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Back Cover — Natasha Glasgow (back row-center), Ryan Monjaras (in front of gate), and Mark Alman (old bald guy in front) with members of Venture Crew 416 of Plano, TX at the Crowner entrance to Longhorn Caverns. Photo by Eddie Smith.

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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.

Cave Emergency
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FOR CAVE ASSISTANCE, CALL THE CLOSEST NUMBER:

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Whole Lotta Longhorn!
Submitted by: Mark Alman
Photos by: Leslie Bell, Paul Gartman, and Eddie Smith

TSA Longhorn Caverns State Park Project Report—Saturday, April 7th, 2012

Volunteers:

Boy Scout Venture Crew (Plano, TX): Mason Gartman, Paul Gartman, Lona Patterson, Austin Patterson, Dave Stone, Collin Stone, Scott Roulet, Greyson Roulet, Eddie Smith, Richard Smith, Eric Dolworth, Brandon Kihl

    Total drive time: 8 hours round trip

Aggie Speleological Society: Amanda Penn, Sabine Wolk, Damien Lebrun-Grandie’

    Total drive time: 6 hours round trip

DFW Grotto: Natasha Glasgow, Peyton Madison, Tom and Mary Sims, Mary Cawley, Mark Alman, Harold “Edwin” Lehr

    Total drive time: 8 hours round trip

UT Grotto: Bob Marshall, Leslie Bell, Christopher Francke, Ryan Monjaras

    Total drive time: 3 hours round trip

Total Volunteer hours: 225 hours, plus 182 hours total drive time.

Wow! Were the roadsides beautiful! With over 6 inches of rain in the week or two leading up to the project weekend, the Burnet County area was blessed with a bounty of wildflowers and HUGE flocks of mosquitoes, to boot. I have never seen Park Road 4 so blanketed in wildflowers and been attacked by such ravenous swarms of skeeters!

    Guess we’ll have to take the good with the bad!

The good news is that the cave was incredibly wet and dripping and we saw water in areas of the cave that I have not seen wet since we began this project back in 2008. Even the normally dry and, most of the time, incorrectly named “Mirror Lake” in the Lovers Lane area of the cave had almost a foot of water in it! Just last year, Edwin Lehr, Julia Germany, Peyton Madison and I had removed a great quantity of fill from this area to cover up the drain pipe just below the Pigs Trough area that feeds this lake that was washed out in heavy flooding back in 2007. I’m happy to say that our work still remains intact and wasn’t washed away.

The other areas where we have worked this past year to remove silt and mud from the trails in Lovers...
lane didn’t fare so well, however, and we may need to schedule another Bucket Brigade to remove mud that washed back into areas below the brick wall where we dumped our excavated accumulations.

We’ll get this area open eventually!

With that, on to the project report.

I arrived Saturday morning around 8:30 and was greeted by Natasha Glasgow and her son, Peyton Madison. They were being served a delicious breakfast produced by the Venture Crew Boy Scouts from Plano, TX, who had all arrived Friday afternoon, as they had Good Friday off.

Amanda Penn, Sabine Wolk, Damien Lebrun-Grandie’ of the A.S.S. were also there and I happily stole some of their Easter eggs that they had brought along to supplement the leftover pizza I had eaten for breakfast on my way down from Mesquite.

After packing the breakfast items and dishes away, greeting the other cavers who arrived that morning, we met at the upper parking lot at the park to discuss what needed to be done that day. We met Kris, gracious as always, inside the Visitors Center, where I told her what we had planned for the day and secured the keys to the cave from her.

Our merry gang trooped on down to the cave entrance where we entered and gave the Scouts a tour of the cave, as they had never been there before. We took them through the commercial portion of the cave, pointing out the sights and history of the cave and also went off trail to the Lovers Lane area, which is closed off to tours. We observed the good (lots of water and a full Mirror Lake), the bad (dirt had washed in from behind the retaining wall), and the ugly (the rain had created a trail of deep, sticky mud over two inches deep in places which will need to be removed at a later date).

After knocking the mud from our boots, we reconnoitered at the Indian Council Room to break into
groups and to tackle our assigned tasks, which are described below:

Longhorn Lumbago Alley Dig - April 7, 2012

After examining the Lumbago Alley Drain, we saw that the drain had filled in again with sediment. Apparently, all the way down the passage with no easy way to even enter.

The only good news is that the sediment is fresh and easily diggable. Although the 60+ foot passage is difficult to continue digging as you get further, since there is no real place to put the dirt to the side, it remains compelling to continue the dig, somehow, because so much water drains down that passage. Large whirlpools have been seen after heavy rains. The water is going somewhere.

We decided to dig on an upper passage, nearly directly above and parallel in direction with the lower drain passage, in hopes there may be a downward trend connection to the lower passage. We lowered the floor and cleaned out the passage for easiest digging. We dug aggressively for about 2 hours and have a good start upon return.

Submitted by Christopher Francke.
Participants: Bob Marshall, Leslie Bell, Christopher Francke, Amanda Penn, Sabine Wolk, Damien Lebrun-Grandie’

The “Wine Room” Steps and Trail Rebuilding

(this is a storage area behind the Indian Council Room that the concessionaire uses to store items for wine tasting and the like during special events. No, we weren’t offered any!)

The steps here are very slippery and, for the most part, non-existent and getting items up from and down into this area is troublesome, to say the least. The folks at Longhorn have long desired steps to be put in here and the trail leading back to their storage area, which intersects with the Basement Area of the cave that is used for the Wild Cave Tour, to be dug out allowing for more head space.

With flat flagstones found in other areas of the cave and carried to this area, the three cavers that tackled this project, Tom and Mary Sims, and Ryan Monjaras, did a great job of getting the steps put in, loose debris removed, and the trail lowered substantially to allow easier egress.

Great job, y’all!
“Mount Longhorn” Removal and Dispersing

For the last several months, since the electrical contractor installing new LED lights throughout the cave began their work, there has been a LARGE pile of dirt in the Indian Council Room that was formed from the various digging the contractors had to perform to create trenches to bury the electrical cable.

“Unsightly” is an understatement.

We began moving this dirt back in February and dispersing it into washed out areas leading to and from the Lovers Lane trail loop which connects with the main trunk of the cave, near the Indian Council Room. We got a good start at it then, but, ran out of time and energy and, yet, the dirt mound remains.

