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Lime Tree Formation, Lynn's Cave, Tasmania, Australia (See article on page 29)

system to 44.5km of underground passage. We also found out about some future leads. In total, the expedition explored and surveyed over 30km of new cave in 6 weeks. There are ample prospects for another expedition and many more besides. We all had an excellent time with our Vietnamese friends, and must thank them wholeheartedly for their kindness and hospitality.

Acknowledgments

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Vet Eats Guinea Pig!!!

Being one man's epic story of the 2002 Expedition to Sima Pumacocha, Peru; the attainment of the South American depth record (in the highest significant cave system on Earth) and the commencement of the World's Highest Dig.

by Tony Jarratt

Background

Avid readers of BB 513 will have been overawed by the story of the discovery and part exploration of Sima Pumacocha 2, near Laraos, Yauyos Province, Lima Dept., Peru. Before the rope ran out, a depth of -430 metres was reached with the way on being big, vertical and a trifle damp. The adjacent S.P.3 was descended in one mighty pitch of 120m to a draughting boulder choke. These caves and the neighbouring, unexplored river sink of S.P.1 were first reported by British caver Les Oldham who was doing geological work in the area. BEC export Nick Hawkes, also a prospecting geologist, joined forces with Les and partly descended S.P.2 to find it a "goer". He eventually recruited last year's Anglo/Canadian/Peruvian/Aussie team for the first push into the system, all of whom were impressed enough to return this year together with four new and unsuspecting Mendip men - sacrificial offerings to appease the wrath of the Puma God. Four Peruvian cavers from the CEESPE club in Lima, together with their driver also turned up for a look at the first part of the system and to do some surface recce.

The 2002 Expedition

On 1st September the Mendip "Saga Holidays" team of Rob, Bob, Dany and I arrived at Gatwick in good time for our flight to Atlanta, Georgia - or at least we would have been if it hadn't left three hours earlier. I'm sure that vets are top class in their own profession but never let one indulge in deciphering flight times as the words "departure" and "arrival" can cause confusion. By great good fortune and the patient excellence of Delta Airways staff we were allowed on the midday

flight as standby passengers, but only after a mild panic when a young security lady decided to swab the inside of my tackle bag. The instant production of my explosive licence calmed things down but the dear girl had to scrub her hands several times to avoid contaminating everything in sight!

Another minor panic occurred later on the airplane when a nurse was summoned to attend a small baby, choking and gasping in its mother's arms. Two seats away "baby killer Bradshaw" silently dropped another one ...

Arriving in Atlanta eight hours later, after an excellent flight, we spent a night at the Radisson Hotel and indulged in a light snack at the local Longhorn Steakhouse. Next day a visit was paid to the Coca Cola Museum and the now subterranean original main street of the city advertised as Underground Atlanta. White faces were few and far between in this predominantly black state, somewhat reminiscent of South Africa. Following several fine pints of Guinness at the airport we left that evening for another excellent Delta flight to Lima, arriving there at 11pm local time for a beer, pisco and wine session at Nick's hacienda in La Molina.

An early start next day saw us packing the Rio Tinto Exploration Toyota 4WD pick-up then heading south down the desert lined Pan-American Highway and south east up the stunning Canete valley towards the Cordillera Occidental of the Andes, pausing for an interesting lunch of fried guinea pig and chips (with beer of course) in Lunahauna. Here we basked in the sunshine after having escaped from the gloomy sea mist of the monotonous desert coastline.

After gradually climbing from sea level to 2,850m, we arrived at the Casa de Gerencia near the village of Llapay. Jeny, our attractive hostess, produced a delicious meal (bereft of small, deep fried heads) and then the rest of our team turned up from a rigging trip almost to the bottom of Huanca Gorge. A couple of crates of Cristal cerveza were necked and we climbed gratefully into our clean beds to dream of altitude and glory.

