

# A FEW SPANISH CAVING TERMS - BEYOND CERVEZA Y BAÑOS

*by Tone Garot and Laura Rosales Lagarde, February 2009  
expanded December 2009 by Jim Kennedy, Gill Ediger, Yazmin Avila, and others  
revised and expanded again October 2010 and January 2011 by Gill Ediger and Jim Kennedy*

Once you have gotten a taste of caving in Mexico, you crave that flavor. You will see all sorts of interesting things, and you will meet all sorts of interesting people; but how do you talk about what you have seen to the people you have met? Here are a few caving terms and other useful words in Spanish. Please print out this handy glossary and take it with you the next time you go caving in Mexico or write a trip report about your adventures there. If you think of other related words that are not on this list, please send them to us.

## Names for caves and karst features

dolina = sinkhole  
cueva, la caverna = cave  
pozo = well (used for pits)  
sótano = cellar, basement (used for pits)  
hoyo = hole, pit  
sumidero = sinking stream, insurgence, drain  
resumidero = drain, sewer  
grieta = crack, crevice  
gruta = cave, grotto  
sima = chasm, pit  
nacimiento, manantial = spring (nacimiento is literally “birthplace”)

## Names for things in caves

entrada = entrance  
salida = exit  
pasaje = passage  
sala, salón = large room, chamber (sala also is used for “camera” due to the original derivation of “camera oscura”, i.e. “dark chamber”)  
olla = pot (also used as a cave term to describe a bowl-shaped hole in the floor)  
muñeco(a) = doll, referring to an archaeological statue (muñeca is “wrist”)  
estalactitas = stalactites  
estalagmitas = stalagmites  
techo = ceiling, roof  
piso = floor  
pared = wall  
tiro = drop, pitch  
subida = climb  
restricción = restriction/squeeze  
pasadizo = passage, corridor  
gatera = crawlway (literally “catway”)  
arrastradera = belly crawl  
gusanera = narrow winding passage where you have to go sideways (literally “wormway”)  
sifón = sump, siphon  
lodo = mud  
barro = mud, clay  
arena = sand  
arriba = up, above

grava = gravel  
roca/piedra = rock  
el agua = water (note that agua is feminine, but has a masculine article)  
derrumbes = breakdown/landslide  
caliza = limestone  
calcita = calcite  
yeso = gypsum  
travertinos = flowstone  
cortinas = draperies  
fósiles = fossils  
murciélago = bat  
vampiro = vampire bat  
guano = bat dung, which is sometimes used as fertilizer  
pez, peces = fish, fishes (pesca = live fish, pescado = dead fish, to eat)  
culebra, serpiente = snake  
víbora, cascabel = rattlesnake  
lagarto, lagartija = lizard  
salamadra = salamander  
rana = frog  
sapo = toad  
hueso = bone  
bichos, insectos = bugs (generically)  
abeja = bee  
avispa = wasp  
araña = spider  
milpiés = millipede  
cienpiés = centipede  
alacrán, escorpio = scorpion  
mosquitos/jejenes = gnats (biting flies)  
moscas = flies (non-biting)  
garrapata = tick (the blood-sucking kind)  
hormiga = ant  
pulga = flea  
piojo = louse

## Cave descriptors (adjectives)

subterráneo = subterranean  
profundo(a) = deep  
hondo(a) = deep  
alto(a) = high  
abajo = down, below

oscuro(a) = dark.  
vertical = vertical  
estrecho(a) = tight  
angosto(a) = narrow  
ancho(a) = wide  
grande = big, great, extensive  
chico(a), pequeño(a) = small, tiny  
bajo(a) = low  
largo(a) = long  
corto(a) = short  
lodoso(a) = muddy  
arenoso(a) = sandy  
resbaloso(a) = slippery, slick  
peligroso(a) = dangerous

### **Names for equipment**

equipo = equipment, gear  
casco = helmet  
luz = light, such as a headlamp or the station light.  
Also generically means “electricity.”  
brillante = bright (light)  
cuerda, cable = rope (note that *la ropa* means clothes, not rope)  
nudo = knot  
cuerda de la almohadilla = rope pad  
mochila = pack  
arnés = harness  
pechera = chest harness, chest block, chest roller  
cola de vaca = cowstail  
estribo = footloop (literally “stirrup”)  
puño = Jumar-type ascender (literally “fist”)  
descensor = descender  
marimba = rappel rack  
ocho = figure 8 descender  
mosquetón con seguro = locking carabiner  
mosquetón sin seguro = non-locking carabiner  
fracción = rebelay  
maillon = maillon/screw link  
plaqueta = hanger  
tornillo, cerrojo = bolt  
taladro = drill  
taladro de impacto = hammer drill  
martillo = hammer  
palanca, barra = crowbar/prybar  
guantes = gloves  
rodilleras = kneepads  
coderas = elbow pads  
libro de la topografía = survey book  
lápiz = pencil  
Disto = Disto  
cinta = tape, such as flagging tape or measuring tape.  
Also means “belt.”  
gafas, anteojos, lentes = eyeglasses  
pilas = dry cells (AAA, AA, C, D, etc.)  
poner/colocar = to put  
ayudar = to help

batería = battery (for a car)  
bolsa seca = dry bag  
traje de neopreno = wetsuit  
cámara = camera [see *sala*]  
cámara de aire = inner tube (air chamber)  
GPS = GPS  
hilo = string, cord  
cadena = chain  
candado = lock  
llave = key  
clave = combination (to a lock), radio frequency channel or code  
escalera = ladder, stairs  
el mapa = map (note feminine noun used with masculine article)  
la foto = photo (note masculine noun used with feminine article)

