

Cueva de la Rubicera to Mortero de Astrana

Introduction

The trip took 8½ hours and had an impressive range of cave passage. Started with enormous dry cave, then dropped down near small trickle at the end through a dug connection. Route finding was made easy by careful reading of the instructions, keeping an eye on the survey, and yellow reflectors we realised took us all the way through. The survey only showed the route, not where side passages went.

Mortero de Astrana

From the village of la Gandara, turn left to the village of Astrana. Here near the start of the village where the road narrows take a concrete road on the left (with a walking waymark to Hoyo Masayo). Leave the village and continue, keep to the right at the next junction. At an obvious Z bend a **P** is signposted up a track but we parked one car on the z bend. Mortero de Astrana and Hoyo Masayo are signposted (If you look and can just make out Mortero in a southerly direction). Walk down the track on the right to a dry riverbed (Rio Leolorna). Head back left SW down dry Valley keeping right, swinging over a rise on a small path (don't cross the fence). Wind down into the next dry valley Rio Cubieja. Follow this a short way and down into the massive Mortero de Astrana doline (15 mins), a huge sink hole with a massive walking sized bedding plane surrounding the pitch head - a very spectacular feature. Look for the wire guides on left and drop straight ahead to the bolts where the rope is rigged straight down the doline in the gully. We found a rope in place, but it was a bit old. The entrance pitch can also be rigged opposite as a more direct hang, but likely to take longer for groups to pass up or down.

This exit must be rigged for any through trips that exit via Mortero de Astrana.

Cueva de la Rubicera

Follow the road from Arredondo through Ason and up the Ason Gorge towards Gandara and the Puerta de la Sia. Just before the top of Los Collados del Asón and its viewpoint there is a track on the left (East). Park sensibly somewhere along this track – we parked a few 100m along by farm buildings being careful not to block any fence-gates used for the cows. 1.5km). Continue to follow the track to the end of the gravel, this then skirts to the right over grass and mud, and on up the hill for 1.7 (k (check) to a final building. The track now continues more as a footpath on up, levelling before reaching a beech wood (look for fluorescent markers). Take a left fork straight ahead, rather than continuing up more into the wood to the right. The route heads towards a tall lump of rock, passing under low branches and a small sink hole to the left. The path then contours around, with the valley appearing below, and a steep sloped funnel shaped grassy gully beneath a rock monolith. Carefully descend this to a wide ledge above the Ason Valley and turn left. After about 80m, you pass a large boulder, head directly down the grassy slope (very slippery if wet) to a lower terrace – a handline may be in place here. Turn left again, passing one cave entrance "Boca Norte" to the impressive entrance of "Boca Sur" of Cueva de Rubicera - which is our entrance. (1 hr walk from the car).

Description of the traverse

Rubicera to Pozo Chocolate

From the large entrance vestibule, we ascend a slippery steep mud and earth ramp, higher steps have been cut into the slope, white moonmilk(keep left then right, rope in place). Soon we enter the enormous elongated room of the Sala Rubicera. Without losing sight of the left-hand wall, we keep going along a flat area (more or less), we pass the characteristic "bloques leopardo" (leopard spotted) on our right we see big chaotic walls of the large blocks that have fallen into the middle of the chamber. Cairns lead us right down to the bottom of doline and up the other side but if we keep left and high we avoid going down and back up again.

The floor becomes flat and we pass by El Bosque (a forest of stalactites and stalagmites). Afterwards the gallery becomes bigger again and we keep going on the left-hand side, the stalactites are on the left side of the gallery. keep going by the left wall and immediately the chamber takes the shape of a big funnel. In this big collapse of the chamber Tremie, springs up the only water that we are going to find in this first part of the through trip and it disappears through the boulders of the floor. We have to go down to the bottom of the chamber through a sandy ramp on the left and later in the direction of a big vertical boulder opposite so we will reach the right wall not far away from the point where the water disappears.

Between the rocks, and thanks to hard digging work of the first explorers, we find the continuation; El paso de la Licuadora (the blender). We enter the boulders which are well worn by cavers and turn right, later we follow the way climbing down until we reach a tiny chamber. It's easier to pass if we go feet first. Once in the tiny chamber we have to keep going down following the water until we reach a chamber with steep and slippery ramp as floor, with dark mood. we have to abandon the chamber by it left side about halfway down (don't go to the bottom).

The way on is well marked with cairns and reflective tape. We soon reach a triple bifurcation, the galleries on the left and in front of us are good for our continuation. From now on we won't see the water until the river and our way will be in bigger and drier galleries. the continuation reaches a crossroad and we take the path on the right heading a low roof pass. The way is really worn so follow the path. we turn right in a transversal reaching another low roof section that we abandon going up and left. We reach the Sala del balcon (Balcony chamber, gallery with a R5). We go down climbing down by a small hole on the left side of the galley. we reach a lateral with a crossroad at the end. we turn left toward a U shape section formed by some rocks and keep going straight ahead by a big gallery that goes down and reaches a chaotic chamber with a long boulder in the floor. , Sala deslizante, which forms a balcony in the middle. there the evident is going down by blocks on the right to the lower area. In this extreme, in our left, behind a big boulder with flat and smooth surface, we reach a rope which shows us the way into the correct gallery which follows the same direction that we were taking before. The chamber now has a lot of boulder that are really slippery and leads us to an area of the passage where two big boulders are in the middle of the way (la muela, the back tooth) that we will pass by the top

and then left. Farther ahead we will find another crossroad on the right, very big, where there are cairns which leads to a steep gallery that we won't take. on the contrary, we keep going through the left into a big gallery , with flat and comfortable floor that reaches a R2 with crevice shape in the middle. we climb down into the sandy floor of Sala de la Biere. This fossil point is the centre of all the cross galleries of the labyrinth in Rubicera.

if we want to rest a bit in this point, we can take advantage and visit the Galeria de las Tetas (west, left in the direction we were following) and seeing the black eccentrics in Meandro Norte (north meander), the impressively big galleries in the nearby and the huge stalagmite (la teta). In case we need it, there's also a place where we can take water.

