Spring 2022

The Texas Caver

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THE TEXAS CAVER, SPRING 2022 – VOL. 66, NO. 1



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It's time to register!

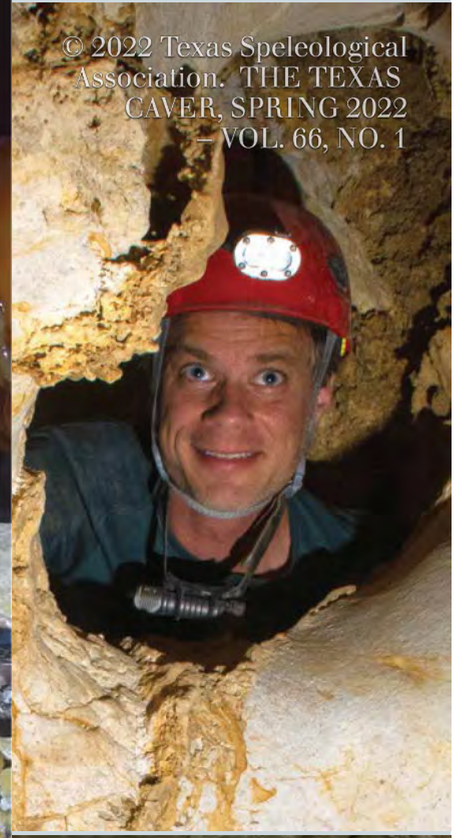
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- THE 2ND EVER SPELEO-RODEO!
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- CAVE TRIPS IN WIND CAVE, JEWEL CAVE, AND OTHERS!
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THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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2021 Winners of the Phil Winsborough

TSA Exploration Awards

The **Texas Cavers Reunion (TCR)** is honored to present the **2021 Winners of the Annual Phil Winsborough TSA Exploration Awards** on behalf of Terry Saythe and Debbie Stewart. This year's winners are **Ben Hutchins** and **Bryce Smith**. Each award comes with a cash prize of $500. Candidates can either be nominated or selected by a panel of peers. *Make sure to get your nominations in before TCR next year!*

Photos from top to bottom:

Surveying in boneyard, TCMA's still unnamed Carta Valley cave
Photo Credit: Chris Vreeland
Photo of Ben Hutchins

Delicate gypsum passage, New Mexico
Photo Credit: Jean Krejca
Photo of Bryce Smith

The Texas Caver

The Texas Caver is a magazine written for cavers, by cavers. It is a publication of the Texas Speleological Association (TSA), an internal organization of the National Speleological Society (NSS).

The opinions and methods expressed in this publication are solely those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, the TSA, or the NSS.

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Cover Photo by Peter Sprouse
Cait McCann in Driftwood Cave.

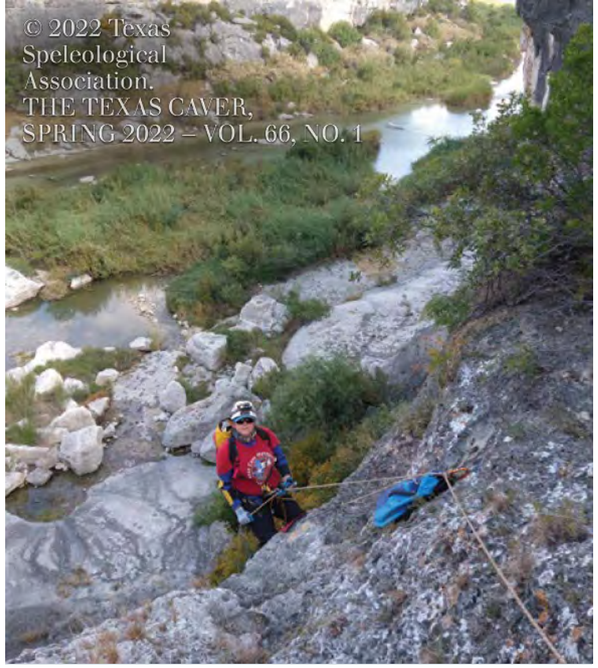
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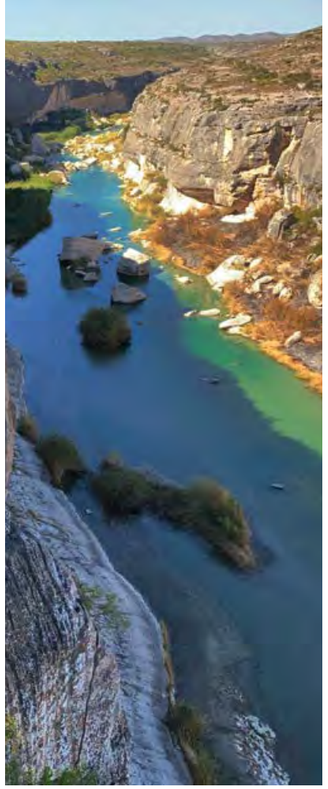


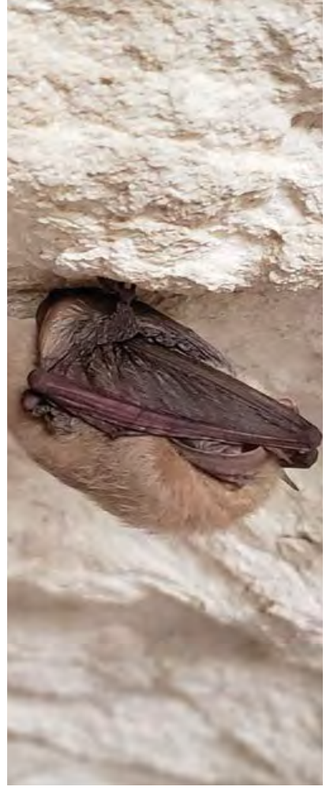
Letter from the Editor

Texas cavers continue to discover and explore new caves, document karst features, and advance our understanding of the underground world. In this issue of The Texas Caver, you can read about active karst projects, new (and old) caving frontiers, cave dives, and deep caving. Take time to remember departed cavers and congratulate winners of the Chuck Stuehm Award and the Annual Phil Winsborough TSA Exploration Award. We are happy to have you in our Texas caving community.

Photo above:

Rappelling to caves in cliffs above the Pecos River
Photo Credit: Aimee Beveridge
Photo of Jessica Gordon







Next to a turquoise oasis ...

The view of the Pecos River from Shumla Point

And bats at the extreme end of their range ...

Townsend’s big-eared bats (*Corynorhinus townsendi*)

Vibrantly glowing ...

Ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*) near the entrance to Shumla Point Cave

Featuring: “Caves of the Lower Pecos Canyonlands”
by John Spence, Peter Sprouse, Cait McCann, and Jessica Gordon
⟶ More details on page 18.

Photos from left to right:

View of the Pecos River from Shumla Point
Photo Credit: Jessica Gordon

Townsend’s big-eared bat *(Corynorhinus townsendi)*
Photo Credit: Cait McCann

Ocotillo near Shumla Point Cave
Photo Credit: Jessica Gordon

TSA Karst Project

by Marvin Miller

With the pandemic raging we avoided spending lots of time with teams of people in small spaces. We did a lot of ridgewalking instead but still managed to survey a bunch of short caves and work on some digs.

Joe Mitchell led teams to finish up the Area 9 ridgewalk. They discovered a short pit with a crawl at the bottom that needs digging. It will almost certainly qualify as a cave with a little work. After Area 9 Joe moved on to Area 13, which was already about halfway done. His teams persevered through some of the densest brush Government Canyon has to offer and that Area is almost finished. All that work did not produce any big, open caves, but there are some sinks to go back and dig on.

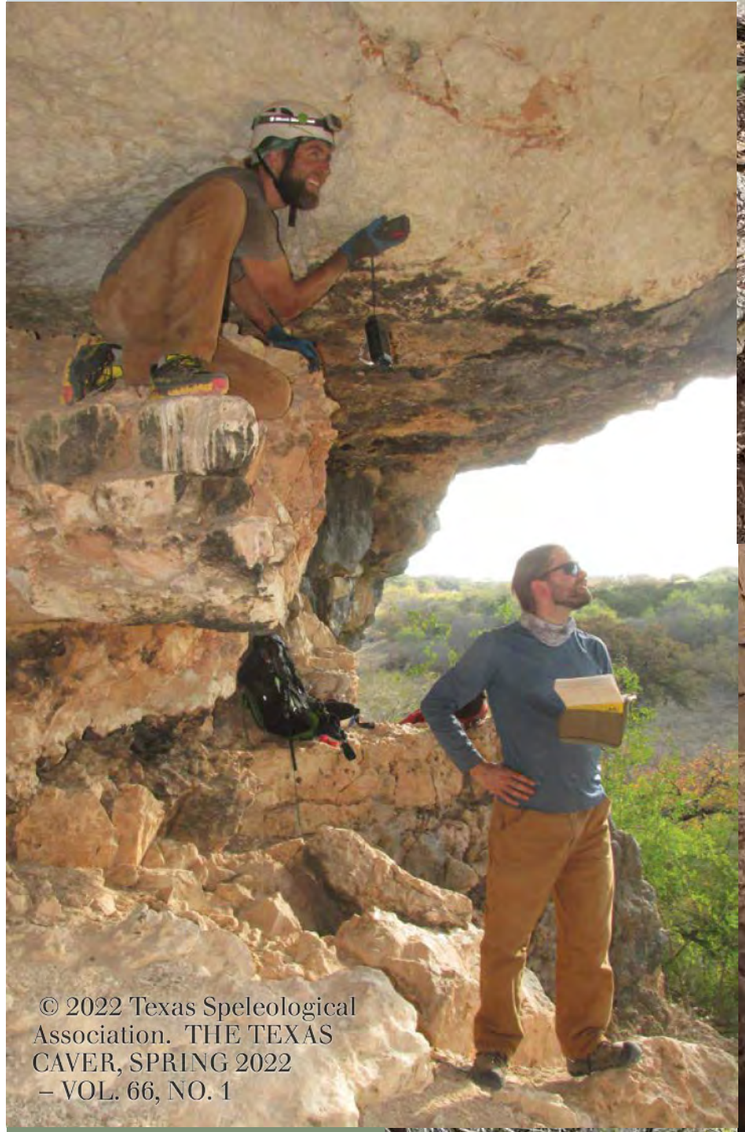
Adam Stevens led a team to finish up the dig on Morphing Mouth Cave. This cave has a thriving population of white-throated slimy salamanders. The small entrance in flat bedrock drops about a meter to a ledge and then the passage steps down a meter twice more, never getting much larger than room for one person. At the end of the last step, the passage drops two meters into a narrow crevice running perpendicular to the entrance passage. The crevice immediately gets too tight to traverse in both directions.

Mark Ross, Adam Stevens, and I teamed up to survey Thorn Thicket Cave and Spillway Cave. Thorn Thicket Cave is a small but interesting cave for the area with joint-controlled passage segments intersecting at right angles to form a mini maze. The survey was aborted soon after we started seeing soft-bodied ticks on the floor. Not soon enough, however – both Adam and I got sick and needed prescriptions of doxycycline to knock out the relapsing fever. Watch out for the ticks!

Peter Anderson-Sprecher led Nate Clark and Kori Dunaway to survey three caves in the horseshoe bend area of San Geronimo Creek. They surveyed Hog Hall Cave, Conglomerate Cave, and Grand Geronimo Cavern.

Mio Spyker surveyed The Ag

Government Canyon State Natural Area





link to TPWD: Government Canyon SNA



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Photos from top left to right:

Surveying Grand Geronimo Cavern, Government Canyon
Photo Credit: Marvin Miller
Photo of Nathan Clark and Peter Anderson-Sprecher

Small pit found on ridgewalk, Government Canyon
Photo Credit: Joe Mitchell
Photo of Tobin Hays

Round Hole Sink/It Didn't Go, Hill Country
Photo Credit: Marvin Miller
Photo of Leah Miller

Photos from bottom left to right:

Rocks revealed a short pit, Government Canyon
Photo Credit: Joe Mitchell
Photo of Peter Anderson-Sprecher

Harvestman Cave, Hill Country
Photo Credit: Mark Ross
Photo of Arron Wertheim and Victoria Summers





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link to TPWD: Hill Country SNA



Steven Gutierrez in Melanie's Cave, Hill Country State Natural Area
Photo Credit: Mark Ross

Hole during the January trip, assisted by Lindsey Adamowski and Liz Brearly. Mio's team plus Mark Ross and Steven Gutierrez also worked on the Area 28 ridgewalk. More transects were done in Area 28 during the May trip. Some small sinks and a nice shelter were documented.

John Young joined me to relocate a cave that had been reported in an old karst assessment for a property on the north side of the park. The property is now part of the park, and along with it comes a cave that we called Insurrection Cave. This was just a few days after January 6, 2021. I surveyed the cave while John worked on digs. Later, Peter Anderson-Sprecher and Steven Gutierrez did some digging and made the cave about 30 meters longer – Peter's estimate. This new crawly area still needs to be surveyed.

During the March trip, Matt Salz and I installed benchmarks with TSA feature numbers at nine cave entrances in the horseshoe bend of San Geronimo Creek.

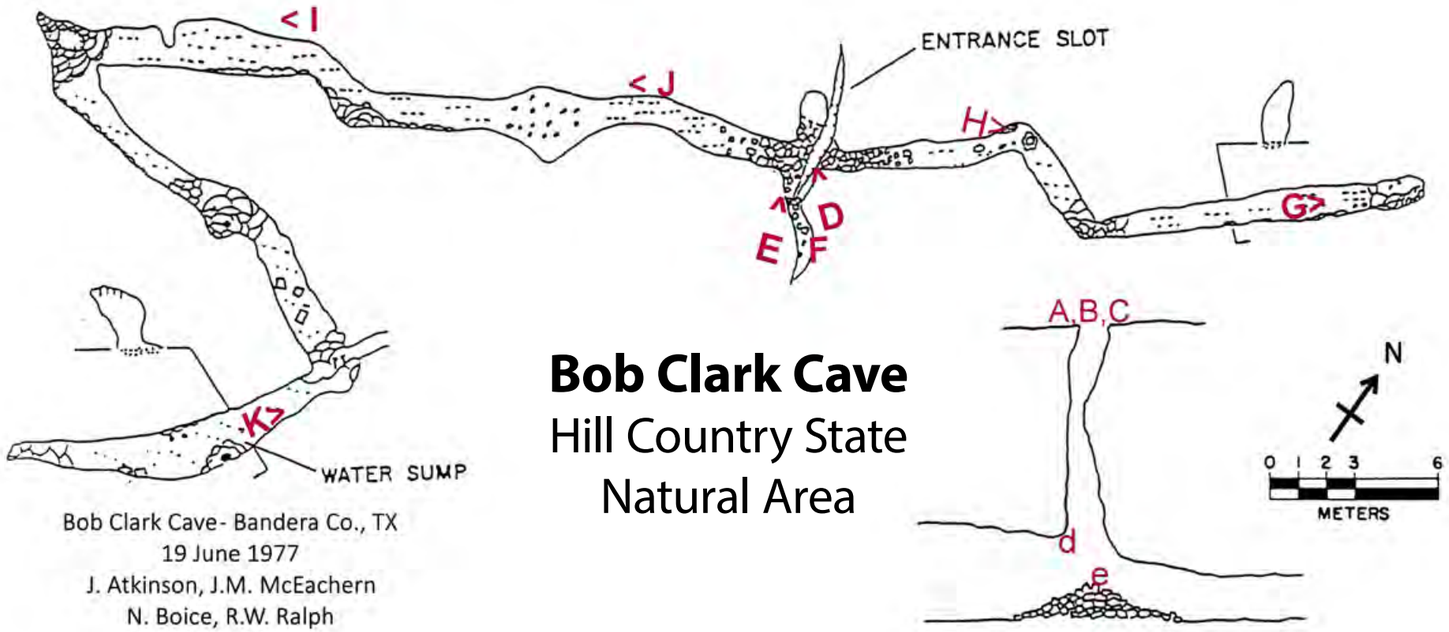
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The work at Hill Country State Natural Area has focused on relocating and completing the work on the currently known features. After that is done we will start ridgewalking to find new features. Even so, as we are traversing the hills to other destinations we are finding things.

