

the texas caver

a magazine written by and for cavers

October 2016

CMS Tank Haule
the 2014 trifecta

Expeditions in Mexico
Montemayor and La Grieta

Government Canyon
2105 update

FOR THE LOVE OF BATS

BCI SUPPORTER GOES THE DISTANCE, IMPARTS WISDOM, STRUT HER STUFF AND GETS CRAFTY TO PROMOTE BAT CONSERVATION

When it comes to giving back, BCI supporters aren't afraid of running the extra mile. Literally.

Niki Lake of Seabrook, Texas, is an avid marathon runner with an inborn passion for bat conservation. Whenever she hits the ground running, Lake loves to raise money for BCI.

"I like to find ways to bring all my interests together," she says. "So I decided to raise money and run."

Lake's fervor for bats can be traced back to her childhood. As the kid of a Houston Zoo volunteer, Lake has always been around animals. At Texas State University, she pursued her interest in wildlife biology and became a park ranger soon after.

Since 2012, Lake has run 93 miles under the hot Texas sun, and has raised more than $2,700 for BCI. Though logging that many miles might sound tortuous to some, Lake says she was "smiling the whole time."

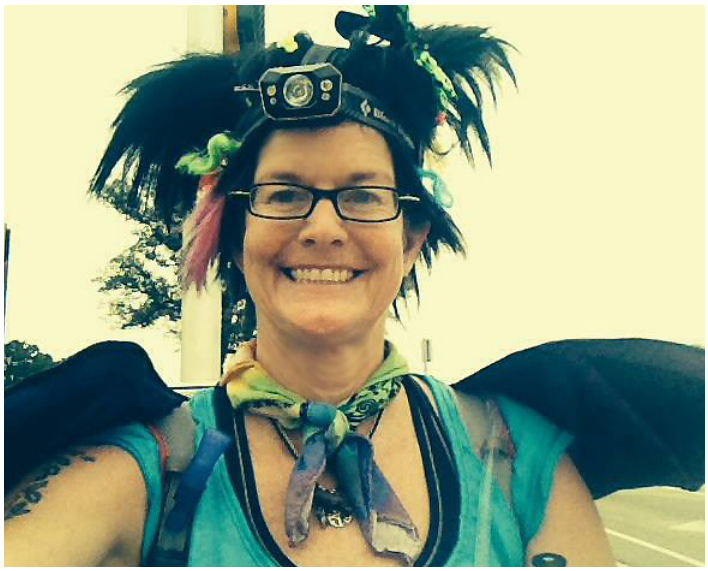
"It was so cool," she says. "Along the way I would stop and meet up with people and talk to them about bats and give them little bat facts and stuff."

Kids especially take notice of Lake when she trudges through the dry Texas terrain—in part because when it comes to raising money for bats, Lake likes to make quite the fashion statement.

"I kind of started doing this batty-clown thing," Lake says with a laugh. "I used to be a clown a long time ago, so I was like 'Oh, I can bring bats, running and clowning together!'"

The end result is a bat-friendly take on marathon running essentials: lavish wings, a batty backpack that also holds water and a would-be wig that kind of looks like bat ears.

To the average runner (and reader), Lake's devotion to bat conservation and education seems



sout of the ordinary, over-the-top and completely outrageous—but there's a good reason behind it.

"Bats make up a quarter of the world's mammals," Lake stresses. "So they're pretty important. And they're facing one of the worst wildlife diseases of all time, White-Nose Syndrome. That was the real stimulus for me. White-nose, to me, is petrifying."

Through quality education and funded research, Lake says that bats populations can be saved from White-Nose Syndrome. So she's just trying to contribute to that effort in her own unique way.

"BCI is a phenomenal organization that's really the forerunner of bat conservation. And bats are a pretty easy sell if you can get people to sit down and listen, she adds".

Spread Your Wings

Thinking of a creative fundraising idea of your own? We'd love to hear about it and help provide support. To get started, contact Micaela Jemison at mjemison@batcon.org.

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The TEXAS CAVER

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SEE PAGE 23 FOR A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR - AN APOLOGY AND WHAT IT TAKES....

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texas caver

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Texas Speleological Association is an unregistered, 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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CM CAVE TANK HAUL TRIFECTA 2014

by Jean Krejca

CM CAVE, CMS, OR SEE MY SHOVEL CAVE… TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN THERE IT CONJURES IMAGES OF LONG, QUIET FLOATS THROUGH DARK, EERIE SECTIONS OF LOW AIR, OF WALKING CANYONS AND STOOP WALKING WITH A GENTLE STREAM, AND OF THE SHORT BUT UNFORGETTABLE MUD AND WATER FILLED BELLY CRAWL AFTER THE ENTRANCE DROPS.



Jean Krejca and James Brown

A little history of the upstream dive exploration. Two trips in 2012, in June and September, yielded the exploration and survey of sumps 1-3. In August of 2013, At the end of 2013, James Brown and myself began hatching plans for a concentrated effort on exploration of the upstream end of CM Cave, where previous exploration had ended at a seventh sump, approximately 500 m from the beginning of sump 1. The idea for this effort was to have three chances at furthering the exploration by hauling gear in the first weekend, then for the next two weekends hauling spent tanks out and fresh tanks in so that we could take advantage of the bulk of the other items (regulators, bc's, lights) staying underground for the full three weeks.

On the first weekend, 25 January 2014, teams of cavers filed into the cave, and everything was successfully carried in except for one accident where a tank that was being carried in a backpack had the valve knob sheared off in a stoop walk. This was a first for us, so we did not have the materials to repair it underground and had to abort the dive that day. The following Friday, 31 January 2014, James and I, accompanied by a small but dedicated weekday team, re-entered with one repaired tank and began survey at sump 6 where line had been laid but no survey was done. We started the survey of sump 6, but had troubles with the underwater note-taking and pop point pencils. So we mapped the dry cave between 6 and 7, laid line in sump 7, and surveyed the dry section between sumps 7 and 8. Meanwhile on the surface pickup trucks full of cavers rolled into the scenic campsite and shared stories and beer around a blazing fire under a starry winter sky. Galen and Gary cooked up an amazing venison chili with all the fixin's for the caving team. Saturday, February 1st saw another cohort of strong cavers haul out the six used tanks. James filled them on site, and on Sunday more cavers got their weekend workout carrying the six full tanks back into the cave. A lot of logistics! The crew was cold, wet, and tired but also energized by being part of virgin exploration in a remote part of the world right under our feet in central Texas.