To top it off, the park had a 90 guest wedding ceremony Saturday night and this dirt pile sat smack dab in the middle of it!

We moved all that dirt from here... to here. While Edwin and Mark supervise.

With the removal and dispersing of this dirt mound being of utmost importance, Natasha Glasgow and Peyton Madison, along with the Boy Scouts from Plano (Mason Gartman, Paul Gartman, Lona Patterson, Austin Patterson, Collin Stone, Scott Roulet, Greyson Roulet, Richard Smith, Eric Dolworth, Brandon Kihl) undertook the highly unglamorous task of hauling the remaining dirt by bucket and wheelbarrow to several washed out trail areas and getting it spread and leveled, improving the trail and the Indian Council Room immensely!

With the dirt mound now being gone, the wedding party was able to set up two more tables and a gift table where this pile of debris once stood.

The park personnel were very pleased and applauded these guys’ efforts, as do I!

Cleaning “The Bridge”

Perhaps the hottest and most dangerous job of the day was undertaken by Boys Scout Leaders Dave Stone and Eddie Smith, along with Edwin Lehr, and yours truly, Mark Alman.

For those of you that have never been to Longhorn Caverns State Park before (for shame!), one must go down several steps built by the Civilian Conservation Corps back in the 30’s (great work, guys!) and travel under a natural stone bridge before arriving at the entrance to the cave.
On the surface of this natural bridge is a very pristine scene of plants native to the Burnet County area, as well as large skylights, through which one could fall 25 to 30 feet onto an unsuspecting visitor to the cave. Not good for publicity!

In this verdant and hot mosquito infested area were several dead trees and other matter that had succumbed to the terrible drought that had stricken most of the state during that terrible summer of 2011.

The park folks asked us to remove this material before it fell on someone’s head and before it became too dang hot to do so, and so we did.

We hauled out several large dead trees and sawed these up into manageable pieces with hand saws and, miraculously, without hurting ourselves or dropping a tree trunk onto Walter from Waco or another unsuspecting tourist visiting the cave for the first time!

We scurried up and down other precarious areas of the Natural Bridge area trimming out smaller dead trees, bushes and limbs and the area is now much more aesthetically pleasing to the eye and safer for any visitors down below who will now not be at risk of a dead tree falling on their heads!

Chris inspected our work and gave it two thumbs up.

Hot, tired, thirsty, hungry and drained a pint or three of blood by the ravenous mosquitoes, we joined the Scouts for lunch where they “forced” us to have a sandwich with them!

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As y’all know, it is customary on volunteer caving projects that one must “work” before one can “play”. Such was the case this weekend.

After having accomplished a LOT this weekend and have received water and sustenance for lunch, it was now “play time”.

We loaded up the vehicles and traveled over to the Crownover entrance to Longhorn Caverns, a little over a mile and quarter from the Visitors Center. We unloaded, geared up for some off trail wild caving and sauntered over to the entrance, crossing two barbed wire fences and two gates beforehand.

Ryan and Natasha were the first ones down, as I wanted them to check for rattlesnakes, as they have been present in the past.

---

Filling in the entrance trail to Lovers Lane. The Scouts did a GREAT job in getting the trail in excellent shape!

---

Edwin below “The Bridge”, loppers in hand. Photo by Leslie Bell.
As no snakes or other hazards were found, the rest of the group proceeded down the ladder into the cave in an orderly and safe fashion. The continued onward and inward thru the two rooms and the Crownover Causeway leading to the main trunk area of the cave and onto and through the VERY muddy and wet environs of The Wiggles.

From all reports, a fun time was had by all, for the most part. Some of the Scouts thought that the trip was great. Others were getting ready to leave and weren’t sure if this was their cup of tea or not.

A few of the other adults and I stayed behind, as the Crownover Causeway proved to be not of their liking and, as I found out when I squeezed through after the rest of the group had traveled to points unknown, the tube which we had so laboriously dug out over three weekends of work in 2009 and 50 to 60 feet in length and lowered by 12 inches or more had, indeed, silted back in quite a bit!

Sabine was stuck with us, as she didn’t know which way they went and we didn’t think it best that we wander around in the back area of the cave looking for the group.

I crawled back into the Causeway, to where the tube takes a sharp right turn, squeezing into 10 inches of airspace and spent the next hour or so removing 3-4 inches of silt and sand with my left and right arms for about 10 to 12 feet and piling it onto the sides of the trail to allow an easier exit for our intrepid group when they decide to exit the cave after exploring.

Much silt remains to be removed and I think we have another project to add to our lengthy “To Do” list!

Epilogue

We exited the cave around 6:30, returned the keys and got back to camp and cleaned up.

Natasha, Peyton, Ryan, and I “roughed” it at the Bluebonnet Café in Marble Falls where we concluded our meal with a slice of their delicious pie. Natasha and Peyton headed to Waco to spend the night with family. Ryan and I headed back to the park, enjoyed a cold adult beverage in the Observation Tower while observing bats and listened to the ever-present coyotes which always seem to call at night from southeast of the park.
We were both in bed before 10!

The rest of the crew headed to their respective homes, surely looking forward to Cinco de Mayo next month, when we will have our next project weekend, complete with a Mexican feast of fajitas (from yours truly) as well as other South of the Border treats! Ay carumba!

Hope to see the old hands back at the project next month, as well as any new faces interested in helping out.

This is a truly fun and enjoyable project and we try hard to keep it that way. No 18 hour Death Marches at this project, but, we can guarantee a great weekend!

Come out to a spectacular and historic cave and park, friendly park staff, and the always entertaining camaraderie of cavers!

Very nice entrance photo by Leslie Bell.
Crownover Fun Time—Getting Down ‘n’ Dirty at Longhorn!

Amanda Penn, Sabine Wolk, Damien Lebrun-Grandie’ of the Aggie Speleological Society. Photo by Leslie Bell.

Ryan gingerly navigating the barbed wire, while Mark and Natasha look on. Photo by Leslie Bell.

Celebrating “Crossover” at Crownover!

Hiking to Crownover. (Having never seen it this green!)

Waitin’ and thinkin’.