Ben and Chelsea Dau, joined by John Benac and Eva Lin, came across an unknown entrance on the same hill that holds Eight Meter Deep Cave and Groundhog Cave. When we went to survey it, Sotol Garden Pit had a promising breeze blowing out. The entrance drop was 3.5 meters to the top of a small debris pile that spilled one way to a tiny hole and the other way to a tall, narrow crevice. This was where the air was coming from, but unfortunately, it squeezed down to only a few centimeters wide after about two meters. The passage could be seen to continue at this dimension for another three or four meters. The crevice had a slightly larger keyhole at the top and could potentially be followed using technical digging techniques. Steven Gutierrez and I surveyed the cave to 7.6 meters long and 3.7 meters deep.

On the same Saturday, Greg Mosier and Aaron Wertheim found Walk Home Pit as they were walking over the ridge back to camp in the evening. The approximately five-meter deep pit was dug on by several teams on later trips in hopes of uncovering passage at the bottom.

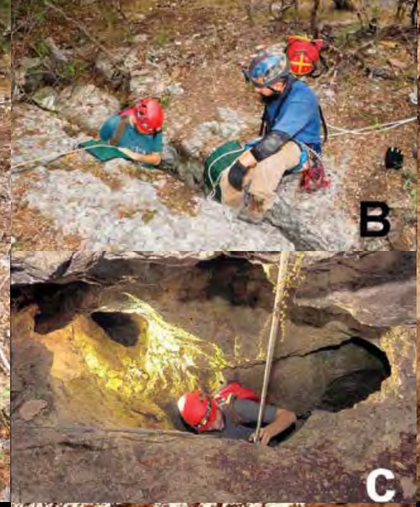
Ben, Chelsea, John, and Eva surveyed Eight Meter Deep Cave and Mosquito Heaven Cave. On the same trip, they rigged and descended the eight-meter-deep pit at the end of the upper-level passage in Groundhog Cave. This was probably the first visit to that part of the cave in a long time. Other caves that were surveyed were Missed Opportunity Cave – after chiseling the entrance a bit larger, Three Skunk Cave, Scott's Cave, and Blind Ambition Cave. Greg Mosier solo surveyed Harvestman Annex Cave. The cave is only 6.8 meters long but it has strong airflow, and deserves



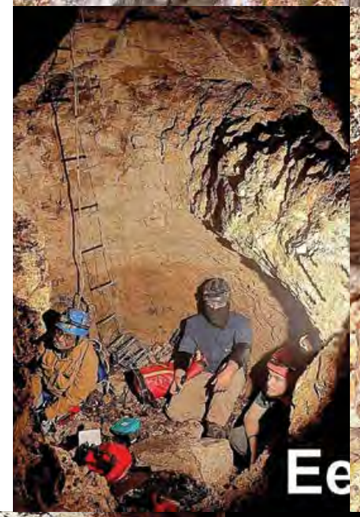
Bob Clark Cave- Bandera Co., TX
19 June 1977
J. Atkinson, J.M. McEachern
N. Boice, R.W. Ralph
A. Grubbs

Bob Clark Cave
Hill Country State
Natural Area

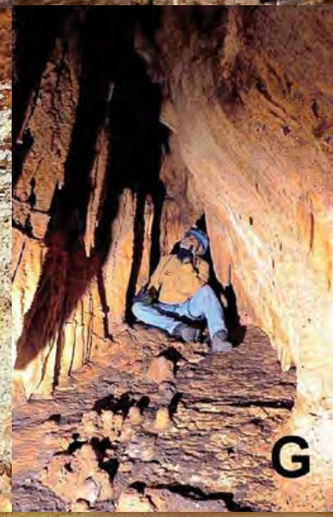




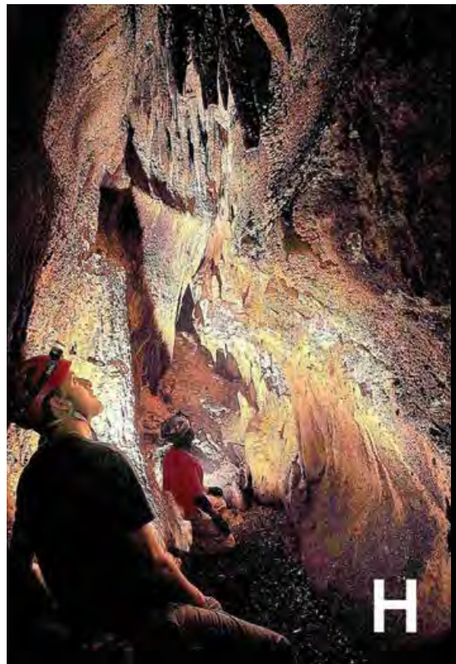


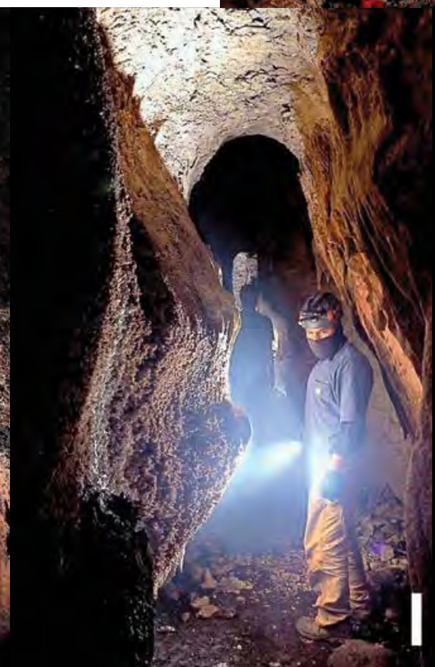


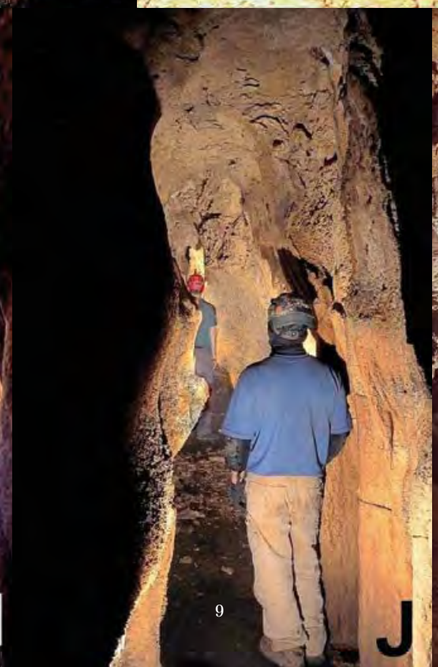


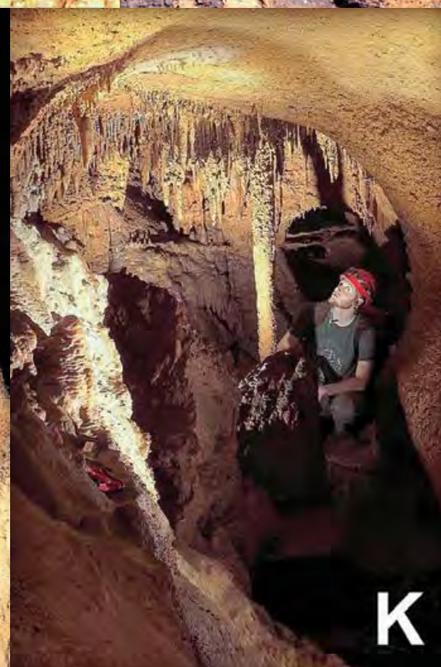


Photos by the Photo Team, October 2020:
Mark Ross, Steven Gutierrez, Sriram Madabhushi, & Nate Waters









some study to see if there is dig potential.

Harvestman Annex was one of the "lost" caves that now has a good GPS coordinate. Other previously known caves that were relocated and given correct coordinates are 1924 Cave, Bonus Cave, Raybin's Find Cave, and Copperhead Cave.

Several of the smaller caves have good potential for more passage with some digging. Dylan Beeler, Eleonore Le Corvaisier, Jim Funk, and Mio Spyker put in a hard day at Backup Cave, removing 100 five-gallon buckets of dirt and rock. The cave keeps teasing and more digging remains. Dylan was back at the project a few months later with another team from Austin. This time they put their effort into God Is My Rock Cave, a short vertical pit with some tantalizing floor drains. Catherine Daas, Lisa Miller, Leah Miller, and Mio joined me to start a dig in Blind Ambition Cave. This short cave has a dirt and rubble floor that slopes down from the entrance to pass under

Photos from top, clockwise:

Insurrection Cave, Entrance Government Canyon
Photo Credit: Marvin Miller
Photo of John Young

Sotol Garden Pit, Entrance Hill Country
Photo Credit: Mark Ross
Photo of Richard Silver

Three Skunk Cave, Entrance Hill Country
Photo Credit: Mark Ross
Photo of Marvin Miller


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the far wall of a dome with only a few centimeters of space. We want to find what lies on the other side.

People that helped evaluate surface sinks are Melanie Garza, John Gonzales, Walker Laza, Greg Mosier, Mike Polendo, Mark Ross, Richard Silver, and Arron Wertheim.

Benchmarks were set at the entrances of 16 caves with the help of Jim Funk, Ozarion King, and Leah Miller.

One last effort of note for the Hill Country project is Mark Ross's photo team. Mark has recruited Steven Gutierrez, Sriram Madabhushi, and Nate Waters for the team. He is organizing and leading photo trips to document the caves. So far the team has completed Bob Clark Cave, Copperhead Cave, Harvestman Cave, Melanie's Cave, and No-No Cave.


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The Solitario: A 'New' Caving Frontier Revisited

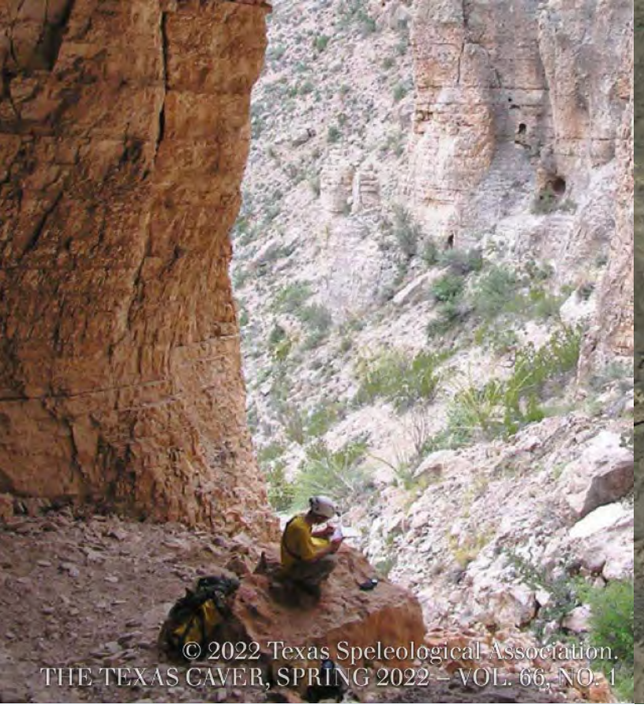
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TPWD: Big Bend Ranch SP

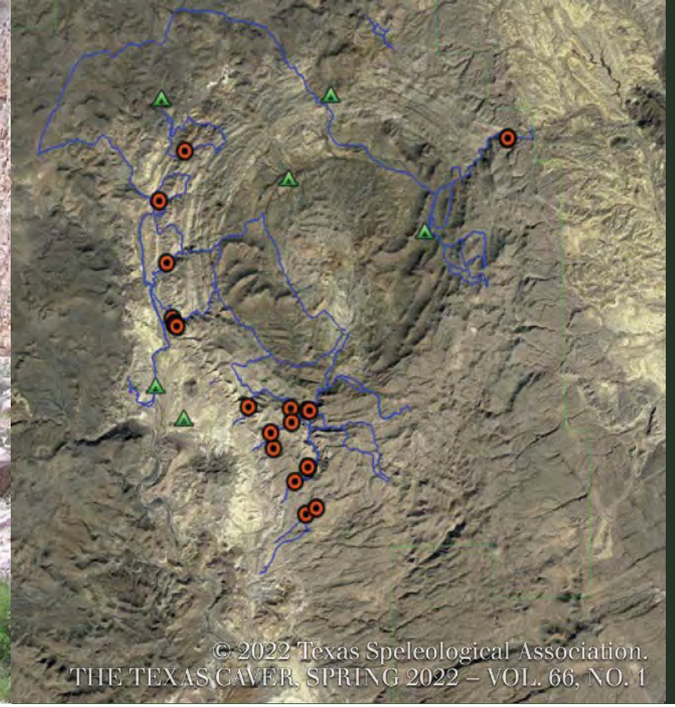
by Ben Hutchins

The Solitario of Big Bend Ranch State Park has intermittently attracted cavers since before the park existed. In 1968, Jim Estes wrote an article for The Texas Caver in which he asked whether the limestones of the Solitario could be the next caving frontier. In 2015, I wrote an article on our nascent cave survey efforts in the park, and six years later, I can now answer Jim's question with some confidence. No, it is not the next caving frontier. However, a recent short solo trip has spurred me to summarize the last nine years of cave survey effort, what we know about the caves of the area, and prospects for future discoveries.


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Flatirons of the Solitario
Photo Credit: Ben Hutchins


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"... a narrow, descending crawlway that terminated in some stalactites, helictites, and boxwork was cause for some real excitement in 2015."


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Media from left to right:

Cueva Auditorio
Photo Credit: Colin Strickland
Photo of Ben Hutchins

Map with campsites, tracks, and caves
Source: Google Earth™ satellite image
Landsat/Copernicus © 2021, seen on August 21, 2021

See a current Google Maps™ satellite view

See a Discovery Map of Big Bend Ranch SP

Guano Surprise Cave
Photo Credit: Galen Falgout
Photo of Joe Datri

The geology of the region is thoroughly covered by Henry and Muehlberger, 1996*, but for cavers, the important thing to know is that a sequence of Cretaceous limestone (primarily Glen Rose, Del Carmen, and Santa Elena) over 600 meters thick was pushed upward during a complex sequence of volcanic activity, followed by caldera collapse. Subsequent erosion has created a dramatic series of concentric limestone ridges dissected by canyons. The limestone is less tilted to the southwest, where the Solitario grades into the Terlingua Uplift: a low, dissected plateau of relatively flat-lying limestone dotted with a few igneous intrusions. Over 65,000 acres of Solitario and Terlingua Uplift limestone occur within the boundaries of Big Bend Ranch State Park. A few small hills of limestone also exist in the far north section of the park, but these remain essentially unvisited by cavers.

Caves have been known in the area for quite some time. Outside the park, the Terlingua Sinkhole is clearly visible on Google Earth and was visited by cavers in the early 1960s. Fewer than a dozen additional, small caves are known from the Terlingua Uplift, east of the park. Some of the caves were intersected during mercury mining operations, while others were explored by a few cavers in the 1960s and 1970s. Along the western flanks of the Solitario, Jim Estes and others visited Ocotillo Cave in the late 1960s. At 46 meters in length, it remains the longest known cave in the park, and although it is currently lost, it should be straightforward to relocate with some additional effort. A few other 'caves' are noted from the park either on topographic maps or in newspaper articles, but they don't appear to be in limestone and are probably rock shelters.

