in the entrance
of Cueva del
Pastor Cantato
(27/9 or Bill's
Cave) in 2023**

Photo: Becka Lawson

27/9 rifts

Photo: Fleur Loveridge





**Connection from 27/9 to 2/7
(2023 - survey note from 2000)**

Tapeworm camp below connection set up in 2024



Photo: Bartek Biela



Tapeworm camp moved in 2025

Photo: Bartek Biela

Things going very well, see you soon



120m

Rising Sump
C3/C4?
Tape worm

300m

Buy the ticket
Take the ride



F.E.

Martian landings
P10

Canals on
Mars

Prohibida la reproducción

99
limit

Savage
journey

500m +
(unsurveyed)
Continues....

Nº 557 MAJADA DE OSTON
Al fondo el Pico Torrecerredo



Tel. y Fax.: 98 536 29 44 - Gijón

La postal
La carte p
The friend

Steve
Roberts



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papel reciclable

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Postcard from last expedition to upstream 2/7 in 2000

Camp above Buy The Ticket, Take the Ride



Photo: Bartek Biela

Tras la Jayada entrance series



Photo: Bartek Biela

Tras la Jayada entrance series



Photo: Bartek Biela

Tras la Jayada >300m of entrance pitches

Survey drawn by
Mark Sims

Tras La Jayada

Asturias, Spain

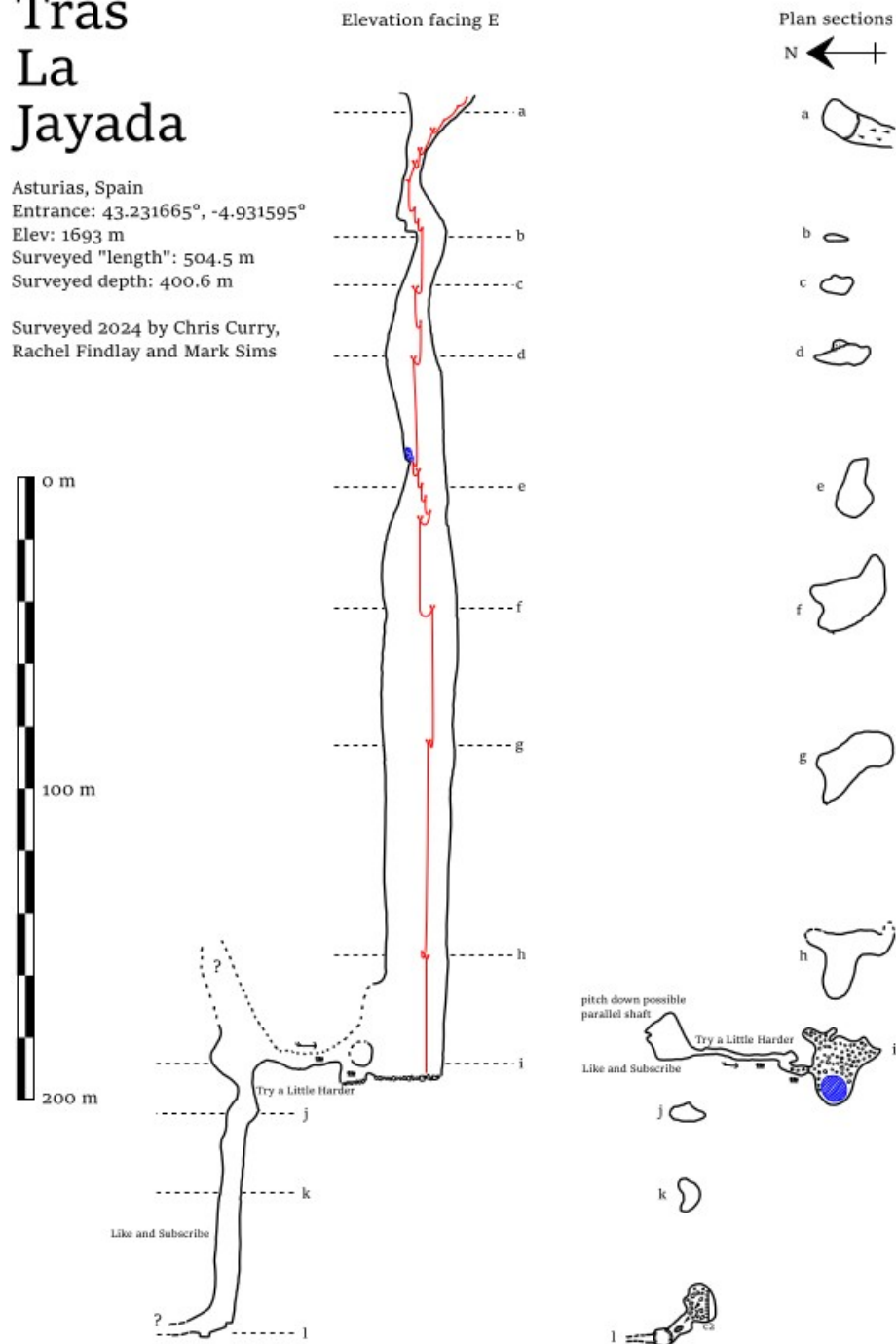
Entrance: 43.231665°, -4.931595°

Elev: 1693 m

