The TEXAS CAVER - 1st Quarter 2009



The TEXAS CAVER

January — March - Vol. 55, Number 1

The Texas Caver is a quarterly publication of the **Texas Speleological Association** (TSA), an internal organization of the **National Speleological Society**.

All material copyrighted 2009 by the Texas Speleological Association, unless otherwise stated.

Subscriptions are included with TSA membership, which is $15/year for students, $20/year for individuals and $30/year for families.

Libraries, institutions, and out-of-state subscribers may receive ***The Texas Caver*** for $20/year. **Student subscriptions** are $15/year.

Submissions, correspondence, and corrections should be sent to the Editor:

The TEXAS CAVER
c/o Mark Alman
1312 Paula Lane, Mesquite, TX 75149
texascavers@yahoo.com

Subscriptions, dues, payments for ads, and membership info should be sent to the TSA:

The Texas Speleological Association
Post Office Box 8026
Austin, TX 78713-8026
www.cavetexas.org

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

Submissions: Articles, announcements, artwork, photos, and material for publication are ALWAYS welcomed and may be sent at anytime. All submissions must be submitted to the Editor in electronic form, either via email or CD-ROM. **NO EXCEPTIONS!**

The editor reserves the right to edit inappropriate material, errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation, and to edit for clarity. In the event of significant changes the author (s) will be given an opportunity to review changes prior to publication.

Deadlines: While submissions are welcomed at anytime, the deadline for consideration for inclusion in the next issue of each quarter is as follows:

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

Mailing: The editor is not responsible for lost or misdirected newsletters caused by failure to notify editor in writing of address changes.

Advertising Rates: Full page is $50, a half page is $25, and a quarter page is $15. Full page color on back page is $75.

Photo Credits:

Front Cover— Linda Palit and Allan Cobb descending into Devils Sinkhole. A NSS Salon Honorable Mention and TSA Convention 2008 Award winning photo by Travis Scott.

Back Cover — A vast collage of photos from the Longhorn Caverns Project Weekend, February 6th thru the 8th. The bulk of the photos were shot by Roy "Puppy" Lewis, with a few thrown in by Lyndon Tiu and Mark Alman

2009 Texas Speleological Association Officers

Chair: **Mark Alman**
chairman@cavetexas.org

Vice-Chair: **Rob Bisset**
vicechairman@cavetexas.org

Secretary: **Denise Prendergast**
secretary@cavetexas.org

Treasurer: **Darla Bishop**
treasurer@cavetexas.org

Publications Committee Chairman -
The Texas Caver Editor:
Mark Alman
publications@cavetexas.org or
texascavers@yahoo.com

The Texas Speleological Association is a not-for-profit organization that supports cave exploration and studies in and around the state of Texas. It is comprised of both independent members and local grottos.

The TSA is an internal organization of the National Speleological Society and represents the greater caving community in Texas. The organization holds business meetings 3 times a year, organizes an annual convention for Texas cavers, and sponsors caving projects and events throughout the state.

The TEXAS CAVER

Written by Texas Cavers FOR Texas Cavers

Table of Contents

- **Harry Walker** **4**
  Obituaries by Jim McLane and David Locklear. Caving Photo by Jim McLane.

- **A Tank Haul of Epic Proportions— 6**
  Adventures (and Misadventures) in Honey Creek Cave
  Reports by Bill Steele and Roy "Puppy" Lewis. Photos by Puppy.

- **Techniques: Safe Vertical Caving** **10**
  By Kurt Waldron - Chairman of the NSS Safety and Techniques Committee

- **Bracken Bat Cave 10th Annual Guano Gathering, Sunday, February 8th.** **12**
  All photos by Mike Breiding.

- **Longhorn Lowdown—February 6th thru 8th, 2009** **16**
  Trip Reports by Lyndon Tiu and Mark Alman.
  Maps courtesy of the TSS Texas Caves CD and updated by Lyndon Tiu.
  Photos by Roy" Puppy" Lewis and Mark Alman.

- **From the TSA Chairman …** **20**

- **The 3rd TCC Winter Conference, Saturday, February 27th thru March 1st.** **21**

- **2009 TSA Spring Convention, April 24th thru 26th, 2009, in Kerrville!** **22**

- **Our Sponsors of *The TEXAS CAVER (Support 'em!)*** **23**

Harry Walker

Photos by Jim McLane.
Obituaries by Jim McLane and David Locklear.



I Remember Harry Walker
Jim McLane, NSS 14628,
Houston Texas

On December 16th, caver Harry M. Walker (NSS 9381) died in his sleep at home in Dickinson Texas. Harry had telephoned me about 6 months ago to express regrets that he couldn't manage to attend the Greater Houston Grotto meetings any more. He sounded very sharp on the phone. There was no evidence of the Alzheimer's disease the doctors said he had. The news of Harry's passing caused me to reflect on my long association with that remarkable man.

I first encountered Harry in the 1960s. I think the occasion was probably a gathering of cavers in Houston at the Villa Monterrey apartment of Tommy Knox, near the Gulf Freeway at the Monroe exit. That speleologically significant place was later torn down and the slab reused to build a hotel. Tommy worked nearby in the Clear Lake area for Lockheed. I remember that Tommy's coffee table held half of a really big cave pearl that he'd collected in Gruta del Palmito, Bustamante and sectioned on a rock saw to display the internal banding. Other local cavers who met at Tommy's place included Dewayne Dickey, Mike Connolly, Charles Fromen, and maybe Billy Campbell and Bill Sherborne.

There was a little caving club out in Clear Lake, the "Spelean Group" led by Ken Griffin. It was made up exclusively of employees of TRW, a NASA contractor. Once I encountered them camping in the Rio Sabinas canyon near Bustamante, roasting chestnuts on an open fire! There seemed to be very few active cavers in Houston during the 60's. Beginning in 1964 Charles Fromen, Mike Connolly and I regularly went on trips. In 1968 I was contacted by Don Broussard and David Honea, undergraduate physics students at the University of Houston. They wanted to visit a big Mexican pit so I took them down to Huitzmolititla near Xilitla.

No large scale organized caving existed in Houston until Rice University PhD candidate Barry Beck persuaded the Rice Geology Department to sponsor a club. Barry also served as the "advisor" to a Boy Scout Explorer post. He took me along on trips with the Scouts so he could tell the parents there would be another "adult" present. Basically the Boy Scouts would subsidize Barry's caving. He would sell his blood to have spending money right before a trip so he often looked pale and anemic. Barry would borrow a big Chevy Carry-All truck from Rice, fill it with Explorer Scouts and we would go caving in Comal County. Sometimes if we made a trip without the boys, Barry's wife Patty would pack him a mayonnaise jar of alcoholic Mai Tai mixed drinks to help him recover after coming out of the caves. This was especially welcome in the cold winter! Gradually the Rice Grotto began to attract some very enthusiastic cavers, including Paul Boyer, Louise Power, Jon Everage, Roger Moore and Harry Walker.

Since he was born in 1921, Harry was a lot older than everyone else, but he was enthusiastic, very physically fit, and his scientific credentials added an aura of respectability to our caving trips. Back then cavers had long hair and wore hippie attire so Harry really improved our appearance, which helped with public acceptance. I think he might have taken part in a Rice Grotto trip to Indian Creek Cave near Uvalde and he might also have gone on some of our trips to West Texas caves near Junction. I have some good photos of Harry and a visiting British caver out at the Valdina Farms sinkhole

Besides caving, he loved mountain climbing and white water canoeing and often persuaded cavers to accompany him on such trips. Charles Fromen made many expeditions with him. Harry didn't go in for too much high tech stuff and I seem to remember I was astonished to see photos of his pack on the summit of the Grand Tetons with the handle of a very heavy cast iron frying pan sticking out! One time Harry went on an expedition with friends into the Sierra Del Carmine in Mexico. This is a remote cluster of largely unexplored mountains south of Big Bend National Park. It's very rough country. They hired burros to carry water and one of the poor creatures fell off the mountain to its death.

Harry topped virtually all the major peaks in the lower 48 and even when he was in his 60's he climbed the Matterhorn in the Swiss Alps. Once he went to Alaska, hired a bush pilot to fly him into a remote area and scaled a mountain that nobody had ever been on just so he could apply to the US Geological Survey to name the place "Mount Dorothy" after his wife. He traveled to lots of interesting places, including a boat trip to Tierra del Fuego on the southern tip of South America.

Harry was a PhD scientist. In the 1980's there was a downturn in the oil and gas business and he "retired" from Monsanto in Texas City. He wrote a computer program that would run on a PC to predict the spread of a plume of gas if there were an accidental release in a refinery or petrochemical plant upset. This was a computationally intensive task and I remember he complained that his 386 computer (the fastest that one could buy back then) took a half a day of number crunching to generate the answers. Consulting on plume spread made Harry lots of money in his "retirement." He often consulted with the company where my wife worked "Applied Meteorology" and was good friends with the owner, the brilliant one–eyed weatherman "Book" Hathorn.

For many years Harry would enter climbing contests at the caver reunions and other get-togethers. He was always the oldest person climbing and consistently made respectable time. One year he showed up with a strange invention. He had mounted a jumar on the top of an aluminum pole that extended upward from a harness up his back, perhaps three feet above his head. He thought this strange device would hold his body in a more natural upright position under the rope.

One memorable trip we made together (but in separate vehicles) occurred over the Thanksgiving holiday in 1971. The Rice grotto decided to go to Mexico. As the cavers made their way through Mexican customs, the group divided. The half that included Harry headed south to Horsetail Falls near Monterrey. The others drove over to the warm water cave, Gruta de Carrizal near the little town of Candela, 20 or so miles from Bustamante.