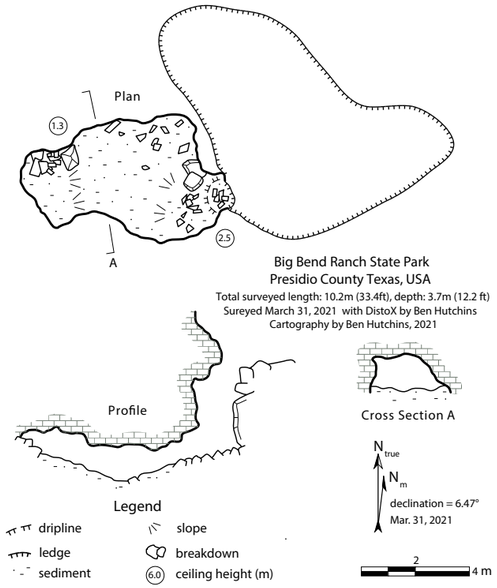
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In 2013, I started organizing trips to the Solitario over the Thanksgiving Holiday. At the time, travel to Mexico had been greatly reduced because of cartel violence along the border, so cavers were eager for alternative projects. In 2015, the Texas Speleological Survey entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, allowing us to camp for free and cave under more official auspices. The MOU has since expired, border-crossings have picked back up (COVID-19 notwithstanding), and no major caves were found, so ridgewalking efforts around the Solitario have become sporadic at best. Eight caving trips have been organized since 2013, and frankly, the trips have always been less about finding exciting caves and more about hiking through a

"... hiking through a vast, spectacular, and secluded desert landscape."

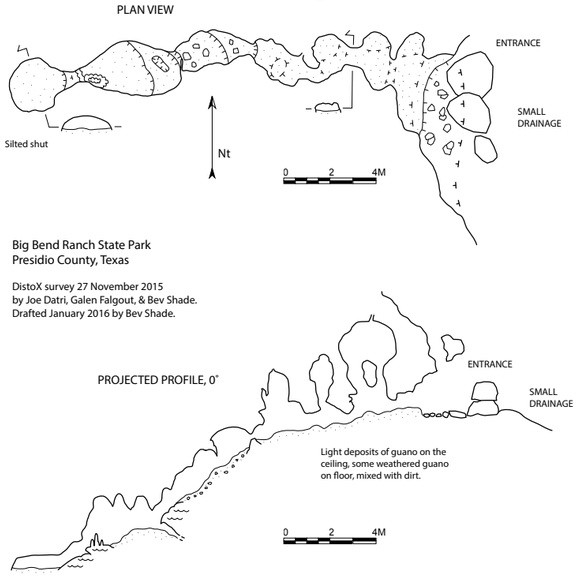
* Henry, C. D., W. R. Muehlberger (Eds). 1996. Geology of the Solitario Dome, Trans-Pecos Texas: Paleozoic, Mesozoic, and Cenozoic Sedimentation, Tectonism, and Magmatism. Bureau of Economic Geology Report of Investigations 240: 182 pps.

Easter Cave



Big Bend Ranch State Park
Presidio County Texas, USA
Total surveyed length: 10.2m (33.4ft), depth: 3.7m (12.2 ft)
Sureyed March 31, 2021 with DistoX by Ben Hutchins
Cartography by Ben Hutchins, 2021

Guano Surprise Cave



Big Bend Ranch State Park
Presidio County, Texas

DistoX survey 27 November 2015
by Joe Datri, Galen Falgout, & Bev Shade.
Drafted January 2016 by Bev Shade.

Photo on opposite page:

The Lower Shutup Canyon
Photo Credit: Sean Lewis

vast, spectacular, and secluded desert landscape. For the most part, cavers have camped at Tres Papalotes campsite in the center of the Solitario. The site was secluded, spacious, and had both composting toilets and non-potable water. A few trips were also based out of the Rincon campsites in Fresno Canyon just to the west of the Solitario, and Pila Montoya 3 to the northwest. From these sites, cavers would set out in one or more directions for light, strenuous, or death-march level day-hikes. Hikes were sharp and thorny, but wildly scenic with beer, food, and friendship waiting back at camp. Mishaps were rare although an unfortunate caver did once split up from his group and become lost. He was forced to spend a cold and thirsty night wandering the canyons and valleys before making his way back to the road in the early dawn hours of the next day. During many of our hikes, we would get funneled into scenic canyons where the hiking was easier and cliffside cave entrances were not uncommon. Over the years, at least 26 different cavers helped document 20 surveyed caves and an additional 30+ karst features, unchecked leads, and unsurveyed caves. Surveyed caves range between 7-45 meters in length, with an average length of 16 meters. Most of these are cliffside entrances, often with scenic views. For example, Cueva Auditorio is the longest cave we've surveyed (only a meter shorter than Jim Estes' Ocotillo Cave!) and sports a dramatic 15-meter-high entrance into an auditorium-like room replete with a few Apache pictographs. Another cave, Rainbow Oztotl Cave, while smaller, has an entrance reminiscent of the Oztotl, so prominent in Mexican and Texas caver culture.

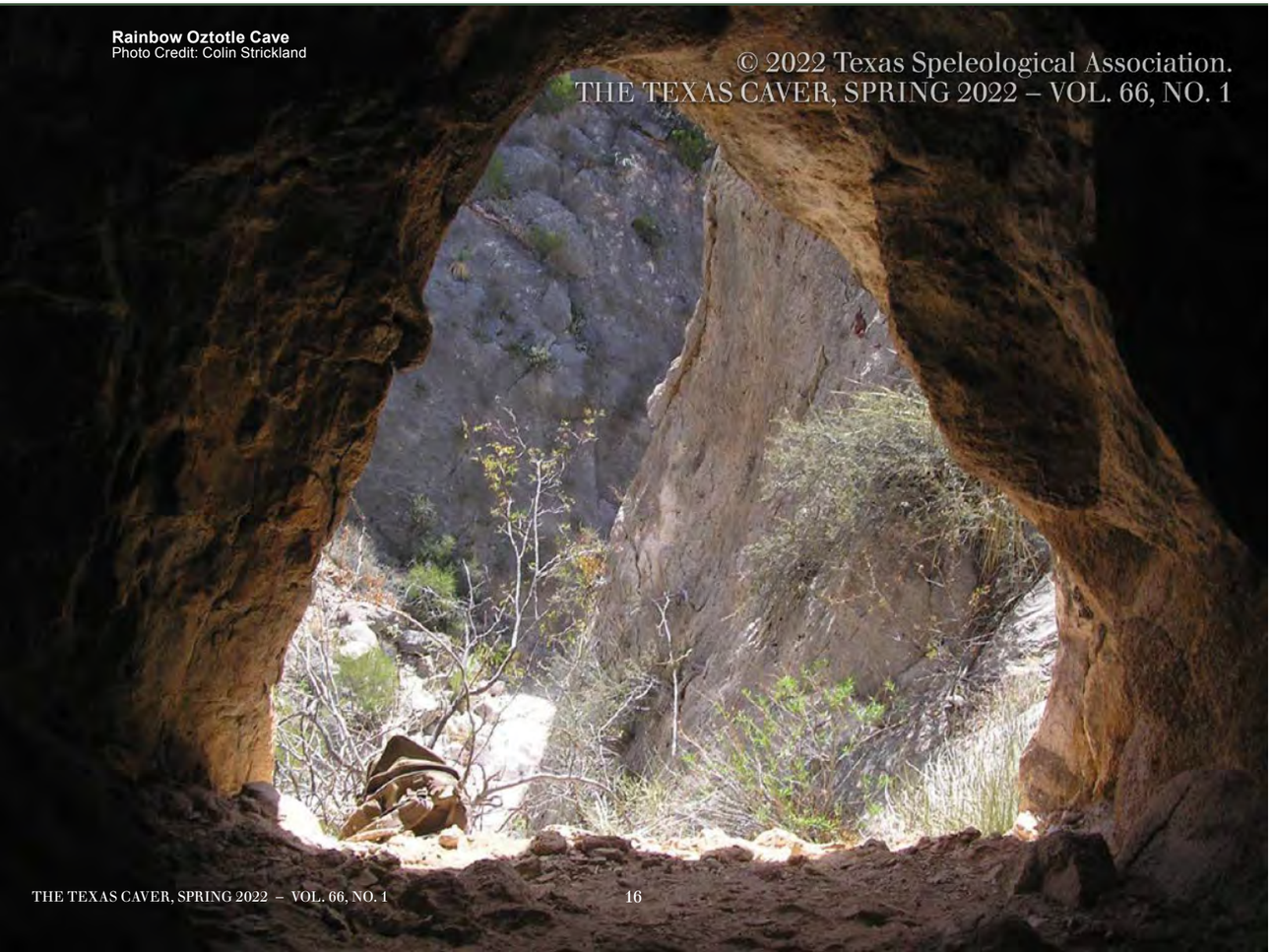
In general, a true dark zone is practically non-existent in Solitario Caves. The 36-meter Guano Surprise Cave is an exception: a narrow, descending crawlway that terminated in some

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stalactites, helictites, and boxwork was cause for some real excitement in 2015. Guano Surprise was also unusual in that it wasn't a cliffside entrance. And, it turns out, there are other non-cliffside entrances in the park as well. In late March 2021, I took a three-night solo trip to the Solitario to check lidar leads. I hadn't used lidar before, so I was interested in ground-truthing my efforts. Among the caves surveyed on the trip, Empty Tomb and Easter Cave can be added to the list of non-cliffside caves in the Solitario. Easter Cave, while short, may be the most hopeful sign of real cave development in the park. The 10-meter cave is at the bottom of a four-meter-deep collapse sink in a shallow drainage. The cave obviously takes water during heavy rains, and although there was no detectable airflow or obvious continuation at the bottom, its existence does provide a glimmer of hope that more significant features may still be hiding in the park.

◆

Although the majority of known Solitario caves occur in the Santa Elena limestone, three caves: Guano Surprise, Tres Entradas, and Leap of Faith, occur in the Glen Rose formation. Guano Surprise, as previously mentioned, is one of the more significant caves in the park, while Leap of Faith has some interesting radial calcite veins, probably from hydrothermal alteration. Neither formation should be ruled out for future ridgewalking efforts although the Santa Elena appears to be more productive. Tens of thousands of acres of limestone have yet to be ridgewalked, and even in the most heavily walked portions of the Solitario, countless canyons, accessible as day hikes, remain unexplored by cavers. We haven't scratched the surface. Huge areas, particularly south of the Solitario and along its western half, are completely unridgewalked. Because of their remoteness, these areas are not reasonably reached as day hikes. Overnight backpacking (weighted down with lots of water) or traveling with horses, could be an approach to accessing the more remote corners of the Big Bend Ranch limestone. Alternatively, a rat's nest of dirt roads heading northwest from Terlingua gets within hiking distance to vast areas of unassessed Solitario and Terlingua Uplift limestones. Whether the park would approve of access from adjacent private lands is unknown… but why not? Analysis of lidar data from the southern half of the Solitario and the portion of the Terlingua Uplift within park boundaries revealed about two dozen potential cave leads. To date, I've checked four, three of which were short caves (including Easter Cave). Undoubtedly, some of the others will be caves as well, and analysis of lidar data from the northern half of the Solitario will certainly reveal additional targets. After nine years of exploring in the Solitario, I've concluded that there are probably hundreds of caves waiting to be surveyed … but will any of them be more than a lousy Texas groadhole? I think that chances for scenic entrances, speleologic oddities, and archaeological remains are a guarantee. Chances of finding a few modest gems are good. My hopes of deep, multi-pitch through-trips and fault-controlled hypogene mazes are nearly gone. But to reuse a quote from Estes' 1968 The Texas Caver article, '…[cavers] will still find their trips into [the Solitario] worthwhile and sufficiently rewarding because of its scenic beauty, geological interest, and archeological remains.'



Rainbow Oztotle Cave
Photo Credit: Colin Strickland

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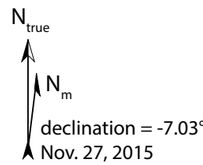
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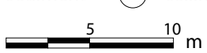
Big Bend Ranch State Park
Presidio Co. Texas, USA

Total surveyed length: 44.8m (146.9ft), depth: 13.1m (43.0 ft).
Sureyed Nov. 27, 2015
with Suunto tandem & Bosch laser rangefinder
by Ben Hutchins & Colin Strickland.

Legend

- dripline
- ceiling change
- ceiling channel
- ledge
- dusty sediment
- slope
- bedrock
- breakdown
- artifacts
- 6.0 ceiling height (m)





Cartography by Ben Hutchins, 2015

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Caves of the Lower Pecos Canyonlands

by John Spence, Peter Sprouse, Cait McCann, and Jessica Gordon

In November 2020, Peter Sprouse, Jessica Gordon, Ben Dau, Geoff Hoese, Aimee Beveridge, and Cait McCann headed to the Trans-Pecos, grateful for a break from the confines of pandemic life and happy for the opportunity to cave together. As a safety precaution, everyone took a COVID-19 test prior to the trip. We met John Spence and followed him to his land along the Pecos River. We cleared rocks in a few flat spots to set up tents. Then we made our way down to Shumla Point Cave. The beautiful honeycombed limestone walls were full of pockets, known as tafoni. Peter, Jessica, and Cait mapped





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Photos from left, clockwise:

Rappelling to the Pecos
Photo Credit: Ben Dau
Photo of John Spence

Pecos Team 2020
Photo Credit: Geoff Hoese
Photo of (From L to R) Ben Dau, Cait McCann, Jessica Gordon, John Spence, Aimee Beveridge, Peter Sprouse, and Geoff Hoese

Shumla Point Cave
Photo Credit: Peter Srouse
Photo of Ben Dau

Photo on opposite page:

Flourescent Scorpion
Photo Credit: Jessica Gordon

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the cave, which had two main passages extending back from the wide entrance. The eastern passage was floored with fine dirt that contained mussel shells and mezcal beans left behind by people long ago, as well as chert flakes. There was a pit dug in the floor, and tailings were tossed down the slope. The eastern passage contains a vague pictograph previously identified by Ron Ralph. There are several mortar holes (molcajetes) in boulders near the dripline. The western passage extends back to a pinch. In the extreme northwest corner of the cave was a wide dusty area with a vertical crack that blows air, likely coming from an opening lower down the cliff. As canyon wrens flitted in and out of Shumla Point Cave, we talked about how spectacular this place was, and the significance to the native peoples of this cave overlooking the Pecos River.

Ben rigged the cliffside drop from the relatively wide dusty

Shumla Point Cave

Val Verde County, Texas
DistoX2 survey 6 Nov. 2020
Ben Dau, Jessica Gordon,
Cait McCann, Peter Sprouse
Drawn by Peter Sprouse
and John Spence

Length: 62 m Depth 15 m
Entrance width: 32 m
Maximum extent from dripline: 33 m





The Pecos River
Photo Credit: Cait McCann

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area of the lowest section of Shumla Point Cave in order for us to access caves reported to be lower down the cliff. Cait, Geoff, and Peter followed and saw two caves on a ledge. From there they did a 17-meter rappel to the Pecos River. Below, Geoff found a small spring before going for a swim in the blue water. Ben and Cait waded across to check out a cave on the opposite side. It was difficult to push through the invasive cane, so dense that it choked the easier points to climb up to the cave. This one was also a narrow, winding walking passage that shrunk down into a crawlway with a very unhappy big-eared bat who eventually flew out, or at least out of harm's way. After checking one more small, similar cave on the same level, they recrossed the river and climbed back up the ropes to rejoin Geoff and climb back up to the rest of the group. That night around the campfire we saw a striking cluster of stars above us that we dubbed the Eye of Shumla that soon vanished into the dark sky. Afterwards, we passed the hours looking at more familiar constellations.

Saturday started with a great breakfast around John's round table on the patio area that he continually works on, adding some stone steps with each trip to the property. We decided to split into two groups. Aimee, Ben, Jessica, and John headed down the canyon to the east, which John calls Javelina Run. Aimee took GPS points for caves on opposite sides of the canyon that would later be named Tapestry Cave and Tafoni Cave. Ben rigged the first drop at the pour-off to the Pecos. After rappelling around 12 meters, they landed on a ledge that was still 17-20 meters above the river and found two small caves.

The first cave had a ceiling that was around eight meters at the highest point, with a passage that was serpentine and narrow. Both caves were full of flood debris. There was a major flood in 1954, and it must have left debris at least twenty meters higher than the river level today. The team dubbed the first cave Fisher Fissure Cave because, as Ben and John explained, it ended in a fissure that was narrow and vertical. They were able to belly crawl to a connected room. The second cave was named Fishhook Nook in honor of a stunning cactus at the entrance of the cave. Aimee, John, and Jessica mapped the cave while Ben rigged the next drop.

