

Imperial College Caving Club (RCC 106)  
Spring tour report  
Sardinia 2011  
27th March - 3rd April



## 1 Summary

The caving club's spring tour was held on 27th March – 3rd April 2011, and was attended by 10 members. It was a great success with lots of caving completed, including a 5 man underground camp which we kept occupied for a total of 4 nights (two 5 man teams for 2 nights each). The caves in Sardinia are truly spectacular and well worth a visit, with intricate crystal formations, majestic underground lakes, and absolutely massive chambers that dwarf anything in the UK. We managed to take quite a few photos underground, and are in the process of compiling an English guide to Su Palu (the cave we camped in) that will hopefully be of use to the caving community.

## 2 Aims and Objectives

The main aims of the tour was for members to experience the caves of Sardinia, and to give our newer members their first chance to cave outside of the UK and to camp underground. Overall, all the aims were successfully fulfilled, with every member on the tour camped underground for two nights. It certainly was a curious experience to be cut off from any natural light for 60 hours!

Our decision to set up an underground camp deep within the Su Palu cave system also enabled us to experience much more of the cave than would otherwise be possible. Though we are by no means the first UK visitors to the cave, few English route descriptions exist for the passages beyond camp ('El Alamein') as most parties are forced to turn back due to time constraints. However, camping underground enabled us to get to the far reaches of the system. This was extremely rewarding, as many of the most beautiful formations and cathedral-esque chambers were found here. (Another convenient consequence of half our party camping underground for most days meant that we managed to save on above ground accommodation and rent 5 person villa instead!)

## 3 Tour diary

### 3.1 27th March

Miraculously, everyone turned up at stores on time (Myles wins the almost-didn't-make-it prize for collecting his passport from the post office a mere 10 minutes before closing, after having to persuade them to give it to him as it was unaddressed.). Spent a chaotic hour shoving everything into rucksacks and desperately trying to even the load out to get everyone to <16kg.

Bus 52 to Victoria station, then took a Terravision bus from Green Line terminal to Stansted. Promptly deposited ourselves around a passport photo booth, cracked out the rollmats and grabbed some shuteye.



Figure 1: Sleep at Stansted before flight

Unceremoniously woken up ~4am by Thomas Cook lady for blocking their baggage check in area. Checked in ourselves and made it through security with nary a hitch. All half-asleep but most importantly on the plane to Sardinia!

At Alghero airport, Jarv and Gergely collected their Fiat Bravas, and after a quick pepper up of €1 espressos and croissants we crammed ourselves and our baggage into the cars. Divided ourselves into two groups which more or less remained our caving teams:

Team Dysfunctional/Vomit: Jarv, Kate, Thomas MCW, William, Clare

'The Boys': Gergely, Myles, Niko, Eric, Jean

Drive to Baunei was OK, with Thomas helping to navigate in front while Kate, Clare and William suffered from varying degrees of carsickness in the back. Moment of hilarity when, without warning, William vomited his peanut butter spaghetti out of the window and onto the front step of someone's home. We drove off pretty quickly.

The apartment/villa was only officially booked for 5 (since half of us would be camping underground most of the time), so The Boys (i.e. Jean) was given the task of sorting things out with the owner while Team Vom was in full stealth mode. So we headed to the beach at Santa Maria Navarrese instead. Jarv, Clare and William chillaxed on the sand, while Thomas cracked out his shortie wetsuit + snorkel and joined Kate in the sea for a swim.

Soon we received word from the boys that the coast was clear for our appearance in Baunei, though they had punctured a tyre and were 'taking care of it'. We wound our way through the mountain roads as the boys changed their tyre, and met up in the middle of Baunei. Quick discussion and it

was decided that we'd swap William for Eric, who'd show us the way to the villa while Gergely's car paid the big supermarket in Tortoli a visit (everywhere else closed on Sunday).



Figure 2: View of Baunei from our balcony

Kate and Thomas almost immediately found the beds, while Eric, Jarv and Clare spent a civilised evening out on the balcony sipping Nido-ed tea. Sometime then Jarv realised he lost his phone, and fretted for the rest the week. Oh dear. Boys eventually returned with food, and Thomas promptly took charge of a supper of pasta. Tired from travelling, bed soon after.

### 3.2 28th March



Figure 3: Breakfast on villa balcony

Late start to the day. Epic breakfast of mushroom + smoked cheese omelette, various cheeses, layers of prosciutto, preserved sausage, vine tomatoes and bread. Loads of faffing follows as we try to locate random items in people's rucksacks and pack for underground camp. Eventually we are ready to leave with 9 tacklesacks for a 5 man camp.