Surveyed "length": 504.5 m

Surveyed depth: 400.6 m

Surveyed 2024 by Chris Curry,
Rachel Findlay and Mark Sims



Tras la Jayada re-bolting the entrance series



Photo: Rachel Findlay

Tras la Jayada entrance series



Photo: Bartek Biela

Tras la Jayada entrance series



Photo: Bartek Biela



**Bottom of Tras la
Jayada entrance pitch**

Photos:
Bartek
Biela

Tras la Jayada >300m of entrance pitches

Survey drawn by
Mark Sims

Tras La Jayada

Asturias, Spain

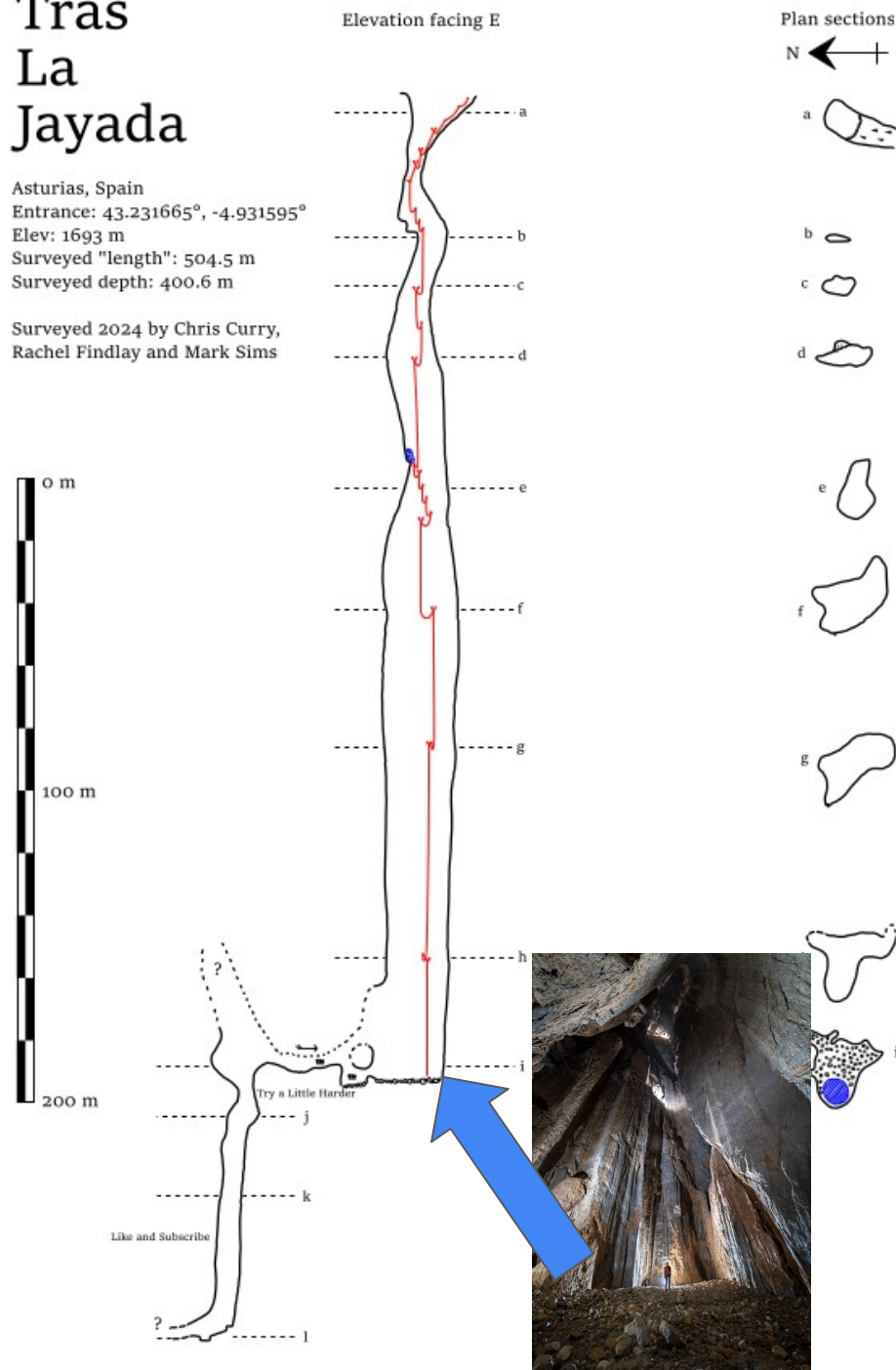
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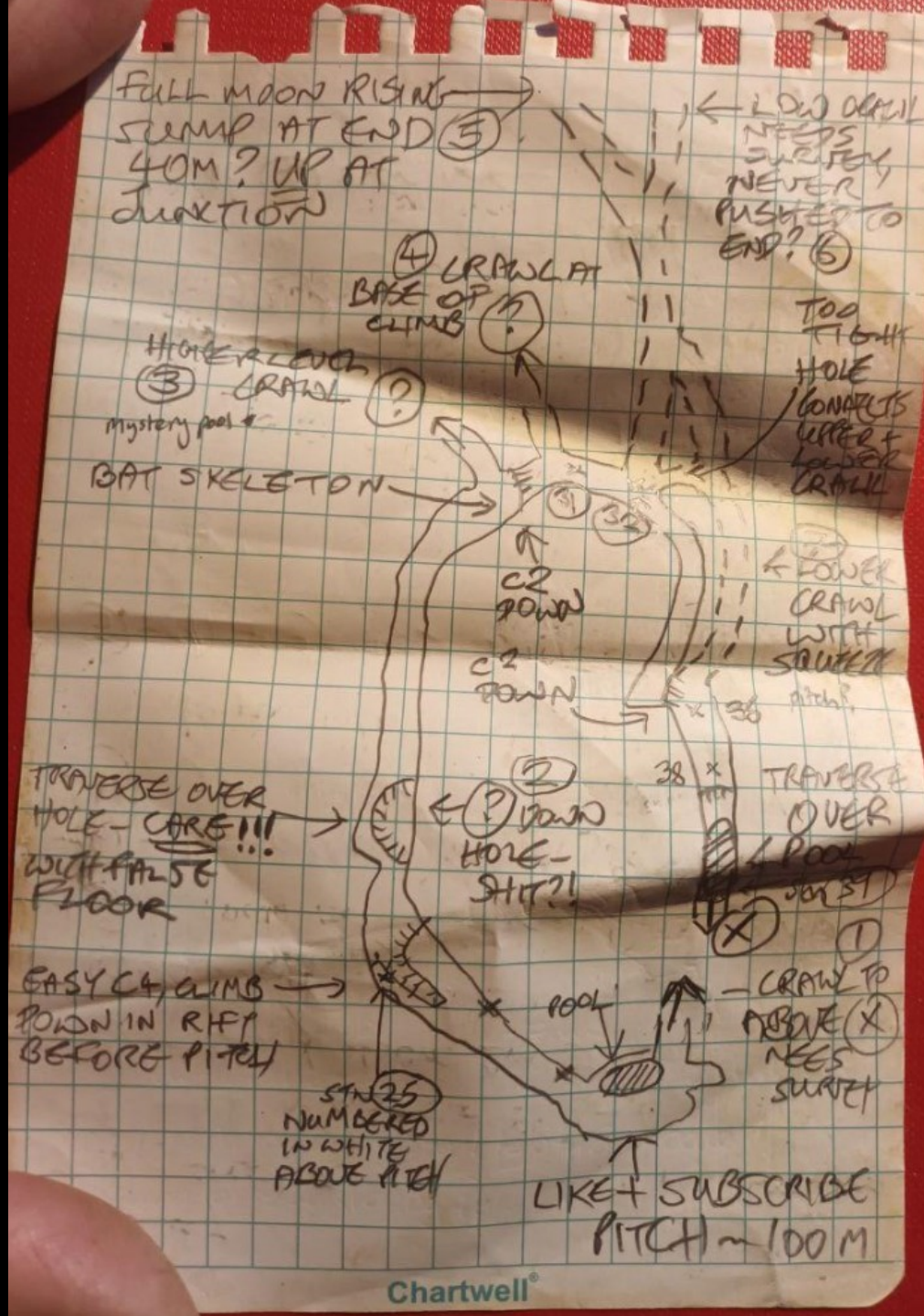
Surveyed depth: 400.6 m

