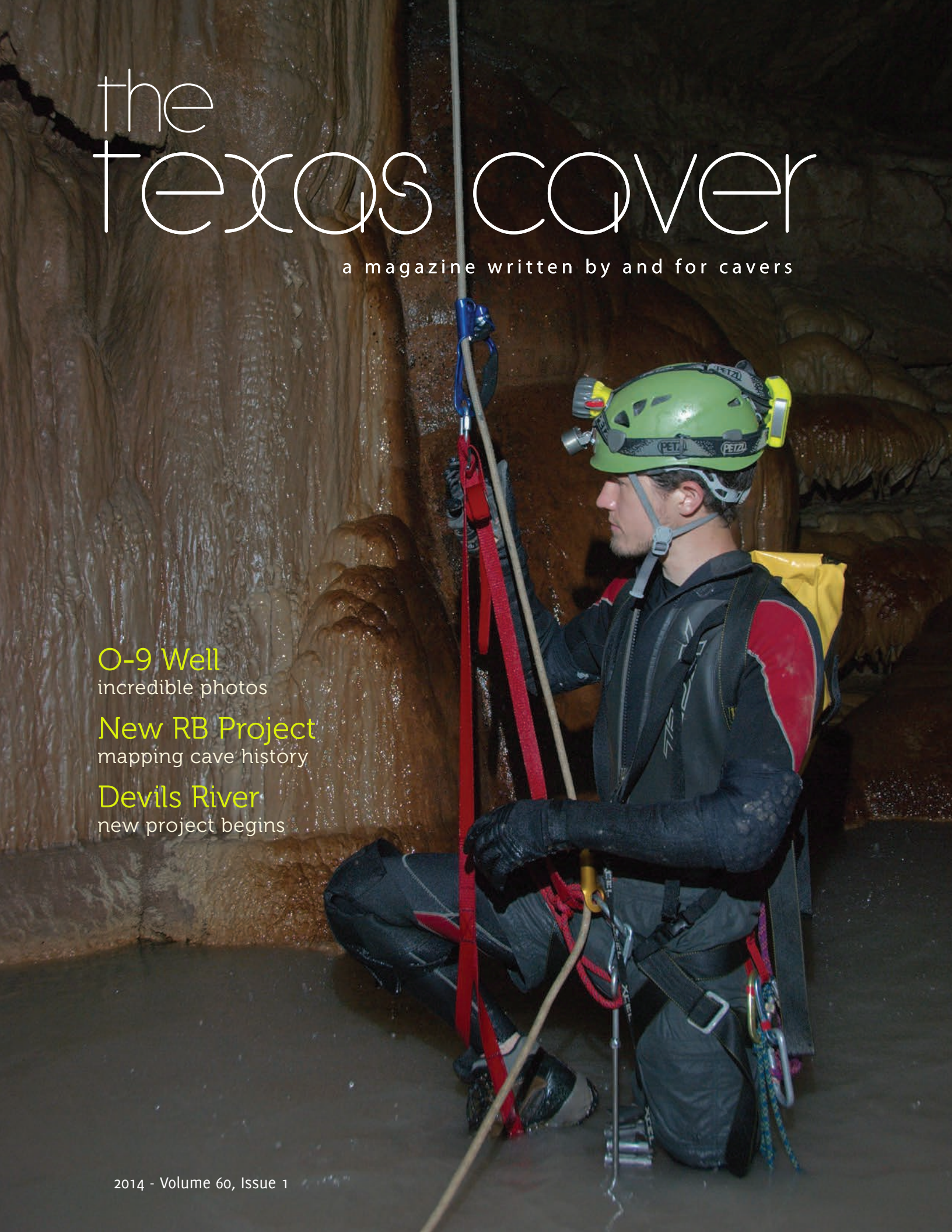
the texas caver

a magazine written by and for cavers



O-9 Well
incredible photos

New RB Project
mapping cave history

Devils River
new project begins

2014 - Volume 60, Issue 1

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ON ROPE, STUCK AT A LIP, WISHING YOUR FOOT STRAP WAS A LITTLE BIT SHORTER? OR YOU'RE AT A CHANGEOVER AND WISH YOUR HANDLED ASCENDER WAS A LITTLE CLOSER? OR SOMEONE NEEDS TO BORROW A PIECE OF YOUR GEAR AND IT DOESN'T FIT THEM, SO YOU HAVE TO UNTIE YOUR PERFECTLY-SIZED COMPONENT TO FIT SOMEONE ELSE.

QUICK ADJUSTMENT PRUSIK

Bennett Lee

Here's a trick that lets you quickly adjust the rope length of your ascending system components. It's called a Quick Adjustment Prusik (QAP). No more tedious re-tying end knots or adding extra midline knots. You can even safely adjust the length while ascending!

The figure-8 is the ideal knot for this since it provides a nice midsection to wrap and cannot be pulled through the knot while the figure-8 is attached to a load. You can also use the QAP on a butterfly knot, which is often used as the midknot for cows' tails.