The 4th September saw the stalwart riggers pressing on down to the X-Files Ledge and photographing the known passage while we spent an acclimatisation day investigating potential cave sites in the mountains above Pumacocha. Two short caves near the Yauricocha Mine, high above the picturesque village of Laraos were first looked at. Yauricocha Cave 1, at an altitude of 4,630m. is a 1.5m. diameter by 14.5m. deep pot located at the side of the dirt road leading to the mine. The scenery is rugged and starkly beautiful with spectacularly vertically bedded limestone peaks. Higher, snow capped ranges provide a magnificent background and we were impressed with the fact that the melt water from these feeds both the nearby Pacific and the distant Atlantic via the Amazon Basin. Not quite the roof of the world but bloody close to the attic! The bottom of the pot was choked with rocks and coils of alloy power cable dumped by the mining company. Being some 230m. above the main system it was obviously worth a trial dig so a return was planned with a pulley and hauling rope. (This was done a couple of days later when some 1.5m. of depth was gained after the removal of several coils of wire and a dozen tackle sacks of rock.

A stony, earthen floor was reached but further work could well yield a way on. A bit far for Wednesday nights though). To remind us just where we were a herd of llamas passed by and the herdsman stopped to have a chat with Nick about other potential cave sites. Flurries of hail and snow added to the surreal atmosphere as did the view down valley of a c.70m. high conical limestone pillar. This is actually an Inca prince turned to stone and has the somewhat unfortunate name of Tunshu Wanka.

Continuing over the pass towards the mine we found Y.C.2. A free climbable ramp led to a c.20m. diameter chamber, choked in all directions. One bone was noted but no wall paintings or other archaeological evidence.

Permission was then gained from the heavily armed guards at the mine to drive through the property and recce. a nearby limestone area where the abandoned Mina Exito (Success Mine) and the totally choked Millpoca and Exito Sinks were investigated and written off. To continue the pyrotechnic theme of this expedition a root around in a digging bag found in the mine (I can't help myself) revealed lots of sticks of gelignite which clearly needed a good home but were reluctantly left in situ. The main level had collapsed - or been blown in - after 50m. Much of the spoil from this seemingly extensive lead/silver working had been dumped in the huge Exito Sink doline and will doubtless present future problems as it is on a direct line from Sima Pumacocha to the supposed resurgence at Alis Springs.

We continued our travels past the huge and distinctly eco-unfriendly settling pond of Yauricocha Mine to the lower village of Tinco where sweets and local music tapes (llama shagging tunes I am reliably informed) were purchased. A narrow, high and spectacular limestone canyon was then followed to the boulder choked springs, some 16km. from and 1,000m. lower than the main S.P. sink. More superb gorges were driven through on our way back down to Llapay which we reached after a round trip of 73km. No caves of note had been found apart from the dig site of Y.C.1. In the evening the Peruvian team arrived to share a few beers before heading for their hotel in the village.

Meanwhile Ian had dropped a bag of bolting gear into the raging torrent of the (apparently non PC) Shining Path and was distressed. Rob the owner of the virgin Petzl hammer (35 pounds) was even more distressed. I sell them and was not unduly distressed.

Next day came our baptism of fire in SP2. This magnificent pothole was named after the nearby Pumacocha (Quechua for Mountain Lion Lake). Nick has recently seen puma spoor in the snow here. Leaving the Lima cavers at the entrance to do their own thing, Bob, Dany, Rob, Nick and I braved the howling gale emerging from the cave and abseiled down a series of mind-blowing dry shafts and almost vertical ramps to a horrifically unstable boulder choke at -240m. The thin atmosphere is full of fine mist blown up by the draught from the river inlet at -300m. This was unfortunate for photographers Bob and Dany but fortunate for me as, especially on the 113m. Ammonite Shaft, it reduces the visibility and exposure factor a little! The photographers were

suffering from "depth shock" and wisely stopped at the Shining Path while the three of us continued to the X-Files Ledge where Rob commenced a hairy traverse out above the thundering hell of the Cascadas de Don Jesus in an attempt to pass this c.60m. deep maelstrom. He managed about 20 hard won metres before the noise, exposure, spray and soroche (altitude sickness) got to him. Nick and I could do little but await his return though on the way down I had employed some time to clamber down to the raging torrent below the main inlet for a critically timed "dump". With a sense of extreme relief I doffed harnesses, metalwork and oversuit, etc. to squat above the deluge and, with no book to read, was forced to admire the scenery. If I hadn't already been in the process I would have shat myself as I realised that the coils of "wire" polluting the riverbed were each the nest of several shiny copper detonators. This concentrated my mind on the job in hand - and on watching my steps on completion of the task!

