Photo taken by Kathy Peerman of John McLean, precipitant of the NSS 2011 Science Award. John McLean, a Colorado caver and a significant contributor to the Fort Stanton Cave Study Project (which boasts several Texas cavers as part of the team), has around 45 years of experience in geophysical measurements strongly directed towards finding new cave passages in several states. John successfully located sections of the Snowy River Passage several times prior to actual exploration by cavers! John was doing gravity surveys over Carlsbad Caverns in the 1960’s, and continues extensive resistivity surveys in the Fort Stanton area on almost every field expedition. Pete Lindsley photo
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Twinkies Palace Cave Project Report

by Kurt Menking
Photos by Kurt Menking, Marvin Miller, and Drew Wendeborn

In the summer issue of the 2010 *TEXAS CAVER* I announced that B.T. Price, a long time Bexar Grotto caver, purchased Bender’s Cave in Comal County. We’ve been very busy since then exploring and mapping, so almost a year later I thought I’d provide an update on this project.

B.T. did several things very early on. First he renamed the cave to “Twinkie’s Palace Cave”, paying homage to his Papillon dog “Twinkie”, and then he hired Charley Savas to build a gate for the cave. The gate construction was briefly delayed and significantly complicated by high water. We spent several long days digging a footing trench for the gate through the mud. Much of the trench was underwater which slowed things down, but we persevered and completed the trench. We also dug on the floor of the cave and moved rocks to try to drain the water out of the cave and more specifically away from the gate area. Charley and Terry Holsinger quickly completed the construction of the gate in horrible conditions. Charley was often standing in water while welding which is not recommended (OSHA approved?). The term shock factor comes to mind. The gate fits perfectly, looks impressive, and recently was tested by a few neighborhood kids, more on that later.

B.T. wanted us to get started on the survey right away. We knew there had been many survey trips into the cave over the years so we began to make calls, check with TSS, etc. to locate all available survey data. Most of it was lost for one reason or another, but we were able to locate the entrance section data and excellent sketch that were done in 1987. After making maps of the cave survey with current aerials, property boundaries, etc we started making survey plans. The survey data, combined with a few reconnaissance trips into the cave, helped us realize the cave was running horizontally about 15-20’ under a fairly flat surface topography. High dome areas in the cave could easily be...
breached by septic tank holes or even lateral lines in the newly created subdivision above the cave. B.T. wanted us to begin the survey in the first side passage since that passage appeared to be heading under the main part of his lot. He wanted to make sure any of his future house plans and septic systems would not interfere with the cave. We also noticed that a significant part of the cave passed under a nearby vacant lot which was also for sale. After more investigating and bargaining B.T. bought that lot as well to make sure no one could damage his cave.

The 9-13-1987 Bender’s Cave survey included surveyors George Veni, Alan Cobb, Don Arburn, Joe Sumbera, and E. Tolbert. They collected 553.51 meters of survey. The entrance section of the cave is 2-3 meters wide, and 2-3 meters high and the water is mostly 1 meter or less in depth. The deep spots, domes, and low ceilings, as well as the roots, formations, and mushrooms provide plenty of challenges and scenery. At about 370 meters into the cave the main water passage sumps but nearby is an upper level dry passage that leads back to water passage. After only about 10 meters a waterfall is encountered that leads to the lower main water passage sump. Another 12 meters leads to a second waterfall which also leads (we assume) to the same lower main water passage. Sumps and plenty of very low air make it difficult or impossible to pursue the lower levels without scuba. The upper level water passage continues slightly smaller than the lower passage, but it’s mostly easy going, very well decorated, and always seems to have very good air flow.

The Twinkies Palace Cave survey project began on 6-5-10 into the first side lead passage and netted 80.45 meters, while the second trip on 3-25-11 added another 48.06 meters. Surveyors included: Marvin Miller, Kurt Menking, Terry Holsinger, Tom Florer, B.T. Price, and Drew Wendeborn. The Catfish Falls passage starts out like a typical in-feeder water passage. But 30 meters into the passage an 8” high travertine, named Catfish Falls, is encountered that clearly indicates that this passage is taking water out of the main passage. A 10” white catfish had been seen hiding under the falls several times by B.T. and others. Fish are occasionally washed into the cave during major rain events from a pond several miles from the entrance. The Catfish Falls passage includes several impassable in-feeders, plus at least two outflow passages as well as numerous 2-3 meter high domes. We ended the second
survey at a point where I could not get through without digging. Drew and Marvin pushed beyond the restriction, and found a 5 meter high dome with a crevice that let in lots of water and debris. The water level passage continues as a body sized tube. On 6-11-10 we continued the survey of the upper level main passage. We found old flagging at the station we needed to tie into from the 1987 survey, and off we went. Marvin Miller, Kurt Menking, Ben Hutchins, B.T. Price, and Terry Holsinger made up a more than ample survey team.
We shot 26 stations for 280.86 meters. The passage was stoop walking and easy hands and knees, and was nicely decorated.

We continued the upper level survey again on 6-27-10 with Kurt Menking, Terry Holsinger, B.T. Price, Joe Datari, Ellie Watson, Sheena McCray, and Josh Rubensteine. We had enough people for two teams but since we only had one set of survey gear, everyone took turns helping out. About two hours into the survey we decided since we did have an extra Suunto we would take back sights along with the normal data. The next 3 shots took over an hour as the instrument readers struggled to make their shots agree within any reasonable margin. Eventually, everyone was shivering from lack of movement so we called the survey. As we finished up the survey we noticed a salamander, a frog, and a nice side lead in the ceiling. This time we added 27 stations and 218.19 meters.