On the Friday of the final weekend, 7 February 2014, James and I entered the cave to do the last push. For this dive we carried our stage bottles farther in an effort to maximize air supplies because some of the sumps are fairly long. We mapped the underwater portions we left from previous trips, then James began laying line in the



virgin Sump 8 while I ran video, and indeed it turned out to be a long sump. Almost 30 minutes of swimming into it, after helping him change reels, I saw his reel running to almost empty. Just at that moment he began ascending into a silvery pool above us – an air bell! But the line ran taught on the empty spool before we could break into the air. Fortunately we had a 'jump' reel along that allowed us to make it the last few meters to the air bell. That final sump, number 8, was likely over 250 m long, bringing our total one-way underwater distance to 880 m.

It was wonderful to exit the cave on the 8th of February and have the camaraderie of the large group of cavers who arrived from many distant places (Batgirl from Calgary!) in order to help bring gear out of the cave. And Stefan Creaser served up an excellent and tasty meal of meat, vegetables and rice for the large group that began cavorting early on Saturday and late into the night!

At the center of recognition are the people that made *all three* weekends, the Trifecta winners! Tom Rogers, Galen Falgout, Gary Donham, Gregg Williams, Laura Battle, and Matt Zappitello.






ROCKY
Marlboro


O'NEILL





Much support was givin and a great time was had by these cavers:



Don Arburn
Laura Battle
Grace Borrengasser
James Brown
Sami Carley
Sofia Casini
Sarah Cline
Stefan Creaser
Andrea Croskrey
Gary Donham
Lindsay Eaves
Andy Edwards
Galen Falgout
Joe Furman
Joseph Garza
Geary Geletzke
Jacqueline Hawk
Fernando Hernandez
Ben Hutchins
Carrie Hutchins
Kathryn Hutchons
Aubri Jensen
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Jean 'Creature' Krejca
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Vivian Loftin
Guinevere McDaid
Jacob McLeod
David Moore
John Nelson
Gabby Obriramer
David Ochel
Batgirl Omura
Jill Orr
Dessie Pierce
Sean Pierce
Tom Rogers
Daniel Rossi
Ron Rutheford
Joe Schaertl
Bryce Smith
Martin Staelens
Bill Steele
Heather Tucek
Matt Turner
Ellie Watson
Allison White
Gregg Williams
Matt Zaldivar
Matt Zappitello
Saj Zappitello

Sumps and airbells explored and surveyed 2012-2014. Thanks to cartographer Ben Hutchins for assembling the distances.

Section	Distance (m)	Notes
Sump 1	180.5	Use stage bottle through this sump, explored and surveyed in 2012
Air bell 1-2	14.6	Climb over mud slope, surveyed June 2012
Sump 2	16.2	Use stage bottle through this sump, explored and surveyed in 2012
Air bell 2-3	14.9	Leave stage bottle in this air bell before crawl, surveyed June 2012
Sump 3	21.3	The beginning of this sump is awkward and tight, so we go through with only two tanks from here
Air bell 3-4	31.6	Explored in 2012, surveyed Aug 17, 2013
Sump 4	62.8	Laid line in 2012
Air bell 4-5	17.8	Explored in 2012, surveyed Aug 17, 2013
Sump 5	48.2	Laid line in 2012
Air bell 5-6	41.0	Explored in 2012, surveyed Aug 17, 2013
Sump 6	32.0	Laid line Aug 17, 2013, surveyed Feb 7, 2014
Air bell 6-7	25.7	Explored in 2013, surveyed Jan 31, 2014
Sump 7	256.7	Laid line January 31 2014, surveyed Feb 7, 2014, and from here to the start of sump 9 was first explored in 2014
Air bell 7-8	42.0	Explored and surveyed January 31, 2014
Sump 8	Long (about 250 m)	Unsurveyed to date, we planned on surveying out in 2014, but the vis was too poor. Probably around 250 m
Air bell 8-9	70.8	A longer section of passage surveyed in 2014. The main passage was surveyed, but there is an unsurveyed side passage that was explored to the end, where there is a sump that is too small to dive (9a).
Sump 9	Not entered	This is where the main stream continues – James free dove to look and verify it was passable, but didn't push into the passage
Sump 9a	Not entered	Too small to dive, this is at the end of the side passage that comes in here



GOVERNMENT CANYON

2015 KARST PROJECT UPDATE

by Marvin Miller

Participants: Niki Lake, Marvin Miller, Joe Schaertl

Only Joe and Niki joined the project for what threatened to be a rainy day. The ground was very wet from rains in the preceding days so the trails were closed. I asked Niki, who is the Resource Specialist at Government Canyon SNA, about the new pit that had been found on the Gallagher tract, on the west side of Hwy 211. It had actually been found several years previous by a bird survey team but the property did not fully transfer from the City of San Antonio to Texas Parks until recently.

The pit was named Loca Guera Pit by the team that discovered it. Niki had only a location marked on a small topo on a poor scan of a Zara Environmental report. Sometime after the pit's discovery Zara did a karst invertebrate survey over some of the ridgetops on the tract and they had noted the cave. The report Niki had did not contain the appendix with the GPS coordinates. Using the poor topo image and Niki's memory we set out trying to find the pit. We did one sweep up the ridge that it was supposed to be on without finding it. We regrouped and changed our strategy. In our trek to the point we were going to start our next sweep we came across a marked karst feature. The tag was numbered PR-10. This made us happy because PR-10 was also located on the topo and the topo had a scale bar. We calculated a heading and a distance to the pit and started walking – and walked right to it.

Niki had to leave to attend to other duties so Joe and I rigged the pit, a 7.6 m drop, and surveyed it. Sadly, there was no ongoing passage at the bottom. The entrance is roughly diamond-shaped and about 2.5 meters across. From the pit bottom the floor descended a slight scree slope and then went flat to the back wall. We surveyed a total length of 15.72 m and 8.61 m deep.



photo: Marvin Miller

When Joe touched down after rappelling first he noticed a diamond-backed rattlesnake on the floor. The floor was wide enough that we could skirt around it. It never made any indication that it was disturbed by us. The cave floor has had significant infilling. Large stalagmites along the back wall penetrate the floor. There are also two sets of initials inscribed on the back wall. The lower initials look more weathered than the top, dated set, and, surprisingly, are located only about .3 m above the floor level. Is it possible that sometime before 1957 (the date with the upper set) the floor level was quite a bit lower? Discussions with George Veni suggest that significant surface erosion of top soils has occured since the beginning of ranch activities in the late 1800's/early 1900's.

