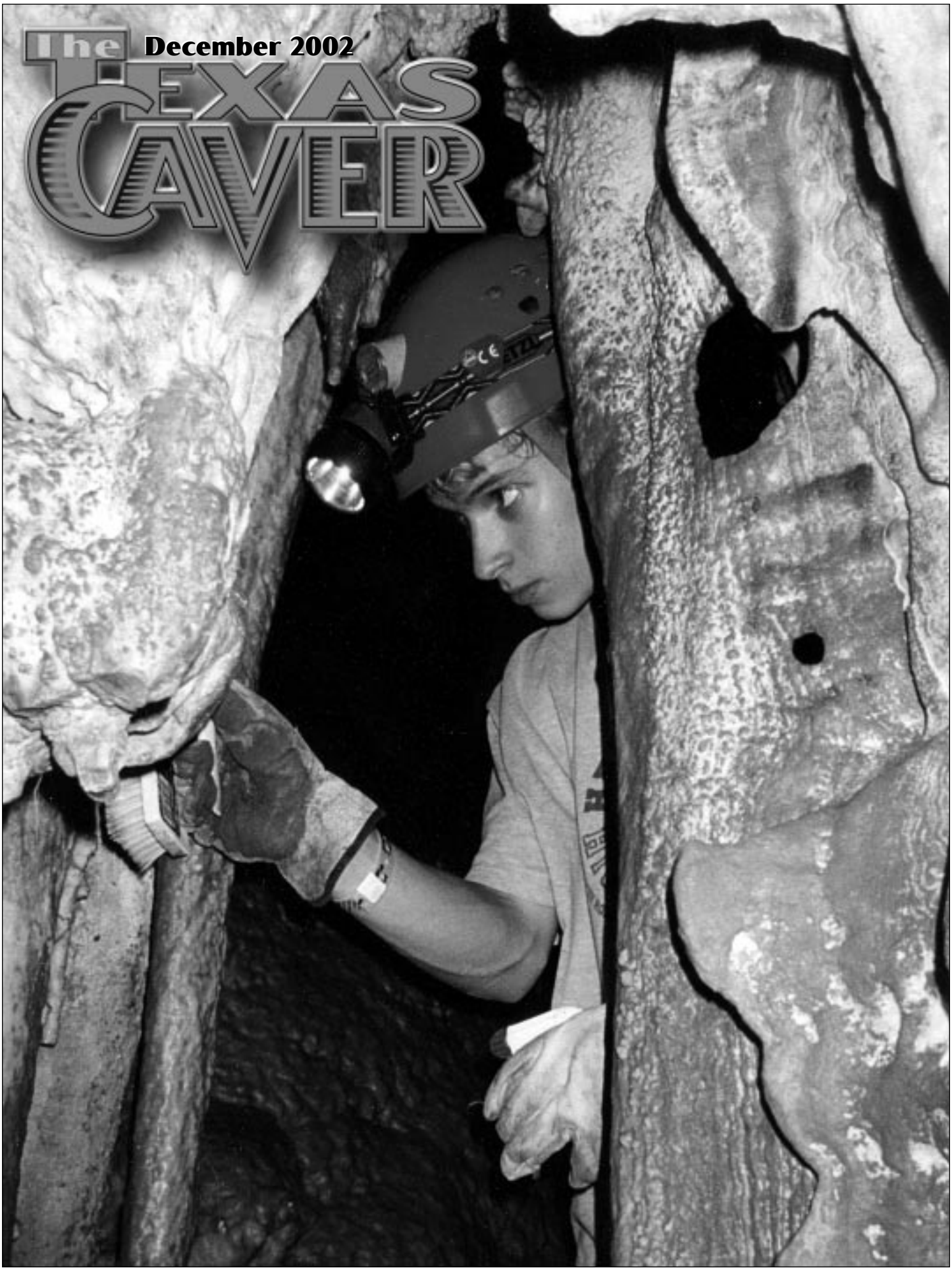
The
December 2002
TEXAS
CAVER

The Texas Caver

December 2002
Volume 48 Number 7

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

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Opinions expressed in **The Texas Caver** are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, The TSA or the NSS.

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THE COVERS:

FRONT COVER: Photo of Wes Schumacher cleaning graffitti in Grutas del Palmitas, Bustamante, Nuevo Leon, Mexico

BACK COVER: BOB (the Big Orange Bus) owned and driven by Charlie Savvas, powering it's way to Minas Viejas, with a spotter riding shotgun.

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CAVE GIRLS!

Grace your wall with caves all next year with the "Texas Women, Texas Caves" calendar. Available in for $15. Proceeds will benefit the Cave Acquisition Fund of the TCMA. Contact Kate Walker (512) 695-1758 or yovimpa@hotmail.com

TSA Elections

The ballots for the Executive Council election are counted and the results are included in this message. The council-elect will take office in January 2003. Many thanks to those serving on the council this year.

174 ballots mailed, 87 ballots returned. (50%)

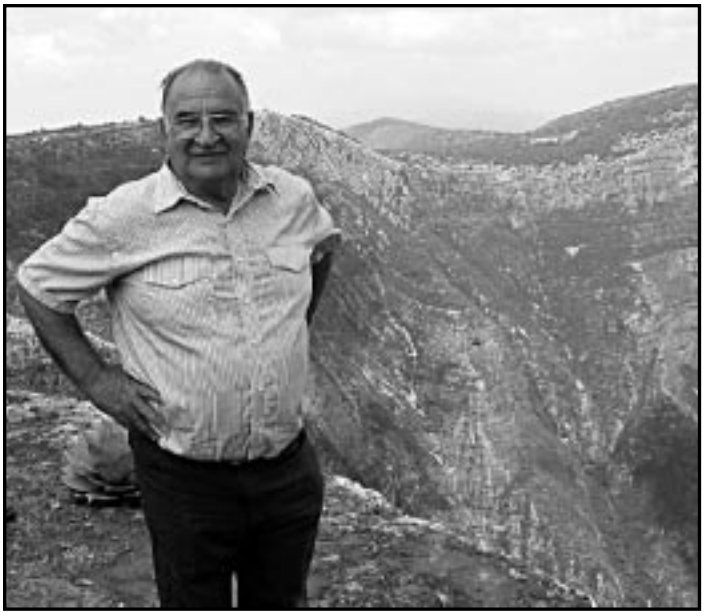
Chair:
Terry Holsinger 51
Jim Kennedy . . .35
Ann Martin 1

Vice-Chair:
Christi Bennett 80
Aimee Beveridge 2

Secretary:
Jerry Atkinson 78
Joe Mitchell 1
Bill Mixon 1
Sue Schindel . . .1

Treasurer:
Joe Ranzau 78
Oztotl 1

These results were verified by Election Committee Chair Sean Vincent.



Minas Viejas owner Don Pedro. Photo by Maryanne Moore/Jackson Harper

Terry Plemons, by popular demand, led the tour of the mescal factory on Monday morning, a fitting farewell to Bustamante.

Following are those who coordinate the many aspects of the project:

Project Coordinators - Orion Knox and Bob 'Rune' Burnett
Project Treasurer - Ron Ralph
Registration - Ron Ralph, Walter and Rae Olenick
Project Publicity - Aimee Beveridge (US) and Peter Sprouse (Mexico)
Banquet Coordination - Terry Plemons
Door Prize Coordination - Susan Souby
Transportation - Terry Plemons
Graffiti Removal - Aimee Beveridge
Lighting Improvement - Orion Knox
Sign Placement - Pete Strickland
Cabeza de Leon Trail Improvement - Philip Russell
Tools Coordination - Rune Burnett
First Aid - Tom Brown
Communications/Radios - Elaine & Larry Reagan, provided by James Strickland of Child, Inc.
Side Trip Coordination - Ron Ralph - Archeology
Shannon Breslin - Birding
Felipe Hernandez - Historic
Terry Plemons - Mescal Factory
Rune Burnett & Orion Knox - Rancho Minas Viejas
Design - Vreeland Graphics (T-shirts, stickers)
Janet Learmonth (stickers, conservation signs, T-shirts)
Charlie Loving (T-shirts)
Printing - Vreeland Graphics

The Bustamante project inspires a phenomenal number of cavers and friends of caving to work hard to restore the natural beauty of a very beautiful place. This is truly an egalitarian project, inviting anyone so inclined to participate in whatever way their talents, skills, and interests lead them. There are many faces in the Amigos de la Gruta: veteran cavers, super cavers, old timers, newbies, arm chair cavers, party cavers, non-caving friends and family, children cavers, those who venture only to the

Project Coordinator, Orion Knox (foreground) at Sunday night banquet. Photo by Bob 'Rune' Burnett.

entrance room, those who never enter the cave, and even those who work diligently on some aspect of the project and have never been to Bustamante.