We waited an entire month before the next trip on 7-24-10. This time we had surveyors, and gear for two teams. The first team of Terry Holsinger, Ben Hutchins, Carrie Hutchins, and Jill Orr called their survey “Up we go to the surface” –Not–Yet. They pushed a side lead that intersected the main passage at the ceiling.
Their passage was about 5’ higher than the main water passage. It lead to several tall domes with obvious breakdown at the top of each one. None were free climable, and none had any light penetrating their ceilings. During their survey they saw several mice, lots of crickets, and encountered plenty of good air flow. Team “Up we go…” added 49.5 meters in 13 stations.

The second team continued the survey of the main passage. The passage was named the Bone Collector for the fairly large assortment of bones found during the survey. Aspen and Geary Schindel, David Daniel, B.T. Price, Monty Strange, and Kurt Menking surveyed 130.34 meters to a fairly low shallow section and ended the survey for the day with going passage. A short scout ahead found a significant intersection of another upper level passage, with the main passage getting significantly smaller after the side lead.

Throughout the survey we were all finding bones laying in the water passage. We picked up many of them and placed them on mud banks so they would not be trampled by our activities. As we were headed out, several of us packed a few of the most interesting bones out of the cave. The bones have been taken to Larry Meisner at Concordia University, and Ernie Lundelius at the UT Paleo Lab in Austin. The bones have been identified as Giant Sloth, Bison, Smilodon, and a very nice intact fossilized land tortoise shell, plus more assorted creatures. B.T. makes regular trips to Austin to the UT Paleo lab on the Pickle complex in Austin which is a block or two past the TSS office. He always gets numerous comments from the security guard and others as he makes sure to deck out in his best A&M gear and drive his big maroon Aggie truck.

On 7-25-10 Terry Holsinger lead a trip to the adjacent McAllister ranch where he has been organizing a very thorough karst survey for about a year. He knew approximately where the sinks should be that would correspond with the domes they had surveyed to the day before. One very nice sink had been named Bill’s Big Dig (BBD) and numerous digs had moved literally tons of the prior owner’s ranch / household trash out of the sink. The survey data from the day before had created a renewed enthusiasm for the dig and soon, Bill and others had...
removed much of the debris and eventually rocks. Voids urged them on and within hours they had opened up a crawlway that lead to stream passage. Later in the day Jeffery Bridgeman, Nathan Parker, and Sean Vincent surveyed 16.5 meters to the water passage. They did not know they actually made the connection when they dropped into the stream passage. They were indeed standing where I had turned around the day before.

A few weeks later, on 8-19-10 I returned with my wife Kitty and tied the BBD survey to the Twinkies survey with three shots totaling 13 meters. After Bill completed his dig and the survey team was in the cave he came over to join myself and Fran Hutchins who were digging on another nearby sink called Big Filled Sink. Fran and I had selected a good looking spot and moved lots of clean washed rock, but had to quit when we were short on time and faced with washing machine sized boulders. Bill decided he didn’t like our dig, and started moving rocks about 25 feet away. After another few hours he had opened up a nice entrance to a 20’ pit. Since it was late in the day everyone decided to head home, and come check it out on another weekend.

On 8-8-10 Terry led another trip to the McAllister ranch where we used a high accuracy Trimble GPS to mark the two new entrances from a few weeks prior. After rigging the new Big Filled Sink opening, we dropped the pit and found a survey flag from the 7-24 Twinkies trip. We surveyed a few shots to tie the GPS locations to the existing surveys. Ernie Lundelius also joined us and eagerly awaited our return with a new collection of bones from the very nearby Bone Collector passage in Twinkies. The new entrances were great time savers.

The next few months most of the Twinkies project cavers were not available, but Geary Schindel was working with a High School student, Alex Dunaway, on a water research project and used Twinkies Palace Cave to do some dye tracing studies. Alex used the typical groundwater flow equation (Darcy’s Law) to calculate expected travel time from a dye injection that is about 2000’ straight line distance from the spring resurgence. Then he measured the actual travel time of the dye in days and used the surveyed distance of the cave passage of 4362.5’. The predicted travel time was approximately 243,000 years while the actual time was 4 days. Which goes to show typical hydrology flow models don’t apply to Karst.

On 2-27-11 Marvin Miller, Drew Wendeborn,
and Ellie Watson set off to survey the upstream passage from the new Bills Big Dig entrance. The passage size was now only 2’ wide by 1’ high, and half full of water. Everything was difficult due to the small passage size and high water levels. Sketching was a nightmare, and setting stations so you could stretch tape, and shoot around the lead person was a real challenge. Drew found a spot to turn around and started backing down the passage setting stations. After only a few more shots the passage got impassably small, and they called the survey. Since the day was still young they set off to survey a few other leads. Next up was 5 shots in the “Mammoth Dome” area, then off to a nearby side lead they named “Twinkie’s Excellent Adventure”. The “X” Survey netted 12 stations in 5-6’ wide and 2-3’ high passage. After a rather long day in the cave, they ended the survey in going passage. The survey total for the day was

25 stations, and 103.68 meters.

Now that the main upper level passage had been completed we started focusing on some other leads. The continuation of the lower level water passage had been a topic of discussion since at least the 80’s. The first 1200’ of the cave leading up to the upper level split is 6-10’ wide and 5-10’ high passage. Many speculated the lower level could indeed be the “Main” passage and the upper passage was just a tributary / in-feeder. Many also believed that Twinkies was the downstream continuance of the Magic Springs and CM caves and had been cut off from them due to the down cutting of the Spring Branch creek. Drew Wendebom led a

Giant Sloth claw found in Twinkies Cave.

Glad it’s not still alive!
recreational trip into Twinkies on 4-16 and discovered the water levels at the upper level split were several inches lower than normal, and the lower level sump was open.

With water levels lower than anyone had seen we didn’t want to waste any time.

