

The TEXAS CAVER - 1st Quarter 2008

The TEXAS CAVER

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The TEXAS CAVER

Written by Texas Cavers FOR Texas Cavers

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Rancho San Judas Tadeo April 2005

by Terri Whitfield. Photos by Peter Sprouse.



Participants: Andy Gluesenkamp, Bev Shade, Bradley Lingold, Charley Savvas, Francisco Farias, Javier Bandas, Joel King, John Fogarty, Leah Adams, Matt Oliphant, Mauricio Perez-Gomez; Monica Ponce, Nancy Pistole, Nathan Parker, Peter Sprouse, Philip Rykwalder, Rob Myers, Saul Rodríguez, Shannon Summers, Terri Whitfield, Vickie Siegel, and Vivian Loftin.

It is not a good idea to put too many crazy people together in a bus. On this trip the Orange bus had its full share - along with three cases of caguamas. On the way to the cave we regrouped for a dinner stop in Uvalde, during which Matt and Nancy (who had trailed the Orange bus in their pickup) complained about having been sprayed. Turns out that when the driver of the Orange bus failed to agree to a pee stop, a beer-filled passenger proceeded to piss out the bus door.

We arrived at the ranch well after dark, met the cavers from Saltillo, and soon headed off-road following GPS coordinates. With night vision shadowed by wind-blown dust and the occasional agave and sage, we closed in on the waypoint. Obscured by the brush, the pit entrance remained elusive as the buses circled eerily through the desert. There is something surreal about riding off-road through the desert in a lurching and lumbering four-wheel-drive bus. Stranger yet is riding in such a bus at night towards a pit. Sensing that the entrance drop was near, those who could bailed out of the buses, offering to work as "spotters." Some of us who remained braced ourselves, anticipating that one or both of the buses might locate the pit first and go barreling over the lip. But soon the cave was spotted, and the

Every now and then, Peter Sprouse and Charley Savvas start thinking about waking up the Power Wagon buses and taking them out for a spin. Waking up cranky 50-year-old buses usually means at least a day or two of mechanic work - replacing carburetors, charging batteries and grinding out frozen lug nuts - then a drive or two around the neighborhood to round out the tires. Then they go at least a half-days' drive somewhere south and west towards a hole in the ground surrounded by dried-out cow pies on some dusty ranch in the desert. This time they aimed the buses for the caves created by the sulfur water that flows toward the Río Bravo through the Rancho San Judas Tadeo, which is located just outside of Cuidad Acuña and within sight of Lake Amistad reservoir and dam.



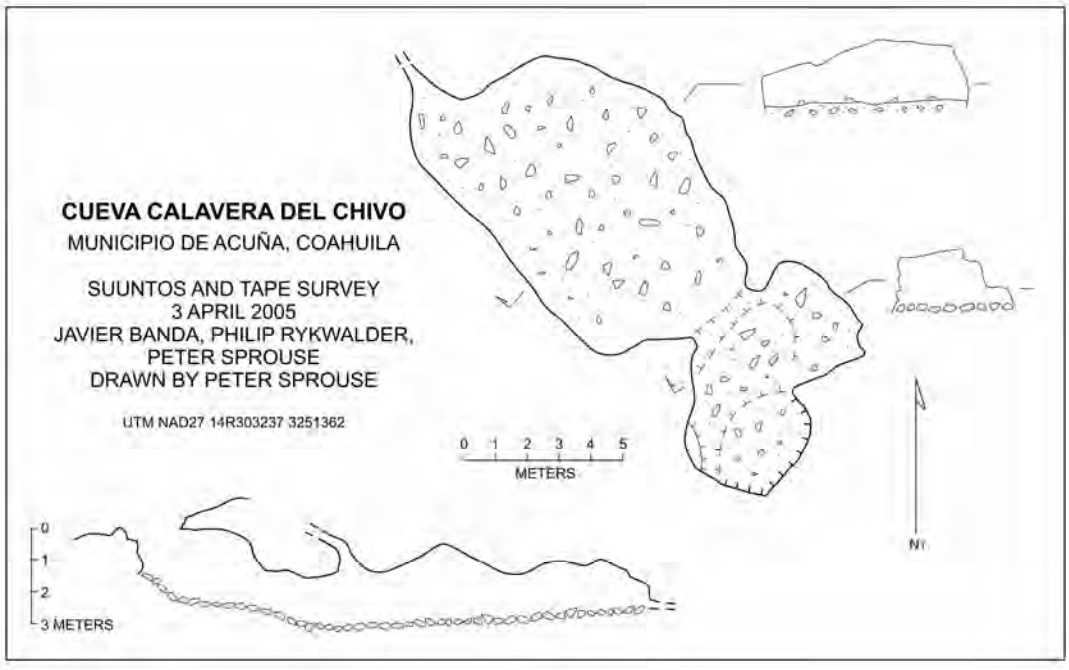


buses inched close to the edge so that the bumpers could be used as rigging points.

Next morning we saw that one of the buses was in primo position for rigging the entrance drop, so a rope was dropped from the front bumper. This was the second trip in as many months to Cueva de Casa Blanca, which was named for an old abandoned ranch house nearby. The entrance drop appeared to have been caused by a collapse which plugged the dry stream passage on one side, creating a dig lead, but which was open and going on the other side. On the previous trip, two survey teams had pushed the going passage, which warmed considerably as the cave developed into a multi-level canyon with a hydrogen sulfide stream flowing at the lower levels. The stream was hot and smarmy, containing gooey biomats, aquatic isopods and a small mystery organism. Dry passage continued large above



Entering Cueva de Casa Blanca



it, where the teams collected some small, pale, interesting-looking scorpions. The two teams had eventually tied their surveys together, with the front team calling it quits with a 15-meter shot waiting ahead.

The plan for this trip was to continue the survey in the going passage, and then have a dig team work through the breakdown on the other side and try to open the plugged passage. During the first exploration of the cave, a colony of owls was found perched in the entrance drop. This time, the first cavers to rappel noticed a nest of owlets located off to one side of the entrance drop. The call went out for our trip's ornithologist, Rob Myers, to scurry down the drop to assess the impact our presence would make on the owls and to ensure their safety. He determined that the nest was well away from the rope and the drop zone, but we were ad



Cueva de Casa Blanca

vised to minimize our intrusion to ensure that our presence would not cause the nest to be abandoned.

Bev Shade and John Fogarty each led a survey team down the going passage while Charley, Andy and Philip worked on the dig. After several hours of digging, the dig team appeared to be pooping out when Andy emerged from the hole all dusty and sweaty. Several hours after that, the remaining diggers climbed out with long faces and immediately started complaining about how hot it was down there and how hard the dig was and how tough it was going. Charley and Philip insisted that Andy needed to go back down and finish the dig. After an hour or so of whining and complaining, and just as Andy was heading down the hole to finish the dig, Charley and Philip sprung back into action, jostling to get back down into the pit to claim their going lead. They had not let on that they had broken



Javier Banda at Cueva del Calavera del Chivo

through the breakdown and all the while they were goading Andy they actually had virgin, open passage waiting to be scooped. They had come to the surface to get the instruments, to rest up before the survey, and to try to get Andy's goat.



Cueva la Manga

The surveyors in the canyon passage suffered the common fate of many follow-up expeditions: the dreaded fizzle-out. The upper portion of the passage was no longer roomy, but became a narrow meander constantly changing shape and direction. They only got a few survey shots before the canyon got too tight, and extremely muddy. Survey tapes could no longer be read,



Leah and Monica mapping in Cueva la Manga

or reeled up. The only way out of the muddy glop seemed to be to drop down to the bottom of the canyon,



Manantial Maris



Philip at Cueva de las Aranas

but they had no vertical gear or inclination to try. The canyon survey teams returned to the surface with their instruments and their clothes thoroughly covered with mud, desperately needing a ride down to the river.

Meanwhile a number of teams set out to locate other entrances, including some that Joel King had found on the first visit to the ranch some 16 years previous. Peter, Rob, Nancy, Matt, Leah, Monica, and Bradley piled into Joel's truck and they tried to find Joel's leads, but time had blurred the locations, so they went and collected Mando the ranch hand, who had been the guide on the February trip.

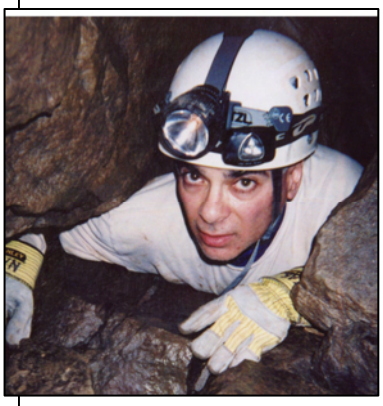
Mando first took the group to Cueva la Manga, which had a spectacular entrance that took the drainage of an arroyo, dumping down a climbdown into a large passage. A traverse along the narrow edge of the right wall got them in without rope, although a disgruntled owl collided with Monica, almost knocking her off the ledge. From there a slope led down into a borehole passage, with a few mazy tubes off to each side. Unfortunately the borehole soon ended, leaving the occasional floodwaters slowly sinking into silt and leaves. We spent some time here, introducing some of the newer cavers to surveying techniques and guiding Monica through her first survey sketch. We also surveyed the second cave we visited, Cueva Pasto del Chivo, which was a low room that soon pinched. Another small cave (Cueva de Nancy) was visited and sketched by Joel, Matt, and Nancy. Joel was not convinced that any of his three previous cave leads had yet been discovered, so more work remains.

A grand party took place that night around a roaring campfire, celebrating the first true joint expedition of Texas and Coahuila cavers. Songs were sung and caguamas emptied. The next day Nathan convinced a few hardy souls to accompany him back into Cueva de Casa Blanca to collect data on the sulfur water. Matt and Nancy went to look for Mando, who was going to inquire with friends about more cave locations, but he wasn't to be found. Peter, Philip, and Javier went to map two small caves seen on the previous trip. Cueva Calavera del Chivo looked like a typical Hill Country cave, and ended after about 15 meters. Cueva de las Arañas was about the same length. It had a small skylight and looked like someone had dug in the floor.

