

Sima de la Cuesta del Cuivo – Mortero de Astrana

Length of traverse: 2.5km

Depth of traverse: 270m

Time for approach: 30mins

Time for return: 15mins

Time for trip: 5hrs

Location: Macizo del Mortillano, Peña del Cuivo, Rio Leolorna, Astrana, Soba, Cantabria

Map 1:50,000 19-5 (59)

Coordinates UTM

El Mortero de Astrana X: 453,860 Y: 4.784,400 Z:720

Sima de la Cuesta del Cuivo X: 453,850 Y: 4,785,200 Z: 838

Summary

The traverse from the Sima de la Cuesta del Cuivo to the Mortero de Astrana provides a classic wet and sporting day out. Before starting the traverse we must ensure that our exit from the impressive Mortero de Astrana is equipped. Sometimes there are fixed ropes, but if these are not present we would need to rig our exit

Approach

From the middle of the village of Astrana (Soba), just before the church, take a concreted road to the left , signed towards Riba, the road soon heads west and turns into a track after about 600m there is a junction, take the track to the right. This starts to climb and after a further 600m the track makes a sharp right hand bend (with a path/track leaving to the left -this is path that we will take). Just beyond this junction, the concreted track makes a sharp left hand bend with another track leaving on the right. Park the car near here making sure that you are not obstructing the tracks.

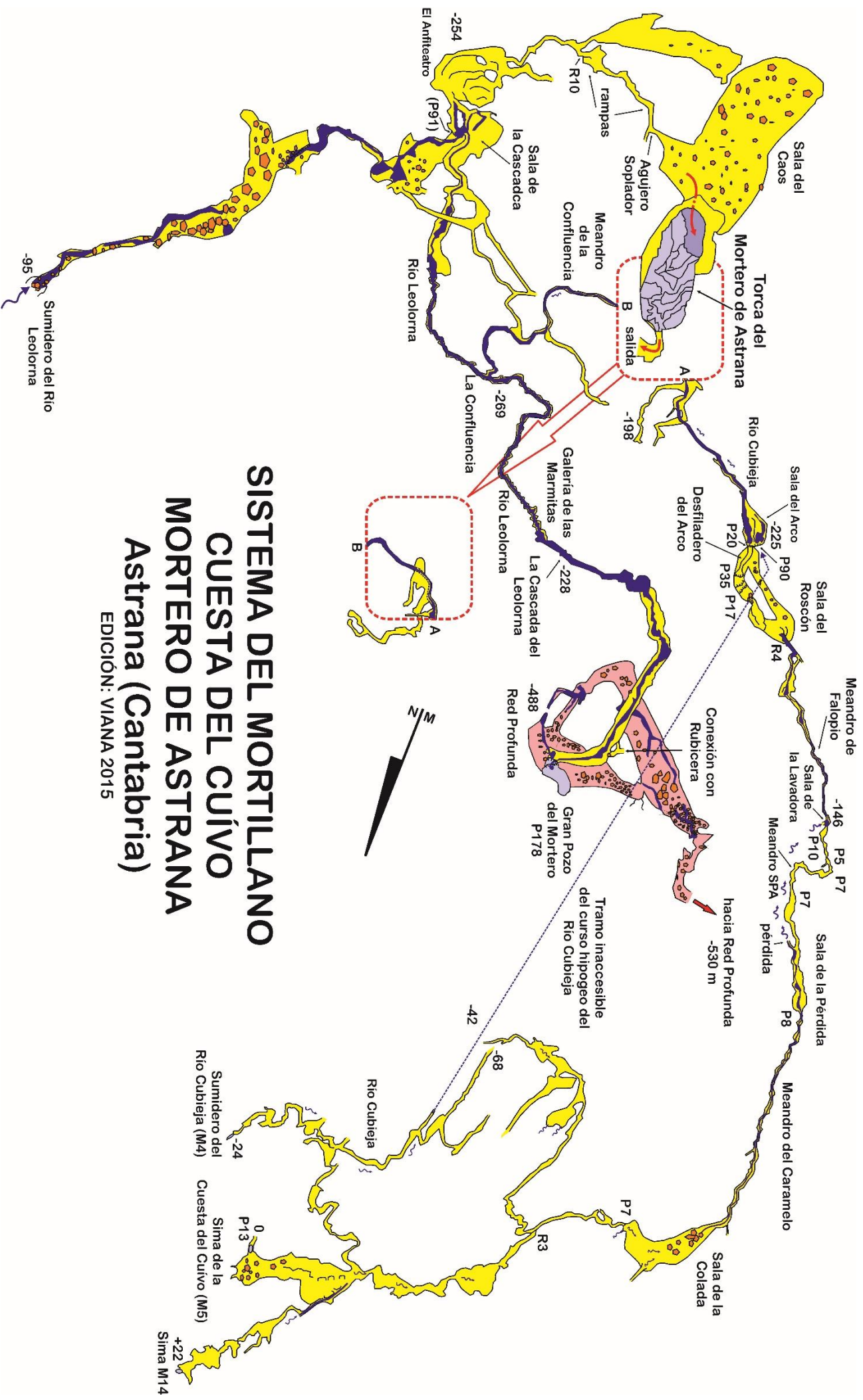
From the car follow the track that leaves from the sharp right hand bend, after a short distance a faint path descends diagonally to the left to cross the Arroyo Leolorna. The path then rises to the west and at the crest of a ridge turn norther before descending to the west into another large gully. (To reach the top entrance Cuivo we will walk up this gully). To check the Mortero de Astrana we follow the gully downstream, where we encounter a very short section of via ferrata to the left and then a short climb down. We are now in the impressive Mortero de Astrana, which is a huge ancient and abandoned sink. The sink hole is surrounded by a huge walking sized bedding plane which we can follow around circumnavigating the entrance pitch. The pitch can be rigged from various points around the bedding plane or down the gully where the water would have flown. The entrance pitch may require a 50m rope and up to 12 hangers and maillions, depending upon the route chosen.

