Bracken Call
call to action poem

Honey Creek
Tank Haul Extravaganza
cavers converge in epic support

Spring Creek
5th survey season wraps up
The third Robber Baron Cave Preserve Open House on April 27, 2013 in central San Antonio was a big success. Attendance was down a bit this year, probably due to it coinciding with Fiesta, but we made almost exactly as much money as the last open house, so we are getting better at soliciting donations! It was also less hectic and as a result, gave our volunteers a break. As before, we opened the first few passages to exploration with volunteers staged at each intersection to guide visitors and keep them from wandering off.

We had a few more helmets than at previous open houses which also helped get groups into the cave with less waiting. There were many positive comments from everyone who came. Thanks go out to preserve manager Joe Mitchell for organizing this event and also to the many volunteers: Leslie Bell, Riley Cahoon, Cade Calcote, David Calcote, Pam Campbell, Michael Cicherski, Melissa Cicherski, Mark Childre, Laurie Clibert, Nathan Clibert, Allan Cobb, Rick Corbell, David Dodge, Tom Florer, Don Formanek, Sid Formanek, Chris Franke, Steve Gutting, Mike Harris, Kim Hartzog, Fran Hutchins, Casey Jones, Rusty Jones, Bennett Lee, Ethan Lee, Viv Loftin, Paul Maslyk, Wade McDaniel, Cyndi McFalls, Kevin McGowan, Joe Mitchell, Evelyne Mitchell, Kayla Mitchell, Linda Palit, Ed Patrick, Kris Pena, Myra Pilant, Will Quast, Ron Ralph, Joel Reese, Obed Rodriguez, Jim Rowsey, Ann Scott, Scott Serur, Carl Sherman, Arron Wertheim, Saj Zappitello.

Thanks also to Geary and Sue Schindel for hosting the after party.

(Original trip report credit to Joe Mitchell)
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**DEADLINES**

While submissions are welcome anytime, deadlines for consideration in upcoming issues are:

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4th Quarter issue — November 15

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**FROM THE EDITOR**

I’m learning that I am occasionally annoying people with the time it takes me to reply to e-mails. I even have a reputation. I would like all potential submitters to know that this is not intentional, and that my e-mails are not forwarded to my phone. My schedule, e-mail volume, and at times a desperate need to escape the computer, can affect the timeliness, or lack of, in responses. I invite anyone who desires a rapid communication to call the phone number that is included in all of my e-mails. I know it may be behind the times, but I prefer a phone call over an e-mail in red, oversized, capital text.

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**EMERGENCIES**

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THE BEST CAVERS’ MAGAZINE
IN TEXAS

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The Texas Speleological Association is a nonprofit, internal organization of the National Speleological Society and represents the greater caving community in Texas.

The TSA is comprised of both independent members and local grottoes, and supports cave exploration and studies in and around the state of Texas.

The organization holds business meetings three times per year, organizes an annual spring convention for Texas cavers, and sponsors caving projects and events throughout the state.

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Our winged friends knew nothing of the threat that loomed so close.
They answered nature’s call just as they had for oh so long.
The fact that outside forces would dare to threaten what they chose
To be their home and nightly flightpath and the water deep down under
Became a call to action near and far to try to right this wrong!

The word went out, the pleas were spread to all both high and low,
That something had to happen NOW to save these special creatures
And others of this habitat and the precious resource down below,
From those who do not understand that once Nature’s balance is shaken,
There is no easy way to mend our Earth’s sadly broken features.

Time was a factor as it seemed this threat was kept low key
By those who would use any means to further their opportunity.
They did not count on all those voices who would answer this great call
From around the world in support for all those creatures, great and small,
And Earth’s most precious resource, water, for them and all humanity.

Letters were written, voices were raised, and petitions proudly signed
To be brought to those in power who seemed more for right than wrong.
The battle has really just started and will last as long as it takes,
And compromise could be an option when there is so much at stake,
But our friends will know, as we fight for them, we will be forever strong.
ROLLING OAKS CAVE PRESERVE CLEANUP

Ellie Watson, Rolling Oaks Preserve Manager
Fourteen volunteers came out for the work day on the Texas Cave Management Association (TCMA) Rolling Oaks cave preserve in northwest San Antonio in April. The volunteers loaded up and hauled off a huge trash pile that was dug out of Niche Cave last fall and removed several large rocks from the cave.

The volunteers began the day by cheerfully loading up piles of trash and glass bottles into a trailer that Peter Sprouse graciously lent for the project. Once the trailer was loaded with trash, Ron Ralph and 6 hard workers unloaded the trailer at a nearby dump. The trash is now off the property! The remaining crew continued digging on the void lead left from last fall where volunteers broke into a 4 foot pit. The lead was covered with large rocks, and when removed, the passage did not extend any farther down but continued horizontally with clean-washed breakdown. Kayla Mitchell took a supervised turn in the pit searching for dinosaur bones and even removed her own share of rocks. Many more large rocks need to be removed and the entire pit cleared from the surface down to where the lead continues.