You cannot use this technique with the popular half-barrel knot because the QAP can be pulled through the knot when loaded. Nor can you use it with the bowline because the QAP can wrap the loop into which the main line enters, pulling it and potentially untying the bowline. There are other methods for integrating a QAP into a half-barrel or bowline, but none are as easy to integrate and visually inspect as the figure-8 version.

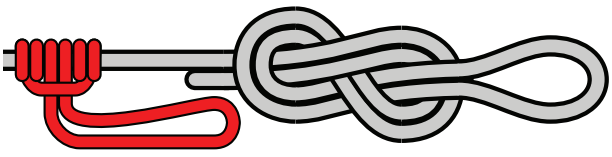
The QAP is a great addition to your Frog's foot rope at the handled ascender. When it's next to the handled ascender, it's at the perfect level for quick and easy adjustment of your rope length.

However, if you use this on the foot long rope for Mitchell Systems, the QAP should be placed by the foot, not the upper ascender. If it's by the upper ascender, the chest harness can hit the Prusik and release it.

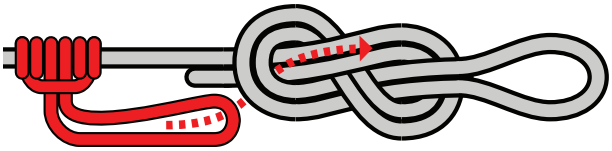
You can also add this to the longer side of your cows' tails or to your safety ascender. Note you can attach the QAP to either the equipment end or the end attached to your seat harness. Adding a QAP to the knot at your seat harness will ensure you can reach the Prusik to adjust the length, which is handy in case the other end is out of reach. However, it does add to the clutter around your seat harness, particularly when you actually use the QAP and have a loop of rope hanging out.

Personally, I prefer to keep the area around my semi-round as uncomplicated as possible. (and it's called a semi-round, not a D carabiner! Semi-round and D carabiners are different and are NOT interchangeable. Know the correct terminology!)

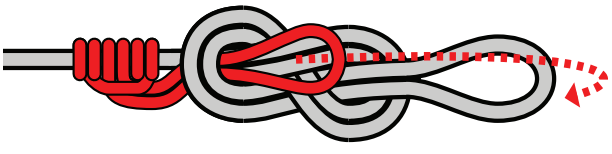
1. Attach a Prusik knot near the figure-8 end loop.



2. Feed the Prusik handle through the first half of the figure-8, following the main line.



3. Feed the figure-8's end loop through the Prusik handle.



4. The Prusik handle should wrap the midsection of the figure-8 knot.



the texas caver

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While submissions are welcome anytime, deadlines for consideration in upcoming issues are:

1st Quarter	February 15
2nd Quarter	May 15
3rd Quarter	August 15
4th Quarter	November 15

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DAVID OCHEL

BACK COVER

DAVID OCHEL

FROM THE EDITOR

I've said before that I was warned the hardest part of editing the Texas Caver would be getting articles submitted, and that is painfully obvious this issue. Content-rich issues with beautiful covers, clean layouts and colorful photo galleries, and interesting, in-depth stories about trips of pleasure, exploration, education, and cavers' histories has been my goal from the beginning. Every article is laid out with exacting care and attention to show off the authors' and photographers' talents, and attract readership as well as inspire more submissions. I appreciate my dependable and regular authors more than I can say; but The Texas Caver needs more. Please send articles and photos!

EMERGENCIES

FOR CAVE ASSISTANCE, CALL THE CLOSEST COUNTY NUMBER:

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HAYS	512. 393. 9054
SUTTON	325. 387. 3424
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texas caver

THE BEST CAVERS' MAGAZINE IN TEXAS

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The Texas Speleological Association is a nonprofit, internal organization of the National Speleological Society and represents the greater caving community in Texas.

The TSA is comprised of both independent members and local grottos, and supports cave exploration and studies in and around the state of Texas.

The organization holds business meetings three times per year, organizes an annual spring convention for Texas cavers, and sponsors caving projects and events throughout the state.

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SCIATIC CAVE

Travis Scott

Early February we were approached by a rancher in Carta Valley about a new hole that was found on his property. The property has a few existing caves and knowing the potential for new caves in the Carta Valley area, he was excited to see what was below. The hole was found by hunters; tracking an animal cross country they noted a significant change in air quality and temperature. Curious, they found the mysterious air coming out of a hole in the ground. It was determined that this was a new feature and there are no known caves nearby in this area. The ranch manager sent us a few photos taken by the hunters and reported that it would likely need some digging to enter. We picked a date and assembled a solid team prepared for the hardest of digs.



Cavers Jerry Atkinson, John Brooks, Allan Cobb, Corky Corcoran, Clark Giles, Joe Mitchell, Amanda Penn, and Travis Scott trickled in throughout the night on Friday and welcomed the much appreciated, warm cabin beds. We were greeted the next morning with a wonderful breakfast feast prepared by the ranch manager. We ate our fill, geared up and headed to the cave.

The entrance was found to be breathing in a cyclical pattern, blowing steam out, and sucking in the cold morning air. We cleared some brush and John began assessing the entrance dig. The dirt and rubble of the shallow sink sloped downwards toward the entrance where a few large boulders rested against the back of a headwall, and a steep passage angled downward. After moving a few initial rocks to get a better assessment of the fill, one of the largest rocks tumbled into the void opening the entrance enough to enter. So much for the dig! All that was left was clearing a few loose rocks.

