

THE
**TEXAS
CAVER**

Spring Convention

o-9 Well

Adventures in Acuña

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COVER PHOTO by Peter Sprouse

Drew Thompson descending into Cueva de Amezcuea

BACK COVER PHOTO by Hector Mejia

El Infierno de la Camotera

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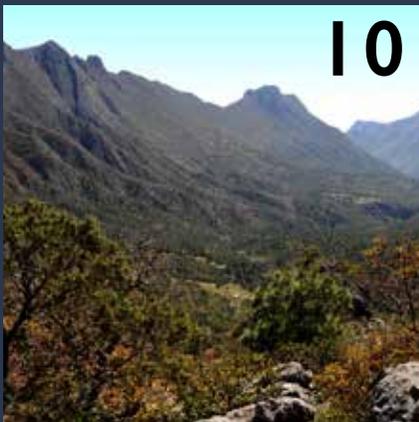
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AWARDS

TSA Spring Convention

by AMY MORTON



CAVER TO AMY: *“Will you organize convention? The TSA Vice Chair position is open and their only job is organizing the Spring Convention.”*

AMY: *“What is TSA?”*

ALSO AMY: *“Sounds like exactly what I should be doing.”*

I guess they asked me around the end of August and I ran in October for the position, unopposed, of course. Rob approached me and the next thing I knew, I was looking for a suitable meeting site for our Winter Meeting (my only other responsibility). What happened next?

I started looking at places. I called all the caves, parks and dance halls in centralized locations and some not so central. I had my eye on Longhorn Caverns. They thought we could be housed there nicely to suit our purposes but they were under a new concessionaire starting January 1st and I just couldn't make anything happen with them in time. I was chomping at the bit for Caverns of Sonora, but the price tag just didn't quite make it. I did get a free cave tour out of that one, but all my friends had to pay, and they did, nicely. You do get really close to the formations in that cave, it's a little unreal. I called a million places and left a million messages. I cut and paste the same email to a plethora of places and nothing was in our price range. Then I think Tom Rogers suggested Hill Country State Natural Area. We were already in negotiations about a new TSA project, so of COURSE we should have convention there.

Rob Bisset helped me out a lot with getting in touch and earning their trust. I knew this was the right choice when I asked the State Park Director if we would have access to the caves and he said *“A gentleman named Rob Bisset will be in charge of all the access.”* Finally, we really started having movement! We even got to do some previewing of some caves on the property and learning some history of the caving there. Thank you Rob! (He also saved the day with some insurance issue at the last minute while I was caving without a care in Mexico.)

AMY TO HER MOTHER: *“I'm organizing a big convention for the cavers. A big event that has scientific talks and a big auction and a dinner. I think I would like to have some workshops somehow this year.”*

AMY'S MOTHER: *“Sounds like you.”*

So I wanted it to be a really nice time with a fun atmosphere that also had tons of educational, scientific and exploratory information, and especially hands on learning. The best way to learn how to do something is by doing it, right? Let's do things! Rob was very excited and supportive at the prospect of having workshops. I started asking people who knew about the HCSNA caving to get their input. Marvin Miller is the award winning cartographer of Tag Team Cave and his eyes lit up at the idea of having a rigging workshop in there. Also, Peter Sprouse and Ron Rutherford were among the survey and dig team of Groundhog Cave, where they dug into the largest underground room in Bandera County. Peter even slept in that old white house twenty years ago. It is so fitting that now we were learning about cartography with him. Thank you, Peter, for your contributions to the caving community! Also, a shout out to Jules Rincon for doing the Illustrator portion of the cartography workshop. She was great!

I was also so encouraged by people like Joe Mitchell and Jim Kennedy on the various workshops that putting them together was easy. Ron Rutherford taught a GPS class and Jean Krecja stepped in and taught the rigging workshop. I hope the people in the classes realize how lucky they are to be taught by these prestigious leaders. I think it was a success and I hope that everyone that wanted to do something got the opportunity to do so.

Everyone kept talking about how difficult scheduling the talks was going to be. They claimed, finding all those speakers and coordinating it all would be such a chore! But I went to Crash and asked him:



AMY: *"Will you be in charge of the talks, all the speakers?"*

CRASH: *"Yes."*

Not only did he do a workshop and his own talk, but he also organized all the people for me! Thanks so much Crash Kennedy, for doing such a big daunting job that everyone warned me against. Naturally, it turned out great. From Aubri's Main Drain video, three Mexico presentations, to a talk about Hawaii by Allan Cobb, everyone has been doing so much great, distant caving, and we were fortunate to hear the talks. And there were so many other interesting topics. From the remarkable and compelling Bill Bentley historical presentation to the informative and relevant Missy Meierhofer's bat talk. Thanks to all the speakers for putting together so many awesome talks!

And how did you know about all these wondrous activities of the 2017 Spring Convention? The program, of course. The very nice eight page booklet that Don Arburn laid out and formatted, with some editing assistance by Ginger Reddig (who also provided desserts. She is always ready to help. Many thanks to Ginger). A lot of time went into selecting and manipulating the information put into that beautiful publication. Also, did you like the Whole Earth coupon on the back? I did and I just used it the other day, thanks to Gregg Williams.

Dinner was served by the tireless Aggies recruited by Bethany Beago and in an impromptu move, led by Missy Bisset. They were smiling faces of misinformation eagerly offering everyone Kim Chi casserole, which was actually King Chicken. I think I was the person to label that dish as such. My bad. But then everyone had seconds, so that was good. Missy really stepped up at the last second finding serving utensils (the caterer was supposed to supply them) and then cleaning them afterwards.

The auctions were amazing and so much fun in our togas. Also there was a lot of really great art, in both the silent and live auctions. How satisfying it is to be a part of a community with so many talented and creative people. I made off with many an item, including a compliment-getting bat hat made by Missy Meierhofer and a nice print of a formation in Logan's by Bennett Lee (and a big thank you for the group photo and a million other things)! Pam Campbell and Michelle Smith both made it really great, as they do every year. Someone has big shoes to fill! The auction was also made fun thanks to beer, negotiated by Bill Steele, who wasn't even in attendance (apparently there was a bigger deal going on at the same time). It was delivered by Linda Palit and Alan Cobb. Also, we were all a lot more comfortable because of Pete Strickland doing the awesome things he does, like building a wall in the pavilion for light and wind concerns. After you had all that beer, where did you go? To the

port-a-potties, of course, and for that you can thank Tom Rogers. He made sure we got the best prices around, and also was the first to show up at the site to meet the delivery. Thanks Tom!

The whole thing was really easy to register for and sign up for workshops, right? Well, we must thank the tireless team of Kris Peña and Will Quast. They got married, ya'll, at the same time as convention and STILL got all the little finicky things done. And it's a skillset that I just don't have, so I am forever grateful for them. Finally, I'd like to thank the pavilion for being a beast of a hot sweaty box and the worst and best thing at convention. Because otherwise we would not have had anywhere to eat, auction or party in that horrible storm. (Imagine if we had been at CWAN) And a nice party was had by all, greatly due to Dylan's spectacular musical endurance and his ability to play every song everyone knows.



So all throughout the weekend, and even as recently as this past weekend, people thanked me and complimented the convention. When Ellie asked me to write an article, I decided to take this opportunity to show everyone what an enormous conglomerate we actually are. The hive. The community. When things happen, it is not because of one person alone. Everyone has their job. This article is an opportunity to thank and recognize everyone, but more importantly to highlight just how collective and unified we really are. Thanks to all of you.

ELLIE: *"You did a good job this weekend."*

AMY: *"We all did."*



A Beginner's Guide to Cave Cartography

by JULIANA RINCON

Sometimes you just need to jump in with both feet. That's how it was for me at the Texas Speleological Association (TSA) survey project at Colorado Bend State Park (CBSP). It was my first time visiting the park, my first experience as a member of a survey team and my first time sketching and producing a completed map, including my first time working with Walls and Inkscape. As a newcomer to the project I did not know what exactly to expect, but I did have a clear objective in mind: if possible I'd like to practice surveying skills. Fortunately, Will Quast, co-coordinator for this project, had exactly that in mind for that day's trip.

That morning we gathered around his car for the briefing, safety information and release forms. Some teams were interested in digging in different leads and projects they had planned, but as soon as Will mentioned he was surveying a cave, I joined his team along with Elizabeth Copelin, also from the DFW Grotto and Angie Flores, from the UT Grotto. While our goal was to survey Sheep Den Cave, we planned stops along the way to explore leads and unknowns: we were carrying surveying tools, rope, vertical gear, tagging equipment, digging tools, a snake hook, loppers to help us deal with the brush and our personal gear so we were prepared for whatever the day would throw at us.

The process to produce a map starts way before getting to the cave. First you need to find a cave to survey. That is one of the main goals of the CBSP project, to hike through the area with maps and GPS units, taking pictures and writing descriptions of new caves and karst features. Sometimes it is necessary to dig to reveal new caves and passages and once those are located, to explore, survey and draft the maps of the caves. As we came to the different points that had been marked on our GPS we documented what could be done with them: basically check for promising dig sites and if they were just a cave feature or worth revisiting. We walked through quite a bit of bush and visited a few leads and caves, such as SAB303, AKA Donut Cave. Donut Cave already has a map, so what we did was clear the brush around the cave tag to increase its visibility. At another stop we found a flat fissure in a ledge, hollowed out between strata on the wall. We tried to squeeze in to see if it went on and became a cave, or if it was just a shelf. We concluded that it was not a human sized passage, that it didn't extend much further and then continued on our way.

