

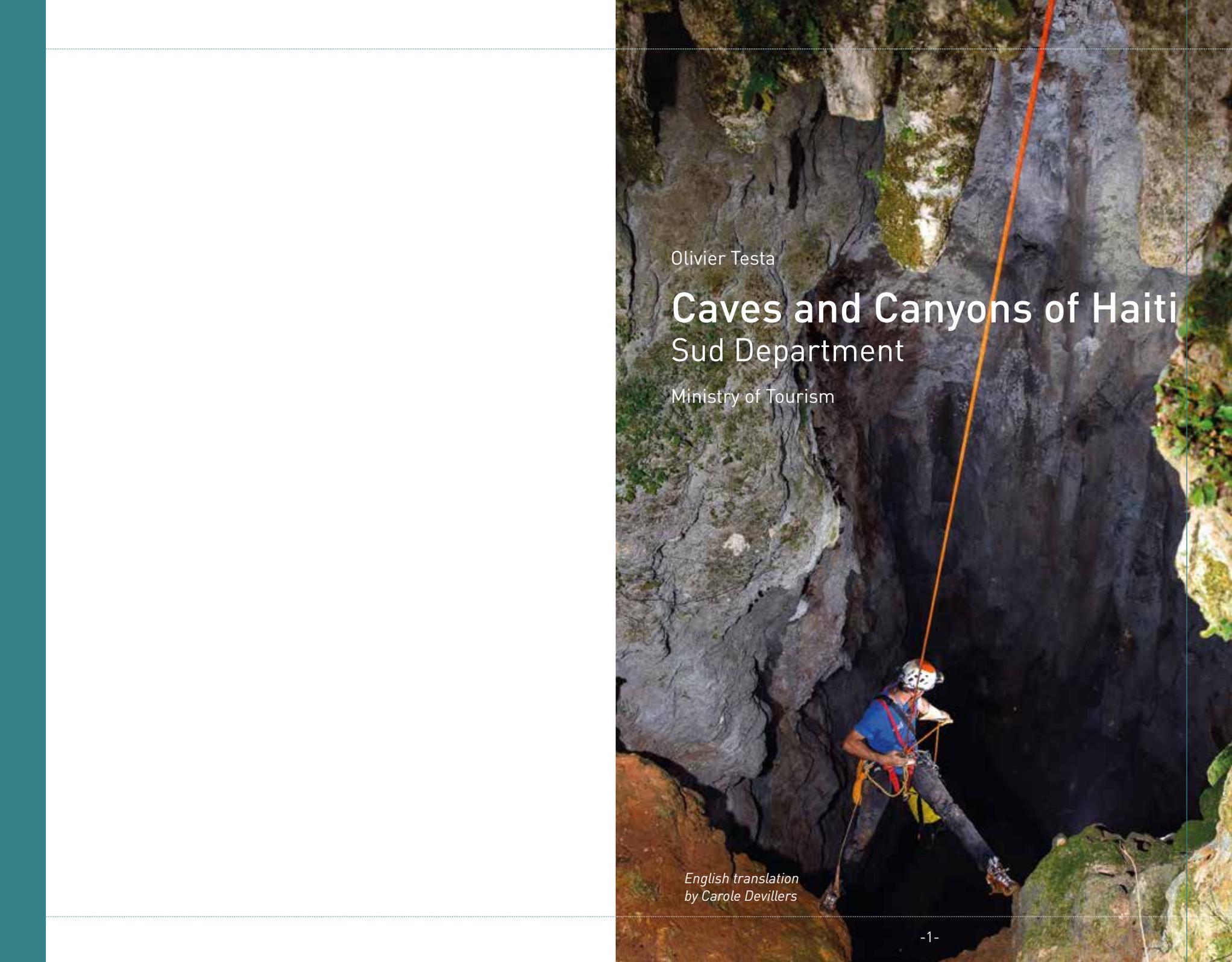


Olivier Testa

# Caves and Canyons of Haiti

## Sud Department





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## Sud Department

Ministry of Tourism

*English translation  
by Carole Devillers*



- Main roads
- Secondary trails
- Canyon circuit
- Access on foot
- Stream, river

-  Waterfall, canyon, basin
-  Cave, chasm
-  Fort
-  Beach

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Plages de l'Île-à-Vache

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## ➔ Foreword



In Vodou, caves are of great importance because of the ceremonial space they represent. Vodou perpetuates the ancestors' memory. Some spirits live in caves and they are Taino, African and even European. Their presence is recognized and venerated by the vodouist who thus preserves their memory and ensures the transmission of sacred knowledge. A place of high spirituality, of purification and enlightenment, caves are a place that preserves part of the Haitian identity.

May this document serve as a compass in your quest for novelty and your thirst for adventure. It is meant for you, amateur and professional cavers alike, or just simply for those who crave for something different and feel the restlessness of their wandering soul.

This guidebook is a map to discover the treasures of Haiti. Plunge into the bowels of the earth, you who are fond of explorations, of scuba diving, of hiking or of simple strolls at sunset: you are here served. The caves of Haiti are alive, invigorating even. More than a natural phenomenon, the karst system of the South, already magnificent in itself, reveals a whole culture, a protective matrix that silently accompanies the history of the country, of this land where the Good God laughs, where the hooting of the owl is a deciphered message for who has learned to hear, and where Indians and Africans still dance to the rhythm of the same pain and the same joy. Symbols of renewal, these hidden beauties wish to be discovered - will you dare look for them?

***Erol Josué***  
***Executive Director of Bureau National d'Ethnologie***

## ➔ Preface



As you flip through the pages of this book, do reconnect with the curious inner child, prompt to wonder, that is dozing in you. From this paper vantage point, wherever you are, dear lover of exotic travel, dive into the heart of the Caribbean. Don a pirate's costume, make yourself up as a buccaneer and open wide your eyes. Discover... discover Haiti, "the best kept secret in the Caribbean."

With its gorges, its chasms, its waterfalls and its subterranean rivers, the South of Haiti, also dubbed the Caribbean Coast, is a heavenly gem for who loves to explore caves and other mineral wonders. Slice through its warm waters populated with rainbow-colored creatures, towards the secrets of its deepest origins. With your treasure map in hand and spurred by the mystery, walk up these shaded and countless trails. Let yourself be caught up in a veritable treasure hunt in the midst of numerous landscapes that take your breath away. Immerse yourself in the underground mazes, mazes adorned not only with majestic stalactites and stalagmites reflecting a magical world, but also with the unavoidable aura attached to its myths. Travel to a thousand places, gorges and rapids. Offered to you is an unimaginable network of canyons and cavities, sculpturally shaped and generating here and there waterfalls and basins of a striking blue color.

Captured by the natural charm of Southern Haiti and especially by its smiling people and bewitching traditions, watch out that the child-pirate wrapped in the liking of Marie-Jeanne's experience, in the mystery of Daredevil, does not carry forever in his heart this country and its people. Because he will be doomed to return. And he will always be welcome... at home, in the land of LIBERTY.

***Marie-Christine Stephenson***  
***Minister of Tourism***



## ➡ Safety and Protection Measures of the Sites

### Recommendations, caution

This guide is intended in priority for autonomous cavers on rope. The caves and chasms we are describing here present, for the most part, vertical sections.

Keep in mind there are no speleological rescue services in Haiti and we therefore recommend the utmost caution. It is also recommended to have an insurance policy covering this risky sport in the country where it will be practiced.

Always notify in advance several people of your itinerary, as well as what to do in case of delay.

Before your departure, leave the following information with your entourage: the name of the cave and its location, the names of the people accompanying you, as well as the telephone number of a person or a service to be reached should it be needed (this may be the number of your embassy if you are a foreigner.)

### The caves

Haitian caves are very warm, 20 to 28 degrees Celsius. Plan to take with you enough drinking water to avoid dehydration.

Be aware that bat excrements often make cave floors very slippery.

Bring along self-rescue equipment (emergency ropes, spit kit, pulleys-blocks) as well as a basic medical kit.

In canyons, the water-level rise can reach several meters. Above all, do not penetrate when a thunderstorm is threatening.

Similarly, certain roads accessing the sites have to ford streams. In case of rain these may be impossible to cross. If such is the case, be patient and wait for the water level to drop. Be reminded that a 4 x 4 floats in water and can easily be carried away by the current.

### For caving novices

When the caves are easy and accessible to caving beginners, each of the group members must have a headlamp of good quality. A headlamp allows you to have your hands free. Don't content yourself with one lamp for two people, and two bad lamps will never replace one good lamp. A cell phone is not a lamp!

Bring with you brand-new spare batteries, in sufficient quantity for the group. It is also recommended to have one spare lamp per person. Otherwise you don't split up!

A mountain helmet, caving helmet, or failing that a construction helmet, is indispensable.

