The TEXAS CAVER - 4th Quarter 2011




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The TEXAS CAVER

Written by Texas Cavers FOR Texas Cavers

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The TEXAS CAVER

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Front Cover— This excellent photo of Saj Zappitello and Gil Ediger's dachshund was shot by Geoff Hoese at TCR. One of my favorite TC photos ever!

Back Cover — Jim Jasek amid some formations near the start of their Deep Cave survey on July 9. Photo by Mike Harris.

Inside Front Cover — A collage of photos from the 2011 Texas Cavers Reunion at Flat Creek Ranch. The inside of the front page collage are photos taken by Bill Steele. The inside back page are photos taken by Geoff Hoese.

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The Texas Speleological Association is a not-for-profit organization that supports cave exploration and studies in and around the state of Texas. It is comprised of both independent members and local grottos.

The TSA is an internal organization of the National Speleological Society and represents the greater caving community in Texas. The organization holds business meetings 3 times a year, organizes an annual convention for Texas cavers, and sponsors caving projects and events throughout the state.

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Assembling and Adjusting Vertical (Frogging) Gear

Submitted by David Ochel
Pictures of Karen Masters and David Ochel taken by Robert Burnett

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NOTE: THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT ADJUSTING YOU VERTICAL GEAR. IT DOES NOT TEACH YOU ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE SAFE USE OF VERTICAL GEAR. SEEK OUT TRAINING FROM QUALIFIED INDIVIDUALS BEFORE USING VERTICAL GEAR.

Having a well-adjusted set of vertical gear is key to efficiency on rope, contributes to safe caving, and provides for an overall greater enjoyment of vertical caving. Maybe you have just bought your first set of frogging gear, or maybe you haven't used your kit in years – in this article I will provide some guidance on how to assemble and adjust it properly.

There are many philosophies of what an ideal and/or safe vertical kit is comprised of, and how to "fine-tune" it. I am discussing my personal view here based on what I have learned from other cavers, lit- erature, and experience, and you should feel free to t a k e this with as many grains of salt as you would like, and use common sense in interpreting it. This guide is primarily aimed at adjusting your gear for efficiency. It is not meant to teach you all you need to know about safe caving techniques; the adequacy of particular knots for particular uses in particular situations; etc. The author and publisher cannot accept any responsibility for you using any of these tips. Seek out proper training, and know and accept the risks involved with vertical caving as well as the particular methods and mechanisms described here!

This write-up assumes that you have learned how to frog, and know how to use frogging gear. I won't explain here what a cowstail is or what its purpose might be. In general, it would seem to be a good idea to learn the basics from your local Grotto, maybe borrowing somebody else's gear who you trust, and having the opportunity to decide which type of descender you like, for example, before going and buying your own kit. Your vertical kit is personal protective equipment. If you are not intimately familiar with the terminology and practices of Single Rope Technique, for example with regard to the knots I am talking about, then have someone experienced help with or double-check your assembly before committing your life to relying on it. Care ought to be taken when assembling a vertical kit from used parts as well – "software", like webbing and cord, as well as "hardware", like karabiners and ascenders, need to be inspected for wear and tear.



A typical frogging kit…

Overview

The components of your vertical gear should be pretty much the following:

- seat harness and harness maillon ("D-Ring")
- chest ascender and chest harness
- upper ascender, safety tether, and foot loop
- cowstails
- descender

Some cavers use additional gear, like foot ascenders, and carry backup gear for emergencies. We will focus on the essentials in this article.

Ingredients

Here's what my shopping list would look like for a basic frogging kit. You might want to read on first,

poll others for opinions, and then decide on what exactly you want to buy:

- Hardware
  - a chest ascender
  - an upper ascender (I use one with a handle)
  - a D-Ring (Petzl Omnis with a screw-lock are my favorite)
  - a maillon, also known as screw link, to attach the upper ascender to its safety tether (I use a 5 mm); do not buy those from hardware stores, since they aren't rated/tested for personal protection
  - a descender (choices here vary broadly, but you will likely want a "caving" descender rather than a rock climbing-style ATC or some such)
  - a (fairly large – 7mm, 10 mm?) maillon, or a screw-lock karabiner, to attach your descender to the D-Ring
  - two straight-gate, non-locking, asymmetrical karabiners with key-gates

- Software
  - a caving seat harness
  - a chest harness
  - about 4 meters (12 feet) of 9.5 mm (9, 10, what ever) dynamic rope – check with the caving vendors, stores like REI don't typically sell dynamic rope by the foot; this is for making cowstails and a safety tether
  - a foot loop (I like the adjustable Petzl ones, or you could make your own from accessory cord, webbing, and/or various other ingredients)

…and how to adjust it

Harness

Caving harnesses have a lower point of attachment than rock climbing harnesses, because you sit in them a lot. (As opposed to just using them as a safety to protect against a fall, and maybe rappel on them every now and then.) Caving in a rock climbing harness is not necessarily unsafe; it's just extremely inefficient.

On a typical caving harness, you want to adjust your belt strap and the two leg loops so that the harness sits tight, but not necessarily uncomfortable. If your harness buckles require it, make sure that they are all double-backed, i.e., the loose end of the webbing is threaded back through the buckle to prevent slippage.

To close the harness, use a half-moon shaped D-Ring. Not a regular karabiner, tri-link, or anything else. Since you will attach more than one piece of life-supporting gear to this link, and loads might shift from one piece of gear to another in a split second, it should be designed to withstand significant loads in multiple directions. The D-Ring connects the two open end loops (or links) of your harness with each other, with the bent side of the D-Ring pointing up. You will want to attach



Double backed buckle.

any and all vertical gear that you are using to the half-moon-shaped side of your D-Ring between the harness loops. Don't accidentally rappel off the descender that is still attached to the gear loop of your harness.

Your D-Ring, be it an aluminum or steel maillon, or a Petzl Omni karabiner, will have a screw link or gate, or maybe a quick lock. Either way, pay attention to the direction it screws shut. When you are climbing on your ascenders, the rope leaves your chest ascender in the vicinity of that screw link. Under unfortunate circumstances, the rope might actually rub against the screw link, and contribute to screwing it open or shut – depending on which way you have put on your D-Ring. You don't want to unlock your D-Ring accidentally while you are on rope.

Chest ascender and chest harness

There is not much to adjust here, depending on which chest harness you use. There is a – quite obvious



– way to put your chest ascender on your D-Ring: The flat part against the belly, and the cam facing outwards.

How tight you want your chest harness to be depends a lot on personal preference, but pay attention to how things work when on rope. Your chest harness is supposed to keep your upper body close to the rope when climbing, and (to a certain extent) to keep your chest ascender upright. That won't work if the chest

harness is too loose. I prefer a chest harness that I can cinch down quite a bit when climbing, and release to a more relaxed fit while off rope.

Upper ascender, safety tether, and foot loop

Part of a frog system is an upper ascender (often referred to as a handheld ascender, regardless of whether it has a handle or not), and a foot loop. Technically, you could climb without tethering that ascender to your D-Ring. Which would be a bad idea, because you wouldn't have a second piece of attachment to the rope while climbing. So, we need a safety (tether) to attach the upper ascender to the D-Ring. I have a dedicated safety, others just use their long cowstail. I tried that approach for a while, and eventually decided that I prefer to have both of my cowstails available while using my ascenders.

The way I attach my safety to the D-Ring is by means of an overhand knot on a bight. That knot doesn't slip, so I can slide it on and off my D-Ring conveniently. I keep the bight as small as possible to prevent unnecessary clutter around my D-Ring, and an inch or two of tail on it. Some technocrats may look negatively upon an overhand knot used as a life safety knot. A less debated knot would be a figure eight on a bight, which is a little bulkier. More options exist. I can't make that decision for you. Regardless, always keep an appropriate amount of tail.

I attach my upper ascender to the safety using a small maillon. You could tie it directly into your upper ascender, or into a locking karabiner that also connects your foot loop, or something else that is rated to personal protective equipment standards. For this, I use what I've heard people call a barrel knot, which is half of a double fisherman's knot. It tightens nicely once weighted, doesn't get in the way much, and – handy for cowstails in particular – if you hold the knot in your hand, the piece of gear attached to it won't wobble around. I've heard somebody say that there have been accidents attributed to this knot being used for this purpose, and I've learned from others that they are designed to flip over when they are shock-loaded. So, I keep at least a fistful of tail on that knot.

The length of your safety should allow you to move your upper ascender up high enough so that you can make efficient steps when climbing, but short enough that you can reach the upper ascender when you hang from it in an emergency. I adjust mine so that I can actually grab the rope just above the upper ascender while hanging from it on rope, or, comfortably, the upper ascender itself. For that to work, you need to hang from your upper ascender on the rope, without using your chest ascender to sit in it, and without your feet touching the ground. This adjustment typically takes me multiple iterations of knot tying and getting back on rope until I get the length right, in particular because the barrel knot – which you should bounce on for a few times while you hang from it, in order to tighten it – will give a bunch of rope as a result.

A "quick and dirty" way to adjust the length of your foot loop to something useful is to stand in it, on the ground, while it is attached to your upper ascender. The cam of your upper ascender should be just above the cam of your chest ascender when you pull the foot loop straight up.

To fine-tune the length of your foot loop, you may want to get on rope and make a few frogging steps. When you stand up in the foot loop and lock your legs, the upper and chest ascenders should be as close to each other as possible without actually interfering with or



touching each other.

Cowstails

Cowstails come in handy in many situations, some of them requiring a slightly longer and some of them a slightly shorter length. The actual length seems to be personal preference to a certain extent. Some folks are perfectly happy with the pre-sewn webbing cowstails sold by Petzl at their standard length.

I make my cowstails from dynamic (climbing) rope. Whether it makes a difference that your cowstail is made from a dynamic piece of rope, webbing, or a (relatively) static piece of accessory cord when you catch a fall on it to a certain extent seems to be a phi-

losophical debate, and my personal philosophy is that I'd rather take a factor-2 fall on dynamic rope with a relatively large (9-10 mm) diameter. Your mileage may vary, but I've seen reports of tests that have suggested that dynamic rope is in fact the most appropriate for the job.



I make my short and long cowstail from one piece of rope, not two separate ones, in order to reduce the amount of knots that go onto my D-Ring. For the knot on the D-Ring I use, again, an overhand on a bight. A butterfly knot is a good alternative here. The 'biners at the end of my cowstails are attached with barrel knots. (See instructions on the safety tether above about tightening them.) But how long should they be?

Stand upright, wearing your harness and having the cowstail attached to your D-Ring. When you extend your long cowstail at a 90 ° angle from your body, and extend your locked arm (keep your body upright), your 'biner (or the knot attaching your 'biner to the cowstail) should lie in your hand. For the short cowstail, bend your arm and put your elbow against your belly. Again, extend the short cowstail at a right angle, and you should be holding the end of it in your hand.



My cowstails don't match that advice exactly, over the years I have slightly adjusted them to what I currently think is my "perfect" length. But anyway, above advice seems an excellent starting point.

A word on which karabiners to use: Unless you have a good reason not to, use straight-gate, non-locking, asymmetric 'biners. Tests have shown that in some twisty, tangled up situations, rope will be able to accidentally unclip itself from bent-gate karabiners easier than it could from straight-gate ones. Using 'biners with "key lock" gates is also recommended, as they are less likely to get hung up when unclipping from anchors and rope.

Descender

There is nothing to adjust here, really. I use a fairly large maillon to attach my descender to my D-Ring. Others use locking 'biners, which has reportedly lead to accidents in a few cases where they became unlocked while on rope. Some racks have an eye that can be threaded directly onto the D-Ring, depending on the angle you'd like your rack to be twisted at while in use. Whatever you use, keep it short, i.e., keep the descender close to the D-Ring, in order to minimize hassle when changing over from climbing to rappelling.

Putting it all Together

The order in which to put your chest ascender, safety, descender, and cowstails on the D-Ring seems to be subject to philosophical debate, as well. Here is what I do:

Keeping the advice on rope-rub above in mind leads me to attach my D-Ring first to my right harness loop, with the open gate on the left-hand side when looking down at it. First (i.e., all the way to the right) goes my chest ascender, so that none of my other gear on the D-Ring will be able to interfere with the open cam of my chest ascender. Next on goes my descender, followed by the safety for the upper ascender. All the way to the left, before closing the harness by putting the other harness loop on the D-Ring, go my cowstails.

Inspection

A word on inspecting your vertical gear. You will want to take a close look at it every so often. Hardware can be damaged if it is mistreated or takes long falls, and software tends to wear out, in particular where it rubs against other parts of your gear. So, check you harness webbing for fraying regularly, in particular also the insides of the loops for closing the harness with a D-Ring if they are made of webbing. Cowstails and upper safety are among the pieces of my vertical gear that I replace most frequently – when you inspect them, also pay attention to all aspects of their knots.

Thanks go to DJ Walker for reviewing this manuscript and providing valuable feedback!

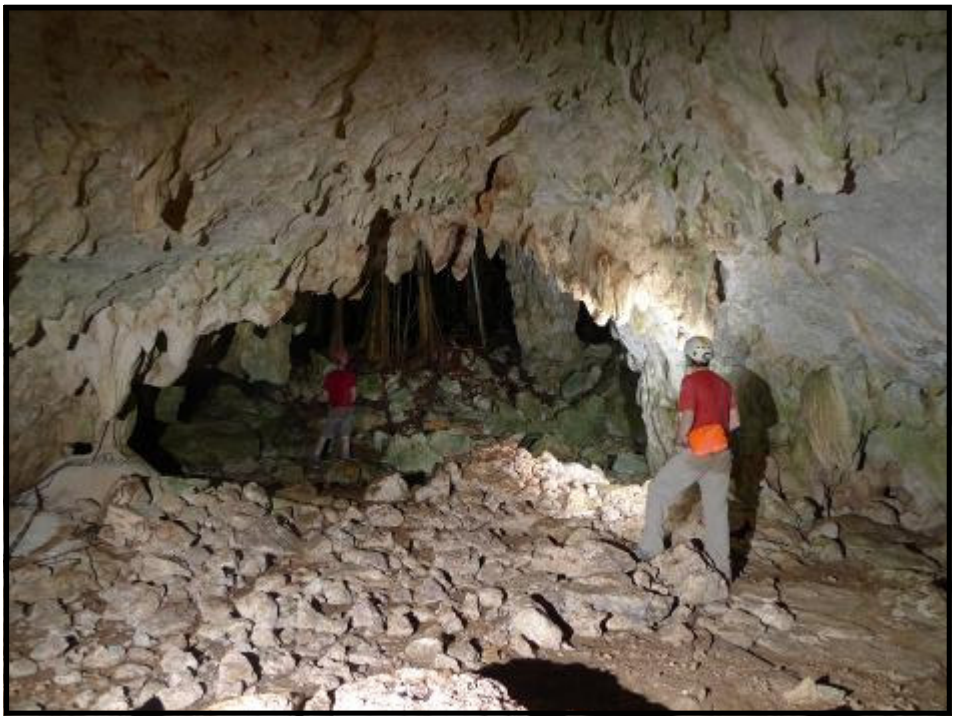
Feedback and questions are welcome. Send an email to do@ochel.net. The plan is to publish an online version of this article later this year, which can be updated based on your feedback.

