This year’s return to the Cleoxxo campsite over the Sistema Pool Tunich cave system was a smaller affair than past trips [see December 2012 in AMCS Activities Newsletter 36 and November 2013 in number 37], with only seven dry cavers plus two cave divers, but continued to produce kilometers of great cave and more than 6 kilometers of new survey. The first wave arrived on Friday, November 20, with Peter Sprouse, the project organizer, Jennifer Foote, Stan Allison, Malgorzata “Gosia” Allison-Kosior, and I settling into our jungle camp. The first order of business on Saturday morning was calibrating three cave-adapted DistoXs, which required reading through a list of instructions, the first of which entailed a wander around the camping area looking for a spot away from any visible metal. Once that was achieved, Peter assembled a set of PVC tubing to create a square that had perpendicular support legs and facilitated orienting the DistoX during the fifty-six sequential calibration shots. While that was a bit tedious, it was wonderful during the rest of the week to just be able to press one button and get all your survey data in one go. No more worrying about whether someone knew how to read a compass properly; all he needed now was steady hands to point the laser at the survey target, which was a white circular piece of corrugated plastic 10 centimeters in diameter.

With the gear organized and machetes sharpened, all five of us headed north out along the road that runs right by camp to head up to the north end of the Pool Tunich system. The good part of the road now only goes as far as the Vasija Entrance, which we had surveyed on the December 2012 trip and is now being offered as part of the cave tours in the Rio Secreto tourist operation. From there onward we had to reopen the old road, cutting our way north with machetes and loppers. With four people cutting this went fairly quickly and would provide access for the rest of the week. The first destination was the Altar Entrance of Pool Tunich, which had some previously surveyed but not sketched passages that Peter wanted to tidy up. While he and Gosia started in the main part of that, Jen and I went back along the wall of the same sink and surveyed in what turned out to be the farthest edge of the same Altar Entrance, leaving Stan to check farther along the host doline for other entrances.

Once Jen and I finished off our bit and had seen the namesake altar, we went in search of Stan, who had chopped his way 100 meters or so to the southwest and found another large, new entrance, which he left for us to start surveying. This would provide our first of many encounters with biting ants, which we hadn’t noticed while meeting Stan, but who noticed us and let us know just as we got into the entrance. Before we realized what was happening, they were all up our pants biting away until we squished them. Jen performed quite the dance, as it had apparently brought back childhood memories of her first experience with an anthill. The cave was essentially a large west-facing shelter cave, with a few smaller slots that went east into a much larger north-facing entrance chamber. We finished surveying the west entrance before having to head back to meet Peter and company at our pre-arranged time for the hike back to camp. Once we were back in camp and relaxing in the swimming pool, Daniel “Matakanes” Nuño showed up, having hitched a ride in from the highway.

Sunday morning saw three teams heading out in different directions. Peter headed off with local...