After surveying the cave we headed back to PR-10 and dug on it for a couple of hours. At first it looked very promising but by the time we finished we were digging down the floor of the sink, hoping to find an open space. The soil and rocks are still loose and the dig should be continued.

December 5 & 6, 2015

Participants: Jorge Carcamo, Lauren DeLeon, Mike Gibbons, Sarah Gorton, Niki Lake, Marvin Miller, Shauna Mohler, Mary Moore, James Morrow, Donnie Roland, Victoria Sommers, Arron Wertheim

Saturday Activities

Donnie Roland was in attendance on Saturday morning and was keen to go looking for a cave that he knew lay close to Horseshoe Canyon Cave. Both caves were found by him in 1995. Horseshoe Canyon Cave is in one of the private property inholdings on the northeast side of the SNA, but from Donnie's description the new cave might be located on SNA property. Donnie was also interested in finding a spring cave in the same area that he had seen previously around 1995 and it was most likely on SNA property. He had led teams to look for this cave twice before, without success. With the recent transfer of properties to the SNA more places were now open for searching. Other attendees Saturday morning were Jorge, Lauren, Niki, Victoria, Arron, and me. We made one large team and went looking for the caves

Donnie said the cave close to Horseshoe Canyon



photo: Marvin Miller

Cave was called 9 Meter Cave. I had coordinates from the TSS database for Horseshoe Canyon Cave so we set out to go there first and, from there, find Donnie's cave. On our traverse to the coordinates we came across a cave and Donnie pronounced that it was the sought-after 9 Meter Cave. The cave has a low sloping entrance in a sinkhole but then opens immediately to a 1.3-m-tall dome with a sky light. Another dome follows that one to the end of the cave. On a flowstone shelf at the end of the cave a too-small tube continues onward. The cave taped out at 5.90 meters, so the 9 Meter name was a hopeful guess. After inputting the coordinates of the cave into the TSS GIS database, WallsMap, I saw that the location is within the inholding, and thus is not a Government Canyon cave. However, this property may be transferred to the SNA in the future.

After this we decided to continue to nearby Horseshoe Canyon Cave just to have a look at it. We followed the GPS down the horribly brushy canyon side and were rewarded with nothing. The TSS coordinates were obviously wrong. We made a plan to retreat to the ridgetop and then follow our further objectives. On the ridgetop we stopped to eat and Donnie started walking around, following his own memory as to where Horseshoe Canyon Cave should be located.


photo: Marvin Miller


photo: Marvin Miller

He found it about 100m from where we were sitting. We corrected the GPS coordinates for the cave.

From there we went in search of the elusive spring cave. We didn't find it but Niki did find another little cave. A low crawl enters at an angle at the base of a cliff. The crawl is .3 m tall throughout the cave. The passage is just short of a meter wide to about 3 m where it widens into a "room". A too-small passage exits the far side of the room. The floor was very wet, probably due to recent rains, and was covered with a layer and piles of porcupine scat, which made for a very messy exploration. Victoria ventured in first but decided it wasn't worth a casual look. Of course, being the sketcher, I actually had to crawl through the mess. We tossed around several possible names for the cave including "Goopy Cave", "Don't Follow Donnie" and "Donnie's Folly". Niki said, "Don't Folly Donnie", and we all laughed, so that stuck as the name: Don't Folly Donny Cave.

The location of the cave was close to the fence line that runs southwest from Old Squeaky Windmill. We hiked in the direction of the windmill, following the fence line. We went over the ridge and came down into the next canyon bottom, the canyon that contains Tight Cave and Creek Bank Cave. I was interested in checking out the canyon headwall for the elusive spring cave, since, topologically, it looks similar to the one where Donnie had us looking for it earlier. Except for Jorge, the rest of the team was tired of struggling with the thick brush and thorny bushes. So Jorge and I headed upstream while everyone else continued in the direction of the ranch road and the cars. While Jorge and I were searching the cliff bands of the headwall I came upon another low crawly cave. This one was also very muddy, with real mud, though it looked trampled by small hooves – javelinas? A .3 m high crawl enters at the base of a cliff face. After 1 m the entrance passage tees into a passage that goes left and right. To the left it looks too small to follow. To the right the passage continues as a crawl with a 1-m-wide, almost rectangular cross-section. After about 4 m the passage enters a low room to the right. A too-small passage exits this room and probably intersects the cliff face again. We did not survey the cave but I did a quick sketch, recorded the GPS location, and hung a flag and a tag in a tree. I also named it: Foot Tall Mud Crawl Cave.

Sunday Activities

On Sunday I was joined by a group of mostly first-timers. Only Sarah Gorton had any caving experience. But Mike Gibbons, Shauna Mohler, Mary Moore, and James Morrow were very interested in having that experience. We were able to borrow one of the SNA utility vehicles to carry the extra bodies, along with my 4Runner, and we all set up the trail to Big Dome Cave. I took the drill and micro-blasting toolkit along. The goal would be to start enlarging the passage at the southwest corner of the cave. The passage exits from a small room and extends to a corner about 2 m away. It is only 10 – 20 cm wide for the first half of that distance, but more than a meter tall. Some airflow has been noted from the passage and it appears to be phreatic.

We got to the cave just about lunch time but everyone liked the idea of eating in the cave so we entered and made our way to the Break-Away Room. After lunch, I pointed out passages to Big Dome and to the formations in the first part of Velvet Underground. There are many holes to poke into in that part of the cave and Mike found a lead that we need to look into in the future. Meanwhile, James and I scooted into the little room and got to work on the target lead. Others who helped specifically in hammering or in assisting with the dig were Sarah and Shauna. We set off 4 charges. One was ineffective due to a pocket in the rock. In the end we removed enough rock that I was able to cram myself up into the passage and see around the corner. If it had looked promising I could probably have continued. Instead, disappointedly, after another 2 meters the passage was completely walled off except for a small hole at floor level - .3 m tall by .15 wide. This may just be an alcove because another wall is visible just 10 or 20 cm on. The walls of the passage could not be seen merging with the end wall, so a cross passage is not ruled out. A skinny person will be sent to investigate on a future trip.

