

# Imperial College Caving Club

## Sardinia Tour March 2007



This is intended as an update and supplement to the excellent SMCC Expedition Journal, which provided almost all of our guidance (Shepton Mallet Caving Club Journal, Series Nine, Number One, Autumn 1991, Sardinia Expedition). It is available from the SMCC for photocopying costs. If you have difficulty finding a copy (or are outside Britain), please get in touch with us by email and we can try to sort something out.

A week is more than enough time to explore these cave systems – we hope that this supplement will enable you to spend more time underground and less time driving or looking for entrances!

**Budget:** With 14 tour members, the total cost for one week was approximately £100 per person for food, villa and car hire. We flew with Ryanair to Alghero, generally for around £60. Car hire was with Avis, they charged us an additional £80 for under-25 drivers but didn't mention it until we returned the cars.

**Logistics:** We stayed in Ilgoli (3hr drive from airport) occupying all 14 spaces of a two-flat villa (<http://www.sardegnavacanze.com/>). We should have stayed much nearer the caves – we had a 2hr drive each way each day. The two caving areas of the Eastern Nuoro province that we visited are the Luna and Lanaitio valleys. There is a cave hut next to Su Bentu. If staying in a villa, Oliena would provide excellent access to the Lanaitio valley, Urzulei for the Luna. There were large supermarkets in Orosei. Stanford's (Covent Garden) provided 1:200'000 scale maps of the area, which we used as general road-maps.

The Luna valley has an absolutely fine tarmac (asphalt) road all the way down to a pleasant parking spot 10 minutes walk from Su Palu. The Lanaitio valley was being worked on while we were there – but is currently only metalled until the cement works, from which there is a 90 minute walk to Su Bentu. Beyond the cement works, the path is partially hardcore, partially mud. Perfectly navigable during dry weather by a two-wheel drive with reasonable ground clearance – but our Mercedes didn't like it!

Teams explored the majority of the large Tiscali and Su Bentu caves as well as around half of Su Palu; as well as lesser caves for which the SMCC description was sufficient.

### Grotta Tiscali:

**Lat / Long:**                      **N40°14'12.9" E009°29'08.5"**                      **Accuracy +-6m**                      **WGS84 Datum**

30cm Red paint spot described in SMCC report entirely absent; a large stone cairn we built just off the track had vanished two days later. I suspect the Grotta Monumental farmer or his goats does not like people to find this cave.

Follow track beyond Su Bentu 'Casa' cave hut, across concrete block bridge (watch your car underside!), and meander through light forest, grabbing a choice branch of Rosemary to take home for the pot. At some point you do a hard right turn, then meander on further. Path eventually joins (dry) river bed; up on East bank is a seemingly recently constructed series of dry-stone wall enclosures. Probably best to park car here unless experienced with off-road hill driving!

Path then goes up valley, meandering along approximately south, gaining a fair bit of altitude. Tiscali is just below the road about 50m before it zigzags up to the obvious Grotta Monumental, which had a dry-stone hut (with solar panels!) and goat herd stationed within it.

A wire fence was present along this stretch of the path, between 2 and 20 metres from the road side. For the actual Tiscali 80m pitch, the fence was absent. The drop is hidden amongst the trees; take care when clambering!

The pitch can most easily be rigged using the through bolts, which are fairly new and well placed. There are just enough spits to rig the pitch but if you want to use spits, a bolting hammer wouldn't be a bad idea as many of the existing ones are just horrendous. Those which have been marked with red paint are clearly unsafe but we were forced to use some of these as backups for the good bolts. Also, the main hang in the pitch could do with a rebelay halfway down as a straight hang leads the rope over some rub points. Rubbing can be averted by keeping on one side of the pitch whilst on the rope but wouldn't recommend this for SRT novices.

The pitch can be rigged starting in a small hole just to the left of the very large hole (when standing on the south side). The descent of the first ledge can be done round the tree root by the small hole, backed up by a nearby tree. A generous sling is needed here to avoid rubbing the rope on the rock below the root. After this, there is a single 'good' bolt which we rigged as a first rebelay. The next bolt is a rebelay to the main hang. Again there is a single 'good' bolt and a myriad of old spits with red painted circles. Would definitely recommend a second bolt here to make a decent Y hang over such a terrifying drop!

