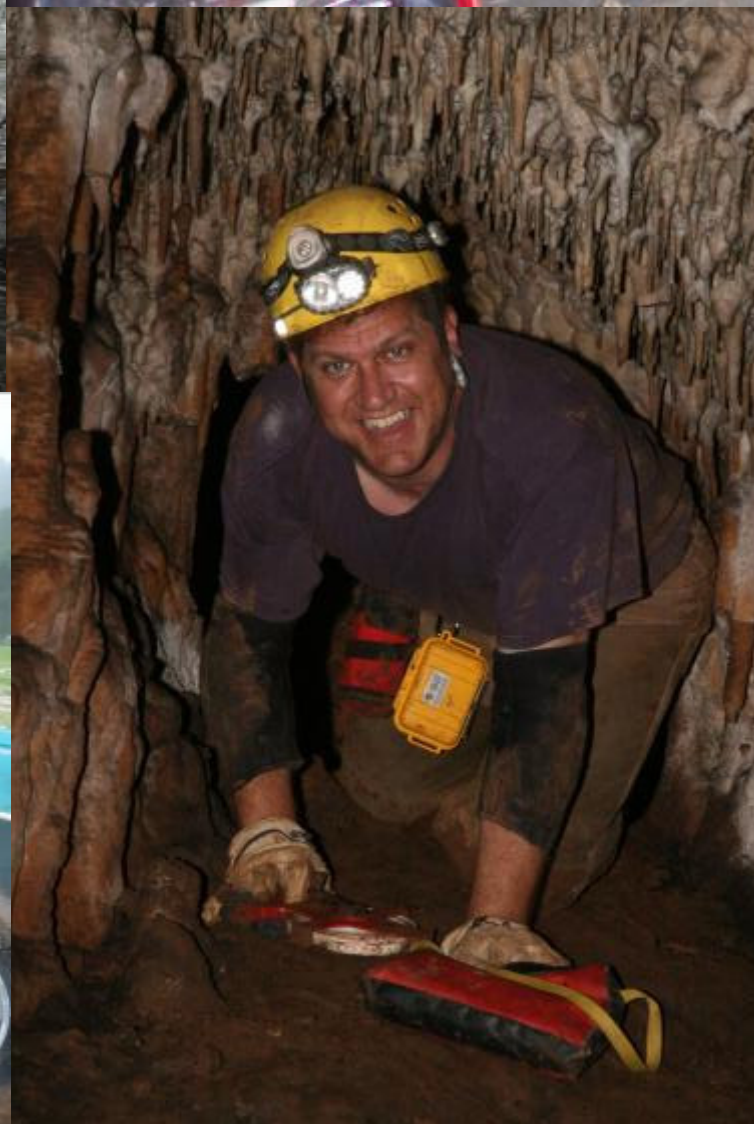

The TEXAS CAVER - 4th Quarter 2010

Shiner
I
Shiner

MIDNIGHT
RUN
TRAIL HEAD
4x4 - LEVEL 4

The TEXAS CAVER

Written by Texas Cavers FOR Texas Cavers

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The TEXAS CAVER

October — December - Vol. 56, Number 4

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Front Cover— An attempt to capture the whole range of flavors from Matt Turner's adventure in Mexico while "Hurricaving ©". Butterfly photo and R.D.'s truck by Jennifer Foote, washed out road and a happy Gary Franklin caving photos by Kim Kennedy, and swollen river photo by Tone Garot.

Back Cover — One of the beautiful pools in Sitting Bull Falls Cave. Photo by Andrew Alman.

Inside Cover — Texas Cavers Reunion 2010 photo montage. Photos courtesy of Lyndon Tiu, with a couple of photos by Mark Alman thrown in for filler and/or good measure.

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

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

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FOR A LIFE THREATENING EMERGENCY IN TEXAS, CALL 911!

FOR CAVE ASSISTANCE, CALL THE CLOSEST NUMBER:

BEXAR	**210-326-1576**	**COLLIN**	**214-202-6611**
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The Adventure That Found Me

Submitted by Matt Turner (with editing help from Tone Garot and Jim Kennedy)
Photos by Jennifer Foote, Tone Garot, and Jim Kennedy.

Prolog

As part of my sign-on agreement with speakTECH (my new job), I was allowed to take a week off to go to Laguna de Sanchez for the June/July expedition.

Between then and the start of the trip, the number of participants waxed and waned from something like 25 people to 10. People had such silly excuses as having to work or wanting to watch the World Cup.

I went from having to drive and take other riders to instead riding with Gary Franklin. So, two months to the day after I started at speakTECH I packed into Gary's van at 6:30 or so in the morning and headed towards Monterrey. Also riding with Gary and me were Jeff Maddux and Matt Zaldivar.

We left expecting a great caving adventure, but found something that, in my opinion, was far greater.

Saturday June 26th

Our drive was pretty much uneventful until we got to the border. We all talked and all got to know Jeff some more, as he had been caving less time than I had been at my new job. At the border we met up with Crash's group (Jim "Crash" Kennedy, Tone Garot, and Jane Slater).

We got our papers pretty easily and then found out we had to wait for RD's group (R. D. Milhollin, George Sanders, and Jen Foote) who I guess, as we'd later find out was usually the case, were running late. Even once they got there, something caused their paperwork to take a while. It was getting toward afternoon, and the aduana filled up with people. When I saw Jen in line, there were only 5 or so people in line with her. But as it filled up it took longer, and the five-minute wait stretched to 20 or more. So after waiting at the border for about what I think was 2 hours, we were finally on the road towards Monterrey.

Crash quickly lost the group when his truck got the green light at the Frontera check stop before the toll road, and the rest of us didn't. Our problem at the check point apparently was the bundle of the 2x4s and 3 pieces of PVC pipe on the top of Gary's van, intended for a rain fly/shelter in camp. They kept asking us if we paid taxes on that, and on the water we brought in. After some time they got frustrated because every time they said import tax we just handed them our visas and eventually they let us go. I'm sure those federales were more than frustrated when we left.

Photo by Jennifer Foote.

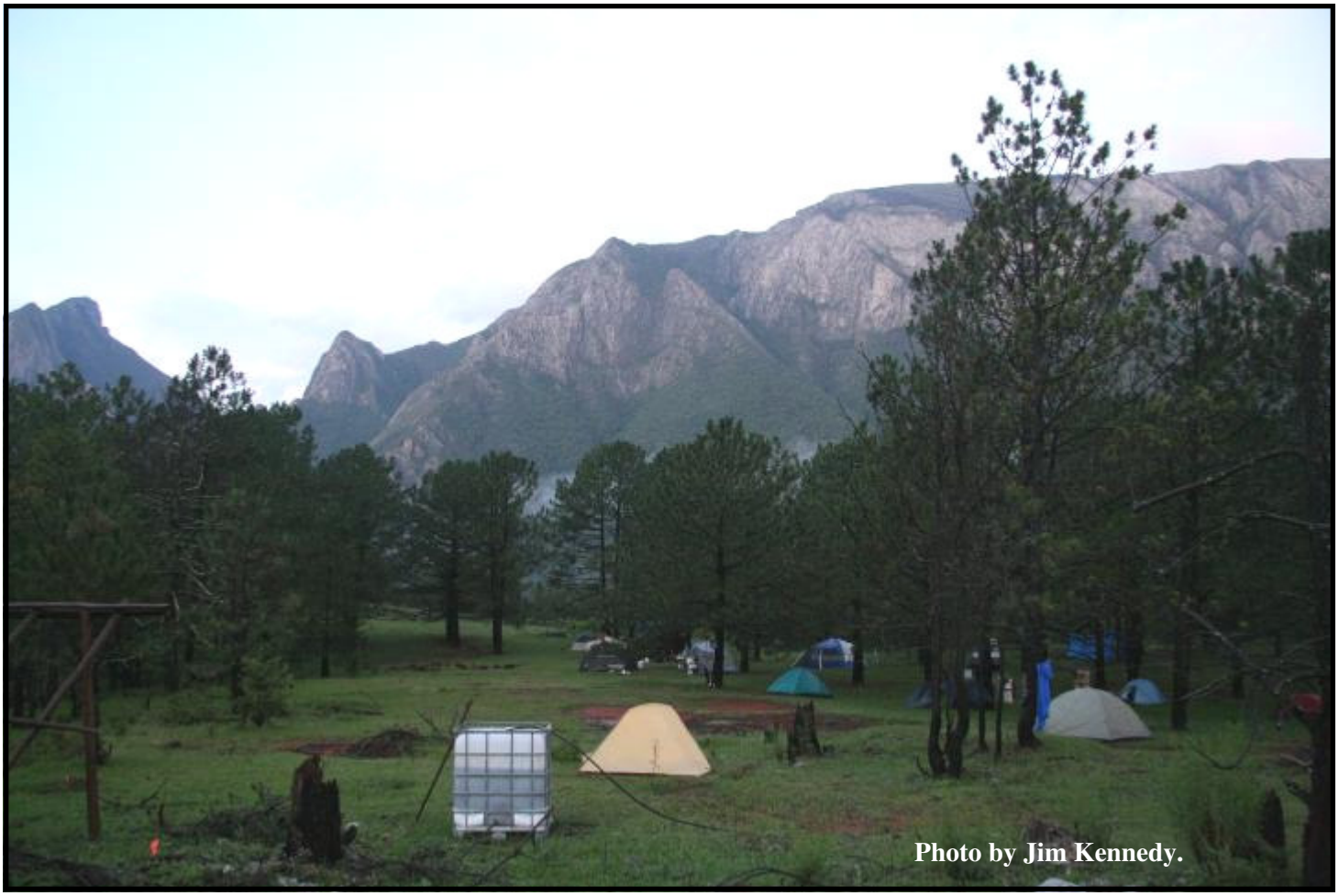


Photo by Jim Kennedy.

RD's group took even longer, but eventually caught up to us right outside of Monterrey. As we entered Monterrey proper, we (of course) got accosted by the window washers. For some reason one just would not leave Gary alone, and so he sped off with the guy on the running board of his van. It was actually pretty amazingly funny. Right after this, I made a decision at a highway intersection that ended up being the best wrong turn I have ever made in my entire life.

We turned on to Highway 210 (I think) at this multi-colored global thing. It eventually turned into 410 (I think) and nicely took us all the way around town. I won't say it wasn't still tense, but with Matt Z telling us it would connect back in to our desired route, we made it around Monterrey so fast we that got about 5–10 minutes ahead of Crash's group (who, to be fair, missed a turn and made a long detour). It also meant we didn't have to deal with the crazy downtown driving in Monterrey.

We eventually all met up again in El Cercado to buy the rest of our groceries: meat, fresh vegetables, eggs, tortillas, and beer. There was a pack of ATV riders in the parking lot there who all wanted to talk to the girls. We started the drive into the mountains about 3 hours later than we expected (due to all our previous delays), so Crash drove fast so he could get to Laguna to buy the wine and other supplies, and set up camp before dark.. The rest of took our time and saw some of the sights.

Once at Camp Geraldo we set up our tents and drank a little before bed. Jen, Jane, Tone, Jeff, Gary, Matt, and I piled into my new 8 man tent (yes I had it to myself, and an inflatable queen-sized mattress, too) and watched ***Zombieland*** on the laptop. Then pretty much everyone went to bed.

Sunday June 27th

I woke up and realized that something was in my eye. I blinked a lot and thought I got it out. Later it still hurt, so I tried to flush it out with some contact lens saline solution. Again, I thought it worked. Then I started to chainsaw some fire wood, which become my tradition back on the November trip. Yes, I wore safety glasses. After deciding who was going where for the day, we formed out smaller groups, geared up, and headed out.

Tone's group (Tone, Gary, George, and I) decided that we should be named Team "Flat Chest," as we were the only group who didn't have a female with us. We set out in search of El Tono Baño to continue a dig from November.

On the way there we found a new cave. George went down and declared that it went. For some reason though I was kind of in a funk that day, and didn't really feel like doing anything other than breaking rocks. I decided to head up to find Tone's Shithole with George, while Gary and Tone descended into the new cave.

After a little while at El Tono Baño I give up, realizing that it filled quite a bit with sediment in the last seven months. George and I rejoined Tone and Gary. This is when the hand of Fate decided to pimp slap us, foreshadowing of what was to come later in the week.

Tone and Gary had decided to name the new cave "Rock me like a Hurricane," because Tone saw a black scorpion in the cave, and that was the name of a Scorpions song. If we had known what an omen this would have been, we might have buried them both right there. I joke. OK, maybe only slightly.

Anyhow, that night we got back to camp and my eye

has continually gotten worse over the day. Luckily, Jeff is an EMT and was able to finally really flush out my eye. That night the most popular joke was probably about how "I weep for X," because my eye was just weeping almost constantly.

We mostly ate some, drank some, and I don't remember much else.

Monday June 28th

I woke up and chainsawed some more firewood, but not much. Luckily the eye was pretty much cleared up, other than some puffiness because I wouldn't stop messing with it the day before.

After hearing from Crash how cool the view is from the ridge above Mesa Colorada, I decided that I would like to see that. Crash obliges me and comes up with a task that we can do while up there, which was tagging and GPSing more caves found and surveyed on previous expeditions.

This proved to be a very popular plan, and everybody joined in except for George and Tone who went digging instead. Crash nicely drove us most of the way up the mountain and then showed us cave after cave after cave which we photographed, tagged, and recorded.

This is when the rain started. Right as we were looking for Cueva Oyamel it started to pour. Not just any rain, but really cold rain. After a bit, Gary left for his van. Jane and Matt found some shelter near a tree, and the rest of us spread out to find the cave. The old coordinates were really bad, and the entrance is pretty small, so we had a hard time. Matt eventually came out to help.

Jim finally found the cave, and all quickly piled into it. Matt Z quickly climbed down a climb, that was technically pretty easy, but both Jen and I decided to not risk it without our helmets. Eventually Jen and I checked out the other side of the entrance and worked our way back to the side with the climb after Matt says there was an easier way.

Photo by Jim Kennedy.

After trying the other way I decided it was too tight. Crash tried to get me do the climb ("It's just like a ladder!"). I finally decided to try it, but stupidly didn't wait and ended up

Photo by Jim Kennedy.

Photo by Jim Kennedy.

kicking Jane rather hard in the face. (Sorry Jane, Tone made me do it. I mean, you saw what he did to Jen later!) Luckily, the only mark that I left was a boot print over her right eye, and she nicely forgave me. She actually forgave me faster than I forgave myself.

We eventually left the cave and got back to the truck. We then had a rather fun drive down the slippery, muddy roads into the village of Laguna de Sanchez. We bought some more meat and other supplies. We made a nice little tour of the town.

