

A pair of vintage round glasses and a brass compass are positioned at the top of the page, resting on a thick, braided rope. The background is a textured, aged paper with a yellowish-brown hue.

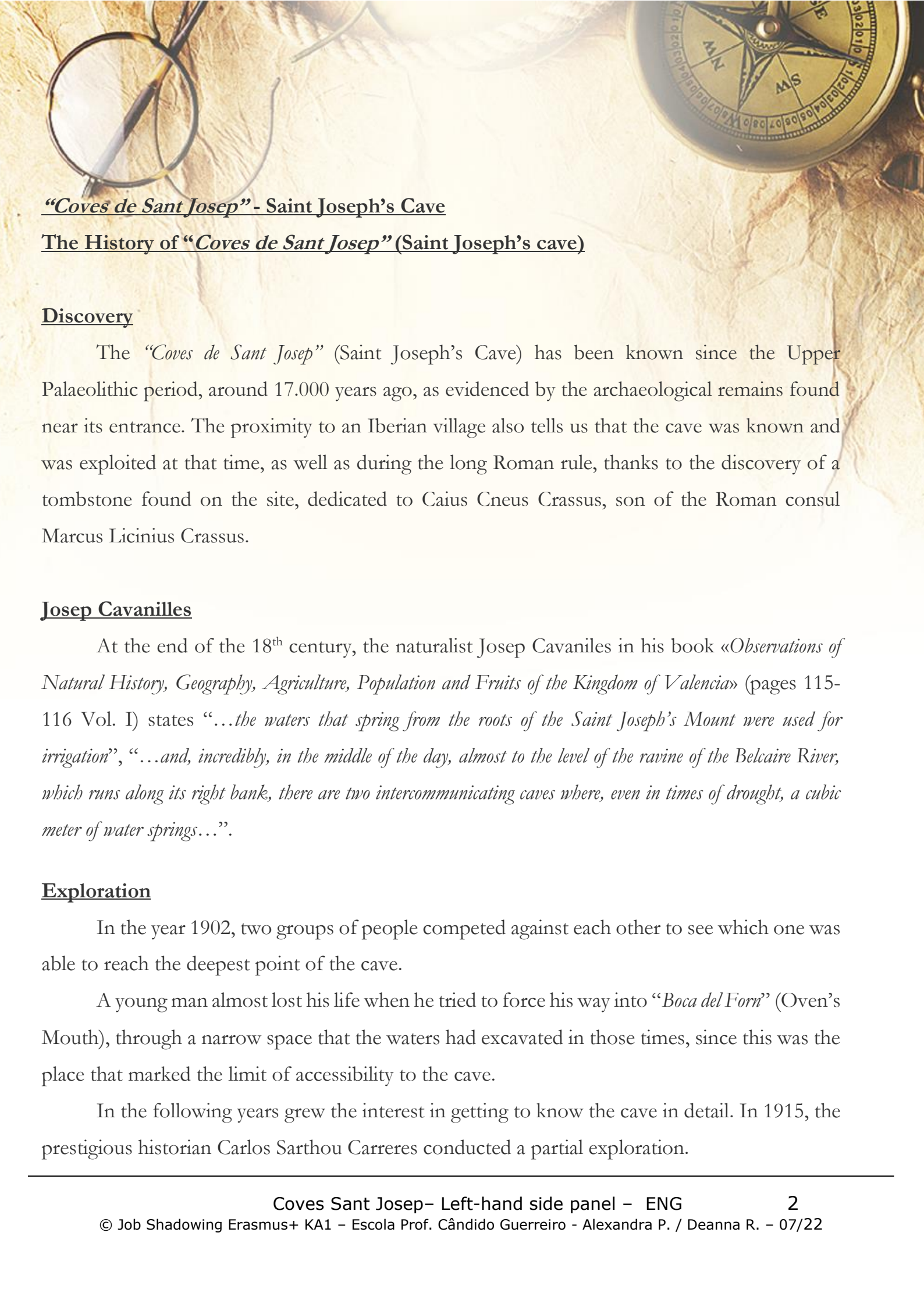
Coves de Sant Josep

Saint Joseph's Cave

Left-hand side panel

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“Coves de Sant Josep” - Saint Joseph’s Cave