Sheep Den Cave (SAB242) was definitely human sized. Nestled in a small canyon, the outside of the cave followed the curved profile of the canyon and the entrance was about 1.5 meters tall and quite wide. The cave was pretty much flat throughout. There was a main room with a column and a side passage. The floor in the main area was pretty evenly covered with round poop pellets which we assumed were from the namesake sheep or deer. We also found a lot of deer hair and different droppings which might have been armadillo, mice or bats, as well as a piece of rib. We also found quite a lot of ticks crawling around the dung. And in the side passages, there were a few seedlings trying to make their way out into the world. An armadillo paid us a visit, and went to hide in its little den to one side of the cave where its tail stuck out for us to see. At least five years had passed since my first and only experience

surveying, which was as part of a speleology course in which we just sketched two or three short stations worth of passage. I definitely needed to refresh my knowledge. Angie and Elizabeth had never surveyed before, so Will sat us down and trained us on how to use the survey tools, in this case Suuntos, Disto and the sketchbook. I was interested in doing the sketching and Will gave me a fair warning: whomever does the sketch has to hand in a completed map. I took up the challenge. Grabbing the small binder filled with resistant waterproof paper, a sharp mechanical pencil, and a cave compass, I sat myself off to one side and waited to write down the readings and start my sketch. Elizabeth and Angie took turns reading instruments and Will set stations and helped each of us in the different tasks as we needed the help.

We completed 42.96 meters of survey over 9 stations. We started towards the side passage that forked. To one side it went about 9 meters and ended: the passage had smooth and worn out walls that seemed to pull in and bulge out like links in a sausage, ending in a smooth and rounded surface. The other end of the fork we measured at 9 meters, going beyond a section that became too shallow for passage. We believe that the end of that fork may open up and continue or be wider than the passage, so perhaps it would be worth digging.

The main room we measured to the furthest area we could reach with our instruments. It was a section that continued behind a low ceiling passage that we were able to measure using the Disto. Once again, the passage is close to the dirt floor and we believe digging will allow us to explore and see if it is a narrow passage or if it opens up into a larger room. We closed a loop by going around the column in the main room and found some worn out stalactites in one edge. A small connection exists between this loop and an exterior section of the cave under the dripline and we included it into our survey. This was all sketched in, as well as cross sections of passages and other pertinent notes about the shape and size of the different features. While the cave was small, I did need additional sheets to extend the different passages: with two survey sheets, I was able to have the main section of the cave, and two separate extended areas.

We headed back to camp where I wrote our trip report. After the weekend and once I got home, that's when the map drawing started. Will sent me a short checklist of how to get started with the map with the four scanned survey sheets. First I imported the survey data into the Walls V2 program. This required perusing the Walls manual and following the straightforward instructions to add the data from our survey and then producing a plan view. Because the cave was small, I was able to export it as PDF. Now I had the scanned survey sheets with my sketches, and a line drawing with the survey points. It was time to bring these together in a drawing.

I had only dabbled in using vector illustration software, and I'd seen friends use them. I went ahead and downloaded a free program called Inkscape, then read through its manual. I also did an online search and found a manual for drawing cave maps in Inkscape. While the instructions were created to use a different cave survey program called Compass, it was easy enough to apply the relevant information to my line plot with Walls. It can be found at www.fountainware.com/compass/Cartography/Inkscape/InkscapeCaveMaps.htm.

I created a layer with the survey illustrations and I lined up the different sections using the registration marks I'd created at the edge of the drawings. This required playing with the transparency of the different sheets, so that I could see what was lying in the survey sheet underneath. Then I created a new layer with the PDF plan of the survey points, and resized and rotated the documents until the different survey points in the plot matched the points on my sketch. It was a pretty close match! Now I created a new layer and started tracing the walls, creating different layers for the details, for the ground texture, and for the wall masks. Basically, building the map from the ground up.

Most of the caving maps are completed using a commercial program called Adobe Illustrator. One of the advantages of Illustrator is that it allows for the creation of brushes, so that you can draw a line, call it a ledge, and it will automatically draw the ledge symbols on the line.

can import sets of brushes that other cavers have created and use them for your maps, which makes things a lot easier. Inkscape, sadly, does not have this feature. For every ledge or ceiling drop, I had to manually make each of the tick marks on the dotted lines. On YouTube there are many tutorials for Inkscape, and I believe that the object to path option may allow for a less cumbersome use of symbols in maps in the future.

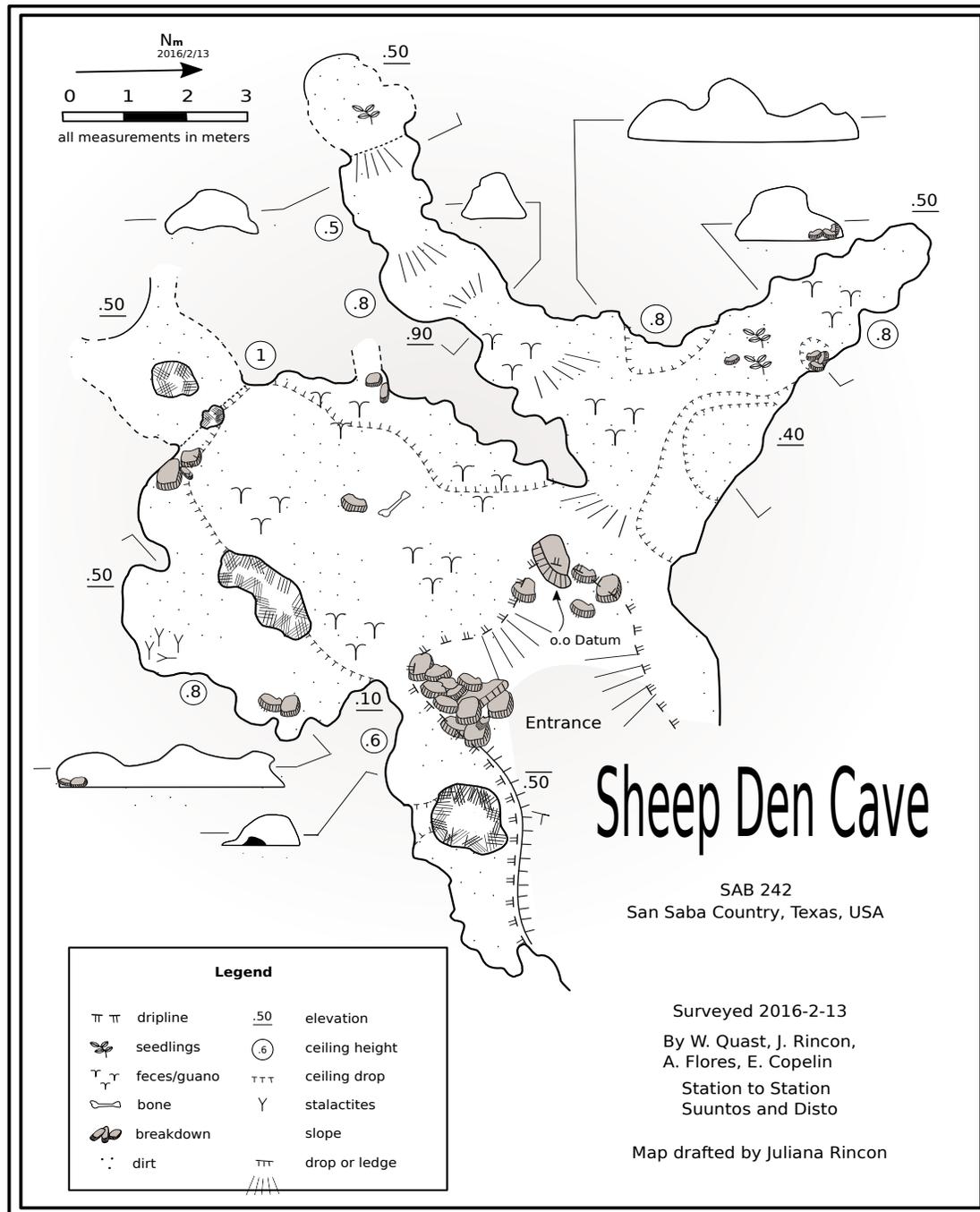
Using the NSS Cartography Salon judging criteria as a checklist to make my map allowed me to understand what information was necessary to include and how best to display it. Past NSS presentations on how to create cave maps, looking at different maps and reviewing the book *On Station* helped me get my bearings and how to show different features. Collaborating with experienced cartographers was an important step, as they could provide expertise and advice on how to improve the map, and since it was a vector drawing, changes were easy to make. Definitely

starting with a small map as my first cartographic learning experience was a bonus, as I had to deal with relatively few survey stations.

Making a map also taught me how to become a better sketcher while in the cave. I would stop and think that there was a piece of information that I wish I could've obtained while in the cave, so that I didn't have to crunch numbers and figure it out afterwards. While my sketch was done to scale, sometimes I couldn't recall if I had drawn the passages at floor level or at some different height.

