The Texas Caver

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The Texas Caver

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COVER PHOTO // by Ethan Perrine
Grace Borengasser in Honey Creek Cave

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Letter from the Editor

In this issue of The Texas Caver, you can read about underground frontiers, cave explorations, caver parties, the International Congress of Speleology and Year of Caves, a tribute to departed cavers, and award winners. I would like to thank Carolyn Fusinato for being the graphic designer for the 2021-2022 issues of The Texas Caver and Grace Borengasser for resuming her role as graphic designer in 2023. In this transition, Carolyn laid out the cover for this issue that features Ethan Perrine’s wonderful photo of muddy Grace surveying Honey Creek Cave.

Photo above:
Jessica Gordon and Tom Rogers admiring magnificent stalagmites in a cave located in the Texas Hill Country
Photo Credit: David Ochel

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Orion Knox in Antelope Canyon in 2012 **Photo by** Jan Knox

Austin's Underground Frontier: An Exhibit of Our Own Endangered Cave-Dwelling Species

Barbara Attwell

Resembling science fiction and expertly executed, the paintings convey the message that the secret life under us all is something worth protecting. Hopefully, more people will learn to care for these ancient, wily creatures, just as they learned to care for local bats.

Cruising through the Austin airport, you may have noticed a wall of mammoth-sized wildlife portraits. These are paintings of our very own endangered species – those that live underground in caves.

Many Texas Hill Country residents are unaware that we have documented endangered species or that they walk daily over a landmark subterranean ecosystem where caves and aquifers network wildly under their feet, or that we are famous around the world for our karst (cave) environment.



Composite of two paintings:
Psuedoscorpion *Tartarocreagri spp* (left)
Tricolored Bat *Perimyotis subflavus* (right)

As the climate in Texas cycled over millennia, life aboveground was repeatedly wiped out while life isolated in caves remained stable. This put cave-dwelling creatures on an extraordinarily long evolutionary journey, creating some remarkable creatures – all of which are particularly susceptible to extinction. State laws don't do the job, and with Austin undergoing rapid urbanization, caves are regularly filled in for development. That's where this exhibit of troglobitic wildlife comes in.

Jollyville Plateau Salamander *Eurycea tonkawae* (top)
Cave Harvestman *Texella mulaiki* (bottom)
Texas Cave Cricket *Ceuthophilus secretus* (next page)





As the mission had become critical, Balcones Canyonlands Program (BCP) Manager Nico Hauwert had an inspiration: to engage the public using the arts. He hired me as the artist based on my previous endangered species work. I extensively research each species to inform my painting and to get to know these marvelous creatures. I chose to paint their portraits on a leviathan scale, as a way to introduce these mostly bitsy-sized faunas. Gathering images from photos taken by BCP biologists Colin Strickland and Mark Sanders, bat conservationist Merlin Tuttle, and a few sourced from the internet, I built a single image from several different photos. This enabled the best angle and coloring to illustrate an individual. Particular importance was paid to the blacks in the background, which is actually composed of several layers of color to impart depth. It is this deep, rich, delicious darkness that serves to generate these creatures' biology and life rhythm. Hidden in each work is an ancient symbol for protection, sometimes so well-hidden that I can't find them anymore.

The first portrait I did was of a pseudoscorpion. After transferring the final sketch on the canvas and starting to paint, I had a moment where I questioned why I had left off the psuedoscorpion's eyes, only to realize seconds later that they are indeed not present - having no need for eyes. The fact that they can't really bite, are hairy, transparent, and have no stinger, was not missed, however.

Resembling science fiction and expertly executed, the paintings convey the message that the secret life under us all is something worth protecting. Hopefully, more people will learn to care for these ancient, wily creatures, just as they learned to care for local bats. Look how well that worked out!

When the paintings were located at Gate 11 in the Austin Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA), countless smudges on the glass, both high and low, revealed to the ABIA airport art manager that the cave wildlife portraits were quite popular. Staff had to clean the glass constantly. Occasional texts that I received from airport visitors would thank me for letting them know that they existed and often described their favorite one. The exhibit is currently displayed at the Beverly S. Sheffield Education Center at Barton Springs.

Here is a link to the portraits:
https://barbaraattwell.net/the-cave-project



Honey Creek: Otter Slides, Booger Bears, and Nearly Endless Mud

Ethan Perrine



Grace Borengasser and Ethan Perrine emerge from the Otter Slides for a second time, having successfully recovered a headlamp that we thought was surely lost forever **Photo by** Patty Calabrese

Honey Creek in mid-May. The threat of summer was looming, but it was cool still, with enough of a breeze to justify encircling the artificial campfire and sharing stories until midnight. That's about the time I arrived Friday night, found Bill Steele, and asked to see the big map. A group stood around the table, tracing our fingers over the line plot, and recounted the March trip to the BM11 lead where we planned to return in the morning. We discovered a curious discrepancy between the survey and the actual passage in which we found ourselves. What was described as a small lead that went on for 20 meters before ending in a dig was, instead, an extensive mud tube, interspersed with domes, that we chased for close to 100 meters before running out of time. The lead deserved a return trip, and now it was time.

