

Red del Silencio

Length of system 47km

Time:

Caballos - Valle = 14 hrs (-498m)

Caballos - Canal = 8hrs (-390m)

Car to Caballos - 30mins

Car to Canal - 15mins

Car to Valle - 1min

Coordinates (UTM)

Torca del Hoyon o de Caballos

X= 470,768

Y=4.791,610

Z=550

Torca de la Canal

X=469,600

Y=4.793,500

Z=160

Cueva del Valle

X=466,090

Y=4.794,260

Z=58

Access

To the Torca de Caballos (Hoyon) (top entrance) one arrives from Rasines (on the Ramales de la Victoria - Ampuero road) taking the road that goes to Ojebar. After Ojebar one passes through the suburbs of Casavega and continues until reaching Torcollano. The road changes to a track which ascends for 300m until you arrive at a cabin (coinciding with a bend) where you can park the car. From here one goes up through a meadow, in the direction of the first gully/ravine which remains on the left side near to the high of Peñas Surbias. By this gully, one arrives, without difficulty, at the Torca de Caballos that presents a wall more abrupt/steep in the side opposite to where you arrive (usually has running water and sometimes a cascade until its bottom, one goes down following a rising path between undergrowth - takes 30 mins from the car)

Torca de la Canal (middle entrance) one takes a road leaving from the end of Casavegas going down this one leaves the road on the right hand side which then arrives at a crossroads where one abandons the road and one takes a track on the right and continue until you reach a new crossroads, where you can park the car. Continue on foot on the road on the right and after passing through a wrought iron gate one leaves the wood and arrives at some paths located in the river bed that goes down to the River Ruahermosa. Some 100m lower down opposite a cabin and on the other side/slope there goes the cave whose mouth semi obscured by abundant vegetation one accesses by a path.

The Cueva del Valle (lower entrance) source of the River Silencio opens itself in the vicinity of Rasines. To get to the cave one follows the road from Ramales to Ampuero (N629). Although there exists a number of itineraries the most direct to be taken coming from Ramales a road on the right that leaves at the height of the Pk 75 some 100m from a chapel. One continues on this road and one turns left at a crossroads, then a little later take another road on the right after some 400m. one

continues for some 800m more giving a large circle, after which follow a road on the left that of new turn in this sense/deep that leads to the river where the cave exits.

Description

Actually the system of the Rio Silencio has six entrances, Torca de Caballos(Hoyon), Torca de Seguia, Sima-Cueva del Escobal, Torca del Hoyu Jondo, Torca de la Canal and Cueva del Valle. The traverses described here consist of entering Caballos and exiting Valle or canal or entering Canal and exiting Valle.