They reached the river in two more pitches, coming down at the spring Geoff had found. It

Photo on opposite page of (from L to R) Aimee Beveridge, Ben Dau, Jessica Gordon, and John Spence

© 2022 Texas Speleological Association.

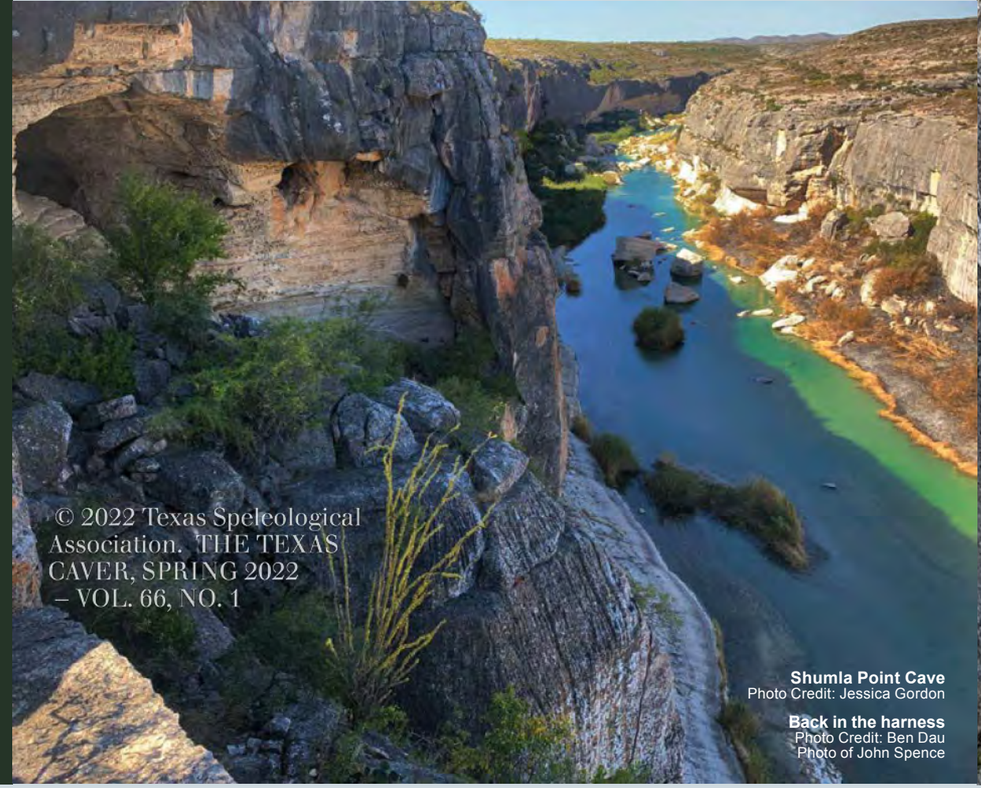
Rappelling to map caves in the cliffs above the Pecos River
Photo Credit: Cait McCann

was surrounded by ferns and buckeyes, thriving near the flow of water. The main seep is just below the pour-off on the downstream side, coming out at the base of a big fern. Near the spring, the groundwater forms pools under the boulders and then follows the channel down. Jessica inspected the spring but did not find any stygobites (groundwater fauna). The team swam in the Pecos River, and John gleefully explored the river below his land. On the ascent, John struggled with his old vertical gear. Aimee loaned him a foot ascender. John was overjoyed to have been able to access the Pecos from his own property for the first time.

The other team, consisting of Peter, Geoff, and Cait had spent the morning mapping the two caves on the ledge below Shumla Point Cave. These are about 17 meters above the river. The first cave they called Big Ear Cave, due to it having several Townsend's big-eared bats in it (*Corynorhinus townsendi*). This was a notable discovery as this is at the extreme eastern end of their range, and the first time that we had seen them in Val Verde County. The cave meandered back to a constriction, but partway back it was possible to climb up to an upper level and exit

A Historical Perspective of the Lower Pecos Canyonlands

by John Spence



Shumla Point Cave
Photo Credit: Jessica Gordon



Back in the harness
Photo Credit: Ben Dau
Photo of John Spence

The first time I looked up Shumla on the Internet, all I could find was a reference to the shelter caves of Shumla, which were associated with the ancient use of peyote by humans. The caves were discovered and excavated in the 1930s by a man whose work eventually started the human history collection at the Witte Museum in San Antonio. Shumla Point Cave was part of the early project, and it was reported that two burials were uncovered. The body of a child was found and reported to have been found burnt and was "discarded" because of its condition. On the Internet now, Shumla first comes up under the Shumla Archeological Research and Education Center, which is located nearby, and is dedicated to the study of the ancient rock art of the Lower Pecos Canyonlands.

All that's left of the community of Shumla are a few rock buildings, which once served as a railroad whistle-stop and local store with three courts for weary travelers on Highway 90. The only other remaining wooden structures were moved to the ranch compound a mile further down the road.

The ranch was bordered by the Rio Grande River on the south and the Pecos River on the north before it was broken up into 30-something lots. Both the western and eastern boundaries were placed where the rivers come within a mile of each other. A "drift fence" was built of rocks on the eastern boundary where the rivers come closest together. This was also known by Native Americans as one of the easiest places they could cross both rivers, having 200-400-foot cliffs. It was named the Hernandez Trail after the Spaniards started using it too. Activity by Poncho Villa and modern smugglers brought patrols from Buffalo Soldiers and now the border patrol. Graffiti dating back to 1919 from the calvary out of Brackettville has been found in Ghost Cave. Local boys also left their names scratched in the soot-covered roof of this cave. They also left articles in Shumla Hideout Cave, which date from between the 1920s and 40s. Judge Roy Bean was the only "law west of the Pecos" just a few miles west on Hwy 90 in Langtry. His son hid in nearby Bean Cave after killing a man.

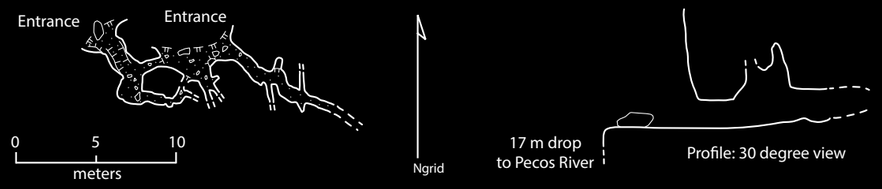
The Southern Pacific Railroad bisects the ranch and runs parallel to Highway 90 starting in Shumla. The railroad construction crews met nearby in the 1880s to complete the second intercontinental route, and Shumla was added to the map as a railroad section station. The railroad used caves to store blasting powder, found in nearby Seminole Canyon State Park. While the railroad and ranching seem to have been the major source of income in Shumla, some manganese mining was done on the property, leaving a few open pits. I'm guessing these efforts were to support World War I. Surface manganese may also have been used to create cave paintings, which abound in many shelter caves in the area.

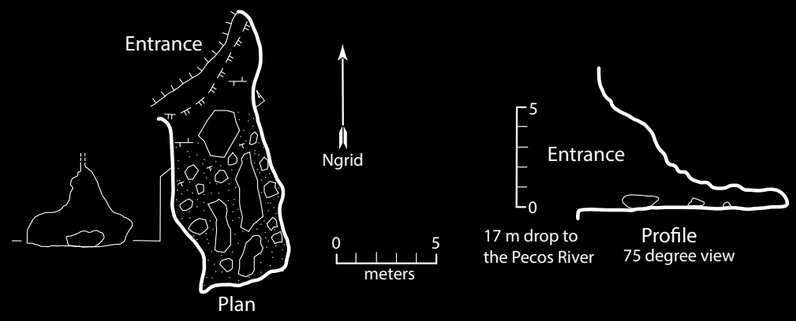
I was first drawn to this part of the Chihuahuan desert to explore some of the longest and deepest caves in Texas some 40 years ago. I have always known of new cave potential in this area and am excited to know we are still finding and mapping new passages. The caves near Shumla have sheltered some of the earliest Americans, offer recent historical mysteries, and provide potential to us still. I'm glad to have been able to draw light to fellow cavers on this area and look forward to the possibilities that remain.

Driftwood Cave

Val Verde County, Texas

DistoX2 survey 7 November 2020
Geoff Hoese, Cait McCann, Peter Sprouse
Drawn by Peter Sprouse
Length: 34 m Depth: 5 m





Fishhook Nook Cave

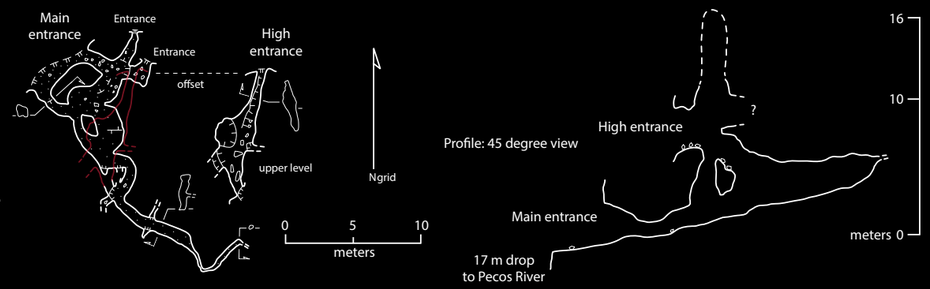
Val Verde County, Texas

DistoX2 survey 7 November 2020
Aimee Beveridge, Ben Dau, Jessica Gordon, John Spence
Drawn by Jessica Gordon
Length: 9 m Depth: 6 m

Big Ear Cave

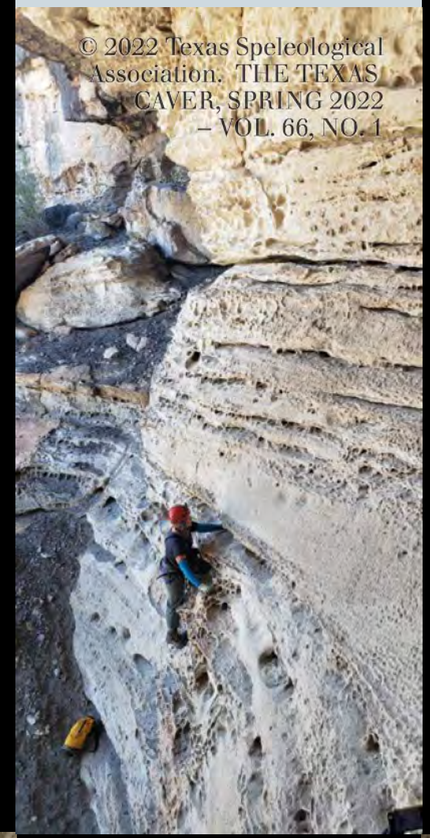
Val Verde County, Texas

DistoX2 survey 7 November 2020
Geoff Hoese, Cait McCann, Peter Sprouse
Drawn by Peter Sprouse
Length: 70 m Depth: 16 m



higher up the cliff. A little farther east was Driftwood Cave, which was smaller. It had two entrances, with two very tight passages connecting them.

The bird sighting of the day was an exciting one. Both teams, from different cliffside vantage points, heard a hawk's scream and looked up to see the big hawk, pursued by a much bigger golden eagle. Poison ivy showers were followed by dinner and margaritas. We sang songs as Peter played the mandolin around the fire, did some more stargazing, and it felt almost like normal times again.


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Photos from top, clockwise:

Shumla Point Cave, Scaling the tafoni walls
Photo Credit: Cait McCann
Photo of Aimee Beveridge

Shumla Point Cave, Ledge
Photo Credit: Peter Sprouse

Shumla Point Cave, Upper Level
Photo Credit: Aimee Beveridge
Photo of Peter Sprouse and Ben Dau


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Coleman's Canyon Karst Project

by Peter Sprouse

Coleman's Canyon is a tract of land north of Jacob's Well in Hays County that is being preserved by the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association (WVWA). We knew that it contained several caves, including Wimberley Bat Cave, Bump Cave, and Pucker Cave. It is a good karst area with potential for more discoveries and is important to the conservation of Jacob's Well recharge zone. So Rich Zarria and I organized a volunteer karst project to assist WVWA with their conservation goals. Rich did an analysis of Lidar data and came up with 264 depressions that had the potential to be sinkholes or caves.

On 1 January 2021, we gathered a large group of cavers and split them into teams to check clusters of Lidar leads. Joining us was Daniel Watson, an old caving friend who grew up in the area and had explored caves there in the 1960s. On that day we were able to visit a portion of the 246 sites, including one new cave that took a good-sized arroyo. We named this Fletcher's Flusher Cave, after Fletcher the dog, who accompanied us. It turns out that this cave had actually been found by Daniel back in the 1960s, but he had been unable to relocate it. A couple of our team members climbed down the entrance drop and explored to some promising dig leads. Afterward many of us went over to Dan's nearby sword factory to see his fine blades and sample his whiskey brand.

We returned to the property on 16 January 2021 to finish up checking the Lidar leads while the dive team went into Wimberley Bat Cave. In all, the Lidar effort had identified 52 karst features and one cave.

The obvious next step was to try and dig open the lead in Fletcher's Flusher and to dig open promising sinkholes. We gathered a sizeable team for that purpose on 15 May 2021. At Fletcher's Flusher Cave, digging at the bottom of the entrance climb opened up a continuing crawlway, but the air quality was poor, so that will have to wait for winter. We did a lot of excavation in Quad City Crack, a previously known feature to the west of Wimberley Bat Cave that had been referred to as Wimberley Bat Sink. Digging opened up a lower level where some small digging leads with slight air continued. We mapped this cave, which is 13 meters long and 6 meters deep.

Extensive digging was also done at a blowing sinkhole that got named Crowbar Crack. This one is still promising and could use more work. At the end of the day, we all went to Jacob's Well for a welcome dip in the spring. Ryan Hoffman, being a diver, did breath-hold dives and kept coming up with sunglasses lost by folks jumping into the deep pool.

link to
Wimberley Valley Watershed Assoc.

Protecting Jacob's Well's recharge zone

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May 2021 crew
Photo Credit: Peter Sprouse
Photo of (From left to right) Liz Hoffman, Ryan Hoffman, Ginger Reddig, Chelsea Dau, Ben Dau, Bethany Carter, Rich Zarria, Liza Colucci, Cruz St. Peter, Jon Pixler, Joel Haus, and Mowgli Swartz

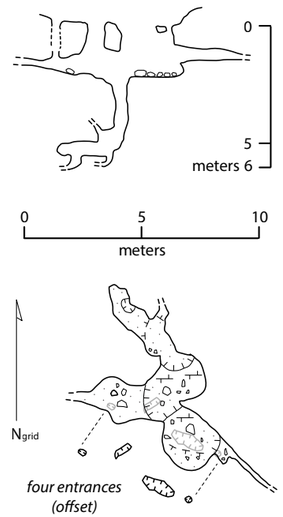
Quad City Crack

Hays County, Texas

DistoX2 survey 15 May 2021
Amanda Pixler, Peter Sprouse
Drawn by Peter Sprouse

Length: 13 m Depth: 6 m

profile: 75 degree view



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Drew Thompson striking a pose in Wimberley Bat Cave, Main Chamber
Photo Credit: Ethan Perrine

Wimberley Bat Cave Sump Dive

by Ethan Perrine

On 16 January 2021, the parking area was buzzing with talk of leads and logistics as cavers unpacked gear from a fleet of truck beds. Waivers were signed, groups were designated, and after a briefing, our group made our way to the entrance of Wimberley Bat Cave. Our objective was to get cave divers James Williams and Jean Krejca to the sump at the bottom of the cave. Drew Thompson, Patty Calabrese, and I would be coordinating safe passage through the cave which we had scouted out two weeks prior as well as sherpaing the dive gear. Our hope was that the sump lead would hold a diveable connection to Jacob's Well, but first, the matter of getting to it.