The morning of May 14 was pleasant but hot enough to motivate us underground as we baked in our wetsuits, waiting for our turn down the shaft. At 10:20 a.m., after reporting to our faithful shaft master, Team Booger Bear clipped in and took the 145-foot ride down the shaft to the stream passage. Andrea Croskrey, Grace Borengasser, Patty Calabrese, and I made up the fearsome foursome. At 10:48 a.m., with Patty leading, we pushed upstream and headed west toward the Boneyard. While we traveled, we tried to select a fitting team name but decided to remain nameless until inspiration struck. We had predicted a commute of little more than an hour and sure enough, noon found us wading up to the BM entrance. We stood about the left wall where it met the floor, peering down at a narrow mud constriction marked with a fresh, innocent piece of yellow flagging tape and one by one, prepared to slither in. Grace was the first to squeeze, and I followed behind. Sounds of objection, confusion, and bewilderment echoed out of the tube as she struggled her way up and

over the first of many slick muddy slides. I tried to offer reassurance, but mostly I laughed. It is great fun to writhe through the BM passageway, which Andrea fittingly named the Otter Slides, but it is even more fun to watch somebody else squirm through. The way is often not clear, and the floor rises and falls under a low ceiling, forming mud humps that must be crawled up, then squeezed through before sliding down the opposite side into a mud pool that rests in the trough between the mud hump you've just slid down and the next.

Before long, Grace was mastering the unique set of moves that grant access to the BM passage. The two of us moved forward and Patty and Andrea entered behind us, ready to experience the same splendid obstacles. With everyone acquainted, we wriggled forward in a single file with comparative efficiency. Approximately 20 meters later we arrived at some flagging in a small dome room big enough for two to sit in. Andrea and Patty related the flagging to the survey notes and determined that we were at the final station of the previous survey.

That meant it was time to wash our hands and retrieve our instruments, a proposition that was easier said than done. Attempting to wash anything in BM was a fruitless endeavor. We did the best we could using the muddy stream puddles that collected between the otter slides, but it was ineffective. We tied in and surveyed from BM12 to 13. As I went to rinse my hands to once again handle the instruments, I noticed something remarkable about the pool I was at. It continued under the next mud hump, and when I stuck my hands in to wash them off, they came out … clean! Or what amounted to clean by BM standards. What sorcery was at work I did not know, but we all seized the opportunity as we crawled by the sacred spring. The rest of the puddles did not share the same magical quality, and the survey from here on was more vexing. My travel brochure had perhaps left out the finer details of how muddy and wormlike the BM passage was, and I think that was not lost on my teammates. Jokes were cracked, groans were issued, and the occasional lighthearted mutiny was proposed until eventually, Patty informed us that her coworker had a term for this kind of situation. Booger bear. With that, our team had a name. How did we know that we were experiencing a booger bear? To move meant to coat yourself in mud, with little recourse. The walls were mud, the floor was mud, and the ceiling was often mud. We were surveying in a Nutella jar. It was the worst for Andrea. She had the unenviable task of keeping the survey book clean, and was, as the sketcher, at the back of our single-file line. This meant that by the time she got to a puddle, it had already been thrice trampled into a state more akin to gravy than water. I can tell you



A group shot of team Booger Bear, taken in anticipation of the still unscheduled award ceremony commemorating our unprecedented 18.46 meters of survey **Photo by** Ethan Perrine



Back in the main passage, Andrea Croskrey takes advantage of the luxuries we'd been without: sitting upright, drinking water, and washing your hands **Photo by** Patty Calabrese



The Three Mudsketeers (Andrea, Grace, and Patty), proudly display the unavoidable layer of mud that comes complimentary with any visit to the Otter Slides **Photo by** Ethan Perrine

from having seen the near-immaculate book later that she did rise to the occasion. That is why she was the sketcher, and I was plastering flagging tape to the walls with mud pies. Know your strengths.

It was slow going, but we were making progress. I set stations and occasionally read instruments or pulled tape when it was more practical from my position. Grace was on tape and backsight duty, Patty was on foresight duty, and Andrea brought up the rear of our column. If ever a passage did not want to be surveyed, this was a contender. And, despite their feedback, I was not setting stations with the intentional goal of making the instruments suffer. Most of our shots were 1-2 meters, but we did hit a home run between stations 16 and 17, shooting a whopping five meters! We rejoiced. Station 17 was bittersweet, however, since the farther in we went, the worse the air became. I am a poor canary, so fortunately Andrea had the good sense to bring it up and after a group morale check, it was decided that we would finish out the last two stations and turn back. The last two stations were a tremendous pain in the butt, however - so much so that since Grace and I had already pushed our way in, the book would be passed forward, and I would sketch the last bit. Grace headed back, too, and I was left there for a few minutes to admire Andrea's extraordinary cleanliness up to that point.

For my part, I didn't make it appreciably worse, which in my book is a victory. I wrapped up and rejoined Team Booger Bear in the main Boneyard passage. Clean water! We rejoiced once more.

But, moments later, Patty discovered that she had been betrayed by a broken zipper and her pocket headlamp had been left behind. She was content to leave it for next time, but I hate to lose things, and I couldn't pass up another ride on the Otter Slides, so I turned around and retraced our steps, combing my fingers through the muck as I went. I hit station 19 and turned back empty-handed. While rehearsing the best way to deliver that disappointment unto Patty, I saw the hint of a fabric strap and recovered the light out of the soup. I backtracked and cleaned off, and the four of us set off for the entrance at 6:30 p.m. After an hour of walking, crawling, swimming, dragging, and murky water - leading to shin-busting - we were back at the bottom of the shaft, gearing up for our imminent rapture. By 7:43 p.m., Grace and I were topside, greeted by the dried-off members of our fellow teams, a plate of hot quesadillas, and David Ochel carrying a tray of cold beverages. Patty and Andrea followed shortly, and with that, the brave Booger Bears were all safely above ground, the last to leave and the muddiest of the day.