April volunteers included: Tom Florer, Journey Bisset and friend Jules, Joseph Schaertl, Missy Egan, Jill Orr, Gary Donham, Joe Mitchell, Kayla Mitchell, Tom Rogers, Gregg Williams, and Ryan the neighbor. A special thanks to Ron Ralph for coordinating the trailer and unloading of all the trash!

After we finished at the preserve, Joe and Kayla Mitchell led a short trip into Wurzbach Bat Cave.

Thanks Joe!
Once upon a time, in the year one thousand nine hundred and eighty-two, there were two cavers named Tom and Logan. Tom was a young fellow, who after many trials and tribulations and tests of courage, had just earned a very important piece of paper called a Pee-H-Dee. This paper meant that Tom knew all about hydrology and geomorphology and other mysterious things like that. Tom lived in the far Northlands in a place called the State of Washington. Logan was a slightly less younger fellow who called himself a cave archeologist. Now, very few people have ever seen a cave archeologist, and many more people say they don’t even exist. But this is a fairy tale, so it doesn’t really matter, does it?

Tom, Logan, and the Cave
A Grim Fairy Tale by Logan McNatt

Logan lived in a vast region called Texas!. He had never been to the Far Northlands and wasn’t even sure if the State of Washington was a real place, but he did know Tom. One day Tom and Logan found themselves in the Far Southlands, in a place called Belize. At least one famous person had described Belize as being one of the ends of the world. It was a beautiful place, though, with lots of jungles, which were full of lots of animals like tigers and crocodiles and tommy-goffs and wowlas, and night walkers and howlers and mountain cows, to name just a few.

Not very many people lived in the jungles. Would you, with all those animals? The few people who did were of many different types: Creoles and Mopan and Kekchi, Chinese and East Indians and German Mennonites, Spanish, English, and Americans. These people spoke different languages and had different colors of skin, but they were all quite pleasant and friendly. The best thing about Belize, though, was that it had many large and beautiful caves. Many of these had never been explored by anyone, so Tom and Logan decided to seek adventure in the caves.

From a small Indian village called Blue Creek, the two intrepid explorers (or so they thought of themselves) journeyed to an even smaller Indian village called Santa Elena. They traveled in Tom’s wondrous horseless carriage called a 1965 Volkswagen Bus. It made an 18-mile 45-minute trip in about two hours. Most of the villagers came out of their houses to marvel at the carriage, and to watch as Tom...
and Logan packed all sorts of strange things into their traveling bags.

They packed helmets and carbide lights, cable ladders and inner tubes, cameras and electronic strobes, tape measures and compasses and a little book for writing down numbers, food and pots and pans and a little SVEA stove above for cooking, and lots of other stuff. When they put their traveling bags on, they were amazed at how heavy all this stuff was, but since they were intrepid explorers seeking adventure, they didn’t groan or complain, at least not in front of all the people. Instead, they smiled and waved goodbye and walked off into the sunset. Well, not really, because it was already dark. It was even darker two hours later when they reached the cave!

They had been to the cave once before, with two young fellows named Chris and Dave who were from a place called Great Britain in the Far Eastlands. (Logan had never been to Great Britain, but he was pretty sure it was somewhere in east TEXAS!) Anyway, T and L (if you don’t know who T and L are by now, you may as well go watch Tee-Vee); T and L knew that they could walk into the cave about 250 meters. At that point, there was a fearsome drop into a vast room. As far as they knew, no one had ever been down that fearsome drop and into the vast room, probably because no one had ever wanted to.

So, with visions of vast virgin voids, T and L set up their tiny camp just inside the entrance and slept the sleep of the innocent. Soon after they awoke the next morning, the Day of Friday, the 28th day of the month of May, it began raining very hard. The season of rains had begun. So rain was “no big ting” as the Belizeans say.

After a leisurely breakfast, T and L began making a map of the cave. They went across a small pool full of logs and sticks and who knows what else, then past another entrance bigger than the first, and up some very slippery rocks. You see, sometimes a river flowed into the cave. That is why the logs and sticks and who knows what else were there, and why the rocks were polished slippery smooth. But T and L knew that the river was dry now, disappearing into the ground about two miles before it reached the cave.

When they reached the drop, they lowered the cable ladders and measured it. It was about 45 feet high. The room was as big as a small castle, perhaps 200 feet across and 100 feet high. There was a lake below the drop, and a small stream which gurgled merrily out of a wall and into the lake.

To their dismay, T and L could not find any more cave passage heading out of the room. Instead of vast virgin voids they found only a pool of water on one side of the room, full of logs and who knows what else. There were bigger logs in the higher parts of the room too. It appeared that sometimes, when the river flowed into the cave, the room filled with water up to 30 or 40 feet high and then drained slowly.

Tom and Logan were disappointed since it’s difficult to be an intrepid explorer if you can’t find anything to explore. So they decided to make a thorough check of the room. On the side away from the drop, they walked between two large white speleothems (which is a word used in fairy tales to mean cave formations). They were surprised to see light coming from a small hole far over their heads, too far to climb. Continuing underneath the skylight entrance, in a short while they came to still another entrance from which they could climb out.

Then Logan found a dry passage which led around the top of the big room and all the way back to the top of the drop. So T and L were back to where they started. Once again, they climbed down the ladders and then ate lunch.

