The TEXAS CAVER - 1st Quarter 2012



The TEXAS CAVER

January — March - Vol. 58, Number 1

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Front Cover— Natasha Glasgow. Taken at Cagle's Chasm Complex in Marion County, Tennessee by Jim Smith on Wed, Nov 23rd 2011.

Back Cover — A beautiful cluster of gypsum flowers found in the boneyard underneath The Jungle, a room past the clothes change areas of Nativity Chamber and Eden. Photo by David Ochel.

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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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The TEXAS CAVER

Written by Texas Cavers FOR Texas Cavers

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To the End(?) of the Far West

Submitted by: Andrea Croskrey
Photos by: Jen Foote, David Ochel, Derek Bristol



The daily commute from Deep Seas camp to the western edge of the cave is mostly a 1.5 hour hike through the Western Borehole. Photo by Jen Foote.

Summary

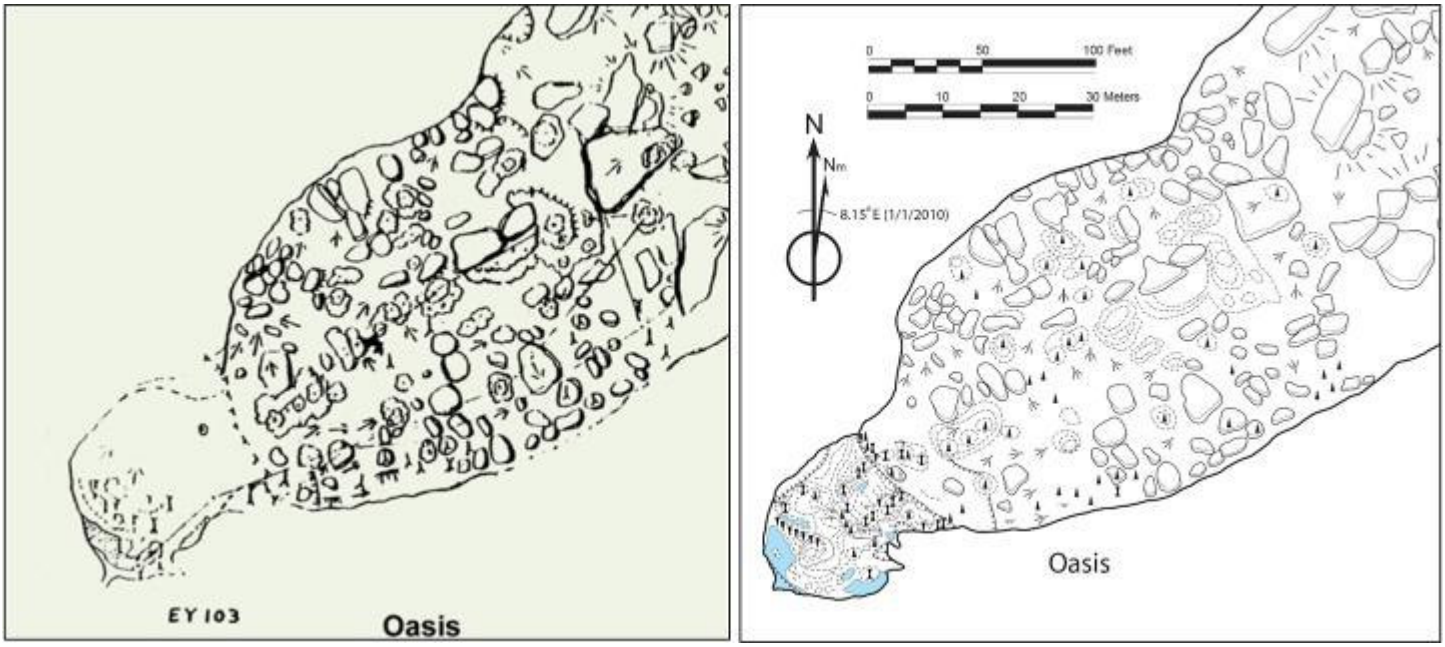
Objective: leads, re-sketch, and blunder corrections in the Far West of Lechuguilla Cave

Team: Derek Bristol (Trip Leader), Andrea Croskrey, Jennifer Foote, Heather Levy, John Lyles, David Ochel, and Adam Weaver

Achievements: all blunders were fixed, only one lead was left, 5,286.9ft of survey (4,162.8ft were new and 1,124.1ft were redundant)

Comments and Points of Interest

So did we find the end of the far western edge of the cave? I'd say mostly. Lechuguilla Cave is definitely past her prime of easily nabbed borehole and is entering the phase of what I would like to call the "Grubby Hole Pushing and High Hopes Climb Probing" phase. This is especially so the Far West since it isn't too horrible for cavers to reach and has been heavily searched for what many would hope to be the continuation of the Western Borehole. At least that is how it felt on this trip to the Far West, others may argue differently for other parts of the cave. The good news is we had a great team to be pushing the grub holes this trip. Checking for these nasty leads takes a dedicated team of sketchers willing to re-sketch rooms without skipping



The Oasis Pool Room drafted sketch, before and after. The old map was pen and ink, by Ray Keeler, and the dotted line he used to draw the north wall of the Oasis Pool Room indicates that there was no sketch or survey. The new map is drafted in Adobe Illustrator and incorporates the work from the October 2011 Far West expedition.

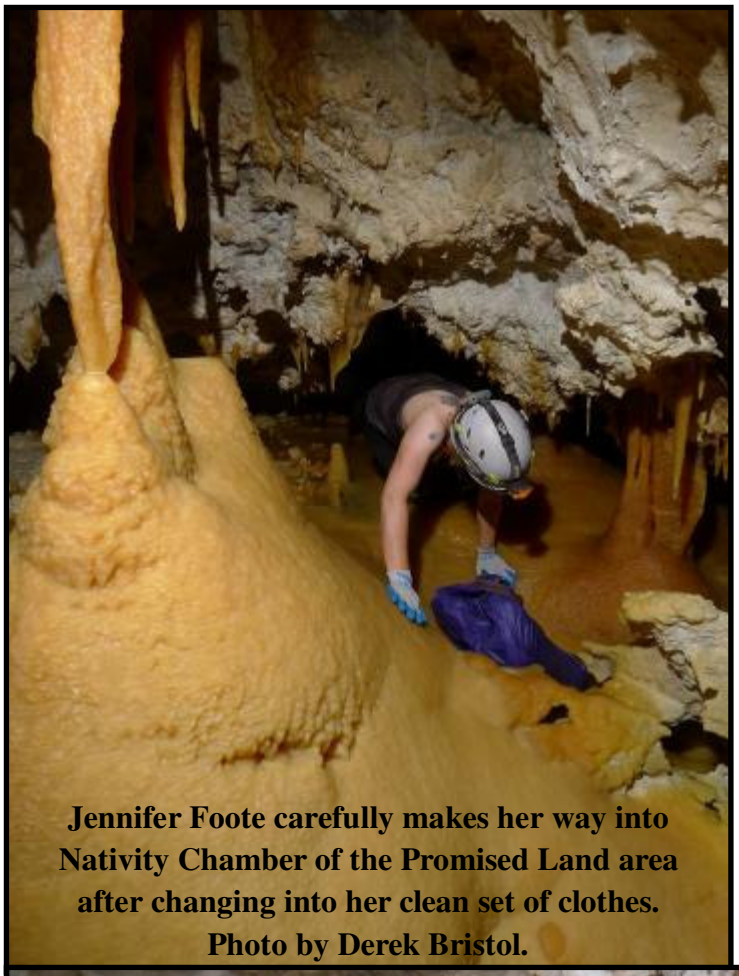


Heather Levy and John Lyles surveying in the Paris, Texas boneyard. Photo by David Ochel.

over even what might seem like the most mundane alcove and thorough, stout hearted scouts willing to leave no shadow not checked or aragonite-stabbing, corrosion -residue-slimed hole not surveyed. We left little for others to return to, but there are always those few tidbits remaining to tempt the next team. As far as "standard" leads that were left, they were in the boneyard under The Jungle and in an area call Paris, Texas. I have to admit, I equate boneyard surveys with breakdown surveys, endless loops that rarely go anywhere. But you never know, all it takes is that one hole to go and you find yourself in never-before-tracked borehole! The other leads left were climbs that Derek methodically documented, including photographs and notes on nearby stations and gear needed. I was impressed with his organization and I can understand the need for it if cavers are going to be hauling climbing gear to the far reaches of the cave!

Other interesting tidbits from this trip include that permission was granted to enter both the Promised Land and Oasis Pool Room areas of the Far West to survey leads and fix missing walls and one team member carried out all of their liquid waste. Both of these areas have been closed to access since they are extremely beautiful (the Oasis Pool Room is heavily featured in Jewel of the Underground) and traveling there requires a clean change of clothes in an effort to reduce the impact of walking, crawling and climbing through and on cave formations. Traveling amongst these formations is a blessing and a curse since they are outstandingly gorgeous but the stress of playing limbo through them wears on the team members. As for one member transporting all of their liquid waste out, MSR dromedaries were used to haul the liquid out and added 15lbs of weight for the trip out. While I don't believe this to be a good option for every caver, it shows that it can be done on week long trips to the Deep Seas camp and should be considered as an alternative for cavers opposed to dumping their liquid waste in the cave.

The final item I would like to note is that the routine of caving at Carlsbad Caverns National Park might be changing as the number of staff decreased. We experienced some scheduling issues, both because of staff availability and the complex schedules of cavers. Dale Pate and Stan Allison are the only NPS cave-dedicated employees left on staff with Tom Bemis



Jennifer Foote carefully makes her way into Nativity Chamber of the Promised Land area after changing into her clean set of clothes. Photo by Derek Bristol.

retiring and Paul Burger taking a job as the NPS Regional Hydrologist in Alaska. That leaves Stan as the only full time staff person as Dale is working half time as the National Cave and Karst Program lead. This has meant that there is a back log of inventory data that hasn't been entered, trip reports might be posted to the website slower and fewer pre-trip orientation time slots may be available. Also, with no new hires on the horizon, fewer expeditions may be approved and cavers might have to do more of the rope maintenance in the cave. The true impact of the staffing changes has yet to be seen but I thought it would be worth mentioning as it could change how expeditions to the cave are run. Let's be glad that Stan and Dale are still there working hard and this might be good news for caves trying to take Lechuguilla Cave's #8 position on the world's longest cave list!

For full trips reports for Lechuguilla Cave, visit the Carlsbad Caverns National Park website at: http://www.nps.gov/cave/naturescience/lechuguilla_cave.htm For a list of the longest caves in the world, visit Bob Gulden's website at: http://www.caverbob.com/wlong.htm

Below: Adam shows off a HUGE double calcite spar crystal found in a lead off of Keel Haul. Photo by David Ochel.

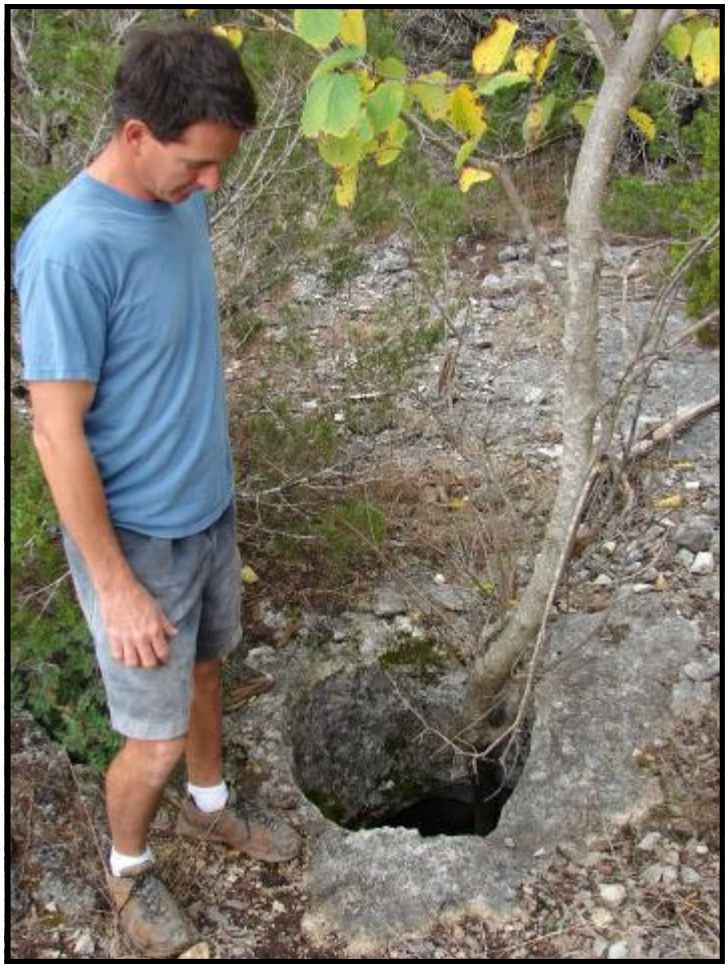


The Exploration of Tag Team Cave

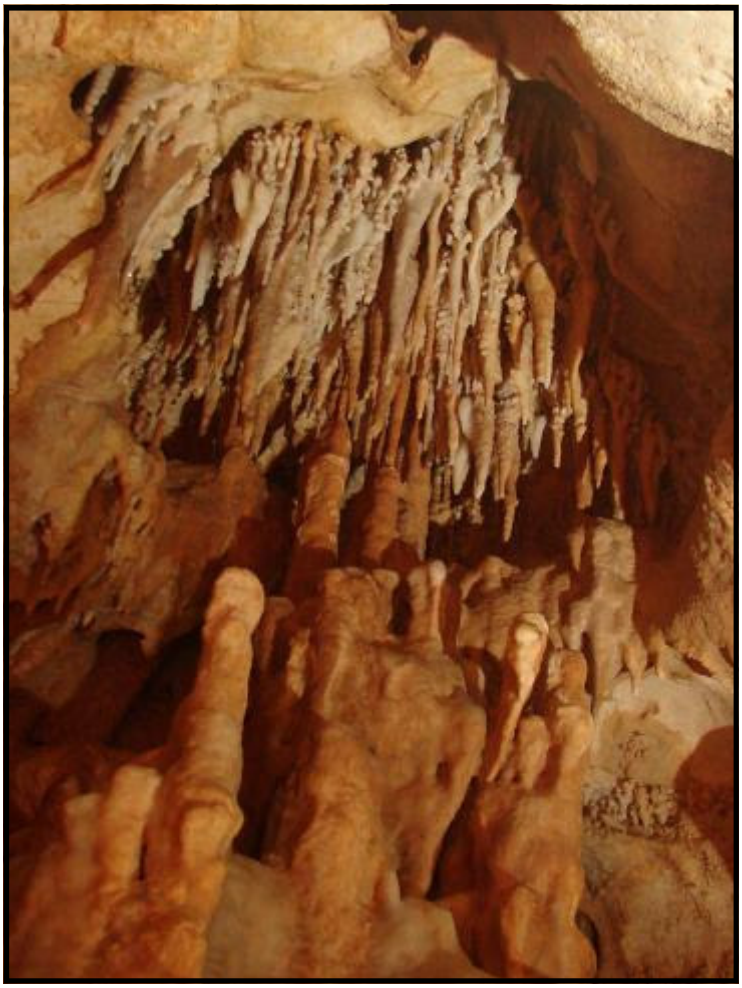
By Marvin Miller

It was April 6 of 2002 that David Custer invited me on a trip with a bunch of other Bexar Grotto folks to survey a cave in Hill Country State Natural Area. The SNA is normally not open to caving but this trip was in support of an informal project David had initiated with the park. The cave was named Tag Team Cave.

