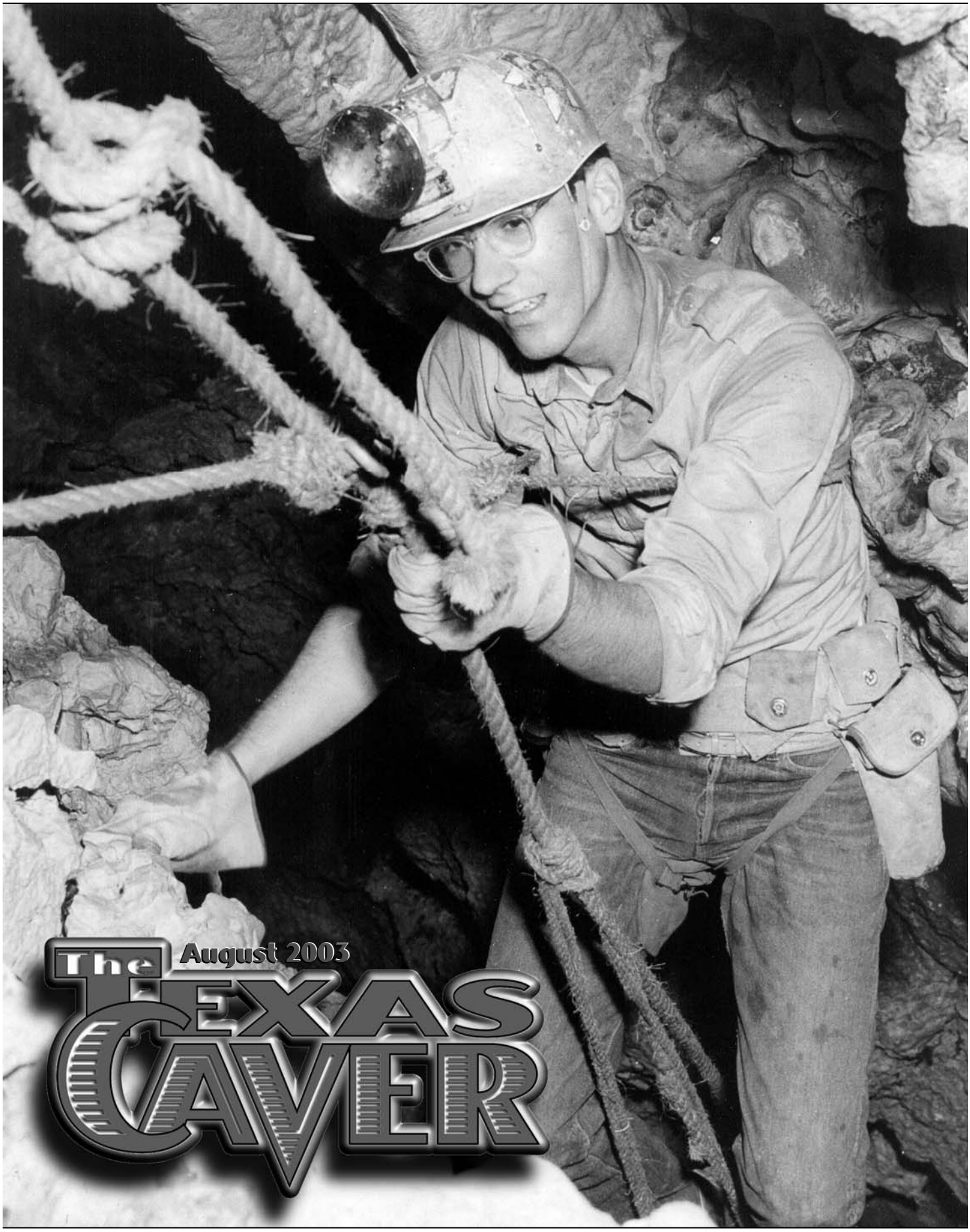


August 2003

The Texas Caver

The Texas Caver

August 2003
Volume 49 Number 4
ISSN 0040-4233

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

Subscription rates are $25/ year which includes TSA membership. **Libraries, institutions, and out-of state subscribers** may receive The Texas Caver for $20/ year,

Letters to the Editor, article submissions, subscription requests, advertising and questions should be sent to the Editor:

The Texas Caver
10801 County Road 116
Kenedy, TX 78119

Don Arburn
moomesa@fnbnet.net
361/362-3677

The deadline for submissions to The Texas Caver is the 3 weeks before publication month.

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.

Texas Speleological Association Officers:
Chair Terry Holsinger . . . . . .trhli@sprynet.com
Vice-Chair Christi Bennett . . . . . .c.bennett@chfbc.org
Treasurer Joe Ranzau . . . . . .joe.ranzau@usaa.com
Secretary Jerry Atkinson . . . . . jerryatkin@aol.com

Texas Speleological Association Business Address:
PO Box 8026
Austin TX
78713

Other contacts:
The Texas Caver Don Arburn . . . . . .moomesa@fnbnet.net
TSA Store Logan McNatt . . . . . .logan.mcnatt@tpwd.state.tx.us
TSA Web Team . . . . . .webmaster@cavetexas.org
TCC Mike Walsh . . . . . .
TCR Andy Grubbs . . . . . .grubbsi@centurytel.net
TSS George Veni . . . . . .gveni@satx.rr.com
TCMA Linda Palit . . . . . .lkpalit@swbell.net
BCI Merlin D. Tuttle & Jim Kennedy . . .jkennedy@batcon.org
AMCS Bill Mixon . . . . . .mexcaves@amcs.org
CaveTex Tom White . . . . . .jswhite@cavetex.net

THE COVERS:

FRONT COVER: Jim Manning from the St. Mary's University Speleological Society, prusiking the 90 ft pit in Elm Springs Cave (Huebener Road Cave) on May 12, 1957. (Note the pads for body rappelles)
Photo taken by Chris Orth.

BACK COVER: Joe Ranzau enjoying the vista and birds from a cave near Allamore (Van Horn) Texas.
Digital picture by Kurt Menking.

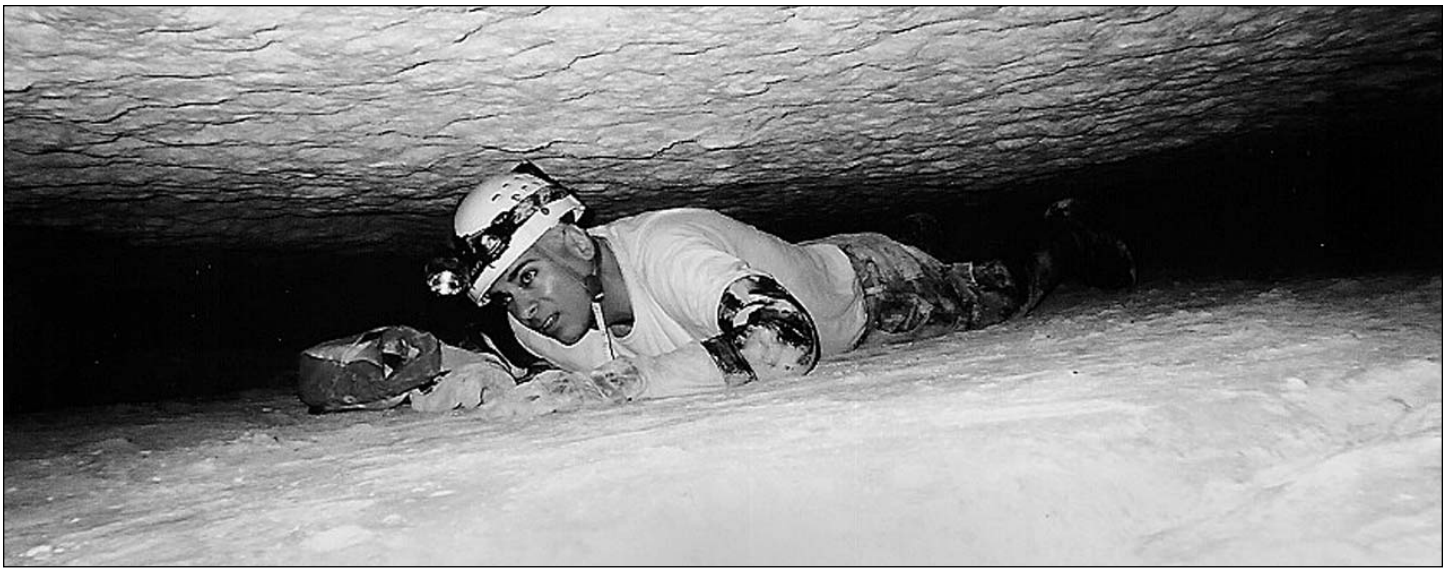
Contents

News: Features
UTG at Beck Ranch Cave 63
Trip Reports
High Guads New Mexico 66
Rucker Bat Cave 69
Circle Ranch 70
TCC Activities Update 72
TCMA 73
TSA 73
From the files of the TSS 74
NSS 75
TSA Business
MINUTES OF TSA BOG MEETING .76
How To & Not To:
Cave Digging 78
Questionaire 79
Book Review 79

TSA Store!
http://www.cavetexas.org/stores.htm
Logan McNatt • 4419 Clawson Rd. • Austin, TX 78745
512-462-9581 • lmcnatt@austin.rr.com
T-shirts

Bumper Stickers Texas Bats & Oztotl!

Back issues of The Texas Caver (not all, but many)
Chronicles of the Old Reading Grotto
TSA patches & Clocks!
TSA Online Store
Grace your Neanderthal with some gifts from the onlline store! What could be easier than clicking to buy?
http://www.cafeshops.com/texaspeleo02

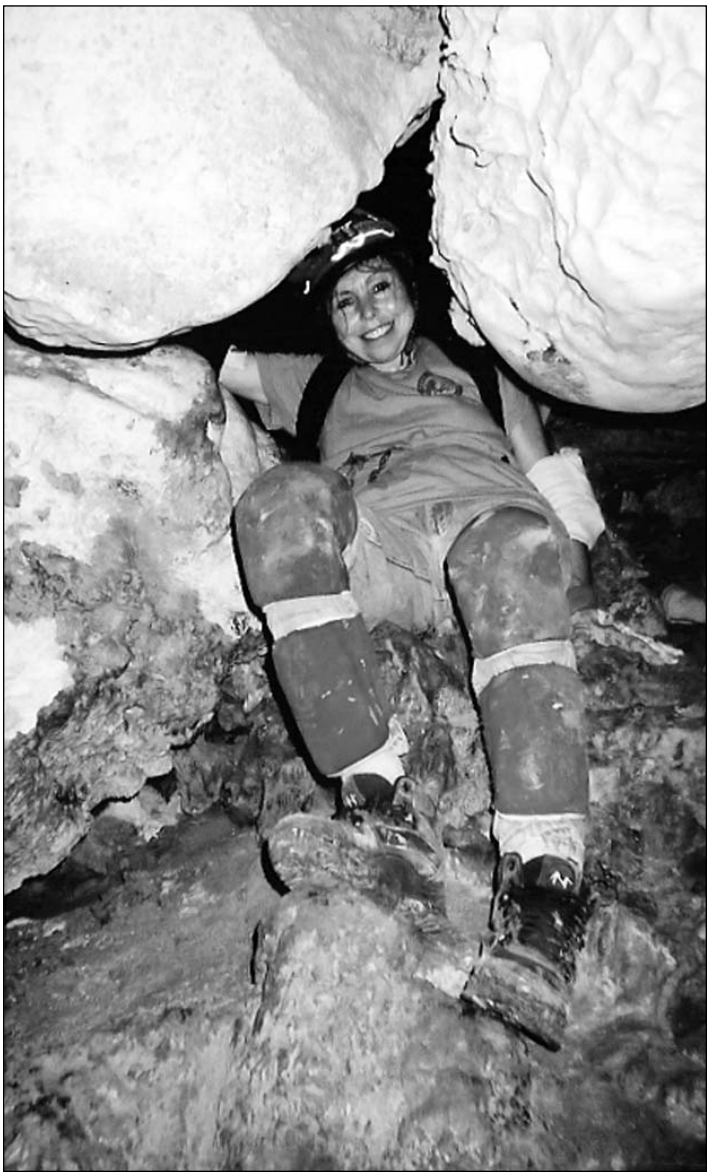


UT Grotto Goes to Beck Ranch Cave

Above: Lawrence in low crawl. Below: Rae in climb down.
Below left: Lawrence in entrance

Lawrence Najjar
October 14, 2003

On Saturday, July 26th, members of the University of Texas grotto went on a graffiti removal and survey trip to Beck Ranch in Round Rock. Aimee Beveridge led the trip. The other cavers included Tom Haile, Fran Hutchins, Rae Naedler, Walt Naedler, and Lawrence Najjar. The purpose of the trip was to introduce cavers to graffiti removal techniques and to identify other locations in the cave that may need graffiti removal on future trips. Beck Ranch Cave is located on Brushy Creek Karst Preserve and is managed by the Texas Cave Conservancy. Mike Walsh, a local caver, is president of the Texas Cave Conservancy.