Everyone enjoyed themselves.
We left the cave at about 4:00.



photo: Marvin Miller



photo: Bryce Smith

EXPEDITION CAVING IN MONTEMAYOR

by Amy Morton

It all started when Jim 'Crash' Kennedy invited me to the trip in August. I wanted to go caving in Mexico since I realized there was even such a thing. I said yes to the event and, reminded daily by Tom Rogers, I applied for my passport. Tom talked to Rob Bisset about driving and a plan was in motion. I diligently packed food, clothing and camping needs. I was so excited that Thanksgiving could not get here soon enough. Rob posted how technical this cave was, stressing that this was not a beginner trip. I sent an email outlining my vertical experience; eight different vertical caves, one with rebelay, the deepest pit I had ever climbed was Pretty Well in Alabama, at 208 feet and I was practicing on rope in trees as much as I could. Rob replied with, "You're now a trip leader." I knew that this was the biggest cave I would ever have been in, but I also knew I was ready. The day before we were supposed to meet at Rob's house in San Antonio, I got the text from Tom; "My passport is expired." Sadder words were never spoken (or texted). After much deliberation over how we could get Tom in and out of Mexico without a valid passport, he decided it would be best to go without him.



photo: Bryce Smith

So Rob and I loaded up his truck and set out. Crossing the border was no problem and we made our way onto Rancho Minas Viejas and up the mountain. Now, I am writing this in March and the event was in November so from here I am going to describe just the caving, rather than try to put a chronological timeline on the trip.

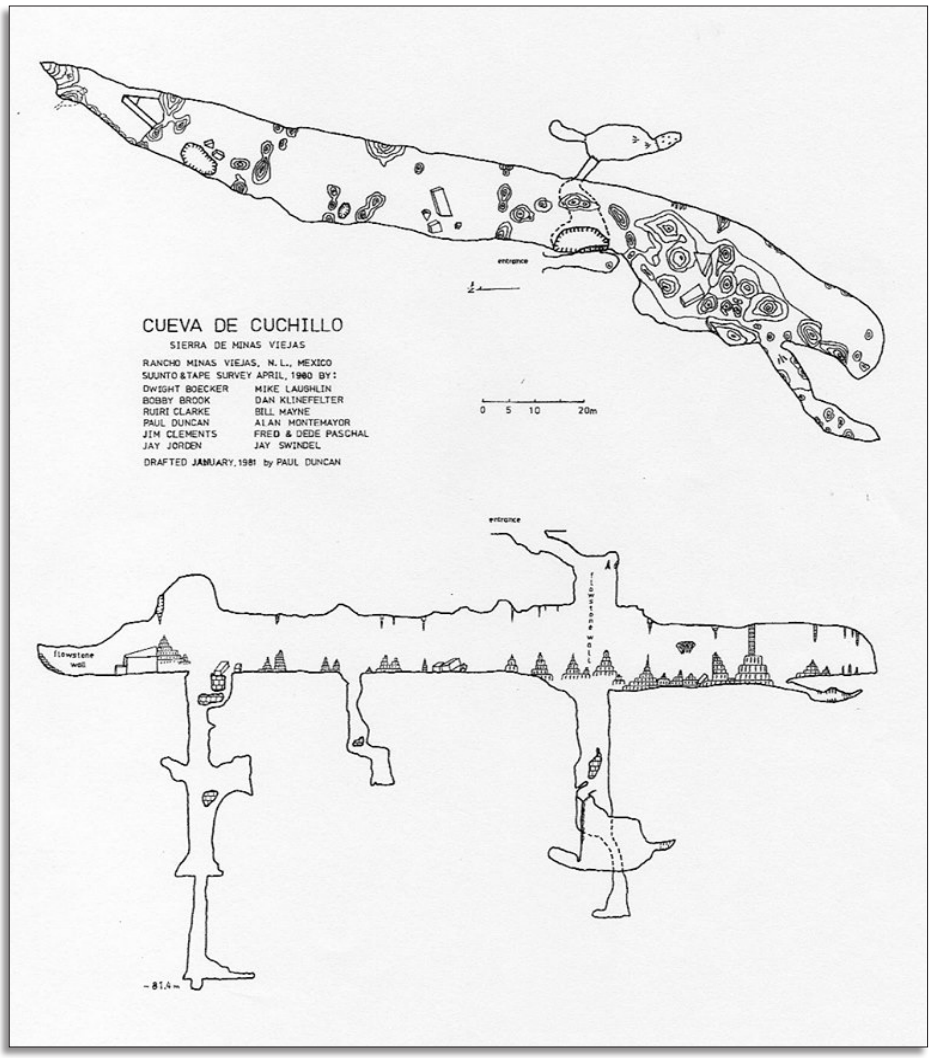
Our accommodations were very primitive, no running water or electricity, but the abandoned restaurant and other ranch buildings were there for our use. We all set up tents in the main part of the dining room, except Rob, who thoughtfully set up away from us because he snores. On Wednesday night, while we were anxiously waiting the main caving team to come back (I stayed home that day with diarrhea; I accidentally drank water while I was showering) Rob had many furry visitors into his tent, one of which took a dump on his pillow. They included a spotted skunk, a ring tail and a mouse! When none of the animals would leave, he said "they can have the room" and moved his bedding (sans pillow) into the main room.

Bryce Smith and I rigged the ceiling rafters and pillars at the Ranch Restaurant. He set up the main rope and I set the rebelay on the side. We happily rigged the ceiling and went caving. We took it down that night because we realized we needed the rope for Montemayor. No one ever practiced on it. Bryce also shot amazing footage and made an awesome video of the trip. Search "MV 15" on YouTube to watch it. It's worth the ten minutes, but maybe I am a little biased. Bryce is a great kid and an excellent caver.

Cuchillo is a cave on the property very worth seeing. It is made up of three major layers. The top layer is the entrance room to climb into. We had a traverse line to clip into to get on rope. I was surprised that Crash remarked that it was free climbable and we didn't need a line. Maybe I'm a wuss, but I was glad the line was there and it made a funny looking entrance. Bryce Smith and I spent the morning together in this cave and it was great getting to know him. The second layer is a rappel of about 120 feet into the largest most decorated non show cave that I've ever been in. The rappel was also fun and challenging because you had to swing over to the ledge to get off rope and you could "miss your floor" if you didn't have the rope tied off. The third and bottom most layer was known to be filled with loose rocks and boulders that had washed down the pit. No one went down there; it was very dangerous for no gain.

Nico Escamilla was the main contact to the ranch and is an all around great guy. He has done it all, caving, cave diving, canyoneering, etc. We talked about his crazy adventures and dreams he has. At six in the morning on Thanksgiving he was ready to go the rescue with me when the cave team hadnt returned. Luckily the truckload of them came down the mountain before we had to go out to get them.