Surveyed 2024 by Chris Curry,
Rachel Findlay and Mark Sims



Tras la Jayada connects to Holier Than Thou, inlet to 2/7

Sketch drawn by
Becka Lawson





Holier Than Thou Inlet

Photo: Bartek Biela



Full Moon Rising upstream sump - Holier Than Thou Inlet

Photo: Chris Curry



Full Moon Rising upstream sump - Holier Than Thou Inlet

Photo: Bartek Biela



Holier Than Thou Inlet

Photo: Bartek Biela



Upstream 2/7

Photo: Bartek Biela

A photograph of a cave interior featuring a waterfall. Two people are visible: one on a high rock ledge on the left and another on a lower ledge on the right. The cave walls are rugged and illuminated by warm, yellowish lights. The waterfall flows from the top center towards the bottom right, creating a misty spray at the base. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and adventurous.

Viagra Falls Upstream 2/7

Photo: Bartek Biela

Viagra Falls, Upstream 2/7

Climbed in 1999 over 8 hours, by Tim Guilford, who placed 15 bolts by hand, belayed by Lou Maurice



Photo: Bartek Biela

Upstream 2/7



Photo: Bartek Biela

Upstream 2/7



Photo: Bartek Biela



Derigging 27/9

Photo: Bartek Biela

Buy The Ticket, Take the Ride



Photo: Bartek Biela

Camp, Buy The Ticket, Take the Ride



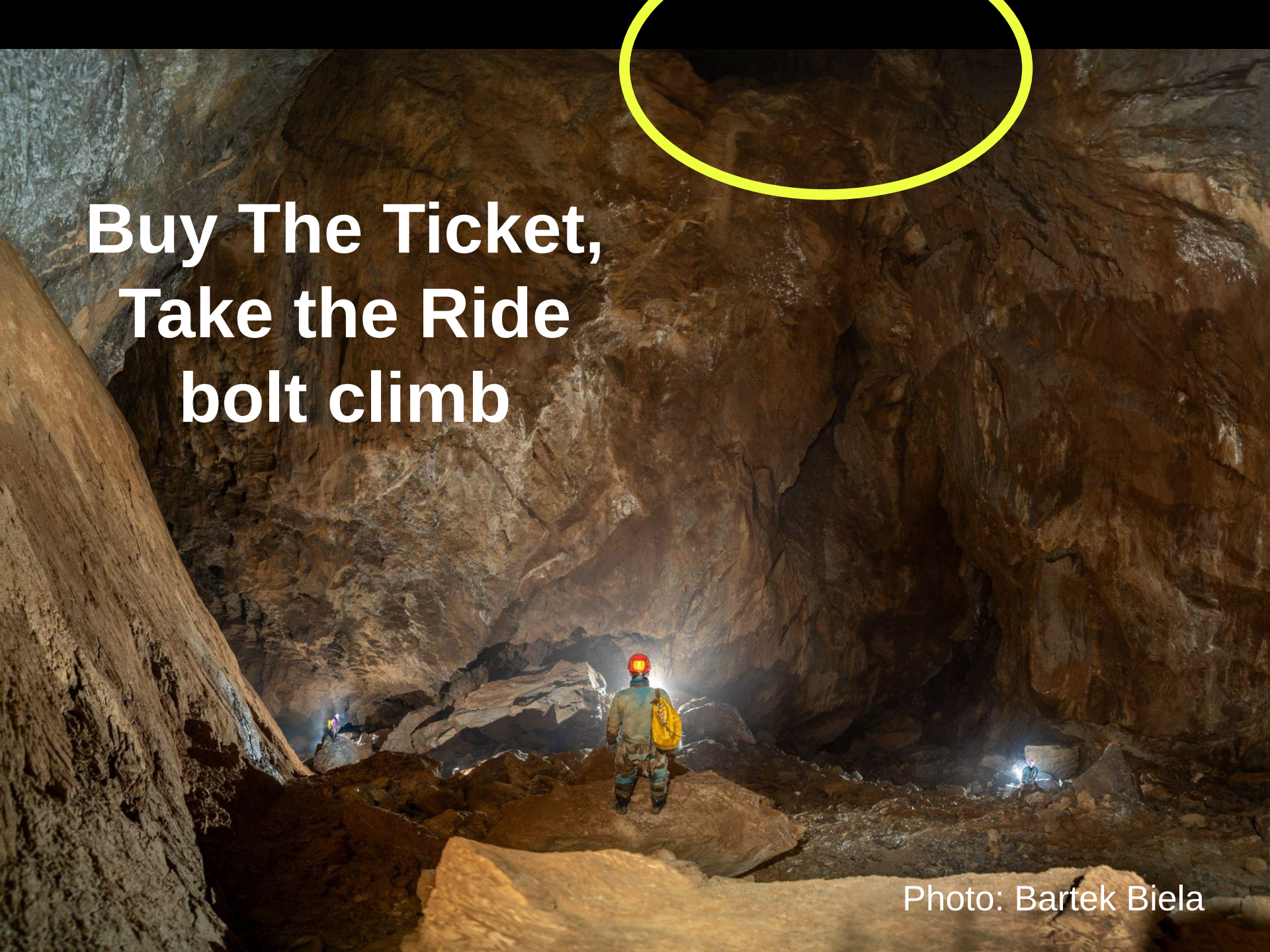
Photo: Bartek Biela



Canals on Mars



Photo: Rachel Findlay

A photograph of a person in a cave, wearing a red helmet and a yellow backpack, standing on a rock. The cave walls are dark and textured. A yellow circle highlights a dark area on the upper right wall. The text "Buy The Ticket, Take the Ride bolt climb" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