The challenges with the station to station survey were that most of the volume dimensions were up to me, as the sketcher, to include by eyeballing, calculating, and remembering how much I or other team members had to bend or crawl to pass through specific areas. In hindsight, I think I would include a cheap digital camera with my survey gear, as memory sometimes fails and details blur together... or at least until I get better at sketching and knowing what details are worth including.

All in all, from survey to finished map it took me a month. I was able to hand over a copy of the map to Will at the following TSA-CBSP project weekend. Now, I'm even more excited to go back each month to the project to find more caves and do more surveys as well!





Bev watches Ken climb rope - Photo by Bennett Lee

Cave Plumbers of O-9 Well

by KEN DEMAREST

Standing tall across the Texas landscape rise creaking metal windmills that bring water to thirsty cattle. Deep in the earth below, a cleverly designed plunger pulls water up a pipe. In the case of O-9 Well, way out near Ozona, Texas, the water source is an underground river and cave system with sparkling limestone dams and a fifty-five foot plunging waterfall.

What happens when the machinery of a windmill fails one hundred and twenty-five feet below the surface? This is a moment when cavers can bring unique value, helping a landowner (really the landowner's tenant) out of a tight spot. "Nobody knows how to go down there, and we can't just haul the pipe up either." University Lands Cave Coordinator Ben Hutchins got the call. "If we don't get somebody down there within a couple days we're worried more parts might fail." Time was short. The trip would have to happen on Monday.

As you can tell from Ben's title the actual landowner is University Lands (UL), manager of 2.1 million Texas acres "for the benefit of the Permanent University Fund". The UL is a remarkable organization in the true spirit of Texas, carefully controlling cave access with best-in-class practices to "promote awareness and sensitivity for the environment." This repair on O-9 Well, and many like it in the past, would serve as a relationship-builder, helping cavers acknowledge the generosity of the UL, and promoting mutual goodwill.

Ben tried Galen Falgout, who promised to find someone. Networking with fellow cavers is easy when you've got a birthday celebration that evening and "everyone" is going to show up. At the party Galen pulled aside Ken Demarest and Bev Shade. He knew they both had free time and liked vertical work. Ken had been agitating for more caving ever since he retired from his career in internet technology and video games. Bev had stepped down from her nursing work in anticipation of her family's move from Austin to Durango. Bev's name appears in the final pages of the Huautla epic "Beyond the Deep". Bennett Lee from San Antonio would round out the team, bringing his admirable photography skills into the mix.

Rancher John Nanny met the team at the windmill with tools and important advice. John is a classic Texan rancher, friendly with just the perfect Texas lilt in his voice. The UL offers long term grazing leases, sometimes handed down through generations, and John is their lessee. Of course, long before any member of the team stepped foot on the property everyone had confirmed TCMA membership and signed UL waivers.

By the time Ken and Bev arrived Bennett had already rigged the entrance and fallen off the roof of his car taking pictures. The photo of the site topside was a beauty - tough, scrubby terrain in which the windmill stood noticeably tall, accompanied by its historical sign. It is hard to imagine that O-9 Well was a regular stagecoach stop. That implies some daring



Ken observes Leslie the snake attempting to climb - Photo by Bennett Lee



Bev assists Ken up a pitch - Photo by Bennett Lee



The windmill pipe - Photo by Bennett Lee

fool might have descended 125 feet on a hemp rope with, perhaps, a hand-held torch providing light. In those days no “descender” was used. Instead, the victim would be lowered using a pulley and friction to the cave floor, then hauled up again by main strength or perhaps by mule. On the other hand maybe they just swung down a bucket on a long, heavy rope.

These days the windmill pipe makes the descent into O-9 Well rather unusual. Don’t push that pipe around, or you might bend the equipment within. Ken descended first, rigged the rebelay and redirect, and Bev carried down Daddy and Baby Pipe Wrench and Big Momma Four Pound Hammer to join him at the bottom. The clear, beautiful stream echoes in the bottom chamber. Deep grooves in the rock stream bed show where the pipe has laid for tens or perhaps a hundred years.

Texas windmills are considered antiques by some. Online one can find tips on “restoring your Aermotor windmill”. Prior research had yielded little insight into what the team might face. Rumors had swirled about leather being used for gaskets, and the rods in the pipe being made of wood. The team’s greatest fear was rust. Rusted threads would make disassembly impossible.

If you hold a walkie talkie close to the pipe you can get a straight shot to the surface. With Bennett relaying from above rancher Nanny was able to give some advice: take off the three foot vertical section (which contained a one-way silt strainer) and clean it out.

While a foot-long rat snake (who we’ll call Leslie) looked on, Bev and Ken struggled to loosen the main pipe coupling. Leslie climbed the

walls, literally, trying to escape the pit without success. Meanwhile daddy pipe wrench and a four pound hammer couldn’t budge that coupling. Hammering the coupling itself possibly loosened it, but baby pipe wrench’s handle, placed into the stem, finally got the leverage to remove the strainer.

Let us all take a moment to recognize the genius of anti-seize goop, and the forethought of those who made this repair last time (looking at you Wesley Schumacher, Linda Palit, Philip Rykwalder and many others). Tipping the heavy, three foot long strainer pipe over and running water through it cleared out ten years of gloppy sediment. Water flow tests made sure no clogs existed in other parts of the pipe. The close nature of the downstream walls made re-assembly tricky, but after a few more gyrations everything was re-assembled and working perfectly.

The rest of the trip was a typical, meaning exemplary, O-9 Well excursion. Plunging into the pools behind each limestone dam was fun. Rigging was easy because ropes are staged at each drop and stainless hangers are already in place. The waterfall descents feel adventurous. The water gives cooling balance to the work of climbing through the river. Sightings included a long white millipede, tiny isopods, and at the very bottom, a three foot rat snake.

One last note. Remember Leslie? Upon our return Leslie was gone, until Bev put her hand on the rope to ascend. Leslie rained down from perhaps 20 feet above, shaken from a rope climb towards the sky. Taking pity on the poor snake, Bev bundled Leslie into a pouch, ascended, and set Leslie free to slither another day. 🦎

Proyecto Laguna de Sánchez

Expedition #15

11-19 March 2017

TRIP REPORT by **CRASH KENNEDY**



AcroYoga on the patio at Emily's casita - Photo by Bryce Smith

The lovely little mountain town of Laguna de Sánchez sits at about 5000' elevation in the Cumbres de Monterrey National Park in the state of Nuevo León, Mexico. It's about an 8-hour drive from Austin. The first visit to the area by cavers was in 1985 by a couple of Germans, Michael Denneborg and Andreas Emonts-pohl, doing field research for their degrees. They worked out a lot of the local geology and mapped three caves there, Abrißkluft Nördlich Laguna de Sanchez, El Infierno de la Camotera, and Pozo en la Camotera. They also mapped a few in the surrounding area, including Cueva Almazan over the mountain in El Manzano, Cueva de la Piedra Parada, and Cueva de los Hundidos, in both Nuevo León and Coahuila.

My first visit to the area was in 1996, assisting fellow bat biologist Arnulfo Moreno with his research on *Leptonycteris nivalis*. He wanted to descend the 55m entrance drop to El Infierno to study the bats inside, but wasn't a caver. I successfully trained him, rigged the entrance, and provided in-cave support. We still remain friends to this day. Besides visiting Infierno, we mist-netted over some ponds in the evenings. Naturally, everybody that walked by wanted to know what we were doing.



Jim's Expedition on the "road" at La Camotera - Photo by Jim Kennedy

When we mentioned the bats, they would say things like “*Oh, do you know about the cave up there (gesturing waaay up a ridge) that’s full of bats?*” Naturally, we were surprised to hear of additional caves. After the third or fourth person telling us of another cave in a different location, I vowed to come back on my own and start exploring and mapping them.

Since that initial bat trip, I have fielded 15 mapping expeditions, with over 90 individual participants. In that time we have discovered over 140 new caves, and mapped more than eighty of them. Activity slowed down about 8 years ago due to the Narco danger, but we have resumed trips in recent years, averaging about a trip each year. There is still so much to do before we are able to compile the information into an AMCS Bulletin, our goal.

This year’s trip was a small one. Lots of last-minute cancellations and conflicts left us with only four participants, with none (except me) ever visiting the area before. (One more caver, Hector Mejia, came up from Mexico City halfway through the expedition.) Rebecca Pokluda, Bryce Smith and I left Austin early Saturday morning, and picked up Kayla Weirich in San Marcos. Kayla was a friend of Bryce’s from school, but had never caved before. We had no trouble crossing the border or driving to Laguna. However, when we got to Emily Olson’s house, where we set up base camp, we had a little trouble. It just rained, and the mud and gravel from two years of neglect (and the last time I was there) provided no traction on the steep road to the house. Despite our caution, we slid into a wall and were stuck for two days until a backhoe could pull us out. Luckily it only rained that first day.

We spent a truckless day acclimating, buying provisions at the local tiendas, and hiking around town. Highlights included yoga on the patio and a guided tour of the local mezcal distilleries. Yes, we bought about 13 liters of mezcal for later, but avoided buying the 40-liter jug, since that would make us alcoholics. We also made a couple of nice hikes, and ate awesome food in the restaurant overlooking the namesake laguna.