From the entrance room ledge the entrance pit dropped straight down in a yawning black hole. About 5 meters down from the entrance there was a ledge and canyon passage left and right. We dropped a tape down the pit and found it to be 13 meters down and blind. So we set out northeast along the canyon passage, stemming across more pits and passing generous-looking leads in the walls. There were 7 people in the cave - so no shortage of help to stretch tape, read instruments, and check leads. We eventually ended the survey at the top of the nicest pit yet, the seventh we had seen that day. While I was finishing the sketch, the pit was rigged and dropped. We measured it at 12.3 meters deep, and Walls later showed the bottom to be 19.4 meters below the entrance. The first descenders reported passage at the bottom but it would need to wait for another trip. For the day we had gathered 79.1 meters of survey and



Tom Rogers at the entrance.
Photo by Marvin Miller.

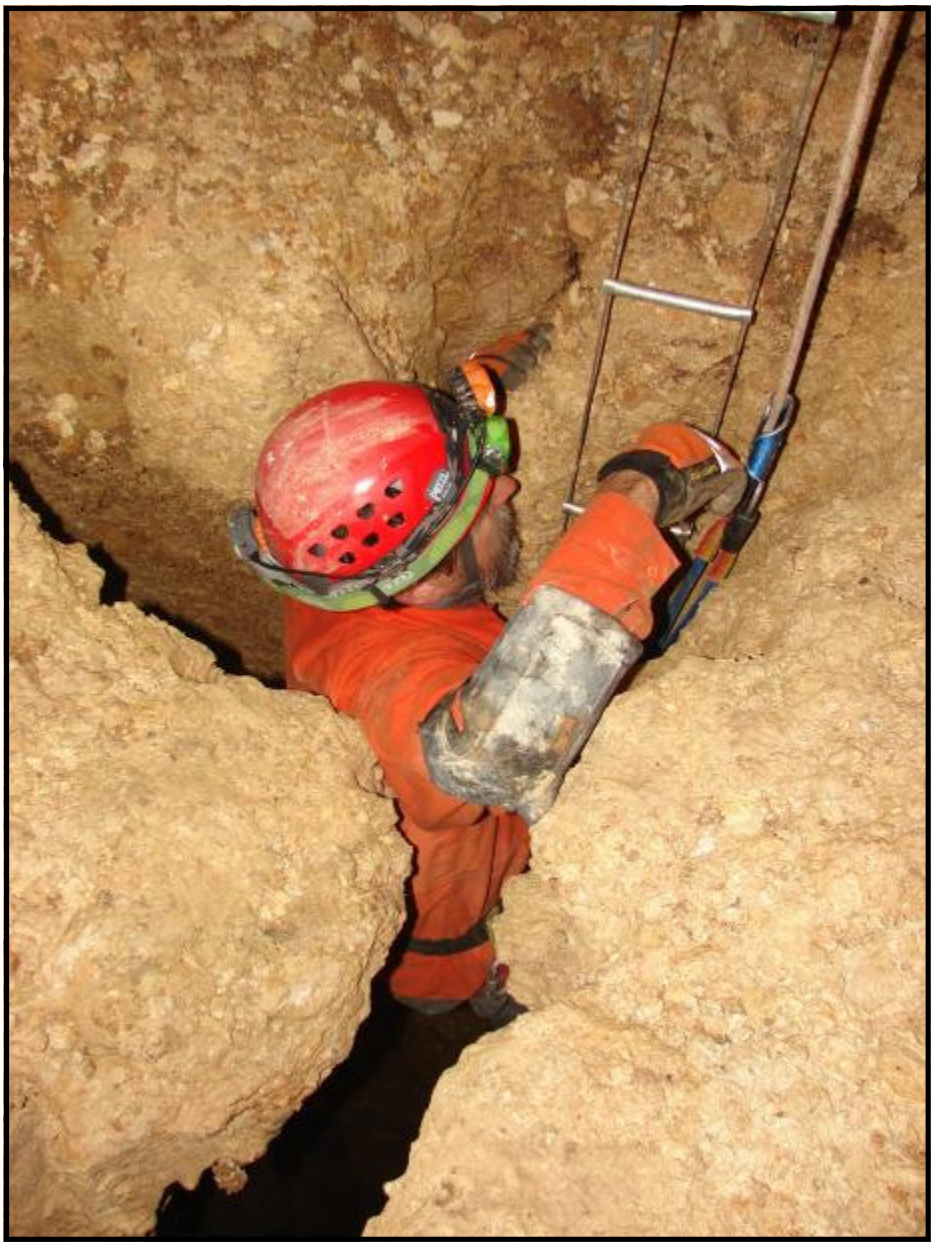


16 leads – 6 of them pits. The cave was going to be a project, and I had lots of other projects already, so I just whittled away at it with a few trip per year.

The next trip was in December of 2002 when Rebecca O'Daniel and I rappelled into the mysteries of Pit 7. For some reason Pit 7 feels very remote. It's only a few minutes from the entrance but there are a lot of exposed moves along the way. Stemming across the wide top of Pit 4 or coming out of the crawl above Pit 5 to stare down into its black space are always exciting. It's a fun caving scramble to the top of Pit 7. The upper cave is fairly dry but this changes as you get deeper and by the time you set your feet on the floor of 7 everything is drippy and wet - the way a cave should feel deep inside. The pit is nicely shaped with a long, wide floor and walls that angle smoothly inward to the pinch at the top.

We found beautiful coral bushes at the bottom but disappointingly little passage. However, it was in Pit 7 that we started understanding the structure of the cave, and that is passage stacked upon passage. Eventually we

Left: Castle Grotto.
Photo by Marvin Miller.



Rob Bisset climbing out of Pit 5. Photo by Marvin Miller.

explored five levels of passage development in the Pit 7 area. The bottom of the pit was the lowest level, Level 5. The passage that we traversed through the cave to get to the pit was Level 2. On that day in December Rebecca and I surveyed 14.7 meters at the bottom of the pit and another 15 meters in a side passage at the top of the pit. We left a going lead at the bottom and what looked like some possible higher level passage development in the wall above that lead and similarly above the short passage we had surveyed at the other end of the pit. Ceiling cracks along the lengths of those passages hinted at something lying above. In the passage at the top of the pit, a 10 cm wide cracked that snaked along the floor for the length of the passage hinted at something lying below. Later, Walls showed these two passages lying on top of one another with about 8 vertical meters between them. The upper passage stepped downward, dropping over 4 meters from beginning to end, where it vanished down a tiny hole. The passage was distinguished by large scallops that formed the curves of the walls.

Joe Mitchell joined Rebecca and me on our next trip to the cave when we went back to Pit 7 and finished the survey at the bottom. The main passage at the bottom turned the corner at the far end of the pit floor and went only another 8 meters before getting too tight. Rebecca, however, noticed that she could climb up into an overhead level there and was then able to traverse back toward the pit and look down on the floor from 4 meters above. After surveying this we went back to the other side of the pit and found a similar "Level 4" above the lower level passage there. This one barely had a floor and we traversed along ledges as we surveyed.

Considering the stacked passages we were finding in the Pit 7 area, I had a hunch that traversing across the top of the pit might yield some reward. After climbing out, and before we left the cave I decided to have a quick look. The far wall of the pit here was only a bit more than a meter stretch across the void to a narrow slot in the far wall. It was necessary to climb a few moves up to a larger keyhole in order to get through. The walls were wet and the holds crumbly and once through I could see that there wasn't a solid floor under me – only ledges along the walls and plenty of space to fall through to the floor of Pit 7. It got better a few meters farther on and I soon stood at the base of a 2 meter up-climb. Once up I traversed a few more meters and was looking at a down-trending passage and, typically, another passage stacked above it traversing up over small ledges and chocked rocks. Far up in the ceiling was a hole with a rock hanging out of it. There was definitely more to survey on the other side of Pit 7!

Altogether that day we got 53.2 meters of survey, with some of the shots being tie-ins. The cave was now 156 meters long.

Joe Mitchell and I did a short trip where we surveyed and sketched Pit 1, the entrance pit, again. We also dropped into Pit 4, and surveyed it to the point of discovering that it had a lower level. We left that for another trip.

The return to the passage beyond Pit 7 took place in December of 2003. Rebecca O'Daniel and Evelynn Mitchell joined me for the challenging bit of survey across Pit 7 and then on into the upward trending passage. The passage went for 5 meters to a pinch at station 28, but past the pinch it could be seen to open up again. We didn't have any digging gear with us so we

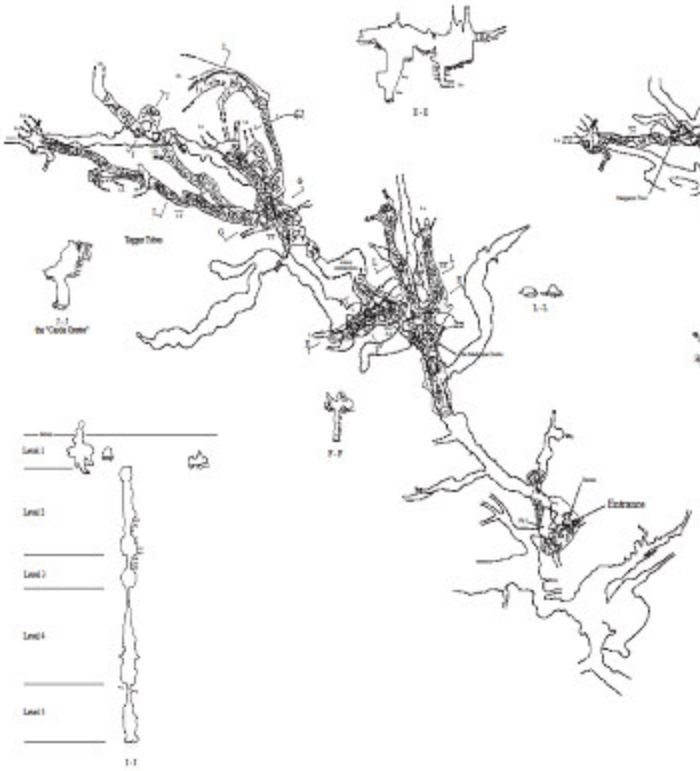


Stargazer Pool, Photo One. Photo by Marvin Miller.

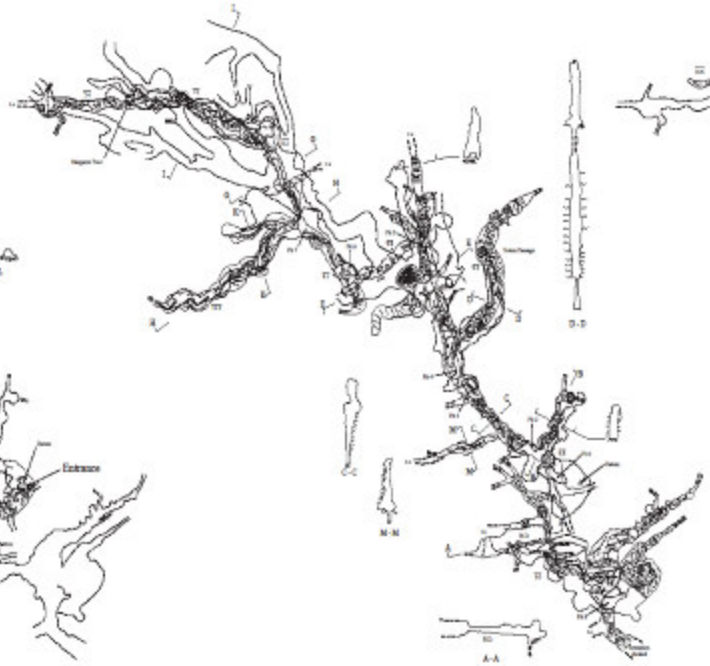
had to leave it. We went back to the down trending passage and surveyed it for 16.7 meters to its end. A small drain and a narrow ceiling crack accentuated the end. The passage was mostly hands and knees crawl and was nicely decorated.

It looked like we had gotten to the end of the passage beyond Pit 7 for the day. On the way out I pointed to the hole in the ceiling that I had noticed on my first exploration of this area. The hole was about 3 meters above us. Through the hole, beyond an obvious space of a meter or more, could be seen white sculpted ceiling - quite different from the passages we had seen so far. Hanging part way out of the hole was a medium sized rock. It was very intriguing but the rock looked dangerous. However, when Rebecca climbed up to just below and to the side of the hole and put her hand on the rock she was able to move it quite easily. It wasn't as large as it looked like it might be from below. She carefully edged it down around the lip of the hole and then let it fall to the floor below. Rebecca invited me up to check out the hole. With her help planting my feet on footholds, I was able to climb up through the hole. The room was mostly dirt floored with beautiful white, scalloped and sculpted limestone for walls and ceiling. It was more than a meter tall and about 2 meters wide and went one way for about 3 meters and the opposite way for about 6 meters. I went to check out the farthest end but was distracted by another passage teeing into the one I was in. I walked down it for about 3 meters to where I would have had to start crawling but it looked like it continued. At the 6 meter end of the first passage it pinched down too small to follow. The trend seemed to be following the same fracture as below - a fifth, older level of the same passage. To make it safe to take a survey team up through the hole we would need to bring a rope and vertical gear. Further exploration would need to wait for the next trip. I let gravity slowly pull me back down the hole and Rebecca once again helped plant my feet. We made our way back toward the entrance, checking out a couple of leads that didn't go and surveying a couple of short passages. Total length surveyed for the trip was 43.6 meters with 21 stations set. The total survey length of the cave so far was 201.8 meters and depth was 20.5 meters.