### Protection of caves

The following instructions are to be followed for any caving exploration:

- Do not smoke inside caves. Smoke affects wildlife and the ecosystem.
- Do not damage concretions (stalactites, stalagmites) and do not touch them.
- Respect all forms of animal life and never disturb bats.
- Keep and bring back all packaging and waste matter (bottles, food...).
- Make sure to relieve yourself before entering a cave. Urine affects the ecosystem just as excrements do.

### General Recommendations

It is always advisable to be guided to the caves entrances. Entering a cave without a guide will indeed be particularly frowned upon by the locals. Communities consider these sites as their natural heritage and they are particularly sensitive to the respect of the premises. In addition, some cavities can be situated on private lands or may be considered mystical places where religious ceremonies are performed.

Gratuities for the accompanying persons vary according to the sites, duration and level of difficulty.

## ↪ The Underground Fauna

Caves are a privileged location for certain animal species that find in them the darkness, temperature or moisture that suit them. **Bats** for example are a typical case. After spending the night in flight to feed themselves, they rest in caves during the day, and must not be disturbed by direct lighting or noise. All Chiroptera are protected species. They are indeed very useful to the ecosystem and humans. Insectivorous species can, in fact, consume several thousands of insects every night (including mosquitoes). The frugivorous bats, on the other hand, pollinate plants and disperse the seeds of many useful plants (mango, banana, ficus, avocado...).



The caves of the South are also the habitat of the **cave-dwelling Yellow Frog of Haiti** (*Eleutherodactylus Counouspeus*). It is a small frog frequently seen that produces an acute all-powerful sound - tweet, tweet, tweet. When all the frogs respond to one another, their high pitch "tweets" sound like a real underground concert. It is probable that in darkness this cry is used for echolocation.

This species is endemic to the Massif de la Hotte where it was first observed in 1964 in Grotte Kounoubwa. Its scientific name stems from its place of discovery.

These frogs distinguish themselves by the lack of tadpole stage in their development: mini-frogs come straight out of the eggs.



Furthermore, another species that is regularly encountered in caves is **the Giant Tarantula of Hispaniola** (*Phormictopus cancerides*), called Krab-anbara in Creole. Contrary to popular belief, this spider is not deadly, however its long hooks inject a venom that can be painful for a few days, similar to a bee sting. Females distinguish themselves from males by their beautiful purplish colors and their size. Males are thinner, and black.



**Amblypygids** are also arachnids. Although they are quite impressive with their large size (40 cm sometimes) and their bristle-covered pedipalps, they are totally harmless. They can be found on caves walls, on which they move about very fast. With time, their first pair of legs lost its locomotor role, and serves to feel the ground and vibrations. They are sensory legs.





At 750 m above sea level, above Ducis, on the road leading to Massif Macaya, is the **Citadel of Platons**. Built after the Haitian independence by General Geffrard on the orders of Dessalines, this imposing fortification has several underground chambers and powder magazines. The view over the plain of Les Cayes is exceptional.

## ➔ The Forts

The landscape of the South Department is punctuated by several forts. Consider stopping there on your way to the caves. On an islet facing the town of Saint-Louis-du-Sud is located the **Fort des Anglais** - the British Fort - (formerly known as Fort Saint-Louis). It was built in 1702 by the French, to protect the town, then the headquarters of the Company of Saint Domingue. It was the best anchorage in the whole coast. Although defended by 338 men and 72 cannons, this fort did not resist more than two hours to the assault of the British Navy commanded by Vice Admiral Knowles in 1748. It was largely destroyed in the battle.

To erase their bitter defeat, the French built the **Fort des Oliviers** - Fort of Olives - in 1754. Of a more modest size, situated in an idyllic setting at the end of a peninsula and facing the Fort des Anglais, it never served.

The visit of these two forts deserves a detour. The Fort des Anglais is the most impressive. To get there it is necessary to take a fishing boat near the Fort des Oliviers. Bring also a mask and a snorkel with you and go and admire the wrecks in the shallow waters in their vicinity.



➔ **GPS Coordinates**  
**Platons Fort:** 18.27 ° N 73.97 ° W  
**Oliviers Fort:** 18.557 ° N 73.558 ° W  
**British Fort:** 18.2517 ° N 73.552 ° W  
*See map pages 2-3*



## → The History

Caves have always fascinated men. On the island of Hispaniola, traces of ancient human occupation are legions. In the South, archaeologists have discovered in numerous entrances of cavities, burial sites, shards of pottery and remnants of occupation (shells, stone shards) characteristic of the island's archaic peoples.

Before the arrival of Christopher Columbus, the island was populated by the Taino Amerindians who used the caves for their ceremonies and covered the walls with petroglyphs and expressive drawings. However no ornate site has yet been discovered in the Southern Department.

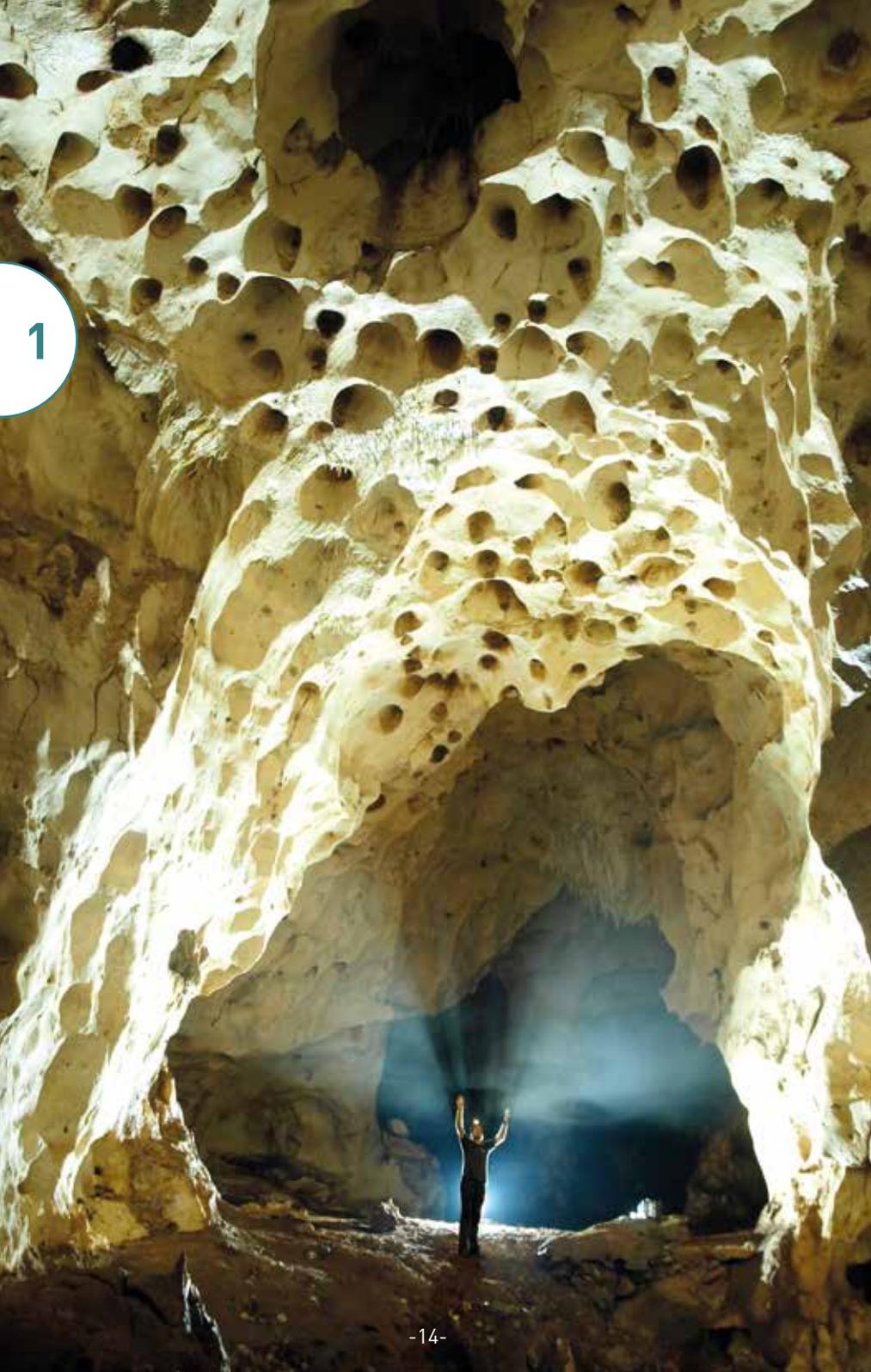
More recently, starting with the colonial period, we find many descriptions of caves in the whole country. In the South, Moreau de Saint Méry (1798) gives us this description of a chasm in Platons that was descended before 1789. The described abyss is 73-meter deep, and has not yet been located to date. Notice to explorers...