As Drew went on ahead to rig the drop into the cave, Patty and I hauled tanks down into the impressively large entrance as James and Jean followed. We moved quietly to avoid disturbing the slumbering bats and began shuttling the equipment down. The thirty-foot drop carves through sculpted walls into the main room of Wimberley Bat Cave, one of the largest by volume in the county. As the name suggests, the cave is home to bats and heaps of guano, piled high throughout the main chamber. The actual length from the surface to our destination is little more than a few hundred feet but that brief distance hosts a gauntlet of obstacles to navigate. We trudged the gear bags up slick guano slopes, under an archway on the edge of a slippery dropoff with the help of a handline set up on the recon trip by Drew, and soon reached the back of the room where carvings from previous explorers tagged sections of the walls. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the standout among them, Scooter Dick, which Drew had noticed on the recon trip, prominently scrawled into the guano-stained rock. This bygone explorer served as our patron saint during our time in Wimberley Bat Cave and his mark was dutifully pointed out to each new group member as they made their way to the back of the room. Once we were all in place, we directed our attention to the next obstacle waiting for us, hiding unassumingly along the right wall.

In order to reach the sump, you must shimmy down a ten-foot, mouth-shaped pit varying in size between eight to twelve inches, snaking side to side. In the lead-up to this trip, the divers carefully considered equipment and diver dimensions with this constriction in mind, and it was decided that James would try first with Jean standing by if need be. Drew and Patty rigged a cable ladder while I slithered down to give pointers from below and with that, James attempted to squeeze through the entrance. He fought his way most of the way down but was unable to fit through the tightest pinch despite a valiant effort. Using my shoulder as a platform James worked his way up and out. Next up was Jean's turn. After a few moments of muffled struggling and falling dirt, I saw her feet jut down out of the hole and we were in business. We crawled out and hauled James' dive gear out and Jean's gear into the cave.

With the equipment swapped, Patty staged herself above the sump while I sat at the bottom of the pit and passed her gear, lowered by James and Drew, which she clipped to the ladder. We then discovered that with the ladder loaded, it pulled taught across the shaft, cutting the pit in half. In order to make room, I crawled into the corner of the funnel and braced my leg against the opposite wall atop the room, and with a spare rope tied around my waist, Patty clipped the equipment bags to me. With the ladder slack once more, Jean could make her way down to us and begin unpacking her dive gear. This is easier said than done considering once

you exit the pit you find yourself at the edge of a nearly vertical 18-foot mud funnel above the sump. That's right, even if you best the pit of despair, there's still one game show obstacle left. As you can imagine, there is nowhere to stand or sit or place gear on a near-vertical, snot-slick, crumbling mud wall, which left Jean with no options other than getting ready while clinging to the mud-covered rungs of the cable ladder.

With considerable grace despite the circumstances, Jean battled the mud and managed to unpack and clip her gear to the rungs of the ladder. We then began a multi-step, patent-pending process that involved climbing down the ladder in stages, handing and donning gear as we went, dodging falling mud globs while clipping her dry gear higher up on the ladder, until she was fully assembled and down in the pool. Slipping underwater, her light probed around and soon faded away beneath the inky silt.

After five minutes the orange glow reappeared and she emerged with news that the lead did not go, and so we planned our exit. Again, easier said than done. We clipped all of the wet dive gear back onto the ladder, and coordinated two haul ropes, one from Jean to me, the other above me manned by Drew and James, and got all of the gear out again, which Patty sherpaed out as we sent it up. Dry clothes were sent down, and we made our way out to a fading sunset, six hours after we went in. While the pool at the bottom of Wimberley Bat Cave can be checked off the list, the search is still on for connection to Jacob's Well. Which is to say, more adventure awaits, hopefully with less guano.

Wimberley Bat Cave

Hays County, Texas

Brunton and tape survey 10 December 1972
M. Burda, T. Jones, W. Russell, M. Worton, & D. Wymer
Redrafted 21 April 1983 by E. Kastning from
original draft by W. Russell

Sump dive sketched by Jean Krejca 16 January 2021
Map updated by Peter Sprouse

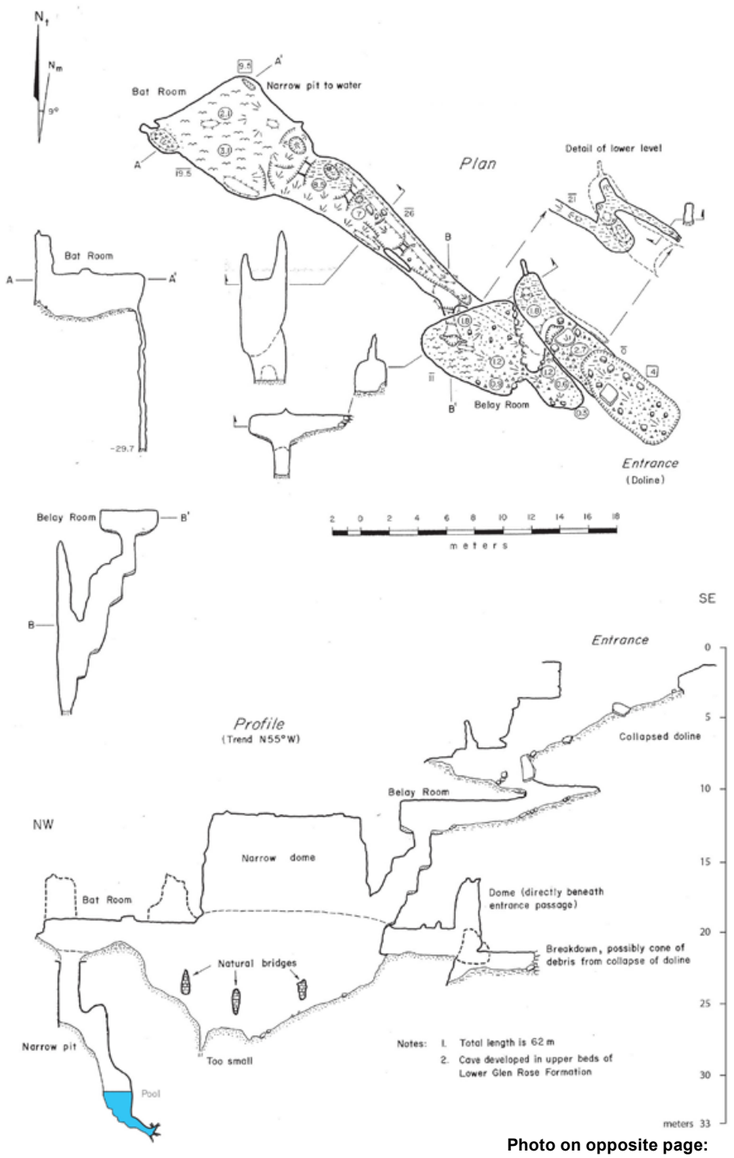


Photo on opposite page:

Descending into Wimberley Bat Cave, Sump
Photo Credit: Ethan Perrine
Photo of Jean Krejca



A Diver's Perspective

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THE TEXAS CAVER, SPRING 2022 – VOL. 66, NO. 1

by Jean "Creature" Krejca

As I stood chest-deep in the chocolate milk, I contemplated the peculiar phenomenon in caving where passages appear larger than they really are when the viewer is also in a very small cave passage. I looked down at a very minimalist diving rig – just a light harness with a wing, plus two small pony bottles (14 cubic feet), yet it was going to be very difficult to turn from facing one wall to facing the other without going back up the cable ladder a couple of rungs and thrashing about to make the rotation. So I kicked around a bit to get the feel of which direction the wall was undercutting, rearranged myself to face the proper direction, and slid down the slope. The passage is basically an extension of the same crack in the air-filled portion above, and the water at first look appeared deep and potentially connected to more passage below.

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"Smiling sweaty faces underneath headlamps dimmed by mud smears ..."



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Wimberley Bat Cave Team
Photo Credit: Jean Krejca
Photo of (From L to R) Ethan Perrine, Patty Calabrese, Drew Thompson, Jean Krejca, and James Williams

Photo on opposite page:

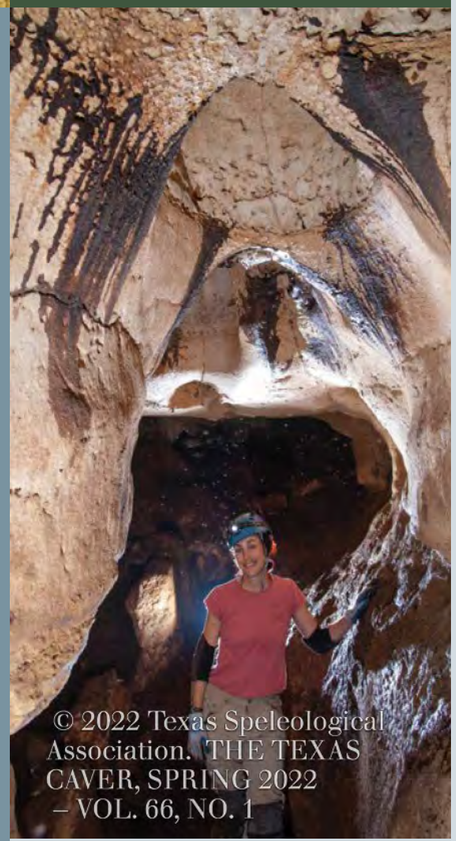
All the Guano
Wimberley Bat Cave, Main Room
Photo Credit: Jean Krejca
Photo of (From L to R) Patty Calabrese and Drew Thompson

The wall in the direction of the main part of the air-filled cave is the one that undercut and I faced to use as a reference. I slid down about a body length until the crevice became too narrow at the bottom and my feet caught at a restriction. At that point, the rest of the passage dimensions were a little larger, yet the visibility was still hopelessly gone. Given the extremely shallow depth, I had the freedom of many minutes of airtime before I would even need to consider looking at my gauges. Thus, I began slowly and methodically tracing the margins of the passage with my hands and feet. My reference wall was becoming a ceiling, and the floor was silt/guano with some larger blocks (probably of mud, maybe rocks) interspersed. After a complete probe of this area, I pushed sideways farther into the slot (away from the cable ladder) to make sure there was no horizontal passable extent, either. In all, I estimate I was never more than 12-15 feet from the entry point, and probably mostly much closer. Coming out of the darkness and into the bottom of a vertical funnel of guano-mud was delightful. Smiling sweaty faces underneath headlamps dimmed by mud smears, strong hands giving support to pull me and the wet gear up, and spirits lightened by achieving a challenging goal!

"The Secret of the Springs" by Liz Hoffman
⟶ Next On Page 37


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Photos from top, clockwise:

"How does one don dive gear on a cable ladder?"
Photo Credit: Ethan Perrine
Photo of Jean Krejca

Bat Stains in Wimberley Bat Cave, 2015
Photo Credit: Jean Krejca
Photo of Kathleen O'Connor

Preparing to rig the squeeze pit above the sump
Photo Credit: Ethan Perrine
Photo of Patty Calabrese and Drew Thompson

The Secret of the Springs

by Liz Hoffman

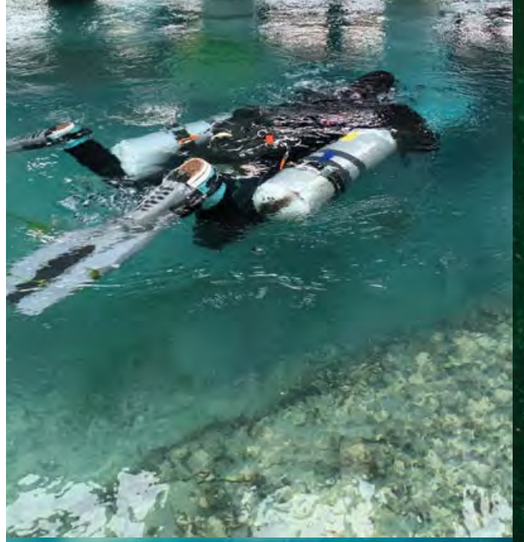
We had a great weekend with new friends discovering what we could while awaiting the opportunity to dive springs that are usually off-limits. While looking for other caves and springs in the area, we discovered the swamp boat, aka mud runner, that we have is not meant to be loaded down and taken out on an open lake but what a good time that was. Please let me know if you have some caves or springs you want to be checked out in small bogs and rivers, we totally have the boat for that. Okay, okay back to the point, a trip report, something I think most of us tend to avoid.

Well after breakfast, which I learned most people prefer syrup with French toast (an obvious thing as I look back), and getting checked out of the Airbnb Matt Turner found for us, Ryan Hoffman, Jef Frank, Matt Turner, and I headed out to hopefully dive while Andy Gluesenkamp, Peter Sprouse, and Jessica Gordon were coming to do some biological stuff at the springs. We show up, get past the gate, and follow along to the next gate in which we find ourselves in a position to dive into the unexpected. We meet up Dan Foley, who helped us access the springs. Once we'd "taken a look" at the spring, we gear up and get into the water. It's nice about 72 °F, so not too much different than what we are used to in the Florida springs. We get in, and Matt is already getting some of the biological samples that were requested. When that is completed, we figure out a dive plan, because we have heard that the cave has high flow, possibly too small of an entrance to get in,

Dive plan: "get through the triangle of insane flow"

and possibly a siphon on one of the walls. Once we have our plan in place, Jef and Ryan head down, and Jef runs the line while Ryan videos and sketches for the survey. I follow behind them waiting to see how it plays out and wondering if I will be doing the dive. While I love to see the springs, I'm not sure I'll dive, if all the stories we have heard are true. As soon as I'm underwater, I see Jef about 20 feet down (maybe more) attempting to get into the cave, sometimes tanks are out sometimes a fin other times the glow of light after I assume a turnaround. Ryan is a bit slower going down because of the survey, but he heads down to the bottom and things continue. Sometimes Ryan and sometimes Jef going at it, while Matt videos and I watch from above. I surfaced a couple of times to give a report to our surface crew and then go explore around the basin. I head back to watch them again through the bubbles and now I would guess limestone silt coming up from the water after about an hour of this they come back up and do a deco stop. The spring is a gorgeous 72 °F (22.22 °C) with sand and rock bottoms until at least the 35 feet down they made it, with flow that I don't foresee much chance for lingering silt really ever in the entryways or cavern zone, but as the cave kept its secrets, for now, it will have to be a guess until next time.

We got out, got our gear loaded up, and hopped into the back of trucks to head over to the next spring, which is only a few minutes away. We got geared up with a plan to swim about 100 feet and then "try like hell" to get through the triangle of insane flow. I have heard people say it's like swimming into a fire hose and I have been in a few caves that fight to keep you out so I am already expecting it to be a bit crazy, but as I start down the tunnel, I am thinking well this is pretty bad but come on guys it's not that bad. I mean yea you have to hold the wall or kick and drag your way in but it is doable. Then I see the triangle at the end of the tunnel and wow it is obvious that the tunnel is nothing compared to what I have coming at me now. I take a minute to look around it is a mix of rocks, pebbles, sand, and glass with anchors on the right side lining the way toward the triangle that has reduced the size and increased the flow, like putting your thumb over a water hose and having it spray out twice as strong. I decide to make an attempt to enter and I take advantage of the preplaced steel anchors and boulders and use them to attempt entry. I get situated and pull myself up and once far enough get my foot against it and push off as I grab the boulder in front of me. I pull on the boulder while pushing with my feet I barely get a grip and pause, to get myself stable there as I prepare to do it again to hopefully get five feet closer. I struggle just to keep a grip and to plan my next grip while the water is trying to rip my reg out of my mouth and shove it as far in as it can at the same time. The flow is hitting me, hitting the wall beside me and making its flow come from multiple directions, as I face forward and slightly down to keep the flow of the water from free-flowing my regulator it's at that moment that I turn my head to







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Photos from top, clockwise:

Testing the waters
Photo Credit: Jessica Gordon
Photo of Matt Turner

Descending below the fish toward the triangle of insane flow
Photo Credit: Jessica Gordon

Searching for the secret of the spring
Photo Credit: Jessica Gordon

Photo below:

Cave Dive Team exploring the first spring
Photo Credit: Jessica Gordon
Photo of (From L to R) Ryan Hoffman, Liz Hoffman Jef Frank, and Matt Turner



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push my body toward the next anchor, which was a big mistake. The water attempts to take the reg from my mouth, pulling it forward, and water shoots into the side of my mouth. I let go and turn back getting myself calm and trying not to breathe in the water. I decide that's my attempt and this is a no-go for me, but then Ryan, Matt, and Jeff show up and are ready to get into the cave. I sit by holding onto an anchor to watch them. They try everything to include some ingenious forearm grip anchors Matt had a friend make along with the anchors and chains that are already from previous trips he has made into this spring. I swear they all tried to get in at least six or seven times, and each time the cave said not today. Ahh, the joys of watching people try so hard, then the downfall as it doesn't work. Well after 30 minutes at 73 feet and the 20+ tries we all decide that it was time to head out. Today was not our day to see it.