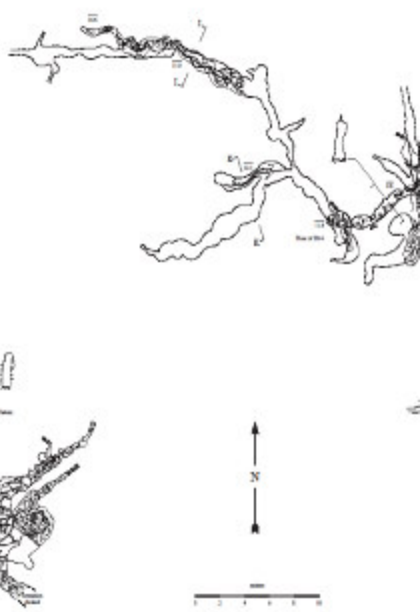
An old caving buddy of mine, Vance Peace, joined me on the next trip in October of 2004. Our in-



Level 1

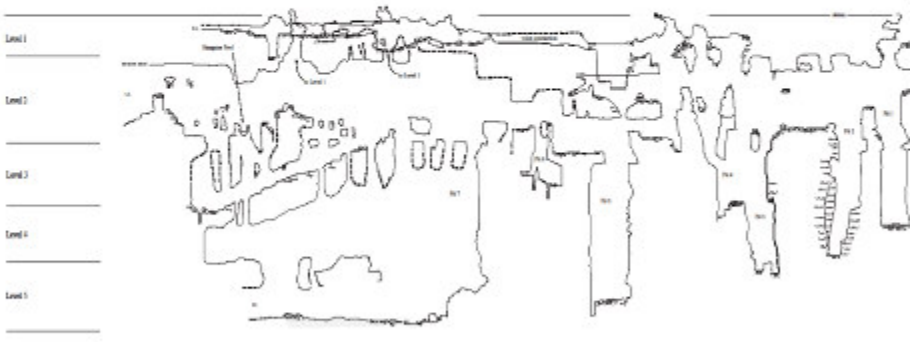


Level 2

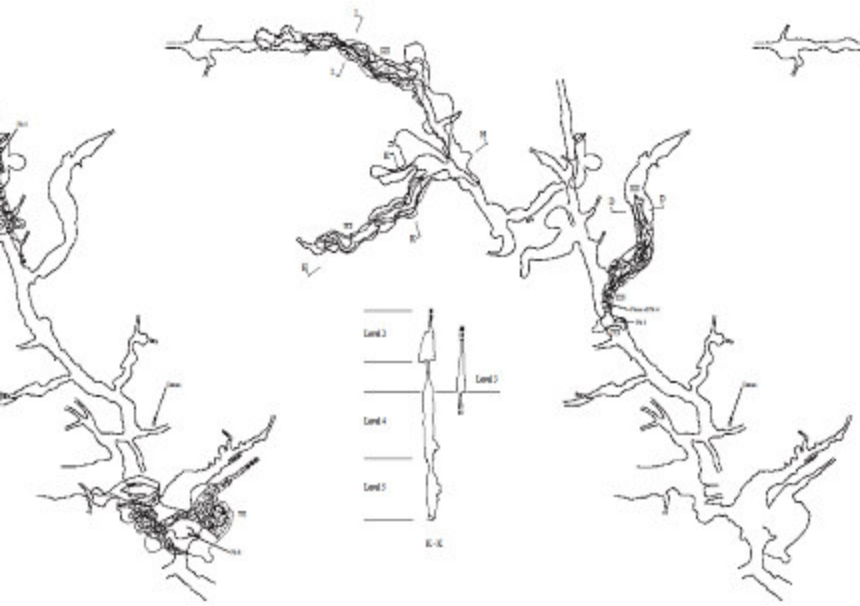


Level 3





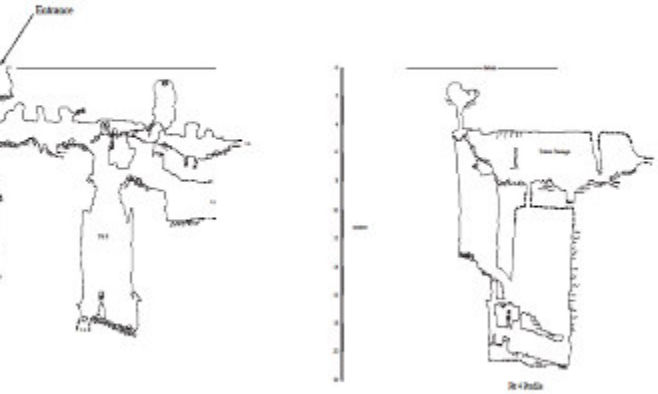
Extended Profile Along General Trend of Level 2

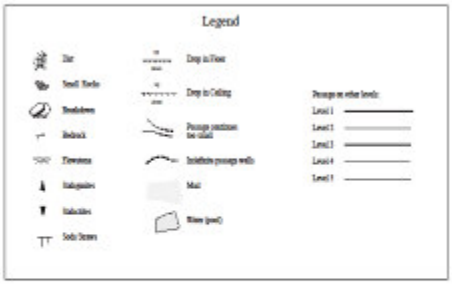


Level 4



Level 5





Tag Team Cave

Hill Country State Natural Area
Medina County, Texas

Survey Details
Sunnto and Fiberglass Tape Survey
Survey data processed using Walls

Statistics
Cave Length 473.2 meters (1599.1 feet)
Cave Depth 21.5 meters (70.5 feet)

Survey Dates and Personnel



Stargazer Pool, Photo Two. Photo by Marvin Miller.

tent was to dig our way through the constriction at station 28 and survey what lay beyond. It didn't take long to dig out the soft dirt floor, which, with slightly wider walls, allowed us to squeeze through on our sides. I was the first one to try it and the first thing I saw as I struggled into the larger space beyond was an upward ascending tube. It sure looked like it could be going somewhere. But the passage continued on this level as well, in the form of a tall narrow canyon. I made room to allow Vance to come through and then we surveyed exactly due west for 12 meters where it all got too narrow. This piece of passage held the remarkable Stargazer Pool, a permanent little body of water attached in cup fashion to one wall. The walls of the pool were calcite, approximately 30 cm tall and the depth of the water was approximately 10 cm. The calcite walls of the pool had arms that roughly corresponded to the shape of a star.

Then it was back to climb up the ascending tube which topped out in a textbook cupola. One side of the cupola opened into a pretty little passage going left and right. Looking to the left, the passage was crawling height. The ceiling was gracefully arched and the limestone a smooth creamy white. The floor was soft cool dirt. It looked very intriguing but I first went the other direction. The passage opened almost immediately into a gorgeous little room with a little sunken pit and a cascade of stalagmites and flowstone under a canopy of some of the most densely packed and varied stalactites I had ever seen. We called it the Castle Grotto. The passage continued past the Castle Grotto as a belly crawl over some dry rimstones but soon got too small to follow.

Going left at the cupola balcony, we followed the smooth walled passage for 7 meters to where it emptied into a bit of standing height passage with another passage coming in at a sharp angle to the right. We surveyed the standing height passage for several meters then up over some rocks into a larger junction room with passage left and right and other likely looking holes in the walls. It didn't take me long to spot the funnel-shaped hole in the floor and recognize it as the room I had climbed up into from below on the previous trip. We surveyed as much as we had time for but had to leave several leads for the next trip. We ended the day by surveying down through the hole in the floor and tying into one of the Level 2 stations below. We called the upper level the Tagger Tubes – a play on the name of the cave and the delight that a tagger would have in

finding such a nice, smooth, white canvass for his art.

After that the cave was empty of humans for more than a year but Vance and I finally made it back in December of 2005 and finished up the Tagger Tube survey with 24 meters more of cave.

On this trip and the previous one, when we accessed the upper level by climbing the ascending tube on the other side of the dug-through constriction, I didn't have the knowledge to recognize it for what it is – a classic rise-tube for hypogenic waters.

With the cave pushed as far as possible on its northwestern frontier, I decided it was time to see how far it went in the other direction from the entrance. There was a rumor of another pit. Ron Rutherford, Justin Fell, and Mica Fell joined me on June 6, 2006. We tied into our old station at the entrance pit and surveyed about 19 meters in crawling and walking passage to the top of a pit, Pit 8. Offset from the pit was a tall, nicely decorated dome that must have been close to reaching the surface. The pit measured 11 meters deep. It was a nice drop, the pit cross-section being about 4 meters by 2 meters with lots of flowstone on the walls. A nice formation waited at the bottom where a cream-colored flowstone mound protruded from the darker wall and dripped down onto another mounded form supported by a ledge and partially by the floor. A sideways chimney through about 4 meters of razor blade canyon led to a short continuation of passage. We surveyed 54.8 meters of passage on that trip. The cave was now 346 meters in length.



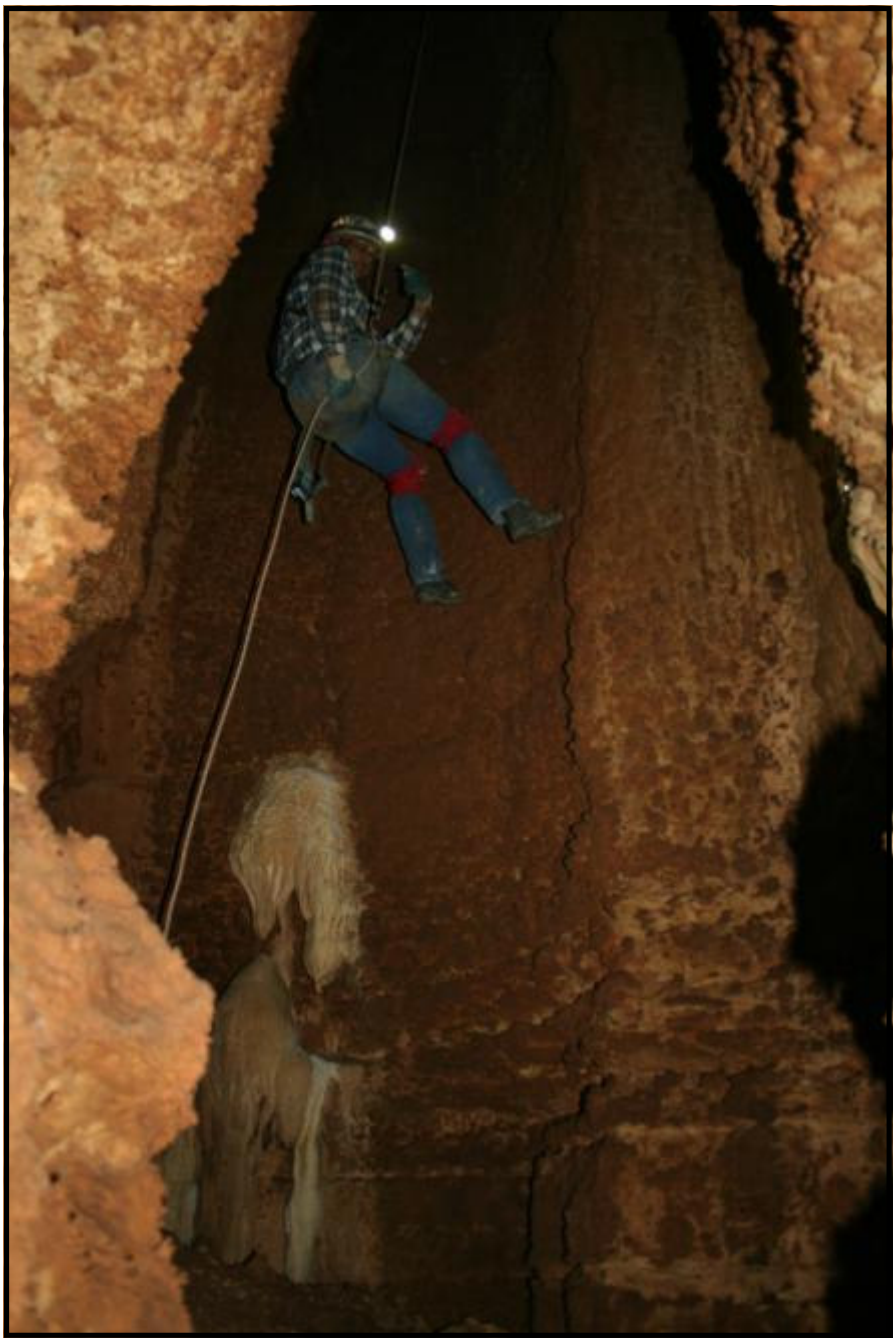
Rob Bisset and formation at bottom of Pit 4. Photo by Marvin Miller.

There remained Pits 2, 3, 5, and 6, and the lower level of 4, plus six other leads which were more or less horizontal. We hadn't found any lengthy bits of passage other than the Level 2 backbone of the cave, but I had high hopes that we still would.

In August of 2007, Zach Harrison, Stephany Garcia, and I surveyed upper level passage accessed from Level 2 and laying somewhat over the area of Pits 4 and 5. This upper level had passage development similar to the Tagger Tubes. There were five passage arms and lots of decoration. A nice lead headed north but it was choked by formations. We surveyed 29.6 meters.

The cave took another rest until December of 2009. I dragged Justin Olson through all the wall walking, down climbs, up climbs, and stretches over voids to the top of Pit 6, just a few meters shy of the drop into Pit 7. I fully expected Pit 6 to communicate with Pit 7 but it didn't. It was short – only 3.4 meters deep – with no continuation at the bottom. We then traversed back through the Level 2 passage to an intriguing lead heading northeast just past the top of Pit 4. It was nice passage, but once again it didn't go very far – ending after 14.7 meters. The passage sported some interesting pool basin remnants and a nice totem. We named it the Totem Passage. Walls would later show this passage directly overlying the passage at the bottom of Pit 4.

In July of 2010 Nathan Summar, Sam Viera, Rob Bisset, and I entered the cave with our sights set on Pit 5. From the top the pit looked about as deep as Pit 7 and I was hoping for similar passage development at its depths. I was disappointed again. Rob was the first one down and I had to ask him twice when he reported matter-of-factly that there was nowhere to go. The pit was



Ellie Watson descending Pit 8. Monica Ponce photo.

plumbed to a depth of 12.8 meters and 20.2 meters below the entrance. After Pit 5 we backtracked towards the entrance, ticking off two more leads off the main passage that I had been hopeful about. Both together gave us just 11.3 meters of survey.

Pit 2 remained virgin and uknown. Pit 3, which I suspected was too tight to get down, had to be investigated, the lowest level of Pit 4 needed to be surveyed, and a few dig leads had to be tested. I recruited Rob again and we were joined by Donny Roland and Tom Rogers. Donny and Tom were given the dig privileges while Rob and I descended Pit 4. We surveyed 8.9 meters in the lower level and then took photos of the 5+ meter tall formation at the end. Walls showed the lowest part of Pit 4 to be approximately 21 meters below the entrance.

Pit 4 has a window into Pit 3. It was too narrow to get through but I could see through it that there was no passage off the bottom of Pit 3. Also, I could watch the end of the tape as Rob lowered it from above for a measurement of its depth. It came in at 13.3 meters.

One of the digs that Donny and Tom had worked on yielded an extension of the Level 2 passage over and beyond Pit 5. The walls were very crumbly and unconsolidated but we added 8.7 meters to the cave. Our last act of the day was Pit 2 which surprised me by actually having a little bit of passage at the bottom. Pit 2 is very close to Pit 1 but there did not appear to be any communication between the two. We measured 8.2 meters to the top of a large rock. From there the pit dropped on down in two directions for a total depth of 11.3 meters. The pit sported some nice hanging draperies.

The survey was done except for one final surprise. When I drafted the map I saw that the formation choked lead in the upper level area above Pit 4 was pointing right at an obstructed lead in the Tagger Tubes. Some additional inconsistencies and missing bits of sketch were identified and I organized a Bexar Grotto trip to the cave to clean up. Jill Orr and Bennett Lee accompanied me to the Tagger Tubes while Ellie Watson and Joe Schaertl hung out at the lead on the other side. I hoped that, if we couldn't find a way to physically make it through, I could at least shine a laser disto through and complete the survey loop that way. It took us about half-an-hour of caving to get from where we left Joe and Ellie to the lead in the Tagger Tubes. I yelled and clearly heard Joe's reply, so the connection was confirmed. However, we could not see each other's lights and it would have taken some major work from my end to get into the larger space I saw beyond. The map simply shows the connection with dashed lines. Meanwhile, Bennett and Jill had been working on a dig lead. Jill actually managed to slither through without any digging. Where it had looked like the passage might get bigger, it did not go. At the end of her push Jill came upon a unique "art deco" formation that she tried to describe to us. She may be the only person ever to see it.

