

Palos Marias Project
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By Peter Ruplinger



Traffic in El Alcomún

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This was our fifth trip to Colima and Michoacán. Each trip has been a rewarding experience, which has enabled us to map several virgin caves.

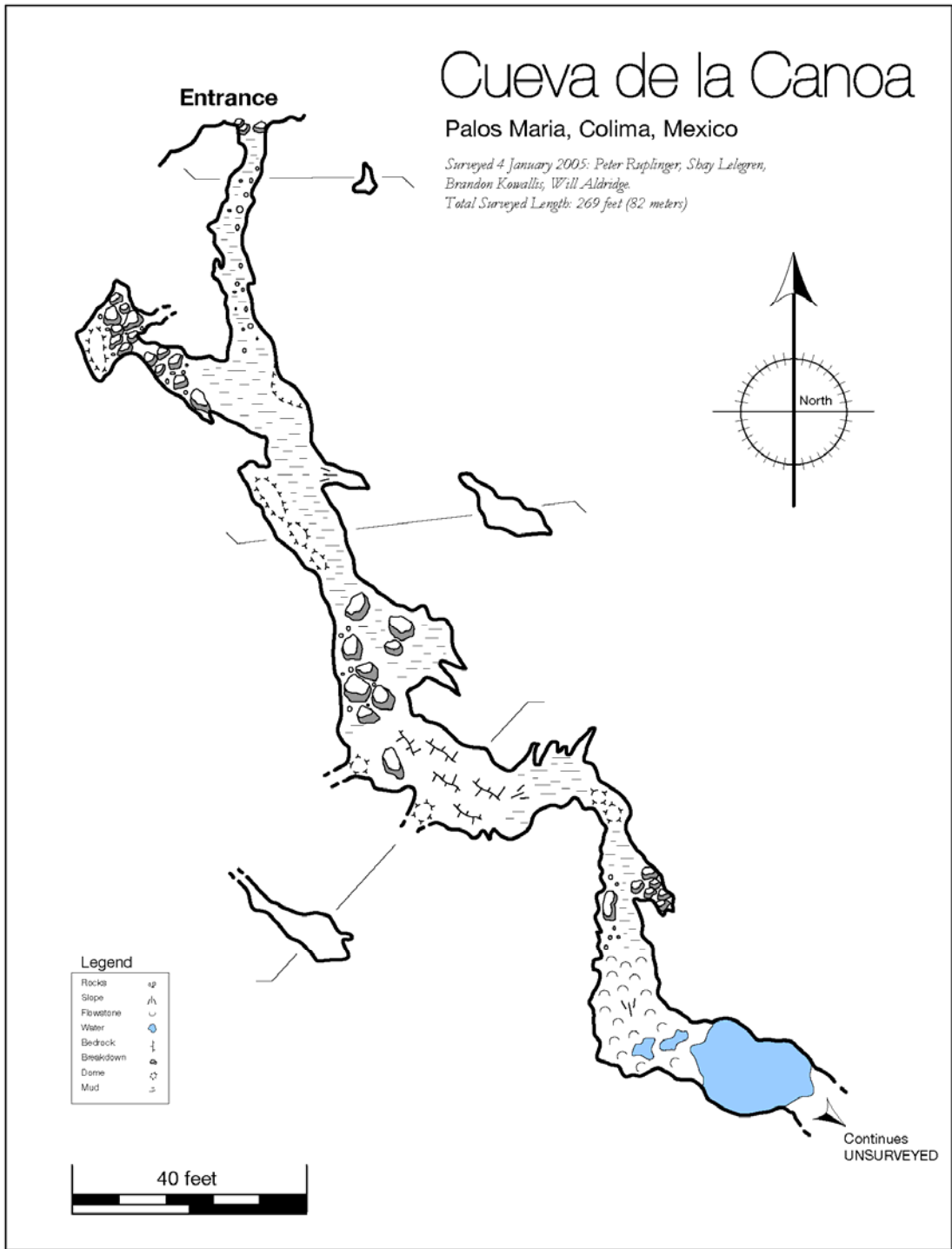
Cueva de la Canoa is a river cave on the outskirts of Palos Marías, Michoacán. This was our third visit to map there. It's a chore. Much of the cave is less than 1.5 meters high. It is a relief to find a place to stand up. There are a few formations, including a large heart shaped stalactite much like the famed heart of Timpagogos in Utah's national park cave of that same name. We mapped 92 meters on this trip, bringing the total to 293 mapped meters. The cave continues with little variation in width or depth. We hope to find an end on our next trip.

Twelve kilometers down the canyon, high on the hill is Cueva Tragaluz. We heard about it on our last trip but didn't have time to map it. It turned out to be a real gem. The main passage is 125 meters long. The big room has a 21.5 meter ceiling. "Tragaluz" is Spanish for "bring light". The big room ceiling has a large opening. Locals informed me that when the cave was first entered there were stone boxes on the floor, much like "auto battery boxes". They contained "monos", which is their word for figurines. Examining the floor we found no signs of stone boxes, chard, or other indications that anyone had been there. Not even graffiti or litter.

There is one area of the cave, which we dared not explore. A chimney led up to a dome. We suspect it is a hydrothermal dome. The upper area was swarming with bats. The passage continued below, but it was covered with black gooey guano, several centimeters deep. The ammonia smell was almost overpowering. Anyone rappelling down the passage would be coved head to foot with the slimy mess. Sorry, but I'm not that gutsy.

A hundred kilometers north of Palos Marías is the small town of El Alcomún. It's incredibly beautiful, and the people are equally delightful. They speak their own dialect. Most are related. The town is too small to have a mayor. The commissioner welcomed me. He said we should consider ourselves guest of the community, and were free to explore any of the neighboring caves. He added, "In Alcomún we are all one big family. There is no crime here."

The first cave we visited is referred to as "Cueva Alcomún". It is total walking passage, and is popular with adventurous teenagers. I heard about it years ago. It was rumored to have hieroglyphic writing on the walls. Indeed there were what appeared to be cryptic symbols on the walls, but on closer examination they appear to be simply the effect of erosion. There were lots of bats, which frequently flew into our faces. Considering the cave is well known we were pleased to observe no graffiti or liter.



Our last cave was a hundred and four meter pit on the plateau east of Alcomún. It was a straight drop with no observable side passages. The young man who took us there said it had no name, so with his consent I named it "Lirio." That's what the locals call the orchids, which grow near its entrance.



Tragaluz entrance



Stream passage in Cueva de la Canoa