Bob Marshall (center) supervising.
Final Resting Place of Ricky The Rattler
TSA Longhorn Caverns State Park Project Report – Saturday, May 5th, 2012

Volunteers:

Lyndon and Barbara Tiu
Casey Tucker
Jackie Lambert
Gerry Geletzke
Natasha Glasgow
Austin McRee
David McRee
Mallory Mayeux
Brian Freyling

Yours truly, Mark Alman

Total Volunteer hours: 50 hours, plus 67 hours total drive time.

With finals week going on, we had a much lower turnout this month from the UT and Aggie crowds, but a good time and much work was accomplished, anyway. Mosquitoes were gone and the weather was warm, but, great weather, anyway.

It also marked the valiant return of a long time project co-leader, Lyndon Tiu, and his lovely newlywed bride, Barbara. It was good seeing them there.

We also had a few newbies along this weekend. Casey Tucker and Jackie Lambert traveled all the way from Lake LBJ (15 minutes) to help out. We also were joined by David McRee, the dad of Mallory’s significant other, Austin McRee, from Houston.

A great bunch to have out this weekend!

Longhorn Lumbago Alley Dig

Nothing done down here this weekend, although, we did walk back there to show folks what has been accomplished and what the 6” of rain back in March did to the passageway that Gerry, Leslie Bell, Christopher Francke, Bob Marshall, and Company had so diligently dug out.

The lower passage that was opened up was about 75% filled back in by loose gravel from the enormous dirt pile wall that was created. Thankfully, the upper passageway that runs parallel to the silted in passage is still open and beckons for further digging and exploration.

Lovers Lane Revisited

As we discovered last month and I reported, the trail that we had dug out near the Pigs Trough and by the stone wall has anywhere from 1 to 3” of mud re-deposited from the March rains.

We saw the holes in the wall and the washed out fill behind the wall where all of the mud on the trails had come from. All of us pitched in with shovels and buckets to remove the semi-dry mud, while Brian Freyling mixed up several buckets of cement and filled in the trail side of the wall, while I worked on lugging and cementing the dirt side of the wall.

Thankfully, there was a LOT of clay and I used this to create a 3” to 6” thick barrier of clay to better seal the cement and the rocks to keep future water and mud where it belongs. We then filled in the washed out area with fill from the trail.

It looks sealed very well, but, the next heavy rain will be the true test.

After getting a LOT of work done, we all descended on the Longhorn SP café where Amy and her Crew cooked us up a batch of hamburgers, hot dogs, and chicken worms! The day was hot, we were tired, and the A/C in the Visitors center was wonderful!

Crownover? No. Basement? Yes!

We were joined on this trip by Sam and Katy, new, friendly folks we had met at lunch who had just completed the wild cave tour with some Boy Scouts that morning. They seemed very interested in our volunteer efforts there and eagerly jumped at the chance to go caving again with us, after I told them that I had extra helmets and equipment.

Very nice couple and it sounds as if they’ll be joining the Greater Houston Grotto at their next meeting, as well as helping out in the fall on the project.

As we found last month, there now is a new owner of the land that contains the Crownover back entrance gate and easement and TPWD is working on access protocols for visiting the property. In the meantime, we have been asked to stay off of the property until this is resolved and to not venture past the Turnaround Point in the cave, where the Catfish Lakes welcome you to the rest of the cave.

Discouraged, but still wanting to “play” after all of our “work”, Amy said that it would be OK for us to explore the Basement area of Longhorn Caverns, as all of their wild tours were conducted that morning.

Natasha and I and 20+ others had done this trip during TCR in October and, thankfully, she was more familiar with the route than I. After squeezing past Fat Man’s Misery and The Saddlehorn (a real challenge for the males out there, if you know what I mean!), we dropped down through several squeezes into the Basement and, probably, the lowest point in Longhorn.

There was quite a bit of mud and a lot of water in the passage. Much wetter than October, when it was dry as a bone. Our merry gang had fun exploring this area, which most had never been to, and even enjoyed visiting a large room and tunnel, which turned out to be the wrong way. One could tell very easily, as the air seemed to get really funky.

Backtracking and pushing on, we popped out in the Frozen Niagara area, just down the trail from the
Indian Council Room. The trail continues on from here, and after a short break, we pushed on.

We actually waded through thigh deep water, more mud, and some other tight areas so, all in all, it was like a mini Crownover trip! We popped out in the vicinity of the Lumbago Alley dig, took a short respite, and headed to the surface around 5 PM to get cleaned up and get cooking some fajitas!

Guacamole, Fajitas, Libations, and a Whole Lotta Lightning!

Saturday evenings after a work project is my favorite part of the whole trip!

After cleaning up at the deluxe accommodations in the picnic area (spigot and a hose), Lyndon and Barbara got their stoves out to cook peppers and onions, while Casey got busy making rice and Brian cooked well over five pounds of fajitas I had brought on my grill.

Natasha made a big ol’ batch of guac and we put our feet up, drank a cerveza or three, and filled our bellies with some delicious Mexican food.

We passed around various adult beverages, in celebration of Cinco de Mayo, and talked late into the night about trips, kids, and politics. Lyndon, Barbara, and Gerry headed home and Sam and Katy, who joined us later that night headed back to their B & B before the storms arrived.

We ascended to the top of the Observation Tower to observe a most excellent light show from the line of thunderstorms heading our way from the west. It was a very impressive display of nature’s power, until we concluded that a high point on a hill was probably not the best place to be in a thunderstorm!

Not wanting to sleep in the tents immediately during the storm, some of the folks spent the night on the second floor of the tower, while I spent the night high and dry in the back of my truck.

Everyone survived OK and the area received quite a bit of much needed rain. We all headed home Sunday AM.

Epilogue

We discussed summer activities and whether to continue on next month and the consensus was to put the project on hiatus until October. With some other tasks in the cave remaining and others still being worked out during the bidding process, as well as the colleges being out and losing a large source of volunteers, not to mention the HEAT, taking the summer off seems to be a wise move.

Temporarily losing access to the Crownover property was also a mitigating factor.

Hopefully, by the time the fall rolls around and the project starts back up in October, we will have something worked out with the new owner.

In the meantime, thanks to ALL of the myriad of volunteers who have helped out with the project in 2011 and 2012 and hope to see all of you, as well as some new faces, in the fall of 2012 and the spring of 2013!

