

Travesía Sima del Bloque al Sumidero de Cellagua

Introduction

This text presents the description of one of the most difficult and interesting crossings that can currently be done in the Asón region, in Cantabria. The interest of this activity lies fundamentally in the great variety of obstacles, installations and galleries that must be traversed to complete the crossing between these two cavities.

It is a journey with 440 m of gradient downhill, to then climb the 240 m of Cellagua pitches, with an approximate distance of 3.3 km, in which you can enjoy or suffer, depending on how you see it, a great diversity of terrains. These range from large and beautiful pitches, interspersed with other short but very narrow ones, sliding ramps in wide galleries, ascending ropes, numerous handrails, rooms with beautiful eccentrics, acrobatic cornices, twisted meanders, narrow and humid meanders, small cascade pools, canyon-shaped and athletic areas, large fossil galleries, calm and sandy rivers, flooded and deep areas where you can practice swimming, and finally the ascent of the large and beautiful pitches of Cellagua, which will take us back to the outside, no doubt tired and with different appreciations and feelings about this activity.

Our overall appreciation of the journey is that it is only suitable for confirmed speleologists with experience in all types of terrain and in good physical shape. It is not a pleasant journey to have a good time without tiring yourself too much. On the contrary, it is quite exhausting, especially because of the always present water that wets and cools us and the twisted meanders in between, in addition to the inevitable bath that, in addition to increasing the cold, forces us to carry a lot of weight and bulk.

It is therefore an ideal route for those speleologists who want to test their strength and technique in all types of terrain, regardless of the difficulty of some sections. In return, they will enjoy very attractive areas for a speleologist, such as the flooded section or the handrails over rows of stalactites.

Location of the caves

BLOCK:

The Bloque sinkhole is located in the emblematic Macizo del Mortillano (Soba Valley, eastern Cantabria). To access it we must start from the Sobano town of Astrana. Here we will take the track that takes us to Entremazos, which we can follow by car to the place known as the Platform.

From this point, unless we have all-terrain vehicles, we will continue on foot. 30 minutes along the track in a northerly direction will take us to Alto del Crucero, which dominates the entire Hoyo Salzoso. Shortly before the top, a horseshoe path that skirts the Cellagua depression to the north appears on the left. Following it we pass next to the mouths of Mortero del crucero and Calaca. A little further on, at a fork, we must take the path on the left, which also leads to Garma Ciega. Finally the path ends near a sandstone ridge, and from there we can see a large sinkhole. In the western area of the

sinkhole, next to a huge block (which gives its name to the sinkhole) covered by a yew tree, the sinkhole opens. **From the car it takes approximately one hour to get there.**

UTM coordinates (ED50 Datum):

X: 453946

Y: 4787345

Z: 1.140 m.

CELLAGUA:

The Cellagua sinkhole is well known in the caving world and is located at the bottom of the Llana la Cueva depression, at the foot of the Mazo Chico peak. The access road is the same as the one taken to go to the Bloque, except that once you reach the hill that dominates the depression, next to the La Espina cabins, you only have to descend to the bottom of the valley and follow the direction of the water that circulates on the surface and that leaves you at the sinkhole. **Total about 20 minutes from the car.**

UTM coordinates (ED50 Datum):

X: 454535

Y: 4786555

Z: 964 m.

Description of the Traverse

The traverse begins in a beautiful 43m pitch with several mouths, entering a handrail anchored to a century-old yew tree, then you must climb a short 3m. climb equipped with a rope ladder, which leaves you at the head of a P18, at the base of which there are 2 possible paths, taking a 10m pitch on the left, followed by another of the same size and which leaves you in a short ascending meander that leads to a very narrow P9 that allows you to cross the meander. At the bottom after a narrow bend a handrail leads to the head of a large 28m pitch with a ledge 10m from the ground. There is a fixed rope installed on this ledge in case it is necessary to climb up to unhook the rope, but normally you descend to the next access handrail, at the head of a P47.

At the end of this large shaft, it is necessary to advance in opposition to the next head, so it is recommended to use the ropes from the previous shaft to reach the head before recovering them. The last section of shafts is a P19, with a ledge in the middle, which also has an emergency rope in case the rope gets caught.

A short and wide downward meander leaves us at a crossroads of several windows and pitches, being necessary to take a right climbing a step and passing over a narrow pitch, to take a window above our heads, we are in the galleries of the Pirates of the Ebro. In this area we descend in two muddy ramps separated by an equipped climb, which leaves us at the start of several climbs with fixed ropes. We ascend 25m., to descend again, to a funnel that again ascends another 25m.

We are now in the galleries of Los Pirates del Asón, which are traversed by linking 4 handrails, some of which are very pretty and made up of varied and colourful formations.

The last handrail takes us to two rappels almost one after the other on two ramps of 15m each, which lead to a passage between blocks and mud, which leads to a room with quicksand. At this point on the left side a rope helps to ascend a 2m ledge... A wide gallery but lowers at some point takes us to a 12m pitch, which is followed by a junction of galleries. Ascending a ramp towards the gallery on the left, we reach the bivouac and a little further on we end up in a room with a beautiful panel of eccentrics on its right side, we are in the Museum, which closes this sector. Following the crossing in front and going down, we end up in a 10m. equipped climb, at the top of which a great blackness opens accompanied at times by a loud sound of water. It is a set of pitches parallel to each other, some fossils and others active. We descend 20m. in double to a ledge equipped with a handrail that leaves us on a platform located between pitches, where we recover the rope and at the end of which another short handrail starts to access a large 52m pitch, with a very aerial exit that makes us go down cleanly almost to the bottom. In this pitch, you have to be careful with the mud and stones at the head that can come loose when passing through, so it is recommended NOT to take the handrail until your partner has cleared the base of the pitch. It is also possible that when you retrieve the ropes and fall to the bottom, they will be held 4m from the ground by some points that stick out from a small rocky spur, so it is recommended to break them in advance and give a final pull on the rope to move it away from the pitch.

