

THE TEXAS CAVER

February 2003



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THE COVERS:

FRONT COVER: Snake Dancers by Carl E. Kunath
Left Hand Tunnel, Carlsbad Caverns, 1966
B&W from Ektachrome-X

BACK COVER: Cave Without A Name, photo without one, either. (I goofed! Someone please let me know who this is and who took the photo and when!)

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TSA Elections

The ballots for the Executive Council election & counted & 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 Martin1

Vice-Chair:
Christi Bennett 80
Aimee Beveridge 2

Secretary:
Jerry Atkinson 78
Joe Mitchell ...1
Bill Mixon1
Sue Schindel ...1

Treasurer:
Joe Ranzau ...78
Oztotl1

These results were verified by Election
Committee Chair Sean Vincent.

Sorcerer's Cave

Easter 2002
by George Veni

Thursday, 28 March 2002, 2:12 p.m.

It was hard walking back to my truck with a big lump in my throat. Earlier this morning I carried all of the ropes to the entrance of Sorcerer's Cave and rigged the entrance pit, but that is about as far underground as I'll get this trip. Like my last trip to the cave over Thanksgiving 2001, I've been pounded with work and need to sit in my truck with my laptop to do it. If this were any other cave, I would have stayed home. But the cave's owner wants me here during caving trips. And dammit, I love being here. I only wish I were doing something more than giving advice, bringing out equipment, and chronicling the trip.

I was the first to arrive last night around 9:30 p.m. Aimee Beveridge and Geoff Hoese showed up about an hour later, their first trip here. I showed them the cave's entrance and other sites in the mystical landscape under the light of the full moon. A little after midnight, as we were getting ready for bed, James Brown, Jean (Creature) Krejca, and Vivian Loftin arrived. Julia Germany, Jim Kennedy, and Travis Scott drove in 1-3 hours later.

By this morning we saw some people hadn't arrived. I was especially disappointed because as the trip date approached, I added extra people to the trip knowing I might not be able to go caving. I'm grateful that everyone here was able to shoulder the burden to make the trip succeed, and without making me feel worse about staying up top than I already do. Jim led Julia and

Vivian Loftin ascends the standing rope from last year to continue past Charley Savvas' high point in Nosebleed Dome. Photo by Jim "Crash" Kennedy



Geoff to rig the cave, and they also carried part of the load for the other team. Creature and Viv led James, Aimee, and Travis in hauling dive gear down to the upstream sump of the Sirion River so Creature, this time accompanied by James, could continue the underwater survey and exploration.

About an hour ago I reviewed the survey notes with Creature.

Since she won't be solo diving this time, she plans to resurvey a couple of air-filled areas for greater accuracy where she had only done a compass and pace survey before. I looked through some files in my laptop and gave her some target goals for new survey. Sorcerer's is the only cave on Texas' top ten long and deep lists. It is already at the top of the deep list, and to increase its 8th place ranking on the long list, Creature and James will need to add 221 m to pass Airman's Cave, 911 m to exceed Cave Without A Name (Creature said "Oh no, have to get past nine-eleven!"), and 1,342 m to surpass Inner Space Cavern. To move even higher up the long list wasn't a practical consideration for this trip.

While over 1,300 m of underwater survey may also not seem practical, James has made it more possible by bringing fiberglass composite tanks that are much lighter than metal tanks and hold far more air for their size. If the tanks can get



The standing line to the high point of the climb, after less than a year in the cave. Is this what bat guano does to you? Photo by Jim "Crash" Kennedy

No, Jerry Fant did NOT dig out the whole thing with only his trusty brickhammer! Photo by Jim "Crash" Kennedy





Viv, with about 20 pounds of gear, prepares for ascent. Note the skinny rope. Photo by Jim "Crash" Kennedy

James and Creature into significant air-space, then beating Inner Space Cavern isn't too far fetched for this long Easter weekend. Like an expectant father, all I can do now is sit and wait.

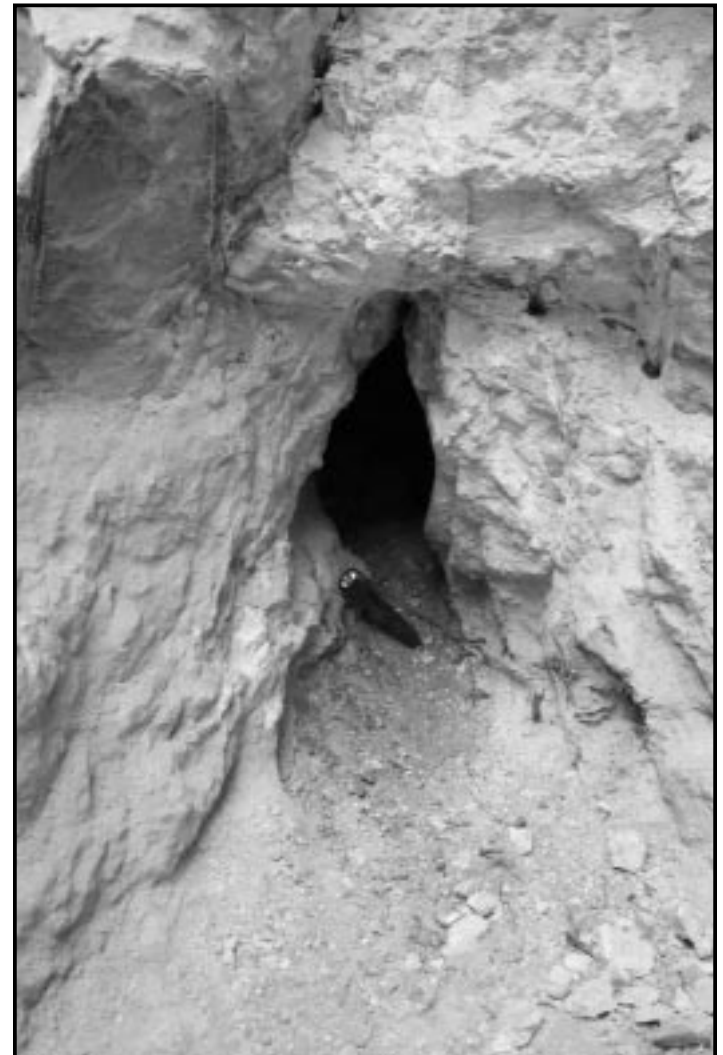
Thursday, 28 March 2002, 10:44 p.m.

About an hour ago, an unexpected turn of events occurred when I saw the helmet-lit figure of a lone caver walk into the

Don, Jim, and Julia set to work enlarging The Crack while Ed, Laura, LJ, and I geared up for another blowing lead. We unloaded a second generator from my truck and hauled it up the creekbed 100 m then ran extension cords another 100 m to the hole. Our specialty tool here was a shop-vac Jim brought to suck out the powdery dry rodent droppings that cover the floor. I used the machine for a few minutes. The vacuum was not very powerful but slowly did the job. It needed a longer hose to reach into the low passage, but I brought a hoe to scrape the dirt out to the vacuum. Except for the occasional hoeing, I thought the work was dust free and relatively pleasant, being easy and shaded from the west Texas sun. However, Travis just came by my truck where I'm writing this and working, and he mentioned that everyone has been temporarily distracted and is watching the excavation of The Crack. I hope someone goes back to work on it. I understand the lack of enthusiasm, especially today where barometric conditions are not allowing any airflow to be felt. Last trip, with a steady moan of air movement to entice us, that little hole got us excited.

Not everyone is digging. Aimee, Geoff, and Viv have driven off, I think to check the creekbed for caves at the west end of the property. Travis scouted around near the camp/cave area but didn't find anything new. He'll be leaving in a couple of hours for Kickapoo Caverns State Park where he and Allan Cobb are renew-

Opening up -- We finally hit almost-human-sized passage. Only a little more enlargement to go! Photo by Jim "Crash" Kennedy



camp. I expected it was one of dive sherpas. A few minutes later I got up, and Jim, who got out of the cave about two hours earlier with Julia, told me it was James. The divers and sherpas took all of the gear to the sump, but considering their late start into the cave and slow progress with their heavy loads, they decided to save the dive until tomorrow. The others from the team straggled into camp over the next half hour. Across the camp, I here distant voices exclaim how beautiful the cave is but also how much effort was needed to move the heavy packs through it. I'm pleased they enjoyed the cave, and disappointed that I couldn't lighten their loads. I also see figures in the dark scrubbing the guano off their bodies and stirring up late meals, closing out the day and preparing for tomorrow.

Friday, 29 March 2002, 2:09 p.m.

It's hard to get work done when there is caving to do. Everyone was up by around 8:30 a.m. Our ranks have grown since Don Broussard and Lee Jay Graves arrived the previous afternoon and Ed and Laura Goff drove in around midnight. James and Creature headed back into Sorcerer's around 10 a.m. A little earlier, I drove some heavy equipment nearby to The Crack, a blowing fissure across and a little up the creek from the cave. From my truck I unloaded a piece of equipment I use in my karst consulting work, a downhole camera. Lee Jay, who often works with me, helped set up the TV-VCR, then guided the tiny camera down the hole while everyone on top directed him on which way to turn it to see best into darkness. We saw down what seems to be an impassably narrow pit and could tell we have at least 2 m more bedrock to remove before it might start to enlarge. During our last trip, we heard rocks fall down the pit a guesstimated 3-5 m depth. While we could pivot the camera's head to look down the pit, we couldn't maneuver the camera down the 90° turn to explore it.



ing the project there this weekend. Jerry Fant just showed up and is heading for The Crack. The divers are probably well into the sump by now.

Friday, 29 March 2002, 6:48 p.m.

I'm sitting in my truck again but this time with the laptop running on battery power, not off the truck. If the lightening fries me and the truck, at least

the laptop will go on. I finished a report about an hour and a half ago and as my reward, decided to check on the progress at The Crack. I met Jim running down the trail to get me. "It's opening up big!" I climbed to the bottom of the now 3-m-deep hole and peered in. I recognized the passage from the downhole camera, which made it seem smaller for lack of scale. Although it looked good, "big" is not the term I would have used to describe it.