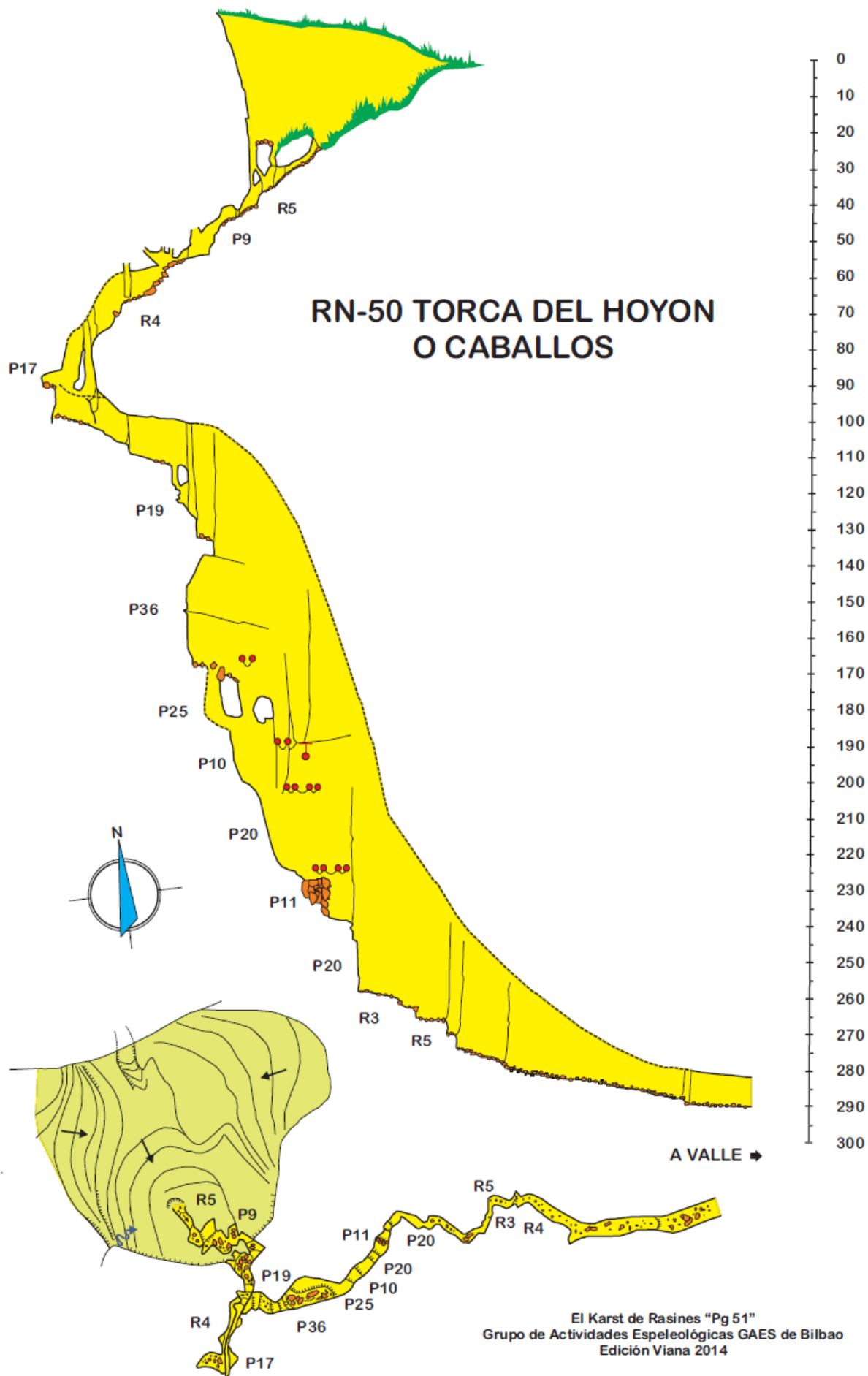
The last entrance discovered in the system is the Torca de Seguias (very close to Caballos but in the southern slope in the direction of Ranero) Taking advantage of the pronounced low water level in recent years the explorers achieved penetration after making some deobstruction towards a zone of inaccessible crawls that finally connected with the system via a network of tubes at the start of the meander of Caballos. In this form the resulting traverse continues increasing enormously the development of the system (one of the longest in the world) although the extreme toughness of the tubes linking from Seguia reduces the attraction.