Baunei is about 17km from the Su Palu/Codula di Luna turnoff, and the carpark is a further 13km or so down the road, next to a bridge over the river running through the Luna valley. We took our time changing, underground for 5pm.



Figure 4: Entrance gate 'squeeze'

The first pitch is about 5 mins from the entrance (which is gated but with a massive body-sized hole to squeeze through) and is down a sloping rift that narrows as you descend but is nowhere near tight. This leads to a massive chamber with plenty of boulder hopping, at the bottom of which you encounter a stooping, at times crawly stream passage.

Follow the stream to the 'duck' – the water is cold but refreshing, with plenty of airspace (i.e. a hands and knees job, not on your back). The route to camp is now marked with helpful reflective arrows so route finding is a piece of piss.



Figure 5: Dammed calcite cascade at start of Alta Loma passage

We pass through pretty chamber after pretty chamber, with stunning calcite dams, emerald pools, plenty of stal and delicate crystals. Soon we arrive at the White Nile, whereupon we bypass the cascades by taking the high level route which starts with a handlined climb to the right. It's permanently rigged, with bolts that appear to be comfortingly new/shiny. Traverse, pitch with deviation, traverse, pitch takes you right into the White Nile. Following the water takes you directly to Lago (massive underground lake!) and El Alamein (camp).



Figure 6: 'Lago' – huge underground lake, confluence of 2 rivers

At camp we say hello to the three Italians (Toddy, Claudia & Mauro) camping there for the night, and start to unpack our tacklesacks while waiting for Gergely & co. to arrive. Camp is essentially a massive underground beach, and is stocked with old roll mats, poly bags, 3 lilos, some tins of fish, etc. We hang around for a brew with the boys and help them set up camp, but time's ticking and we soon have to start making our way out.



Figure 7: Quick brew while setting up camp

Exit is surprisingly quick, despite Kate almost overheating to the point of heat exhaustion. Thomas

spots some wild rosemary by the road on the drive back; quick post-midnight dinner of pasta before bed. Great days caving, really whetted our appetites for underground camp in a couple of days.

### 3.3 29th March

Surprise surprise, ICCC on tour = another faffy morning. We finally managed to get our arses in gear and pack some rope for Su Spiria in the Luna valley, on back of the recommendation from the Italians and after overruling Thomas protests.

Caving gear on our backs, we began an absolutely lovely walk down the valley, mostly staying near the river though sometimes poking up the hill to search for the Spiria entrance. Unfortunately all our efforts were in vain, though we did pass a really cool wooden bridge built into the side of the valley wall, and a comedy green metal stile over a dam of fallen tree trunks. Eventually we succumbed to the heat, gave up on finding the entrance, and jumped into the river for swims instead.

Drove to the Sisa supermarket in Tortoli to stock up on villa + UG camp supplies in the evening. Stayed up late talking, as we downed plenty of pots of tea + bottles of wine.



Figure 8: At the bottom of the pitch to Disneyland

Meanwhile, the other team were busy underground finding the way to Disneyland.

### 3.4 30th March

Woke up, packed our daren drums for camp, and cooked some lunch in anticipation of The Boys return. They eventually got back ~2pm looking decidedly grimier and we shared a meal and quizzed them for info. Started pouring so we hung around the villa waiting for the rain to let up before setting off.

Speedy trip to camp, familiarity with the route meant we reached camp easily. Kate immediately found the comf, splaying herself on all 5 sleeping bags; William located the gameboy and started playing Super Mario. Jarv and Clare headed down to the Blue Nile to collect water, while Thomas started preparing his underground feast that included pancetta and dried mushrooms.



Figure 9: Huge boulder slope in Lilliput

Delicious supper later, Jarv, Clare and Thomas went to recon the next day's route through Lilliput (till 'Morgan Tesoro'), trusting Kate and William not to kill each other in our absence. Lilliput was absolutely ginormous, with some really cool passages. Back after a quick bumble to Tesoro di Morgan. More saucepans of tea (is there anything better than Nido tea underground?), sat around chilling in our thermals and barefoot, before bed + Blackadder. Sleep ~2+am.



Figure 10: Night time at El Alamein camp

### 3.5 31st March

Alarm rang at 10am. William was the first to get out of the comfort of the sleeping bags, and cooked us a breakfast of soup sachets with ~300g of peanuts to justify his bringing a kilo of it down. It was edible enough, I guess..



Figure 11: Calcite flowstone and grotto in Lilliput series

After shrugging on our sweaty, wet, sandy furies and gear we set off for Disneyland. Route finding was mostly OK with only minor hiccups, helped by Gergely's route descriptions in the logbook. It's a cracking trip, marred only by the extreme warmth of the cave. Really good variety, with boulder hopping, some climbs, some rope work, and plenty of pretties to look at.