Not Just Another Austin Caver Party

Bill Steele

It was a major speleological expedition send-off event. Well attended, too. The estimate is that 100 cavers and caving-associated people attended. There was a live band. There was food and libations. There were even speeches.



Expedition leader Bill Steele talks about the objectives **Photo by** Audrey Steele

What expedition? The PESH 2022 Expedition: Proyecto Espeleologico Sistema Huautla is our seventh one since Virginia caver Tommy Shifflett and I restarted caving in the vast cave system discovered in the mid-1960s by Austin cavers. The party/event was held on March 26, 2022, and it launched a 5 ½ week-long expedition.

Tommy and I both began caving at Huautla in the late 1970s. We went on a majority of the expeditions through 2007. In 2013, we joined the British-organized cave diving expedition that dove the sump at the lowest point in the cave system, an 81-meter-deep dive that reclaimed the distinction for Sistema Huautla as the deepest cave in the Americas, surpassing yet again Cueva Chevé. Chevé had a television show about it named “The Deepest Cave”, so we call Sistema Huautla The Deeper Cave.



PESH 2022 Send-Off Party **Photo by** Bill Steele



The band in the house **Photo by** Bill Steele



The pile in the living room **Photo by** Bill Steele

The goals Tommy Shifflett and I wrote down in the airport in Oaxaca City as we awaited our flights back to the United States in 2013 included giving our project a new name in Spanish, planning a logo, conducting month-long expeditions 10 years in a row, doing full speleology, meaning all of the possible studies while there, supporting Mexican cave scientists, and extending the length of Sistema Huautla from the 65 kilometers it was then to 100 kilometers. We reached 100 kilometers this year.

Full speleology includes geology, biology, paleontology, archaeology, paleoclimatology, anthropology, and folklore. Through the years, we've had two master's theses written on the geology, many papers published on the biology, and papers published on paleontology. Work is ongoing, including a master's thesis written on archaeology. We are currently working with a geology professor on paleoclimatology, a Ph.D. dissertation on anthropology, and local Huautla scholar, Montserrat Peralta Mendez, is our folklorist, collecting Mazatec stories about the caves told in oral tradition from long ago.

Montserrat goes by Montse. She was at the March 26 expedition send-off event. I flew her to Texas to ride down with the expedition so she could experience the northern part of Mexico all the way to Huautla, and to experience a PESH expedition from start to finish.

Also, at the expedition send-off event were three of the original Huautla cavers from the first three trips there in the mid-1960s. I introduced them and one at a time they came up on my daughter Audrey's backyard deck, took the microphone, and told a story about their first Huautla trip.

John Kreidler was first. He talked about how he had just turned 17 in 1965 and had started caving with Bill Russell who had figured out that Huautla de Jiménez, Oaxaca, Mexico was a place to look for deep caves, and how they were utterly surprised when they arrived in Huautla and found hippies from the United States there for a magic mushroom experience.

Rune Burnett told about being the first person to enter the 80-meter entrance pit of Sótano de San Agustín, now one of 30 entrances to 101-kilometer-long and 1560-meter-deep Sistema Huautla. Rune and his wife Susan Souby visited PESH expeditions while they were underway in both 2015 and 2019. Rune was followed by Ron Ralph, who told about his first trip into Sótano de San Agustín and facing thundering waterfalls and seemingly never-ending pits. And they haven't ended yet, 55 years later.

I ran through our objectives for the expedition, a list of deep underground camps that were planned, and our hopes for the results of the expedition. When I finished, a three-piece rock band inside a sliding glass door to the deck started playing. Cavers mingled beneath canopies, talking about caving, seeing friends they hadn't seen in a long time, and posing with the flag of The Explorers Club, the flag of Mexico, and the PESH logo banner.

Beyond the band in the house, stacked against the wall of the dining room, was a huge pile of gear, jerky, and other foods, plus many boxes of spools of rope, etc. that were to be loaded into three vehicles the next morning. Volunteers were recruited from among the partiers to come help with the loading. They did, in true Austin caver fashion.

An Unconventional Christmas in Conrado Castillo

Ethan Perrine

Christmas morning in the Conrado Castillo field house found a team of cavers pouring over maps at Gill Ediger's dining table. I entered and crossed the room toward the high shelf where my animal crackers were hidden. Breakfast in hand, I sat down to join the fold. Bev Shade was studying the maps for Oyamel and Allarines, while Matt Oliphant and Nancy Pistole flipped through survey notes of Valhalla, a section of Sistema Purificación near the field house. I had been there a few days earlier and agreed to guide Matt and Nancy to the first marked station after which I agreed to join Mowgli (Michael Swartz) for the day's primary objective. We scattered to pack snacks and I met Matt and Nancy to begin our hike through the village.



A brisk 10-minute walk later, I was squirming through the narrow boulder entrance, using my body to check for snakes. Soon the three of us were off and moving. I soon realized that I had condensed the route in my head … considerably. If you're wondering if I am referring to the route to the cave, or the route in the cave, that's correct. I had told Bev I'd be back in 20



Mowgli rappelling into Oyamel **Photo by** Ethan Perrine

minutes which we'd already spent on the walk there. So, I ushered them farther and farther, twist after turn after squeeze after climb, and occasionally rounded the corner to dart ahead and covertly confirm that I was not leading us astray. Finally, I saw a familiar station that I had set days prior and bid them adieu after agreeing on a callout time.