Today these two springs kept their secrets, that I feel they may continue to keep, with the flow so strong you would rather try swimming into a fire hose and leaving with a scalp full of sand through your hood, where any unplanned turn of your head almost guarantees you a mouth full of water. Although with all of that being said if you're like me you are reading this thinking "that girl she doesn't know what she's talking about, I got this, where is it, let me try." I say good luck. I can admit when I've been bested. Although, then again, maybe not. As soon as we left the cave, we seemed to have forgotten how strong the flow at the triangle is, because while on the surface taking off gear all we did was make plans of how to get into it, so I guess all I can say is to be continued …

Dive one 30 minutes temp 72°F or 22.22 °C and max depth reached of 35 feet or 10.67 meters

Dive two 30 minutes temp 72 °F or 22.22 °C and max depth reached of 73 feet or 22.25 meters

Cave Dive Team exploring the second spring
Photo Credit: Jessica Gordon
Photo of (From L to R) Ryan Hoffman, Matt Turner, Jef Frank, and Liz Hoffman

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Mexico's Sótano de Las Golondrinas, Then and Now

by Bill Steele (NSS 8072) FE, LB, CM, AL

I was a caver and going to college in 1968 when a photo of a caver hanging on a rope in the vastness of Sótano de las Golondrinas in Mexico appeared in the NSS News.

I remember thinking how much I wanted to get into deep caving. Two years later I went to Golondrinas for my first time. I did it three more times.

When I went to Golondrinas for the first time in 1970 we hiked from Aquismón. We hired a man with a burro and he delivered our 1,200-foot rope to the pit for us and came back two days later and hauled it back to Aquismón. When I moved to Austin in 1976, I became friends with TR Evans, the discoverer of the immense pit, often called the best entrance pit in the world, and the first person to rappel into it.

A few years ago, I started pulling together materials for a book about Golondrinas with the idea of having it compiled and published for the fiftieth anniversary of its discovery by cavers in 2017. I didn't finish that project, but here are three of the stories I gathered. The first is an interview I did at the Texas Cavers Reunion (TCR) in 2014 with TR Evans. The second is a letter the late John Fish wrote to me in 2015, telling the story of the second trip to Golondrinas to map it. The third story was written recently by bird researcher Dave Whitacre, who has been steadily going to Golondrinas for 55 years doing bird counts.

Photo in background:

Sótano de las Golondrinas
Photo Credit: Dave Bunnell

See a current Google Maps™ satellite view

About TR Evans by Bill Steele:
TR was an early Association for Mexican Cave Studies (AMCS) caver. He was among the first cavers to go to areas such as Huautla. He lived in Austin for many years and moved to Colorado once he retired.

Interview with TR Evans

by Bill Steele

CONDUCTED AT TEXAS CAVER REUNION, OCTOBER 18, OCT. 2014

TR, what made you go above the SLP (San Luis Potosí) town of Aquismón to look for pits?

I was in the army. I didn't have time to make the trip to Huautla in April 1967, so I asked Bill Russell where would be another good place to go look for caves.

Well, they found the caves in 1965. They drove a Corvair up there, Russell and Reddell, and they found caves there.

This might have been the Christmas trip of 1966. There might have been another trip down there before the big trip.

Well yes, Ron Ralph, Terry Plemons, and John Fish, went and actually got pretty darn deep, ran out of rope, and came out. Then the following year was the big trip to push it farther, but the water level was up and they didn't get as deep as Ralph and them had. So Bill Russell suggested that you go up above Aquismón?

There was a concurrent trip to Huautla. I was in the army at the time, and I didn't have enough leave to go on a longer trip to Huautla. So I asked Bill where else would be a good place to look. And he said, well up above Aquismón. So that's when I went up there with, I think it was, Chuck Borland and Randall Stearns, who were in the army.

Are those guys still alive?

Chuck's not. I don't know about Randall.
And so we were poking around up there above Aquismón and got led – the first few days we were up there – we were shown a lot of blind pits and dead-end caves. One morning we went to this little hut and knocked on the door and asked if they knew of any sótanos or caves. The guy said yes and he would show us one.

We started up the trail. I guess it was a way to get all the way to Tamapatz, there are several trails that go to Tampatz, to the village. After over an hour of walking, we were wondering where is this guy taking us, to another blind pit, or what? We thought, well he's going pretty long, so maybe he's got something really in mind. That's when – probably about an hour and 15 minutes, or an hour and a half, we got to the entrance of Golondrinas.

What did you think of that thing when you first saw it?

It was so big, so big, at least compared to what I'd seen before. It was hard to judge how really big it was.

The biggest open pit like that I'd seen previously was Sótano de Huitzmolotitla, and I think it's probably three or four hundred feet deep and not as far across in diameter. So we looked down it and were trying to see if we could see the bottom.

Janie Evans – Did you throw a rock in?

It looked like we could maybe see something. So we threw a big rock in. And we didn't hear a sound. It was 11 seconds later, and we thought, "There's something wrong here."

That can't be!

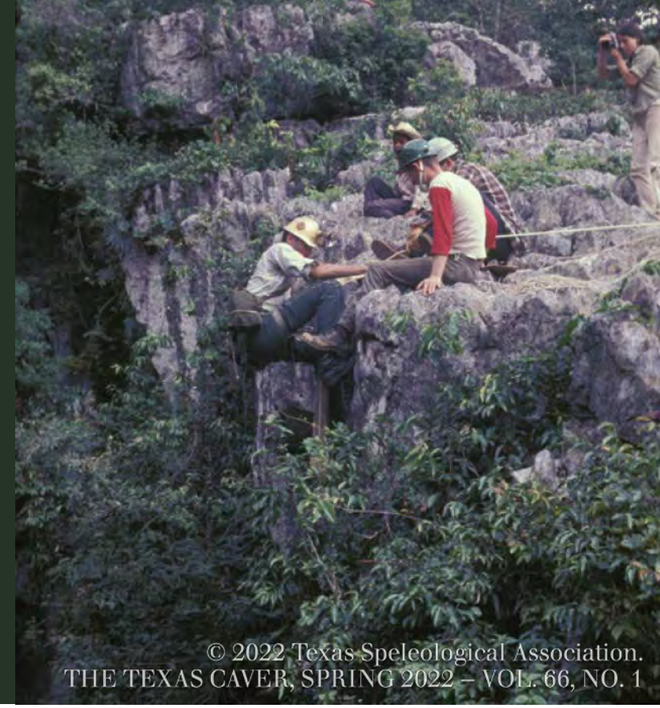
That sound did something funny. So, we threw in some more rocks and they all took about 11 seconds before we could hear them hit.
So at that point, we knew it was a deep pit, but we had no idea just how deep.

I was in the army at the time, at Fort Detrick, Maryland, which was the old biological warfare center. I had majored in math, so I was assigned to a statistical division up there that analyzed the various experiments they did.

I'd learned the programming language Fortran, so I wrote a Fortran program that solved the differential equations that had to do with falling objects. It took into account the shape of the rock, the density, temperature, humidity, all sorts of variables, and wound up with a solution that indicated it couldn't be any less than 800 feet deep, and no more than 1,200.

Photo on the right:

First descent of Golondrinas
Photo Credit: Bill Deane
Photo of TR Evans with Bill Cuddington and John Cole aiding and Nancy Walters with camera



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Pretty accurate.

Yes, kind of near the upper end. I think it was 1,094 feet, or something like that?

On the lowest side of the entrance to the pit it is.

I don't know how the information got around so quickly back in those days. I mean, I'm used to the Internet now, but even back then people knew who had what, where, and when. We knew Bill Cuddington had bought a new 1,200-foot length of rope.

How did you know him already?

Well, I'd met him at the 1960 National Speleological Society (NSS) Convention. I really met him through Cliff Foreman, another older eastern caver.

I'm not sure how we had kept up, or how the news traveled so fast about the fact that he had that rope.

Janie Evans – How did you carry it?

TR Evans– There was a lot of … interaction back then between the stuff that Bill had done – single rope technique stuff had filtered into Texas and so all the Texas cavers that were older than me at the time, were using those techniques and of course I learned it.

Janie Evans – How did y'all carry that much rope?

Well, you braid it.

Janie Evans - Did you go from shoulder to shoulder?

They had rented donkeys. Donkeys and mules to haul a lot of equipment up on that first descent trip.

When you say single rope technique, are you talking about rappel racks, or carabiners with brake bars?

Carabiners and brake bars. Texas cavers even cast what were called dinosaur rings. They were just big, probably an inch or an inch and a quarter in diameter, aluminum rings that you could wrap the rope around.

I think the first rack I had was probably one John Cole made that I got just before the Golondrinas trip.

Did you practice with it, or use it in Golondrinas the first time?

Practiced with it, but as I recall, I think I forgot the rack and actually went in on brake bars.

Really? Hey, you know I asked you to donate what you rappelled in the first time with and ascended back out and we auctioned that off at the Texas Cave Managementment Association (TCMA) auction, and by the way, do you know where those things are now? They're on display at the National Cave and Karst Research Institute in Carlsbad, New Mexico.

I had Jumars at that time.

Ok, so you climbed out with Jumars? With a chest box?

I had a seat sling and … back then we were experimenting with various ways of doing it, but … it was probably a seat ...

You didn't Texas out of that thing did you? Two Jumars? One to a foot and the other one to your seat harness?

Two Jumars, yes.

My god, what a man! And you climbed out of that thing that way? People have, but wow!

I think most people back then – I don't know that all the fancier stuff had come into play then.

Probably no chest box either.

Janie Evans – Wasn't there some kind of chest thing where you had the rope coming off, in case your foot slipped out, or…. It seems like you were attached in two places, but one was real loose or something.

Well, I used a safety, a prusik safety.

When you were climbing out you had a third, you had a prusik safety on?

No, when I was rappelling in.

You rappelled in with a prusik safety?

Yes.

And that didn't screw up? You know they do. They engage when you don't want them to. I'll be darn. Pretty cool. So you went down first, who then came down second? Were there politics of who got to go first and who got to go second?

Who got to go first was based on who found the pit. And probably Bill Cuddington came second, I don't remember.

I think that's what John Cole said in his presentation at this year's NSS Convention three months ago.

But I remember when I got off the rope at the bottom. I walked around, trying to see what was there and the rope just totally disappeared. I had a hard time finding it.

Yeah, people have tied balloons on the rope to find it again. And you probably covered the whole floor while you were down there.

Well at least most of it. But you know, we missed a lead that I think ...

The Crevice.

Yes, the Crevice that went down another what ...?

Six hundred feet. I've done it a couple of times. I don't even know that you can anymore, and the reason is that they've got strict rules now you've got to be out by a certain hour. So you can't camp down there anymore. And did you ever do that, sleep on the bottom?

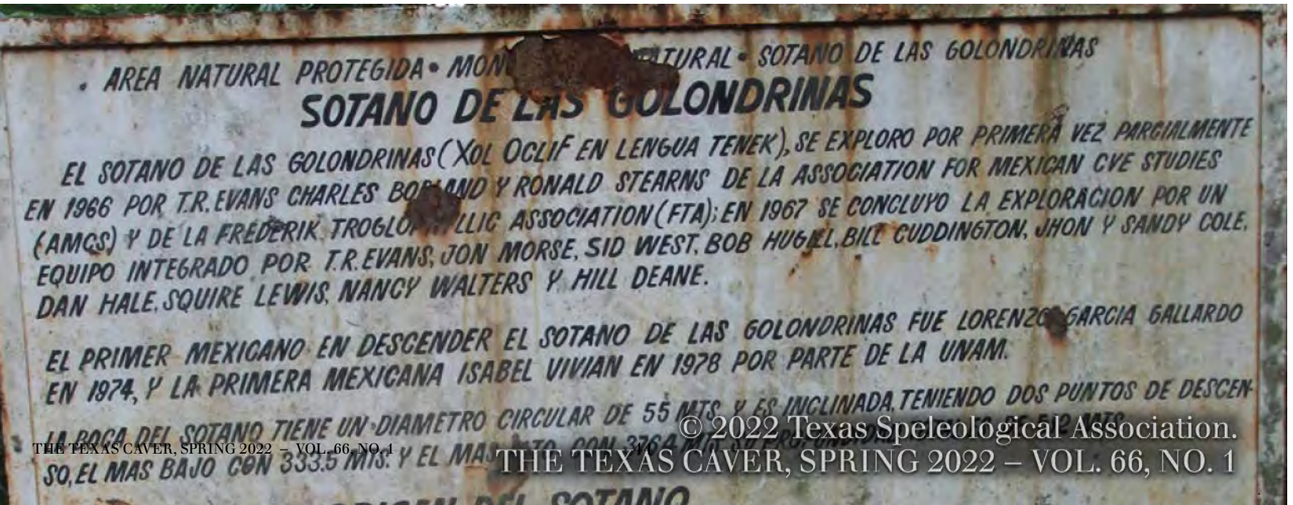
I never spent the night at the bottom.

You did it just once, or did you go back and do it again?

At least twice because I found another trip report I had been on, so I was there at least twice.

So not twice that first time?

Two different times.



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THE TEXAS CAVER, SPRING 2022 – VOL. 66, NO. 1

Two different times?

Janie Evans – So how many people were on the first trip?

It was probably 12 or 14.

Bill Deane was there.

Yeah. John Cole. Bill Cuddington. Dan Hale. But I don't remember all the names. If I start naming them I'll forget some.

It's all recorded.

Well, that's good.

The rest is history.

In my old age I've become amazed at how fleeting history is. Or can be.

Did you have an idea at the time of the impact of finding that pit? You know, it had a lot of impact on a whole generation of American cavers that were inspired by that article that was in the NSS News. I know it did me. I saw that and said, "That's what I want to get into, deep caving. My God, look at that thing!"

There was a lot of deep caving going on. Maybe not that that deep, but Bill Cuddington had found lots of deep caves all over Virginia and West Virginia. I don't think that Surprise Pit in Alabama had been found by then.

It was found in 1961.

Then that was before then.

Ellison's Cave was found the next year, in October 1968.

So were a lot of deep pits in Mexico that were being found, too.

Photo on Opposite Page:

Sign at Golindrinas
Photo Credit: Dave Whitacre

The Second Descent of Golondrinas

by John Fish, ***from October 2015***

PRELIMINARY THINGS

After TR Evans and his friends found Sótano de las Golondrinas on a reconnaissance trip during December 1966, there was of course much speculation about how deep it might be. They had timed some rocks dropped into the pit to get some idea about the depth. Apparently, they thought it might be 300 to 400 feet deep. It took about 10 ½ to 11 seconds before a dropped rock could be heard hitting the bottom.

Many days of much excitement and speculation! I remember sitting at a table at the Chuck Wagon (University of Texas student union cafeteria) when Fred Sawin, a physics graduate student, solved a second order differential equation, allowing an estimate for air friction, to obtain an estimate of 800 feet for the depth.