A good forum to discuss vertical caving techniques and gear is the NSS's Cavechat forum at http://www.forums.caves.org/viewforum.php?f=5.

Reference -Marbach, Tourte. Alpine Caving Techniques. (English Edition.) Allschwil, 2002.

Gruta Escondida de Tara

By Peter Sprouse



Entrance passage of Gruta Escondida de Tara Photo by Peter Sprouse.

In November 2010 I started caving on the Caribbean coast of Quintana Roo, south of Playa del Carmen. The underwater caves of Quintana Roo are world famous, and rightly so. The longest mapped submerged caves on the planet are located there, the result of several decades of amazing exploration by large numbers of divers. In the last decade there has been a growing realization that there are dozens, probably hundreds of kilometers of dry cave to be mapped as well. So we set off south to help the Quintana Roo Speleological Survey in the documentation of these caves.

Joining me on the November trip were **Cyndie Walck, Shane Fryer, Paul Bryant, Tone Garot,** and **Joe Datri.** We secured dormitory lodging at an environmental center by the beach, a lovely stretch of white sand, palm trees, and blue sea. Our first order of business was to accept an invitation from Gustavo Vela to visit the Río Secreto, a wild cave tour at a system known as Pool Tunich. Gustavo had mapped the cave, which at 14 kilometers was the longest dry cave in the state. This close to sea level (typically 13 m elevation) "dry" merely means you don't need SCUBA gear, so we found ourselves wading and swimming a fair amount. Joining us for the trip were Mexican cavers **Roberto Rojo, Fátima Tec Pool**, and **Carlos Duarte**. We were led by commercial tour guide Tania Ramírez, veteran of the cave survey effort with Gustavo. We ran through several kilometers of cave, passing under a number of skylights and collapse entrances. The water passages were distinctive in that we did not stir up the usual mud as we passed, the floor of the pools was instead covered with the remains of calcite rafts, making for lovely water all the way through. These rafts had been on the surface when the original explorers came through a few years earlier. Tania was keen to hook us up with the principal from that group, Gil Harmon, who lived nearby in Paamul. A quick phone call found us all at a beachside restaurant with Gil and his wife. He agreed to join us for many of our caving trips the rest of that week.

We mapped several caves on this trip, including some that Gil had explored near his home. One of these was a cave to the west of Pool Tunich. This was in an area of jungle that had been sliced by property line survey cuts, now somewhat overgrown. None of the lots had been built on yet, and these senderos provided a route into the jungle to search for caves. It took several hours for Gil to relocate the correct survey cut ("those GPS coordinates would have been handy"), but eventually we were at the lovely entrance to Gruta Escondida de Tara, named after the daughter of his companion on the exploration trip.

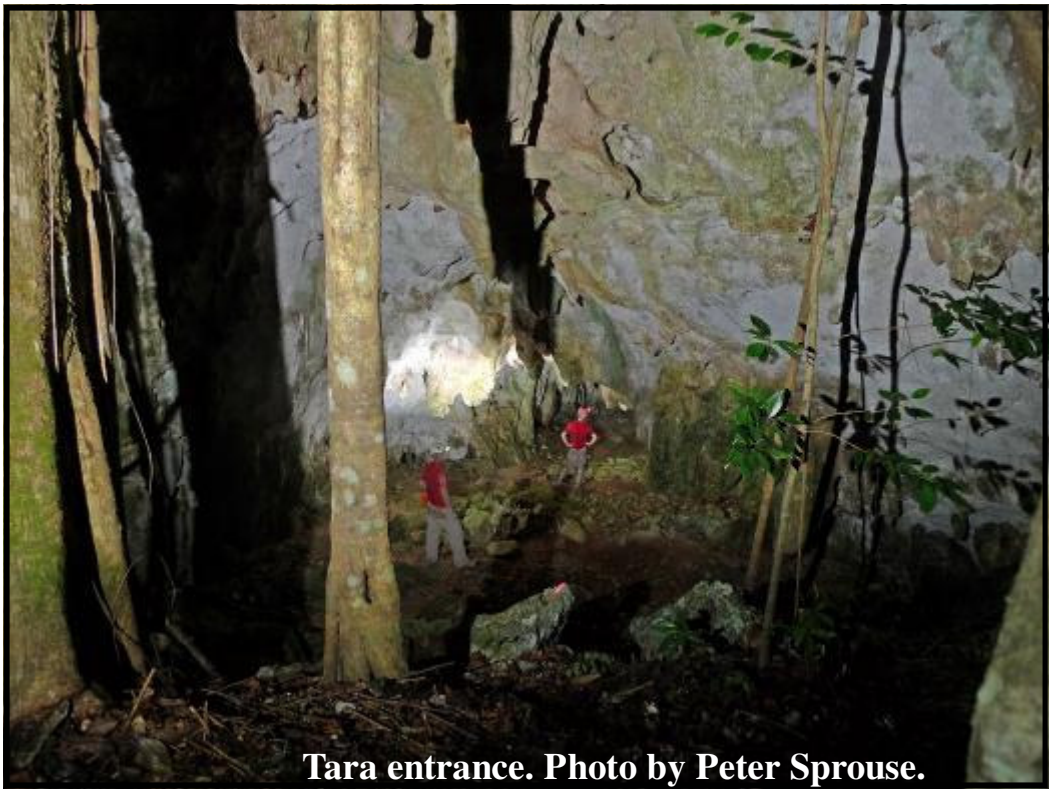


Joe Datri in a column forest in Gruta Escondida de Tara. Photo by Peter Sprouse.



South Passage. Photo by Joe Datri.

A slope led down into a large sinkhole with a headwall entrance at the south side. Massive roots hanging from the short cliff over the entrance gave it a jail-like appearance. Gil reported that the cave was moderately long, and that he had explored it for some hundreds of meters both north and south from this collapse sinkhole. He had seen no continuing leads, except for a low spot blowing air at the north end. By now it was late in the day, so we only had time for a couple hours of surveying. The parts we saw were spacious and well-decorated. As is often the case in these parts, there were places where no walls were visible, only a forest of columns that became lower and lower. Not the easiest to sketch, but still way better than Lechuguilla-style boneyard. The six of us continued the next day without Gil. Cyndie, Shane, and Tone finished up the spacious south section while Paul, Joe and I mapped to the north. Gil's description was accurate, and as the passage lowered we reached the blowing constriction. We had not flown to Quintana Roo with rock hammers, but being Texas cavers that did not stop us from digging. The narrow walls were solid bedrock/flowstone, but a selection of loose rocks was used to bash and pry on the thin sheets of floor flowstone layered over sediments. In about an hour we were through and back in walking passage. This led us to another collapse entrance, with our passage continuing around the left side of it. We gained another 70 meters or so of passage before this gave out. Meanwhile we could see that there was another entrance with continuing passage on the other side of the collapse entrance, but our rendezvous time was approaching so we needed to rejoin the other crew. Since we were at an entrance we decided to traverse the surface rather than the cave. This can be risky when you have just popped out in a spot in the jungle where you have never been before. Of course my GPS was back at the Tara entrance, so I scaled an azimuth and distance off of my sketch and we set off with Suunto in hand. Not very precise, but we managed to regain the original entrance. The other crew was not yet there, so we enjoyed a tour of their section and caught them up. Altogether the cave turned out to be 944 meters long, with good prospects for more passage continuing from the north entrance collapse. Indeed, a follow-up trip in March 2011 revealed a cave to the east of Tara called Mordida de Hormiga that appears to be heading toward a connection with it.



Tara entrance. Photo by Peter Sprouse.

This article was adapted from one that appeared in the Association for Mexican Cave Studies Activities Newsletter No. 34. *The cave map appears here for the first time.*

Gruta Escondida de Tara

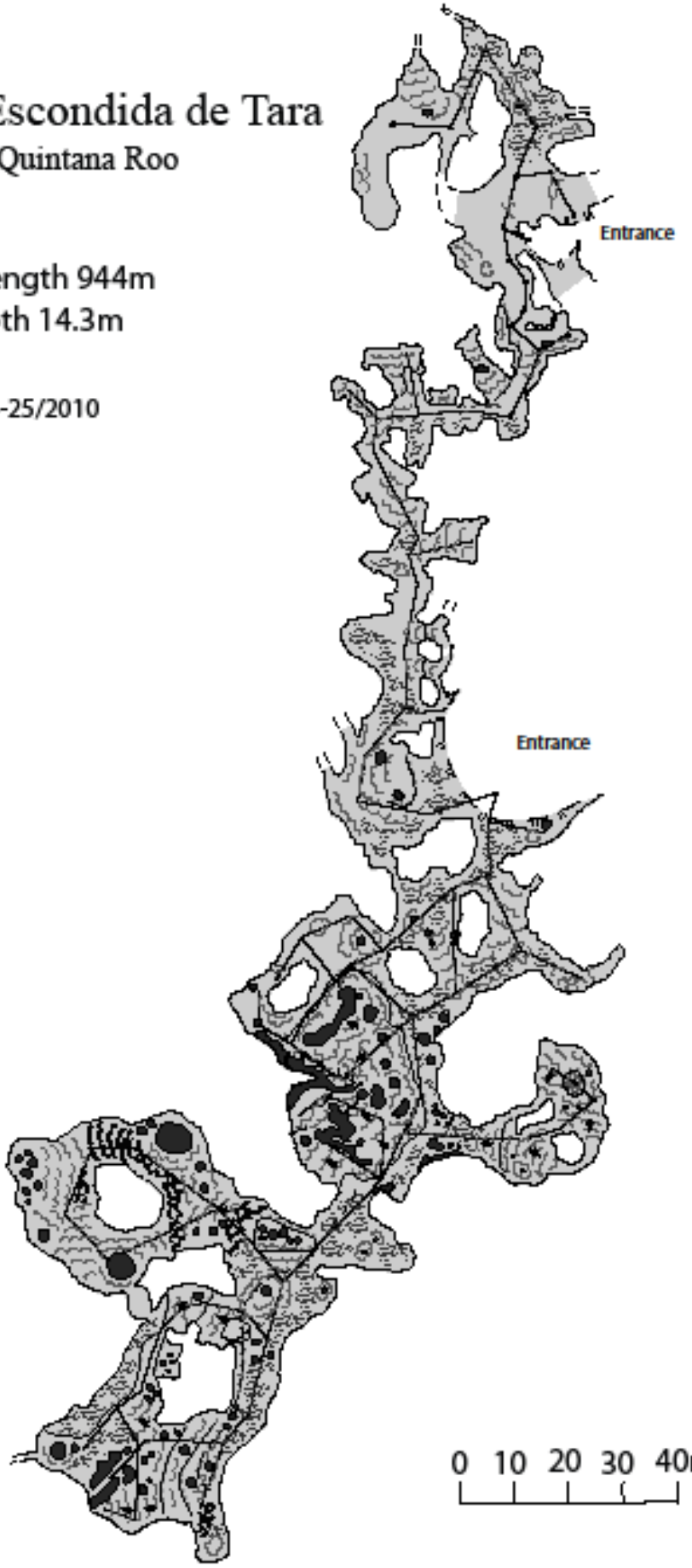
Quintana Roo

Surveyed Length 944m
Cave Depth 14.3m

Surveyed 11/24-25/2010

Gil Harmon *
Peter Sprouse
Shane Fryer **
Cyndie Walck
Tone Garot
Joe Datri
Paul Bryant

*Discoverer
*Cartographer



Return to the Deep

Submitted by Joe Mitchell
Photos by Mike Harris, James Jasek, Joe Mitchell, and Ellie Watson..
(Includes excerpts from "The Caves of Carta Valley" by Carl Kunath)



Ellie Watson, Marvin Miller, Steve Gutting, and Sofia Casini take a break on the way out to the west end of the cave to begin their surveys on the July 9 survey trip. Photo by Mike Harris.

Deep Cave is one of the more interesting and complex caves in Texas. Like its neighbor Punkin, it is essentially a large multi-level breakdown maze with lots of leads and airflow indicating its potential. Additionally, Deep also has many areas of spectacular and delicate speleothems. Although the cave is frequently visited as part of TCMA's Deep and Punkin Preserve, it has numerous virgin leads heading toward unexplored areas as well as a large portion of cave that was found in the 1960's but awaits rediscovery. A project was begun in 1999 to produce a complete, detailed survey of the cave, but the project has been on hiatus for the past few years. This summer marked the return of Project Deeper, to continue to survey of the cave.

Deep Cave resembles many of the Guadalupe Mountain area caves in New Mexico in that it is developed as a series of large, horizontal maze levels connected by steeply dipping to vertical rifts. Boneyard mazes are common and there is abundant evidence of condensation corrosion. Phreatic pendants and embayments, rim vents, and cupolas are ubiquitous. Speleothems include stalagmites, stalactites, flowstone, helictites, moonmilk and draperies. Passages tend to alternate between tight, crystal-lined crawls and spacious rooms with multiple leads.

The cave was first visited by cavers in July 1960 when Preston A. McMichael and other Houston cavers were shown the cave by a ranch hand. In September 1962 the cave was independently discovered by James Estes and other Abilene Grotto members. Numerous other trips were made in the cave from 1963-1965. The cave was the principal focus of the Texas Speleological Association Project "Deep" held on Sept 4-6, 1965. Frequent trips were made to the cave after this time until it was closed to caving in the late 1970s.

The existing maps of the cave are a product of the 1965 Project Deep and were drafted by James Estes in 1965 and 1967. The goal was to undertake a comprehensive effort to explore and map the cave. Although it was one

of the best attended TSA projects of that era with 112 registrants, the project accomplished relatively little in terms of survey. This was likely due to many factors, including the cave's complexity and project organization and only a partial map of the certain areas of the cave was produced and no survey notes are known to exist. Large portions of the '65 and '67 Estes maps, especially toward the western parts of the cave to any beyond the Lunchroom, were not drawn from survey notes but from memory.