Pozo de Montemayor is the cave we went there for. We set out to do a resurvey of the cave because



no one had been in there in twenty years. The cave is 500 meters of vertical, and proper rigging was vital to the success of the trip. The rigging team on the first day was Fernando Hernandez, Morgan Smith, Bryce Smith and Mike Devalantes. These guys are some of the most badass cavers I have had the pleasure of hanging out with. They had to do insane stuff in this cave! They climbed old rope, old rigging and they pushed the cave so the rest of us could follow and survey with ease. These guys are truly the fearless cavers on this trip. Morgan even risked his life climbing a frayed rope in Argo's well. He saved us all. Mike was really surprised when I knew the Wobble (teenager line dance). Morgan is impressively working on his doctorate in Archaeology at A&M and has an awesome dog named Tallahassee. She slept with me the whole day I was sick and the whole night when I was worried. And Fernando, the wild man, climbed the side of the building as soon as they pulled up. I got to know Fernando really well in Muzquiz, Mexico (he even taught me how to set a bolt), but that's another article.

The entrance pit to Montemayor is approximately 120 feet with one rebelay. It became a nuisance drop by the end of the week. The entrance is right off the road, no hiking necessary, very convenient. There are a couple of upper leads in the entrance room that Sara Cline and Kathryn Hutchins explored, but go nowhere. Next, there are two nuisance drops (including a long awkward series that was a flail fest to climb out. It was rerigged later over a much easier lip). Then there was a 50 foot pitch that led to the top of the Former 400. It was tricky loading your rack coming out of the crevice but I developed a technique that was like doing a reverse pull up off the rigging. The first big drop in the cave is called the Former 400. It was once thought to be 400 feet, but is actually approximately 380. It has three rebelays and a pool of water at the bottom. This pitch is soaked with water and covered in live flow stone. It took me about 300 frog strokes to climb the longest portion of the pit. Then there is some short walking passage, including a flow stone formation that we had to climb over that became increasingly difficult, the muddier it became. Eventually I had to dig my fingers into the popcorn on the walls to scale this slightly too tall formation. The next challenge was the Muddy Whore. The Muddy Whore is a fifty foot pitch that has to be climbed up. There was much speculation as to how Joe Ivy got up this the first time and I think the short answer was "ice ax". Fernando climbed the rope that was left 20 years ago then promptly replaced it for everyone else to climb safely, albeit a muddy wet mess. Once The Muddy Whore was scaled, there was a little more walking passage and the top of Argo's Well. Argo's Well is 300 feet with four rebelays. I got to really love rebelays.



photos: Bryce Smith

The bottom of Argo's Well has shin deep water. Bryce covered his feet with trash bags to avoid wet feet. Amy promptly fell in up to her neck upon landing from her rappel. Morgan drank the water with his lifestraw. Then there was more walking passage and Disbeliever's Well. This pitch is about 175 feet and four rebelays and very difficult to survey, but somehow Bryce and I did it. Next, the dreaded Rebirth Canal, which was completely dry, no water pump needed! The cave completely changes on the other side of the Rebirth Canal. The temperature goes up at least 15 degrees and there's washed in leaves and sticks and even a snake skeleton. All signs point to another entrance on that side of the cave. The next section is ever-widening canyon passage. Surveying with Bryce, who is 6'7" and Matt, who is 6'2" made it ever challenging to read my instruments. At one point, Matt was propping me up so I could see to Bryce's station. There is plenty more cave, but our survey ended here. Beyond the canyon passage is the Great Bat Hall that was full of thousands of bat skeletons, then more pits, including Page's Pit and walking borehole passage. We surveyed 401 vertical meters of cave and 772.76 meters of length. Not bad for five days of caving!

The survey team was an adventure of raunchy jokes and incredible personalities. The team was made up of Matt Zappitello, Carson Fuls, Ron Rutherford, Kathryn Hutchins, Amy Morton and Bryce Smith. Carson Fuls' girlfriend loaned me an under armour shirt that I wore in the cave every day (and she didn't even know, I'm so glad she made him over pack). He was lead tape for the first two days. He had been to the ranch the previous year and his quote is "I wanted to come back and survey Montemayor". We climbed out together the first day but the Former 400 was a pitch he only wanted to scale once. So after that Bryce took his spot on the survey team. Carson is also a johnny cake making fool. He was always really helpful in the kitchen when I was trying to get a hot meal together for everyone.

Ron Rutherford showed up sometime in the middle of the night on Sunday or Monday and joined the survey team. He and Rob were the only people on the trip who had ever been in the cave before. He was a huge help on the Former 400, surveying a pit of that magnitude is daunting to the then novice surveyor such as me. He was also really generous with his gear. We completely destroyed his rope making a haul system the last day and he didn't complain at all. Then he had to go back to Texas early so he disappeared in the early morning as quickly as he came.

The day I was sick Kathryn Hutchins took my place on the survey team. The three girls, Sara


photo: Amy Morton


photo: Amy Morton


photo: Bryce Smith

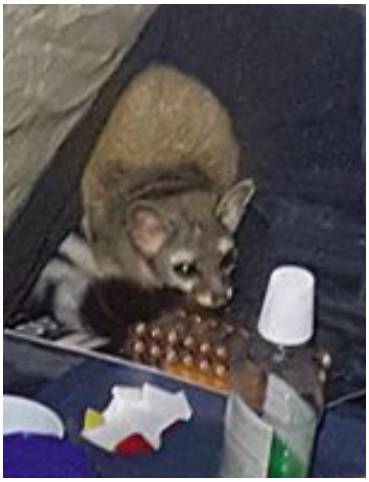



photo: Amy Morton

Cline, Ginger Reddig and Kathryn Hutchins were amigas and spent a lot of time exploring the ranch together. They found lots of other cave entrances on the property and named them awesome names such as "Dude, Where's My Pants?" and "Tally Had To Pee." They are also fire feeding maniacs and I credit them to the amazing turkey we had on Thanksgiving. There may or may not have been dancing on the tables thanks to these silly girls.

Appointed by everyone as the team leader and our sketcher extraordinaire was Matt Zappitello. The first day I said to him, "Whatever you do, whatever the team feels up to doing, I am right there with you." And he did not disappoint. He's a beast of a caver who never tires. An easy leader, I would have no problems following Matt into any cave in the future. Not to mention, a laugh riot every moment in and out of the cave. I could never say a bad thing about Matt Zapp.