Alcaldesa Norma Robles (rt) speaking at the banquet with interpretation by Philip Russell (center), accompanied by her husband and former mayor Jorge Santos (left). Photo by Maryanne Moore

"Conservation Activities at Palmito Cave- "Graffiti- A Disappearing Act"

by Aimee Beveridge

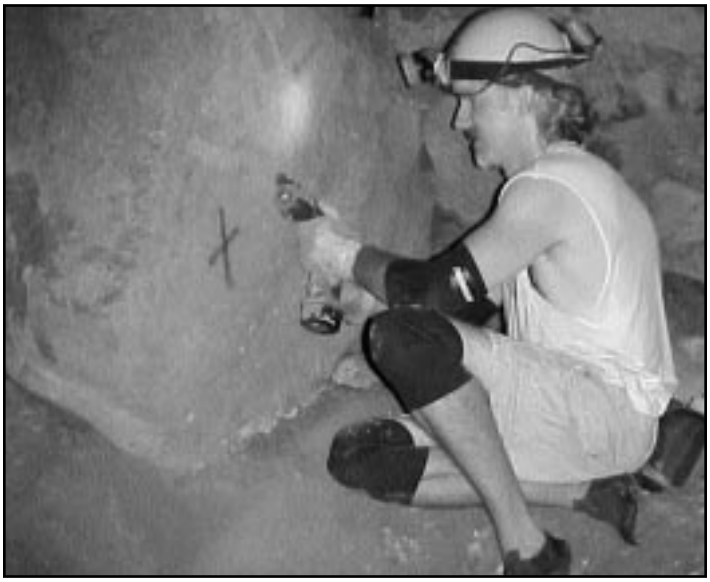
This past labor day weekend over 100 cavers from Denver, Colorado to Monterrey, Mexico participated in the annual cave conservation activities at beautiful Palmito Cave, representing a 36 percent jump in the number of cleanup crew members compared to last year! In addition to more people, the tremendous rain fall this summer gave rise to a noticeable increase in humidity and water-filled pools inside the cave. Though the moisture made for more difficult footing in the lower sections of the cave, it also allowed for easier access to water for filling spray bottles.

As in past years, most of the group used nylon brushes and spray bottles on soot graffiti and muddy flowstone formations. This year, however, we employed more methods to remove painted graffiti. We had several teams using cordless drills with stainless steel brushes removing painted graffiti on both breakdown blocks and flowstone. Thanks to Pete Strickland and Fran Hutchins, we had several industrial cordless drills and multiple charged battery packs. Pete insisted on working to remove painted graffiti until his largest industrial battery pack gave out. The battery pack finally won by around 6:30 PM, when Pete decided to lead a trip the Red Room instead, getting out of the cave by 9:30 PM. Go Pete! Other more traditional methods of paint removal were not as successful. Susan Hanna and Sammy Pizzo worked for four hours using nylon and stainless steel brushes as well as a drill with stainless well brush on a particularly stubborn red paint spot, Susan said "I was so depressed, we worked so hard and it was still mostly there". Susan, who is undaunted by her disappointing first effort is excited to return to lead smaller graffiti removal trips to the cave in the future.

On the breakdown mountain, the "Beatle Team Strike Force" consisting of Fran Hutchins and Simon Knaus effectively worked on removing all the visible non-historic painted graffiti along two-thirds of the main trail. Nylon brushes were used to lift paint flecks after drilling ceased. The paint flecks were taken out of the cave in locking quart-sized bags. Once removed, the areas where graffiti were located were smoothed over with available dirt to restore the surface to a more natural look.

An extension ladder was brought into the Cathedral Room to work on hard-to-reach impacted areas. Angel Steuwe and Wes Shoemaker nimbly climbed the ladder to complete work on an area of very visible soot graffiti on several high walls within the Cathedral Room. As more of the eye-level graffiti is removed, we will likely need to rely more heavily on ladders and rope in future years.

Another change resulted from an overwhelming request from last year to add more stainless steel hand brushes to work on the painted graffiti. Initially, we had concerns with wide-scale use of steel brushes resulting in more scratches being left in the place of the paint. Those assigned to steel brushes were advised against



Simon Knaus using power tools undergound. photo by Don Arburn

Taking Your Vehicle to Mexico

Kathy Scanlon

There have been numerous posts to CaveTex about what one does or does not need to take one's vehicle to Mexico. I cannot guarantee that things won't change, but what follows is a description of my recent experience. Although the information here is based on Austin locations and offices, with a little looking you can find the nearest equivalent agency for your locale.

The Background

Mexico imposes very large import duties on cars. Therefore, to keep people from circumventing these duties by driving cars into, and then selling them in Mexico, you must leave a temporary import deposit. When you get your car papers you pay a fee for the temporary import permit which is good for 6 months. You also authorize them to charge your credit card for a fee of several hundred dollars if you do not turn in your permit within that 6-month period.

In addition, they are trying to keep you from transporting stolen cars across the border. Therefore you must prove that you are the owner of the car for which you are getting a permit. All of this requires that you bring documentation with you when you cross the border.

Exceptions

If you are not going to go further into Mexico than roughly 20 miles, you do not need car papers (nor do you need a tourist visa). The exact limit depends on where the frontera is on the road. At the frontera they will ask you for your car papers and your tourist visa. If you don't have them, you cannot continue. Don't try to circumvent this because there are checkpoints on the roads after the frontera. You might get waved through, you might get stopped and then you're toast.

The Steps in Brief (and in this order):

1) Get Mexico Insurance Coverage
2) Gather Proof of Ownership (title, registration, letter from lender)
3) Prepare your Financial Guarantee (either credit card or cash)
4) Go to Banjercito.com and pre-register at least 24 hours, but no more than 15 days before crossing the border
5) Get your tourist visa
6) Get copies of everything gathered above
7) Get your IITV permit (car papers)
8) Drive Safely

Proof of Mexico Insurance Coverage

This is especially important if you have a loan on your vehicle (More under proof of ownership/permission). You can go to a variety of places, both in person and on the Internet, to get Mexico Insurance. A few places include:

Local:
Sanborn's 1400 S. Congress - 440-1100 (Austin, TX)

Internet:
http://www.mexpro.com/mexproauto1.htm
http://www.mexicaninsurance.com/
http://www.mexonline.com/mexpro.htm
http://www.mexicaninsurance.net/

Policy Duration

Each of these agencies sell Mexico Insurance both by the day (more expensive) and in 6-month or one year policies. For the price of about 20 days of Mexico insurance, you can get a 6-month policy.

Proof of Ownership/ Permission

If there is no lien on your vehicle, you can bring your title. If you have a lien, gather as much documentation as you can. It is impossible to bring too much documentation. You should be able to get through with your registration receipt and a lienholder's letter, but it would be even better to get a letter from the titles office too (see below).

Getting a Copy of Your Title

If you have clear title to your car, but cannot find the paper, you can get a copy of your title. Or if you have paid off your loan, you can give them the lien release (original only) and get the revised title.

You can get a new title or certified copy the same day in Austin for about 5 bucks. If you do it by mail, it takes about 10 business days and about 3 bucks.

The Myth of the Non-Negotiable Title

There is no longer any such thing as a non-negotiable title. Straight from the mouth of Jeff at the titles help desk, they stopped giving them out about a year ago because despite the fact they said "non-negotiable" all over them, people still used them to sell cars even though they couldn't legally do so.

They do, however, offer letters certifying that the car is titled in your name with a lienholder on record. He seemed to think this was sufficient but thought that if you could also get a letter from your lender it would be a really good idea.

At the border, you MUST have originals of all the letters you collect.

Title Forms

The title forms you will need are all on the web in pdf (acrobat) format at:
http://www.dot.state.tx.us/insdtdot/orgchart/vtr/reginfo/forms/vtrform1.htm

Or you can get them faxed to you by calling 1-888-232-7033 and entering the appropriate fax form number.

You cannot fax them back. Must be mail or in person.

Fax form numbers:
Application for Title — 0130
Application for Certified Copy of Title - 0034

There is a regional title office in Austin at:
1001 E. Parmer Lane
837-4416

For more information, call the Vehicle Titles help desk at (512) 465-7611.

Getting a Lien Holder's Letter

If you have a lien on your vehicle, get a letter from the lender that specifies:

* VIN
* make, model, year
* other identifying information (the more the better)
* YOUR name
* dates you are authorized to have the vehicle in Mexico (begin and end).

This letter must be notarized and you MUST present the original at the border. The lien holder will require you to show your proof of Mexico Insurance before they give you the letter.

Vehicle Registration Receipt

When you renew your vehicle registration, the tax office gives you a receipt. Bring this receipt. If you need a new copy, go to the the County Tax Office. You will need your license plate number to get the receipt. For more information call the County Tax Assessor's Office.

Financial Guarantee (Hostage)

Finally, you will have to provide both a fee and a guarantee that you will turn in your permit. The newer your car, the higher the guarantee. If you use a credit card they won't charge you unless you don't turn in the permit. If you use cash - you have to hand it over, and may or may not see it back.

"Payment of guarantee for the return of the vehicle by international credit or debit card forwarded abroad under the importer's name, or by making a guarantee deposit. The amount for this will be determined by the vehicle's model and will be refunded upon re-entry to the USA. (1999-2002 models, USD $400.00; 1994-1998 models, USD $300.00; models previous to 1994, USD $200.00). " - banjercito.com

Credit/Debit Cards

!Recommended!

If you use a credit card (and possibly a debit card) the fee will be charged to your account only if you do not return the permit. This is what my credit card statement shows:

8/10/02
8/10/02
MOD ITV PTE INT 1 Y 2 NUEVO LAREDO MX
$24.82

8/10/02
8/10/02
2224 239.58 484 0.103597963
$0.00

So basically, they run your card through twice - once to pay the fee, and once for some unknown reason - sample authorization or something I guess.

Cash

Use cash at your own risk. Purely anecdotal evidence suggests that you will see little or none of it back. Try if you like; let me know how it turns out.