They still had not found what they were looking for. Neither one of them was particularly excited about mapping through the low pool of water on one side of the room, full of logs and who knows what else. So they decided to look first at the little gurgling stream merrily pouring out of the wall and into the lake. Since it would probably take only a few minutes to do so, they left their packs under the drop.

As they moved around the lake, they heard a strange roaring sound. Logan asked, “Do you hear that noise Tom? That roaring sound?” “Yes, I do hear something different,” replied Tom. They stopped to listen. “Maybe it’s just the acoustics changing as we
move around the room,” said Logan, although he really wasn’t sure. Tom didn’t say anything, so they continued working their way slowly around the big room, nearly as big as a castle, climbing over logs and slippery rocks.

About fifteen seconds had passed, when suddenly the roar changed to a RUMBLE and then came a most horrendous CRASHBOOM! The noise was deafening, and the room seemed to shake. T and L looked at each other, knowing immediately that the river had flash flooded and that tons of water were cascading violently over the drop which had been totally dry ten seconds before. It would be impossible to climb up the ladders.

Tom said something very practical (because, after all he had a PEE-H-DEE). Tom said, “I think we’d better head for higher ground.”

So that’s what they did, very, very FAST. The rocks were just as slippery as before, but Tom and Logan didn’t seem to notice. They just wanted to find the passage between the two speleothems which led underneath the skylight entrance and on to the other entrance. They could hear nothing but the CRASHBOOM of water, and it took them about thirty seconds to find the passage. In Grim Fairy Tales - thirty seconds can be the same as eternity.

Feeling they were now safe, Tom asked Logan if he would like to go back and look at the water. Logan said something which can’t be said in fairy tales, but Tom understood that Logan did not want to go back. So they walked out of the other entrance and struggled through the jungle back to the main entrance. Of course, they could not see their camp, since it was covered with ten feet of swift moving brown water.

They looked at the water and thought about what was underneath it. They thought about their backpacks and cave packs and compasses and cameras and electronic strobes and watches and machetes and lots of other stuff. And they felt very sad.

Then they thought about WHAT IF. In Grim Fairy Tales, there are little what ifs? and big WHAT IFS?. None of them are really very important because they are things that didn’t happen. Even so, Tom and Logan looked at the water and thought about only big WHAT IFS?.

WHAT IF? The water had come during the night while they were sleeping the sleep of the innocent. WHAT IF? the water had come twenty minutes earlier, while they were climbing down the ladders or even five minutes before when they were eating lunch under the drop. WHAT IF? the big room had not had another entrance, and WHAT IF? they had not found it before the water came.

So they looked again at the swift brown water and felt almost happy. Then they thought about all their stuff and felt sad again. They continued feeling almost happy, then sad, then almost happy again, for quite some time.

T and L decided to go back to Blue Creek Village and wait for the waters to go down. But first they had to get to the trail, which meant they had to swim across
the swift brown water. That swim was almost worse than being in the big room, but they made it.

The people at Santa Elena were surprised to see Tom and Logan back so soon, not to mention empty handed, wet, dirty and tired. The people didn’t think they looked very intrepid at all, just funny. Logan even had a combat boot on one foot and a tennis shoe on the other.

T and L waved goodbye once more to the friendly, laughing people and drove quickly away, but they didn’t go very far because the next river, called the Rio Blanco, had flooded the bridge. That river also flowed into a cave, which T and L had been exploring a few days before. So they had some more WHAT IFS? to think about.

They spent the night in Tom’s wondrous horseless carriage in front of the Station of Police in a little village called Pueblo Viejo. About the only excitement that night was when a fellow from the land of Guatemala stole a horse from the village, and four men with rifles went after him.

The next morning T and L drove the 18-mile 45-minute, two-hour journey back to Blue Creek. There the people from the land called Great Britain were very kind and helpful. As they had done before, they gave T and L food and things to drink both hot and cold, and soft beds on which to sleep the sleep of the no longer quite so innocent.

After one day and one night had passed during which there was no rain, T and L went back to the cave. The river was no longer flowing, but there were big pools in the cave where there had been no pools before. And there were logs and branches and definitely something else which made a queer flop-flopping noise. T and L did not want to know what made the flop-flopping noise. They just wanted to find what remained of their stuff.

They searched between the slippery rocks and in shallow pools, and they found their machetes, the inner tubes, a first aid kit, a can opener, a jar of coffee, Logan’s sheet, his watch (still ticking!), his strobe (definitely not ticking), Tom’s little stove and fuel container and foam pad and best of all, Tom’s backpack. They also found two cable ladders which had been twisted ’round and ’round by the flood.

Alas and alack, though they searched high and low, they never found Logan’s backpack or their cameras or lots of other stuff.

All of the time they were in the cave, their ears were very big, listening for another roar. But this time nothing happened.

So they carried out what they had found, and after some more time had passed, Tom headed back to the Far Northlands, and Logan went home to TEXAS!. And as far as anyone knows, they haven’t been seen in any more Grim Fairy Tales and lived Happily Ever After.

THE END
Tank haulers and surface support came out in droves, and 71 cavers hauled over 30 loads of gear to and from the sump for cave divers Dr. Jean Krejca and James Brown. Five Texas grottos were represented over the two haul-weekends, January 19 and January 27, 2013.