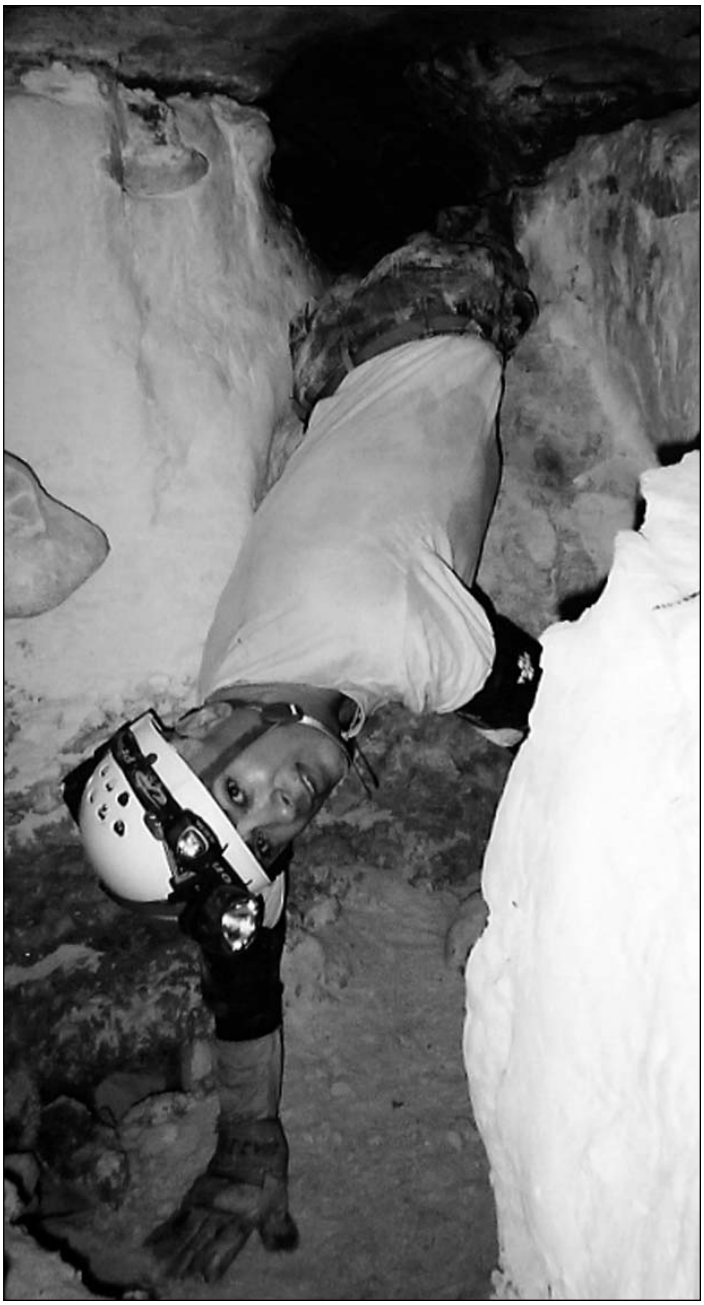
Lawrence and Walt trying out some restoration techniques

The karst preserve is located behind a firehouse in a large park with a playground, walking trail, exercise stations, and restrooms. We met at 10:00 a.m., and it was already bright and hot under the Texas summer sun. After changing into grubby caving clothes and checking our gear, Aimee led us around part of the walking trail then off onto a light trail through some scrubby grass, prickly pear cactus, and small cedar trees into what looked like an old cow pasture. The cave entrance was at the edge of a sinkhole and was surrounded by a sturdy, locked fence with a few shade trees. Aimee unlocked the fence gate and the heavy cave entrance grate. We checked our lights, then scrambled down the 12-foot, slightly vertical entrance. After we got in we had to make a choice; bear right to reach the low, muddy crawl passage or bear left to get to the higher, drier passageway that featured a couple of rooms to stand in. We went left where the graffiti probably lived.

Tom led us past a couple of false leads, down a few short, vertical pitches and through a low, wet crawl that featured delicate rimstone dams and active stalactites. The crawlway opened up into an intersection. Bearing left, we entered a 20-foot-high room containing flowstone and an intriguing passage over some rocks up and to our left. Tom dubbed this the "throne room" because he could scramble up the rocks to sit on a little ledge that overlooked the room. The throne room had some graffiti in it, mostly Magic Marker and red paint on flowstone. A year earlier another group of hard-working cavers (see http://www.nincehelser.com/cave/index.html) did a tremendous job removing much of the graffiti that used to be here. We worked on removing ink and paint on the beautiful flowstone wall that went up one side of the room. We found more graffiti on the ceiling of the right-hand passage back at the intersection. After finishing the survey, we couldn't resist checking out that intriguing little passage up behind the throne.

Group shot below flowstone.

Lawrence exiting a mound crawl



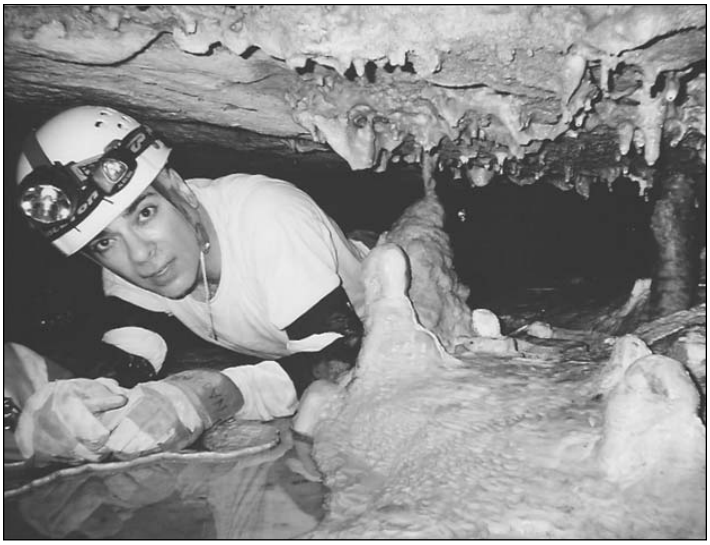
Turns out, the passage was a 15-foot long dead-end, but what a fun little dead-end. Basically we had to dive over two high mounds that blocked the small, standing passageway. Here's how we did it, we wedged and kicked and clawed ourselves up the side of the passage, then went hands-first through a foot-high opening near the ceiling and over the mound. As we went over the mound, we did handstands on the floor on the other side of the mound, then hand-walked forward until we got our feet over the mound and under our bodies. We walked forward five feet, then repeated. Fun! After diving over the two mounds the passage ended in a disappointing tiny, inaccessible squeeze. But then we got to dive over the mounds on the way back!

After being underground for several hours, we headed out of the cave. Aimee locked the grate and the gate; then we walked through the scrub to the park's walking path. A few joggers passed us and seemed startled at the sight of our happy little group shambling down the path in filthy clothes. I think we gave them something to talk about over their cappuccinos at Starbucks that afternoon ("Homeless people in the park. How horrid!").

We changed our clothes in the convenient park restrooms. When we got back to our cars, we realized that the fire station was having a grand opening. They were offering free food and drinks! We grabbed some hot dogs and iced tea, then checked out the shiny, red fire trucks. One of the trucks even had movable cameras on the side-view mirrors. We got a brief tour by Michelle Cartwright — a very impressive, knowledgeable firefighter who was also an emergency medical technician. What a great role model. She was fascinated to hear that we'd been caving in the fire station's back yard. Michelle had not done any cave rescues, but she loved the idea of doing rope work. Since she sounded like a perfect caver we encouraged her to join us at a grotto meeting.

After the fire station open house, we zipped off to visit Mike Walsh at the new Texas Cave Conservancy headquarters in Cedar Park, just north of Austin. The headquarters is in a small ranch house that borders a cave preserve. The previous owner even discovered a small 15-foot-long cave in her flower garden. Mike treated us to sodas, then gave us a tour of the headquarters, including map files, a library, and other resources for cavers. He welcomes volunteers and encourages interested people to contact him at 512-249-2283 (tccaus@cs.com). Mike is also setting up some bunking space for out-of-town cavers to use when they visit Austin. During our vist, we helped him move in a comfortable fold-out couch and love seat that he just picked up for a measly $25 at a yard sale. What a bargain hunter! Then a few of us piled into his rugged little all-terrain vehicle and got a driving tour of a few of the five nearby cave preserves that the Texas Cave Conservancy manages.

Going caving, looking at fire trucks, bombing around town in an all-terrain vehicle, driving by cave after cave ... What a great day! Thank you, Mike Walsh and Aimee Beveridge.