Monica Ponce and Tom Rogers had also come on this trip and I had given them the task of dropping Pit 8 and taking some pictures. Ellie and Joe joined them after the voice connection work was done and enjoyed bopping that picturesque pit.

Thus ended exploration of Tag Team Cave, with a surveyed length of 475.2 meters and a depth to the lowest point of 21.5 meters.

O-9 Well trip report - February 4, 2012

Submitted by: David Ochel

This was a trip to continue the re-survey of the upstream passage of O-9 Well.

Out of 10 cavers originally signed up for the trip, 6 actually made it to the cave (the others canceling for various reasons): Andrea Croskrey, David Ochel, Sandi Calhoun, and Sean Lewis arrived from Austin about half an hour before midnight, and Aubri Jenson and Lydia Hernandez an hour later. While the actual outside temperatures weren't that cold that weekend, it was very windy at night and in the mornings.

Two survey teams went into the cave Saturday, all entering by noon. David (sketcher), Lydia, and Sandi set out to make it to the upstream end of the cave and survey back towards the entrance. Rather, they ran into a junction about half-way into the cave. One passage continued without any survey stations visible, various types of (flagged or written in mud) station markers had been present on and off before that. The other passage soon became very tight and had survey markers with station names that were not on the line plot of the 90's survey that the surveyors had brought along. It was decided to start surveying the unmarked passage from the junction on towards the end of the cave, and to tie into the unknown survey markers.

Up to that point, no water-filled passage had been passed, and those wearing wet suits felt pretty warm while moving swiftly through the cave. The team surveyed for about 5 hours in muddy, stoop-walking and hands-and-knees-crawl passage, until reaching stream passage with water about knee-deep. The survey was ended here, and the onward passage explored for a few minutes before returning to the entrance - water continues to be present (up to the terminal sump, maybe??). Continuation of the survey requires wet suits, laying in the water frequently will likely be required. 164 meters were surveyed.

The other team continued surveying upstream from where Bev Shade's survey team had concluded on a previous trip. Aubri sketched, getting tips from Sean, and Andrea set point. They surveyed for about six hours, which yielded another 164 meters. Both teams happened to meet a little after 7 pm at the bottom of the entrance pit. Andrea, Aubri, David, and Sean went on a downstream tourist trip for about 2 hours while Lydia and Sandi decided to exit the cave. The downstream trip, even more so than just being close to the entrance pit, involved battling the intensifying odors of what smelt like a decomposing skunk just downstream of the entrance shaft. David de-rigged the cave on the way out, and everyone was out sometime between 9 and 10 pm.

After another windy night camping, everybody started their way homeward around 9 am on Sunday.

See My Shovel Cave (CM Cave) trip report—Feb 12, 2012

By Ben Hutchins with contributions from Ben Tobin

When it started to sleet on us as we drove to Spring Branch, things seemed grim. But when the taco stand that we religiously visit before our CM cave trips was closed, the universe seemed downright cruel. Resisting the temptation to turn around, Brett Gerard, Ben Tobin and I drove on to meet Roger Blodgett and Tom Rogers at just after 10:00AM. We drove to Joe Eisenhauer's ranch in Spring Branch and after brief hellos, we were driving through the field to the cave entrance.

As quick as possible (still sleeting), we unlocked the cave, rigged the first drop, suited up, and began rappelling the 2 entrance pits that would take us to Echo River, 90ft below. The nasty crawlway leading off from the bottom of the 2nd drop was sucking cold air, chilling the water/ mud soup that we were slogging through. To make matters even better, the cedar duff/ cricket guano/cow urine slurry that is perpetually pooled in the crawlway was smelling especially ripe. Nevertheless, we were quickly in the main passage where we were greeted by warm air, warmer water, and definitely nicer passage dimensions.

Water in the main passage was at normal or even low levels, making the low airspaces a cinch. With all the rain, however, the temperature of the water was noticeably colder. We started heading upstream at noon. We had 3 objectives for the day: continue survey in an infeeder side lead that had been started back in August, aid climb to the high lead 10+m above the upstream sump, and in the process survey approximately 700 meters to rival Longhorn Caverns and Cave Without A Name in length. Because of the increasing chances of rainfall that evening and due prior obligations in the real world, we had 6 hours (4 of which would be spent in travel).

It took us about 2 hours to wade, stoop walk, swim, salamander, stoopwalk, walk, crawl, and stoop walk upstream to the terminal sump. We all went together so that the weight of the climbing equipment could be divided among us. At the sump face, I donned a hoodie and goggles to get a better look at the unknown. The water at the sump face is about 2.5m deep and the conduit is just over 1m wide. In the sump, the ceiling levels off perhaps a foot below the water level but didn't appear to rise again as far ahead as I could see (about 3m). It will take divers to push this one.

In short order, Robert, Tom and I backtracked to our lead, leaving Brett and Ben T. to storm the castle. Our lead was a north trending infeeder, about 200m from the upstream sump. It started out with admirable

dimensions (3-4m high, 2m wide) although travel was made difficult by the hills of slick mud that we had to crawl up and over. It was not graceful, and this portion of the passage had been surveyed previously. Where we picked up, the lead degraded into a 1.5-2m wide, 1m high oval shaped phreatic tube with mud banks and a trickle of water.

Watching Robert contort and wallow in the soup to read instruments made me thankful to be sketcher. The passage continued north with these dimensions, getting slightly lower but showing no signs of ending. After 10 stations and 52m of survey, I checked my watch and we were already late. So, we made SB23 a semi-permanent station and headed back out. While the survey team backtracked and began surveying, Brett and Ben T. sorted through gear and began the climb. Starting up a wall that appeared to have numerous jugs and protrusions for slings, they quickly discovered that it was all an illusion. The mud and the rock had very similar consistency, with the mud possibly being more structurally sound. As each potential hold fell off in progressively larger chunks, both climber and belayer became progressively larger balls of mud.

Finally, some nice, solid rock was found about 5 feet from the top. Looking at the time we realized we were approaching out turn around time, but shear stubbornness led us to finish the one bolt, leaving it at a nice starting point for the next trip. After quickly packing up, we made our way out. Barring anything unexpected, the climb should be finished in short order on the next trip, with 1 or 2 more bolts. When we got back to the glorious crawlway leading to the entrance pits, we were a bit dismayed that the cold breeze sucking in was causing steam above the warmer water in the main passage: it was going to be a cold exit! But climbing rope is a great way to warm up and thankfully it wasn't raining when we exited the cave, just as the last light of evening faded away. Ben and Brett arrived moments later to the delight of good beer sitting at the cave entrance. Although we didn't 700meters of survey or discover booming upper level borehole, it was still a great trip. After letting Joe know what we had accomplished, we warmed ourselves by his fire for a few moments before heading home. See My Shovel currently stands at 4.45km with several leads remaining to be surveyed.

Cave Without A Name, Kinney County, TX—January 28, 2012

Submitted by: Benjamin Schwartz
Crew: Benjamin Hutchins, Benjamin Tobin, Benjamin Schwartz (Ben3)

After a slow start leaving San Marcos on Saturday morning, the three of us piled into my truck and headed out to the cave. On the way we had to stop twice - once for breakfast tacos and another time for batteries (both critical caving supplies), but we made it to the cave before 10:00 am. Checking in with Mike Burrell, he reported that the water at our gauging weir was up a mere 0.08 feet after all the heavy rain in the region earlier in the previous week. The area around CWAN only got about 1.5 inches, and the stream level hardly budged, while other areas nearby got several times that amount and experienced more serious flooding.

The plan for the day was to go to the Waterfall Room at the current upstream end of the cave and continue pushing a virgin upper level stream crawl that Brett Gerard, Ben Hutchins and I had turned around in on the previous trip to this part of the cave. During the previous two years, a group of us have systematically resurveyed the known cave in order to create a high quality map and (we hoped) find additional cave passage. Sometime last fall, the last previously enjoyed passage was surveyed and we were able to start pushing and surveying some of the many virgin leads that remained. Admittedly, a number of them are not very attractive when compared with the main stream passage, but there is good airflow moving through parts of the cave and I am convinced that there is potential for a significant amount of additional passage to be found.

Our goal for the day was 260 m, which was the amount required to move CWAN up a notch in the TX long cave list. Quickly changing into our wetsuits and gearing up, we managed to leave the parking lot and enter the cave before scaring off too many tourists. We told Mike to expect us by midnight and headed upstream around 10:40. A little while later, we looked at each other and realized that none of us had a watch with us. This was strangely reminiscent of the last trip into the cave! I sloshed and jogged back to the surface, got my watch, and rejoined the others at 11:00 – finally we could really move!

The trip upstream took around two hours as we swam, crawled, waded, and salamandered through the ~2.5 km of stream passage between the Tour Route and the Waterfall Room. On the way, we speculated about what some of the virgin side leads might do, and if we would get a chance to survey them on this trip. The two very low air space leads were still very low, but still blow, and none of the 'sumps' (low air sections, really) along the main route were any lower than normal – including the third one which, in the main passage, is the lowest and longest by far. At the Waterfall Room, we climbed into the upper part of it, traversed into the upper level passage leading out of it, and paused for a quick taco break and to push a potential breakdown lead. The lead didn't look very good, but I did find another point to access the stream (with no passable leads) which feeds the waterfall entering the middle part of the room, as well as a possible lead that seemed to be have potential for rejoining the same water farther upstream.

But more on that later…

Our first lead for the day was another smaller stream in this upper level section. Both this and the larger 'waterfall stream' are flowing to the southwest and into the room, which is in the opposite flow direction when compared with the main stream below it. The streams are also perched on top of a green marly layer ~1.5m thick. The Waterfall Room appears to have developed at a point where water has punched down through this layer, intersected the main stream level, and caused a large zone of collapse which is slowly being dissolved away to create the room. Another interesting aspect of the room is that it is the largest known room/passage in the wild cave and is comparable in size to the large parts of the tour route, but with multiple levels and more complexity.

Moving toward our objective, we traversed a section of complex dry breakdown passage before dropping through breakdown and into a low, dry, stream bed ~ .75m high and 2m wide. Following this upstream, the passage gradually became lower as we passed tiny holes in the floor where trickles of water are pirated away to some lower level during higher flow conditions. We soon reached an active piracy hole and the cave turned from sticky muddy to wonderfully wet and sloppy. Just past this, we arrived at the end of the previous survey and quickly started doing what we came for; survey. Ben Tobin sketched, Ben Hutchins did frontsights, and I got to do lead tape and backsights for the first time in nearly forever! But glory was not to be mine…

The passage slowly became even lower, the water became deeper, then shallower, and the bedrock floor and ceiling got closer together and razor sharp and snaggy. Between snaggy sections, we plowed through mud slurry in low passage. Watching mud roll past your ears is always somewhat amusing when you consider what most people do on the weekend. Near the end, the cave completely shredded my shirt and somehow unzipped my wetsuit. I didn't realize it until I noticed that rocks stabbing me in the back seemed unusually sharp. Thanks to Hutchins for helping me zip up again in the crawl. We pushed the passage to a bitter 'end' where it does continue, but only 15 to 20 cm high (with lots of snaggy rock protruding into that space) and 2 m wide for as far as I could see – about 6-8m . Although there was a slight hint of air moving upstream, it is not a priority dig lead by any stretch of the imagination. The passage also contains many small fragments of fossilized and well-tumbled bone and turtle shell. We named this passage the Bitter Ben.

With this lead finished, we thrashed our way back downstream to the other potential lead I had seen. The passage started off low in large breakdown, and soon popped into what looked like some very nice walking passage. It was, but only for a few steps. The passage is coated in loose fluffy and super sticky mud; the kind of mud that peels up in 10 pound chunks when you put your hand down and pick it up again. Just imagine what happens to your feet. Unfortunately, the nice passage immediately degenerated into a small crawl coated with the same mud. Being lead tape, I pushed into it and thought I could see the end at a chunk of breakdown a couple short shots away. When I got to the end though, I could squeeze up onto the block and peer through a low slot into darkness beyond. Energized, I spent quite a while digging, breaking, and moving chunks of rotten muddy breakdown in a very tight tube. I finally opened the squeeze and pushed ahead and into the blackness. It turned out to be a low and wide room about 4 x 9m and less than 1 m high, with one short dead-end side passage off of it. I did a solo survey in the room so Ben and Ben didn't have to suffer through the crawl. We called this section the Capricorn Party Passage in honor of a caver party happening above-ground (the horror!).

With this lead finished, we declared the upper levels in the Waterfall Room complete, removed the handline and headed down to the waterfall for a 30 minute shower to clean ourselves and our gear. The ~120m of survey had taken us about 5 hours of very hard and muddy work. Clean again, we decided to head back down to the stream and survey a virgin walking canyon passage that heads out across the top of the 3m waterfall in the main stream – this is downstream from the Waterfall Room by a few hundred meters. This lead looked really nice and had the appearance of a paleo stream route. Currently the stream drops down the 3m waterfall and flows through what is now the third 'sump'. We surveyed quickly and efficiently along a 2m high x 1-1.5m wide dry and meandering canyon. After about 80 m, the passage abruptly ended in a blank wall at a cross joint and the only apparent way on is a 2 cm diameter hole down low in one end of the joint. After plotting the data up, this passage has gone off into blank space to the east of the main stream, so it is too bad it didn't continue.

Still short of our goal for the day, we moved back upstream to a comfortable dry crawl lead on the NW side of the main stream canyon. This passage stayed roughly the same for ~60 m before looping back to the main stream and connecting with another known lead. Ben Tobin calculated that we were only a few meters short of our goal at this point, and we decided to finish up the day by tying in a hanging shot in a side lead much farther downstream. In short order we arrived, did the two survey shots required, and called it a day with right around 260 m of virgin cave survey in the book.

We got out of the cave by 11:30 and enjoyed a TX version of winter weather; clear, crisp, starry, and just cold enough to make a stinky wetsuit steam. What a wonderful way to end a wonderful trip with great friends. It was not until the next day that Ben Tobin entered the data and reported that we were only a few meters short of passing Longhorn Caverns. Arghhhh!!!

We'll pass it next time, for sure!

(the long anticipated return of)
The Carbide Corner

After a way-too-long hiatus, I 'm happy to introduce a longtime Texas caver, **Logan** (call me "**LowGun"**) **McNatt,** with his first CC contribution!

Logan's bio reads as such:

"Logan's first cave was Carlsbad Caverns in 1953, at age 2 1/2.(He got bit by a chimpanzee on that trip, but not in the cave.)

In 1968 he joined the Southwest Texas State University Grotto in San Marcos, which had been co-founded by his brother Randy. His first "wild" cave was River Styx Cave, the longest gypsum cave in Texas.

From 1969 to 1972 he did a lot of caving in Texas and deep pits in Mexico. In Jan 2012 he celebrated the 40th anniversary of the "discovery" (by him and Craig Bittinger) and first descent of El Sotano de El Barro, the deepest pit in the world at the time.

He lived in the infamous Kirkwood Kaver house in Austin from 1972-1975.

In 1973 he made his first trip to British Honduras (Belize), and participated in numerous caving expeditions and archaeological projects there over the next two decades, living there from 1983 to 1993.

