

*Unique Dive Site*



*The third dimension,  
a Bosnian experience*

**Cave divers are like rock-face climbers; their purpose is the same, only in the opposite direction, with one difference. Cave-diving is about as extreme as it gets.**

It's a very Zen experience and the next thing to absolute oblivion. You are quite literally in a parallel universe, totally removed from reality. If its peace and quiet and isolation you're looking for, this is the place to be.

Cave diving is not about discovering what there is but determining what there isn't. In a cave you are surrounded by velvet darkness and an unnatural silence, leaving you with a distinct impression that the fish can hear your heartbeat.

To a virgin cave diver, it looks somewhat frightening as this is a completely different type of diving, with different equipment. It appears somewhat dangerous too as there are no shotline attachments.

"The reason for this is pretty straight forward," says Zeljko Mirkovic, of Una-Aquarius, a Speleologist, with numerous div-

# The River Una

*Cave Diving in Bosnia Herzegovina*

Text and photos by Cindy Dale



LEFT: Divers enter a cave under the River Una (inset); ABOVE: Mostar bridge



# unique dive



Diver explores the depths of a cave in the River Una where time stands still and one can hear one's own heart beat

ing and instructor qualifications.

"If a cave diver is hoisted to the surface in an emergency, it could cause a further crisis as the dangers of becoming entangled is great. And of course there are the caves themselves - seldom are they straight up."

"Also, being tied to a line limits a diver's movement and could have serious consequences if he

is trying to sort out other problems."

For those who dream of travelling through time, the caves and the pits of the River Una are priceless, rich in unique aquatic flora and fauna.

"The River Una represents a primeval beauty only a few have seen," says Zeljko, "Sometimes she is shallow, other times bot-

tomless, often wild with unpredictable raging rapids, then at once, tranquil and at peace with nature. But she is always beautiful and serene with cascading waterfalls and little pockets of quiet splendour. The Una is, I think, a little like a

Latino woman - wild and reckless and full of surprises and at the same time desirable and evocative, only occasionally allowing you to think that you have conquered her."

Una's beauty can never be fully captured with a paintbrush; and a camera lens does her no justice, as her beauty extends beyond the visual.

"She needs her emerald waters to be stroked, she needs you to smell the nettles of the black pines and inhale the scent of virgin nature, watch her re-dress herself as the daylight begins to fade, and watch the sun dance on her coat of diamonds at sunset," says Zeljko.

"Sometimes one wonders where she derives her beauty from, whose soul she carries and what is beneath her surface."

Undeniably, the Una's outer beauty captures all who meet

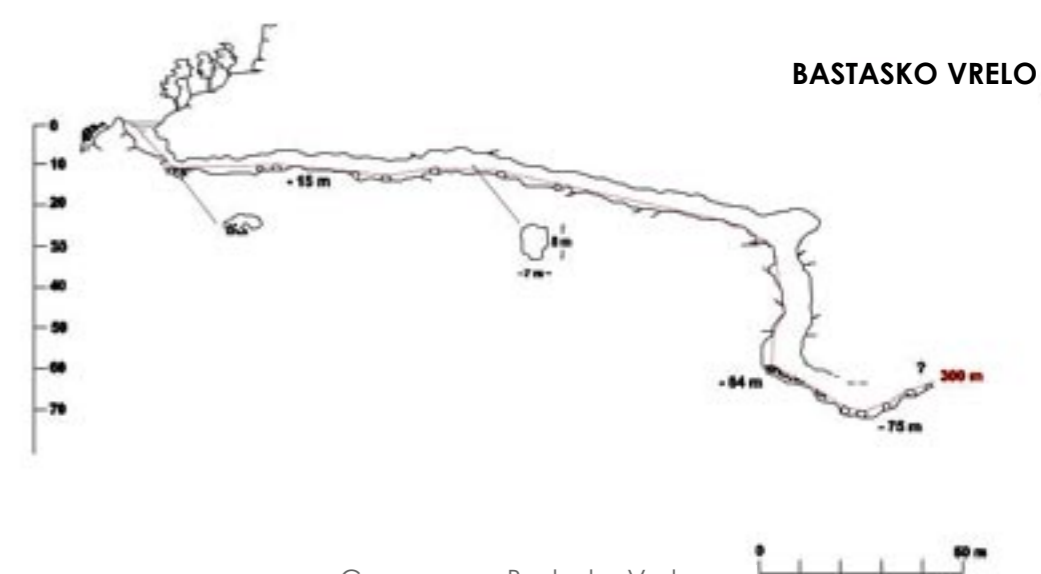
## The River Una

her. But her inner beauty is a world of silence and secrets. For millions of years, the Una hid her other dimension, the one where the river's dynamics have laboriously shaped, moulded and worn away the submerged landscape.

To understand her underwater splendour is to experience her currents and see them wash over the limestone rocks and sway the narrow fronds of underwater plants, playing with her riverbed sand, moving it here and there, like the desert winds move dunes. But this is only a small part of the Una.

When gazing into her depths, you will periodically catch a glimpse of peculiar underwater figures and lustrous green stars glistening in the late afternoon sun—some call it a parallel universe where all her creatures live in harmony.

Some of Una's children are large, like her 10kg Trout and the



Cave map - Bastasko Vrelo

Grayling, indigenous to Bosnia, and the 25kg Huchen, fresh-water crayfish, and small insects like the *Efemerela ignita*, the Human fish (*Proteus Anguinus*), and the large assortment of ornamental underwater plants, which all bear witness to Europe's cleanest river. But these are only some of the abundant life-forms found in the Una. Many remain undiscovered and unrecorded.