Go to Banjercito.com and Pre-register

OK, so I'm standing in line with someone else. I've been there for over an hour and a half by this time. I don't speak a word of Spanish, mind you....SO anyway, I see the supervisor walking a woman up to the front of the line and sending her to the next available teller. She has the printout that you can get when you go to banjercito.com. The banner at the end of the hall says you get expedited service. I'm not guaranteeing it, because I chose to wait anyway, but it certainly didn't hold me up. It might save you a couple of hours of waiting in line. Try it and then tell me.

For banjercito.com you need all of the information you would normally need (make, model, VIN, insurance info, registration info, your ID you will use for your visa at the border - passport, birth cert, etc.). Fill out the form then print a copy of the page that has your "Leaf Number"

You still have to bring original documents to the border, you still have to see a clerk and get stamped and stuff, BUT you might get to jump ahead in line.

Again, from banjercito.com
Do not forget:

1. Presenting your credit or debit card will make transactions faster since you just need to pay USD $22.00 plus tax.

2. Presentation of the original form plus a copy of all documentation at the border office is mandatory.

3. Your Temporary Vehicle Import Permit will be available 24 hours after your information has been submitted through this page and for a period of up to 15 days. "

Get Your Tourist Visa

Last step, you get your tourist visa. You can do this at the border. Or, you can go to the consulate in Austin (located at 200 E. 67th Street (512) 478-2866). You will need your tourist visa when you go to the Banjercito window to get your car papers. To get the tourist visa you need proof of citizenship. Acceptable proof is a passport, voter registration card, or original (or very official looking) birth certificate.

NOTE: You will need a copy of your tourist visa - there are copiers there at the border. You will pay a few pesos for each copy.

The plan was basically the same as in previous years. Cavers in the pit would dig and fill 5-gallon buckets with rocks and dirt. A couple of "mules" would haul them up via a pulley system to the trail at the top of the pit where they were then stacked on a dolly and wheeled to the first set of stairs. About 17 cavers passed the buckets up the stairs and along the passage to where it was wide enough for two dollies, which wheeled the buckets to the next series of stairs. About 30 cavers then passed the buckets up three staircases and two short sections of horizontal passage out of the cave and into a dump truck.

The cavers in the pit stayed there until lunch, and a different crew replaced them for the afternoon. Everyone else slowly rotated through the cave, completing one full cycle by the end of the day. The rotation was determined by those emptying the buckets. Once they dumped their 20th bucket, they would abandon their position, move to the top of the pit, replace one of the mules, who would replace the next person in line, and so on through the cave back up to the entrance.

My job was to make sure everyone rotated and everything ran smoothly. I began making plans to install cameras and loudspeakers in the cave for next year. The team worked so well, I felt that next year I could stay home and do virtual coordination by just occasionally barking "Rotate!" commands through the loudspeakers while monitoring the project over my computer screen. It felt good when a couple of times I really was needed to make adjustments in the system.

There was one change in our approach from previous years. We used to have two haul systems raising buckets at the north end of the pit. This year, we needed to dig below where one of the systems would have hung, and there was no place else to set up another haul line. Bill Sawyer, a caver who works at Sonora, built a fine system and a platform at the bottom of the pit to use as a staging area for hauling. The problem was that with only one haul system, we could only remove half the material as before.

After thinking about it, the only solution was to assign some of the dig crew to shuttle buckets to the shallow south end of the pit, where they could easily pass them up a short ladder to the trail for dolly retrieval. We knew this would be less efficient, but it was our only option. As it turned out, this plan worked great! About as many buckets came out of the south end of the pit as by the pulley at the north end.

At noon, we took a break for lunch, which the owners provided with build-your-own options in the Visitor Center. An hour later, we were headed back inside for the afternoon shift. The hours went by smoothly. We stopped digging around 4:30 p.m., but clearing the filled buckets and supplies out of the cave took longer than expected. The plan was for everyone to be out of the cave by 5 p.m., a goal we've met on all other projects, but this time we were about 20 minutes late.

Dinner was ready soon after we exited and was kept warm for those at the end of the long shower lines. The fine feast was provided by the Ed and Laurie Hale family who run Bitterweed Catering in Ozona. After dining, the owners thanked everyone for coming out once again to help. Guides from the cave led several cavers back into the cave for a photo tour. Other cavers stayed in the Visitor Center to watch slides and then visit with friends. Most crawled into their sleeping bags earlier than usual to rest their weary bones. In the morning, most cavers headed home, but 24 first followed me for a relaxed caver-tour of Sonora. It was a good weekend.

So where are we now?

During the 2002 project, we removed 1,007 buckets of rubble from the cave with an estimated weight of 14 tons (at the cave I made a math error and announced 9-10 tons). This brings the total removed from the Devil's Pit to 118 tons and the total removed from the cave to 173 tons. Since 1998, I've been estimating that "two more years" should wrap up the pit. Why should I break tradition now?! I'll stick with that estimate. Seriously, the problem is that we don't know what the floor looks like and are only guessing how far we have to dig. And the digging is going more slowly. The deeper levels of fill are more compact and located in crevices, between breakdown, and near speleothems - all factors that slow the digging speed.

While I may not be good at estimating how much more digging remains, I'm getting better at understanding how much work can be done with a fine group of cavers. Each year I'm amazed and humbled at what the Sonora restoration team accomplishes. On behalf of the cave's owners and staff, thanks to all of you for the great work, and we hope you'll join us again next year.

Caver Restoration Team: Tina Arriens, Robin Barber, Barbe Barker, Gary Barnes, Christi Bennett, Sue Bennett, Bill Bentley, Jacqui Bills, John Brooks, Don Broussard, Tom Brown, Vickie Brown, Rune Burnett, Cece Carlisle, David Caudle, Cindy Chamberlain, Melissa Cicherski, Michael Cicherski, Gralin Coffin, Patrick Connelly, Bob Cowell, David Deluna, Joann Deluna, Frank Everitt, Walter Feaster, Chinatsu Fukuda, Mark Gee, Julia Germany, Chris Hall, Tonia Harper, Elizabeth Hernandez, Jay Hodge, Kelly Holladay, Jenni Hrobar, Jack Johnson, Jim Kennedy, Christine Krejca, Jere Lee, Ted Lee, James Lopez, Milo Marks, Michael McEachern, Donna Mosesmann, Gary Olsaver, Linda Palit, Cindy Perez, Alicia Post, Ron Ralph, Joe Ranzau, Eric Shirey, Susan Souby, Angel Stuewe, Shannon Summers, Chris Thornley, Diana Tomchick, Meredith Turnbough, Chris Tydlacka, George Veni, Faith Watkins, Kevin Welton, Bob West, Trish Wilson, Phillip Woods, Jimmie Worrell, and Jan Zelinka.

Caverns of Sonora Staff: Mandy Brister, Mike Burrell, Mike Cunningham, Filemon Garza, Greg Hanson, Ben Ingham, Gerry Ingham, Sherry Ingham, Louise Ingham-Moore, Bucky Jackson, Mickey Jackson, Michael Lozano, Danielle Matthews, Seco Mayfield, Colton Moore, Valerie Rennele, Bill Sawyer, and Jody Trainer.

The date for each year's Caverns of Sonora Restoration Project is announced via CaveTex in mid-September and then further distributed by e-mail, web sites, newsletters, and word-of-mouth. Sign-up is on a first-come, first-served basis. No one will be signed up until after the project is announced. The project is held during the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd weekend in November, depending on other commitments for the cave's owners and staff.

Government Canyon Karst Survey
14th & 15th September, 2002
by Marvin Miller

Trip participants: Erik Holmback, Kyle McDaniel, Kurt Menking, Marvin Miller, Rebecca O'Daniel, Derek Smith, Martin Smith

Saturday Activities

On Saturday Martin, Derek, Rebecca, Kyle, and I followed Erik up the Johnston Road to the Little Windmill Trail. We were looking for some sinks that had been discovered right beside the trail. After much walking back and forth over the wrong section of trial, the very obvious sinks were found along the section of the Comanche Cut Trail that heads north of Little Windmill Trail. I noticed some old pink flagging at one of the sinks and later found that the features corresponded to features 19-10, -11, & -12, found back in 1994. We knocked some rocks out of one of the sinks and confirmed that it will take a lot more rock busting to even get to where the dirt floor of the sink can be dug. There is one other larger solution sink and two small drains in the area that can be dug more easily. We didn't do any further digging because George Kegley, the park resource specialist, was not along. Because of the large quantity of archeological sites in the area, all digs must be approved by the resource specialist or other qualified person.

Our plan had been to go on to Goat Cave and find and survey the upper level lead that I had been told about by Donny Roland. We continued north on Comanche Cut and intersected the Johnston Road north of Goat Cave. Kyle then led us directly to the cave. Everyone checked out the entrance room and the lower room to the south. Rebecca and I climbed up into the tight passage heading east and soon found that it opened into about 30 meters of multi-level crevice passage. We explored but didn't have time to survey. There is one more narrow lead to push.

