

Migovec - an introduction

The Hollow Mountain

The silhouette of TOLMINSKI MIGOVEC is like an old friend to the inhabitants of nearby villages and alps. The sheer cliffs endure the passing of the seasons, while all around, the alpine meadows and pine forests grow boldly green or retreat and sometimes hide under a thick blanket of winter's snows. Its rough crevices, imposing limestone buttresses and bare scree cones impart an austere look on the unmistakable southern precipice, the face TOLMINSKI MIGOVEC shows to the casual walkers.

This mountain of TOLMIN is reared up against a limestone ridge higher still, as if a promise of a larger barren wilderness, towering at 1862 m elevation above the TOLMINKA valley. MIG lies at the western edge of the TRIGLAVSKI NARODNI PARK (TRIGLAV NATIONAL PARK).

The ascension to the summit, a three to four hour walk from the city of Tolmin rewards the curious walker with gorgeous views of the limestone landscapes of the JULIAN ALPS. To the south-west, span-

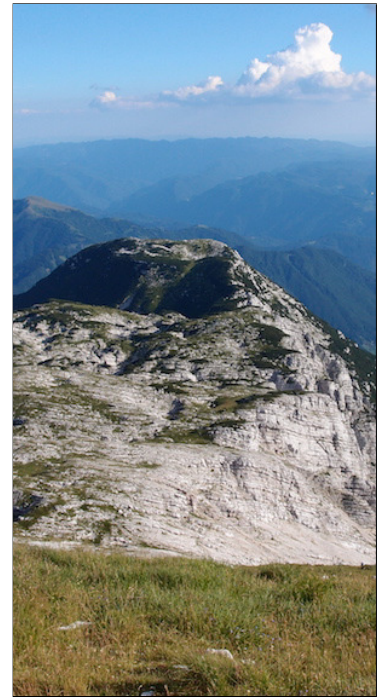


Figure 12: The MIGOVEC PLATEAU and a panorama to the south over the DINARIDES
📷 *Andy Jurd*



Figure 13: TOLMINSKI MIGOVEC in Winter, as seen from a popular paraglider spot looking north 📷 *Jana Čarga*

ning the bay of TRIESTE, the unbroken flatness of the Italian plain scintillates with a myriad of urban lights after dark. South is a world of rolling hills and low plateaus merging into the sky in a blue haze; the BAČA and IDRIJCA valleys cutting deep furrows in the otherwise gentle scenery.

The east is barred from view by a line of jagged high peaks, clawing at the sky with bare grey knuckles, the first prominent mountains of the JULIAN ALPS. Beyond, another country almost: water drains to form the Sava river, collecting in the glacial lake BOHINJ, then flows past LJUBLJANA, the capital, towards the BLACK SEA. The majority of the TRIGLAV NATIONAL PARK lies beyond the NW-SE oriented ridge, with the KOMNA plateau separating the massif of Tolminski Migovec from the walls of TRIGLAV, not 15 km distant.

The valley of the TOLMINKA lies to the west of the TOLMINSKI MIGOVEC plateau. Resurging through marshland and boulders at the foot of OSOJNICA, the river flows within a deep, glacial valley, bounded on either side by steep cliffs.

The MIGOVEC massif is made up of nearly a kilometer thick stack of well bedded Triassic limestones. During the building of the Alps, these were emplaced on top of younger Jurassic and Cretaceous rocks, which are predominantly made up of limestone alternating with mudstones, and therefore less prone to hosting extensive cave systems.

As a result of the geology, the surface of the undulating, 1x2km PLATEAU is karstified; it is riddled in places with potholes as much as 30m deep, contains 'staircase' karst and a vast underground network of caves, the MIGOVEC SYSTEM. A karst landscape is the unmistakable sign that of all possible erosional processes, dissolution of rock is predominant.

The main resurgences associated with a karst system² are the aforementioned Tolminka springs to the west, the ZADLAŠČICA to the south east and the SAVICA to the north.

² a karst system encompasses all interconnected voids within the limestone whereas a cave system refers to the fraction that is enterable by man

Local geography

For cave specific research, we refer the reader to the index of colloquial names, located at the end of the book. In the body of text, the named passages are HIGHLIGHTED THUS.

The M-series

The M-series as the caves found mostly on the Migovec Plateau and were first explored during the 1974-1994 period. This area encompasses the undulating surface of the Migovec Plateau, as far north as the start of the rise towards TOLMINSKI KUK, and as far south as the main LIMESTONE PAVEMENT, a significant depression between TOLMINSKI MIGOVEC and the camping spots (see map 2 on page 25).