Days earlier, a couple of cavers and I had towed motorcycles into Mexico on a trailer behind a car. We headed for a place called Potrero Redondo in the mountains south of Monterrey. From where the pavement ended near Horsetail Falls, the



Harry Walker at the entrance of Valdina Farms Sinkhole, Medina County Texas in January 1975. Notice the Goldline nylon rope and carbide lamp.

route to Potrero Redondo was a rough, single lane dirt road with steep grades and one very deep river crossing - always worrisome on a motorcycle. The approach to the village offered a view of a beautiful waterfall cascading over a cliff and down into a deep canyon. Behind the waterfall was a water-filled maze cave. The other Houston cavers arrived at Villa de Santiago (near Horsetail Falls) and Harry somehow hired an old open-top jeep. A large group squeezed into Harry's jeep. We met the Jeep near Potrero Redondo and split up to visit the local caves. The weather was great and we spent a couple more days in the area.

We arrived back at US customs in Laredo Sunday night and were shocked to hear that fellow Houston cavers had crossed the border earlier that day with the bodies of two of our friends who had drowned in Gruta de Carrizal.

Over Easter 1973 Charles Fromen, Mike Connolly and I became the first cavers to enter Cueva Brinco in the remote headwaters of the Rio Purificacion above Cuidad Victoria. We'd visited several caves on that trip, guided to entrances by local villagers. We were also told of a major cave entrance in a nearby canyon where a waterfall sometimes spewed out. Charles made plans to return and visit that place. Harry was with him in 1976 when cavers first climbed up into the mouth of Infiernillo, the huge entrance to the extensive network now called Sistema Purificacion, one of the greatest caves on earth. On a later visit to the area, Harry and Charles went with Austin cavers on an arduous through trip, entering Brinco and a day later (and nearly three thousand feet lower in elevation) exiting Infiernillo. This is very heavy-duty caving. A person has to squeeze through a tight spot named the "Crack of Doom" in the middle of the cave. Photos show Harry with most of his clothes removed, his face in an awful grimace, struggling to make it through that narrow place.

Harry remained an active caver, even into his later years. For example, he put on a wet suit and went on a trip through Honey Creek Cave at the age of 80.

I know very few details of Harry's life before he came to Texas. I heard that during WW2 he trained to fly B-24 bombers, but dodged being sent to the Pacific when he was injured diving into the ocean just before his crew and plane departed. He was one of the very first to get to explore the famous Kartchner Caverns in Southeastern Arizona. I think once he had been involved in mining operations out west. He leaves behind his wife Dorothy in Dickinson Texas and a sister in Tucson Arizona. Harry raised a fine family, but none of his children or grandchildren became world class adventurers like him.

Harry was a significant part of my life for the last 40 years. I look forward to digitizing the thousands of photos I have from those decades. Many will bring back warm memories of an intelligent, lively gentleman who had a genuine, passionate interest in caves, not just an armchair caver, but a man who embraced the subject with remarkable enthusiasm, curiosity and energy.

From David Locklear:

I met Harry in 1989 at a Houston Grotto Meeting. He appeared to be in his late sixties, but he showed slide shows of recent caving trips to the Sierra Madres. I was very impressed with his slideshows and his enthusiasm. He was always inviting me to go on his trips, and I always had to turn him down, because I couldn't get off school or work, or it conflicted with going to the NSS Convention.

Harry and I did got to TCR a few times together, the last being the big flood at Chalk Bluff. And I tried my best to get him to go with me to the TCR, just a few months ago.

In 1998, Harry invited me on what would be his last attempt to complete all the 14'ers in Colorado. But he planned the trip during the Tennessee NSS Convention, which I was greatly looking forward to. I had to make a tough call, as I knew Harry was 70 something, and I would never again get the privilege of climbing with him. We tried Mt. Anterra, Greys Peak and Torrey's Peak. Harry would have made it to the top had he been with an experienced person, but I had never been mountain climbing and I was way too out of shape.

We later went rafting thru Brown's Canyon on the Arkansas River near Salado, Colorado.

Harry was flipped out at Snider's Suckhole and we thought he may have drowned. It was a very tense moment waiting for someone to find him and pull him out of the eddy like water.

Harry apparently started caving in the 1940's, back east somewhere. He had a low NSS number. I saw him climb rope at a vertical practice about 10 years ago, and he did fine. I think he has been into Purificacion. I know he climbed Pico Candela, and that inspired me to give it a try.

Harry's claim to fame is that he taught his nephew how to cave. His nephew moved to Arizona, and went caving with some other guy and found a little hole that they kept secret for many years called "Kartchner Caverns." I recall Harry talking excited about it back around 1991 or so. He also showed me the recent book, before I had seen it at the NSS Convention.

Harry became an important role model in my life and I looked to him for wisdom. He more than anybody else, was the caver that advised me to marry my current wife. Had he told me to run for the hills instead, I probably would have. And since I have an incredibly wonderful daughter, I can only tell Harry "thank you."

Harry based this judgement on at least 2 road-trips from Houston with my then-girlfriend. One to Carta Valley to go in a cave, and the other to at least one TCR (2000?) at Flat Creek Ranch.

Hurricane Ike was a stressful event for the Walkers. I think it really took a toll on Harry.. I have been out of work for a few months, and Harry paid me to work in his yard to clean up the debris left over by Hurricane Ike. It was a real mess and he really

(Continued on page 22)

A Tank Haul of Epic Proportions—Adventures (and Misadventures) in Honey Creek Cave

Reports by Bill Steele and Roy "Puppy" Lewis
Photos by Puppy.



The entry shaft to Honey Creek.

On the weekend of January 24th, an epic trip was taken into Texas' longest cave, Honey Creek Cave. The objectives were 1) to do a tank haul in support of two cave divers, James Brown and Jean "Creature" Kreja, to dive the 1,435 foot-long HS upstream sump, which is nearly six hours of travel from the shaft entrance, and 2) to take a cave radio borrowed from Brian Pease of Vermont to the passage on the far side of the sump and get a precise location above it on the surface.

The HS upstream sump was dived twice in the late 80s and early 90s by John Schweyen, then of New Jersey, and now living in Tucson, Arizona. John laid about 1,000 feet of dive line without reaching air-filled passage. James Brown, now living in the Dallas area, dove it twice in 2007, and on December 1, 2007 reached air-filled passage after adding 435 of dive line to that which had been in the sump for 17 years. Being solo, and needing to survey back and desiring visibility to do so, and without caving boots, James chose to not take off his diving gear and climb up over mud-covered breakdown to check out whether or not he had reached a passage or just a chamber between sumps.

On the weekend of January 24th, an unprecedented number of people graciously volunteered to help haul loads in this, what people who have done it and have been in many other Texas caves, consider hands-down to be the most challenging caving trip in the state. Twenty-seven people began entering the cave at 9:30 a.m. Saturday morning, with it taking about 45 minutes for everyone to be lowered into the cave three at a time. Of those 27 people, 26 made it to the sump, with one person turning around early and leaving the cave.

Members of five Texas grottos participated in the tank haul:

Barry Adelman	UTG
Branndon Bargo	
James Brown	DFW
Paul Bryant	
Steve Bryant	UTG
Casey Campbell	GHG
Michael Cicherski	
Joe Datri	UTG
Bobby DeVos	UTG
Charlie Emerson	DFW
Ed Goff	DFW
Gary Franklin	UTG
Krishna Gandhi	ASS
Lawrence Hart	UTG
John Kerr	DFW
Jean "Creature" Krecja	UTG
Trey Lessard	UTG
Puppy Lewis	GHG
Vivian Loftin	UTG
Mallory Mayeux	GHG
Ryan McCormick	ASS
Jason Middleton	UTG
David Moore	UTG
Paul Pierce	UTG
Bill Steele	DFW
Ellie Thoene	DFW & Bexar
Alex Wendeborn	ASS

Supporting on the surface were:

Jerry Atkinson
Don Broussard
Allan Cobb
Bonnie Longley
Kitty Menking
Kurt Menking
Linda Palit
Joe Ranzau
Mary Thiesse
Diana Tomchick
Drew Wendeborn
Cephas Wozencraft

The first three cavers lowered down the shaft entrance to the cave entered at 9:30 a.m., and the last were pulled out 16 1/2 hours later, at 2:00 a.m. Sunday, with one embarrassing exception, explained at the end of this report.

Saturday morning began with a briefing for everyone. Even though going the right way at the base of the shaft entrance was stressed with details, four cavers went the wrong way, which could well have thwarted the dive, because they were carrying necessary dive gear components. To their credit, those who went the wrong way in the cave figured it out, and arrived at the sump at the precise moment the gear they were carrying was needed.



Bill Steele, on right, going over the plans for the trip.

The cave radio began transmitting at 3:00 p.m. as planned. Forty-five minutes later it was turned off and moved to the dome at the sump, where it was set up again and transmitted for half an hour.

James and Creature discovered that one of the four fiberglass tanks with 5,000 psi of compressed air had a hairline fracture in it and had leaked about 800 psi of air. Deliberations ensued and it was decided that James would dive solo.

James was gone into the sump for 2 1/2 hours. On the far side he took off his dive gear, climbed up out of the water, and saw that he was in a passage 12 feet high and 8 feet wide. He set up the cave radio and transmitted in two places, approximately 30 feet apart. Then he explored ahead. In about 250 feet he reached a funnel-shaped depression across the width of the passage so he decided at that point to return. Beyond him the upper level passage continued without the stream, in the same dimensions, 12 feet high and 8 feet wide.

Soon after James returned to the entrance side of the sump, Joe Datri arrived with his high definition video camera in a Pelican case. He interviewed James as he stood in the water of the sump, and me about the significance of this discovery to future caving. Joe is making a documentary video about Texas cavers, which he plans to show at the ICS next July.

Twenty-six cavers then packed up the gear and headed to the entrance at 9:00 p.m. The last exited at 2:00 a.m. to a cold night and a roaring campfire.

Well, almost...