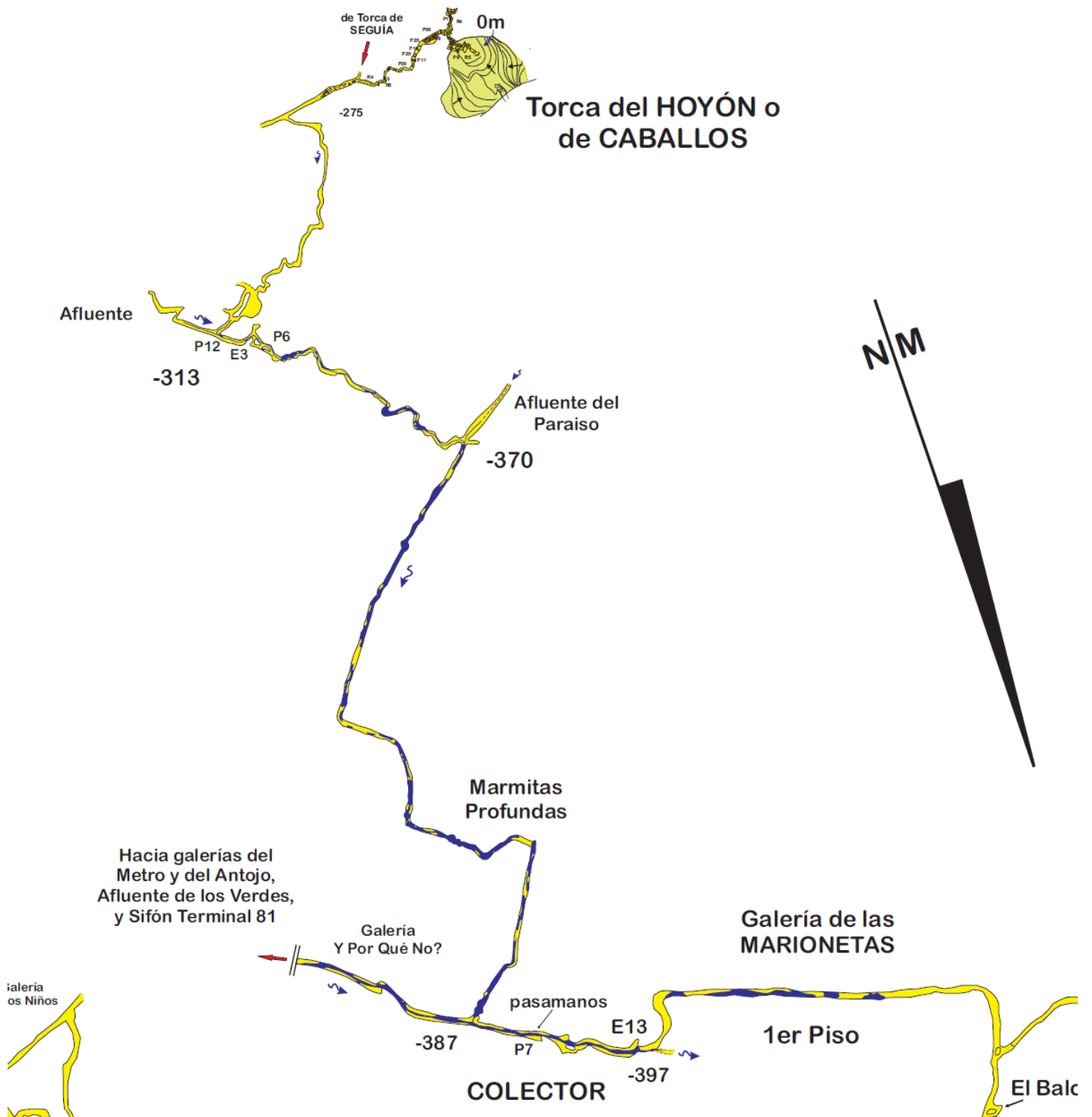
Sector Caballos - Canal

After going down to the bottom of the Torca de Caballos via a lush thick path until a big block, one must take a ramp of mud that is to your left. via the ramp one gains access to the first climb (R5) which is the start of the upper section of small cliffs and pitches separated by small meanders (P9, R4 + P17, P7) easily a P19 is reached where the dimensions increase. This pitch is the start of the largest vertical zone and the pitches follow continuously (P36, P25, P10 + P29) - access to some pitch heads being by short traverse lines. Especially troublesome is the rigging of the P29 located on a wedged boulder. After a P21 there follows three climbs 3m, 5m and 4m and then a larger gallery is reached at -240m. All the pitches are usually "watered", and can get very wet after periods of continuous rain. Estimated time to descend to here (3-4 people = 1.5hrs to 2 hrs).

We continue easily in a wide meander where the river flows until you reach a room, with a tall aven and small inlet. From here we follow a strait fossil meander with smaller dimensions, which is accessed by a ramp to the right (DO NOT TAKE a bottomless and muddy meander that appears after a few meters). The beginning of this tight meander was gained by a short climb of 3m in a zone of concretions followed by a handline/traverse and a P12 that you descend to the bottom of the gallery. We continue to a R3 then traverse to a p6 (fixed rope) which takes you back down to the river.