The following weekend on 4-24-11 Drew Wendeborn and I started surveying the lower level lead. The water level was at least 3 inches lower than normal. There were lots of 1-3 inch air spaces, but it was all easily passable. Our first shot was a long one and we were able to shoot through the worst of the multiple very low air spaces. But when Drew went back into a nearby dome to get his head and shoulders out of the water he discovered he was in the first water fall dome from the upper level passage. The low water levels had caused the flow to stop at this location. We could hear the water at the second waterfall, but the low flow was also affecting water levels above us as well. We had to re-shoot the first station so we could tie into first waterfall dome, and the upper level survey stations. We continued the survey and tried to place stations near small domes so we could read instruments and sketch in the miserable low air conditions. The passage size was much smaller than we expected, in fact in many places it was downright cramped. The passage was mostly 4-6’ wide, but the height was 1-1.5’ high with 1-8” air space. The domes were a welcome break from the otherwise miserable conditions. The station in the second waterfall dome was reminiscent of surveying the shower stall in Spring Creek Cave, except about 1/10 the size. I was sitting hunched over trying to sketch with water splashing all over and around me, and while shivering full time. I was amazed that I could stop the shivering for short periods while I was sketching, but as soon as the pencil left the paper it would come right back. Drew climbed up above the waterfall to warm up, but I was just a bit too large to squeeze through. I found another nearby dome and did my best to get at least some of my upper body out of the water so I might warm up a bit. After a short break we continued on. A few more shots found even smaller passage at 2-3’ wide, and 1’ high. Drew started backing up down the passage so I could see the stations. We did this for a few stations and were both shivering so bad we decided to stop so we could do the tie in shots to the upper passage. We retreated to the upper level where we could warm up, rest up, and finish up. We ended the day with
63.76 meters of survey, and ended or at least changed the speculation regarding the continuation of the lower level passage. On the way out of the cave I stopped to check out a nearby side passage which is always sumped. It was also about 3” lower than normal and after a fairly short section of 2-3 inch air space it “opened up” into mostly 4-6 inches of air and the overall dimensions of the first 80 feet that I scooped were 5-6’ wide and 1-2’ high. This would have to be our next push as long as the drought continued.

With a few popcorn showers developing daily to the west, I wanted to get back in the cave before we lost access to the open lead. On Tuesday night, 5-10-11 Ellie Thoene, Drew Wendeborn, and Kurt Menking set off to survey the “EDK (Ellie, Drew, Kurt)” passage. The passage was mostly 6-8 feet wide and 1-2’ high. After about 100’ of mostly 6” air space it changed to mostly 2-3 inch air space. Fortunately, there were just enough domes to allow one or two at a time the luxury of getting both ears and eyes out of the water at the same time. Most shots involved holding your breath and lowering your head until the water line was just above the nose. With your eyes at water level you could just see the next station marker… if you were lucky.

We used cyalumes to light up the Suunto because there wasn’t room to keep a flashlight far enough away to not deflect the compass. We ended the survey with 96.46 meters and the passage continues at least a few more shots. Drew scouted past the end of survey and found a 10-12’ high dome and more passage that seems to be getting a bit narrower, plus tighter vertically. The new plots show the survey ended near several surface sinks. I suspect more surface digging lies ahead.

The current surveyed length for Twinkies Palace cave as of 6-6-11 is 1855 meters. There are still a few side leads to continue the Twinkies survey and more digging on nearby ranches that may find more connections to Twinkies, or even better yet entirely new systems that lead into the great unknown. Line plot maps are updated with each new survey, and Marvin Miller is working on a more detailed version of the map as time permits.

The owner is currently having a house built on the property, and he plans to live there when the house is completed, some time near Christmas. He still plans to give the cave and even the house to TCMA upon his death. He and his
Fiancée Suzanne have been spending many quiet evenings sitting on the property enjoying the sounds of the creek, the wildlife and scenery. A neighborhood hiking trail leads along the beautiful creek to the edge of his property line and he regularly enjoys visiting with walkers, and hiking the trail with Twinkie and Suzanne.

One particular evening, they were enjoying the sunset and the ensuing darkness when they could hear a few walkers coming along the creek. To their horror the group proceeded off of the official walkway and started walking across his property towards the cave entrance. They turned out to be teenagers who were carrying shovels and other digging implements. It was clear they intended to dig under the gate. Due mostly to the darkness the kids didn’t know they were being watched. B.T. waited until they were near the cave opening and he shouted out at them, told them to never come back, and explained there would be very severe consequences if he ever catches them on the property again. When he went into the cave the next day he discovered the kids had evidently tried earlier to dig under the gate. None of us believe they could have come close to breaching Charley Savvas’ massive gate, but it will be good to have someone living on site to deter such activities.

The caver & owner B.T. Price still welcomes cavers to come visit the cave. It’s a great water cave and a super place to come beat the Texas summer heat. B.T.’s new house, when completed, will even include a caver changing room with showers, and visiting caver parking spaces. You can contact B.T. at texascaveman@fastmail.fm
Amazing Cavers
Amazing Maze Cave on July 4th Weekend, 2011
A Texas Cave Management Association Project
Compiled by Ellie Watson

Authors:
Ellie Watson, Saj Zappitello, Peter Sprouse, Jim “Crash” Kennedy, Aubri Jensen, Heather Billetter

Photos by: Andy Zenker, Saj Zappitello, George Veni, David Ochel, Peter Sprouse, Karen Masters, Lydia Hernandez

The July 1-4, 2011 weekend at Amazing Maze Cave in Fort Stockton, TX was hot, fun, and fulfilling. Over the holiday weekend 30 amazing cavers from Texas and New Mexico gathered in the Pecos County, Texas desert for a weekend of caving. Cavers, led by Peter Sprouse, surveyed new passage and cleaned up some connections. Over the weekend, 4 teams surveyed a total of 830 meters, going from 6087 meters to 6917 meters of total surveyed passage. This gain does not include survey meters that were re-done to “clean-up”. If surveyed meters can be measured in fun, we surveyed thousands of meters of fun over the dry, dark 4th of July weekend!