He has worked as an archaeologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department since 1996, and lives in south Austin

He doesn't go caving much anymore, but is often heard telling old caving stories to anyone who will listen, and trying to give them old back issues of *The Texas Caver."*

TWO WOMEN (who happen to be blind) REACH THE SUMP IN GORMAN CAVE—

A 1977 Trip Report by Logan McNatt

PROLOGUE:

The following trip report appeared in the UTG News, April 1, 1977 8(2), pp. 20-21, published by the University Speleological Society, Austin. The trip took place on March 5, 1977, when the cave was part of the privately owned Gorman Falls Fishing Camp. There were no restrictions on entering the cave, and no gate, so it was fairly trashed by the general public, but many grottos took beginner trips there and picked up litter on the way out. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department later acquired the property and opened it to the public as Colorado Bend State Park in 1987, with restrictions on entering the cave.

I had a friend named Betty Huffman who is blind and worked for the state. Her job required her to have a driver, so for several months she hired me to chauffeur her and her Seeing Eye dog Nyla around Austin in my 1967 Chrysler Newport.

I was caving a lot back then, so Betty asked me if there was a chance for her to visit a wild cave. We organized a trip for her and four of her friends—Glenda Born, Kathy Gann, Marshall Levitt, and Robert Thompson, all of whom were blind or partially sighted. I rounded up five Austin cavers--Don Broussard, Gary Napper, Andy Grubbs, Sheila Balsdon, and Leslie Davis—so there would be at least one sighted person for each blind person. Unfortunately I don't think there are any photos of the trip. With a few slight revisions I've made, here is the original trip report:

Gorman Cave has been the first cave for many people. This trip was no exception, but there was an additional factor, which made it considerably more interesting and enjoyable. Of the six people along who had never been in a wild cave, five of them are blind or partially sighted. They had expressed interest in caving, and had recklessly agreed to trust their lives to five experienced cavers. It was a fun "experiment" for all of us, because the five cavers had little or no experience in being the "eyes" for someone else.

As always, we were late getting to the cave, so our time was limited. We paired off at the entrance, one caver for each novice, except for Leslie, who drifted among the group helping out whenever needed. We fired up our carbide lamps (those of us who needed them), and slowly began our journey. Step by step instructions, literally, were given: "step up a foot, down ½ foot, duck your head here, follow the left wall with your hand and crawl for the next fifteen feet, climb over this rock," etc. The system worked well, and the new cavers quickly adapted to the rough terrain. We made surprisingly good time, stopping every so often to feel a formation (already trashed) or the texture of the wall, and listening to dripping water or the sound of large passage. Kathy used a cane in addition to her partner, and it was sometimes a help, sometimes a hindrance. Betty had decided to leave her German Shepard Seeing-Eye dog, Nyla, at home, which was probably a good idea, although there have been caving dogs in the past. We might explore that potential on another trip.

Only one or two bats were heard. Separation Lake was dry. The first part of the cave was full of about 25 other people, all of whom were on their way out as we headed in. Unfortunately, time ran out for most of our group, who were not planning to camp out, so six people turned around just before the muddy crawling starts. However, Don, Leslie, Glenda, Betty, and I kept going. In the low muddy crawlways, the knee-deep trenches formed by the passage of numerous people made it very easy for Betty and Glenda to negotiate. They loved the feel of the mud!

The bad air was noticeable as always, but tolerable, and we made it all the way to the first sump at the back of the cave, about ½ mile from the entrance. Quite a feeling of elation for everyone, though we were too tired to enjoy it for long. On the way out, the weariness began to show in a couple of amusing minor incidents.

At one point, Glenda went left over a rock instead of right, and found herself in an awkward position on her back, with her legs dangling into space. The concern in her voice struck Betty as terribly funny, and she burst into laughter while Glenda (mumbling) extricated herself. Betty's turn came, though, when after stooping down to wash her hands, she decisively announced "I'm going to stand up", followed by a loud "bonk" as she decisively crammed her hard hat into the ceiling. We left the cave without further incident, and camped above Gorman Falls.

This trip was an enjoyable experience for everyone. Six people were introduced to caving, and three of them made it to the back—all women. Caving is obviously a very tactile experience, and the feeling of the rocks, water, formations, and especially the mud, were thoroughly enjoyed. It's also a very auditory and olfactory experience, so Betty and Glenda were more acutely aware of the changes in sounds and smells as they moved through the cave than Don, Leslie, and I were. They will certainly never forget the smell of acetylene gas from the carbide lamps, the ammonia smell of bat guano, or the bad-air feeling of low oxygen/high CO2. Five cavers got a different perspective of caving, and realized that you can "see" a cave without using your eyes. We hope to have another trip soon, and perhaps squeeze in a little ropework as well.

EPILOGUE, February 4, 2012

Well, we never made it to another cave or practiced vertical work, but Betty and I are still friends. Whenever we get together we always laugh about that caving trip, which was a life event for both of us. I went in Gorman Cave many times, but because of bad air this was one of only three times I made it back to the first sump. We had other adventures, including getting kicked out of Highland Mall (A blind woman, a long-haired hippie, and a Seeing Eye dog walk into a mall…), but that's another story.

Editor—If you are a "chronologically-challenged" caver, like myself, and have been caving for 30 years or more, unlike myself, send a short bio to me, as well as an interesting story, incident, memory, anecdote, or what have you that you think may make for an enjoyable read here at "The Carbide Corner".

I'm always looking for material and this is a great way to share a favorite caving experience and embarrass your friends, with all of the new cavers that have recently joined the TSA, but, may not know you.

Deep Cave Survey Report - Jan 6-7, 2012

Submitted by: Joe Mitchell

The most recent Deep Cave Survey Trip was held on Jan 6-7, 2012. This was a two-day trip to clean up some previous survey and continue the work from the last two survey trips held in July and October of 2011.

On Friday, only 4 people were able to attend, myself, Don Arburn, Jill Orr, and Mike Harris. Except for Don who had been out there most of the week for a trip for cavers visiting from Tennessee, the rest of us arrived on Friday morning. We got out to the cave before noon and began by working on the B-survey, which is the high, and mid-level areas back to the right from the Entrance Room. There were several sketch problems, which were resolved, and a few possible leads were checked but none had any promise.

Eventually we worked our way down to the D-survey, which began small so only Jill, and I proceeded. This survey from 2005 had extremely poor closure and has not been included in the length of the cave previously. We were able to relocate 6 stations and reshoot them. Though the shots each had problems, the biggest issue was found to be an incorrect tie in point to the E-survey. Most interestingly, at the end of the D-survey, many leads were seen heading off it multiple directions, so would be an excellent location to send teams in the future. We were then planning to go and tie in a hanging survey from a previous trip, but the wrong notes were brought so, being tired from various illnesses and wanting to save energy for Saturday, we exited the cave.

As we relaxed that evening, the remainder of the survey crew gradually filtered in. Joe and Sara Ranzau along with Evelynn and Kayla Mitchell (who were staying at the Ranzau's) also came over to visit for the evening.

Saturday was the main survey day with 19 people on the property. Sue Schindel had come to relax and hang out at the cabin so did not go into the cave. After breakfast and getting organized, the teams entered the cave by 10:30 am with two teams visiting the Helictite Room area and the others going out to the west end of the cave.

Bennett Lee led a team that included Steve Gutting, and Geary Schindel. They carried out a survey of the perimeter of the Helictite Room and to more carefully check leads off of the room. Although this survey did not add much length to the cave, it did provide a

much better sketch of the room for map drafting purposes. A previously unknown passage was found heading south from the Helictite Room and is a good lead for future survey. This team also tied into a hanging survey from the previous trip to add that length to the cave. The team surveyed 11 shots for 86.13 m.

The next team consisted of Don Arburn and Gregg Williams. Mike Harris intended to join this team but was unable to do so. This team continued the survey of areas below the Helictite Room. They found it difficult to sketch. There were several going leads that were found and a passage that led deep into a room with a soft dirt floor, which is unusual for that part of the cave. The area looks like it took a great deal of water flow showing water lines about 0.75 m up the wall. The team surveyed 13 shots for 65.13 m.

My team consisted of Aspen Schindel, Jill Orr, and Tom Florer. Our goal was to head out to Gotham City in the western part of the cave and continue working the leads off this room. We traveled with Marvin and Ellie's teams to the Crystal Waterfall. Along the way we stopped at the obelisk rock to install a permanent handline in preparation for establishing a new visitor route into this section of the cave. After separating from the other teams, we reached Gotham City. The right wall leads were not promising but Aspen found that the straight ahead lead went, so we started surveying there. We went for 4 stations into a room where the route ended with poor leads. Back in Gotham City, Jill found a good lead on the west wall at the climb up to the LA survey. We surveyed this lead for 5 stations, which went into a series of rooms that corkscrewed above itself. Several of these rooms were well decorated.

Aspen then checked a lead opposite the LB survey down below Gotham City, which lead to a coral crawl but the team decided to save it for another time. (Marvin's team ended up surveying into it later from the opposite direction.) We then proceeded up to the Junction Room, and after meeting Ellie's team in Metropolis, we surveyed north from the Junction Room down a coral lined slope. This led to a winding passage that eventually came up into the northern side of Metropolis from below. Bat droppings and a flying bat were encountered in this loop, which is rather far from the entrance by known routes, so was surprising to see. Several holes lead down into a short series of rooms, which remain to be surveyed. Just before the climb back up into Metropolis, Jill discovered a steep climb down that goes into a complex maze with many leads and larger rooms and no end in sight. The team surveyed 19 shots for 74.87 m.

The next team was led by Ellie Watson and included Galen Falgout, Joe Schaertl, and Andy Edwards. Their goal was to connect the Sparing Cascade Maze to the Metropolis Room and then to survey any of the maze leads beyond that point. They made the connection successfully and ended up in the Metropolis Room. They saw dozens of leads and explored a few of them but ended up ending their survey early. A cave harvestman and cicurina were seen near the cascade waterfall area. The team surveyed 7 shots for 28.37 m.

Finally, Marvin Miller led a team with Angela Edwards, Drew Munson, and Gerry Geletzke. Their goal was to push the cave as far west as possible from the end of the 2006 C-survey that went through and past the Lunchroom. They began at the end of that survey at the "3 Dot Lead" which was the westernmost known extent of the cave. However, their survey in this direction only went down into the next room and no further leads were found there. They then backtracked to a lead at an earlier point in the C-survey and followed it down to the southwest, however it ended up tying into a location at the west end of the Lunchroom after 4 stations. From this point, they saw another lead going north and surveyed it for 8 stations to a pit. This lead down into the Moonmilk Battery Room from the 2008 AR survey, which provided the first loop closure to that survey. After this, they continued for 4 more stations until they came into the bottom of Gotham City and tied onto the survey there. Along the way they passed multiple going leads to the northeast and east and one digging lead to the west. The team surveyed 20 shots for 53.45 m, connecting many previously unconnected surveys and showing that the loop closure in the western portion of the cave was good.

Marvin's team was the last out of the cave, arriving back at the cabin by 9:30 pm, although Bennett stayed a bit later to do some photography in the Forest of Columns. Dinner was the usual pot-luck affair with lots of food and drinks all around.

Though this trip ended up mainly being about connections rather than new directions, each team found new and promising leads on top of the many others that still await exploration. This cave still has a lot remaining to be explored and surveyed. After this trip, the new length of Deep Cave is 3378.0 m, barely surpassing Caverns of Sonora to move up from the 16th to the 14th longest cave in Texas. The depth remains unchanged at 77.6 m.

The next survey trip is planned for the beginning of March.

Colorado Bend State Park Project Report

Project date: 13–15 January 2012
Reported by: Jim Kennedy
Person-hours: 302 hours (200 work, 102 travel)
Personnel: (21 folks) Yazmin Avila, Emily Booth, Jerome Cap , Andy Edwards, Ryan Fabich, Galen Falgout, Mark Gee, Lee Jay Graves, Devra Heyer, Terry Holsinger, Jim Kennedy, Maya Liu, Karen Masters, Ryan Monjaras, Kris Peña, William Quast, Scott Serur, Bryce Smith, Keenan Smith, Matt Turner, Liang Wu (Mark Alman, +10 Boy Scouts and their leaders).
Photos by: William Quast from his UTG meeting presentation.

The beautiful weekend weather combined a good turnout for another successful Project weekend. We continued working on small caves needing survey, cleaning up the data set to weed out duplicate and non-karst points, and answering other questions about the less-well-documented karst of Colorado Bend State Park.

Team 1: Lee Jay Graves, Karen Masters, Kris Peña, William Quast

Will and Kris took a break from Dog and Butterfly Cave (SAB197) this month since sketcher Heather Túček was home sick. So Lee Jay and Karen eagerly recruited the couple to help them finish up the profile and cross section of Centennial Cave (SAB239). After a brief delay caused by a return to camp for a forgotten headlamp, they finally rigged the cave's entrance and began their work. They investigated the few leads at the bottom of the cave, and began digging at the most promising, the natural bridge and the crawlway behind the flowstone. They also photo-documented this rather pretty cave. About 6 tri-colored bats (Perimyotis subflavus) were seen in the main room of the cave. Upon exiting, Will discovered that the narrowest part of the entrance drop was free-climbable.

Before heading back to camp, the group helped to ground-truth the correct location for MM Hole (SAB191). Jim had 2 different waypoints for the cave in his data set, but the northernmost was discovered to be off the Park, and the southern was correct. A large rock was pulled out of the bottom of the cave, and Will lowered Kris headfirst to look at the potential for continuation. Only another meter of very tight passage was


Bottom of lower pit of Centennial Cave.


Main chamber of Centennial Cave


~2m flowstone in Centennial Cave


Kris in flowstone area of Centennial Cave.

seen, making this a karst feature, not a cave.
Team one's hours: 24.0

Team 2: Yazmin Avila, Emily Booth, Ryan Fabich, Galen Falgout, Maya Liu, Jim Kennedy, Matt Turner

Jim continued his quest to clean up questionable locations in the Park, and teaching new cavers survey techniques, especially sketching. They headed out towards Glory Hole (SAB220) and the Bill Larson Caves. Matt found the first new karst feature, named Sounds Hollow karst feature (SAB816). It was a nice looking entrance that plugged too quickly with sediment, but could probably be dug open. They then moved on to one of the two locations Jim had for Bill Larson Cave #2 (SAB594). Yaz and Galen got separated from the group on the way there, and by the time they were finally found and reunited, Galen noticed that Lee Jay's Stenlight, which was on his helmet outside his pack, got knocked off and lost somewhere on the ridge. Yaz and Galen went back to look for it, to no avail. Meanwhile, Jim located a nice lead in the creekbed which was where Bill Larson Cave #2 was supposed to be. It was obvious, however, that the cave was never large enough for humans before we got there. Jim and Matt soon had it opened to reveal a nice-looking fissure below stream level. Maya entered, and Ryan sketched, and it was re-named Honeybee Cave. A temporary aluminum tag was finally found with "594" written on it, but we have no idea who put that there, or when. The new virgin cave mapped out to 5.89m long, all depth.

Jim and Galen and set out again to look for the lost headlamp and for Yaz, who got separated again from Galen and lost a second time. Over an hour was spent with no success, but Jim found Yaz as Galen returned to the rest of the group. On his way back to the team, Yaz wandered off again, getting lost for a third time. Jim decided to check out another questionable point on the way back to the group, labeled only as "Fat Bob." It turned out to be a nice-looking cave with two entrances. He went to collect the rest of the group to survey this cave, and they finally were able to make voice contact again with Yaz, and holler her in to rejoin the rest.