All leads were soon pushed to their ends, so Joe, Clark, and Corky began to dig the only spot that showed any promise. Jerry, Travis, Allan and Amanda began surveying. It was Amanda's first time at surveying so she learned the ropes of being lead tape. By the time the survey was finished, the dig crew had decided their lead was not going anywhere so everyone exited the cave. A few photos were taken of the entrance and the cave was named Sciatic Cave due to a minor back injury received during the dig.

The entrance is situated at the south side of a shallow sink approximately 4 meters across. The dirt and rubble sink floor slopes toward the entrance where a small, body-sized opening can be found just below a headwall. From the entrance, the cave drops at an angle towards the south/southeast and widens as it descends into a rift passage. The entire cave is developed along a rift with an inclination of approximately 35-40 degrees. The ceiling and walls are solid rock and the floor is a mix of solid rock, dirt, and breakdown. The main chamber opens to the east with a small opening to the west. To the east, the cave opens a little into a room where one can stand upright in the rift. Some old re-solutioned formations are present on the ceiling of this room and plenty of porcupine guano covers the floor. One can crawl below the rocks at the bottom of this room into another small passage below the floor. The passage tapers to the east and eventually becomes impassable. The small opening to the west leads to a small chamber that is filled with pebbles and small rocks. The cave, very dry and dusty, with only one small opening along the wall in a very difficult place to dig, showed potential for air flow. The cave is 67 meters (220 ft) long and 14 meters (46 ft) deep.

Later that night, we were taken to a hole a few miles south of the ranch house that had been uncovered while clearing cedar. The hole appeared to be hand dug, approximately 5 feet deep and belled out at the bottom with a flat floor. The first thought was that it might be an old cistern, however after inquiring with a few local archeologists, the origin and purpose remains a mystery.

ROBBER BARON RED ARROW PROJECT

Jill Orr

On April 9, we began a project of mapping Robber Baron's historical brown arrows, with the double intent of recording the arrows, then analyzing the results to determine if they will provide clues to closed passages for future dig sites. These arrows are different from most of the other graffiti in the cave and are thought to be much older since they are hand painted, are often quite faded and are sometimes hidden under more modern graffiti. A clue to their age comes from a 1910 El Paso Herald article about Robber Baron.

Project leader is Jill Orr, who conceived the project and team leaders were Joe Mitchell and Mike Harris for their superior knowledge of the cave. The two teams consisted of Chris Lafferty, Mallory Mayeaux, Tom Rogers and Jill Orr.

No passages were ignored. As we poked and crawled into every nook and cranny we could fit into, we quickly realized it was a much more complex project than initially conceived. There are many more arrows than we were really aware of, and the shape of some of them were strange, degraded, or impossible to determine the direction they were pointing. We even dug out some arrows as the passage floors have risen several feet over the decades, with bits of paint peeking out from the dirt.

The arrows were fastidiously color coded, and location, direction and shapes recorded. Mike photographed the arrows in his section. In three hours the teams covered the front half of the cave, east and west of the Great Southwest passage, recording 76 arrows.

A few previously unrecognized historical graffiti features were discovered and recorded also. Of note, a few yards into the Hidden Passage was a reference to "The Man" by Jack Kyle, dated 1947, with an arrow pointing to the "Man's Head". A name and date of 1915 for R.L. White, and finally, an undated, meticulous painting of a black bat, both in the Bedroom. A pristine white feather formation of about 6 inches long was also discovered around the corner of a rarely traversed pancake crawl.