The current Deep survey project was begun by Jerry Atkinson in 1999. Through 2008, a total of 11 trips surveyed 2,730 m of passage to a depth of 77.6 m. The notes and line plot of the cave reveal a very complex maze structure to the cave on multiple levels. Interestingly, the overall structure of the cave found so far has a half-dome shape. Is it possible that there is another half to the dome awaiting to be found? Or is the cave more of a long sloping fissure? If so, could it continue to the southwest toward nearby Punkin or Blowhole? The notes also reveal numerous good potential leads numbering in the dozens if not more. The far western portion of the cave is especially interesting with numerous leads, unusual features, and nice speleothems. The western end is the portion of the cave that was mapped in the 1960's and those maps indicate significant leads, large rooms and hint at many discoveries awaiting to be made.

Planning for the Survey

Since Deep is such a complex cave, some planning was needed before fielding survey teams. The survey notes showed numerous leads in many parts of the cave and it was difficult to see where to begin. A scouting trip was setup for the weekend of June 18-19, 2011. The team who entered the cave consisted of Don Arburn, Jerry Atkinson, John Brooks, Joe Mitchell, Linda Palit, and Monica Ponce. Jerry, who had been leading the project since its inception, gave the group a detailed tour of the cave along various routes, identifying significant features and providing some of his knowledge of the cave. We also discussed survey strategy and project considerations.



Marvin Miller prepared to take a shot while surveying with Jim Jasek and Steve Gutting on July 9. Photo by Mike Harris.

After this trip, an effort was begun to draft a portion of the cave map in order to get a feel for the magnitude of the project. Due to the multi-level nature of the cave, the general lack of bedrock walls and the ever-present huge breakdown blocks, production of a good map of this cave will be a significant undertaking. However, this effort produced a preliminary map of the section from the Crooked Broomstick Room west to the Lunchroom that is suitable for identifying leads and locating existing survey stations. It is hoped to continue drafting the map as the survey continues to expand the cave and add more areas to the preliminary map to aid the project.



Moonmilk coated bacon near Gotham City. Photo by Ellie Watson.



The survey teams prepare to enter the cave on the July 9 survey trip. Photo by Mike Harris.

First Survey Trip

It was finally time to being surveying! The resumption of "Project Deeper" was held on the weekend of July 9-10, 2011 and was attended by 16 people.

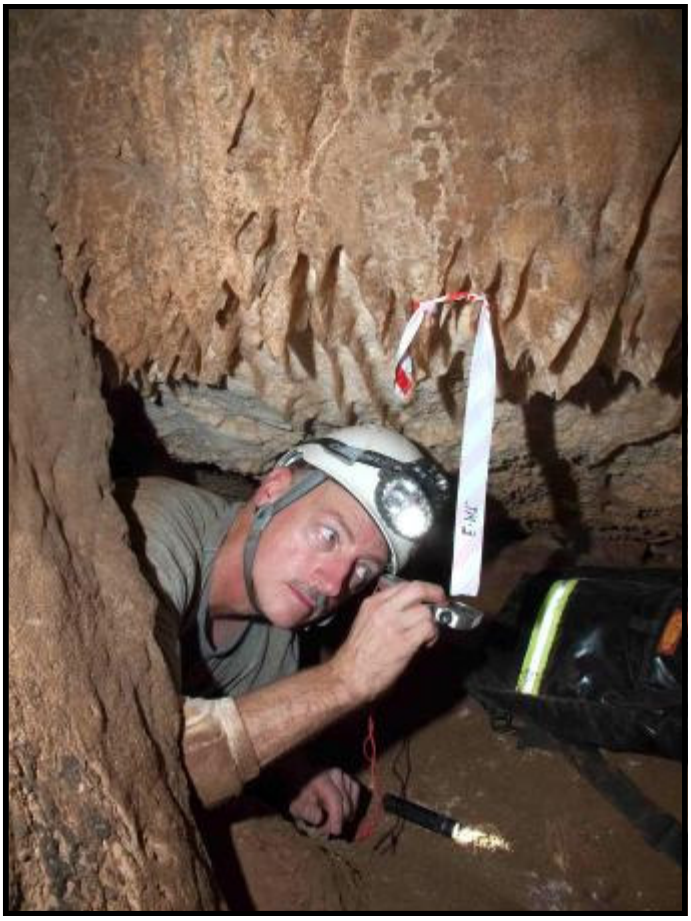
John Brooks' team consisted of Tom Florer, Joe Schaertl, and Geary Schindel. Their goal was to check leads in the eVentful Maze portion of the cave beneath the lower part of the Entrance Room breakdown slope. It took them quite some time to route find and locate the existing survey stations. They first surveyed an upper area above station A76 and then relocated a pit lead at A82, which was an approximately 20 foot drop into a room. Unfortunately, access to the top of the drop was blocked with cemented breakdown. It appears to be a rim vent type feature and had good blowing airflow. They also looked at a lead above A82, which was a small single room with lots of organic sediment and also looked at a lead with a "B" marked on the wall, which proved too tight to enter. As the team began to exit the cave by, they discovered a previously unsurveyed area that reconnected back to the Entrance Room but due to the lateness of the time, did not survey it. Due to the difficulties they had, this team only managed to achieve 15.2 m of new survey, but found much more to do next time.

Jim Jasek's team consisted of Steve Gutting, Mike Harris, and Marvin Miller. Jim is a veteran of the 1960's TSA trips to Deep Cave and had not been back since then. Their survey trip focused on areas along the upper side of the upper route west of the Crooked Broomstick Room. His team started at station CB6L and surveyed down to a further lead but first completed a loop back up to CB6L. They discovered one lead where everyone but Marvin was filtered out. Marvin explored 2 directions from this point. The upper one led to a pit and some other leads, one that appeared to head back to where we had been. The lower lead went to a small room that has some nice formations and to a downward lead obstructed by a cemented in, but potentially removable rock. After this they went back to the earlier lead, starting from JJ4 to JJ10 where there was a squeeze. Marvin made it through and discovered it connected to a previously explored passage leading to a 4 m pit past JJ9. After hammering, Steve also made it through the squeeze. Marvin and Steve surveyed JJ10-JJ15 and Marvin sketched. The team surveyed a total of 45.9 m.

Don Arburn's team consisted of Jill Orr, Joe Ranzau, and Ann Scott. They were tasked with checking leads off of the Helictite Room. They started from station H2 in the Helictite Room and surveyed to the north in a direction with no known passages. The survey started by making a new station from H7 to H2 and also

corrected some station errors in the Helictite Room area. Continuing north out of the Helictite Room, they surveyed to a red and white cauliflower room. Then they surveyed down to a room where there was evidence of standing water. After this station, the passage continued about 8 – 9 m and air flow was found at dead end in small crevice. At this point, Don ran out of pencil lead after having rationed the weight of lead to make it last as long as possible (resulting in fainter and fainter survey notes!) There is still a room to finish at the end of their survey and many more Helictite Room leads to check out. Don's team surveyed a total of 40.3 m.

Joe Mitchell's team consisted of Sofia Casini, Galan Falgout, and Ellie Watson. Their goal was to find a rumored but long lost route to the Lunchroom that bypassed the Nutcracker Chimney (aka. the Million Micron Filter). First they started by cleaning up some previous survey along the lower route west of the Crooked Broomstick Room. The Old Turnips formation had been lost until it was rediscovered on the previous survey trip in 2008 but had never been surveyed. After completing this, they headed up to the Crystal Waterfall to try a small lead immediately to the right of it. It quickly opened up into multiple routes, one of which was surveyed up until it came out at the top of the Crystal Waterfall. Back on main route, the team surveyed up and around a loop into a very nice looking tall crevice area. Along the way were bear scratches and a large bone was found, as well as a nice looking lead going up. After exiting the crevice into a low room, station c69 was found which was just above the Lunchroom – connection achieved! There was still plenty of time remaining with a good looking lead straight ahead, so the team continued on past a pretty and large fishtail formation and down a short drop into a sizeable room. The room is about 9 m in diameter and 2-3 m high and has numerous leads going off in all directions. One was checked and found to loop back to the c71 area. Others were headed off in new directions where no surveyed passages exist. This room has several interesting features including flowing water, lots of moonmilk, and a small, but relatively fresh looking pile of guano. This room was later determined to have been in the "sketch from memory" portion of the 1965 Estes map and marked as the "Moon Milk Room" but has now been dubbed "Gotham City." Also, as the day wore on Ellie was increasingly hungry so many features were being naming after food! Our team completed 75.2 m of survey.

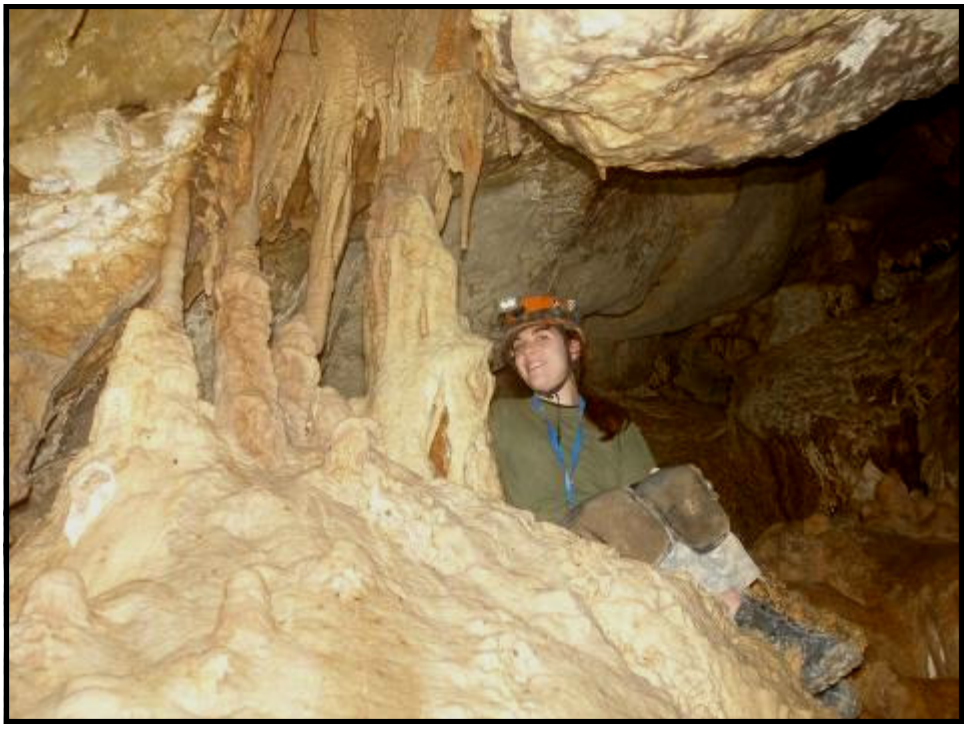


Gerry Geletzke surveying along the route down to the Helictite Room on the October 1 survey trip. Photo by James Jasek.



Ellie's team found many unusual formations during their survey on Oct 1, including the Fried Chicken formation. Photo by Ellie Watson

Many of the people on this first trip has not surveyed in Deep previously so it was a good learning experience for everyone both in terms of what was involved in surveying this cave, route finding through it, and becoming familiar with



Mallory Mayeux checks out some formations in the Metropolis room. Photo by Joe Mitchell

certain areas which will help future survey efforts.

Second Survey Trip

The next survey trip was held on the weekend of October 1-2, 2011 and was attended by 15 people. It was hoped to field 5 survey teams but a number of last-minute cancellations reduced the turnout.

Don Arburn's team consisted of Bennett Lee, Tom Florer, and Jill Orr. This team resumed their survey in the Helictite Room area. They started by surveying to the left of the shelf. The finished up a lead from last time in an area dubbed the Upper Depths Room with a single shot on the DJ survey then moved far left over to the Portishead and then down into Deep Purple. Jill and Bennett found a narrow pit that lead under the breakdown and into the Black Sabbath Maze. This area is a series of water channels that branch off in many directions and have signs of standing water. Near the beginning of the Black Sabbath Maze, animal bones were found and to the right and up , a formation exists with some small flowstone, columns, and draperies. They found a large dome room with a muddy dirt floor at the end of one lead, but numerous other leads exist. Tom and Don tried to follow, but were thwarted by their size so Tom found another potential entrance on the far wall of Deep Purple. The survey was cut short by a compass failure which prevented them from shooting their last few stations and they headed out having surveyed 59.9 m.

Jim Jasek's team, consisting of Mike Harris, Chad Johnson, and Gerry Geletzke, ventured down to the area below the Forest of Columns to survey the tourist route to the Helictite Room, which strangely had never been surveyed previously. They were unable to locate an old station (c15) near the top of this area, so picked a point and surveyed down until reaching the Helictite Room area. The surveyed back to the west to near c33 and left it to be tied in to Don's team's survey. Unfortunately due to the failure of Don's compass, no connection was made, so the 39.5 m they surveyed cannot be tallied into the cave's length until it can be tied in.