Again in Sala de la Biere we keep going by the right, with lower roof at the beginning thtst we will follow until we've passed several small section. we enter then Galeria del tambor (drums) whose floor is shaft under a calcite lay and which sounds like a drum when we pass through it. we go up a bit towards our left and turn into a big descending gallery that goes downs in our right. We reach Galeria del anden (train platform gallery) and we eventually have to climb down and take a small traverse which avoid P50. Further ahead we reach a big chamber with plenty of stones in the floor, sala decrepita, close in the front by a huge wall opened by the top y with a big descending gallery in our right. Just in between this and the wall there's a U-shape pass which soon becomes in a big descending gallery blending right and eventually becomes smaller. following the same direction, we reach another transversal that we take on the right but soon it seems that finishes, the continuation is by a narrow lateral on the left (there's a luminescent mark) that becomes a slithering sandy crawling after which the gallery towards El Pozo del Chocolate opens. a traverse on the right side gives way to the pitch head. We descend the 31m pitch without any revelay. We reach then the third level of Rubicera (there can be several ropes on this pitch).

Pozo del chocolate(p31) to pozo de la cascada blanca (P80)

We are now in a chamber which gives way to some isolated and beautiful formations in the laterals of a narrow but high gallery. This is the beginning of the straight Galeria de la Plancha (Ironing Gallery) which will lead as to the active collector of Rubicera. We start with a couple of 180-degree blend and later we pass by a short area with smooth walls with the section of a horizontal triangle. we pass by a low roof area with small stalactites in both roof and floor and keep going until we reach by the left to a junction. we take the one in the right, which is the bigger and easier to progress in (ignore the black arrow). The floor in the gallery is quite dark and that made the explorers named the it Galeria del Chocolate. After a little while the dimensions become bigger and we reach another junction in the shape of a Y and a climb down. There is a book to enter that you have arrived at this junction. We are turning left marked Mortero and down a fixed rope. we will have to climb up and down several boulders until we can spot the Rubicera River (more a stream in this spot). That feeling is not right as the river disappears thought a laminador we cannot pass. The solution is taking a left-hand gallery and after several cairns, we reach the fossil level of the river. We spot an aven with three big arrows showing upwards, but we ignore them and walk by the obvious continuation. (the aven is another of the conexions with the second level of Rubicera). We eventually reach the river. This active gallery is a big meander. we will pass several areas where the river become deeper, most of them can be avoided taking lateral ledges. We will get a point where the river gallery becomes higher and the flat foot becomes

a bit steeper (Los rapidos), just before that we look for a big cairn in the upper right gallery not far away from the roof to which we will have to climb up.

We are now walking by the upper flat level which, like a balcony, goes parallel to the river. We will avoid the big holes to the river jumping from one side of the gallery to the other until we reach a peculiar fossil gallery on our left in which we will see the river disappear by a narrow and deep crack. We are now in Via Real, this, in the beginning, is straight and flat and allows us to walk comfortably. At the end it becomes narrower and describes S; we have reached the Paso del Leopardo. The curious walls where the small holes are filled in with orange clay give the gallery a spotty looking similar to a Leopard.

Shortly afterward the floor goes down abruptly in the contact with the black rock. We have to crawl towards the left and go down by an easy climb down to get to the bottom of a gallery of Via Real, a big gallery that was once the place through which Rio Rubicera used to flow.

A bit further away we will find a similar pass that we also have to climb down surrounding it by the right. We are going by the gallery and will find aR3, with a fixed rope on the left to go down to another big gallery with a fossil sump on the right. Later we will find other climb down, R5, where there's also a rope.

The gallery goes down until we reach the river level again arriving to a big flooded area where a waterfall in our right surges. We have to avoid the water by an edge on the left. Without reaching the other side of the lake, we have to come into a crawl in our right after which we arrive to El Balcon (be careful while stepping because it's hollow where we find the beginning of the impressive la Arana traverse which surrounds by the top the big P80 Pozo de la Cascada Blanca (white waterfall pitch).

To pass the traverse it's better to have the tackle bag in short. The traverse goes up a bit to an edge, later we must abseil a rope with a deviator at the top and a pendulum at the bottom. We follow the traverse to go up to an edge and reach a low chamber where we can comfortably wait for the others and from which there's a great view of the pitch and the rope and traverse that we have already passed. This chamber is the beginning of the Galer'ia de la Union (intermediate net).

Pozo de la Cascada Blanca - Galeria del Rio Leorna.

We come into a crawl that ends up in the big Sala de la Espera where there's a 20m pitch fixed rigged that we have to ascend (E20). The traverse on the pitch-head takes us to a vertical rift and goes up until we reach the Sala de la Encrucijada. We will pass, after going up the pitch a fossil marmite where there's a traverse. After that we reach a fixed rope that we have to climb up (E15) where we have to be careful with the rubbing of the rope, mainly in an edge about 4m up from the bottom.

Once in the top we have reached the Encrucijada chamber (thought it's not really big). To come out of it we have to crawl down a boulder and take a small hole on the left -paso del cocodrilo- be careful, do not take the obvious and bigger gallery on the right, there's a stone wall on that side that prevents us from taking that way. We then reach another rift where we must climb down a R2 and later, climb up another R2 to get to the upper area of Galeria de la Union. Further on we must abseil a 10m pitch that arrives in a gallery in right angle

with the river and a few meters afterwards we reach the P15 that leaves us in a rift parallel to the river. To go down we have to walk some meters to the left and abseil a 5m fixed rope, so we get to the river bank, Galeria del rio Leolorna (Mortero de Astrana).