Overview Exploration of SISTEM MIGOVEC by the *Jamarska Sekcija Planinskega Društva Tolmin - JSPDT*, hereafter referred to as the JSPDT, began in earnest in 1974, under the impulse from longstanding members Zoran Lesjak, Brane Bratuž, Stanko Breška and Fischione Alfonz (JSPDT, 2007). They started exploring, digging and bolting down the main shakeholes of Area M (for Migovec), naming and numbering their most promising leads at the time (M1 to M17). More M number caves were added during the 1994 *Imperial College Caving Club (ICCC)* expedition (M18-M24). Below is a short discussion on the most significant of the M-series caves (see JSPDT (2007) for complete details).

M2 Early on, M2 or KAVKA JAMA (Jackdaw Cave) was explored to a depth of -350m, and comprised a 120m unbroken and impressive shaft named SILOS. The twin entrances to the cave lay to the east of the Plateau: a sizeable shaft plugged with snow letting light into the main entrance chamber connected to a smaller, free-climbable rift entrance. The termination of M2 at the time was an artificially enlarged squeeze at the end of a draughting, narrow rift with clear depth potential.

M16 In 1982, and after significant digging effort, M16 was broken into. A 100m to the SW of M2, and a stone's throw from the massive, but unfortunately choked M1 gaping entrance, a small, choss filled tube led to the start of a long pitch series, extending down to -547m. The jewel of the cave which, unusually at time ranked as one of the deepest in Slovenia, was the final chamber GALAKTIKA, the largest underground volume yet under TOLMINSKI MIGOVEC.

M18 This area of shakeholes yielded many other caves in the mid 1990s when the Imperial College Caving Club started to systematically explore the mountain. M18 or JAMA STRGANE SRAJCE cave, with its entrance less than 10m away from M2 developed into a sharp canyon until the key NCB breakthrough, which enabled two major connections to be forged between M18, M2 and M16. Together, these formed SISTEM MIGOVEC otherwise known as the OLD SYSTEM. Through the M16 entrance, exploration focussed on the deep end at first, with separate sumps encountered near -969m depth and shifted towards the shallower pitch series, with new passage adding up to over 11km of cave, most of it vertical.

As shown on the AREA M (2 on page 25), many other blowing holes, potential cave entrance and caverns of lesser significance (as yet) were pushed, named and surveyed over the years. Early ICCG expeditions (1994-1995) continued in the tradition of the M-series, with cave like JACKIE'S BLOWER (M21) VENUS CAVE (M22), Gulliver's Kipper and PF10 (M24, 119m deep). more information on page 13

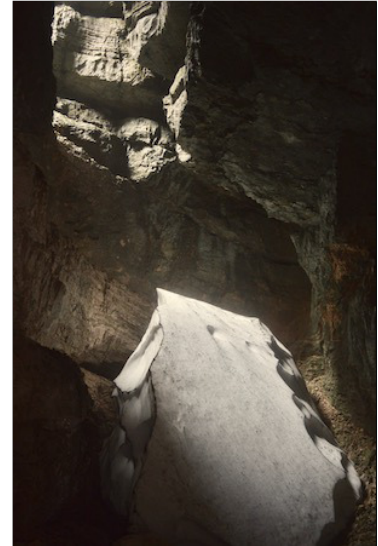


Figure 14: The snow plug entrance of M2 is the highest of the eight ways into SISTEM MIGOVEC 📷 Tanguy Racine



Figure 15: The large (by MIGOVEC standards) entrance of PRIMADONA, found off the west cliff of the PLATEAU whose exploration is dealt with in the 2016 and 2017 exploration entries 📷 Rhys Tyers



Figure 16: Due to its ease of access M16 is the chosen entrance for visits to the OLD SYSTEM 📷 Rhys Tyers

East of the Plateau

Vrtnarija Dropping further down the eastern glacial cirque, to the NE of the aforementioned entrances lies VRTNARIJA also known as GARDENERS' WORLD cave. Though spotted in 1996, the key breakthrough occurred in the year 2000, when a deep pitch series quickly dropped to -350m and was left ongoing. The following year ended on the discovery a long horizontal gallery at -550 m, which provided the ideal campsite for the next decade of joint cave exploration between ICCC and the JSPDT. more information on page 13. There is now more than 10km of horizontal cave development at depths >500m, extending as far north as TOLMINSKI KUK and south as PLANINA KAL.