While Don, Jerry, LJ, and Jim continued working on The Crack, Julia and I went to look at the still unnamed blowing lead. We fired up the shop-vac and continued sucking up the dusty stuff covering the floor. I saw why others got frustrated with that task earlier. The nuts and small rocks rapidly clogged the shop-vac hose, necessitating a regular massage to send the clog into the canister. After about 15 minutes, I simply hoed out much of the stuff and tried not to breathe it in. I stopped when the thunder and lightning approached.

After stashing the generator and other gear away from the oncoming weather into nearby rockshelters, I got back to The Crack just in time to see Jerry crawl into a hole at the bottom. Jim took a look a few minutes later. They disagreed on if the pit was 2 or 3 m deep, but agreed it was narrow, debatably passable, that more enlarging was needed, and that another drop followed it.

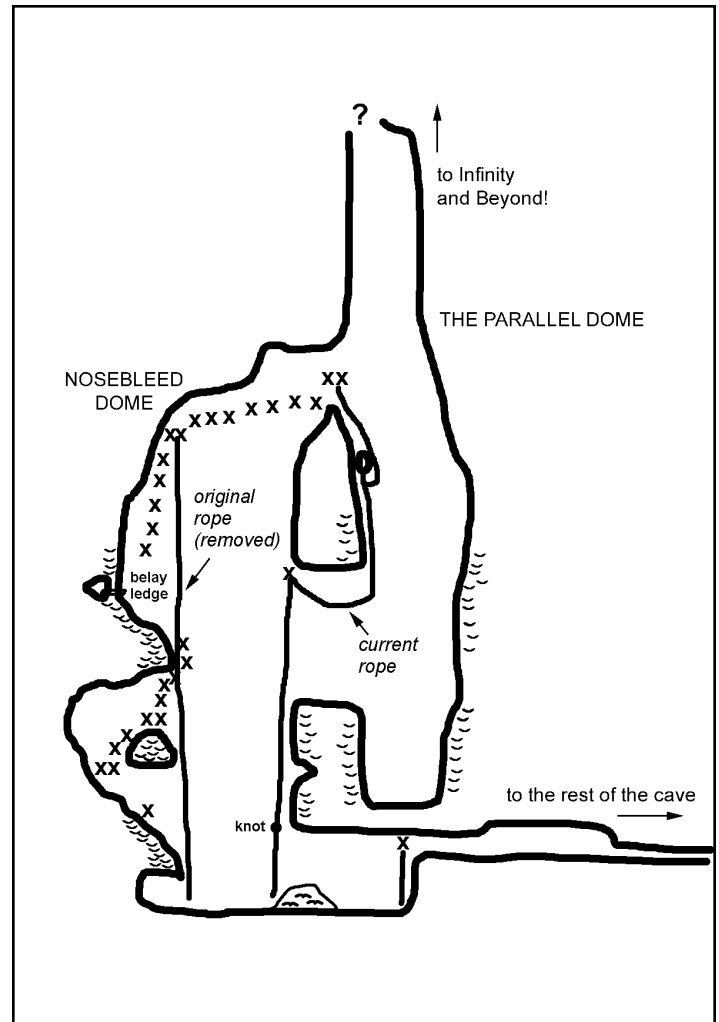
Geoff was there, having returned from his stroll around the north and west ends of the property. He saw some interesting and nice desert scenery, but no holes. We walked to camp ahead of the clouds and found that Don and LJ had already secured everyone's possessions from the oncoming rain. A few droplets have hit so far, and some of the spidery lightning is spectacular. It is almost dark and time for supper as soon as the rain passes. Then we'll sit and wait for James and Creature to regale us with their underwater adventures.

Friday, 29 March 2002, 8:43 p.m.

Dinner was boiling when I saw the distinct blue-white LED headlamp approaching. Creature was the first diver into camp. She patiently endured my questions before going to clean-up and eat. She and James extended the cave from the limit of the last dive through a 144-m-long sump into air filled passage. They waded for about 23 m and were surprised to find the cave continued up a 3-m-high waterfall. Using James as a ladder, Creature got to the top of the falls, which stair-stepped up a couple more short falls then led an estimated 40 m to another sump. James wasn't able to follow her up the main falls, so the passage above the falls wasn't surveyed and their trip ended prematurely. However, from the base of the falls they surveyed a side passage that ended after 10 m at a dripping dome. Creature said the new limit of exploration in the main passage is a mouth-shaped sump with a narrow knob of rock dangling down in the middle, so she named it Uvula Sump. On the way out of the cave, they heard a low rumbling noise from near the Drippy Dome downstream of the sumps. Although it seems unlikely, there was a lot of thunder at that time.

Friday, 29 March 2002, 10:55 p.m.

After dinner Creature and I plugged in the survey data from today's dive into Walls, the survey data reduction and plotting program. The cave continues to run in a nearly straight line to the northwest. The new length of the cave, 3,443 m, was slightly disappointing since only 8 m more would have moved Sorcerer's past Airman's Cave on the long cave list. We discussed options for



tomorrow. Three days in a row of long trips to the bottom of the cave would be hard, but Creature is tempted to attempt another dive since the gear is down there and a good crew is ready to help haul it out tomorrow. She and James will see how they feel in the morning, recalculate the air they have available in the tanks, and then make a decision. Meanwhile The Crack crew is feeling frisky and excited enough to continue digging into the night. I thought they were done and driving back from the dig when I realized that the headlights belonged to Terry Burgan, Steve Keselik, and Joe Sumbera -- Team Troglobrau -- who just arrived at our camp.

Saturday, 30 March 2002, 12:11 p.m.

I'm sitting here feeling more pangs of guilt and envy as I watch cavers slowly drift into Sorcerer's Cave. After a leisurely awakening and breakfast, we all met to discuss our plans. They will work as three teams. James will lead Aimee, Don, Ed, and Geoff to the upstream sump where they will pack up and haul out about half of the dive gear. Meanwhile, Creature will dive the sump, returning to the waterfall to set a couple of bolts and leave a permanent rope rigged for the next trip. If she feels up to it, she'll do a compass and pace survey to Uvula Sump. Hot on her heels, but by a more roundabout route, Team Troglobrau will make a tourist trip downstream to enjoy a fine section of the cave. They will rendezvous with Creature at the upstream sump at 6 p.m. and haul out the remaining dive gear and de-rig the lower third of the cave. Ed may help get James' team a little ways up the cave and then join Team Troglobrau to help with their load and the partial de-rig. (Although I've known them for years, I learned this morning that they call themselves "Troglobrau" for a beer that Steve brews and not just for liking beer.) Jim will lead the third team, taking Jerry and Viv to continue the bolt climb up Nosebleed Dome that he and Charley Savvas began during the Thanksgiving 2001 trip. They'll also de-rig the upper two-thirds of the cave. It should be a full and good day.

Saturday, 30 March 2002, 4:21 p.m.

Nearly everyone went into the cave. Julia and Laura went to Sanderson to restock supplies. As the clouds rolled in and the wind gusted, I decided I needed to leave camp too. First I found what is probably a paleo-entrance to the cave in the bed of Eightmile Draw. Last November, Jim saw flowstone cemented sediments and stream gravels up Nosebleed Dome which suggested an old, plugged connection to the surface. Knowing what to look for and where, I'm now pretty certain that the depression I casually thought was one of the many soil-filled scours in the creekbed is probably an old entrance to the cave.

Also during the last trip, a couple of sinkholes were found in a shallow ravine and almost directly over the Drippy Dome located en route to the upstream sumps. I hadn't seen them and wanted to check them out. Located about 10 m apart on opposite sides of the ravine, the larger sinkhole is about 3 m in diameter by 0.3 m deep and has a compact soil and cobble floor. The smaller sinkhole is more promising. It is only about a meter in diameter, but its soil and cobble floor is collapsing into an underlying void. Water that flows down the Drippy Dome emerges from a bedding plane, and so if the sinkhole is excavated the chance of a physical connection to Sorcerer's is almost impossible. However, with over 125 m depth potential, the sinks could lead into a cave that is significant on its own.

The last stop was the waterfall found during yesterday's dive. Actually, I looked for the spot on the surface above the falls. Since I've plotted the cave's survey data into Walls along with GPS coordinates for the cave's entrance survey station, Walls gave me the GPS coordinates for the waterfall. I was curious to see if something on the surface might explain the falls. The spot below which the falls occur is pretty non-descript. However, nearby is an unnamed canyon where it looks like the limestone beds begin to gently dip upward. That change in dip may cause the falls. I've long suspected some changes in the cave might be the result of subtle changes in the dip of the limestone. Careful and precise mapping of the strata might prove this out.

Tuesday, 2 April 2002, 10:13 p.m.

The trip is over, and I'm semi caught-up with the usual madness I find when I return home from trips. Everything went on schedule Saturday in the exploration and de-rig. Ed became the de-rig hero when he helped haul heavy loads through much of the cave toward the entrance with the first team, then returned to the bottom to help haul more heavy loads with the second de-rig team. Creature was the dive team hero for bolting up the waterfall, rigging a rope, and doing a compass and pace survey to the next sump to push Sorcerer's into the #7 slot on the Texas long cave list at 3,478 m. Jerry, Jim, and Viv shared the limelight in completing the climb up Nosebleed Dome. They estimated it reaches about 5 m above its lower, surveyed, 32-m height. It then leads to another dome that continues at least 10 m higher and into a parallel dome that drops next to Nosebleed and connects into it via a couple of holes in the wall. This will all need to be surveyed on the next trip. One surprising note was the incredible fungus found on the coiled rope that was left hanging in the dome since November. Jim took a digital photo and showed it to me. I've never seen anything like it before in the cave.