After the truck was rescued, we began our adventures in earnest. We made an epic scenic drive through the mountains, through deep canyons, beautiful valleys, and over pine-covered passes. We must have surprised the hell out of two guys hauling a horse in their pickup coming at us on what could generously be described as a 4-wheel-drive road. *Pinche gringos!* We finally made it out of the mountains as the sun was setting, but still had to refuel and make our way back to LdeS, another hour away. But would we do it again? In a heartbeat!

The next day we drove up to my friend Paolina’s house. We were welcomed like long-lost relatives. Shouldering our packs, we made short work of the hike up to Llano Grande, stopping only for the obligatory photos at the precipice overlooking the town. Our goal for the day was Guides Cave (Cueva Guía), where Matt Zapp, Steph Davlantes, and I were stopped by three pits during our survey in November 2014. We kitted up and I showed Bryce how to set bolts, which he did well. We dropped the first pit, and it led to a jumbled maze of collapse passages. Eventually Kayla



Ready to distill a new batch of goodness - Photo by Kayla Weirich



Gerardo’s farm at La Camotera. LdeS is over that pass in the background - Photo by Kayla Weirich



Bryce says “This scenery definitely doesn’t suck!” - Photo by Bryce Smith



Rebecca befriends the magueyero's burro - Photo by Jim Kennedy

found a way on, and learned that it connected to the second pit that I pounded open in 2014. After that was surveyed, it was off to pit 3, which I was able to freeclimb. That mapped back towards pit two before pinching out. Bryce climbed the terminal dome, only to find there were no leads. It was good to be able to wrap up this survey. That evening Hector finally found us (we expected him four days earlier). We made a great dinner, prepped gear for the next day, and partied until late.

In the morning we packed the truck and headed to La Camotera, a large karst plateau over the Tejocote pass from the laguna. The roads are marginally better than when we recovered the truck after 2010's Hurricane Alex, but a far cry from the late 90s, when we drove a mini-van back there. High ground clearance is an absolute necessity, and even the Expedition bottomed out a time or two. Two-wheel drive is OK as long as it is dry, but woe unto thee if it rains!

After an hour or so of bumping along and spinning tires, we made it to my friend Gerardo's house. He and his family are the only living souls on the entirety of Camotera. He told us they found two more caves, and that the boys could show us one the next day. We took a short hike to El Infierno so everyone could be impressed, then drove on to the awesome campsite we have used the past 6 trips or so. After setting up camp we then drove to the trailhead* and hiked to Cueva No Se Grande ("I Don't Know if it's Big" Cave). I started the survey of this one on Expedition 9 (December 2008 to January 2009) with Tone Garot and Devra Heyer, but was stopped by lack of time and bad air. Matt, Steph, and I (with Kathryn Huchton and Sara Cline) tried to push past the last pit in 2014, but could not find any natural anchors, and neglected to take a hammerdrill. This time we were prepared. We rigged the pits easily and Bryce and I made it to the bottom of the cave, only to find that the air quality was horrible. We managed to set a single bolt before routing, so the pit is still undropped. Someone needs to go back there again in the winter to finish the survey, but after three trips to the bottom, I'm done.



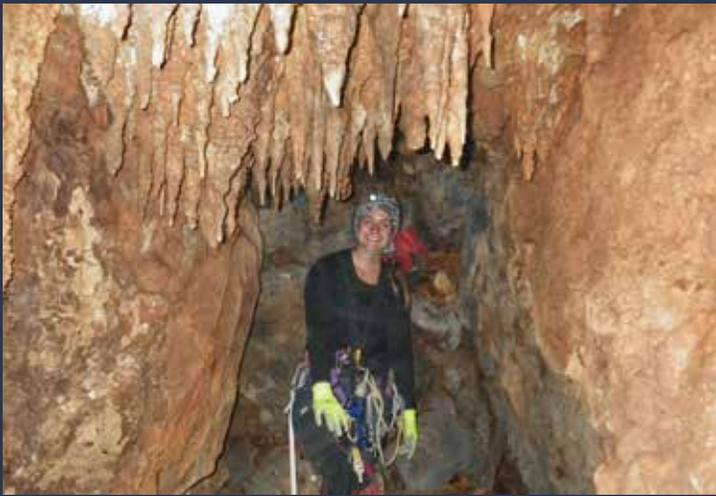
Gerardo Torres and his family - Photo by Hector Mejia

We enjoyed a fine campfire that night, more incredible food, and excellent camaraderie. The next morning we packed up, and started back. We picked up the boys at Gerardo's and drove down the road to the stream crossing. From there we hiked up towards the Mesa Seca caves to a new pit the teens found while looking for their goats. It was obscured by thick brush, but definitely requires a rope. We'll have to hit it on a future trip. We named it Cousins Cave (Cueva de los Primos) after the discoverers. We said our goodbyes and headed back up the road, only to be diverted by a swim in the icy mountain stream on the way. It was another one of those "can't pass it up" opportunities. Once back at the casita, some of us took a little hike to White Rock Cave (Cueva Peidra Blanca) and Styrofoam Cave (Cueva Poliestireno), just across the valley from Emily's.



Making dinner (and drinking) back at base camp - Photo by Hector Mejia

The last day we packed the truck, cleaned the house, and gave all the remaining food to the neighbors (and the pig up the street). We made a little detour to Bustamante on the way home, to have lunch with Nico Escamilla and to take a quick tour of Gruta del Palmito. We had no issues crossing the border, and made



Kayla seems to like this caving stuff! - Photo by Hector Mejia



Rebecca is ready to tackle the second drop in No Se Grande.
- Photo by Hector Mejia

it home safely. I hope to schedule another trip in the next six months, when the temperatures are low. Bryce also wants to lead a death hike to a large cliff-face entrance way up on a mountain.

Proyecto Laguna de Sánchez has a website at www.garot.com/LdeS with the project archives,

and a Facebook page: www.facebook.com/lagunadesanchez/ for announcements. We need help updating the website, and also drafting up maps from the surveys.

Please let me know if interested in any of the above, cavercrash@gmail.com 🦋



Hector, Kayla, and Bryce washing off the stink - Photo by Jim Kennedy

Sótano de Amezcuca

September 22-25, 2017

TRIP REPORT by **CAIT MCCANN**

TEAM:

Andy Gluesenkamp	Ken Demarest
Charley Savvas	Kevin Walsh
Cait McCann	Patty Calabrese
Drew Thompson	Peter Sprouse
Grace Borengasser	Terry Sayther

OVERVIEW:

Sótano de Amezcuca is located near Ciudad Acuña in Coahuila, Mexico. It was first mapped in February 1993 by a group of Texas cavers. The sótano is bifurcated near the surface into north and south pits, separated by a natural bridge. It has a total depth of 84 meters and, with diving of the upstream sumps, a total length of 1393m. The September 2017 trip was organized by Peter Sprouse, and a primary goal was the collection of water from the sump to use as baseline data for a study of environmental DNA of the Mexican blind catfish.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

On Friday, the group set out from Austin, and after a simple crossing passed through Ciudad Acuña and then over the unpaved “road that goes on forever” to the Rancho Seco. The gate was unexpectedly locked, so Peter, Ken, and Cait climbed over and began to hike, but quickly turned back after a call from the ranch manager saying he’d come in a half hour to let us in. The whole group merrily passed away an half hour and an hour more with nearby hikes, singing along to mandolin, guitar, and whistle, and finding bits of nature on the side of the road including a tortoise shell, vulture (but maybe chicken?) skulls, and a desiccated shed from a black tail rattlesnake.



Dylan, Patty and Drew relax at camp - Photo by Grace Borengasser



Ken and Peter play with rope on east side of pit - Photo by Grace Borengasser

Once past the gate, we drove through flatlands dotted with cenizo and other shrubby plants, until the wide sinkhole yawned in front of the first truck in the caravan of three. We set up camp just east of the sinkhole, and Peter and Ken began rigging after dinner. We began with a static line tied on the truck near camp, but found that there were too many rocks rolling down on that side. Andy and Charley walked to the other side to feed a rope down the west side of the sinkhole to serve as a handline in an area with easier access. Two ledges and a gully helped to prevent the considerable number of “bowling ball” rocks from sliding down. Still, care was taken not to scramble up or down from the pit while anyone was on rope. After assessing existing bolts, Peter and Ken found the old south pit bolt loose and set bolts to traverse between entrances about 1.5 feet on either side of the two pits. Andy and Cait sat on a nearby ledge as Ken began to descend the south side and put in a redirect, but couldn’t get the bolt in all the way. This frustrated him enormously, but he made sure it was safe and went down another 2/3 of the way to plan for the next day. A delicious salad, Mexican goulash, chicken, beans, and corn was followed by Dylan’s discovery of a juvenile bull snake and a great night’s sleep under the Milky Way.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

Saturday morning began with coffee, breakfast, and more rigging. Peter and Ken headed down to rig the south side. Toward the top of the sinkhole, several members of the group



Patty Calabrese and Drew Thompson reach the bottom of the Sótano de Amezcua - Photo by Peter Sprouse