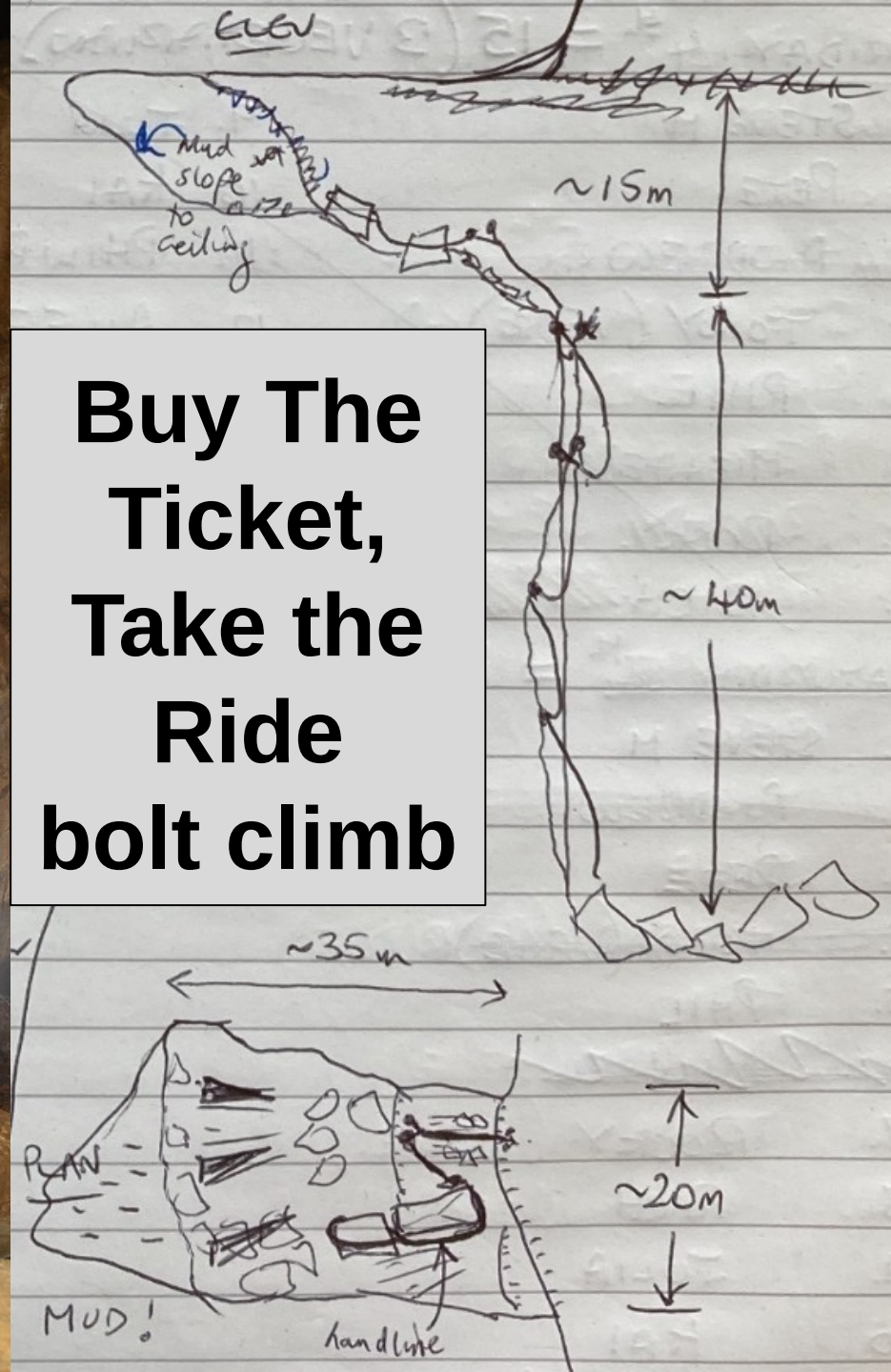
**Buy The Ticket,
Take the Ride
bolt climb**