We are at the base of the "La Galerna" well, which always carries some water, or a lot if there is a flood. Two ramps installed in double of 10m. intercalated by a deep pool that is flanked by climbing on the right, leave us at the beginning of the meander of "La Ruta Sangrienta", which has a first pitch of 6m in double, which is the last pitch in double of the crossing, and later another of 5m in fixed.

This meander of black marl, not very narrow but uncomfortable, leads to another area of pure limestone, with two consecutive pitches of 6m, which indicate the beginning of the meander of "Las Agujas", with narrow and tortuous areas and low and flooded passes, which force you to get quite wet. The final stretch is wider and leads to the Tembleque room, very high and well ventilated.

In this room begins the third meander, again in black marl, the "Stalingrad" meander with 4 pitches equipped with fixed lines and some narrow or uncomfortable steps. The last 15m pitch with a ledge in the middle, takes us to a wide room, which in front has a narrow passage leads to a canyon with a new river, that of Los Cantabrones.

The canyon of Los Navegantes is followed downstream almost always along its bottom with an equipped climb and an equally equipped descent and some passage between blocks, until reaching a point where the canyon seems to be closed by a barrier of blocks and stones that ascend towards the ceiling. You must first take a narrow passage on the ground, which goes down 2m and take a hidden gate perpendicular to the path that we were following, followed by a low gallery at the beginning and which later forces you to climb over a block and go around on the right in opposition to an apparent cliff, which leaves you at the Nathalie passage, equipped with a rope and which you must pass carefully between unstable blocks, to descend 8m.

Once again, the river is reached and we continue along its bottom with small climbs and descents, until reaching a 7m ascending rope, which is followed by steps between blocks and another small basin, which is skirted on the right, to then ascend to the left on gravel and come out to a large fossil gallery "Camino Soria", which we follow to the left skirting a pitch and going up a short ramp with a rope.

Gravel ramps are descended, and another short rope must be climbed to descend new block ramps until reaching a large block that is crossed in the gallery and under which a 10m fixed rope takes us back to the river, which we follow to a short climb between blocks with the help of a rope. We continue between blocks until reaching a 20m ramp pitch that takes us back to the river, next to deep potholes that are avoided by climbing over piles of blocks to go back down to the river, this time with a soft, sandy ground.

We reach a deep pool at the foot of a block pitch, which we go around on the right, ascending about 3m, being necessary to look for a small and hidden passage between blocks, marked with black carbide spots, which leaves us above another deep pool, after which we take a passage to the left that leaves us in a high gallery covered with large blocks and which a few meters later give way to the flooded area. This section of several hundred meters completely covered with deep water, has a width of 1.5m in the first meters, with an exit over blocks to return to the water again until reaching a large chimney-room with a sandy beach, where 2 waterfalls from the ceiling arrive.

You must continue along the water on the right side until you reach a window on the left to a sandy gallery parallel to the water, which you follow to the right for a short stretch, ending in a large pool with a large block, which you go around on the right. We are at the base of the Cellagua pitches, and we only have to climb them to reach the outside.

Installation

The installation of the traverse is basically composed of double rappelling anchors, most of which have a chain with a ring and a parabolt, along with rope access handrails. Some short pitches are equipped with double anchors with spit and chain or 2 independent bolts with rings. The passages in the galleries are equipped with double rope.

The climbs are equipped with fixed ropes, which are the most fragile part of the installation, so it is recommended to treat them with care so that they last, although they will inevitably deteriorate with the passage of personnel, so it is not a bad idea to carry some pieces of rope to change a section that may have been damaged.

The oxbow pools are equipped with fixed ropes and double anchors, which so far do not appear to have been damaged by the water, being a little further away from the fall of the water, but some damage should never be ruled out, so they should be checked carefully before using them.

Cellagua pitches

The installation of the Cellagua pitches can be done in many different ways and with different materials. There are several publications that describe this installation and the size of its pitches. Below we give a summary of the possible materials, although there may be other options:

Pozo	Cuerda	Anclajes
P25	45 m	8 sp
P80	10 m.+ 4 m.+ 85 m	2 sp + 1 sp + 2 sp + 1 pb + 1 sp + 2 sp + 1 sp + 1 sp + Na
P8	20 m	1 sp + 3 m. 1 sp + 1 sp desv
P23	100 m	2 sp + 2 sp + 1 sp
P20	la misma de 100	1 sp + 2 sp + 1 sp + 2 sp
P2	la misma de 100	1 sp
P4	la misma de 100	1 sp (Los p23, p20, p2, p4 con cuerda de 100 m llega para todos)
P58	75 m	2 sp + 2 sp + 1 sp + 2 sp + 1 Na

Sp = spit, **Pb** = parabolt, **Na** = natural

The P80 requires access handrails on the left wall.

Recommended Materials and Tactics

As you might expect, having to wade through deep water makes it essential to have the right materials for this section. These materials can be very varied, and it is possible to use a full wetsuit, which is the simplest and most obvious solution, but which has the problem of bulkiness that it represents on a journey with many long meanders. Another possible option is to carry only the wetsuit and a float, which should not be very large since the first flooded sections are no more than 1 m wide at some points.

A third option is to carry a pontoon and a float, with the advantage of the weight and size of the pontoon, and the option for those who are sensitive to the cold to put it on, at the beginning of the meanders and the river, thus avoiding getting wet in this section, although later it can be somewhat annoying in the fossil galleries at the bottom.

Another very convenient option is that the team in charge of previously installing the Cellagua sinkhole, takes care of carrying the wading material to the point where it is needed. This should not take more than 1 hour between the round trip from the Cellagua base, although it requires having extra wading material and carrying more bags at the installation.

The option of using a boat is not very viable due to the narrowness of a large part of the flooded section, which does not allow easy passage of a normal boat, perhaps a narrower or smaller model would be suitable.