In the morning Michael Cicherski, Linda Palit, Diana Tomchick, and I cooked up a big breakfast taco feed for everyone. Several times I asked where Puppy Lewis was. Hours before around the campfire I had noticed that Puppy wasn't there, but I figured he had gone to bed like others had.

No, he had not made it out of the cave. When Rob Bisset, who came out on Sunday morning with his son Journey to cash in on a trip into Honey Creek Cave I offered as an auction item at the TCMA auction last April, Creature, and I were lowered down the shaft, we saw a light on the bottom as we neared it. To our utter horror there was Puppy, dressed in a black trash sack and balaclava, leaning against the wall. He had been marooned in the cave all night long.

Even though I had purposely done "the sweep," and



The elusive Michael Cicherski

brought up the rear of the procession of 26 people, I had not realized, and no one else had either, that Puppy had not made it out of the cave. Even though there were several clues that the shaft entrance was being approached, such as noticeably colder air, fog, a well casing within a few feet of you as you pass, and a cable stung in the passage from the well casing 50 feet to the shaft, Puppy, being dog-tired from the trip and the full marathon he had run the prior weekend, didn't notice any of those things and continued going downstream past the shaft entrance. Once he realized his mistake he returned and found the shaft, but the cable was not lowered again all night long. Puppy stayed close to the shaft in case someone came down during the night, managed to get some sleep, but was stuck there for over 8 hours. Once he was raised up the shaft to the surface he dried off, put on warm clothes, got in Kurt and Kitty's pop-up camping trailer with a propane heater, drank hot coffee, and recovered fast.

The mistakes that were made included: not maintaining a check out sheet to insure that everyone was out of the cave, knowing that two seat harnesses were still in the cave and leaving them there in case someone was still in the cave, the surface team did not lower the cable down after the assumed last people came out. Thankfully Puppy is a tough guy and suffered his ordeal well, though he did show a photo of his face with a certain finger gesture given.

The result of the cave radio transmission was that the first two transmissions, done on the entrance side of the sump, one at the junction where the side passage leading to the sump leaves the main passage, and one at the dome above the sump, were picked up on the surface, and showed that the cave survey was only off by about 50 feet. This was good news in that when the



survey of the cave was done in the 80s backsights were not done, and inclinations were only done when the shot was a steep one. That, and it's about 6 1/2 miles from the natural entrance to the cave radio transmission sites.

Disappointingly, the two radio transmissions on the far side of the sump did not work out as well. This was due to metal corralling and power lines being where the radio indicated the spot was, which caused the receiver to not work right. We have a general location, but not a precise one. Thus, we're thinking of doing it all over again in a few months. Any volunteers?

Bill Steele
NSS 8072
Irving, Texas

Roy “Puppy” Lewis here.

Yes I had a bit more of an adventure than everyone else (well, except for that lucky Ninja brown, but his adventure was fun). Diana isn't to blame and neither is Bill (although I won't ever let him forget he forgot me).

I pushed myself too far by attempting HC 6 days after running a marathon. My feeble attempt to help Creature carry a tank back out made me realize just how far gone my body was and I should have stuck closer to someone. And by the way, Creature is one of the most incredible super human cavers I have ever known. I watched her grab a tank and practically run when I could barely carry my pack and her Tang at a slow crawl.

This is a bit long but it was my way to document for myself my experience so I thought I would share it as well.

I remember passing the water well and yelling a good "yahoo" knowing the exit was near. plus at this point the water is deeper and much easier to float on my pack and rest my body with minimal effort of just moving with my toes. then came the cold and fog and I thought wow I didn't know there was another air access point (hhmmnn wonder if bill knows about this), so I kept going enjoying my easy float. then the fog cleared and after a few minutes I realized I apparently just had never looked up from following the crowds because this part of the cave is quite nice. Rock bottom, nice and clear and quite pretty.

I wondered if somehow I had taken a wrong turn so I stopped, listened and heard Bill and several others splashing and talking still coming in my direction, thus I must be going the right way still. I went on about 10 more minutes (I didn't have a watch) when I came across a very low ceiling and I knew I had never been here before.

For the first time in hours my brain actually sparked and said oh shit. Suddenly all the pieces: fog, cold, etc clicked. I turned back but I wasn't panicked because I would run into everyone in 10-15 min I was sure. It took about 10min to make my way back to the entrance going at a fast pace only to find three harnesses (two extras and my own) hanging but no cable. Not a problem they are just in the middle of unhooking people, so I put my harness on, shined my light up a few times and waited, 5 minutes later nothing. I shined my brightest Pelican light up the shaft and yelled for a minute or two, but I knew that was useless if no one was actually looking down.

I've been through this exit twice before so I knew it was a mad dash from the shaft to your tent to get dry and warm and shove something in your mouth then pass out. I was getting very cold very fast so I set a timeline of yelling for a few more minutes then I would focus on sheltering in place for the night. The low was around 35 that night and a strong wind comes straight down that shaft but I rationalized I couldn't risk moving farther back into the cave for fear someone would come back for the gear.

Then my light died and I messed around with an alternate light and switching out another light out of Creatures bag to make sure I had plenty of backup. I still had two long sleeve thermal shirts and two pairs of running tights and dry thermal socks that I had in my dry bag for the wait at the end. Creatures bag I just found a skimpy pair of spandex hotpants (Sorry Creature, but I got the biggest laugh out of that at that moment since there wasn't enough material to keep one nugget warm) The shaft area is all standing water, but through a crack near the floor where I could see a shelf of rock just above water level in the adjoining room. I put the gear bags against the crack to block the wind and went to the other side and moved lots of rock to make a bed.





Ellie Thoene, of the DFW Grotto.

It was equivalent to climbing under a standard 2'x5' coffee table. once I was situated out of the water I attempted to exchange my boots and neoprene socks for a pair of nice dry thermal socks (not easily done with an 18" ceiling) along with the two pairs of tights (over my harness of course). My feet were already light blue and my toes dark blue when I put the socks on. I didn't want to put my wet boots back on so to keep them dry I dumped out my dry bag and put both feet in the bag in case my feet slipped off the shelf during the night into the water. I also had two trash bags that I poked my head out the top of that I could keep my arms inside and I would breath into the bag to add heat.

So there I laid, occasionally pulling my face out of the bag to watch my breath freeze in the air. I was shivering quite profusely for what seemed like hours but I really don't know. I thought of all kinds of ways to communicate with the top but most involved getting on the Internet to which I actually thought of going to sleep, dreaming and finding someone that could call bill. I even tried to use my touch screen computer monitor on the ceiling but dirt would fall into my eyes and I learned not to touch the screen.

Eventually I started noticing odd things in the ceiling (a few inches above my face) such as very colorful sweater covered dogs. There was an art exhibit I wanted to see in Houston a few weeks earlier where an artist took some taxidermy animals and knitted bright outfits along with rearranging body parts between different animals (The museum of un-natural science). Well, those animals were in 3D on the ceiling. I touched one but just got a few specks of dirt flakes in my eye so I learned not to pet the animals. I knew the image was fake so it actually added entertainment. I've had hallucinations once before after 48 hours straight of paddling in the Texas Water Safari race so I know how vivid and real my hallucinations can be, but this was pretty freaky.

I kept one low power LED on shining against a far wall in case someone dropped in to the shaft they might see the adjoining room was partially lit. (I also had a tether to a gear bag so no one could remove it without finding me.), but I shut off the light to douse the images.

A while later, a noise got my attention and I found I was no longer shivering hard but rather very, very light. I yelled out but still just a false alarm. My pulse was really slow which at the time I took as a good sign that I wasn't panicked. Then the most bizarre event of my trip happened.

I heard a mumbled voice so I flipped on lights and looked to see if anyone had dropped down. then I saw a man in a brown jumpsuit, helmet w/carbide lamp (not lit) in the corner. It was my uncle (still alive by the way). He introduced me to geology and fossil hunting as a kid but never did any caving so this was odd. He just said I was doing good and to keep warm. I laughed and he was gone. I'm not religious, but at this point I felt if I went to sleep I would either wake up in the hospital or not at all. I still had no emotions with any of this and simply accepted the facts. So I said the Lords Prayer and what I could remember of my favorite Irish blessing then closed my eyes.

And before you ask why I didn't go back farther into the cave and warm up? For one, I was determined to be near those harnesses because I was confident someone was coming back for them, and because I was almost petrified of getting wet again.

After that I think I actually slept for the first time and was awakened by the start of the tractor. I looked over into the shaft room to see a big round circle on the floor where the sun was shining. I grabbed my boots, nearly fell into the water and made a quick dash for the shaft. The tractor wasn't running, but then to my horror. I saw a bar across the shaft entrance and I thought, "Oh crap, they are putting those metal locking slats in!". I have never yelled sooo loud I was frantic for about a minute until I realized that was the upper support bar where the pulley is. Then someone looked in to the shaft and waved (it was one of the kids I later learned). I was relieved they knew I was down here. But then it took forever until I finally saw the line move and people hoisted up. HUGE relief.

As Creature entered the top dome I yelled out "Good morning!! Is it nice and warm up there on the surface?" Then Bill dropped down and our eyes met and I could see every single neuron clicking together in his head spelling out, "Oh, shit". It took all of a millisecond for him to realize I had either been down there all night or this was a bad practical joke.

Being the calm cool person Bill is, I think he started yelling at me something to the effect of how the hell did you get behind me, what happened, etc, etc. To which I replied that it would have been nice if there had been an rope hanging in the shaft since there were still 3 harnesses on the line. I think our confrontation ended when we both realized I was very cold and I would love to be out of the cave. So they both checked my harness, hooked me up and got my ass out of there. One of them was telling me to leave the trash bags on because it was cold up there. I laughed and said I could handle it.