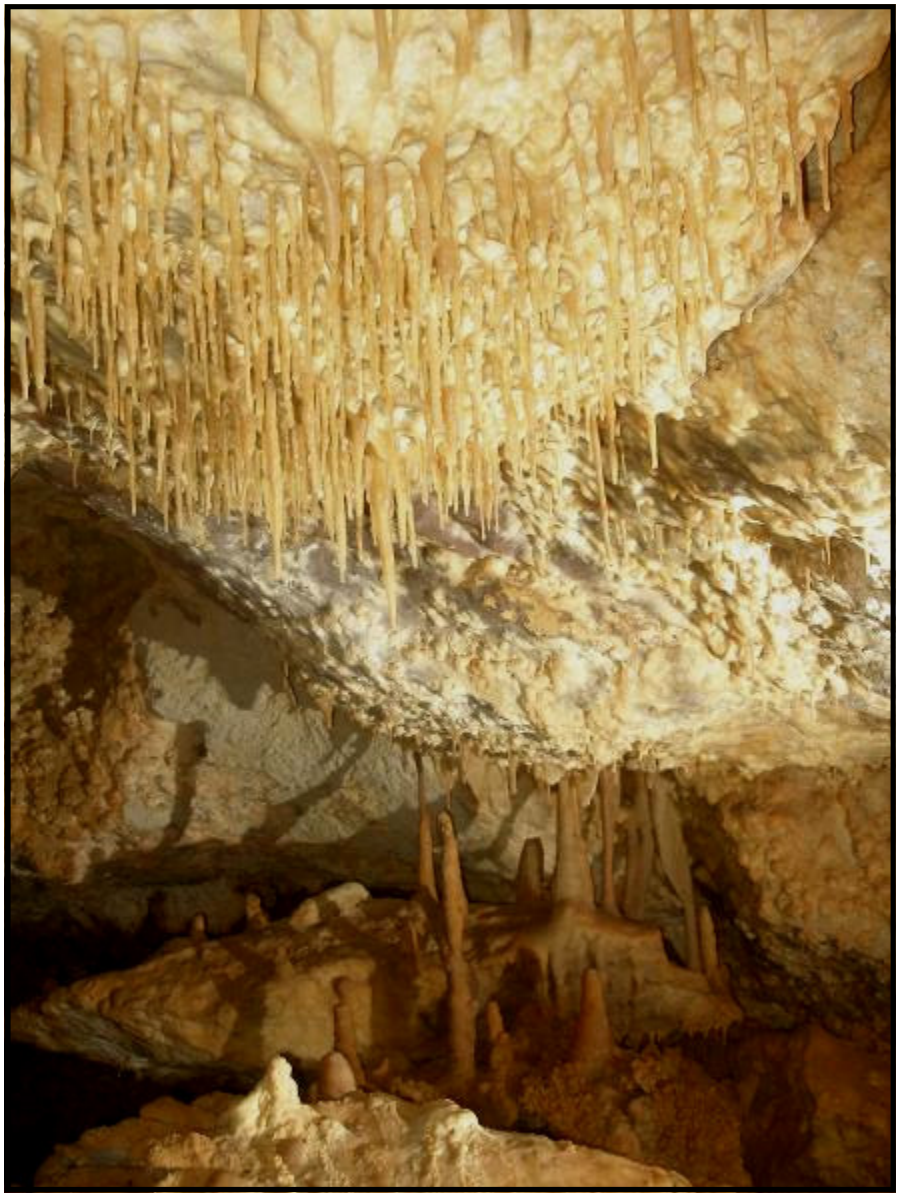
Sofia Casini checks out the Metropolis Room in Deep Cave. Photo by Joe Mitchell.

Two teams returned to the Gotham City room to explore the many leads from this area. On the way they stopped briefly to do a bit of resto cleanup at the Crystal Waterfall. Ellie Watson's team, comprised of Joe Schaertl and Jennifer Thompson, started on the west side of Gotham City checking a downgoing lead. They surveyed into a small room below Gotham City that was covered with white walls and moonmilk and delicate aragonite covered floors. From here a loop was completed back up into Gotham City. They then took a non-obvious tight squeeze

from the lower room to a room with a lot of breakdown and many great upper and lower leads, but surveyed the main passage trending upward. Once through another tight squeeze, the team came upon an area they called "Sparing Cascade Maze' because of the flowstone floors and many interesting dogtooth spar formations and bacon covered walls and ceilings. An area off this room that was not surveyed was observed to be very mazy. Interestingly there were also gnats and surface debris in this area. While Ellie sketched, Joe S. and Jenny checked many leads. Some leads go up and several go down deep. At one point while Joe S. was checking leads off of LB9, he came upon Joe M's survey team, so we know passages connect. After completing 58.7 m of survey, they followed Joe M's team's survey back to Gotham City. Ellie's team ending up being the last to exit the cave at around 10pm putting in a long day of survey.

Joe Mitchell's team was composed of Sofia Casini, Mallory Mayeux, and Ryan Monjaras. They also started in Gotham City with the goal of checking leads along the eastern wall. The first lead went up for 6 stations into a small room that ended. Returning to Gotham City, the next lead also quickly ended in holes that were too tight. The third lead was up in the ceiling above the middle of the room. It was found easiest to access it by climbing up a block on the west side of the room and traversing back overtop of Gotham City. This turned into a crawlway that sloped further up but then opened into a larger passage. In this area, the team clearly head voices from Ellie's team and Joe S's light became visible in a small side passage. However, he was not able to squeeze far enough through to make the connection. Also from this area, a good lead went downward, but the team continued to push the main route around a corner to a junction with numerous passages going off, some quite sizeable. This is thought to be the Junction Room from the 1960's map of the cave. Checking two of the leads to the east, the team found that they both opened out into a quite large, downsloping room – more than 10m long and 5-6 m wide with a ceiling of 3-5 m high. This room was named Metropolis. To the northwest, a second portion of the room sloped upwards for another 9 m but was not explored. At the far end of the room was a nice selection of speleothems. Multiple leads ran off of this room, some quite large, going both upward and downward. Due to the lateness of the day, the team had to quickly wrap up its survey and begin exiting the cave without having the opportunity to do more than a cursory check of a few of these leads. On the way back through Gotham City, at least one bat was seen flying around. Between that and the fresh guano piles in and above Gotham City, we speculate that there may be either an undiscovered connection to the main entrance hall or even possibly another entrance. Only more survey will tell!

On both trips, the number of new leads found was many times more than the number closed out, so it is safe to say that there is a great deal of cave remaining out there to be found. We now also have a good group of "Creatures of the Deep" who are becoming familiar with various areas of the cave and can find leads and survey more efficiently in the future. These two survey trips have added substantially to the length of the cave allowing it to finally break the 3 km mark. The new length of Deep Cave is 3098.2 m and the depth remains unchanged at 77.6 m leaving it as the 16th longest cave in Texas – for now.



A nice collection of speleothems at one end of Metropolis. Photo by Joe Mitchell.

Robber Baron Hosts Biggest Open House Yet

Submitted by Joe Mitchell
Photos by Mike Harris, James Jasek, Bennett Lee, and Ellie Watson.



The surface of the property hummed with activity while groups awaited their turn to explore the cave. Photo by Mike Harris.

Back in 2008 as the Texas Cave Management Association was completing the restoration project at Robber Baron Cave, we realized we needed to mark the completion of the 5 year project in some way. The cave sits in the middle of a highly urbanized area and the community had put up with and provided support in our efforts to improve the property. We hatched the idea of having a public open house to give the community a chance to see the results of the work and take a tour of the cave. Prior to the event, the San Antonio Express News sent a reporter to interview us about the cave and planned open house. We did not anticipate that the event would be on the front page of that morning's newspaper and it resulted in a huge turnout of about 450 people of which we were able to provide about 345 of them with a tour of the cave. People stood in line for hours to get into the cave and the property was filled to the brim with visitors. In the aftermath of the open house, I received multiple email requests per week to tour the cave. Between donations and t-shirt sales, TCMA raised about $1200. The outpouring of interest made the fundraising opportunities for TCMA immediately clear.

Preparing for an open house at Robber Baron is no small undertaking. It involves locating dozens of volunteers, preparing and distributing publicity, cleaning and prepping the property, designing and printing handouts and literature, getting t-shirts printed and collecting other sale items, contacting other organizations who may want to participate, having food for volunteers, rounding up and cleaning caving gear, getting signs, tables, chairs, being sure everyone knows their jobs, and on and on… As a result, we have only held an open house every year and a half, the first in November 2008, the second in April 2010, and most recently on November 5, 2011. During the April 2010 open house, we scaled back what we did and had a more limited advanced ticket-based attendance system. Although this avoided the crowds and lines of 2008, we only ended up with 153 attendees and it ended up being a relatively slow day. However, being more focused on fundraising, even with less than half the number of attendees, we still managed to raise about $840.



Don Arburn, Jenni Arburn, and Ann Scott get visitors geared up to enter the cave. Photo by Mike Harris.

Having had two under our belts, we decided to go bigger for the 2011 open house, eliminated the advanced ticketing system and advertising more widely. However, to avoid the long lines, we implemented a first-come ticketing system. When people showed up, they signed in and received a numbered ticket for their group and when gear was available, their number was



Visitors of all ages enjoyed their trip through the cave. Photo by Ellie Watson.

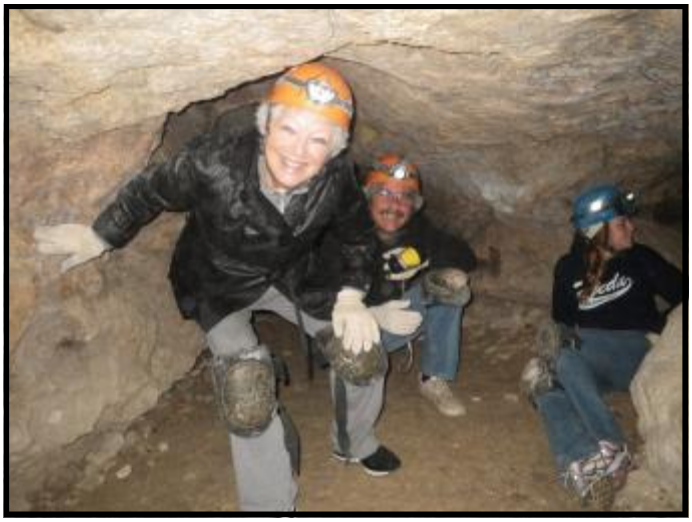


Preserve Manager Joe Mitchell takes Kayla Mitchell crawling while checking up on things in the cave during the open house. Photo by James Jasek.

called and they could proceed into the cave. For those who could not stick around, we let them return later on with their number and go on into the cave. Like with previous open houses, we retained the most popular part which was the ability of visitors to feel like they are exploring on their own. The first several passages and a number of the connecting crawlways were opened for visitors to wander in freely. Volunteer cavers were stationed at each major intersection to direct traffic, an-



Kids enjoyed squeezing into the tight crawlways where their parents wouldn't follow. Photo by James Jasek.



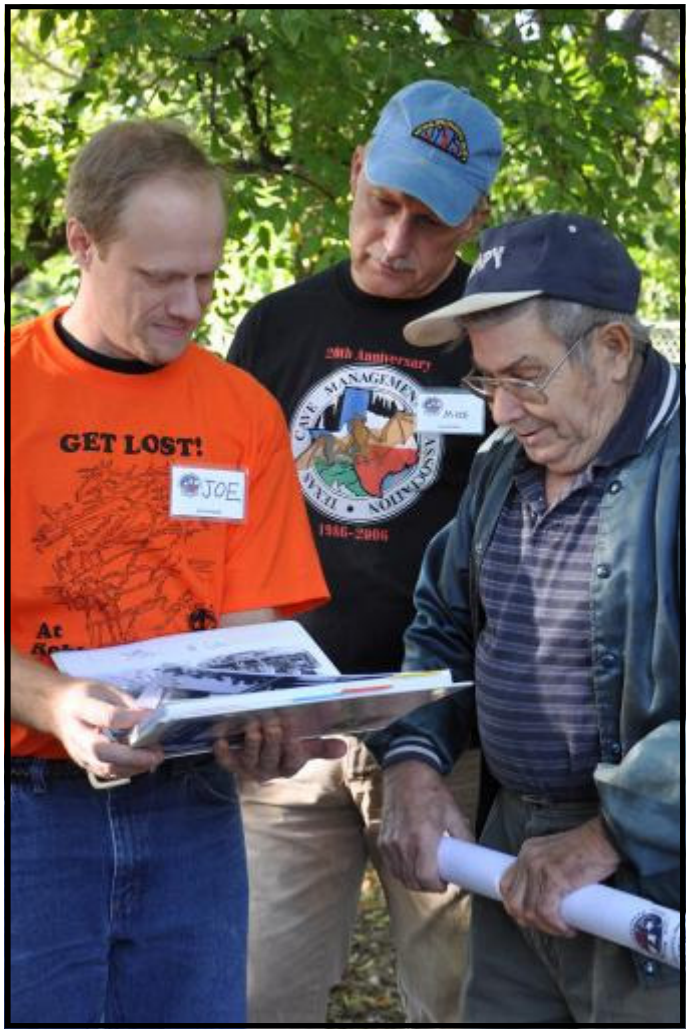
swer questions, and prevent people from going into more distant parts of the cave. No other cave tour that I am aware of offers this level of free exploration, providing the visitors with a unique "wild caving" like experience which seems to be very popular. Throughout the open section of the cave, signs were placed with information about the cave including its history, geology, and biology.

For this open house, we expanded our fundraising opportunities and the surface activities available for people while they waited. Bat Conservation International, the Edwards Aquifer Authority, and San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department all had tables with information, handouts, displays, and activities. A tent had a rotating slideshow of photos of the cave and the TCMA Karst Hydrology model was setup at the EAA table. In addition to selling Robber Baron T-shirts, we also had water and snacks donated by HEB for sale. Whole Earth Provisions and Good Sports both donated items to use in as door prizes in a raffle which had as its 1st prize a private trip through the cave for up to 8 people. A new fundraising item we implemented was photo sales. You've seen the annoying people who want to take your picture when you come into an amusement park or get off a ride. We figured if it works for them it should work for us. Also, unless you know what you're doing and have good quality equipment it's difficult to get a good photo in a cave, and most people's photos would not be that great, so they might want something better. A place was set in the cave where people were asked if they wanted a photo taken of their group. After they returned to the surface they could preview their photo and had the option of having a 5x7 printed on the spot and mounted in a special holder they could take home, or they could have it emailed to them for a lesser cost. Memory cards were run back and forth from the surface to the cave periodically to get the photos to the surface in a timely manner.

During the weeks leading up to the open house, Robber Baron was hit with several incidents of vandalism, with the kiosk, picnic tables, bridge, and even sinkhole being repeatedly graffitied or even damaged. We needed to clean this up, so the bridge and picnic table were painted, the kiosk signs were removed and



Marvin Miller and Journey Bisset manage the crowds at the entrance. Photo by Bennett Lee.



Joe Mitchell and Mike Harris talk about the history of the cave with Charles Spang Jr. who is perhaps the last living person who was in the cave during its commercial days. He grew up across the street from Robber Baron and his father helped develop, operate, and explore the cave in the 1920's.
Photo by Bennett Lee.



Linda Palit and Ron Ralph work the sign-in table. Photo by Mike Harris.

cleaned, and new sign covers were ordered. On top of everything, word came that the City of San Antonio planned to tear up the alley next to the cave and replace the utilities, which would have created havoc of the open house and a meeting was held with City representatives to discuss the environmental impacts of their project. Besides making some changes to protect the cave, they also ensured us that they would not start the project until December.