The long drag out was my first experience of prolonged prussiking at such an altitude and I found that it took two to three times longer than the descent with plenty of rests needed. These gave one plenty of time to reflect on the single, thin rope stretching into infinity above and below and only touching the walls near the razor sharp fossils..... I was spat onto the surface at 10pm and by midnight we were about to organize a rescue for Rob when a muffled "Yoh" from the entrance came as a great relief.

On reflecting on this trip we realised that this great pothole was essentially easy and superbly rigged by Mark, Snablet and team using a battery drill rented from an unsuspecting Oxford hire shop. Our lack of acclimatisation and big pitch training (Hunters' Hole after five pints not being quite enough Dany!) caused a few problems and the psychological effects of travelling up and down this awesome hole were not insignificant. Not a bad showing for the Old Mendip Gits though. (Meanwhile the Young Mendip Gits had been getting deservedly stoated in the bars of Llapay).

A rest day followed for some while Nick, complete with bad back, and Snablet returned to push the depths.

Dany drove Matt and I up to Pumacocha where our objective was to survey the 120m. deep free hang of SP3 and attempt to dig a connection through the terminal boulder choke into the main system. At the nearby miners' hut, kindly lent to us by the manager of San Valentin Mine, we changed and had an inspired brew of coca leaf tea with Gatorade - a vivifying drink which I guarantee you can't get in the U.S.A! While sunbathing in my shreddies I was suddenly confronted by the ancient crone who dwelt in a nearby thatched hut and herded llamas. It seems that she was adamant that we were unleashing demons from the cave to create illness in her flock. A bar of melted Hershey chocolate mollified her and she tottered off muttering in Quechua about the attractiveness of practically naked Englishmen.

On the way to the cave we investigated the large, abandoned Mina Ipillo situated above the hut and reached a (blasted?) roof fall after 210m. of 4m. square roadway. I got up and over this for

10m. but was not happy with the air conditions or state of the roof. There is a dodgy way on back down to the main level but no obvious draught. This mine, at 4,462m. a.s.l. was worked for copper, lead, zinc, gold and silver and has left a long embankment of spoil to disfigure the beautiful Pumacocha Valley. The thousands of soles worth of high explosives littering the cave system are obviously derived from here - SPI being located almost at the end of the spoil heap. Matt was by now suffering from the effects of high altitude alcohol excess and swearing never to drink rum again so, taking advantage of the weather, we changed our ambitious plans to the more mellow project of photographing the entrances and running a surface survey from SP2 to SP3 and onwards to five other entrances downstream which we had identified earlier. This was soon accomplished and we then realised that four of these entrances led to an interconnected cave system which we now had no choice but to survey.

Three of these four entrances were protected by drystone walls from the intrusion of animals, the fourth being a steep 3m. drop. Inside we found a pleasant and beautifully scalloped little system which was unfortunately despoiled by rubbish including lengths of plastic pipe, an oil drum, alpaca fleeces, old clothes, a sleeping mat, two 2m. drill steels, coils of power cable and some graffiti dated 1946 or 1996. Most of this clutch had apparently been scrounged or liberated from the nearby mines. Despite the obvious potential there were again no cave paintings or signs of archaeological importance as found in other local rock shelters. The drystone walls and aqueduct on the surface appear to have been originally of great age and later modified by more recent herdsmen and miners. I suspected that this was a pre-Inca, high altitude settlement site as used in the "ayllu" system of taking advantage of all possible ecological niches from sea level to snow line in order to avoid famine in the tribal community. We were soon to find a valuable clue towards proving this.