By the time Sunday afternoon came around it was time to pack up the buses for the trip home. Before leaving the ranch, we were all more than willing to make a side trip down to the Río Bravo for a dip in the spring, named Manantial Maris. None of us expected that Andy would dive head first into a submerged rock at the spring. But that is exactly what he did. He sliced his forehead open right between his eyes forcing the trip's paramedic to go into full medical emergency mode. John Fogarty pulled out his monster wilderness first aid kit, stopped the bleeding with compression, cleaned the wound with betadine then butterflied and bandaged the slice shut. Needless to say Andy was initially chastised, but then was coddled and comforted and ended up happy as a pig in slop since he got to snuggle in the bed deck all the way back to Austin.

After photos and farewells, the Saltillo cavers headed south, and the rest drove a few kilometers west to cross into Texas on Amistad Dam.

Gear Guy—Caving Lights



By Lawrence Najjar

Caving lights are the most important gear you bring into a cave. Good caving lights help you pick the best route, identify dead-end leads without crawling down them, spot interesting formations, and make the cave trip safe and fun. Good caving lights are reliable, bright, and easy to use. Bad caving lights can get you hurt, lost, or cause you and everyone else to turn back early on a great trip. Bad caving lights can wreck a trip.

In this column, I share my opinions and some helpful tips for selecting good caving lights.

First, here are a few important caving rules that are worth repeating.

- Always carry three good light sources into a cave.
- Always carry spare batteries into a cave.
- Always cave with someone else.

Why? Because stuff happens. People trip. Lights smack into rocks. Bulbs burn out. Batteries die unexpectedly. Water falls. Helmets fall down pits. Cavers get lost. Packs roll into holes. Lights get rubbed off in crawls or on-rope.

So carry three caving lights and spare batteries. And cave with other people for safety and to share their lights.

What should you look for in a caving light? Here are some good features.

1. **Bright** – Allows you to see where you are, where you're going, and where you don't want to go.
2. **Hands-free** – Keeps your hands available to crawl, climb, brace, scramble, and hold onto your rappelling rack bars and the rope during a rappel.
3. **Reliable** – Works when you need it – every time – despite the occasional bump or accidental drop.
4. **Reasonably light** – Does not tire out your neck from wearing it on your helmet. Plus, has reasonably light backup batteries.
5. **Simple** – Is easy to use, especially with one hand, when your hands are cold, wet, or muddy.
6. **Easy to change batteries** – Allows you to easily open the battery pack when your hands are numb or slippery and makes it obvious which way to place the batteries.
7. **Water resistant** – Handles the mist from a waterfall, a hike in the rain to the cave, and a brief, shallow dunk in a stream.
8. **Reasonably priced** – Fits in your budget, especially since you may eventually break or lose it.

Primary Light

For a primary light, you need something bright, ideally with adjustments for focus or brightness. I have a Petzl Mega Belt that uses three C-batteries. It is heavy, but, oh does it light things up. I can see down holes, up domes, across pits, down passages, and deep into crevices. I can check out leads without moving my feet. I can focus it into a tight circle to light up distant objects or defocus it to light up the passage around me as I walk. It is tough and it is a caving classic, but it is heavy and not really water resistant. I burned out a bulb when I turned on the lamp beside a waterfall. I think the mist got to the halogen bulb.

Light emitting diode (LED) headlamps are the next great advance in caving headlamps. LEDs are reliable, don't use as much power as incandescent bulbs, and last a long time. Since LED headlamps don't drain batteries as quickly as incandescent bulb headlamps, you can use fewer, smaller, and lighter batteries. LED headlamps are now getting bright enough where they may be good replacements for traditional, heavy, battery-sucking, bright, incandescent headlamps.

I really like the Princeton Tec LED headlamps. Their lamps are tough and water resistant.

If I had to buy a new primary headlamp, I would go with the three-Watt Princeton Tec Apex. The three Watts of light are blindingly bright, but offer much longer battery life than a comparable incandescent headlamp. The Apex has a single, three-Watt LED and four regular LEDs that run on four AA batteries.

The three-Watt LED lasts an hour on High and nine hours on Low, then slowly fades for around 72 hours. On High, the three-Watt LED's focused beam lights up objects about 50 meters away and is good for brief use to look down pits and up domes.

The four regular LEDs go eight-and-a-half hours on High and 14 hours on Low, then slowly fade. The four regular LEDs produce a broad beam. On High, the four regular LEDs light up objects about 20 meters out and seem to work best overall for caving. On Low, the regular LEDs send a beam about 10 meters out that is good for crawls.



Figure 1. Princeton Tec Apex headlamp.

LEDs	Level	Full Brightness	Useful Distance	Total Light Life (includes Fading to Off)	Comment
One 3-Watt LED	High	1 Hour	50 Meters	72 Hours	
	Low	9 Hours	35 Meters	96 Hours	
Four regular LEDs	High	8.5 Hours	20 Meters	100 Hours	Recommended general setting
	Low	14 Hours	10 Meters	150 Hours	

The three-Watt and regular LEDs do not work together and have separate switches on the bottom right and left sides of the lamp. The left button controls the three-Watt LED. When you press the left button once, the three-Watt LED turns on in High mode. When you press the left button again, the three-Watt LED goes to Low mode. To turn on the four regular LEDs, you press the right button once. The regular LEDs turn on in High mode. When you press the right button again, they go to Low mode. A third press puts the regular LEDs in the common but annoying blink mode. If the three-Watt LED is on and you turn on the regular LEDs, the three-Watt LED turns off. The same thing happens if the regular LEDs are on. To turn off the light, you hold down the associated button for a second or two.

You cannot change the focus of the beams. The Apex tilts up and down, so you can point it down for a tough scramble or up for an easy walk. It has a removable overhead strap to help secure it to your helmet.

The Apex also includes an LED battery power indicator so you know how long your batteries will last. The LED changes from green to yellow to red as the batteries drain. After you turn off the Apex, the battery power indicator blinks for 24 hours. I think the purpose is to help you find the headlamp in a dark tent. But it



Figure 2. Princeton Tec Apex buttons.

prevents you from completely turning off your light to enjoy the pitch blackness of a cave. While your friends sit there with their lights off, yours emits the occasional green blink, destroying the pitch black experience. If you find this feature annoying (and I do), put a piece of duct tape over the battery power indicator.

The Apex is waterproof in up to one meter of water for 30 minutes, so it can take the occasional climb in a waterfall or walk through a drippy passage.

The Apex includes a power regulator, so you can use AA alkaline, rechargeable nickel metal hydride (NiMH), rechargeable nickel cadmium (NiCad), or even Lithium 1.5 Volt batteries. The alkalines are easier to find when you're out on a trip. The rechargeables reduce the number of used batteries you add to the environment. The Lithiums probably last the longest on a single trip.

The batteries are fairly easy to change. You use one of the strap buckles as a screwdriver head to turn the latch screw that opens the battery compartment. The inside of the compartment door has a handy drawing that shows you which way to face each of the batteries. After you replace the batteries, you close the compartment and tighten the latch screw securely with your hand.

Right now, the Princeton Tec Apex is, by far, the best primary caving light available.

Get the regular Princeton Tec Apex, not the "Pro" that uses two Lithium batteries. The four AA batteries on the regular Princeton Tec Apex last longer (8.5 hours vs. 5.5 hours on regular LED High) and are easier to find when you are traveling. At BrightGuy.com the Princeton Apex is $69. You can also get it at Cabelas.com for $80 and REI.com for $84.

If price is no object, there is a very promising $310 headlamp called the StenLight (http://www.stenlight.com/). Designed by cavers, it is small, rugged, uses two very bright three-Watt LEDs (one focused narrow and far, one focused broad and near), has a rechargeable lithium battery, is water resistant, has adjustable brightness and tilt, and lasts for more than 24 hours on Medium. Currently, you have to drill some holes in your helmet to mount the StenLight. Cavers who have used it also want the broad-near lens focused a little more broadly.

Second Light

Since primary caving lights fail, you need a couple of backup lights. As you move to your second and third lights, they should get smaller, dimmer, and lighter. Because your primary light could fail while you're on-rope or in a nasty, tight crawl, your second light should be on your helmet, facing forward, right beside your primary light.

There are many good second lights. A small

LED headlamp is a good choice. I like the small, lightweight, and water-resistant Petzl Tikka Plus. Don't confuse it with the new Petzl Tikka XP which has a beam diffuser, a temporary bright "boost," and a single one-Watt LED. And don't get the regular Petzl Tikka which has only three LEDs.

The Petzl Tikka Plus uses three AAA batteries, has four white LEDs, and a single, wide headband. Due to its light weight, you don't need a top headband. The Petzl Tikka Plus is small enough to place to one side of the primary lamp on your helmet and puts out a decent amount of light. It lets you see well for a distance of about five meters. It won't light up any high domes or long passages, but you will be able to continue to cave with this light. I've had to use mine when my primary headlamp faded out when I was on a long rope climb. A quick click on my Petzl Tikka Plus and I was back in business, safely climbing without banging my head into any rocky overhangs. The Tikka is also comfortable to wear without a helmet while you put away your gear in the dark or hang around your camp.



Figure 3. Petzl Tikka Plus.

The LEDs have four modes. When you press the button once, the Tikka is in High. The second click is Medium, the third click is Low, and the fourth click is blink mode. To turn off the headlamp, you hold down the button for a second. After being on for a few seconds, a single quick click turns it off. The Tikka tilts to one of four fixed settings. You cannot adjust the focus of the headlamp beam.

The battery pack is directly behind the LEDs. To replace the three AAA batteries, you push one of the headband strap buckles into a half-inch tab on the battery pack. The front and back halves of the headlamp pop apart. Simple drawings on the inside of the battery pack show you which way to point the replacement batteries. Since it keeps popping out, you have to be careful to keep in place the battery closest to the hinge. You slip the bottom hinges back into the bottom of the front half and snap the two halves together. The seal is fairly tight, though not waterproof. The Tikka can handle waterfall spray or a brief splash. I've turned mine on in the rain and it worked fine.