July 1st, 2011 (Arrive at Camp)

Jim Kennedy

“We were fortunate enough to get out of Austin early and set up camp well before dark. In my truck were also Lee Jay Graves, Andy Zenker, and Lydia Hernandez. To kill time, we cut back mesquite and prickly pear from the highway to the stock pond where we camped. This made it much easier for those not having as much ground clearance as Sasquatch. We also set up a couple of shelters in anticipation of the harsh sun. These were very useful, but had to be guyed extra carefully due to the strong winds. We took a little walk up to the low ridge west of camp just before sunset to check out the rocks, plants, and scenery (and check last-minute messages on the phones!). Meanwhile, more folks were rolling in back at camp. Music and booze soon broke out, and we enjoyed the stars and company.”

Photo by Andy Zenker


Photo by David Ochel.

Walter, Sadi Calhoun, and Devra Heyer. All Amazing Cavers.

Photo by Rae Nadler-Olenick.
Saj Zappitello

“This weekend I got to take my little sister caving! Sharing the joy of caving is always fun, but introducing it to someone so important in my life is extra special. This was her second trip in a wild cave and her first surveying trip. I outfitted her with camping gear, my extra caving gear, instructed her in appropriate clothing and footwear, and dragged her out into the desert for the weekend. Our typical dry stock-tank campground was as lively as ever with a multi-talented crew put together by Peter Sprouse. Peter had also wrangled together comprehensive survey packets for each team consisting of line plots and survey notes for various portions of the cave needing survey. There were lofty goals of finishing the entire survey of the cave this weekend!”
On Saturday morning, we geared up, pestered Peter for our assignment, and headed into the cave trying to beat the heat of the July west Texas desert. Matt and I lead Amberly into the cave, crawling, squirming, and sweating in the dust. I outlined cave wayfinding techniques, and Matt taught her how to read instruments while I sketched. She was fantastic! We mopped up several leads and filled in more than just our assigned area of the cave jigsaw puzzle. That evening she got to share stories and excitement with a couple of other new cavers.

Charley Savvas, John Thompson, and Aubri Jensen mapped various bits of passages in the east central portion of the cave. These areas were Gypsum Central, Oak Hill, and A Reptile Dysfunction.

The next morning I wanted to go back to some leads I left from my previous visit to AMC, but Peter said those were finished by another team. So I took the next best thing, which was further mopping up of hillside passages on the southwestern boundary of the cave. Devra Heyer and newbie Heather Billetter joined me as we made our way more or less directly to our objectives. We quickly familiarized ourselves with the existing stations as well as the remaining leads. Passages were relatively low and gravel floored, but otherwise fairly rectangular in plan. We made 14 shots for 43.86 meters, dosing many loops, finishing one small section of the cave, and tying into George Veni’s survey, whose team was working a section adjacent to ours. We also made some biological collections, including about 30 or so ticks that we plucked from the walls and ceiling. Fortunately, none of them found us.

Being brand new to caving, I loved learning to survey and being around science-minded people. Even though I was slow at getting readings (my head never felt so big and bulky), I received plenty of good instruction and patience from my teams. It all had the feel of being on an important mission. And I am so happy to report great success with peeing in a bottle.

My favorite part was digging out underneath a small window between two passages in order to join them together and then crawling through it. It gave me the thrill of knowing I was the first person on a certain spot of this Earth. I also got a kick out of our tick collection, which was about 30-40 on the first day and being introduced to assassin bugs. Unexpected tidbits were receiving a tick check (kind of nice), a shower in the open air of the desert (Hi, I’m Heather. Nice to meet you.) and learning to hoop in the dark.
Jacqui Thomas the rock star caving on her 60th birthday!

Photo by David Ochel.

Jacqui Thomas

“When I joined the Permian Basin Speleological Society [PBSS] I absorbed a proprietary feeling toward Amazing Maze cave. PBSS members had been in on Amazing Maze since the first road-cut hole. PBSS members helped to install the original gate. A PBSS member came up with the name, even. The cave is close to us and great for our beginners. I have been there multiple times and was delighted to participate in Peter’s survey project.

Scheduling and timing allowed me only two survey trips. The first one was a frozen winter trip that Kel and I turned into a day trip; the second one ended up being the opposite—three days with a forecast in the mid- to upper 90s after a week of well above 100. When I committed to this second trip I didn’t notice that the 4th of July weekend included my birthday. That would have been just fine, but in the days between committing to the trip and the trip, Kel returned from working in Wyoming. Not on the survey list Kel said, “too hot” and stayed in Sonora.

On my birthday, Saturday, I was on a three person survey team with people who were moving much faster than I. I’m never the fastest on a team but I’m rarely the slowest. On a normal day, I would have just told myself, “my pack is heavier than usual” (it was), “I’m not used to this pack” (also true—I’d borrowed Kel’s pack so I could carry more water [See “my pack is heavier…” ] ). When we got back to where we were surveying and took a short break, I needed it, so much so that I told Rebecca and David what I hadn’t planned to tell anybody: that it was my 60th birthday and I was pretty discouraged by how slow I was. It didn’t help that right before my confession, Rebecca looked at my arm and asked, “You’re not on blood thinners, are you?” at which point I noticed I’d cut my arm and was bleeding into my elbow pad and feeling old for the first time ever. (But not on blood thinners.)

Immediately after “confessing” I felt fine about being 60: I just needed to whine briefly. (Thank-you David and Rebecca for letting that go with kind comments.) We surveyed all day, and I only refused one very tiny tube and that only because the bend in the middle of it would have kept me from being pulled out by my ankles.”