When we got back to camp we had another great meal and hung around the campfire, mostly making fun of Jane (our normal pastime). We learned about Dirty Gomez and Jane Sandwiches. Little did I know, but this would be the last night I got a good nights sleep.

Tuesday June 29th

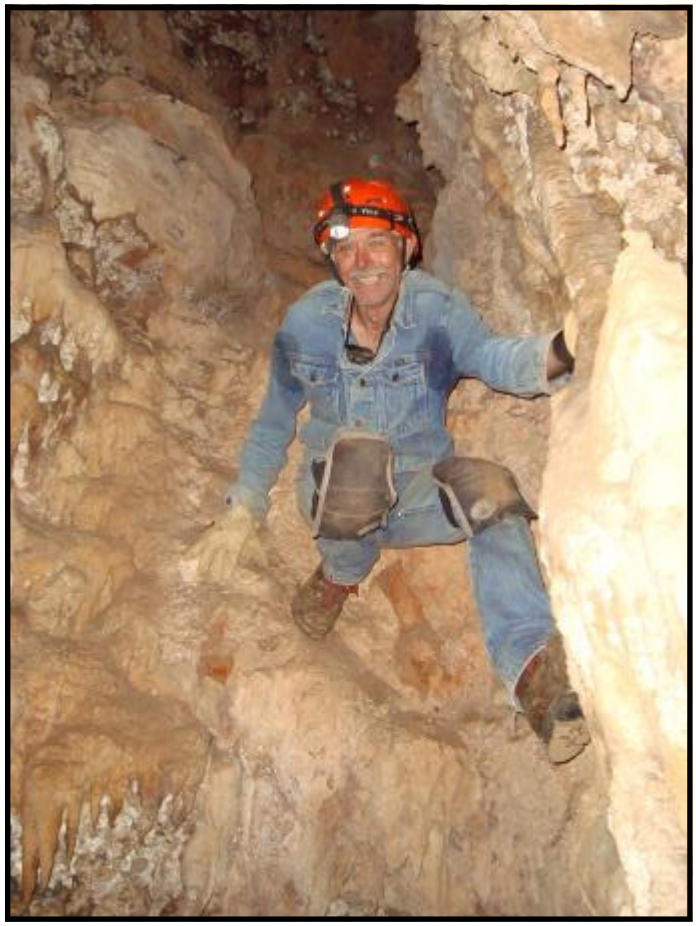
We woke up, had breakfast, and then split up into teams again. I was with Tone and George. Our group planned go to Cueva Tres Luces push a lead left at the bottom by Crash and company about 10 years earlier. This cave is awesome, but at first it was way too much for me. This is partially because Tone led us in the harder of the two ways.

There is a place that seems pretty easy now, but it really got to me then. You have to go around a column on a ledge about 2 meters off the floor. While the potential fall isn't much, it's enough to get hurt, though probably not badly. Anyhow, you have to commit and just do it and for some reason I just couldn't get my head around it. Eventually, after the fourth try, I did it.

Then there was a short climb down of maybe 20 feet. I reluctantly did it and with Tone's guidance got to the bottom. But upon thinking about what they were saying about the next part of the cave, I decided that I had enough and climbed back up.

Around that time Crash's photo team (Crash, Jen, and Matt Z) entered the cave to do some extensive multi-flash documentation. I swapped places with Matt Z, giving Tone's group a full complement for their work at the bottom of the cave. Crash, as he is known to do with me, convinced me to settle down and follow him. So he took me through the correct (easier) route. We stopped at several places to take a few pictures, and everything was fine. We got to the fun drop, which is probably only seven or eight meters, but intimidated me. It doesn't need a rope (none of the drops in that cave do), but the day before Tone's group rigged a handline. Jim climbed down to show me the holds, and I followed. I think I did pretty well at it, and really didn't think it was as hard as I was told. Jen didn't have it as easy, though. It wasn't because of anything she did, but because Crash wanted her to pose at the top of the climb. Not just pose, but also hold and fire a flash behind her. She had to do this for the better part of an hour, while we tried to get all the lighting correct and the focus right. Then she happily climbed down. We then climbed down the next short drop and took another picture.

Photo by Jim Kennedy.



George climbing down. Photo by Tone Garot.

Eventually, we met up with Tone's group and learned that they were successful in their digging endeavors. I decided not to climb down further to see because of how cramped it was, and because I was mentally pretty tired. The climb out was uneventful, though it had started to rain some.

From there we went to Cueva Martiniano. This cave is also just gorgeous. I have seen show caves that didn't look this nice. While Jim took pictures of Jen, I scouted around and collected additional invertebrate specimens. I found out that I really like doing that. I mean **really** like doing it. The coolest thing I found was a 2-inch-long centipede. While getting it into the bottle I got to hear Jen screech like a girl. Of course Jen is a girl, but she's tougher than most football players I know. Anyhow, we were in that cave for a while and collected a lot of photos and bugs.

We left the cave and then the fun started. It had rained enough that everything was squishy slick mud outside. We were driving back to camp and Crash almost made it all the way to the good part of the road. But alas, had opt for discretion being the better part of valor, and leaving his truck on the hill and hiking back to camp. It wasn't worth the risk of sliding into a tree or a ditch. He figured he would walk back the next day when it stopped raining and drive it back to camp. Little did we know...

We started making dinner back in camp, wondering why RD's group was so late returning. It turned out that he got his truck extremely stuck, near Jim's, not having the same amount of discretion. I was tired from all the activities and stress that day and went to bed early, but some people stayed up and watched *Cloverfield* on the laptop in Gary's van.

Wednesday June 30th

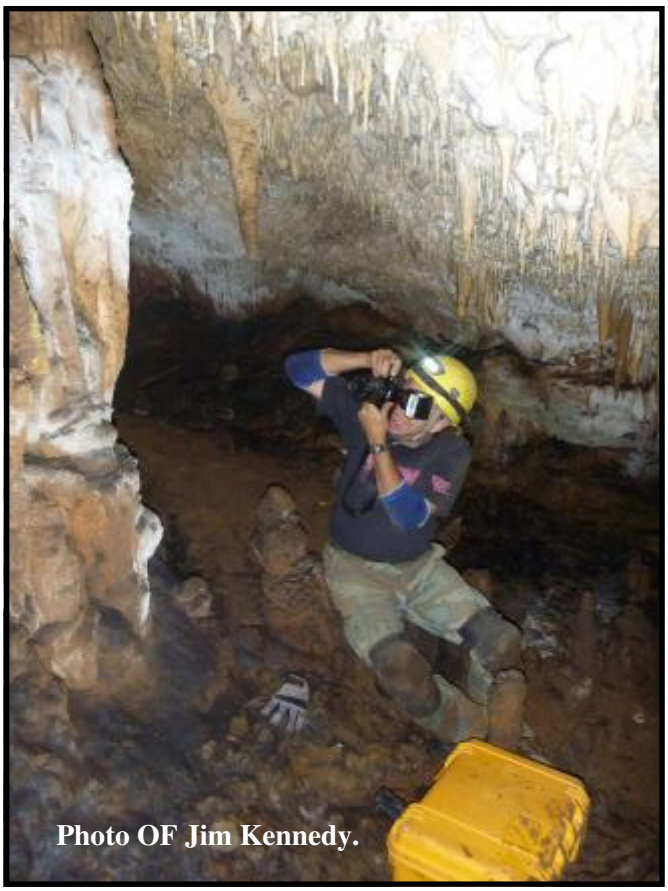


Photo OF Jim Kennedy.

Photo by Jennifer Foote.

I woke up to hard rain. It rained off and on all night. I think this was the day that Gary fed us all grits and canned ham for breakfast. Thank god Gary had that. Most people just stayed in their tents all day long. This day I realized that the rain gear I bought for the trip was a size Medium, and in no way, shape, or form fit me.

We hiked to Jim and RD's trucks get things we left the day before. Some of us stayed to try to free RD's truck. Some others of us were thinking it could wait until it was drier, and headed back to camp. Tone and I dug trenches around our tents for drainage. I pretty much spent the rest of the day in my tent. I read, and fell asleep. Repeatedly. That, and occasionally dealing with my tent.

Around dinnertime we all got together under the little cooking shelters (which, even though they had screened sides, kept out more water than my tent, I swear!) and had a meal. I think it was mainly because we were all tired of being in our tents. We then proceeded to hang out under the shelters and get drunk.

Geraldo came to visit this night to offer to shelter us in his log cabins, but we said thank you but no thanks, and got even more sloshed. Geraldo hung out until the end. At some point I went to bed, already hung over.

Thursday July 1st (or, the day the tents failed)

The rain got steadily worse and worse through the night. There was SO much rain that even the 2–3 inch deep trench that I dug around my tent was completely underwater. That said, I was still mostly dry, and more importantly, my sleeping bag was, also. Early in the morning,.

Tone came running to my tent because his had completely failed. We got settled, and while we're both not dry, I guess it's still drier than his tent. Almost the minute we got settled the winds hit. It broke the porch support pole of my tent and eventually started to warp my tent so much that the rain was just coming straight in.

So we ran to the van. Jen came and hung out for a while and then left. Eventually some others joined us and we started to watch another DVD, *Coming to America*. I fell asleep in the van, then watched *The 13 Warrior* and another movie. Crash then made dinner again (after fixing the cook tent) and we all ate and drank the last of our beers and apple wine. Then most of us went to sleep in the van.

Friday July 2nd

We woke to a relatively pleasant and rainless morning. We made a nice breakfast, and the sun broke through the clouds for a few brief appearances. Tone and Jane went with Geraldo to get more wine and some other supplies from Laguna de Sanchez, and to scope out the damage and see what difficulties we would have on our way out in a few days.

As far as we knew, they were riding to the village on horseback. Because the rain let up a bit, the rest of us hiked over to recover the other two vehicles. Jim just started his up

and drove up the hill. Then we got to RD's truck, which was way more stuck, being almost on it side in a muddy ditch more than a meter deep. We trying towing, jacking, digging, prying, placing rocks underneath, and even just praying to Oztotl. We all had our own ideas about how to get it out, and truthfully none of them worked. I let my temper flair at one point, and then in the end all it took to get the truck out was to get everybody to just push it out.

We got back to camp, had another great dinner, and hung out for a while. It was raining off and on again. I got a bit worried because it was about 6 p.m. and Jane and Tone were not yet back. So I decided to hike up to Geraldo's house to ask his family what they thought. With my broken Spanish, I think I understood that they were not really expecting him home until the next day. I then decided to take look at the road back to the village. I didn't even make it 100m before it
was obvious to me that our vehicles would be making it out of there any time soon.

Photo by Jennifer Foote.

Parts of the road were gone, and the parts that remained were covered by huge landslides, boulders, and downed trees. I hiked back to camp and told Jim and the rest of the group. We watched the rest of a movie and hung out, until Tone and Jane came back with Geraldo. They gave everyone the news that the road isn't there anymore. Geraldo suggests some options. Jim decides that in the morning that he will take a group up to the ridge to see if they can call out.

Most of us go to sleep, but I can't say anyone really slept well.

Photo by Jim Kennedy.

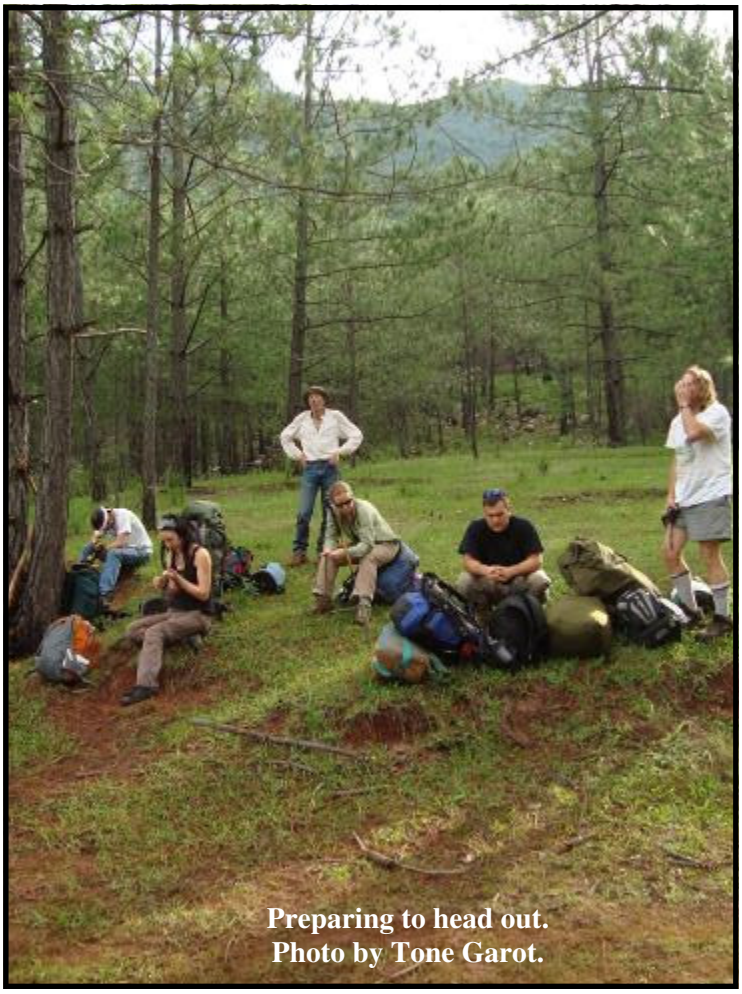
Saturday July 3rd

After breakfast, Crash, Matt Z, and Gary started hiking up the ridge. Our plan was that we would begin our 4–5 hour hike to Laguna de Sanchez when they got back. The rest of us started to dry out what gear we could. It rained slightly, but never too much. Geraldo came by and asked to have Crash talk to him before we do anything.

Eventually, the trio made it back and tells us of the destruction in Monterrey. Geraldo shows up and convinces the group that going into Laguna isn't our best choice. Instead we should start out in the morning and head directly over the mountains towards the paved road.

We all re-packed our bags for a longer hike. This took some time as we had to consider A) what we needed B) what we could leave C) what we could carry and D) what we were willing to carry.

We also broke down camp except for my tent. We put both my queen-sized air mattress and Jeff's mattress in my tent, along with two other one-person mattresses. Gary, RD, and Jim slept in their respective vehicles. My tent was cozy, but not bad. Our spirits were definitely not high, but all-in-all better than expected.



Preparing to head out.
Photo by Tone Garot.