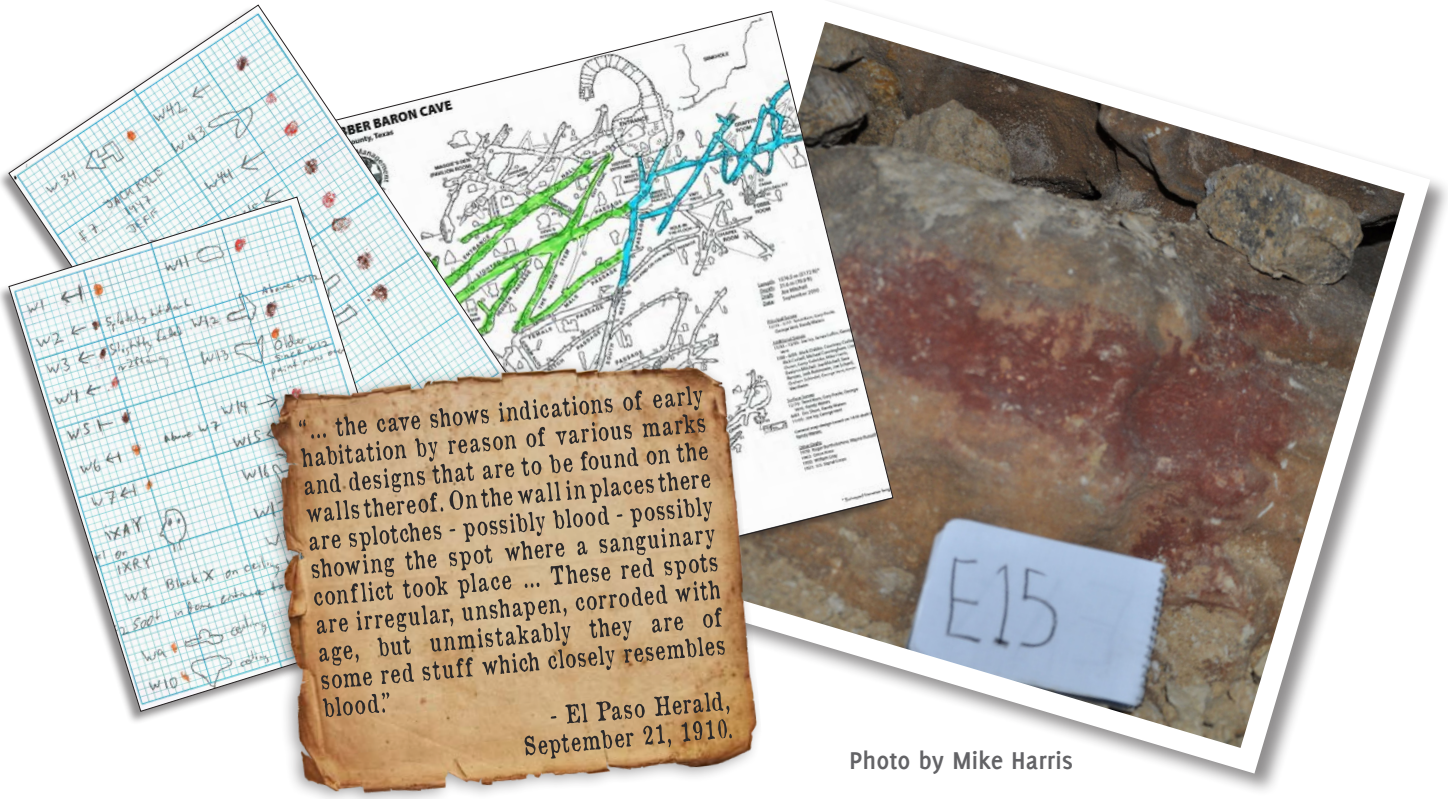


Photo by Mike Harris

ROLLING OAKS PRESERVE WORK DAY

Ellie Watson





VOLUNTEERS SORTED TRASH AND CONTINUED THE MASSIVE EFFORT OF EXCAVATING NICHE CAVE.

We began the day by sifting trash from the debris removed from Niche Cave on a former trip. Volunteers then began digging in the cave and, as rocks crashed down around them, quickly realized the area was unstable and we would have to rethink the dig.

We decided to clear the entire area beginning from the surface and leading down a steep slope to the cave entrance. After removing several large rocks and knocking a few massive ones into the pit we decided we may need to bring a tractor out in the future. In the end, volunteers cleared more than a ton of rocks and large boulders from the sloping surface of Niche Cave entrance.

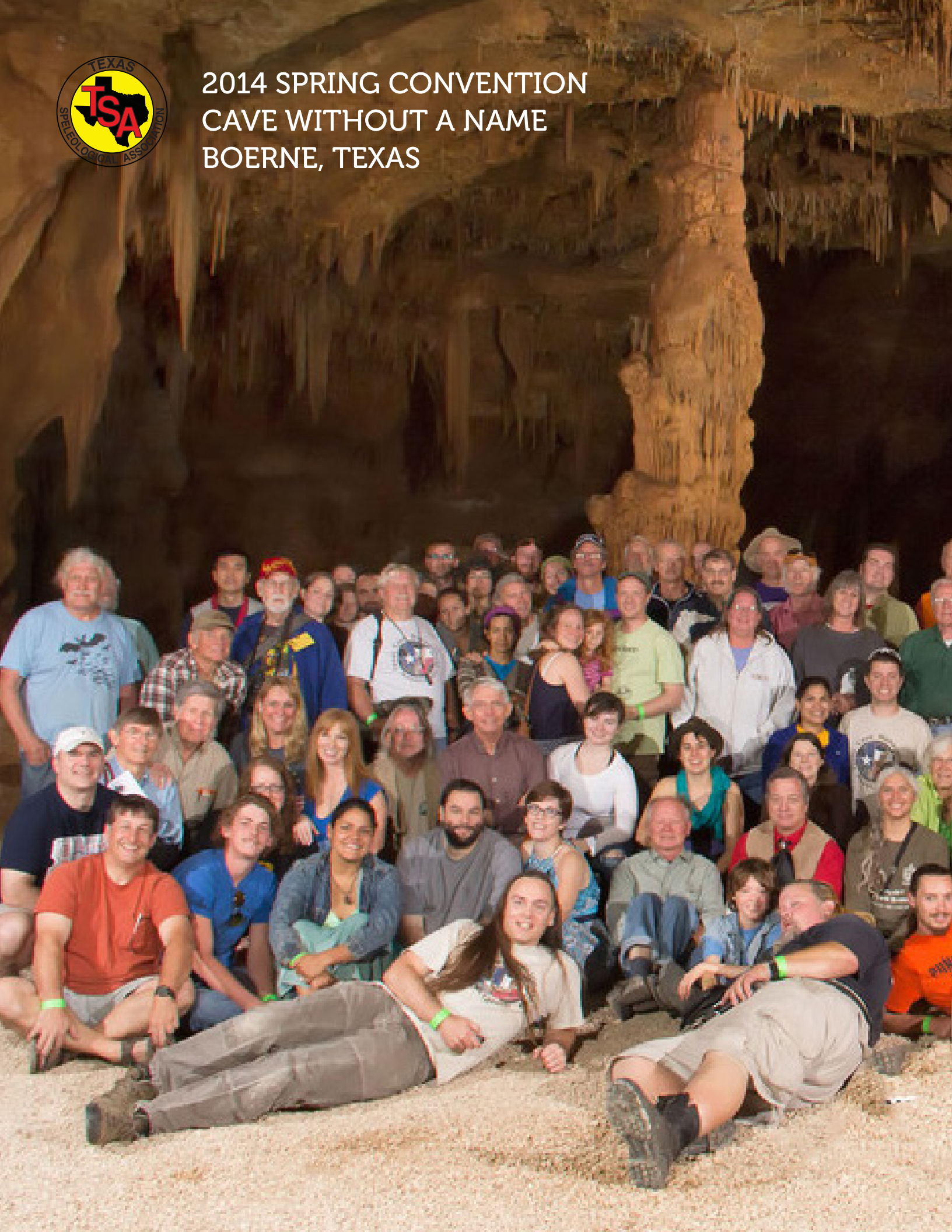
Niche Cave still has a lead completely filled with boulders which will provide many more trips of digging and fun. Stay tuned for another trip in the fall!

