

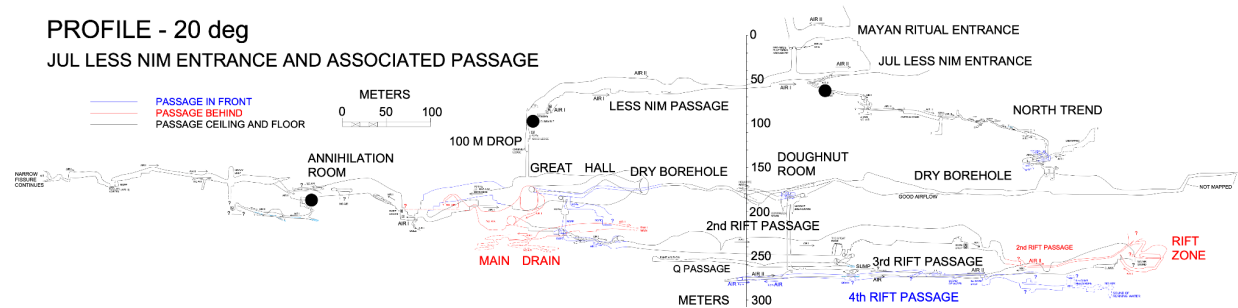
Guatemala -- Yalijux -- Jul Mas Nim

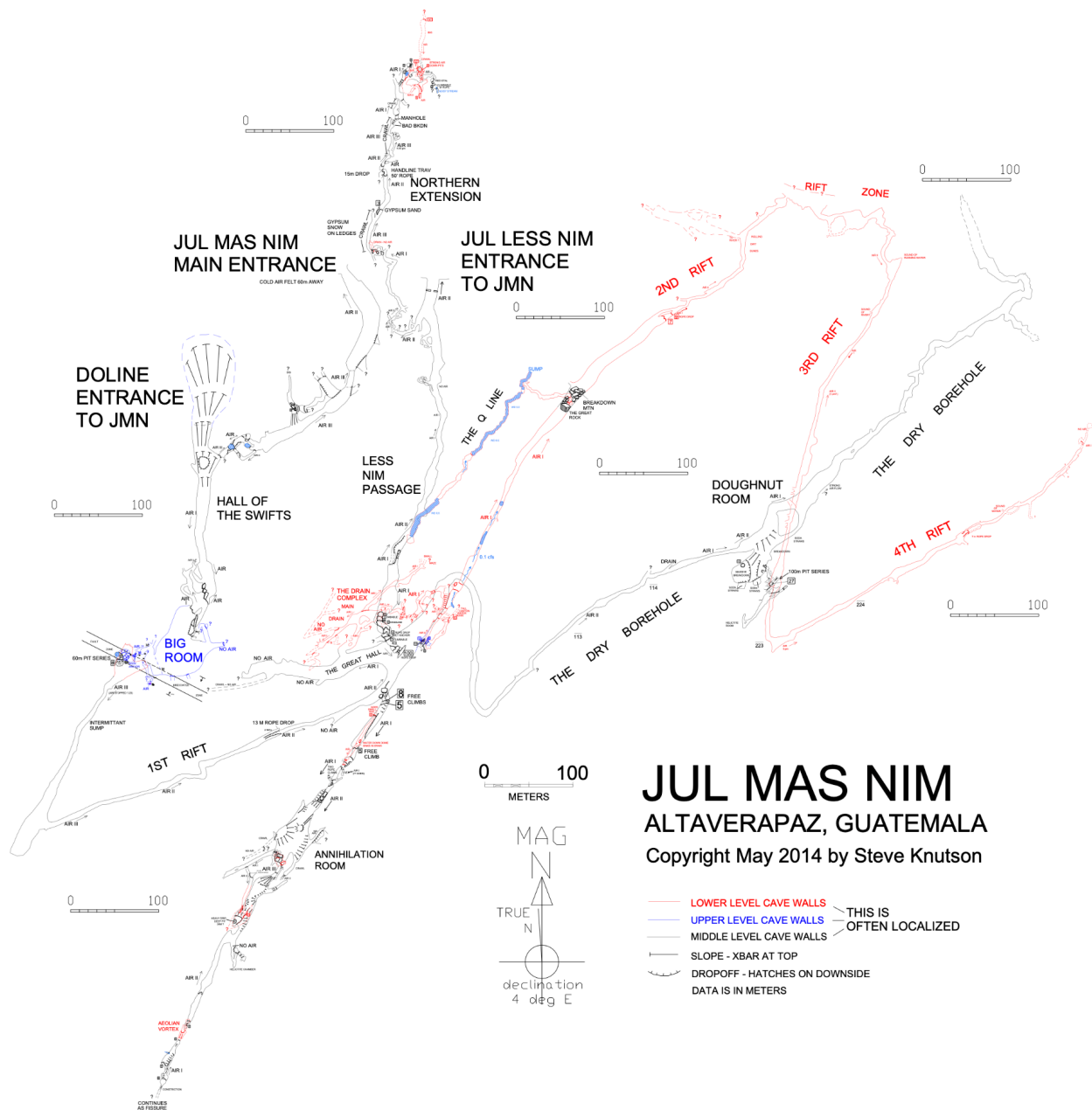
By Steve Knutson, 6-Jun-2016

It's taken me a bit to get this out, but we still have lots of time to get it together. What I want to do is restart the Yalijux, Guatemala project. So I am aiming at spring, 2017 for an expedition.