On Sunday morning, James and Creature left camp by 6 a.m. to be on time for a rendezvous in Austin. Everyone was pretty beat but happy with their trip into the cave. Tentative plans to dig on the blowing shop-vac lead were abandoned. In short order, everyone was soon heading home. It was a good trip and we look forward to more.

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New Year's Caving, Tennessee

by Julia Birch, age 7

On New Year's Day, we went caving in Tennessee. This is how it began: We went after lunch to someone's house and thanked her for letting us go into the cave on her property. I said the cave looked like a mouth opening to say, "Hi!"

Then we were inside. At first, it wasn't very dark. But soon it was very, very dark and so we had to turn on our lights. It was cool in the cave.

Soon, we were walking on sand and then we were in a creek in the cave. Most of the time, we were able to stand up because rocks had fallen down for years which made the ceiling tall enough that we could stand upright. Some of the time, we got to crawl. It was really cool.

Soon, we got to a point where we saw bats. All of them were hibernating. It looked like they were sleeping. Some of them had frost on them. I thought they would be about a foot long, but they are really small _ maybe two inches. Most of the bats were individuals, but two of them snuggled.

I went with Aunt Mary, Paul, Brian, Sheila and Jay and my cousin and my brother, Liam and Brian's two little girls.

Near the end of our trip, we saw a steep little hill with no rocks on it, except a few rocks that were stuck to the surface. We climbed up onto it and slid down! Brian told Mary that there was a hole near the top so we climbed up and slid down the steep hill in the cave.

This trip was one of the best in my life!



PINT-SIZED CAVING: For New Year's Day, it was the children's turn. Exploring this Tennessee cave are (from L) Whitney Lloyd, Jennica Graber-Grace, Liam Jorden, Austin Birch, Sierra Lloyd and Mary Grace. Jay Jorden photo.

New Year's Caving: Tennessee

by Jay Jorden

Dates: Dec. 31, 2002; Jan. 1, 2003

Personnel: Brian Lloyd, Sierra Lloyd, Whitney Lloyd, Paul Singley, Mary Grace, Julia Birch, Jennica Graber-Grace, Austin Birch, Liam Jorden, Sheila Knight, Jay Jorden

From a subterranean vantage point in eastern Tennessee, a group of friends and relatives "young and older alike" rang out the past year and welcomed the new.

Brian Lloyd, an electrician who has been working on the remodeling project at the lakeside home of Tricia Dougherty and Paul Singley near Knoxville, had offered to take us caving when we arrived for an end-of-year visit.

Originally, Brian had been wanting to run a trip to a long project cave about an hour and a half away from Lenoir City. But since time was growing short, he chose a cave that was closer to home. Our destination for the last day in 2002 became the Angel's Cave property in Knox County.

Our gracious host and hostess had provided us with caving gear, including helmets, the nifty "TAG lights" that run off rechargeable batteries, packs and other equipment. Paul loaned some hunting coveralls that seemed to work nicely for the excursion. The only items I couldn't borrow were caving boots, but I made do with my Solomon approach shoes.

BIG ENTRANCE: Cavers silhouetted against winter sky for New Year's Day caving in Tennessee. J. Jorden photo.





AFTER THE CLIMB-UP: Mary Grace at the top of a climb in Angel's Cave, Tennessee. Jay Jorden photo.

TENNESSEE CAVING: Preparing to enter Angel's Cave in Knox County, Tennessee are (from L) Brian Lloyd and Jay Jorden. (Not pictured, Mary Grace.) Photo by Mary Grace.



We were to meet Brian, who had finished some wiring work at Tricia's and Paul's home but had to return home for his gear, at a gas station along Interstate 40 on New Year's Eve. From there, we drove by caravan to the farm property. Brian said it was best not to leave any vehicles at the Petro station.

At the Angel's property, roadside parking was available near the gate. We found that someone had abandoned a pair of tennis shoes. They weren't muddy so it was probable that the former owner hadn't been doing any caving on any of the several caves on the property.

Brian said the Angel's tract has been in the family for four generations.

Getting to the cave was a sporting challenge, as the creek was deep and swiftly flowing after two upper branches had merged. Downstream, we found where a large tree had fallen across the creek and partly scooted and shimmied across it after crossing under a barbed wire fence.

I had to toss my camera box to Brian. After crossing the creek without falling in, we made a mental note of the fact that there was probably an easier way to make the return trip!

We cut cross-country and diagonally up the hill for about five minutes to a low entrance half-hidden by fallen trees and rimmed in dead leaves. There was little air movement from the entrance as we prepared for the trip. Brian said that some kids had found the cave in recent years and some vandalism and graffiti had resulted. The cave also had a small bat colony in a side passage and we planned to avoid entering that area.

After stooping and partly crawling through the entrance slope, it opened up into a small breakdown maze that ended in a large room where we could hear some water running. Brian said the stream level was down from the last time he had visited the cave - more than a year ago.

Beyond the stream lay the bat colony. We could hear a few bats and kept our distance so that we wouldn't disturb their hibernation. Turning to the right, we scrambled out of the large room into a lead that continued into the hillside.

The mud got thicker, with a heavy clay content. Brian said that the cave has about 1,000 feet of passage. We were uncertain if it had been mapped.

Even though Brian had described Angel's as a small Tennessee cave, it was surprisingly spacious with a variety of squeezes, chimneys and climbs.

After pushing the first passage off the stream level room to its end, we were presented with a second branch to explore.

At the end of this passage, Brian noticed a crawl that he hadn't seen before. He and Mary went back to a small room while I did some photography at an area decorated with some formations. Along the way through the crawl, Mary's light failed and she chose natural light for the rest of the trip, carrying a small candle along the way.

Another promising passage went down a breakdown slope, but then turned muddy and ended in a canyon-like area coated with liberal amounts of clay.

We chose a lights-out break back in the stream level room and enjoyed hearing the low murmur of water flowing underground.

It was drizzling but warm when we returned to the entrance. For the stream ford, we chose to cross the two smaller tributaries where rocks appeared across the first branch. Another barbed wire fence presented itself for our night tour. At the second stream, there were no rocks so we chose to jump it, with only modest success.

From the parking area, the cavers returned to Tricia's and Paul's to eat and to prepare for a New Year's Eve get-together that lasted into 2003 by the lakeside.

For the first day of 2003, we were

headed to Emblen Cave for a youth-oriented trip. The New Year's Day trip had been planned for the youngsters in the group.

It was the first cave trip for Brian's daughters, Sierra and Whitney. Other new cavers included Austin and Julia Birch and Jennica Graber-Grace. For Liam Jorden, it was his third caving trip. The trip leaders were Paul Singley, Mary Grace, Sheila Knight and Jay.

Earlier in the day, Mary had reviewed a beginner's book on caving for the youngsters, including descriptions of stalactites, stalagmites and other formations.

Along a winding lane in the Tennessee hills, Brian led our caravan to a quiet valley where smoke curled up from chimneys of two-story clapboard houses and cattle grazed along small, swiftly flowing streams.

The owner, an elderly, white-haired lady, opened the front door of her country home and welcomed Brian on her porch. Brian said the family enjoys allowing youth groups to visit Emblen Cave.

After gearing up and getting all the kids in tow, we crossed the road onto a pasture and hiked across the grass to a steep hill with a well-established trail going up. After a couple of minutes, we could see the very large cave entrance about halfway up the hill. With the rains of the previous two days, water was dripping from the top of the entrance and the floor was muddy. The ceiling of the cave continued almost horizontally from the face of the hill while the floor dropped away, revealing several passages.

We paused just inside so that everyone could power up lights. When the group reorganized, we continued past the twilight zone. Shouts of, "It's dark in here!" and "This is really neat" punctuated the stillness.

We entered a stream passage where we had to avoid ankle-deep water by stepping across large stones. Some of the small children had to be carried across. After a few missteps, keeping those little shoes out of the water became less of a priority. Spare socks and shoes were back in the vehicles.

One of the adults joked as the ceiling lowered in the stream passage that it was a lot easier for the kids - much walking passage remained! After a while, though, everyone had to revert to hands-and-knees crawling before we emerged in a small room. A couple of bats perched on higher parts of the ceiling. Dew covered their bodies.

The children were instructed on safety and conservation as we went along. The kids got into more crawling as we left the first room, continuing upstream, and then entered a smaller chamber.

Interestingly, what an adult would consider an enticing but impossibly tight squeeze became possible to a small child. So we found ourselves holding the kids back from exploring inner recesses from which we knew we could not rescue them if they got stuck!

On the way out, we took a side trip down a passage to the



Brian Lloyd of Tennessee emerges from a clay-coated crawl in Angel's Cave. J. Jorden photo.

stream level. At the bottom of a breakdown slope, clear flowing water appeared from a low passage and flowed past to a bend, where it disappeared again.

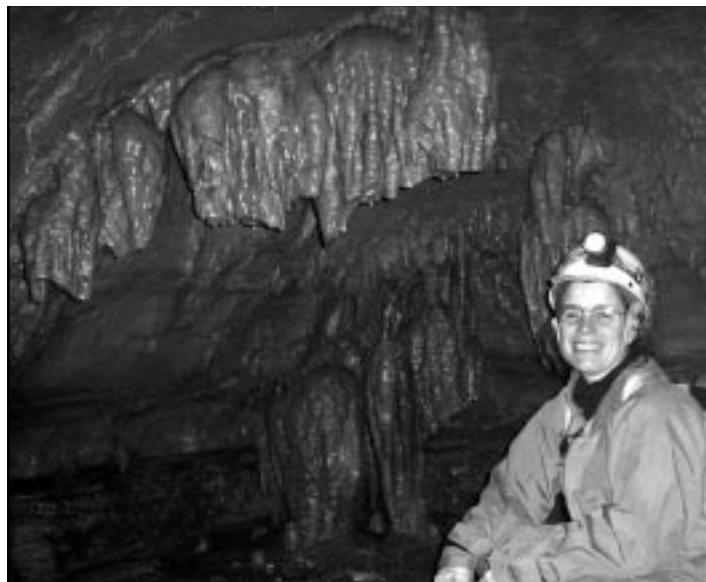
Brian said that the stream had been pushed both ways to sumps.