**Le morne des Platons est extrêmement boisé. Au Nord & au Nord-Est sont les plus beaux bois de construction; l'acajou, le gayac, le bois de fer & de superbes acomas à fleurs bleues. Au Sud est le bois de lance, le bois trompette; tandis qu'à l'Ouest un terrain noir nourrit de magnifiques palmiers & d'autres bois qui semblent indiquer une terre végétale profonde.**

**Sur l'habitation Guérin est un monticule incliné vers le Nord-Est, élevé & rempli de roches à ravets mobiles, au bas duquel vers le Sud-Ouest est une ouverture d'environ 72 pieds de circonférence. Deux personnes y ont descendu dans un panier suspendu & à 230 pieds de profondeur, elles sont arrivées sur un fond uni & solide, où était du sable fin ayant la blancheur & l'éclat de la nacre, une espèce de sable à parties moins rondes d'un blanc éteint, & enfin une substance d'un rouge brun, qui, après des essais, s'est trouvée être une vraie pouzzolane très-propre à cimenter les bassins à laver le café. Le fond du trou frappé avec une pince a rendu un son creux. Le trou va en s'élargissant en entonnoir jusqu'à avoir à son espèce de plancher environ 120 pieds de circonférence.**

**Ce trou n'a aucune des grenailles ferrugineuses, si communes à la surface du sol. On y trouve des stalactites. Il est assez éclairé pour qu'on puisse lire étant au bas, & la température quoique fraîche, n'y était point incommode.**

**La température des Platons même, ne donne pas plus de 23 degrés de chaleur au thermomètre de Réaumur au mercure. Il marquait 21 degrés un tiers le 21 Août, jour où l'on descendit dans l'entonnoir au fond duquel il resta à 13 degrés deux tiers.**



1

## ➔ Grotte Marie-Jeanne

Crossing through Grotte Cactus



1

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**This full crossing of Grotte Marie-Jeanne, down to its deepest level is an exceptional adventure.**

Grotte Marie-Jeanne is to date the longest known cave in Haiti with a gallery length of 5,3 km. It was completely explored by Belgian speleologists Mertens, Soulas and Sprumont in the 1970's and then mapped under the direction of Lace and Kambesis from 2008 to 2010. A final exploration by Testa in 2017 brings the total length to 5,3 km. It's a dense network with nine entrances over 4 hectares, and the entire galleries of the cave are comprised in an area of 200 m in diameter.

We propose to start the crossing through Grotte Cactus. Located slightly above Grotte Marie-Jeanne, Grotte Cactus is a fault of 12 meters deep, under a beautiful clump of Kandelab. These plants resemble cacti but are not. They are Dragon bones trees (*Euphorbia lactea*) which produce a corrosive latex with medicinal properties.



1

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ITINERARY

Go down the **P12** from Grotte Cactus. Then a 4-meter step, then another and arrive in Vertières chamber. Down below is the exit path towards Grotte Marie-Jeanne. Proceed rather straight towards the Refuge (collapse), pass under a huge rock. You get to the Lantern chamber, where tree roots hang from the ceiling. An opening at the top of the vault lets some light filter through. Continue, pass a narrow passage between concretions that leads to a 1-meter step. Go down it. Past the ledge, there is a pit to an underlying gallery. A 12-m rappel would allow to get back into the Olympus chamber, but do remain on top. Turn around and underneath is a passage. It is necessary to crawl. Rappel down the **P25** (inclined), and arrive at the top of the Puits des Chauves-Souris (Bats Pit). This **P30** gets rigged on the right-hand side by a traverse line to access a chain that lead straight down.

At the foot of the **P30** is the 4<sup>th</sup> level of Marie-Jeanne's network. Leave a bag there. Do not take the gallery that climbs up steeply in front but take the horizontal one, just to the right, that leads to the Lair of the Blue Worm. You quickly find yourself feet deep in guano and, just behind a wall of concretions that blocks almost the entire gallery, you emerge into the first bat chamber. Thousands of these mammals frolic about. In order to not disturb them, do not proceed any further into the gallery, where all the bats have taken refuge.

*Note: From this chamber, by the left wall, begins an ascending gallery that leads into Grotte Belgique or to Doline Nord (Doline North).*

Go on visiting levels 4 and 5. It's labyrinthic, but the presence of the bag left at the bottom of the **P30** is your landmark. Once you are finished, climb the **P30** and the **P25** back up.

From there, either take the **P12** which quickly leads to the exit, or set off again towards the Refuge, climb down to level 3, on the main route, beautiful (and obvious passage) up to the big hall of the Voûte Étoilée (Starry Vault). A gallery on the north side spirals up to the Salle d'Attente (Waiting Room) at the entrance of Grotte Marie-Jeanne, flooded by daylight.

Should you not be yet satiated, you can set off to other areas of the network, towards the Jardins Suspendus (Hanging Gardens) and Doline Gèp (Wasp sinkhole), or to the Salle du Cabri (Goat chamber) and the Salle des Racines (Roots chamber).

## Practical information

- ➔ **Type:** Cave with rope
- ➔ **Duration:** 6 to 8 hours
- ➔ **GPS coordinates**  
Grotte Cactus: 18.254543 ° N 74.094270 ° W

- ➔ **Access**  
Follow the trail for Grotte Marie-Jeanne. Before the panoramic platform, mid-way, take the path that goes up to the left, to the North. After 100 m, walk along a large sinkhole (Doline Nord) and continue 100 m further. When the trail turns southeast, the entrance opens up at 20 m on the right (fracture 2 m by 5 m).

- ➔ **Recommendations**  
This is a very hot cavity; bring sufficient drinking water. Entrance often clogged with branches, cacti, roots and vines. Even wasps.  
Optional intermediate rappel.  
Slippery floor at times.

- ➔ **Equipment**  
**Puits Cactus (P12):** (Cactus Pit) (P12): 30-m rope (rappel), 2 slings, 3 carabiners  
**Access pit to the Olympus chamber (P12):** 30-m rope (rappel), NA, 2 bolts (one sling, 2 carabiners)  
**Access slope to Puits des Chauves-Souris (Bats Pit):** P25: NA + NA (30-m rope, 2 large slings, 2 carabiners)  
**P30 Bats Pit:** Big NA + big NA + small NA + 1 bolt + chain (50-m rope, 2 small slings, 5 carabiners).