On top everyone kicked into high gear when they realized what had happened. I was whisked away to a luxurious two bedroom "HEATED" camper with a nice big bed and lots of blankets. Stripped of my wetsuit and everything else I put some dry things on and slipped into the covers. Linda Palit and Kitty



Swoboda (that girl can leap like a gazelle). used their warm hands to warm my arms and legs. then plied me with warm (not hot) oatmeal and chili. then the coffee came and within 20 min or so I had feeling back in my limbs.

My mind clicked back in place pretty quick and within an hour or so I would say I felt pretty much back to normal with the exception of a the typical muscle aches and such that come after caving.

I was really happy that I was able to personally return the Boy Scout knife that Diana T had lent me, since it was very much needed and I am so very thankful she caught onto the fact that I did not have a knife before entering HC.

My doc checked me out the next week and was only worried abut all the cuts and bruises on my shins to which I laughed and said so it's ok If I run the Austin marathon in 2 weeks? She thought I was joking.

So there's my story.

I'm not done with Honey Creek Cave (call me a masochist if you wish) but I'm not going to learn something and then avoid the fun altogether. I'm still more worried about dying driving to and from my hobbies than the hobbies themselves.

My recommendation for the exit procedures for HC are simply that no one goes down the shaft without a harness of their own (or borrowed specifically for them). No borrowing of harnesses from people already down the shaft. Every caver in the cave should have a harness hanging on that line down there. if there is one harness left then there is one caver in the cave and the rope stays down.

PS: It wasn't until later Sunday night when I received a message asking how I was doing that I was reminded of the fun I had during the wait for Ninja Brown to dive.

The brief conversation sparked a slew of memories I had forgotten about such as the infamous "Glass Scented Candle" (moonlight walk or something sweet like that) and the gourmet 5 course MRE meal that Mallory cooked up, the kitchen cleaning jokes, the Brokeback caver jokes, it all fell into place and I was happy.

My favorite quote from the Brokeback caver group (those up front). "WHAT? You actually saw that movie? "

PSS: In case you forgot already: Creature is one of the most incredible super human cavers I have ever known.



"Puppy", just saying, "Hi and Happy Salutations!".

SAFE VERTICAL CAVING

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

EDITOR—As a neophyte to the vertical world, I found this article from the September issue of The NSS News to be very helpful, well written, and easy to understand

Kurt has, once again, graciously allowed me to reprint his article for all of those folks who are new to caving or, like me, curious as to the best and safest methods to "go vertical". Enjoy!

From time to time we hear about people who get in trouble while on rope. Although there can be many reasons for the difficulty, it usually can be attributed to one of two reasons: inadequate equipment or an inability to perform the required skills. With adequate training and preparation, problems can almost always be avoided. In this article, I'll present some of the equipment needed to safely cave on rope. I am not aware of any established standards on this topic, so what follows are only my thoughts, developed over time from experience. As always, your thoughts and ideas are always appreciated. You can contact me at cave_safe@hotmail.com.

EQUIPMENT

We all approach caving a little differently. Some of us are "minimalists" who only take exactly what we will need on our trip and nothing more. In some cases, that may be all that we own. Other people are "gear heads" with plenty of equipment and need to choose what to take on a trip. Regardless, one needs to take enough equipment on the trip and know how to use it properly. What is "enough" depends on the type of trip, individual training, and experience of all of the cavers on the trip. While some people may be very comfortable climbing on knots with a tied harness made from webbing, the intent of this article is to discuss the equipment used by the caver who will want or need a sewn seat harness, mechanical ascenders and typical friction-based descent devices.

Over time and with experience, some cavers begin to choose what they take based on the potential problems that could be encountered on the trip. This is a great idea in theory, but can easily lead to problems if too much equipment is taken, especially if the caver carrying all of this gear has a large, heavy pack and the trip is very long or has narrow passages. However, taking the absolute minimum equipment on a trip will limit options if any problems arise. Obviously, a reasonable balance between these opposite extremes needs to be established. The intent of this article is to establish the minimum equipment required for an individual to stay safe while on rope as well as define the extra equipment which will be most useful if problems arise.

Since one should not go underground without an adequate helmet, light, clothing, gloves and boots, I will presume that you already have this equipment (see my articles on how to prepare for a cave trip in the June and October 2007 NSS News.). This article is directed at the things which are unique to vertical caving.

First, there are many types of climbing systems to choose from. Personal preference, the type of vertical caving that you are most likely to be doing, and comfort are three factors on which to base the choice of a climbing system. Whichever system you choose, be able to use it effectively and know what the limitations and problems are and how to deal with
them on rope. Some of the more popular climbing systems would include the "Frog", "Mitchell" and "Rope Walker". The differ-

ences between the "Frog" and "Rope Walker" illustrate the types of choices that one must make when choosing a climbing system. No one system is perfect for every scenario, or person, and at some point each becomes a less than optimum choice. With time, you may become familiar with more than one system and you may them in very different scenarios.

The "Frog" is very popular because it is compact, requires minimal gear, and functions very well with short climbs and scenarios where the climber needs to maneuver while on rope (for example rebelays). A "Rope Walker" has more hardware and is therefore heavier and bulkier than a "Frog", but it really comes into its own on long free drops where it is possible for a fast climb to occur. I have and use both systems. I generally use my "Frog" when caving in the Virginia Region with climbs of 200 feet or less, especially when I need to do a lot of maneuvering while on rope. I usually use my rope walker on the longer drops in TAG and in Mexico, but I have also used it when I am tired after a very long cave trip and want to get up the rope with the least amount of energy expended. It is a little more expensive to own two systems instead of one, but the versatility is probably worth it. That said, many people only own one system or the other and make it work for all situations. If you are new to vertical caving, talk to the people you cave with and see which systems are in use in the area you will do most of your caving.

Once you start using a climbing system, take the time to keep it in good condition. It is a good idea to inspect it periodically and make sure that everything is working OK. Replace any equipment which is worn out or not working properly. You are, after all, dealing with your life when you get on rope. Is it worth the few bucks that you will save by NOT ordering a new harness or ascender when your old one is worn out? The best you can hope for in a case like this is that you will just be severely embarrassed when your poorly maintained gear fails at a critical moment and delays everyone else's departure from what should have been an easy cave trip. Of course, your equipment might also fail and kill you too.

When you make repairs to your climbing system, avoid the temptation to replace the screw links and mullions you use for life support with stuff that you can buy in a hardware store. The stuff you find there is not intended for climbing and if used in that way has an increased risk of failure. You should also be careful about using rock climbing gear for vertical caving. Rock climbers have some very good equipment, but it generally works best with a clean, dry rope – something that we frequently do not have in vertical caving.

Just as important as your climbing system is your descent device. The best choice for a cave environment would be either a rack or a figure 8, because they work well with the dirty, wet conditions typically found in a cave. The primary issue to sort through is the size and the weight of the device that you plan on using. As a general rule, racks are more versatile than figure 8's and the larger the rack the more control you will have over your rappel. A lot of people use micro racks and figure 8's because they are small and light, but what they are usually giving up is the ability to control the speed of their rappel. It is critical that you understand how your descent device works and that you know how to solve any of the potential problems that you are likely to have while you are on rappel.

Regardless of the type of climbing system and descent device you use, there are several useful upgrades and modifications which every caver should consider making to their system. The first is to add a "Quick Attach Safety" or "QAS". This is an extra ascender used to help the climber always maintain two points of attachment when changing ropes, performing change-overs or negotiating difficult lips. The type of ascender used in a QAS is not as important as being able to manipulate it with either hand while you are in a very stressful situation.



Figure 1 - A non adjustable Petzl SPELEGYCA cowstail

A second useful modification to any climbing system is to have the length of your top ascender and QAS be adjustable. When this is done your ascenders can always be adjusted to the length that you need instead of the length that you were sold. This can be seen very clearly in Figure 1, where the Petzl Spelegyca with a cowstail (frequently sold with a Frog climbing system) is of a fixed length that can not be adjusted while on rope. Although its size is adequate for many, it will never be a perfect fit for most people. On the other hand, an ascender with an adjustable lanyard can always be exactly the length that you need (figures 2 and 3). Adjustable lanyards can be bought from vendors, but if you know your knots, you can make your own. Using adjustable gear will frequently make your system a little less compact, but it is worth its weight in gold if it can get you out of a tough situation with a little less effort.



Fig. 2 - An Adjustable Ascender which has been shortened

The third and final modification that I make to my climbing system is to always use a "French Wrap" or "auto block". Its purpose is to stop your rappel if you ever become unconscious or incapacitated for any reason while you are on rope. It has been used by rock climbers for many years and has only recently begun to be used by cavers. It is an excellent and nearly fool proof piece

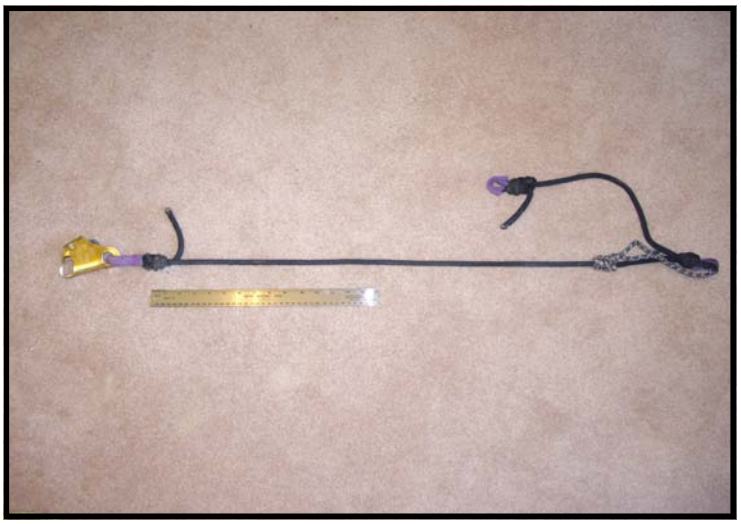


Fig. 3 - An adjustable ascender which has been fully extended

of equipment to add to your climbing system and is well worth the effort to learn and use. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the French Wrap and want to know more about it, see Gordon Birkhimer's excellent article on page 31 of the August 2005 NSS News " Rappin With The French Wrap" (VOL 63 #8). There are lots of different thoughts out there as to whether or not it should be used, but I like things that keep me from becoming a crater at the bottom of a pit. As it is with all things related to caving safely, what you choose to do is up to you, but as for me, I do not leave the lip without it.