Liam, not satisfied with seeing the stream where it was accessible, wanted to venture downstream. Of course, it was over his head. Paul, who had already waded out into the stream, volunteered to carry Liam for a bit. But Liam did not want to leave that stream, even after we told him how cold it was!

For more details on the trip, please see the youth report by Julia Birch on her first caving expedition.

This holiday in the Tennessee hills was a brief but welcome respite from the busy year-end season.

DEEP BELOW IN ANGEL'S: Mary Grace of Virginia poses in front of formations that have suffered some vandalism at Angel's Cave, Tennessee. J. Jorden photo.



Explorations North of La Linja

Don Broussard

The team of four cavers departed Texas January 13, 2001, with the dedicated intention to survey virgin pits above Aquismon, S.L.P. Mexico. Austin was cold; frequent rain approaching freezing each night. Bonnie found a WWW weatherman who claimed Ciudad Valles, a large town close to Aquismon, was between 50° and 70°. Everyone looked forward to the warmer temperatures. Robert's 1997 Ford 4x4 diesel pickup crossed into Mexico lunchtime Saturday and arrived in Aquismon Sunday afternoon.



Jol Quele. Bonnie Longley is standing to the left of center among the breakdown.
Photo by Ernie Garza

As we sat in the Aquismon square enjoying cold ice cream, Barry Cunningham, from Houston, walked up. Barry is building a home on a small lot two blocks south of the east side of the square. This \$9000 lot is big enough to build a two-room concrete-block home. He is the third Texan I know of in Aquismon. By 2 PM the Ford is slowly bumping up the road west of Aquismon. Three hours steep driving on narrow dirt roads brings us to the community of La Brecha, a few kilometers north of the main road between Aquismon and Sotano de las Golondrinas. In the smattering of daylight remaining, camp is pitched in a tiny flat spot 100 meters south of La Brecha on the narrow west edge of the road. Cow patties are moved to one side, rocks are migrated back to the road and three tents are pitched with the truck and kitchen in the middle. Immediately across the road in a short bluff is a nameless shelter 2 1/2 meters high, 4 meters wide and 1 1/2 meters long.

After dinner is over and the sun has firmly set, a friendly mid-20s local by the name of Carlos Perez appears at the edge of camp. We ask him if it is OK to camp where we have already done so,

and Carlos says 'Of course.' Several minutes of polite conversation ensue during which Don offers to hire him the next day as a guide to caves south of camp. Carlos readily accepts. The group already knows of caves nearby. The map Becky Jones had provided in Austin shows the locations of three sotanos rumored to be 'big and deep!' Don neglects to mention this detail to Carlos, in order to see where Carlos will go the next day without being prejudiced.

Five minutes walk south from La Brecha is a 50 meter stretch of road with no trees to the east. Carlos points to a huge entrance on the other side of the deep valley below the road. The entrance is two-thirds of the way up the opposite mountainside. 'Al Brate' Carlos calls it. The gaping entrance is easy to see. Al Brate is a Huastecan expression, certain to be misspelled in this report, which Carlos translates as "the entrance above a tree". Sure enough, there is a big tree visible just below the entrance, but there is a suspicion Carlos is seeing how far he can test my gullibility. Carlos states Al Brate is an hours walk up and along established trails through the coffee bean trees.

Carlos walks 5 minutes further south to Cueva del Agua. Located only 15 meters east of the road, Cueva del Agua is not visible from the road due to thick undergrowth below the rainforest canopy. A narrow, flat trail wiggles past a two meter wide fissure three meters deep; probably a fossil remnant of the cave. The horizontal cave entrance, three meters wide and two high, began to pinch down within six meters. Carlos told Don it went on another 40 meters, stooping, then crawling. There is no further exploration, as Don is anxious to find pits!

Then politics rears its ugly head. End of guidance. According to Carlos, there are no more caves or pits until one reaches La Linja (pronounced ling' ka). Don walks back to camp where we pack daypacks and stroll back down the road toward La Linja looking for Juan Marciano Isabela. Becky had also provided the tidbit that Marciano knows of three pits between La Brecha and La Linja. We realize Marciano is going to be needed. Half way to La Linja, a fellow who lives in a thatched-roof stick-walled home near the edge of the rocky road said he can take us to a sotano only five minutes away as he points west through the cof-

fee bean trees. Being judicious with the translation of 'five minutes' from a fellow who has never owned a watch, that approximate location is close to one of the dots on Becky's map. Bonnie tells him she has an interest at seeing the sotano, but our walk to La Linja at that particular moment has precedence.

Entering the north end of the tiny community of La Linja, we find a young fellow manning a tienda. The tienda is well stocked for the area; beer, soda pop, sardines, D batteries and animal cookies. He says Juan Marciano Isabela is in the center of town. We continue walking south. At La Linja central over soda pop, the next, older tienda owner huffily says there is only one fellow in town with that name, Marciano is what he is called, and he is at the north end of town. We walk back to the first tienda. After all, the town is only five minutes in length. Marciano arrives within a few minutes. Don mentions we got his name from two gringos, Becky Jones and Joe Ivy, who had been there the year before looking for caves. He ponders for a moment before he decides that he does remember Becky and Joe. His willingness to guide us to the same sotanos he had shown them is discussed. Marciano agrees to guide us for dos (two). He suggests it will be about two hours of walking along trails. "Dos como?" (Two what?) Don asks. "Pesos?" Yes, he says, "Dos pesos." We foreigners realize 'two pesos' is not a reasonable wage; only 20 cents U.S., when a local makes a dollar a day on the rare day he gets a wage from anyone. Marciano repeats "Dos pesos" is what he wants for two hours of easy walking along trails. We set off immediately. Don estimates that between the four of us, once we have been there, we can return without his assistance the following day. We're carrying a roll of orange flagging tape to be used for marking trails. Robert is skeptical about how long the flagging tape will last after it is tied so colorfully to a tree.

Throughout this elevated valley grow continuous fields of rich coffee bean trees tucked into the rolling karst. Coffee has been the primary cash crop for over a hundred years. Fifteen minutes walk take us past two solitary huts partway along the south end of this primary north-south ridge. Then up a steep trail weaving among the coffee trees into the edge of a small worn-out cornfield in a rare, flat karst field. Jol Quili is located here. Jol is 'pit' in Huastecan, and quili is a small bird. Thick undergrowth sur-

rounds most of Quili. The only obvious landmark in the cornfield is a lone tall tree with flaky red bark growing two meters from the edge of the pit. Later questions combined with Marciano's own handwriting reveal Jol Quili is also known as Sotano Guaguas and Sotano Huahuas. No 'de' or 'del' pronounced in the middle. We surmise 'quili' is the same as a 'guaguas' or a small parrot of the region (1). Jol Quili is about 15 meters in diameter. Its depth is estimated at 3 seconds, using a two-fist-sized flat rock as the measuring device. It's a marvelous entrance, compared to most of the pits in Texas. A narrow glimpse of the far side of the floor can be seen as bouldery with low vegetation striving for sunlight. Robert is carrying a 'Garmin GPS III+' meter that Whole Earth Provision Co. had loaned to Susan Souby, who in turn let Robert borrow. The satellite page in the GPS meter is 870 - North



Bonnie Longley is standing on the lowest area of Sigue Jol. Photo by Don Broussard

America. With the map datum set to WG8 84, Robert determines Jol Quili is located at 14Q, 0490527, 2392462.

Next, five minutes north along a north-south trail in the coffee bean karst is Jol Quele, a.k.a. Sotano de Guacamayo, a.k.a. Jol Cuelet. A "quele" is Huastecan for the guacamayo bird, none of which have been seen in the area for 20 or more years. Quele is an impressively huge entrance that awed Don so much he neglected to ask the definition of "cuelet". Quele is surrounded by thick undergrowth up to an edge composed of huge boulders that are contemplating their next phase of existence in the bottom of the pit. Jol Quele is on top of the south end of the ridge immediately west of the road between La Brecha and La Linja. 30 meters in diameter and 6 seconds deep! 14Q, 0490436, 2392515.

Fifteen minutes downhill, straight west of Jol Quele, Marciano walks to Sigui Jol. 'Sigui' is the Huastecan name of this particular valley. Jol follows the name Sigui, instead of preceding the