I tore back to the entrance as fast as I could and got out at 11:14 a.m. I sprinted back to the field house where I was relieved to find Bev still showing route information to Mowgli for our day's objective. We were going to rig Oyamel through the Lower Pit Entrance, all the way down to -82 meters at the Slit Pit. Simultaneously, Bev and Sean were going into Allarines to bust through a dig constriction at the bottom. They intended to come out through Oyamel, and we were meant to be waiting for them. This would add Allarines to the extent of Sistema Purificación, which already connects with Oyamel. As we stood over the map, I took note of all the blue water drawn in nearly every passage. I am sensitive to the cold and wasn't bringing



The first wave caravan of cavers stop by the famous La Boca cave entrance, headed for Infernillo **Photo by** A friendly tourist

my wetsuit so I wondered to myself if I would get wet that day. Mowgli and I set off for the cave, which was just a short walk from the field house in the opposite direction of Valhalla.

We remarked on how pleasant the path was and chatted while we meandered along the GPS route. Upon reaching the supposed coordinates at the base of a towering limestone henge, we struggled to find any signs of a cave entrance. We scoured the area inside, around, and above the henge, and after a hunt that left us with a GPS track resembling spaghetti, found a sink with a pit and decided that we were probably in the right spot. We stood overlooking a 20- to 25-foot deep drop, shaded by two sturdy oaks. I rigged to a branch and Mowgli went down to find out if there was a passage at the bottom and if so, if it matched the map. He whooped in the affirmative and soon we were both at the bottom facing a duck-under.

Mowgli is a caver of many skills, but he said wayfinding was one he needed to work on, so I followed his lead. Even if I had been leading the way, none of my map reading experience had prepared me for the multi-level Gordion knot of a cave that we were examining on his phone screen. The beginning of the cave was simple though and confirmed that we were at the right entrance of the correct cave. We knew this because just inside the entrance room was a still, blue pool of water. I got the feeling that I may be getting an answer to my question about staying dry sooner rather than later. Mowgli led the way, and we carefully traversed along an archipelago of rocks that sat above the water line. We made it across with relative ease and I hoped out loud that all of the pools would be traversable.

Moving further in, my inner monologue was interrupted as I came face-to-face with a worm-shaped, transparent blob. It was attached to dripping flowstone on the wall and scanning around I could see several more. The blobs appeared to be cocoons; within each one was a larva that freely floated in the iridescent goo medium. These were totally new to me, so I documented them and pulled myself away to catch up with Mowgli. He was beginning to climb around a waist-deep plunge pool. Traversing successfully looked grim and after a few moves Mowgli fell in. He made peace with it and waded to the other side. I, on the other hand, was determined. I floated my pack and rope to the pool's far side, and climbed along the slick holds protruding from the ceiling. As I crossed the halfway mark, the holds were smaller, fewer, and farther between. I spanned the wall with my arms and was straining, hard. My trembling fingers slipped off the slick stone as I surrendered and slid in. My boots flooded, my pants soaked up to the thighs, and with them went my hopes of staying dry. I wrung out my socks in the next dry room and we checked the map. The drawn passages were spot on as we looked around and we were growing more confident with our navigation.

On the floor, much to Mowgli's dismay, I spotted more intriguing fauna. Yellow and black Xystodesmid millipedes hid in flood debris on the floor. I documented them, too, again falling behind Mowgli as he pushed on. We regrouped and pushed on.

The cave had transitioned into an obstacle course of oily-black conglomerate that had long ago been shaped and smoothed. It led us to a lower level down that we believed to be the "Apricot Pit". This passage was just a line plot on the map and quickly proved to be much more convoluted than it appeared on paper. Horns stretched out from the undulating walls, obscuring potholes and ceiling domes - all of which distorted our echos and abilities to tell which way to go. We hunted for old flagging, leaving some of our own as we explored the unintuitive passages. Tubes branched, intersected, and branched again in multiple directions. We started to leave cairns at the ways we'd come through, then split up to collect reconnaissance on the possible routes ahead. There were fewer critters to keep



Iridescent larval tube **Photo by** Ethan Perrine



Team lead Dan Green studies the Brinco map, fine tuning plans for Camp 7 **Photo by** Ethan Perrine

me distracted, and my lower half was getting cold. I wrung out my socks again, since every time I got them less than sopping, we would encounter another pool, and we stopped for a snack break. We looked at the map, just to humor ourselves, and followed our instinct to go lower where possible.

Landmarks were few and far between, and when there were noteworthy obstacles, like a 6-foot-long, 9-inch slot canyon squeeze, they were nowhere to be found on the map. Reluctantly we abandoned our reliance on the map and leaned into the "when in doubt, try to go down" approach. Sure enough, we forged our own path that continued to lead us deeper and deeper. Several hours had passed by now as we snaked deeper and deeper when we rounded a corner and all of the sudden … we found some bolts! We were on the right track all along. What a relief! 6:30 p.m. found us sitting atop what we believed to be "Anchovy Pit". We were discussing the Cheve expedition while Mowgli flaked rope to rig the drop. In the middle of his story, a sound caught my ear: the distinctive, familiar sound of a hammer striking rock. I exclaimed and we held our breath, waiting in expectant silence. We listened intently, eyes looking nowhere in particular; all attention was trained on the walls. "Tap, tap, tap," this time it was clearer, and we both heard it. It was close! Bev and Sean must have been right through the wall.