Above: Lawrence in another low crawl.
Below: Entrance group shot

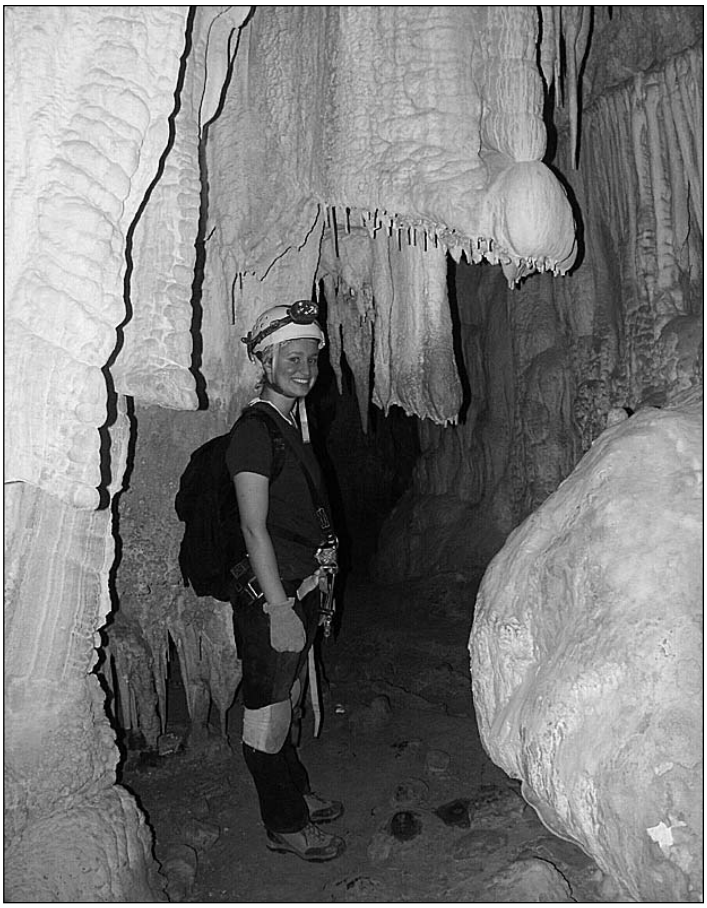
Michelle Cartwright — a very impressive firefighter and emergency medical technician

High Guads New Mexico

May 23-26, 2003
Reported by Kurt Menking

Whew, what a trip! We'd all been looking forward to the annual Bexar Grotto / Oren Memorial day trip for months. Christi Bennett was the trip's organizer and fearless leader, and with her usual keen sense of planning and organization we were more than prepared for the trip. Meals were planned, meeting times and places were established and all seemed ready as the day arrived. There were the usual minor snafus and delays, the most notable was that Christi wasn't sure she could leave work when she had planned. Something about payroll and checks. Gee, I can't imagine why they thought those things we more important than her vacation.

Tom and Vicky Brown, Joe Ranzau, Megan Bush, Christi, Steve Gutting, and the Herzigs including April, Frank, Andrew, Marie, her friend Wendy and I met in Boerne. We exchanged cell phone numbers, and passed out walkie-talkies to keep in touch. The first several hours went well, then Steve's truck started to hum, then it grew into a vibration, and we decided to pull off and check the tires. A bump was discovered on a front tire, so we pulled into a rest stop and put on the spare. The bulge grew from barely visible to a very large bulge during the 1\2 mile trip to the rest stop. We were glad we avoided a blow out, which had nearly ruined our trip two years earlier. We stopped in Fort Stockton and replaced the bad tire, plus the other front tire for good measure, and were off again.



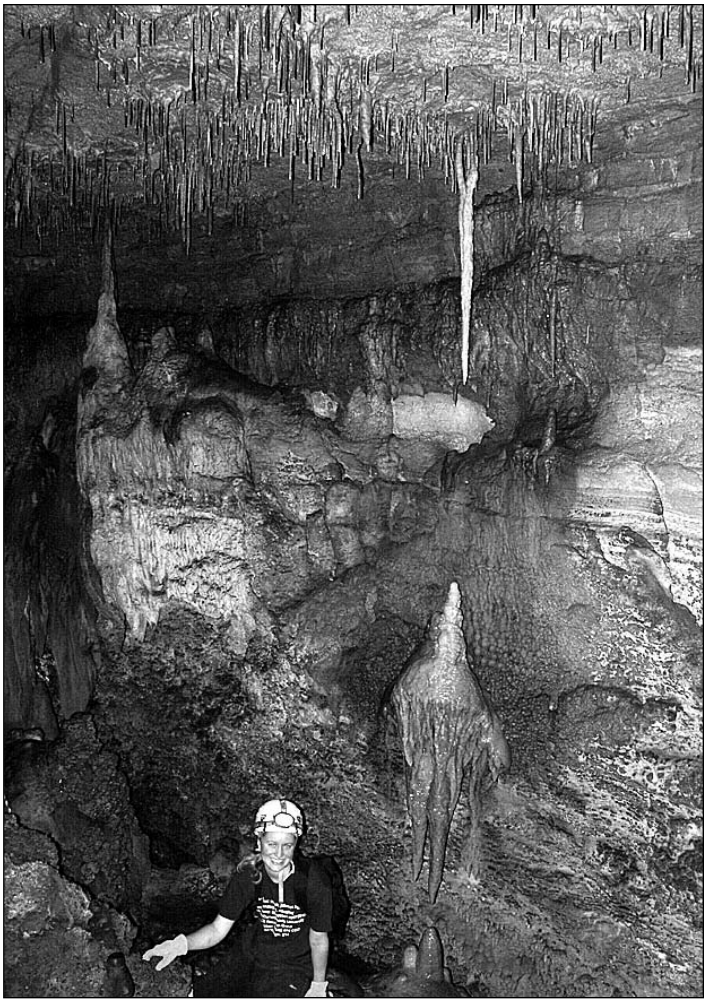
Megan Bush in Hidden Cave

We re-formed our entire caravan outside of Pecos, munched on Grandpa's jalapeno peanut brittle and other assorted snacks, and were off again. All was well except for the occasional prodding by April and others for Steve to keep up with the speed limit or we'll be setting up camp after dark. About 5 miles past Orla, we got a garbled radio message from Vicky, more of a scream. All we could hear was accident, Herzigs, come quick. When we arrived we could see the Herzigs Toyota was destroyed. It looked like it had rolled over. They had suffered a major blow out, the truck swerved left, then right, then slammed into a guard rail, rocked up onto the rail, sliding along with all four wheels off the ground, slammed back onto the asphalt, staggered along hitting the rail again then mercifully came to a stop upright. Thank goodness, no one was seriously hurt. We waited for the sheriff, DPS, and finally an ambulance to arrive. At one point we had all the law enforcement from three counties on the scene. The ambulance took Marie (with April riding along) to the hospital for x-rays and exams, but she was released in less than an hour. Steve took the Herzigs back to San Antonio and the rest of us continued on with the adventure.

Wow what a hail storm

The remaining two vehicles in our caravan arrived at the Texas camp in the High Guads about midnight. We noticed several green glowing alien heads along the road to the camp. We suspected Dale, who lives in Denver, must have picked them up as he passed through Roswell. He greeted us as we arrived in camp, and helped set up a few tents. Emily and Kevin McGowan, from Houston, were also there but had already retired for the evening. We set up camp in the dark and immediately crashed.

We awoke Saturday, made breakfast, caught each other up on the events of our travels, then set off for some caving. Four of us went to Hidden while six others went to Black. Vicky graciously volunteered to stay at camp. She caught up on some reading and

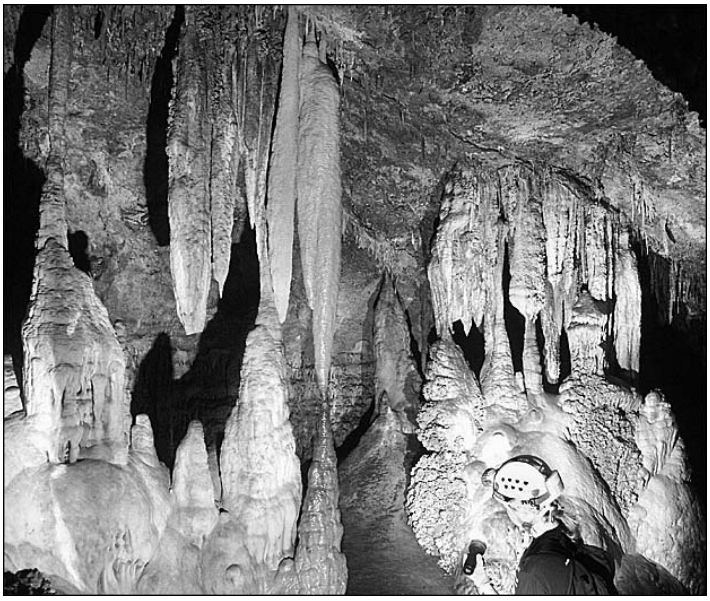


Left: Black Cave
Top: Megan Bush in Black Cave

just enjoyed the peace and quiet. My goal on this trip was to test out my new camera, learn what works, and what doesn't. I had just purchased a new 5 mega pixel Minolta 7i. Joe Ranzau and Megan Bush patiently helped me by posing with the slave flash through out the cave. The first hour was an exercise in frustration as Joe had to endure my cursing and blabbering about why the slave never seemed to appear in the pictures, even when we saw it fire. We tried time and again to use the on board flash to trigger the slave(s). I tried the auto setting, I tried manual, I tried long exposure times, etc. Nothing seemed to work. In fact, the pictures were horribly underexposed when I used the slave. They were fine with only the onboard flash, but only if you were less than 20 feet from the subject / formations. The camera was sensing the light from the slave as an over exposure and would compensate by closing the shutter or aperture. I finally resigned myself to just taking close up pictures. Megan and I wandered off one direction while Joe went to help Kevin light up some long exposure multi-flash photos in one of the big rooms. We eventually caught up with Joe and Kevin as they were wrapping up. I helped Kevin out for one more photo while Joe and Megan explored more of the cave. We heard thunder coming from the entrance on a regular basis, and decided to exit. As we were leaving I asked Kevin if I could try a long exposure with my camera and one of his flash bulbs. As I saw the image appear on the camera it was a major eureka, something had finally worked. As it turns out it's very simple: if I turn off the on-board flash and set a long exposure, the camera auto detects when it has enough light and exposes the picture very nicely. Unfortunately we were in a hurry to leave, so I'd have to continue another day.

When we arrived on the surface we discovered the thunder storm had just skirted the area and we were spared the deluge and the worst of the electro technics. We arrived back at camp and began to unwind and help Vicky prepare dinner. After the other group returned from Black the camp began to cook. Dale made a quick dash into Queens for ice and to call in sick for work the next

The Herzigs car after the blowout and near rollover



Megan Bush at The Carrot in Black Cave

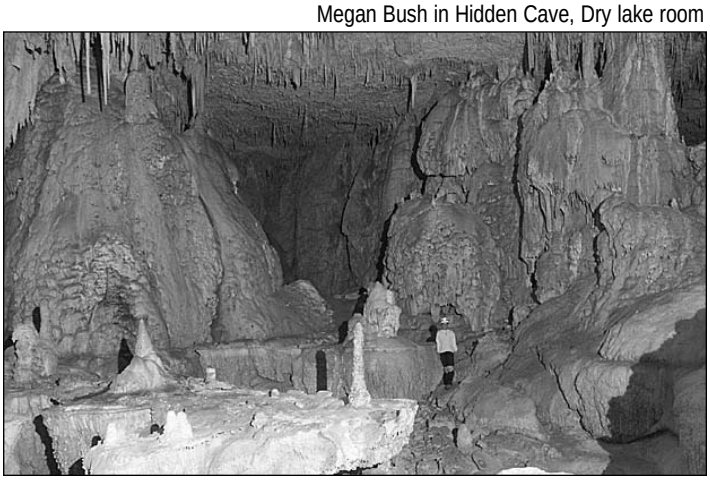
day. He also wanted to pick up the aliens he put up the day before but someone beat him to them. They were all gone. Oh well, maybe they got picked up by a UFO during the night. When Dale (Shot Guy) returned he fired up his 12V blender and made Strawberry margaritas, other frozen concoctions, and some kind of Clinton drink. He roamed the camp with tequila bottle and shot glass in hand shouting "Shot Guy, comin at ya". Pretty soon most of us were feeling no pain and starting to enjoy the party. Some were enjoying more than others, some couldn't even stand up to get something to eat, others were just giggly and very happy. Then the rain moved in and cooled us all off. We hurriedly threw up some tarps and just continued on with the party. I guess we were making enough noise to attract the attention of the Wichita Falls cavers camped down the road. They came to check out the ruckus and stayed for the party. Some one brought out a can of whipped cream, and then things got really weird. Numerous body parts were "creamed" all across the camp. There was singing, dancing and merriment. There was Santana, country, rock, folk, and finally Inagoddadavita. It was almost spiritual... man.