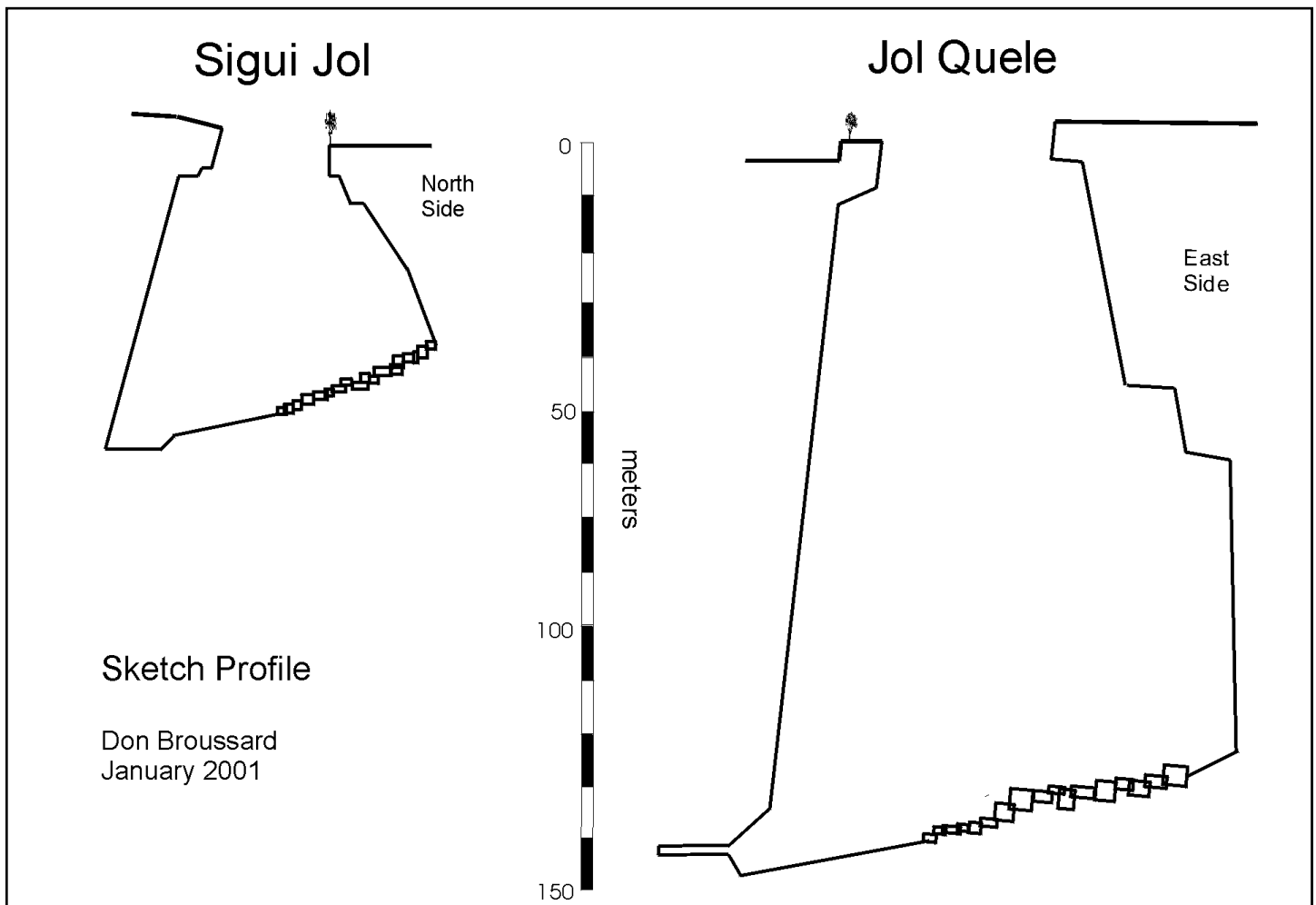
noun as it commonly does in other pit names. Sigui Jol is 20 meters from the principal east-west trail crossing the Sigui Valley. This pit is also surrounded by thick vegetation, 20 meters in diameter and 3 1/2 seconds deep. 14Q, 0490425, 2392287.

After returning to the road, Marciano is given two pesos. He refuses to accept two pesos, saying he wants two hundred pesos. His change of heart is declined. Don offers him 40 pesos, which he also rejects. Don then offers him 20 pesos as a compromise. Marciano immediately accepts the 40. He opens up to us then, and says he really had wanted "Dos dollar" (two dollars). We thank him again for his guidance, tell him we will not need his help tomorrow, and part amicably.

Tuesday morning Ernie, Bonnie and Don arrive at the entrance to Jol Quele with Ernie's 300 meter rope. Robert and 0-9 remain at the truck to guard camp. The low side of Jol Quele is rigged to a tree five meters from the edge. Bonnie rappels in as the first person ever recorded to enter this fine pit; 118 meters to a bottom much bigger than the entrance. It's a thrilling drop to the huge sunlit bottom. Two small rooms exist on the north side; two meters high in the first room and one meter high in the second. The entrance floor is piled breakdown with ferns and small trees in the middle where the sun shines sufficiently often. Bonnie and Don survey around the perimeter of the 2 acre floor. After we all climb out, we carefully stash the heavy rope and assorted personal vertical gear to the side of the trail since we will be passing close by here tomorrow.

Wednesday, seven local gentlemen show up before the sun is up, before even Robert and Don finish making coffee. Robert uses the most advanced of his Spanish vocabulary to carry on a polite conversation with them. Sr. Tiburcio Ausencio Eulalia, Juez Auxiliari (head honcho) is irked that we did not asked his permission to visit his town. Don is unable to politely convince them to leave until after agreeing to meet them immediately after our breakfast. We are told Carlos Perez has no "carga" and neither does his father! Carlos' opinion does not count! "Do not ask permission to be in this area from Carlos!" they demand. Robert and Don are apologetic; sorry they did not realize who to ask permission from. One of the background gentlemen in a red-plaid jacket seemingly lackadaisically places his thumbs behind his belt with his hands resting on his waist. This slightly splays open his jacket, allowing Robert to see the handle of something both shiny and textured tucked in his pants. After the gentlemen depart, Robert mentions to Don it looked like the handle of a pistol. Those fellows are as apprehensive of us as we are of them! Coffee and breakfast consumed, Robert and Don walk to a multicolored building behind the church in the center of La Brecha where the men wait. 50 pesos and a list of our names mollify everyone. We anxiously head back to the truck to organize packs for the next survey trip!

Everyone heads up the trail to Jol Quele. Bonnie is in charge of making maps, so she and Robert GPS around the entrance of Quele while Ernie and Don head down the trail carrying the 300 meter rope with the intention of getting Sigui Jol rigged. 30 min-



utes later Don sees orange flagging he had tied on a tree near Jol Quele. He realizes he has walked a long loop carrying the heavy rope! Ernie and Don use the convenient TalkAbout Motorola radio to contact the other two just finishing GPSing Jol Quele. Robert, Bonnie and 0-9 come down to where Ernie and Don rest. Robert and Bonnie's memory of the trail gets everyone to Sigui Jol easily; ten minutes straight down an obscure trail then left on an easily recognized large trail for five minutes. By 12:30 PM, Bonnie and Robert are GPSing around the entrance of Sigui Jol. Ernie and Don rig the rope through a 'V' of tree branches at the edge of the pit. While Don rappels in, 0-9 leaves with Robert. Sigui has a 55 meter entrance drop. Eight meters of rope pass through the few plants clinging desperately to the top edge, then the pit rapidly expands out until the rope touches bottom near the center of the entrance chamber. Bonnie rappelled in second, then Ernie, who immediately begins taking photographs. Bonnie begins surveying the breakdown pile.

Back at Jol Quele, 0-9 slips out of his harness and dashes off. Robert doesn't have a clue where 0-9 has gone. He is really relieved to find 0-9 standing at the entrance to Sigui Jol a few minutes later. Robert yells down into the pit to turn the bottom radio back on and explains he is lashing 0-9 to a tree at the top. Bonnie requests an additional tie-off to 0-9's harness so that 0-9 can not slip out again. Robert ingeniously runs a length of leash around 0-9's back leg, then walks to camp alone. Surveying on the bottom continues using radial patterns from two high points near the center of the bottom. Two-thirds of the floor is breakdown, ferns and skinny trees up to 3 meters tall with big leaves. A huge shelf of deteriorating flowstone 3 meters high and 14 meters long is flowing off the northwest wall of the floor. On the south end of the floor is a large flat low spot. The crew finishes surveying, photographing and derigging in time to meet Robert at camp shortly before sundown.

By 9:35 AM Thursday, camp is packed back into the truck and Robert is driving south toward Cueva Linda. This well-known-to-the-locals cave was mentioned to cavers walking to Sotano de Golondrinas in the early '70s. Described as having a horizontal entrance, cavers did not investigate it at first when the longest free-fall shaft in the world was beckoning. At 10:30, we park 1/4 kilometer east of the tiny community called Paxahalia. Everyone walks through coffee tree fields containing an occasional orange or banana tree. Robert measured 300 meters with the GPS, where on the left side of the trail, is a distinct one meter drop-off heading west into the bottom of this ravine. 100 meters of scenic stroll through more coffee trees in the ravine. The sides of the arroyo gently grow taller until we arrive at the big, 4x5 meter Cueva Linda entrance looming black. Ernie, Don and Bonnie dash in to take photos of this heavily decorated passage. 2 PM and we drive off the plateau heading for El Bano, 10 kilometers south of Ciudad Valles, for a luxurious camp. The gently sulphurous dark pool is 88 degrees. Our first bath in a week; it feels good to be clean and refreshing to give assorted poisonous mala-mujer rashes a good scrubbing.

Next morning we drive to Alta Cima where Ernie has been before. This town is nine miles west of Gomez Farias, in the Sierra de Guatemala mountain range north of Ciudad Mante. At the Hotel El Pino west of the center of Alta Cima, we pay 20 pesos

(\$2) each to pitch our tents in the front yard by an outhouse and registration building. The rooms 50 meters up the gentle slope are 150 pesos each. Some are double-bed rooms with their own bathrooms out back. The row of five rooms 30 meters above the registration building contain 2 bunk beds (4 singles) with two baths at both ends of the row. The flush commode in the Men's toilet is stopped up, Robert reports.

Ernie guides Bonnie, 0-9 and Don to Cueva de Alta Cima this evening. The trail toward the Cueva begins 50 meters north of the "Registro de Visitantes, El Cielo Biosphere" building says the sign above the door. There is an old barbed wire fence on each side of this portion of trail for 100 meters to a large field used for soccer, then uphill past an unbelievably huge ant pile. This ant pile is 2 meters across and 1/2 meter high, biggest ant hill we have ever seen. The trail continues uphill through forest on the north side to the top of the ridge. A pit with a one meter high concrete wall in front of the pitch is located on the other side of the ridge 50 meters down from the top. Ernie tentatively named it Sotano de Alta Cima. Approximately 100 meters down the north side is an obscure side trail weaving west through karst for 60 meters to the entrance of Cueva de Alta Cima. A mild scrunch past a breakdown block in the entrance brings us to about 65 meters of horizontal passage. Airflow at the back indicates another possible entrance, which could easily be the pit seen on the walk down to the horizontal entrance. Ernie squeezes through and down the chimney at the back for fifteen meters. More low passage continues. UTM readings at both entrances: 14Q 0480355 2550393 at the Sotano, and 14Q 0480355 2550393 at Cueva de Alta Cima.