The High mode is the most useful for caving. Full brightness lasts for about 10 hours, then fades out over about 80 hours. The light lasts longer in the other, dimmer modes.

The Petzl Tikka Plus sells for $33 at BrightGuy.com and for $35 at Cabelas.com and REI.com.

Third Light

The third light should be the smallest, lightest, dimmest, and cheapest of your three caving lights. If you are using your third light, things are bad. All your batteries died, or you smashed your headlamps, or you lost your helmet down a drop. And, your caving buddies are not around to lend their better lights so you can keep up.

I don't like to mount my third light on my helmet. First, three lights make my helmet heavy and unbalanced, so my neck hurts. Second, if I somehow manage to lose my helmet, I still have a light. I heard about a guy who forgot to fasten his helmet chin strap as he got on-rope for a 200-foot climb. Partway up, he tilted his head back to answer someone at the top of climb. His helmet slipped off and fell 100-feet to the rock floor – along with his lights. So, I don't mount my third light on my helmet. And I don't like the idea of fishing around for a flashlight in the bottom of my cave pack – especially if I'm on-rope, jammed in some tight crawl, or away from my pack.



Figure 4. Photon Micro-Light II.

I found a tiny, bright light that I can wear around my neck, inside my shirt, so it is always with me. It is the Photon Micro-Light II and I love it.

It is a single regular LED in a small case about the size of a quarter. And, unlike a lot of similar lights, it has an on-off switch that is much more convenient for longer use than one of those tiring squeeze buttons (though it has one of those, too). The Photon Micro-Light II comes with a key ring, but I took it off and ran an accessory cord through the hole for the key ring, then tied the two ends together with two adjustable, slip knots.

The Photon Micro-Light II comes in a wide variety of colors. The red one lasts a long time and retains your night vision. So, I originally bought a red Photon Micro-Light II. Mistake. It used a single battery, wasn't very bright, and the unfamiliar red light made it difficult for me to identify objects (like the passage I just came out of). Also, I eventually realized that I never had any night vision to retain in the cave. I was always using my white lights or was surrounded by other cavers using their white lights.

So, after a few years of carrying around a not particularly bright light, I finally got a white Photon

Micro-Light II – the new 2X brighter one that uses two CR2016 lithium coin batteries. Good move. It may not last as long as the red light (12 hours vs. 120 hours), but it is bright and it is very useful. I use it when I'm changing batteries in the primary headlamp, or trying to find my cave bag in a dark and crowded car trunk, or even when I want to poke into a hole when I'm out hiking. Since it is around my neck, it is very handy. I use it a lot.

The only time I caved with the Photon Micro-Light II was after hiking to the top of Enchanted Rock in Fredericksburg. I held the light in my hand or mouth to clamber about 10 meters down into the narrow, twisting main entrance to Enchanted Rock Cave. If I had to use my Photon Micro-Light II for caving, I could switch it on and use the accessory cord and my headlamp straps to attach it to my helmet.

I use my Photon Micro-Light II so briefly that the batteries have not died. But I did open it up to see what was inside. I used a tiny, eyeglass-type, Phillips-head screwdriver to unscrew the four tiny screws that hold the two halves of the polyurethane case together. To change the coin-like Lithium batteries, you simply slide them out, note in which way they are positioned back-to-back against each other and in the case, and replace the batteries. Simple. But not something you want to do in a cave.



Figure 5. Four screws to change battery on Photon Micro-Light II.

The Photon Micro-Light II is not water proof, but it is water resistant. I never had a problem with mine getting wet, even from my sweat or from belly-crawling in streams. I have heard of one problem. Someone I know got his soaked in water. When he turned it on, it would not go off. When he got home, he opened it up, took out the batteries, let everything air-dry, then put it back together. It worked fine.

You can get the Photon Micro-Light II 2X white for $8.75 at Gad-Zooks.com, $8.95 at Battery-Junction.com, or $12.30 at BrightGuy.com. Avoid the cheaper imitations that are out there. And be sure that you get the post-June 2005 2X white beam version with the two CR2016 lithium coin batteries.

Good caving lights are bright, reliable, simple, and free up your hands. The right caving lights make caving a pleasure. The three lights I described are currently some of the best choices out there and should help you have a fun trip.

Great gear. Great caving. I'll see you underground.

Fire at Punkin/Deep Cave Preserve! Photo and report by Allan Cobb



A fire was apparently started by a welder working on a gate over the weekend of Feb. 9th. He was working alone and didn't realize the fire started until it was too late. The fire came close to the Preserve cabin. It reached the road just northwest of the cabin. Standing on the front porch, you would have been able to see the fire reach the road. Either Friday night or early Saturday morning, the firefighters lit a back fire along the road and it kept the fire from spreading across the road. If the fire had crossed the road, our cabin would have likely burned.

At least 1300 acres burned. The Texas Forest Service cut a fire line along the road just north of the cabin to help contain the fire. The dozer then went out onto the land north of ours to work on some hot spots. It was then that the dozer slipped off a ledge and ended up on its side. The dozer is a D6 so we had nothing to available to right it. The TFS brought out two dozers to right it. Edwards County brought in another dozer to cut fire lines. It was on the other side of the county so that took several hours to get it out there. They cut more fire line along the road on our property and then moved onto the property with a high game fence to the northeast of our property. They worked with that dozer until it got too steep. TexDOT brought in two more big dozers to cut fire line in the steep areas. They worked until dark.

Early Sunday, things were more tense as they had no firefighters on the scene other than the TFS dozer and a person from TPWD. There were still burning areas the northwest, north, and northeast of the cabin. Linda Palit, Geary Schindel, Joe Ranzau, Calvin Alexander, and I worked on weedeating the grass around the cabin and raking back what we cut around the cabin. We also trimmed up the trees close to the cabin and cut out all brush around the cabin. This made a good fire break around the cabin. When the Edwards County dozer arrived, they cleared some cedar away

EspeleoCoahuila 2007

By Terri Sprouse



Synchronized camping in cuatrocienegas.
Photo by Ernie Garza

One would think that a Fourth of July excursion to the Chihuahuan desert would be unbearably hot and dry, with blinding sun and with dust devils coating clothes and camp with gritty windblown sand. Even though it was the rainy season throughout Mexico, Coahuila, much like Texas, had experienced an extraordinary amount of rain. Instead of the 100+ degree heat we had expected, we were greeted with a cool, inviting desert landscape. We took advantage of the wonderful weather by visiting the desert aquariums of the Cuatro Cienegas valley and taking a short exploratory canyon trek before heading south to the town of La Flor de Jimulco near the Durango state line.



The entrance to Cueva de Cutberto.
Photo by Peter Sprouse.

EspeleoCoahuila has been hosted by the Asociación Coahuilense de Espeleología, A.C. (ACEAC) for the past four years. As a fledgling caving club, ACEAC staged its coming out party at the Museo del Desierto in Saltillo with the first EspeleoCoahuila in 2004. ACEAC president Monica Ponce organized the event, as she has done each year since, alternating field camps one year with a lecture format the next. This year Monica and the ACEAC selected the Reserva Ecológica Municipal "Sierra Y Cañón" de Jimulco as the location for the EC 2007 field camp.

With the field camp set for July 5 – 7, Peter Sprouse decided to encourage cavers to leave Austin early enough to spend the Fourth of July camping at Poza la Becerra, which is one of the largest and warmest aquariums of the Cuatro Ciénegas area. Most of the other cavers were able to get away early on Tuesday the 3rd, but our truck did not leave Austin until about 8 pm. There were four cavers in Peter's 4Runner, including two of Peter's business associates, biologists Mark Sanders, with the City of Austin, and Kathleen O'Connor who works for Travis County. We headed down to Eagle Pass and crossed over to Piedras Negras, stopping for the night at a hotel in Allende. After breakfast the next day, we stopped to get visas but an official at the aduana refused to issue Mark, Kathleen and me the free 7-day visa. The official complained about Bush's politics and about Mexicans having to pay for US visas and said it was only fair – so he charged us for a full 180-day pass at about $20 dollars each.



Crossing the Rio Aguanaval into Durango state
Photo by Peter Sprouse.

After we got our visas, Peter decided to try to locate a spring he had noticed on the map that was just outside Allende called Ojo de Agua. We drove slowly down the highway then stopped to ask some locals about the pool. They directed us to an unlocked gate. After entering the property, we proceeded through several unlocked gates until we came upon a residential compound. Not seeing anyone, we drove on past what appeared to be the main house until the road stopped at the poza. The pool was shallow and clear and seemed to flow, with little fishes darting about. It was not long



Monica sketches Cueva Podarohe.
Photo by Hector Esparza

afterward that the owner came down accompanied by five or six dogs that looked like Australian shepherds. He was extremely nice, as are many locals in Mexico. He invited us up towards his house to view the main spring-fed pool. It was a fairly large, deep and dark pool that continued on around a bend. He explained that a big flood came through several years ago and wiped out his 28 fish pens that he used to grow tilapia. His residence was well-designed, with natural stone masonry around the front and sides and ceiling-to-floor windows creating a wall in every room along the back of the house. From where we stood at the main spring, we could look back towards the house and see from room to room. The dining room led to the kitchen and then to the den and then, at the other end of the house, we could vaguely make out a huge king-sized bed in the bedroom. Magnificent. The windows provided expansive views from the house of the dark, spring-fed pools below.

Next we arrived at the hot springs of Hermanas. This place consisted of various separate rooms that each housed a private bath spa, where the hot water was channeled directly from a hot spring that percolated into a gated pool behind the caretaker's house. Warning signs advised that 30 minutes was the maximum time allowed in the hot spas.