Thanks to Ron Ralph, Galen Falgout, Joe Schaertl, Vickie DeLeon, Arron Wertheim, David Oualline, Veronica Esqueda, Don Arburn, Steve Gutting, and David the neighbor kid.



Clearing out the boulders at the surface of Niche Cave. Photos by Ellie Watson

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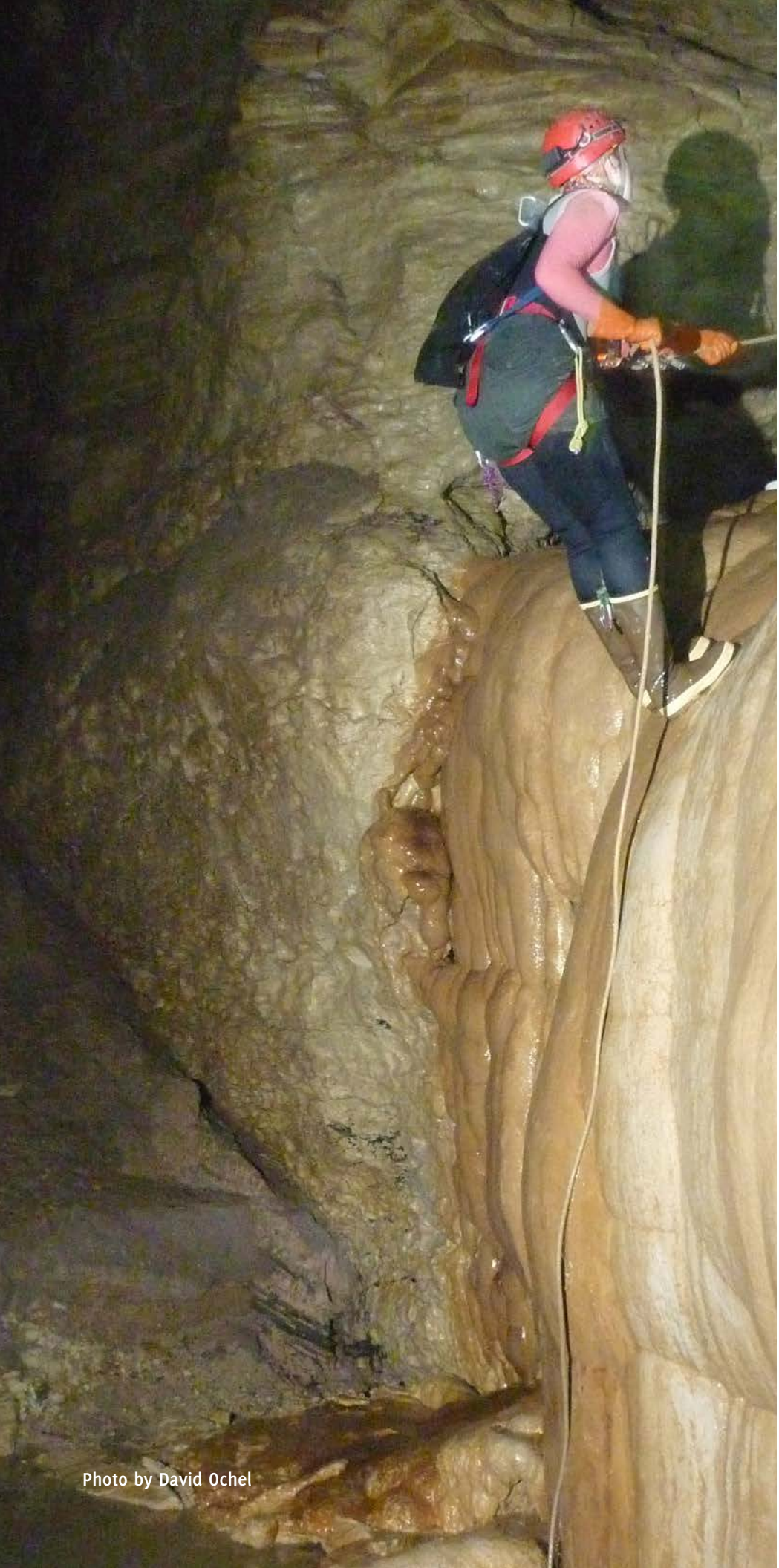