The History of “Coves de Sant Josep” (Saint Joseph’s cave)

Discovery

The “Coves de Sant Josep” (Saint Joseph’s Cave) has been known since the Upper Palaeolithic period, around 17.000 years ago, as evidenced by the archaeological remains found near its entrance. The proximity to an Iberian village also tells us that the cave was known and was exploited at that time, as well as during the long Roman rule, thanks to the discovery of a tombstone found on the site, dedicated to Caius Cneus Crassus, son of the Roman consul Marcus Licinius Crassus.

Josep Cavanilles


At the end of the 18th century, the naturalist Josep Cavanilles in his book «*Observations of Natural History, Geography, Agriculture, Population and Fruits of the Kingdom of Valencia*» (pages 115-116 Vol. I) states “...*the waters that spring from the roots of the Saint Joseph’s Mount were used for irrigation*”, “...*and, incredibly, in the middle of the day, almost to the level of the ravine of the Belcaire River, which runs along its right bank, there are two intercommunicating caves where, even in times of drought, a cubic meter of water springs...*”.

Exploration

In the year 1902, two groups of people competed against each other to see which one was able to reach the deepest point of the cave.

A young man almost lost his life when he tried to force his way into “*Boca del Forn*” (Oven’s Mouth), through a narrow space that the waters had excavated in those times, since this was the place that marked the limit of accessibility to the cave.

In the following years grew the interest in getting to know the cave in detail. In 1915, the prestigious historian Carlos Sarthou Carreres conducted a partial exploration.



“Boca del Forn” - Oven’s Mouth

In 1926, a group of local people managed to go beyond the “*Boca del Forn*” (Oven’s Mouth), reaching the “*Llac Diana*” (Lake Diana). At this point, they encountered an insurmountable obstacle: the “*Galeria dels Sifons*” (the Siphons’ Gallery). In 1929, Herminio Arroyas Martínez, an inhabitant of la Vall d’Uixó, died while trying to go beyond the Siphons’ Gallery. This year marks the first attempts to transform the caves with passageways so that they can be visited.