Despite the warped acoustics of the Swiss cheese passage, we were confident in the direction. Mowgli used his climbing hammer to send a burst of taps back in reply. We were right on the money; we had to be! Our spirits soared with the promise of imminent connection, and we hastily rigged and descended to the next lower level in the direction we heard them, pounding on the walls and looking for leads. We hammered, listened, then hammered again. Nothing. "Maybe they were hammering an obstacle on the way to the lead," we reasoned. We both knew we were losing time and needed to capitalize on this window of apparent closeness. Mowgli climbed up to a higher level, pushing leads and shouting. I descended the lower levels through smaller pits, slamming rocks into the walls. Hammer, listen, repeat.

Eventually, I ascended back up Anchovy, and sat against the wall, listening for replies as Mowgli pounded on the walls. Now I was properly cold, shivering in my gravel-filled boots. We went on like this for 2 ½ more hours, until finally, our head-out time of 9 p.m. arrived. We ascended the upper pit, spirits lowered by the confusing radio silence. My feet, and the rest of me, were continually soaked as we backtracked.

We retraced our steps, passed our flagging, and quietly made our way an hour and a half to the exit. We emerged,



Traversing pools in Oyamel **Photo by** Ethan Perrine

in the dark at 10:30 p.m., waterlogged and grateful for the warm night air. We started back on the GPS track to the field house, but decided to stay on the road we'd unnecessarily deviated from on our way in - then missed a turn, and wound up at the base of the hill where the field house was. "F*** it" was a mutual sentiment, so we just cut up into the trees and fortunately stumbled onto an animal path that lead to the Brinco trail. We sloshed past the reflective tags and finally made it back just after 11 p.m. The field house was dark, so I peeled off my freezing shoes and top layers and clambered through the door.

To my surprise, Bev and Cathy were waiting up for us. I had questions! Where were they? Did they hear us, did they break through, and most of all, when did they turn around? Bev told us that they had busted into virgin passage but it soon ended in a sump and they left at 6:30 p.m. I stared at the wall and had to laugh. That meant we had heard them right when they were leaving and subsequently spent three hours trying to communicate with an empty cave. Oh, well. I was so glad to be dry and I had enough service to ask about how Holly's day was. At the table, Cathy treated us to stuffing, gravy, and mashed potatoes, and I had oatmeal for dessert. All told, it was a Christmas I won't soon forget.



The first morning in the fieldhouse after all 6 trucks had arrived **Photo by** Ethan Perrine



U.S. Caver delegation **Photo by** ICS Staff

Explore, Understand, Protect: International Congress of Speleology and Year of Caves

Jay Jorden

Following a year of unavoidable delays due to the pandemic, it was great to witness the 18th International Congress of Speleology (ICS) firsthand in France. The world's most significant gathering of cave and karst scientists, explorers, managers and educators was even more noteworthy last summer because it wrapped in the International Year of Caves and Karst.

The ICS venue was southern France at the Universitie Savoie Mont Blanc (Savoie Technolac) on the shores of Lac du Bourget, France's largest natural lake - near Chambery and the foot of the Bauges massif, a UNESCO world geopark. The congress, hosted by the International Union of Speleology (UIS), was the first to return to France since the initial congress in 1953, hosted in Paris.

More than 1,000 Congress participants were welcomed by the outgoing UIS President, Dr. George Veni, who is also executive director of the National Cave and Karst Research Institute in Carlsbad, N.M. George emphasized UIS' role in the year of caves and karst.

The UIS had proposed to UNESCO in 2015 that an International Year of Caves and Karst (IYCK) be recognized to increase worldwide knowledge of their importance—and to enhance protection, study, and management in the face of threats from pollution, vandalism, development, and neglect. "This is a vision not just for the international year but going forward beyond this year," Veni said, adding that it was essential to align this congress with the IYCK and urging participants to continue research, exploration, and conservation efforts. Ironically, the pandemic may have been a blessing in disguise because the IYCK designation was extended for both 2021 and 2022, enabling a total of 700 or so live and virtual events to occur worldwide, reaching more than 50 million people.

Congress participants in France were treated to 20 symposia covering all speleological topics, with 600+ submitted abstracts setting a congress record. Symposia topics included biology, exploration, archeology, mapping and cartography, karst hydrology, glacier caves, geomorphology, volcanic caves, history, cave rescue, karst heritage and resources, pseudokarst, cave deposits, climatology, cave diving, and socioeconomic aspects. The congress featured a sprawling vendors' area with gear from Petzl, Scurion, Meander, Jaws, Cave Lighting, and more—plus bookshops from the Swiss and Italian speleological societies along with groups from Germany, France, Belgium, Catalonia, and elsewhere.

Also prominent on the Savoie campus was a large red tent sponsored by Petzl for the awards presentation, banquet, and other major gatherings. It featured a SpeleoBar open for business day and night, with beer and wine for one euro a glass. In fact, the wine and beer flowed across the campus, and food trucks offered crepes and other delicacies—plus the ubiquitous French fries. The congress also featured an international film festival, with screenings all week, and the opportunity to contribute to a time capsule and sign a guestbook to be sealed inside a cave in Savoie for the year 2091, 69 years from now—the same time span since the first ICS in Paris.

Since Wednesday at Congress is traditionally reserved for excursions, cavers had their choice of at least 10 different cave and sightseeing trips. Our group chose a trip to three caves: Grottes de Choranche, Grotte de Thais, and a wild cave in the mountain above Choranche.