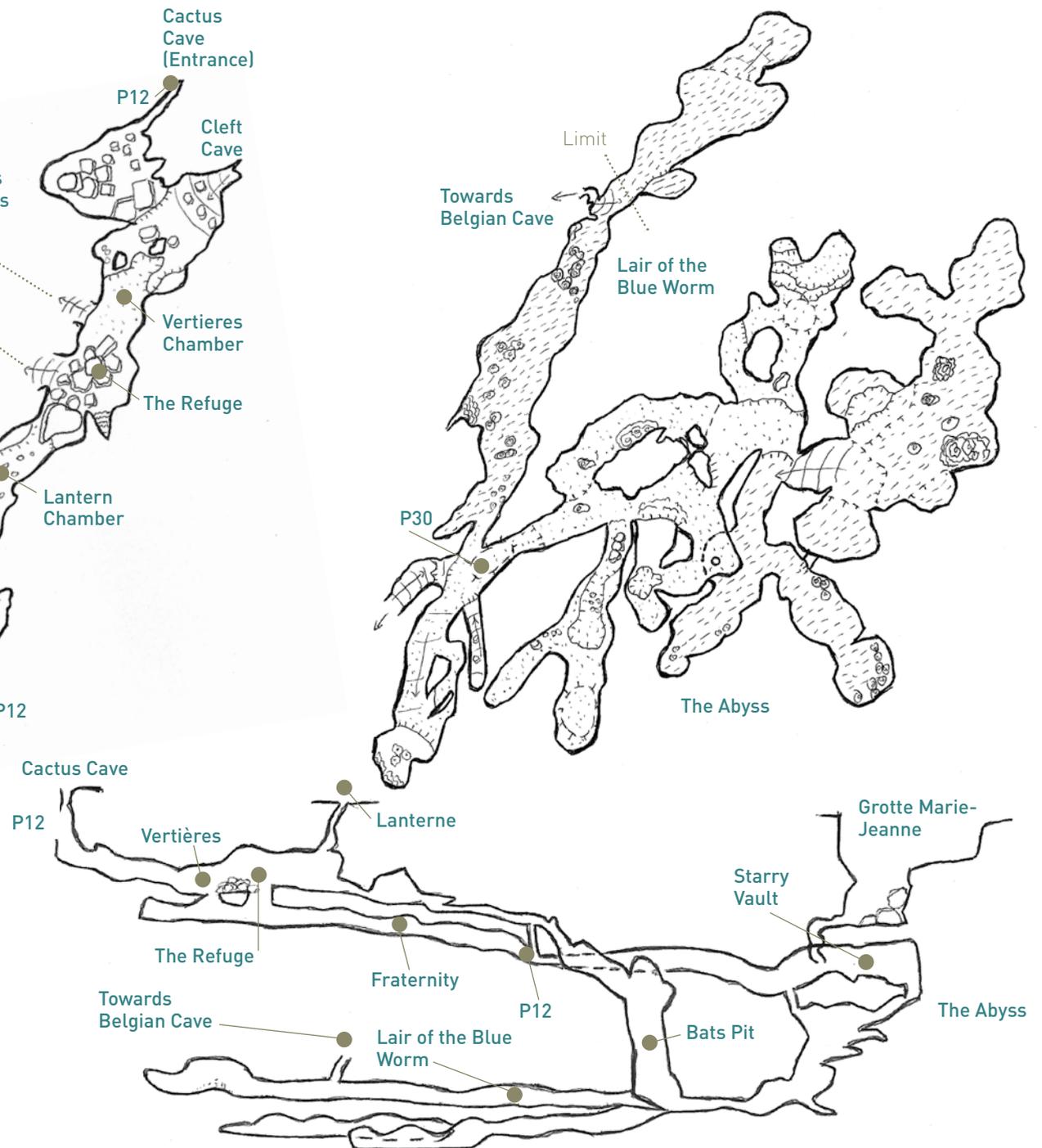


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plane sketch  
Adapted from Lacey et al.



## ➔ Grotte Goudron



**Initiation cave particularly adapted to learning vertical caving, with an entrance pit of 20 m and a concreted hall.**

The pothole is particularly attractive and opens with a wide opening. A fracturing of the rock weakened the limestone and is at the origin of the collapse and the entrance. Access to the main hall is made by a 20-m descent on a rope anchored on bolts in place. Space is occupied by vines and lush vegetation.

Below, a first space, largely illuminated by the pothole natural light, is richly decorated: stalagmites, massive columns as well as many draperies abound.

Grotte Goudron (The Gum Drop) is connected to the network of Grotte Marie-Jeanne. Between the rocks, a narrow and descending passage allows you to reach, after much crawling and through a chaos of rocks, a balcony overlooking the lower level of Grotte Marie-Jeanne. You stand at a depth of about 100 m.

### Practical information

- ➔ **Type:** Simple cave with rope
- ➔ **Duration:** 1 to 3 hours
- ➔ **GPS coordinates**  
Grotte Goudron: 18.253332 ° N 74.095326 ° W
- ➔ **Access**  
Park in the parking lot of Grotte Marie-Jeanne in Port-à-Piment.
- ➔ **Approach**  
Grotte Goudron is located on the access path to Grotte Marie-Jeanne. At about 100 m before the latter, branch off to the right, towards the sea side. The pothole is about 30 m away from the path.
- ➔ **Equipment**  
**Handline:** natural anchors, then 2 bolts
- ➔ **Material**  
30-m rope, 3 carabiners, 1 sling
- ➔ **Fauna**  
Grotte Goudron is home to many tarantulas and a few thousands bats.



Facing the access shaft, on the other side, begins a gallery of 70 m. You have to progress below then climb up a small ledge and explore a small network.

Grotte Goudron  
Profile sketch



*Grotte Goudron's name is associated with a species of trees growing at the entrance of the cave, the Cirouelle or Mombin Tree (*Spondias purpurea*). A natural resin is pulled from the trunk that can be used to seal canoes. But this tree is known mostly for its small fruit (called siwèl) that are edible when perfectly red.*

## ➔ Grande Grotte

3



-22-

**Grande Grotte is a practice cliff rigged for vertical caving training. It overlooks the entire town of Port-à-Piment and offers a panoramic view on the coast.**

A training site has been rigged for technical training. It is located right next to town, and in case of rain it is possible to get shelter under the porch.

At least 5 descent/ascent lines are available, secured by a traverse line.

A passage through the chimney above is possible.

The equipment is modular to adapt to many exercises.

*Behind the porch is a small cave (about 30 m away), accessible after a 16-m pit. This cave houses a large colony of bats, which are seldom disturbed because of the difficulty of access. We do not recommend going down, so as not to wake them up and disturb them.*

3



### Practical information

➔ **Type:** Cave with ropes

➔ **GPS coordinates**  
Grande Grotte: 18.252250° N 74.095383° W

➔ **Access**  
Fifteen minutes walk from Port-à-Piment.  
Take Marie-Jeanne street (which runs along the EFACAP school) towards the southeast. Walk along the large EFACAP building and take a nice trail on the left, going straight up to the porch of the cave, which can be seen above.

➔ **Equipment**  
**Traverse line:** 2 bolts + 1 bolt + 1 bolt  
**Line heads:** 2 bolts + 2 bolts + 2 bolts + 2 bolts + a few spits  
**Chimney rappel:** 2 bolts

-23-

## → Trou Zombi

4



4

**A 90-m deep chasm worth descending for the adrenaline it procures - and for the somptuousness of the surrounding landscapes.**

Located in the commune of Chantal and known for a very long time, Trou Zombi is an impressive vertical chasm of 90 meters. Its name speaks volumes on the fear it might have aroused over the years in the inhabitants. At the bottom, animal skeletons but also human remains have been discovered.

The descent is carried out on the right bank, where the different lengths of the 90-m pit succeed one another.

At the foot, a scree cone allows you to descend to the very bottom of the cavity, to a depth of 110 meters.

At the deepest, it is possible to thread one's way between the rocks in an imposing rock collapse, and try and find a passage that would extend this abyss. No one has found it yet.

*Beyond Trou Zombi, around Formon, speleologists from the Anba Makaya expedition explored in 2013 a hundred chasms, of a depth of 20 to 80 m. All the chasms of Formon end in collapses and none to date shows access to any large underlying network that collects karst waters.*

## Practical information

➔ **Type** : cave with ropes

➔ **Coordonnées GPS**

Trou Zombi: 18.315258 ° N 74.011298 ° W

➔ **Access**

20 km/1:30 hour of good dirt road from Torbeck (passing through Ducis) to Le Prêtre. Then go up towards Formon (Pic Macaya), until after passing the village of Sous-Bois. Plan for 15 km/1:15 hour by 4x4. After the Citadel, the dirt road passes next to several chasms.

See map pages 31 and 2-3

➔ **Approach**

On foot, 2 minutes

➔ **Équipement**

**P90**: 110-m rope, 10 carabiners, 2 slings

**TL**: NA, NA (optional), 2 bolts (pit head) - go down 15 m

**(-5)** 2 bolts - optional but available

**(-15)** 2 bolts - down 30 m

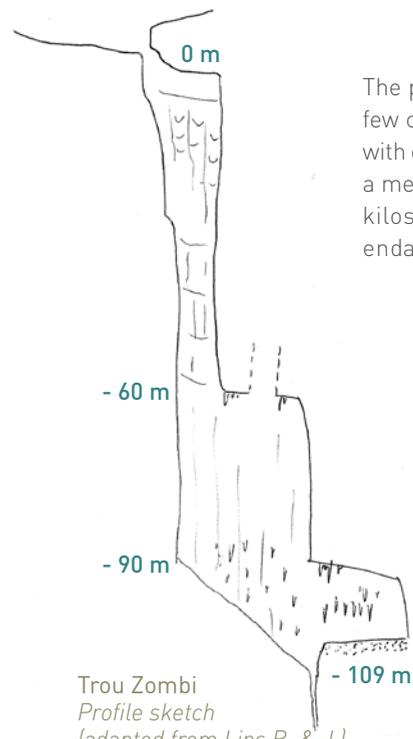
**(-45)** 2 bolts - down 18 m

**(-63)** 2 bolts - down 27 m

Beware of risks of falling stones, the walls being unstable.

4

4



Trou Zombi  
Profile sketch  
(adapted from Lips B. & J.)

The pit walls are plastered with a layer of calcite a few centimeter-thick stuck to the rock underneath with clay or moonmilk. It is very fragile and unstable: a mere kick could dislodge plates weighing several kilos. Be very careful during the descent not to endanger the lives of your companions below.

➔ Lovers of big verticals will also enjoy in the Jacmel Valley (South-East) the Séjourné chasm which opens with a 100-m deep pothole, and extends for one kilometer underground with a magnificent river.

## → Canyon Casse-cou



5



5

**Descending Canyon Casse-cou is reserved for athletes. It will surely seduce with its well-rounded hollowings.**

This canyon, very often dry, presents an impressive encasement: the river that dug it in the course of millennia sinks into a narrow corridor a few meters wide by more than one hundred meter deep. Mother Nature seems to have dug this canyon just for the viewing pleasure!