I usually carry no less than 6 carabiners when I am climbing on rope. Three will be a part of my climbing system (cowstail, French Wrap and attach the rack to my harness) and the others are extras, to be used as I need them. I have found carabiners to be wonderful things and I have done everything from rappel with them (with a munter hitch on small drops (<20ft.)) to make a Z-rig haul system while on rope. Any time a carabiner is going to be used in such a way that a life depends on it (i.e. for "life support"), it needs to be able to lock. That said, I prefer to not use auto locking carabiners because they have been known to open and people have fallen off of them and been injured.

To go along with the extra carabiners that I am carrying, I always try to have 2 – 3 extra prussik loops in addition to the one that I use for my French Wrap and at least 20 feet of 1" tubular webbing. I have used prussiks for everything from making a quick safety while at the lip of a drop, to a haul system and so on. If you carry 5 or 6 extra prussiks with you and some webbing, you can make a complete climbing system. Likewise, it seems like there are an endless number of things that you can do with 20 feet of webbing. I have used it for everything from making a harness (Swiss seat), rigging a drop (wrap 3 pull 2) and a hand line to get down a drop.

Once you have the proper equipment, you need to learn how to use it. There are a number of ways to do this, but it is best if you can do one of the following 3 things: receive personalized instruction, take the NSS basic vertical course or attend at week long level 1 training course offered by the National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC). No matter what you do, you want to concentrate on developing the required skills, knowledge and vertical competence needed to keep yourself safe while on rope. We will talk about what those skills are at another time. Until then, cave safely !

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

Bracken Bat Cave 10th Annual Gathering of the Guano, Sunday, February 8th.

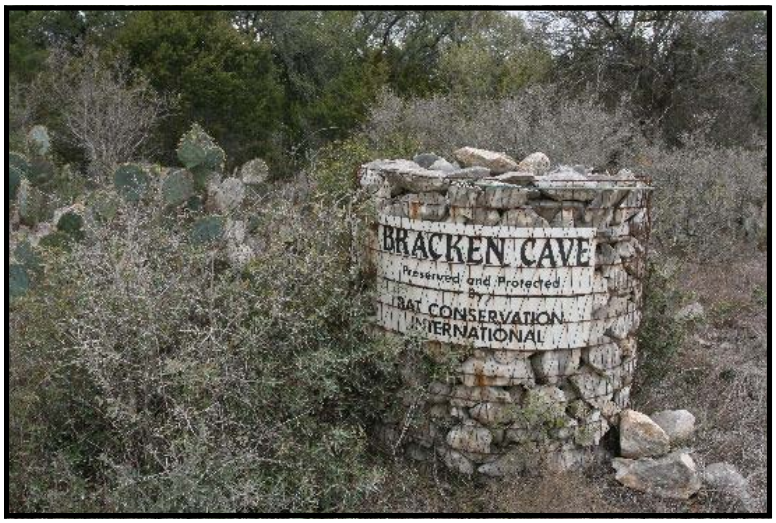
From Jim Kennedy, BBCGG Coordinator:

I must say, there are a HECK of a lot of folks out there who want bat guano! This year we smashed several previous records, including number of participants (65) and amount of guano removed (3.5 tons). And all that in only 2 hours of work! Huge thanks go out to all who participated, including those who dragged their relatives and neighbors along. A very special recognition goes out to Wes Schumacher, Sandi Calhoun, and Matt Turner, who were at the sharp end of the line, filling buckets at a feverish pace! Afterwards, 16 of us did the traditional Italian feast at Capparellis. For those of you who missed it, too bad! Now you have to wait another whole year. ;-) Guano: It's not just for breakfast anymore!

The photos you see here, unless otherwise noted, are reprinted by permission of Mike Breiding.

Mike is an old friend of Geary Schindel's who was fortunate to have been visiting Texas this weekend. He hails from Morgantown, West Virginia (and former WV and KY caver) and is traveling around the Lone Star State for a few weeks.

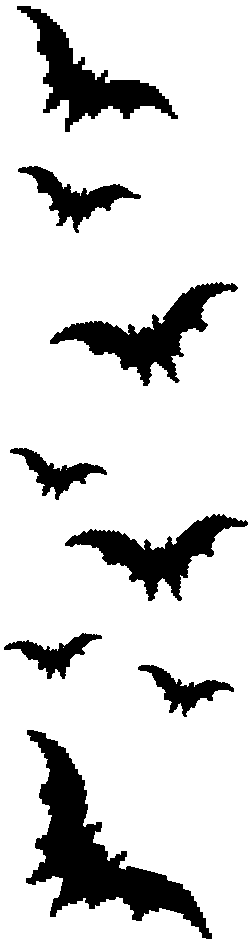
You can read further about the Guano Gathering and Mike's travels at his website: http://epicroadtrips.us/2009/texas/week1/week3_day16_sunday08feb2009/













Bracken Bat Cave 10th Annual Guano Gathering, Sunday, February 8th.





















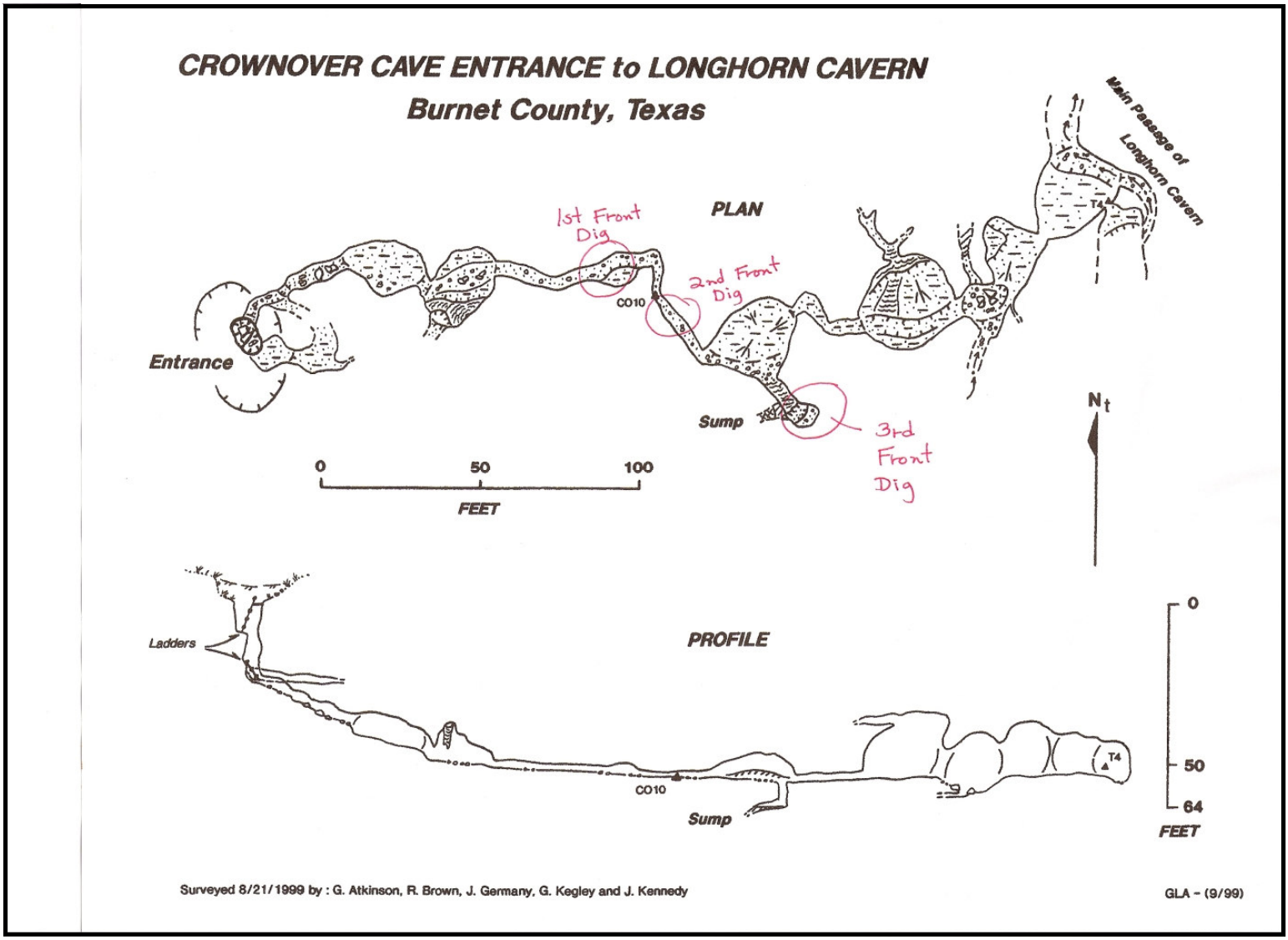






Longhorn Lowdown—
February 6th to 8th, 2009

Trip Reports by Lyndon Tiu and Mark Alman.
Maps courtesy of the TSS Texas Caves CD and updated by Lyndon.
Photos by Roy "Puppy" Lewis & Mark Alman.



Report submitted by Lyndon Tiu

Twenty four cavers from all over Texas participated in this weekend's dig and through trip.

Since there were plenty of diggers, we split up into 3 teams. Two teams digging from either end of the original blockage with the intention of widening the passage (to international standards? fit for ics2009).