The river has a succession of marmites (deep pools) and short climbs. Some traverses and fixed ropes appear in the middle and end of the meander where they help to pass really deep pools. In some areas it is possible to avoid the flooded sections making traverses in opposition in the higher sections - take care as some of these might be risky. After this a rectangular stretch which on occasion is tight at its base and in which there are blocks and marmites then leads to the collector. (Time required to traverse this zone of meanders is 2hrs)



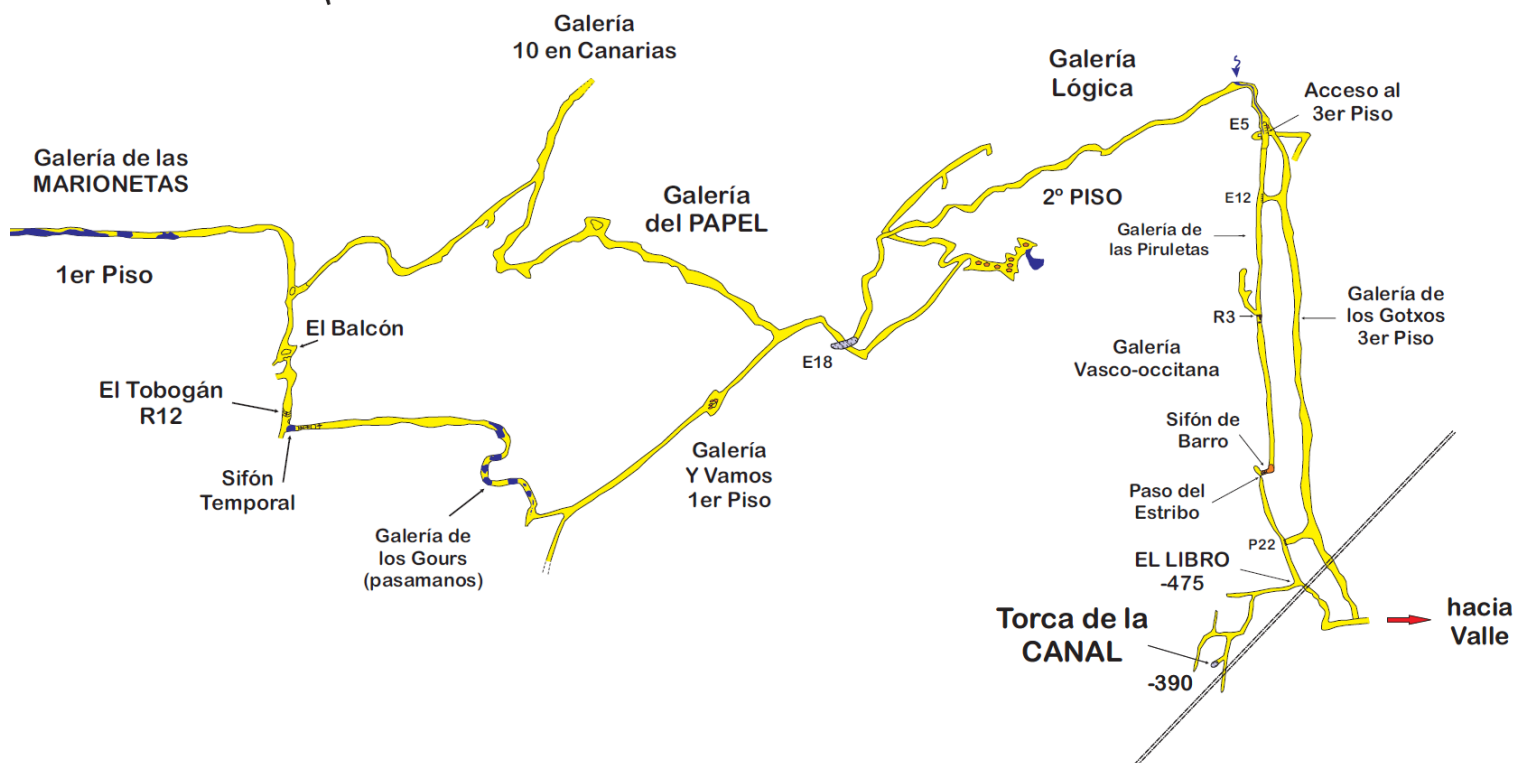


Once in the collector at -374m the galleries acquire large size. Immediately downstream the stream disappears we take a handline on the right which is followed by a chaos of blocks that gives access to a lower level. Later on this gallery becomes impenetrable and we ascend to a high level by a fixed rope, installed on the muddy left wall E13.