The entrance to the canyon is shielded by a 25-m high waterfall beyond which no return is possible. The descent of the canyon is quite short, but the approach walks, going and back, make this canyon a strenuous affair.

Canyon to be practiced after a rainy period, if possible. In fact, there is no perennial water supply, and the basins are most often dry. But beware! During flash flood, water can rise several meter high and no escape is possible and once you are engaged in the canyon, there is no safe place to rest.

## Practical information

➔ **Type:** Canyon with ropes

➔ **Duration**

A long day. Leave very early from Les Cayes (5 a.m. or 6 a.m.) and take along lamps in case of nightly return.

➔ **GPS coordinates**

Le Prêtre: 18.2687 ° N 73.9484 ° W - **Parking:** 18.274 ° N 73.9786 ° W

**Beginning of the Canyon:** 18.2980 ° N 73.9755 ° W

➔ **Access**

20 km/1:15 hour of good dirt road to Le Prêtre from Torbeck and 7 km/30 min by 4x4 up to Platons.

**Shuttle:** You have to either leave the car at Le Prêtre and hire motorcycle-taxis to climb up to Platons, or go up with the car and have the chauffeur drive the car back down while you descend the canyon. The driver can go for a ride to Tête l'Acule and wait for the group there. See map pages 31

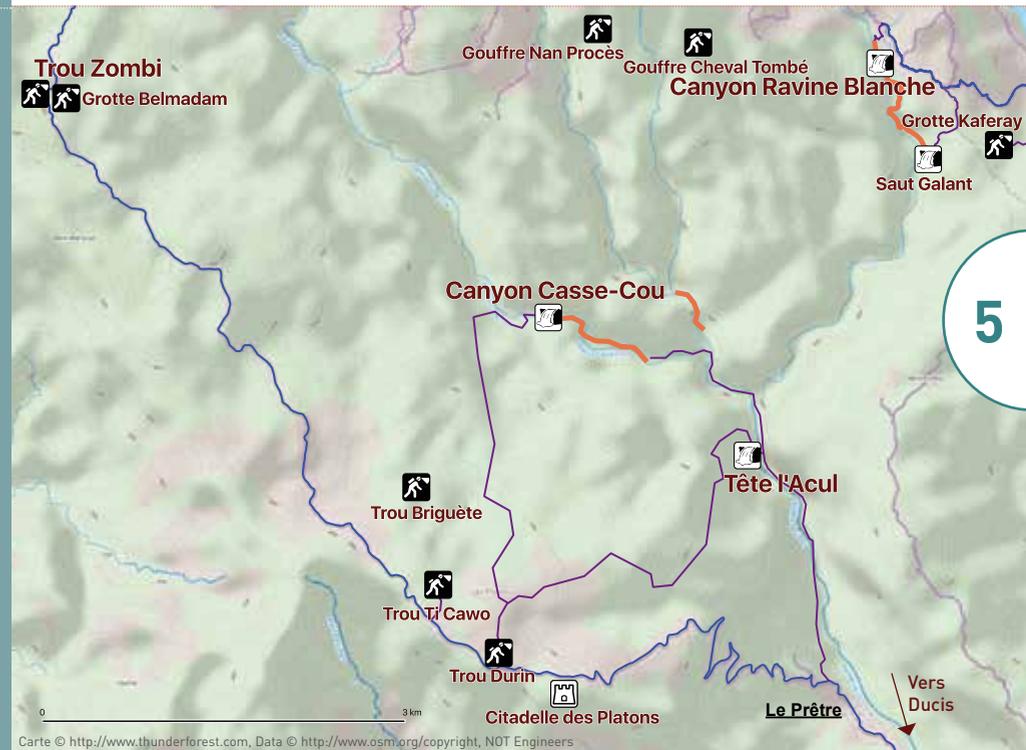
➔ **Approach**

Going: 1:45 hour walk (easy) from Platons to the beginning of the canyon, through a very diverse and most interesting karst landscape.

Return: two-hour walk down the ravine at the end of the canyon to Le Prêtre, via Tête l'Acule where one can swim in the basin. See following page.

➔ **Equipment**

One 50-m rope, 5 carabiners



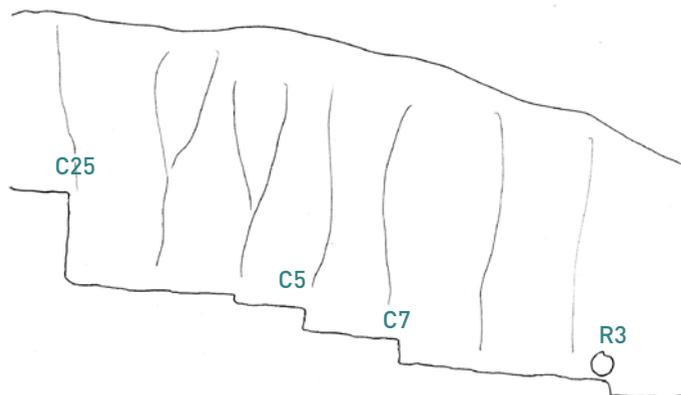
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## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRESSION

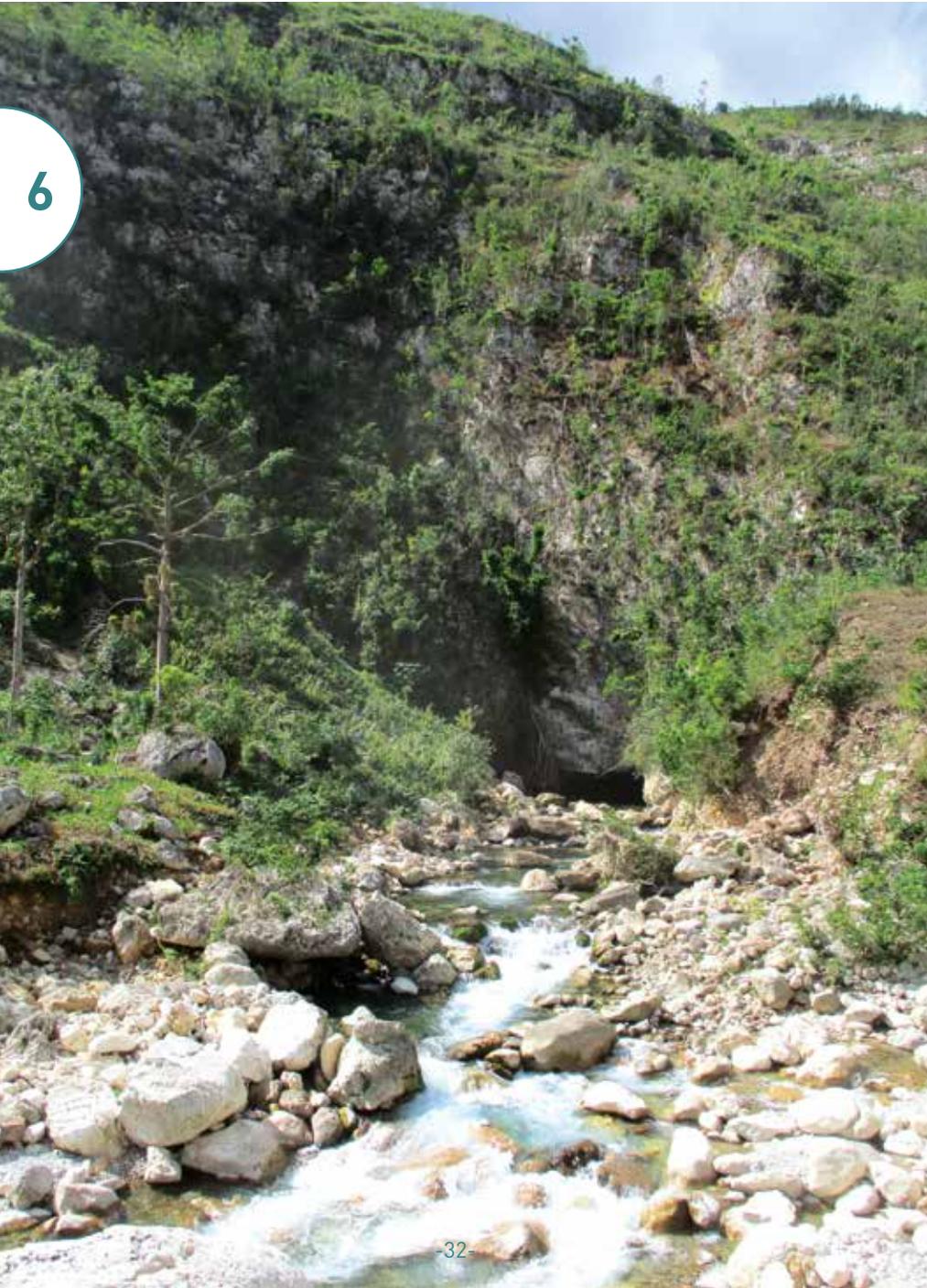
➔ **List of obstacles**

- **C25:** impressive 25-m waterfall. Traverse line at the beginning, on the left bank.
- **C5:** 5-m waterfall. Rappel on right bank.
- **C7:** 7-m slide, possible if water flows. Otherwise, handline and rappel on the left bank (beware of the presence of trees in water).
- **R3:** 3-m Step with rappel on right bank, behind the rock, if there is no water.