We are now entering the 5th year of the projects and the folks at Longhorn, TPWD, and I really appreciate you and couldn’t do it without you!

Have a great and safe summer and we’ll see you in the fall!

Mark
Texas Cave Conservancy Activities - 2012
Submitted by: Mike Walsh—TCC Chair

This year has been a busy one for the Texas Cave Conservancy and it is far from over. Last year we had over 800 visitors go into the TCC educational show cave, Avery Ranch Cave, on CAVE DAY. Since it was getting far too crowded, we made a commitment to add a second deck to the cave before the next CAVE DAY.

Work In Avery Ranch Cave-New Deck

In order to be ready for CAVE DAY on April, 2012, we had Freddie Poer install a cedar deck base and we ordered the special mold resistant plastic decking from Canada. Freddie and his new wife, Martina Correa installed the decking. We brought Spencer Woods in to do the welding of the vertical poles for the handrails. Avery Ranch Cave is now a first class educational show cave.

TCC Winter Conference

Each year, on the last weekend in February, the TCC hosts this weekend event in Cedar Park, Texas. The 2012 TCC Winter Conference was held from February 24-26. It was a weekend of caving, camping, a cave digging workshop, a Saturday night party with a meal and guest speakers. Past speakers have included: Terry Rains, Ronnie Fiesler, Ron Kerbo and Mike Warton. This year, Logan McNatt and Mike Walsh had a presentation on the old Southwest Texas University Grotto. Christopher Francke organized a successful cave digging workshop in Die’s Ranch Cave. Each year we have had approximately 75-100 cavers attending and 2012 was no exception.

National Groundwater Week

The TCC received a telephone call from Sylvia Pope with the City of Austin Watershed Department. She asked if they could have a few television stations out to Avery Ranch Cave to promote the National Groundwater Week. On March 13, 2012, every Television Station in Austin and many of the newspapers showed up at Avery Ranch Cave. The TCC President, Mike Walsh was even interviewed live from within the cave. The resulting publicity created a situation where we had to deal with incredible numbers of visitors on CAVE DAY.
CAVE DAY Preparation

We knew we were in over our heads when we saw all the television and the newspaper publicity that week. We had over 30,000 visits to our web site in the twenty-eight days prior to CAVE DAY on April 14th. The Avery Ranch Cave was in fairly good shape, however, we had a good deal of work to make the Die’s Ranch Treasure Cave safe for visitors. Walter Beck, Martina Correa, Freddie Poer and Mike Walsh installed four metal safety barriers in order to make the cave safer for the large numbers that we expected.

CAVE DAY- April 14, 2012

The big day arrived and we had not overestimated the numbers created by the media storm. We passed out tickets and we had 1800+ visitors in Avery Ranch Cave and 600+ visitors in Die’s Ranch Cave. These are not large caves and everyone going down the stairs and or ladders have to leave the cave the same way. We could not have made it without the following volunteers: Lynda Beck, Walter Beck, Leslie Bell, Martina Correa, Christopher Francke, Bob Heart, Freddie Poer, Mike Walsh and Cindy West. We really need caver support on this high profile public education activity.

Jollyville Plateau Salamander

The Jollyville Plateau Salamander is a candidate for the U. S. Fish & Wildlife listing as an endangered species. The TCC works to protect caves, cave life and the aquifer as related to caves. Toward that end, we are developing a monitoring plan that will help identify, monitor, and mitigate potential contamination situations concerning the Buttercup Creek Watershed. Within this narrow watershed, there are miles of cave passage.

It is in the interest of the City of Cedar Park and others to work toward the protection of this watershed that leads to Cypress Creek and on to Lake Travis. The TCC will continue to work with interested parties on a watershed protection plan.

TCC Web Site – 600,000+ visitors

When the new TCC Website went on line in April, 2010, we had no ideal that it could generate as much interest as it has. We expect to reach 600,000 visits by June 25th, the opening day of the NSS Convention in West Virginia.

We must thank the following cavers for their assistance in the creation of the TCC Website: Christopher Francke, Martha Meacham, George Nincehelser and Mike Walsh. Check us out at Texascaves.org.

The Texas Cave Conservancy invites you to visit us in Cedar Park, Texas.
TSA Convention Report!

Photo and report by Bennett Lee

I got to Cascade Caverns for the TSA Spring Convention 2012 on Friday evening. Unfortunately, Marvin Miller's annoying little girls found us almost immediately and whisked my sweet little son away to corrupt him. I found a good camping spot close enough to the main buildings to stumble back to it at night but far enough away to not be too bothered by the noise from the impending party.

I made rounds Friday night and saw many caving buddies from around the state, partook from the keg of fine Shiner Bock, and unfortunately found Gregg Williams (a.k.a., Big Daddy Crunkshine) at which point my memory becomes a bit hazy. I do remember that Tom Rogers, who has a habit of stepping in cactus while wearing inadequate shoes or even no shoes, set his camp by the only cactus on the property.

I awoke late the next morning, heard something about breakfast that I missed, and then hopped in the car with my son to drive to the Geneva School to see the presentations. Ellie Watson, who was coordinating the weekend activities, was already stressed. Turns out the water was off and we had no bathroom facilities there. I didn't need to go at that time, but there was much griping from people who did.
I hung a few photos in the photo salon, including "Two Moons over Punkin" to get a little exposure for the cave calendar (pun intended). Next, I checked out the vendors out front. Gonzo Guano Gear didn't bring a massive PEP Bag (probably because I'm the only one foolish enough to buy a cave pack that big). No one at the TCMA booth could tell me if the Robber Baron t-shirts were the old map or the newer one (I don't want some outdated map on my t-shirt when I get lost…I mean "explore"). At least Lisa Miller had some nice scented oils at her booth.