Honey Creek Cave is too fun for just one trip, so we made several trips to the cave for this Extravaganza. In November 2012, on a day when a larger group of cavers were doing a swim-through trip of the cave, a team including Matt Zapitello, Matt Turner, Andrea Croskrey, Steph Davlañtes, and Sean Lewis went to the sump to stage gear and place bolts for hanging hammocks for the upcoming January 2013 cave camp. The air was bad, and a few had to turn around halfway. When the group got to the sump, they realized the hammer drill was flooded and inoperable, and so they were unable to place the bolts. Due to bad air, the team was too exhausted to manually set bolts. The trip that weekend did not go as planned, but all of the gear made it to the sump and everyone got to cave. I did not go to the sump that weekend but made it to the campfire and got to hear the tales.

With some of the gear staged in the cave, the trip was on a roll. Early in the planning stages, I agreed to coordinate volunteers for Jean and James, and I was happy to have the opportunity to get everyone involved. I spread the word about the trip, and many people were immediately interested in joining the haul team, some for both weekends. With everyone’s involvement, we secured a solid team to haul gear to the sump. This was the first time many cavers had ever made the legendary trip to the sump. They
could only imagine what kind of caving was in store for them.

We had a Patch Packing Party a few weeks before the first haul and were able to tie up a lot of loose ends. Seven people showed up and learned how to use a Speedy Sticher sewing awl to patch gear. We recovered over 30 packs for the tank haul effort. Having group packs instead of individuals bringing packs made logistics much easier because Jean and James were able to pre-pack the gear, and we were able to leave the packs in the sump for 2 weekends. Ron Rutherford saved the day by making several large packs and customized packaging for the tanks and rebreather.

Excitement built as the day approached and several grottos and individuals donated money for the efforts. Donations provided group meals, supplies, and prizes for all cavers in attendance. Cavers got breakfast on Saturday and Sunday both weekends and had a hot meal waiting for them when they exited the cave after their journey to the sump. Thank you to all the organizations and individuals who financially supported this event: DFW Grotto, Bexar Grotto, GHG Grotto, UT Grotto, TCR, Texas Speleological Association, UT Grotto individuals, Don Arburn, Bev Shade & Jonathan Wilson. Many individuals contributed time, equipment, gear, and food. The dive would not have been possible without gear graciously lent from Bill Stone.

Early in the planning, Jonathan and Bev Shade suggested having a group meal for cavers. Kitty and Kurt were also on board, so an idea was born. They all had the gear for cooking for large groups and made it look easy. Kitty guaranteed me that no caver would go hungry and the meals were always hot and plentiful. Ash Ewing and Andre Laroussini cooked a hearty meal that satisfied the haulers’ appetites.

Tank haul day finally came, and everything was ready. Tons of people showed up, surface support was strong and organized, meals were on a roll, and people were ready to cave. Kurt Menking, Bev, and Ted Lee went into the cave before the haul to drill holes for hammocks. We set a sweep team to pick up any abandoned gear since every piece of gear was essential to the success of the trip. Now this was really happening. I tried to think of every last thing before I was lowered into the rabbit hole to begin a 3-day trip of assisting the divers at the sump. I had agreed to camp at the sump with Jean and James for part of their dive, and Lydia Hernandez volunteered to stay at camp for the entire dive. We arranged for Heather Tucek to relieve me because I had to work on Monday.
I had been to the sump many times and knew what to expect: mud, mud, mud, and mud, but this would be my first cave camp, and I relied on Jean and James for guidance.

The weekend before camping at the sump, I participated in a 63 mile endurance run on rugged trails in the Texas Hill Country. I finished the race after over 20 hours of running, with temperatures ranging from heat exhaustion to freezing. I learned a lot about human strength and humility. Even with a sharpened mind, I was nervous thinking about my first cave camp as I was lowered down the hole, but I enjoyed the journey to the sump.

We set up camp at the junction before the 15-minute gnarly route to the sump. The camp was in a narrow hallway filled with mud and water and a short rock ledge which could be used to stand out of the water. Jean called it Camp Awesome, and the name was humorous because the camp conditions were anything but. We unpacked the bags piled up in the confined room further up the passage at the sump. Lydia and I then made camp while Jean and James prepped their dive gear late into the night. We went to bed in our mud chamber while cavers were exiting the cave and partying on the surface.

The purpose of the first day’s dive was to replace the dive line in preparation for a day-long dive and exploration of the sump. The divers wanted to get an early start. Lydia was camp cook and diligently tried to get a spark from the flint and steel device we resorted to after all the lighters wouldn’t work. As Jean and James set up their gear, we noticed that the adhesive from the newly-made bags filling the room with fumes had only seemed to increase in potency overnight. While the divers prepared for their dive, Lydia and I started on tasks, first being to drag all the packs upstream, away from the sump. I envisioned cave camp would be relaxing, reading, napping, and snacking but we kept busy all day until the moment Jean and James returned from their dive. We were all looking forward to a good night’s sleep and a long dive the next day.