**Warning:** plan for enough equipment to re-rig the obstacles. The floods are colossal.



## ➔ Tête L'Acul resurgence



**Tête L'Acul is a beautiful basin filled with fresh blue water ideal for swimming.**

Tête L'Acul (Tèt Lakil, in Creole) literally means "L'Acul River Spring". It is a karst exsurgence, the location where the rainwaters that fall on the plateau of Platons, of Formon, and maybe of Gracia and Gros Morne, come back out in the open. These rainwaters had seeped into cracks, or had been swallowed by chasms, and have circulated inside the massif.

And it's a real river that comes out of the mountain! The water, clear and fresh (19 ° C), has a flow rate of about 500 liters/second in dry season. During floods, it exceeds 30,000 l/s.



The extent of the catchment area is yet unknown, but in 2017, speleologists-divers (Lehman, Testa) began the exploration of the sump, which goes under the mountain for more than one kilometer, without reaching the end. In 2018 Widmann went down to 100 meter deep.

During the approach walk - a superb hike along L'Acul River - in a steep-sided valley, one can admire the trees and flowers, and

notice a diffuse exsurgence that forms nice little waterfalls, on the bank opposite the trail. After 45 minutes, one arrives at the foot of a cliff and finally the blue basin of the exsurgence presents itself. The basin is especially suited for swimming and picnics. Site shaded in the afternoon.

The basin has a depth of 25 meters!

### Practical information

➔ **GPS coordinates:** 18.2874 ° N 73.9560 ° W

➔ **Access**

From the village of Le Prêtre, *see page 31*

➔ **Approach**

The resurgence is reached after a 45-minute walk from Le Prêtre along L'Acul River, on a very well-marked path: the village children are used to going there for swimming!

## → Grotte Soulas



**Located not far from Camp Perrin, this cavity opens with an entrance pit of 18 m providing access to several chambers that will delight you with their abundant concretions.**

The chasm is located on the path leading to Grotte Kounoubwa, about 10 meters from the clearing, in the thicket. You can get near the hole and discover a wide and deep chasm of 18 m, surrounded by ficus roots that go all the way to the bottom.

Below is a large collapsed chamber partially covered with guano, that slopes down gently. From there, the exploration of the different chambers can begin.

Starting from the bottom of the entrance scree, on your left-hand side, you meander through several chambers of significant proportions. At the north-western end, take care not to proceed forward into the two chambers whose ground is covered with delicate, very fragile calcite speleothems: it is just as well to observe them from a distance.

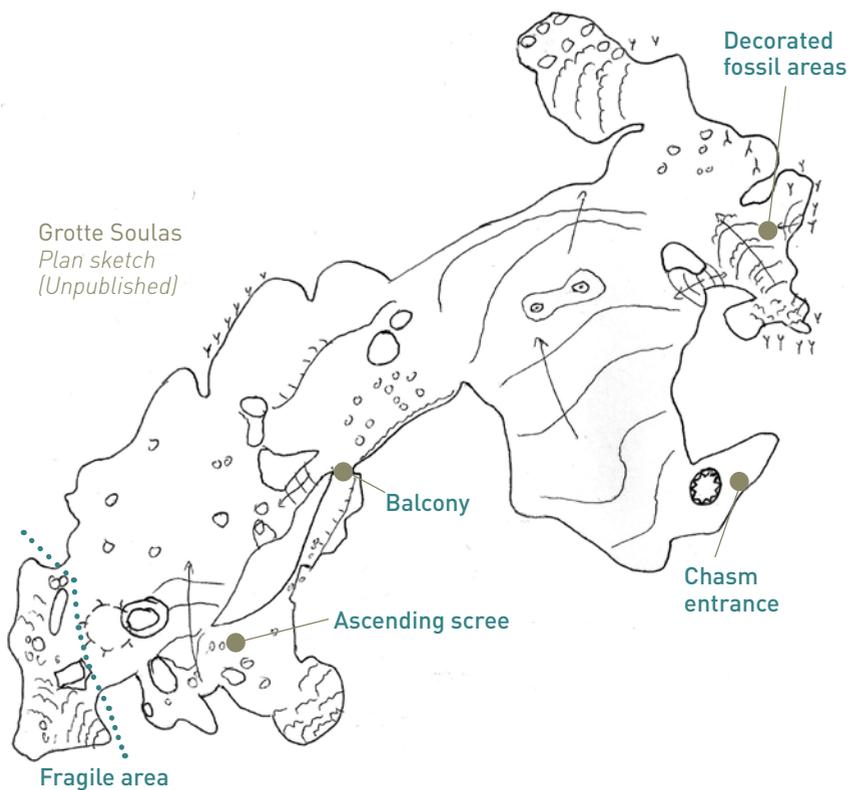
➔ At the end of the visit, it is possible to make a detour by Source Moreau (Moreau spring) (see map page 35), a karst exsurgence where one can swim and cool oneself, and even cave dive. It is located 3 km away; or go and visit Grotte Kounoubwa.

Then you can climb back up a scree, and admire from a balcony the large decorated hall.

At the foot of the entrance scree, if you go to the right, it is possible to climb back to the decorated fossil areas.

A few bats are present in several areas of the cavity.

*The cave, discovered at the end of the 1970s, was named after its discoverer, Belgian agronomist Éric Soulas. For its preservation, it had remained secret. A team of youths rediscovered it by chance at the beginning of the 2000s and went down the pit with makeshift means. They wrote their names on the walls of the cave, unaware that, by doing so, they were damaging this little gem.*



## Practical information

- ➔ **Type:** Cave with ropes
- ➔ **Duration:** Half day
- ➔ **GPS coordinates:** 18.303944 ° N 73.870121 ° W
- ➔ **Access**  
Park on the edge of the South Ravine, in Camp Perrin, cross the South Ravine and climb the steep slopes leading to Grotte Kounoubwa (30-minute climb). See map page 35.
- ➔ **Approach**  
20-minute walk (80-m height difference)
- ➔ **Equipment**  
35-m rope, 6 carabiners  
TL + P18: 2 bolts + 1 bolt + 1 bolt  
+ 2 bolts (pit head) (to be adapted to cavers' level)



## ➔ Grotte Kounoubwa

8



**This unheard of circuit is going to start through a 40-meter deep pit in one of the most-known caves in Haiti.**

Grotte Kounoubwa is one of Haiti's most famous caves, as per the thousands of graffiti covering its walls and the narratives of Haitians having already visited it in their childhood, proud to have written their names in it and brought back a piece of stalactite ("No more than 5 per person!" insisted the guide at the time).

For a visit of the cave without rope, just contact the guide, Joel Constant.

But we suggest you descend through the 40-m pit that opens up in the middle of a field. It is surrounded by shrubs to prevent animals from falling in. The pit is almost vertical and after anchoring the rope to the tree, just rappel down.

Below, at the level of the end chamber, one can either come out through the classic circuit, or comb all the little galleries, pass through muddy squeezes, and have fun for hours.