Ellie Watson

Our teams first day of survey was inspired by an inaccurate book I kept on a previous trip to Amazing Maze Cave. Sean lead the team on sketch with Lydia Hernandez and Ellie Watson on instrument and thankfully, the major survey blunder was just a mix up of numbers and was easily fixed no need to retake shots. So, we had the rest of the day to check leads and make connections! Sean was rockin’ on sketch and Lydia was a

David Ochel enjoys caving with Jacqui on her caving birthday. Photo by David Ochel.

Ellie Watson

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genius with lead tape. The most exciting connection we made on the first day of survey was connecting the North Passage to the East Passage, two major areas of the cave that did not previously have a connection in the north portion.

July 3rd, 2011 (Day 2 of Survey)

Peter Sprouse

"On July 3rd, 2011 Peter Sprouse, Rebecca Pokluda, and Kara Savvas were a roving repair team working in the central and south parts of the cave. They checked erroneous inclinations, resurveyed some loops, cleaned up intersections with redundant shots, and even mapped an un-surveyed loop with a 13.8 meter shot."

Ellie Watson

Our teams spent the second day surveying with 2 other teams in the Lower Level. Sandi Calhoun lead the team on sketch with Devra Heyer, Galen Falgout, and Ellie Watson on instrument. Our plan was to survey the tight passage that had turned Don Arburn’s survey team around the first day. Soon into the survey, Galen Falgout had to head to the surface and in his absence our all-ladies team turned soul by singing old-school rap and Broadway musical numbers. We finished the survey by connecting back into the main lower level passage.

Saj Zappitello

"The second day of survey, I lead a team of five women, including my sister, into the cave for more survey mop-up and scouting. We spent the day mapping a hot, cramped branch of the cave with several ugly assassin bugs. The ladies managed to have a great attitude all day in spite of those conditions, and we sure
were glad to finish that portion of cave. I am not sure if my sister is hooked on caving yet, but we got some great photos to scare our mom.”

The next day some folks headed home, but most of us wanted to get our cave survey to driving ratio a little higher. I returned to the cave with a new team, consisting of Don Arburn, Matt Zappitello, and Matt Rasler. We went back to the area I surveyed the day before to (hopefully) knock off the remaining leads. It turned out that Zapp had surveyed near that area on his previous trip out to the cave, and left the exact same leads we were tackling this day. So he was happy to help finish those off and get some closure. When we arrived (by the same route as the day before), we started in a fairly small hole. Don, whose guts were already giving him warning signals, would have none of that. After the first shot or two he basically hung out in a larger spot, keeping us entertained with stories and jokes, and adding more ticks to the bottle of isopropyl. The two Matts and I gamely pushed onward, until the very last shot or two strained out Zapp. Fortunately, the last lead connected back to our only open lead from that day, and also to our survey from the day before. We finished that end of the cave! We made 14 survey shots, gaining an additional 52.01 meters. This gave us 95.87m for both days, almost 100m. Not too shabby!”

The rocks between Lydia Hernandez (left) and Aubri Jenson (right) are the remnants of a crumbling cave wall. Photo by George Veni.

Jim “Crash” Kennedy

George Veni instructs Aubri Jensen on the finer points of sketching. Photo by Lydia Hernandez.

Three survey teams split up leads in the lower level. Galen Falgout, Andrea Croskrey, Sean Lewis, Ellie Watson. Photo by Andy Zenker.

Andrea Croskrey makes the room glow red when she reads instruments. Photo by Andy Zenker.
Audri Jensen“On Sunday, Team ED went into the cave with Sophia Casini setting stations, Lydia Hernandez reading instruments, and myself sketching with guidance from George Veni. We started our work from a room in the B survey where several adjacent passages appeared to go off in the same direction. Sophia had an excellent eye for placing stations, and chose a path for us to systematically explore each of the leads. We discovered that two of the passages led to an elongate room filled with large breakdown blocks, where we were able to tie into the A survey.

I needed some extra time to sketch and catch up with Lydia and Sophia, who worked quickly together. At this point the team paused for a much needed lunch in the room where we started. After lunch, with renewed energy and sense of purpose, we began from an A station and worked our way back again through a low crawl space filled with rubble and interspersed with pillars. This was a confusing space to sketch, and I learned the importance of checking back-sites as we go.

Our next lead took us in a different direction than the others and opened up into a room divided by a low, crumbling wall. We followed this passage back to the place we were before (the room with large breakdown blocks), and heard voices down the corridor. The voices proved to belong to Lee Jay, Justin, and Ron. They were done with their assignment, and needed something to do, so we gave them a few leads on our list that were in another area. We continued to loop around back to the B survey through yet more connecting passages, and tied into the H survey as well. We finished the day with a shot through a narrow tunnel that was not on the map. After many...
hours, but in surprisingly good spirits, the ED crew emerged from the cave at dusk in search of food and beer.

Evening Time is Fun Time

JACQUI

"At the end of the day I finally got around to making supper while most everybody was gathered around Peter’s lightning ball “campfire.” I was cleaning up when I was asked if I was planning to join the campfire because there was “a little something for your birthday.” I finished up as fast as I could and took my brand new early birthday present folding chair with sunshade over to the circle, where I was greeted with a loud and enthusiastic rendition of “Happy Birthday.” Equally terrific, there was chocolate cake, rich dark chocolate cake with a ganache-type icing. To start year 61 right, I ate more than one piece. Proof again that chocolate, good friends and caving make everything better."