This got started when I heard there is now a paved road to Yalijux from Senaju to the east. When I heard that I took it at face value, and google earth indeed showed a road there, though it didn't look paved. I got hold of Todd Rasmussen, now a prof at U of Georgia, and he helped with topos and google earth views. But was there a point to going back?

I looked at the old hand drawn map of JMN and there were no leads shown. But when I looked at the actual notes, there were, so I got those out and cranked all the data into the computer and did a plot and map, plan and profile. There are leads all over the cave, and many, maybe most, with air flow. I can email a PDF of this map to whoever.





To check out the scene, we did a trip this past spring, which included the Sundquists and Mark Harder. The drive to Senaju revealed much of the Tucuru road to be still not paved, but a stretch from La Tinta to Senaju, looked like brand new pavement, with reflectors down the middle and sides. However, the road on to Yalijux was rough and very 4 wheel drive. Our rental wasn't going to cut it so we hired a truck and got there.

We met with the Comite, and with the aid of our driver, we got them to agree we could come back and go caving. Part of this involved promising to do something/contribute to the community and we made the first installment then, donating 900 quetzales for lumber to make writing desks for the school. That's about \$130. We also took the comite into the walking section of JMN, inside the main entrance, to show them it might be possible to use some of the cave for tourism.

The road was pretty ugly, and it's a long way to Yalijux that way, so later Mark Harder and I came back and checked out the old route in, from Tucuru up the mtn to Tzalamila and over the pass into Yalijux valley from the south. In checking hotels at Tucuru we found one a km out of town toward Tactic that was on the side of the valley, so it got a bit of a breeze, and had a swimming pool, only 150Q for a double. Tucuru is always very hot and stuffy, so this was pretty nice. We also found the old road to Tzalamila had been improved and now had a mini bus service to that town. We easily drove up it in a little rental car, as far as the cliff with the El Salto waterfall. No problem at all but at that point you had to ford a creek and I didn't want to chance it in the little car. Locals said the creek came from a cave, and the same is said for the El Salto stream, just below Tzalamila.

The word from both sides of the last stretch, Tzalamila to Yalijux, is that it is ok. So with the rental of a 4x4 we should be in good shape, using the old road.

Resurgences

Back in the 80's Todd measured the flow of the Yalijux not far from its submergence and got 7 cfs. This stream has never been seen in JMN. Some locals say it resurges at Jul Saconak (rock cliff in kek chi) to the NE, where google earth shows two resurgences. But some insist it goes to one near Finca Los Alpes to the SE, which is on the escarpment face that runs along, and is the south edge of the whole Cuchumatanes. JMN seems to be headed that way, gradually descending in that direction.

We never got a chance to try the side roads off the Senaju/Yalijux road, that are shown to go near where the NE resurgence is. We were told again that the Yalijux

stream resurges at Finca Los Alpes. Years ago we had checked out F Los Alpes and were shown a nearby resurgence much too small. But on this huge face/escarpment in the ravines lower down there could be a resurgence not well known. El Salto, below Tzalamila, SW of JMN, is said to come from a cave, so there is another candidate.

Guatemala is now very different from 1990, and seems happy, prosperous and friendly. But with the higher standard of living comes more expense for hotels, meals, etc. Guatemala City was madness to drive in. A downloaded app for a smart phone allowed Sundquist to navigate it ok, and Mark and I studied the street map until we could follow the route thru the city, from Antigua toward Yalijux, and back again. Once armed with some knowledge, we are based in Antigua, which has maintained its nature/sanity from years ago.

So right now, I see next year's trip as flying in, having a rental 4x4 waiting, with a driver, and getting transported out to Yalijux. The vehicle is contracted to come get us at the end. We need to come up with a lot of rope, as nothing is left of the old cache I once had with Mike Shawcross (r.i.p.)

There seems to be no facilities in Guatemala for gear storage, no big rental units, and no hotel wanted to give that service. I suspect we can arrange such at Yalijux, where a yearly fee would be fairly cheap but enough to satisfy the comite. Rope could be cached in JMN, like down the first part of the drop into the main level. I had 300 ft of 11mm in my baggage and was under the wt limit, so a lot can be brought in with us flying in.

At this point we don't have a building to stay in at Yalijux, so we need to be prepared to camp out. If things go well, I expect to be able to rent something in the village. Timeline has to be away from Semana Santa, the week before Easter, when travel is chaos. Locals said it doesn't start the rainy season until May, so we could do it either in March or April, avoiding the holy week. I would suggest a 3 week session.

Expense depends on how you get there. Driving would be cheapest, but takes several days. Our airfare was about 750-800 round trip. I strongly suggest NOT having a plane change or stopover in Mex City. Hotels \$10 and up a night.

Objectives

1. Push JMN.
2. Push pits on the mtn above to get a connection to JMN.
3. Check out the NE resurgence, El Salto, or Los Alpes, whatever is easiest.
4. Whatever shows up. Pozo Sepalao (Cepalao) on the pass to Tzalamila is the deepest in Central America.

JMN is the longest cave in CA at 9.6 km. One blowing, unexplored entrance at Puertas Alta, a couple miles to the NW, is 100x25 ft in size. The potential there is huge.

So please think about this, then let me know your interest and possible best time. If anyone wants the JMN map let me know. Also think of anyone you know might be a good candidate. Remember this is a somewhat delicate ethnic situation, there in Yalijux. Those folks are reserved, quiet, and probably easily offended. We would only be there at their sufferance, so even a strange haircut or clothing might be a problem.