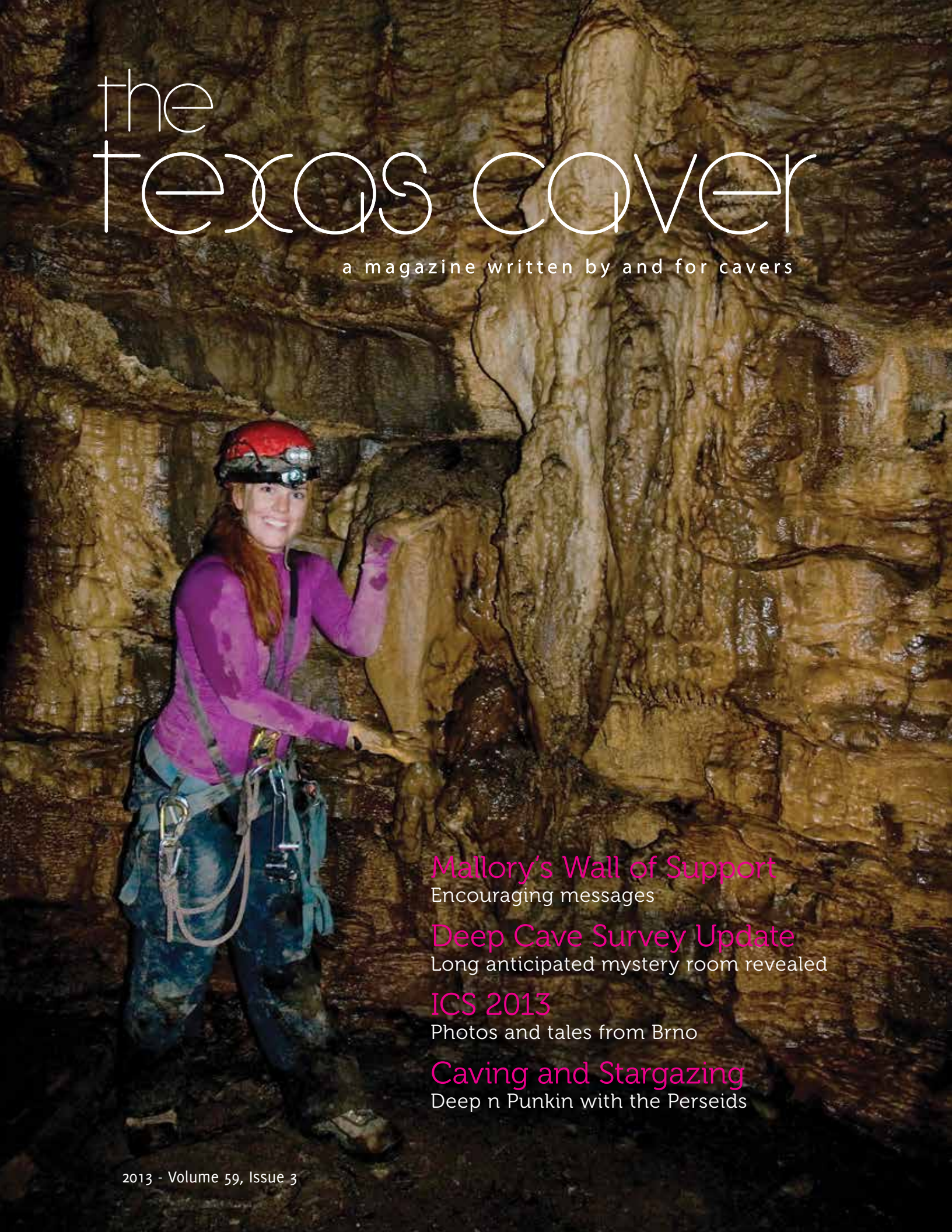
the texas caver

a magazine written by and for cavers



Mallory's Wall of Support
Encouraging messages

Deep Cave Survey Update
Long anticipated mystery room revealed

ICS 2013
Photos and tales from Brno

Caving and Stargazing
Deep n Punkin with the Perseids

2013 - Volume 59, Issue 3

TEXAS NSS AWARD WINNERS 2013

NSS FELLOW AWARDS

Marvin Miller
Bexar Grotto

Bill Stephens
DFW Grotto

MALLORY'S FAMILY & FRIENDS

From left: Mallory's brother, Caleb Mayeux, Lyndon Tiu (GHG), Greyson Knapp (GHG), Roger Moore (GHG), Mallory's mother, Vickie Mayeux, her aunt, Barbara Fabre, and friend, Jamie Ducote, from Louisiana. Our deepest thanks, Vickie, for keeping us so faithfully updated on Mal's condition. With the support of such an amazing family, Mal is going to be caving again before we know it.

PHOTO CREDIT CORRECTION In the June issue of the Texas Caver, the photo on page 24 of Katie, Bill, and Orion, and the photos on page 25 of Jasek with the big camera, and of people sitting at tables in the campground, were taken by Carl Kunath.

COVER ART MERIT AWARD

Jill Orr,
Design/Layout
Bexar Grotto

Mike Harris,
Photographer
Bexar Grotto

the texas caver

Volume 59, Issue 3 - 2013 July-September

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PHOTO CREDITS

Front Cover

Chris Lafferty: Mallory Mayeux

Back Cover

Peter Pitts

FROM THE EDITOR

FIRST YEAR REFLECTIONS....Now that there is more than a year and an award behind the new Texas Caver, I want to thank everyone who has supported our efforts to put out what I think is the best quality cavers' magazine in the country. We've published beautiful, compelling