Before heading for Texas the following morning, we tour the community of Alta Cima. The Restaurant "La Fe" has birds penned up in its side yard. A military macaw and a Great Curassow are there. The Curassow has black feathers and a bright yellow beak containing a yellow ball on top of its beak larger than a shooting marble. Also penned are two Black Penelopina and two Crested Guan. Ernie's bird book is very useful! These last four birds looked like large guinea hens in color and size. The population of Alta Cima is estimated at 30 people. The terrain is very old secondary growth due to people living here a very long time and cutting down the original old growth trees. Spanish moss drapes the trees throughout the area. The karst is so weathered in the roadcuts that distinct bedding planes could not be detected in an attempt to estimate bedding thickness. A gentleman in Alta Cima said he knows of a pit three kilometers southeast of the village. He also knows of a cave thirty minutes north composed of two rooms separated by a crawlway. The first room is big enough to hold 500 people he assures us! These leads still need to be checked.

Participants: Robert Burnett (1940), Ernie Garza (1941), Don Broussard (1948), Bonnie Longley (1956), 0-9 (1999)

(1) Ron Ralph, personal communication, 3/12/2001. Discussion of the pit called 'Hoya de Guaguas' which Ron helped to first explore in the 1960s.

Kickapoo Caverns State Park

Date: March 29-31st
Cynthia Lee

Cavers: Tina Arriens, Allan Cobb, Ellie Hernandez, Gilbert Hernandez, Linda Palit, Amanda Scott, Travis Scott, and Sarah Springer

The purpose of our trip to Kickapoo Caverns State Park (KCSP) was to establish the groundwork for a TSA project in the park. Goals of the project at KCSP include relocating and obtaining GPS coordinates for "lost" caves in the area, surveying and producing maps for these caves, and documenting the biology and geological features of each one. Additionally, the goal of this project is to complete restoration work at Kickapoo Caverns. Allan Cobb and Travis Scott have been working with the park service and KCSP's manager Mike Knezek to start the project. The project will involve two to three large trips to the park per year.

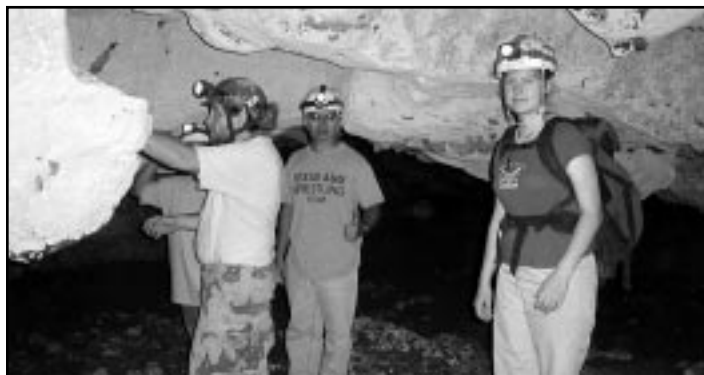
Allan and Linda arrived at the park early on Friday afternoon. The rest of arrived just in time to observe a 25-minute bat flight at the newly developed viewing area at Stuart Bat Cave (AKA Green Cave). A red-winged hawk even paid us a visit while it was feeding on the bats.

Mike Knezek and Mary Jane also met us at Stuart Bat Cave and showed us to the bunkhouse where we would be staying. The bunkhouse will serve as the project headquarters. Equipped with a wonderful gas stove and running water, it made a nice shelter from the stormy weather later that night.

On the following morning, we woke and gathered our gear for a day of ridge walking. Mike and Mary Jane joined us as we located and visited Cot Cave. The primary objective of this trip was to relocate lost caves, so we decided to split into three groups. Each group took one section of the park. Following about six hours of ridge walking, we were only able to relocate and obtain GPS coordinates for two of the caves.

Later that evening we watched the bat flight at Stuart Bat Cave again and then decided to go to Kickapoo for a tourist tour. Allan

Amanda Scott, Allan Cobb, and Gilbert Hernandez in Cot Cave.
Photo by Cynthia Lee



Sarah Springer in Kickapoo Caverns
Composed by Allan Cobb, Photo by Cynthia Lee

served as our tour guide through Kickapoo that had, for the most part been closed to cavers since the NSS convention in 1994. We really enjoyed the tour as most of us at never been there before. It was nice to walk upright in a Texas cave!

Our group watching the bat flight from the day-old viewing area.
Photo by Cynthia Lee



On Sunday morning, a few of us returned to Kickapoo and practiced out photography skills in the main room. However, our main goal that morning was to conduct a preliminary restoration survey of the caverns. We looked at several areas throughout the cave and identified formations that could be restored or cleaned.

After our morning in the cave, we said good-bye to Mike and Mary Jane and thanked them for their hospitality and the bonus Easter candy. We had a great time while at KCSNA and think it will be a great TSA project. Maybe next time we can locate a few more "lost" caves.

Special thanks to KCSP and Mike Knezek for working with us to get this project started. If you are interested in more information about this project or interested in participating, please contact Travis Scott (Project Coordinator) travii99@hotmail.com OR Allan Cobb (Project Data Manager) acobb@austin.rr.com (Editor's note, as of print time Alan was in Hawaii.) Hope to see you KCSP!

Bexar Grotto Carlsbad Caverns Restoration Trip #4

By April Herzig

Once again, on January 19, 2002, several cavers gathered to clean dirt off rocks underground in Carlsbad, New Mexico. Joe Ranzau, our fearless leader, Frank & Andrew Herzig, our photographers, April Herzig, cooker of spaghetti, Libby Overholt, our comic relief, and Kevin & Emily McGowan from Houston made up our crew. After meeting the ranger and signing the traditional papers, we headed for the cave with buckets, toothbrushes, whisk brooms and dust pans in hand. Since the freight elevators were under construction, we rode down to the bottom of the cave in the visitor elevator with a real live elevator operator. After final bathroom stops, the cavers left the trail and descended to Lower Cave. We hiked back to our last site enjoying the new bridges over some of the wet areas. The morning was spent dusting the formations before bringing out the squirt bottles and sponges after lunch. In spite of water fights and throwing sponges, the area formations were much whiter at the end of day than when we began. The small cave pearls that were in the area were carefully gathered to be replaced after the flowstone was cleaned. A few photos were taken of the workers and the work, and then a tour of the Big Loop Trail in Lower Cave was begun. It was fun walking through large passages in large rooms, through narrow passages with walls close enough to touch covered with aragonite formations, through low places and high places, over breakdown, and past huge chunks of former ceiling now resting on the floor. Some photos were taken, and the photographers wished there was more time for pictures. However, the group was starving so we headed out for our Research Hut #6 and homemade spaghetti sauce, spaghetti, salad, and French bread. Showers felt great, and the warm hut made for a good night's sleep.

On January 20, 2002, Joe, Emily, Kevin and Libby gathered on the front porch as the sun came up to enjoy their morning coffee. The Herzig's more sanely slept in until about 8:00 a.m. By 8:30 a.m., our rested crew was on their way back to our restoration site

in lower Carlsbad Caverns. Final touches were made on the majority of the area, spraying water and dabbing with new clean sponges. Boots were removed as the individual cleaned sections were connected. The small cave pearls were rinsed and replaced. Photos were taken of the results. Flagging tape was placed around the bat bones and cave pearls as well as the general area. A discussion was held about placing threatening signs warning people never to walk on this area, and the dust never to settle here. However, we settled for the flagging tape. It will be interesting to see what shape the area is in the next time we come for a Carlsbad restoration trip. We finished before lunch and headed out of the cave.

We split up for afternoon activities. Emily, Kevin and Libby had a nice visit with friend Susan Herpin, currently of Artesia. They all went out to eat at the Golden Corral in Carlsbad; the good food was a treat.

Leaving about 1:30 p.m., the Herzig's and Joe drove off to Slaughter Canyon to hike up the riverbed to Christmas Tree Cave. Walking up the canyon into a strong headwind, we made our way slowly over the river stones toward the cave. The regularly placed cairns made trail-finding quite easy. After about an hour's hike, the trail headed straight up the mountain. After a little over a half-hour's hike, we found a shelter cave, and then Christmas Tree Cave. We rigged the rope and the four of us rappelled the 20 foot drop at the entrance. We walked the 400 feet to the back of the cave marveling at the huge formations – columns and stalactites and stalagmites. Some white stalactites near the flagged trail were flagged with flagging tape. There were also small helectites and white soda straws with drops of water on the ends. Most of the cave was dry except for the few drops of water on the soda straws. It must have been magnificent when the cave was wet and alive and growing; there are so many formations in a small amount of space. We saw the cave's namesake Christmas Tree formation and made our way to the back of the cave. Joe and April sat down and enjoyed being in the cave while Frank and Andrew began taking slide photographs on their way out of the cave. After a little over an hour of picture taking, we rigged up to exit the cave. Andrew used a frog system, Joe climbed out using an ascender for a safety, and Frank and April used their rope walker systems. Once out of the cave, packs were loaded, and the rope was coiled for the hike down the mountain by moonlight. The stars were beautiful, and the Orion constellation shone over us as we hiked down the riverbed out of the canyon. The winds were lighter, and we were happy to be heading back to the hut for supper and a shower. It was so nice to sit down when we reached the car about 9:30 p.m. We quickly drove back to the hut because we had told the rest of our crew to call out a search party if we were not back by 10:00 p.m. We drove in at 10:06 p.m. to the welcome smell of bacon cooking in the warm hut. Sausage and egg tacos have never tasted so good as they did that evening. After sharing stories late into the night, we all went to bed for a much needed rest.