Photo: Bartek Biela



Photo: Bartek Biela

**Buy The
Ticket,
Take the
Ride
bolt climb**



Prospecting and rediscoveries

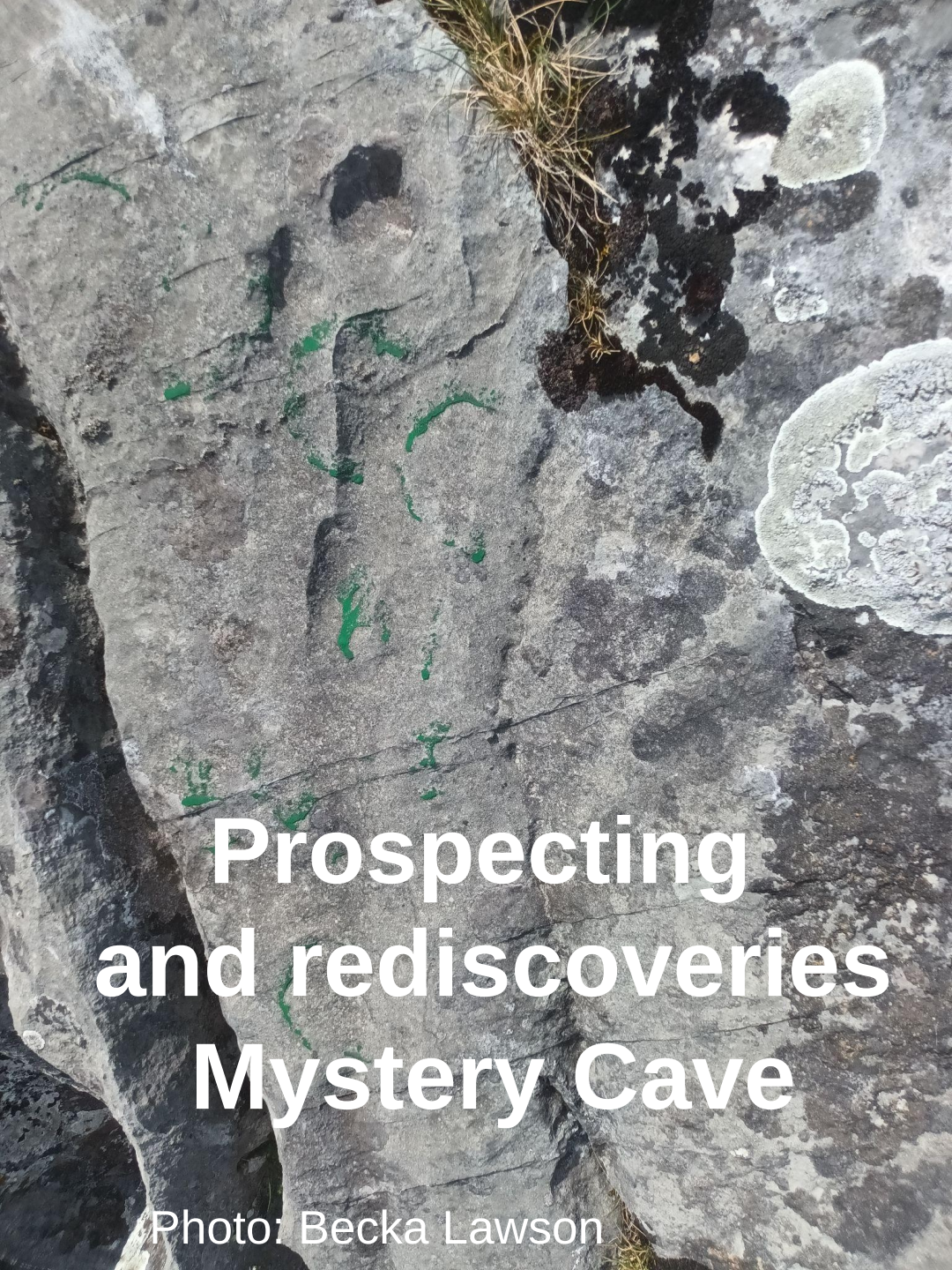
Photo: Becka Lawson





**7/7 - snow plug at
-30m unchanged
since 1985**

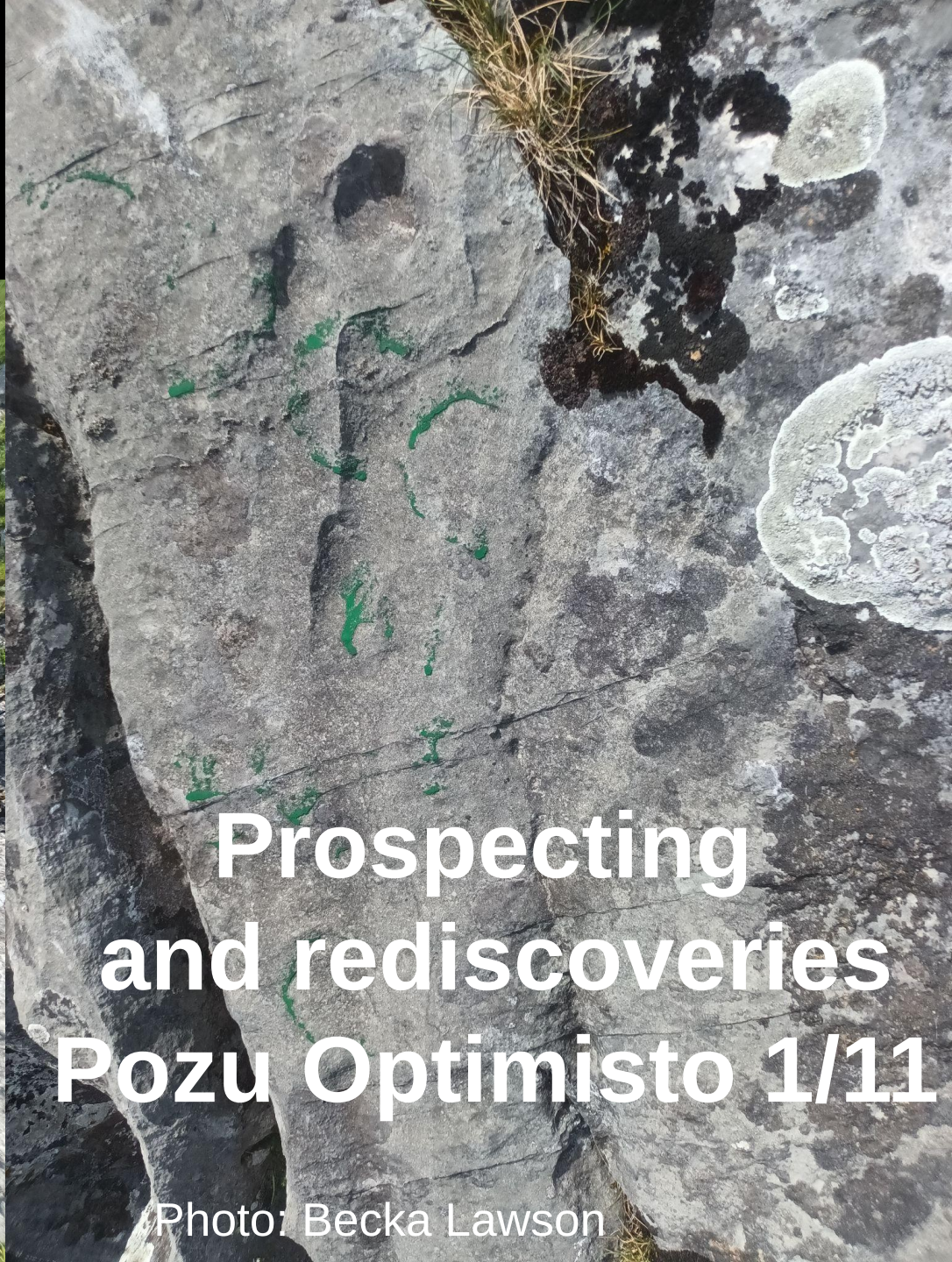
Photo: Becka Lawson



Prospecting and rediscoveries Mystery Cave

Photo: Becka Lawson

***"The difficulty of
finding this cave is
legendary"***



**Prospecting
and rediscoveries
Pozu Optimisto 1/11**

Photo: Becka Lawson

**More capping
through
Cheese Hole
in TR2
- to no avail**

Photo: Ben Thompson



**Squeeze in
80/5 - capped
to 15m pitch
and no way
on**

Photo: Rachel Findlay



Prospecting + rediscoveries - 25/9



Photos: Becka Lawson



Skull Cave

First explored in the 1990s and "wide open by modern standards" (Tony Seddon) - a route into downstream 2/7?



Photo: Tom Batten