Sunday July 4th (Independence Day or "You're going to be in a lot of pain" Day)

We got up pretty early, ate a cold, light breakfast, and tore down what was left of camp. I took out some stuff from my bag and put in Jim's camera case, since he needed it for work and was bribing me with beer. I think my pack weighed 60–70 pounds, which was definitely not ideal. But in my pre-trip packing paranoia I chose my REI Mars backpack as my clothes bag, so at least I had a good pack for the hike. Actually, it was the best pack that any of us had.

I also had really good backpacking boots, Merrell Outbound Mid GTX Shadow. Overall, I felt I was doing better than some, who had nothing better than army duffle bags, daypacks, and cave packs, along with muddy wet caving books.

Photo by Jennifer Foote.

Around 8:30 or so we headed out. After the first 30 minutes I wasn't doing well. I wasn't sure what it was, but at our first stop I just felt wiped out. Some of the others weren't doing well either, so it might have just been shaking off the morning funk. Or maybe the altitude. We didn't drink the night before, so it wasn't a hangover.

Geraldo and his son Cesar were as nice as could be. Not only did they guide us over the mountain on a maze of goat trails, but they both helped carry of our packs. And hardly broke a sweat, despite Geraldo just recovering from a broken foot. Tone, who was also being nice, offered to take my pack. But I could tell that I wasn't doing as badly as others in the group, so I had him

Photo by Tone Garot.

switch out with someone else. By the second stop, it was clear that even though I was nowhere near the front of the group, I was doing much, much better. I think this is mainly thanks to George, who helped me set a good pace.

When we got near the top of the ridge the clouds lowered almost like magic, and gave us a great view of the valley. From there everything looked great. We got over the ridge and started down a "shortcut." I was doing OK until about an hour downhill, when I started to get tired and fell a few times. On one of those times I overextended my left hip, and things just got worse from there.

Eventually, because I was lagging, Geraldo took my bag and started to carry it, having me carry two much lighter bags that he was carrying for someone else. We picked up speed and I got a nice rest from the heavy pack. Tone gave me some "Vitamin I" (ibuprofen, for the uninitiated) about an hour later when we stopped, and I started feeling better. So I took my pack back, so that others could have a break.

This continued until we hit the river at the bottom of the mountain. The river was normally a dry, cobble-filled watercourse, but due to the rains was now a runable stream, but nothing outrageously dangerous. In fact, it was far less dangerous than the shoreline, since Tone and Matt Z both got stung by bees while Jim and I were scouting out the nicest place to cross. We figured it out pretty quickly, and soon helped the others across. Tone had to sit a while and eat several Benadryl™, since he has bad reactions to bees.

We took advantage of the break and cooled off in the river, washing away the stink and playing like giddy kids. But all too soon recess was over and we were back on our plod up over the next mountain.

This is the part where things started to get really hard. I was wiped out, and Jeff also had hit his energy wall. So the two of us took our time. Geraldo was extremely patient, trying to keep us energized by occasionally yelling out "Marcha! Marcha! Marcha!" This went on for a while until it got to the point that both Jeff and I were only making 3–5 steps before having to sit down.

At this point we were both out of water. Geraldo went ahead with the others, but came back and got Jeff's pack and urged me to keep moving. We met up with Gary, Matt, and Jen at the beginning of a really washed out old road. I asked Jen to go ahead and see if they can send a vehicle back,
because Jeff and I are in bad shape. If I had the energy to look at the road, though, I would have seen immediately that my request was impossible to fulfill.

We drank what was left of Matt Z's water. I have to say how impressed I was with Jeff's attitude throughout the hike. Even when he stopped sweating he was pleasant and calm.

We started out again. Jim thankfully sent back Cesar to help with our packs, since he was racing ahead of us most of the time with all the energy of a young mountain goat. Geraldo and Cesar carried the packs the rest of the way up the hill for us. At the top we reclaimed our packs and hiked with them for a time At least until I slipped again and

The Longoria Institute.
Photo by Tone Garot.

Geraldo took my pack from me.

We eventually got to the paved road, we saw that it was covered with rocks and mud, and completely gone in places. Crash and George had already caught a ride with passing sightseers to La Nogalera, the village we were aiming for. Geraldo just has us hike down the road to the village, which was probably about another mile, but being on the road instead of a steep rocky trail made all of the difference.

This is when Geraldo tells me that his stomach is really hurting him (ulcers), on top of his recently fractured ankle. This man is really tough as nails. Once we get civilization we find that George and Crash have found a place still serving food, have ordered for all of us, and are already served and eating.

We find out that this isn't the restaurant at which Geraldo intended for us to eat. He knows the proprietors, but was planning for us to eat at his uncle's business a few houses further down the road. Oh well, the cold drinks and hot food were the best thing we had in days.

While we're sitting enjoying sodas and waiting for food, we see Erick Gonzalez (our savior!) walking up the road towards us. He borrowed his sister's mini-van, drove to El Cercado and had to park it there, and hiked the rest of the way up the mountain to find us. The food came and we had a good time feasting and resting our poor feet. We finished just as it started to rain again.

Meanwhile, Geraldo went to see his uncle about getting us a ride down the mountain. As the rain stopped, he showed up in a double-cab, open-bed, red F-150 pickup. I gave Geraldo my favorite multi-tool as thanks for carrying my pack, but I don't think he really realized what it was. We piled the 10 of us, Geraldo, Cesar, Erick, a dog, and all of our gear into that truck, and started down the mountain.

If I was able to turn my body in the crowded truck and look forward, this probably would have been one of the more exhilarating rides of my life. Because time after time the road was just gone, and yet the uncle would just drive over it or around it.

On one of the first obstacles, which probably would have just stopped me, was a waterfall that was rushing across the road. It was about 4–6 inches deep, and disappeared over the edge of the road which was slowly crumbling away. All the uncle told us was to hold on, and he drove right through it. Some of us had to hold on to Gary since he was sitting on the tailgate of the truck.

Another of the obstacles was a piece of bad roadway that was quite literally the width of the truck. Well, what was left of the roadway was, anyhow. Even this remaining piece was so incredibly undercut that, by my estimation, we probably should have been rolling down the side of the mountain. Thankfully I was wrong and we made it past just fine.

The main bridge in El Cercado was out, so our

Gerado road damage.
Photo by Tone Garot.

Aftermath. Photo by Jim Kennedy.

driver just went on an alternate route and drove us through the creek. Eventually, after being tailed by some ATVs having fun slinging mud on each other, we made it to Erick's van in El Cercado.

Once back at the Inter-American Highway, we stopped by a pair of ATMs and all withdrew as much cash as we could, giving it to Geraldo for him to hire a backhoe to repair the road to his house. He had us give him the money stealthily because he wanted to ask his uncle for money for the road also, and was afraid he would be denied if he saw the gringos giving him money. We gave his uncle 60 pesos each for driving us down, the pre-negotiated amount.

We left Geraldo and Cesar there to ride back up the mountain with his uncle, and walk back home the next day. As usual, he was genuinely sad to see us go.

From there we piled into the mini-van, a 7-seater filled with 11 people, a dog, and gear. We were on our way to Erick's parents' country house, about an hour or so away.

Driving through town, often on roundabout routes because only a few bridges were still intact and safe to drive on, we got to see firsthand the destruction to Monterrey. Major highways and expressways were all but gone. Cars were buried in sediment. A drowned horse was laying on the main highway, and bridge after bridge was either completely destroyed or majorly damaged. Many locals probably thought that the clown car stuffed with gringos was the height of hilarity. Truthfully, it probably was, especially with all the gear tied to the top.

We stopped for gasoline and to pee, and finally got out in the country to the weekend house. This place was awesome. I went from the extreme of hiking myself as close to body failure as I have ever been, to a luxuriating in an air-conditioned house with real beds and an in-ground pool.
It was fantastic, and my shower felt almost decadent. The soak in the pool afterward, though, was definitely too decadent.

Crash and Erick made a run back to town for pizza, beer, and food for breakfast. We eat and hung out, utterly exhausted, and most of us went to bed early. But before we did we checked online for bus schedules the next morning, and found out we needed to leave the house by 6.

Monday July 5th

The next morning we were all moving slowly, but we did make it out by 6:30. But when we got to the bus station, the bus hoped to be on was sold out. After a bit of discussion (mostly by Erick), they said that actually they still had four slots, but the bus was only going to San Antonio. So the impatient amongst us (including yours truly) snatched those up and started for the bus.

There was some initial stress because the tickets we just purchased said Bus 110, but the bus driver from that bus said it was the wrong bus and that we actually wanted 112. Luckily, he was right. After stowing our gear and boarding the bus, we were off. RD was also on our bus, even though he was going through to Dallas. He had to buy a carrier for Mac, his dog.

There was a brief security stop in Monterrey, and then it was off to the border. I tried to sleep for most of the trip, but it was mostly in vain,. We got to the border, and found out that the rest of the crew had gotten on a direct bus to Austin that even left before we did. They were actually ahead of us!

The border, as always, was the HEIGHT of government efficiency, as in "it took forever." But there were no real issues at the border, and after a stop to let off some people and pick up some others in Laredo, we were back on our way.

We stopped for lunch at a Travel America truck stop and I tried to find deodorant, but for some reason they were sold out. Four hours on a bus had not done my body odor any good.

The real fun happened when we got to the Border Patrol checkpoint. There, the drug dog keyed in on our bus. So they moved our bus to the side and came on board to check our passports and have a second dog check the bus. When that one also picked up on something, they made us get out of the bus.

This wouldn't have been so horrible if it wasn't blazing hot and they made us all stand in the sun with no seating and no shade. This included the women with babies. The border agents were not really mean. I actually had a few really good conversations with them while waiting.

Unfortunately for them, they didn't listen to my warning that our bags were covered in poison ivy, instead handling them without gloves. I'm sure some of them are regretting that now. After about an hour of standing around in the sun (increasing my already bad BO) they decided that it was either Mac (RD's dog) or his Milkbone dog biscuits that set off the alarm with the drug dogs.

The agents think it was probably the biscuits, as they train their dogs with them. The rest of the trip was pretty uneventful, with a small stop in San Antonio. But the welcoming committee we had was AWESOME! Crystal and Melinda met the bus in Austin and picked us up — and they brought beer!

We finally got to Gary's house, where I grabbed my truck and headed home. I got home around 10pm , took a shower, and went to sleep.

While this wasn't the adventure I had originally planned for that week, I have no doubt that this will be one of those trips that I remember for the rest of my life. It pushed my limits both climbing in the caves and hiking out from camp.

I got to bond with friends I hadn't seen in months, and hang out with some really great ones I see everyday. All-in-all I couldn't ask for a better trip. It was full of new experiences, and nobody got hurt. I'm sure it's been said before, but the best adventures are the ones that find you. While I feel badly for those whose vehicles are still down there, this was a grand adventure that found us.

Read all about their adventures retrieving the vehicles in the next TEXAS CAVER! - Editor

Matt Zaldivar. Photo by Jim Kennedy.

A Gathering of Texas Cavers at the 2010 NSS Convention in Vermont.

Front row, L-R: Rene Shields, Lisa Goggin, G.G. Raines, Mercy Raines, Ellie Watson, Gary Napper. Back row, L-R: Josh Rubinstein, Chris Thibodaux, Mark Minton, Jim Kennedy, Colin Strickland, Terry Raines, Evan Strickland, Keith Goggin, Lee Jay Graves, RD Milhollin, David Locklear, Tom Summers, Mike Walsh.

TSA News and Notes

The 2011 TSA Officer elections were held over TCR and I would like to thank **Ron Ralph** for heading this up, yet again, and for doing a fine job!

The results are listed below:

Chair: **Mark Alman**, Vice-Chair: **Ellie Thoene** , Secretary: **Denise Prendergast**, and Treasurer: **Michael Cicherski**

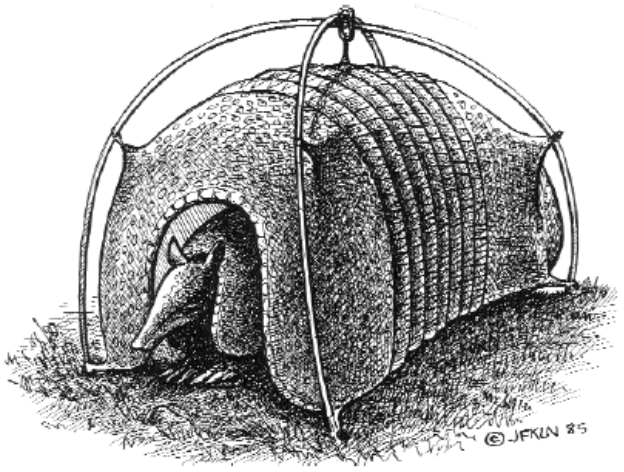
Congratulations to the first three officers being re-elected and huge hats off and thanks to Michael, the TSA's new Treasurer, having served a couple years ago and, more recently, as ICS Treasurer.

I also wanted to sincerely thank **Darla Bishop** for her outstanding work the last few years as TSA Treasurer and keeping me and the rest of the officers and the TSA in line! She has done a superb job of keeping the TSA in the black and making sure the TSA was funded and ran responsibly!

Finally, be sure to mark your calendars for the TSA Winter Business Meeting to be held Sunday, January 23rd, at noon at the TSS Offices on the UT Campus. More info and directions will be announced via CaveTex.

Have a great holiday season and cave safely!

Mark



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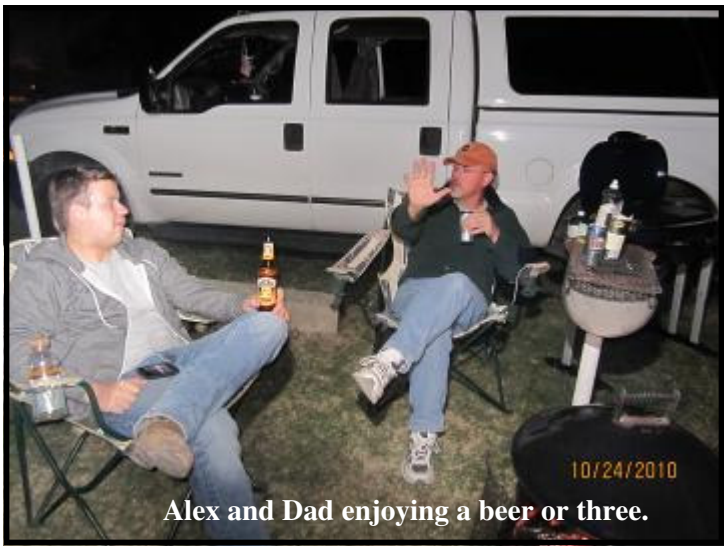
2934 South Shepherd Drive,	HOUSTON	713-526-5226
5400 East Mockingbird Lane,	DALLAS	214-824-7444

RC's in the HG's (Or Why I Love New Mexico Caves)

Submitted by Mark Alman.
Photos by Andrew, Alex, and Mark Alman.



