Polish Chapter of The Explorers Club

Polish Expedition „Rapa Nui – Juan Fernandez 2001”

Organizer:
Polish Alpine Association, Commission of Speleology

Patronage:
The Flag of The Explorers Club, N.Y., Aeroclub Nowy Targ

Cooperation:
Jagiellonian University, Universidad de Chile, Polish Association of Latin-American Studies, Board of Chilean National Parks

Place and time:
Easter Island and Robinson Crusoe Island (Nov. 21- Dec. 21. 2001).
We flew from Warsaw to Santiago with British Airways, to Easter Island with LanChile Airways, and to Robinson Crusoe Island – with private airways LASSA. Reconnaisance trip to Diego de Almagro Island on board a motor yacht „Foam” rented in Puerto Natales (captain Luis Conrado Alvarez Diaz).

Participants:
1. Dr Andrzej Ciszewski, FI’99 - leader, 2. Michał Ciszewski, 3. Dr Agnieszka Gajewska, 4. Henryk Nowacki, 5. Lesław Oprowski, 6. Krzysztof Recielski, 7. Prof. dr Zdzisław Jan Ryn, FI’98 – science leader, 8. Magdalena Slupinska, 9. Piotr Slupinski, 10. Wieslaw Wilk, 11. Ewa Wojcik, 12. Wladyslaw Vermessy – sports leader, 13. Igor Miloszewski, 14. Grzegorz Gaj, 15. Andrzej Tylenda.

Easter Island (24.11. – 1.12.2001)

The goal of the expedition was the exploration of the caves situated in cliffs and rock walls, which according to our findings, has not been the subject of exploratory or documentary activities.

In the course of our consultations with the director of the Easter Island Institute at the University of Chile in Santiago, it turned out that the Institute is not in possession of any monographic study which would be devoted to the island caves, including those most easily accessible ones. For the activity which had been undertaken in this respect up until then had a purely adventure-like quality and was often carried out by tourists, or else by informal groups of speleologists who did not pass on any documents to the Institute. In this situation, after prior consultation with the Institute, we embarked on a systematic exploration of the island, combined with localization of the openings and measuring the caves.

We carried out the (GPS) measurements of cave openings, marked their localization and subsequently drew up charts for various regions of the island.

1. ROIHO lava field

It is a region displaying the greatest density of underground caves which are easily accessible and which must have constituted a social background for the original inhabitants of

the island. In some caves we came across traces of man's presence: animal and human bones, traces of fires and human skulls lined up on rock shelves. This may point out to other than traditional funereal practices of the original inhabitants of the island.

With the consent of CONAF (Forest National Commission), every cave opening which had been examined was assigned a consecutive inventory number. We had drawn up charts for nearly 20% of the surface area of this territory.

2. The region of the POIKE volcano

The ANA O KEKE cave which is localized in this region, has been known for some time. In the cliff walls descending to the Pacific, one can detect numerous cave openings. Altogether 6 descents (each some 100 m long) have been carried out. This made it possible to access a dozen or so openings leading to small caves.

3. External walls of the RANO RARAKU volcano

A number of openings, one of which of considerable size which is connected with the local legend , are visible in the wall of the volcano. We descended down a 150 m high vertical wall. The opening leads on to a vast niche without any traces of human activity.

4. The cliff of the ROIHO lava field

In order to check whether the caves situated on the ROIHO lava field have their continuation in the walls descending to the Pacific, we penetrated a section of the cliff in this area. We explored several openings leading on to small caves.

A team of divers carried out a number of underwater explorations in several areas of the island. The most interesting underwater caves were located in the formations of the youngest volcano Hiva Hiva.