If we follow the river we will get to a low and wide passage that ends up in the Gran Pozo del Mortero P178, which is worth visiting.

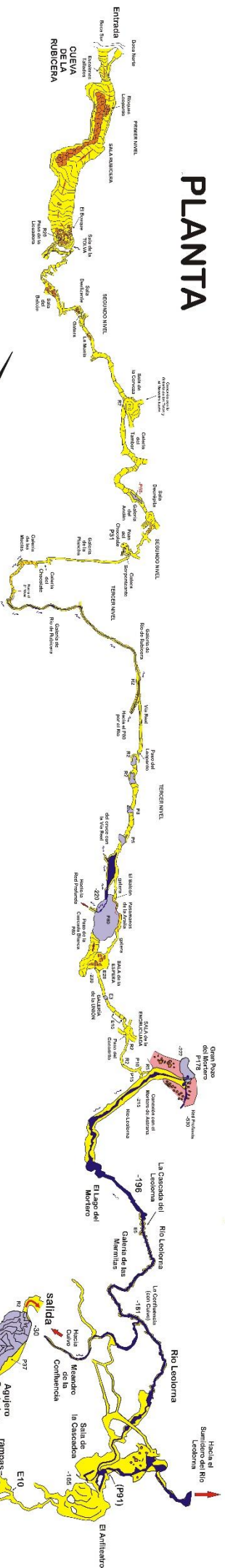
the through trip goes up the river, we the gallery becomes higher. we soon arrive to the lake in mortero. there are several options to pass this point: a boat, wetsuit or, the easier one, go up a fixed rope that, by an athletic traverse, avoids the lake and later goes back to the river. we follow the gallery by the river being careful as it has V shape and the centre is deep so we can finish completely damp. we will find a short traverse on the left which might be too high for some of us.

we reach then the marmite sector and will see from now on huge graffiti on the wall which usually involve a letter and a number. The first marmite is where the Mortero waterfall ends, and there's a rope that we have to climb up and follow the traverse. Later we will pass several more marmites thank to the help of several traverses. we keep going and will notice that the gallery it's a bit narrower and in that same gallery we soon reach teh Confluencia, point where in our right the river Cuvieja (coming from Cuivo cave) joins the Mortero river. we keep going by the Mortero gallery, the obvious one until we eventually abandon the Leolorna river in sala de la Cascada-waterfall chamber.

short after the area with water finishes and the volumes become bigger until we get the Anfiteatro Chamber and we will find on the right wide, white and slippery potter ramps. When the area is no longer horizontal and following the direction of the gallery would involve climbing an edge on our right, we have to find on the left wall a lower gallery (there's an arrow and a reflectant) that we have to follow to get to Salida gallery. we keep walking by the bottom of a horizontal rift until we reach a rope that climbs up.

that rope will help us to climb up the step ramp, although it's also possible to climb it without rope by the blocks on the left. we follow the rope until the end, which is a hole between blocks with strong air current after which we reach the big Sala del Caos (100x50m). we turn left and shortly afterwards find out way through the blocks, there are several options. After 100m climb we will reach the big Torca del Mortero de Astrana, where we must take the rope that we rigged before in any of the possible options to come out to the big edge. facing the wall of edge, we will turn left and surround the big hole, there's an obvious path, and will reach a small climb inside the rock followed by a wire tiny traverse that surrounds the last wall. From then on, the way path to the car is obvious and easy and it will take us 10 to reach the parking.