Alex and Dad enjoying a beer or three.

A thought ran through my mind, as I lay head to Lyndon Tiu's foot in a barely two foot wide and a little over eighteen inch high tunnel, back in the far reaches of Longhorn Caverns the first weekend of November.

While waiting for Lyndon to scrape another small bucket of dirt from the caver hardened floor of, what we have affectionately started calling, "The Crownover Causeway" , and gently nudging the container with his foot towards my nose, I couldn't help but reminisce about what I had just been doing a week or so earlier….

Three wild and crazy guys go on a road trip...

Well, two of them are pretty wild and crazy. The other one has mellowed and, hopefully, wizened with age and still enjoys a good time, but struggles mightily to keep up and to put his thoughts down.

The original idea for this trip was conceived in the winter of 2009, after having read one too many trip reports from Recreational Cavers **(RC's)** lucky enough to have made it out to the High Guads **(HG's)** and without seeing my name included.

I had heard about these caves for years, starting at DFW Grotto meetings and, later, on CaveTex and in the *TEXAS CAVER* and knew it was something we just had to experience for ourselves.

We had planned originally on going over Spring Break, but caving plans clashed with financial reality and a long list of "Honey do's" at the house, in anticipation of Andrew and our new daughter-in-law, Brandi, upcoming nuptials. So, we reluctantly postponed plans until the fall.

Unfortunately, Brandi and my daughter, Allison, were right in the middle of fall school, so they were unable to attend, so it was just the three of us. Hopefully, the two ladies will be able to make it our there with us some other time.

With the boys both working (ah, a lovely sound for any parent!) I loaded the truck with all of our supplies on Saturday, the 23rd, after Andrew and I loaded up on food, firewood, lots of beer, and whatnot at Walmart, after he got off his shift as a paramedic and firefighter in Rowlett.

All of Saturday was in the rain, but, luckily it cleared out early Sunday and we were off to Carlsbad!

Parks Ranch or Not to Parks Ranch, that's the Question

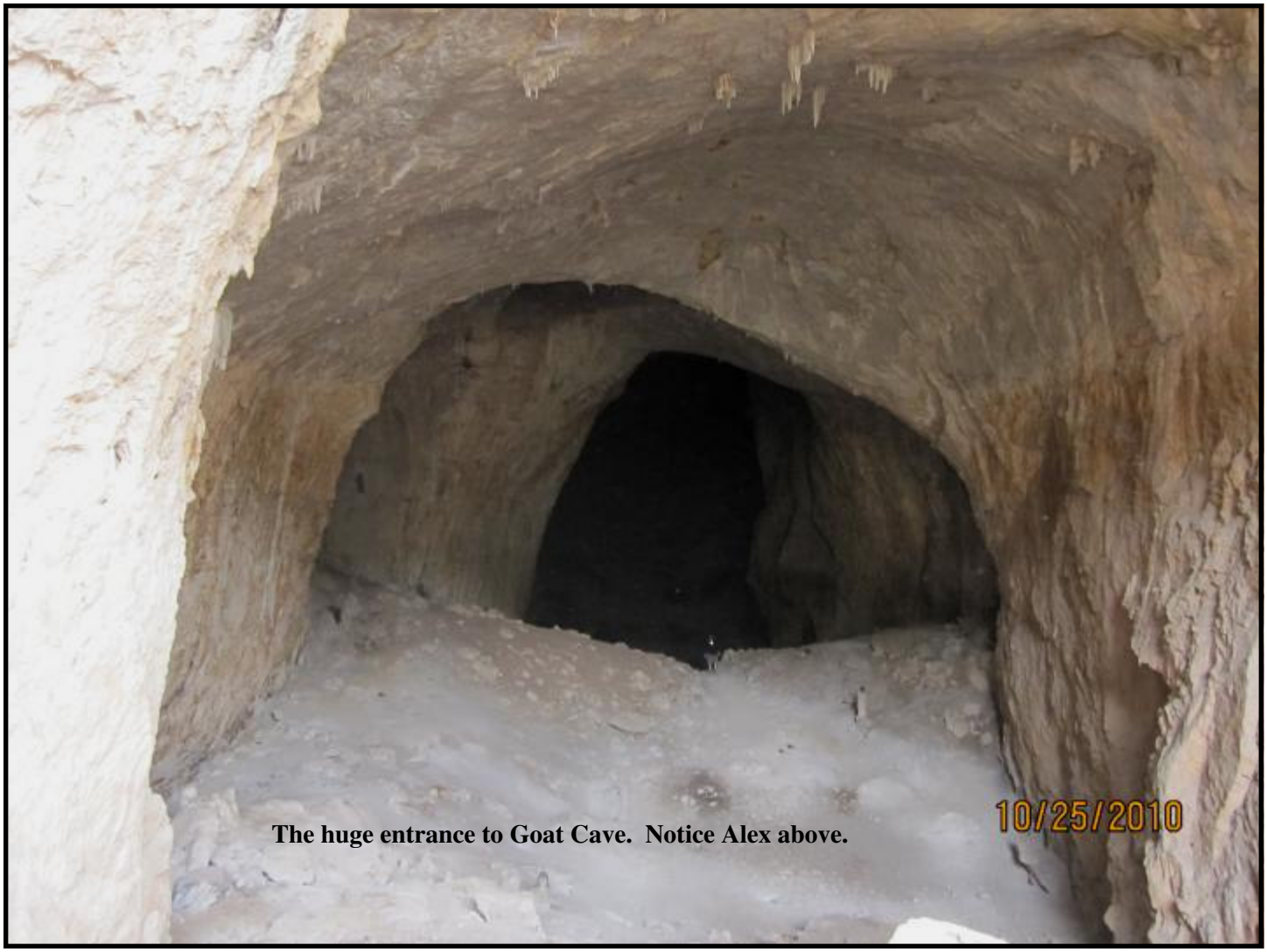
It's amazing how fast a trip can fly by when you're excited, have three drivers, great company, great music (everything from Wilco to Stevie Ray Vaughn to Five Finger Death Punch), and can nudge the speed up to a reasonable 80 MPH, once you're off the main highway and on into the desolate flatlands of West Texas and eastern New Mexico,

We originally were trying to keep our costs down and had planned on camping Sunday and Monday nights at Parks Ranch. I had been thinking for the last hundred miles or so whether this would be a good idea or not. Having plenty of time to discuss among ourselves on the way there, and not feeling comfortable about leaving all of our gear, tents, etc. unattended while we were gone all day caving, we opted for the Carlsbad RV Park instead.

We had stayed here many times before and the staff and restrooms were always nice and had much wetter and hotter showers than the Parks Ranch campsite would have provided. We camped for $40 for two nights, including the rental of a fire pit, and chalked it up to the priceless feeling of a peaceful state of mind and not having to worry about our gear.

Our trip chef, Andrew, who had become quite a cook in Boy Scouts and honed his skills even more by cooking at the fire station, prepared a great meal while his brother

The road to Goat.



The huge entrance to Goat Cave. Notice Alex above.

and I supervised, looked on, and drained a barley pop or two! A nice shower and warming our feet around the fire, while enjoying a Shiner or two, concluded the evening.

Thar she blows!

Not being a stranger to southeastern New Mexico and reading reports about the high winds up in the Guadalupe Mountains, one of the things we stocked up on during our reconnaissance trip to Walmart was LOOONG tent stakes.

Little did we know how important these would be later on in the day.

After rising early Monday, getting in a shower to help open my sinuses, an affliction I would have this entire trip, and getting the coffee and fire going, in that order, it was breakfast time before heading out to Carlsbad Caverns to see Dale Pate and obtain our permits for Goat Cave.

We were blessed to be camping by a pecan tree that was overloaded with some of the best pecans I have ever found in the wild. Since we were having sausage and pancakes for breakfast, topping the flapjacks with pecans seemed like a splendid idea! So, Alex and I got cracking (pun intended) while Andrew manned the stove.

A great breakfast to start out a great day of caving!

On the way out of the campground, we ran into one of the owners who wanted to make sure we had battened down the hatches before heading out for the day. We told him we had and he stated that that was good, as 50-60 MPH winds were heading our way and that Albuquerque had already reported 90 MPH winds at the airport. Yikes!

Ready to get caving and hoping for the best for our campsite when we got back, we head out to the National Park.

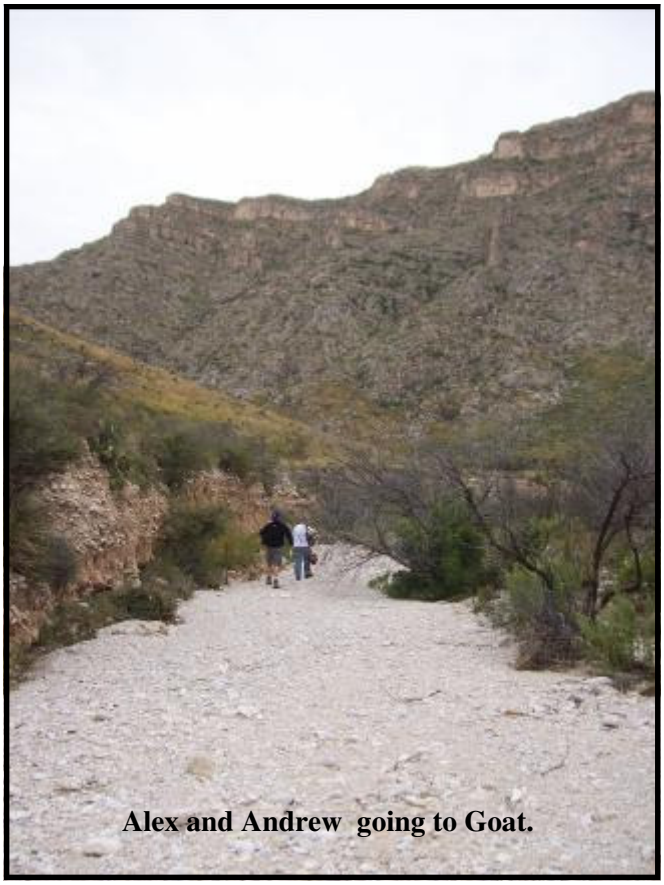
We arrived at the main offices and, after a nice visit with Dale Pate, we picked up the required paperwork, signed in the right places and initialed everything else and headed out to the Slaughter Canyon turn off to begin our hike to Goat Cave.

By this point, the dry cool front (that blew in from the south. Strange, huh?) and the HIGH winds had definitely arrived and the view of Guadalupe Peak to the south was virtually nonexistent at that point, due to the dust that had been kicked up.

We loaded up our gear, food, lots of water, and literally held onto our hats as we headed off down the trail. The trail started off well enough, well marked and cairns aplenty marking the way west. After the Slaughter Canyon Cave cutoff, the trail was still well marked, but, markedly more overgrown and less travelled.

That demon plant called, "Cat Claw".

Since the weather was still quite warm and, usually, baking under a pair of blue jeans when I hike, Alex and I



Alex and Andrew going to Goat.

opted to wear shorts on this day, while Andrew wisely opted for a pair of Levi's. Little did we know how wise he would be!

As I just mentioned, the trail was quite open and well marked at the initial start. After we came to the lesser travelled trail to Goat, the Plant from Hell called "Cat Claw" started making its presence known to the defenseless legs of Alex and I. First, a scratch here and a scrape there. No big deal. But, as the trail became more and more overgrown and we were having to plow through grown in areas to reach the next cairn, the aptly named thorns of this worthless plant began to draw more and more blood from these hapless hikers!

Dale had warned us that parts of the trail and some of the cairns could have, possibly, been washed away in a deluge that they had received a couple of weeks before and he was right. The cairns and trail pretty much disappeared about half way to the cave, but, we had very good instructions from Dale and an navigator par excellence in Andrew leading the way. As long as we followed the creek bed and looked for the small skylight marking the cave, we would be fine.

After many a bloodied leg, a good deal of bushwhacking, a hike of around two hours and 2.5 miles of rugged terrain, and

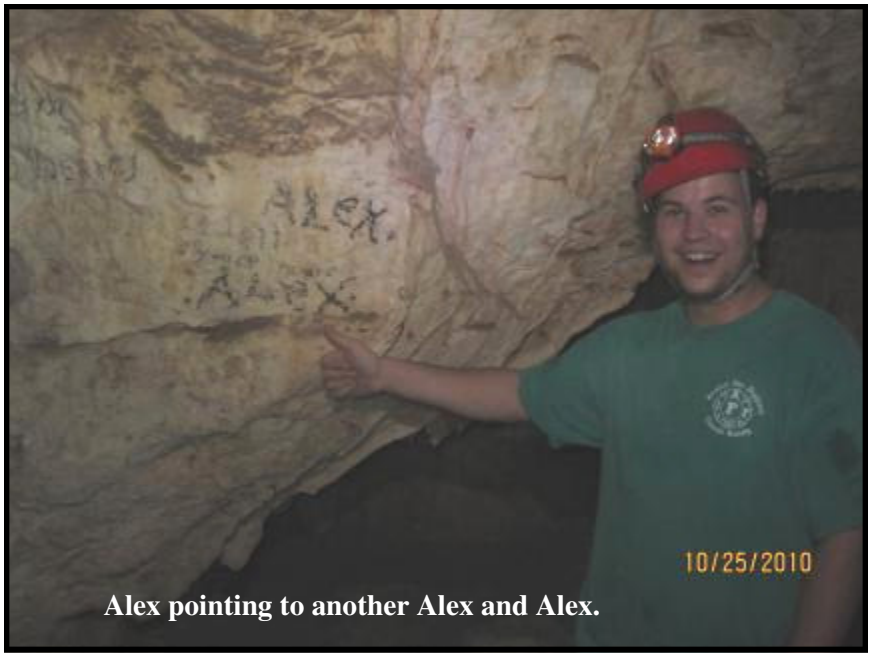
enduring wind tunnel like winds howling through the canyons unlike anything I had ever seen or experienced, we spotted the skylight and all wondered together, "How the hell do we get up there?!"

Dust Without and Dust Within

I had read in other trip reports and articles online that there is no "clearly marked" true trail up to the cave and one had to claw their way up to the entrance as best as possible. Andrew, not being encumbered by bare legs made raw, bulled his way through the rocks and undergrowth halfway up the mountain slope and was the first to spot the entrance to Goat Cave. Alex and I gingerly picked our way to where Andrew was while trying to minimize inflicting more damage to our traumatized legs.