Regarding the ropes needed for the traverse, a minimum of 55m is required for the La Galerna pitch, and it is advisable to carry at least one rope of this size in case any ropes get caught. When this traverse was carried out by the A.E.R., no problems of this type arose, and only when the rope was recovered in the La Galerna pitch did it get caught 4m from the ground, but it was finally released. In any case, this type of incident is always possible, so it is better to carry the rope, and if it is a large team, it may be profitable to carry a third rope, which allows the rappels to be linked in the pit.

Finally, we give an approximate timetable, since this always depends a lot on the number of participants and how fast each one moves, especially on a trip with so many rappels like this one. Orientation should not be a big problem on this trip since almost all the time you follow the facilities or the river.

The times given here are for a team of 5 people and 3 ropes, carrying their own wading equipment. Take into account 1 hour of total changing time before and after wading:

1. Descent of the Bloque pitches: 2 hours.
2. Climbing and handrails to El Museo: 1 h.
3. Arrival at the start of the meanders: 1 h.
4. Meanders: 2 h.
5. Galleries at the bottom to wading: 1.30 h.
6. Wading and changing: 1.30 h.
7. Ascent of Cellagua: 2 h.

Total 11 hours plus time for food or rest. According to this, we must think of a reasonable schedule between 10 and 13 hours, depending mainly on the size of the groups.

Of course, for those who are very motivated, there is the possibility of making the crossing to Garma blind, instead of Cellagua, which would allow enjoying 2 km more of large and interesting galleries in the Cellagua canyon. But it would be necessary to install the long and complex Garma chasm, which requires a lot of material and time, in addition to increasing the crossing by a minimum of 6 hours.

As for the most recommended time of year to make this crossing, it is of course in summer, since, although there are no siphon passages under normal conditions, both the Galerna pitch, the Cellagua pitches and the low passes of the meanders are not very recommendable in case of heavy rains.

A good indicator of the state of charge can be the Cellagua river, since if this is passable, probably the rest of the crossing will also be, another thing is that we get more or less wet. For all this, as a precaution we must wait for a dry period to make the crossing without complications.

Finally, I would like to remind those interested in this activity of the need to preserve the rubbish cavity as much as possible. Unfortunately, there are some old remains of carbide in Piratas del Ebro, but the rest is clean and should remain that way. It is also necessary to take into account that materials deteriorate over time and use, so each team that decides to make the journey must assume responsibility for what they are doing and carefully check each installation before using it.

Some data

Here are some numerical data on the traverse and its characteristics:

AER explorations: between 1998 and 2002

First full traverse: 6 September 2003

Development: 3,300 m.

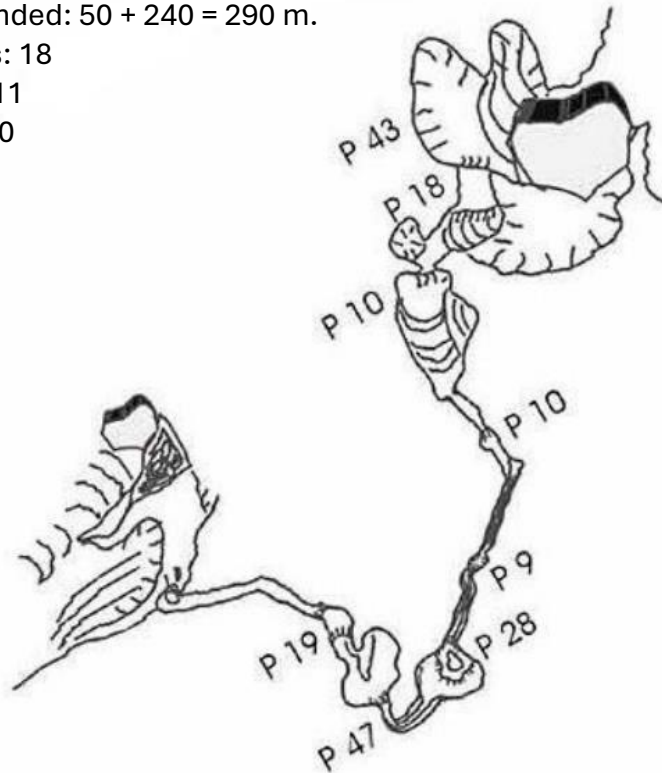
Elevation descended: 440 m.

Elevation ascended: $50 + 240 = 290$ m.