The next morning we jumped up all bright eyed and bushy tailed ready for more caving... well almost. Kevin went back to Hidden to work on more pictures and took some of our group and a few Wichita Falls cavers with him. Christi and a few others went to Cottonwood and another group and I went to Black. I continued to practice with my camera. Joe and Megan were real troopers helping with the slave flashes. I was surprised the pictures worked as well as they did. Black is very dark inside but I managed to get some very nice big passage shots along with the standard close up stuff. We moved right along in the cave so we would have time to visit Cottonwood later that afternoon. As we were exiting the cave we again heard thunder. After exiting we looked around and decided it would most likely skirt around us again. We passed Tom Brown's truck on the way back to camp and noticed the window was rolled down. We put a shirt over the window to help keep rain out of his brand new truck if we were wrong about the storm missing us. We arrived back at camp about 3:30, relaxed for 15-20 minutes, then all hail broke loose. We could see big clouds approaching and expected a little rain squall like the day before. But what came was a hail storm of epic proportions. You gotta love the mountains. It hailed relentlessly for over an hour. There was hail piled up and floating all around camp. So much debris was beaten from the trees that the little drains were clogged and lakes began to form all around camp. My tent was in the middle of a large lake. The good news is that it mostly floated and it wasn't horrible inside. Most of the other tents didn't fare as well. The hail just beat the water through the rain flies until everything inside was soaked. There were piles of hail 6" deep around some of the tents. Fortunately the largest hail was about nickel sized and most of it was smaller than dimes. The temp went from nearly 90 to the low 40's. We hid out in the cars waiting for it to stop, occasionally venturing out to rescue one object or another.

Tom's group returned from Hidden in the middle of the storm. They climbed the 60' drop and de-rigged in the worst of the hail storm. They hiked back to their truck in the hail and were very grateful for the helmets they were wearing and for the shirt we had placed over the truck window. When they arrived in camp we decided to break camp and get a hotel in Carlsbad. We waited for the hail to stop but it just kept coming. Finally we jumped out and started throwing stuff in vehicles. We tried to put most of the wet muddy stuff in the back of Tom's truck and the relatively dry stuff in Joe's Tahoe. Dale and the McGowan's didn't have that luxury. They just had to throw stuff in every which way and hope for the best. The hail finally quit just as we finished packing up. We made a pit stop at the latrine on the way out which was 400 yards from camp and there was no hail visible at all. The trip down the mountain was much easier than we were expecting. Evidently we had much more rain and hail in camp than the rest of the mountains.

On the way to Carlsbad we passed through the same storm that went through the camp. It was much more comfortable driving through it than slogging around camp and packing up wet muddy gear in the middle of it. As we approached the storm we watched the temp on Joe's truck go from 85 to 55 in less than a minute. The vehicle owners were worried about hail dents, but luckily the hail stayed small and it seems the vehicles all escaped unscathed. After we warmed up with some quick showers we were off to an all you can eat buffet dinner. By the time we returned to the rooms it was almost 10pm so most everyone crashed immediately. Dale stayed up for hours downloading pictures and burning CD's. He copied the 140 pictures I took plus the 120 he took and

Megan Bush in Hidden Cave, Dry lake room



made 9 CD copies so everyone on the trip could take one home. We all agreed that technology made for a more enjoyable trip. From the cell phones, walkie talkies, GPS, blenders, LED lights, CD burners and even satellite radios. Just a few years ago none (or very few) of those things would have been on this trip.

The trip home was fairly un-eventful. It even seemed faster than normal. We met at Linda Palit's house to sort out and clean up our gear and we ate Steve's chili that he had prepared for the trip. Most of us enjoyed the adventure and we regret the Herzig's and Steve were not there for the duration. But we're glad they're OK and hope they join the madness next year.

Who says Tequila and Whipped cream don't mix
All photos by Kurt Menking

News: Trip Reports

Rucker Bat Cave, Edwards County, Texas

April, 5 2003
Personnel: Jim Kennedy, Jerry Atkinson, Julia Germany, Andy Gluesencamp, Joy Cukierman, Mary Thiesse, and Rebecca O'Daniel.
Reported by: Jim Kennedy and Jerry Atkinson.

Rucker Bat Cave, located in the Carta Valley area of Texas, has historically been listed as the second largest bat population in the state. It has been estimated that 12-14 million Mexican free-tailed bats (Tadarida brasiliensis) lived in the cave in 1957, a number that has been carried on by other biologists without substantiation. The cave was once mined for guano, with at least 2700 metric tons removed before 1957. It is unknown if the guano mining or any other activities have had negative impacts on the bat colony there.

Because no bat biologist has visited the cave in over 40 years, Jim wanted to make a site visit to assess the condition of the cave and its bats. Jerry was finally able to arrange a trip with the ranch owner for the first weekend in April. The seven of us arrived before midnight on the 4th in three vehicles from Houston, Austin, and San Antonio, and camped on the ranch. The next morning the owner led us to the cave located on a remote part of the ranch.

The entrance to the cave is a pit opening approximately 15 by 10 meters wide on a shallow slope near a dry draw. There was an aluminum ladder in place at the low side of the pit (~8m) which we used in conjunction with a self-belay rigged to my truck. The main part of the cave is a single, huge collapse chamber approximately 90 by 60 meters and 12 meters high. This entire chamber could easily be negotiated without headlights, due to the amount of light coming through the entrance. We noted three passages leading from this room. The first, in the northeast corner, is a high-level lead reachable only by ladder, which we did not have. This is the bat roost, which will be discussed in detail later. The second is a low crawl leading to a decorated area on the west wall of the main room. This passage is less than 50 feet long. The third, not indicated on the map, is another high lead, approximately 1 meter in diameter, on the south wall. We did not enter this passage due to a lack of ladder, but do not expect it to go far.

The floor of the main room was covered in varying degrees by guano, but the main concentration was directly below the second ("bat roost") lead. The ceiling was quite clear of any staining except in the bat roost. This led Jim to believe that bats have rarely, if ever, roosted in the brightly-lit main room, but have traditionally roosted in the second lead, which would certainly trap warm air. As this passage is not very spacious (and only about 15 meters long), it is doubtful that more than a million or so bats are present at any given time. Perhaps the original population estimates were based on the guano dispersed around the room by swarming bats? The dramatic decline in population (by an order of magnitude) is not likely due to disturbance. Even cavers have not had access to this cave for several decades.

While in the cave we noted the usual assortment of dead and dying bats amongst the guano on the floor, and the usual dermestid beetles and other guanophilic invertebrates. We also noticed several owl roosts, and saw a pair of great horned owls exit the cave from our disturbance. A handful of owl pellets were seen and woodrat, rabbit, and bat bones were noted sticking out of some pellets. The direct predation of bats by the owls would certainly not cause a huge population drop, but it may be possible that the presence of the owls may be a deterrent keeping more bats from using this cave.

Our group was joined in the cave by the owner and two of his guests, turkey hunters from out of state. Jim gave the group a talk about the natural history and importance of the cave, and (with the help of a nearby Tadarida that Jim plucked from the wall), the biology of the Mexican free-tailed bat. The owner seems very interested in preserving both the bats and the cave.

After several hours, we left the cave and spent the remainder of the afternoon unsuccessfully searching for a lost cave on the ranch. The next morning, most folks left for Austin while Jerry, Mary, and Rebecca mapped a small cave on the ranch that had been converted into a wine cellar. They spent the afternoon swimming in the headquarters stock pond before departing for home.

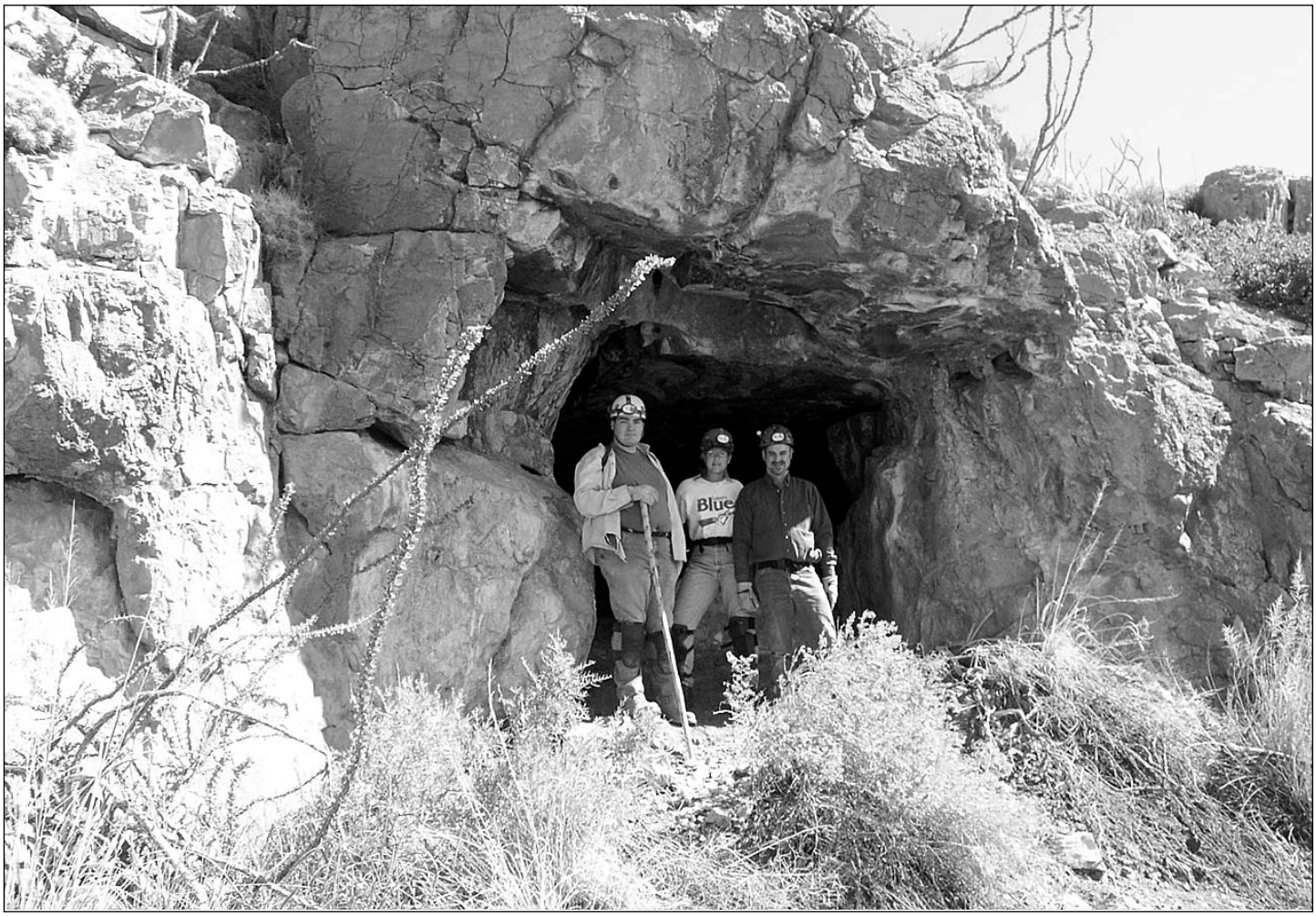
Circle Ranch

September 11-13, 2003
Kurt Menking

Joe Ranzau, Mark Gee, and Kitty Swoboda, and I thoroughly enjoyed the weekend at the Circle Ranch, which is 30 minutes past Van Horn. That's nearly to El Paso, so we're talking 7+ hours to get there. Mark Gee drove in from Dallas and arrived about 1am Friday morning, while Joe, Kitty and I drove from San Antonio and arrived about 3:30 am. We drove through an incredible West Texas rain / thunderstorm that seemed to last for over an hour, but other than that the drive was pleasant and went quickly.