We were all excited to have finally reached our destination and reflected on how shitty it would have been to have hiked all that way and endured the scourge of The Claw and not having been able to locate the cave.

Thankfully, we had and we enjoyed a nice lunch and



Alex pointing to another Alex and Alex.

rest before excitedly heading into the cave.

Having inhaled an estimated half pound of dust just on the way to the cave, we were shocked by the amount of "dust", if you want to call it that, inside Goat Cave. I had read reports and the literature issued by the NPS that Goat Cave earned its name as a shelter for herds of goats in years past. At night, to protect the goats from bears at the time and mountain lions, shepherds used to herd their flocks into the cave for safety and to avoid storms and flash floods in the canyon.

As a consequence, quite a bit of manure had accumulated on the floor of the cave, going all the way to the back we would later find out. Over the years, it had deteriorated and was no longer dung shaped, but, ground down into a fine powder that was easily stirred up when one trod upon it. "Great!", I thought. This will do wonders for my sinuses!

Goat clearly is a great New Mexico cave, though! With an entrance large enough to accommodate four lanes of traffic and a ceiling high enough to allow a large building, this was MY idea of caving. Much preferring using my feet to enter and navigate a cave and not my elbows/knees/belly, this is what I imagined years ago as a boy and now as a chronologically-challenged adult caver.

The boys headed in first while I shot some photos from the entrance. Their smallish figures provided excellent scale to the enormity of this cave. I later joined them down the slope, stirring up dust along the way.

We found a very nice alcove to the right that was relatively free of goat manure/dust and Andrew proceeded to get some very nice photos utilizing his mega flash that he originally bought for their scuba diving trip on their honeymoon in Hawaii. It worked quite well during our exploration of the cave, that is, until the dust was kicked up so badly by us that the camera had trouble focusing on the object at hand and started focusing on the dust.

Nevertheless, we managed to spend several hours investigating this wonderfully immense cave and marveled at its size and age and how it reminded us quite a bit of one of our favorite Texas caves, Kickapoo Caverns. We explored quite a while, until the dust became too much and we headed for the entrance, to endure another type of dust outside the cave.

Loading up our gear that we had left outside, we drank quite a bit of water, rinsed ourselves off as well as we could, ate a light snack, and picked our way ever so gently down the slope we had just traversed and back to the stream bed that would take us back to our truck.

It took the three of us quite a while to get back to "safe" ground, as the slope is literally a 45 degree angle, and each of us took different routes to reach the same destination. We deliberately took our time getting down to the canyon floor, knowing that the nearest hospital was a long ways away and not wanting to have to hobble back two and a half miles over unstable ground with a sprained ankle, or worse!

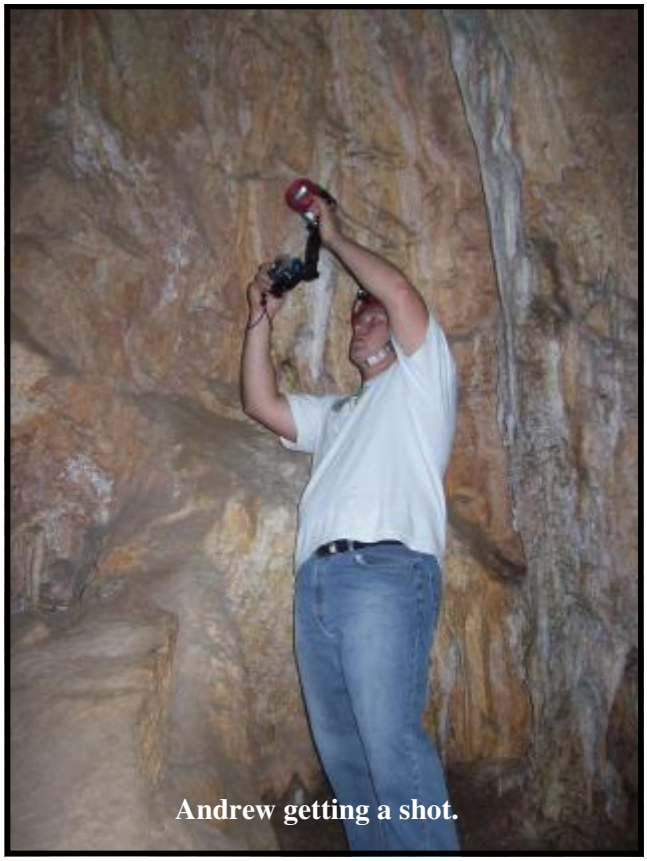
Somehow, I managed to beat these two whipper snappers down from the cave and safely back together, we headed east from whence we came.

The blood on Alex and my legs was nice and dry by this point but, not to worry, fresh abrasions were yet to be created and the blood on our legs was flowing freely and red as you please, by the time we reached the truck a couple of hours later. The hike back, having taken less time, as we now knew the way and did manage to find a semblance of a trail heading back that allowed us to avoid the loose rock and the hazard of a twisted ankle traversing the streambed as before.

We celebrated our arrival back at the truck by downing a couple of fine ice cold products from Golden, Colorado and disposed of our recyclables in the nearby receptacle before heading back to Carlsbad.

When we arrived back at our campsite, it became readily apparent that winds of biblical proportions had blown through. Our tents were still in place and intact, but the high winds had still managed to deposit a layer of dust on EVERYTHING inside the tents, despite being zipped up. The only thing we could figure is that the wind had managed to carry the dust up, under the rainfly, and into the tents. Most of our belongings were in our duffel bags, but we still had to drag our sleeping gear out and everything else in order to knock off all the dust that had accumulated during the Great Carlsbad Dust Storm of 2010.

We also rounded up our lawn chairs that had been blown over twenty feet and into a pile. Thankfully, the high pampas grass separating our campsite from Hwy 82 prevented the chairs from being blown into southern Colorado,



Andrew getting a shot.

Looking back towards the entrance.
Notice all of the dust.

Once we had accomplished squaring our campsite up, we headed to the restroom to enjoy a hot shower (Man, I'm glad we didn't stay at Parks Ranch), after we removed the three foot high pile of tumbleweeds from the door. It was then off to "roughing" it in town at the Stevens Inn to enjoy Happy Hour and to watch the Dallas Cowboys go down in defeat, once again, at the hands of the NY Giants.

Once it became apparent our beloved 'boys were not going to win on this night, Andrew and I thought it wise to head back to camp before Alex got into a fight with some anti-Cowboys folks from town. Never a dull moment with the Almans!

Miller Time!

And now for something completely different…

One good thing did result from the Carlsbad Cyclone: a wealth of pecans had been knocked down from our friendly neighborhood pecan tree. They were literally EVERYWHERE, so while our personal chef cooked up some hot links, coffee, and hot water for oatmeal, Alex and I filled a large grocery bag with pecans for use later and in our breakfast.

Man, I was enjoying this, but, the weather had cooled down noticeably overnight and I was concerned about tent camping up in the Guads, which was to be our destination on Tuesday.

After a great breakfast we loaded up our gear, honked twice on the way out (as the owners want you to do, if you've had a great time), filled the tanks with diesel and headed out to Sitting Bull Falls, our next cave.

Taking the Dog Canyon Campground cutoff, we headed west to this beautiful oasis hidden well within the Chihuahuan desert. We enjoyed the scenery on the way and remembering the last time we were here when Alex and I were skirting several thunderstorms that marched their way across the plains and having caused us to abruptly shorten our trip to the falls back in '07. Storms were not an issue on this visit, but, the high winds were still making themselves known.

We arrived at a delightfully quiet and virtually deserted parking lot and searched for the Park Host who had our permits. He was a delightful gentleman and told us that he and his wife lived in Queen and to be sure to stop by the café on the way to the Guads for the best hamburgers around.

Alex and Andrew in front of Sitting Bull Falls . The cave is behind them and up to the right.

Great advice, as it turned out, but I'm afraid his name has slipped my mind. Curse old age!

We talked a good bit about life out there, so far away from everything and everybody, and what wildlife he had seen out there. He named the usual suspects one would expect to see, but, made mention with particular emphasis on mountain lions, as they had "hauled out" over twenty so far this year. Not sure if "hauled out" meant dead or alive. Hopefully, the latter, as I would hate to see such magnificent animals being put down, unless they were a menace to us humans.

We then got our permits for Sitting Bull Falls Cave, Cottonwood Cave, and Black Cave, as well as directions as to the best way to access Sitting Bull Falls Cave. Having never been to the cave or in it, for that matter, he didn't have a lot of tips and it fell to us to locate it.

We dressed for the trek, gathered our gear, especially cameras, and made the short hike to the falls. After arriving, we noticed that the water was noticeably down from the last time we had visited, but, was still spilling nicely over the flowstone shields to provide a very beautiful scene. We took a lot of pictures and then looked for the entrance.

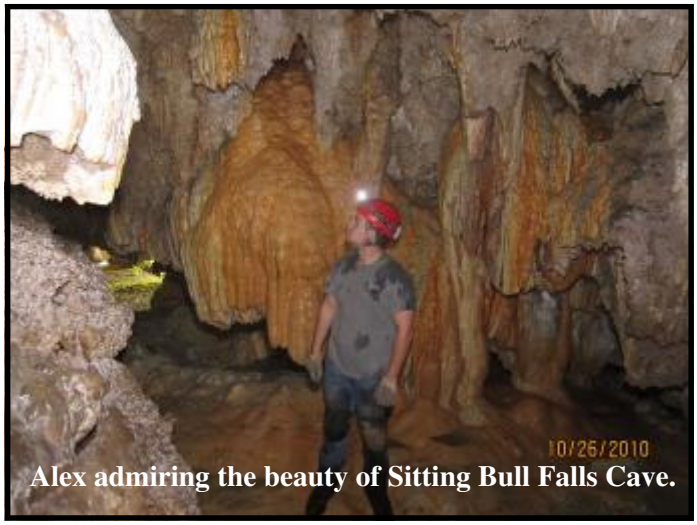
After having spent a short while clambering over the rocks for entry, to no avail, I shouted to Andrew to scrabble up a little higher from where he was and to take a look into the dark recess above him and behind the falls. This would mean that he would have to get wet and he was howling in protest. I instructed him to just move fast and to take a look.

Bingo! There was our entrance and getting a tad wet entering this cave was a small price to pay in order to view

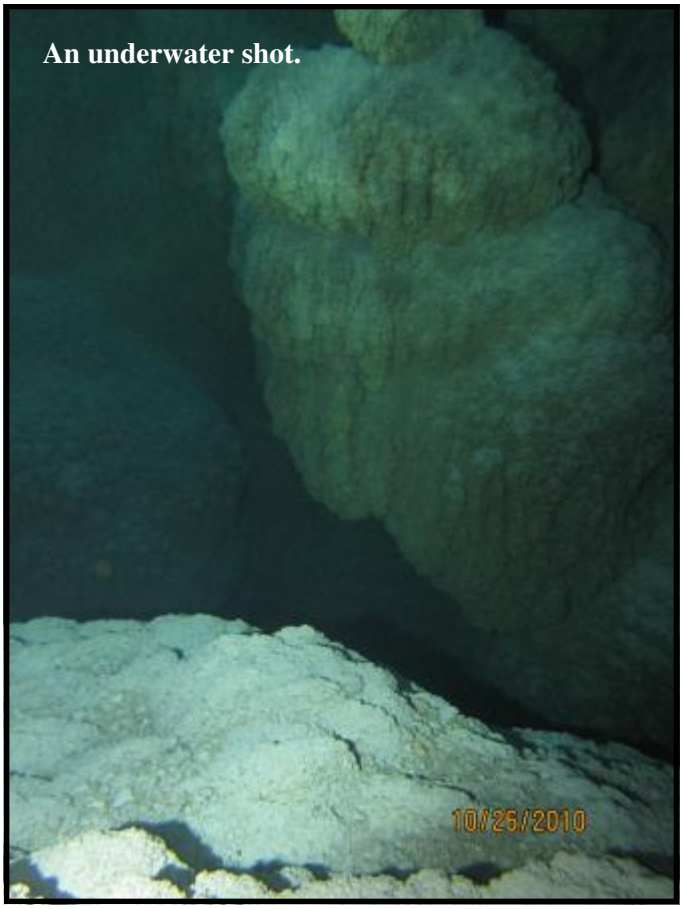
such a beautiful and different grotto than the one we had visited a day earlier. Alex and I excitedly, but carefully, clambered up the slick rocks and ducked under the cascading water to enter a cave unlike any we had ever been in.

Once through the water, we encountered a small, flat, and relatively dry alcove and left most of our gear there near the entrance. Carefully ducking under the delicate formations, we joined Andrew, who had already entered this marvelous hall of beauty.

Sitting Bull Falls Cave is not a large cave by any stretch of the imagination. But, what it lacks in size, it more than makes up in grandeur. Still growing formations greeted our eyes and covered the entire breadth of the cave, varying in colors from white to a golden yellow to orange and, finally, a dark reddish rust color from some unknown mineral. Pools of crystal clarity and of an unfathomable depth greeted



Alex admiring the beauty of Sitting Bull Falls Cave.



An underwater shot.

us on our right side, while shallower pools with beautiful rimstone were on our left.

We eagerly, but, carefully explored this wonderful cave, wondering what lay beyond the deep pools we encountered and whether more cave lay beyond some unknown sump. I recall reading that the cave did go on a little further, but, not having any scuba gear or permission or desire to foul these delightfully azure pools, we could only wonder and imagine.

Alex and I spent quite a while in this place of beauty, carefully peeking into every alcove while being sure not to inflict any damage, while Andrew managed to snap several shots of underwater formations in the pools, thanks to his waterproof flash AND camera. Interesting, I must say.

Watching the time and wanting to hit the café in beautiful downtown Queen before having to navigate the off road route up to the Forest Service Fire Tower and Texas Camp in the Guads, we reluctantly said goodbye to this beautiful cave which was to become one of the highlights of our trip.

We shot a couple more photos of us behind the falls exploring further for more cave before we departed. We then loaded up and made our way to the foothills of the Guads and into true wilderness.

Following the excellent directions that I received from Joe Ranzau, we made our way up into the Lincoln National Forest, after making a pit stop at the NFS headquarters just outside of Queen. There was some confusion as to our permits, as we had the permits for Cottonwood and Black, as well as a mysterious key. Was it for the gate at Black, the permit lock box, or what? Also, I knew how to get to Cottonwood, but, we had zero info on how to get to Black Cave.