Fat Bob Cave (SAB557) turned out to have 22 meters of passage and was about 8m deep. It has some nice speleothems, at least 3 or 4 hibernating tri-colored bats, and is used as a porcupine den at least part of the year. It also has ticks. It was a great practice survey cave, so Yaz and Emily both sketched while Jim coached and Matt and Galen set stations and got attacked by bugs. The sun was starting to set and the temperatures were dropping, so the team headed back to the truck parked along the Park road. But, as usual, several more new karst features were discovered, within sight of a Park trail. They were named Offtrail karst features (SAB818), and a little digging was attempted. But the lateness of the day and general low spirits (from the lost light) cut the efforts short. However, they did relocate and get improved coordinates on two long-misplaced caves, Polish Pit (SAB233) and Crystal Crevice (SAB029) and collected coordinates for Puny Pond Pit (SAB308), which we apparently never had before. All three caves were near roads, and all were visited in about 30 minutes.
Team two's hours: 52.5

Team 3: Sandi Calhoun, Devra Heyer, Terry Holsinger, Sean Lewis, Liang Wu

The group left in Terry's truck and parked at the old Caver Camp. Following the recently-corrected coordinates, they easily found the entrance to Scorpion Pit (SAB289), a slim, triangular opening. Photos were taken as Sandi entered the cave with survey gear. One very narrow spot, measured at 22cm, excluded some of the group, and gave the others trouble getting through with their vertical gear. Sean and Sandi ended up mapping the cave, getting 44.27m in 8 shots. The lowest level drain has a good going lead, and a brick hammer left in the cave from the first exploration 20 years ago. Two tri-colored bats were noted, as well as an unidentified frog, cave crickets, and lots of bones. Afterwards, the group looked at nearby karst features that might possibly turn into caves with some digging and hammer work. Finally, they stopped by Puberty Pit (SAB244) on the way back to camp.
Team three's hours: 35.0

Team 4: Jerome Cap, Andy Edwards, Scott Serur

Scott led the latecomers back to his latest obsession, Deep Dream Cave (SAB769) to try again to gain entrance. They spent 4 hours breaking rocks and finally were able to enter. About midway through this process they were joined by members of Team 5 who were working nearby. They set a bolt, rigged the pit, and sent Andy in first to check it out. It went down 6m to a 2.5m x 4m room, leading to a second drop perpendicular to the first. This went down another 8m to a natural bridge and a climbdown to a steeply sloping fissure for another 9m. Airflow was noted at the cobble-filled drain. Another 4m could be seen, at which point the passage appeared to enlarge and make another left-hand turn. Digging is necessary to continue. Scott and Andy, joined by Bryce (from Team 5) surveyed out of the cave, noting that it is about 17.5m deep so far.
Team four's hours: 22.5

Team 5: Mark Gee, Ryan Monjaras, Bryce Smith, Keenan Smith

Mark's goal was to head back to Blood and Guts Cave (SAB768) and map it. Upon arrival, they removed a rock from the entrance with the aid of a big rock bar. The three skinny guys entered while Mark began the survey. The cave unfortunately only dropped 4m to a 4m long fissure plugged by breakdown at each end. It ended up being 8.54m long in three survey shots. Afterwards the dejected foursome joined Team 4 for their more interesting cave.

Team five's hours: 28.0

Team 6: Yazmin Avila, Emily Booth, Galen Falgout, Maya Liu, Jim Kennedy, Ryan Monjaras

On Sunday morning Jim led a group to Gorman Cave (SAB054) to admire the new bat gate. It is holding up quite well, and all were suitably impressed. Matt, Emily, and Maya then left, while the others climbed the bluff to clarify another set of bad points. We had two sets of coordinates for Pat Geary Pit (SAB 231). It turned out that one set was fairly accurate, and the cave is less than 2m from one of the new hiking trails. This cave still needs to be mapped.

Team six's hours: 10.5

Team 7: Kris Peña, William Quast, Scott Serur, Bryce Smith, Keenan Smith

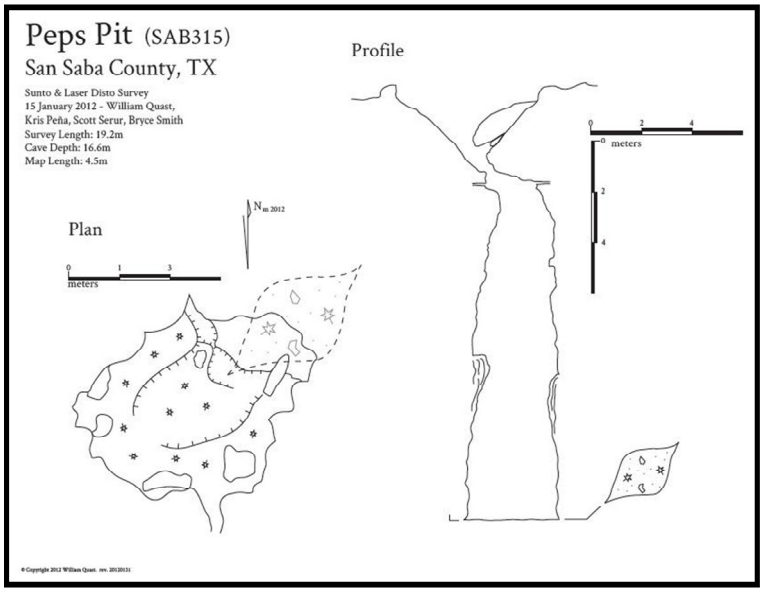
Taking advantage of the beautiful Sunday morning, this group headed back out to Lively Pasture to have a go at Peps Pit (SAB315). Rattlesnakes had been reported from almost every previous visit. Despite that threat, the pit was rigged and William descended, finding bad air at the bottom. The "snakes" turned out to be an old set of bedsprings dumped in the cave, that "rattled" when hit by rocks tossed in to see if snakes were present! He stayed in long enough to make a survey, finding the cave to be only 14.7m deep, with no good leads. After Will emerged, Kris, then Bryce entered to check it out. Will is already at work on drafting the map, his first.

Afterwards, the group wandered around Lively pasture, stopping at Coon Scat Cave (SAB273), Hard Wedge Cave (SAB272), Spider Web Cave (SAB314), Good n' Tight Cave (SAB283), Dog and Butterfly Cave (SAB197), Arizona Cave (SAB282), Flying Log Sink (SAB740) and numerous other karst features, some of which may even be new. As usual, there is a lot more to do out there.

Team seven's hours: 27.5

Team Boy Scouts, led by Mark Alman:

Cleared native cedar near main campground and visited Dynamite and Turtle Shell caves.




Surface sink of Peps Pit


Will lowering into Peps Pit


16.6m to bottom of Peps Pit

TAG Trip November 2011

by Natasha Glasgow and Bill Steele
Photos by Bill Steele.



Campsite on Tater Knob

The plan became for Ellie Watson and Mallory Mayeux to drive up to Irving from San Antonio and Houston respectively on Friday, Nov. 18th, Steve Webb would arrive early the next morning, and we four would leave then and drive straight through to Scottsboro, Alabama, and meet there with Jim Smith of Atlanta at the caver campground on Tater Knob on the mountain behind Scottsboro. Jim had offered to take the week off work and be our guide.

On Friday night Natasha Glasgow brought her caving gear to our house for us to pack it and take it with us. She would join us late Tuesday night in Scottsboro after flying from Dallas to Little Rock and riding with Deitra Roberts, from Arkansas, and her boyfriend Brent Biely, from Oklahoma.

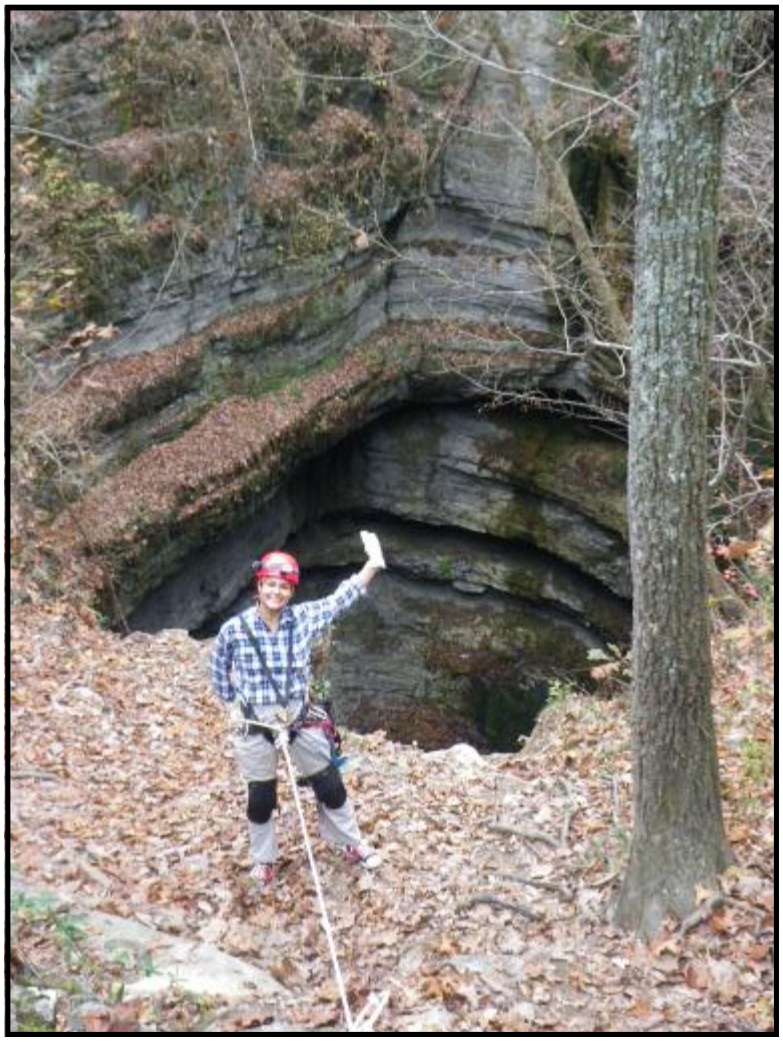
Steve, Ellie, Mallory and I got our early Saturday morning start and headed east from Dallas on I-30. In Little Rock we picked up I-40, and in Nashville I-24. Up on Tater Knob above Scottsboro Jim Smith awaited us with

PART 1 by Bill Steele

Last September Diana Tomchick and I decided to go on a caving expedition to China for three weeks over the Christmas holidays. To whip our fannies into shape, we decided to go caving in TAG over Thanksgiving. I could shake loose for the whole week, which including the two weekends, was for nine days. Diana, on the other hand, doesn't get as much vacation time as I do (31 years with the same employer as opposed to 12), so she decided to fly to Nashville on Wednesday night and spend the last three days in TAG. I was going to be able to go caving for seven days.

TAG stands for Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia. The acronym was coined by cavers in the 60s and adopted from a railroad line by that name. The late Richard Schreiber of Tennessee and Georgia, who I first met through caving in the late 60s, and was one of the founders of the project to explore, map, and study the super-deep caves of the Huautla, Oaxaca area (I wrote a book about it: Huautla: Thirty Years in One of the World's Deepest Caves), is given credit for the name.

My estimate is that I have taken around 70 caving trips to TAG – 35 of them from 1968 to 1976 when I lived in Indiana, and around the same number since I moved to Texas in 1976. I average one business trip to one of those three states per year, and usually arrange with my good friend Jim Smith, of Atlanta, another Huautla veteran, to go caving over a weekend while I'm there.



Ellie rappels first into Neversink



cold beer and a campfire. We were here for a week with caving planned for every day.

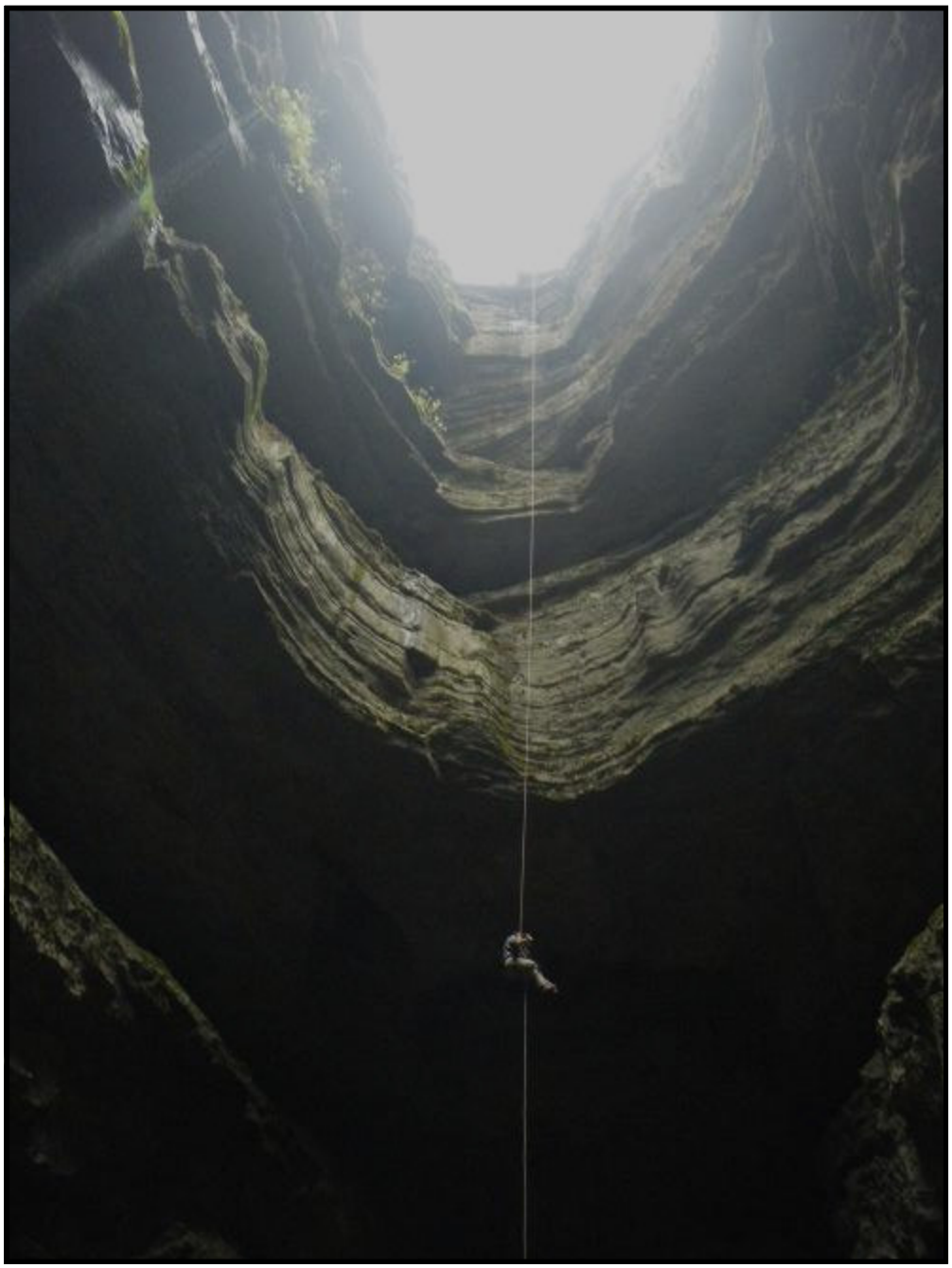
On Sunday morning our first cave was Neversink, now owned by the Southeastern Cave Conservancy (www.scci.org). I've done Neversink many times, even went to a wedding at the bottom one time back in the early 70s, but I had not been there since the SCCI raised the money and bought it so that it remains open for cavers. We had done the necessary paperwork with SCCI to do some of the caves they own or manage.