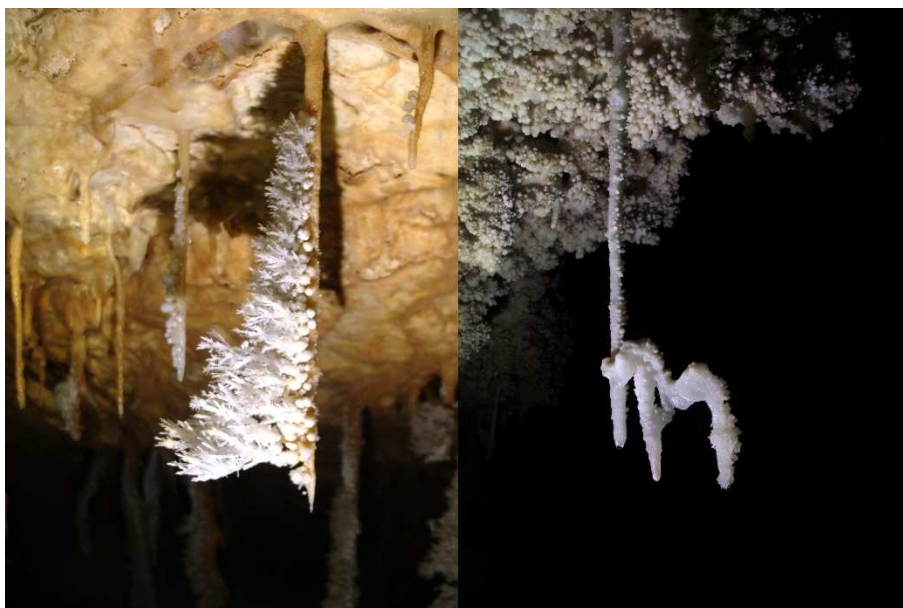


Figure 12: Pretties in Disneyland





Figure 13: Disneyland; White Nile

Took loads of photos; Nice relaxed pace back to camp – such a joy not to have to worry about getting back to the surface for a callout time, or to rush back to London!

Super sweaty after the day's caving, so we went for swims in the lake and washed in the river.

More fishy soupy pasta and cous cous for supper, yums. Cola bottles also worked a treat as it staved off our hunger while dinner cooked. Thomas was in bed straight after dinner and never quite managed to leave it till the next morning, but the rest of us sat around drinking more tea, the most amazing hot chocolate (copious amounts of Nido + water + chocolate block) and relaxing in the luxury of camp.

### 3.6 1st April

10am alarm was promptly switched off and ignored by most till about noon. We were just lazing around drinking tea and eating breakfast as the boys sans Jean arrived. Should have realised they were planning something when we noticed a huge time lapse between first spotting their lights and their actual appearance at camp, but being the trusting folk we are we fell right for their April Fools joke (Jean's 'broken leg', €500 parking ticket)!



Figure 14: Terminal chamber of Mordor - Shelob's lair?

We all sat around faffing for a bit, drinking more hot chocolate and eating more food. Soon it was time for some caving action. Thomas, Kate and William were ready to head out, so they took the car keys and made their way out with some of the camp gear, while Jarv and Clare joined Gergely, Niko, Myles and Eric on a trip to Mordor and Sand Creek. Great trip with plenty of laughs, and Niko's now classic rendition of 'Where have all the flowers gone?' that only gets more hilarious each time he belts it out...



Figure 15: Last meal at camp

Back at camp, we quickly de-camped as Gergely prepared a delicious meal of soupy meaty cheesy smash and sweet, milky coffee. Relaxed trip out as Jarv + Nico took plenty of photos and we made videos of the duck near the entrance. Jarv was a real trooper/pervert as he re-entered the cold water 5 times to shoot videos of each of us passing through the duck! (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxCWClxV0S0> )

Soon we were ascending the first pitch of Su Palu for the last time, and before long we were back at the car park, where Kate William and Thomas weren't looking thrilled at having spent the last 3 hours with nowt to do!

Back at the villa Jean had prepared a pasta dinner as his farewell gift to us, since he was leaving pre-dawn the next morning. Espresso shots of Mirto, lots of wine, good times.

### 3.7 2nd April

Our last full day in Sardinia after a superb week. Unanimous vote for a relaxing day at the beach. Headed to the Santa Maria beach first, where rather miraculously Jarv found his phone half buried in the sand, completely intact save for a flat battery. He was very happy.

Then we went to a nicer stretch of beach 5 minutes up the road for a lovely day. Biscuits and chocolate in the sun, swims in the sea, Nerf ball, lazing in the sand, and general goofing around.