This article is written from my perspective of the trip that made me an expedition caver. I'm not a writer and this article doesn't cover everything but I wanted to share my experience. A trip like this is life changing. I got to know new people and made lasting friendships. I made Thanksgiving dinner (including a turkey we roasted in a rock pit fueled by coals from the fire) and as we sat around to eat, it really felt like family. We all served ourselves and sat at the table and I realized everyone was waiting to begin. I almost started crying because it was such a sweet gesture by everyone. Except for my missing boyfriend, I could not have asked for a more grateful holiday. In the cave, I pushed my physical and mental limits, this cave changed my perspective of what "challenging" is. I climbed the Former 400 three times and I climbed out of the entire 401 meters (over 1300 feet) on the last day. When we go back we will be packing bevy sacks and camping in the cave to continue the survey. I will be ready for that trip, in fact, I can't wait.

LA GRIETA CAMP 3: 2016 A FIRST EXPEDITION

By Fernando Hernández


photo: Frank Bogle

To the reader: Sorry for my English; it is not my first language.

On April 15, 2016 I traveled towards Huautla de Jiménez in Oaxaca for the PESH expedition. This was my first big expedition ever, so I did not know what to expect or what I was going to do exactly. I was uber-excited, and I guess not knowing what I was getting into calmed me down a bunch. "Ignorance is bliss."

The trip started when I arrived at the Mexico City airport, where I met Katie Graham. She was really nice and humble about her caving experiences, which later I found out to be incredible. We visited the flea market and then took the overnight bus to Huautla. I was expecting to take a beauty sleep on the bus, but the driver had other plans. He decided to blast salsa music on his stereo all night long. So I got a few minutes of sleep to the sound of "Suavemente" by Elvis Crespo.

We arrived in Huautla at 6:00 a.m. and proceeded to take a taxi to Plan Carlota. It was still dark, so I could not see a lot. Eduardo, our taxi driver, explained to us some details about the area, like their government complexity and also about their seasonal fruits and the milpas. When we passed San Andrés, the sunrise came and we could fully appreciate the beauty of the area. It is truly breathtaking when you first see the valley with its intense lush green color. Little houses spread through the hills with their cornfields next to the houses. Some locals start poking their heads though the windows to observe arrivals, but most of them just continue their daily life: men hiking with their digging poles, women walking to the market with flowers in their hands, and dogs resting on the porches.

Plan Carlota is a little town on the side of the mountain with no more than 15 to 20 visible houses. Katie and I arrived at the main field house, which was next to the local school. The accommodations were

pretty nice: three houses on the side of the hill with a spectacular view. One was the main cooking and gear storage building, with a little room on the roof. Another had three rooms where people set up camp, with others camping on the roof. The third was a computer room, which also contained a bathroom.

My first logical question to Bill Steele was, "Hey Bill, so what am I going to do here?" He just told me to talk to Gilly Elor. I approached Gilly, and she asked me if I wanted to go underground, to which I responded, "Yes." My bags were still outside the house and I started getting ready to go caving. I asked what exactly I needed to prepare for. She just casually said, "Prepare for 7 to 9 days." That is when it became real, because I had never been on a proper cave-camp trip before.

That afternoon I was on my way to La Grieta. The early team consisted of Katie Graham, Zeb Lilly, Scott Wahlquist and Kasia Biernacka. They were going to survey the 'Merican and Canadian tubes (and planned to connect into the Refresher and go downstream to Camp 1.5). The late team consisted of Gilly Elor, Bruce White, Andrew Chapman and me. We would carry dive gear for the Pato Mojado and go directly to Camp 1.5. We went down the first drop and the first thing we noticed was a putrid smell. That was the turkey that was sacrificed in a Mazatec ritual in the past few days. We avoided staying in that room for too long. We continued through the series of drops and rebelays until we arrived at the stream passage. The cave itself is not particularly difficult, but the heavy backpacks make it quite a challenge. Lots of climbing up and down on brittle rock made it a thrill. We passed thought the "Torture Chamber" and the "Bottleneck" until we arrived at our destination.

We regrouped with the rest of the team at Camp 1.5. They arrived very excited because they had made the connection that everyone was hoping for. The Canadian Tubes were connected with the Refresher. I heard the conversation half asleep, half fighting an annoying little drip in my face. At this moment, I started getting to better know the people I was caving with. I never felt so out-caved on any trip. Everyone was so strong and had an impressive caving resume. People were talking about Croatia, Slovenia, France, China, Lechuguilla, San Agustín, Castleguard, and here I was talking about Whirlpool, Punkin and Deep. They made me feel so excited to cave and learn from them.

Day 2 The next morning we parted ways with Scott, Kasia and Andrew. We loaded up our gear and headed on our way towards Camp 3. On the way we took a detour to "Mexiguilla." It was named like that on the previous expedition, due to its nice-looking formations. I would recommend looking for the pictures Kasia took of this place, because it is hard to describe in words. I was amazed by the formations called "snake dancers." This area was also the birth place of our team name when Katie called a formation a "Fat Turtle" and Gilly thought she was saying that to Bruce. We lost a member of the team for some minutes, which made me hyperaware



photo: Katie Graham


photo: Matt Tomlinson

about the seriousness of this cave. Any turn can be deceiving and you never know where you are going to end up. We continued our way and arrived at Camp 3. This room had big, reddish breakdown with some platforms built using mud and rocks. It was fairly big and you could faintly hear the waterfall. It sounded just smooth enough to act like a lullaby for sleeping. We needed to get on rope to go for water, which turned out to be a pain when all our gear was wet. The whole area was unstable and on a slope; that made traversing through camp part of the adventure. The toilet was a nice crack in the floor, which could be smelled throughout the camp.

Day 3 I woke up super excited, because it was the day of the first push. We previously got informed that there were two leads; one was a tight lead, and the other one was a technical climb. We arrived at the intersection, split the team and attacked both leads. Zeb, Katie and Bruce went to the dry passage, and Gilly and I went to do the climb. We followed bend after bend of endless stream passage on fragile protrusions of rock. After checking some of the passages, we found "Alcan Falls." Gilly and I were on the bottom discussing how to avoid the waterfall when all of a sudden we saw lights on the top of the waterfall. My first thought was, "Who the hell is up there!" After we recognized their voices, it was Zeb and Katie! Gilly and I looked at each other and just started free climbing the waterfall. It was not as bad as we first thought, but now we were wet as if we just went to Honey Creek Cave. We met up with Katie and Zeb and it was decided that Gilly and I will continue the climb and they will go back to expand the tight passage (which became the commuter route) and check on Bruce (who, we were informed, took a small fall). Gilly took the lead, and I belayed. She effortlessly climbed "Alcan Falls" and in no time, she was setting a rope for us to climb. We continued in free-climbable and uptrending stream passages until we hit a small breakdown. After finding a way through it, we ended up in a huuuuge room; well at least for me. (Remember, I cave in Texas.) In this room there was a waterfall and yet another small climb. I led the 2-bolt wonder, and got into more stream passage. We did some leapfrogging to maximize the survey, and stopped at another waterfall.