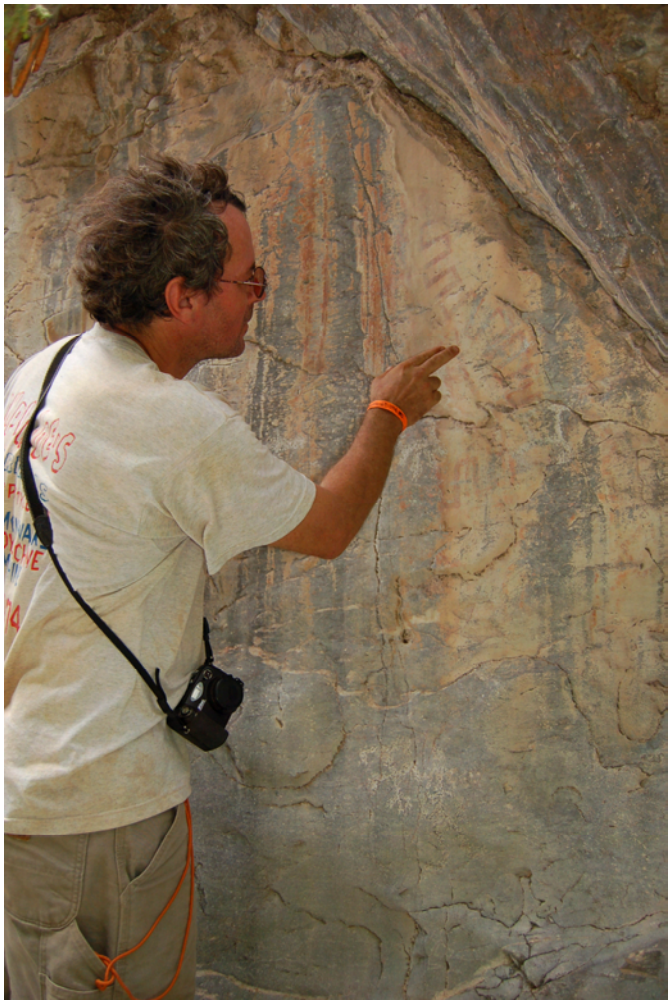
Afterwards, we stopped for lunch at Nadadores, where we witnessed a puppy getting run over by a car. Kathleen was heartbroken when we realized that the frightened pup seemed unable to walk. She picked him up and held him for a while, but we had to move on. Reluctantly, she laid the little golden-haired pup down on the sidewalk and watched it as we drove away.

As we traveled on towards Cuatro Ciénegas, we decided to stop at the Río los Mezquites. This wandering spring-fed river is quite bizarre, just appearing out of nowhere and flowing through the desert. We pulled the truck under one of the palapas, then the wind kicked up and blew my hat into the water. When I dove in after it I discovered a wonderful aquatic ecosystem with many fishes darting about. Soon we all pulled out our masks and snorkels and enjoyed swimming with the fishes in the wandering river.

Everyone else had arrived at La Becerra by midnight Tuesday, July 3rd, and pitched tents in a howling wind. That evening's entertainment consisted mainly of fishing Joe Datri's tent out after the whole thing had been blown into, and was sinking to the bottom of the poza. La Bercerra is located in a park-like setting, with showers and palapas and tall grass surrounding the poza. In many places, water can be seen percolating from cracks in the limestone rock at the bottom of the clear, deep blue pool. Our crew finally made it to La Becerra around 5 p.m. on Wednesday. After mingling for a few minutes, Peter offered to lead us to a nearby canyon that looked interesting on the topo map. Pete and Jocie had not yet returned from their trip into town, and Wes' group had just returned from a hike up a nearby ridge, and were not up for another hike, so most of the rest of us piled into the two 4Runners and headed for the canyon. We stopped along the way at Poza la Churince, which is another poza that has much cooler water than La Becerra. We realized that we could possibly have camped there instead and would have had the place to ourselves.



Jocie and crew at a pictograph shelter cave.
Photo by Jean Louis Lacaille.



Shaman depicted in a Jimulco shelter
Photo by Jean Louis Lacaille.

Along the way we noted a series of gypsum sand dunes off in the distance which looked interesting, but a sign at the gate there indicated that arrangements for access must be made in advance at the visitor center. As we continued on down the highway we saw an interesting looking travertine mining operation that had shaved off part of the top of the mountain leaving a large wide flat area on top that was surrounded by massive bare travertine walls. This impressive-looking place could pass as the palace of the mountain gods. We continued on past the quarry and soon came to the turnoff, which was just a dirt trail going off into the desert. We followed this road to the mouth and then began the hike into the canyon.

Geoff Hoese tells a story of having deciphered certain pictographs he had come across in the past, finding a pattern in certain images that were used as directional signals leading to a water source. He was anxious to test his theory out on any new pictographs we could find. We could see many cave-like openings along the left canyon wall. We hiked up to the first cave which appeared to have rocks stacked up blocking the opening. This space turned out to have been used as an animal pen, possibly for a small goat herd. Then we came upon an Indian shelter cave that did not have any pictographs, but it did have incised lines on the rock boulders that could have been places where they sharpened their arrow points. We later found out that this cave had been visited previously by pictograph-hunter Terry Sayther. Unfortunately, there was also a very large bee hive hanging about waist-high on the wall. The hive was noticed by the first group that passed through, and a warning was passed along to the others.



Kathleen on rope in Gruta de la Llanta
Photo by Mark Sanders.

But as is often the case, the message had gotten corrupted as it was passed down the line. While exploring the shelter (and looking in the wrong place for the bees) Geoff unwittingly walked too close to the hive. The bees came buzzing out and began attacking our group. Peter yelled for everyone to “Run”! Aimee, Kathleen and Ernie ran towards the cars while Peter, Geoff, Mark and Rene ran the other way, farther into the canyon. In the end it was Ernie who caught the brunt of their wrath, ending up with 25-30 stings covering his shoulders, back, face and head. Since Ernie’s group was close to the car, they hopped in and radioed to the rest of us that they thought the best thing we could do for Ernie was to rush him to one of the springs to try to soothe the stinging. The poza with the coolest water, La Churince, was closest. We agreed that was a good idea



Amblypygid discovered in Gruta de la Llanta. Photo by Mark Sanders.

so the rest of us hiked out of the canyon and drove over to the cool springs of La Churince. Luckily, Ernie appeared to be having only a mild reaction with no respiratory distress, just pain where the stingers were. Aimee and Kathleen began pulling the stingers out while assuring him that the bees faired worse – each one doomed to die.



Nancy climbs the lower drop in Pozo del Castigo. Photo by Peter Sprouse.

We came back to camp with our bee story, prompting Joe Datri to pull out his video camera to document the stressful event. He first interviewed Ernie and got shots of some of the stings, then got other versions of the story from Aimee, Peter and Geoff. Joe has been filming caving events for a couple of years now, with the intent of providing a film to be shown at the upcoming caving Congress. While Joe was filming we were able to pull together a delicious pot luck dinner. After dinner, Peter and Geoff went for a night-time swim with waterproof headlamps drawing the fish in closer. They described a very different experience from daytime swims. The fish seemed to be sleepy, so they were able to get close enough to touch them. Also, they were able to spot an elusive soft-shell turtle.

We got an early start the next day hoping to get to Jimulco by at least 2 p.m., but we could not resist stopping at the travertine quarry site. Since it appeared to be vacated, we drove up the steep road to the very top, where the mountain had been carved into gigantic limestone blocks. Peter should have realized that taking more than one geologist on a side trip to a rock quarry might provoke a little dust-up. Someone claimed that a small, seemingly inconsequential feature was a palmetto fossil, someone else swore it looked like a stromatolite. Then the geologists weighed in, and a lively discussion ensued. By the end of the debate, the geologists and the biologists and every other interested person had chimed in with an opinion.

Our next stop was at El Hundido, a large gypsum sink that was just off the road behind what appeared to be a roadside truck stop with a vulcanizador. We pulled the five-car caravan up to the pit, and just as we reached the edge Jocie hollered out for us to take our time looking because Pete's Trooper had just gotten a flat tire. The pit was interesting enough, but Pete Strickland is one of the few persons that I know who can make changing a flat tire more interesting. We all took a quick look at the pit, but then wandered back over to the Trooper to listen to Pete's stream-of-consciousness debate as he weighed his tire options. Someone advised Pete that there was a vulcanizador (tire shop) just on the other side of the bushes. His response, "There is, huh? Well, I could probably just put a plug in this thing. But I doubt if that's gonna work. See, the air is coming out really fast. There's a good chance that it might not hold. We could get going down the road and have a really serious blowout. Now, I've got a spare, but I don't want to use that because then I wouldn't have a spare if I needed one." Pete convinced himself (and us) that he should at least try using the plug so he wouldn't have to use his spare. So he got to working on that, gooping it up and then curling the plug around the push-tool. Then he forced it into the hole and moved it around a bit, finally leaving a big chunk of it poking out of the hole. We had gotten about a mile down the high-

way when Pete radioed that the plug just blew out and he needed to pull off the road. Our caravan found a pull-off and circled around in the desert, stopping to check Pete's tire. Sure enough, the plug was gone and the air was going out fast. Pete high-tailed it back to the vulcanizador, who decided that the old tire was shot so they mounted Pete's second (well-used) spare tire onto the old wheel. The Trooper was good to go.

We took the long winding backroads to get to Jimulco Reserve in order to avoid the traffic of Torreón, finally reaching the ranger station that was to be the site of our camp. The reserve rangers were housed in what appeared to be an old hacienda that had an open interior patio and garden and living quarters and meeting rooms around the exterior. One side of the building contained an outdoor garden area that made a perfect setting for the makeshift men's showers. The other side of the building contained a dirt parking lot that abutted what appeared to be an old outdoor theater stage.

After introductions Thursday evening, cavers split into teams. We had 26 cavers registered, 15 from Austin and the others from various areas of Mexico. Our guides, the rangers and other helpers, including the local 4x4 club members, increased our numbers to around 50. We had to be prepared to leave camp at 6:30 a.m. the next day to meet our guides. Team 1 would be taken to pictograph areas. Team 2 would survey a pit that local legend claimed was used for dangling wayward criminals for a few hours until they agreed to mend their ways. Team 3 would be taken to Cañon de la Cabeza which had been carved through the mountains by the Aguanaval River.