After what felt like a very short sleep we were up cooking breakfast and preparing to go caving. We spent some time talking to the Ranch Foreman (Charlie) and asking questions while studying the bunkhouse map. Charlie led us to an area marked on the map as the Indian Caves. Indian Cave was a 50' x 30' stand-up-height room with a 7' x 8' entrance. We poked around in every nook and cranny trying to find more cave passages but none were found. The floor of Indian Cave was thick dust that was a combination of fine silt dirt and lots of fine ash. The ceiling was black from centuries of camp fires in the cave. It looks like it was a popular Indian camp site, as well as other passers-by over the years. There were screens and shovels from prior relic scavengers, but we didn't see any flint, and we didn't dig around at all. The dust was way too bad to consider digging and sifting. Numerous swallow nests were seen and a bat was letting us know we were unwelcome guests in his home.

We walked along a narrow ledge on the edge of a cliff face to reach the second cave in the area which we called Ladder Cave. The cave had a nice 8' x 10' entrance, and went back 30+ feet to an old 2x4 ladder under a dome in the ceiling. Mark bravely tested the ladder and made it into the small dome. Before climbing down Mark needed to clear the debris from the ledge he was on. The rain of rocks and dust turned visibility to nearly zero, and made breathing really tough, but we stuck around to help Mark get down from his precarious position. There were some interesting 1 inch pointed grey calcite looking crystals in the ceiling, and even some round geode looking rocks in the walls. We took some photos and then walked back to the truck. We spent the rest of the day Friday looking for another cave marked on the map called Skull cave. We also investigated cracks and dark areas in cliffs all along the way. We stopped and hiked around often, but the vehicles were the best way to explore the 32,000 acre ranch. 52 square miles is a lot of ground to cover. They let us use the ATV for a few hours Friday and Saturday. It really helped us cover much more ground in a very short time. It also allowed us to split up into two teams and see twice as much of the ranch. We never found Skull Cave, but after searching then reviewing the map at the bunkhouse we feel confi-



dent we could find it next time.

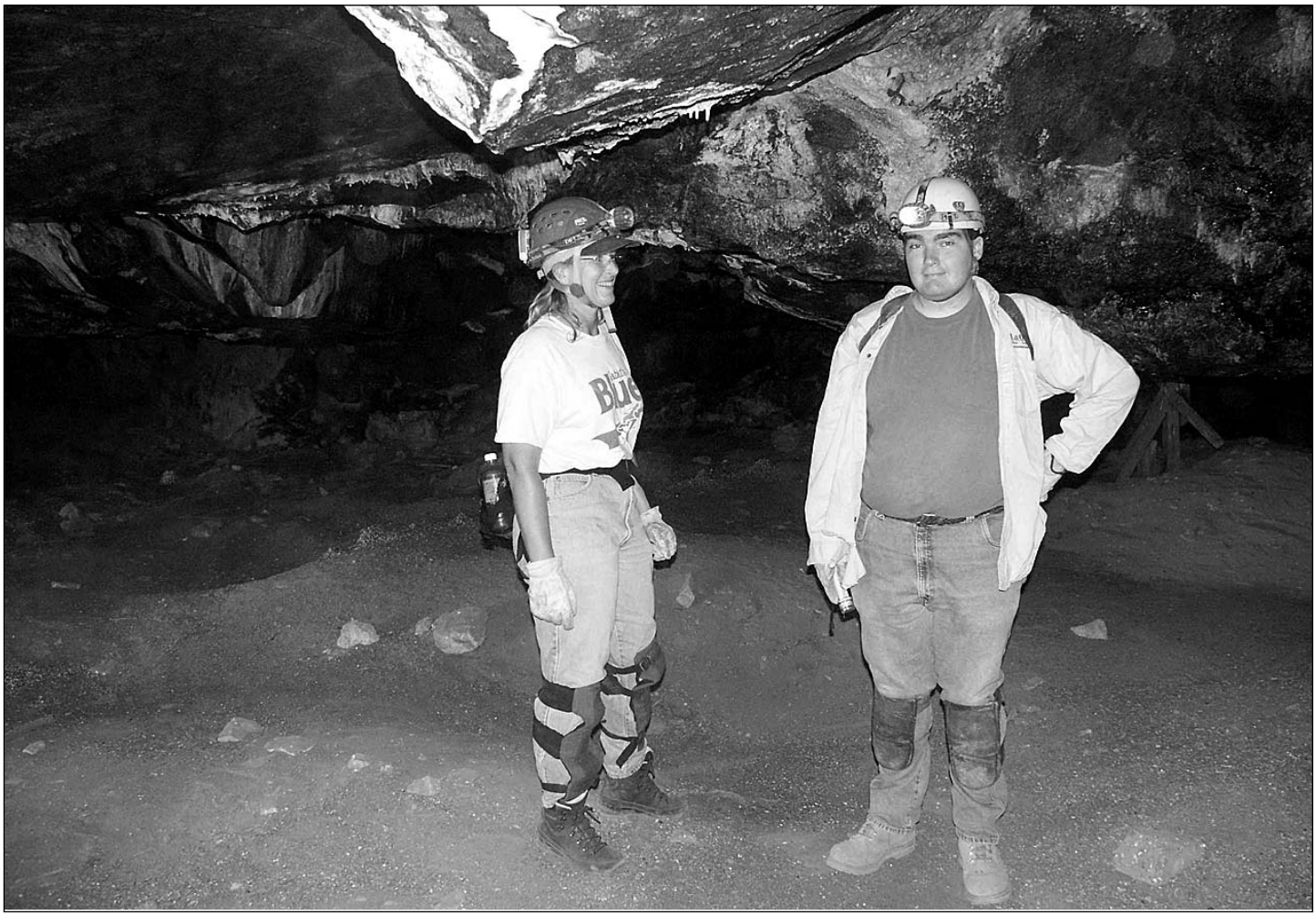
Saturday we split up again. Kitty and I went to search for some mines that were marked on the map, and look for caves in that area while Mark and Joe went to search for another feature on the map called South Pasture Cave. They found it without any trouble and surveyed the cave. Later they returned to Indian and Ladder caves to survey them as well.

Kitty and I started driving toward the mine area and found them quite by accident. We pulled off the main road and started checking out interesting dark spots in the creek draws. We hiked up to one interesting area, then followed that elevation around to the various draws until we stumbled into the draw with the mines. We saw the red mine tailings and almost passed it off as just some off colored rocks, but I finally trudged up the slope and discovered the source of the dark red tailings. We went into one of the mines that went down about 20-25 feet and about 40 feet back. It was all climbable and we were very careful to not touch any walls or ceilings. It looked stable enough, but we didn't want to push it. The other mine we found had a large bush growing out of it that completely blocked the entrance, so we didn't go in it. Next time I'll take some small clippers to trim the bush. I wasn't so much worried about the bush as much as I was about what critters may be making the mine a home. It looked like a wonderful habitat. The owner claims they were never really mines, they were just test holes to see if any valuable minerals were there. The mine shafts were following dark red metallic looking veins that seemed common in that immediate area, but we didn't see it anywhere else on the ranch. We collected a few of the rocks to help identify what they may have been mining. Based on what we saw and the amount of tailings the mines were not very extensive and clearly looked like an experiment.

Most of the hills and mountains we saw were a very hard sandstone or soft gypsum style limestone. The horizontal bedding was evident in the rolling hillsides. The harder and softer layers cause typical stair step ledges that make road building a real challenge. Above the softer rock is harder more typical limestone (Permian, I think). There were cliffs and steep slopes towering at the top of most of the taller hills. All the caves we found were in or at the base of that harder limestone layer. It was disappointing not to have found more features, but I'm not yet convinced there is nothing to find. The existing caves are hints and teasers to us that more caves are yet to be found. There are plenty of thick bedded layers of limestone we just need to keep searching.

The owner and his ranch hands were gracious hosts and very friendly. The accommodations were first rate, by caver standards. There is a bunk hose with at least 12 bunk beds, full kitchen, bathroom, shower, beautiful stainless steel fire pit and more. The scenery was nearly worth the trip. I'm not sure we'll find any significant caves, but it's worth a few more trips to check it out. The roads were easily drivable with 4WD, but their ATV was the preferred search tool. It was much more effective and loads of fun. We'll be heading back after the first of the year.

Digital pictures by Kurt Menking. Cave near Allamore (Van Horn) Texas



Texas Cave Conservancy Activities Update

by Mike Walsh

The Texas Cave Conservancy would like you to join us for a brief update of our activities. If you are currently an Associate, please write or send an e-mail to make sure your contact information is up to date. If you are not an Associate please join. What are the dues? If you want to support the organization and are not able to join us for work projects, please make a one-time donation of $25. If you want to support the organization and can join us in cave surveys, restoration, cave preserve development, etc. you can be listed as an Associate for only $5. After you contribute 40 hours of work, you will become a Lifetime Associate. Join us to create recreational cave access situations and help us in our cave preservation activities.

The Texas Cave Conservancy volunteer group of the year 2002-2003 is the Greater Houston Grotto. Donna Mosesmann and the Greater Houston Grotto did a great job in the clean up of the trash and graffiti in Beck Ranch Cave. Thanks also goes to the Aggie Speleological Society, last years winner. Contact us if your group is interested in working with us. Call and set up a trip. We usually work for two or three hours and then get you underground. In addition to the Texas Cave Conservancy campground in Williamson County, we have the TCC headquarters for overnight cavers.

We have one new Lifetime Associate this year. Jerry Fant of Wimberly has contributed to the Texas Cave Conservancy in a number of ways. The most visible may be the steps that he put in at Avery Ranch Cave. Thanks for all of your support.

Amanda Scott, of College Station, is the new Texas Cave Conservancy Photo Archives Chairman. Please send her electronic copies of any photos taken at TCC activities. In addition, we could use good photos of the following caves: Palace Cave, Turkey Pen Cave, Webb Cave, Alamo Village Cave, Harrison Cave, Wheat Cave, Wyatt Cave, Chivo Cave, Avery Cave, Marigold Cave, Buttercup Creek Cave, Beck Ranch Cave, or the Stiver Ranch Caves.

In addition, if you have good slides or photos, contact her for possible duplication. We would like to develop three TCC slide shows. One would include the caves in preserves managed by the TCC. Another would include some of the better caves under TCC access and management. The third would be on Harrison Cave in Sutton County. Amanda can be reached at 979-693-4088 or <arscott77@hotmail.com>.

The TCC now has several cameras available for Texas cavers to borrow. One is a 35 mm Nikon Zoom 90. The second is a Canon ML. We also have a Hanimex AMPHIBIAN 110 MF waterproof camera. We even have a Nishika N800 3-D camera. This one could make some great 3-D photos! We can even provide a cave to photograph. Contact our headquarters to borrow a camera at 512-249-2283 (249-CAVE) or <tccaus@cs.com>.