Skull Cave Trips

17th - Sandy, Dave - capping, hammering Eft

20th - Jean-Luc, Pauline, Jess - capping, hammering Eft

21st - Mark, Will - capping, hammering Eft *"rock is too hard to hammer and too soft to cap"*

[Second half team arrives]

29th - Michael, Tom, Fiona - capping, hammering Eft

30th - Michael, Tom, Rocky - capping, hammering Eft and pitch head *"In 1991 Tony Seddon must not have had bones or must have been able to defy gravity"* - Michael dropped the capping rod and mat down the pitch before it was enlarged enough. Tom got down by breathing out but failed to find the rod in 40 minutes of searching then spent about an hour making inch by inch progress getting less and less happy

Skull Cave (47/7) *Ario, Picos de Europa*

0 2 4 6 8 10 m

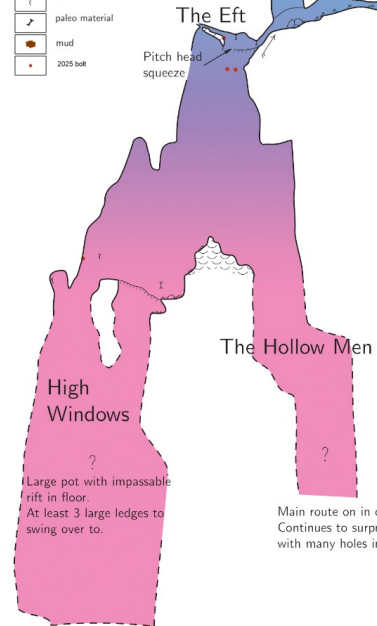
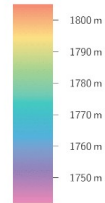
Extended Elevation