Double pitches: 18

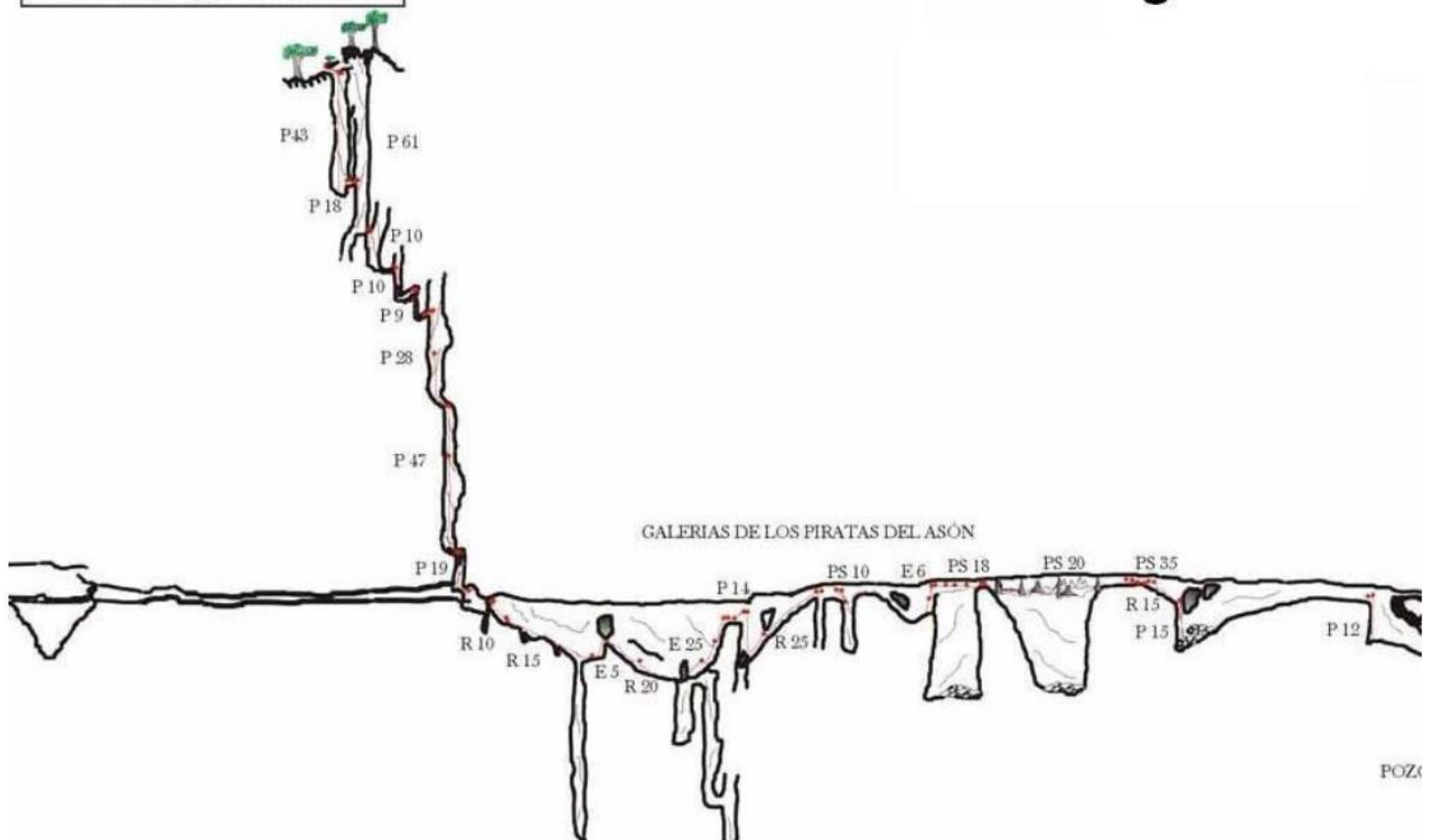
Fixed pitches: 11

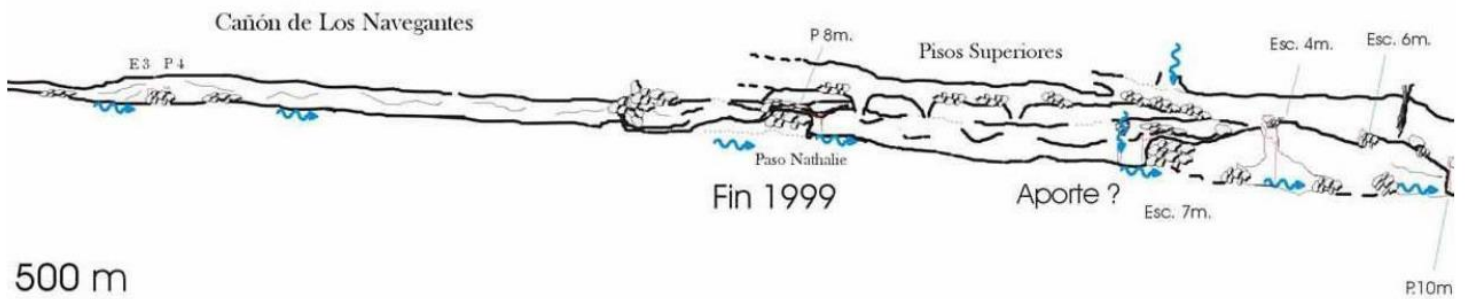
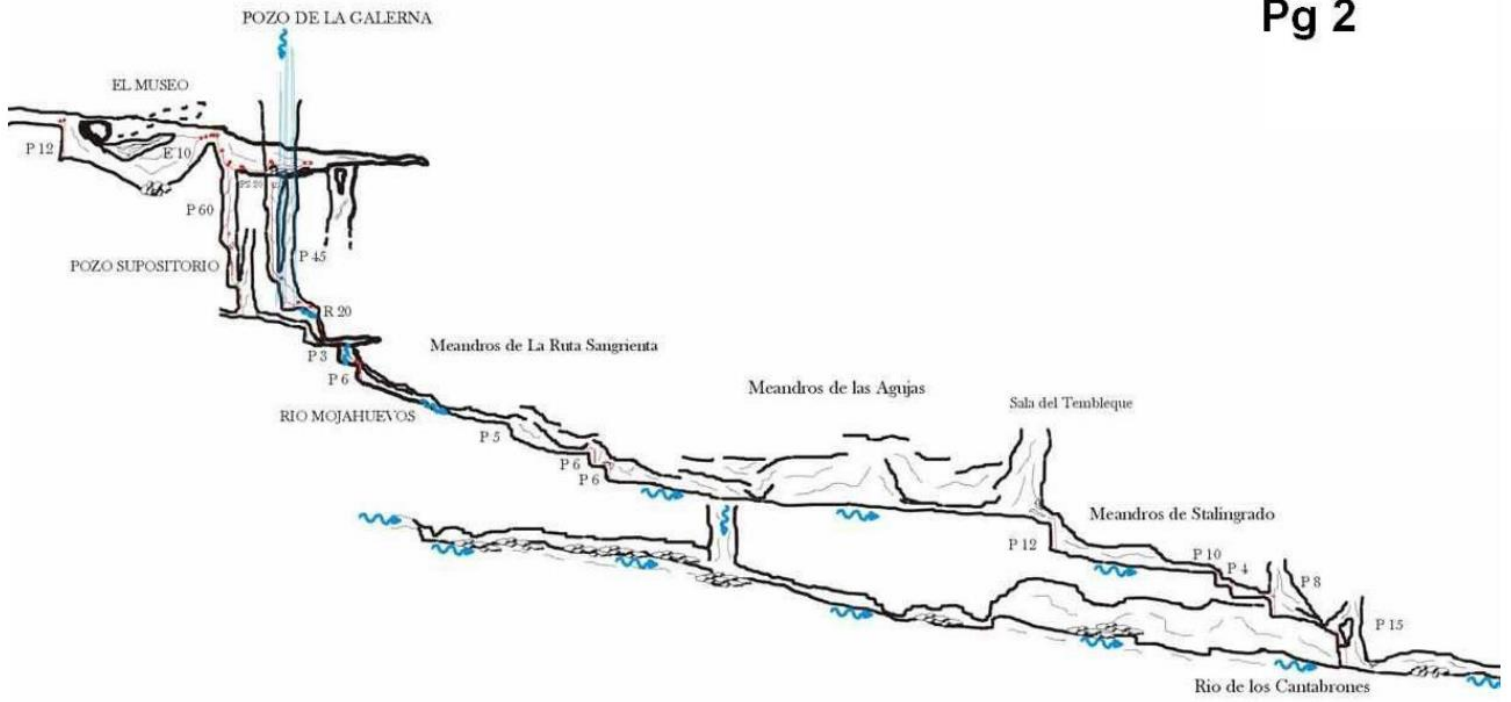
Fixed climbs: 10