HARNESSES • ASCENDING SYSTEMS • ASCENDERS & DECENDERS
CARABINERS & SCREWLINKS • PULLEYS • BOLTING GEAR
ROPE & CORDAGE • ROCK CLIMBING • HELMETS • LIGHTS • PACKS
KNEE PADS • CLOTHING • FITTING INSTRUCTIONS • CUSTOM WORK

Going on an expedition? GGG can supply gear from rope and screwlinks, to dry bags and sewing awls, to nalgenes and stoves.

Please mail any questions or comments to: **Sales@GonzoGuanoGear.com**

To place an order or get a catalog, call us at **915-247-5165** We accept Visa and Mastercard for your convenience. For established customers, we will also ship and bill for payment by check or money order with 30 day terms. And, of course, cash is always accepted. When placing an order, tell us what you want and where it's located in the catalogue. Don't forget sizes and color choices when applicable. For custom sewing orders, we'll need to talk with you to make sure we get the info we need to build what you want to fit you properly.

The Texas Cave Management Association has begun to actively solicit funds for the sole purpose of buying caves for cavers. The fund, known as the Cave Acquisition Fund, is accepting donations of any amount. A donation of $25.00 or more will get you a TCMA T-shirt and one day, a cave for all to enjoy. Please send your donations and T-shirt size to:

TCMA, P. O. Box 202853, Austin, TX 78720-2853.

Sue Schindel Treasurer.

Preston McMichael Award Reinstated

Gerald L. Atkinson and Carl E. Kunath

At the TSA Members Meeting held at the 2003 TCR, it was decided that the Preston McMichael Award would be reinstated. The Preston McMichael Award was established in 1969 at the 19 April TSA BOG meeting at Southwest Texas State University, in honor and recognition of the passing of Preston McMichael. Preston was an excellent example of a caver who pioneered a new caving area in Texas while carefully cultivating cave owner relations at the same time. Preston's caving activities began in the late 1950s and ended with his untimely death in January 1967. He was a talented artist and musician and had a great future ahead of him in many ways. We were diminished as a result of his loss but may continue to profit from his example.

James Reddell was the first recipient of the award in October 1969. The second recipient was Carl Kunath and the staff of the Texas Caver in October 1970. It was awarded sporadically throughout the 1970s and faded from the collective memory in the early 1980s.

As currently defined, the Preston McMichael Award:

"...shall be awarded annually by the Texas Speleological Association in recognition of meritorious contribution to Texas caving. The award shall consist of $50.00 as well as recognition at a TSA function and in a TSA publication. If the recipient is not a current member of the TSA, honorary membership may be awarded. The award may be retroactive. Choice of awardees shall be made by the Executive Committee or a committee appointed by the TSA chairman."

The Executive Committee is presently soliciting nominations for the 2004 Preston McMichael award. If you know of someone that has made a lasting and significant contribution to Texas caving and has not already received the award in the past, please send your nomination to the TSA Secretary <jerryatkin@aol.com>.

Photo caption: Preston McMichael, October 1966. B/W from Agfachrome by Carl E. Kunath.

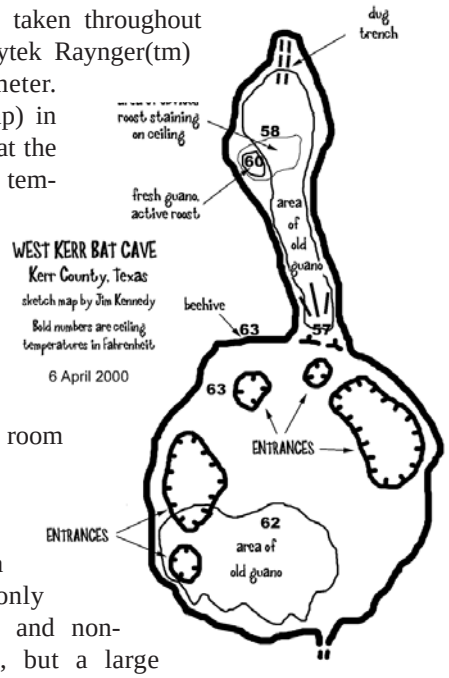
West Kerr Bat Cave
Kerr County, Texas

by Jim Kennedy

This previously unreported bat cave was visited by Jim Kennedy and Elaine Acker of Bat Conservation International on 6 April 2000. It is located on the YO Ranch quadrangle, but is not marked on the topo sheet. The exact coordinates and owner information are on file with the Texas Speleological Survey.

The entrances to the cave are in a shallow draw just downstream of the confluence with another draw. There are five entrances large enough for human entry. Unfortunately, from a bat's standpoint, all but the smallest entrance are restricted by vegetation. All entrances are unclimbable drops, approximately 18-20 feet (6-6.5m) to the floor of a large room, almost 80 feet (24m) in diameter at the base. The center of the room is a flat platform, and the ceiling is likewise flat. There are no passages leading off from the entrance room except one at the northeast end. This passage begins as a stoopway, descends a short flowstone and guano slope, and levels off into a flat-floored walkway to a large elongate room, 35' x 70' (10x21m). There are no other passages leading from this room.

The biota of the cave is interesting and diverse. Two species of bats were observed, hibernating Eastern Pipistrelles (Pipistrellus subflavus) and Cave Myotis (Myotis velifer). Seven P. subflavus were noted, and approximately 150 M. velifer, but roost stains and guano in the elongate room indicate a much larger past population, likely as many as 50,000. There was also abundant evidence, including a skeleton, of porcupines (Erethizon dorsatum), and woodrat (either the White-throated woodrat Neotoma albigula or the Southern Plains Woodrat Neotoma micropus) through latrines and middens in the entrance room. Invertebrates observed included honeybees (Apis melifera) nesting in a wall cavity of the entrance room, ticks, fleas, cave crickets, and unidentified spiders. No particular attention was devoted to the invertebrate fauna.



Temperatures were taken throughout the cave, using a Raytek Raynger(tm) infra-red thermometer. Temperatures (see map) in early April indicate that the cave provides suitable temperatures for hibernation, as suggested by its configuration, which is an ideal cold air trap. The extensive guano and roost stains in the elongate room indicate long-term summer roosting. It is unknown whether summer use is by a nursery colony or only from bachelor males and non-reproductive females, but a large enough colony could certainly produce adequate heat that would be trapped in the domed ceiling of the elongate room, thereby providing adequate temperatures for developing pups.

Human disturbance and degradation does not seem to be a significant factor at this cave. A broken ladder inside the largest entrance and evidence of possible guano mining (wooden slats, old feed sacks, and a trench at the far end of the elongate room) indicate past human visitation. Recent visitation is very limited due to the location of the cave and the limited ranch access. Future human visitation should be limited to non-critical months except for legitimate scientific research. More visits and observations will be necessary to determine exactly what these periods are, but the most sensitive times are likely the winter months (November through March) and the summer (May through August).

(Cont. on pg. 79)

Elaine Acker standing below the main (largest) entrance to West Kerr Bat Cave. Note the hackberry tree growing out of the entrance, and the remains of the wooden ladder used by previous visitors and guano miners.

Elaine at the top of the main entrance. See how the branches cover most of the opening, making it extremely difficult (if not impossible) for the bats to use this entrance.

Texas Cavers in California: A Summary of What Texans Did at the 2003 NSS Convention

compiled by George Veni

Number of Texans in attendance: over 40

Awards, salons, & events:

Cartography Salon Merit Award (Master/Professional category)
• Admiral's Cave, Bermuda

Cartography Salon Honorary Mention Award (Experienced category)
• Robin Barber for The Promised Land, Lechuguilla Cave, New Mexico

Cartography Salon Honorary Mention Award (Apprentice category)
• Mark Gee for Half Hill Cave, Lampasas County, Texas

Flowstone Award for best original cave song
• Steve Boehm for "Caving with Jesus" (a real hoot, downloadable from www.caves.org/committee/salons)

Lead saxophone for the Terminal Siphons
• Robin Barber

NSS Fellows Award
• Annette Summers Engel

NSS Fellows Award presentation
• Bill Mixon

NSS Science Award presentation
• George Veni

Caving trips:

Several, and lots of trips to look at giant trees that are larger than many Texas caves!

Chair meetings/workshops:

John Moses • Can the NSS host an International Congress?

Bob Richards • Lava Tube Symposium

George Veni • Geology and Geography session and luncheon

Papers:

James G. Coke, IV • Regional studies for underwater caves in Quintana Roo, Mexico.

James G. Coke, IV • The Quintana Roo Speleological Survey: recent advances in underwater cave exploration in Quintana Roo, Mexico.

William R. Elliott and James R. Reddell, with D. Craig Randolh, Darrell Ubick, and Tom Briggs
• California cave biogeography.

Annette Summers Engel, Libby A. Stern, Philip C. Bennett
• Consequences of low pH, cave-wall condensation and biofilm development to sulfuric acid speleogenesis.

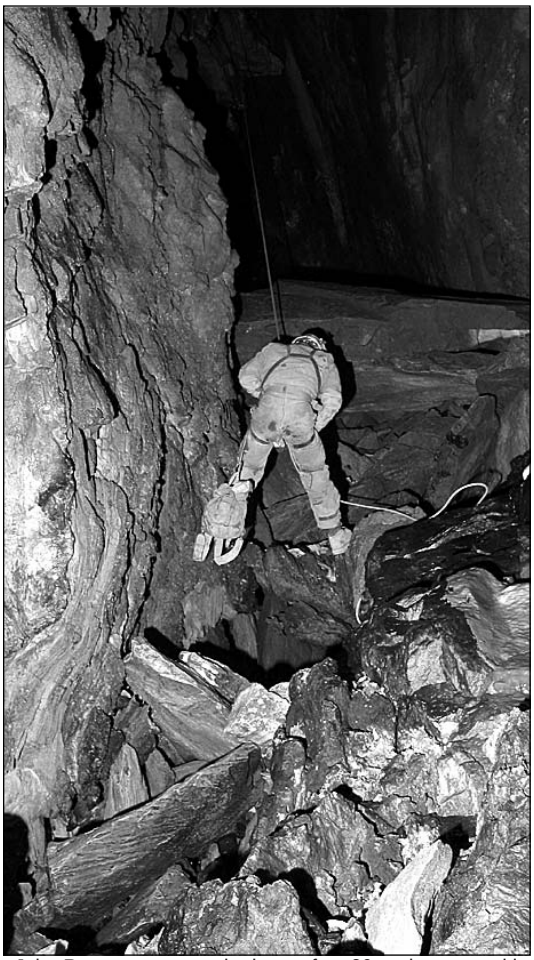
Thomas M. Iliffe
• The BeCKIS Project • establishing a GIS for cave and karst conservation in Bermuda.

Jean Krejca
• Genetic structure and historical biogeography of stygobite populations as they relate to development of hydrologic systems: a case study in the Edwards Aquifer of Texas and northern Mexico.