All in all, documentation relating to the total length of around 2300 m of cave corridors has been completed, whereas cave openings have been localized in the GPS system. The openings of the charted caves were marked discreetly with white paint. The documentation relating to the entire exploratory activity is currently being prepared and will subsequently be sent to the Easter Island Institute (Instituto Estudios Isla de Pascua, Director: Dr. Patricia Vargas) at the University of Chile in Santiago. Apart from drafting cave plans, their openings will be marked on the map of the island on the basis of the IPS/GIS system. In the future, documentation relating to all findings on the island should be prepared in accordance with this standard. Following the presentation of the results of our explorations in the Easter Island Institute, we came across extremely favorable opinions concerning our work and we accepted the proposition of more intensive international cooperation in this respect. Although the island is visited by thousands of tourists annually, its underground world still requires further intensive research.

A team of paragliders carried out a series of individual flights, as well as tandem flights on an engine propelled paraglider. Photographic and video camera documentation of the island's main archeological sites has been performed. The most spectacular flights were performed over the Rano Raraku volcano as well as over the Ahu Tongariki archeological complex. Several inhabitants of the island took advantage of our offer and took part in tandem passenger flights on the motor-propelled paraglider. According to the islanders, in this way the legend of „man-bird" has finally become realized. In the process of realization of paraglider flights over the island, we took advantage of the kind assistance and cooperation of meteorological and logistic services of the Mataveri airport.

Robinson Crusoe Island (3.12.-10.12.2001)

We reached the island by three separate flights from Santiago on board a light plane belonging to a private airline LASSA. Having reached the island, it turned out that a strike of the personnel of National Parks (CONAF – Comisión Nacional Forestal) had just begun. In connection with this, a ban on any movement on the territory of the national park, including the area of our planned activity, had been issued. The local authorities did not respect the formal permission granted to us by the CONAF headquarters in Santiago to carry out our research. Consequently we were able to conduct our exploratory activity on a limited scale. We limited our search to two areas in the central region of the island on the slopes descending from the highest summit of the island EL YUNGUE.

The cave openings we had explored, in the majority of cases for the first time, were usually a few to a dozen or so meters long. We also conducted an exploration of cave openings along the vertical walls of the island accessible exclusively from the sea (during the exploratory island cruise). The team of divers also carried out underwater exploration along the shores in the San Juan Bautista and Puerto Ingles regions.

On the basis of the conducted research, one can state that on the Robinson Crusoe Island underground caves are probably smaller in size than those on the Easter Island. Yet, the above conclusion would seem to require further exploration in more favorable conditions.

The flights on the paraglider over the island are extremely difficult due to sudden changes of atmospheric conditions, strong winds and very limited possibilities of a safe landing.

Exploratory Cruise around the Diego de Almagro Island in Patagonia (12.12.-18.12.2001)

We conducted the exploration of the Diego de Almagro Island in a 5-member team in the region of the Patagonian Archipelago. In the course of three days, amid difficult atmospheric conditions we had reached the island having sailed along the canals and fiords from Puerto Natales (around 300 km) on board a rented motor yacht. In this totally uninhabited region, one can come across numerous virgin islands. On the Diego de Almagro Island one can come across vast limestone and marble formations with numerous caves. It is to this region that we are currently preparing our next expedition which will take place in the year 2003.

Before commencing our field activity, Dr. Z.J. Ryn had participated in the Congress of Chilean Psychiatry in Pucón, where he delivered a lecture on the behavior of the human brain at high altitudes. He continued his research on the traditional medicine of the local population on both islands.

Grzegorz Gaj had completed two films for Polish TV. The fruit of the expedition is also a rich photographic documentation. The expedition and its findings were described at length in the press and presented on TV both in Chile and in Poland. The Explorers Club Flag had been photographed in the most attractive spots on all three islands.

On behalf of the management of the expedition, we would like to thank most cordially, the Board of Directors of the Explorers Club for the privilege of granting us the Banner of the Explorers Club, as the first Polish expedition to be so honored.

Prof. dr Zdzisław Jan Ryn, FI'98
Science leader

Dr Andrzej Ciszewski, FI'99
Expedition leader

Krakow, February 1, 2002