Sunday Activities

On Sunday I was joined by Kurt, as well as by Martin and Derek, who had camped at the park. We hiked up to Hackberry Sink and finished the survey of that cave - at least the currently enterable part. Martin set stations, Kurt read the instruments, and I sketched. We set 14 stations and tallied up 61.5 meters of survey. The cave is approximately 57 meters in length so far. The extra meters of survey are due to surveying around the perimeter of the entrance room. At station C2 there is a window into at least 7 meters of more passage heading directly toward passage in Dancing Fern about 27 meters to the south. As I remember, the passage in Dancing Fern pinches down to about 20 cm with solid rock above and below, but it might be worth another look. A really skinny person might be able to push it. On subsequent trips we will work on enlarging the hole in Hackberry Sink.

Interestingly, George Veni reports that the Dancing area caves along with Blacktail Cave just over 100 meters to the east are the first caves found in Bexar County to occur in the Grainstone Member of the Kainer Formation.

5th & 6th October, 2002
by Marvin Miller

Trip participants: Duke Bannister, Cindy Lee, James Loftin, Elizabeth Loftin, Justin Menking, Kurt Menking, Marvin Miller, Rebecca O'Daniel, Denise Prendergast, Chris Spaua, Dave Smith, Richard Wark

Saturday Activities

We had 2 teams, James led Elizabeth, Richard, and Chris to ridgewalk in Area 6. Areas 6 and 7 border the Johnston Road directly north of where the Visitor's Center will be so a goal is to get the ridgewalking of those areas done before the park opens. That area, especially, sees lots of visitors. James & team put in a good effort, covering approximately 80 acres. They found only one promising feature, they flagged and got a GPS location for.

I led team #2. Cindy, Denise, Rebecca, Dave, and I hiked up to the Dancing area caves for another day of work there. Dave and I got started on the third, and hopefully final, surface survey to tie all the cave entrances together. We left the heavy work for the ladies. They threw rocks and boulders back into the sink 30 meters to the north of Dancing Rattler Cave. The sink connects to the cave but the hole is barely fist sized and would take a lot of work to make any bigger. Since we were able to get to this area inside the cave from the original entrance, we didn't see any point tearing up the surface to make a second entrance to the cave. This is especially true since Rhadine infernalis infernalis, one of the endangered Bexar County invertebrates, has been confirmed in the cave, and a second entrance would change the air flow patterns, and thus the environment, in the cave.

While Dave and I were still working on the surface survey, the girls finished up at the sink and then entered Dancing Fern and got to work on the dig at the south end of the cave. It wasn't really a dig, just using a hammer on a few rocks sticking up and impeding progress. They gained a small .5 meter high room and about 10 meters of passage, which we surveyed. A dig lead leaves the room heading south but it would take a lot of effort and we felt no airflow. I'm certain most of the air coming out Dancing Fern is coming from Hackberry Sink. To end the day, some of us took a short tour of Hackberry Sink, and installed a benchmark there.

Sunday Activities

On Sunday, Kurt, Justin, Duke, and I finished the exploration and survey of Hackberry Sink. While I was taking care of some sketching in the entrance room, Kurt and the others worked on enlarging the window at station C2 that looked into more passage heading toward Dancing Fern. In about 20 minutes Justin and Duke were able to squeeze through. I followed soon after and then, after a bit more enlarging, Kurt was able to make it through. Justin and Duke had already scouted ahead and reported lots of formations and even standing room. We surveyed 21.1 meters in 5 stations. The passage headed almost directly south towards Dancing Fern but squeezed down too small about 7 meters shy. The passage was prolifically decorated and there were areas where highest point on the ceiling and the lowest point on the floor were about 2 meters apart, vertically. The passage was divided into four sections by breakdown and formation growth. At the window and at several other points in the passage airflow could be felt going into the cave (towards Dancing Fern). There were several small holes in the west wall of the passage that looked like they might be opening into passable cave in that direction but nothing that looked like it was a sure thing or that it would be easy to get into.

After exiting Hackberry Sink, Kurt led us to a sink to the west of Dancing Rattler Cave that he had found on a previous trip to the region. We flagged it and filled out a feature report form. We then walked a large circle to the north and east, hitting the Far Reaches Trail just north of Hackberry Sink. Not far from there we came across another solution sink, which we flagged. It looks like we'll be making a few more trips to this area.

Underground Personal Hygiene

The straight poop on pooping in caves

Jonathan Wilson and Kathy Scanlon

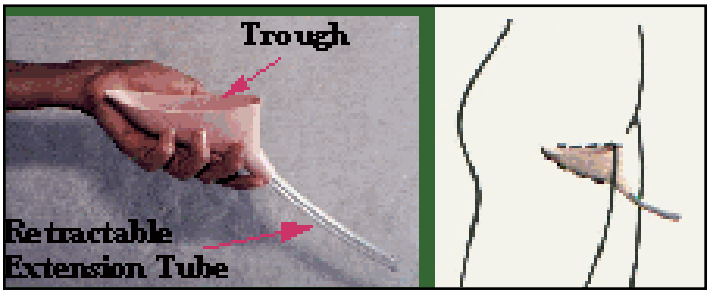
As young cavers we all learn the mantra 'Leave no trace', but do we all know exactly how to do that? Our early potty training only covers the basics but leaves out certain particulars when it comes to answering the call of nature in the dark places. How does one 'drop the kids off at the pool' when the pool is an environmentally sensitive aquifer? In response to this waste management conundrum this month's recipe: The Cave Burrito.

The old-timers will boast of straight tailing it on sheets of aluminum foil, rolling up the burrito and stuffing the wonder into a zip lock bag. As times progress and technology advances there are now newer better ways of pinching a loaf under ground.

Enter the turkey baking bag, a very durable plastic lined bag fully equipped to handle life's earthier matters. Before the trip add a little baking soda to the bag, this will help in the all too important battle against odor. What makes this bag nice is its shape holding ability. Pull the bag from your pre-made 'pocket john kit', roll the sides and make a nice little bowl.

Find yourself a good flat spot. Remember the key to a successful swat is balance and a good stable footing can help one achieve the proper position. After you have done what used to make mommy and daddy so proud you can clean up your business end with a paper towel. Paper towels tend to be a little more effective at the task than standard toilet paper in humid and wet conditions. They can be pulled out for various reasons beyond those involving personal hygiene, where as old fashioned TP becomes a mess at the first sight of moisture. A WetOnesTM toilette to finish off the job will give that in-cave fresh feeling which will make the rest of your trip more enjoyable. Find the little sample packs at the pharmacy. Use the toilette the cover the fresh pile as it will help to keep odors down later. Don't water your pile. Mixing urine and fecal matter tends to make the whole affair quite messy. They don't come out together so don't pack them out together.

Gather the sides of the baking bag up and tie a good knot in the top. Push all the foul air out of the sack before tie more knots to make it air-tight. Now form the famous burrito shape and wrap it with a sheet of Renolds WrapTM (Also kept in a handy 'pocket john kit'). This will hold the odor down for the duration of the burrito's travels. Plop the whole affair into a Ziploc bag, roll to desired size, and seal the top. Store this in the gallon Ziploc which carted all of the necessary items into the cave and continue on with the exploration of places where the sun doesn't shine. Don't forget about the burrito riding in a favored caving pack. An unfortunate event can cast a certain stigma on that bag for years to come. Dispose of your treasures promptly when returning home. Nothing is worse than finding a two week-old burrito stash with some caving gear after a couple of weeks.



Ingredients for a 'Pocket John Kit'

-1Turkey baking bag
-5 paper towel squares
-1 small WetOnesTM packet
-11/2ft of Renolds WrapTM
-1 quart Ziploc bag
-1 gallon Ziploc bag

Now available from Inner Mountain Outfitters is the Restop(r), an engineered, poo specific sack. The Restop(r) has a scientifically formulated blend of polymers and enzymes in specially designed plastic bags. The unmentionables are first contained and then converted into environmentally friendly waste. The polymers gel upon contact with liquid, safely containing waste as the enzymes begin to consume the waste products. Restop(r) claims that as the enzymes are done munching on what the human body doesn't need, the enzymes consume themselves leaving nothing but basic salts and water. The solid-waste bag retails for about $2.50 and has plenty of TP and a moist towelette included. The bag comes in a re-sealable outer bag for extra protecting. Packing out your sh!t high-tech style!

Taking care of a number one is a far less complicated matter. A properly labeled Gatorade bottle works great for storing urine for disposal outside the cave. Keep in mind that urine is sterile. A pee bottle can be cleaned with a bit of chlorine to eliminate odor and safely reused. Be sure the bottle is clearly marked to avoid it contents being mistaken for apple juice. A good trick in camp is to store tequila is a bottle marked for pee. This is a sure- fire way to keep poachers out of your stash.

Special Section for Women

Hey Gals - Pee Bottle for Women is a bit more complicated. The basic problems are convenience and precision. Squatting to pee requires taking off gear, possibly lots of gear. And with all that gear gathered around your ankles, it can be pretty hard to pee into a bottle, even a nice wide-mouthed nalgene. The degree of possible aim is inversely proportional to the amount of urgency. Our male friends, with their out-in-the-open design, can engage in the time-honored tradition of writing their names in the snow if they choose to. We, with our more complex topography, are lucky if we can equal the precision of a Jackson Pollack painting. Note that this information is good for outdoor activities and public restrooms as well.

There are two basic challenges: redirecting the stream, and getting the stream away from you and your clothes. Thankfully there are several devices, either commercial or home-crafted, that can help with this challenge.

Tools of the Trade

Although there are some websites that tell you how to pee standing up without implements, you have a lot better chance of quicker, cleaner success with an implement. There are two basic types of device- a funnel-like gadget, and a tube.