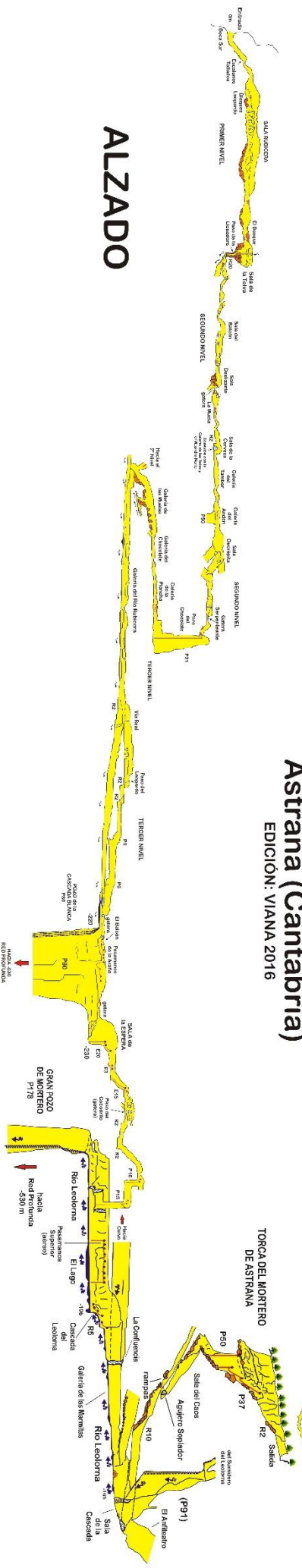
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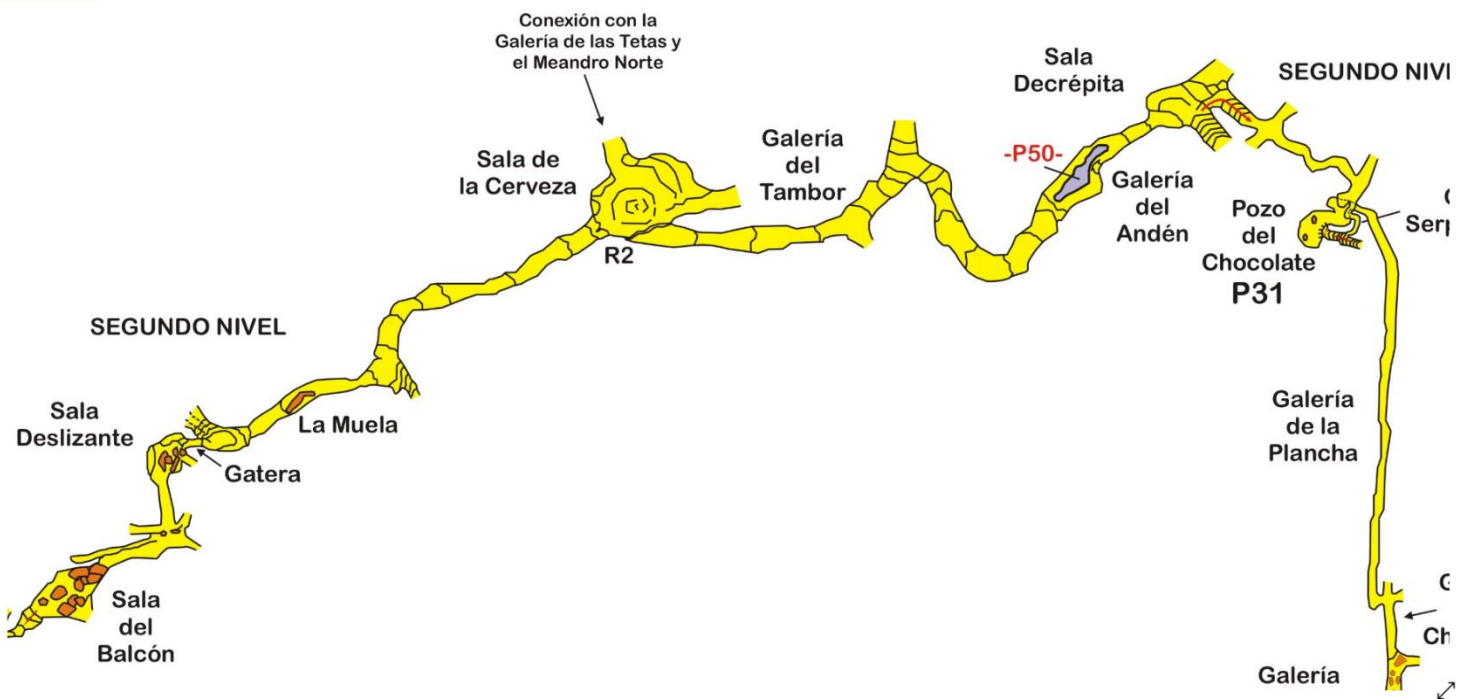
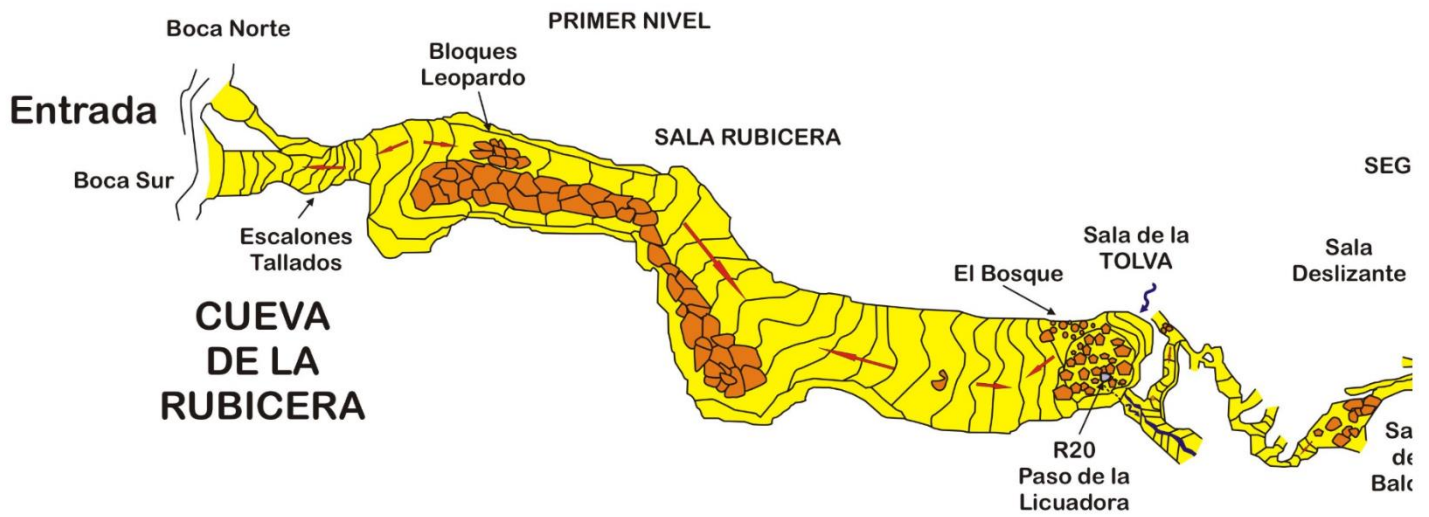