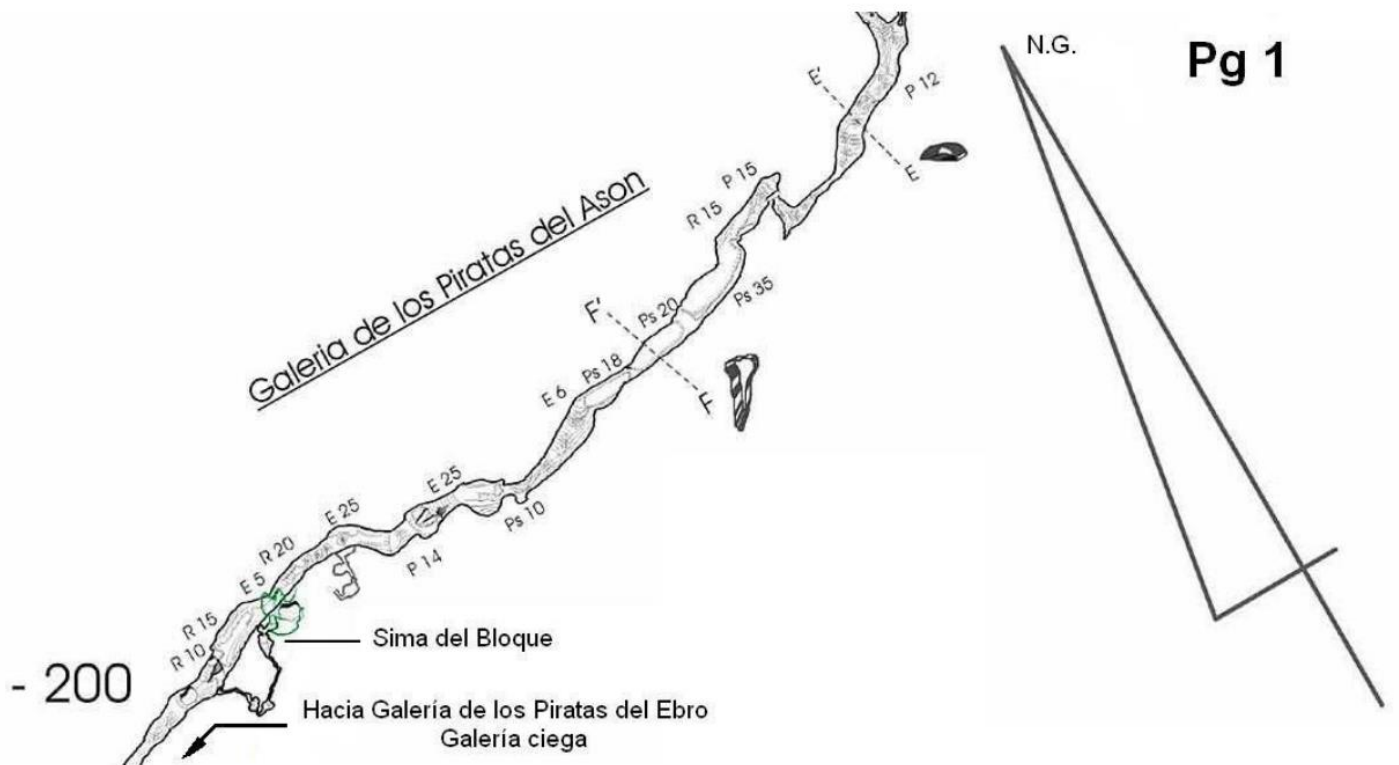
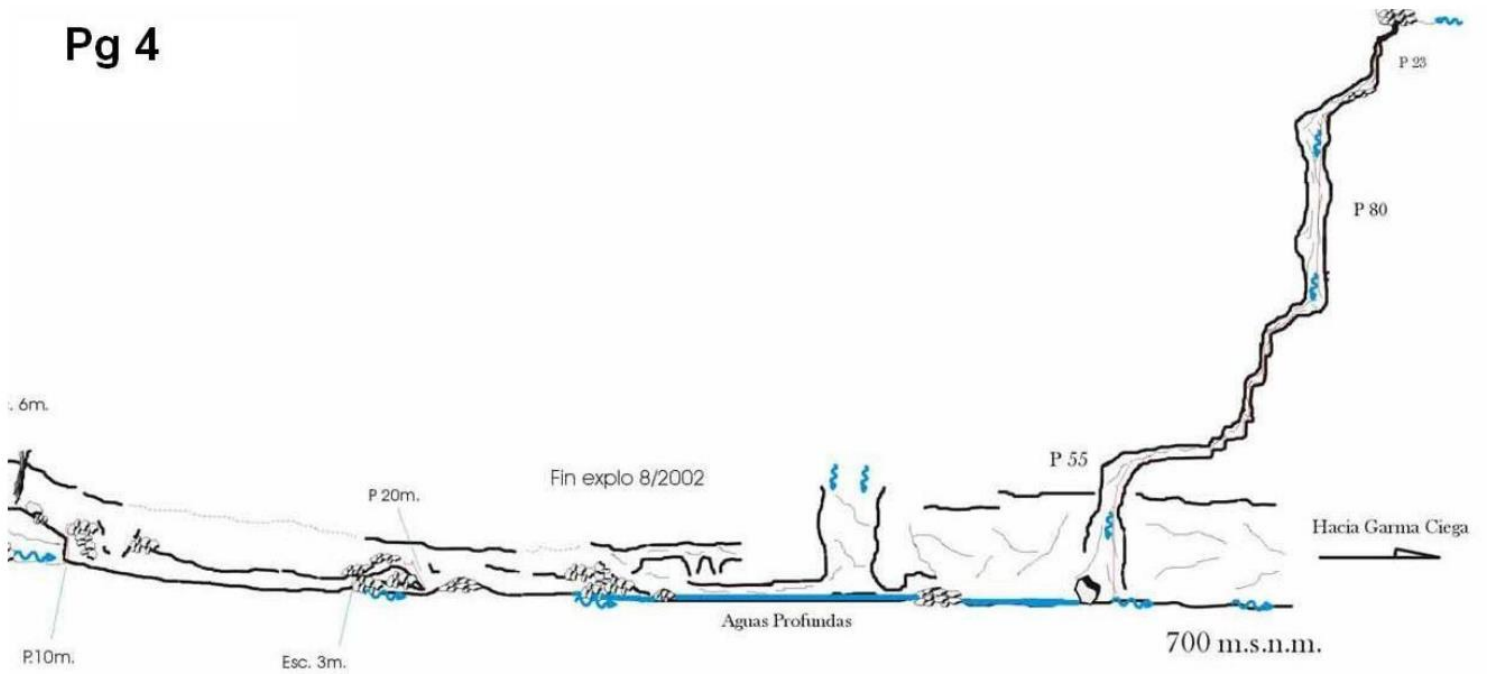
Sima del Bloque 1140 m.s.n.m.