### **Su Bentu:**

Extremely easy to find; follow path around cave hut wall. SMCC description very detailed indeed; though the way on once reaching the lakes is to head upstream; meander up the passage after the third SRT rope. If you find yourself in a large gour chamber walking down towards sumps; you've gone the wrong way - though it is very interesting to look at for its own benefit!

The entrance scaffolding ladder is entirely absent, entrance pitch was rigged with large sling material tied around block, 10m of traverse line to a bolt backed up with a normal sling passed through an eye-hole, offering a ~8m drop to a ledge from which there is an easy climb down.

First climb up gour slope had a rather weathered hand-line in situ.

Once at the chaos, the rigging is rather unpleasant - not for SRT. Some time spent re-bolting would be a great idea.

With approx 40m rope, on slope covered with fine sand 2 slings were chained to form a backup through an eye-hole in rift; then a bolt re-belay allowed gentle walk down slope to lead around corner and find through-bolt for 4m hang to slope from which there is an easy climb down. Should be a bolt further up the slope to prevent nasty rub when going around the corner.

An approx. 40m rope was used with large sling to form traverse to large window, where stretching above led to Y-hang from two bolts, walking descent of very steep ramp to place deviation after ~6m from longish sling passed through eye-hole, then further 6m descent of ramp to overhang where bolt around the corner allows 5m drop to floor.

Misc slings and a ~20m hand line were used within the lakes to gain the Sahara.

All gear squeezed into one rather heavy tackle sac!

### **Su Palu:**

Ignore the SMCC location description! From the Luna valley car park, follow the obvious path north, along the east bank of the (active) river. After ten minutes, when you come approximately parallel to a canyon on the opposite side of the river, there is a path splitting off to the right which completes three quick zig-zags to gain ten metres of height and arrive at the yellow-gate of the entrance.

Entrance pitch was found to be permanently rigged with OK rope. Requires approx. 30m rope, y-hang from permanent hangers, rebelay after 4m to stal boss, further rebelay 10m down rift/slope.

Route finding is too complex to attempt a description. Red Dots seem to mark survey points; black arrows (including ones with 'C' next to them - 'Continuare'?) generally point the way in, black arrows with 'U' or 'Us' stand for Uscita (Exit). Scoured white arrows in the calcite generally pointed to the exit.

Much fun to be had learning the way; amazing formations scattered around, one lovely chamber with beautiful calcite bridges across clear pools, surrounded by flow-stone, delicate helicitites & all the other mites to be had!

9m Cascade was rigged with 50m rope; bolt on right wall forming start of traverse a couple of pools back from the lip, rebelay with sling on natural on left wall to protect as you climb above the waterfall to find a pleasant ledge to stand on while choosing the least two dodgy bolts, before rebelaying to bolt after 4m, then straight hang to bounce-traverse around wall (deep pool, amongst spray). Climb up into warm place to wait on left (main passage now very cold). Further on can rebelay to green permanent hanger in cascade pool as hand line. Significant amount of water going down these cascades while we were there - one group was halted here after a day of rain. Wetsuit fully recommended.

Above you notice permanently rigged SRT ropes. I suspect that the current way of passing this (other than the SMCC recommendation of using a ladder, which is clearly suicidal in anything other than summer drought) is to climb well above the pitch and find a high-level traverse; you can see permanently rigged short-pitches and traverses above the lower cascades.

Bolts around the 9m cascade are horrific; badly placed, not fully inserted, rusted without proper clearing of undulations around the area. Bolting hammer fully recommended - our method was still nowhere near ideal.

Once at the obvious, enormous, lake; backing up the Nile finds the clamber up in El Alamain and the disused camp. Dubious canned meat products present, a football & room in the soft sand to play a good game! Way on to Disneyland was not found. Unfortunately the only photo trip turned back at the cascade.