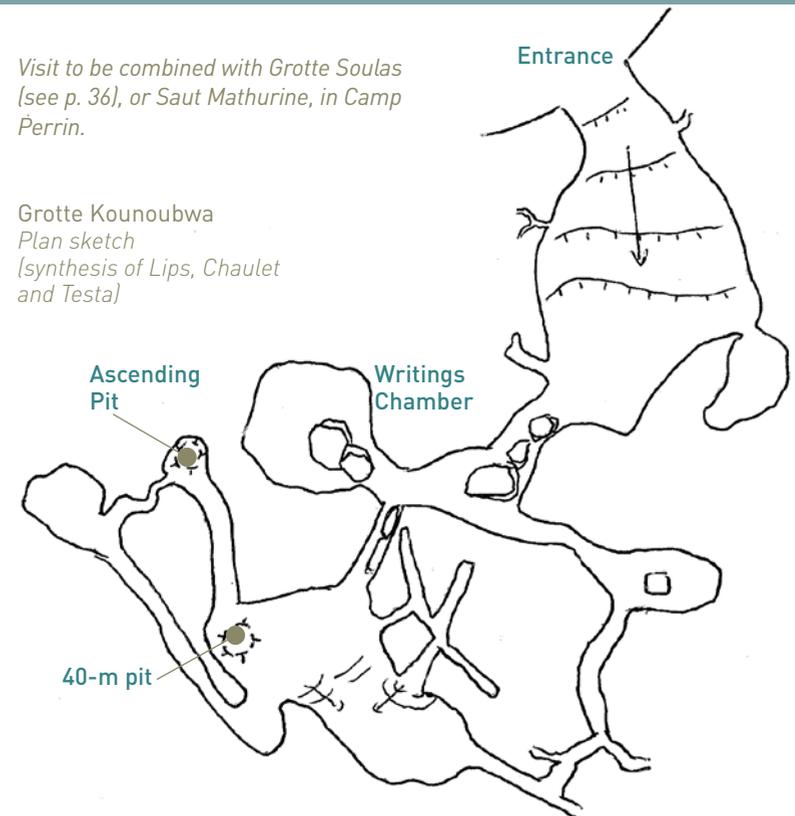
### Practical information

- ➔ **Type:** Cave with ropes
- ➔ **GPS coordinates**  
Chimney: 18.3063 ° N 73.870134 ° W  
Municipality: Torbeck (access from Camp Perrin, by crossing the South Ravine)
- ➔ **Access**  
See Grotte Soulas. Joel Constant (Ph: 3810-5075), owner of the land and Grotte Kounoubwa's guide, will open the access gate. *See map page 35.*
- ➔ **Equipment**  
45-m rope, to descend all the way to the bottom of the cave.

8

*Visit to be combined with Grotte Soulas (see p. 36), or Saut Mathurine, in Camp Perrin.*

Grotte Kounoubwa  
Plan sketch  
*(synthesis of Lips, Chaulet and Testa)*



# ➔ Grotte Geffrard



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**Grotte Geffrard is a cave offering various modes of exploration, that will delight the young and the more experienced alike, with narrow passages, muddy passages, climbs, and belly crawl passages.**

The whole interest of this cave resides, for the occasional caver, in the adventure of reaching the cavity, and in searching for the underground route, while having this sweet feeling of finding still-unexplored galleries.

The approach walk goes up the river and passes by many basins. When given the opportunity by the river bends, one notices, on the left bank, artisanal ladders hooked on a sheer cliff that enable one to climb up to two cave entrances. These are the two entries leading to Grotte Geffrard.

## Practical information

➔ **Type:** Cave without ropes

➔ **GPS coordinates**

Parking: 18.3782 ° N 73.793 ° W - Cave: 18.394 ° N 73.80 ° W

➔ **Access**

Take the road from Les Cayes towards Camp-Perrin, and branch off towards Maniche [45 min]. From there, go, in 4 x 4, up to Geffrard [40 min]. Then it's a 20-minute walk along the river. The cave is located at the edge of the water.

See map pages 2-3

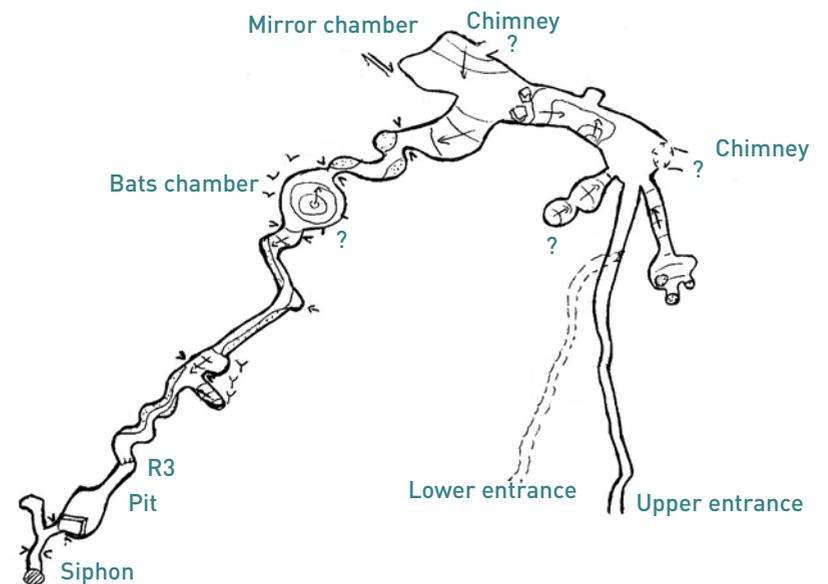
## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRESSION

➔ **Lower entrance**

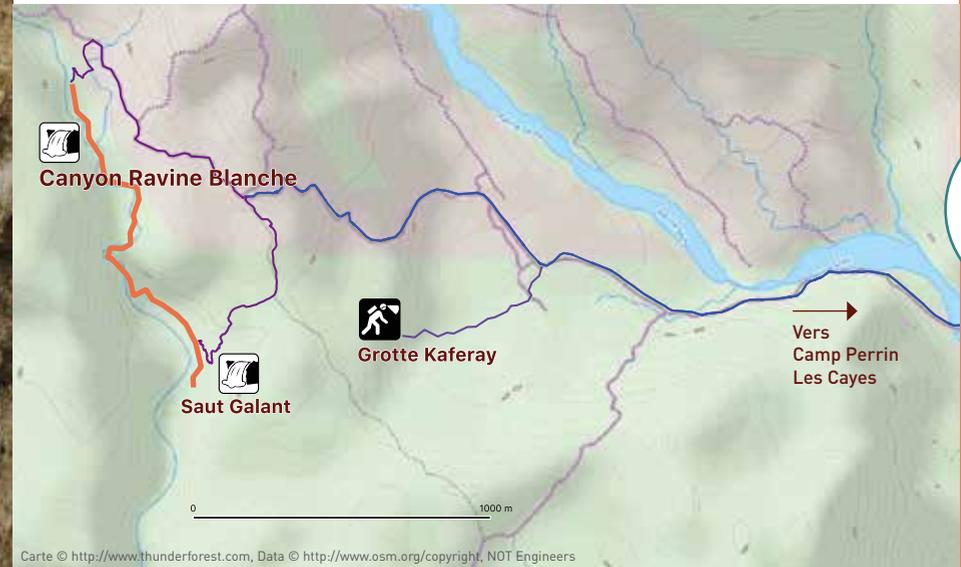
Just above the riverbed, a low entrance allows, not without several contortions and climbing, to get to the entrance of the first chamber in the upper Grotte Geffrard.

➔ **Upper Entrance**

By climbing the ladder up 20 meters, you can access the upper entrance and enter the cavity from there. It's a fossil resurgence. You can notice on the walls scallop marks on limestone, evidence of a former water outlet. Decorated with a few concretions, the entrance gallery leads you, at the end of 80 m, into the first chamber of the cave. You will notice on the right a pretty steep ascending slope. After going up the slope by trudging between a few old concretions, you emerge into a nice chamber that includes several openings in the ceiling and the prettiest of skylights. The farthest gallery is flanked by clay shoulders, while a slow stream flows through it. After several low passages, a small chaos and a muddy slope, you will be stopped by a very low passage, then a sump. It is necessary to turn back. The cave shelters several colonies of bats, including the little *Natalidae*.



## → Canyon Ravine Blanche



**Nice canyon revealing a hidden place of Southern Haiti. Succession of cascades in natural basins and playful short rappels are on the program with this refreshing canyon.**

The excursion begins with two small, very accessible, waterfalls followed by a nice 7-m rappel.

The passage under a huge boulder suspended between the canyon walls leads the traveler to a 6-m waterfall. Here, the walls are very close to each other and curiosity will prompt diving in under the gaze of endemic frogs, and follow the stream. This encasement sculpted by nature offers 4 steps (R1 C4 C6 C7) interrupted by small basins occupied by shrimp and fresh water crabs.

In the end, the ravine finally opens up to reveal the magnificent waterfall of Saut Galant.

The canyon offers a few obstacles made up of waterfalls and jumps (loopholes).

To fully appreciate this aquatic gem, it is best to discover it during a wet period and not during the dry season.

## Practical information

➔ **Type:** Canyon with ropes

➔ **Duration:** 3-4 hours with support

➔ **GPS coordinates**

**Parking:** 18.3139 ° N 73.9377 ° W - **Canyon:** 18.319 ° N 73.9466 ° W

**End of Canyon:** 18.3105 ° N 73.9429 ° W

➔ **Access**

By car: 10 km/45 min from Camp Perrin to the village of Gros Morne.

See map pages 43

➔ **Approach**

**Walking approach: 30 min**

After parking the vehicle, the approach is done on foot by the dirt road crossing the village of Gros Morne, towards Gracia.