images, and interesting, informative, and humorous articles. I have the best support staff in the world for editing and keeping our authors (and me) looking good. At the start of each issue, there is a fear there won't be enough material, but Texas cavers have come through every time!

I know I can continue to count on Texas cavers to make the next year even better!

EMERGENCIES

For Cave Assistance, Call the Closest County Number:

BEXAR	210.326.1576
COLLIN	214.202.6611
HAYS	512.393.9054
SUTTON	325.387.3424
TRAVIS	512.663.2287

For Life Threatening Emergency: 911

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texas caver

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 grottos, 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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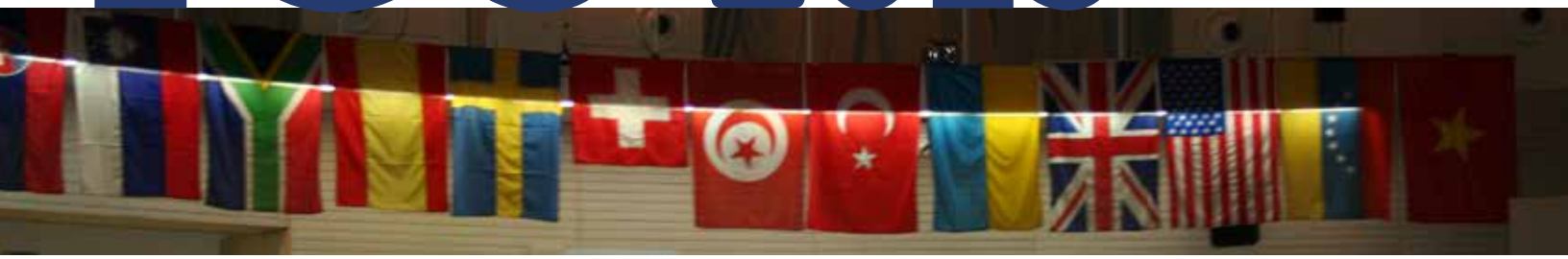
ICS 2013



George Veni

This year's ICS had the best US attendance to date (not counting the two held in the US) with over 140 attending. Texans were especially well represented with over 20. I hope this is a sign of things to come. Historically, US cavers have not been connected well internationally. Texas cavers' connection with Mexico has been a long-time exception. In the years that followed the first US ICS in 1981, in Bowling Green, Kentucky, US cavers began to expand their international connections with more far flung expeditions, research partnerships, and long-term friendships. By the 2001 ICS in Brazil, those connections leveled out and only a small core contingent went to Brasilia. New, younger cavers hadn't made their international connections. That changed with the 2009 ICS in Kerrville, and it showed in Brno.