Jean and James left camp the next day at 11 am for the day-long dive and exploration. I planned to be gone before they returned, with Heather taking my place. As I drifted into a much anticipated nap, I heard the divers coming back to camp, way too early. James wasn’t feeling 100%, so they had abandoned the dive with plans to exit the cave and come back in a few days to finish. We ran into Bennett Lee and Heather as we were heading out and stopped to enjoy the fresh breakfast tacos made by Kurt and Kitty they had brought. Don Arburn was waiting for us on the surface, and it sure was great to see the light of day.

The Honey Creek Tank Haul Extravaganza 2013 was personally a great experience for me. I enjoyed all the caving and camaraderie and loved being part of original exploration.

DR. JEAN KREJCA’S DESCRIPTION OF THE DIVE

The big push day turned out to be Thursday, January 24th. James
Brown and I left Camp Awesome at 9 am, dove through Sump 1, and prepared the rebreathers for transport to Sump 2. This involved changing CO2 scrubbers and partial deconstruction for travel. This section of dry cave was our nemesis.

The travel turned out to be four round trips for each of us to get the full rig to Sump 2, then reconstruction for travel. It is characterized by stoopwalking, crawling, passing through a keyhole, spanning over steep crevices in boot-sucking mud, and walking on top of slick mud-covered breakdown.

By the time we were coming back 12 hours later, we had passed through that 1,000 foot section of dry cave 16 times, for a total of about 3 miles of gear hauling.

Next we re-assembled our rigs and entered Sump 2. This was previously partially explored but not surveyed. We mapped and laid new line beyond the previous end of exploration. In about 300 feet, we came up into dry cave. The dry cave was a mix of walking and crawling passage, still following the stream and the general trend of the cave.

We finished the proper survey at 9 pm, our turnaround time, and compass-and-pace surveyed the remaining 300 feet to find it ending at Sump 3. Sump 3 is about 12 feet tall and 6 feet wide. In total we added about 2,000 feet of survey to the end of the cave, with 1,300 feet being unexplored prior to this trip. Sump 2 is 1,080 feet long, and Sump 3 is unexplored and the current ‘end’ of known cave. We returned to camp at 7:30 am Friday, very tired and glad to see our new exit support team, Mike Pugliese and David Moore.

**TANK HAULERS**


**SURFACE SUPPORT**

Don Arburn, Don Broussard, Kitty Swoboda-cook, Kurt Menking-cook, Gill Ediger, Don Cooper, Ernie Garza, Jonathan Wilson, Ollie Wilson, Linda Palit, Allan Cobb, Carol Schumacher, Jill Orr, Gary Migues, Joe Furman-videographer, Ash Ewing-cook, Andre Laroussini-cook, and AGGIES

Joe Furman debuted a 40-minute long documentary about the Honey Creek Tank Haul Extravaganza to cavers at the Texas Speleological Association Spring Convention held in Cave Without A Name in Boerne, TX.
KIWI SINK PROGRESS
Gill Ediger

The digging begins by removing wood, rocks, and trash that had been thrown and pushed into the pit over the centuries.

Rain water runoff falls into a pool in the sinkhole soon after Terry Raines first dug the small swallet open with his backhoe.

The primary sinkhole full of water after the flood had retreated from flowing across the driveway.

Note that the top of the excavator is still a couple of feet above the existing grade. Several yards of material had already been removed.

Peter Sprouse takes a turn at the controls. Gill Ediger and Ron Rutherford watch for any gold that might show up in the diggings.

No gold turned up, but this great caving rope seemed to have been abandoned by an early race of caving giants that roamed Central Texas.

Following an exciting breakthrough into real cave passage, a few anxious cavers scrambled down into the darkness with neither hard hats nor headlamps. Unidentified caver, Daniel Raines, Sandi Calhoun, Ernie Garza, Ron Rutherford.

Handloading a couple of large rocks into the excavator bucket. Gill Ediger—operator, Bill Russell (left), Peter Sprouse (bottom), Ernie Garza (front of ladder), Andy Gluesenkamp (behind ladder). Note that the ladder has but 8 rungs. As we dig, the cave becomes more undercut and the chance of collapse increases.
KIWI SINK DIGGERS HAVE ENTHUSIASTICALLY PERSEVERED THROUGH BACK-BREAKING LABOR, RAIN SET-BACKS, AND SCORCHING HEAT FOR SEVERAL YEARS. THERE ARE THE PERSISTENT REGULARS AND THOSE THAT COME AND GO. BUT THEY ARE EVER CLOSER TO THEIR GOAL: BREAKTHROUGH!

Left to Right:
As Peter nears the extension limits of the excavator and we run out of working room in the pit, the Project is abandoned for a few months.

Upon our return in the spring, weeds had grown and rain and floods had taken their toll, washing silt and dirt off of the surface rocks. The Big Rock and the length of the ladder leaning against it became a reference point as we dug deeper.

Water pools up at the base of a waterfall. The barrel is for hauling muck up out of the pit. Note the location of the Big Rock. The telephone pole was put in place to haul 5-gallon buckets out of the pit, but the arrival of Terry's ginpole truck and several barrels precluded its use. The pole floated out of the pit and 100 feet down the borrow ditch of Billie Brooks Lane during a later flood.