The day of the open house dawned cool and clear. Volunteers started arriving at 7:00 am to setup. Ellie Watson was made in-cave coordinator to ensure that all intersections were manned and that everyone working underground knew what to do. Don Arburn was made sinkhole coordinator, in charge of gearing up and checking in everyone going into the cave and being sure the gear was returned and people were signed out upon exiting. On the surface, Jill Orr was the surface coordinator being sure the sales and sign in tables ran smoothly, and Ann Scott was made volunteer coordinator being sure everyone got signed in and out. By the 9:00 am opening time, a line had already formed at the gate, but we were ready and people began their tours through the cave. For most of the day, Ron Ralph,



Evelynn Mitchell shows off the TCMA karst aquifer model to explain to visitors how groundwater works. Photo by Mike Harris.

Linda Palit, and Allan Cobb manned the registration table. Helping Don with gear in the sinkhole were Monica Ponce, Jenni Arburn and Ann Scott while Marvin Miller worked the entrance. Due to limitations of gear and the capacity of the cave, we limit the numbers that can be inside at one time, and with the number of people showing up, we shortly started getting a backlog of people. However, since they had tickets, they could look around at the displays in the surface while waiting or even leave and come back. Sue Schindel, Lisa Miller, and Fran Hutchins and others worked the sales table. Photography sales were setup and run by Mike Harris, Kevin McGowan, Lori Harris, and Mimi Jasek. Jim Jasek stayed in the cave the entire day being the designated photographer. Most of the volunteers worked in the cave with some others helping on the surface. Several of Evelynn Mitchell's students from St. Mary's University also helped out including one who is a campus police officer who helped direct traffic for us.

Three tri-colored bats in the cave braved the onslaught of people and provided visitors with closeup



Mimi Jasek, Sid and Kevin McGowan show a visitor their cave photos in the photography sales area. Photo by Mike Harris.

views of cave wildlife. A video production crew came and filmed interviews with people both in and out of the cave. Several special guests attended which were in their 70's and 80's who had visited the cave when they were young. One of these was Charles Spang Jr. who grew up across the street from the cave and whose father helped develop it as a commercial cave in the 1920's. He had many recollections from the commercial days and spending a lot of time as a boy playing in the cave and on the surface.

By 2:30 pm, the wait time was in excess of 2 hours, but that did not dissuade too many people and we managed to get the last person out by about 5:15pm. The final total was 416 attendees of which we got 370 through the cave, a new record. In addition, 71 wonderful volunteers came from all across the state including sizeable contingents from the Houston Grotto and the UT Grotto. An amazing total of $1786 was raised for

TCMA by the open house with t-shirt sales being the most popular, followed by the photography sales where about 50 photos were sold. After we cleaned up and cleared out by 6:30pm, many of the volunteers re-grouped at the home of Geary and Sue Schindel for a post-open house party, where food, drink and hot tub were enjoyed by all!

By the spring of 2013 we will have forgotten how much work it was and start planning for the 4th Robber Baron Open House. I hope you can come volunteer and help us educate people about caves and help raise money for TCMA!

A huge thank you goes to all the volunteers who helped out at the open house:

Ann Scott
Gregg Williams
Tom Florer
Kevin McGowan
Jill Orr
Jenni Arburn
Monica Ponce
Allan Cobb
Roman Pineda
Linda Pineda
Robert Pineda
Shawna Baker
Don Arburn
Ron Ralph
Ellie Watson
Lori Harris
Mike Harris
Joe Schartl
Jeff Pannell
Robert Blodgett
Sue Schindel
Rick Corbell
Linda Palit
Bennett Lee
Wade McDaniel
Geary Schindel
Marvin Miller
Lisa Miller
Christin Miller
Leah Miller
Lyndon Tiu
Barbara Tiu
Sid Formanek
Evern Yarman
Bob Marshall
Eric Holman
Renee Skwara
Fran Hutchins
Mariya Kontsepolskaya
Megan Gallo
Stephanie Vanegas
Roy Wessel
Evelynn Mitchell
Kayla Mitchell
Fatma Ozbay
Belgin Ozbay
Jim Jasek
Mimi Jasek
Guillermo Castillo
Liz Torres
Felix Oyeruldes
Bryan Scott
Andrea Escalon
Alisha Toepperaein
Richard Jemal
Journey Bisset
Missy Bisset
Rod Guajardo
Tom Rogers
Melissa Olmos
Arron Wertheim
Devra Heyer
Liza Mutrofauora
Kitty Swoboda
Kurt Menking
Leslie Bell
Christopher Francke
Scott Serur
Laurie Cubert
Nate Cubert
Kevin Young
Myra Pilant

Special thanks go to the following companies and organizations:

- **HEB** - Donations of food for sale and for volunteer lunches
- **Whole Earth Provisions Co.** - Raffle door prizes and allowing us to put announcement fliers in their store
- **Good Sport** - Raffle door prizes and allowing us to put announcement fliers in their store
- **San Antonio Parks and Rec** - Providing educational materials and handout and to Myra Pilant for running the table.
- **BCI** - Providing educational materials, a couple of displays and handouts
- **EAA** - Providing educational materials, handouts, and caving gear
- **Houston Grotto** - Providing extra caving gear

Although all the volunteers deserve lots of thanks a few people deserve special recognition for helping in advance to put the event together:

- **Jill Orr** - Helping plan a lot of the details of the open house, doing the advertising, fliers, and signs.
- **Mike Harris** - Cleaning up the property, repairing vandalism damage, fixing the kiosk, organizing the Friends of Robber Baron, and helping put together the folders for the photography sales
- **Gregg Williams** - Arranging for the door prizes and preparing many of the supplies and equipment needed
- **Allan Cobb and Linda Palit** - Preparing the property, repairing vandalism damage, bringing TCMA materials and many other needed supplies.
- **Kevin McGowan** - Arranging for the photo printing to happen and helping get new t-shirts made.
- **Tom Florer** - Arranging for donations from HEB and bringing food for the volunteers
- **Ellie Watson** - Soliciting volunteers.
- **Don Arburn** - Bringing needed supplies.
- **Fran Hutchins** - Bringing needed supplies and BCI materials
- **Geary Schindel** - Bringing much of the caving gear and EAA materials.
- **Lyndon Tiu** - Bringing Houston grotto caving gear.



The first crew of in-cave volunteers prepares to go underground just before the start of the open house. Photo by Ellie Watson.

NSS Board of Governors meeting in Houston, October 21 – 23, 2011

Submitted by Clint Ladd, Dean Wiseman, and Bill Steele. All photos by Bill Steele.



The BOG meets and conducts NSS business. There are 16 members of the BOG: 12 elected directors and four officers elected by the directors.

*From **Clint Ladd** (GHG Chairman)*

The events surrounding the fall NSS Board of Governors (BOG) Meeting are now at a close, and we here in Houston can finally come up for air. The festivities ended this afternoon (Sunday), with a strategic planning meeting at the historic 1940 Air Terminal Museum at Hobby Airport, and let me tell you, there are some really positive things happening within the NSS!

From the Greater Houston Grotto's perspective, hosting this event was certainly a team effort and a very rewarding experience. For those of you who didn't make it to the event, you missed an incredible gathering of great people and great cavers. And for those of you who DID make it, thank you very much for contributing to this event!



Houston caver Roger Moore presents a framed proclamation from the Houston City Council proclaiming October 22, 2011 as NSS Board of Governors Meeting Day.



The assembled GHG members, most of whom worked hard to host the NSS BOG meeting.

A few highlights included: Roger Moore presenting the NSS BOG with a framed certificate commemorating October 22, 2011 as the official "National Speleological Society Day" for the City of Houston; NSS President Wm. Shrewsbury whacking a bat pinata; Kevin and Emily McGowen being awarded a beautiful cave photograph as a GHG lifetime achievement award; and Louise Hose delivering Jean DeVries to the door of the Sunday meeting via her personal aircraft! We even had several BOG members tell us that they sincerely felt that the BOG dinner/party was the best they had ever attended (though it sounded like they weren't at the legendary Buda BOG in the 70's)!

And of course, this wouldn't have been possible without the support of the entire Texas caving commu-



Ryan Monjaras, a member of several Texas grottos, poses for a photo taken by Jay Jorden beneath the NSS banner just outside the lecture hall where the BOG met.



Ernie Garza picked up the donated kegs of Shiner beer from the brewery in Shiner, Texas. Shiner remains the Beer of Texas Cavers.

nity! In particular, thank you to the Bexar Grotto, DFW Grotto, and TSA for donating to the event! Outside of the Houston area, thank you to folks like Ernie Garza and Bill Steele for obtaining kegs from the Shiner Brewery, Dave McClung for his bartender services, Hungarian Barbara for helping to shop, and Sue Schindel for single-handling saving party goers from swarms of mosquitoes with some timely bug spray.

Then there are my fellow Houston cavers who went above and beyond the call of duty: Mallory, Lyndon, Kevin, Roger, Louise, Paul, Peter, Evren, Stephen,



L to R, Tom Summers, owner of Cave Without a Name, Bill Liebman, NSS director from West Virginia, and Paul Nye, one of the host couple for the Saturday night party.



The Saturday night party was hosted by Louise Hose and her husband, Paul Nye, in their airplane hanger behind their home in a Houston suburb.

TJ, David, Don, Sid, Ray, Julia, Greyson, Lyndon and Barbara, Will, and Andy. And I sincerely apologize if I missed anyone (like the various folks who helped set-up and clean-up the events). Thank you!

The following was posted to TAGnet, the Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia cavers listserv, on the Monday following the BOG meeting, by NSS director Dr. Dean Wiseman of Indiana.

Highlights from the Houston Board Meeting
By: ***Dean Wiseman*** *(NSS Director)*

Hi everyone! Just wanted to give you all a quick update on what happened in at the BOG Meeting in Houston this past weekend…

From my perspective, I found this meeting to be Extraordinarily productive. It seems that we're beginning to develop a little momentum on the Board in terms of specific issues, which is a really good sign.

Our OVP, Dave Luckins, announced that we are now in a Purchase Agreement with the Cahaba Shriners. (HOORAY!) So that part of the HQ is moving forward.

In addition, per request from Board Members, our President, Wm Shrewsbury, gave us an informal operational cost analysis of what the new site will be versus what we're currently spending at Cave Avenue.

Those of you who've read the BOG Agenda know most of the items were fairly straightforward. Some items of note:

1.) The Board created, per request from OVP, a new Archives Division. This is intended to establish a method of standardization with regard to images, recordings, collections, etc. This Act will hopefully allow establishment of Society-wide standards for archiving and retaining our collections for the future.
2.) Act 01-287 Executive Committee Act Amendment.



The Infamous Dave "Cave" McClung manning the Margarita Mecca.

This Act revised some language about the Executive Committee Meetings. The larger point of contention is that this new amendment no longer REQUIRES recently- leaving Officers be included in correspondence after they leave office. It was a very close vote that centered around this last provision, and Wm had to cast the deciding ballot, since the Board tied 8 for and 8 against.

My take on this Amendment was that, while Institutional Memory" is an incredibly valuable thing, it is up to the Incumbent to decide when or how to best use that Memory. So, rather than making it mandatory-- especially regarding sensitive issues for which a Past Officer may have a Conflict of Interest-- this Amendment allows the Incumbent at least some discretion. That said, it is hoped that Incumbents will continue to include former Officers in correspondence most, if not all, of the time.

3.) There was a Motion to restrict alcohol sales at NSS events. This motion probably would have died for lack of a Second, but was seconded by the Chairman of the Directorate, as he wanted to get a "sense of Board Opinion." Those of you who follow CaveChat know that there's been an interesting discussion thread there.

In any case... the Motion failed by a margin of 15 against and 1 for.

From my own perspective, I think the NSS has very good, if not exemplary record of conduct at events where alcohol is served. Secondly, it was clear to me that the language of the Motion could have been construed in any number of ways, and an "NSS sponsored activity" could mean just about anything. This Motion was just asking for trouble…

4.) Another Motion involved setting a policy to bar persons from attending NSS events if they engage in violent behavior to people or property during an event. This Motion died for lack of a Second. While I think the author of this Motion meant well... my take is that the Board doesn't want to be in the Morality Police Business. Host Grottos and Regions and IO's can do a much better job of keeping an eye on this sort of thing, and from my perspective, are doing just fine.

So, those were the most exciting things from Saturday. Sunday was a lot more fun, though no less work: Strategic Planning.

Won't go into all the details, but I think we accomplished more in one day than basically all the previous meetings where I've been involved, combined. It helped to have a some outside perspective on how to prioritize issues in the form of a Professional Strategic Planner. But I also believe that the previous meetings had been a sort of conceptual "dry run," if you will, to help us all know where everyone stood.

Now we're on schedule to have a Strategic Plan the Board can approve by the next BOG Meeting in At lanta in March/April. It was really, really cool to see everyone really coalesce on issues, and do it in a productive, forward-looking way.

*From **Bill Steele,** former officer with the Bexar Grotto, DFW Grotto, TSA, and a former NSS BOG member:*

Texas Cavers should be very proud that we have hosted four NSS BOG meetings in the Lone Star State in the past six years.

First there was the one hosted by Bexar Grotto in San Antonio in March 2005. A year later the then three grottos of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex: DFW Grotto, Maverick Grotto, and the Cowtown Grotto (the Maverick Grotto has ceased to exist) hosted one in March 2006. I gave leadership to that one and the meeting was held in Irving.

Three years later a BOG meeting was held in Kerrville during the International Congress of Speleology.

And now this superb one in October 2011 in Houston. This seems to me to be an incredible level of support of our national caving organization by the cavers of one state. Thanks to all who helped make this happen.

The Greater Houston Grotto rose to the occasion and put on a terrific weekend. Probably the only downside is some other grotto trying to follow that act. They nailed down every detail and added some real flair. Hip, hip hooray!



The beautiful Rice University campus where the meeting was held.

A Whole Lotta Longhorn!



Greyson Knapp-Greater Houston Grotto



Steve Webb—DFW Grotto

A variety of reports on all of the trips and other goings on at the Longhorn Caverns State Park Project this Fall.

TCR Longhorn Wild Cave Trip

Submitted by Peter Druschke—Greater Houston Grotto

This October was my first trip to TCR, and after hearing of a wild cave tour of Longhorn Caverns, I thought it would be good to actually do some caving during a caving event. I brought my wife Carrie and 15 month old son Willem with the idea that they could do one of the standard walking tours of Longhorn while I was crawling and getting dirty. After a good and greasy breakfast at the Country Cupboard in Johnson City, we made our way to Longhorn. On arrival I saw Greyson Knapp. from Greater Houston Grotto, but learned most of the other cavers were late leaving TCR and the trip would be starting late.