On January 21, 2002, Emily and Kevin left early for the long drive to Houston, and Joe pulled out the papers to complete the trip reports for the park service. After a visit to the book store at the Caverns, the rest of our crew bid a fond farewell to the Carlsbad area and headed back to Texas for work and school the next day, but with many pleasant memories to hold us over until the next trip.

Gorman Cave

(Colorado Bend State Park)

February 23, 2002

By Link Hullar and Lane Hullar

As we headed north out of Elgin the sun began to shade the eastern horizon in orange. We had left our home in the Houston area before 4:30 a.m. so that we would arrive in Colorado Bend State Park in time for our "wild cave" tour of Gorman Cave. We had read about this opportunity in the book *Texas Caves* by Blair Pittman, made our reservations a few weeks in advance, and we were on the road again. By 9:30 a.m. we had met our Park Ranger guide and followed him in our truck to the small parking area where we would pick up the hiking trail to Gorman Cave.

To reach the cave our small group hiked an easy mile and a half trail that led through the brush, trees, and rocks that border the Colorado River. It was a pleasant walk with the only minor difficulty being a steep grade with loose rock. Along the way we passed a small cave with bad air that our guide described for us, then we pushed on to our destination among the rocky bluffs that overlook the river.

The entrance to Gorman Cave is a horizontal slash along the face of the rock wall. One must climb or slide down about fifteen feet to the entry room, where our group assembled after everyone made it to the floor of the cave. From here there is much to see for beginners like the two of us. Our guide led the way while pointing out features and formations. The passageway was easily negotiated and did not seem to provide any serious challenges for the people in our group. Wading in shallow pools of water and skirting or climbing around deeper pools are the only inconveniences for those who have no previous caving experience. We saw cave crickets, isopods, rimstone dams, helectites, soda straws, and of course, the usual stalagmites, stalactites, and flowstones. Many of these formations are quite accessible so that it is easy to get up close for a good look at some of these developing phenomena. Watching the soda straws drip inches from our heads was fascinating. The tour wound back around to a gate that had been placed at the natural termination point of the cave. Exploration by cave divers continues in the pool that lies beyond the gate. As we made our way back the way we had come, our guide pointed out a couple of alternatives for those who wanted to try something a little different. First came a short side passage that briefly diverts then reconnects with the main corridor. This was about knee deep in water and approximately four feet high by two and a half feet wide. Then, just inside the cave entrance, there was a crawl space that took us to a small room that could be exited via a somewhat tricky, contorted opening that brought us back into the main cave entry room. These brief alternatives gave us a little physical challenge and a couple of small side trips off the beaten path of Gorman Cave.

Our group was inside the cave for about an hour and it was well worth our drive. In addition to the beauty of the cave, and the very nice scenery of the walk to the cave, Colorado Bend State Park is a grand spot. Gorman Cave is great for novice cavers as it provides a nice step up from show caves while introducing some basic elements of caving. Also, one can see in this cave the damage that can be done by unregulated and/or unsupervised cave vis-

itors. Many of the formations in Gorman Cave have been broken or otherwise damaged by visitors in the years before the area became a state park and some of the walls are covered by graffiti with one example dating back to the 1880s. Even with the extensive damage, the cave can provide visitors with a sense of hope. Where stalactites have been broken off in the past one can already see the beginnings of new formations as the water drips from the ceiling of Gorman Cave. It was a satisfying morning, to be sure.

Reservations for the Gorman Cave walking tour can be made by calling Colorado Bend State Park (915-628-3240). The tour is \$10.00 per person with reservations highly recommended. There is also an afternoon crawling tour with a greater degree of physical difficulty but this tour is even more difficult to join as reservations are booked months in advance. The crawling cave tour ventures into two or more of the other two hundred plus known caves in Colorado Bend State Park. The cost is \$20.00 per person. We will make that one eventually and report back to *The Texas Caver*. Meanwhile, we have another wild cave tour booked at the Lost Sea in the Smokey Mountains of Tennessee this coming May and we are looking for other caving opportunities here in Texas. We hope to see some of you in a Texas cave soon.

Caving in Lampasas County, Texas

February 23, 2002

By Mark Gee

A few months back, Keith Heuss and others were ridge walking at the far, east side of Colorado Bend State Park when they met a landowner on the other side of the fence. Keith explained that they were looking for caves. The landowner said, "I have some caves on my property, why don't you look at them?" So Keith and others jumped the fence to have a look. The landowner took them to four caves, but the group just looked into them that day.

A few weeks later, Keith contacted the landowner and set up a trip to his property to explore his caves. On February 23, 2002 we made the trip.

Keith Heuss, Rafal Kedzierski, Rebecca O' Daniel, and I arrived on Friday night at the cavers' camp at Colorado Bend State Park. Keith called and made arrangements for us to camp in the park, but, in exchange, we would have to do some work in the park.

Upon arrival, to our surprise, we discovered a group of fire fighters and paramedics called the STORM Team, who were having a cave rescue class. They were quite entertaining.

One of the firefighters named Scott told me an interesting story about a back entrance recently discovered into Longhorn Caverns. It seems that beyond the sumps, there are still some unsurveyed passages. Well, . . . that's another story.

On Saturday morning, we all got up early and left camp at 8:30 a.m. and headed to the small town of Nix to meet other cavers and the landowner at a locked gate. When we arrived at the gate, the landowner was waiting along with two other cavers, Wayne and Alvis Hill. We all said our hellos and headed on to the ranch.

The first cave that was shown to us was just down the hill from

his trailer house. It looked like it might go, but it needed some serious digging to get in. The next cave was much more interesting. A small opening led to a deep crevice that required a rope. Rebecca and Alvis began to chimney down about thirty feet to a ledge. Alvis asked that a rope be rigged. We didn't have one long enough, so Alvis climbed out to retrieve his 150-foot rope.

After his return, I tied a figure eight in the rope and slipped the end of the rope around a large cedar tree. Then I finished the figure eight with a follow through. Alvis then made his descent into this deep crevice. When I descended, I expected to find Rebecca at the first level, but she had found a way down to the bottom. What an amazing climber!

The floor of the crevice was mud, with a few cobbles. The floor sloped to the west, where a ten-inch hole went down about two feet and turned back under the floor. Could be a dig. The west room of the crevice was about thirty feet long by three feet wide. To the east end was a short crawl to another room about twenty-five feet long by four feet wide with a ceiling height about thirty feet high. Rebecca climbed up to the room above. Much of the room above could be seen from a crevice in the floor. She said the walls were covered with flowstone, as below, and a few stalactites and helictites could be seen.

By now, Rafal Kedzierski and Chris Hall had made it to the bottom. We all watched as Rebecca scooped virgin passage above. Rebecca climbed back down with Alvis helping her spot her foot holes. We all made a picture of the cave in our memory, knowing we would be back to survey some day soon.

Time came to go back up. Rafal headed up first. I followed as Rebecca began her ascent. She began to climb up the wide crevice using her back, feet, and elbows to gain her freedom from this deep crevice. I got up and out and then, ten minutes later, Rebecca made it (a very tough climb) followed by Alvis then Chris.

The third cave visited dropped down about ten feet, with a small hole going off to the west. I told Rafal, "Got to go feet first, belly up." Hence the name of the cave was born. Rafal climbed down in Feet First, Belly Up Cave, but the hole was too small. We would have to dig. We stopped and went looking for other caves. Wayne found a sink and we tried to dig it, but found nothing.

From here some followed the road while others went through the thick growth looking for holes, but none were found.

The owner asked if we wanted to see his rain catchment, so we all walked over to it. A large sixteen-foot by sixteen foot roof drained to a rain gutter, which in turn drained into a five hundred gallon tank which feeding into two small water troughs that provided water for the deer, turkey, and other wildlife on his land. We cooled ourselves by washing up in the water, then ate our lunch. With lunch over, we headed off to look for caves.

After a while Rebecca and Alvis found a small hole that they dug out with additional help from Chris, Rafal, and myself. In about forty-five minutes we had a hole big enough for Chris, Rebecca, and Alvis to make it down. Alvis and Rebecca reported that the length of the cave was about thirty feet with a ten foot ceiling at the

east end. The depth was thirteen feet. The owner told us that this part of the ranch had belonged to his father, so he named the cave in honor of his father, Wolverton Ranch Cave.

It was getting late in the day, so we headed back up to the first cave we had looked at that morning. Walking the fence, we found another cave formed by a group of three crevices. Two crevices ran parallel to each other and the third diagonally crevice cut through the other two. One crevice was about twenty feet deep and the other was fifteen feet deeper which was mostly closed up at the surface. A large wall of flowstone spilled out one end of the crevice and went down to the floor below. Also, about thirty bats were seen. A few stalactites and breakdown were seen in the passage between the two parallel fissures. All in all, about one hundred fifty feet of passage with a depth of forty feet was explored. I made my way up to the surface, and we headed for a cave just below the owner's trailer.

The owner seemed to think that this cave would be the biggest and wanted to know where the best place to dig would be, so we showed him.

Chris, Alvis, and Rebecca dug on the west end, and Rafal and I dug on the east. After about one hour the east end had been dug down to a large rock and a lot of persuasion would be needed to move it. On the west end a large tree stump was cut away and dirt and rocks were removed. Still, one thirty-pound rock at the bottom of a small hole proved very tough to get at. It was wedged between the walls. Rebecca, with a lot of effort, finally got the rock loose and managed to tie some webbing around it, and I pulled it out. It looked like we could get in, so Rebecca tried, but the crevice was still too tight and will need a little more rock removed to allow entry.

It was almost dark by now so we called it a day. Keith will try to set up another weekend when we will enter that cave and survey and map all the caves we have seen.

The owner led us down a gravel road to the gate and opened it. We all shook his hand and headed to Lampasas for a burger at Storm's and refreshments at the Diamond Shamrock.