Within Choranche were several aquariums housing *Proteus anguinus*, a depigmented salamander with undeveloped eyes. These were fascinating because of their slow metabolism and longevity, believed to be about 90 years. Forests of soda straws abound where two rivers—Coufin and Chevaline—meet to form an underground lake.

The Thais caves are well-known for their prehistory and picturesque setting at the foot of the Vercors Massif. Found inside were encampments and a bone plaque with engravings of what's believed to be lunar or solar cycles. Other excursions included a hike on the Sornin Plateau and the entrance to Gouffre Berger, which for 10 years held the world's depth record at -3,681 feet; Rhône Valley caves, where Neanderthals lived 100,000+ years ago; and the caves of Cerdon and Dinoplagne, regarded as the world's longest dinosaur trail.



Spelolympics **Photo by** Jay Jorden



Closing banquet in Petzl tent **Photo by** Jay Jorden



Jay Jorden in a wild cave above Grotte de Choranche **Photo by** Dan Legnini

The congress paid homage to the 12th ICS held 25 years ago about 100 miles away at La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland (the only other international ICS I had attended outside the U.S.) in 1997. The latest congress also included a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the European Speleological Federation, founded in 1990 in Udine, Italy, to unite cavers across Europe for speleology and sport caving.

Although not an exhaustive list, other Texans (and former Texans) at the ICS included Geary and Sue Schindel; Grace Borengasser; Tom Summers; Terry Bolger; Joel Haus and Eléonore Le Corvaisier; David Ochel and Andrea Croskrey; John and Anne Moses; Aimee Beveridge and Geoff Hoese; and Mark Minton and Yvonne Droms.

At a gala awards ceremony, Dave Bunnell, Kevin Downey, and Chris Howes were among U.S. and UK recipients of top honors in photo categories.

Post-congress, after helping Chicago caver Dan Legnini rent a camper van near Chambery, we were joined by Dr. Patricia Seiser on a delightful journey to Chamonix at the base of Mont Blanc. There, we caught up with the Schindels and their friend Mary, taking an excursion to the Mer de Glace in the Mont Blanc Massif.

During the UIS General Assembly at the Congress, Pat was among the new adjunct secretaries elected to the bureau,

which conducts UIS' daily business. Dr. Nadja Zupan Hajna of Slovenia was elected as the new UIS president. Founded in 1965 at the Fourth International Speleology Congress in Postojna, Slovenia, the UIS has 57 member states, each appointing delegates for four-year terms to represent the respective countries' cavers and cave scientists.

During the French Congress, much of Europe was sweltering in a heat wave - apparent by lots of brown in the fields and little rain during the event (just one day when it was overcast and drizzling). The striking toll of global warming was more apparent on the glacier near Mont Blanc, where long sets of stairs (with 500+ steps) have been built to the ice cave, along with markers for the level of the glacier in 2005, 2010, and other benchmarks.

Because the site for the July 24-31 UIS, sponsored by the French Speleology Federation, was almost midway between the Lyon, France, and Geneva, Switzerland airports, the initial challenge for me was getting there. In order to avoid expensive destinations in last-minute travel plans, my itinerary included flying to Frankfurt, Germany (via Cancun, Mexico!), taking two high-speed TGV trains to Paris and Lyon, respectively, and then finally a bus to Chambery. . Returning stateside for me involved three more trains—from Grenoble to Lyon, then north through the Chunnel to London, and then flying to JFK. Congresses occur once every four years. The next ICS will be in 2025 at Belo Horizonte, Brazil in the state of Minas Gerais. The Congress is returning to Brazil for the second time since the 13th ICS in Brasilia and will celebrate the UIS' 60th anniversary.



Congress logo


Lake inside Grotte de Choranche **Photo by** Jay Jorden

Remembering Departed Cavers: The Hall of Texas and Mexico Cavers

Jay Jorden

The Hall of Texas and Mexico Cavers on the Texas Speleological Association (TSA) website (https://hall.cavetexas.org/) is our collection of stories — including tributes, biographies, obituaries, and photos — dedicated to departed cavers who have explored in Texas or Mexico.

We seek to maintain a comprehensive repository of those who visited, mapped, and chronicled scientific discoveries in Texas and Mexico caves. The TSA voted last year at the Texas Cavers' Reunion to move The Hall of Texas and Mexico Cavers from where Bill Elliott had been hosting to the TSA website, and I became editor. I appreciate all of Bill's great work in building this, as well as Ron Miller's early efforts to help lay the groundwork for a place to retain our shared history as told through our people.

When you go to the TSA website at www.cavetexas.org/, look for "Who We Are" at the top of the page, open it, and you'll see the link to The Hall. Or go there directly at https://hall.cavetexas.org/

Please help us share any missing information and fill gaps. Please see the "Lost Cavers" section at the bottom of the web page. You can send info to me at jjorden@gmail.com. I'm also interested in "pre-obits": info about someone living, like you or a friend ... including biographies, CVs, resumes, and photos.

Thanks to all who have contributed so far (see the web page for a list of names). The Hall has become a rich resource of compelling stories and photos for the caving community. The latest information follows:



The trail to Sótano de la Joya de Salas, Tamaulipas, June 1965. Mules and driver, John Fish, and Orion Knox **Photo by** David McKenzie



Orion Knox in Uvalde Cave in 1988 **Photo by** Jan Knox

Orion Knox Jr.