The funnel type devices are less likely to leak, but a little harder to maneuver. They tend to not give you enough length to extend beyond layers of clothing. The tube type devices, if used properly, extend farther from your clothing to keep your fly dry, but you must position them properly to avoid accidents.

Funnel Devices

There are two types of funnel devices, the Lady J and the Freshette. They both feature a fairly generous, oval shaped funnel device that fits over your vulva. The funnel has a tube on one end that you poke out through your fly.

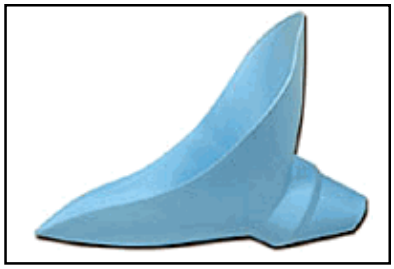
The Freshette has the same sort of all-encompassing design as the Lady J, but it also has a retractable 6" tube to help clear the clothing around your fly. The Freshette also has optional urine storage bag and extender tubes available.

Both of these devices were described by a US Navy publication about deployment hygiene:

"Two products that have been successfully field-tested by military women are the 'Lady J' and 'Freshette.' Both of these enable women to urinate while standing and without extensive disrobing.... the plastic funnel is slipped inside the pants and underwear and held tightly against the vulva. Released urine is caught by the funnel and drains out the spout. The few drops of urine remaining in the system are shaken loose ... the Lady J, having a relatively short drain, may not clear the BDU clothing. This requires vigilance to avoid wetting the clothing. The Freshette has a longer spout, clears the BDU clothing, and can be aimed in nearly any direction. With both of these products, some practice is usually required to become proficient."

Tube Devices

Tube devices are pretty good at getting the urine stream away from you, but you have to be a bit more careful about placement. Unlike the funnel devices, which gather the pee in mid-air, so to speak, the tube devices gather the stream as it is leaving your body, before it can fan out and wreak havoc.



The TravelMate is a tube with a tapered/spatula end. It doesn't cover as much of the vulva as the Lady J or the Freshette, but as long as you hold it correctly, it doesn't need to. You position it between the inner and outer labia and they keep the stream going down the tube. The manufacturer also offers accessories such as bag extension, a carrier, etc.

Make Your Own Device:

You can also construct you own device using either a turkey baster or a piece of PVC tubing following the instructions below.

Turkey Baster:

1) Get a turkey baster

2) Slice the bulb longwise - removing 1/3 to 1/2. Make sure you don't cut the part that keeps it on the tube.

3) On the pointy end of the tube, slice some of the end off so to make the opening bigger. Otherwise, you will experience back-pressure (bad idea!) if you have to go badly. The exit should be at least big enough to fit a pencil in (remember it is NOT a sealed system - pressure is BAD).

PVC:

Use PVC tubing - make a diagonal slice at one end to give you something to fit over your vulva. (It will end up looking kind of like the Travelmate).

Device & Price & Pros & Cons

The Lady J: $6.95 plus S&H
http://store.yahoo.com/campmor/80976.html
Pro: Covers whole vulva, less likely to leak
Con: Too short, must be careful clearing clothes

Freshette: $22.95 plus S&H
http://www.freshette.com/
Pro: Covers whole vulva, less likely to leak
Con: Expensive

TravelMate / $14.95
http://www.travelmateinfo.com/
Pro: Long enough to clear clothes, easier to shake off, spout is designed to give better directional control
Con: Must be more careful positioning

Turkey Baster Special / $3- 6
any grocery or kitchen store
Pro: Fit is midway between the funnel type and the tube type, easy to replace. Better Aim than PVC.
Con: Prone to crack if not protected

PVC Tubing
at any hardware outlet
A little less cushy than the turkey baster, but cheaper than the TravelMate

ing a delicious breakfast and chatting. We then took Ransom down to the Forest Service admin building and decided we would go as far as we could. If nothing else we could at least take pictures of the flooded road and wait until the water receded.

Along the way, we had to go across several water-crossings that were about eight inches deep. At each crossing that looked pretty deep, R.D. would get out and wade across to see how deep it was. We finally came to one spot where the water crossed a wide stretch of the road and looked really deep. We waited there for the water to go down for about an hour and a half before R.D. went across. This time it was knee-deep! Karen slowly and carefully drove across and her truck made it without complaining. There were 3 more high-water crossings, with the last one being the worst. We waited there for about 30 minutes before R.D. finally waded across. This time it was again up to his knees, but he said the current was faster. Every step he took, he could feel the water trying to push him sideways. Karen decided to go ahead and try crossing, and once again, her little Toyota pickup made it across just fine.

At this point, you probably expect me to say that the rest of the trip home was uneventful. But wait... there's more! We were a few miles West of Abilene on I-20 when we noticed an 18-wheeler driving erratically up ahead of us. I called 911 on my cell phone and they put me through to Texas DPS. I explained the situation to the dispatcher and she found out that there was a trooper just off the freeway about 6 or so miles ahead of us. I continued to stay on the phone with the dispatcher reporting what the driver was doing and we followed him until we came upon the trooper, who was now waiting on the side of the freeway. Both us and the truck passed the trooper and within less than a minute the trooper came flying past us and pulled over the 18-wheeler.

After that, *then* the rest of the trip was uneventful! We arrived back at Karen's house about midnight, separated our gear, and went our separate ways.

As a footnote: Karen and R.D. are now certified trip leaders for Cave of the Bell (Some caves in the High Guads require certified trip leaders for permits.See Karen for more info.).

Marvin Miller Receives Government Canyon Award

by George Veni

Marvin Miller holding daughter Christin and Conservation Award. Photo by George Veni.

Government Canyon State Natural Area (GCSNA) is located along the northwest edge of San Antonio. The property has been slow to open to the public (probably in late 2003) due to the need to assess and properly manage its many valuable resources. The Government Canyon Natural History Association (GCNHA) has coordinated the volunteer research and support efforts and on 16 November 2002 presented its first awards to its most outstanding volunteers.

Marvin Miller received the prestigious Conservation Award for his efforts, which primarily revolve around his leading the TSA's Government Canyon Cave and Karst Project. Some may question what the Conservation Award has to do with that project. Good conservation is difficult to achieve without good research to identify the resources needing protection and the ways to best manage them. Through Marvin's excellent leadership, the project has:

+ continued for almost nine years, 51 project trips, and over 5,500 person-hours of outstanding service to GCSNA;

+ searched about 3,700 acres and found 28 open caves, almost 250 karst features, and 37 sites with historic, archeological, or paleontological material;

+ dug open seven caves, established the presence of endangered species habitat in seven caves and possible habitat in two caves, and conducted/assisted in biological studies in eight other caves.

Additionally, Marvin provides timely reports for every karst project to GCSNA, with copies to the Texas Speleological Survey's archives. These reports include detailed descriptions of activities, copies of all notes and data, and newly drafted maps of surveyed caves. While Texas has had many fine caving projects, I've believed for the past several years that Marvin's is the best. He doesn't have the biggest or most spectacular caves, and thus doesn't have the biggest attendance. But those who join him have a lot of fun doing interesting and productive caving, and Marvin makes sure that the results are clearly and promptly drafted and distributed.

Marvin has been an invaluable resource to GCSNA staff by always watching for potential resource use and management problems and quickly reporting anything he finds. He serves on GCNHA's Recreation Committee to represent the interests of cavers and climbers, and provides that committee unique and vital insight where recreational activities may inadvertently impact important natural resources. He has often stepped outside the bounds of the Cave and Karst Project to also assist in educational issues, field trips, resource protection actions, and has always been available for consultation and support.

Marvin has served as an outstanding ambassador for GCSNA, perhaps his greatest contribution to conservation. In his quiet way, Marvin instills a deep sense of appreciation for GCSNA, its many resources, and the need to respect and tread gently around them. There is only so much that one person alone can do, but as a good teacher and leader, Marvin is reaching the world.

High Guads caving trip

Sept. 13-15, 2002 Karen Perry, R.D. Milhollin and Scott Boyd (all from the Maverick Grotto)

We started our trip by meeting at Karen Perry's house on Friday the 13th at 4pm. As usual, R.D. was fashionably late, arriving at 5:30. We loaded all our gear and food in Karen's truck, and left around 6pm. The trip to New Mexico was uneventful, of course with the obligatory stop at WallyWorld in Carlsbad.

We arrived at Texas Camp, near the Forest Service's watch tower, at about 4:45 a.m. TX time. We quickly set up camp, and were all in bed by 5 a.m. We were to meet with Ransom Turner of the Forest Service at 9 a.m. at the watch tower. We got there a little before 9, and so did Ransom.

Our plans were to go through Cottonwood Cave's 2nd Parallel on Saturday, followed by Cave of The Bell (CotB) and Black Cave on Sunday. While we were reading and signing the permits, another vehicle had pulled up, and Karen went out to see who it was. It was a couple of cavers going to Gunsight Cave. While talking to them, Karen noticed a steplog, but didn't notice a permit. She told Ransom about them, and he didn't find anyone listed on his list that was permitted for Gunsight Cave on that day. So Ransom decided he needed to go check and see if they had a permit. Since CotB was in the same general area as Gunsight, it was decided we would go to CotB first, and we would do Cottonwood Cave on Sunday.