In the middle of the system we descended a 10m. deep pot whose lip was protected by a drystone wall constructed on a ledge about 1.5m. down. A talus cone at the bottom of the moonmilk lined pot was full of animal skulls, mainly goat. Two impassable, strongly outward draughting holes between deposits of moonmilk and calcite revealed open spaces beyond but bang will be needed to pass these into the presumed connection with the main system. Having good relations with the local mining companies makes this a feasible project and it would not affect any possible archaeological artefacts in the talus cone. On our return to the head of the pot a grotty little bedding plane was noticed behind the ledge and Matt life lined me down to this in order to complete the survey. I crawled in feet first, over a narrow rift, to find it closed down after a couple of metres. On the way out I glanced down at the large stone under my chest to find it staring back! A round headed human skull (not purposefully deformed as were some Inca skulls) lay on its left side, wedged among rocks. A couple of leg (?) bones were noted some 2m. down the narrow rift below and Bob later found a pelvic bone further into the bedding plane when he photographed the find. How the hell this skeleton got here is a mystery but a purposeful cave

burial is most likely. It has the aura of great antiquity so is unlikely to be a victim of Sendero Luminoso terrorists. Other theories of a crushed miner or injured victim of a pit sacrifice expiring on their desperate free climb out are improbable. A burial would add credence to the settlement site theory and it is quite likely that there are other human remains interred in the talus slope or earth floor of the horizontal passages above. Another possibility is that this could be the remains of an ancestral mummy hidden from the Catholic conquistadores who were taking great pains to eradicate the ancient Andean religions. There were no obvious artefacts and the skull was left undisturbed. The alcade (mayor) of Laraos was informed of the discovery but didn't seem particularly excited. An English professor with interests in the region has also been contacted with no reply as yet.

This amazing cave threw one other surprise at us with the arrival of a 1215cm. long humming bird which was either feeding from the walls or scared by our presence from entering its underground nest. Is this a previously unreported cave dwelling species? (Anette Becher informs me that they are well known - another chance to be famous blown out!).

Well satisfied with our day's work we returned to the hut via a 2m. long rock shelter above SPI where a store of drying llama pats was found. With no trees around this is used by the herdsmen for cooking and heating fuel. Our fuel was more "high altitude" tea and beef risotto then rapidly into our grubby sleeping bags.

Nick and Snablet had managed to bottom the Cascadas de Don Jesus pitch to find a steeply descending, boulder floored passage with part of the main river sinking and part running beneath the floor. Yet another pitch halted progress but they were convinced that they had the South American depth record in the bag and after waking us up to inform us of this fact insisted on celebrating it with a dram of Laphraoig which even the now temporarily abstemious Matt was forced to imbibe. Mark and Ian had gone in after them to push on even further, drop more pitches and rejoin the main river "thundering vertically out of the roof" and earning the name "Viagra Falls". They stopped at the head of another pitch and at a depth of c.-580m. Mark described their extensions and the cave in general, as "totally cool". Being Canucks they celebrated with tea!

After a spiffing breakfast of chicken noodle soup and tuna, washed down with more special tea, Matt and I entered SP3 at 9.40am, passed the X-Files Ledge traverse - gobsmackingly exposed and dripping with rebelay - and started our task of surveying the extensions at the top of the boulder slope below the almost deafening Cascadas. We had opted out on surveying the traverse itself until we had figured how the hell to do it. We pressed on around or over house sized boulders in a large gallery festooned with flood deposited detonators hanging high up on the walls and on down Pozo Jeny, named after our hostess. We then swung across the deep Lago Yerlina, dedicated to our vivacious housemaid and then along a short horizontal (!) streamway to the Rolling Thunder pitch. Ahead roared the main river inlet, a wicked place

indeed. The Britney Shakira pitch (pop music appreciating housemaid's baby daughter!) alongside this, led to the current end with a huge and well watered passage/pitch heading off into the gloom. Here we halted the survey and returned to our starting place. I ascended the pitch and traverse, taking the best part of an hour, clutching the end of a 100m. fibron tape and by using walkie talkies we were able to connect the surveys with a single leg of 77m. at an angle of 68 degrees - is this a record? The true record was later revealed when Rob computed the figures to give a depth of 584.1m. and a length of 842.9m. This beat the rival Brazilian cave by c.150m. to easily give us the glory and prove the system as the world's highest cave of significance (but beware Bolivia).

Bob and Rob had that day been on a rope delivery mission to Rolling Thunder but were still suffering from soroche. We were finally spat out of the cave by the draught at midnight after a 15 hour trip which personally tested me to my limits. Matt was dissuaded from burning his SRT kit and we put our brains into neutral ready for the de-rigging which was becoming imminent. An inch of snow on the surface added to the fun as we drove back down the vertiginous dirt track to a clean bed in Llapay.