20 March 1941 – 31 December 2022

Orion was a pioneering caver in both Texas and Mexico, famous for his beautiful cave maps and photos that were produced over six decades. He also helped develop several important show caves and was an organizer of restoration work at Grutas del Palmito near Bustamante in Nuevo León, Mexico. He served 10 years as the co-coordinator of the TSA's Bustamante project leading the Amigos de las Grutas in the cave's restoration, conservation, and development. He received the NSS Conservation Award in 2007 for his work at Bustamante and Natural Bridge Caverns as well as Kartchner Caverns. His discoveries in Natural Bridge are legendary, opening up the vast galleries that visitors to the commercial cave see today. Orion also worked on the survey and planned development of Harrison's Cave in Barbados.



Photo by Lin Guy

Marion O. Smith

24 September 1942 – 30 November 2022

With caving connections worldwide, Marion was a skilled explorer, renowned historian, and a true force of nature in TAG (Tennessee-Alabama-Georgia) cave country. But he also extended his reach into Mexico, exploring and mapping many caves in Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosi, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. Exploration included vertical caving in the Huautla Plateau and other pits where he could use single-rope techniques. By the end of his life, Marion had visited and recorded 8,290 different caves in meticulously maintained journals. Of these, 3,616 were vertical caves where he ascended more than 900,000 feet of rope. A longtime NSS member, Fellow, and recipient of the Lew Bicking Award, he also supported the Southeastern Cave Conservancy and worked on projects for cave surveys in Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia.



Marc Tremblay, from Facebook, 6/28/2022

Marc Tremblay

31 July 1964 – 26 June 2022

Marc was an exceptional caver from Quebec who caved a lot in Mexico, including San Luis Potosí, Puebla, and Oaxaca. Marc has left his mark on Quebec caving through his decisive involvement in many important projects, including MEXPÉ, which has seen dozens of Quebec and foreign cavers explore the caves of the Sierra Negra in Mexico. He has also participated in several explorations in other regions of Mexico. He traveled enthusiastically across Quebec from the Outaouais to the Gaspé, and the world in search of unknown underground spaces. Since he was an excellent photographer and videographer, many will remember the long sessions underground in his company.

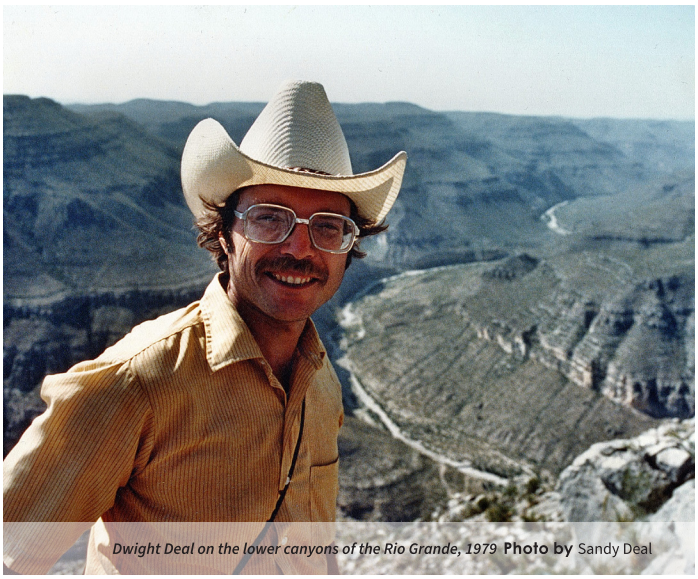


Tom Rogers in a cave in the Texas Hill Country **Photo by** David Ochel

Tom Rogers

9 April 1970 – 22 June 2022

Thomas Wayne Rogers passed away suddenly in San Antonio, Texas. Tom was a carpenter who specialized in making gorgeous decks. His style and creativity were known through the area. He was also known throughout the state for being an avid caver. He enjoyed traveling to various caves, helping survey them, and teaching at various seminars. He will be greatly missed by his family and friends. He was a great friend, full of adventure, who loved being underground and NOT drinking from plastic bottles.



Dwight Deal on the lower canyons of the Rio Grande, 1979 **Photo by** Sandy Deal

Dwight Deal

18 April 1938 – 11 June 2022

Dr. Dwight E. Deal passed away peacefully in his home in Parker, Colorado after a recent trip to his and his wife Mary's cabin in Terlingua, Texas. Dwight was a famous caver and geologist, well-liked, influential, and accomplished in many ways. He was a scientist and educator with expertise in earth and environmental sciences. He was a life member of the National Speleological Society, an NSS Director, a Fellow, and a recipient of the Certificate of Merit. He was an NSS Luminary speaker in 2012. He and his wife were popular leaders of educational karst tours in China, Laos, Vietnam, the Balkans, and Cuba.

Additionally, we have new entries for John Delano and Joe Giddens. Please take a few minutes to read about more of our talented, amazing people and help us complete the picture of Texas and Mexico cave exploration.