GPS 43.22857 -4.92011 Alt: 1805m
BCRA Grade 5d

Drawn by Michael Holliday
Survey by Michael H, Tom B, Rocky Y
Surveyed July 2025

Length: 98 m
Depth: 63 m

Altitudes



Skull Cave

98m long, 63m deep

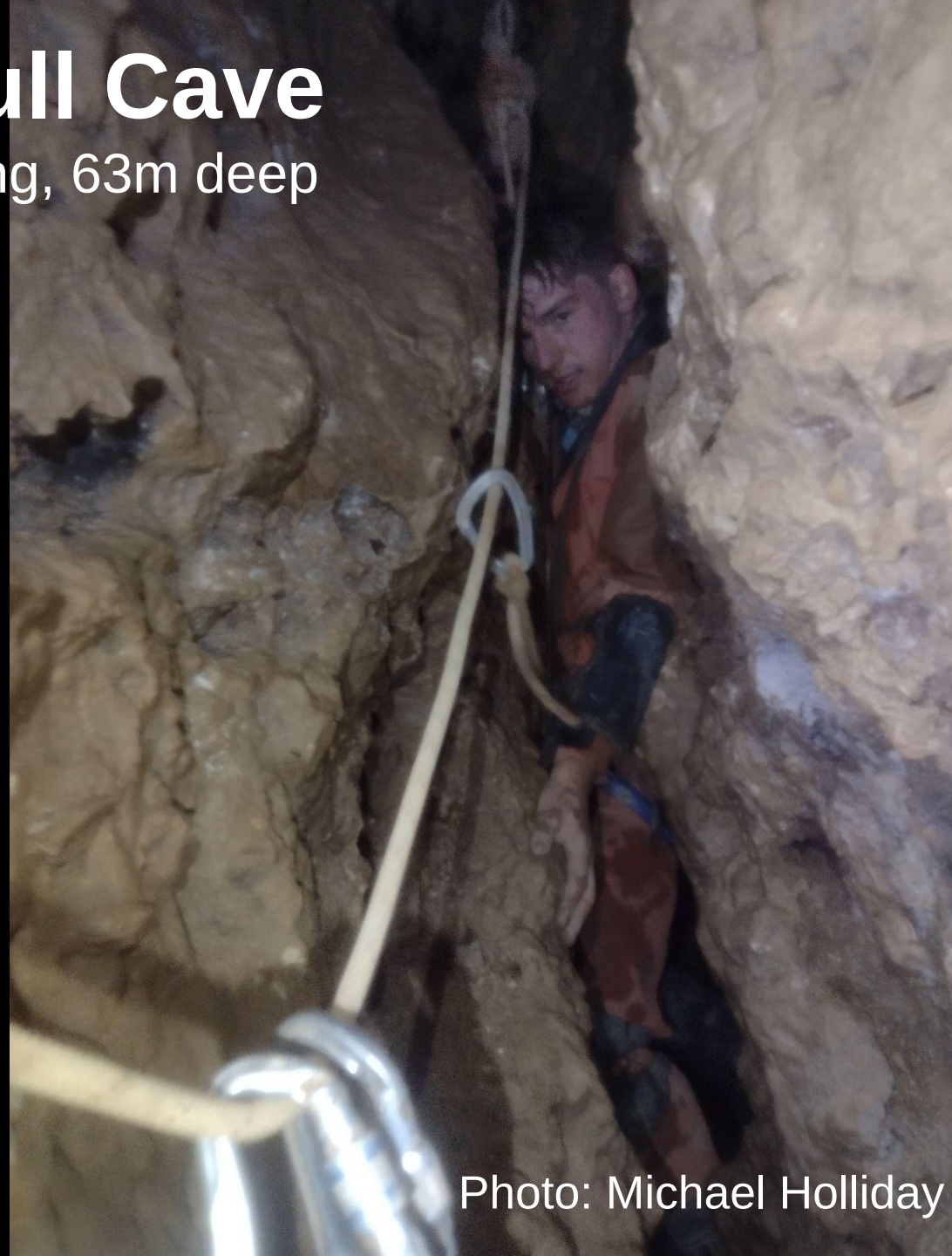


Photo: Michael Holliday

Skull Cave Trips

1st - Michael, Tom, Rocky - capping, hammering

3rd - Ben, Tom - "minimal amount of effort"

4th - Alfie, Sophie - rigged below the squeeze but they
"would suggest more capping" of the squeeze as 5 min to pass

5th - Kai, Steve, Philip, Eoghan - capping, hammering, Steve
drops his descender

6th - Andrew, Steve, Rocky - capping, derigging *"the tight pitch
head is still too tight for most cavers"*

Expedition Aims

- push pitch in Cave of the Singing Pasteur/Bill's Cave (27/9) - could this be a sump bypass giving a dry route to Sistema Verdelluenga (C4)? **DONE + 27/9 DERIGGED**
- revisit upstream in Cave of the Witches Eye (2/7) including
 - Canals on Mars (drysuits) **DONE**
 - Full Moon Rising sump (dive) **DONE**
 - Buy the Ticket, Take the Ride (bolt climb) **DONE**
- connect Tras la Jayada to upstream 2/7 **DONE**
- prospecting for new caves and re-visiting old caves **DONE**
 - Skull Cave - not "wide open by modern standards"
 - Pozu Optimisto ("Mystery Cave") - visited 2x before
 - many others
- the future?

Thanks to the Refugio Vega de Ario



Photo: Bartek Biela

Thanks to the Refugio Vega de Ario



Photo: Becka Lawson



**Thanks to the
Refugio Vega de Ario**

Photo: Bartek Biela



Ario Caves Project 2025

Photo: Bartek Biela

Hidden Earth abstract

This summer we returned once more to northern Spain, to the warm welcome of the Refugio Vega de Ario, for a four week expedition. We quickly connected two significant caves. The massive shaft of Tras la Jayada was linked in to an upstream inlet of Pozu Jultayu, 2/7 (Cave of the Witches Eye). This allowed us to bid a - perhaps not so fond - farewell to our previous approach to this inlet via 27/9 (the Cave of the Singing Pasteur), which wasn't the widest. Now with a relatively easy and spacious way in we could fully equip an underground camp and access leads left decades earlier when this area was far more remote - an undived sump, an enticing hole high in a chamber and Canals on Mars, a deep water streamway. Hear what happened next and the work we did elsewhere - prospecting, re-exploring and some serious capping action.

Tras la Jayada rope damage

Photo: Becka Lawson



Below Niagara Falls Upstream 2/7

Photo: Michael Halliday