Neversink is 164 feet deep and the rope hangs freer from the break-over across a tree root to the floor. Ellie went first, followed by Mallory, Steve, and me. We all marveled at how beautiful it is. Photos of it have appeared many places. After climbing out we got in the two Toyota Tundras and drove to where you park for Stephen's Gap, another SCCI owned cave.

Stephen's Gap has two entrances and can be done as a cross-over cave, meaning going in one entrance and out the other. This time we rigged the 147 foot drop, the longest one, and the rope went down the wall very close to a fairly large waterfall. I went first. I didn't get wet, which sort of surprised me, because from the top, looking down, it looked like the waterfall and the rope came together near the bottom. I had taken down a radio and reported to the top that everyone should come down and they would not get very wet. Mallory and I checked out the passage at the bottom until we came to another drop.

Jim Smith had an itinerary planned for us and we were thankful and went along with it without question. The cave for Monday was 227 foot deep Valhalla, one of the most beautiful and popular pits in the USA. I have done it many times, perhaps as many as six times, maybe more, but I had not done it in the 26 years since a rock the size of a Greyhound bus broke off the wall and landed and crushed to death two very unlucky cavers who happened to be waiting at the bottom for someone climbing the rope. The person climbing the rope heard and saw the massive chuck of rock fall off the wall, followed by terrible silence from his two friends below. There is a brass plaque attached to a boulder at the top, in memory of the cavers who were killed there.

Steve Webb went down Valhalla first. At the bottom, Steve, Mallory, Ellie and I walked across the





Mallory stands with the old bucket used to lower and raise people in Mystery Falls



Steve Webb in Blue Springs Cave.

bottom of the pit and traversed a lot of the more than a mile of cave that's there. We had the map with us done in 1971, and our opinion is that the map is not up to today's standards and needs to be redone. This may end up being a DFW Grotto project to spend a week camping at the nice campground at the base of the mountain and map Valhalla. Maybe we'll do that over Thanksgiving this year. We all climbed out of Valhalla and called it a day, and ate at a Mexican restaurant near Scottsboro.

Back at Tater Knob, which is a secure place to camp, with a locked gate that cavers can unlock and gain access to the road leading the top, we had our usual campfire and drank beer and whiskey. Now with three pits under our belts, and Mexican food, beer, and whiskey in our bellies, I popped off and said that I wished we could do Mystery Falls. Thought this 285 foot pit with a large waterfall is one of my all-time favorites, and I hadn't done it in 36 or more years, my recollection was that it was scary and intimidating. What I recalled as intimidating was that there is a dam at the top of the pit with a hole in the base of it and a plug for that hole to back up the water in a stream and you have just so long to climb the pit before water crashes down on your head.

Jim Smith took note of me saying that we ought to do Mystery Falls and was immediately on the phone to our main contact with the SCCI, who leases the cave, and arranged for him to meet us there in the morning and unlock the road gate and the cave gate for us. All worked out well and in the morning was got going early and soon we were up on Lookout Mountain looking down at Chattanooga. Since the last time I had been to Mystery Falls a nice gate had been installed, and the hole in the dam now has large sections of PVC pipe that extend beyond the edge of the pit to cause the water to shoot out away from a climbing caver. I was both a little



YSTERY FALLS AND CAVE

Nearby is an underground wa- which plunges down a drop t as deep as a football field is Once called Evylin Falls, it is nly known as Mystery Falls e of the uncertainty about the of the water that pours across It was discovered Novem- 1885, by William Walker no Jr. when he was on a boat Tennessee River and spotted a of water coming out of an the mountain. Anderson, owner Robert company that of the falls. Later, ing the first spotted was and a new passageway to the was blasted under Old Pike. Then a small dam in the cave near the top of and water was pumped out. City Water Company began water from Mystery Falls after citizens of St. Elmo agreed to become customers. service to this Chattanooga continued until 1911, when was incorporated into the ers. The pipe to St. Elmo some of the water company are still in place just below ad toward the river.

A corporation was formed in 1947 to develop Mystery Falls as a tourist attraction. Although the cave was never opened for public visitation, spelunkers continued to visit the underground wonder by descending 286 feet on ropes. At the bottom of the descent is a gigantic room with a 321 foot ceiling. A passageway extends from this room about 300 feet, and the portion of the cave at the top of the waterfall has over 2,000 feet of passageways. In 1992 the cave opening was permanently sealed to prevent accidents.

Garnet Carter, right, at cave opening

View looking directly up to the top of the dome of Mystery Fa

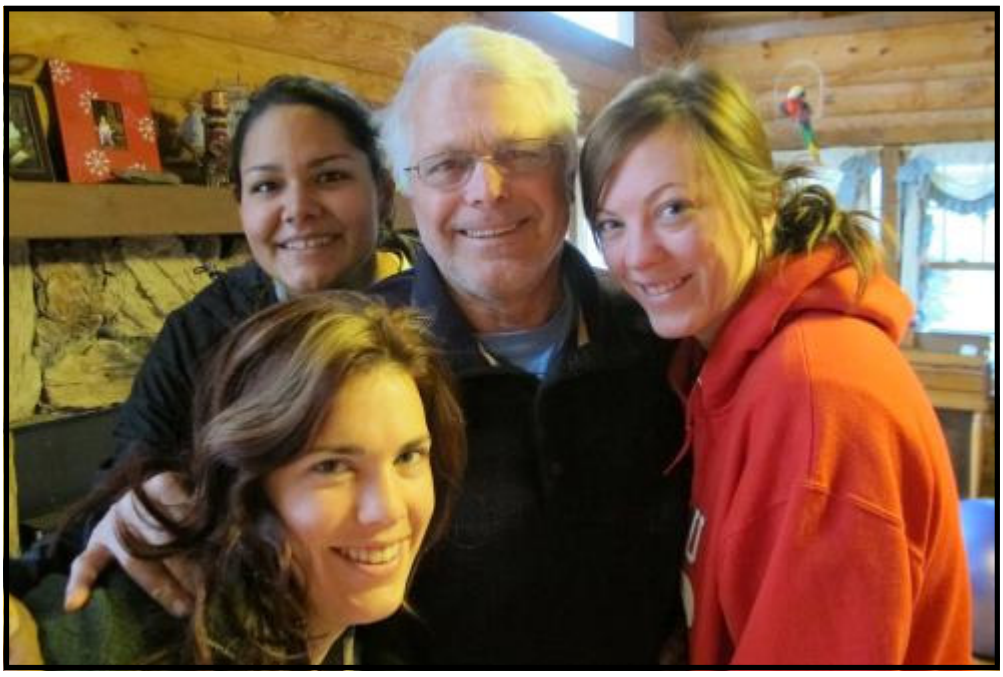
Display on surface at Mystery Falls shows the old bucket.



Photo on Marion Smith's fireplace mantle has Bill Steele in it from May 1969. This group was about to enter Ellison's Cave, George on the original descent of 440 foot deep Incredible Pit.

saddened by this modification and relieved.

Mallory went down Mystery Falls first. At the bottom we radioed up for the water to be released and it utterly amazed the others how much roar, wind, and storm the water caused. Mallory and Ellie danced around yelling which I video recorded. All went smoothly without incident and we were soon back at Tater Knob and looking forward to the arrival of Deitra, Brent, and Natasha sometime in the night.



Bill Steele and Steele's Angels

I was sleeping in the back of the truck and thought I would hear Deitra arrive, or them talking, or setting up their tents. I didn't, but in the morning they were there, having arrived in the wee hours of the morning.

Part II by Natasha Glasgow

When I think back to the days just before I left for TAG, I remember feeling very excited and very prepared. Ha! I was wrong. Well, not on the excited part; that definitely paid off. But in regard to the prepared part, well, I'm not sure that a Texas girl will ever really be prepared to camp in 30 degree weather for 5 days. But I did. And



Out for Mexican food after a long trip in Cumberland Caverns. TAG legends Jim Smith on the left and Bill Walter on the right.

I survived. And I can't think of anything that would have been more worthwhile.

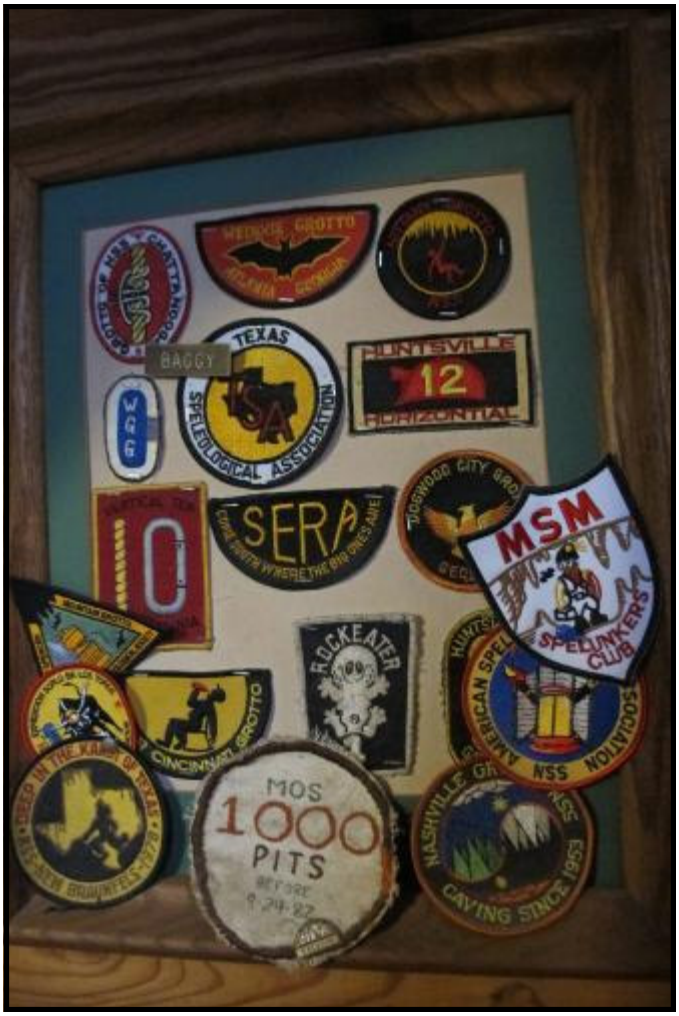
So, my trip report begins with every caver's biggest problem (well, every caver that I know, anyway): "What do you mean, I can't have the entire week off to go caving?!?!?!" And, unfortunately, my best "sad face" and heaviest sigh as I trudged out of my boss's office didn't change his mind, so I wasn't able to leave on Saturday morning with the rest of the crew. Instead I drove over to Bill and Diana's house on Friday night to drop off my camping gear and toasted to a successful trip with a few shots of Maker's Mark. I painfully endured two days at the office and, at 4:30pm on Tuesday, November 22, I was headed for the airport…..finally. I flew Southwest Airlines Flight 3921 from Dallas, Love Field to Little Rock National Airport. I arrived in Arkansas just before 8pm and, having spent the entire flight praying that my luggage wouldn't be lost, I was quite pleased to see that it was among the first out at baggage claim.

After about half an hour later, I was picked up by Arkansas cavers, Deitra Roberts and Brent Biely, also known as the happiest couple on the planet. Having never actually met before, we spent the first couple of hours getting to know each other and exchanging a few caving stories. By the time we hit Tennessee, we has resorted to the companionship of our iPods. It was late, we were all tired and we still had a long way to go. I made it to Memphis, down into Mississippi and caught the first few minutes of Alabama before falling asleep.

I woke up just as we were coming into Scottsboro, AL. We arrived at Caver Camp on top of Tater Knob Mountain just after 3am. I grabbed my bags from the car and said goodnight to Deitra and Brent as they began to set their tent up in the near freezing, misty Alabama weather. Being the clever girl that I am, I had made arrangements with Mallory Mayeux from the Greater Houston Grotto to share a tent, so mine was already set up. I climbed inside, unrolled my sleeping bag and shivered myself into some-



Brent Biely and Deitra Roberts cooking on the trunk of their car at Marion Smith's



Patch display on wall in Marion Smith's home



Diana Tomchick fully kitted up for Ferris Pit

thing resembling warmth and fell asleep. Speleo-Death-Camp had begun.

Three hours and not enough degrees later, the camp was awakened by the cheerful wake-up calls of our fearless leaders, Bill Steele and TAG native, Jim Smith. They kept insisting that everyone put on their socks and remove their hands from …..something. I can't remember. Our pillows, I think. So, after applying several layers of socks (I wanted to be sure not to disappoint) Mallory and I, along with the rest of our camp, Steven Webb, Ellie Watson and Deitra & Brent reluctantly crawled from out tents and began to pack up camp. In under an hour, we were loaded up and on the road, headed back to Tennessee; destination Marion County.

Before any pits could be bopped, we all agreed that breakfast was in order. In what was apparently becoming a tradition on this particular road-trip, the crew decided on Cracker Barrel. Countless biscuits and eggs and pancakes later, we'd all had our fill of warm, delicious food, electricity



Mallory Mayeux rappels into Ferris Pit



Steve Webb rappels into 285 foot deep Mystery Falls

and running water, so we paid our bills and hit the road. We all caravanned behind Jim Smith and made our way to Cagle's Chasm, our first stop of the day, and my very first TAG pit.

Cagle's Chasm is a complex made up of 3 pits. The deepest single drop being 186 feet, the second, a 75 foot drop connected to a 125 foot drop by apx 15 feet of narrow passage and the third, a 90 foot free fall. All three pits were rigged and we all began descending. Mallory, Jim and I started out with the 90 foot pit. At the bottom, we found and photographed salamanders and explored until we hit a drop that was not free climbable. We would later discover that this drop was the connection to the chamber at the bottom of the 186 foot drop. After about 20 minutes below, we took turns ascending; Mallory first, followed by me and finally Jim.

Next, Mallory and I moved on to the 186-er. This pit was much more open and I was able to see everything around me on this descent. It was one of the most amazing and intimidating experiences of my life. I had rappelled into the darkness before, but being able to see your destination somehow makes you that much more appreciative of the strength of the rope and the snug fit of your harness and the dependability of your steel rack. To this day, I can close my eyes and remember every second of that rappel.

Finally at the bottom, I took a seat and let my heart rate return to normal while I watched Mallory come down. The next half hour consisted of some very muddy exploration, a few pretend cave monster sightings and pictures of said sightings that will never make it to Facebook. Mallory and I decided that we would climb the third pit out. This was a bit of a tricky climb; a 75 foot climb up a very chilly waterfall, a 15 foot changeover through narrow passage and a 125 foot free climb through beautifully decorated passage. On our way up, we de-rigged and pulled the ropes up with us. Deitra, Mallory and I got a quick rope coiling lesson from Jim before we joined the others, packed our gear and headed back to our vehicles.