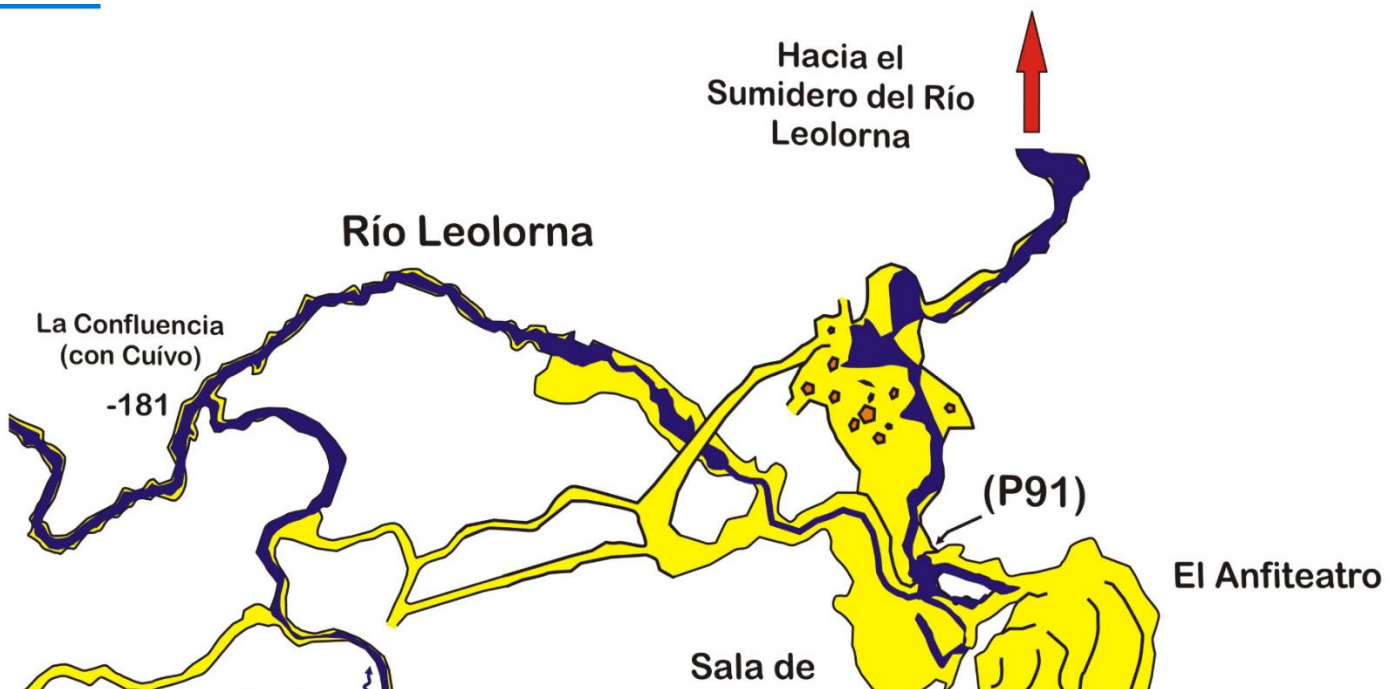
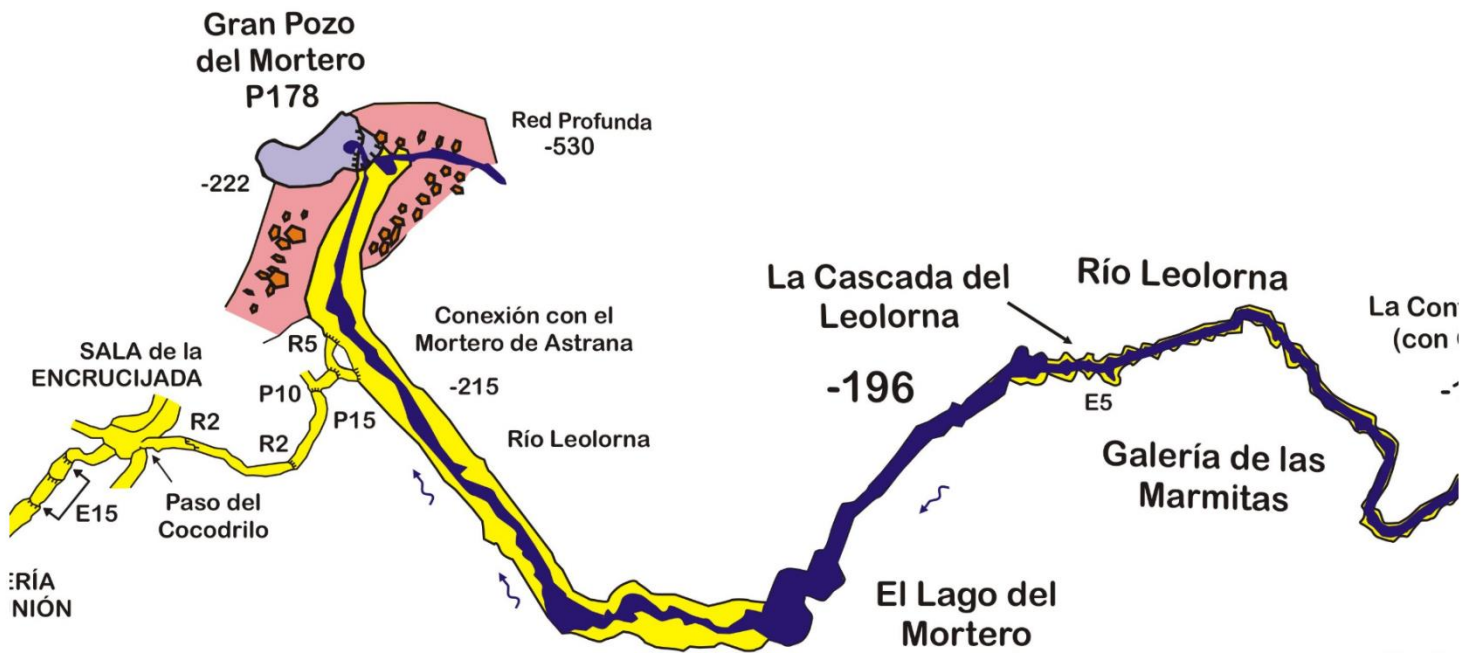
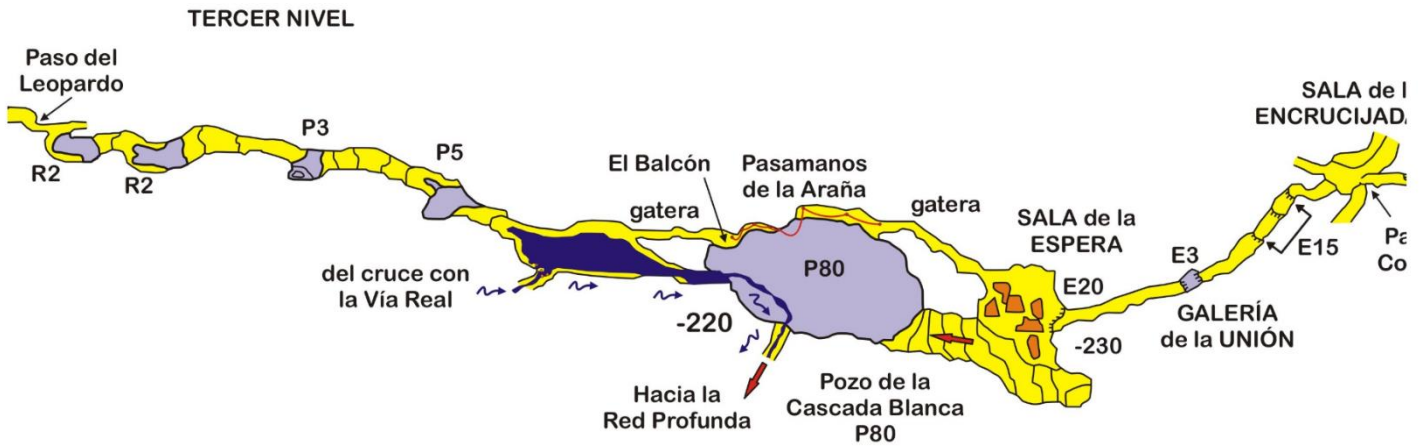
SISTEMA DEL MORTILLANO CUEVA DE LA RUBICERA MORTERO DE ASTRANA (Cantabria)