I hope to see this enthusiasm and attendance in four years at the next ICS in Sydney, Australia. I know it's far, but set aside only $2 a day, and you'll have it covered. The ICS is an unparalleled opportunity to expand your caving experiences, knowledge, friendships, and possibilities to join expeditions and projects. You won't regret it. Talk to the cavers who went this year and see. Besides, they almost speak Texan in Australia, so little translation will be needed!

Kurt Menking

Kitty and I spent a week at the ICS, and two additional weeks just exploring the area in and around Czech. The ICS was full of very good talks and events. The fireworks were better than any I've seen. We didn't do any pre or post trips, but we visited 5 commercial caves, and really enjoyed the 50 degree cave temps, since outside it was unseasonably warm for the area. Some days actually were 100 degrees.

Some of the commercial caves were very nice, especially the cave with plenty of aragonite formations. My favorite place was the Czech sandstone towers. It is a large area of beautiful sandstone with towers exceeding 80', narrow slot canyons, and supposedly 20 kilometers of caves, although we met some who scoffed at the caves, saying they're just crevices between the stones.

We wandered around in 5 countries, saw more than our share of green dead guys (weathered bronze statues), stacks of human bones (ossuaries), castles, and churches.

The travel was also interesting. We got $100 of airport cash to spend on food or trinkets in SA because our flight was canceled, and we got $1000 each in air travel vouchers, plus free dinner, and an overnight stay at the Marriott for volunteering to step down from an over-booked return flight. Plus we got much better seats on the next day flight.

Vendor Hall. Photo by Kurt Menking

Sandstone Park. Photo by Kurt Menking

Skull Church. Photo by Kurt Menking

Monica Ponce.

Photo by George Veni

ICS: SLOVENIA & THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Geary Schindel

SUE AND I HAD BEEN PLANNING ON ATTENDING THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF SPELEOLOGY SINCE THE LAST ICS ENDED IN KERRVILLE, TEXAS, FOUR YEARS EARLIER.

We formalized plans after reviewing the profusion of pre and post congress excursions. Sue chose to spend a week in the pre-congress trip to Show Caves and UNESCO Monuments in the Czech Republic based in Prague. She had a wonderful time on the trip with Texas cavers Susan Souby, Bob (Rune) Burnett, and Gary Knipper. In addition, Sue also met some friends she made in Kerrville - Margot and David Checkley from England. They had a great time visiting castles and caves, eating schnitzel, and drinking good Czech wines and beer.

I choose to take the pre-congress trip to the Dinaric Karst of Slovenia, as visiting the "Classic Karst" has long been on my bucket list. We both flew from San Antonio to New York's JFK airport; there we went our separate ways for the week until we would meet at the ICS in Bruno. Sue flew directly to Prague, and I took off for Paris, and then on to Ljubljana, Slovenia. My flight was about 5 hours late leaving New York, and I got into Paris just in time to make the connecting flight to Ljubljana. We flew over the Alps in a small commuter jet, and I could look out the window and see some of the high peaks sticking above the clouds.

I took a taxi to a hotel in Ljubljana where I ran in to Annalisa Peace from San Antonio. She had been touring other parts of Europe, chose to go on the Slovenia excursion since her father, long time Texas caver Carl Ponebshek, had roots in the area. Annelisa and I walked around the downtown area and found a nice little restaurant near the Ljubljana's river walk.

The next morning, we were picked up by Jure Tičar near the hotel, where we also ran into Saj and Matt Zappitello. Saj and Matt had signed up for the caving excursion, and Annalisa and I were on the karst excursion. We loaded into vans, and stopped at the bus station where we picked up a couple of other folks, including three Australian's - David Butler, Cathy Plowman, and Timothy Moulds. We were driven to Rakov Škocjan Regional Park nature reserve, stopping on the way to look at various castles, museums, springs, and caves. Annalisa had arranged to meet her Slovenian cousins for a long Sunday outing, and she got the tour of their farms along with the Slovenian countryside.