The Aguanaval River flows north from the state of Zacatecas into Durango to form the Durango/ Coahuila state line. Plans for the construction of El Tigre dam south of Jimulco in Durango is the subject of local discontent. The locals are concerned that the dam would plug the north-bound flow and minimize the amount of water that would be available for use in Coahuila. Team 3 would have to wade across the Aguanaval River and then hike through what was described as "fierce lechuguilla" to begin the recon of the many cave entrances that could be seen from the bottom of the side canyons.

Mapped caves at EspeleoCoahuila 2007

Coahuila caves	Length	Depth
Cueva Podarohe	28	4
Cueva del Guano	24	11
Gruta de la Llanta	96	50
Pozo del Castigo	26	20
Cueva de las Arañas	5	?
Cueva Gatera	12	6
Cueva del Guano 2	10	7
Cueva Delgada	28	5
Cuevita del Borrego	8	2
Shelter cave	?	?
Durango caves		
Cueva de la Muralla	23	6
Cueva de Cutberto	14	3

We had all been warned about the abundant lechuguilla so many of us had scavenged a pair of gaiters to wear on the desert hikes. Rene won the style points for gaiters. Hers were vintage 1940s lace-up numbers that she acquired from the Quonset Hut in Austin. Worn with shorts, she made quite the hiker. At the other end receiving style demerits were Peter's camouflage "snake bite" gaiters that he had gotten at Cabela's and which he convinced me that I should wear. By the end of the week I had ditched those and appropriated Kathleen's spiffy Travis County-issue gaiters, which worked well until the lechuguilla started to shred the straps. It certainly was fierce lechuguilla. During the hikes we also discovered a variety of the stinging plant Mala Mujer. This plant had smaller leaves than the familiar large-leafed tropical Mala Mujer, looking more like a stinging nettle. But the guides referred to it as Mala Mujer, and its sting was immediate, feeling a little like getting popped with a rubber band. Although the puncture site would ooze and itch, we discovered with relief that this plant did not cause us to blister and fester; nor did it spread like the tropical Mala Mujer.

Geoff Hoese joined Team 1 that initially went to a pictograph site in Cañon los Mimbres. As luck would have it, one of the pictographs seemed to be a prime candidate for testing his water source theory. Geoff found an image that looked a little like a vertical snake, with a small crescent drawn across the top. According to his theory, the bends of the image indicate the number of bends in the canyon to a water source. The image drawn at the top of the snake indicates the water source. In this case since it was a crescent, and not a full circle, this was taken to mean that the source was an intermittent water source. So Geoff pointed out the image to the other cavers on the trip and then they proceeded up the canyon, counting the bends until they had met the number of bends on the pictograph image. Sure enough, at the last bend there was a tinaja. Since it had been raining quite a bit, the tinaja was filled with water and also with lovely, delicate fairy shrimp. Fairy shrimp spring from eggs left in pools in areas where water is present for only part of a year. The shrimp come to life when the pools fill with rain. In this case at least the theory proved correct. The image in the cave had directed the cavers to an intermittent water source, a tinaja that was full of water due to the recent rains.

After the tinaja discovery a subgroup of Team 1, Team Asno led by Aimee Beveridge, headed for Cueva Gatera, which they surveyed to a length of 12 meters.

Our guides for Team 2 took me, Peter, Cynthia and Nancy Esparza, and others to the dangling pit, Pozo del Castigo. The cave was located just below the summit of a high mountain ridge that was reached only after much searching by the guides and several hours of scrambling through agave, lechuguilla and Mala Mujer. The climb got so steep that the guides had to abandon their burros and continue, like us, on foot. As we gained elevation, we came through an area containing bright-green giant ocotillo, with stems 5 meters long. The recent rains made most of the ocotillo leaf-out. Many of the other flowering desert plants were also in bloom. The cave had a 3 meter pit entrance, followed by a squeeze to an 8-meter drop, but it ended after about twenty meters. We were accompanied by photographer, Armando Monsivais Saldaña, who took lots of photos, and writer Raquel González, both of whom were on assignment for Nomádica magazine. An article covering EspeleoCoahuila 2007 should be coming soon.

The team leaders for Team 3, Monica and Wes, marched their teams through the fierce lechuguilla up Cañon de la Cabeza to survey two caves, Cuevita del Borrego and Cueva Guano 2, plus a small shelter cave. That evening we gathered in the conference hall at the reserve headquarters and watched slides of the day.

On Day 2 for Team 1, Pete Strickland had another flat tire. Again, this prompted onlookers to gather around. From this incident Kathleen acquired a dead-on mimic of Pete's drone, hilariously declaring now and again "Well, that's not gonna work!" After changing the tire, Pete bailed on the pictograph trip, deciding instead to look for a vulcanizador to patch the tire. Pete got one new tire from the vulcanizador, and then put on his old (well used) spare that he had obtained in Xilitla about 8 years ago. The others continued on to the site where Jean Louis photographed many images of pictographs. This team also found the best cave of the project, Gruta la Llanta. This cave was 96 meters long and 50 meters deep, with a rope drop in it.

Also on the second day our team surveyed two caves that were located on steep mountain sides tucked way above the Muralla canyon floor; Cueva de Cutberto and Cueva de la Muralla. To get to this side canyon off of the main Cañon de la Cabeza we had to wade across the Aguanaval River into Durango state. To maneuver our group through the canyon required two impromptu rope climbs. Although the guides scrambled up the exposed climbs, since we had rope we decided to rig hand lines, and then back that up with a top-rope belay.

Team 3, Monica's team, started at a bridge across the Aguanaval River and walked around the mountain up an arroyo looking for caves. They hiked through until their canyon met Muralla canyon then teams 2 and 3 merged and bunched up at the rope drops. Then we all exited Cañon de la Cabeza together. They did not find any caves.

Since we had been experiencing evening downpours that soaked camp, and since Strickland's group wanted some time the next day to check out the new gondola at Grutas de García, several cars carrying Texas cavers decided to leave Jimulco around dusk on Saturday. Of the Texas group, this left only Peter and Geoff and their riders in the 4Runners. Strickland's goal was to make it to a familiar campsite somewhere around a gas pipeline near Saltillo. Unfortunately, Pete ended up having a third flat shortly after leaving the rangers' station causing them not to reach their camping destination until 4 a.m. Meanwhile, back at the rangers' station, Monica presided over a closing ceremony where we were presented with diplomas to recognize our attendance at EC 2007. Although most of us had turned in early in anticipation of an early start Sunday morning, some stayed up late Saturday night saying their goodbyes and watching the last slide show.

At 7 a.m. Sunday morning, Peter and Geoff loaded up their trucks and headed for Peter's "secret route" to Puente I, one of the Laredo international bridges. We had a mere thirty-minute wait to get to the bridge, and it took another thirty minutes to get across, not bad for a holiday weekend. Many thanks to Kathleen for convincing the customs officials that we were "not the droids you're looking for!" We arrived back in Austin at about 8:30 p.m. and got pummeled by more torrential rain.

EC 2007 Texas participants: Aimee Beveridge, Sandi Calhoun, Joe Datri, Ernie Garza, Devra Heyer, Geoff Hoese, Jocie Hooper, Gary Napper, Kathleen O'Connor, Mark Sanders, Wes Schumacher, Rene Shields, Peter Sprouse, Terri Sprouse, and Pete Strickland.



Nancy rappels into Pozo del Castigo
Photo by Peter Sprouse.

NSS Cave Safety— Part 2

By Kurt Waldron - Chairman of the NSS Safety and Techniques Committee

In part one of this two-part article I discussed the responsibilities of a trip leader. In this second article I will cover what kind of clothing should be worn as well as the equipment needed for a horizontal caving trip. Future articles will discuss the equipment needed for a vertical caving trip. As always, I welcome your feedback and input on topics related to cave safety and equipment.

If you have any comments, feedback, or input please feel free to contact me at cave_safe@hotmail.com.

(Part II-) AT THE CAVE

DRESS PROPERLY

What you wear in a cave is up to you, yet what you wear can make a big difference in your ability to move safely and effectively in the cave. It can make an even bigger difference if you become injured or disabled in the cave and need to be rescued.

What you wear depends on where you are caving. For example, in West Virginia and Virginia the average cave temperature is 53ºF year round. The caves can be wet and muddy and "cave wind" can make them feel much colder, especially when you are already wet. On the other hand, if you are bouncing pits in TAG or Mexico the temperatures can be in the 80's or even higher. Obviously, you will dress differently for each of these caves. Your group leader will be able to help you figure out the best gear to wear for the particular cave you are visiting. A good rule of thumb is layer your clothing to suit the activity level and temperature of the cave and use synthetic materials, such as polypropylene or nylon, rather than cotton.

For caving in the Virginia Region, I suggest wearing coveralls with either fleece or polypro undergarments. Synthetic fibers dry quickly and, unlike cotton, do not keep moisture close to your body. Synthetic clothing will therefore help you better regulate body temperature if you get wet. At the very least, a polypro or fleece shirt can help you avoid hypothermia by keeping your torso warmer and dryer than cotton. Coveralls are usually made from either cotton, nylon or PVC, each of which has advantages and disadvantages. The type you use will depend on what you feel is important to you. For example, cotton is inexpensive but not very durable while nylon is usually pricey but rugged. On the other hand, PVC is rather durable and easy to clean but is very expensive and extremely hot. Most people, (me included) wear nylon coveralls because they believe that it is probably the best material overall. Make sure that you are dressed so that you will be warm with the expected cave temperatures and that you will have an acceptable range of motion when you are wearing this clothing. If you know that you will be inactive for an extended period of time consider bringing along (but not always wearing) a second fleece or polypro top for when you are going to be cold.

Chances are, when you engage in strenuous activity you will get too warm. This will be especially true if you are wearing multiple layers of clothing. In this case you will appreciate being able to take some of the layers of clothing off and store them in your pack until you need them again. Most people (including me) usually sweat for at least some portion of a cave trip, so plan accordingly.