After the marketplace, go down the widest ravine and start the descent.

It is possible to find guides in the village, as youths there enjoy bathing in the first basins.

➔ **Return**

**Return by foot: 45 min**

The return is done from the left bank as soon as the waterfall of Saut Galant is visible. Go up the ravine by a pretty vertical path that goes back up a hundred meters to the plateau. Cross the fields and get back to the parking lot.

➔ **Equipment**

20-m rope, 5 carabiners

➔ **Recommendations**

Canyon to be practiced in the rainy season. During dry weather, the upper cascades are no longer water-fed, and the basins may contain stagnant water. These obstacles can be by-passed.

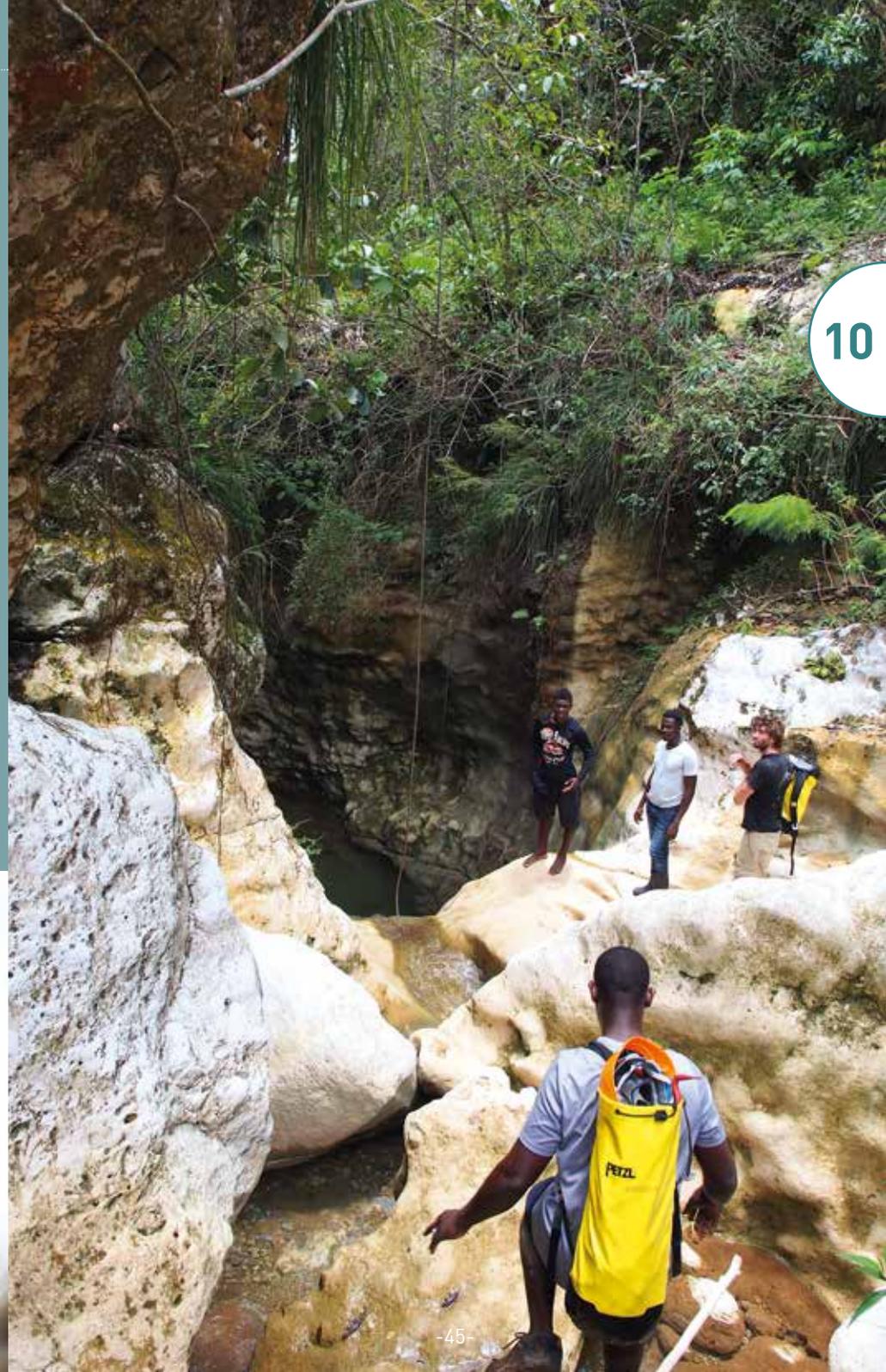
In floods, the practice is impossible. Shelter is available at almost all the obstacles.

10

10



-44-



-45-



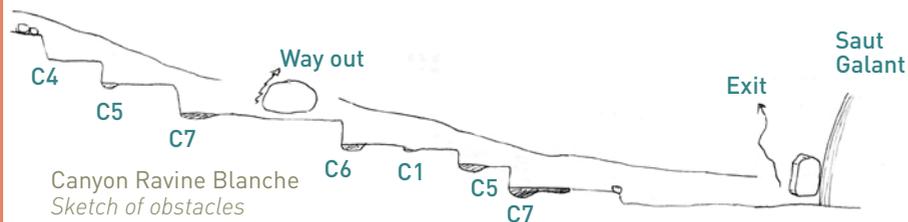
## DESCRIPTION OF PROGRESSION

### ➔ List of obstacles

- **C4:** 4-m waterfall that falls in a shallow basin. Sometimes dry. A handline is possible on the left bank to avoid passing through the water. It is not possible to jump.
- **C5:** Small ledge of 5 m. The basin is deep (in places) and the jump is difficult. Rappel descent.
- **C7:** 7-m waterfall between two rocks. The basin at the bottom is not deep. It is not possible to jump. A handline must be rigged, that allows going down full expanse.
- **C6:** 6-m waterfall, to rappel down. Very difficult cascade for beginners because of rock hidden in water.
- **C1:** Easy ledge.
- **C5:** 5-m waterfall with nice basin. Rappel descent and easy jump possible. Ascent with rappel/knot rope possible.
- **C7:** 7-m waterfall rappel. Very difficult waterfall for beginners.
- **C4:** 4-m ledge. Possible jump.
- **Final basin:** climbing without getting wet is very difficult and slippery. If the basin is dry, possibility of going down.

There are two ways out: one at the big rock (left bank) and one after the **C1** (left bank). All obstacles (except the last three waterfalls) can be by-passed (with some difficulty at times).

Rescue difficult in case of accident because a very steep slope makes exiting the canyon uneasy (100 m in height elevation).



## ➔ Earthquakes and Caves

What happens if you are inside a cave when an earthquake occurs? In a word: often nothing!

An earthquake generates several types of waves: volume waves, which propagate inside the earth, and surface waves. The latter are the most destructive.

A deep enough cave is a small hole inside a large mass of limestone. It will only be traversed by volume waves, and the rock, being hard, will transmit the wave without damage.

Most people who found themselves, by chance, in cavities at the time of an earthquake were not aware of it. Others describe a dull, powerful rumble. Still others speak of a breath of air, of water level variation. But no collapse, no broken stalactites.

On the other hand, if you stay just at the entrance of the cave, the surface waves may well bring down a few rocks.

Numerical modellings carried out by scientists show that only the longest and extremely fine stalactites can be broken by seismic waves. The others, thanks to their elasticity and the slowness of waves, are traversed by vibrations without damage.

## Technical Terms

**Pothole:** Vertical opening of a cavity outward. Synonymous with chasm.

**Calcite:** mineral composed of calcium carbonate.

**Concretion:** Formation due to accumulation of mineral deposits, mostly calcite.

Ex: stalagmite, stalactite, rimstone pools, etc. Synonymous with speleothem.

**Moonmilk:** water-soaked calcite deposit with spongy or milky consistency.

**NA:** Natural Anchor

**TL:** traverse line

**P30:** 30-meter deep Pit

**R5:** 5-meter step (no rope required)

**C7:** 7-meter waterfall

**E6:** 6-meter Climb

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With its karst plateaus, its gorges and its valleys, its chasms, its caves and its resurgences, the Southern Department is a little paradise for cavers and adventurous hikers.

Speleologist Olivier Testa has been exploring the caves of Haiti for over 10 years. The canyons and cavities he has selected for this guide are the best suited for the discovery of this geological heritage diversity.

The proposed caves and canyons have progressive technical levels starting with Grotte Geffrard accessible to all, up to Trou Zombi and its 90-m vertical pit reserved to confirmed cavers.

This guidebook is the culmination of a project of promotion of the caves and canyons of Southern Haiti, implemented by the Unité Technique d'Execution of the Ministry of Economy and Finances and the Ministry of Tourism, with funding from the Inter-American Development Bank.



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