Rakov Škocjan has been set aside since 1949 because of its incredible karst landforms. The park contains a number of large caves, sinkholes, sinking streams, and two natural bridges. We stayed in a facility designed as a nature camp with dormitory style rooms, a meeting room, and commercial kitchen. The facilities were outstanding and the location was even better. We rarely had a long drive for our field trips in the region. During the week, we visited the Karst Research Institute in Postojna, numerous caves, poljes, sinkholes, and related karst features. Our field trip guides were Mateja Ferk, Jure Tičar, Andrej Mihevc, and Miha Staut. Their organizational skills, patience, sense of humor, geologic and caving knowledge of the area was outstanding. As with most cavers, they went out of their way to make their international guests feel welcome and at home during our visit.

Most days, we started in the early morning for our tour of the Classic Dinaric Karst. Places we visited included numerous poljes (giant sinkhole), some covering as much as 50 square kilometers, castles built around karst springs, local museums, and numerous fantastic caves. We discussed the regional geology, hydrology, climate, and how it all comes together to make the Classic Dinaric Karst. Some of the highlights of the trip, and there were many, included visiting the great caves - Postojna Jama and Škocjanske Jame, and seeing Proteus anguinus, one of the first described cave adapted salamanders, in its natural environment.

Postojna Jama is huge, and calling it highly decorated would be an understatement. The cave has been shown commercially since the early 1800's, and currently has a visitation of over 500,000 people a year. Approximately 5 kilometers are open to the public, but the cave has been mapped to a length of over 20 kilometers. Postojna Jama is home to more

SCENES FROM THE ICS

Photos by Geary Schindel

Participants in the B1SL and B2SL.

Large karst pinnacle at the entrance to a cave in the Czech Republic.

Left is Terry Bolger, a NSS caver living in Laos, and Bob "Rune" Burnett taking a nap and trying to escape the heat on the steps of a museum in Vienna, Austria.

From inside the entrance collapse to Škocjanske Jame Cave.

Left is Hazel Medville (NSS Colorado), Sue Schindel (NSS, Texas), and two Australian cavers. To the right is Doug Medville (NSS, Colorado) and Tim Moulds (Australia).

Proteus anguinus, the cave adapted salamander from Postojna Cave, Slovenia.

Typical karst landscape in Slovenia.

Matt Zappitello displaying his vertical skills at the natural bridge at Rakov Škocjan.

than 130 species, of which 84 are troglobites.

During our tour, we visited numerous collapsed sinkholes, unroofed caves, and many surface karst features. Some of the caves had rich fossil deposits, including cave bear teeth and bones, and were also home to early humans. Another highlight of the trip was visiting Labodnica Cave, located about 100 meters past the border into Italy. The cave is a series of shafts, with a total depth of 280 meters on fixed ladders, to a very large chamber and the Reka River, for a total depth of 341 meters. It took about an hour and a half to descend the ladders, and about two hours to climb out. The cave was first discovered and explored in the early 1840's, and for 70 years, was the deepest known cave in the world. The Reka River sinks in Škocjanske cave and discharges near the town of Trieste in Italy, and ultimately enters the Adriatic Sea.

On Saturday, we left our temporary home, said goodbye to many new friends, and headed to Brno in the Czech Republic and the ICS.

Cave sediments in a Slovenia Cave.

Postojna Cave entrance, Slovenia.

MAL'S WALL OF WELL WISHES

I'm glad to see you're recovering so quickly, Mal! You'll be in right shape in no time. Change can be rough, but if you can take on a car and pull through as well as you have already, I can't imagine anything stopping you now. Stay strong and carry on :) -Chris Lafferty

We love you girl!
Ellie

"No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main..."
~John Donne

Mallory, you are such an important part of our Texas caving community, and we are less while you are apart from us. Recover, get strong, and rejoin us in whatever way is good for you. We will be here for you.