We loaded Ransom's gear into Karen's truck, and went off in pursuit of the other two cavers. We got to a campsite where they parked about 20 minutes later and they had already started hiking toward Gunsight. Ransom decided we could go thru CotB, and we would probably get back to the campsite before they did, and then he would wait for them to return. We took off hiking towards CotB, which was about a mile away.

When we arrived at the cave entrance, we paused for a bit to take some pictures, and Ransom explained to us about getting all plant seeds off of our clothes, so we wouldn't carry them into this sensitive cave. Ransom unlocked the gate, and we all climbed in one-by-one, meeting up at the bottom of the initial slope, which also happened to be the cave's twilight zone. We spent the next hour or so working our way to the back of the cave, admiring the formations and taking photos along the way. In one spot, there was a skylight up above, about 50 feet or so. We stopped to look at some bones marked off with tape. They looked like they were bat bones.

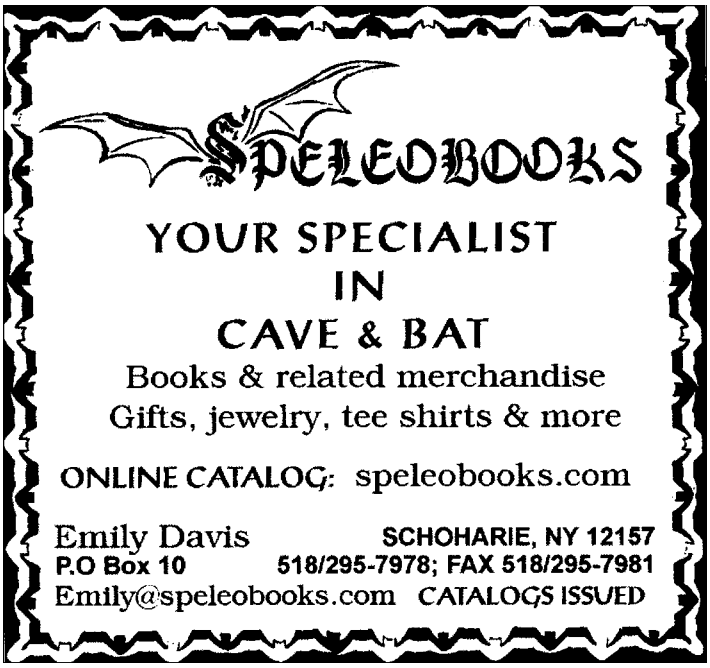
When we got to the back of the cave, we stopped to eat lunch and rest for awile. Then R.D, Karen, and I went one at a time into a low passageway where we had to belly-crawl through sand to admire the many stalactites and other speleothems. Near where we ate lunch, Karen and I took some photos of capstone on the floor to be used for comparison at a later time. We then started heading back to the entrance, taking more photos along the way.

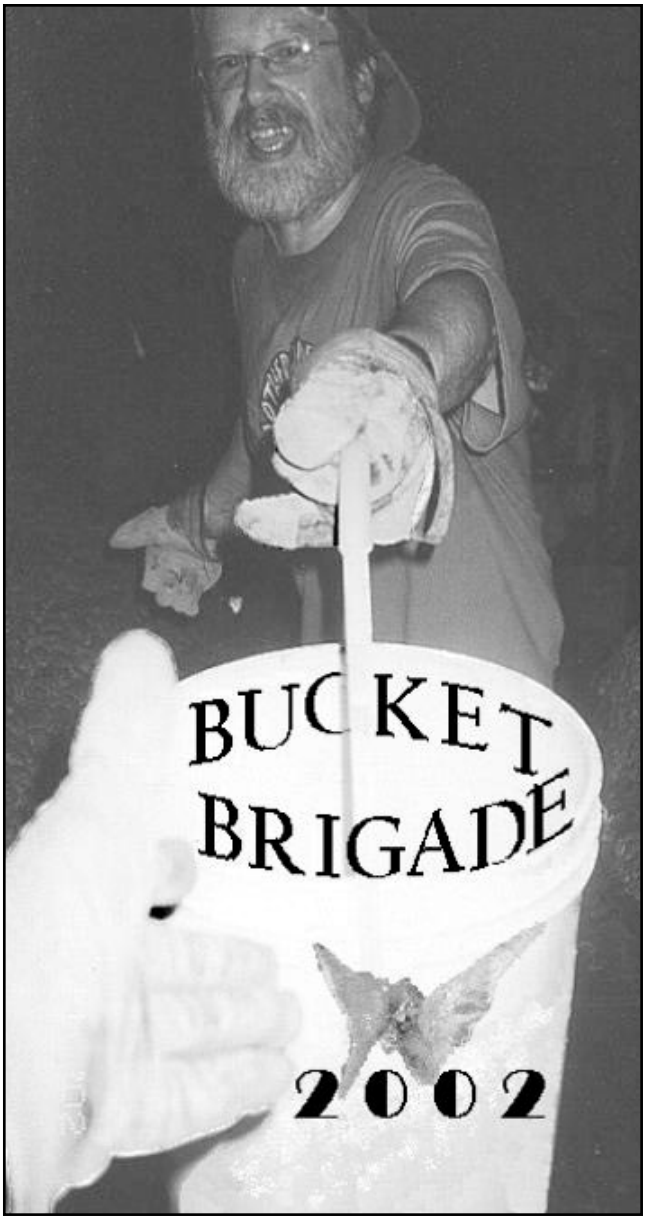
It wasn't until after I exited CotB that I realized it was a very dry and dusty cave. I didn't see any water at all in the cave, and all the speleothems looked to be dry and dormant. But there sure were alot of formations for such a dry cave!

When we got outside and locked the gate, Ransom and R.D. took off up the hill, and headed back to the campsite where we parked. Karen and I both made the climb and hike back a lot slower. We finally arrived back at the campsite, and R.D. and Ransom were sitting there resting. I asked Ransom about the other cavers, and he said they had left about 15 earlier, and that yes, they DID have their permit. (It was issued at the admin building late the day before.)

We headed back to camp for a short time, and then headed to Black Cave. Karen had talked Ransom into going with us, so we all piled into her truck. We drove part of the way there and hiked about a half-mile to the entrance. I was very, very tired by this time so I decided to stay outside the en- trance while the other three went through the cave. On our way back across the ridge we stopped to snap a few photos of a beautiful sunset up in the clean, clear air of the High Guads. Once we got back to Texas Camp, Karen and R.D. fixed dinner. They then took Ransom back to the cabin at the watch tower and I went off to bed.

During the middle of the night it started raining... and raining... and raining... By the time we got up in the morning we decided we had better get on out of Texas Camp and head out to Carlsbad since the only road out, thru Dark Canyon, is prone to flooding. We hurriedly packed up our gear and stopped off to pick up Ransom on our way out. We stopped to eat breakfast in the tiny town of Queen at the little convenience store/restaurant that's located there. As soon as we walked in we were told that the road to Carlsbad was flooded so we wouldn't be able to get out until maybe late that afternoon. We spent about an hour or so there eat-





Alabama caver Michael McEachern passing the bucket. Photography and techno-cleverness by Bob West

Still Digging After All These Years: 11th Annual Caverns of Sonora Restoration Project

by George Veni

Starting with a Bang!

When most people think of cave restoration work, they think of delicate work, carefully cleaning lint and dirt from speleothems with tweezers, gentle brushes, and other dainty instruments - especially in a cave as spectacularly decorated as the Caverns of Sonora. Except for two years where we did such work, the Caverns of Sonora Restoration Project has been unlike most restoration efforts. We use shovels, picks, and even sledge hammers to fill buckets with rubble that was deposited over 40 years ago when passages were enlarged for trails to develop the cave for the public. The biggest rubble pile lay at the base of the Devil's Pit where we have worked now for 5.5 years.

This year we added a new tool to our unorthodox restoration arsenal. Last year we exhumed a boulder that was once part of the wall, although you couldn't tell by looking since any cave deposits had been sheared off long ago. What you could tell by looking was that further digging would undermine the rock and it might move and crush a caver below it. In order to deal with this hazard, I arrived early at the cave on Friday, 1 November 2002. Once the tours were out for the day, Seco Mayfield, who owns the cave with his sister Gerry Ingham, plus some staff and a couple of other cavers who also arrived early for the project, went to the Devil's Pit to examine the rock. Seco agreed with my assessment, so we drilled a lucky 13 holes, packed them with detonation cord, and with a loud "BOOM" that reverberated through the cave, we reduced the boulder into many small rocks that would fit nicely the next day into our buckets and be hauled out of the cave. By carefully planned drilling and packing of the holes, the blast was directed away from a coral-covered wall, and no new damage was done. But everyone seemed more impressed by the noise and new little rocks than by the finesse.

Tons of fun

By the next morning we had an almost full crew, except for four no-shows. Those gaps were filled by Caverns of Sonora staff, so we were at full strength as we congregated in front of the entrance for the usual group photos and a briefing on what to expect. Next we grabbed the dozens of buckets that Walter Feaster again provided, plus the dollies, shovels, and other tools provided by the cave's owners and several cavers, and then headed 200 m into the cave. Once at the Devil's Pit, it took about 10 minutes to get the crew of a dozen cavers down the hole and all of the buckets and gear down to them. I gave more instructions on how the project works and began to distribute the team in set locations extending back to the entrance. Almost as soon as everyone was in place, they started passing buckets of rubble outward.