Rushing floodwater erodes the marley excavation ramp on its way to the aquifer far below.

Barrels are the essence of pit digging.

Don Broussard lashes the first rock to the lift line while Ernie Garza waits to unlash it at the spoils pile.

The heart and soul of the matter: barrels and buckets. Now, after many cubic yards of rock and muck have been removed, we have a 20-foot ladder leaning against the same rock. Both the floor and the cave are much, much larger. Watch for more of the saga to be related in future issues.
the Texas caver magazine

WNS BLEACH BAN
Diana Tomchick

Aside from the obvious result that acids are bad for the structural integrity of harness material (both polyester and nylon), I found it interesting that common household chlorine bleach is also pretty bad. Of course the web site doesn’t tell you what concentration of bleach they used (I’m guessing they just used it straight from the bottle, and that could mean 3-6% bleach, depending upon the brand).

I just remember that you should never use the bleach method to disinfect your climbing gear, no matter how attractive the method seems due to the cheap and easy accessibility of household bleach. For alternatives: http://whitenosesyndrome.org/sites/default/files/resource/national_wns_revise_final_6.25.12.pdf

THE UT GROTTO
Anna Klis

The UT Grotto started the year off right, with many grotto members participating in the Honey Creek Tank Haul in January. Congratulations to Ellie Watson for organizing such a fantastic expedition. Jean Krejca filmed a wonderful video of the diving passage inside. More recently, a number of Grotto members took a trip to 0-9 Well in April, and Galen Falgout organized a Punkin and Deep Trip Leader Training over Memorial Day weekend.

In February, we had an exciting presentation from David Ochel on China, where he had been caving with the Hong Meigui Cave Exploration Society for two weeks of cave camps and lead climbing.

In April, we had a guest speaker from the UK, Chris Jewell, about his trip which established Sistema Huautla as the deepest cave in the Western Hemisphere, as well as our own Peter Sprouse reporting on his ongoing project to systematically map the dry caves of Quintana Roo near Playa Del Carmen. These caves are extensive, wide, and well decorated with more than 40 km mapped so far, and much more remaining.

In May, notable speakers included Geoff Hoese, who presented photos from lava caves in the Galapagos Islands from a trip in March. Most recently, in our first June meeting, Bev Shade and David Ochel shared their photos and tales from the Tzontzeucuiculi Expedition to Sierra Negra in Puebla, Mexico.

Our grotto’s ongoing projects include the Kiwi Sink Dig, which has unearthed what appears to be a substantial cave. There is still plenty of work to be done, and diggers are always welcome - contact Gill Ediger for more information. Digging also continues in Cedar Park, at Dyes Ranch Treasure Cave and others nearby. Notably, the Cedar Park caves hosted another successful Texas Cave Conservancy Cave Day on April 13. Contact Chris Francke for more information on these Thursday evening excursions.

Currently, the UT Grotto has an all-female board. In February’s general elections, Andrea Croskrey was elected as Vice-Chair, and Yazmin Avila was elected Secretary/Treasurer. Sean Lewis called emergency elections in May to replace himself as Chairperson, as he is moving to New Mexico to pursue his graduate studies. Anna Klis (the author and a UT student as well) was elected the new Chairperson.

UT Grotto contact list currently has 317 people, including over 100 NSS members. Special thanks to Yaz, who spent a great deal of time updating the list and gathering annual dues ($2 for new members, $10 for returning
members). Grotto members are active throughout the US and internationally, and contribute to much cave research.

GOVERNMENT CANYON

Marvin Miller

Survey and exploration in Big Dome Cave is ongoing. The leads that really looked promising initially either don’t go or will require a lot of work. We’re not done checking every hole yet, however, and there is still a lot of survey to do in cave that we know about. The cave survey length stands at 181.4 meters and 16.8 meters deep. Casey Tucker, Leah Miller, and Marvin Miller surveyed 30 meters in a lead under the breakdown on the March trip and found another 15 meters of passage that ties into the bottom of a previously explored pit.

Also on the March trip, Christopher Francke led Ellie Watson, Tom Rogers, and Joe Schaeftl to work the leads in Lost Pothole. Christopher used his magic hammer drill and rock-shaving techniques to open up a window into the bottom of a dome. There was no ongoing passage. The team also worked on the blowing lead in the floor of the muddy room at the bottom of the cave and made considerable progress, allowing cavers to reach Rebecca’s Pit. The pit is named in honor of Rebecca Hutchins (O’Daniel) who was the only person to ever have made it through the tortuous passage to the top. The top of the pit still needs to be worked on to allow access to the 3 meter climb-down. There is a good amount of air coming up the pit.

On the May trip, we ridgewalked several transects at the southern edge of the Balcones Fault zone. We found only two small sinks, but one of them had good airflow. We will return on a future trip to dig it out. The project is on hiatus for the summer and will resume in October.

