

Big Sink (Tragadero Grande)

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One exciting discovery on the Granada Plateau part of the 2022 expedition is a large river sink (called 'Bigger Sink') located 4 km to the southwest of Jacinto Camp (Fig. 1). Bigger Sink is just one of a set of major river sinks located to the southwest of the camp, where multiple rivers come off the sandstone ridges and then sink into the limestone in large depressions. In general, this line of major sinks that extends to the southwest of the Jacinto camp is a very promising set of targets, and I visited just one of the sinks seen on Google Earth.

I was on my own when I visited Bigger Sink, as Fleur was ill with severe diarrhoea and staying in the tent, whilst Jean-Yves, Antonio and Gino were on a multi-day trip to the Pico del Oro area further to the west. Thus, I was being fairly cautious....



Figure 1. (left) Photo of the 'Bigger Sink' where the river sinks into the cliff at the bottom of a large vegetated depression. (right) GoogleEarth image of Bigger Sink'.

Bigger Sink is reached by walking over the ridge from camp for about 90 minutes to reach 6° 3.884'S 77° 30.915'W (Fig. 1). On the way I passed a series of much smaller dolines at the very edge of the limestone, which Fleur and I had previously visited on the only day she was not ill. Two of these small holes are also ongoing and not fully explored yet. Once I reached the Bigger Sink, I could see that a river cut down a gorge, and then disappeared into a cliff at the end of a large and heavily vegetated depression (Fig. 1). There is an entertaining climb down of ~10 m through dense vegetation on the left side of the gorge (i.e. the side nearest to the Jacinto Camp) to reach the bottom of the gorge. I then walked in the river's bed to where the river sinks into boulders. After climbing down and around in those boulders, I found there was no way on. However, I then found a small tube blocked by a single large rock, which is 3-5m above and right of where the water sinks. I managed to remove the rock, and then crawled into a small cave entrance (~1 x 1 m; Fig. 2), which rapidly enters a larger (5 x 7 m) chamber (fig. 3). This entrance now has a small cairn to mark its position.

There are two ways on from the chamber, both of which will probably need a 10-15m rope, and both of which I left undescended. First, there is an obvious ~5-10 m pitch down at the end of the chamber, which continues as an ongoing passage to the right. This 5-10m pitch might be bypassed by a squeeze through a horizontal tube, and then climb down (fig. 3). But I was on my own, and where people may not find me easily, so I did try this climb down and squeeze. There is also a second hole in the floor of the chamber, which needs a hammer to make it a little bit bigger. Once a person can fit through, it is probably a 10-15m pitch. Thus, there is at least one cave entrance with ongoing leads that is directly above 'Bigger Sink'.

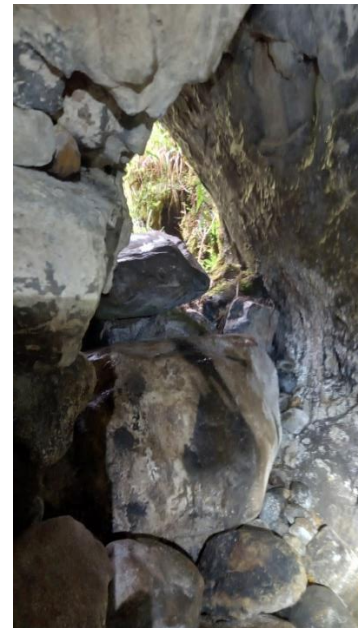


Figure 2. Photos of the entrance of Bigger Sink cave from (left) the outside, where there is a small cairn, and (right) the inside of the cave.

I crawled out of the cave, and climbed back above the depression and its dense vegetation. There I could see another significant hole, possibly a cave entrance, in a cliff that is higher to the south. Jean-Yves, Gino and Antonio also reported a depression with an undescended (~30 m) pitch further to the west, which they went to on our first day at the Jacinto Camp. I had been ill for the previous days with diarrhoea, and thought that it would be nice for Fleur to also see and explore bigger sink the next day. But we were both ill again on the next day too, so we never went back to Bigger Sink in 2022, and that may have to wait until the 2023 expedition. It looks like a really good area for future exploration, both for Bigger Sink, and also the other large river sinks that are located a short distance (1-3 km) further from camp.



Figure 3. Photos inside Bigger Sink cave. Photo is ~20m inside the cave, where this is a ~5m deep undescended pitch, beyond which cave continues.