Later we all shared our stories with each other around the fire. We shared our stories with STORM, the fire fighter cave rescue team.

Early Sunday morning, Rafal and I began to pack. By 7:30, we were packed and intended on getting home early, but we decided to help Keith GPS some cave locations. This was to be the work that we were supposed to do for the park. We did find and GPS several cave locations. Rebecca dropped one cave near the conference center, but a rope will be needed to continue. Keith said that it may tie in with Gorman Falls Cave. After walking to Gorman Spring, Gorman Falls, and talking with a Baylor professor who was studying small rodents, it was getting late in the day. We all took a vote and decided to head to Lampasas to eat lunch. The Country Kitchen was closed, so we ate at Storm's Hamburgers again. By 3:45, Rafal and I headed home. By 8:30 I was home, unpacked, showered and ready for a soft pillow. I was beat. Looking forward to going back. Happy caving!

Weekend at Bracken Bat Cave

By Jim "Crash" Kennedy

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Ooops, wrong epic. But the recent TSA weekend at Bracken Bat Cave in Comal County was certainly epic, and had both good and bad.

The weekend was planned in order for volunteers to work on Bat Conservation International's (BCI) Bracken Bat Cave Preserve. This 700-acre site protects the world's largest bat colony and an important aquifer recharge zone. Cavers, led over the years by San Antonio's Bexar Grotto, have been excellent stewards for the property, even before BCI bought the first five acres around the cave entrances. Saturday, January 25th, 2003 was set aside to clean up trails around the cave itself, and to begin clearing a 5700-foot-long swath for a fence line along the new western property boundary. Almost 30 cavers showed up to work in the rain and cold, clearing a little over 600 feet of new line. Almost all were from San Antonio, except for Garry White from San Marcos and Rune Burnet and Susan Souby from Austin. We really appreciated Rune's transit, which helped us to stay accurate on the unmarked line. BCI was represented by Jim Kennedy and Bob Benson, also from Austin.

After the day's work, the shivering masses enjoyed a hearty meal of venison stew and fresh pesto pasta served in Bexar's new white tent. The evening plans were to work on a couple of other cave digs on the property and to have tourist trips into Bracken -- even rappelling into the Guano Shaft entrance -- but the weather squashed any remaining enthusiasm for such ambitious activities.

A few hearty souls camped over night, and found other, mostly liquid, ways to keep warm.

Sunday morning was the TSA Winter Business Meeting, which began promptly upon the late arrival of our new Chair Terry Holsinger. About a dozen interested TSA members and officers sat in on the meeting which discussed publications, the upcoming Texas Cavers Directory, the TSA Spring Convention (May 9-11 at Cascade Caverns --<http://www.utexas.edu/depts/tnhc/www/tss/show-caves.htm#Cascade>), and other pertinent business. TSA Secretary Jerry Atkinson should have the complete minutes posted on the TSA website soon.

While we were shivering in the white tent, Bob Cowell and Mike Cunningham organized the guanophiles in extracting about one ton of guano (<http://www.wingedseed.com/rstitt/cavsng94.html#OneTonOfGuano>) from the shaft entrance for personal gardens and flowerbeds. Long-distance award goes to Jay Jordan who came for the guano but stayed for the meeting. Our hats off to those who got smelly on our behalf.

We packed up camp and cleaned up the site before adjourning to Caparelli's for a hot Italian meal. I wish I had a sign-in list so I could recognize everyone individually who showed up to help in the foul weather. There will be many other works sessions coming up at Bracken, and we hope to see more TSA members there.



Bracken Bat Cave in early fall (top), complete with flight (left).
photo by Don Arburn

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Light Leech (In-Cave Light Management)

By Jonathan Wilson
Singaporean Independent Caver

As we explore deeper into the earth the time we spend underground increases. This duration is limited by several factors, one of which is light.

Existing among the caving community is the light geek continuum, the deep pockets who shell out five hundred clams for the latest in custom waterproof, 1000 hour, LED torches. The sleek anodized aluminum housings spark envy in the eyes of the most reverent of our flock. Heated discussions rage around the campfires and flame up across data lines contesting which voltage oscillating multiple array LEDs will guide the way out of some dark hole. Save your money - become a light leech.

As a light leech, one can enter most caves with the old standby incandescent gear. A Petzl Zoom with Mini Mag backups will only slightly dent the bank account of the modest light leech caver. The light leech is never too concerned with batteries as they will steal light from others in the group. The best leeches keep their light dowsed until absolutely necessary, hardly ever running out of juice.

A good light leech will cave with about four or more folks.

Positioned in the middle of the group, the light leech can exploit the light from the other cavers to guide the way. The kind, unsuspecting folks in front will light up the passage yet to come. Watch the rocks turn to shadow as those 'on point' pass them. The rocks become a dark object with in an illuminated background. After some practice the light leech will soon sense where everything is.

Being a light leech works incredibly well when wading through water passage. Muddy water hides the clear footing, so there is no need for direct light. The surface of the water reflects and scatters the light of others, illuminating the walls and ceiling.

Save the batteries on that long ascent out of the cave. Pop the light on close to a rebelay or deviation, pass the obstacle, douse the light and continue. It is quite a trip to climb the nylon bean stock in the dark. The darkness envelops your senses, the feel of the taut rope becomes the only link to the rest of the world.

It is highly recommended to keep the lights burning on the way down a rope, keeping an eye out for that rock outcropping looking to unexpectedly turning the day sour. Nothing compares to the pain of catching the end rope knot with the braking hand at full speed and having that hand shoved forcefully into your descender.

A light leech can cave longer than the rest. Go ahead hug a tree, push a beached whale back into the ocean, and build a composting toilet. The only true environmentalist is the light leech. Keep our dark places light-pollution free!

Review

Sinkholes.

Sandra Friend. Pineapple Press, Sarasota, Florida; 2002.
ISBN 1-56164-258-4. 8.5 by 11 inches, 95 pages, hardbound.
\$18.95.

This is a children's educational book about sinkholes, loosely defined. At times the author seems to consider just about any cave or spring a sinkhole, but the emphasis is on true karst sinkholes and the engineering and water-pollution hazards they cause. The messages are conveyed clearly, but there are numerous silly little errors in the text that indicate the author's grasp of the material is tenuous. The book contains many color photos, including the traditional upside-down one of cave formations. Ignore the text and enjoy the nice collection of pictures of sinkholes devouring forests and buildings

—Bill Mixon



Texas Bats

Merlin D. Tuttle. Bat Conservation International, Austin, Texas; 2003. ISBN 0-9638248-8-0. 6 by 9 inches, 71 pp, soft-bound. \$9.95.

This is a nice little booklet about the bats of Texas, with a few pages of introductory text about bats, followed by photographs and descriptions of thirty-two species of bats that have been reported in Texas. The book contains a nice guide to eight bat-watching sites in Texas, all of which feature summer flights of Mexican free-tailed bats, and it ends with brief bibliographies of bat books for children and adults. For a more extensive and technical book about Texas bats, see *The Bats of Texas*, by David J. Schmidly, published by the Texas A&M University Press in 1991, which is still available.

Merlin Tuttle is the founder and president of Bat Conservation International, so naturally the introductory text favors bats, but sometimes it looks like Tuttle is parodying bat conservation, as when he attempts to replace the myth that bats are blind with his own myth that bats "generally have excellent eyesight." The text is awkward in places, and some of the numerous photographs are reproduced less well than in most books that feature Tuttle's excellent bat photography. Nevertheless the book is a good summary of our furry friends, some of which are fellow cavers.

—Bill Mixon

2003 TSA SPRING CONVENTION

2-4 May 2003 at Cascade Caverns, Boerne, Texas

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Camping with trees, picnic tables, and fire rings (first come, first served)
- Real toilets and showers, and port-a-johns in the camping area
- Pavilion for the TSA Store, TSS Bookstore, and other Speleovendors
- Saturday presentations -- contact Christi Bennett if you want to give a talk
- Saturday Salons 9-4, with great prizes -- contact Salon Chairs to enter
Photographic (slides/prints): Joe Mitchell <joe-evelynn@satx.rr.com>
Cartographic (maps): Sean Vincent <sean.vincent@alumni.utexas.net>
- Limited sign-up cave trips, including:
 - Vertical (Peep in the Deep Entrance to Cascade Caverns)
 - Restoration (in the commercial section)
 - Rugged (vertical and wet caving at the back of the cave)
- Photo (after-hours photographer's tour at Cave without a Name)
- Saturday dinner (barbeque & sides). Bring your own dishes and utensils.
- Sunday -- TSA meeting at 10:00. All Texas cavers invited!

EVENT RULES

- Parking in the commercial lot only during event registration. All cars must be moved to the campground for the weekend.
- Restrooms near Visitor Center are off limits to cavers during business hours.
- No free-roaming dogs. All pets must be on leash or in kennel at all times. No pets in buildings.
- Bag all trash. Do not move picnic tables.
- No fires outside of fire rings.
- No firearms or fireworks.
- Speed limit 15 mph!

For more information, contact:

Christi Bennett, TSA Vice-Chair
2447 Lockhill-Selma Road, #1304
San Antonio, TX 78230-3028
210-344-7149 home
210-377-8413 work
c.bennett@chfbc.org



One person - \$22.00
\$17.00 if you pre-register

Family - \$32.00
\$27.00 if you pre-register
Pre-Registration ends
April 18th 2003

Directions: The 2003 TSA Spring Convention is at Cascade Caverns in Boerne, Texas. Go 14 miles northwest of San Antonio and Fiesta Texas on Interstate 10 West to Exit 543. Follow the many signs to Cascade Caverns. If you get to downtown Boerne, you have gone too far. If you are coming from the west and get to Fair Oaks, you have gone too far. Look for TSA signs to the camping area. If you get lost, try calling Cascade Caverns at 830-755-8080.

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