TAYLOR BAT CAVE

Marvin Miller

On April 13th Journey Bisset, Marvin Miller, Jill Orr, Tom Rogers, and Joe Schaeftl surveyed Taylor Bat Cave, located northeast of Kyle. They divided up into two teams with Jill and Marvin taking on sketching duties. The cave has a main upper passage extending north and south, with a 22 meter x 6 meter bat room at the southern end. A small passage drops from this room to the lowest part of the cave and then climbs back up to a low room before getting too tight. Jill and Tom surveyed an upper level lead off the main passage to an end at 36 meters. They also surveyed the northern end of the main passage. About midway along the length of the main passage there is a sloping climb down of approximately 8 meters to a 29 meter-long passage with a bat room at either end. Several hundred bats were encountered in this part of the cave. Survey length ended up at 196.9 meters and depth at 16.9 meters.

Missy Egan provided much needed support by bringing dinner. The cavers then spent several more hours finishing up the survey.

TEXAS CAVE CONSERVANCY

Mike Walsh

Many of you have been to the Texas Cave Conservancy (TCC) Headquarters in Cedar Park, Texas. For the past nine years, we have created a number of excellent memories at this location. Last April, the TCC received an e-mail from the owners of the house and land requesting us to purchase the property. We replied that we were ready to purchase it for the $175,000 price in the Mandatory Lease Purchase Contract. Our offer was turned down because they wanted the property appraised.

We looked carefully at the situation and determined that the house was not worth more than our offer. We then offered to purchase the 3.1 acres with the caves behind the house. This offer was also rejected. Fortunately, we found a new building in the same area. Our new office was built this year and will work great for the TCC.

We are now moved into the new TCC office and headquarters. Cavers will still be able to gather here for the 50 to 70 cave trips per year that are conducted through the TCC. When the old location is sold, we will make an offer for the 3.1 acres to the new owner. The TCC will not have camping available until CAVE Day, September 14, 2013. Toward that end, we will be working on acquiring a new TCC campground.

Visit the TCC online for more info at: texascaves.org.
Photo by Sean Lewis
Spring Creek Cave – Fifth Season of the Modern Era

Bill Steele

The fifth season of the Dallas/Fort Worth Grotto’s project to thoroughly explore and survey Spring Creek Cave in Kendall County, Texas ended on March 30, 2013 - with two exploration and survey groups working in different parts of the cave, and two cavers going the wrong way while carrying scuba tanks into the cave requiring a search to be conducted. The current project started in November 2008. A season at Spring Creek Cave runs from November to April, when few of the thousands of bats that give birth and rear their young here are present.

There were only two trips to Spring Creek Cave during 2012 – 2013, one on November 17, 2012, and the other March 30, 2013. The November trip was to survey a side passage found in March 2012 during the final push and survey of the end of the Soda Straw Heaven and Wallow passage. Diana Tomchick had taken a look at it and said it continued on, though it was low and probably didn’t go very far.

Will Harris, a mainstay of caving with the D/FW Grotto for many years, and recently relocated to Dripping Springs near Austin, joined Diana and me to push and survey the small side passage. Joining us to tour the cave were Mike and Steph Davilañites (Mike being from Florida, and Steph, a UTG caver who was soon to depart Austin to live and work in Argentina), and Adam DeWitt, a fellow D/FW Grotto member who, contrary to good advice, insisted on wearing “finger” shoes, those shoes that to me look like gorilla feet. He learned a hard lesson about caving due to fine gravel making its way inside to the end of the toes and being difficult to remove.

To get to our lead, we travelled approximately 2,000 feet in progressively deeper water until we were swimming to a “T” intersection, turning right at the “T.” Our lead was the third side passage on the right. An 8-foot section of deer blind ladder awaited us after a mud crawl the consistency of chocolate pudding. We went up the ladder to the White Man Passage, presumably named so when discovered and surveyed in 1983 because it’s easy and comfortable (for a short distance).

Steph, Mike, and Adam came along like pros, not flinching the least while swimming in deep water, wading in shallow water, going through low airspace just high enough for your nose, and crawling in liquid mud before arriving at the steel ladder leading up to the White Man Passage. Here we took a lunch break, after which Adam, Mike, and Steph headed back out, and we started our exploration and survey of Diana’s side passage. It went 44 meters (143 feet) before the ceiling lowered. The crawlway became body-tight and was full of soda straws with no discernible air flow, so we called it done.

We usually get four surveying trips in Spring Creek Cave each season, but this time we only managed to have two due to our three-week trip to China and other commitments. We ended the 2012 – 2013 season with a double-header on March 20, 2013, when we did a tank haul supporting Jean “Creature” Krejca and Dave Moore who were planning to dive the 40-foot long Bunny Hop Sump and a virgin sump where Creature and Vivian Loftin had turned around on the last trip.

The leads of our double-header on March 30th called for Creature and Dave to dive the second sump beyond the Bunny Hop Sump, then explore and survey beyond it. My team was to begin the exploration of the last remaining lead to the right at the “T,” the middle tributary of the
three to the right, the “DS” survey, which had not been seen since October 1983. I had the notes from that trip, which I copied at the Texas Speleological Survey (TSS) office in Austin. It indicated that though a crawlway, the passage continued past the point they reached.

Diana Tomchick, Steve Webb, and I got to the cave early enough on Friday for Steve and me to take a reconnaissance trip to make sure we knew exactly where our lead was, and to see if flagging tape was still there from the 1983 survey to tie in our new survey. We had a leisurely trip lasting about four hours, and located the 30 year old survey station where there was indeed a length of orange tape remaining. We exited, rounded up Diana who was over at Cave Without a Name, and drove into Boerne to eat at one of our favorite restaurants, the Dodging Duck Brewhaus.