Sincerely, with best wishes for a complete recovery,
Jim and Mimi Jasek
Waco, Texas

"To succeed you must first improve, to improve you must first practice, to practice you must first learn, and to learn you must first fail."
~Wesley Woo

Mal, You prove you have the strength you need every day.... And you inspire me and make me laugh when I need it. Can't wait to get you back underground
- where it's safe!
Jill

"It's kind of fun to do the impossible." ~Walt Disney

Mal, you've become the heart and soul of the Greater Houston Grotto in the comparatively short time you've been with us. The best thing about you, aside from your winning personality, wonderful sense of humor, considerable organizational skills, and ability to party hardy is the fact that you are always going caving! And you've got the whole Grotto, young and old, caving with you, which is necessary to keep any caving club from withering away to a few old-timers like me.
We can't wait to see you caving again, on rope and inspiring us even more! (But I'm also counting on you for lining up speakers for the 2014 TSA Spring Convention!)
Roger Moore

"The marvelous richness of human experience would lose something of rewarding joy if there were no limitations to overcome." ~ Helen Keller

At the NSS Board Meeting AfterParty, hosted in Houston, 2011.

The day-to-day updates through your whole ordeal both kept me cringing and hopeful. It was a quite a scare for the caving community, so the updates were a great comfort. Keep healing!
Dale Barnard

"In the midst of winter, I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer." ~Albert Camus

Fè byen kreyòl zanmi mwen. Mwen gen konfyans nan Bondye nou pral tounen pi fò pase tout tan tout tan!
Galen

"The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain." ~Dolly Parton

In the words of Winston Churchill: "The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty" Even though your road will have difficulties - react to those as an optimist and show em whose boss...
Eileen "Missy" Egan

"May you live all the days of your life." ~Jonathan Swift

Ready to rappel into Neversink, TAG pit bopping trip 2011. Photo by Bill Steele

"Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions."
~Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

You glide with ease through the caves. You take on the Simon Cowell. You beat down a car. What's next for our daredevil heroine? John Pierson

I have never had the pleasure of caving with you. But, I have admired the part you played in breathing life into the GHG. And, most importantly for your tenacity during your recovery. Without your strength of will, you would not have come so far in such a short time.
Sheryl Rieck

Mal,
Ever since I met you, I thought you were a great, strong woman, and now you are demonstrating what you are made of! Receive a big hug and all my thoughts and prayers for your soon recovery! From Mexico City, Amalia Montoya, Former member of Bexar Grotto

Dear Mallory,
I am so relieved that you are finally getting better. This is been such a worrisome ordeal for your Texas caving friends, me included.
You know that we've caved together not only in Texas, but also in Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Hey, you're one of "Steele's Angels", remember? Remember how you so bravely went down Mystery Falls first, and the "Waterfall Dance" Ellie and you did at the bottom? Remember camping at Tator Knob on that mountaintop outside Scottsboro, Alabama? And how about me rocking you in the world's longest cave by words alone? You know that I'd like to do that again.
Soon you'll be prancing around in your Pocahontas outfit.
You're known for having about the finest body in Texas caving. Not that I look or anything.
Your caving bud,
Bill Steele

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgement that something else is more important than fear." ~Ambrose Redmoon

OMG! I was so sad to hear about your brutal encounter with a crazy driver in my home town - and then so glad to learn about your incredible recovery!
All the best, Mallory - your TCMA pals have been rooting for you since Day 1, and I hope to visit in September when I come to the area for a 96-year-old aunt's birthday.
Cheers, Jay

Mal, thank goodness for all that you have overcome thus far, and for all that you will overcome in the future!! Soooooo glad and grateful! Now... To get you underground again!
Love, Emily and Kevin

"Mal, while you were asleep, I whispered to your ear that you love to cook, cleaning and laundry and taking care of kids. Thinking that since your brain is re-wiring, it would re-wire so you'd wake up loving to cook. Hope it worked ;-) Glad to see you back." Lyndon

Magic Mal -- blasting expectations out of the water! Keep up the great work! I know healing is frustrating and very hard work but you are on the way, and we are relieved and thrilled. Linda Palit

"When you're going through hell... keep going!" ~Winston Churchill

O-9 WELL: NEVER AN "OH-WELL" CAVE TRIP

Matt Zappitello

ON THE EVENING OF FRIDAY, APRIL 26TH, 2013, 12 STALWART CAVERS SLOWLY TRICKLED INTO A RANCH ABOUT 25 MILES NORTH OF OZONA, TEXAS. EVERYONE WAS IN HIGH SPIRITS AND EXCITED ABOUT THE NEXT DAY, WHEN THEY WOULD SEE ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AND FUN CAVES IN TEXAS.