Photo by David Ochel

O-9 WELL

ASSES IN THE...

Damien Grandie, Fernando Hernandez, Daniel Rossi, and Morgan Smith

On January 25th, we met with UT Grotto members Heather Tucek, David Ochel, Will Quast and Kris Peña to make our first descent into O-9 Well cave. We arrived at the site around 3 AM after a 7 hour drive from College Station through some very remote terrain, and quickly set up camp and went to sleep. Waking up around 9 AM, the temperature was below freezing. After a good breakfast, we broke down camp and prepared for our descent.

The main drop was rigged by David and Heather the previous night, so everything was in place. We went in two separate teams, as Dave, Kris and Will were going to survey passage upstream. We were led by Heather downstream to the terminal room.

The first pitch fell 11 meters to a rebelay was required to continue another 30 meters. The rebelay is made interesting by the very inconveniently placed water pipe running down the main shaft into the stream below. However, it is straightforward enough moving it out of the way to continue descending. Once at the bottom, we admired the entrance chamber before continuing, and were in awe over

whomever first set up the well in the 1840's, and how they did it.

Continuing downstream, the horizontal passage took us about 50 meters and over a serious of small waterfalls, of which we alternatively slid and splashed our way into the pools beneath.

The second pitch required a small traverse to the anchor points. This pitch descended about 20 meters into a beautiful waterfall, cascading over a brilliant flowstone formation. At the bottom we poked around the room a little, and Heather showed us the skeleton of a small snake that apparently had the misfortune of ending up quite a ways away from his home.

We climbed over some very large breakdown and headed down a 20 meter stretch of the same small cascades until we reached the third pitch, a 17 meter drop with a re-belay located 4 meters down. This drop descended over another small waterfall into a beautiful, blue pool. After this we followed 2 more pitches down another 8 meters into the terminal room.

This room is massive, yawning upwards and revealing many brilliant flowstone features.


Photo by David Ochel

We toured the terminal sump and went for a quick dip in the water. While poking around, Fernando found a very large, old battery which we packed to bring up with us. There were also several curiously pigmented frogs in this room. We had a bite to eat and rehydrated before beginning our return ascent.

We underestimated the climb-ups required for of some of the taller cascades. The one just above the second drop proved particularly troublesome for the shorter cavers.

Back on the surface, we bounced the main entrance several times and took photographs while the survey team de-rigged the drops behind us.

A minor incident occurred while the survey crew ascended on rope. At the re-belay, the lead climber dropped his pack on the following climber, also on rope. He shouted "rock!" immediately, but the pack was unavoidable as the second climber was directly beneath. The pack stuck the climber's helmet and fell to the bottom of the pit. The climber descended back to the bottom, collected the fallen pack and her composure, then safely ascended. The cause of the pack dropping was the that a non-locking carabineer came open as the climber was crossing a rebelay. On the surface, we examined the climber, who was indeed fine.

Overall, the trip in the cave lasted just over 4 hours. When everyone was up we took several pictures on the surface, and said our goodbyes before the return to College Station.

THE SURVEYORS' TALE

Kris Pena and Will Quast

We left Austin on Friday night heading west toward 0-9 Well. When we arrived just after 11 PM the thermometer read a balmy 27°F and we learned that a minor ice chest leak had pre-wettened our wetsuits. David Ochel and Heather Tuček were both already asleep, so we set up our beds and turned in for the night.

The next morning we found the ASS cavers had arrived sometime after we'd gone to bed. We had breakfast, discussed the objectives, and reviewed the maps.

With David, we descended into the cave around 9:30 AM. The first drop follows a narrowing fissure crack alongside the well pipe. About halfway down there is a rebelay because the fissure directly below the entrance is so tight; moving slightly to the side



Photo by David Ochel

affords more space to descend. Once we reached the bottom of the first drop, Will and Kris proceeded in the direction of the well pipe and began their survey. The survey objective was to connect two known passages through a tight hourglass shaped and watery passage. After 34.9 meters of survey including a short dunk under, we joined back up with David at the first upstream intersection.