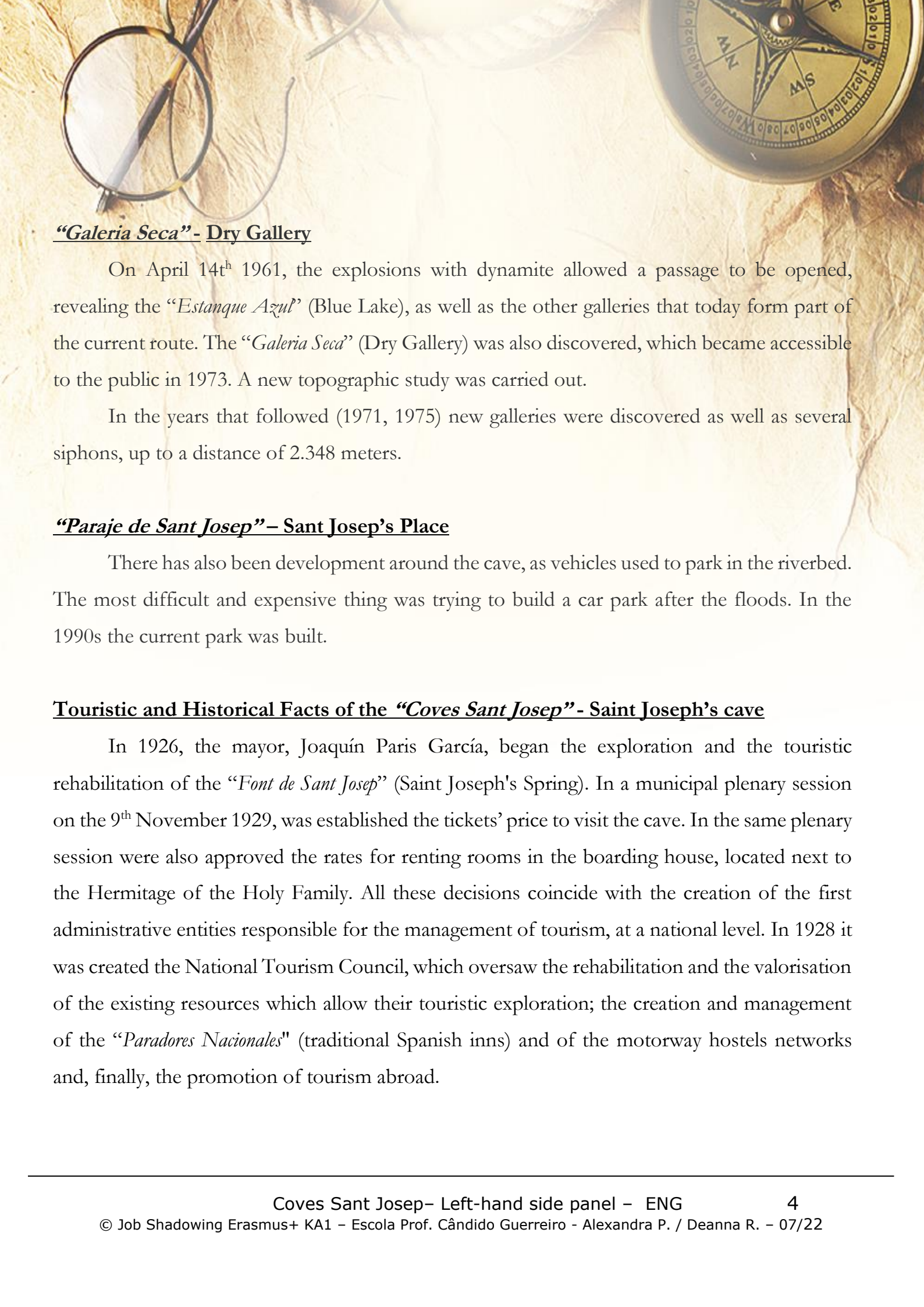
“Galeria dels Sifons” - Siphons’ Gallery

The “*Boca del Forn*” (Oven’s Mouth) was no longer the limit point of the route. When it was widened, by means of explosions, it was possible to use boats to cross it. These actions date from 1950.

The first exploration took place in 1954, when a group of speleologists from the Underground Explorations section of the Centre of Excursionists of Valencia entered the cave. In 1958, this group drew the first topographical map of the cave. On November 13th, 1960, the continuity of the cave was confirmed, when Joaquín Saludes, from the Centre of Underwater Investigations and Activities in Valencia, managed to go beyond the “*Galeria dels Sifons*” (Siphons’ gallery).

Lighting

The journalist of the *Heraldo de Castellón*, J. Javieres reports, in an article written in early summer of 1936, that the passageways had been replaced by a boat. The construction of a small dam that maintained the water level, as well as the dredging of some places, were the main factor that made it possible. The cave was also electrified, at that time, to illuminate the galleries.



“Galeria Seca”- Dry Gallery

On April 14th 1961, the explosions with dynamite allowed a passage to be opened, revealing the “*Estanque Azul*” (Blue Lake), as well as the other galleries that today form part of the current route. The “*Galeria Seca*” (Dry Gallery) was also discovered, which became accessible to the public in 1973. A new topographic study was carried out.


In the years that followed (1971, 1975) new galleries were discovered as well as several siphons, up to a distance of 2.348 meters.

