

# Set of nine cave houses in La Algueña, Alicante (Spain). Renewal proposal

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**ABSTRACT:** This work outlines the discovery of a unique set of nine excavated cave houses from the eighteenth century in the vicinity of La Algueña, a small village in the Vinalopó Medio region in the province of Alicante (Spain). These cave houses are of special interest since they were dug out by Algueña's first settlers and boast all the main features of excavated architecture in this area. Studying these caves has shed light on the sequence of excavation. After comparing them to other excavated cave houses from the same region, part of a previous study, a plan for their renewal and reuse is outlined. With the goal of preserving the region's excavated heritage, this proposal involves transforming the set into hotel complex.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Excavated architecture has always been associated with the countries of the Mediterranean basin, since it is here that this habitat has been most developed (Jessen 1955).

Most of the cave houses in the Iberian Peninsula are found in the southeast, with Granada, Murcia and Alicante being the provinces with the highest number of inhabited caves (Urdiales 1987).

In the Alicante province, cave houses have been studied, or at least identified and located, in Alfafara, Crevillente and Rojales as the three main and most referenced sites in the province. However, there are numerous other cave clusters in the Vinalopó Medio region, the existence of which is known almost exclusively by their current inhabitants and immediate 'neighbours'.

The research presented here is part of a broader, on-going project to inventory and catalogue the 1000 or so caves in Vinalopó Medio.

The caves presented in this work are located in the municipality of La Algueña which, at the turn of the eighteenth century, was made up entirely of cave houses. So far in this area alone 140 remaining cave houses have been inventoried.

The focus of this paper is the detailed study of one of the oldest sets of cave houses in the municipality, excavated by its first settlers. The morphological and architectural features of the nine caves in the set are presented and compared to those typical of excavated architecture in the Vinalopó Medio region, as outlined in earlier studies (Martínez et al., 2014), (Martínez, unpubl.). Finally, a plan for their

renewal and conservation as habitable spaces is proposed, by way of demonstration that excavated architecture can indeed be recovered and put to use in the present day (Aranda 1988).

## 2 LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENT

La Algueña is a village in the province of Alicante (Fig. 1) with a total population of 1391 (INE 2016). It is located on an alluvial plain set between three prominent hills. The surrounding landscape is typical of the warm and arid Mediterranean climate, and has significant environmental value thanks to agriculture (table grapes and almonds) and the unique topographical features and Mediterranean flora (rosemary, thyme, and almond, olive and pine trees).

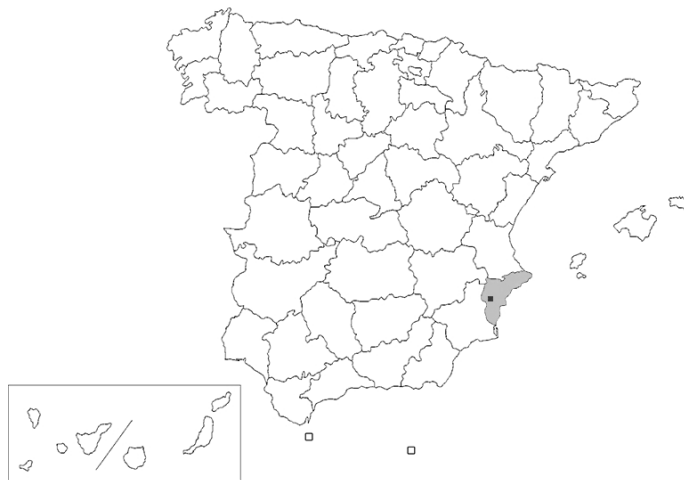


Figure 1. Location of La Algueña, Alicante (Spain).