The delay gave me a little time to take a look at some of the impressive Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps buildings in the park, and soon everyone was gathering for the trip. We met our guide, Brad, and headed down the steps into the entrance pit of the cavern, which was complete with a natural bridge. The first area of the cavern we encountered was the Crystal Palace, which has an impressive concentration of densely crystalline calcite veins. The calcite crystals were blocky, clear, translucent, and several inches across and looked to be dense vein calcite and fracture-filling cements rather than the finely crystalline calcite that is typical in most caves. The calcite decorated the walls and ceilings of several alcoves off the main branch of the passage.

We next walked up the main passage to view the Queen's Watch Dog, an unusual feature of the cave that seems to be part natural solution-shaped stone, and part modern art. The formation was taken from another part of the cave and propped up along the pathway of the tour route.

From this point, we began our first "wild" caving, leaving the main route and following our guide through Fat Man's Misery and Lover's Lane, a series of narrow passages where we alternately had to stoop and shimmy, but nothing very tight. After winding our way through this passage, we next rejoined the main route in the Indian Council Room. This large chamber has ceilings over 20 ft in height, but few formations. The room is located below a sinkhole that served as the original entrance of the cave before the CCC bricked it up in





"The Footprint" in the ceiling at Longhorn.

1935, probably destroying a large colony of bats in the process. The room takes its name because it was here in the 1850's that a war band of Comanches holed up with about 10 captive settlers. The Texas Rangers tracked them to the location and freed 3 of the hostages after a gunfight, the remaining hostages had been disemboweled and scalped (not necessarily in that order). One of the rangers ended up marrying a young women he helped free from the Comanches.

Here our guide told us that Longhorn Cavern was formed in the Ellenburger Formation, a dolomite (= ferro-magnesium carbonate vs. calcium carbonate that makes up limestone) of Ordovician age, roughly 450 million years old. Dolomite caves are a bit rarer than limestone caves, given the reduced solubility of dolomite. However, with enough precipitation and organic matter to make carbonic acid, dolomite formations can and do develop extensive cave systems. The dolomite mineralogy may help explain why there are relatively few secondary cave formations at Longhorn. Our guide explained how Longhorn was one of only two stream-carved cave systems in the U.S., the other being Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. I am pretty sure that this is inaccurate, but it seems that every managed cave has to have some claim to fame. One cave in Montana that I recently discussed with the National Park service was billed as the largest cave in the lower 48 States west of South Dakota and north of New Mexico! Gazing at the walls of the Ellenberger in the Indian Council Room, I saw a series of fossil stromatolites nicely exposed in cross-section. Stromatolites are colonial algal constructions that form hemispherical domes with a characteristic internal banding, which are formed as growth rings as the algal films repeatedly colonize the outer surface of the dome, form a calcite rind, and re-establish themselves on the new outer surface. The stromatolites are diagnostic of a warm, shallow marine environment, and may be found today happily photosynthesizing in the Bahamas or Shark's Bay Australia. They were especially abundant in the Ordovician, before many modern reef-builders like corals had appeared. While the Ellenberger is a dolomite today, it started out as a typical marine limestone, and was converted to dolomite through mineral replacement at some time in the distant geologic past. Structural doming of the billion-year old granite cored Llano-uplift caused much of the overlying Paleozoic and Mesozoic formations to be eroded away, which is why you have such old rocks exposed near Lake Travis and younger Cretaceous limestones make up much of the Edwards Plateau farther away from the Llano uplift.

As we looked around the Council Room, a regular tour group wandered through wafting cologne and perfume, and with the participants looking at us quizzically. I hoped to see my wife and boy on one of the tour groups we briefly passed, but never did. Next we wandered over to the adjacent Cathedral Room, which as the name suggests is another tall chamber that was once used for local church services. Later during Prohibition this room as served as the local speak-easy, which offered local law enforcement free admission. From here, we diverted off the main passage again through a series of crawling passages that were one of the more sporting portions of the trip. The first obstacle we had to pass was the "crotch rock," a narrow chimney squeeze that features a rock projection in a very unfortunate location. After negotiating the squeeze and chimney, there was a section of tunnel suitable for hands-and-knees crawling. Portions of the group hunkered in this passage while we waited for the tail end of the group to negotiate the squeeze.

As we sat and waited, a bat was disturbed up-passage and flew into the group. One novice caver let out a high-pitched shriek that led to some laughing and joking from the rest of the group. The next portion of the trip had us following a long, sinuous low passage that lies below the main passage of the cavern. For some time we alternately stooped, crawled and belly-flopped along this dry stream passage, although at no point were there any tight constrictions. Our proximity to the main passage was made clear when we passed the "Wishing Well" chimney, the top of which was a railing along the main cavern passage and scarcely 8 ft above our heads.

At long last we rejoined the main cave passage in the Marble Hall. The Marble Hall is of course more

Ellenburger dolomite, but definitely one of the prettiest portions of the cave. The ceilings here are 15 ft or more above, with fluted walls, cupolas, and solution pockets artfully lit along the tour route. Here a number of areas were decorated with flowstone, draperies and stalactites, many of which looked like old, mostly extinct formations. At one point the rock walls formed a profile of Abraham Lincoln, although truth be told it looked like a hideous zombie Lincoln.

We followed the passage until the walls began to close in and the ceiling began to descend. Along the walls above our heads were bits of silt that attested to past floodwaters through the cave. At last we reached the end of the main passage at Catfish Lake. This area still had considerable water despite the drought, and members from the trip took turns stooping below the low ceiling at this point to look on across the subterranean pool to where the passage continues through low airspace crawling passage.

It was this passage that members from an upcoming service trip to Longhorn would attempt to push to see if the drought had exposed potential continuations of unsurveyed passage beyond. Here we turned around and slowly made our way back toward the entrance. On the way back we made the detour to the Powder Room, an area where in the 1960's President Lyndon Johnson had kept a back-up nuclear fallout shelter as a bolt-hole if war struck while he was staying at his home in nearby Johnson City.

Climbing a small staircase from the main passage we filed past Sam Bass's Boot print, an unusually boot-sole shaped ceiling cupola. Thereafter we stooped single-file back to the Powder Room to see where Johnson would have taken shelter and had his bedroom. I was shocked to see a small room with a very uneven floor and some active flowstone to one side. This would have made a miserable bedroom and seemed very comical that the President of the United States had made concrete plans to take shelter here, having had rations and radio equipment stored just outside for some time. Seeing this was like learning that the backup plan for a Soviet invasion entailed construction of a treehouse behind Camp David that included a tin can-and string command and control system. It is scary to think in the years following the Cuban Missile Crisis that we were so completely unprepared for what a nuclear war might really entail, and that our government thought it feasible that the President could actually ride it out at Longhorn. I imagine President Johnson undergoing a transformation into "Gollum" from the Lord of the Rings if he was stuck here long-term, as the first flood of the cavern would inundate it with silt laden with radioactive fallout.

From here we made it back to the gift shop where everyone split up for lunch and a return to TCR. I met up with my wife and son, who had enjoyed their walk-through of the cave and were enjoying a snack at the cafeteria when I emerged. For those interested in visiting I would recommend one of the upcoming service-trips to Longhorn, and I hope to make it back myself next spring for a little more crawling and ridge-walking.

Longhorn Wrap Up-Saturday, November 5th

Submitted by Gerry Geletzke.



Of the 19 that went in through the Crownover entrance, 17 made it to the second sump, two stayed at the first sump. The low air at the first sump provided about six or seven inches of air at its lowest point, a little more than Summer 2009. The second sump water level looked like it was down about three to four feet from Summer 2009 but it didn't provide any real additional passage only a larger terminal room. Mallory took several pictures of the second sump to document its current state. (One interesting note; Caleb found his initials and '2009' still clearly legible in the lower dirt sidewall of the passage between the two sumps.)

On the way back to the Crownover passage Caleb, Mallory and I looked for and partially explored a couple of already identified leads but we did not want to get too far behind the rest of the group. All 19 of us



Gerry giving a "What to Expect" talk before heading into Longhorn, via the Crownover entrance. Photo by Mark Alman.

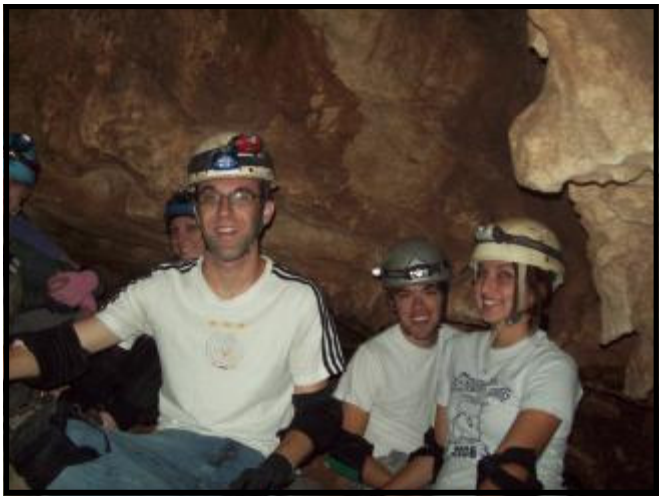


Photo by Mallory Mayeux.

took the Water Trail passage on the way back to the Crownover passage also.

After regaining the Crownover passage, 13 exited the cave and six of us went over the dams and down the main passage to intersect with the Wigglies pit entrance. Your rope and carpet at the dams seemed to have weathered the last two years fine. We then entered the Wigglies and exited back in the Crownover passage. There was some water in the Wigglies but at the deepest point it was less that one foot deep.

We then proceeded to exit the cave.

I look forward to the next Longhorn work trip.



The Sump

Participants:

- Mallory and Caleb Mayeux
- Andy and Angela Edwards
- Zach Broussard
- Chelsea Bergoine
- Cruz St. Peters
- Chelsea Small
- Kyle Leonard
- Will Schievelbein
- Tori Dunbar
- James Kancewick
- Sam Kancewick
- Jerome Cap
- Scott Grimes
- Valerie Bowen
- Jared Lingo
- Natasha Glasgow and son, Peyton
- Julia Germany
- Edwin Lehr



The other cave dog in Longhorn.
Photo by Mallory Mayeux.

Submitted by Mark Alman

It was pretty brisk camping out Friday night and the direct opposite Saturday night. Weird!

We had a total turnout of 24 folks and a dog attend. GHG, A.S.S., TSA, and DFW Grottos well represented. Met Jim Sheets, the new Park Host. A very nice and accommodating gentleman and who will be very easy to work with. The LCSP staff is also very excited and welcoming and looking forward to having us down in the future.

Julia Germany, Edwin Lehr, Natasha's son, Peyton, and I worked in the Lovers Lane area.

We moved a lot of dirt and rock and began on the area directly below a pool of water (!) called the Pigs Trough. Julia and Peyton visited this area and took pix.

We got a good start at rebuilding this area, covering the large drainage pipe, and obscuring the mann



Photo by Mallory Mayeux.

made dam that forms this area.

We still have a lot to do and they gave us a thorough tour of the cave showing what other tasks they would like to see done and where fill can be located or relocated.

Some of the items were :

- Fill in washed areas near both entrances to LL.
- Dig out the encrusted mud on the trail near the Pig Trough.
- Complete rebuilding the drainage pipe are below the Pig Trough.
- Dig out the mud filled trenches in the LL area and area leading to Frozen Waterfall area.
- Unclog drainage pipe in Frozen Waterfall area.
- Fill in some other washed out areas.
- Ridge walk areas of the park, including a few new karst features that may/may not connect with the cave.

These last two items are pretty exciting:

- Discussed with Christina and Brad about forming a 501C non-profit called "The Friends of Longhorn Caverns" that could do fundraising, etc. in order to pay for projects in the cave, much like Colorado Bend SP and other State Parks have. Julia is much more knowledgeable on this that me and knows all the how to's and details. LCSP folks very excited about this.
- There is an area near Lumbago Alley, towards the Turnaround/Catfish Lake jump off that takes a LOT of water, according to Brad. They would love for us to dig this out and see if there are additional levels of the cave. The tube is filled in with loose gravel and looks pretty similar to the Crownover Causeway and would be easy to dig out.



Caleb and Mallory Mayeux.



Gerry Geletzke and Natasha Glasgow.
Photo by Mallory Mayeux.



Angela Edwards in a definite "Before" pose.
Photo by Mallory Mayeux.



Mallory checking out "The Sump". Our final obstacle.

My First Cave by Peyton Madison

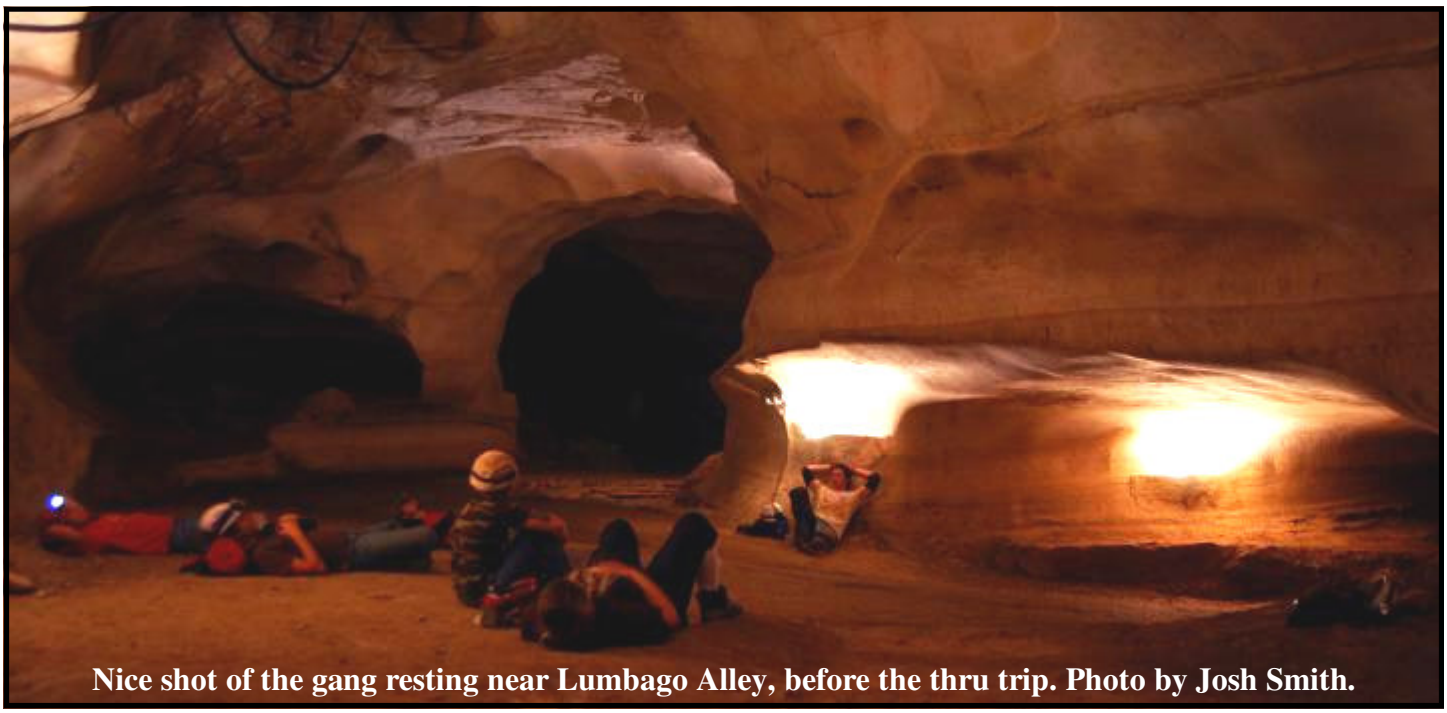
My name is Peyton Madison and I am 10 years old. I live in Dallas, Texas and am a member of the DFW Grotto. My mom (Natasha Glasgow) has been caving for a while and wanted to take me with her, but said that we had to wait for the right trip. When she finally told me that I was going to get to be a part of the Longhorn Cavern Project, I was really excited....and a little nervous.