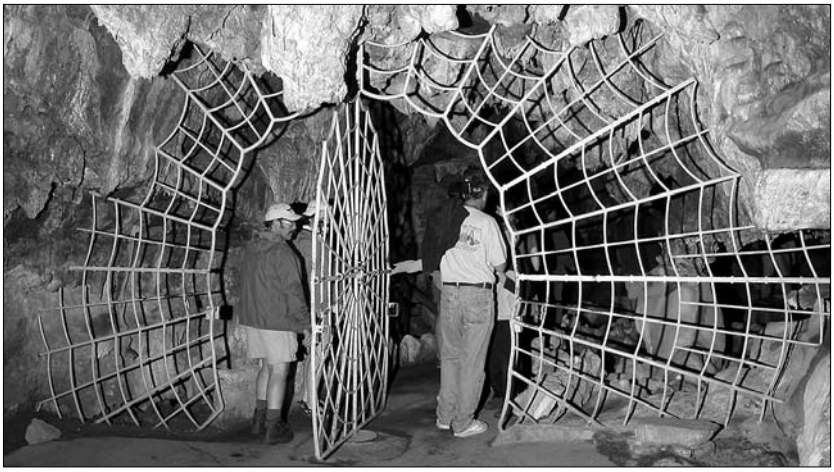
Adrien L. Lindley and Susan D. Hovorka
• Applying statistical analysis to cave maps to infer controls on conduit development in the Edwards Aquifer of central and south Texas.

David McKenzie and George Veni
• Walls 2D: realistic drawing and morphing of cave walls and passage details and its application to GIS

(Cont. on pg. 79)



John Rasmussen near the base of an 80-m-deep rappel in Church Cave, Kings Canyon National Park.
by George Veni



Cavers on tour through the spider web gate of Crystal Cave, Sequoia National Park.
by George Veni

MINUTES OF TSA BOG MEETING

19 October 2003
(Convened at the Gass Ranch, Comal County, Texas in conjunction with the 2003 Texas Cavers Reunion)

Present: Terry Holsinger, Chairman; Christi Bennett, Vice-Chairman; Jerry Atkinson, Secretary; Joe Ranzau, Treasurer.

TSA Members in Attendance: Geary Schindel (BG); Linda Palit (BG); Jenni and Don Arburn (BG); Allan Cobb (UTG); Jay Jorden (DFWG); Keith Heuss (Maverick); Mark and Melanie Gee (Maverick); Joann DeLuna (BG); Carl Ponebshek (BG); Tom and Vicki Brown (BG); Travis Kinchen (Ind.); Bob Cowell (BG); Roy Wessel (BG); Carl Kunath (Ind.); Bill Steele (DFWG/Maverick); Jacqui Bills (PBSS); Mike Walsh (TCC); Rafal Kedzierski (Maverick); Kurt Menking (BG); Jon Cradit (Ind.); Bill Bell (Ind.); Terry Plemons (UTG).

The meeting convened from 10:40 AM to 12:30 PM. The Secretary read the minutes from the last TSA meeting held on 4 May 2003 at Cascade Caverns in conjunction with the TSA Convention. The minutes were accepted as read with minor corrections.

Chairman's Report : (Holsinger) No report.

Vice-Chairman's Report : (Bennett) No report

Secretary's Report : (Atkinson) No report.

Treasurer's Report : (Ranzau) Current financial statement for the TSA as of 30 September 2003:

Compass Bank : $5848.67 in checking
$3693.05 in savings
Fidelity : $6598.49 (Land Trust)
Credit Union : $802.86 in checking and savings
Total assets : $16,943.27

The Credit Union accounts are being closed out and the funds deposited in the Land Trust. It was noted that many memberships were made and renewed at TCR.

Committee Reports:

Safety and Rescue : (Schindel) Becky Jones and John Green (NCRC) have volunteered to write some S&R articles for the Texas Caver. There will be a two-day TSA vertical training workshop at Government Canyon the weekend of October 25th. Approximately 15 people have signed up. The $20 workshop fee includes two meals and the Basic Vertical Training Student's Manual prepared by the NSS Vertical Section.

There is an NCRC Level 1 and 2 Safety and Rescue course scheduled to be held at CBSP in January 2004.

TSA Store : (McNatt) Sales from TCR were approximately $150. Past receipts from sales of the Chronicles of the Old Reading Grotto need to be sent to the family of Squire Lewis.

Logan suggested that the TSA acquire a large banner similar to the TSS's and volunteered to expedite its purchase once the logo design was completed. Atkinson volunteered to design the banner logo. Consensus of the membership was to design and purchase two TSA banners; one to be used at registration functions and the other at the TSA Store.

Publication : (Heuss) Keith is actively soliciting grotto representatives to promote TSA memberships and the Texas Caver at grotto meetings.

Texas Caver Report : (Arburn) Don needs additional material for the Texas Caver. He would like to receive reports from the TCMA, TCC, etc. Approximately 400 Texas Cavers are being printed per run which is necessary if the TSA plans to hand them out at grotto meetings.

Don plans to send digital pdf files of the past Texas Cavers to the TSA archives at the TSS office.

A discussion ensued regarding the issue of providing the membership with hardcopy vs digital versions of the Texas Caver. The editor has not surveyed the membership as was decided at the last TSA meeting. It was decided that the survey would be included on the upcoming 2004 TSA election ballot which will be mailed to the membership. The officers and editor will design the survey.

TSA Webmaster : (Kinchen) Travis is continually improving the TSA website. The newest version will be online within the next couple of weeks. Secure sites and other upgrades can be easily added. There was a concern voiced regarding the security of any TSA membership listings that might be added to the website. It was noted that the Maverick Grotto has successfully established a secure membership area on their website.

It was noted that the content and member services of the TSA website needs to be upgraded.

Research Grant Committee : (Geoff Hoese) Not present. It was decided to table the committee due to lack of interest.

Conservation : (vacant) No report.

Old Business:

Proposed Constitutional Amendment : (Holsinger) Holsinger read the proposed amendment for staggered 2 year terms for the TSA officers:

In accordance with Article VI, "Amendments" of the Bylaws of the TSA Constitution, the following proposed amendment is announced:

The change in length of term of TSA Officers under Article III: "Officers", Paragraph B from:

"Officers are member's elected annually at a TSA meeting."

To the following:

"TSA Officers are members of the TSA elected to a two year term. Terms will be staggered with the Chairman and Secretary elected on odd numbered years and the Vice Chairman, and Treasurer elected on even numbered years."

A general discussion ensued as to how to proceed with the amendment. As the Constitution requires that a written notice of any proposed amendment to the Constitution be sent to the members at least thirty (30) days prior to the Member Meeting in which it will be voted on, it was the consensus of the membership in attendance to include the proposed amendment on the upcoming 2004 TSA election ballot which will be mailed to the membership. The official vote on the proposed amendment will be conducted at the 2004 Winter Meeting.

2004 Member Meeting Schedule : It was decided that future TSA Member Meetings should be pre-scheduled to aide the membership in planning their activities. It was the consensus of the members to schedule the Winter BOG on the third weekend of January, and the Spring TSA Convention for the end of April.

TSA Member's Manual : (Ranzau) The Treasurer has been preoccupied with other matters but promises to complete the Member's Manual by year end. Most of the membership and grotto information has been compiled. Deadline for submittals and changes to the membership information that will be included in the manual is 1 November 2003. Intent is to have the manual distributed to the membership by yearend.

New Business:

Preston McMichael Award : (Atkinson) Atkinson suggested that the Preston McMichael Award be reinstated by the TSA. The past history and definition of the award were reviewed for the membership. The consensus of the membership was to have the award reinstated as defined:

"The Preston McMichael Award shall be awarded annually by the Texas Speleological Association in recognition of meritorious contribution to Texas caving. The award shall consist of $50.00 as well as recognition at a TSA function and in a TSA publication. If the recipient is not a current member of the TSA, honorary membership may be awarded. The award may be retroactive. Choice of awardees shall be made by the Executive Committee or a committee appointed by the TSA chairman."

The Secretary will submit an article to the Texas Caver informing the membership of the award and soliciting nominees.

Material for the Texas Caver : (Arburn) The editor would like to increase the volume of material that is being submitted to the Texas Caver. A discussion ensued as to methods to improve submission response from the membership. As Heuss will be soliciting grotto representatives for the Publication Committee, it was decided that the grotto representatives would also actively solicit material for the Texas Caver. A discussion ensued as to whether the editor should reprint material from TSA grotto newsletters and postings on CaveTex. It was the consensus of the membership that reprinting such material in the Texas Caver is desirable if the volume of submitted material to the editor is not sufficient to publish the Texas Caver. It is up to editor's discretion if the material is suitable or necessary for inclusion in the Texas Caver. It was suggested that the grotto newsletter editors and webmasters should become a part of the Texas Caver staff in order to facilitate communication. A listing of the grotto newsletter editors and webmasters will be compiled and sent to the Texas Caver editor.

TSA Membership Dues Change : (Atkinson) The Secretary submitted a motion to "reduce TSA membership dues from $25 to $20 per year." A discussion ensued as to the merits and reasons for the dues reduction. The Treasurer noted that the proposed reduction in income would not adversely affect the budget as long as the organization published only six (6) issues of the Texas Caver per year. The TSA has large financial assets to fall back on if unexpected expenses occur. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The new membership dues will become effective 1 January 2004.

Non-subscription Membership Status : The issue of whether to allow non-subscription memberships to the TSA was tabled. The Executive Committee will discuss the issue at a later time.

Officer Duties : (Ranzau) The Treasurer would like to have the duties of the TSA officers reviewed and amended as necessary to equalize the responsibilities amongst the Executive Committee. Linda Palit moved that the Executive Committee address the issue of the officer's duties at a later time. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

TSA - TCR Financial Affiliation : (Bennett) For several years, the TSA has been accepting monies on behalf of the TCR during TCR registration and then writing a check to the TCR organizer for the balance owed to the TCR. There are concerns with this relationship related to monetary reporting and possible litigation. It is felt that this is not a legitimate business practice for the TSA to be involved with. Felicia Vreeland and Andy Grubbs were present as representatives of TCR and presented their views on the matter. A general discussion ensued. Linda Palit moved that "the TSA will not collect TCR dues and does not serve as a money-channeling organization." Motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

TSA Relations with Other Caver Organizations : (Holsinger) The issue of the TSA developing better relations with other Texas caving organizations was brought up. It was suggested that the TSA pursue a MOU with the TCMA. Ranzau will expedite the proposed MOU with the TCMA Board.

Internal Organization Reports : No reports were made.

Projects : No reports were made.

Affiliated Organizations : No reports were made.

Announcements : No announcements were made.

Submitted by Gerald L. Atkinson.

Can you dig it?

A Cave Digging Primer
Jonathan Wilson, Texas Independent Caver

Sometimes small caves are in need of a little help to become big caves. This is where the ages-old art of digging comes in. Digging has a long history, starting with early man, progressing into a time honored tradition of sh*t shoveling.

Many caves have been opened by digging. One particularly large and well known cave in New Mexico was entered though a man made shaft. The reward of longer cave passage does not come without an outlaying of dig currency: sweat. Sweat is the main ingredient in digging, without which no tool or technique functions properly.

Choose you're digging partners carefully: they should be hard workers to ease the load on yourself. They should not mind getting dirty, not just caving dirty - dig dirty. Remember that all glory attained from the discovery of huge new passage must be shared with dig partners. Bring high energy snacks to keep the crew going. Pack in some water, stretch your muscles, and have a bottle of Advil at home. No Pain = No Gain of cave passage.