Presentations are the highlight of the Spring Convention for me, but unfortunately Ellie assigned me the task of shooting the group photo. In between that and keeping an eye on Marvin's girls so they didn't do something like teach my son to light a cigarette, I didn't get to see all the presentations I wanted. I missed a supposedly great surveying presentation by Peter Sprouse. Maybe he can do a repeat at a Bexar Grotto meeting (expect a call). However, I did catch one that was far too hydrologically scientific for me, and Ellie's presentation on Logan's (you did great, girl!), the last bit of Allan Cobb's caving in Asia, and Travis Scott's Porcupine Grotto presentation with some great photos. The most significant to me was Travis' comparison of an old photo and a recent photo of the same location/perspective that showed the damage to a wall of forma-

(Continued on page 26)
Deep Cave Trip Report-
April 20-22, 2012
Submitted by: Allie Loftin
(niece to our very own Vivian Loftin)

Twenty-five cavers from TCMA met up at the Punkin Cabin flush with excitement to explore and enjoy Deep Cave. We set out for Deep Cave, some of us on foot and some of us in a large truck that faithfully lumbered over the rocks like the cattle who used to walk the road we were on. We buzzed as we approached the cave’s entrance, located under a grove of 3 majestic persimmon trees with enough flat limestone bedrock to let us all rest and take a few gulps of water before going in. We embarked in 4 groups, each led by a guide.

The entrance was a great warm-up for the large muscles and provided that perfect grounded feeling one gets when inside the earth. We clambered down the guano-covered limestone, noting very few slick spots. It transitioned into bouldering before we entered the Forest of Columns. Calcite columns and large stalagmites loomed at you like Mother Earth flashing jewelry she proudly made herself. The author, first-timer Allie Loftin, 22, “was struck by these crystalline structures that are not only gorgeous, but seem to exist solely to flourish, like progress you make when no one’s looking.”

We moved into the Helictite Room through a vaguely spiraling path and remembered just how famished this kind of thing can make a person. We lunched on a 15 x 30 limestone block in the middle of the biggest room in the cave. Satisfied, we took some moments in silence with all lights off and prepared to climb back up and go on to our next destination, the Crystal Waterfall.

Once we started on the Crystal Waterfall path we were relieved to find it was a more horizontal journey, however, the decrease in effort led to a decrease in focus and we missed the passage to the Crystal Waterfall. The group doubled back and found it with gratitude. The room was “pretty sparkly, though to me not as impressive as the Helictite Room”, commented Angela Edwards, 23.

Zennet Colburn manages to continue sleeping while Sean Vincent and a small crew demolish the upper deck.
A Successful Rescue in Boyett’s Cave, Hays Co TX
Submitted by Ben Hutchins

Around noon on Monday, May 21, 2012, I received a disturbing email from Rob Pupelis, owner of Boyett’s Cave near Wimberley Texas of a victim that had fallen into the 35ft pit entrance of the cave sometime on Monday night or Sunday morning. Rob said that he could be seen at the bottom of the pit and that he appeared to be uninjured, but Rob’s attempts to use a lasso to pull him out had been unsuccessful. At 5:00PM that afternoon, we had assembled a rescue team that included Carrie Hutchins, Clay McCafferty, Philip Ramirez, Ben Tobin, his son Liam Tobin, and me. We located the cave without much difficulty using Rob’s excellent directions. The victim’s presumed girlfriend was lingering at the site and she talked to us a little bit, but was understandably scared and obviously shy and nervous. We quickly rigged a rope and Ben Tobin repelled into the cave. The victim was lying in a small alcove about 25ft down the overhung pit, on a ledge about 10ft from the bottom of the cave. He appeared to be uninjured but wouldn’t talk to us. Ben Tobin climbed back out and we rigged a simple haul system using a second rope, a single pulley, and ascenders. Clay and I then repelled into the cave and since we couldn’t get him to put on a harness and perform a self-rescue, I grabbed him by the head, pulled him to the ground, and Clay hog-tied him. We then stuffed him in an army duffel which we attached to the haul line. I ascended alongside the duffel to make sure that it didn’t bounce too violently against the walls or get hung on an overhang. At the surface, Philip Ramí-
rez freed him from the duffel bag and he and his girlfriend were last seen skipping off through a field of flowers. He appeared to be favoring one of his back legs slightly but could put weight on all four and we hope that he makes a full recovery. After the rescue, we used the pulley and an ATC to lower Liam down the pit with Ben Tobin descending on the other rope next to him. Liam reported that the cave could be classified as awesome and that it included two huge lakes. In all, the rescue and fun trip lasted about 2 hours.

Texas Speleological Association Membership Directory

The TSA will be publishing the members list soon. This will be done by emailing the list to active members. The list will only include active members at this time. It is possible a more comprehensive list will be published at a later date.

If you do not wish your info to be published in this list, please email the TSA Secretary at secretary@cavetexas.org and make your wishes known.

Thanks!

Denise
Smith Ranch Cave and Nearby Caves  
Kerr County, Texas - January 13-15, 2012  
Submitted by: Travis Scott  
Participants: Jerry Atkinson, Travis, Amanda and Harper Scott, Mary Thiesse, Ellie Watson

As we are always on the search for more caves to explore, Jerry recently got word of a “new” cave out in the Hunt area. After some work gaining access and scheduling a trip, an agreement was made to explore, push, survey and photograph the cave for the owner. The Porcupine Grotto sprung to action!

The description we had received of the cave said "The entrance is 0.8 by 1.0m wide and drops approximately 6m to a room. A metal ladder has been placed in the entrance to allow access. The cave is decorated with various types of typical speleothems. Reportedly, it has been explored by the owner for at least 300m". We were provided a few photos of the ladder and close ups of formations, but not much more. Either way, it was something worth looking into.

It turns out that the property was across the highway from another ranch where we had previously completed surveys and photography of three nice caves. Given the long drives most of us had, I set us up with lodging for the weekend at this neighboring ranch and made sure we could do some recreational caving while there. You can’t beat having a nice heated cabin and quality recreational caving while you check out virgin cave! At the same time, I had been looking for an opportunity to take my 5 year old daughter, Harper caving again, and this was finally it.

Saturday morning we all met up with Ellie Watson and the owner in Hunt. Amanda and Harper headed off to a friends ranch for the day with plans to meet back with us when done at the new cave. Meanwhile, we followed the owner up the rough roads to the property. Once there, we geared up to enter the cave while the owner waited on the surface. The entrance consists of a shallow sink with a steel ladder that is only tall enough to reach to the lower lip of the hole. It is held in place by loose cables from above and rocks back and forth as one
Ellie and Mary went in first while I started taking photos and Jerry began sketching. Unfortunately, by the time Jerry and I got down the 7 meter entrance drop, the ladies had already pushed and explored the entire single-chamber cave. It turns out that the cave is not over 300 meters long. Rather it is a nice large chamber approximately 20m wide, 30m long, and 6 to 10m high.