On Friday, November 4th, 2011, my mom picked me up from school at 3:00pm and we headed south to Burnet, Texas where Longhorn Cavern State Park is located. It took us almost 4 hours to get there. When we finally did, we stopped for dinner at Dairy Queen and split a Steak Finger Basket. On our way out, I got a Blizzard (which I didn't even eat because it was too cold outside) and we were off to Longhorn. It's about a 10 or 15 minutes drive to the cave from town and it was already dark when we got there. We pulled up and my mom got out and unlocked the gate, drove through and locked it back behind us. Once we were inside the park, we followed signs for the Observation Tower and looked for Mark Alman's truck. We found Mark and we headed to the top of the Observation Tower while my mom set up our tent. After a few minutes, my mom joined us and we talked and told stories while we waited for the others to get there. We waited until it was too cold to wait anymore and finally went to bed.

The next morning, I was the first one up and when I went outside, there were tons of tents! Lots of people had showed up while we were sleeping. We got dressed and ate breakfast; my mom made breakfast tacos for us. After we ate, we got dressed, gathered up our gear and got ready to go into the cave. We loaded everything into Mark's truck, picked up the key from the main office and drove about a mile down the road to drop my mom and the others off at a part of the cave called the Crown-Over Entrance. This part was much too hard for me to go into. Someday I will be a good enough caver to go into hard parts like this.

At the Crown Over Entrance, we had to cross two fences and hike across a big field to get to the entrace of the cave. We finally made it, took some pictures watched everyone get geared up and climb down a ladder that went down to the cave.

After that, Mark and I went to the part of the cave that we were going to spend the day in. My mom told me that it was the commercial side, but that I would be going off trail, much further than the tourists were allowed to go. We got our gear on and met up with Julia Germany and Edwin Lehr and headed into the cave. We walked for a little while until we finally got to Lover's Lane. A couple of years ago, Lover's Lane got flooded, so I went down there to help repair the damage so it could be part of the tour again. So, we got down there and planned everything out. There were cracks



Nice shot of the gang resting near Lumbago Alley, before the thru trip. Photo by Josh Smith.



that needed to be filled and a pipe and metal that needed to be covered up and lots of other stuff to do too.

First, I helped Edwin dig up some dirt to cover the pipe. We covered it with dirt and rocks and it looked really pretty. While we were doing that, Julia took a few minutes to go exploring. While she was gone she overheard a tour guide saying that they thought the cave was haunted because the lights kept getting turned on after the guide had turned them off. Finally, Julia told them that there was no ghost, it was just us. She came back while we were having lunch and told us the story.

After lunch, we got back to work. I was working on covering some metal on the wall. After I got done with my job, Julia took me exploring. We found a hole and walked back as far as we could until the ceiling was so low we had to crawl. When we got to the very back, we found water! Julia and I took pictures and then she said, "Hey, Peyton, turn off your light. It's really cool." Later on, my mom told me that when you do that it's called lights out. While our lights were out, it was so dark that I held my hand right in front of my face and I couldn't even see it. It was pretty cool, but after a while it was kind of creepy, so I turned my light back on.

We finally got done exploring and came out of the cave and went back to the camp site where my mom was waiting on me. She was really dirty and really excited to hear about my trip. I told her about it and she checked the weather on her phone because it looked like it was going to rain. The night before it was really, really cold, so we decided to drive to Waco and stay the night there because we have family that lives there . Also, my mom had mud in her hair and wanted to take a shower. So, we packed up our tent and camping gear, said goodbye to everyone and headed out.

I really liked the cave and definitely want to go back again.



Rachel Saker admiring one of the few bats. Photo by Josh Smith.

Longhorn Wrap Up-Saturday, December 3rd

Submitted by Mark Alman

Participants:

- Alan Downey – Project 1
- David Franks – Project 1
- Kyle Leonard – Project 2
- Scott Grimes – Project 2
- Nicole Yzaguirre – Project 2
- Rachel Saker – Project 2
- Joshua Smith – Project 2
- Valerie Bowen – Project 2
- Leslie Bell – Project 1
- Christopher Francke – Project 1
- Gerald Geletzke – Project 1
- Jerome ? – Project 2
- Maya Liu – Project 2
- Rahul Bhandari – Project 2
- Mark Alman – Project 2

Total volunteer hours: 182 hours, including 92 hours drive time.

Project One: The Search for New Passage

Lumbago Alley Area Dig Team Report from Christopher E. Francke

At first inspection, the dig passage looked about 25+ feet long, with rocky sediment, and filled the 2.5 foot high passage to about 2 feet. Basically a 6 inch gap, from sediment layer to ceiling.

We, first cleared the outside entrance of the passage, in order to level the area so a digger's body



would not be at a down sloping angle while digging.

The next few hours, all diggers removed the sediment, rocks and debris.

At the conclusion of the dig, the passage was opened to about 16 feet, where there was about 2 feet long of "tubular" passage remaining, before the passage opens to a "room" about 4+ feet wider, the ceiling raising to about 3+. This "room" had a depth, from the end point of the dig, about 6 feet, and appeared to veer to the right of the passage.

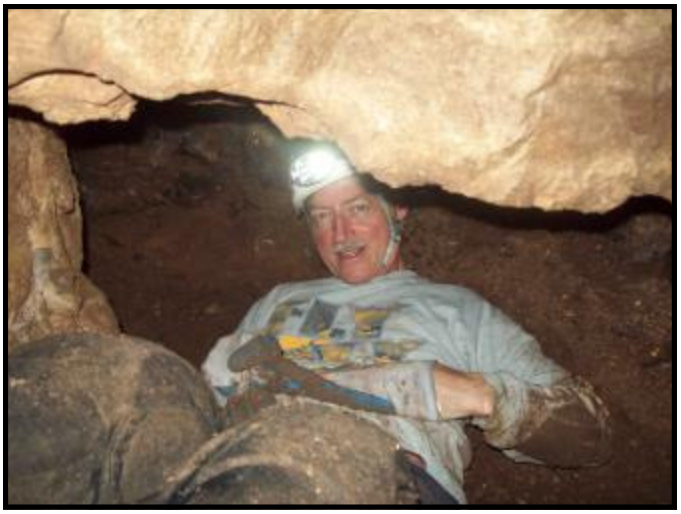


Christopher E. Francke in the hole.
Photo by Leslie Bell.

It is apparent that the floor sediment of the room begins to slope near the walls and water is settled in those areas. It may be likely that the passage will become more watery at this point. There was no water settling in the passage during the dig, although if one dug deep enough, the sediment became more wet and muddy and less rocky.

I'm excited to go back, knowing that we are about 2ft (say 1hr) away from getting in to the little "room" ahead.

Thank you, Mark, for the opportunity to help the folks at Longhorn Caverns.



An excited Gerry Geletzke.
Photo by Leslie Bell.

Team Report from Mark Alman

Let me first compliment the Project 2 folks, made up mainly of young cavers from the A.S.S. (Aggie Grotto) as consistently being one of the hardest working and most pleasant to be around group of cavers I have ever encountered.

We got a LOT done this past weekend!

Using fill material removed from the heavily



One of the two buckets brigades in operation at Longhorn this weekend. Gerry Geletzke on left and Alan Downey with bucket.
Photo by Mark Alman.

silted and compacted floor near the dam below the Pigs Trough area of Lovers Lane, we have managed to replace all of the material that was washed out during heavy flooding that exposed the large drainage pipe.

This area is now filled back in and all sign of the drainage pipe has been eliminated. Next project weekend, we will begin hauling in gravel and rock to give the area a more “natural” appearance and, hopefully, minimize erosion during the next big rain.

The trail there is also now very smooth and has



The Gang really making the dirt fly! Photo by Mark Alman.

been taken down to the original trail and stone. Much easier to walk, now!

After a short and enjoyable lunch in the LCSP cafeteria (yeah, we really rough it) we tackled removing anywhere from 4 to 8 inches of the silted in and dried material that covered the original trail just down from the drainage pipe area. The "youngsters" managed to remove a section 2 to 3 feet wide and approximately 12 to 15 feet long of compacted mud and top soil that revealed the original trail through this area.



Maya Liu exits having enjoyed her first ever thru trip! Photo by Mark Alman.

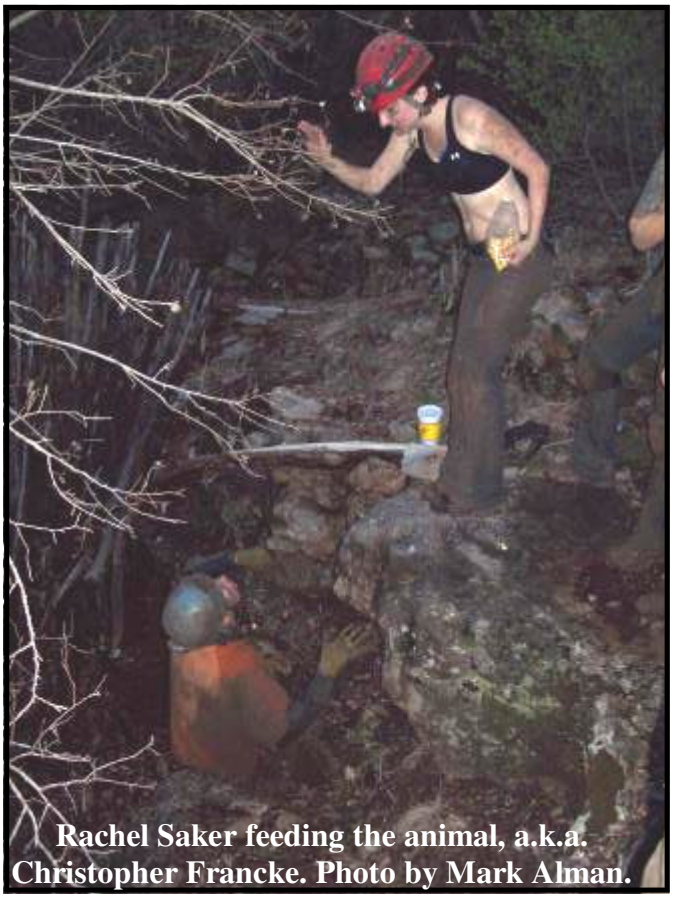
A very efficient bucket brigade system moved several large buckets of material that were deposited just behind a stone wall ~50' away to help reinforce it against future flooding.

Their amazing work increased the head room through this area immensely, making it easier for visitors to pass through without bashing their heads.

We still have ~12 to 15' of trail to complete before exposing the original trail. And then, on to a plethora of other Lovers Lane projects.

We finished up this project around 3 PM and Gerry escorted 11 of the crew on a through trip to the Crownover exit.

Two of the Aggie cavers ran in to Burnet for



Rachel Saker feeding the animal, a.k.a. Christopher Francke. Photo by Mark Alman.

supplies and, after securing the Crownover key from LCSP staff, I met the mud-encrusted intrepid travelers around 5:30 at the LC Back door and transported them all back to camp in the back of my truck.



A VERY clean Mark checking out the diggers' progress. Photo by Josh Smith.

During their trek, a nice nap was enjoyed by yours truly near the Crownover gate.

After cleaning up, some stayed in camp, while 8 of us went in to Marble Falls for a delightful dinner and the highly recommended Peanut Butter Pie at the always satisfying Bluebonnet Café.

Alan, Rahul, Maya, Christopher, and Leslie said their goodbyes and headed home after dining, while Gerry, Josh, and I headed back to LCSP.



The always amusing thru trip "After" shot. Photo by Mark Alman.

After seeking shelter from the cold and rain on the second floor of the Observation Tower, hilarity and banter and repartee ensued before heading to bed around 11 and Gerry heading back to Waco.

A VERY chilly cold front and rain blew in around 2 AM Sunday and all headed home rather quickly after getting up Sunday.

All in all, an extremely fun and productive project weekend!

January project weekend ic cancelled, due to availability of project leaders and prior commitments. The project will start back up in February.

If y'all are ever interested in helping out with this ongoing project, please do so. We guarantee a fun and enjoyable weekend with a lot of caving, service to the TPWD, and a ton of good ol' caver camaraderie!

Thanks to all of the folks who have helped out this year on the Longhorn project, especially Gerry Geletzke, and hope to see more of you next year.



From left: Maya Liu, Rahul Bhandari, Josh Smith, Mark Alman, Alan Downey, Christopher Francke, Leslie Bell, and Gerry Geletzke. Photo by Jenny, our Bluebonnet Café purveyor of homemade delights!

Hutto's Sinkhole (Satellite Sink) Trip Report



Ryan on his first vertical ascent out of a cave.

Submitted by Zach Broussard.
Photos by Travis Scott.

November 8, 2011
Cavers Present: Jerry Atkinson, Chelsea Bergoine, John Brooks, Zach Broussard, Travis Scott, Ellie Watson.