Always dig with a team. There are several advantages with the first being a ready buddy to help when trouble arises. Perhaps even acting as the voice of reason: "Are you sure you really want to dig on that loose gravely hole?" Teammates can relieve each other at digging duties avoiding exhaustion. Teammates can entertain and motivate each other with witty banter: "You dig like an old train engineer!' or "How come you don't dig like you kill fish?" Teammates can hold cold beer (only if you plan on not seeing a single drop the tasty beverage)

Think about what there is to be done before doing it. Plan the job. Some digs can be dangerous: loose dirt, instability and rock fall are some things to take into account when planning a dig. NO amount of cave passage is worth a caver. Please use your head.

Leather work gloves, found at most truck stops and hardware stores, work great and they last much longer than cotton work gloves. Thicker leather gloves, such as welder/fitter gloves, will protect your hands better from sharper rocks. The best type of gloves are, of course, those you do not pay for. No tears fall from the demise of liberated gloves.

The implements of destruction are a favored topic of discussion among our ranks. What makes a good cave digging tool? The answer is: Whatever works! Since most cave digging takes place in small holes the tool should be of a size that can be wielded effectively in the given space. A full sized shovel doesn't work well in a crawl space, but a foxhole shovel will dig like nobodys business in the right conditions.

Most digs don't occur in soft clay, so when following a blowing lead into a breakdown pile, a crow bar may be the ticket. This is the 'Old Faithful' of the implements of destruction. The crow bar can pry, chisel, dig, scrape, and beat most blocked holes into new voids. It is considered a 'must have' by the very elite of diggers. For a little extra green, one can buy the ultimate in crow bar technology: the titanium crow bar. This Gucci crowbar has the strength and power of its steel cousins at half the weight and twice the envy. Found on the internet, you could be the first kid on the block with one of these marvels of modern metallurgy.

Sometimes it just takes brute force. The 12 pound oilfield standard sledge hammer does not function well in tight spaces, but its little brother, the 3 pounder works great to massage a tight passage wider.

Without consideration for battery power, a hammer drill can be used to open up tight passage. Shaving the rock with a series a holes on an odd protrusion may be quicker than the bludgeon method.

So a big piece of breakdown is blocking the passage, the air is blowing like a hurricane past it, but there is no way to get enough muscle power down into the space to lift out the darn rock. A bolt placed in the offending rock can be used as a rigging point for a block and tackle hauling system. Just set a bolt, rig the rope and heave-ho, the passage is now open for business. Be sure that anything you remove does not have a way to fall back into place (remember the part about using your head). It sucks being buried alive.

Word to the wise. Choose your favorite color and go buy a can of spray paint. Color coding your tools will help ensure they come home to you.

Safety glasses are a good idea when beating on rock, what good is the beautifully decorated passage about to be discovered if one is blinded by an errant chip of rock? Eye injuries are horribly painful events that never have good endings. Simply put, for the budget-minded caver, safety glasses are cheaper than eye surgery.

In a cave in Mexico called Secamimous I ended up being first to wiggle down a small hole in a flowstone block. Down through the hole, I was to meet the stream passage below and crawl a small distance under the flowstone block back to walking passage. "It's real easy, just pop through and go, dude" were Mr. Savvas's words of encouragement. I was soon in a very tight, gravel-floored dome. The passage beyond was four inches high for the next fifteen feet. Apparently a flood pulse over the previous year had deposited several yards of gravel in the passage. The dig took about an hour to complete on my belly, . Several times I had to back out of where I was digging to release the water my body was damming up. With one final push I broke through to the walking passage again! Exiting the cave, I was sure to be the last though this section, as all the bodies ahead of me had opened up the chest high channel into a very comfortable salamander slide.

Whether it is a small hole on a ranch outside Lampasas or opening the mud plug in historic Brinco, digging is an important part of exploration caving. Dig it, baby!

...West Kerr Bat Cave Continued from page 74

A far more serious problem to the bats, and therefore the entire cave ecosystem, is the presence of trees and shrubs in the entrances, especially the largest. These trees all but block the openings, restricting the bats' flight path. Undoubtedly this is the primary cause for the reduction in the bat colony that once roosted here in the summer. These trees also make it easier for predators (such as Ringtails, Bassariscus astutus) to enter the cave to feed on the bats since at least two grow from the cave's floor. Evidence of behavior was not clear at this time of year, but may be due to the low numbers of bats overwintering. In order to restore the bat populations to former levels, all trees and other vegetation should be cut down and removed from the entrances, allowing the bats free ingress and egress.

An accurate map of the cave should be made, and a complete description written and submitted to the Texas Speleological Survey. Future trips should note the numbers and locations of roosting bats, and take comparative temperature readings. Finally, rumors of other caves in the area should be investigated.

...NSS Continued form page 75

Terry Raines
• 40 years of cave exploration by the Association for Mexican Cave Studies.

Bob Richards
• Computer generated cave maps: what you need to set up and be successful.

Bob Richards, with Bernie Szukalski
• The Maui Cave Project • history and activities.

George Veni
• Origin and mineralogy of a tectonic rhyolite cave in Big Bend National Park, Texas.

George Veni
• The Mayan maze of Actun Kaua.

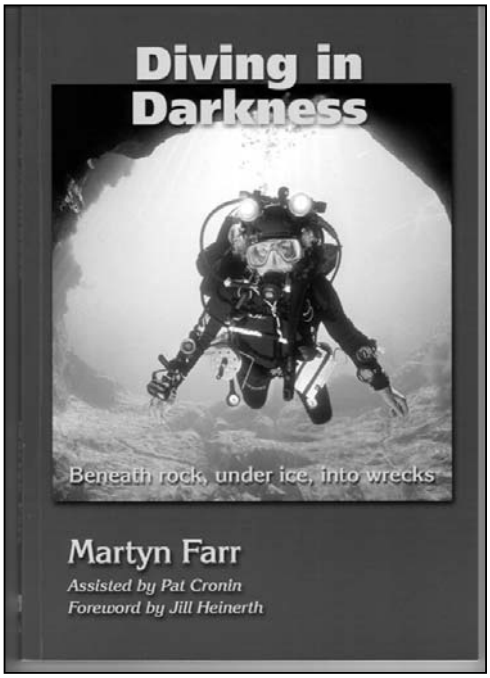
Vendors:
Becky Jones: Gonzo Guano Gear
Bill Mixon: AMCS
Denise Prendergast: Cool jewelry!

Apologies: to anyone that was overlooked!

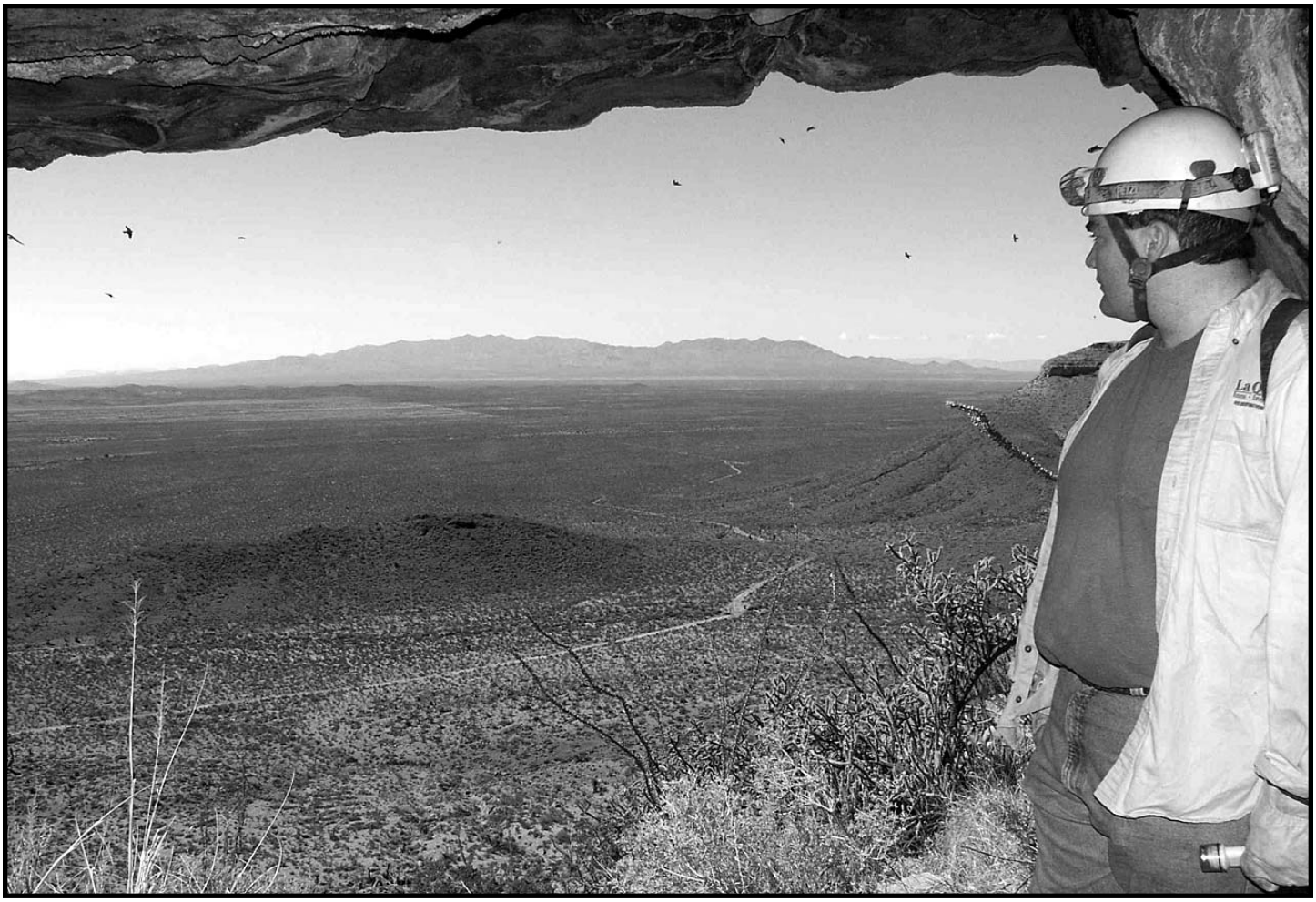
Review

Diving in Darkness: Beneath Rock, under Ice, into Wrecks.

Martyn Farr. Wild Places, Cardiff, Wales; 2003. ISBN 0-9526701-5-1. 7 by 10 inches, 128 pages, softbound. £19.95or $34.95U.S.



This is a short introduction to diving in an "overhead environment," where the diver cannot ascend directly to air. The book is really about cave diving, with anything but token references to ice and wreck diving relegated to short appendixes. The author, who also wrote The Darkness Beckons, a fine history of cave diving, has very wide experience, and the book covers techniques used around the world. (American divers will have to get used to tank pressures in bars and tank sizes in water capacity, with, say, 12 liters equivalent to roughly 100 cubic feet at 3000 PSI.) While the advertised 170 color photographs include a lot of simple equipment illustrations, there are three or four dozen nice photographs of divers in underwater caves. Farr rightly emphasizes that no book is a substitute for proper training and special attention to local practices, but the book will give anyone, including those who believe that the cave ends where the ceiling stops getting lower and starts getting deeper, a good feel for what's involved. In fact, I'd say a curious caver is likely to enjoy the book more than a trained cave diver. Even an expert, though, will find something new unless he's dived in a wide variety of caves.—Bill Mixon



THE TEXAS CAVER
10801 County Road 116
Kenedy, Texas 78119

PRSRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BEEVILLE, TX
PERMIT NO. 882

DATED MATERIAL

Address Service Requested