### **Names for techniques**

“libre” = “Clear”(used when getting off rope and out of the fall zone)  
“ayuda!” = help!  
aventar la piedra = to toss a rock into a pit  
redireccionar = to redirect  
rappear = to rappel  
descender = to go down  
subir = to ascend, climb up  
biólogo(a) = biologist  
arqueólogo(a) = archaeologist  
geólogo(a) = geologist  
topógrafo(a) = mapper, sketcher, surveyor  
mapa = map  
plan de mapa = plan view  
perfil de mapa = profile view  
estación = survey point, station  
punto = point, as in a survey point, or period, as in “punto com” (dot com)  
fotografía, foto = photograph  
excavar, cavar = to dig  
encuestar = to survey (to make a map)  
explorar = to explore  
entrar = to enter  
salir = to exit  
dejar = to leave  
bajar = to go down  
subir = to go up  
escalar = to climb a wall  
cargar = to load, to carry  
caminar = to walk  
gatear = to crawl (like a baby)  
arrastrar = to crawl (on your belly)  
levantar = to lift  
empujar = to push  
jalar = to pull  
rescate = rescue (noun)  
rescatar = to rescue

rescatista = rescuer  
primeros auxilios = first aid  
botiquín = first aid kit

### **Clothing**

ropa térmica = thermal clothing  
sombrero = hat  
gorra, cachucha = cap  
chaqueta, abrigo = jacket, coat  
suéter = sweater  
camisa = shirt  
camiseta = T-shirt  
pantalones = pants  
shorts/pantalones cortos = shorts (yes, they also say  
“shorts” in Mexico)  
ropa interior = underwear  
bragas, calzones, pantis = panties  
sostén, sujetador = bra  
calcetines = socks  
mosquitero = mosquito net

### **Body Parts**

uña = fingernail  
dedo = finger  
pulgar = thumb  
mano = hand  
puño = fist  
brazo = arm  
pierna = leg  
cabeza = head  
cráneo = skull  
pata, pie = foot  
dedo del pie = toe  
pecho = chest  
piel = skin (sometimes also used for animal hides)

### **Miscellaneous useful words**

carga = cargo, gear, load

compañeros = teammates  
campamento = the camp  
campo = the country (as opposed to “the city”)  
sierra, cordillera = mountain range  
montaña = mountain  
cerro = hill  
loma = rise in the landscape, small hill  
valle seco = dry valley  
sendero = trail, path  
cerca = fence (also means “near”)  
árbol = tree  
serrucho, sierra = saw (for cutting wood)  
hacha = ax, hachet  
filoso(a) = sharp, as in a knife, ax, or machete  
lima = file (for sharpening)  
fuego, lumbre = fire  
alumbre = illumination  
encender, prender = to light a fire, turn on a light, or  
burn  
apagar = to turn off (a light or equipment)  
comida = food  
cuero = leather, animal hide  
vaca = cow  
burro = donkey  
borrego = sheep  
chivo, cabra = goat  
cerdo, puerco = pig  
norte = north  
sur = south  
este = east  
oeste = west  
oriente = East  
poniente = West  
izquierda = left  
derecha = right  
derecho = straight ahead  
clavo = nail (for pounding in to wood)

## **Select Spanish phrases**

Does anyone here speak English?  
Does anyone there speak English?  
I don't speak much Spanish.  
Are there any caves or holes nearby?  
Who owns this cave?  
Can we enter?  
Can we camp here?  
Full tank, please.  
How much is it?  
How much is this?  
How much are they?  
How much do I owe you?  
I want something for an upset stomach.  
I want something for diarrhea.

¿Hay alguien aquí que hable inglés?  
¿Hay alguien allí que hable inglés?  
No hablo mucho español.  
¿Hay cuevas o hoyos (o pozos o sótanos) cercano?  
¿Quién es el dueño de esta cueva?  
¿Podemos entrar?  
¿Podemos acampar aquí?  
Llénelo, por favor.  
¿Cuánto es?  
¿Cuánto cuesta?  
¿Cuánto cuestan?  
¿Cuánto le debo?  
Quiero algo para las molestias de estómago.  
Quiero algo para diarrea.

*please send additions and corrections to [cavercrash@gmail.com](mailto:cavercrash@gmail.com)*