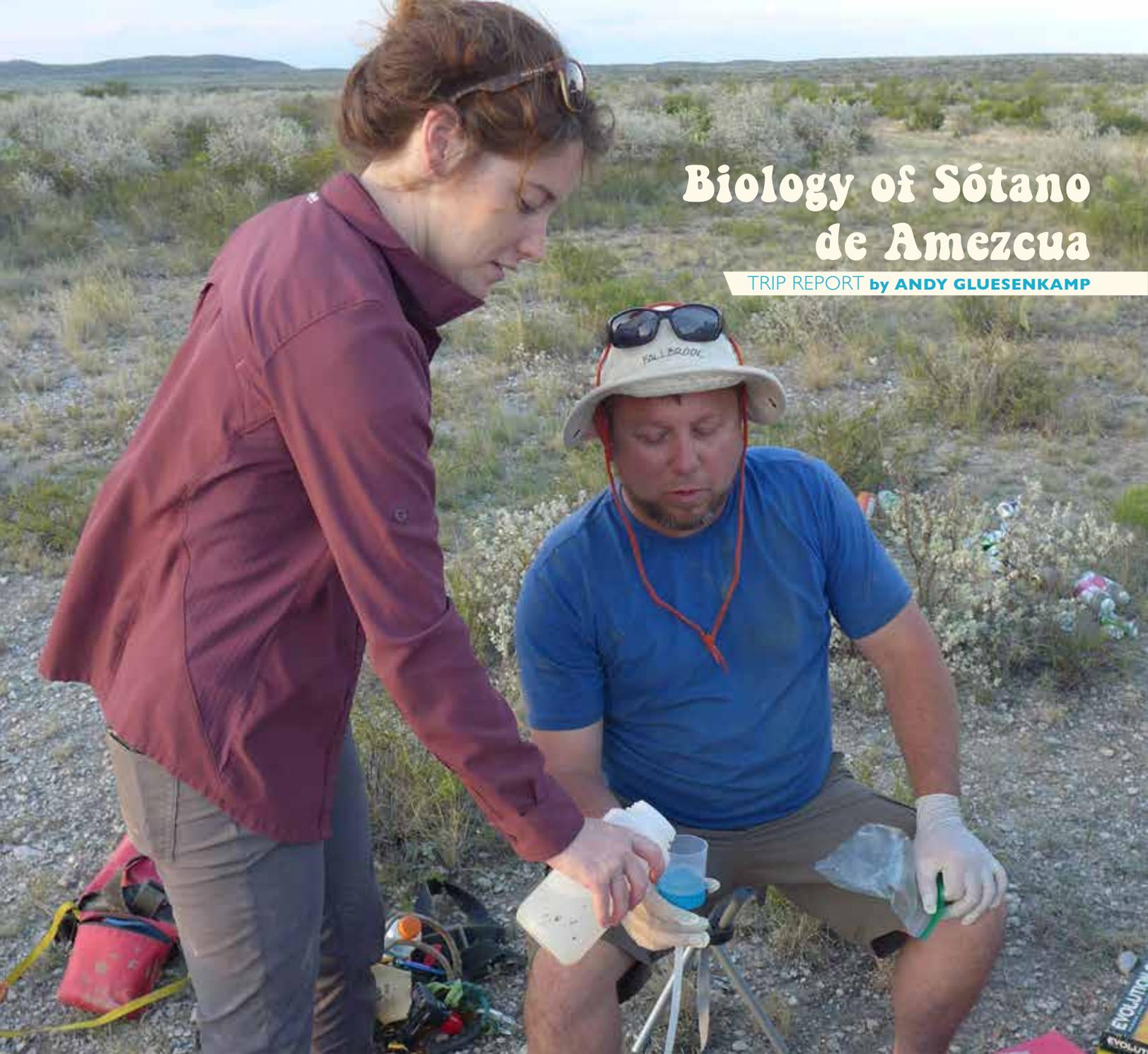
came across a western diamondback rattlesnake and Andy, who has seen quite a few snakes in his day, said it was the largest he had ever seen. As a great crew cleaned up from breakfast and found their gear, Ken, Peter, and Cait were down in the sinkhole where Ken continued to rig. After passing the redirect set the night before, Ken placed a bolt at the first major ledge and added a bolt at the natural bridge below to make a pair. The bolt hanger from 20 years before spun, but could tighten, so the second was added for safety, and that enabled the south pit rope to reach the bottom of the sótano. Careful not to knock rocks down to Ken, Peter put a rope in the north pit and lowered it down. He put in a natural redirect, and would have liked a few more, but was short on options for them. Ken, on the south pit rope, swung over to the north side pit about 30 feet above the bridge. He secured a bolt about 40 feet below the entrance in a spur to the north. Limited redirect options meant that the rope touched the rock in two wide, smooth places before reaching a bridge, where there is a bolt on the west wall just below the bridge that reaches to the bottom.

Cait went down first, using the south pit, nearly landing on top of a beautiful Mexican milk snake, and startling both a leopard frog and the bats roosting in the far south side of the shaft. Dylan was second down, and spotted another snake and a mouse scurrying along a ledge on the south side as he walked over the chunky mud. The radios the team had hoped to use to communicate between the surface and the bottom to coordinate travel on ropes didn't work, but everyone communicated well via intermediaries and made their way down. Drew and Patty came down simultaneously, captured in a great photo taken by Peter,

reminiscent of photos from earlier visits to the sótano by other cavers. With more eyes came more observations: bull snake, Great Plains rat snake, red-spotted Acuña, and a blind catfish in the upstream sump. The group collected 5 liters of water from the sump, careful to fill the Nalgens underwater to exclude any surface air or film from on top of the water. *(continued on page 17)*



A Mexican milk snake explores Cait's helmet - Photo by Peter Sprouse

A woman in a maroon jacket is leaning over a man in a blue shirt and hat, who is sitting on a stool and filtering water from a white jug into a blue cup. They are in a field of dry grass and shrubs. The man is wearing a hat with 'VAL VERDE' on it and sunglasses on his head. The woman has sunglasses on her head. There is a red bag and some equipment on the ground around them.

Biology of Sótano de Amezcuá

TRIP REPORT by ANDY GLUESENKAMP

The primary goal of our recent trip to Sotano de Amezcuá and nearby sites in Municipio de Acuña was to filter some water. Yes, water. This effort is part of two overlapping projects in which the San Antonio Zoo Department of Conservation and Research and Zara Environmental are collaborators:

1) to document cave and karst resources, including rare species, on Amistad NRA (Val Verde County, Texas) and northern Coahuila, Mexico and **2)** survey of the distribution of groundwater vertebrates (blindcats and salamanders) using environmental DNA.

Environmental DNA (eDNA) is a new method that promises to increase detection of organisms with extremely low detection probabilities while reducing time and effort. It works like this: all animals shed DNA through sloughed skin cells, feces, etc. The DNA is collected from water in which the organism lives by pumping it through a very fine filter. New molecular methods

can detect DNA at incredibly low concentrations. The DNA is then analyzed using advanced sequencing techniques including species-specific primers and target regions. The result is that we can detect the presence of target species even when they occur at low densities or are inaccessible (i.e. wells and karst features).

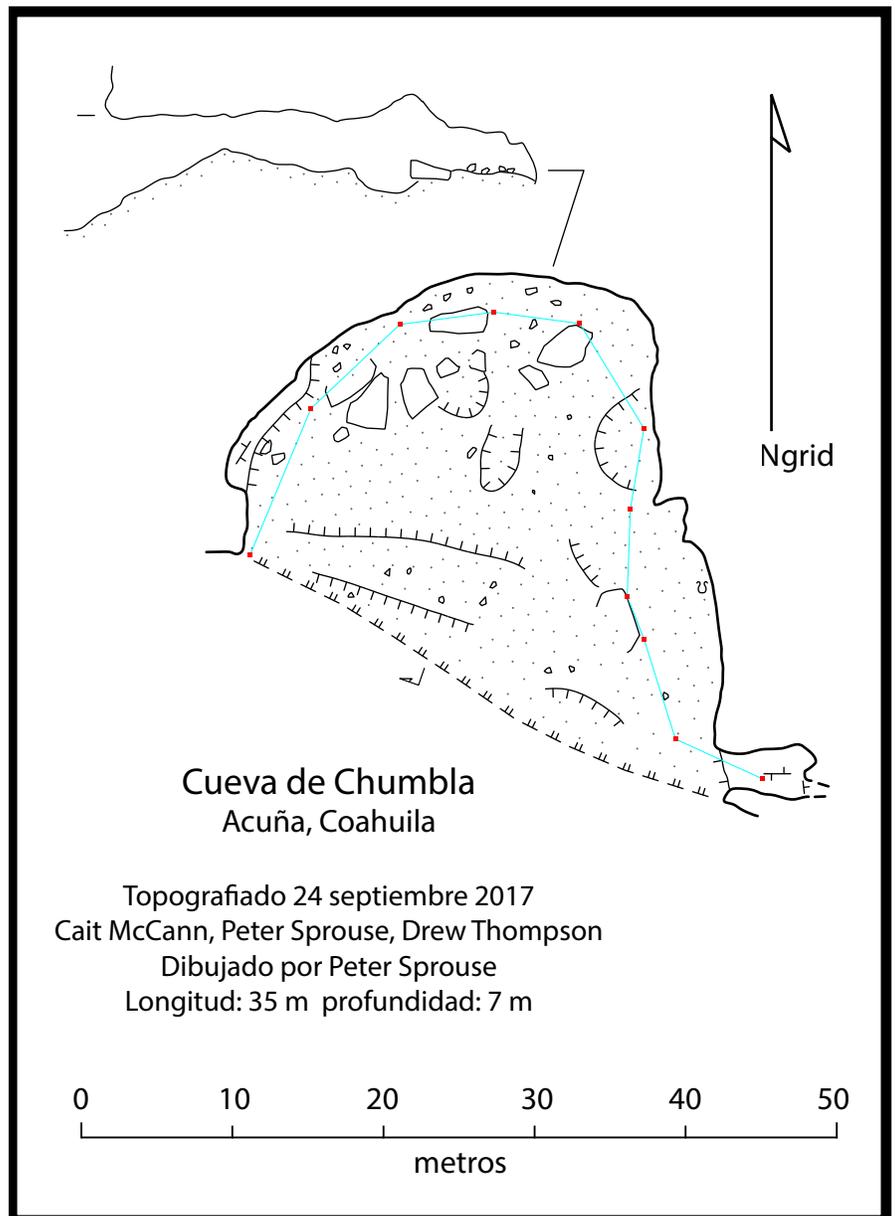
The Mexican blindcat (*Prietella phreatophila*) is listed as endangered in both the US and Mexico and is known from only a few sites (one in Texas and thirteen in Coahuila). Sotano de Amezcuá is a known locality for this species. Samples from this site will serve as a positive control for comparison with other potentially-occupied sites. We plan to sample additional sites, including water wells and springs, on future trips. We hope that this will lead to a better understanding of the distribution and habitat preferences of the Mexican blindcat. This, in turn, will aid in developing sound, data-based approaches to conservation and management of this species and others. 🦇