The chamber appears to be the void above massive breakdown which fills the original cave below. Nonetheless, the cave is nicely decorated with the typical speleothems including some massive stalagmites. Of particular note are several areas of canary yellow-colored flowstone and stalagmites. Cave coral is particularly common on the breakdown mounds due to "splattering" from the numerous ceiling drips. There are a couple of very shallow pools and the cave is unusually wet considering it is quite shallow. No airflow was observed and there are no leads from the room. Given the size of the room, we had ample time to survey and photograph the cave. Once done, we met with the owner of the property for a while to explain our findings and the cave was given the name Smith Ranch Cave. Soon, we were heading back to our comfortable lodging at the neighboring ranch to meet Amanda and Harper for some more caving.

Harper was very ready to go caving after waiting all day. We geared her up and she insisted on wearing her helmet (a bike helmet with a headlamp taped on) for the entire drive to the rancher's house, while we met with the rancher, and for the drive to the cave. Once at the cave, the rest of the cavers couldn't get ready fast enough. The cave we were visiting was a simple 4m crawl that opens into nice walking passage with lots of formations. Harper and I entered the crawl and once we stood up, the race began. Harper hurried us through the cave loving every second of it, except that we were moving way too slow for her.
At the end of one tunnel, Harper practiced climbing an obstacle over and over. At another end of the cave, most of the group crawled to an old lead and pushed it a good distance. Harper was stoked about this too and took it until the adults petered out. After we saw the entire cave and were heading out, she was very disappointed that her adventure had to come to an end, but very satisfied for having had the experience. We then enjoyed the rest of the evening cooking dinner and relaxing in the warm cabin after an easy day of visiting nice caves.

It was a three day weekend for the Scott family so we decided to hit up Enchanted Rock on the way home so Harper could feed her new “cravin for cavin” once again. She raced us to the top of Half Dome and drug us over to the ‘pink cave’ right away. The official cave was horribly crowded with boy scouts, but we were able to find solitude and almost total darkness beneath the huge boulders nonetheless. Satisfied yet again, we enjoyed hiking and exploring around the dome before finishing the drive home. Harper was so excited to go caving again, and see all of the sights; I don’t think she even realized just how far we had hiked by the time we made it back to the car.

With all the enthusiasm that Harper had on this trip, I think we’re definitely molding a future caver out of this little one!

Harper and Amanda Scott about to visit a cave on the neighboring ranch.

Harper and her dad, the author.
New TCC - Cave Access Information

Recent urban caving related issues require the TCC to make some changes in cave access. We request the following from cavers:

- Please request access at least one week prior to your visit. The caver making the request will be responsible for the group.

- Please limit your group in the cave at any one time, to six cavers. Avery Ranch Cave & Die's Ranch Treasure Cave may have additional cavers. Do not leave the deck at Avery without special authorization.

- Please do not use the cave name or the location in newsletters or on the internet, etc. To do so creates problems for the cave managers.

- Please follow the information on the instruction sheet that will be provided when you pick up the key or combination.

- No dogs at the caves. No smoking or drinking in the caves.

- Some caves will only be available one day a month. Contact the TCC for detailed information.

- For each Grotto member that assists us at Cave Day, your Grotto can have six members access to the caves mentioned above outside of the one day per month.

Thank you for working with the Texas Cave Conservancy!

TCC - 512 - 249 - 2283  TCC - caves@austin.rr.com

P.S. -- Did I mention I need models and photos for the cave calendar?
AS ONE

by Mimi Jasek

We are by nature nocturnal. When dusk approaches, we wake and fly out of this place to do as we must do. There is no thought to our actions, simply a response to that genetic code by which we were created.

They are nocturnal by choice. Although their darkness is different, created by the nature of this place they come to explore, Deep down their compulsion to go into this night is no different than our own, an instinct so deep as not to be ignored.

How could this be that creatures so diverse in nature could seek this common place? By end of night, we fly back for rest and all we get from our colony in this world of rock and crevice. Yet by day or night, they come into this place by choice to seek we know not what, except the thrill and joy we feel from them while they are here.

But in the end, by nature or by choice, it matters not what draws us to this place. A realm so vast and wonderful that fills the needs of both, when drawn within we are, as one, home.
On the first weekend of February, the UT grotto took a trip to O-9 well in Crockett County, TX to map upstream passages of the cave. This was a small group lead by David Ochel and Andrea Croskey, and included Sean Lewis, Sandi Calhoun, Lydia Hernandez, and myself. I left Austin on a cold Friday evening and rode out with Lydia, who picked me up in her truck with a newly acquired camper shell. I almost didn’t recognize it except for the bat sticker on the front. I had never been to this cave before, but Lydia had, and she basically knew the area. We found our way through the featureless West Texas ranch roads, and arrived at the cave just past midnight.

When we got to the campsite, everyone else had already pitched their tents and gone to sleep. The weather was cold and windy, and in the dark I accidently pitched our tent next to a dead opossum and then had to find a new spot. In the morning, the weather was still unpleasant, so we slept in as long as possible. Everyone else had the same idea. I finally ventured out around 8:00am and met up with David, who rigged the entrance.

For those who are unfamiliar with O-9 Well, it is a unique cave because it is literally a well that has been used to water cattle for over a century. A windmill straddles the entrance, which drops 40m into stream passage below (see Photo 1). We used the windmill as an anchor point and had a rebelay at a tight spot about half-way down.

Later that morning we divided into two teams for survey. David (sketcher) led Sandi and Lydia with the intention of going all the way to the back and surveying forward. However, about half-way back they discovered a junction with crawling leads that appeared to have been partially surveyed at some point, but were not on any known map. They decided to clean this area up and spent the next five hours stoop walking and crawling in dry passage.

Andrea led me and Sean to a lead off of station B12, where Bev Shade’s team ended the last survey. I sketched, Sean read instruments and tape, and Andrea took back-sights and set point. Sean and Andrea both gave me some much appreciated pointers to improve my sketching. One of the hardest things was simply keeping the pages clean. Mud was thick and sticky and covered everything it contacted. I kept putting the book
on my lap, which got it muddy, and then I tried to wipe it “clean” with my hands, which got dirty, and then, of course, I tried to clean my hands on my wetsuit. It’s a vicious cycle.