Audri Jensen

"Just before sunset on Saturday, several UT cavers talked amongst themselves about hiking up to the windmills. Deciding that this was a worthy goal, Galen, Lydia, Rebecca, Ellie, Aubri, Andy, and Angela began a trek up the steep plateau, which looked much closer than it was. We followed a road until it became apparent that there were two paths to our destination. Galen, Lydia, Rebecca, and Ellie chose to wind their way up the side, while Andy, Angela, and Aubri opted for going straight up along the edge of a drainage. The former team picked a careful trail and avoided a rattlesnake that Ellie saw. The later team pushed through thorny things and suffered, and overcame, and arrived first. While we waited for the others, we examined the windmills and reflected on the elegance of their design. Once the others joined us, we all agreed that these marvels of engineering were “freaking huge” and enjoyed the view. By this time it was getting dark enough that we could see dots of headlamps down in the camp,
and decided to make our way down together. We all returned safely, and considered that a good day."

Jim "Crash" Kennedy

"When we got out of the cave I helped Peter enter the survey data from several teams into WALLS. After a couple of beers, of course. That evening we showered, courtesy of Don’t awesome shower enclosure. More craziness ensued, most of which I don’t remember. July 5th, 2011 morning we broke camp (slowly), packed the truck, and had a relatively uneventful drive back to Austin. Many thanks to Peter for organizing the trip, providing line-plots to the different areas of the cave, and generally keeping track of a vast mountain of data. I hope I am able to return for the mop-up surveys, and finally finish the cave. There are large parts of it that I have never seen.

That night we had one rocking good time, with copious amounts of food and alcohol, “fire twirling”, folk music (guitar, mandolin, and drums --- oh yeah, and a sousaphone!), a night hike up to the wind turbines, and other crazy stuff. These are the added bonuses that make Texas caving so much fun."

As always, the caving over the July 1-4, 2011 weekend out at Amazing Maze Cave was awe-some and relaxing. A major thanks to Peter Sprouse for spearheading the resurvey of Amazing Maze Cave and for involving so many cavers in the ongoing project. Its sad to think that the survey will be over soon but we have at least one good trip left!

Editor’s 2 cents:
To all you wannabe Editors and Proofreaders: I know the font and layout of this piece don’t match the rest of the newsletter. I used it the way Ellie sent it to me 'cause I liked the way it looked
Deal with it! If not, send me something!


Left: Saj and Matt Zappitello show off their hula-hoop moves. Photo by Lydia Hernandez.
Above: Rebecca Pokluda and the giant wind turbine. Photo by Lydia Hernandez.

Below: Matt Zappitello, Sandi Calhoun, Sean Lewis, Aubri Jensen, and Jim Kennedy soak up the heat before heading underground for a day of survey. Photo by Andy Zenker.

Matt Zappitello and Sofia Casini revel in the evening fun. Photo by Andy Zenker.
On page 14 of the 2011 Quarter 2 issue of the Texas Caver, editor Mark Alman ran a copy of an article I sent him about an Explorer post I was in while a teenager. The Explorer post, a Boy Scouts of America unit for teenage youth, specialized in caving, and we boys organized it and planned the caving trips. The article was from my high school newspaper and ran in March 1965. It mentioned that I was planning to go to the NSS convention that summer in Bloomington, Indiana. I did go to that convention and my two buddies who went with me and I went caving a lot that week. Spending a week on its beautiful campus, I also decided that I wanted to go to college at Indiana University.

My NSS convention attendance through the years has been spotty. That is entirely due to the amount of vacation I get and how I would rather be on a caving expedition and underground than attending presentations on caving that others have done.

I’m on the NSS Awards Committee, so I knew that my friend and TSA treasurer, Michael Cicherski, was going to be awarded an NSS fellow award. I got him into caving, so I wanted to be there when it happened. Also I wanted to see the photo salon, the international session, and go to the closing banquet. In addition, the founder of Cave Books, the Cave Research Foundation affiliated publisher of cave related and caving books, recently recruited me to be an associate editor, with the job of soliciting manuscripts for consideration. I wanted to hit the ground running and stir it up. So Michael Cicherski and I arranged to fly to Denver and arrive at approximately the same time late in the afternoon of Wednesday, July 20. We rented a car and headed west on I-70 over the mountains, arriving at the convention campground at 10:30 p.m. The Terminal Siphons played that night, but had stopped playing early because of their rock and roll volume and complaints from nearby residents. There was still a crowd standing around in a giant lit canopy. I dove into their midst and started talking right and left with old friends, including former Texas caver Mark Minton.

Cicherski and I set up our tents in Groad Hollow, the name that’s stood the test of time as long as I’ve been going to conventions, where the Texans are to be found. We were camping in a grassy field near a fast flowing mountain creek that spills into the mighty Colorado River less than a mile away. The grassy field, dubbed the “loud campground”, as opposed to the “quiet campground”, was across railroad tracks from a high school complex. It was a quick and easy walk from the campground to the high school and its auditorium, classrooms, and gymnasium where the indoor parts of the convention were taking place.

The high school cafeteria was operating and I ate most meals there. I had my pick of old caving friends to sit with and varied them with every meal. There were my old Indiana cohorts, CRF cavers, Montana caving buddies, Huautla veterans, Oklahoma cavers, TAG, and so on. It was heaven. I started thinking that I don’t ever want to miss another NSS convention. These are my people.
Earlier in the week I had texted with a friend of Ellie Thoene’s who was at the convention the whole time and asked her to get a couple of sentences into the daily convention newspaper that I was going to be there and would like to talk with anyone interested in writing a caving book and getting it published by Cave Books. It ran on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and I had some takers. Through two days I heard from eight people who sat down with me and discussed their ideas and I told them how it works.