Passports

You can get a passport in 2 weeks if you fill out everything correctly and pay additional fees ($60) for expedited processing. You can also tack on USPS overnight fees to get it even faster, or you can make an appointment, drive to Houston, and get it same day. See the State Department web-site for more information.

http://travel.state.gov/passport_services.html

Editors note: Local Post Offices can issue passports.

Thanks to Jack Wood who sent me the following link to new passport fees effective August 19th, 2002.

http://travel.state.gov/newfees.html

Birth Certificates

If you were born in Texas, you can get same day birth certificates (takes about 10 minutes) at the Department of Health. 1100 W. 49th (Austin) (512) 458-7111. Other places, well, mine took about 5 weeks from DC.

Editors note: Local County Clerk's offices can now print copies of Texas birth certificates.

Voter Registration Card

While you are getting a copy of your vehicle registration, you can get a copy of your voter registration card at the County Tax Office.

Get Copies of Everything

Copy all of your documents. You will need the copies to get your car papers. Make two sets - you can turn one set in and still have a spare set in case you need it for anything. If you get your visa beforehand, you can make copies of that as well, otherwise you can get copies at the border station (they sell them there for a few pesos).

Get Your Permit

Once you have your tourist visa, go to the line for the Banjercito window. If you have pre-registered, find the fellow who looks like he's in charge (a civilian) and show him your banjercito.com printout. See if you get bumped up in the line. Otherwise, stand in line and wait for the next available clerk.

The clerk will want to see your banjercito.com printout (if you have one), tourist visa, originals of all of your documents, and your credit card, and will want to keep the copies of same. You will stand around while he does incomprehensible things: makes printouts, runs your credit card, frowns at the screen, has you sign a few different credit card slips and a few other papers (including the one for the import fees which will be 200 something pesos) and then come up with a sheet with a funky high-tech sticker on it.

Go put the permit on your windshield. It should be placed just above your registration sticker.

Important! Keep the sheet the sticker came on! You will need it at the frontera and possibly other checkpoints.

Turning the Permit Back In

You must turn the permit back in within 6 months. If you do not, you will forfeit your deposit and your credit card will be charged. You must turn in the permit at a border crossing, but it doesn't matter which one. You cannot get a second permit for the same car until you turn in your previous permit. If you replace your windshield, save the permit to turn in.

Failing to turn in a permit can cause hours of delay and possibly fines the next time you need one.

Editors note: This did not work for us. Initially we crossed and got our permits in Nuevo Laredo, we crossed back at Columbia and were told to go BACK to Laredo to turn in our permit.

If You Have Two Vehicles

If you have a car that already has a permit in your name, they may give you a hard time at the border. A nice, official-looking letter from a police station or some other civil agency that says that the vehicle really has been returned to the US may help you, but they may insist on canceling your previous permit even though it is a different vehicle. (Recently travelers at the border got someone at home to drive the truck to a police station, get a letter, and fax the letter to the border as proof, but it took a LOT of effort and time)

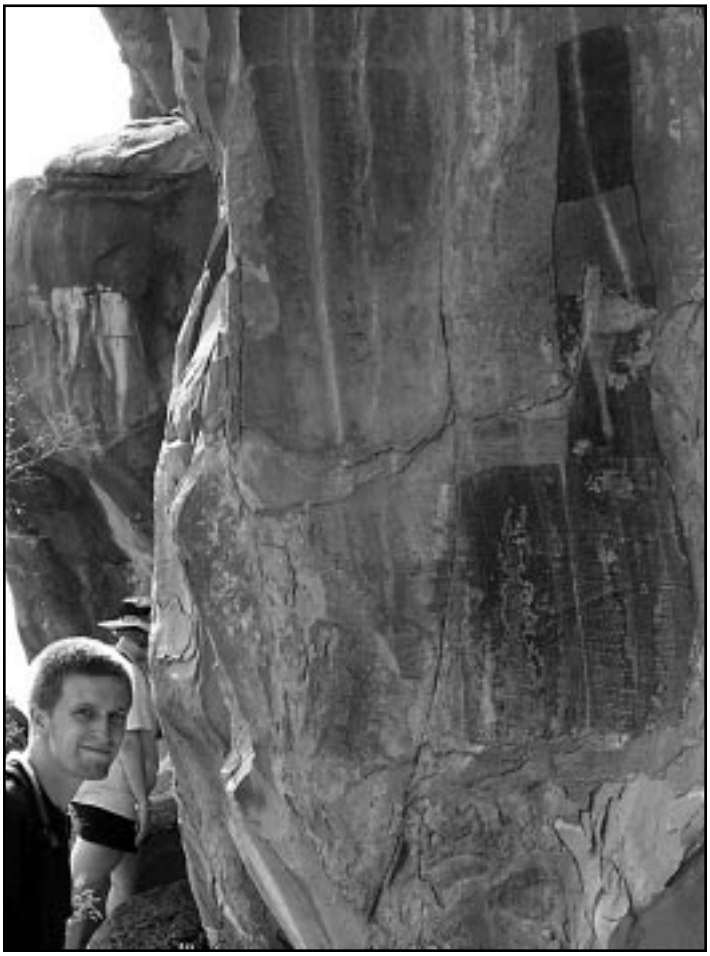
The Rule of Thumb

More is better. If you have lots of documentation, as long as they are all in your name, it can't hurt.

Chiquihuitillos

by Ron Ralph

Chiquihuitillos pictographs are characterized by angular geometric designs placed in fine lined rectilinear, subrectangular, oval or multi-sided box outlines. The nested zigzags, pendant triangles, saw-toothed lines and spoked or rayed circles are known from eight locales in the Sierra Madre Oriental between Monterrey and Monclova. Found usually in shallow overhangs and rock shelters, this distinct polychrome motif appear to be ritually placed and may date to 2000 or more years ago.



using aggressive back and forth motion to scrub the graffiti and on initial inspection, there do not appear to be areas where scratches remain visible. It was also noted that the white flowstone formations are much harder then the breakdown limestone, therefore paint removal on the flowstones is more difficult.

In addition to paint removal, some conservation team members including Karen Evans and Angel Steuwe made use of smooth stones to gently abrade "scratched in" graffiti restoring the surface of several slightly degraded flowstone formations to a more natural appearance. We did have some clogging of the spray bottle nozzles which may have been caused by being filled with silty water, and we could have used more equipment given the larger group size this year, but overall we feel that the level of graffiti is going down and the best part is that we don't see evidence of new graffiti since cave access is no longer uncontrolled.

Above: Large stalagmite ready for cleaning by Ed Sedivic of the Greater Houston Grotto. Photo by Aimee Beveridge

Right: The same stalagmite after cleaning with nylon scrub brushes and water from the cave. Photo by Aimee Beveridge

No Banjercito Necessary

by Rodolfo Gonzalez Luna, AKA Fofo

For me, it started on Friday. I wanted to get off work early, to pack, buy food, etc. But, as somebody pointed out, a plan is just a list of things that won't happen. Anyway, I eventually managed to get out of Monterrey and head for Bustamante.

No problems on the road (it's just 1.5 hrs), but as I was getting closer to the entrance of the town I saw on the mirror flashing lights coming from the distance. When they were right behind me I signaled them to pass me. I even slowed down and pulled a little bit to the right. Well, after a while it was clear they didn't want to pass me, they wanted to stop me! Well, the cop said I had not slowed down while crossing Villaldama, so he was going to give me a ticket.

"All right", I said. "But, I don't have the tickets here", said the officer. "No problem, what should we do?" "Well..." "I'd be willing to go back to Villaldama so you can get them" I volunteered. He complained "But we'll have to drive all the way back to Villaldama" "Yes, I don't mind. Should I follow you or will you follow me?" We made it back. They managed to figure out how to fill one of those out. They told me about the shooting near El Molino that morning. I told them about our plans for the clean-up. I left, cautiously keeping an eye on the speed while in town. I made it to campground, finally!

Next morning I got up, met some friends and went to the cave. I waited for a group of Monterrey cavers I invited. And waited. And waited. Two hours after the meeting time I assumed they weren't coming, and all of a sudden they drove up the gravel road. They got lost: one of them was on his way to Monclova, the others were looking for the cave in Villaldama.

Anyway, they made it there and we got in. First I took them on a guided tour, but I underestimated the time needed for moving a large group of inexperienced cavers and by the time we got back to the Cathedral it was about time to head out. I stayed back, scrubbing for a while with a small group that stayed there.

They had an extended stay permit, so we caved for some time after cleaning, and went to some interesting places in the cave.

The next day, I'll skip what most people know about (Minas Viejas). I'll talk about the Dreaded Starter. Yup, Bruce's nightmare. We made it down the mountain and hauled the truck to a mechanic. The typical Mexican small town mechanic, using his front yard as a shop, with parts all over the place, everything covered in oil and grease. I translated for a while, went back to dinner and went back to hear what the deal was. The starter was screwed. There were no extras around, and the best shot would probably be Monterrey. After some deliberation, I headed back to Monterrey that night and the next morning looked for a starter. I first went to the Ford dealership, but... why don't they make it simple? There are about 15 different models of starters for that truck! They gave me a part number of the one they thought was the indicated (which, as Murphy had expected, wasn't in stock). I looked for it at another couple of parts stores. Finally found one, a generic, no brand or markings and the owner said that would work (it looked a little bit different and cost 1/3 of the original). I told Bruce this but he felt more comfortable hauling it back to Laredo. Well, after a slow trip he got it fixed in Laredo and made it to McAllen shortly after. Good to hear a happy ending after all!