A 3rd team dug at a promising location (see map, 3rd Dig Front). Strong air flow can be felt coming out of the 3rd front. We dug for about 1.5 hours. Moving about 3 cubic yards of dirt. The dirt was well compacted and wet, making it a tough dig. We moved forward about 5 feet from where we started digging but never reached any substantial opening.

While the 1st and 2nd teams continued their work of widening the primary passage. The 3rd team decided to stop digging and do some exploration of the rest of the cave.

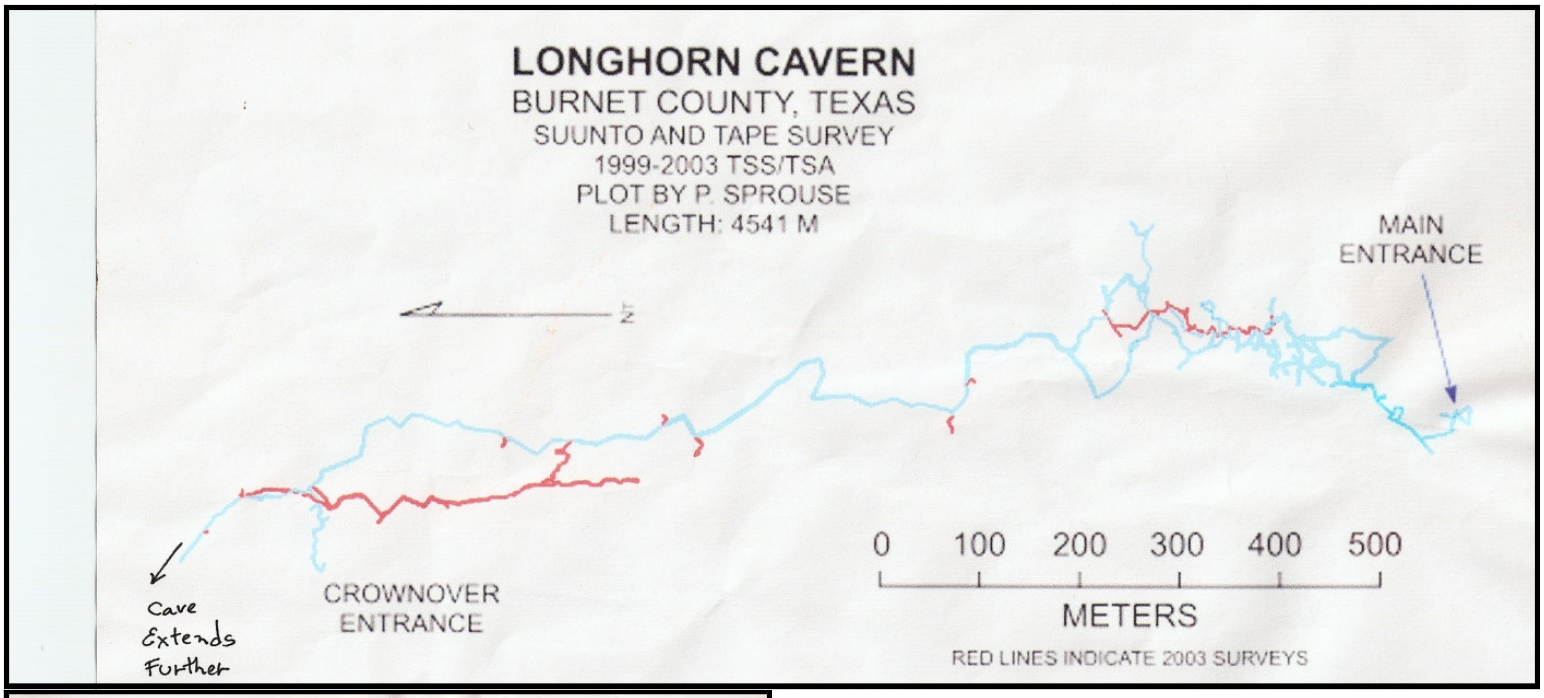
It is known from maps of Longhorn that the rear of the cavern was not passable due to high water (see map, "Passage Blocked by High Water"). Knowing that we are in the middle of a serious year long drought, we thought perhaps water levels have dropped and the rear would now be passable.

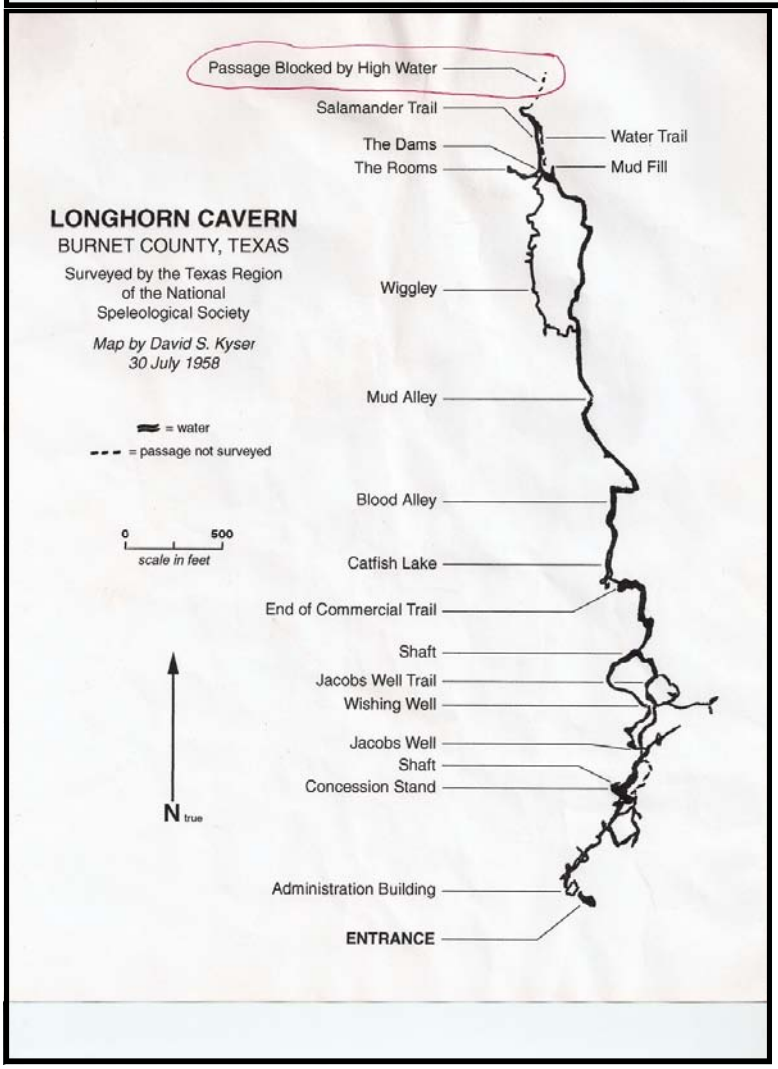
A few cavers went all the way to the back and saw an ear dip passage. One of the cavers did not have proper water proof lights. So the whole group turned around. It was lunch time anyways. So a plan was hatched: We go back up the surface, eat, regroup, get the right equipment together and go back in and push to the back of the cave.

After lunch, the majority of the 24 cavers opted for the through trip from the commercial entrance to the Crownover entrance A smaller group of 7 cavers from ASS and GHG went for the rear of the cave to see how far we can go "past the map".

We went through the ear dip passage with no incident. The ear dip was about 10 feet in length, with air space narrowing down to about 2 inches in parts. So narrow, a few of the cavers in the group decided to remove their helmets just to get through and still stick their noses above the water to breath.

From the most recent maps, we knew that the surveyed cave terminus extended not too far from the Crownover entrance (see map, "Cave Extends Further"). After passing the ear dip and





crawling for a while, we were very certain that we were no longer "on the map".

We crawled and walked through mud and debris for about 45 minutes after the ear dip when we reached what seems to be the end of our journey to the rear. We were now at a sump surrounded by soft mud, crawling full of crayfish. The mud was so soft and deep we would sink to our ankles while walking over it.

Along the way, we saw white spikey fungi growing on some dirt on the cave floor. I noticed the "basement floor" of the cave after the ear dip is smooth white dolomite covered in most places by a thin layer of mud. We noticed cave crickets in a small segment of the cave, indicating an entrance is nearby. We saw a few forks in the cave. But since this is our first time in this cave passage, we decided to stick to the main passageway and come back next time for the side passages.



Lyndon peering over one of the dams they discovered during their exploration.

We are planning on going back next month to survey the cave after the ear dip. We are also planning on exploring and surveying the side passages we saw (but did not have time to explore) and see if there are any leads to the surface. In the process, we wish to officially extend Longhorn further on the map.

We had hoped we were in virgin cave passage, but some research burst our bubble. According to an excerpt from the Caves of Burnet County Publication, it says: "Members of the San Angelo College Speleological Society and the ITSS explored the northernmost portion of the cave beyond the Salamander Trail on

30-31 March 1962. They found that the reported sump at the end of the cave was open and were able to continue exploration for several thousand feet to another sump. Unfortunately, no survey of the cave was made during the trip."

Rain has been falling since. This may mean we can never go back and survey as the ear dip passage may be fully underwater by the time we get back next month.

So what do we do? Send in a diver? Another tank haul? Has anyone seen Puppy?



A much needed rest stop about two thirds of the way thru "Hell's Half Mile", as the author refers to it now.

Got mud?! A trip report by Mark Alman.

It was with much trepidation that I approached the task of traversing this portion of Longhorn Caverns.

Having initially enthusiastically volunteered to lead ICS folks thru the cave in July, once we had opened up the Crownover passageway (see prior page), my eagerness was beginning to wane the closer I got to actually making the trip.

I wimped out in making the trip last November, the last work weekend of 2008, giving the excuse that I was tired from having down a lot of digging. In actuality, it was the youngsters that actually did the digging and I only shot the bull, emptied



One of the Aggie cavers checking out our new and improved "Crownover Expressway".