The vendors were out in full force. I walked into master wood carver Michael Kehs’ classroom gallery, knowing full well that I was in the market to own one of his works. I had come close to laying out $600 for a beautiful mirror frame of cave formations at the ICS in 2009. I returned half a dozen times and considered it, finally seeing a “sold” sticker on it. Kehs caught me looking at another such a mirror this year, though priced at half as much as the one two years before, and he commented that I looked interested. I said yes, and told him how I had almost bought the one at the ICS, but I deliberated too long and missed out. He said that I should go ahead and buy this one, so I did. It’s an heirloom I’ll pass on to one of my kids.

There were Speleobooks, Petzl, the NSS Bookstore, Inner Mountain Outfitters, on and on, a caver’s delight for discretionary money. I had pre-ordered Dave Hughes’ book about Lew Bicking and asked a NSS Bookstore person to get it autographed for me the prior day during Hughes’ book signing. Mike Wagner with Speleobooks and I talked at length about the Scurion light, the best caving light I have ever owned, and I reported my experience with wet caves, going through sumps with it, mud, etc., putting it to the test.

Thursday night was the photo salon in the high school auditorium. It was entertaining with lots of pretty photos, and some videos, but the photos that blew my mind were the next day at the international session. Two presentations made me fidget to go there: Puerto Rico and China. Mike Futrell’s program on caving in China astounded me. Apparently the year before he had commented that the wind in the caves they’re exploring was so strong that you could fly a kite, and it was scoffed at. So he took a kite there and flew it in the cave. The sizes of some of the passages are so immense that Futrell had to point out the people for scale. I kept thinking how much I’d like to go caving in China, and in Puerto Rico, following a presentation by Mark Minton.

Then there was the speleo-politics. Perhaps the biggest decision the NSS has made in 40 years was to occur on Friday afternoon. I had followed it a little, and had my own opinion of what I wanted to see happen, but I did not know when the Board of Governors’ meeting would get to the agenda item of the new headquarters location. As people poured out of the international session some helpful person in the hallway outside the auditorium announced that the next BOG agenda item was the move of the Society’s headquarters. For an hour and a half I listened along with a room full of NSS members to our elected directors and officers state their opinions and debate the proposed locations. In the end the vote was taken and the decision was made. Following the recommendation of the NSS Headquarters Commission, the NSS will purchase the Huntsville Cahaba (“Shriner’s) Temple and property. This was after 29 sites in five states were evaluated. The 31,580 sq. ft. building includes an 11,000 sq. ft. auditorium and sits on 89 mostly wooded acres that include a campgrounds and large outbuildings.

Friday night was the closing banquet. I got in line almost an hour ahead of time to be able to grab a table up front. I did that at the ICS and got the first ta-
ble in front of the podium. And I got it again this year. The emcee, former DFW Grotto member (way before my time) Rob Kolstad, was funny and clever, and the keynote speeches by Dick Mitchell on early vertical caving and by Hazel Barton on her theory of cave development by biological processes, were fascinating. Then the awards. Karen Kastning was sitting at our table. She landed one of the top two: the Outstanding Service Award. Michael Cicherski was awarded his Fellow Award, the only Texan so honored this year. Karen and Michael passed their certificates around the table. Wine flowed freely. For me, life does not get better. (Congratulations, Michael!!! - Editor)

Michael Cicherski and I stayed at the campground until Sunday morning. As many as 95% or more of the attendees pulled out on Saturday. Michael and I had missed the Howdy Party on Monday night, and we had heard several tales about it being up on the mountain, visible from the campground, at Glenwood Caverns, a show cave and tourist attraction. We had been told to be sure and do the scary swing up there which swings out over the canyon. I like telling the story of screaming like a girl when in the swing for 60 long, long, terrifying seconds. The commercial cave is well decorated, our guide was knowledgeable and funny, and I recommend the experience.

There’s a NSS volunteer position that I have been wanting for years – chair of the Lew Bicking Award sub-committee of the Awards Committee. I started telling Pat Kambesis a couple of years ago that if she ever hung it up that I would like to follow her. Pat stopped me as I exited the international session and asked me if I was still interested. I gave her an enthusiastic thumbs up and verbal “Yes!” and she said that she was ready to pass the baton. What that does is obligate me to go to NSS conventions each year to make the presentation of what is considered officially to be the third highest award in the Society, the Lew Bicking Award, for exemplary cave exploration. Unofficially, word of mouth among cavers, is that it’s the highest award, or at least the most coveted one. Whatever, and there are differing points of view, it was the volunteer position I wanted, and I now have it. I’ll be going to the NSS convention in West Virginia next summer for sure. And last, but certainly not least, it’s looking good that I’ll be going caving in China at the end of this year and in Puerto Rico next spring.

Had I not gone to the NSS convention that surely would not be the case.
The Chuck Stuehm Award
—An Annual Grotto Award
for Exceptional New Cavers
Submitted by Linda Palit

Have you ever heard of the Chuck Stuehm Award? It is an award for new and exceptional cavers, and can be awarded to one new caver in each grotto in Texas.

The award is named after Raymond Chuck Stuehm (pronounced “Steam”) who was a member of several Grottos in the San Antonio area and was especially good at guiding, working with, and encouraging new cavers. Chuck's memory is honored every time a new, exceptionally exuberant caver receives this award. Every grotto has the opportunity to encourage new cavers by selecting a new caver for this award every year.

Chuck Stuehm died an untimely death on January 31, 1980 at the age of 52. A memorial issue of the Texas Caver was a memorial issue for Chuck, outlining many of his accomplishments in caving. At the same time the Chuck Stuehm Award was established for to be given to an outstanding new caver in each grotto each year at Texas Cavers' Reunion (TCR), which was then called the Old Timers' Reunion.

The Chuck Stuehm Award Requirements:

The only requirement for the award is that the caver has been caving two years or less and shows an unusual enthusiasm and interest in caving, and all aspects of caving.