To reach the top entrance we retrace our steps to the gully heading upstream from the Mortero de Astrana, and we follow this for nearly a kilometre, passing a couple of fences and a few fun climbs. Eventually the gully becomes wider and a couple of hundred metres further upstream we encounter a muddy track running up-valley and descending into the gully at a muddy puddle. From the muddy puddle head obliquely up to the left for 150m to a small knoll. To the right and above the knoll is a shallow gully in which the entrance is found within a minute or two from the knoll. The entrance to Cuivo is a P13 equipped for pull through.

Description

The entrance P13, usually has an in situ traverse line to the pull through bolts, at the base of the pitch we descend a cone of debris into a blocky chamber. We follow this downwards and enter a large fossil gallery. (A 100m further on, we ignore a winding gallery 100m long that connects with another entrance El Sumidero del Cubieja.) After ten minutes of progress following the main stream make a short climb up (rigged with a handline), before descending to the stream again, a little further on is a 3m climb down, often rigged as a pitch. Below this we continue downstream and we encounter a low wet crawl before arriving at the head of a P7 with a waterfall that falls in to a pool. (This P7, is the location in the famous photograph on the cover of the 1995 Grandes Traversias guidebook). We are now in the Sala de la Colada and the gallery is much bigger. We continue easily to a section of huge blocks that we climb over to regain the river in a meander. The next section starts with a 3m climb down flowstone into a series of beautiful deep pools, where we “may” get wet (some pools are very deep), this is the Meader del Caramelo. At the end of this gallery is a P8 into the Sala de la Perdida, at the downstream end of this chamber the passage becomes a narrow meander with a stream. After a few meters we have to abandon the stream and climb up into a higher gallery, by a short climb up some clay to the right. (Take care here as the downstream meander is a long crawl to a sump).

After a narrow start the gallery becomes very muddy and we pass several toboggans and puddles. After this we reach a series of short pitches, that follow in rapid succession, these have some slippery down climbing between them and have muddy pools at the base of each one. These pitches are a P7, P10, P5 and P7. At the base of these muddy pitches, we need to avoid the ongoing small crawl that leads to a mud sump, by taking a short climb up to the left into a narrow meander that after a few minutes takes us back to the river at the Sala de la Lavadora, (the Washing Machine Room) where we can clean up a little. Downstream from here is the challenging Meandro de Falopio where we have to find the correct height to progress downstream, sometimes with the water and sometimes by traversing – at the end of the meander is a P4 into an out of depth pool. Continuing downstream we soon climb up into a larger room, either by an exposed climb or a little further downstream is a route up through boulders. A little further on In the floor of the chamber is a short pitch into the continuation of the streamway which we follow downstream into another chamber where the stream sinks into the boulders. (From this chamber there are two alternatives the one not described is to ascend a ramp to the head of the Pozo del Arco P90.) The usual route is by a series of smaller pitches which are equipped for pull through. This route starts with a P17 that is rigged from between blocks in the chamber floor, this is soon followed by a P10. Below this a short crawl leads to the head of an impressive P35 landing on a wet ledge. From the ledge is a P5 into a deep pool and a short way downstream is a further P5 which takes us to the head of the final pitch a P20 which drops into a large pool in the Sala del Arco (Room of the Arch). On the other side of the arch is the base of the Pozo del Arco P90. To continue we climb above the block to the left hand side of the gallery before climbing down into a tall meander with the streamway, the Rio Cubieja, which we follow downstream for 500m to the confluence with the Rio Leolorna. At this junction we turn upstream and follow the river up to the Sala de la



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CUESTA DEL CÚIVO
MORTERO DE ASTRANA
Astrana (Cantabria)**

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Cascada, here the passage is wide and we leave the water. We continue along a short gallery that leads to a gallery where the right hand side is made of tall slopes heading upwards, but we continue to the left along the bottom to gain a meander that allows us to enter a wide gallery with blocks that we follow to the end. On the right just before the end are the famous Ramps, the first of these is 15m tall and normally equipped with a rope. (in case there is no rope it is possible to climb up between the blocks) After this there are no major difficulties, we climb another ramp and pass the Agujero Soplador (the blowhole) which takes us to a huge room the Sala de Caos (Room of Chaos) which we climb up to reach the entrance pitch which we will have previously visited to ensure that it is rigged.

Recommendations

To make the traverse it is necessary to have at least one rope of 40m and other ropes that add up to the same length. Possibly two 20m ropes that can be used on many of the shorter pitches. To equip the Torca del Mortero you need a 50m rope and 12 hangers/maillons. The cave floods in wet weather and there are long wet sections, it is possible to undertake the traverse in a furrysuit but it is worth taking a rash vest or similar extra insulation to ensure that you don't succumb to hypothermia.