A quick phone call to Roger Beason from the office insured a set of instructions for the step log to be faxed to us, guaranteeing our arrival at Black, or so we thought. Many thanks to Roger for helping us out, as we would have NEVER found the cave without them! Why these weren't sent along with the permits is beyond me, as they knew we had never been there before, but it was quickly resolved and we were on our way to Queen!

A hamburger in paradise!

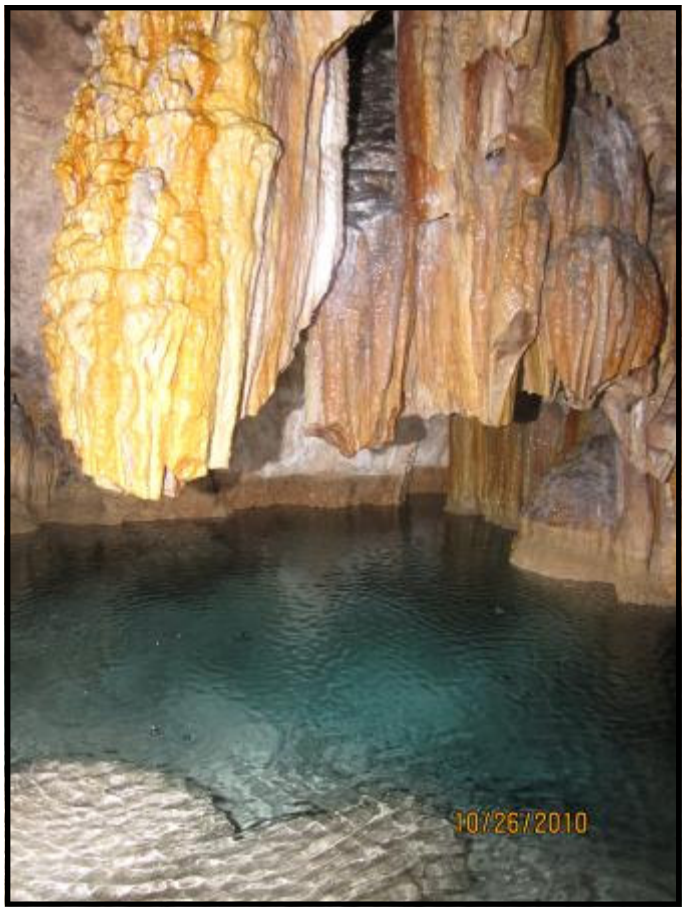
Queen, NM is truly one of those places you hear about. "Don't blink or else you'll miss it!" We saw a couple of houses, indicating that something was coming up, and then it was back into the pine trees of the Lincoln NF. Before the trees and a short distance down the road was our café.

"Paradise" is dependant on one's own definition, but, any place that lacked all of the cars and concrete of the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex is paradise to me.

We pulled into the parking lot, leaving the truck unlocked, knowing that everyone out there, including us, was armed and troublemakers were few and far between. We walked up to the cedar porch and through the squeaky screen door to a surprisingly busy little joint, that was "manned" by a pleasant older lady, her daughter, and her 3 YO granddaughter. Everyone there seemed to know each other, most of them being deer hunters, and we felt quite welcome and at home. We placed our orders (a green chile cheeseburger for me, since we were in NM) and sat down.

Looking around the room, I assumed most of the folks were local yokels, coming in for a bite to eat. Imagine my surprise when one distinguished older gentleman, noticing my shirt with "Mesquite, TX" on the chest, mentioned that he and his two son-in-laws were from a place just down the road from us. A little place named "Waxahachie"!

What a surprise! Come to find out that they had



Downtown Queen, NM.

been up there for a couple of weeks hunting and were soon going back. Little did we know that most of the people we would encounter in the high country would be from the Lone Star State!

We talked for a good while, and told them that we were hunting for caves instead of deer. We invited them to come on by, if they get a chance to see the caves with us. We conversed until there food arrived and devoured ours a short while later.

One of the best hamburgers I've ever had!

Through the river and over the woods!

After the delightful respite, we loaded up and headed out. The road continued to be blacktop, then gradually, gravel, which then degraded to one lane rock road, then lumber road, then a truck wide trail. Andrew was handling the driving nicely and Alex and I hung on and tried to minimize stuff bouncing around in the interior of the truck.

The road was quite rocky and some of the more challenging terrain I have ever taken my truck. Andrew managed to avoid punching a hole in the ol' F250's oil pan, that is until we came across a wide and rocky dried streambed. There were some huge boulders, but, we could tell that other folks had managed to get across without mucking up their trucks. Alex and I decided this would be a good time to get out and go for a walk, while watching for any gas tank gotchas.

We steered Andrew around the more menacing looking rocks and nudged a few others out of the way. Once across the 100 yard stretch, we loaded back up and enjoyed a great drive with spectacular scenery, and made the final push to Texas Camp.

We arrived at the NFS Fire Tower and Cabin, not too far from camp, and looked around and made full use of their beautiful (in my opinion) composting latrine. While I was dropping the kids off at the pool, Andrew had checked the cabin and noticed that the door was tied just tied shut with a note to close when finished. He went inside and looked around and said, "Dad, you want to set up the tents or stay in the cabin?". With a strong, blustery wind on the mountain ridge promising a brisk couple of nights sleeping, I said, "Whaddya think? Let's use the cabin!".

The cabin has been used over the years by the High Guads Restoration folks, led by Jennifer Foote, and it was very nice and roomy. We set up "camp" inside the cabin and got supper going on our stove. Later on, we enjoyed a delightful fire near the sand pile, courtesy of a great fire pit Andrew and Alex built while I made supper. After enjoying another couple of cold Golden, CO hop and barley products, we enjoyed a beautiful full moon, a couple of falling stars, and the delightful absence of light and cell phone coverage. We soon called it a night.

A whole lotta caving going on

We all enjoyed the best night of sleep of the trip because of the delightful digs we had set up, but, also knowing that we were better protected from the local critters (read "mountain lions") than we would have been if we had tent camped outside.

After a huge breakfast of pancakes with a BUNCH

Alex and Andrew making breakfast. (While Dad drinks coffee).

of pecans, sausage, coffee, and tea, we loaded up our gear and headed out the door , ready to head down the trail/ canyon to Cottonwood Cave, the main cave that I was the most intrigued by.

After using the luxury loo that the NFS provided, we heard a truck coming up the road. We hung around to see who it was and, lo and behold, it was a couple of the guys we had visited with at the Queen Café! They had taken us up on our offer to go caving with us and wanted to know if that was OK. We said, "Sure!" and handed them some extra helmets and lights and off we went.

We had a lot of good conversation on the way to the cave and found out what they did back in Dallas (landscaping and construction) and arrived at the cave entrance in short order. Once again, Andrew was the first to arrive, due to the fact that he is half my age and in much better shape.

"WOW!" doesn't quite describe the view from the entrance of this magnificent cave. The skylight is quite large and the cave slopes down towards a large collection of massive columns on the left side of the cave. We left some gear at the entrance and headed on in.

The trail was well marked and our Waxahachie compadres were just as awe-struck as we were by the beautiful formations, vast slopes of rimstone (with quite a bit of water present), and the unbelievably high ceiling of this wide open and easily accessible "wild" cave. Very little damage and vandalism was visible, probably due to the fact of the difficulty in getting up to and down into this cave, being off of the beaten path, and all.

We continued inward and onward on the path until we came to a HUGE slope going down at a steep rate into the cave. Our two Texas buddies decided that this was probably far enough for them and that they had seen enough. We weren't sure if the idea of allowing enough time to drive back to Texas later that day sparked their decision, or the dark and oppressive gloom which entices us cavers but causes second thoughts in others was their primary motivation.

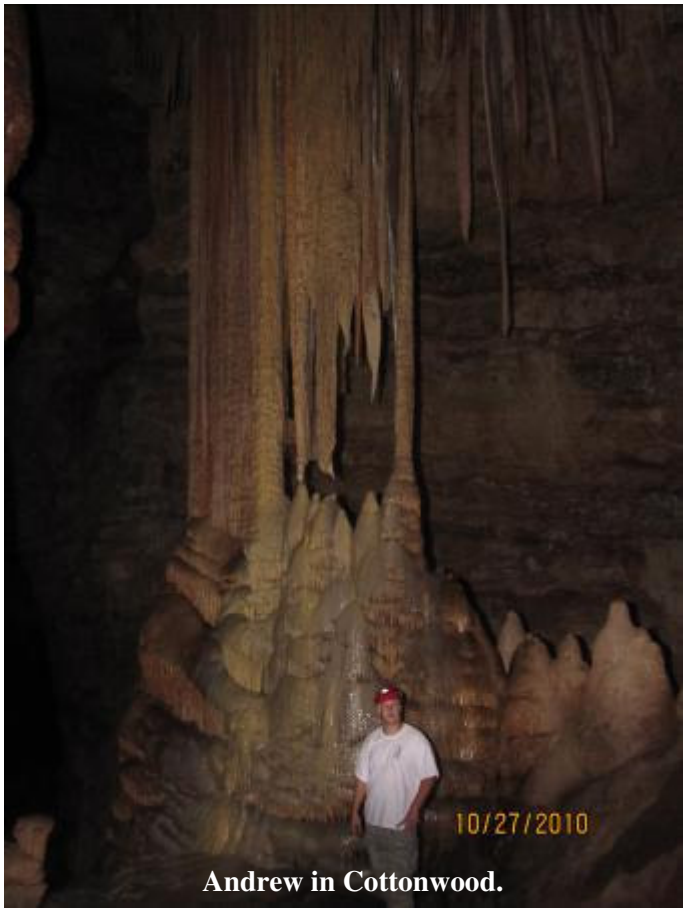
Either way, we bid farewell to our new friends and wished them a safe trip home. They thanked us for allowing them to tag along and said that it was a truly memorable experience for them, having never visited this cave before, despite several trips out this way over the years.

Andrew remained at the top of the slope in order to capture, as best as he could, on camera Alex and I making our way down this huge slope. As we navigated our way, one recurring thought kept running through my mind, "We have to hike back up this sucker!". The vastness of the room made it quite difficult to capture the images, but , Andrew got a few.

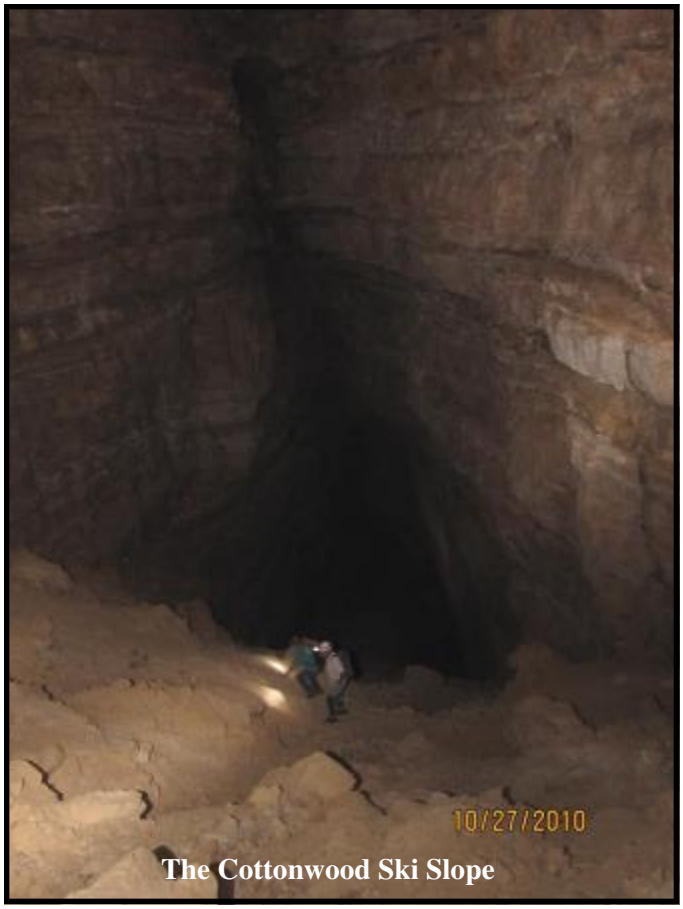
He soon joined us and we continued on into the void. We traveled on, dumbfounded by the wide collection of columns, observed some animal bones of some sort that were cordoned off by flagging, and made it back to the very back lower, and well hidden, room.

We had come across the gate to the lower parallel passage, (why didn't I request permission to visit?!) which is usually Ranger led and which we had no permits for and thought (by me) to request! We looked around in vein for a back door entrance to the restricted section, but our ducking and squirming were for naught, because if there is a "secret" passage to this beautiful area, we were unable to find it!

After scouring every nook and cranny of interest, we made our way back to THE SLOPE. We girded ourselves for the long, slow, trudge to the entrance and slowly made our way. I don't know if it was the length, the angle, the altitude and us being relative flatlanders, or the spirits of Oztotl desperately wanting our presence to remain, but, after a lot of huffing and puffing from all three of us, we eventually reached the summit.



Andrew in Cottonwood.



The Cottonwood Ski Slope

Mark and Alex near a pool in Cottonwood.

After collecting our breaths and chugging some water, we made our way back to the entrance, pausing every so often to look at what we had missed and failed to photograph. After saying, "Goodbye" to one of my now Top 5 Caves, we headed back to the cabin for lunch and to plan our afternoon.

Out of the Gloom and into the Black

We arrived back at the cabin around noon and reveled in a delightful meal of tuna salad, ham salad, crackers, and other non-perishable goodies that we brought along.

With so much time left in the day and another cave to visit, we decided to hike to Black Cave, rather than go there on Thursday, as we had originally planned.