Selection of the recipient is by the grotto in whatever way they choose. Often the officers will choose the recipient after consulting some of the more active members of the grotto, keeping the award a surprise until TCR. Often the grotto will also honor the recipient at the next grotto meeting after TCR.

The Chuck Stuehm Award Prize:

The prize is one year's membership to the TSA (Texas Speleological Association) and a shiny certificate suitable for framing. If the winner is already a TSA member they will receive one year's extension of membership. The Chuck Stuehm Award winners will be announced at TCR which is at Flat Creek Ranch this year on October 15th, 2011.

This year Ellie Watson, ellie.thoene@gmail.com, is coordinating the award this year and one (1) submission per grotto is due, from the grotto president only, by October 1st, 2011. Please contact her if you have more questions.

We are also trying to compile a list of all Chuck Stuehm Award recipients, so if you received the award or were a grotto officer and awarded a member the award, please contact me so that we can complete this list and put it on the website. Send any information to Linda Palit, lkpalit@sbcglobal.net.

The Chuck Stuehm Award has not been awarded every year or by every grotto.

Following is a partial list of recipients:

- 1983 – Allan Cobb (San Marcos), Eric Short (San Antonio), Brian Burton (UT)
- 1989 - Pam Oczkowski (Greater Houston)
- 1990 - Susan Helton (San Antonio Grotto), Tony Jackson (Southwest Texas Grotto, Peter Mills (Bexar Grotto), Susan Herpin (Greater Houston Grotto)
- 1991 - Jacob Herpin (Greater Houston Grotto),
- 1995 - Bev Shade and Justin Shaw (UT Grotto)
- 2009 – Ellie Thoene (DFW Grotto)
- 2009 - Arron Wertheim (Bexar Grotto)
- 2009 – Drew Wendeborn (ASS Grotto)

Please help us record those who have received the award in other years.

We will print a more complete list next year.

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34th Annual Texas Cavers Reunion!

October 14-16, 2011
Flat Creek Ranch, Johnson City, TX

Howdy Y'all!

This is the first announcement for the 34th Annual Texas Caver's Reunion!

This year TCR will be on the 500+ acre Flat Creek Ranch in Johnson City, TX (www.txsranch.com) on the weekend of October 14th-16th, 2011. There will be lots of shady camping, swimming,

Flat Creek Crossing Ranch is a 500+ acre ranch/retreat site owned by the non-profit Child, Incorporated. It is located in the Texas Hill Country immediately adjacent to Pedernales Falls State Park. Flat Creek Crossing Ranch is a 500+ acre ranch/retreat site owned by the non-profit Child, Incorporated. It is located in the Texas Hill Country immediately adjacent to Pedernales Falls State Park.

A Bit of History—The Texas Old Timers' Reunion was organized in 1978 by Gill Ediger, Chuck Stuehm, and Mike Walsh in order to fill a need created by the absence of a TSA Labor Day Project during most of the previous decade. It was felt that the TSA needed a fall caving event to bring Texas cavers together for fun and frolic and social interaction, an all important part of most cavers' caving education and experience.

Over the years, the event grew from the original 90 participants at Luckenbach to well over 500 at recent gatherings. A few years ago the name was quietly changed from TOTR to TCR--the Texas Cavers' Reunion--to avoid confusion with the "original" OTR--Old Timers' Reunion--in West 'by God' Virginia. Although many cavers help with the event, the general philosophy is to try to make the Reunion appear that it just happens spontaneously without any or much direction from anybody.

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As always, well behaved dogs and children are welcome. We have obtained special permission to allow dogs as the park generally prohibits pets.

Because of this, TCR asks that you please pick up after your dog.

For the latest information about TCR 2011, visit the website at www.oztotl.com/tcr.

A few general rules and fine print:

- Please remember to bring your own reusable eating utensils to the Grand Feast and to come prepared to take your garbage home.
- Well behaved dogs, friends, and family members are welcome, in that order, those that may tend to be obnoxious should be left elsewhere.
- Port-a-Potties will be provided.

- JOIN THE TSA! - As a convenience to cavers and in support of the Texas Region of the NSS, the TSA will be collecting dues for the 2011—2012 membership year. If you are not a TSA member, this is a very good opportunity to join and to show your support for the organization that cares about cavers and caving in Texas. The TEXAS CAYER, and the many caving projects are obvious benefits provided to you and other cavers by the TSA. The TSA provides many other benefits that aren't so obvious--so please join and support the TSA.
- Vendors of caving equipment and publications will be set up.
- The TCR staff is not in the police business. That means everyone should police themselves and those in their clan. In other words...you are responsible for the behavior of your children and your guests.
- Using Common Sense and Common Courtesy is the best policy.
- Remember, this is primarily a caver event. People who will contribute to the general craziness are encouraged to attend, those who will detract are discouraged.

Directions to The Ranch at Flat Creek Crossing
(From Austin) Estimated Drive Time: 1 Hour

1. Take 290 West out of Austin, through Oak Hills, Drippings Springs and then Henley.
2. Turn right on 3232 -- this turn is very easy to find: It is just over a mile past the small town of Henley and is marked by a sign pointing the way to Pedernales Falls State Park.
3. Stay on 3232 until it “T’s” into FM 2766 (almost at the park entrance -- FM 2 7 6 6 becomes County Road 201 at this point).
4. Turn RIGHT (a left will take you to Johnson City) and go past the park entrance -- DO NOT go in the park gate.
5. Continue a little over 2 MILES down County Road 201 (you’ll notice that even though you did not go through the park gate, you are still traveling through the park). You will pass an electrical power transfer station on your left at about 1 mile -- at 2 miles you will cross a cattle guard and notice the ranch’s white wooden fence on your left.
6. Continue a few hundred yards over a slight hill.
7. Take a left at the ranch entrance. You’ll see a sign that says “FLAT CREEK CROSSING.”