Day 4 We headed straight to the waterfall where we left the survey the day before. It was eventually named Turkey Fell. Zeb led the climb, which turned out to be more complicated than at first sight due to crappy rock. Zeb and I proceeded to go ahead and scout and survey back. We kept following the stream passage, until we found a waterfall heading to the west and a passage to the east. Since we did not have any climbing gear, we proceeded the easy way even though most of the water came from the west lead. We followed the stream until we got to a constriction, which I went through. To my surprise, it was tight. Here I was trying not to get stuck with a cold waterfall blasting in my face. I managed to pass, and had to get the water out of the inside of my ears. Then Zeb took the best approach and with a sling we moved some rocks to make it easier. We then continued to a U-turn that led to a room with a high ceiling and a big mud/breakdown mountain. We stopped our booty scooping and proceeded to survey back. On the way back, we were able to find a way to avoid the waterfall squeeze through an upper passage. We met with the rest of the group at the previous waterfall and decided to go back to the big room. We then checked the flowstone waterfall, which led to a free-climbable waterfall which became tighter and tighter. Here I used my Texas cave skill and managed to squeeze through a slot. Not everyone was able to pass through this. The rest of us continued heading up. The passage ended in two leads. One was like a small culvert with water flowing and trash. It ended at a constriction impossible to pass without some

modification. The other lead was a 10-meter climb on loose and crappy rock. We surveyed back and headed to the rest of the team. Meanwhile, Bruce and Zeb found a way to tie in a loop from the big room to a previous station.

Day 5 We had a late start. We really tried to maintain a 24-hour schedule, but the days started slipping little by little. We were almost going to call it a rest day, probably just because of the idea of putting on wet clothes… again… We fought our lazy desires, and Zeb, Katie and I proceeded to climb the waterfall that leads west. Gilly went to retrieve more ropes from Camp 1.5 for further climbs. We approached the waterfall and thought about our plan of attack. Zeb had identified a ledge in the middle of the waterfall and we proceeded to climb from there. Katie took the lead and I took the belay. Katie showed her impressive climbing skills and disappeared from our view, across a ledge, and rigged the waterfall. We explored a couple of meters upstream until we decided to leave the lead for tomorrow.

One good thing to mention is that camp life was pretty cheerful. We bonded very well, and that was a huge step for the success of the trip. We all shared duties, laughed out loud every night, and every decision was a group decision.

Day 6 We went directly to where we left off. Again we divided into two groups. Gilly and I had the plan to scoop ahead until we found an obstacle, and survey back. Zeb and Katie surveyed from the waterfall onward to us. We followed the stream up until we found a section of deep pools. We had to make a couple of traverses across the rock to pass. There was one pool that seemed wider and more challenging than the others. Gilly passed first and crossed successfully. I was so confident in my climbing skills that I went full climbing mode and did a bouldering traverse. To my surprise a rock decided it did not want to be on the wall anymore and dislodged in my hand. The broken handhold sent me plunging down into the deep pool, getting me wet up to my neck. This pool got named "The Gluck Gluck" (the sound a turkey makes whilst drowning) in reference of the Glubs in the lower levels of the cave. After some cursing and laughing we continued onward. We came to another waterfall, "Gobble Gobble Falls," which Gilly climbed. After that we leapfrogged again, and Gilly and I took the lead. We encountered a series of "Deep Pools," which reminded me of fun bouldering. We then found ourselves in a big upstream passage, which blew cold air. This was named "Beyond the Deep Pools." After this area, we found a split: a large stream partially blocked by breakdown to the east and a smaller stream to the west. We surveyed back to the rest of the team and called it a day.

Day 7 We returned to the split we left the previous day. Water seemed particularly higher on the waterfall, which we later found out was caused by a quick and heavy shower on the surface. We were prepared for the pools and took some rope and Zeb rigged a traverse line. This kept us… well, I wouldn't say super dry, but less wet.

We got to the breakdown pile that blocked the eastern stream. I free climbed it carefully and tried to avoid the rolling boulders that were coming down. I rigged some ropes, and the rest of the team came up. We divided into two groups. Zeb and Katie went ahead, and Bruce, Gilly and I surveyed from the top of the climb. We continued in big, flat passage. We were really excited by the ongoing passage. It was unbelievable that it continued that big. Moments after that thought came to my head, I saw lights coming our way. The other team was coming back. They got stopped by a little obstacle. It was an 18-meter waterfall with roaring water, which marked the end of our exploration. This waterfall is named Ankara. The rest of the team ran to see this thing. It was really impressive and inviting to climb.

The passage to the west continued in a meandering, tighter passage and ended up at a 21- meter waterfall. This is Cappadocia.

The best news is that the cave continues upward. We returned excited. On this trip someone mentioned to me "always leave the leads better than they were" (or something like that). I think The Fat Turtles achieved that goal.

On the way back, we stopped at a side passage that Katie had identified while trying to avoid Turkey Fell waterfall This led to a heavily decorated paleo passage. It was full of soda straws and flowstone; it was very beautiful, but hard to move and not break anything. We left that passage as a lead option for a future trip. I particularly enjoyed that last way back. We had done it so many times, but I knew I was not going

to be back there. Just for a year hopefully. We returned to camp knowing that still it was not over. We still needed to inventory Camp 3 and look for "Pato Mojado," which leads to a whole other section of the cave.

Day 8 We did the inventory of Camp 3 and I took my last poop in the crack. We left for Camp 1.5 and in my eagerness I got lost, of course. I took the turn to "Super Awesome Lead." I realized it eventually and caught up in the "Formation Room." Many would claim I got lost; I was just exploring more of the cave, of course. We got back to Camp 1.5 and found the most awesome surprise. Paul and Eric went down and left a water bottle full of mezcal that Vico sent us. It was a very happy moment for the crew. We drank it cheerfully and even though it didn't give us a buzz, it was a good pre-party for the surface.