While we surveyed, David attempted to climb up a steep, over 45° angled, mud-covered in-feeder off the main passage, directly opposite from the lead that we would eventually appear from. Kicking steps into the mud allowed him to ascend about 68 meters before being stopped by a steep flowstone step with precarious footing and no useful hand holds. It didn't take long during his first attempt to overcome that step before he slid all the way back down the mud, resulting in a few scratches on his arm. The second time up, he made several attempts to lasso a flowstone flake above the step with a rope and webbing, without success.

With our two primary objectives behind us, and this being our first time in the cave, we proceeded for a recreational trip downstream. We traveled from the well pipe over several rimstone dams that spill over into small pools, some of which you can just touch to floor in. Kris jumped over one dam expecting it to be shallow on the other side and instead got a nice dunking without ever hitting the bottom.

Eventually you make it to the first major waterfall, a 55 foot rappel. A few recreational pictures were taken before proceeding through

the breakdown to more watery passage. Soon we made it to the second waterfall, a 38 foot rappel with a short rebelay to get beyond the sloping pour off, and proceeded down a couple more short drops to the Mud Room (also known as the Lake Room), and spent a some time taking in the massive expanse.

Eventually, we reversed course and began the long grueling climb back up to the surface. Arriving at the well pipe, Will began his ascent first. He cleared the rebelay and notified the team below, and Kris proceeded on rope. Shortly after, Will could be heard yelling a loud profanity followed by "ROCK!! ROCK!! ROCK!!" Since Kris was already on rope, she braced for the hit.

Will's pack landed squarely on her helmet and bounced to the floor. Though stunned for a few seconds, Kris soon concluded that aside from a headache and stiff back she was all right.

David helped her off rope and they yelled to those above to let them know everything was OK. After recuperating for a few minutes, she began her ascent again and exited the cave, soon followed by David. This incident reminded us of the need to use a locking carabiner on our tethers, especially when others are below on rope.

Once all were safely on the surface, we sat around, chatted a while, debating whether to head home that night. Since below freezing temperatures were again in the forecast we decided we'd be much warmer in our own beds and were packed and on our way by 6 PM.


Photo by David Ochel


Photo by David Ochel


Photo by David Ochel

DEVILS RIVER KARST SURVEY

Gerald Atkinson

In late 2013, the Texas Speleological Survey and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department signed a MOA establishing a Karst Survey Project to be conducted at the Satan Unit of the Devils River State Natural Area (Big Satan Unit DRSNA) in Val Verde County. The project will consist of three phases; the first being the survey of known cave and karst features within the unit. Later phases will include remote infrared detection of caves and their subsequent survey and inventory. The goal of the March 2014 project trip was to begin the exploration, survey, and inventory of the known cave and karst features within the unit.

On 28-30 March 2014, 14 volunteer cavers attended a weekend trip to the Big Satan Unit DRSNA. Volunteers included Gerald Atkinson, Dale Barnard, Aimee Beveridge, Allan Cobb, Michael Harris, Geoff Hoese, Jack Johnson, Joe Mitchell, Linda Palit, Kris Pena, Will Quast, Jacqui Thomas, Sean Vincent, and Gregg Williams with Joe Joplin (superintendent), and Amber Joplin in attendance as park representatives. The group divided up into three teams for the Saturday activities:

Team 1: G. Atkinson, Allan Cobb, Linda Palit, Jack Johnson, Joe Mitchell, Joe Joplin, and



Photo by Gerald Atkinson

Amber Joplin were assigned to the caves and karst features in the Big Satan Canyon area.

Team 2: Dale Barnard, Will Quast, Kris Pena, Aimee Beveridge, and Geoff Hoese were assigned to the caves and karst features in the South Branch of Cedar Spring Canyon.

Team 3: Sean Vincent, Jacqui Thomas, Gregg Williams, and Michael Harris were assigned to the caves and karst features in the Little Satan Creek area.

The trip was very productive and surveyed nine caves and three karst features, and discovered one new cave and three additional karst features that remain to be surveyed. A total of 187m (614 ft) was surveyed by the three teams during the weekend. There are several more known caves and karst features within the unit that remain to be surveyed and I anticipate several more project trips to the unit during the upcoming fall and winter months.

Future trip announcements will be posted to TexasCavers.com for those that may be interested in participating. The Big Satan Unit of DRSNA encompasses over 17,000 acres so there's a lot of area left to explore. The unit is not presently open to public use, except for permit-holding river paddlers, so this is a rare opportunity to see the area.

For more information on Big Satan Unit of DRSNA go to www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/devils-river/conservation-use.