Whatever you wear, you should go with the assumption that you are unlikely to ever get the dirt out of these clothes. Clothes that go into caves get a "cave tan" and it seems like no amount of washing will ever get rid of the stain. You should plan on these clothes being permanently stained by the cave. An additional consideration is that some cave passages seem to be able to shred clothing in a hurry, so your clothing needs to be rugged.

Wear socks that will not give you blisters and will not let your feet get too cold if you get them wet. Some people wear two pairs of regular socks. Wool socks are nice because they will do a good job of keeping your feet warm, even when they are wet.

You will need gloves that allow you to have a good, firm grip. Gardening gloves work fine but your hands can get muddy and wet in them. Some people do not like that because they want to keep their hands dry and clean for as long as possible. For those people, leather gloves are the best solution. Like the rest of your clothing, your gloves need to be rugged and able to endure the cave environment.

People with long hair need to be able to tie it back, preferably in a bun. It is best if the hair fits under the helmet. Long hair which is not tied back will get dirty or, worse yet, could get caught in a rack while on rappel. If that happens the hair usually must be cut it off where it gets caught. Obviously, that is not good- for a number of reasons. (More information on vertical caving is coming in a future article.)

You will want to wear knee pads, especially if you are going to be doing a lot of crawling.

Boots need to have a rather firm sole and at least a little bit of tread. More tread is ALWAYS better.

You must be comfortable climbing with these shoes and moving over tricky, unfamiliar terrain. Do not use sneakers or shoes with leather soles; neither is good. Leather soles tend to be slippery in the cave and sneakers tend to bend and get caught in cracks and crevices.

Bring a complete change of clothes to ride home in, especially if you decide not to wear coveralls. It is quite likely that your clothes will be very dirty and wet and no one will let you ride home in their car without completely changing first. You should have some place to put your clothes once you have changed. It is best to put your clothes in a large plastic bag, but anything that keeps them from getting all over the inside of the car will be good enough.

GEAR

Each person on the cave trip has to have a helmet. Your helmet should be UIAA-approved and have a 4 point chin strap. It also needs to fit comfortably and have good structural integrity. You must have at least one light mounted to your helmet and you may want to consider mounting a second light, just in case your primary light goes out for some reason.

You should never go underground without at least 3 sources of light and sufficient extra batteries (or carbide) that your sources of light will be able to last at least twice as long as the planned trip. Remember, the objective of these light sources is for you to see well enough for you to get out of the cave after your primary light source has failed. There are, for example, some watches which provide an amazing amount of light when the dial is lit up. While you could probably technically use that watch to get yourself out of the cave, it would be slow-going and dangerous, especially in a large room with lots of breakdown. You may also want to avoid the temptation to put all of your spare sources of light on your helmet, since you would be in a world of hurt if it were to fall off of your head and get someplace where you could not recover it.

You will need a pack which has room to carry things like food, water, extra clothing, spare batteries and anything else you might need, like vertical gear. The kind of pack you take is up to you, but packs made for caving usually have a handle on the top that will help you carry them through the cave when conditions will not let you put it on your back. Although you can put stuff in your pockets, you should never allow it to restrict your range of motion. An additional consideration is that things put in pockets can fall out of them and become lost, so plan accordingly. As you pack for your trip you should remember that the cave environment can be very physically demanding, so be sure to protect stuff adequately.

If you are going to be in a wet environment, be sure to put things that are sensitive to water in a water tight bag. Things which are fragile should be put inside a rugged container which will be able to withstand the impacts likely to be encountered on the trip.

It is usually wise for someone in your group to have a first aid kit. What you should have in there is something that could be the source of another complete article, but at the very least you should have a knife, gauze pads, an ace bandage, a large plastic garbage bag or space blanket and a candle. Caffeine pills are also a good idea in case someone on the trip runs out of energy while still in the cave.

Food is very much a matter of personal preference, but you should always bring some on every trip underground. Energy food and candy is excellent for shorter trips but you need to be able to package it in such a way that it will not be smashed while it is in your pack and you are moving through the cave. On longer trips I have found that a trip to a supermarket to buy canned food with a pull top is a good idea. It is very easy to eat this stuff in a cave. It is not easy to heat food however, so unless you have an MRE with a heat pack, expect to eat your food cold. Be sure to bring plenty of fluids too. Although any non alcoholic liquid (energy drinks, Gatorade, soda, etc.) will work, water is best since it can also be used to clean wounds and flush eyes.

Prior to actually going underground, all equipment should be checked to make sure that it is working properly. If last minute repairs or adjustments need to be made to the equipment, they should be completed before you get underground.

A good cave trip starts with good preparation. Taking the time to "do it right" will, among other things, keep you both safe and healthier and reduces the likelihood of a rescue in case something goes wrong on your trip.

Now that you have properly prepared for your cave trip, it is time for you to get underground and enjoy the cave. Until next time, happy caving..

Editor—If you're any kind of caver, you need to JOIN THE NSS TODAY!

Go to http://www.caves.org/info/member.shtml



Government Canyon Update – 2007

Report and Photos by Marvin Miller



Christin Miller at entrance to GC Bat Cave

The focus at Government Canyon this year has been the exploration of Dancing Rattler Cave. Previous articles have covered the history of exploration of the Dancing System and the discovery of the new Dance Hall section about a year ago, and after that, the Pool Hall.

In July, Joe Mitchell and I returned to continue pushing the cave beyond the Pool Hall and the Frozen Cascade, a striking flowstone formation cascading into a series of rimstone pools. It had rained a lot prior to our trip and the pools were full and overflowing. This created some nice photo opportunities. We then commenced the survey beyond the Frozen Cascade at station C8 into a series of small galleries that we ended up calling "Charmed Hall".

The cave continued presenting us with new sights of unique formations: a group of three helectites all bent in one direction as if by a breeze, the "Snakedancer" – a stalactite that writhed its way a foot-and-a-half through the air, and columnar brown stalagmites topped by dollops of creamy white formation. We also found more instances of corroded bedrock behind layers of flowstone and more boxwork. We surveyed 20.5 meters in this area in 6 stations. The cave continued north, but through squeezes that would require significant modification and would require breaking formations. The best of these leads seemed to be heading for a connection to the crawling lead at the north end of the Dance Hall at station B18. There was still a possibility for pushing the cave north from this lead.

Joe and I also surveyed a small room that opens off of the Pool Hall at station C4. We surveyed 8 meters



French film crew in GC Bat Cave

and set 3 stations. In this room we found more rimstone pools – though not as large as in the Pool Hall, an amazing little three-legged arch hanging from the ceiling above the pools, and the nicest examples yet of the calcite crystals that we have found imbedded in the host rock throughout the cave. The room exhibits more interesting boxwork and bedrock corrosion.

The next trip into the cave occurred on the October 28 project day. Mark Childre, Niki Lake, Joe Mitchell, and I were in the cave by about 10:30 that morning. Niki, was smaller than either Joe or me and had no problem with the tight spots in the cave. Mark grunted and groaned through Challenges 1 and 2. It was number 3 that stopped him. He tried mightily but his frame was just a little too long for the backwards 90 degree bend in tight passage. There was nothing for him to do but leave the cave. I suggested some other tasks that he could undertake on the surface to help the project.

When I rejoined Joe and Niki in the Dance Hall, the first thing I wanted to do was push the northward lead. I had hopes for this lead bypassing the restrictions that we had found on the last trip, enabling us to follow the cave north. I was disappointed, however, when I got up to the start of the crawl and shown my light in. It didn't seem as likely a lead as I remembered. In fact, it looked like we would be able to access only a few meters of passage before it got too small. Joe crawled in and

confirmed my fears. We got one shot out of it.

No worries - there was another good lead heading south off of the Dance Hall at station B38. This lead needed some hammer work but larger passage could be seen past the constriction. The passage was tall enough but was constricted right at its entrance. It was probably possible to thrash through but there were too many delicate formations in the area, so, using the hammer and chisel, I took a bulge off one wall. In a short while I slid through to confirm that it looked like going passage. I came back out and Joe and Niki started running stations. After only a few shots, however, the passage turned into an upper level crawl that had an impassably tight spot several meters in. We could see another 7 meters or so down the passage but there was no airflow and the tight quarters made hammering on the constriction difficult. The lack of airflow made this seem an unpromising lead. We took some photos of the typical nice and interesting speleothems and crawled back out to the previous room where we had some space to stand up and spread out. There I noticed that the air was fresher and that an area of cemented breakdown that sloped down under one wall looked like a good lead to pursue. I crawled in and broke a few rocks with the hammer. The lead still looked good and I decided that it was the best possible chance for a continuation of the cave. It was time for us to leave but we would attack it on the next trip. All together, we added just 9.1 meters to the cave survey.



Niki Lake in Dancing Rattler Cave



Eastern barking frog in Dancing Rattler Cave

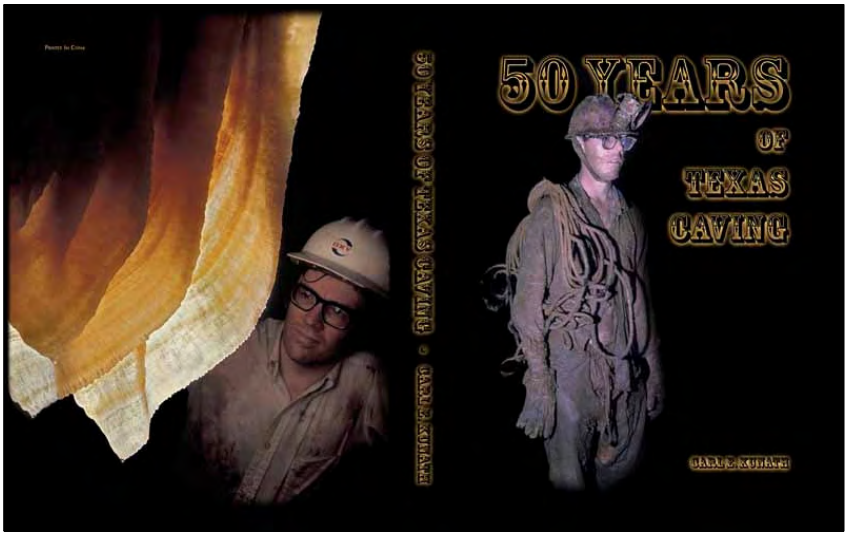
Harry Goepel and I were back at the cave on the morning of November 18. A half-hour of crawling and maneuvering through formation filled rooms brought us back to the lead at station B37. It didn't take long for us to work enough rocks out of the way for me to inch in on my belly. The cave coral was virgin and sharp and I had to work myself in to see every nook and cranny of the space. Once again I was disappointed, as the holes leading onward were well too small for cavers. This was the story for the rest of the day. We backtracked to the "old" portion of the cave where Ron Rutherford had



Frozen Cascade—Dancing Rattler Cave

identified a dig lead on an earlier survey trip, close to station B4. The digging was easy, in soft dirt, and even the big rocks came out easy. But after two body lengths it dispersed into small holes and, with no apparent air flow, was given up. We crawled out to the entrance passage and hen I decided while we were in the cave we needed to visit the northern end of this passage one more time and confirm that there was no way to push north from the terminal room. After crawling through

(Continued on page 23)



Book Review By Bill Mixon

50 Years of Texas Caving by Carl E. Kunath. A&K Enterprises, San Angelo, Texas; 2007. 8.5 by 11 inches, 526 pages, hardbound. $50. See ad on next page.