Figure 16: Last day at the beach

Massive barbeque on the villa balcony at night for our last big end to a fantastic tour. More decadence, more espresso shots of Mirto, excellent toasts/speeches from Nico and Eric, more bottles of wine, more music whilst star gazing.

Around 11 we remembered we had to leave in 6 hours for our flight at Alghero, and we still had a villa to clean and kit to pack. Those sober enough to stumble around did the best we could, washing up and cleaning before sneaking in a few hours of sleep.

### 3.8 3rd April

Gergely's alarm rang at 3:45am, and we spent an hour rushing about downing tea + coffee and finishing up in the villa. Then we set off in the dark for the 3 hour drive back to the airport. William started vomiting about half an hour into the journey and his plastic bag started leaking; it was swiftly double bagged. He kept his plastic bags of joy all the way to the airport, we kept our windows down for a good portion of the journey.

Journey back to South Ken went smoothly as we retraced our steps from a week ago. Dumped rucksacks in stores, cycled home, hot bath, deleted a week's worth of emails, then slept till midnight :)

## 4 Finances

This is the expenditure breakdown for the tour (EUR converted to GBP where applicable):

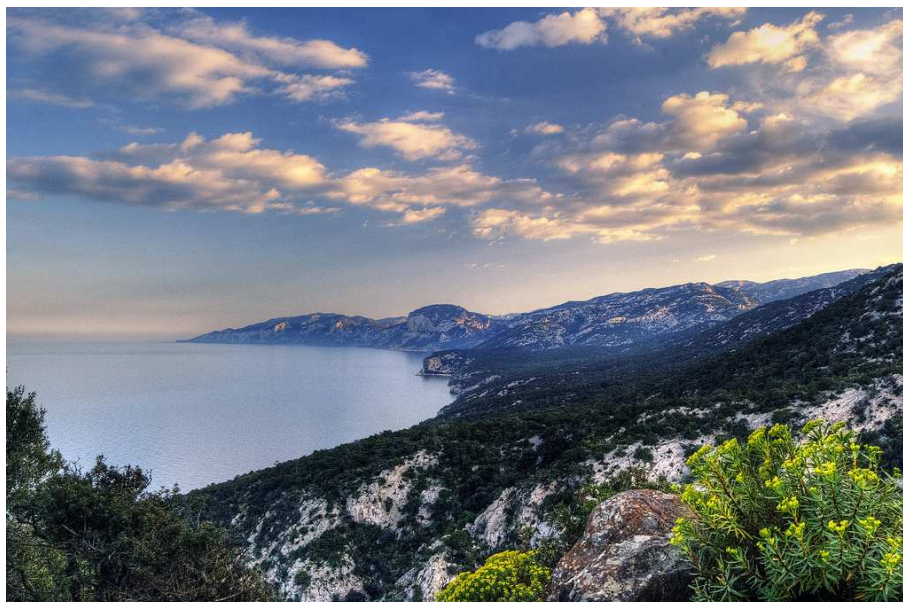
Item	Unit price	No. of Units	Total Cost	Budget head
Flights (London <> Alghero)	£81.98	10	£819.80	Travel
Car hire	£164.60	2	£329.20	Travel
Diesel for cars	£141.90	1	£141.90	Travel
Car tyre replacement	£68.80	1	£68.80	Travel
Bus tickets (to and from Stansted)	£14.00	10	£140.00	Travel
Villa rental	£215.00	1	£215.00	Ground hire
Food (pp pd)	£5.48	80	£438.20	Hospitality
Misc underground camp equipment (gas, freezer bags, etc.)	£17.09	1	£17.09	Consumables
TOTAL			£2169.99	

## 5 Conclusion

The tour was a undeniable success, with wonderful caving and good times had by all. Sardinia is definitely a caving destination worth visiting! The caves are generally horizontal with a bit of vertical ropework needed, and extremely well decorated – quite possibly the prettiest caves many of us have seen. Camping underground was an amazing experience, no doubt helped by the relative luxury of our camp.

Logistics for the trip were simple enough to arrange, though it would have worked out to be much more expensive had we not saved on accommodation costs by camping underground.

Sardinia itself is also a great holiday destination, with lots of stunning walks, great weather, beaches and breathtaking scenery.



More photos can be found on our website at [http://www.union.ic.ac.uk/rcc/caving/photo\\_archive/tours/2011%20-%20sardinia/dirindex.html](http://www.union.ic.ac.uk/rcc/caving/photo_archive/tours/2011%20-%20sardinia/dirindex.html) – they were too numerous to include here! More content (guides, logbook extracts, reports, etc) will also be uploaded in due course.