“Paraje de Sant Josep” – Sant Josep’s Place

There has also been development around the cave, as vehicles used to park in the riverbed. The most difficult and expensive thing was trying to build a car park after the floods. In the 1990s the current park was built.

Touristic and Historical Facts of the “Coves Sant Josep” - Saint Joseph’s cave

In 1926, the mayor, Joaquín Paris García, began the exploration and the touristic rehabilitation of the “*Font de Sant Josep*” (Saint Joseph's Spring). In a municipal plenary session on the 9th November 1929, was established the tickets’ price to visit the cave. In the same plenary session were also approved the rates for renting rooms in the boarding house, located next to the Hermitage of the Holy Family. All these decisions coincide with the creation of the first administrative entities responsible for the management of tourism, at a national level. In 1928 it was created the National Tourism Council, which oversaw the rehabilitation and the valorisation of the existing resources which allow their touristic exploration; the creation and management of the “*Paradores Nacionales*” (traditional Spanish inns) and of the motorway hostels networks and, finally, the promotion of tourism abroad.

A pair of round-rimmed glasses with dark frames and a brass compass are resting on a textured, light-colored surface. The compass is positioned in the upper right corner, showing cardinal directions (N, S, E, W) and degree markings. The glasses are in the upper left corner.

The visit to the cave could be made thanks to the installed platforms making possible the access to "*Boca del Forn*" (Oven's Mouth), which at that time was the known limit of the cave. The room "*De les Rates Penades*" (Bats' room) was then referred to as the "*Sala de las Maravillas*" (Room of Wonders). In addition, temporary lighting is installed.


"*El Paraje*" (Place of Sant Josep) became an official site to receive the authorities and personalities who visited la Vall d'Uixó. In 1936, there were already voices calling for the better use of the touristic potential of the area and of the cave, which could result in an economic benefit for the town.

The Spanish Civil War and the post-war period ceased this attempt of touristic transformation, and it was not until 1954 that interest in the cave and in the site was revived. That year, the "*Centro Excursionista de Valencia*" (Valencia's excursionist centre) conducted the first speleological expedition, according to the "*Actividades del Centro Excursionista*", *Periodico Las Provincias*, 3/9/1954" (*Las Provincias Newspaper - Activities of the Excursion Centre*" dated from 03/09/1954).

In 1956, torrential rains caused a flood that swept away all the structures that allowed the visit to the cave, including the passageway and the electrical installation.

With the election of the new mayor, Eleuterio Abad, the touristic exploration of the place was implemented. Different explorations showed that the cave continued beyond the "*Boca del Forn*" (Oven's Mouth) and the works began to enlarge the cave and make it navigable. In 1960, the works were finished, and regular touristic visits were developed, which by then reached as far as "*Llac Diana*" (Lake Diana). That summer, over 3,000 visitors were counted, the following year there were over 20,000 and in 1962 the number doubled.

The Catalan engineer Carles Buhigues and his team developed the first "artistic" installation for lighting the cave, which became operational in 1963. That same year, the first touristic guide to the cave was published, in Spanish and French.



The explorations continue as well as the rehabilitation of the accessible area, reaching in 1969 its current route, with the opening to visitors of the "*Galeria Seca*" (Dry Gallery), that same summer.

The "*Paraje de Sant Josep*" (Place of Sant Josep) was also provided with the complementary equipment from the "*Coves de Sant Josep*" (Saint Joseph's Cave), to make the visit more attractive and to be able to offer more activities to the visitor:

1961 - municipal swimming pools

1967 - entertainment area and dance floor, as well as a round stage

The collecting of memories about the "*Coves de Sant Josep*" (Saint Joseph's Cave) among the inhabitants of la Vall d'Uixó, known as "*Valleros*", has been considered in the historical and patrimonial dissemination strategy of recent years. The new electrical installation of the cave opened a new stage in their history and their position, on the path towards to a futuristic, technological, sustainable, informed tourism, with a will to know, to learn and live experiences.