THOSE STATEMENTS WILL BE QUALIFIED SHORTLY, BUT FIRST, LETS LOOK AT HOW SATURDAY, APRIL 27TH, UNFURLED.

Caving on this trip were Trip leader: Andrea Croskrey, Team Leaders: Ellie Watson, Matt Zappitello and Aubri Jenson, and Team Members: Sofia Cassini, Galen Falgout, Yaz Avila, Laura Battle, Anna Klis, Bob Marshall, Tom Rogers, and Jill Orr.

We woke to a cool morning with scattered clouds and the occasional call of turkeys. It had the makings of a very peaceful morning... until the very angry man with a hunting bow, and his friend with a hunting rifle, showed up.

Evidently, they had arranged with the rancher to hunt those turkeys we had been hearing, and had spent hours preparing the site the day before, which included putting up a couple of blinds right next to our campground.

He was none too pleased. After trying to explain to him that arrangements had been made several months ahead with the landowners and the rancher that leases the land, the hunters were still incredibly irate, and went storming off to check with the rancher. So much for our peaceful morning, but it was still beautiful.

All of that happened very early when only a few people were up and about. Over the next couple of hours everyone else got up, ate, and prepared to go caving. Our fearless leader, Andrea, separated us into 4 teams of 3, with at least one person per team that had been in the cave before as the team leader. After explaining what we should expect from the cave and how we were to proceed, Andrea took the first team in to rig all of the drops and make sure all of the rigging was good.

While the last team was waiting to go in, the rancher showed up with the original two irate gentlemen and about 6 more turkey hunters. Everyone seemed to be in a much better mood, due in large part to the conciliatory gestures by the rancher and a fair amount of beer.

The last team of cavers on the surface fielded a number of questions from the hunters about caving and O-9 well in particular. The hunters watched in fascination as the team of all women cavers geared up and made their 150 foot drop, before moving on in hope of finding some turkeys. Luckily, rancher-hunter-caver relations were still intact and everyone parted on good terms.

The last team finally entered the cave around 2 in the afternoon. The cave is not very long, nor is it exceptionally challenging, but there is a rebelay and a number of small drops. None of this accounts for how long it generally takes to drop into or climb out of the cave. The cause for slowness is awe-inspired by the beauty of the cave.

The entrance drop sets you in a shallow stream that gets deeper and deeper as you go over one rimstone dam after another. Jumping into those plunge pools is about as much fun as you can have in a Texas cave.

After the plunge pools, you

Photo by Anna Klis

traverse to a spectacular drop down a flowstone waterfall with one of the most beautiful spiral shaped draperies I have seen in Texas. Then, you go down several smaller flowstone waterfalls, all of which are breathtaking to behold. I reiterate, that is why one moves slowly on rope in this cave; it would just be a shame to do otherwise.

At the bottom of the final drop, some of the cavers got bored waiting and started playing a game of keep away with an, as yet, unidentified snake. At first, it was really easy, since the snake didn't seem all that interested in anyone. Then it started getting more lively, and surprised everyone with the speed with which it could travel through water.

When people realized it was going to be a much more adventurous game than they bargained for, everyone decided it would be best to move up to the second from the bottom ledge to hang out.

After the trip, with the aid of some pictures and the internet, we are fairly certain that it was a Great Plains rat snake, which would not have caused any serious injury. We still felt it was in the best interest of the snake and the cavers to leave it alone, since it had evidently been doing fine for several months. No one had any wish to risk getting bitten while trying to wrestle it into a cave pack.

After everyone had made it to the bottom, we began the climb out of the cave, with Andrea de-rigging in the rear.