In this broad gallery of the 1st level called Galería de las Marionetas, appears various flooded zones, a certain length, but these are easily avoidable by using side shelves. The end of the gallery becomes a canyon and you inevitably get in the water. (The depth of the water does not exceed waist deep)

The continuation leads to the Balcon where awesome handlines prevent you from falling into a loose hole in the floor - fixed rope. After this a mud slope descends 12m - El Tobogan which is followed by the most problematic area of the sector, a low ceilinged muddy gallery which sumps easily in times of heavy rain. If it is sumped we must retrace our steps until beyond El Balcon and take the Galeria del Papel. By this gallery we can bypass the temporary sump. But instead we will have to crawl through a long succession of crawls and beddings.

The normal route is open after the sump area and rises to a gallery with water where the famous deep marmites are passed by handlines (Galeria de los Gours) Following the left hand of this gallery we arrive at the junction with the end of the Galeria del Papel (joining from the left) and later we arrive at an ascending fixed rope (E18) climbing up to the 2nd level. Time spent from the collector (via normal) = 2hrs

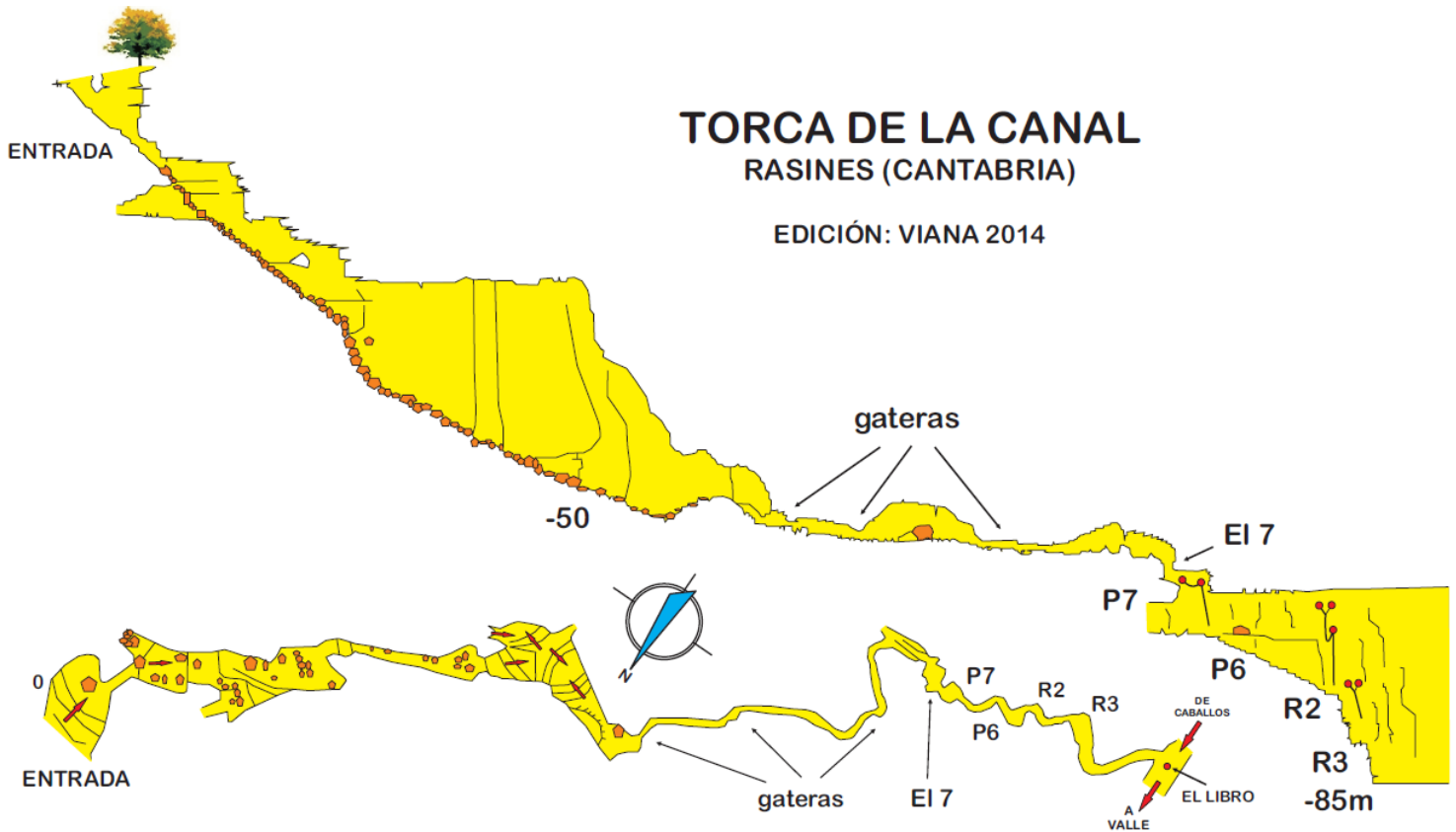