Many snakes were found – and all released – as the whole team watched. - Photo by Cait McCann

Dylan, Ken, Cait, and Grace crawled downstream to see a little more of the cave. With wet hands and calves, we moved over the downstream cobbles and the ceiling dipped toward the cave stream. In the three inch low airspace, Dylan went to find the limits of his capabilities, but couldn't pass the sump. Despite Ken, and then Cait's, and then Grace's concerted efforts not to make ripples in the water, Dylan responsibly gave up the endeavor after he reported that his "nose was in the way" of him continuing on. Everyone enjoyed the cave – and the snakes! With little energy in the cool cave, the milksnake seemed content to wind herself around helmets, headlamps and even the traveling lawn flamingo that Andy brought from work. Charley packed the living snakes out in his drum, and after everyone enjoyed snacks and the passing around of snakes, we started to make our way out. Dylan derigged the north pit and Ken the south. Once back on the surface we heated up a great big batch of chili, accompanied by Grace's pad thai.

Terry had scouted the surrounding area during the day, met the Amezcua family, and heard stories that while excavating an area for a wind turbine tower using a backhoe, crews intersected a horizontal walking passage of unknown length. The snake finding continued with a black-headed snake, stalked by a huge wolf spider. We still had some energy to spare, and Peter, Terry, Charley, Grace and Cait took off for a little scouting in nearby Arroyo de la Zorra. It was a pleasant drive, a pleasant hike, and an even more pleasant hair *(continued on page 19)*





Terry Sayther pointing out shaman figures at the impressive Abrigo Diego site - Photo by Grace Borengasser

Pictograph Caving

Well, shelter caves at least

TRIP REPORT by **TERRY SAYTHER**

When Peter Sprouse asked me if I was interested in going on a caving trip to the Burros in northern Coahuila, I said to myself “Huh, that might be fun.” He didn’t need to remind me that I hadn’t been on a caving trip for 20 years. That I hadn’t slept in a tent, on the ground, in 20 years. That at 70 years old I couldn’t climb up rocks worth a crap. Nor did he mention that it would rain the whole time and my 25 year old tent would leak. But it WAS fun, and we did find three nice rock art shelters.

The first shelter we were led to, was called Cueva de Chumbla. It is a pretty good sized chamber, mapped by Peter Sprouse and crew, with a heavily potholed dirt floor. The cave walls and ceiling have a couple meters of Pecos-style pictographs including three very clear figures that look like the horned heads of cows. Dr. Solveig Turpin, **THE** expert on Coahuila rock art, interprets these figures to be the torsos of shamanic figures with their arms outstretched. She believes this cave is a known INAH site and was first described by Herbert Taylor who visited Rancho Santa Rosa in 1948 as a part of his Master’s Degree research. The cave walls are heavily covered

with black carbon deposits which Taylor was told were due to the rancher filling the cave with wood, then burning it to kill parasites that were infecting his sheep. He was told that the cave was full of art before that fire.

The second shelter in Arroyo de los Ajos is a major Pecos-style site on two levels. One is at stream level, and there is more art above that in a large separate shelter a couple meters higher. Both shelters are extensively decorated with large overlapping traditional shamanic figures. This shelter is a known site named Abrigo Diego, one of the most decorated Pecos-style sites on either side of the border.

The third site we visited on Rancho Santa Rosa is another arroyo-side shelter, but one with an important difference — horses. Horses only re-entered the North American scene when the Spanish brought them here. Consequently, this is called a historic site — painted after the Spanish contact. Numerous horses with riders, several human figures with shields, and even a couple of “1886” dates make this one of particular interest. Dr. Turpin says this is also a previously known and recorded site, called Arroyo de los Indios, the only historic site in the area. So, these were previously known sites. There are leads to more pictograph shelters, both east and west. Hopefully we will be able to go find them as the Serranias del Burro project continues. 

rinse in a leaking water pipe crossing the dry creek bed, but yielded no leads. Using micropore filters and a peristaltic pump we filtered the 5 liters of water collected from the sump and preserved the filters to later precipitate DNA from as part of the UT Austin environmental DNA project focused on the Mexican blind catfish, other groundwater catfish, and groundwater salamanders. Not to lose the snake-theme of the day, Patty and Andy took the lead releasing the snakes found in the cave after nightfall, surrounded by the whole team. It was a full day. Before a middle-of-the-night drizzle, we sat under the stars and enjoyed the great music of Peter on mandolin, Dylan on the guitar, and Andy on harmonica.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

Very late at night, or maybe very early morning, rains woke nearly everyone, and the Sunday morning sky stayed gray and drizzly as we made our way out of tents and towards the coffee. Soon it was time to stuff wet tents into bags and pack up camp. Soggy gear and soggy people were packed into trucks and we headed north to follow up on the leads Terry learned of on Saturday. First, we headed for the Amezcua house, where we talked with Homero and Gloria Amezcua on their ranch house patio, somewhat distracted by their rock and fossil collection. We also met their adult son, Homero, and young grandson, also name Homero. They were very welcoming and the conversation flowed from caves and conservation efforts, to family in Mexico and San Antonio, to the safety of areas nearby. They asserted that you might still see narcos in Ciudad Acuña, but there was much less trouble there these days and compared to not long ago, it feels safe. Gloria said that Tamaulipas is still “muy fea.” She asked Cait and Grace what the cave was like and how we got down there, while Homero told Andy all about opportunities for hunting on the ranch. Back into the trucks we went, and drove

north for what seemed like forever, spotting a skunk along the way, to Rancho Santa Rosa. There we met caretaker Juventino, who got in a truck and took us to the Cueva de Chumbla rock art site, a short walk down limestone ledges from where we parked near the Río Bravo.

Big slabs of rock had fallen from the ceiling in the center of the cave room, and it was clear that locals had dug pits around them in search of artifacts. They excavated more than a meter under the rocks to reportedly discover mats made of sotol. An onion bag made of plastic mesh bag hung from the ceiling closer to the drip line entrance, which was likely used to help sift through the incredibly dusty soil which seemed to be primarily pig excrement, old and new. Peter, Drew, and Cait surveyed the cave, while Terry documented the rock art next to a low, wide passage on the right side of the shelter, just inside the dripline. It was about one foot tall that came to a dead end after about 5 feet, and its ceiling seemed to be back from soot. The group saw two bats tucked into a tiny hole in the nearby ceiling, names of two different doctors scratched into the wall and dated 1942, and many, many snail shells and bivalves. There was a large berm along the dripline entrance that seemed to be the tailings left by artifact hunters. Many small pink shards of knapped rock were left on the hard limestone outside the shelter, which we passed on the way back to the truck. If these pieces weren't good enough to keep by the looters, it made you wonder what else was found there than merited so much smelly digging. On the way back to the trucks – and really throughout the trip – we saw a abundance of millipedes. It must have been mating season, because on every damp rock with plants living in its cracks we saw millipedes; big and small, dark brown or a golden color. We then drove, directed by Juventino, and walked to a bend in an arroyo to find the overwhelming Abrigo Diego rock art site.