The trip had been a success -- no one got hurt, lots of people were able to see another spectacular Texas cave, and everyone had a blast.

Once on the surface, everyone produced libations and Ellie and Galen cooked a delicious group meal of fajitas. Some all night partying took place, and all was right with the world. As it always is after a spectacular trip.

Photo by Anna Klis

Photo by Anna Klis

Photo by Anna Klis

Top Left: The 0-9 Well trip crew L-R: Andrea, Yaz, Aubri, Saj, Galen, Tom, Ana, Jill, Matt, Ellie, Sofia, and Bob. Top: Trip leader, Andrea, ready to rig the multiple drops. Above Ellie, hanging around the entrance. Left: Desert flower.

DEEP: THE CAVE THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Joe Mitchell

THE CURRENT ITERATION OF THE DEEP CAVE SURVEY PROJECT, WHICH BEGAN IN 2011, HAS ADDED MORE THAN 1850 METERS TO THE CAVE, AND THERE IS NO END IN SIGHT. NEW DISCOVERIES ABOUND, ALONG WITH RE-DISCOVERY OF ROOMS LOST SINCE THE 1960'S EXPLORATION OF THE CAVE. EACH TRIP UNVEILS MORE INTERESTING ROOMS OVERFLOWING WITH CORAL, CRYSTALS, MOON MILK, HELICTITES, AND OTHER BEAUTIFUL AND UNIQUE FORMATIONS. THE LAST TWO SURVEY TRIPS HAVE CONTINUED THIS TREND, UNCOVERING MANY NEW SURPRISES AND THE TWO MOST HIGHLY DECORATED ROOMS YET FOUND, ONE OF WHICH IS AMONG THE LARGER ROOMS IN THE CAVE.

FEBRUARY SURVEY

The first trip of 2013 was held on February 9. Attendance was somewhat lower than in the past, with only 13 attendees, so only three survey teams entered the cave.

On my team were Tom Florer, Steve Gutting, Mike Harris, and Arron Wertheim. We headed out to the west end of the cave to follow up on some leads from a 2008 survey that I was on, which originally got me excited about surveying this cave. My other objective was to attempt to locate the route to the "Big Room" shown on the 1965 Estes map of the cave. We began near the Crystal Waterfall with some up-going leads. These proved to connect to each other, but progress for most of the team (everyone but me) was blocked by a narrow squeeze. Beyond this, I found a number of leads which were similar to the Estes map, strengthening my suspicion that this was the way on to the Big Room. In the process of poking around, I came across a connection to the LB survey from a previous trip. This connection bypasses the usual Gotham City route, shortening the trip to Metropolis – if the team is small enough! After this, one of the team lost their helmet down a hole between the breakdown, so I spent some time working through the backside of the breakdown – eventually locating it. About then, another team member lost their gloves down another hole (which were also recovered.) Since we weren't going any farther here, and the spot seemed to be trying to take our gear from us, we went on to the end of the AR survey to work on a crawlway lead. Surveying over sharp broken coral through winding crawlways was not fun, but eventually led to a climbdown into a larger walking corridor that Tom and I surveyed. From either end of this corridor, leads went off – one to a larger room, but with an opening that needs digging. The other led into a crawlway, but was not pursued. Most of the team was worn out by the small passages, and several hadn't even made it back this far, so we elected to start backing out. Mike had been looking in a small side opening just above the climbdown into a decorated room. I squeezed through it to sketch, and found a pair of larger promising leads heading in different, but downward, directions. These were left for a future survey trip. We completed 11 stations for 35.8 meters.