All the Aggies met up in College Station (Chelsea coming from the Woodlands) and we proceeded to pack up all of Zach's 'glamping' gear, and I mean ALL of it. We headed west around 6:00pm, destination, Edwards County. Our epic adventure was detoured to San Antonio for the acquisition of Ellie. Fortunately for us, she had been baking delicious confections while waiting out our arrival. After the quick addition of Ellie, our sights were finally set on Edwards County. The drive out went pretty smoothly except for the head-on motorcycle/car accident that we passed somewhere west of Uvalde, being beleaguered by Border Patrol, and of course, the plethora of suicidal deer along the back roads. Luckily, no deer were hit despite their best efforts.



Zach and Chelsea in a nearby cave.



Travis helping Ryan on his first rappel in a nearby cave.

Upon arriving at the ranch, our group found John Brooks sleeping the night away. We began setting up camp and soon after Jerry arrived. After some confabulating, we found ourselves jaded by the long drive and hit the hay.

Eventually, we all woke up and prepared ourselves for the day. Our first mission of the day was to replace the lock on a nearby cave gate that was previously left unsecured. This took forever as the roads must be traveled at basically rock-crawling speed. After securing the cave, we proceeded to the next mission, to survey Hutto's Sinkhole, a recently explored feature reported in the 2nd Quarter 2011 issue of the Texas Caver with the name Satellite Sink.

We broke into two survey groups. Team ASS consisted of Zach on instruments, Chelsea on tape, and Travis sketching. Team Non-ASS consisted of John on instruments, Ellie on tape, and Jerry sketching. After about an hour and a half of surveying, we completed the survey of Hutto's Sinkhole shooting a total of around 373 meters in 25 shots. The feature consists of one large sinkhole measuring approximately 60m long, 25m wide and 5-7m deep with a shelter-cave-like cave at each end. North Hutto's Sinkhole Cave basically consists of one large shelter/room with some small passages leading off which pinch amongst massive breakdown with some old dry formations on the north wall. South Hutto's Sinkhole Cave consists of one large shelter-like room with no passage leading off. One dome heads upward but ends.

On the way back to the cars, trouble started brewing from above. Before we could get to the cars, the heavens opened up and Oztotl released its beautiful bounty upon our bodies. After alternating between mud and the dry haven of vehicles over and over while waiting out passing lines of rain, we headed to our next and final mission of the day, to teach the land owner's son the ropes (pun intended) in a nearby cave with a sparkly new set of vertical gear. After setting up and fitting the gear for Ryan, we walked him through the proper technique of vertical caving. He watched a few of us drop before deciding he was ready to give it a go. He did a great job on rappel and got to see a wonderful cave as a reward. The ascent went just as well as the rappel, despite more bands of rain soaking everyone on the surface.



Travis and Zach checking out the South Cave.

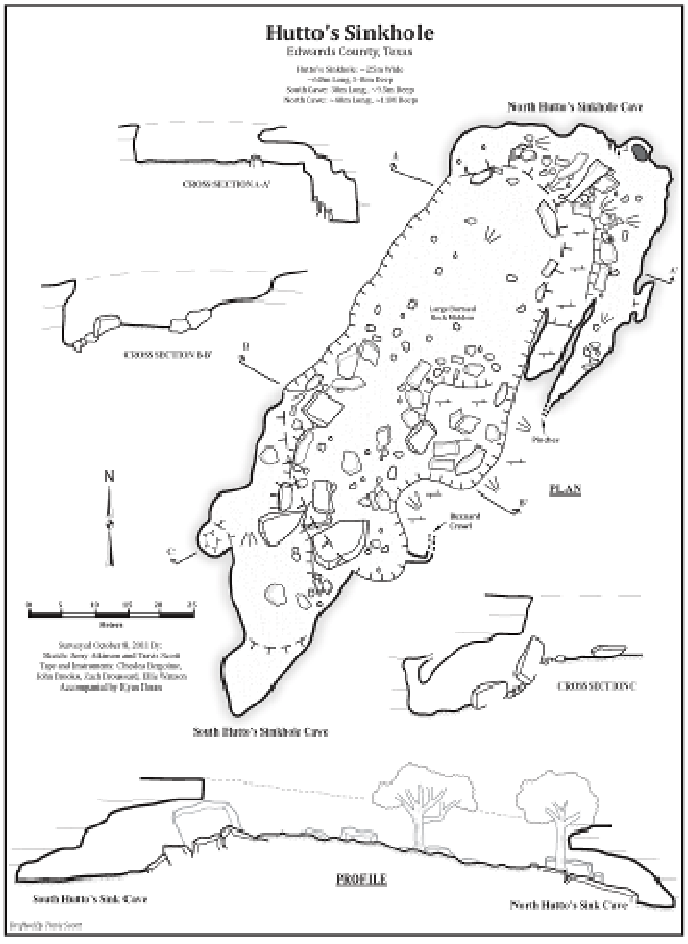
Eventually the rain let up a little and we slid our way back to camp, but not before finding John's truck had endured a death blow of sorts that was losing air faster than a popped balloon (or I suppose a popped tire). In reality, it was a simple slow leak and we made it back to camp just fine. Upon arriving we mingled with the owners and eventually got around to dinner and cleaning up. We all sat around and mingled while watching the Aggies "Beat the Hell Outta" Tech. Around 9:30pm we all found ourselves suffering from severe cases of lethargy, and (quite pathetically) called it a very early night. The cave gods were clearly displeased with this lack of Saturday night merriment, for the tempest that set in shook us to our bones. For the rest of the night, the gods fought above us, lighting up the sky above and shaking the ground below. The ranch, and area, received significantly more much needed rain.



Ryan checking out some nice formations.

The next morning we awoke to vast lakes where there was once desert, oh and breakfast tacos. After visiting with the owners and eating breakfast, we hit the road. John headed home, but the fun wasn't over for Jerry, Travis, Chelsea, Ellie, and I. We stopped at a different ranch to catch-up with a nearby cave owner before having to find another route home due to flooded low water crossings along the small Carta Valley roads. Everyone made it home safely and the trip was considered a success. The main goal, surveying Hutto's Sinkhole, was accomplished and a nice map (attached) has since been finalized.

Gotta love caving in Carta Valley!



The Chuck Stuehm Award Winners and TCR Wrap-Up

Submitted by Allan Cobb and David Ochel

At the Texas Cavers Reunion this year, the TSA recognized three new cavers who have been caving for less than 2 years. These new cavers have shown great enthusiasm to their fellow grotto members. This year, three grottos submitted names of new cavers for the Chuck Stuehm Award. The recipient receives a free year of membership in the TSA.

This year, the three recipients were:

- Bexar Grotto (San Antonio, TX) - **Joe Shaertl**
- DFW Grotto (Dallas/Ft.Worth, TX) - **Steve Webb**
- GHG Grotto (Greater Houston, TX) - **Andy Edwards**

The award is named after Raymond Chuck Stuehm (pronounced "Steam") who was a member of several Grottos in the San Antonio area and was especially good at guiding, working with, and encouraging new cavers. Chuck's memory is honored every time a new, exceptionally exuberant caver receives this award. Every grotto has the opportunity to encourage new cavers by selecting a new caver for this award every year.

Chuck Stuehm died an untimely death on January 31, 1980 at the age of 52. A memorial issue of the Texas Caver was a memorial issue for Chuck, outlining many of his accomplishments in caving. At the same time the Chuck Stuehm Award was established for to be given to an outstanding new caver in each grotto each year at Texas Cavers' Reunion (TCR), which was then called the Old Timers' Reunion.

Following is a partial list of past recipients:

- 1983 –Allan Cobb (San Marcos), Eric Short (San Antonio), Brian Burton (UT)
- 1989-Pam Oczkowski (Greater Houston)
- 1990-Susan Helton (San Antonio Grotto), Tony Jackson (Southwest Texas Grotto, Peter Mills (Bexar Grotto), Susan Herpin (Greater Houston Grotto)
- 1991- Jacob Herpin (Greater Houston Grotto),
- 1995- Bev Shade and Justin Shaw (UT Grotto)
- 2009 – Ellie Thoene (DFW Grotto)
- 2009 - Arron Wertheim (Bexar Grotto)
- 2009 – Drew Wendeborn (ASS Grotto)

Congratulations and to hope see y'all underground for many years!

Allan Cobb

TCMA Awards

I would like to share will all of you the Texas Cave Management Association award recipients. At the Texas Cavers Reunion this year, **Heather Tucek** won an Outstanding Volunteer Award for her work with Whirlpool Cave Preserve. **Mike Harris** won an Outstanding Volunteer Award for his work at Robber Baron Cave.

TCMA also presented a Lifetime Achievement Award to **William Russell**. William has been an active caver for more years than most of us remember. William has dug open and explored more caves than many of us have seen. William has worked hard in the area of cave conservation for many, many years. Williams contribution to caving in Texas has been immense. TCMA gave William this award as a thanks for all his contributions.

Allan Cobb, President, TCMA

Texas Speleological Association Survey Winners

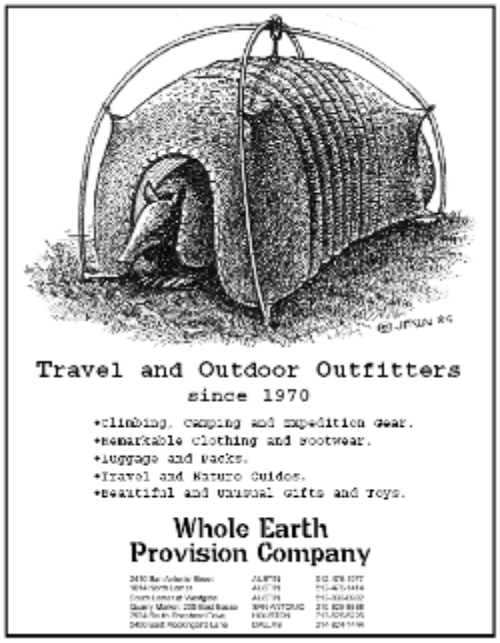
Congratulations to the winner's of this year's TSS survey contest at TCR, and thanks everybody for entering!

The winners were:

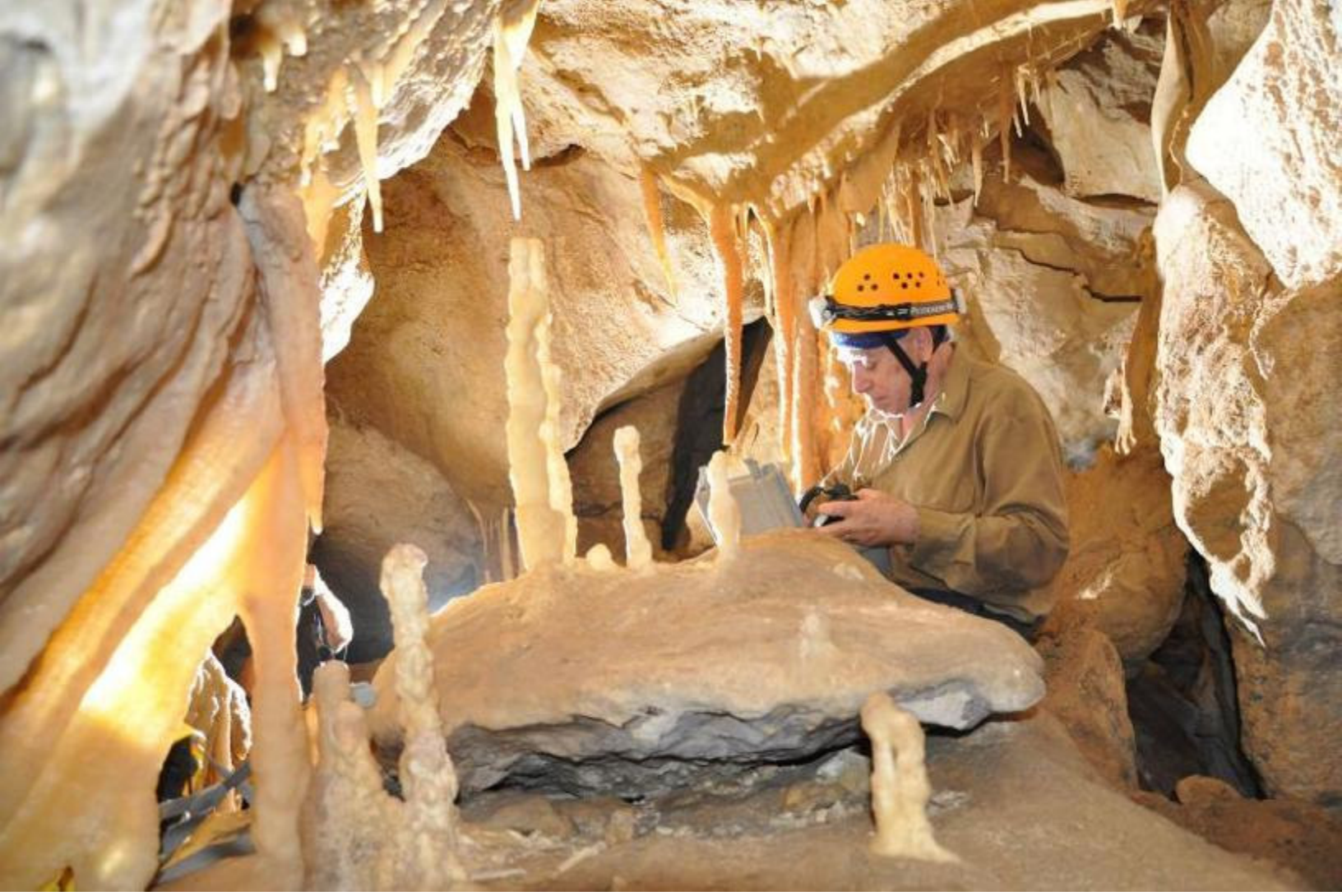
1. Ellie Watson and Joe Shaertl (.54 m loop closure error)
2. Heather Levy and Seth Spoelman (.67 m)
3. Monica Ponce and Steve Gutting (.71 m)

Thanks to the Texas Speleological Survey for sponsoring the instruments and lights, to Gonzo Guano Gear for sponsoring the survey pouches, and to Miller Blueprint for selling us the instruments at cost! And to Andrea for helping me set up the contest, and to Dale for helping with evaluating the results!

Cheers,
David Ochel




ZARA
THOR



Texas Speleological Association
1312 Paula Lane
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Attn: Editor