A heavy rainstorm heralded the following day which we dedicated to eating, drinking and reading while Mark and Snablet did the final pushing trip to reach a roomy sump beyond two more pitches with only a couple of metres of rope to spare. The final depth was -638m. and length 931 m. They reported a possible desperate climb up one wall to a large, draughting passage which will probably bypass the sump. They commenced de-rigging but soon became knackered and headed out to well deserved glory and beer.

While they were scampering up the equivalent of two Pen Hill Masts with a river inside the rest of us were manfully doing our duty for public relations by necking vast quantities of beer and dancing the night away with the local lovelies at Jeny's bar in Llapay. The pyrotechnic theme continued with an exploding paper and cane bull which a local character put on his back before it was lit by a well wisher. The assorted fireworks distributed about the body of the bull burst into action and our man rushed around Llapay's singular street to good effect before he was incinerated creating havoc, hilarity and a spate of drunken photography. Home made rockets, a selection of local piss heads and another infusion of ale kept most of the BEC contingent going until the early hours. A memorable night.

De-rigging day saw your scribe "as grumpy as an Easton taxi driver" and I was dragged, kicking and screaming up to the Mina Ipillo hut a couple of hours before following Nick, Matt and Ian down the cave. This lonely, hungover trip was enlivened by a nearly fatal epic partway down Ammonite Pot when I fortuitously noted that I had clipped my short cowstail around the maillon instead of inside it. Top tip - always utilise BOTH cowstails!!! At the Shining Path oxbow, just below the main river inlet I found a large orange poly. bivvy bag left for my salvation by fellow drunk Matt and clambered in replete with life saving Russian carbide generator to keep warm

while I awaited the de-riggers. After two and a half hours of fitful sleep in the all pervading thunder I ran out of available carbide and retreated to the bottom of the Huanca Gorge to report my colleagues' non arrival and the possibility of their being flooded in by rain and snow melt. Rob and Bob were the recipients and they also had absolutely no desire to suffer the X-Files traverse in search of the late comers though Rob, suffering from a nasty, infected sore on his ankle caused by a rubbing foot loop, unselfishly volunteered to go and look for them. After waiting for an hour I heard Nick's voice emanating from the boulder choke - a great relief to both me, Rob, Bob (sciatica in the hip) and three oblivious partygoers back down in Llapay. All eventually staggered out to the surface between the hours of 1 and 7 am to meet the redoubtable Juan who had dossed down in the Toyota all night in order to ferry emerging cavers the short distance back to the hut. He deserves a medal.

Next day the Mendip contingent left for the fleshpots of Lima leaving the honour of de-rigging to the colonials and ex-pats. On our last night Les turned up with a barrel of tasty Peruvian draught beer having the (hardly mouth watering) name of Colon. So ended our hols. All agreed that though bloody hard work it had been a memorable experience. The scenery, people, food and beer were all first class and the ladies, Jeny and Yerlina, had done us proud. Our absent sponsor, Don Jesus Arias Davila deserves our greatest thanks for his generosity as does Sofia Hawkes and her housemaid for their hospitality. Nick's bosses at Rio Tinto and Juan "Diablo" are absolute stars. Muchas gracias.

I am told that there is a horizontal cave in the jungle that needs investigating.

Anacondas, tarantulas, cocaine running terrorists, malaria and alligators abound. Sounds great Nick - book us up!

The Team

Nick Hawkes (BEC - U.K. & Peru), Les Oldham (ex NSG - U.K. & Peru), Matt Tuck (BEC - U.K. & Canada), Rob Harper (BEC - U.K.), Dany Bradshaw (BEC - U.K.), Bob Cork (BEC - U.K.), Tony Jarratt (BEC - U.K.), Pete "Snablet" McNab (BEC U.K.), Ian McKenzie (ASS - Canada), Mark Hassell (BCSF & ASS - Australia & Canada), Juan "Diablo" Castro (Rio Tinto - Peru), Carlos Morales Bermudez, Rolando Carascal Miranda, Samuel Arias Mansial and James Cuentas Alvarado (all CEESPE - Peru), Robert Luis Bejarand (driver - Peru).

Ed. Photographs and surveys from the expedition will appear in the next BB.

Caving in Tasmania, Australia

by Phil (MadPhil) Rowsell