Our survey area was a stream passage through a narrow canyon that reached nearly 10m high. We couldn’t always see the ceiling, however, because the walls pinched in about 7m up, and large boulders of breakdown filled in the space above us. The floor gradually sloped upward and had occasional puddles, rubble, or sudden steps that made pretty little waterfalls. The stream varied from a muddy slush around our boots to pools that were about waist-deep. We shot from stations B12 to B45, averaging a shot distance of 3.5m (see Photo 2). The last station ended on the far side of a room where the water got deeper, and we could watch it bubbling up from a spring. We decided to call it quits after six hours, when we were getting cold and tired, and I could no longer read my own notes.

Back in the room below the entrance drop, we met up with the other team who had finished their objectives and were ready to leave. David offered to stay longer and rig the drops downstream of the entrance for me and Sean, since neither of us had seen that part of the cave yet, and Andrea opted to come along for fun.

The downstream side took us past a series of rimstone dams and short waterfalls. The most impressive part of this was a 90ft drop above a pool. Once on rope and ready to go, I unlocked my rack…and I didn’t move. The rope was heavy and wet, and I had to feed it almost every foot of the way down. The four of us sloshed our way through the water into a large and muddy room with a sump on the other side. The water at the sump was fairly clear, but it was hard to tell how deep it was. Leaving the cave required going back over the rimstone dams (for this I made effective use of the ‘walrus technique’) and of course, ascending all the drops. There was also a funky smell towards the entrance that proved to be the remains of a skunk. Needless to say, the way out felt longer than the way in!

It was dark when we climbed out of the cave. The others who had come out earlier had already cleaned up and had dinner going. It was still too cold and windy to sit around comfortably, and I believe there was a burn ban in effect, but we stayed warm as best we could with hot chocolate and peppermint schnapps. That night I hung my vertical gear in a tree to dry, and the next day it was frozen stiff. Everyone broke camp quickly and headed out on Sunday morning for various reasons.

Despite the weather, it was still a good time with good company, and I’m looking forward to more trips this year.
The weekend began with a near-run in with the law, as we all feared for the worst while watching Kyle pull in to the parking lot with the cops close behind. Disaster was averted, however, and we resumed kicking around Val’s nalgene until the cars had all been packed to capacity (plus some) and we were ready to hit the road. Or the nearest gas station! We continued this trend of frequent stops all night, including a stop at a gas station adjacent to the good ‘ol Wienie Genie, and at a burger joint for dinner. It was at this stop that the privilege of having a human-sized (as opposed to mouse-sized) water cup was denied to some. We had just set off when flashing lights had us stopped once again- this time for real! We will never know whether the one car was pulled over because the other wouldn’t stop or if the cops were just really bored, but in the end we came out with a warning for a burnt-out headlight and one for an ‘obscured’ license plate. In order to remedy the problem of the headlight, we stopped at the nearest Walmart (after a few of us missed the turn) and got a lesson in loitering 101. It was at this time that we discovered that it takes not only 13 cavers, but also 13 Aggies to change a light bulb. We also learned about the difference between metric and “American.” Parking lot soccer was played with a borrowed ball (while some stood back and feared for the well-being of their side mirrors). While all of this was going on, one of the local children put on a lovely display for us in which he revealed his hatred of litter, as he stomped repeatedly on an old soda can and shouted, “Die!” The light was finally fixed, and we set off again: the remainder of the drive occurred without further incident (at least, not to my knowledge-I was busy examining the insides of my eyelids).

Upon our arrival, we all piled out of the cars, pulled out our headlamps, and braved the task of socializing with the cavers already huddled ‘round the campfire. This turned out to be not such a bad thing, however, as we became acquainted with the honey badger, a caver from another grotto who, quite honestly, did not give a shit! After setting up our tents (or just sleeping bags wrapped in tarps for a few brave souls), we returned to the fire to defrost our fingers and observe the icing of our VP.

The following morning, a determined few beat the odds and actually woke up at 4am to make the trip from College Station to join the rest of us by 9. By this time, we’d all emerged from the warmth of our sleeping bags and gathered around the fire ring; Kurt (the project manager) held a meeting to get us all on the same page (and had us write down our names & grotto so he’d know who’d been grabbed by the zombies) and to explain how things would work: the high-tech operation consisted of a cable being attached to a tractor, which reversed (to pull up the cable) us being attached to the cable (via our vert gear) three at a time, and the tractor
driving forward at high speeds (kidding! It was actually a quite leisurely pace), to lower us down the 150-foot hole (man-made: drilled and blasted). After Kurt was done with us, we faced the challenge of getting into our wetsuits. This task was completed with much difficulty, and we moved on to fighting for the best-fitting helmets, replacing batteries, and zip-tying headlights to helmets. We were then instructed in the ways of vert gear by our lovely officers (after which we were all sure to double-back our straps, so as not to die, and get double-checked by others). The wait to be lowered down began, and we all sat around the fire and basked in the little bit of sun that we were going to see that day.

Our turn to be lowered down came at last, and we descended into the depths three by three, being sure to move out of the way upon reaching the bottom so as not to be landed on by the next person up the cable. It took a good half hour for the whole group to get down, during which time it was revealed that “There are those who pee in their wetsuits, and there are those who say they don’t.” Once everyone was down, we counted off (so as to thwart the cave zombies in their attempt to pick us off one by one), put on our fins, and were on our way! We swam a total of around 2 miles (downstream, although there was not a current). The water was deep enough to swim the majority of the time, with the exception of a few dams and rocks that had to be climbed over. We also encountered a few low-airspace areas, where we swam on our backs to breathe (and to avoid damage the formations). Near the halfway mark, a break was called, and we snacked while waiting for Kurt to catch up (he turned back to find a pool noodle that had been lost). We also made a semi-successful emergency fin repair, making use of what materials we had at hand, including duct tape and ‘biners to attach the fin to foot. As we neared the natural entrance, Kurt helped us through a no-air passage in which (you guessed it!) we had to completely submerge our heads to get through. Although this was the very first cave for some, we had no freak-outs or panic attacks! Around four and-a-half hours after we set off, we emerged at the natural entrance to be met with some very cold air. Wetsuits were stripped off and dry clothes put on without delay, and we all piled into the cars to get back to the fire as quickly as possible. During this (bumpy) ride back to camp, we speculated on what those who hadn’t come had been doing all afternoon: we settled on “goosenecking” (term supplied by James).