Admiring the calcite in The Crystal Room.

buckets, and piled dirt up and way from the main trunk.

But, this month, I had no excuse after having a LOT of good volunteers and plenty of hands to lighten the load. Plus, the fact that I had promised we'd actually do a thru trip in the afternoon, after we dug open the passageway in the morning.

Being a man of my word, about eighteen of us headed towards the Visitors Center, after partaking of lunch and arranging



An enjoyable lunch before "The Trip".

who was going to leave/sacrifice their vehicles behind to transport the extremely muddy crew back to camp.

We made quite an impression to the regular visitors to the cave, and there were a LOT this weekend, which is good for TPWD's business. We came across quite a few grandparents with their grandkids in tow (no weddings this weekend!), who took one look at us, smiled nervously, and backed up a pace or two so as not to experience or grime and sweat.

I jokingly commented to one cheerful set of grandparents that they better not go on the tour, as you'll come looking like us!

We were greeted at the front desk by Steve, the operations manager for LCSP. (The staff there has been excellent, supportive, and very pleasant to work with!). He led our gang down to the cave and unlocked the massive gate to the cave and showed us where the light switches were, wished us good luck, locked the gate behind us, and we essentially had the whole cave to ourselves!

It is so wonderful that the staff there and the TPWD

trusts us and has so much confidence in us as to not damage their cave. This type of working relationship is one to be treasured and cultivated in the future. But, I digress!

We proceeded to take a leisurely stroll down the path into the cave, pausing quite often to admire the pretties, especially in the Crystal Room. Quite a few of the cavers in our group had never seen the cave and this portion is quite lovely as it is an area that straddles the path and is loaded with yellow and pink calcite filled rooms and ceilings. I did report the story I've been told how this area used to be much prettier, but had been heavily damaged by folks thinking they had discovered diamonds, and had proceeded to remove as many as they could.

We continued our journey thru the cave, back into the Indian Council Room portion of the cave, where I told the group of the now closed Sam bass entrance and how good of a job the Civilian Conservation Corps had done in closing up the entrance and camouflaging it so well that it was indiscernible from the surround rock face.

Steve also mentioned, as he was locking us in, that three different paranormal groups had conducted studies and measurements in the cave and had detected a large amount of paranormal activity. I mentioned to the group that we were now standing in Ground Zero of this activity and was where they had measured the most activity! A few eyes got wide, we looked for any kind of signs, and then our own ghostly sound effects were added.

This cave and area, to those who don't know has been used for quite a few centuries and has a long history of human activity. As mentioned, the Native Americans of the area used it for centuries, and it was later by bank robber, Sam Bass, and his gang. Like all caves in Texas, it seems, there are rumors of his having hidden cash and other booty in the cave. We have yet to find it, though.

During the Civil War, it was used to store gunpowder and it was also mined for saltpeter in order to help produce said powder. A violent explosion is also said to have occurred there, but, I'm not sure if there were any casualties.

During the cave's most colorful era, it was used during Prohibition and the Depression as a speak easy, dance and reception hall, and a church, of all things. It was never raided during these times, as the sheriff and his deputies were frequent attendees!

Concerts are now held periodically in this area.

Continuing on from this area, we passed Lumbago Alley, Sam Bass' Footprint (in the ceiling), the famous Watchdog formation, the dried up Wishing Well, the Halls of Wonder and of Diamonds, a reposing formation that looks eerily like Abraham Lincoln (Happy 200th birthday, Abe!) until we reached the end of the tourist trail.

Which brings us to Catfish Lake...

And now for something completely different!

To say that the water was invigorating would be an understatement!

Since I was towards the rear of our little parade, I was able to enjoy the piercing and shrill cries of surprise as my fellow compadres took the plunge into the chilly murk. The water was about two feet deep, yet the ceiling was barely a foot over your head, so one had to move on hands and knees through ~75 feet of this less than pleasurable experience.

Emerging from the waters a eunuch, I swear, we partook of crawling mud, duck walking mud, on-your-belly-salamandering mud, and boot-sucking, and sole stripping mud. I actually lost both soles of my boots on this trip, which only enhanced the experience!



The damn dam and the most dangerous feature of this trip!

This was interspersed with a couple of wide expanse of golf ball sized sharp rocks in an area fittingly called, Blood Alley!

Rinse and repeat twice more and you get the general idea! We would encounter areas like this through much of the trip.

I was really starting to think that I had gotten myself in over my head and thinking, "Mark, you're getting too damned old for this s***!". I believe part of the problem was not drinking enough fluids, read "Gatorade", before this adventure and my being one of the oldest members of this Donner party! Trying to keep pace with some 20 year old trip guides is not easy and the pace is probably what affected me the most.

That and losing both of the soles of my now disposed of hiking boots! Nothing like traversing mud, blood, and tears in the equivalent of flip flops!

We finally took a much longed for and well deserved break about 2/3 of the way into the cave, by mine and Edwin Lehr's estimation. Others that that we were only or less than half way and my spirit sank! I took several good swigs of my Gatorade and contemplated the adventure, thus far!

Fortunately, after we started moving again, we came up to the area known as the Wriggleys. Some of the braver souls wanted to venture down this route and I quickly put the kibosh to that idea!

Slip sliding along on our miserable way, we eventually came to the formation shown above and one of the most dangerous formations I have ever come across in my caving experiences.

This area was a large 80 degree mud covered, as were the cavers, stone slope with an ancient appearing rope, two extremely high foot/hand holds, and characterized with a large deep hole, just to the right, which yours truly almost fell into. If it hadn't been for one of the GHG cavers, I probably would have. Using his knee to raise myself, I managed to get my soleless foot into the lower hole and sling myself up onto the formation. Once attaining this precarious summit, one must lower themselves from this muddy perch onto yet another muddy bridge that straddles two other deep slippery holes! I managed to get across this most treacherous of areas without breaking my neck, but, this is one



area that most definitely needs to be improved upon before ICS or there will be trouble!

Once insuring everyone was across, we trudged on through more "normal" passageway, meaning, no more mud! Through a series of loops, crawls, and an area reminiscent of a twisted bowel, we came across The Rooms, or what is now referred to in this day and age as the Crownover area.

We took another break and caught our breathes, while we all one by one, travelled the length of the now widened Crownover Expressway towards the surface, gathering tools and whatnot along the way as we exited.

Graffiti , ahoy!

One interesting note is the hall of graffiti we came across. There was some recent signage in there, as in less than 50 years old, but also, quite a bit of very old graffiti from the 30's and CCC days. One could tell by their excellent workmanship, even that far into the cave, and the different style it all contained.

Another interesting note is some suspicious carbide produced graffiti we saw on the ceiling past the damned dam. It was from 1958 and contained the names of Alton Smith, a Holt, and someone with the initials of "CHK". Sound familiar?!

I'll try to get pictures next time.

Closing thoughts.

After waking up Sunday and feeling like I had been beaten with a bag of doorknobs, I swore that day and later in the week to George Veni and Travis Scott that there would be no way in hell that I would do that trip again. ICS or not!

After further consideration, I have reconsidered and, being a man of my word, I will help out the ICS on a couple of thru trips, once we go down there in March and April to improve the DD formation area. The three of us thought that it could be made safer and we will insure that happens before taking any visitors thru.

If you would like to help out with this undertaking or with Lyndon's explorations, give one of us a shout. We'd be glad to have you!

Much thanks needs to be given to the Aggie and Houston Grottos, and to all who have come out, whose energy and enthusiasm this last three project weekends has made a world of difference!

The Texas Parks and Wildlife and Longhorn Cavern appreciates you!

January Attendees:

Lyndon Tiu	Edwin Lehr	Natasha Lehr
George-Paul Richman	Caleb Mayeaux	Mallory Mayeaux
Chelsea Bergone	John Sloan	Steven Carrell
Joe Bartley	Will Jarvis	Bryce Lewis
Roy "Puppy" Lewis	Ian Lewis	Ryan McCormick
David Wendeborn	Amanda Bentley	Megan Files
Lynn Shaver	Sandra Truong	Casey Campbell
Robert Shipman	Stefan Cresar	Mark Alman



From the Chairman & Editor

Some of you may know me and some may not. John Brooks and I are the two completely bald cavers you may have seen running around. I'm Mark Alman, the new Chairman and, entering my third year, the Editor of the TC. I also have glasses and a goatee.

John is the outgoing chairperson and has no glasses or goatee and is much better looking! I am originally from Iowa and have been caving for around 15 years. John has been caving for much longer than that. I just wanted to give you a short bio and give my thoughts and goals for the TSA for 2009 and beyond, if you continue to have me as your chair and don't run me out of town.

Some of the goals I envision are:

- **Increasing membership—**We have 195 paid members and even more, if you include kids and spouses. This has grown the last three years, but, we need YOU to encourage your fellow cavers, ex-members, and Grotto members to join up!
- **Attract youth and new cavers—**Some Grottos are doing an excellent job at this. Bill Steele and the DFW Grotto, Julie Jenkins and Matt Turner of the UTG, Travis Scott and A.S.S., Geary Schindel and Linda Palit of the Bexar Grotto, and Lyndon Tiu, "Puppy" Lewis, and George-Paul of the GHG are attracting a lot of youth and new blood. See the trip reports here as proof. We just need to get them signed up as members and NEVER turn them or any Scout or other interested youth groups away. Get the word out at places like REI, Whole Earth Provisions and, to be sure, your local college campus!

  These groups aren't a hassle, they're FUTURE cavers!
- **Initiate new projects! -** A lot of projects have wound down and have yet to be replaced, i.e., Kickapoo Caverns, Robber Baron, and Lake Amistad. Government Canyon and Bustamante are on hiatus. CBSP, like the Energizer Bunny keeps going and going. We have some promising projects developing, like the Honey Creek tank hauls and the Longhorn Cavern project. But, more are needed to generate interest, participation, and publicity. Don't wait for someone else to do it!
- **A new spirit of volunteerism—** We have a lot of great cavers who willingly donate their time. Unfortunately, it's usually the same folks I see. George Veni and Travis Scott and the ICS are in desperate need of volunteers! This is a once in a lifetime event for Texas caving and we need all involved, as little or as much as you can spare. Active cavers or the arm-chair variety! This will carry onto other activities.