Day 9 It was the last day in the cave. After 8 days, part of me was ready to get out, but another part was feeling nostalgic. It had been such an awesome trip and it was coming to an end. What could have been happening on the surface? Yet, the cave had one more jaw-dropping moment to give us. We went to the lower levels to look for the "Pato Mojado." The lower levels had not been visited for a long time previous to this expedition. Another team had already rigged it, so it was a cruise for us. The Refresher, or what I think the Refresher was, consisted of a rappel into a room with a roaring waterfall going beside you. After that, the rooms start getting bigger and bigger. There are very fun traverses along the stream passage, but you can't avoid getting in the water. There were some impressive boulder fields, until we got to the famous Camp 2 aka "Mazateca Shores." This was very nice to see, because I had read about it and seen pictures. There is still no comparison to seeing it in person. We spent a short time on the "sandy shores" and kept going to hit the "L Room." The map doesn't do justice to how complicated it is to navigate through that section. It was awesome that the previous team had placed some tape. We searched for the "Pato Mojado" but Zeb ended up not diving it, because we were not sure if it was the correct spot. We took some mental notes about the possible Patos Mojados and headed back to the surface.

The way back was not as hard as I expected. The prospect of beers and food made me float my way back. I also used a foot ascender for the first time. That thing is magical. I was running through those ropes, or at least in my head. I got ahead of the group, and I thought I got lost until a peculiar smell came to my nose. Rotten! The putrid smell of the turkey was still lingering and in a weird way I was happy for the awful smell. It meant surface. So I went ahead and got on rope. In that last stretch of rope, my mind went to all of these events that happened through the week. I was really grateful for the awesome team that I had and the friends I made. I felt blessed for the opportunity that the expedition gave me to explore this beautiful cave. A tarantula came close to my face and even that I thought was beautiful. When I got to the surface, I lay down against a tree and turned off my light. To my surprise, nature had a treat for me. All the hills were shining with lightning bugs. It was nothing I had seen before. Thousands of them swirling and dancing just for us. After a couple of minutes I saw a light emerge from the pit.

We ran down the hill and got back to the fieldhouse around 10:30 p.m. We were welcomed by the whole crew with food and beer. We swapped stories all around. Nothing incredible happened on the surface, except Prince. I never listened to his music anyway. Everything was merry and cheerful; it was success. I was supposed to feel satisfied and accomplished, but the only thing in my head was Ankara and Cappadocia. 2017 is going to be an exciting year for Huautla I am sure.

As a last thing to mention, this story is just about one group that explored underground, but this whole exploration could not have happened without the joint efforts of everyone inside and outside the cave. That was a thing I learned on this expedition.

The leaders, cooks, riggers, haulers, public relations, locals, interpreters, etc. all matter.

Many people focus completely on the high-end of the exploration, but it all starts from the base. It is all part of a big team.

On this trip, I met wonderful people and cavers. I experienced the happiness of the local people, and got humbled by the immense cave that is Sistema Huautla. I am grateful to have been part of PESH 2016. Caving is not going to be the same for me again. It gave me a bigger perspective and bigger goals of what caving is about.

Now, back to Deep and Punkin Cave in Texas (which I did the weekend after PESH).

FROM THE EDITOR

An apology and explanation.

Dear TSA members, first of all I want to apologize to you all for not putting out a magazine in a year. As paying members, I am well aware of what is owed you and feel deeply responsible for not following through with my responsibility as editor. However, I also strongly feel some explanation is due, as well as a description of what involves getting the Caver out.

Simply put, I have been burned out. Putting out a quality 28 page publication takes an enormous amount of work, communication, coordination, and dependency. Last year around this time, aside from my job, I was working on three major projects for the caving community – and I was doing it gladly. But the hours and stress took their toll. I tried to resign as editor last spring because I felt the TSA deserved better, but agreed to continue as graphic designer only. The TSA President has been looking for a dedicated support team for several months.

My hope is that if everyone understands the work involved, there may be more willingness for publication support and to increase the reliability and overall quality of the Texas Caver – with either me or another editor.

To put out an issue, requests must go out continuously for articles from the community. I give each article a light proof read before passing it to another proofer. If an article needs heavy editing, I work with the author. My foremost objective here is making the author look good. If there is a consistent style that breaks the rules of grammar I carefully choose what to edit in order to preserve the character of the story.

When articles arrive, most of the time there are no, or low resolution photos (lots of cavers are using phones for photos - it may look ok on screen but it doesn't print well). Sometimes, I'm given the name of someone who was on the trip for me to request the photos from. I have been directed to Facebook but Facebook photos aren't printable. Sometimes, I'm given a link to go online storage folders, sift through hundreds of photos and download the images one at a time – being sure to organize the article and photographer(s). This is why I request using Dropbox.

There are more hours than I care to admit for design layout; this also involves photo cropping and touch up for exposure. Then there is a final round of proofing.

A current members list is requested from the TSA Secretary and submitted with the file for addressing at print. Then the files are submitted to the printer, approved, printed and returned. Each magazine must be taped shut to be accepted by the post office.

The stamps must be purchased in person since there is not a $1.65 (est) stamp and the volume is too small for bulk rates and processing. So this requires working with the post office to find the closest combination of available stamps – which is always changing!

When the two or three stamps per issue are applied, a final trip to the post office to drop is made. Each issue requires fronting about $450 for printing and $180 for stamps. The TSA Treasurer has always been very prompt for reimbursement.

Thanks for giving me your time. I hope that with this understanding, more people will step forward to create a dedicated team to support the Texas Caver.

A final note: Recently, it has been brought to my attention from more than one person that I've been accused of holding back articles. To my knowledge, this only happened on one occasion two years ago when there was a miscommunication about splitting an article that was too long to print in a single issue. If I am wrong and there are others not printed, my sincerest apologies, but if any submitted articles have not been printed, no authors have come back to me regarding this.

FORGED IN FIRE





photo: John Wilson

An unforgettable adventure on the Big Island of Hawai'i: Lava tube caving with John Wilson, president of the Hawai'i Grotto and Peter Bosted, world renowned cave photographer. Above: Crater portion of Kilauea's Crater Rim Trail, the hike across was about two miles. Below: In one of the lava tube caves on John Wilson's property.









John Wilson and wife Mary were gracious hosts and tour guides each weekend.



Peter and Molly. I had the good fortunate to help Peter with a photo shoot.



John, Peter and Jill. We spent a day surveying with Peter in a private cave.

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