Upon our return, we went straight to the fire to defrost. Eventually, hunger took precedence over warmth; the dinners that were brought out ranged from trail mix to canned whatever-was-left-in-the-pantry to a pre-prepared delicious-smelling dinner that made the rest of us jealous. The evening continued thus, as we all ate, drank, and were merry (some of us very). Some of the cavers from neighboring grottos provided musical instruments, including a fiddle and a terratonz, for us to try our hands at. Kyle seemed to have a knack for the terratonz, and the fiddle was passed around many times, but alas, we had not a prodigy in the group (excepting Chelsea, who claimed she couldn’t...
play without music). At some point, the delicious scraps from the afore-mentioned fancy dinner were given out (yummm!). It was around this time that he who had been iced the previous night repaid the Icee, and we all got to see the power of teamwork. The night produced some very memorable quotable moments, including: “I’m really enjoying this position on the ground right now!” The Kraken was defeated, and soon after el presidente became one with the fire.

The following morning, we awoke to the sad sight of frozen gloves, wetsuits, and a pair of jeans that were frozen completely solid (at some point in the wee hours of the morning, one of the survey teams had returned to the entrance, only to have the tractor need to be jumpstarted. They eventually made it out, though, and had proceeded to get out of their wet clothes and join in the festivities). The almighty recycling bags were brought out (ASS is eco-friendly!), cleanup was completed, tents were packed up, fingers were frozen, cars were creatively packed, and just as it was time to head out, sleet began to fall. The drive back was fairly uneventful, consisting mostly of rehydration and the ritual post-cave (not-so-dirty this time) dirty Mexican food stop.

To conclude, much equipment was borrowed, broken, and some lost: all in all, we had a great trip!
**Joe Mitchell’s 40th Birthday at Robber Baron Cave**

Photos and report By Michael Harris—Bexar Grotto

During a recent Robber Baron exploration/dig trip Preserve Manager; Joe Mitchell was surprised with an underground Birthday celebration for his 40th Birthday by several members of the Bexar Grotto.

Among the attendees were Joe's wife Eve-lynn and his daughter Kayla. After a diminished motivation to dig, explore, or just get up due to the sugar-fix a team still managed to survey a section that had not previously been surveyed.

Thanks to these efforts Joe was able to add enough new data to bring the surveyed passages of Robber Baron over the one mile mark. Joe still sur-veys like a 39 year old!
10 Reasons I Would Rather Be Caving
Submitted and started by: Sheryl Rieck

I started caving a bit later in life than many people and promptly became too busy to cave even though I had fallen in love with the peace and beauty of the caves I had visited. I have not been in a cave in 4 years but almost no day goes by that I don’t think about caving. It is my choices that have kept me from caving. That doesn’t keep from missing it any less.

As I was wading through the massive number of issues associated with a go-live (the ultimate goal of my projects) that was in too short a time span and with too little information, I found myself thinking yet again of caving and how I would so much prefer to be underground with a bunch of fun folks than getting my butt kicked by issues. About this same time, the emails from Mark began.

I agreed with the assessment of the publications becoming very scientific. I’m an accountant. I have no scientific knowledge in the realm of speleological studies. I don’t read those articles because they make my eyes roll back in my head and that just makes my eyes hurt.

So, in an effort to give Mark an article and to give us laypeople something to read, I came up with 10 reasons I would rather be caving.

Here are my 10:

1. The snakes are only at the entrance of a cave and look like snakes.
2. A traffic jam is just a good way to rest in a cave.
3. The people who annoy me most would never be able to find me in a cave.
4. My laptop cannot get a signal in a cave. That is my story and I am sticking to it no matter what.
5. My cell phone cannot get a signal in a cave. Ditto sticking to it.
6. Saying you have been mapping a cave sounds more interesting than saying you have been mapping a chart of accounts.
7. Mapping a cave IS more interesting than mapping a chart of accounts.
8. When I am in the dark in a cave that is the way it is supposed to be.
9. I have met some interesting, entertaining, and/or incredibly odd people on caving trips and that is just fun.
10. I am usually not the strangest person in the group.

From Lyndon Tiu
1. Cavers are good people.
2. I get to go camping for cheap surrounded by good people.
3. I get to do something fun and exciting with good people.
4. I get good food prepared by good people.
5. I get to hang with beautiful good people.

From Nico Escamilla
1. Cavers are good people.
2. I get to go camping for cheap surrounded by good people.
3. I get to do something fun and exciting with good people.
4. I get good food prepared by good people.
5. I get to hang with beautiful good people.

From Mallory Mayeux
1. The smell of cave dirt brings back the BEST memories. (I began caving in college, at Mammoth Cave, the first time I was ever really away from home. When I take a deep breath underground, suddenly I’m 19 again, tasting my first freedom, and life’s possibilities are endless.)
2. There is nothing like a 12+ hour cave trip to run your mind blank, and just exist in the moment.
3. Caving gear is my indulgence. Ordering a shiny pantin, a thick coil of new 11 mm rope, a colorful new Rutherford pack, chunky boots...bliss! I love them all and can’t wait to put them to good use!
4. The fear you feel when you’re stepping off the side of a tall pit makes you feel alive.
5. If society collapses I know ALL the best hideouts.
6. The people. Cavers have been my best friends, significant others, inspirations. And of course, some of the weirdest people that I’ve ever met! Not a day goes by that I don’t thank God and whatever stars aligned that I fell into caving and became one of you wackos. :)”
7. The couch at Deep/Punkin is the comfiest one I’ve ever slept on.
8. Getting to cave entrances puts my RAV4’s 4x4 capabilities to good use. Probably the ONLY time I get to use that feature.
9. If I go caving, I usually go west. And when I go west, sometimes I see cactus. And cactus is really cool.
10. I look damn good in a wetsuit. Honey Creek Tank Haul, baby!

From Bill Bentley
I go caving because:
1. I get to enjoy Nature's Central Air... Cool in the Summer and warm in Winter...