Wow! Five hundred pages. Six hundred illustrations. Two hundred thousand words. Nearly five pounds of heavy, coated paper in a hard cover. Could this be a fifty-dollar book that is actually worth fifty dollars?

This book nominally covers the period from 1951 through 2000, but there are some notes from earlier years, and some data from later years appear in tables and elsewhere, including a short epilog. The main chronological section contains year-by-year summaries of two or three pages each. Then there are capsule histories of the sixty-nine Texas caving groups that have existed over the years. Next is a Serious Side section covering things like cave science and conservation, Texas cavers' work in Mexico and New Mexico, cave diving, and accidents and fatalities. A Lighter Side section describes famous parties and recounts humorous tales about things like vehicular misadventures. Finally there is a long section with histories of Texas's ten greatest caves and one cave in Mexico with which Texas cavers have been heavily involved, especially in restoration.

The book is to some extent organized around the history of the Texas Region of the NSS, now called the Texas Speleological Association. The amount of research is impressive, with information from the Texas Caver, the archives of the TSA and the Texas Speleological Survey, and many interviews and other sources. Jerry Atkinson wrote a lot of the groups section, and some others contributed portions of the book, notably in the science chapters. Interesting old letters are quoted or reproduced.

The illustrations include about 375 photos, two-thirds of them in color. The colors in some of the older photos look a bit faded, but generally the photographs are well printed. A wide net was cast for photos, and we see such things as a yearbook photo of the 1958 members of the Kerrville Speleological Society at the Schreiner Institute (now Schreiner University, where the International Congress of Speleology will be held in 2009). Especially noteworthy are photographs in the greatest caves section, many by the author. There are cartoons scattered throughout, and the other drawings, many in color, include things like posters and newsletter covers. A few of the photos and cartoons have been childishly censored, even to the extent of digitally amputating a middle finger that would have been a whole eighth of an inch long on the page.

I had read snatches of the book as I was doing the final page layout following the author's specifications. Before writing this review, I borrowed a set of unbound press proofs while the finished books were on their way from China, thinking that I really ought to read some more of it before I wrote a review. I ended up reading the whole thing straight through. In doing so, I noticed a few redundancies, but this might actually be a good thing, because I imagine most readers will skip around in the book, picking out the parts most interesting to them and, perhaps, never quite getting around to the history of the Central Catholic High School Grotto (1972–1973). While, inevitably, I could quibble with the punctuation here and there, the grammar is exceptional, and everything reads smoothly. I noticed one clearly typographical error in the whole book. (I believe Jerry Atkinson deserves much credit for proofreading, too.) In these respects, this book must be in the top percent or so of cave books.

Carl Kunath is a bit of a curmudgeon, and it doesn't take a very close reading to see that he thinks Texas caving, and the Texas Speleological Association in particular, have gone all to hell since the good old days. To some extent, he is justified. Certainly there haven't been any recent discoveries like Caverns of Sonora or Natural Bridge Caverns, which became two of the country's top show caves. The main responsibilities of the TSA, the Texas Caver and the annual spring conventions, have been hit or miss. He doesn't give much credit for the more popular, if unofficial, Texas Caver Reunions that have been held faithfully for the past thirty years. The book seems to be best about the earlier times, when Kunath was himself more involved and knew most of the smaller number of active cavers. Of course, the older days will be most interesting to the reader, too, because they are less familiar to most of us. Kunath also tends to assess the quality of grottos based on their esprit de corps and whether they celebrate their anniversaries, rather than the actual activities of their members. I suppose that is a natural bias in a historian.

I don't expect to live to see another history of an NSS region as good, or even as extensive, as 50 Years of Texas Caving. The answer to the question in the first paragraph is, "Yes!".

(Continued from page 21) **Government Canyon Update – 2007**



Calcite crystals in host rock - Dancing Rattler Cave

several more squeezes to get there we satisfied ourselves that there was no way on. On the way out I looked at one other possible lead and found slight airflow but nothing that looked like going cave. The survey of Dancing Rattler Cave is therefore considered complete. The surveyed length is 225.2 meters and the depth is 3.9 meters.

In the terminal room we saw a rhadine beetle, one of the common troglobitic millipedes, and a small troglobitic spider. I think all of these have been collected already. We also saw several cliff chirping frogs and an eastern barking frog closer to the entrance.

Besides exploring Dancing Rattler Cave, teams have been ridgewalking and digging in promising sinks. The dig at feature 6-151 started out as a promising surface sink with a pronounced drain. After several dedicated project days of digging, it still goes and holds promise.

In November a French film crew was at the park gathering footage for an episode of "Guardians of Nature", a French television series. The episode they were filming for focuses on the state of Texas. Niki Lake led the crew and a team of project participants to Government Canyon Bat Cave. Everyone toured the cave and we inspected and refurbished the trail markings in the cave. Once the kids in the group realized that the camera guy thought the cave critters were interesting, there were cries from around the large room.

"Here's a spider!"

"I found a cricket!"

The crew seemed pleased with the footage and had both Niki and me on camera explaining different aspects of the cave.

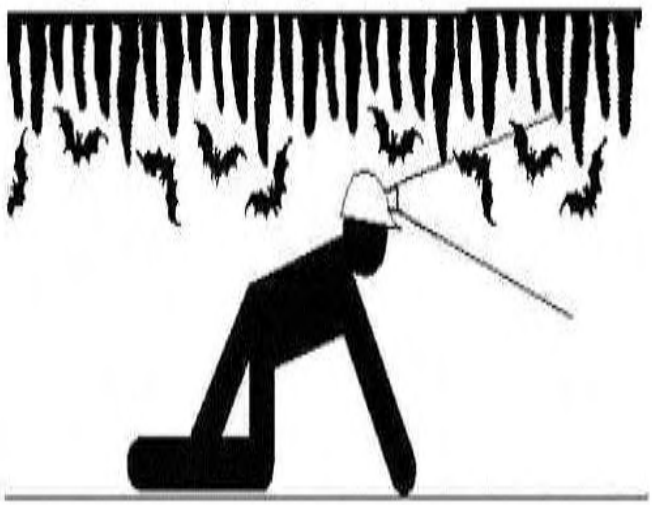
We then took them up the canyon and they filmed us working on the ongoing dig at Feature 19-1X. Exciting stuff. Look for it soon on your local French TV station.

2007 has been an interesting year and we look forward to more of the same in 2008.





CAVERS CONNECTION

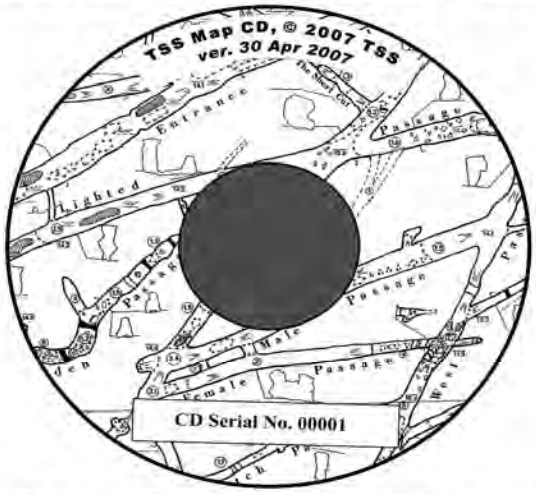


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Mark Your Calendars!

The Combine

2009 National Speleological Society Convention

and

15th International Congress of Speleology

is in

Kerrville, TX

from July 19-26, 2009.

The Advertising Committee is looking for folks/businesses who would like to advertise in the ICS publications that the visitors will receive. Ads could be for a business or from a grotto or individual who would like to welcome the visitors.

We are also looking for corporate sponsors, so if you or someone you know would like to be an ICS Corporate Sponsor, please contact Matt Bowers, who just joined the ICS committee for fundraising via email: matt66@ThirdMedia.com.

For all the information currently available on the 2009 International Congress of Speleology, please see the website: www.ics2009.us.

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Cat Kennedy: ckennedy@batcon.org.