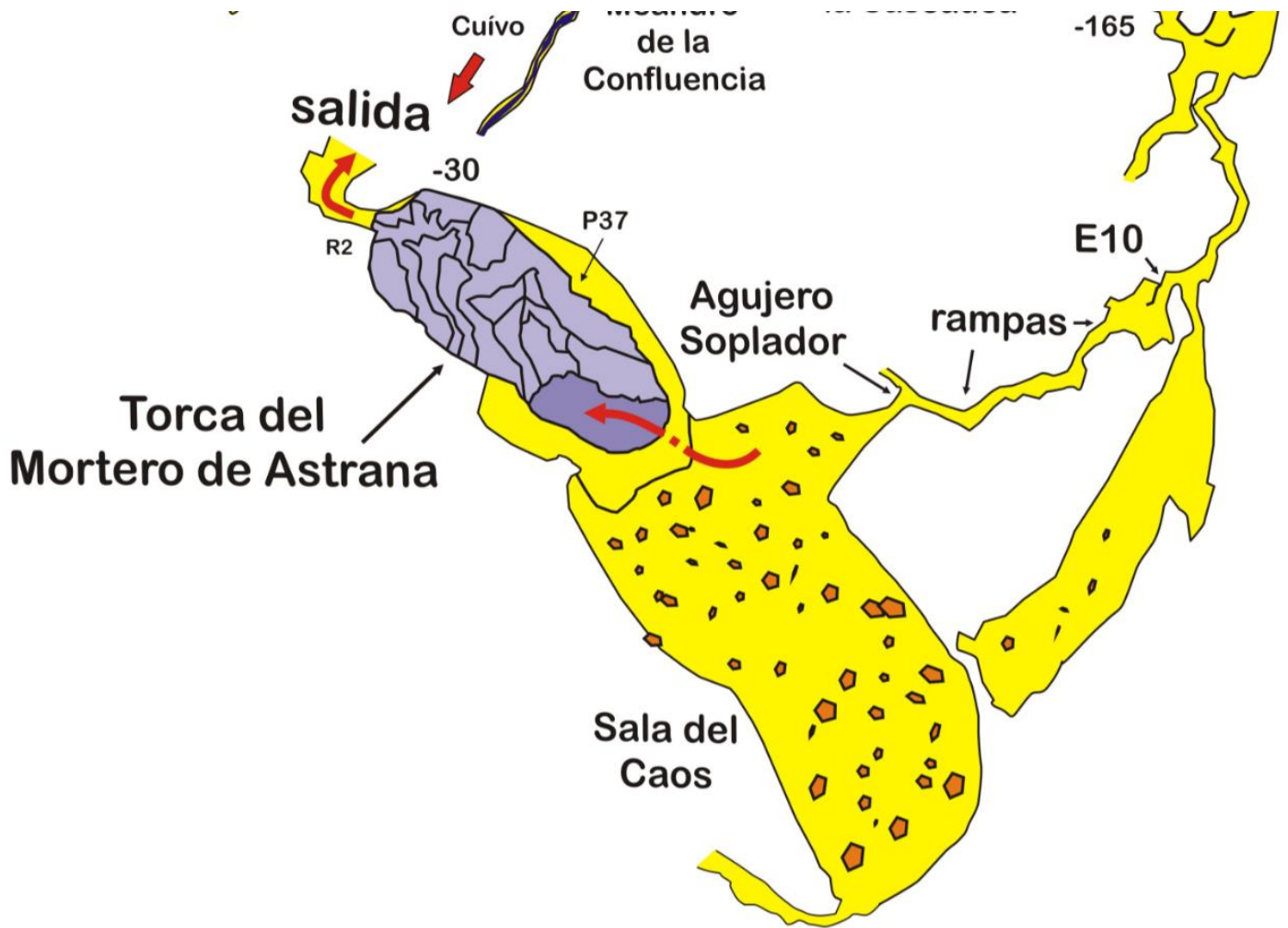
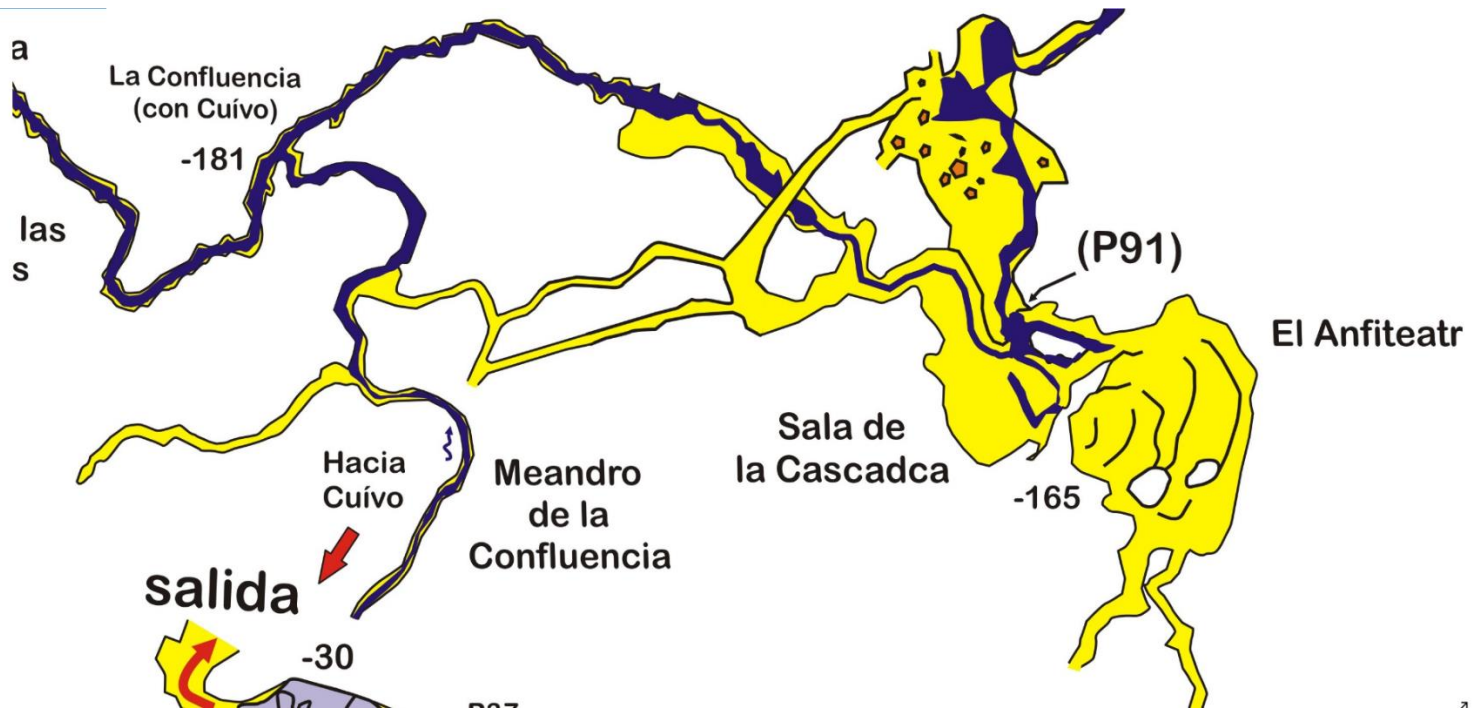