The next morning we met Dave, Creature, Don Broussard, and Bonnie Longley at Cave Without a Name and drove the couple of miles to Spring Creek Cave. At the entrance we divided the gear into reasonable loads, and I told everyone that the sump was to the left at the “T,” 2,000 feet into the cave. It is the easiest sump to reach in Texas. It is literally a stroll. You walk right to it.

We unlocked the cave gate and waded and then swam a half mile, then waded and salamandered to the sump. Feeling certain that everyone knew where we were going, I did not bring up the rear as I customarily do on tank hauls to make sure that everything necessary for the dive makes it. This time I got out ahead. Then Austin caver Sean Lewis and a friend of his from the UT Physics Dept. came along and were in the cave to take photographs.

At the sump we broke out the gear, and Creature and Dave began to assemble and put it on. But then I looked around and realized that Bonnie Longley and Don Broussard were not with us. “Where are Bonnie and Don,” I asked? “They should be here by now.”

Dave and Creature said that they had started out at the cave’s entrance being last, but soon they caught up with Bonnie and Don who were stopped and seemed to be fiddling with one of their lights. They passed them, assuming that they knew where they were going. “Oh no,” I said, “I’m going to go look for them.”

So I dashed off by myself. After 600 feet of wading and salamandering I was back at the “T.” Left or right, deeper into the cave or out toward the entrance? I chose deeper into the cave. They had to have gotten here by now. Maybe they didn’t know left at the “T.” How could they not know that? I had not specifically told them and had not shown them the line plot like we usually do. I was complicit.
Travelling alone, I swiftly breezed upstream, going left at the “T,” the right goes to the entrance, looking for murky water that would indicate they had gone that way and stirred up sediments. The water’s deep and showed no evidence of anyone passing through. I went about 1,000 feet upstream to where you get up out of the water and walk over breakdown. There, I doubted that they had gone that way because I had said, and knew that they heard me, that you could walk all the way to the sump and pull your floating pack behind you. They must have had a problem and went back out of the cave. So I turned around.

Back at the “T,” I met up with Diana coming from the direction of the sump. She said that Bonnie and Don had not shown up. Together we covered the 2,000 feet of cave to the entrance, and I ran all the way to Don’s truck to look in the bed to see if there was caving gear in it in case they had taken a walk. No gear. That settled it; they had gone right at the “T” and apparently had gone on even when they reached the breakdown and flowstone you walk on.

It was beginning to look like the trip would be a failure. The divers had said they would call the trip off if they didn’t go through the first sump by 2:00 pm. It was now noon. They had wanted to get started at 10:00 am.

Steve joined us and told us that Sean and his friend had gone up the upstream passage right at the “T” to take photos. We three went that way too. When we got to our side lead, we caught up with Sean and his friend. Sean and Diana went upstream to find Don and Bonnie. And find them they did, in the most unlikely place. They were groveling in the liquidy mud of the side passage that leads to Double Dome, White Man Passage, and the Soda Straw Heaven and Wallow. It has to be the most difficult passage in the cave to drag a scuba tank through.

We got the dive gear back to Creature and Dave in time for their dive. Bonnie and Don were tired and left the cave. Diana, Steve, and I surveyed into virgin cave and continued the DS Survey. Creature and Dave explored and surveyed through the second sump for a total of 36.85 meters (121 feet), and stopped at a third sump. Diana, Steve, and I started our exploration of virgin cave and survey at station DS 43, the end of the October 25, 1983 survey, and added another 59.5 meters (172.5 feet) to the surveyed length of the cave. The DS passage continues 1.3 meters (4 feet) wide and 1.6 meters (5 feet) high, stoop walking, and was flagged with white flagging tape at DS 53, where we turned around.

The new length of the cave is 4,251.1 meters (13,943.6 feet or 2.64 miles). It remains the 12th longest cave in Texas as they now stand.

We got out in time to drive into Boerne for a second night in a row at the Dodging Duck Brewhaus.
TSA CONVENTION 2013

Photo by Lyndon Tiu

Photo by Lyndon Tiu

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Photo by Lyndon Tiu
ACROSS
3. People who don’t like caves could be either afraid of small places, or afraid of the ____.
6. Bat type commonly found in caves.
8. Where most cave maps start.
11. Never go caving without your ____!
12. The Edwards and the Trinity are vital to many people’s water supply.

DOWN
1. Caves generally are found in a ____ landscape.
2. In the event of a rockfall, this could save your life.
4. Barton Springs is home to a type of salamander that has what special characteristic? It is ____.
5. What many caves are comprised of.
7. What you do to create a map of a cave.
9. This state is home to the Punkin’ and Deep Caves Preserve.
10. When a cave passage is filled with water, it is said to be a ____.

ANSWERS: Across: 3. dark 6. myotis 8. entrance 11. buddy 12. aquifers
Down: 1. karst 2. helmet 4. blind 5. limestone 7. survey 9. texas 10. sump
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