But I wasn't satisfied. We (Texas cavers) had been finding and exploring deep pits in Mexico for a few years. It was obvious from the wild speculations about the depth of Golondrinas that something practical and more empirical was needed. This had been happening to a lesser degree in the past as well with smaller pits. But even then gross errors in guessing the depth of a pit

About John Fish by Bill Steele:
About the late John Fish by Bill Steele: John moved to Austin in the mid-1960s and earned a master's degree at the University of Texas at Austin in geology. He was very active in caving in Mexico, including at Huautla. He went on to earn a Ph.D. in geology under Dr. Derek Ford at McMasters University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, where he influenced British cavers who were also studying under Dr. Ford to start caving in Mexico.

caused problems. We had learned to tie a knot in the end of a rope lowered into a pit as a safety precaution to avoid rappelling off the end of the rope. Then we could more easily switch over to climbing gear and ascend.

For some time I had been making a graph of measured pit depth versus the time it took for a rock to fall and the sound of the impact to be heard back at the surface. I used a stopwatch and reasonably equidimensional standard-size rocks, about fist size or slightly larger. The average of 10 good readings was used for a data point. I had plotted pits ranging from 57 feet to about 400 feet so far on the graph. Although it was quite an extrapolation, I projected that curve out to TR's estimate of 10 ½ to 11 seconds. There was plenty of room for variation, but I believed the pit was at least 1,000 feet deep, and possibly had a depth of 1,100 feet or more.

In April TR took a large team to Golondrinas to explore the pit. Although I was invited to go, I decided there were plenty of experienced cavers to deal with the pit. So I talked with other Texas cavers and we decided to go back to Sótano de San Agustín, which we hoped could be explored to world record depth someday, or at least nearly so. At New Year's school break Terry Plemons, Ron Ralph, and I had surveyed down to -1,492 feet in San Agustín and were looking down a 200-foot waterfall pit. Unfortunately, we encountered heavy rains and only got to the top of the Fissure, about -900 feet, where high water stopped us. This was before wetsuit caving in Mexico.

TR and the others came back with a glowing report about the awesomeness of Sótano de las Golondrinas and its depth that we all wanted to see and experience. Its depth, a new World Record, was approximately 1,070 feet as measured by rope, making

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Sótano de las Golondrinas
Photo Credit: Dave Bunnell

an allowance for rope stretch. I knew, because of its significance, that Golondrinas needed a more accurate depth measurement and a good map. So I organized a trip to survey the pit. I bought 1,200 feet of coated steel wire and a spool to hold the wire. We checked out the stretch by suspending almost the whole length of the wire and spool over a new nail. We did not observe any significant stretch. We borrowed a 1,200 foot long Sampson rope (the same one which had been used for the first trip), and a plane table, stadia rod, and telescopic alidade to survey the pit.

In late June of 1967, after school was out, our team gathered for the second trip to Golondrinas, the mapping trip. From back east came Dick Mitchell to join those from Austin, Texas, Jonathan Davis, Ed Alexander, Ted Peters, and Johnnie Fish (I used to be called John Fish or Juan Pescado). Of course, we were filled with anticipation. We even spent a little time rappelling and prusiking repeatedly off a bridge about 85 feet above a river – like doing laps before a long run. We were also getting used to a device, new at the time, called a rappel rack. Each one of us also had to decide what system he would use to ascend out of such a deep pit. I decided to use a modified Texas climbing system, using Jumars with a single length of webbing for the foot strap, with two loops at the end, one for each foot.

THE TRIP TO MAP GOLONDRINAS

Finally, after all the preparations, which can be extensive for some Mexican caves, we were off to Golondrinas. Five of us and all the backpacks, gear, food, and surveying equipment were somehow stuffed into Ed Alexander's Land Rover, the short kind, not the long version. After driving all night and into the next day we arrived at Aquismón, San Luis Potosí, Mexico. We spent another day making arrangements, getting a letter of permission from the presidente of the area, and lining up burros for all the equipment and a burro driver.

The next day the Mexican and his burros showed up, and off we went. We had decided to load our backpacks on the burros also to better enjoy the long hike in the hot, humid June weather and save energy for Golondrinas (and one never knows when he might want to check out any cave possibility along the way). For someone who grew up in rural Kansas, it was as usual very interesting to see many aspects of native life in Mexico, especially where various Indian groups are involved. The Indians in this area even have a different way of greeting or "shaking hands" than we do. Instead of grasping hands firmly, they hold a handout with fingers extended up against the other man's hand. Then they gently slide their hands back toward themselves, maintaining contact. It's a surprise and it feels weird the first time. After hours of hiking, we neared the pit and ran ahead of the burros to see it.

It is awesome! I could sense that as I approached the pit, even before I could look down into it. Some natives apparently heard we were coming and were already waiting for us. I cautioned everyone to lay down and crawl the last few feet up to the edge of the pit because vertigo is a very real danger (I believe TR's group had told us about the possible danger). Also, there is no level ground, just uneven barren rock with deep fissures. Generally, I preferred deep, going caves to blind pits, but I had never seen a pit like this one. It's a good thing I was laying down. We looked down into the vast expanse and watched a flock of green parrots circling in and out of sunlight hundreds of feet below. From the surface, one cannot really perceive the size of the pit. It is roughly oval-shaped in the horizontal section and like a truncated cone in the vertical section. The walls just recede into the vastness.

We then rounded up a bunch of fist-sized rocks about equidimensional, and dropped them, timing them with a stopwatch. As I remember, the average time was 10.7 seconds. Then we got a couple of rocks 10 to 12 inches across. They made a loud roar while falling and the impact reverberated in the pit, drawing lots of racket from the birds. The big ones took something like 9.5 seconds. Just for fun, and interest, we tried a few rocks about three inches across but much thinner. These sailed instead of dropping straight and took up to 14+ seconds.

After recovering from our initial impressions, we set up camp and watched the return of the swallows (Golondrinas) in the evening. They fold their wings and dive into the pit at great speed (there is plenty of room after all). You could hear the sound of them diving, almost like arrows, only louder.

After supper and a night's rest, we were ready to start the mapping project and our own Golondrinas experience in the pit. I had a plan in my mind and

shared it with the others. Two persons were needed to help me with the plane table alidade survey. Ed and Jonathan volunteered. So, we rigged the 1,200-foot rope and pad at the rigging suggested by TR Evans. It is near the low point of the entrance just to the right of a prominent rock. Dick then Ted descended to the bottom, taking about half an hour each. Dick's legs went to sleep because the descent is so long. He just sat on the bottom waiting for Ted. We had walkie-talkie communication between surface and pit bottom.

Next, we moved to the lowest point on the entrance and lowered the wire with a canteen on the end. We needed people on the bottom to help with the measurement and we needed the walkie-talkie communication. It was important to keep the wire from getting tangled up with the rope. Using a 100-foot long steel surveying tape we measured off 100-foot intervals of wire and put a knot in the wire. In each knot we tied a piece of cloth having the appropriate number in the knot. That way we could know where we were along the wire to simplify the measurement. As we moved the wire along the edge to find the shortest drop, my excitement rose as I realized the pit was almost 1,100 feet deep, so it truly was a new world record. The rigging point turned out to have a 1,094-foot drop.

While Ted and Dick explored the bottom, Jonathan, Ed, and I began the survey all around the entrance. I set up a plane table station a little ways away from the entrance at a place where all of the entrance and the rod man could be seen. The rod man moved to many locations around the entrance so we could make a good outline of its shape and height variations. The other man helped locate good sites and to clear some jungle.

After a while, Dick and Ted arrived back on top exhausted. It took about 1.5 hours for them to ascend out of the pit, Ted first. They prusiked in daylight and had plenty of time to see the pit from various heights. We left the rope rigged for the night and went to our camp for food and sleep.

The next morning it was our turn, the plane table crew, to go down the pit. I went down first. Commonly one tends to look at the pit a bit first before going over the edge – and so did I. Getting over the edge can be difficult because of the weight of the rope, about 65 pounds, that must be lifted up. Even with some help from others to relieve the weight, it is still awkward. With the rack of brake bars, I could start out with a few bars and then add more bars during the descent as the rope weight below decreased. This proved advantageous.

What a breathtaking experience! I could only touch the wall for perhaps 10 feet or less. Then it was absolutely free fall the rest of the way. The walls kept receding so that I was suspended out in the middle of the vast space.

However, my descent was unexpectedly interrupted. During the night some natives had pulled the rope up and "played" with it or inspected it. After "playing" with the rope they threw it back down the pit. Perhaps they were amazed at so much rope. Also, it had a straight sheath instead of being the more common laid rope like Goldline. They didn't bother the rigging so none of us suspected what had happened. About 500 feet down I encountered a sequence of knots in the rope. In fact, much of the remaining 700 feet of rope was tangled up. So I had to put my Jumars on the rope – I had made a practice of keeping my ascending gear ready even when descending a pit in case of some difficulty. Patiently I pulled the rope up to me and gradually untangled the mess. Fortunately, most or all of the knots were looped through rather than threaded through from the end.

As I sat in my seatsling my legs kept going to sleep. So I would Jumar up two or three steps with my right leg and Jumar back down with my left leg to get blood circulation going again. Not all of the knots were at one spot so I had to work my down the rope perhaps 50 feet getting the knots out, having to keep lifting the 700 feet or so of rope all the time.

At last, the final knot was undone. I could see the end of the rope on the bottom and I was on my way again. Altogether it took two hours to reach the bottom, 1.5 hours longer than normal. Fortunately, the rope was not damaged in any way. Thve landing place is near the middle of this immense pit, over 200 feet from the nearest wall.

Being on the bottom of Sótano de las Golondrinas can be almost eerie, especially if you are by yourself. It seems like you are in another world. As the sun heats up the floor a cloud several hundred feet thick forms partway up the shaft. It slowly oscillates up and down. The birds making a racket only add to the atmosphere of the place.

Meanwhile, the men on the top couldn't understand what was taking me so long, and hollering didn't help. Once on the bottom, I got to the walkie-talkie and we talked. They had thought I was being too cautious, but it was an entirely different matter. They pulled the rope up and lowered the survey equipment in a duffel bag. Then Ed and Jonathan came down without incident.

The delay put us behind schedule for surveying the bottom, so we got right to it. I knew we had to get at it quickly because we needed daylight to accomplish the survey. Again, I set up the plane table/alidade, the rod man took up various stations, and the third man checked out various things. When the survey was completed, I found the bottom to measure 440 feet wide and 1,000 feet long, including the alcove of nearly 100 feet at one end.

Daylight in the pit was beginning to dim as we finished the survey. Jonathan started out of the pit late in the afternoon while Ed and I poked around some more. We also took down the survey equipment, put it in the duffel bag, and tied it on the end of the rope to be pulled out later. After Jonathan got to the top, Ed and I prusiked (Jumared) out. It was an interesting experience. If we coordinated our steps, we could take a step (push down on the foot loops), the rope would stretch in response, and then we could ride the bounce. Going with the rhythm of the rope, I (we) would take my next step at the peak of the bounce. It took me (us) one hour and 50 minutes to climb out using the modified Texas system with a double foot loop. We climbed in the evening by carbide light, finishing after dark. So in the dimmer light, we missed some of the emotional/visual impacts of the pit one normally experiences from the rope, other than it's a long way. However, I got plenty of that on the way down. Once on top, it was time for food and bed – it had been a lo-o-ong day.

The next day we set about pulling up the rope with bag and breaking camp. Although we all helped, Ted Peters was particularly strong at hauling up the rope and bag. After getting loaded up we headed for Tamapatz about two hours to the south, going out a different way than we came. Our purpose was to do more reconnaissance for future pit or cave exploration. In particular, we wanted to take a look at Hoya de las Guaguas, another "bird pit" we had heard about.

It was probably about this season of Mexican caving that Texas cavers started calling these big pits with lots of parrots and swallows "bird pits". TR Evans may have coined the term. That was one of the terms we took up using when talking with locals in a new area – "Are there any 'bird pits' around here?"

Eventually, we made it out to the highway. Ed caught a ride to Aquismón to get his Land Rover and came back for us. After a night's rest, we headed back to Austin.

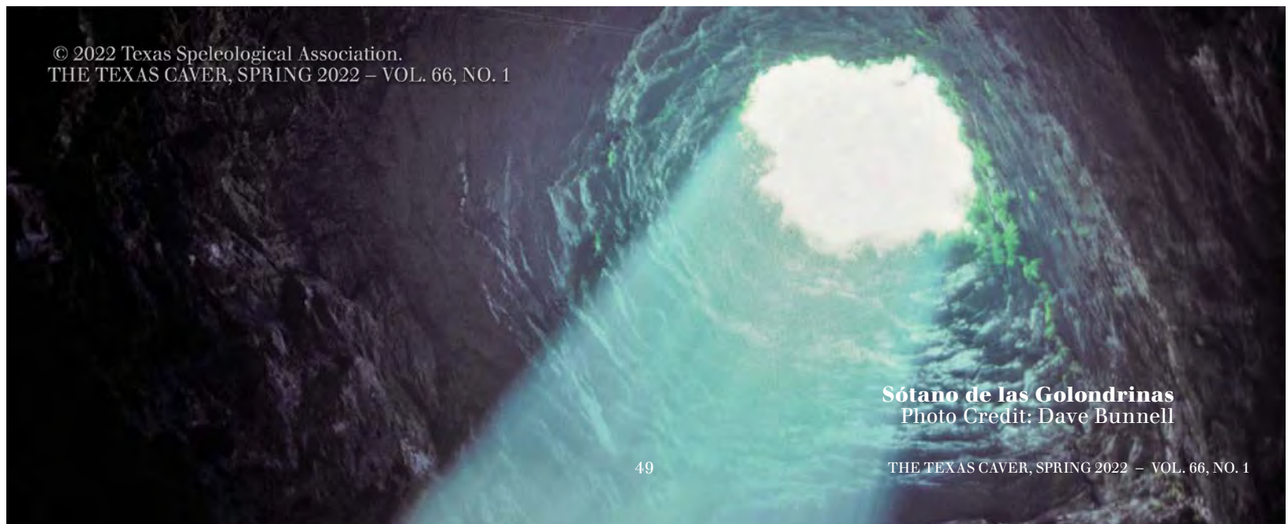
ADDENDA

Later in the summer of 1967, Terry Raines and I went back to Sótano de las Golondrinas to take pictures. The pictures completed the portrayal of Golondrinas for an AMCS Bulletin.

"Ecotourism Scene" by Dave Whitacre

⟶ **Next Page**

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Sótano de las Golondrinas
Photo Credit: Dave Bunnell

Ecotourism Scene at Golondrinas

In Modern Times

by Dave Whitacre

In recent years, Sótano de las Golondrinas has become a major ecotourism attraction. At least during the summer months, each dawn finds up to a hundred tourists on the pit rim, awaiting the exit flight of some 50,000 white-collared swifts, along with the raucous comings and goings of the green parakeets that still inhabit the pit walls as in days of yore. For the evening flight, a mostly different set of a hundred or more tourists is often present. The vast majority of tourists are Mexican nationals, with a sparse sprinkling of the more adventurous brand of European, U.S., or Canadian tourists. While most tourists are there to watch the swift flights and parakeet antics, it is now possible for even a casual visitor to descend the pit. A number of local men with the requisite vertical gear and experience will lower anyone, for a fair price, into the pit, along with a guide, and then pull the two back out after an hour or so exploring the bottom. A crew of a half dozen local men is often used to power the pull-out.

The pit has been a Protected Natural Area of the state of San Luis Potosí for some years, and descending the pit is prohibited during the swift nesting season. Hoya de las Guaguas is similarly protected and managed by the state of San Luis Potosí. The local communities (ejidos) set regulations and manage tourist visitation to the rims of both pits. There are more roads in the area than there were three to four decades ago, but the area is largely unchanged other than that–still a spectacularly exotic corner of the world.

To watch a recording of a hauling operation at Golondrinas, see: https://bit.ly/36qDi0d



About Dave Whitacre by Bill Steele:

Dave heard about Sótano de las Golondrinas from a mutual caving friend of ours in 1968, soon after the friend had been there. Not long thereafter, Dave was on a family vacation to Mexico and his parents dropped him off for two days in Aquismón, SLP, and he hiked to the pit and saw it.