Orion was commonly found wherever there was activity in Texas caving. Here, a group of prominent Texas cavers is assem-bled at the parking area for Midnight Cave in 1969. From left: Roger Bartholomew, T. R. Evans, Jon Vinson, Hank Shields, Bill Russell (with survey tape behind Carol), Carol Westmoreland, Jan Knox, David McKenzie, Orion Knox, and Ron Bridgemon (behind the car). **Photo by** Carl Kunath

2022 WINNERS OF THE PHIL WINSBOROUGH EXPLORATION AWARDS



A real self portrait of fake survey **Photo by** Ethan Perrine



Cruz explores a virgin cave in the Sierra Gorda, Querétaro, MX **Photo by** Rogelio García, Grupo Espeleologico de Querétaro



After much toil, Drew and his team dug into a new room called "The Omelet" in Lady Bird Lounge. **Photo by** Eleonora Chouquetta

The Texas Cavers Reunion (TCR) is honored to present the 2022 Winners of the Annual Phil Winsborough TSA Exploration Awards on behalf of Terry Sayther and Debbie Stewart. The 2022 winners are Cruz St. Peter for his ongoing work in the Múzquiz area and the Purificación karst, to Ethan Perrine for his work in the Huautla cave system, and a special award to the Austin-based diggers, led by Drew Thompson. These three cavers join the ranks of past awardees Jim Kennedy, Ron Rutherford, Marvin Miller, Bryce Smith, and Ben Hutchins. Candidates can either be nominated or selected by a panel of peers. Make sure to get your nominations in before TCR this year!



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- Even when you can't be here.

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2023 NSS CONVENTION

JUNE 26–30, 2023 | ELKINS, WEST VIRGINIA



What happens...

when it happens to you?



As an experienced caver, you know the limits of your skills and abilities. That confidence is what makes you a good explorer. The very nature of caving requires it.

You feel safe in the belief that accidents only happen to someone else.

But what happens when that someone is on the trip you're leading? Worse yet... what happens if it's you?

Accidents are unpredictable. They can impact your trip at any time, in any cave, to any caver.

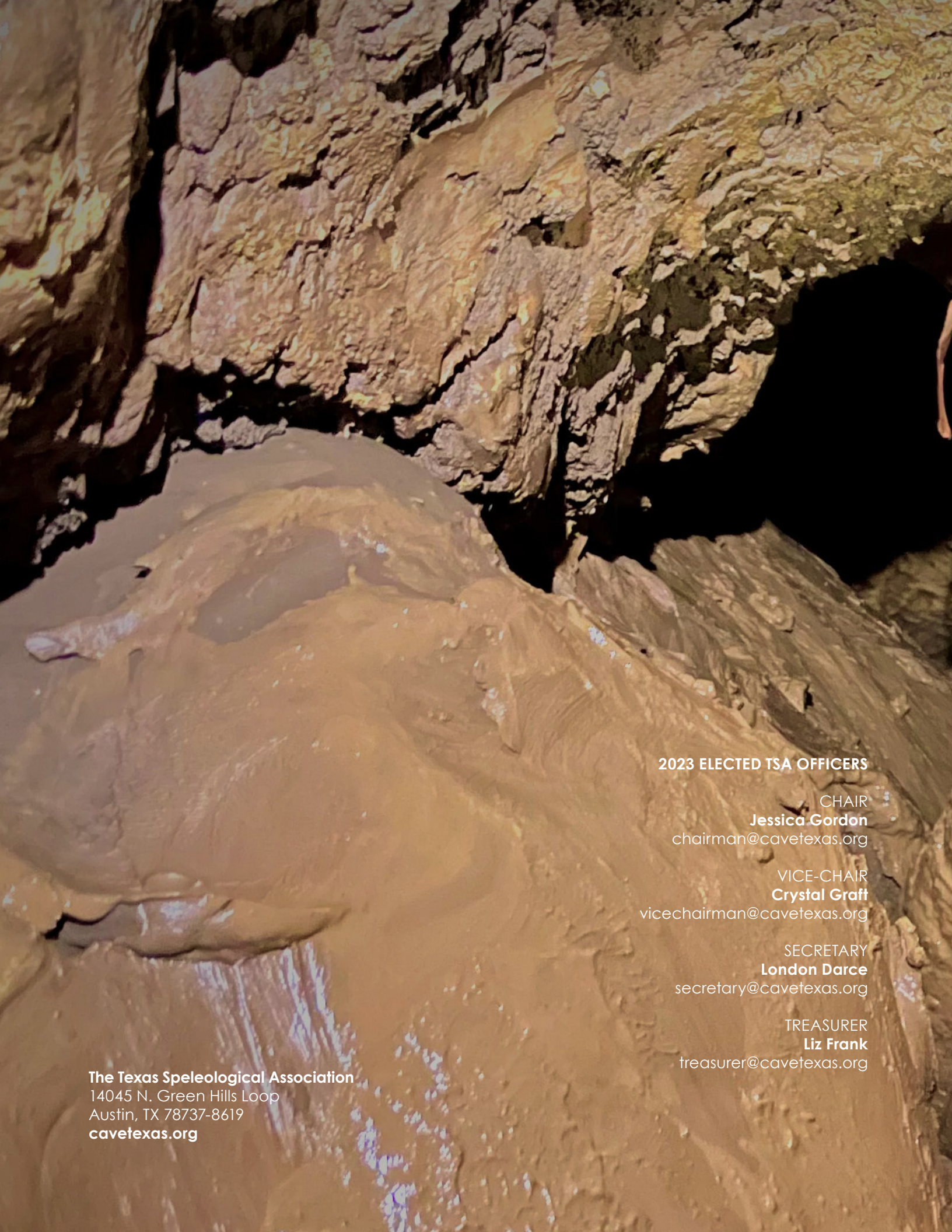
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Photo by Jansen Cardy, NSS #50665



2023 ELECTED TSA OFFICERS

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