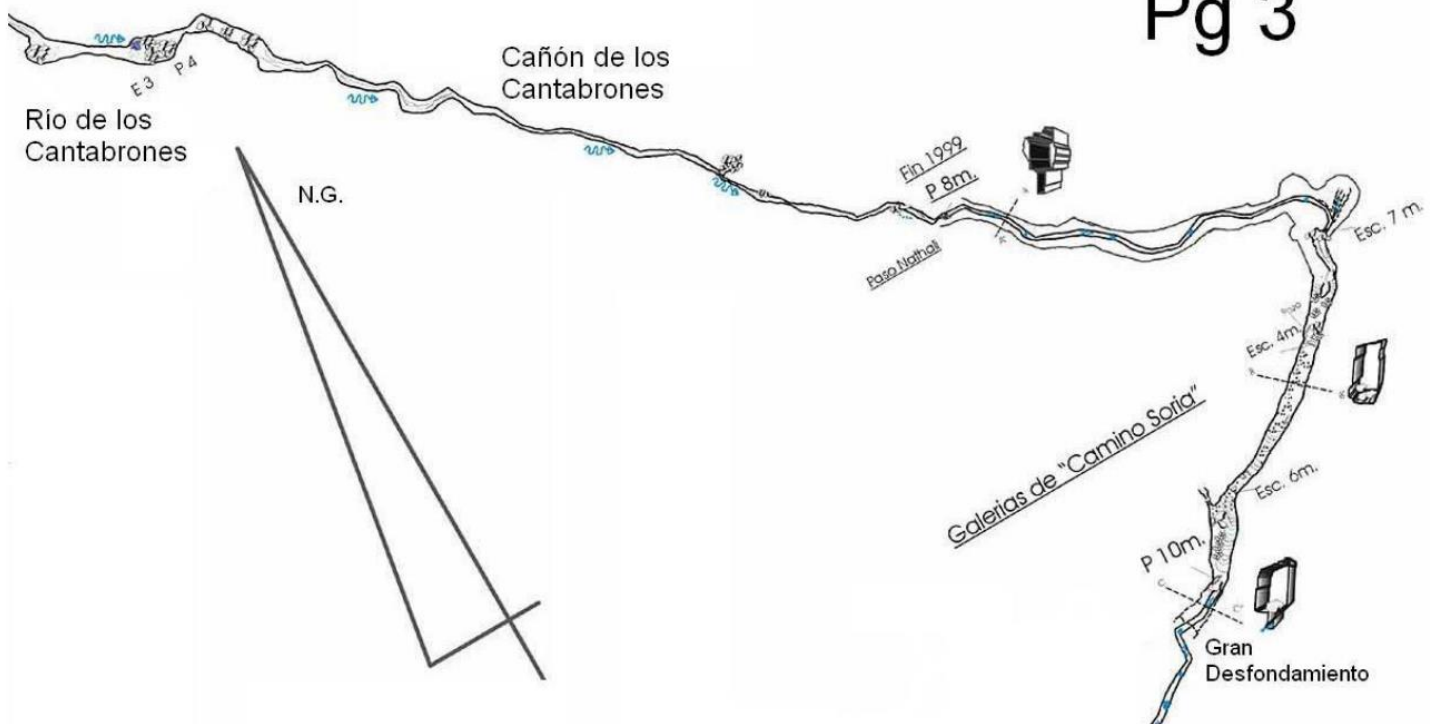
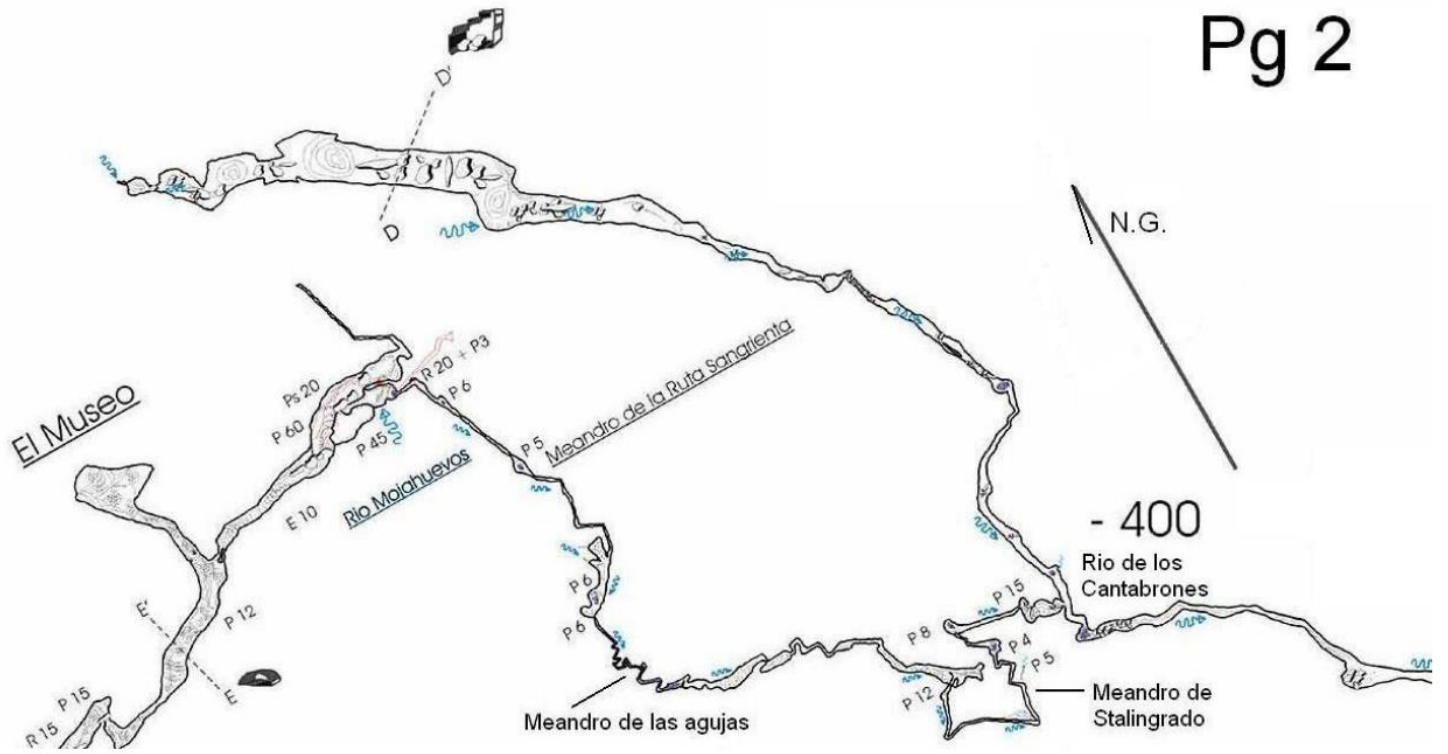
Pg 1