Una's underwater world has remained hidden from the world

for centuries and the native experts are cautious about divulging her secrets.

"Perhaps the Una is ready for a fresh diversion, a new play-mate or two, in exchange for a glimpse at her most secret of places," says Zeljko, a man clearly passionate about nature.

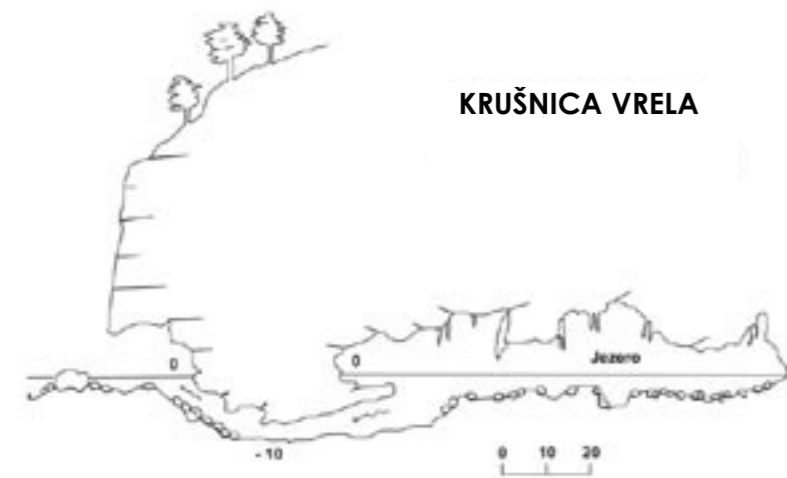
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[www.una-aquarius.org](http://www.una-aquarius.org) ■



Mouth of a cave dwarfs explorers standing in its gaping cavern and provides an entrance to a passage into the belly of the Earth

## KRUŠNICA VRELA



Cave map - Krušnica Vrelo

# fact file



## Bosnia Herzegovina



**History** In October 1991, Bosnia and Herzegovina's declaration of sovereignty was made. It was followed by a referendum on 3 March 1992, which made a declaration of independence from the former Yugoslavia—a referendum boycotted by ethnic Serbs. Supported by neighboring Serbia and Montenegro, the Bosnian Serbs responded with armed resistance which aimed at dividing the republic along ethnic lines and forming a "Greater Serbia" by joining Serb-held areas. But by March 1994, Bosniaks and Croats had signed an agreement creating a joint Bosniak/Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which effectively reduced the number of warring factions from three to two. The three years of interethnic civil strife was halted on 21 November 1995, in Dayton, Ohio, when the warring parties initialed a peace agreement, which was finalized on 14 December 1995 in Paris. In the Dayton Peace Accords, Bosnia and Herzegovina's retained international boundaries and created a democratic multi-ethnic government which was responsible for conducting fiscal, diplomatic and foreign policy. A second tier of government was also recognized. It comprised of two entities approximately equivalent in size: the Bosniak/Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosnian Serb-led Republika Srpska (RS). The Federation and RS governments were given the responsibility of overseeing most government functions. NATO-led international peacekeeping forces were sent to Bosnia to implement and monitor the military aspects of the agreement, and later, to deter renewed hostilities. In December 2004, European Union peace-

keeping troops replaced NATO forces to maintain peace and stability. Government: emerging federal democratic republic; Capital: Sarajevo

**Geography** Southeastern Europe, bordering the Adriatic Sea and Croatia. mountains and valleys.

**Climate** hot summers and cold winters; areas of high elevation have short, cool summers and long, severe winters; mild, rainy winters along coast

**Environmental Issues** The country is working to improve air quality and wastewater issues in industrial areas; limited sites for disposal of urban waste; water shortages and destruction of infrastructure due to civil strife from 1992-95; and deforestation.

**Economy** Next to Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked as the poorest republic in the old Yugoslav federation. While agriculture is mostly in private hands, farms are small and inefficient. Traditionally, the republic is a net importer of food. As a remnant of the socialist economic structure of Yugoslavia, industry remains greatly overstuffed. The country's two most serious economic problems are high unemployment and a sizeable current account deficit. Substantial amounts of reconstruction assistance and humanitarian aid come from the international com-



munity, yet the population will have to prepare themselves for an era of declining assistance. Agriculture: wheat, corn, fruits, vegetables; livestock. Industry: steel, coal, iron ore, lead, zinc, manganese, bauxite, vehicle assembly, textiles, tobacco products, wooden furniture, domestic appliances, oil refining

**Currency** Convertable Marka (BAM); Exchange rates: 1 EUR = 1.96 BAM, 1 USD = 1.56 BAM, 1 GBP = 2.84 BAM, 1 AUD = 1.17 BAM, 1 SGD = .98 BAM

**Population** 4,498,976 (July 2006 est.) Bosniak 48%, Serb 37.1%, Croat 14.3%, other groups 0.6% (2000). Note: Bosniak is the ethnic term used to prevent confusion with the religious term Muslim which

denotes an adherence to Islam. Traditionally, the region called Herzegovina, which is contiguous to Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro, has been settled by an ethnic Croat majority in the west and an ethnic Serb majority in the east. Religions: Muslim 40%, Orthodox 31%, Roman Catholic 15%, other religions 14%

**Language** Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian

**Web sites** Bosnia Herzegovina Tourism [www.bhtourism.ba](http://www.bhtourism.ba)

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Source: [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov) ■

Entrance to a cave in the River Una, Bosnia



Cindy Dale is an international photo-journalist based in Brussels. For more information or to order images, please visit her website at: [www.cindyloudale.com](http://www.cindyloudale.com)