Graffiti removal by 'Mimi' Alexander, the littlest caver.

morning tour to Chiquihuitillo, a rock art site, along with Shannon Breslin, who led a tour to find desert birds. During a walking tour of Bustamante, Felipe Hernandez, with interpretation by Philip Russell, explained the history of the town. Rune Burnett and Orion Knox led the long awaited tour of Rancho Minas Viejas. Landowner Don Pedro and his son Luis were most gracious hosts, welcoming the large group in the soon to be finished large mining building turned restaurant with drinks, snacks, and photos of the caves and ranch property. The Elizaldi family is developing their high mountain ranch for eco tourism, restoring the historic mining buildings as cabins, providing a campground, and designating trails for hiking and mountain biking. The breathtaking panoramic views of the valley to the south and east allow visitors to see on clear days the almost 60 miles to Packsaddle Mountain near Monterrey.

The banquet held on Sunday night at the Hotel Ancira patio was well attended by more than 120 volunteers and guests. The regionally famous restaurant at the Ancira put on a diverse and delicious buffet of typical fare. Special guests this year were Alcaldesa (mayor) Norma Robles, her husband and former mayor Jorge Santos, and the Secretario (city administrator) Baldemar Gomez and his wife Nancy Castillo. The presidente expressed her appreciation to the group for all that has been accomplished at the cave. She was pleased to report that $2 million has been appropriated by the government of Mexico for development. Master of ceremonies Rune Burnett announced that Chaco (maker of Chaco sandals) donated $1,200 cash to the Bustamante project as part of their funding for grass roots conservation programs. Each volunteer was acknowledged with the award of a door prize. The vast array of door prizes were contributed by Whole Earth Provision Co., Gonzo Guano Gear, Bat Conservation International, Patagonia, Eagle Creek, Vasque, Cascade Designs, Sweetwater, Metolius, Boreal, Leki, SmartWool, Petzl, Kings Hardware store in Wimberley, the Hotel Ancira, Jan Knox and Orion Knox.

Pete Strickland installing signs, Project Coordinator Bob 'Rune' Burnett and Joe Jones 'supervising'. Photo by Alana Skrabanek.

Rescue of visitor with broken ankle. Photo by Bob 'Rune' Burnett.

Town Square. Photo by Don Arburn

Los Amigos de la Gruta Bustamante 2002

By Susan Souby

The 6th Annual Bustamante Project, sponsored by the Texas Speleological Association, took place at Grutas del Palmito over Labor Day weekend.

Grutas del Palmito, located near the town of Bustamante in Nuevo Leon, Mexico, has been a favorite destination for Texas cavers since the early 1960's. It has been an excellent training cave and a great way to introduce new cavers to caving and to Mexico. Having been well used by visitors from the US and from Mexico, it has suffered some abuse. The TSA sponsored volunteer projects for many years to clean up the cave and in the last few years has expanded the scope of the project to include improvements to the cave gate, the entrance trail, the lighting, as well as graffiti removal throughout the cave and on the access road to the cave. Projects have also included the installation of interpretative, conservation, and directional signs.

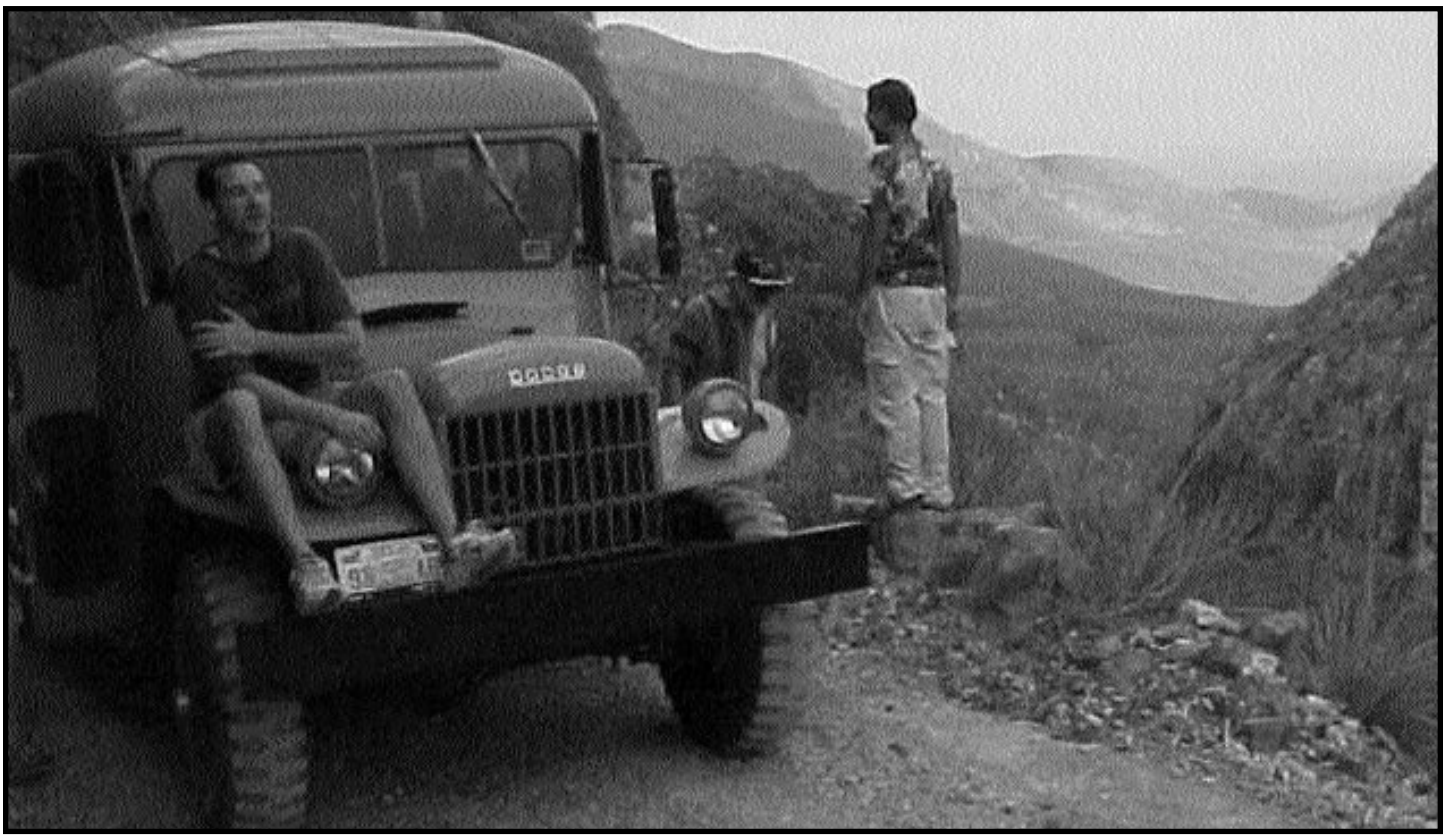
The Bustamante Project draws volunteers from cavers and non-cavers alike. This year more than 160 volunteers from Texas and Mexico participated in what has become a much-anticipated annual event.

This year several of the improvement projects continued and a new area outside the cave was added. A record 140 volunteers logged in and out of the cave under the watchful eye of Anne Souby. The ever more successful graffiti removal involved the majority of the volunteers. In fact, graffiti removal coordinator Aimee Beveridge reported a 36% increase in the number of volunteers and great strides in graffiti removal with some improved techniques and new access to previously hard to reach locations. Orion Knox, lighting coordinator, and crew continued the installation of PVC lighting shields around the light bulbs in the Entrance Room. Pete Strickland, sign coordinator, and his crew placed additional conservation and directional signs on the road from the lower to the upper parking lot and at the cave entrance. Graffiti removal continued on the walls outside the cave using electric drills with stainless steel brushes. Improvements to the slippery entrance trail to the cave included cutting steps, placing rocks, and placing the electrical service lines in conduit away from the trail. Philip Russell headed a new project this year to improve the access trail up the mountain to the peak at Cabeza de Leon. This outside crew flagged about 1/3 of the trail up the mountain, then cut brush and set trail markers along the way. Several early arrivers picked up trash in the upper parking lot and outside the entrance to the cave. Due to the success of past efforts, there is not much litter remaining inside the cave and limited access has prevented additional litter. This year Fofo Gonzalez led a group of about 30 new cavers, members of the Espeleologia ITESM from the Monterrey Technical Institute, on a tour through the cave.

Tom Brown, first aid coordinator, was summoned from his lighting project with Orion to attend to a visitor from Saltillo who slipped and broke her ankle while on a guided tour in the Entrance Room. Her accident could not have been better timed with the coordinated response and professional help she got from the cavers. Tom splinted her ankle with an air splint, and she was transported out of the cave using Orion's ladder as an emergency stretcher. She was passed down the steep path by more than 30 volunteers to the ambulance that had been summoned by radio up the mountain to meet her. She left for the hospital talking, smiling, and waving thanks to all of her many rescuers.

After a full days work on Saturday, volunteers had several Sunday excursions from which to choose. Ron Ralph led an early

View down the road from Minas Viejas. Photo by Don Arburn



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