He went on to become a published ornithologist and high school teacher. He has maintained a count of the white-collared swifts (Streptoprocne zonaris) ever since. He published an article about them in AMCS Activities Newsletter No. 41. He lives in Idaho.

The Hall of Texas & Mexico Cavers

"The Hall" (cavelife.info/hall/hall.htm) is dedicated to tributes, biographies, obituaries, and photos about departed people who caved in Texas or Mexico.

William R. Elliott launched this web page on 5 September 2019 after so many old friends were lost in recent years.

Remembering Departed Cavers

by William R. Elliott

We have continued to post obituaries and find lost cavers, but I want to gradually turn over "The Hall" to someone else. I will continue to host the page within my cavelife.info website for a while to keep it going. There is an ongoing need to maintain these tributes for sentimental reasons, history, and safety training. Readers are invited to send files and obituaries to post. We have had many talented, amazing people in our ranks, so please visit "The Hall" to read about them.

RECENT DEATHS

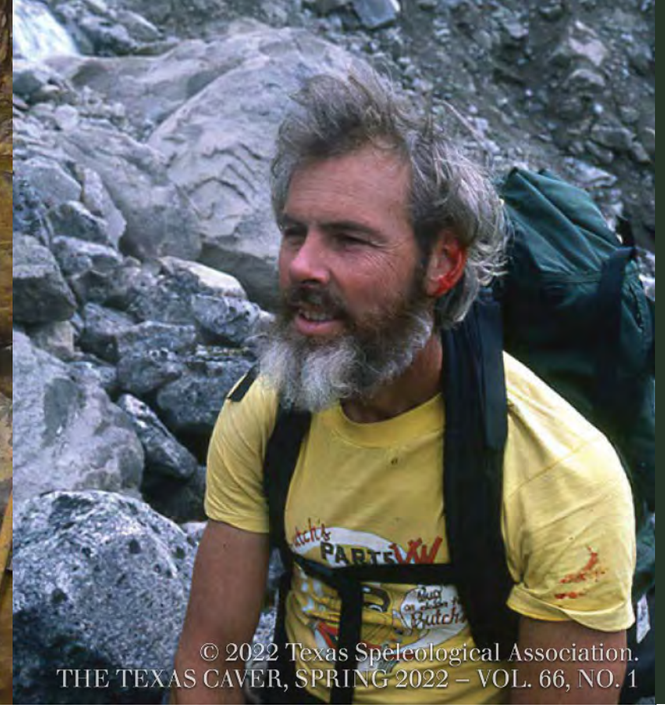
Mike Connolly, 28 July 1947 – 8 July 2021, 73. Mike passed away peacefully. He was passionate about cave exploration, participated in many caving adventures to Mexico, and was one of the originators of the Greater Houston Grotto.

James (Jim) Youmans (aka "Iron Man"), 7 June 1941 - 20 May 2021, 79. NSS7004 FR. Jim was an avid vertical caver and explorer. The 1985 Expedition to Sistema Huautla was the last caving expedition Jim Youmans was involved in. "He was an inspiration and teacher to many cavers" (from the obituary written by Jim Smith NSS14529FLB in the NSS News, July 2021).

Nevin Davis, 1942 - 2021, 79. NSS 6227, RL, FE, LB. Nevin was dedicated to cave exploration and conservation. He was the recipient of the National Speleological Society Lew Bicking Award and

More Info at cavelife.info/hall/hall.htm


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"Jimmy was one of the early explorers of the Caverns of Sonora..."


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Photos from left to right:

Nevin Davis, 2013
Photo Credit: Phil Lucas

Jim Youmans, 1981
Source: NSS News, July 2021
Photo provided to NSS News by Jim Smith

Jimmy Walker and his iron collection, 2001
Photo Credit: Carl Kunath

Butler Cave Conservation Society Limestone Award.

John Loving, 1975? - March 2021, 46. John and his parents, Charlie and Jeannie, were TSA members from Round Rock, Texas. He was part of the photo crew that camped in Sótano de Montemayor (Minas Viejas, NL) 440 meters underground in 1992. He was mentioned in several issues of The Texas Caver in the 1990s.

OTHER REMARKABLE CAVERS, PART TWO**

Jimmy Walker, 1927 – 12 October 2017, 90. Jimmy was one of the early explorers of Caverns of Sonora and was with Preston McMichael for the first explorations of Deep Cave. Jimmy explored caves in the Sierra de El Abra in the 1950s. A talented artist, his paintings were photo-realistic, and he established the "Absolute Realism" genre of art, mostly with western themes. He also worked as a magician and collected irons.

Sergio Zambrano, 1948 – 12 November 2016, 68. Deep vertical caver, cave diver, climber, and pilot from Mexico. Sergio dove in caves in Mexico and Florida. He died in a traffic accident on the way to Sótano de las Golondrinas.

David McKenzie, 1943 – 14 December 2016, 73, NSS 6419. An important speleologist and professional programmer who mapped many caves and wrote the software Ellipse, Walls, and WallsMap. He dedicated his life to helping other cavers.

Francis E. "Ab" Abernethy, 3 December 1925 – 21 March 2015, 89. A professor from Stephen F. Austin University, Nacogdoches, he was famous in Texas folklore studies and was a naturalist, conservationist, author, and photographer. He caved and studied Mexican culture from 1958 to 1977 with his close friends, Bob Mitchell and William "Dusty" or "Dub" Rhodes.

Barry F. Beck, 18 October 1944 – 28 November 2011, NSS 11737RL (HM–FE), 67. The famous "Rain God," who seemed to attract rain wherever he went caving, often flooding out his trip. Active in Texas, Mexico, and Florida. A Ph.D. expert in karst hydrogeology, he started the Sinkhole Conference, a recurring event.

Rod Goke, 6 December 1946 – 5 October 2011, 64. Kind and soft-spoken, Rod was a brilliant scientist in computer architecture for Motorola. He was a founding member of the Texas Cave Management Association and a reliable helper at caver events. He collected vintage computer gear.

*Mariano Silva Fuentes, 1971 – 6 April 2004, 33. Mariano was a leading cave explorer and biologist from UNAM, Universidad Autónoma Nacional de México. Among other accomplishments, he was a member of the 2003 Sistema Cheve expedition, reaching the Cheve sump. He died while sump diving in Cueva Oztoquito, Puebla.

Alejandro "Alex" Villagomez, ? – spring 2000, ~35. We don't have his birth date, but everyone who knew Alex loved him. He had lots of energy and joy. He was from Mexico, but he made Texas his home, then back to Mexico, where he died in a fall from a cliff at Real de Catorce. He is mourned in Texas and Mexico.

*Chris Yeager, ? – 2 March 1991. He died in Cueva Cheve, Oaxaca when his rappel rack detached from his seat sling.

*Sheck Exley, 1 April 1949 – 6 April 1994, 45. The world's leading cave diver and deep dive record–holder. Died in a deep-diving accident at –906 feet. (–276 meters) in Cenote El Zacatón, Tamaulipas.

*Ian Rolland, 1965 – 27 March 1994, 29. An English caver who died in a rebreather diving mishap in the Sótano de San Agustín section of Sistema Huautla, Huautla, Oaxaca.

*Bill Mayne, 12 February 1954 – 16 July 1993, 39, NSS 15404. Born in Corpus Christi, Texas, William Allen Mayne was a Texas caver who moved to Tallahassee, Florida, and took up cave diving. Bill did 120 cave dives and was certified, but he died in Clearcut Sink with friend Ariel Goldberg in a double accident.

** See The Texas Caver Vol. 65 No. 1 for PART ONE

* Indicates a cave-related death

Philippe Rouiller, ? – 27 May 1990. An international caver and cave diver from Switzerland, Philippe was a driving force in the 1987 and 1989 Cerro Rabón, Oaxaca, expeditions, pushing the deep Kijahe Xontjoa and other caves in the region. The survey has not been finished. He died while climbing in Switzerland.

Tom Meador, 2 April 1943 – 29 September 1986, 43, NSS 5202FE. A famous West Texas, Mexico, and New Mexico caver and rancher who wrote cave history articles. Tom liked to drink a gallon of milk for breakfast.

*Wayne Russell, 1947 – 26 February 1984, 37, NSS 9873. A well–known caver and former TSA Chairman, Wayne drowned while cave diving in Jacob's Well, near Wimberley, Texas. The ninth person to drown in Jacob's Well.

A.T. Jackson, 1895 – 27 January 1980. Archaeologist and contributor to NSS Bulletin 10, The Caves of Texas, 1948. He proposed the first cave and archaeology preserve in Texas in 1938, now Seminole Canyon State Historical Park.

Paul Boyer, 6 March 1940 – 19 August 1980, 40, NSS 8422. Paul was a Ph.D. geologist from Rice University, a member of CVS, and an author. He moved to Austin and went caving a lot in Texas and Mexico until a year before his death from cancer, in Florida.

Jerry W. Cooke, 20 November 1936 – 7 April 1975. Cave biologist and arachnologist who studied cavefishes and ricinuleids (rare arachnids) at Texas Tech under Bob Mitchell. He moved to Houston to teach high school, but he was murdered in his apartment.

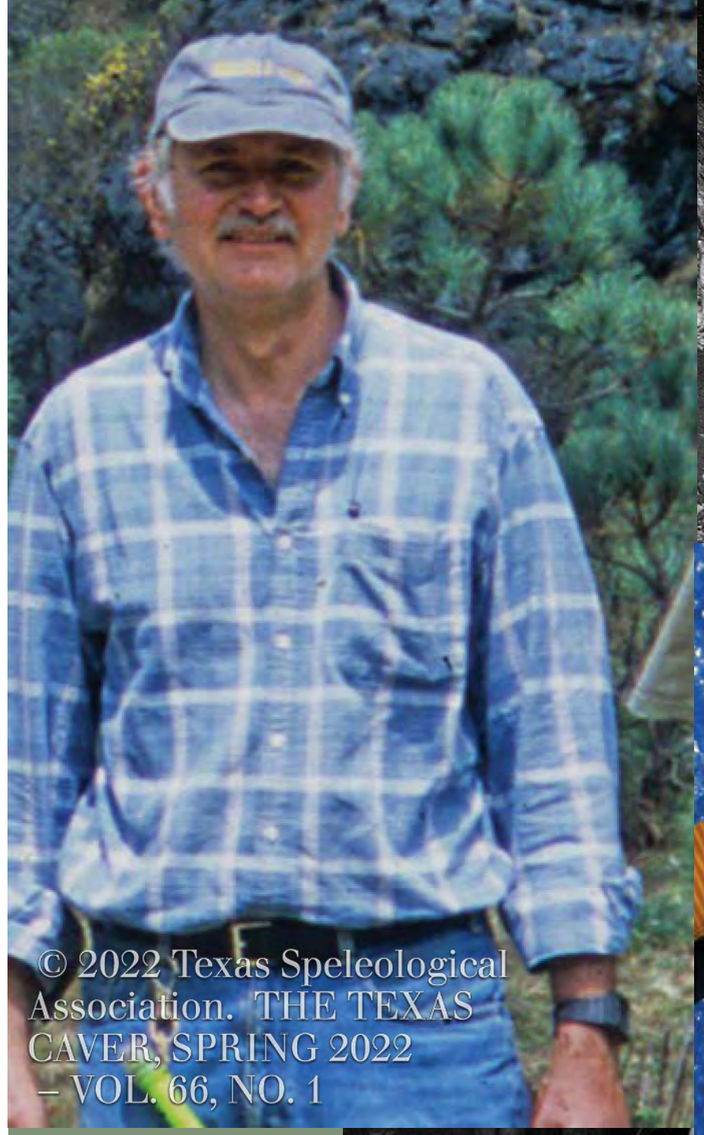
*Angeline Palmer, 1954 – 15 April 1972, 18. Equipment failure and fall from a rope in Devil's Sinkhole. Redundant safety tethers became a thing after this tragic accident.

*Bruce Stone, 1953 – 26 November 1971, 18, from Houston. Drowned in Gruta de Carrizal, Nuevo León.

*Chris Cleaveland, 1953 – 26 November 1971, 18, from Houston. Drowned in Gruta de Carrizal. Same accident report as Bruce Stone. This accident led to the creation of the Texas cave rescue system and toll-free phone number.

Preston McMichael, 4 May 1938 – 14 January 1966, 27. Preston was a beloved and multi-talented cave mapper. The "Preston McMichael Award" was later given by TSA in his honor with a certificate and money to a deserving Texas caver. The award was given five times from 1969–2005, but unfortunately, it has faded into obscurity. The recipients were: James Reddell (1969), Texas Caver staff (1970), Roger Bartholomew (1972), James Jasek (1974), award reinstated, but not given (2003), and Linda Palit (2005).

*Abner J. Totty, III, 11 November 1944 – 4 September 1960. A 15–year–old Explorer Scout from San Antonio who was struck in the head by a large rock to which his cable ladder was attached at Devil's Sinkhole. Apparently, there was no belay, and he fell 120 feet to his death. This was the first cave–related death in recorded Texas history.



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Photos from top left to right:

Sergio Zambrano, 2003
Photo Credit: Bill Stone

David McKenzie, 1965
Photo Credit: Orion Knox

Rod Goke, 1971
Photo Credit: Roger Moore

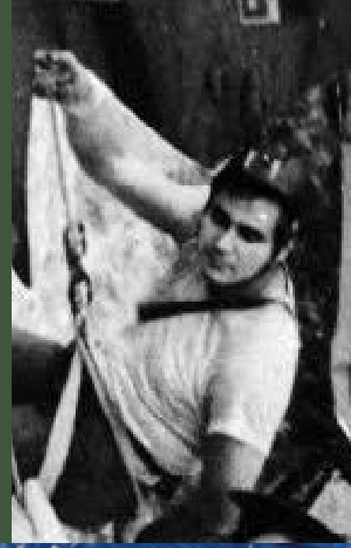
Photos from bottom left to right:

Jimmy Walker, 1950s (notice the golf spikes on boots)
Photo Credit: Jimmy Walker collection

Plaque honoring Sergio Zambrano, 2017





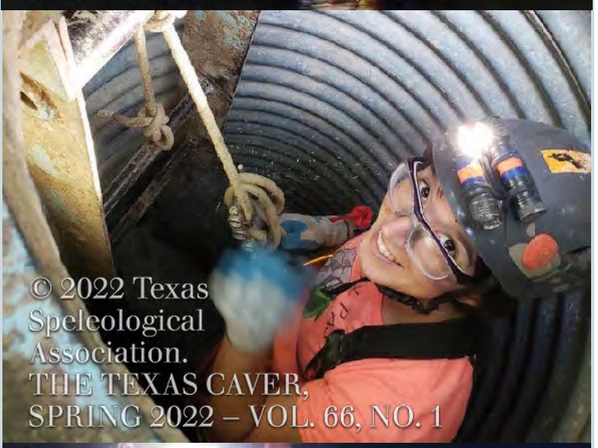


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2021

Chuck Stuehm Award Winners

Congratulations!

to the 2021 Chuck Stuehm Award Winners:

Bethany Carter (Greater Houston Grotto), **Brittany Williams** (Dallas Fort Worth Grotto), **Eléonore Le Corvaisier** (Underground Texas Grotto), **Luke Fuka** (Aggie Speleological Society), **and Tobin Hays** (Bexar Grotto).

The award is named after Raymond Chuck Stuehm (pronounced 'Steam') who was a member of several Grottos in the San Antonio area and was especially good at guiding, working with, and encouraging new cavers. Chuck's memory is honored every time a new, exceptionally exuberant caver receives this award. All winners will also receive one-year free membership to the TSA.

Thank you to all the Grottos for their participation.

Photos from top to bottom:

Signal Light Cave, TAG
Photo Credit: Victoria Smith
Photo of Bethany Carter

Cave in Leakey, TX
Photo Credit: Scott VonBorstel
Photo of Brittany Williams

Fisher Ridge Cave System
Photo Credit: Andy Edwards
Photo of Eléonore Le Corvaisier

Powell's Cave
Photo Credit: Tristan Barron
Photo of Luke Fuka

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