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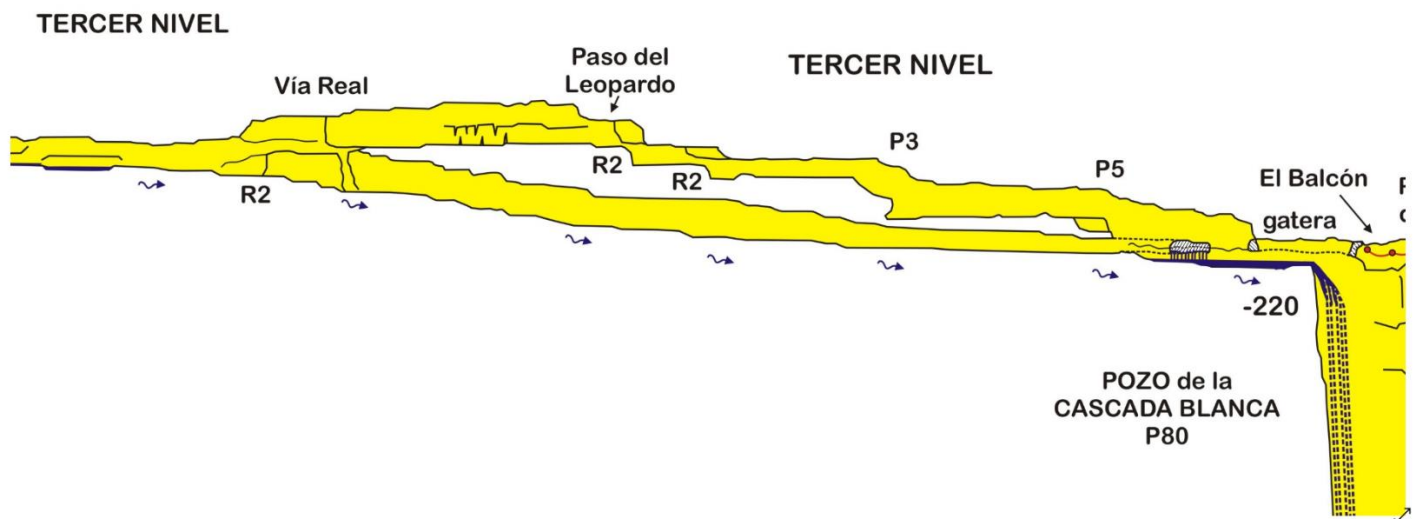
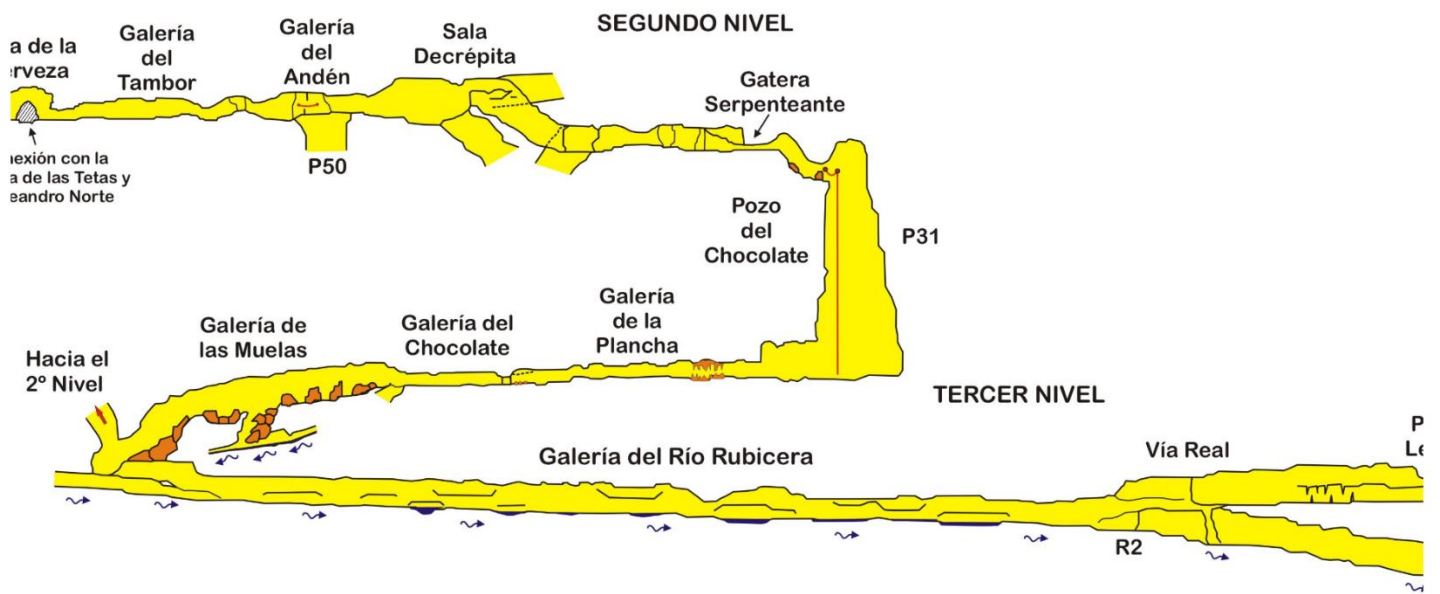