Lunch consisted of beef jerky, Girl Scout cookies, chips and whatever other treasures we were able to find at the Dollar Store, eaten in the truck on the way to The Sinkhole, another eastern Tennessee gem. When we arrived and parked along the secluded gravel road, it was near dark. By the time we had made our way up the mountain side and located the cave, there was no light left in the sky. With the joint efforts of our lights, we rigged tandem ropes and rappelled two at a time into the 190 foot pit, alongside a beautiful roaring waterfall. After taking a few minutes to explore the cave below and deciding that the absence of our knee pads was a problem, we made our way out, two by two. Bill took off on his own while we de-rigged to pick up Diana



Bill Steele begins his rappel into Mystery Falls



Isn't this sweet? Deitra and Brent kiss as they begin their duel rappels into Ferris Pit

Tomchick from the airport in Nashville. Apparently, the sad eyes didn't work with her boss either. Once the vehicles were loaded, we wandered aimlessly into the night in search of a suitable place to eat a hot meal. And wouldn't you know, the warm glow of The Cracker Barrel sign alongside the highway was just too much for us to resist. Our exhaustion was comforted by the delicious food and the adorable accent of tiny waitress, Amy. As a matter of fact, I am pretty sure that Steven Webb still owes me $20 for making her say "cheddar" (pronounced: ched-ah) one more time.

For the next two hours, Mallory and I napped in the back seat of Jim's truck while Steven helped to navigate us to Caver Camp, just outside of Blue Springs Cave in Sparta, Tennessee. Along the way, Mal and I were jolted awake several times by bursts of icy air coming in from the windows that had to be suddenly opened to allow the methane gas to escape. We still haven't figured out where that mysterious gas was coming from. Once we reached camp, we attempted to build a campfire while we waited for Bill and Diana to return from Nashville with our camping gear. But with temperatures already into the 30s and the fog so thick that you could barely see 5 feet in front of you, our efforts were fruitless. Our tents finally arrived and we, once again, shivered ourselves to sleep while visions of stalactites danced in our heads.

The next morning started out with the usual, "On with socks, hands off……" Hmm. Pockets? Maybe that was it. It was the coldest morning yet; in the high 20s when we woke and everything was white with frost. But it was Thanksgiving Day and we were thankful to be headed to Blue Springs Cave for the day. As we ate breakfast and reluctantly put our soggy caving clothes on, we were joined by Marion Smith and Philip Rykwalder, our guides for the day. Everyone loaded up for the short drive from camp to the entrance of the cave. Marion and Philip opened the gate and we took turns shedding our hats, scarves and heavy coats and filing into the cave. I think we were all a little surprised to see that the first few hundred feet of Blue Springs Cave was beautifully and carefully manicured with stone-lined foot paths winding around the cave leading us to our designated meeting spot; the Corkscrew entrance. In the middle of the medium sized room was a ladder leading up to the tight, windy entrance that was used up until about a decade ago. After everyone had signed in we made our way into a beautifully decorated room, complete with a waterfall and suspension bridge. The bridge led us to a small climb down into a huge breakdown room. We wove our way in and out of the breakdown, climbing what we couldn't find ways around, until we reached the far side of the enormous room; this was the beginning of the BO crawl. One by one, we all



We found a lighted parking lot in which to completely unpack and then repack the truck for an all night drive to Dallas with six people. A person slept in the back the whole way.

disappeared into a tiny hold in the floor. The BO crawl is over 1000 feet of tight passage. Some places nice and smooth and we were able to drag our packs behind us, some were rocks and jagged and much more difficult to maneuver and in other places the floor disappeared completely and we able to cross by tucking ourselves into a small cubby above us to pass the hole. Once through the BO crawl, the cave continues with nice boarhole passage that was easily navigated and filled with beautiful gypsum formations. Easily navigated, with the exception of the ½ mile trek over sand that made my calves hurt so badly that I forgot about my aching shoulders. We stopped for a lunch break just beyond the 2nd spring crossing and a few of us left our packs and pads there because we were told that they weren't necessary for the rest of the hike back to the 3rd crossing. The rest of our trek to the 3rd crossing was very pleasant. Mostly walking passage with a few spots that required stoop-walking . The spring was beautiful and we all paused a few minutes to take it all in while Marion and Philip pointed out places where the cave continues in different directions and told stories of how they were discovered.

After a few minutes, we turned around and began our journey back to the entrance; over the 2nd spring crossing, across the sand that reminded us how much we missed solid ground and finally back to the beginning (or end, depending on how you look at it) of the BO crawl. I'm not sure why it's called the BO crawl, but enduring it at the end of a long day of caving with a group of people that hadn't seen a shower in a few days, well, it had its own meaning that day. With the BO crawl behind us, we made our way back through the breakdown, all taking different routes, up the short climb, over the suspension bridge and back to the corkscrew entrance. Here, we re-grouped and said our goodbyes to Marion and Philip who were leaving us for pie and undercooked turkey.

We exited the cave around 7pm and made our way back to camp, changed clothes and began to prepare our Thanksgiving feast. Deitra made white chicken chili. Jim made a hearty stew. I warmed rolls in foil over the fire; there was squeezie butter, of course. Diana sliced fresh homemade bread. After dinner we enjoyed Brent's homemade wine (which Bill still talks about)



Ellie is the first to ride in the back for the all night drive back to Texas



and Deitra's homemade pies. Our attempts at fire were much more successful that night thanks to the dry (or drier, I should say) wood that Diana and Bill had brought with them from Memphis. That was a great night. The fire was warm, the food was delicious and the camaraderie was strong. That was also the night that Mallory and I discovered that rocking your own sleeping bag was a fantastic idea…..as long as you let the rock sit in the fire for a few hours before. I fell asleep toasty warm that night.

The next morning we awoke to our usual chant: "On with socks, hands off…….hot rocks?" Maybe that was it. Although our rocks were far from hot the next morning, they were not, however, covered in frost like everything else outside our tents. We all grabbed what we could to eat and packed up camp as quickly as we could, all looking forward to the heated vehicles for our drive to Cumberland Caverns in McMinnville, TN.

An hour later, the sun was shining and the temperature was well on its way to 60-something as we arrived at Cumberland Caverns. We were meeting Bill Walter, our guide for the day, and Rusty Jones, a friend of Marion Smith who would be joining us for the tour. From what I understood, not many people have been to the far reaches of Cumberland and I would soon see why. We began in the commercial part of the cave, getting a little history and seeing the giant chandelier in the ballroom and continued on past the commercial paths to the much less traveled paths that led to the most beautiful rooms that I had ever seen. The floor was slippery clay that made me a little nervous at times, but looking back it was good fun. When we came to a 50 (ish) foot slide, Bill poured what was left of the water in his Nalgene down the slope to make it even more slick. We each took turn sliding down and posing for pictures. The wonders of Cumberland included the Crystal Palace, a long, narrow arching passage that was adorned with Gypsum flowers, snow and "toasted marshmallow". A small room off the Crystal Palace was named The Sewing Room because it was filled with thousands of Gypsum needles, some close to a foot in length. The Keyhole crawl was a narrow climb in which we went one at a time and passed our packs ahead of us as we went. The Rock of Ages was a gigantic boulder positioned upright in the center of a 5+ acre room of breakdown. Standing there, looking out over all those acres of jagged rock was truly a humbling, yet breath-taking experience. On our way back to the entrance, we passed the "missing lynx", a pile of lynx bones discovered several years ago. Several hours after we began, we were back at the entrance, just a few minutes before closing time. The last treasure that Cumberland Cavern had to offer was the public restrooms, complete with showers and a seemingly endless supply of hot water. We all showered and put on clean clothes. It was divine. All cleaned up and rejuvenated; we headed to a local Mexican Restaurant for a hot dinner and cold margarita. The food was delicious, the drinks were strong and the conversation was good. After tabs were paid and goodbyes were said to Bill Walter, we made our

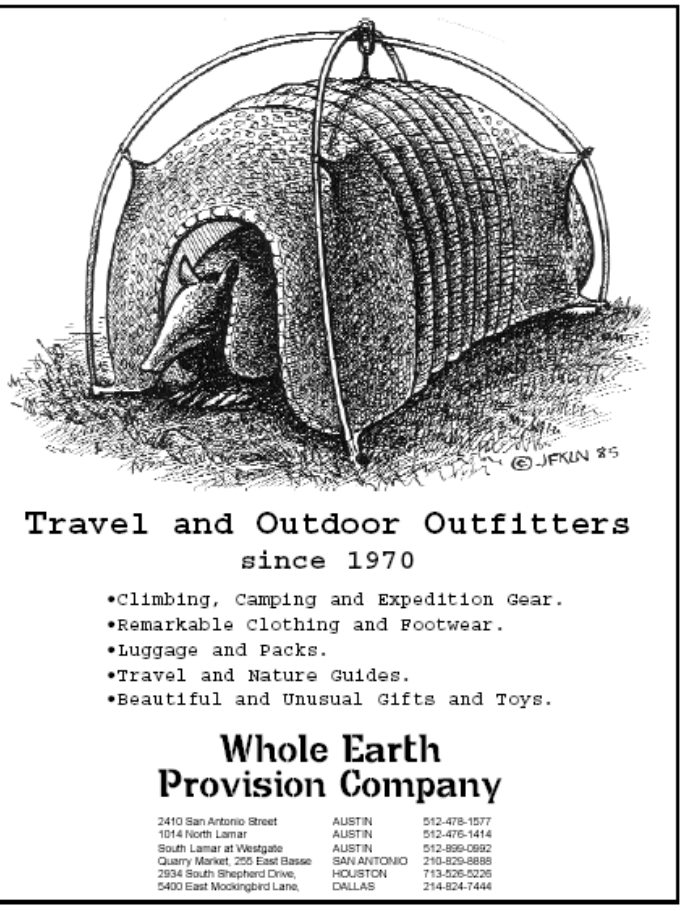
way to Marion Smith and Sharon Jones' house to camp for our last night in TAG.

Marion and Sharon (Rusty's mom) offered our group a place to camp for the night. We sat inside around the fire and listened to caving stories from the legends among us. One by one, our group disappeared to their tents, campers or the shop that Marion had offered for sleeping that night, until Mallory and I were the only ones left. It was dark, late and cold so Philip offered Mallory and me a warm place to sleep in the loft with the other cavers in town from Indiana for the weekend. It was almost too hard to believe….a hot shower and a warm bed for the night…..we were in heaven. Half way through the night, I had to take my sweatshirt off because I was too warm. Wow. Best night of sleep I've ever had.

The next day was Saturday. We would be leaving for Texas that night. This would be our last TAG adventure of the trip. It had been a couple of days since any of us had been on rope; we were all looking forward to our last pit. Ferris Pit was about a half hour drive from Marion and Sharon's house and Rusty joined us as well. It is located in the back acreage of the home of the Pharris family. When we arrived, we weren't sure of the house, so we pulled into a church parking lot. A friendly neighbor, a teenaged boy named Brandon, walked over and knew exactly what we were looking for. He directed us to the correct house for parking and led us back to the pit. In fact, he sat with us all afternoon and, although he politely declined a turn at the pit, seemed very interested in watching us rappel in and climb out, soaking wet. We rigged the pit with tandem ropes, as we did at The Sinkhole. Rusty and I were the first two in. Just past the lip of the pit, we rappelled down 251 feet with a waterfall. At the bottom, soaking wet, Rusty and I were instructed to wait a few minutes while the rope pads were reset, so we took a few minutes to explore the bottom of the cave. We saw salamanders and a few baby snakes and a register canister that turned out to be empty. We climbed back up quickly because we were climbing up the waterfall and it was chilly. Once at the top, we changed into dry clothes and had fun watching rocks roll downhill into open packs while we waited for everyone to take a turn. Deitra, the brave soul that she is, took two because there were an uneven number of people. She went once with Ellie, her bestie, and a second time with Brent, her sweetie. Bill and Diana paired up as did Mallory and Steven. When the last two emerged, we de-rigged the pit, said goodbye to Brandon, the local kid, and Rusty, our new friend, and began a quest to find Tennessee BBQ. With the help of Google, Steven found a local BBQ place a few miles off the Interstate and we sat down for our last meal in Tennessee.

After everyone was full, we said goodbye to Jim Smith, who had been with us since the day we arrived and moved the truck to the Food Lion parking lot to try and figure out how to get 6 people and gear into a 5-person truck. With the help of packing master, Ellie, we were able to get everything on top and in the back of the camper and managed to leave just enough room for a person to lay in the back with the gear. Ellie took the first turn in the camper. Bill, Diana and Steven all took turns driving home while the rest of us listened to music and attempted to sleep. We weathered a storm or two, but eventually made it back to Dallas in one piece, collectively. The crew dropped me off at my office where my truck was waiting and I said a quick and sleepy goodbye and headed home to crawl into my own bed for some much needed horizontal sleep. Speleo Death Camp was over.

I look back at my five days in TAG with only the fondest of memories. The weather was uncooperative at times, but the caving was exceptional. I made new friends and had the honor of caving with people whom I've read about in books. It was definitely a trip that I will never forget and cannot wait to go back!





2012 TSA Spring Convention
March 30-April 1st, 2012
Boerne, TX



The Texas Speleological Association's annual Spring Convention is right around the corner!

This is an annual, technical meeting with presentations from cavers about cave sciences, exploration, project status and displays in the Map/ Photo Salon.

Presentations will be on Saturday, March 31st and Mallory Mayeux (mmayeu4@gmail.com) and Roger Moore (caverarch@aol.com) are already lining up a slew of interesting speakers so it should be another great year. Please contact Mallory and Roger with all your great presentation ideas. Don Arburn(donarburn@mac.com) will facilitate the Photo Salon and Marvin Miller (mlmiller@gvtc.com) will facilitate the Map Salon.

Registration
$15.00 Individual Rate per person
$10.00 Child Rate per child 12-16 years old
$40.00 Family Rate (parents & children)
Children 12 and under $free

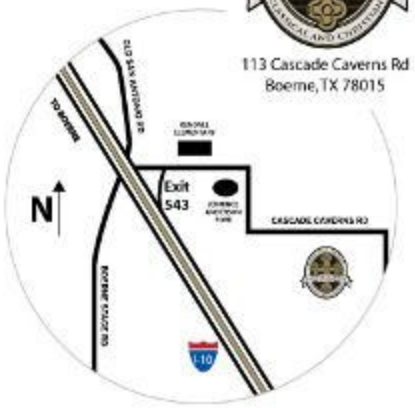
Camping
$5.00 Camping per person/per night camping (children under 16 camp free)

No attack dogs permitted on campground and all pets must remain on leash



Facility for Saturday Meeting:

Geneva School of Boerne
(113 Cascade Caverns Rd, Fair Oaks Ranch, TX 78015)
Campground for Friday-Sunday: Cascade Caverns (226 Cascade Caverns Road, Boerne, Texas 78015)



More info at: http://www.cavetexas.org/events/TSASC/tsasc2012.html and www.cascadecaverns.com/

- Free scheduled cave tour for all registered.
- Full use of campground facilities for Sunday meetings, auction, and meals.
- Renovated showers/bathrooms.
- Easter Egg hunt for the kiddos



Please don't hesitate to ask me any questions. See you soon!

Ellie Watson
TSA Vice Chair
509-899-0007 or email: ellie.thoene@gmail.com





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Attn: Editor