The team explores the upper level of the Abrigo Diego rock art site - Photo by Cait McCann

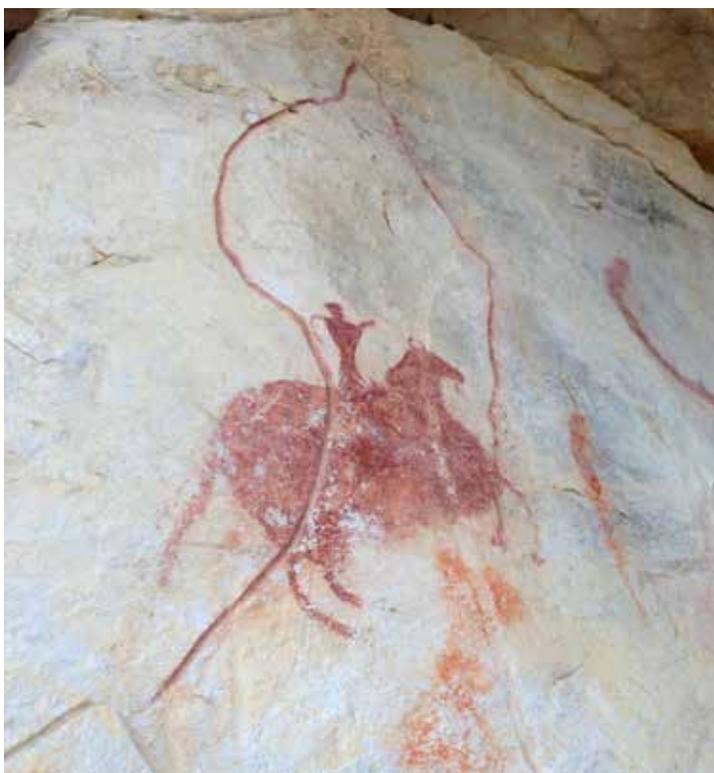
It was two stories high, each about 3 meters tall with rock paintings on the ground level, just above the river cobbles, and also on ledge above, carved out by the same river much earlier. The lower level arced overhead and by scaling the breakdown on the far upstream side of the site, we could reach the second tier. Terry's report describes these images with more of the historical nuance that they deserve, but even untrained eyes grasped the magnificence of this artwork. After the trip, Terry found that this site and the others we visited were described previously in a book by Solveig Turpin. There were double helix patterns, larger than life human figures with images emanating out from their heads in what Terry said represented a dream state. It was breathtaking. We retreated to the Santa Rosa ranch headquarters, the small white house where we had met Juventino, and several other small houses, a corral, and the "santo techo" of what seemed to be an old sheep shearing operation that kept some of the rain off of our tents and provided dry real estate for a dinner feast.

Terri Sprouse had sent a shrimp pasta salad that was enjoyed by all, and accompanied by an embarrassment of food from cheese to hummus to olives to cookies. During dinner we were regaled with stories of close calls and long suffering by Terry about an epic trip years before in the Sierra de Australia, far to the south near Cuatro Ciénegas. I was grateful that Peter prompted Terry to recount the story, which I can't do justice, but included the sliding out of a truck leaning over a mountain ledge on two wheels with his wife and their young son, only to face a long, dark journey during a harrowing storm, a tiny tow truck with a flat tire, and tow truck operator who used a rock to loosen lug nuts. The rain came down hard that night, and even in the roofed sheep barn, the wrath of Tlaloc reached us. Tents closer to the edges had to be pulled to the center overnight and, despite his best relocation efforts, Kevin woke up in a small lake formed in the slight dip of the cement.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

Monday morning saw packing, a hearty breakfast, and then meeting Juventino once again to see more impressive rock art, this time close to the Arroyo Santa Rosa. Terry thought these images, which were smaller in size and spread out like individual paintings in a gallery partway up the limestone rockface, could be from a more recent era. One even depicted a human on horseback, and some human images carried shields. Afterwards we learned that this site was also previously recorded by archaeologists as Arroyo de los Indios. Ken took video of this site and the impressive Abrigo Diego site for later reference. We were also taken in by bivalves and ammonite fossils in the dry creek bed below and the skulls of rams bleached by the sun, with giant, curly horns. Juventino said that based on the skull size they could have been 7-10 years old when they died. We thanked him and dropped him back off at Rancho Santa Rosa, and headed out.

We tried to take a water sample from a windmill well on the road out, but found it fortified by bees and thought better of it. The muddy road out was long, and fairly busy with identical small white pick-ups associated with the wind farm construction project. We made it to Acuña and labored to find a place to get the trucks washed on a rainy day, lest we get turned back at the border. We passed through customs easily and made the drive back in a torrential downpour. Just as the group passed through Uvalde and Peter's carload was synthesizing the lessons of the trip, "being dry is under-appreciated", "can't wait to go back", "treat every night as if it's going to rain", etc. ... Grace called from Charley's truck to say that it had broken down. We had asked a lot of it on wet and muddy roads. Everyone's good spirits were tested – and proved – as we regrouped, called roadside assistance, ate some chicken-fried steak, and eventually made it home from a great trip. 🦋



One of the more recent pictographs, including a man on horseback
- Photo by Grace Borengasser



Terry Sayther takes notes at Arroyo de los Indios site
- Photo by Peter Sprouse

Texas Grottos

LOCATION	MEETING INFO
AUSTIN Underground Texas Grotto (UT Grotto) www.utgrotto.org	1st, 3rd & 5th Wednesdays at 7:45 PM University of Texas Campus, Burdine Hall 2505 University Ave Austin, TX 78705
BRYAN – COLLEGE STATION Aggie Speleological Society (A.S.S.) https://cavetamu.com	Every Thursday at 7:30 PM Texas A&M University CE137 (Civil Engineering Building)
DALLAS – FORT WORTH DFW Grotto https://dfwgrotto.org	2nd Wednesdays at 7:00 PM Dallas Makerspace 1825 Monetary Ln. #104 Carrollton, Texas 75006
EL PASO Guad Grotto http://www.vcrux.com/grotto	1st Saturday at 6011 Hueco Tanks Road, El Paso Texas 79938
HOUSTON Greater Houston Grotto http://greaterhoustongrotto.org	3rd Tuesday at 7:30 PM Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary 440 Wilchester Blvd, Houston, TX 77079
LUBBOCK Lubbock Area Grotto www.lubbockareagrotto.org	1st Tuesday of each month at different member's homes. swSee website for location and time.
MIDLAND – ODESSA Permian Basin Speleological Society www.caver.net/pbss/pbss.html	2nd Thursday at 7:00 PM Murray's Deli Midland, TX
WITCHITA FALLS North Texas Speleological Society	1st Tuesday of the month, 7:00 PM Texas Best BBQ & Burgers Crossroads Center, 2708 Southwest Pkwy # 136B, Wichita Falls, TX 76308
SAN ANTONIO Bexar Grotto www.bexargrotto.org	7pm on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month Chester's Hamburgers 1006 NE Loop 410, SA 78209

Caving Organizations

TEXAS SPELEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION – TSA

www.cavetexas.org – Non-profit organization supporting cave exploration and cave studies by cavers in and around the state of Texas.

TEXAS SPELEOLOGICAL SURVEY – TSS

www.texasspeleologicalsurvey.org – Organization dedicated to collection and management of cave data, which is done in support of research, exploration, and conservation of cave and karst resources.

TEXAS CAVE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION – TCMA

www.tcmacaves.org – TCMA is a nonprofit organization existing to acquire, conserve and manage caves and to promote research and education regarding caves and karst while providing responsible access to our preserves.

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION – NSS

www.caves.org – NSS is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the scientific study of caves and karst, the protection of caves, the responsible exploration of caves, the fellowship of cavers, and the conservation, stewardship and ownership of caves.

SOUTHWESTERN REGION – SWR

www.caves.org/region/swr/contacts.html – Non-profit organization promoting safe cave exploration and promoting discovery, exploration, scientific study and conservation of caves.

BAT CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL – BCI

www.batcon.org – Education about the value of bats, conservation of bats and bat habitat, and research of the same.

THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SPELEOLOGY – UIS

www.uis-speleo.org – International organization fostering and promoting cave exploration, science, education, management and fellowship of cavers internationally.

KARST INFORMATION PORTAL – KIP

www.karstportal.org – Information network linking scientists, managers and explorers to archive information and promote collaboration.