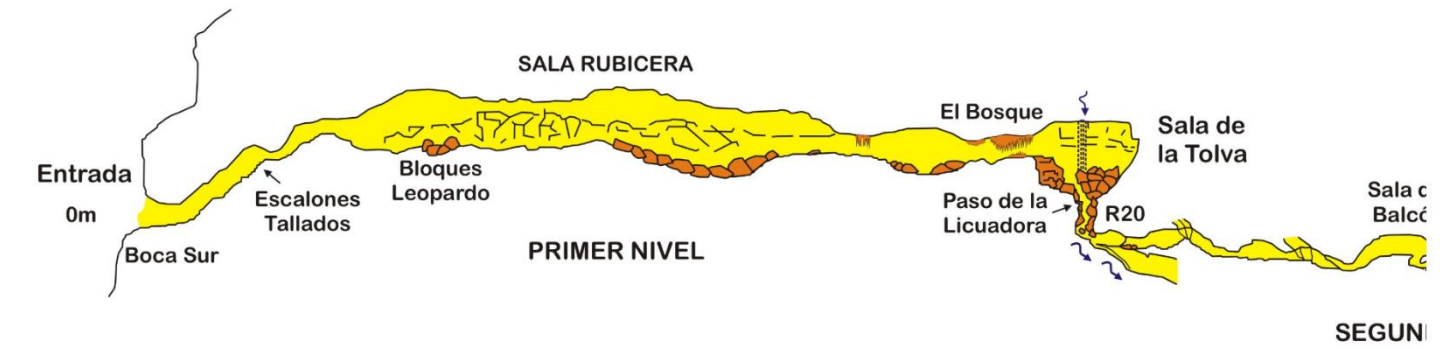
ALZADO













TORCA DEL MORTERO DE ASTRANA