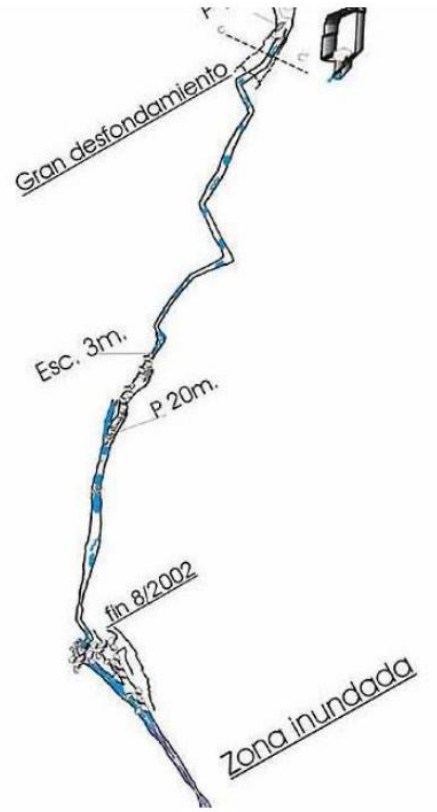
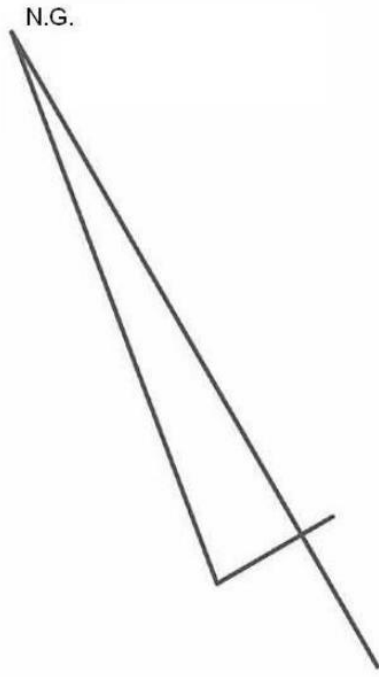