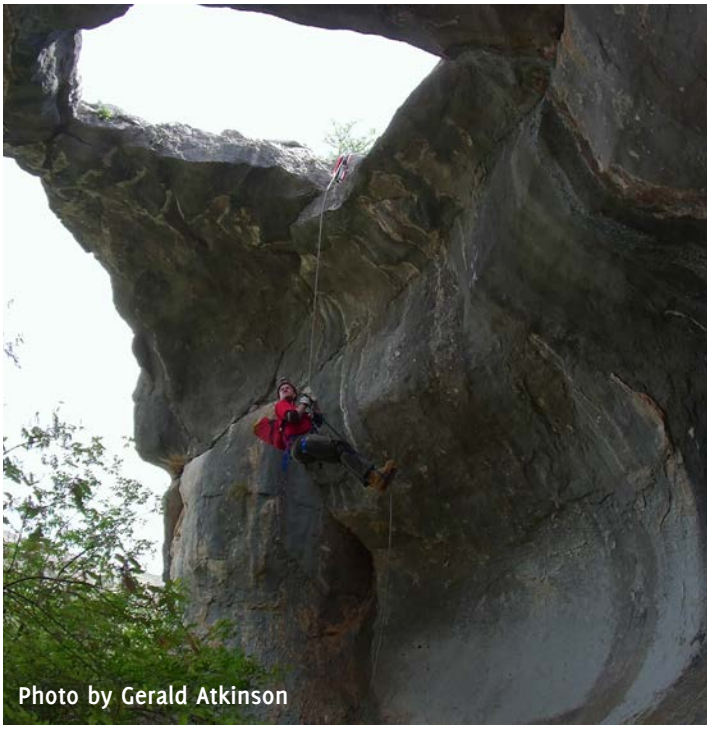
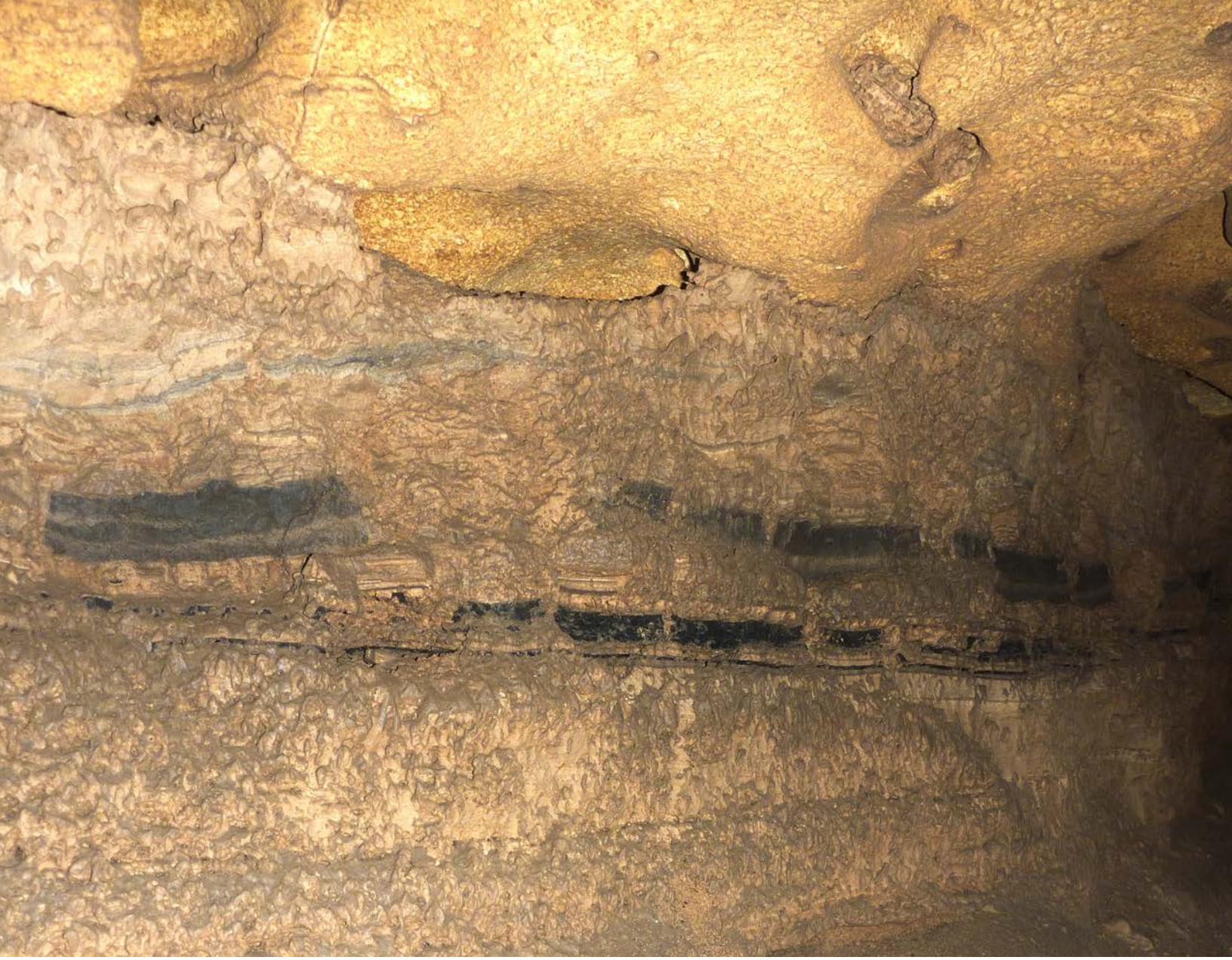


Photo by Gerald Atkinson



Photo by Gerald Atkinson



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