We continue in a bigger gallery interrupted by a cliff of 5m (E5) which is passed by a fixed rope. After which is a rectangular gallery, loose holes in the final part. To pass this section it is necessary to use the installed handlines some of which serve only as psychological support. At the end of this zone a short handline and climb down regains the 1st level. Galeria Vasco-Occitana. In this gallery with a lowering sloping ceiling we arrive at another sumpy point. This point occasionally fills with water after heavy rain. The way to the outside avenues currently appears clogged by sand and clay exists only a small opening few centimeters wide. If sumped it is necessary to step back and take a fixed rope before reaching the E5 which allows up to third floor. This level is followed until another fixed rope allows us to descent to the lower floor the other side of the sump and a few meters before El Libro. The time to descend from E18 to El Libro = 1.5hrs

Once in El Libro you can either exit by a gallery leading to the Torca de la Canal (middle entrance) or continue to Cueva de Valle (lower entrance). El Libro (the book) that appears to suspended from the

ceiling, is used to record when you entered the cave and when you passed here this will expedite finding you if you need to get rescued or you get lost ;-)

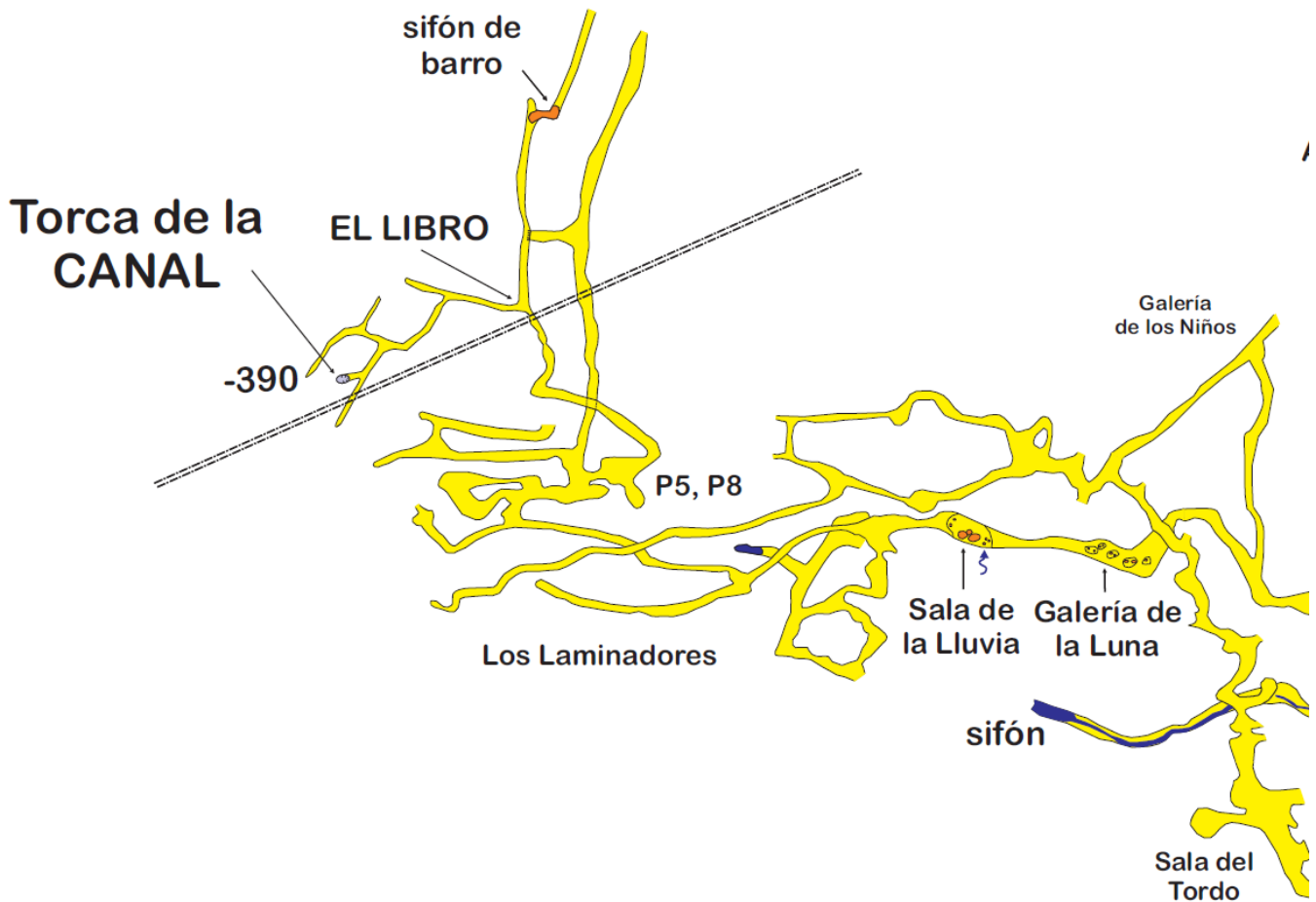
The exit Torca de la Canal is found by a tight and wet meander ascended in opposition, to a p7 ascended by a fixed rope with a tight bit at the top, this give access to a bigger gallery and then a tighter section of crawls - dug - the way is evident and easy. Time to exit from El Libro = 30mins.