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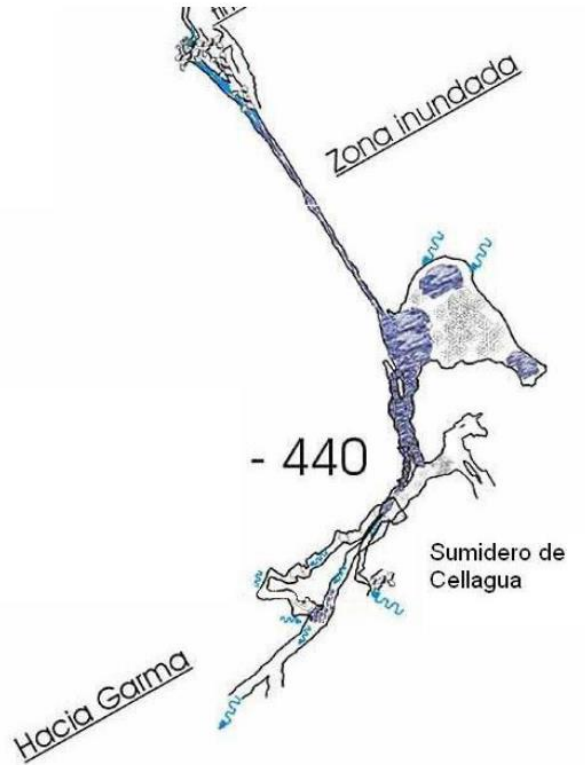
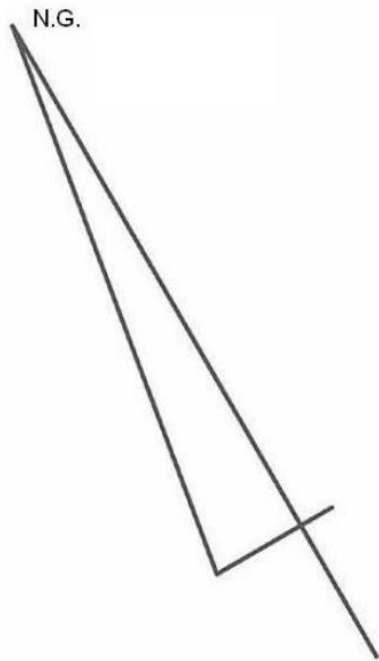




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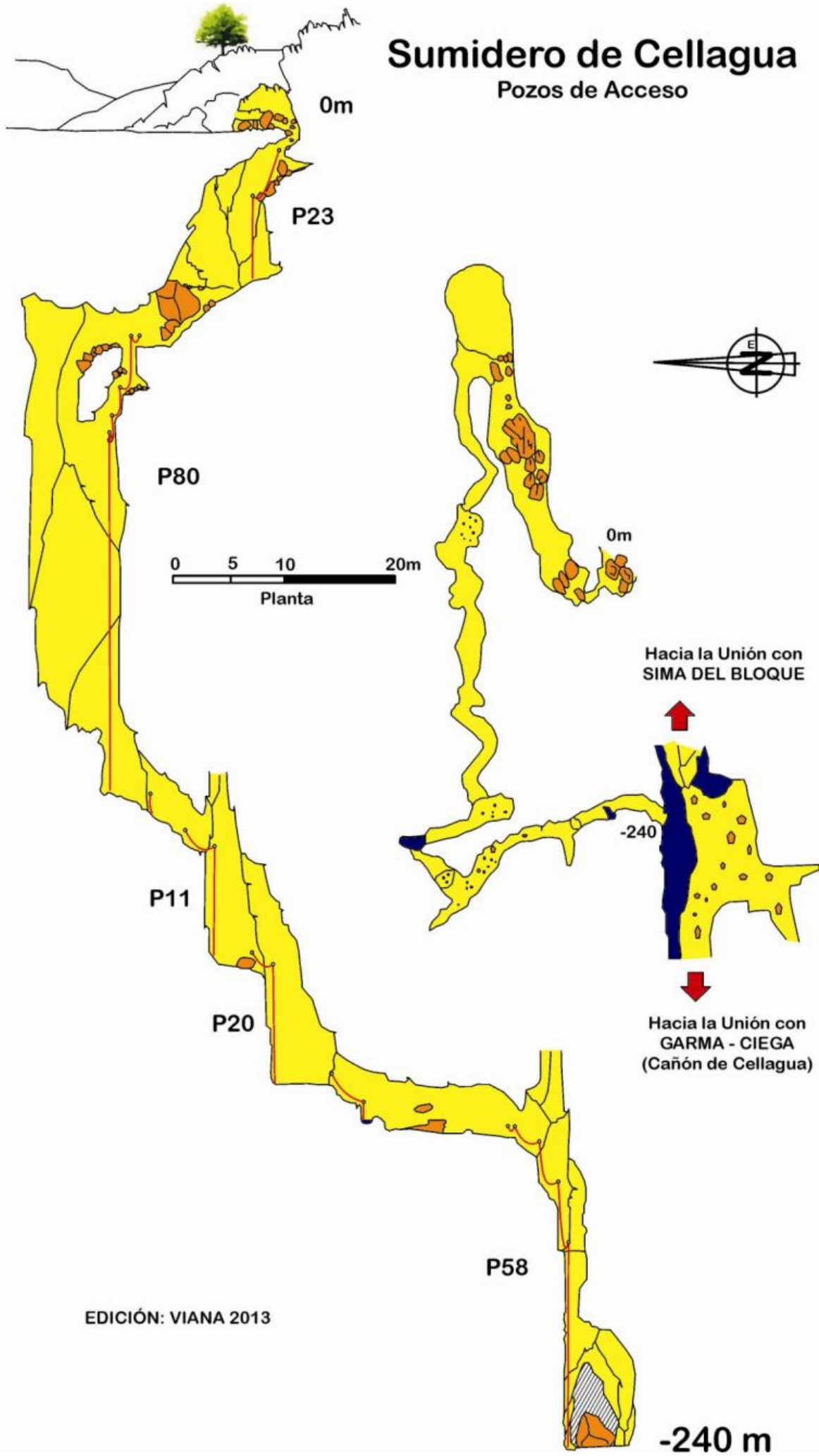


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Sumidero de Cellagua

Pozos de Acceso



EDICIÓN: VIANA 2013

-240 m