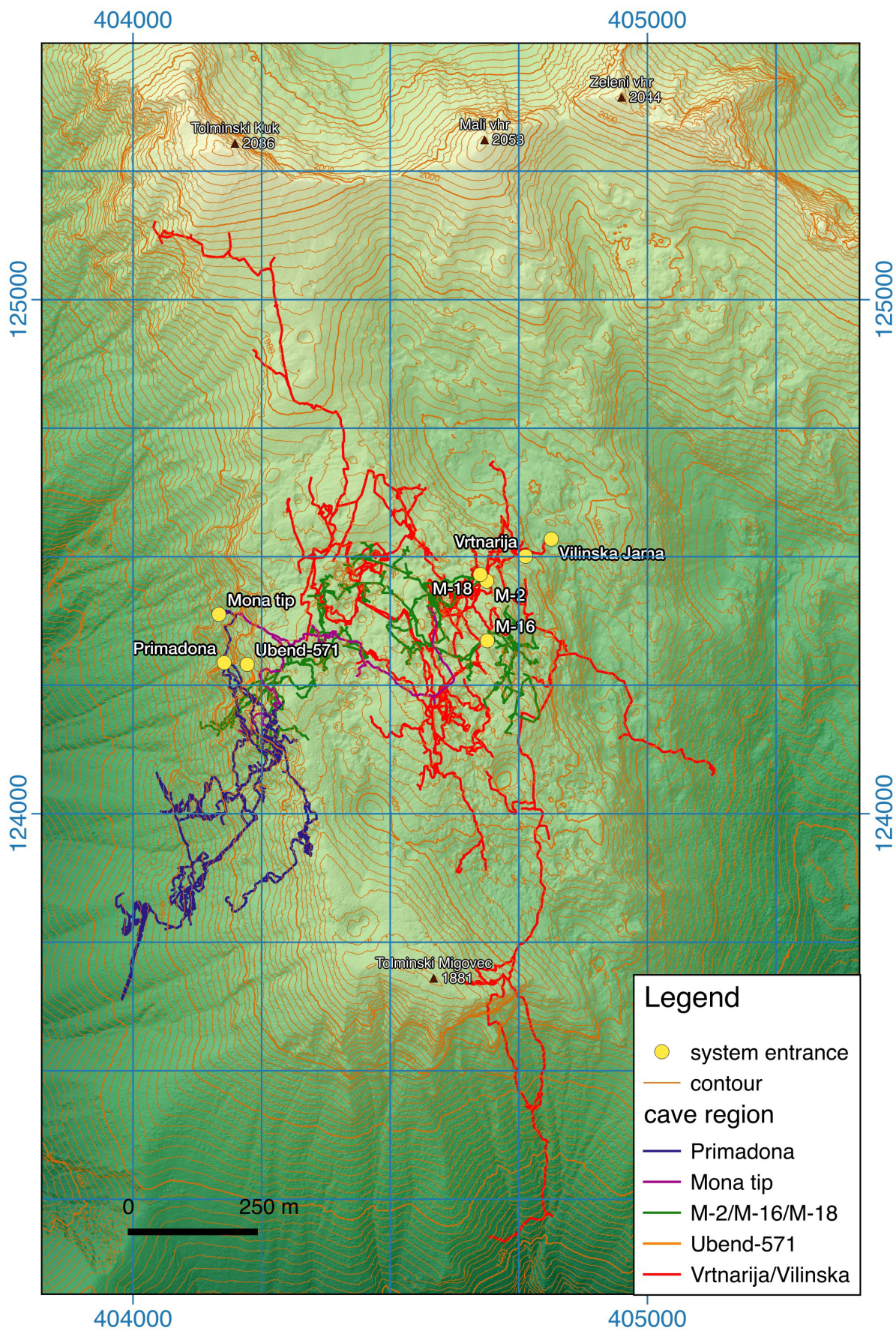
The S-series This collection of caves lies down in the GARDENERS' WORLD valley. In 2013 the numbers 5-7 were added to the list, but it is S1 which has received the most attention so far. Sporadic exploration over the years (up until 2017) met an ascending boulder choke obstacle issuing a very cold draught, which due to the pushing front's proximity with M16, was attributed to the same air as flows through the end HOTLINE gallery to the northwest.

West of the Plateau

Primadona At the opposite edge of the PLATEAU, and accessed via either a 120m cliff abseil or a steep scree climb, the large entrance of PRIMADONA was the gateway to another significant system. The cave filled a blank area of mountain far to the west of SISTEM MIGOVEC (more information on page 16).

Monatip MONATIP was connected to PRIMADONA early on. The first is located 100m north of PRIMADONA along the cliffside, begins as a near horizontal crawl and breaks into a short series of up-and-down pitches heading southeast, before two routes split off. At PLANIKA CHAMBER, a ≈ 30 m climb leads into the high level series that eventually connected with SISTEM MIGOVEC near NCB in 2015 more information on page 146. The other way is down a steep rift breaking into ALKATRAZ chamber and further down into the water chamber near SEJNA SOBA.

Other cliff entrances Along the nearly 2 km long stretch of cliffs which characterise the western side of the PLATEAU, several more caves have been discovered e.g. UBEND571, which connects into PRIMADONA and whose entrance is 70 m higher along the abseil route or GONDOLIN, located 100 m north of MONATIP. PLANIKA JAMA lies almost directly above the entrance to MONATIP and the far passages are choked in ice and rubble.



Map 2: Cave passage and topography of Tolminski Migovec, Slovenian National Grid ESPG 3794