Sector Canal-Valle

If you opt for the hard road to Cueva de Valle, we continue in a gallery which is a succession of beddings and sandy rooms, here we take the most obvious path, later reflective markings appear to indicate the right direction. Later, after making a climb, just appears a handrail/traverse to a P5, then we go through a window to go down a P8.

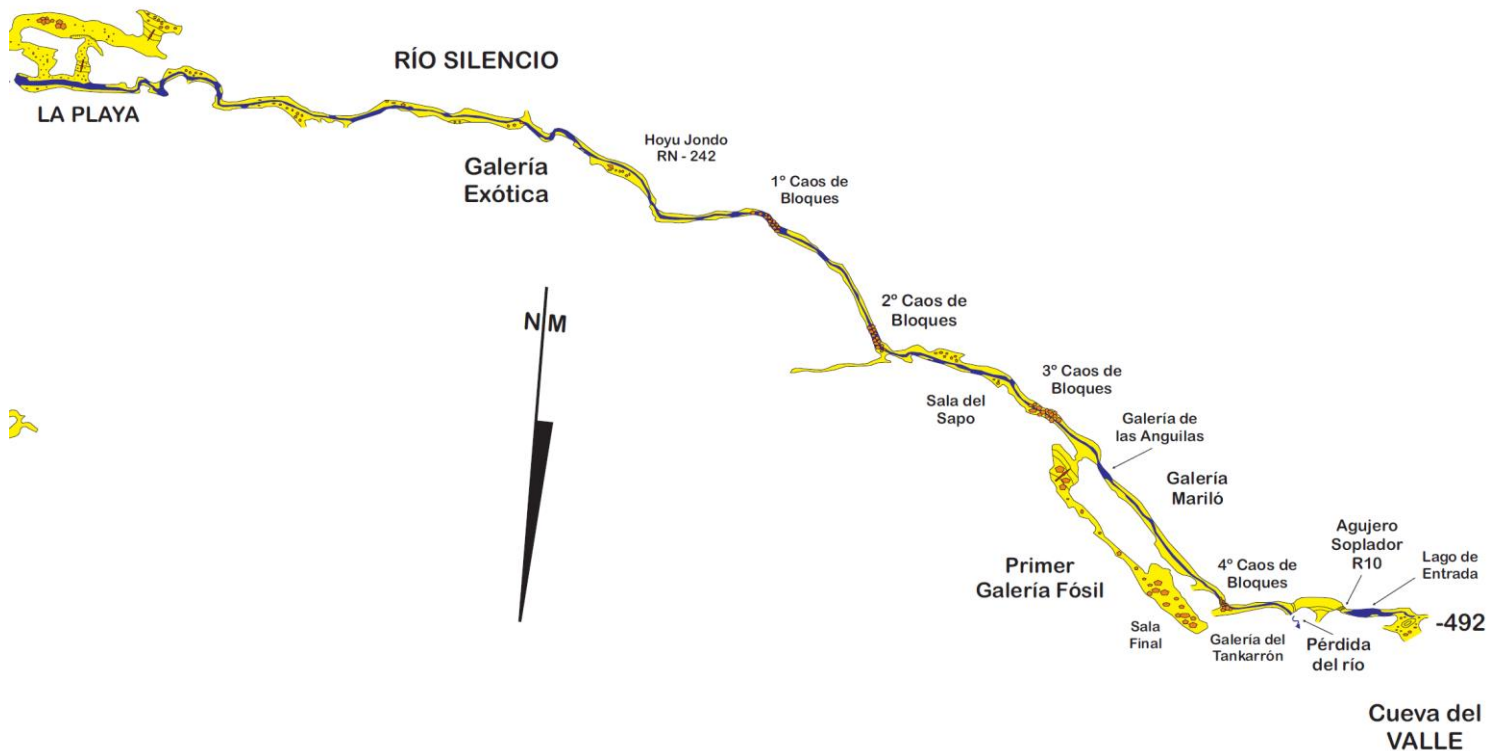
Then follows a series of beddings, which take 1 to 1.5h to pass. It is a broad gallery in which, due to the great clogging, we have to pass it by crawling. Later, and after passing through the Sala de la Lluvia, we get to the Galeria de la Luna, where again there are some bedding areas, low steps and dotted with holes or craters in the floor ceiling areas.