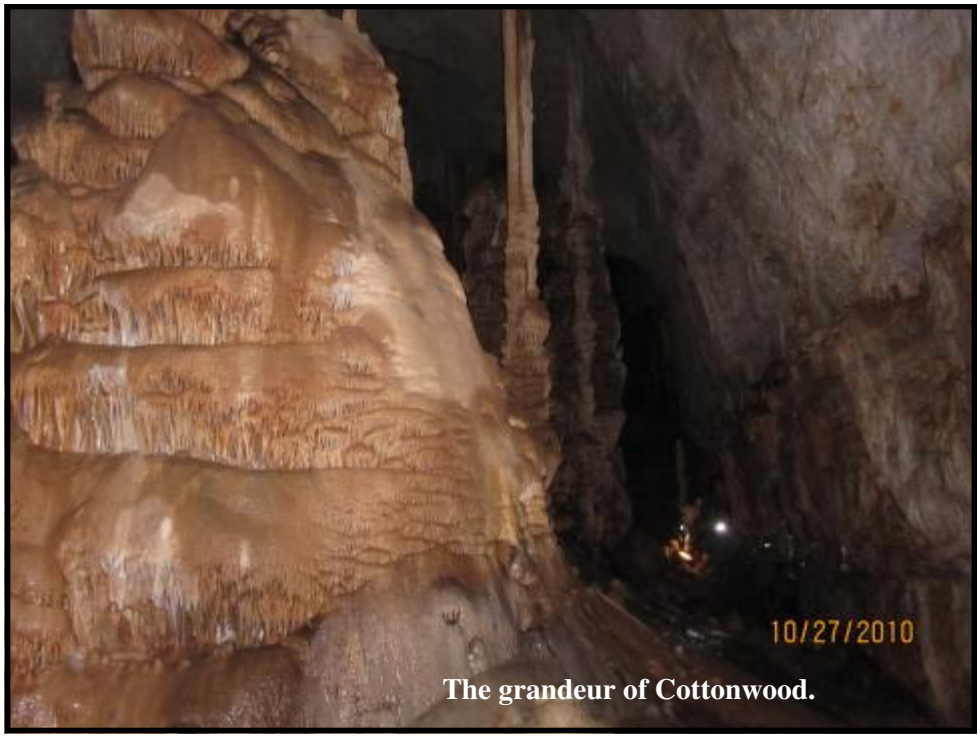
This would involve a LOT of hiking in just one day, as we had made the one mile round trip to Cottonwood, as well as the long trail to the back of the cave. Our butts would be dragging, but, we had plenty of time and daylight. We knew it was over a mile from the cabin to the green gate, which led to the trail needed to get us to Black. We could shorten our hike by driving to the gate, but, one formidable obstacle blocked our way.

The Dragon's Teeth!

To anyone who has been there, you know what kind of hazard these rocks are to any vehicle that is NOT jacked up at least 18" off of the ground. If you have not ever seen these, no surer recipe for low ground clearance vehicular disaster could ever be conceived. We had surveyed these rocks earlier in the week when we first arrived at the fire tower and there was some discussion as to whether to risk traversing them or not. Since we were over 60 miles from town and would be in deep s*** if something happened to the truck so far from town, we decided it would be better to risk our feet rather than our sole means of transportation.

So after lunch and loading up quite a bit more water (and Aleve), we made the ~one mile hike to the gate and the 2.5 mile hike to the cave turnoff.

Our Waxahachie hunting buddies.



The grandeur of Cottonwood.

On the way, Andrew once again proved his value by expertly navigating our way to where the Black Cave turnoff was supposed to be, utilizing a compass and very accurate pacing, according to the step log Roger had sent us. Alex and I did our part to help Andrew navigate by shutting up and not talking to Andrew, as he counted paces and measured direction and degrees.

It was a very pleasant, although rocky and muddy in some parts, hike downhill and we were able to enjoy a lot of the beauty that draws people to the Guads, as well as a lot of wildlife, including more tarantulas and a horned toad that scurried across the trail. (See photos). We followed the step log precisely, until we came to the last section where it listed a trail that split off to the left. No trail!

We backtracked a couple of times and Andrew checked that he had read the directions correctly. Everything jibed, except for where the trail was supposed to be. Damn, now we had to bushwhack!

Looking to where the cave was "supposed" to be only showed us a lot of high grass, brush, and trees but, thankfully, no cats claw at this high altitude. According to the directions, the cave was supposed to be below a 5-6 foot rock ledge. So we separated out along the slope and looked with increasing futility for the rock ledge and the elusive gated entrance to Black Cave.

After checking out a few promising leads to no avail, I finally sat down in order to get a drink and to "enjoy the Kodak moment". Old people vernacular for "taking a break"! I did manage to get some nice photos of the fall foliage down in the bottom of the canyon. I did spot another ledge that looked promising but, since Andrew was heading that way, I thought I would let youth and energy win the day and let him check it out.

I was contemplating calling it a day since it was getting late in the afternoon, even though, it would be a real bummer to have hiked all that way and not find cave. About this time, Andrew yelled, "Found it!" and we all converged to his spot.

Looking back up from the cave and above the ledge, it became apparent that there was a trail but, for some reason, it had been covered up and the cairns removed to show where the cave lay. We resolved to rectify this on the way out. We all met up, got well hydrated, geared up and headed on in.

Battling a swarm of gnats and mosquitoes, we went through the gate and quickly found out why it was called Black Cave. I had read a myriad of explanations as to why this cave was so black, most attesting to soot. I didn't buy this explanation, as the dark pallor of the formations was throughout the cave, even on the lower formations, and didn't wipe off when touched. Besides, there was no calcite over the darkened material, so concluded that the formations were that

Black popcorn in Black Cave.

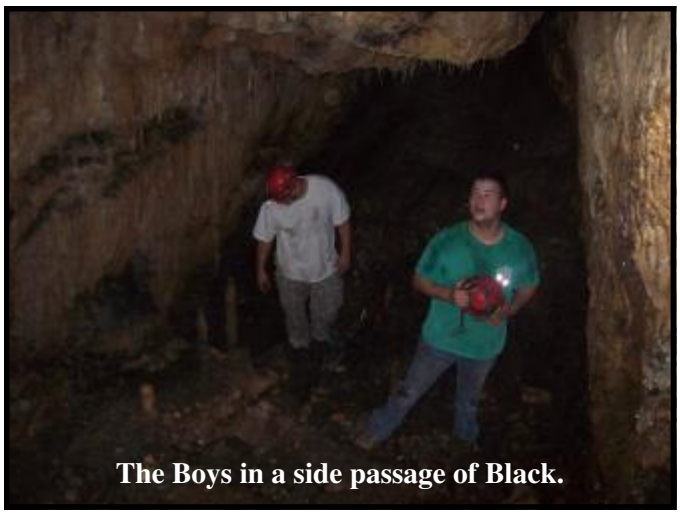
color due to some material in the water that helped form them.

To say that it was black would be a misnomer. The blackness of the walls and formations gave the appearance of the cave being dirty and unattractive, where in truth, it was quite lovely and varied. It was very rocky, but, the trails were very well marked and there was a LOT of formations. We discovered several secluded pools towards the back of the cave, but, decided not to venture beyond them to see what passages lay waiting to be viewed.

We also found quite a few deep canyons that we explored, all with the blackish mineral deposits mainly throughout. We did find one side passage that was more "normal" in color and lacked the dark hues of the rest of the cave. We were able to get some good pictures in this area, as it didn't suffer so much from the light-sucking qualities of the majority of the cave.

One thing we all did agree on is the fact that this cave didn't seem to have been visited very much. The trails weren't real worn down and the Register showed that the last visitation had been about 4 months before by our own JUSTIN SHAW of Austin! Just missed seeing you, Justin!

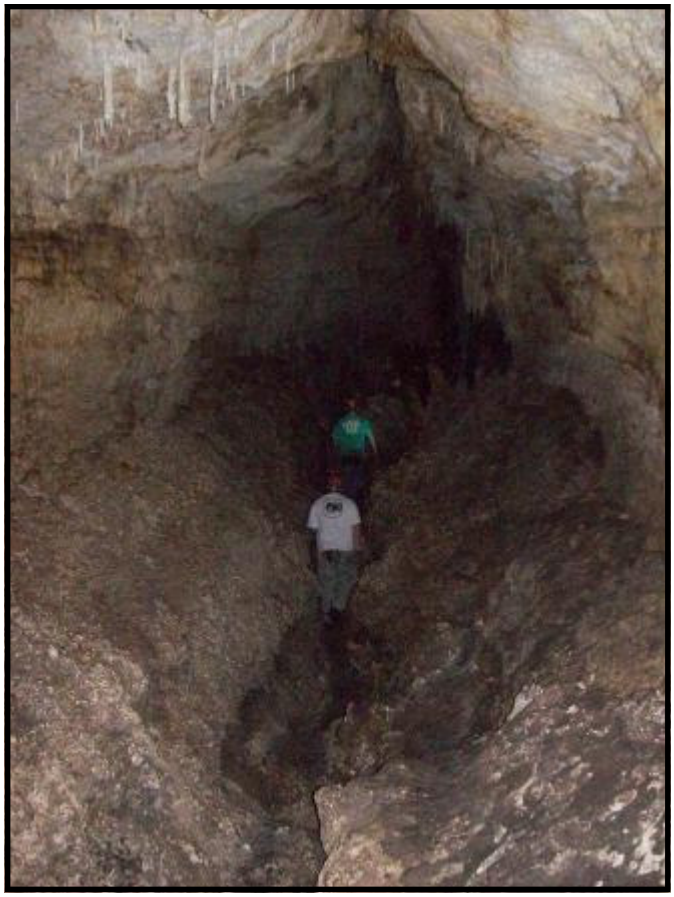
The Register was pretty damp and torn up, due to the fact that it was in a low area near the entrance and had probably gotten damp from the large amount of rain from a few weeks before Dale had told us about. We put our names down as best as we could and placed the PVC tube in a nook on the ceiling, thus preventing it from further damage, hopefully. I did make a note on our permits about the need for new paper in the Register tube and the condition (or lack thereof) of the trail to the cave.



The Boys in a side passage of Black.

After seeing all there was to see, we exited the cave and rounded up our gear. We worked our way back towards the main trail we had used and cleared and re-marked the previously non-existent trail that used to exist. It became readily apparent that there used to be a good trail marking the way to the cave but, for some reason, someone had gone to a lot of trouble to hide the route. Cairns had been destroyed and tree limbs and brush had been placed to obscure the trail.

Since the cave was not closed and was available for visitation, this struck us as odd, so we removed the debris and tossed it well aside and rebuilt the cairns so as to mark well the trail. We wanted to make sure that no one else experienced our frustration and near giving up on visiting this unique and fascinating cave. And it wasn't like this cave is in



danger of vandalism or damage. It is well off the trail and well away from folks who might just happen by. Besides, it was gated, as well, so you can't just walk right in.

We chugged some more water and headed back up that long, long slope to the top ridge and relative flatness of the main trail. In our excitement on getting close to the cave earlier, we didn't really notice how the trail came down a long slope and slowly descended, until we had to hike back up that mother! A 3/4 mile slug up to the top, where upon your dear author laid down on the ground to catch his breath and to enjoy another "Kodak moment"!

I'm happy to report that I wasn't the only one huffing and puffing, as my two young un's were blowing a lot of air, as well!

After about a two hour hike and the sun quickly setting, we finally reached the truck. We celebrated by downing

a couple of barley pops and while we caught our breathes and looked for more Aleve.

A very pleasant and memorable day concluded with all of us being plum worn out, but having spent a great day together. It was capped by a nice warm dinner of stew around the campfire and all of us hitting the sack quite early!

And now for something else completely different—Part II

I awoke early Thursday to step out and water a tree and hating myself for having drank so much right before going to bed. I couldn't help but notice Andrew all huddled up under a pile of fleece and sleeping bags in the front room. It being "air-conditioned" by a one inch gap above the door that allowed a strong cold wind to blow in from the north. Man, had the temp dropped overnight or what!

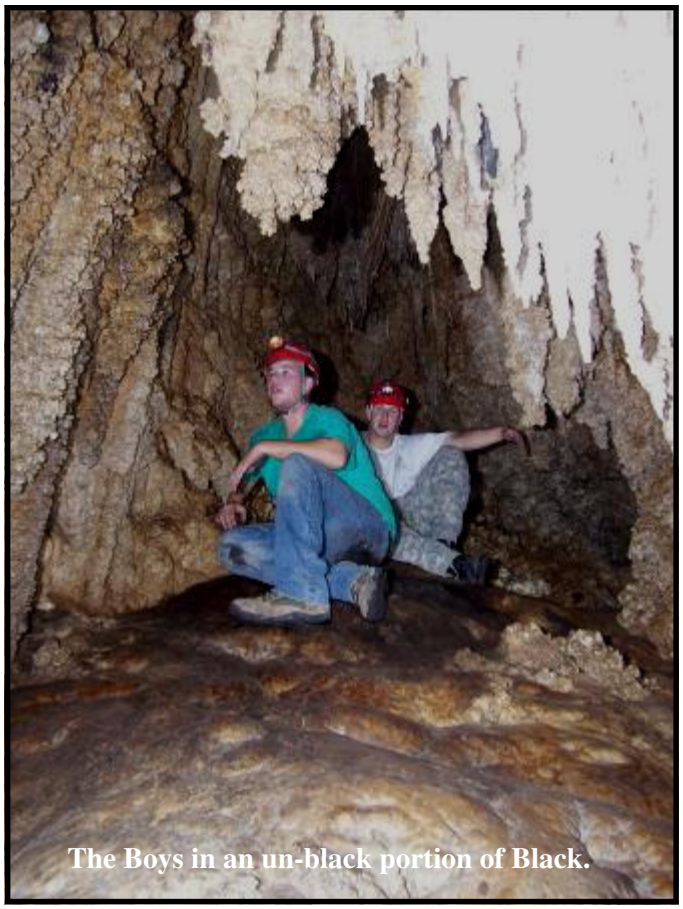
I thanked God for about the hundredth time for the use of this cabin and thankful we weren't camping in the tents! I attempted to get a few more winks of shut eye, but finally got up with a twofold purpose: to get some coffee in me and to use the propane stove to heat up our cheerful little place!

We all were up a short while later and dined on oatmeal, Pop Tarts, and a LOT of coffee and then began to pack up. We got everything loaded and the cabin squared away, as well as the grounds around the fire tower and cabin. It seemed that whoever was there before us had set the trash can outside, so debris and beer bottles had been spread around by the four-legged nocturnal visitors that call that area home.

We policed the area to make sure that we left it better than we found and placed the trash can inside the deluxe latrine to keep it away from critters and hauled out our trash.

One thing I didn't mention is the fact that Andrew had been itching the whole trip to do some target practice with his pistol. So, relenting and having a good backstop in the large sand pile near where we had our fire pit, we set up a firing range and did our best Dirty Harry imitations by blowing away a few hapless beer cans before loading up.

Back at the truck after a LOOONG hike!



The Boys in an un-black portion of Black.

Andrew, once again, did a marvelous job of driving down the mountain and stopped at the creek to, once again, allow Alex and me to guide him over and around the rocks that threatened the ol' F250's oil pan. We waved at a few other hunters, presumably from Texas, and made our way back to Queen and the NFS service center to drop off our permits and the key to Black. It was a cool, but, perfectly clear day and we enjoyed the scenery on the way out and the beautiful mountains and total lack of cars and concrete.

Around 10 AM, we passed the Sitting Bull Falls cut off and I suggested than rather go to Carlsbad Caverns for the umpteenth time and it being too early to check into the hotel (yes, we were roughing it at the Days Inn that night), that we head up to Roswell to go look for some aliens.