  And, finally,
- **Go Electronic, my son (and daughter) -** The bulk of YOUR dues goes to put out the TC. It was decided at the Winter Meeting that we would be adding the *TEXAS CAVER* and a Members Area to the website. By doing so, we would strongly encourage, but not require, members to receive the newsletter electronically, thus freeing up the bulk of your annual dues for CAVING activities, while avoiding a dues increase. We've had a good response. 10% of membership has opted for electronic only and over 20% of membership has joined the Members Area. Register as a Member and you can view back issues and still get your mailed version of the newsletter, although, we hope you'll eventually opt to receive it electronically.

  Go ahead! It's very painless! Go to **www.cavetexas,org** and thanks to Butch Fralia for maintaining this site!

Thanks! Mark

The 3rd TCC Winter Conference, Saturday, February 28th.

The Texas Cave Conservancy would like to invite you out to the third TCC Winter Conference, February 27 - March 1,2009.

This Cedar Park, Texas conference is an opportunity for you to get out that winter coat, tent, sleeping- bag and do some camping, caving, learning and even some partying. The cave CO2 levels should be at their lowest this time of the year. It is a time for caving. This annual event is directed toward new cavers. Even the old folks are welcome.

Camping (with a campfire) is available at the TCC Headquarters. We have 25 tent pads with additional space for larger groups. Check out our new Hot Shower in the TCC Campground. In the event of a real winter, we can make space for cavers inside the TCC Headquarters. Breakfast will be available on Saturday and Sunday. We will have an evening meal Saturday night followed by a special presentation and a party. Some of the TCR cooks will be making Mexican food. Caving is available all weekend.

With a donation for the old- time cavers and free for cavers that have been caving for less than five years, how can you go wrong? This event will be what we make of it. If you want to hold a workshop, cave ballads, slides, or what –ever, contact us.

The events will start Saturday morning at 10:00 at the TCC Headquarters. Information on tours, workshops and caving will be available at the TCC Headquarters all day Saturday.

Don't miss visiting the Twin Creek Historical area with a 100 year old log cabin, springs, year round water, tall trees and a great shelter cave.

The following are just some of the activities planed for the conference. Most of these activities will take place on Saturday. Caving-Friday-Saturday-Sunday.

All activities start at the TCC Headquarters

To reach the TCC Headquarters from Austin, Drive north on HWY 183, exit on Lakeline Boulevard (last free exit), follow the access road, turn left under HWY 183 on Lakeline Boulevard, drive 3.8 miles to Park Street. Turn left into TCC property located at 1800 West Park, Cedar Park, Texas.

TCC Winter Conference Activities

Friday—Camping and caving

Saturday—Breakfast

Tours& Workshops – 10:00 AM

- Geology-Caving Tour
- Twin Creeks Tour
- Basic Caving Workshop (Includes)
  Introduction-Land Owner Relations, Cave Biology, Survey, & Photography.

- Urban caving information (Visits several caves).
  . Avery Ranch Cave- All Day
  . Avery Ranch Cave Special Event- 4:00 PM
  (Good music & beer)
  . Dies Ranch Treasure Cave-All Day
  . Dies Ranch Shelter Cave-All Day
  . Cedar Park area Caving-All Day

- Bob Finger Napping (making arrowheads)
  TCC Headquarters, 5:00 PM

- Urban Cave Monitoring & Management
  Workshop- At the TCC Headquarters -5:00 PM

- Dinner - Mexican Food 6:30 PM

- Special After Dinner guest presentation by Ron Kerbo
  "Wooden Lettuce, Chili Peppers and the Speleo-education of an Oil Field Roust-a-Bout"

- Hall of Texas Cavers slides & Party

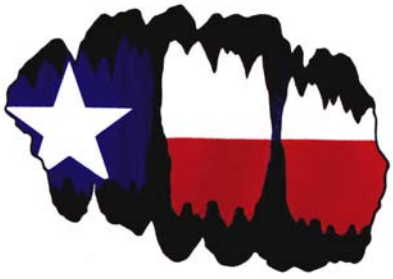
- Dave Cave's Salon (Strawberry Margaritas & more)

Sunday—Breakfast and Caving

For additional information:
TCC-caves@austin.rr.com or call 512-249-2283

We will send you the latest TCC-News with a map and additional information on the event. and other TCC activities.

Last year we had 75-90 cavers, this year we want to have a hundred or more. Help us continue a new Texas tradition, the TCC Winter Conference!



Mark Your Calendars!



2009 TSA Spring Convention is coming!

Date: Friday, April 24th, thru Sunday, April 26th, 2009.

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 Meeting Saturday evening, immediately following the caving presentations, and the TCMA meeting 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 5)

needed someone with big chainsaws and a bobcat with claws on the front of it. Anyways, I am thankful for him paying me, as it was a big help at this time.

My daughter met Harry a few times. She temporarily had a pet turtle. We named it Harry.

Harry always wanted to go to Houston Grotto meetings but it was a very difficult drive for him from Dickinson. For a while, another caver, Ray Hertel, was kind enough to bring him to the meetings. I guess it has been 5 years since he was able to attend one, so none of the new cavers know him.

From the *Galveston County Daily News:*

Dr. Harry M. Walker, 87, resident of Dickinson, Texas, passed away December 8, 2008. He was born April 22,

1921 in Los Angeles, California, to parents, Charles and Nina Walker. He retired from Monsanto after 35 years of service. He received a Bachelor of Science and a Master degree in chemistry from University of Arizona and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, and a PHD degree in chemistry from University of Minnesota.

Harry served in the United States Air force from 1943-1945. He married Dorothy Wikre February 5, 1945, in Langley Field, Virginia. He loved mountain climbing, spelunking, and canoeing.

He is survived by his loving wife Dorothy Walker; daughters Sharon Ann Walker and Joel Catalano, Linda Jean White and husband Charles, Barbara Jo Farnham and husband Peter; son Harry Brian Walker and wife Barbara; sister Carol Tufts; niece Judy Rodin; grandchildren Harry Gabriel Walker, Sean Travis Walker, Michael White, Jason White, Garrett White, Kenneth Walker Farnham, and Julia Farnham; and 6 great-grandchildren.

A memorial service was held at 2 p.m. Saturday, December 13, 2008, at Crowder Funeral Home in Dickinson, Texas with Pastor Lawrence Juull officiating.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America at www.myasthenia.org

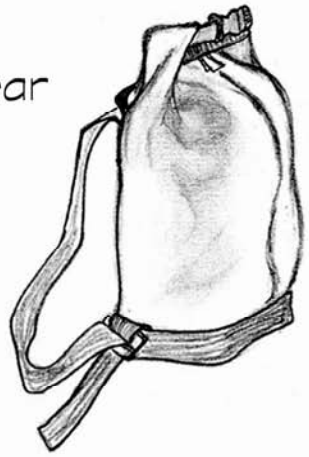


Gonzo Guano Gear

Serious caving requires serious gear...we supply that gear

Products include:

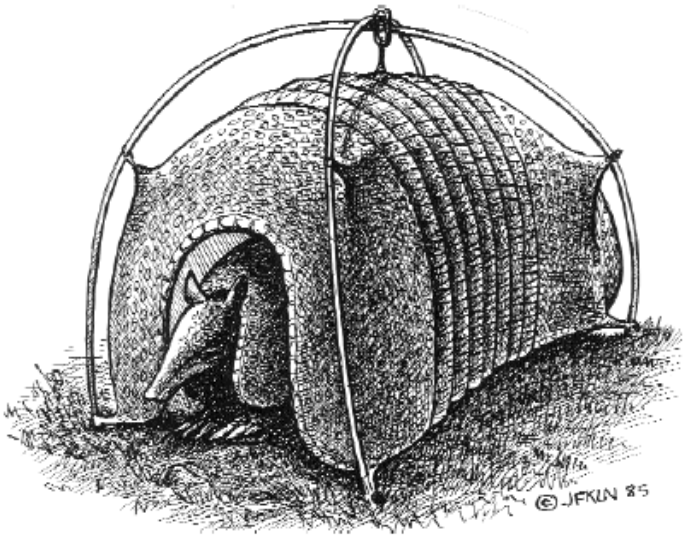
- Ascending and Descending Gear
- Knee and Elbow Armor
- Caving Packs
- Rope
- Lights and Helmets



263 CR 117
Llano, TX 78643
Phone: 325-247-5165
www.gonzoguanogear.com
sales@gonzoguanogear.com

Mention this ad from the Texas Caver and take 15% off any GGG pack!

Valid until March 31, 2009



Travel and Outdoor Outfitters
since 1970

- Climbing, Camping and Expedition Gear.
- Remarkable Clothing and Footwear.
- Luggage and Packs.
- Travel and Nature Guides.
- Beautiful and Unusual Gifts and Toys.

Whole Earth Provision Company

2410 San Antonio Street	AUSTIN	512-478-1577
1014 North Lamar	AUSTIN	512-476-1414
South Lamar at Westgate	AUSTIN	512-899-0992
Quarry Market, 255 East Basse	SAN ANTONIO	210-829-8888
2934 South Shepherd Drive,	HOUSTON	713-526-5226
5400 East Mockingbird Lane,	DALLAS	214-824-7444



Gonzo Guano Gear

Serious caving requires serious gear...
we supply that gear

Bring this Coupon to the TSA Spring Convention and get a Free Galvanized Maillon Rapide Half Moon when you purchase a GGG Seat Harness

Support Caving in these United States!
Join the NSS at: www.caves.org

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY