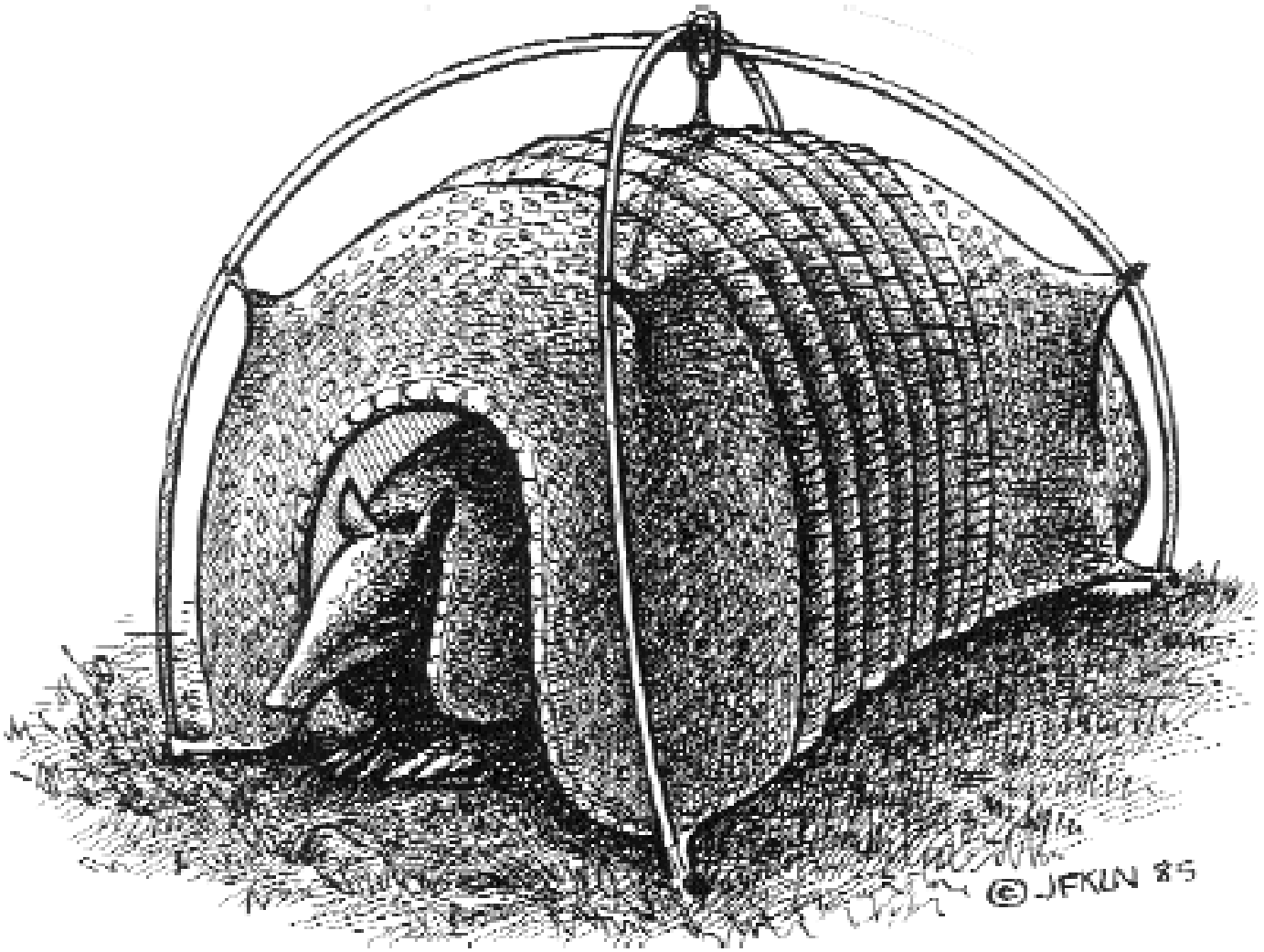
Thanks,

Julia
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Check Out the NSS Website

National Speleological Society: http://www.caves.org

Don't forget, the 2007 NSS Convention is in Marengo, IN from July 23-July 27.



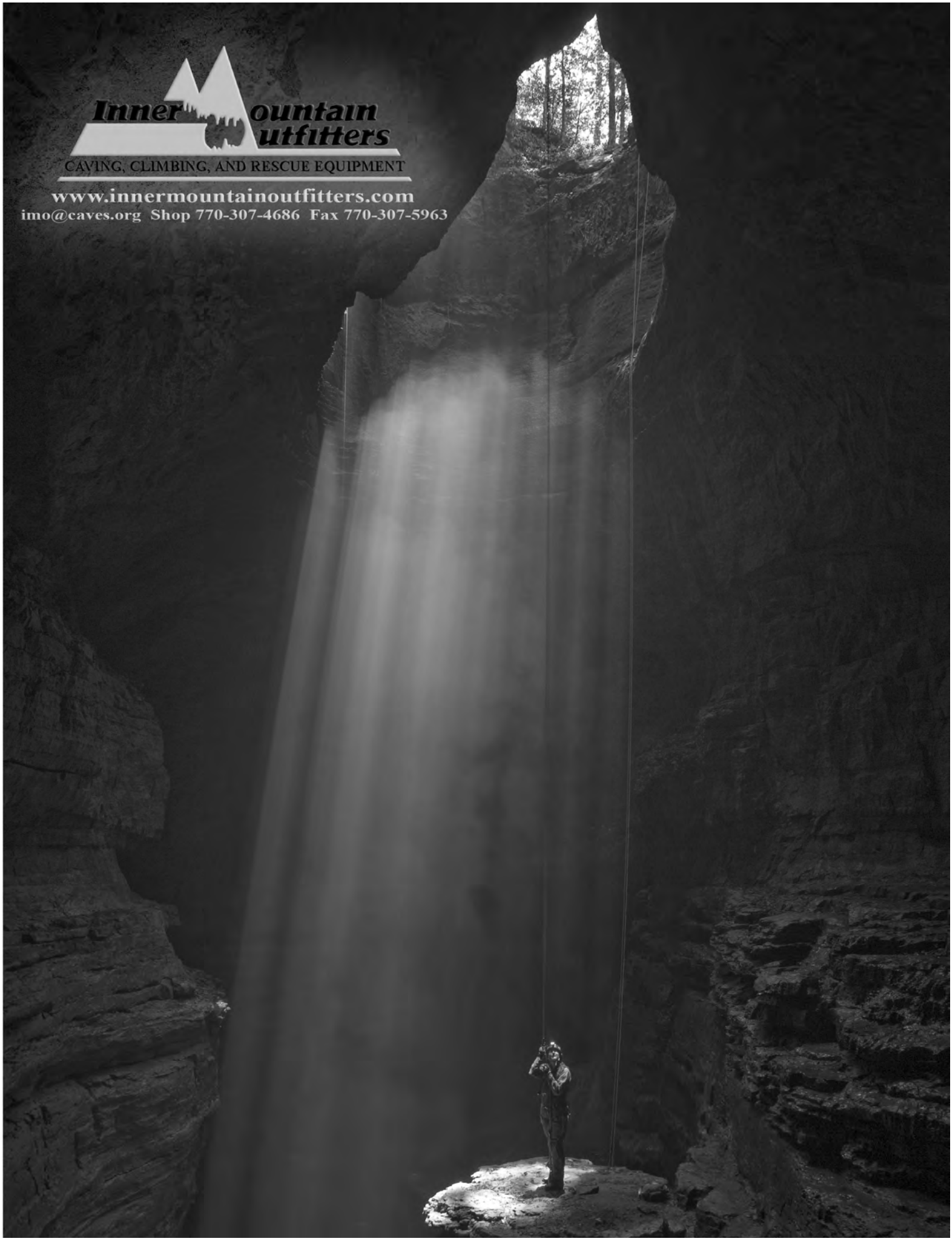
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Mark Your Calendars!



2008 TSA Spring Convention is coming!

Date: Saturday, April 5, 2008

Location ; Kerrville - Schreiner Park
2385 Bandera Highway, Kerrville, TX 78028
830-257-5392 www.kerrville.org/index.asp?nid=318



- Attend great caving presentations: From high adventure to highly educational, from local to out of this world.
- Meet fellow cavers and project leaders from around the state. This is a great opportunity to become involved with ongoing projects and create future caving opportunities for all.
- See the latest and greatest Maps and Photos of your favorite caves.
- Come by and visit with suppliers of caving related books & merchandise.
- Enjoy a unique and healthy caver prepared dinner.
- Support Texas caves by participating in the TCMA fundraiser auction.
- Attend the TSA & TCMA meetings on Sunday for an opportunity to offer your input and insight into the future of Texas caving.
- An open invitation exists on Sunday for all to tour ICS/NSS convention sites. Many opportunities exist for you to become personally involved with the 2009 ICS / NSS Convention.

Besides the many great caving related activities, Kerrville –Schreiner Park has many miles of bike & hike trails, water activities like kayaking, fishing, swimming. For an extra cost, also note that the Park has Air Conditioned Cabins and RV sites available for those that would rather not set up a tent.

Price is $25 per person and includes all access to seminars, camping, and dinner Saturday evening. See y'all there!

(Continued from page 11) **Fire at Punkin/Deep Cave Preserve*!***

from the cabin and we now have a larger parking area.

About the time that the Edwards County and Val Verde County Volunteer Firefighters arrived, a helitanker arrived and dumped water on many of the hot spots. This helped in some of the hard to reach areas. The firefighters were then able to get in and mostly contain the fire. By this time, the most of the fire was to the northeast of the cabin and the winds were from the northeast so the fire was moving away from our cabin. TexDOT and the firefighters returned later to continue cutting fire lines and then plan to start a back fire. We were very lucky that winds were light all weekend.

Special thanks go out to Bill Stivers for alerting us about the fire. He was heading out to go caving at Punkin and Deep with a group from Wichita Falls. He was stopped on the road between the third and fourth gates by the fire. He spent the night on the side of the road in Carta Valley and stayed out with us until late Saturday. On Saturday morning, Bill kept a firewatch sitting on the front porch of the cabin playing the guitar.

Special thanks go out to Don Arburn for bring food, cold water, and cold drinks. We were able to feed ourselves and give the firefighters sandwiches and cold drinks. They really seemed to like that.

Special thanks also go out to Zara Environmental for sending out a truck load of water. We ended up not needing the water so we refilled the water tank at the cabin since it hasn't rained in a while.

Based on this experience, we need to make sure the trees are trimmed up around cabin. We need to make sure that brush close to the cabin stays cleared out and we need to make sure we keep the grass trimmed around the cabin. It is also a good idea to make sure we don't keep wood, lumber, and other combustibles around the base of or under the cabin. In short, we got really lucky this time.

Thanks to everyone for your support!


POWER WAGON