The boys thought this was a grand idea, since none of us had ever been there before and we had time to spare. The tiring hikes of the day before to two caves sure came in handy, giving us some spare time to goof off before heading back to Dallas the next day. I took over driving for Andrew, who was ready for a nap and we pulled into Roswell around noon.

Roswell is a pleasant enough little town, but, we were unsure where the tourist areas were and where one would go in search of aliens and their artifacts. We finally discovered our first clue when we spotted the streetlamps made up to look like alien heads and figured we were on the right track.

We quickly came upon the old converted theater that house the official sounding "International Museum of UFO Studies". We parked next door and went inside to tour this

landmark and to learn more about this much-heralded incident and all of the conspiracies that accompanied it.

To say that some people take this UFO stuff way to seriously would be an understatement. There was display case upon display case of the when/where/why of the alleged alien crashing back in 1945 and a whole retelling of the government cover up that quickly ensued and, supposedly, continues to this day.

We perused the displays for entertainment reasons only, while casting a skeptical eye towards most of it, especially since we are from Dallas. The home of the Granddaddy of All Conspiracies: a little ol' incident back in 1963 involving a late great president with the initials of JFK. I imagined the same people having an interest in UFO's being equally intrigued by all of the conspiracies centering around a certain grassy knoll.

Having seen enough, we visited the gift shop, of course, and bought my daughter a Roswell t-shirt and an Aliens Crossing street sign for her bedroom.

We checked out several other purveyors of alien related gift items and ended up at a very good Mexican restaurant across from the museum, where we discussed various theories on alien life forms over a couple of Dos Equis' and barbocoa tacos.

We finished up and I drove back to Carlsbad to our hotel while the boys slept. We thoroughly enjoyed a nice, hot shower before heading to the Chili's in town to watch our own dear Rangers in their first World Series appearance. (They lost the game and the series, I'm sorry to report).

I got us back to the hotel after a great evening out, but, before Alex got in a fight with either a pro-Giants or anti-Texas fan. Couldn't tell which and Andrew and I didn't care to find out.

A good night's sleep ensued and then we were on the road Friday, back to Mesquite and to my daughter's last half time band performance at the football game that night.

Final thoughts

I guess I'm weird, as far as cavers go, in that I don't get overly excited over the fact of discovering "virgin passage". Never have been that way and don't think I ever will be.

I'm more into creating memories with the family and friends and any cave that I have never experienced myself is "virgin passage" to me, whether anyone has ever been there or not. If I've never been there, it's "new" to me.

I must say that this trip and these caves more than lived up to my expectations and the memories the boys and I created will be remembered for a long time. I had a great trip with these guys and look forward to getting out there again.

That's the great thing about getting older and having my memory slip as time goes by. One gets so forgetful that every experience you have, whether you've done it before or not, is always new!

Now, get out to New Mexico and make some of your own!

Interested?

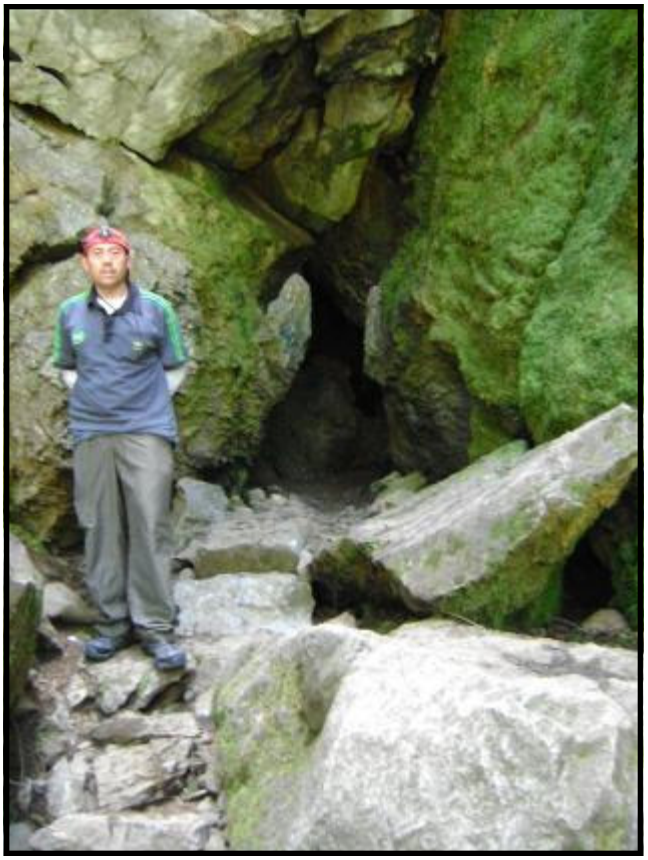
- McKittrick Hill Caves (Horizontal) —Jim Goodbar, (575) 234-5929 or James_Goodbar@blm.gov.
  (Bureau of Land Management)

- Carlsbad Caverns NP (Horizontal and Vertical Caves)-
  Dale Pate, 575-785-3107 or dalelpate@gmail.com
  http://www.nps.gov/cave/planyourvisit/upload/backcountry_cave_permit_info.pdf

- Lincoln National Forest Caves (Horizontal and Vertical)
  575-885-4181
  Ken Anderson - kenjanderson@fs.fed.us
  Rhonda Stewart—rsstewart@fs.fed.us
  Roger Beason—rbeason@fs.fed.us

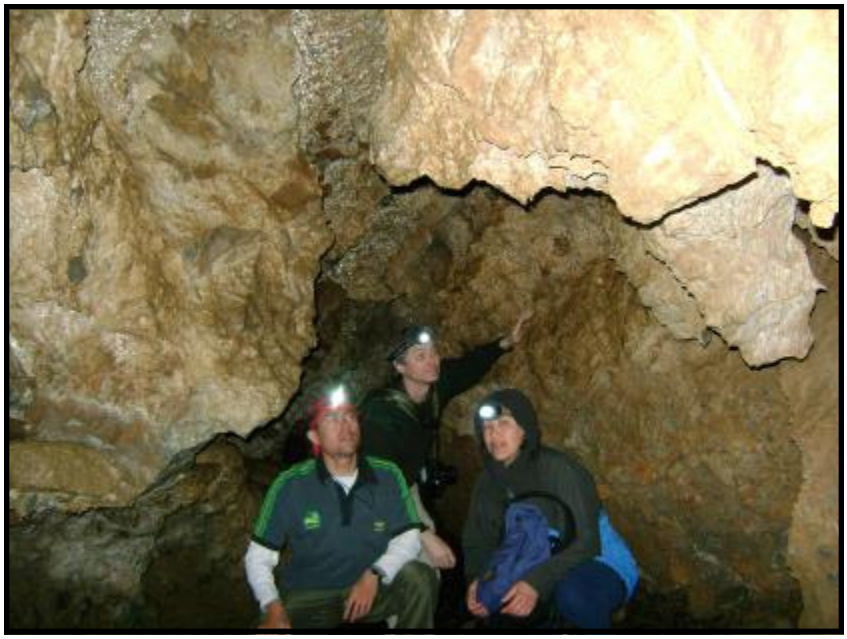
Horne Lake Caves 'Spelunking' Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada May 14, 2010

Submitted by Lyndon Tiu



Spelunkers!
Lyndon
Trent
Diane

Stayed outside, Surface support ;)
Anthony
Margaret



Lyndon, Trent, and Diane.

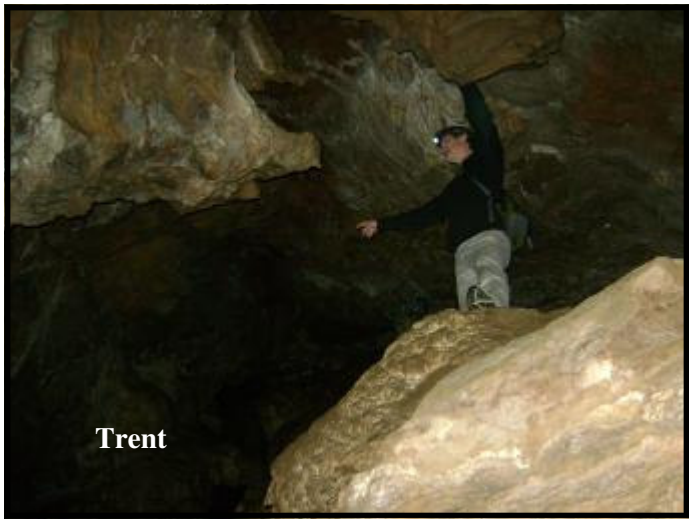
Me and 4 friends were on our way to a weekend getaway on Hornby Island, British Columbia. Our driving route took us right pass Horne Lake Caves Provincial Park. My buddies knew I was into caving back in Texas. They decided to take a detour and check out the caves with me.

Two of my friends graciously offered to serve as surface support (caving was not for them). Another two went to check the caves with me. The caves are a short hike away from the parking lot. About halfway up the hike, I asked, where are your flashlights? Ah, it's in the car. D' oh! Neither one of my companions have been in a wild cave before.

There are quite a number of caves on the park. Only 3 are open to the public. Of the 3, one is open by appointment only, and on Saturdays only, while 2 are open for self-guided tours. It was a Friday and the day we were there, one of the two self-guided caves was closed due to a landslide hazard. That left us with a single cave we can check out, "Main Cave".

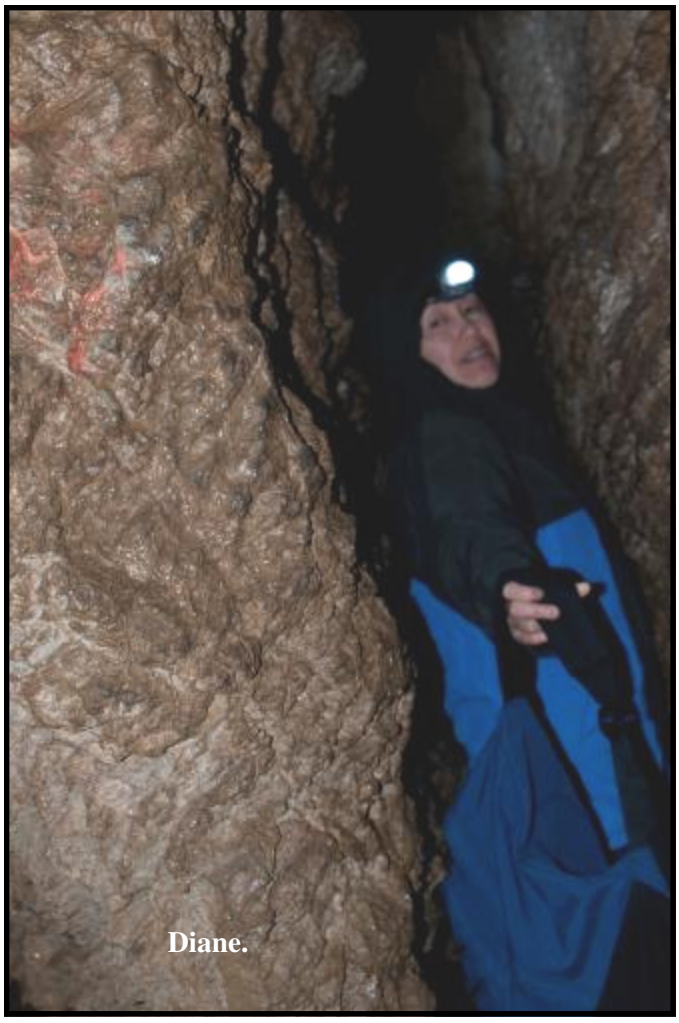
All we had were flashlights/headlights. We did not have helmets, gloves, and nor did we have knee/elbow pads – True Spelunkers!

The cave is definitely on the cold side. Cool air was blowing out of the entrance. It was a hot day, so cool cave air was most welcome. You can faintly hear dripping/running water as soon as you enter the cave. The cave floor was mostly dry and covered with rounded pebbles. It is very damp inside the cave. Further inside, there is a small waterfall and creek. There are some formations, but mostly covered in mud/sand. On the way in, we encountered a group of teens on a guided tour of the cave. They were getting ready to do a lights out and we gladly joined them, turning off all our lights. The cave is a mostly walking cave, with some scramble/climb up a slope partly spanned by a wooden ladder.



Trent

We had fun, and we hope you enjoy looking at the attached pictures.



Diane.

Teen tour.

TSA Spring Convention

Fort Clark Springs Brackettville, TX
April 1st-3rd, 2011

FEES: $10 per person plus $5 per person per night camping (kids camp free)

Join the Texas Speleological Society and fellow Texas cavers for a relaxing weekend in the unique oasis and National Register Historic District of Fort Clark Springs. The TSA, founded in 1956, has been brining Texas cavers together for over 50 years.

Fill your day with informative presentations from cavers about developments in cave sciences, project updates, national and international exploration, and much more. Participate in the Photo and Map Salon by entering your latest and greatest works for all to enjoy. Support Texas caves by participating and contributing to the TCMA auction. Attend the TSA meeting on Saturday & TCMA meeting on Sunday for an opportunity to offer your input and insight into the future of Texas caving.

Meet fellow cavers and project leaders from around the state. This is a great chance to get involved with ongoing projects and create future caving opportunities for all.

Roger Moore and Mallory Mayeux are excitingly lining up presenters so if you have a great topic to present, please contact them at caverarch@aol.com and mmaveu4@gmail.com

The presentations will be held at the Service Center which accommodates 300 people and has AC, bathrooms, and a kitchen.

Spend the weekend lazing with friends in the lush Rendezvous Park campground and soak in the crystal clear, on million gallon spring-fed pool. The campground is shaded, private, hugs, the creek and is just a few steps from the pool and Service Center. The campground and pool area has bathrooms, showers, and potable water.

There is a motel on site. Please make your own reservations at the Fort Clark Springs website.
Well behaved pets are welcome. There is an airfield for those who choose to fly in.

Mark Alman has set up trips for Kickapoo Caverns and more cave trips will be set up for the weekend.

And just for the kids.... an Easter Egg Hunt first thing on Sunday morning!

Hope to see you there!

Ellie Watson
TSA Vice Chair
ellie.thoene@gmail.com

TSA Spring Convention site: http://cavetexas.org/events/TSASC/tsasc2010.html
Fort Clark Springs site: http://99.139.198.182:1069/
Facebook site: www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=118366598218649

TSA SPRING CONVENTION
APRIL 1ST-3RD, 2011
FORT CLARK SPRINGS
BRACKETTEVILLE, TEXAS

Texas Speleological Association
1312 Paula Lane
Mesquite, TX 75149

Attn: Editor