The route becomes more evident (El Sahara), passed through a sector concretions and accessing a large gallery, Galería Comoda. This, after a few concretions cornice and a narrow passage, we reach a point where we can go down to the river to La Playa. The time taken from the El Libro to La Playa is 2.5 to 3 h.



From La Playa the river continues, and we need to pass four large chokes, sometimes there are arrows pointing the way. The second choke is passed through its upper part (about 10m up), and in the third, we also cross above with crawls and formations. After the last chaos, where you can access an upper floor, we pass through an aquatic passage with chest deep water, which can sump (Galería de las Anguilas). Later the river rises to an escarpment, we then go down again helped by a sling. Finally out of the mouth of the Cueva de Valle, past the great entrance pot, that in times of high water may cover more than 2m. The time to pass from El Playa to the exit Cueva de Valle is between 2 and 3hrs.



Material and Installations

To descend the Torca de Caballos with double ropes you need two 40m ropes and it is recommended to take an extra rope of 20m which can be used on the smaller pitches and climbs. It is not normal to see any problems in recovering the rope. However it might be useful to take some cord to use to pull down the ropes. As to the installations the pitches in Caballos were equipped by and stainless steel belays and chains for pull throughs.

After caballos's pitches, all the difficulties that appear all along the through trip, including the traverses in the lakes and overhands, pitches and climbs between the different levels, are all rigged. All the difficulties in Canal are also rigged.

To pass through lakes and other flowed areas, a pontonier can be used, although it can be done as well without it (the neoprene is too much). Excepting the marmitas the level is never higher than the waist and there are big sections of completely fossil galleries where it's easy to get dry on the go. The cave, as most of the caves in Cantabria, is not very cold.

Recommendations:

You have to take into account that it's a really long through trip and that there are all sorts of difficulties. We have to add the weather, which can make the always wet pitches of caballos dangerous and completely flow some parts of the galleries (in the first floor, the bit located after the Tobogán, or the ones just before El libro or in the active river of Valle.)

If you are going to do the whole through trip, and because there's an intermediate cave in-between, it could be advisable to enter by it first and try to recognise the central part of the system, both in caballos and Valle direction. It would be also interesting entering by Valle until la Playa to know that area, specially the chaos, which can be difficult, especially after a lot of hours of trip.

Write in the book hanging in the junction with Canal, the time and direction you are taking. That would be really useful for the rescue team. In case of reaching the Book feeling tired or not feeling like wanting more caving, it's advisable to come out by Canal as Valle could take another 6 hours in those conditions.

Do not trust the ropes in place (how do we go up rope if we don't trust them?)