NATIONAL CAVE AND KARST RESEARCH INSTITUTE

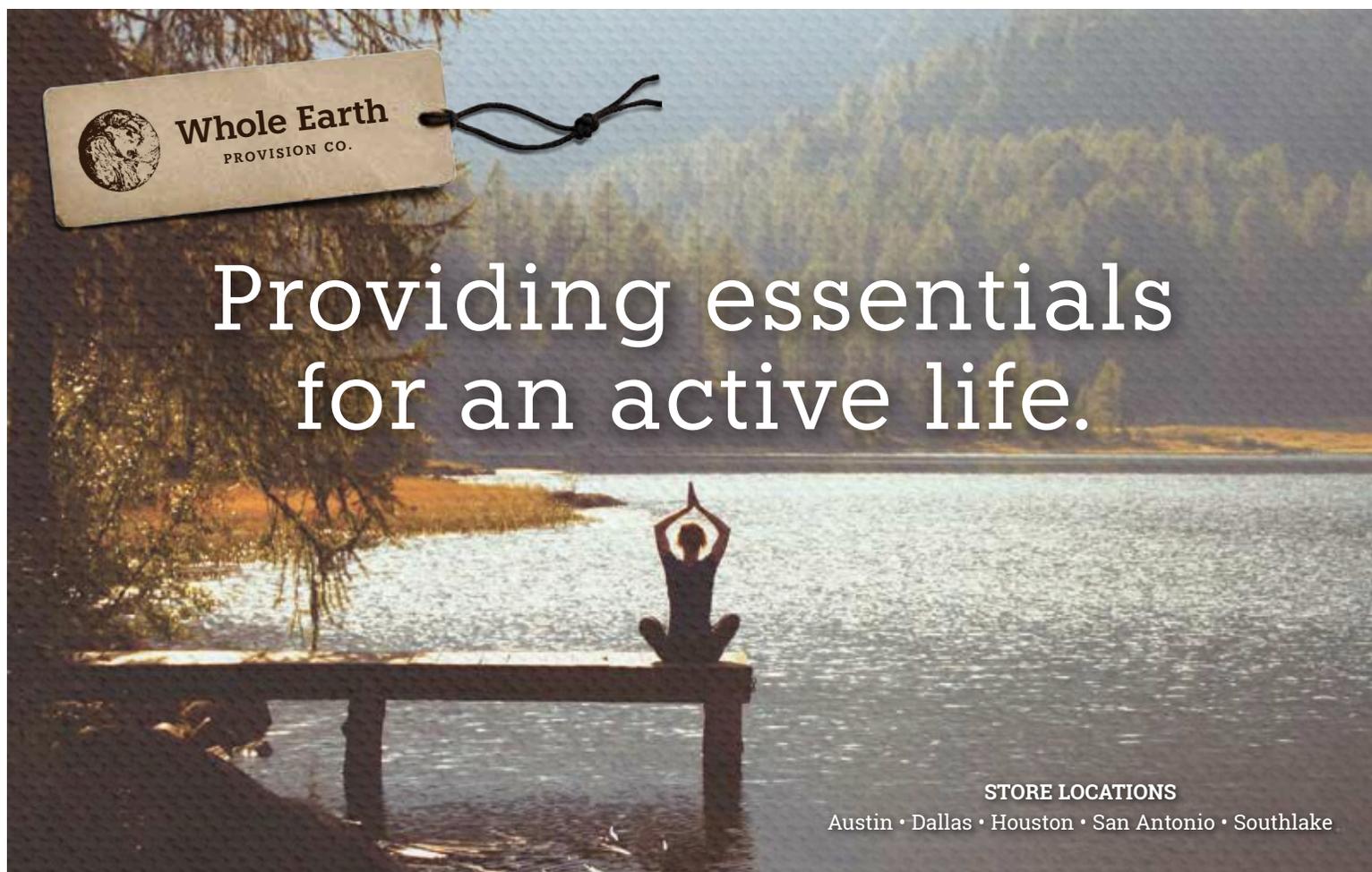
info@nckri.com – Congressionally formed institute to advance cave and karst science, research, promotion, education and development of environmentally sound practice of management of caves and karst.

ORGANIZATIONAL SPOTLIGHT – TSS

James Reddell, dedicated TSS board member and contributor, received the Karst Waters Institute 2016 Karst Award and the TSS Outstanding Service Award on March 4, 2017 at the 2016 Karst Waters Institute annual banquet. Educational presentation from the banquet can be accessed at www.texasspeleologicalsurvey.org/cavephotos/Reddell-AwardPresentation

ASSOCIATION OF MEXICAN CAVE STUDIES – AMCS

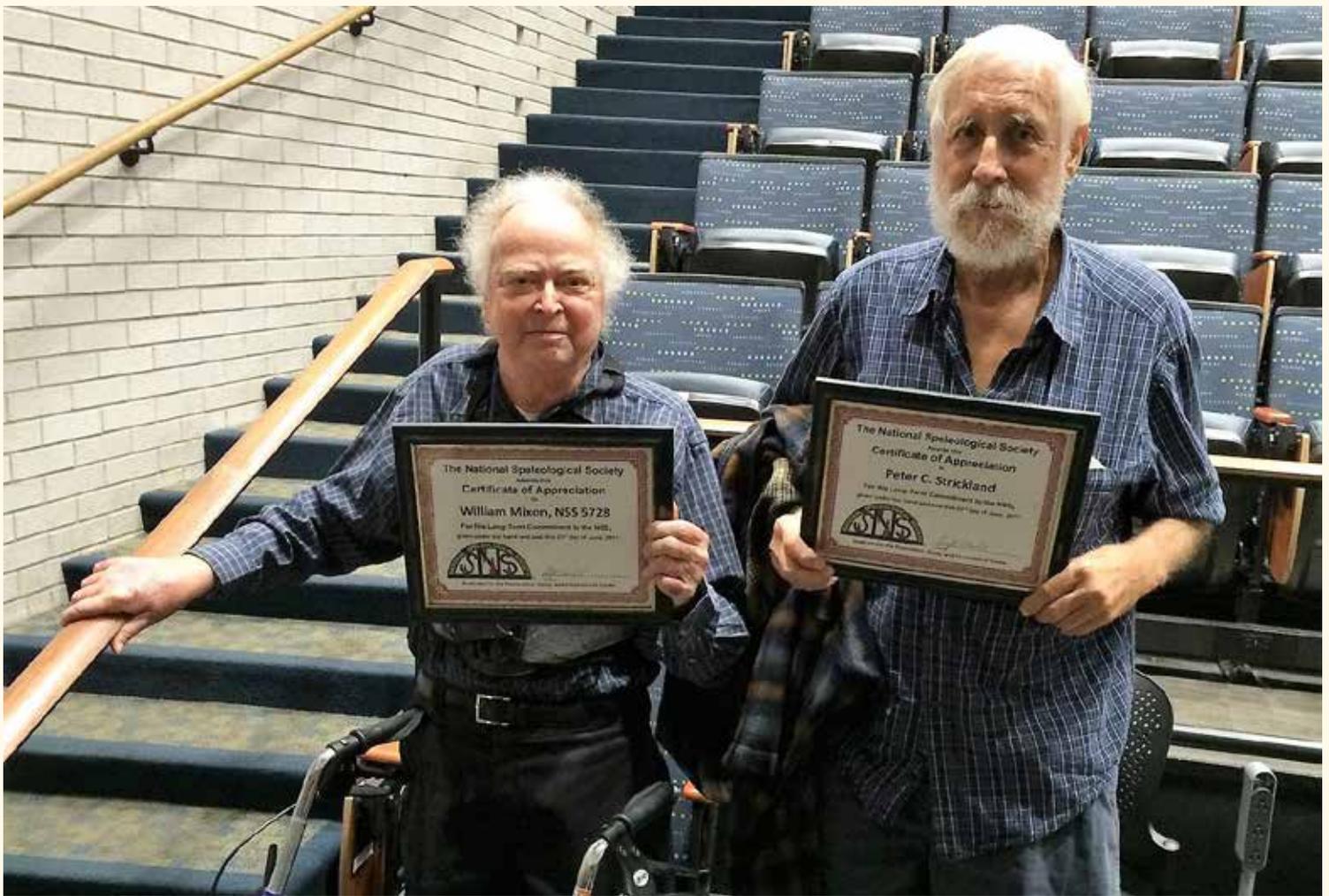
www.mexicancaves.org – A volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the exploration, study and conservation of the caves of Mexico, chiefly through a program of publication.



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Pete Strickland & Bill Mixon receive NSS Certificates

by LOGAN MCNATT Photo by Dylan Beeler

We had some fun at the UTG (University of Texas Grotto) meeting Wednesday, July 19, 2017. About 50 people were there, the usual mix of caver generations ranging in experience/membership from “young” (< 5 years) to “mature” (5 to 25 years) to “venerable” (25 to 40+ years).

I announced that I had a presentation that would require group participation.

“Everyone who has been to At least one NSS Convention please stand up.”
about 25 stood

“At least 5 Conventions, keep standing; the rest sit down”
about 15 still standing

At this point I mentioned that this impromptu survey was “a bit skewed” regarding age, and the absence of many mature/venerable cavers (e.g. Terry Raines, Don Broussard, Bill Stone, to name just a few).

“At least 20” left 4 standing: Gill Ediger, Jim Kennedy, Pete Strickland and Bill Mixon

“At least 30” left only 2: Pete Strickland and Bill Mixon

“At least 40” left only 2: Pete Strickland and Bill Mixon

“At least 50” left only 2: Pete Strickland and Bill Mixon

I said that both of them had been unable to attend the convention in Albuquerque this year because of health problems, breaking Pete’s string of 47 straight years since an interruption for military service.

But I had something for them, and presented each their 2017 NSS Certificate of Appreciation “for his long-term commitment to the NSS.” They got an enthusiastic round of applause and cheers.

After the meeting several photos were taken; the attached is by Dylan Beeler. Bill had been sitting the entire time (with his hand raised during the questions) because he is too weak to stand for long, but you can see he held the rail for the photo. I noticed that Bill’s NSS #5728 was on his certificate, but Pete’s #8298 was not on his. So I called NSS President Geary Schindel in San Antonio, and he will send a corrected certificate to Pete. Geary is the person I initially contacted before the Convention (I didn’t go) to do something special for Pete and Bill. I was hoping for something a little more personal than the generic NSS Certificate — like mentioning their Convention attendance, Pete’s legendary hot tub, and Bill’s service as an NSS Director, Editor/Co-Editor of four Speleo Digests, and many book reviews, but it worked out ok.

Congratulations and thanks to Pete and Bill!

Note: William B. White, NSS 2237, apparently holds the record, with well over 60 Conventions attended, including 2017!

Logan McNatt
(At least 5 NSS Conventions)
NSS 11274L (FE)





El Infierno de la Camotera - Photo by Hector Mejia