Don Arburn led a team to continue the exploration and survey of areas below the Helictite Room. Accompanying him were Pam Campbell, Gerry Geletzke, and Gregg Williams. Initially, they rechecked the V-survey pit from 2006, which leads down to the lowest point in the cave. Gerry managed to free-climb the pit to its terminus, but found no leads. Continuing their survey, they made a surprising discovery: a previously unknown sizeable room. This room was named Ann's Ballroom, is directly

Photo by Joe Mitchell

below the Helictite Room, and, at a depth of 72 meters, is within 6 meters of the deepest known part of the cave. Unfortunately, this room appears to be near base level, since it has a slightly damp, dirt covered floor and does not have any obvious down-trending leads. While there, the survey took a break to dance the Rhumba and Cha-Cha. From Ann's Ballroom, the team surveyed up a steep climb for 9 meters, and from there continued generally upward until connecting to existing survey. They then surveyed a higher level loop. During the survey, several carbide marks on the walls were observed. Also, three scorpions were encountered, two on the approach to Ann's Ballroom. The team surveyed 16 stations for 77.6 meters.

Team "Never Quits" consisted of Galen Falgout, Wade McDaniel, and Jill Orr, and was led by Ellie Watson. They began the survey from a pit lead leading down from Norm's Room, rediscovered and surveyed on the previous trip. The team surveyed a long corridor that was covered in cave coral, white flowstone, stalactites, a tall drapery, a wall of helictites, and many other formations. They called it the "Glass Castle" because of the numerous fragile decorations covering the floor, walls, and ceiling of the room. They surveyed two short leads off of the Glass Castle. One lead went into a tight crawl with cave coral, flowstone-covered floors, and a helictite corner. There was good airflow in this area. The second lead went into a tall room that also had good airflow, and was covered in more cave coral and moon milk coated flowstone. They did not pursue another lead that is a tight upper lead that mazes into a tall room about 3 meters wide and perhaps goes on. Ellie got turned around in this maze area, and Galen had to come and find her. The team then pursued the other main lead from the Glass Castle, which went down a steep slope and back underneath the Glass Castle. There were pits going directly down, but the easier route went to a room

with standing passage covered in yet more coral. The passage continued to a larger room that connects to the LA survey below Metropolis, which was surveyed last year, but the connection was not surveyed. While Ellie continued sketching, the team checked leads in this room. Wade suggested Galen enter a unobtrusive tight lead. Galen disappeared, and was soon heard making a muffled, but loud exclamation. He was looking down a 10 meter pit into what looked to be quite a large room, but couldn't see what it looked like.

Galen attempted to descend with a webbing handline, but the slope was steep and undercut, and the webbing didn't reach the floor of the cave. Knowing it would be months before they could drop this pit, it was a tantalizingly frustrating discovery!

At that point, the team elected to call it a day having set 16 stations for 75.5 meters.

MAY SURVEY

The May 18 survey trip had a larger turnout, with 17 attendees, and coincided with Don's birthday. Five survey teams were assembled.

Don, along with Pam, Steve, and Gregg, continued the survey below the Helictite Room, and a second route to Ann's Ballroom was discovered. Areas of formations were found including bacon, stalactites, coral and popcorn. Areas of mud were observed, and a bat was seen in Ann's Ballroom. They completed 9 stations for 43.4 meters, with many leads remaining.

Marvin's team included Gerry and Kurt Menking, and they headed to Highway 69 found two trips previously. This is a new area well below the Crooked Broomstick Room, but only accessible from Miller Time. Airflow was noted at several spots in that area, including a tight lead that could be seen to go to a larger passage. What was reported in this area previously as evidence of blasting was assessed by Kurt as compression shattering and flaking. Thirteen stations were surveyed to an end with a tight spot that might be passable by a small person. More airflow was noted here. All other leads in the area were pushed, but did not go. At RA13, it is possible to climb up to a narrow slot that appears to open into a larger area after about 1 meter. According to the line plot, this may connect to the pit lead at the end of the JJ survey from 2011. Every surface was coated with a 1 to 2 mm layer of calcite. At places, this had broken off or separated from the host rock, revealing a reddish brown surface beneath. All of the breakdown is cemented together by this layer. Some speleothems seemed to indicate filamentous bacterial growth covered by calcite. They surveyed 17 stations for 67.2 meters.

The remainder of the teams ventured out to the west end of the cave. Traveling together to Gotham City, we encountered a large number of bats in Gotham. A couple of bats and guano had been seen there before, but not the hundred or more seen on this day. Gotham City is quite far from the entrance, and the only known routes are quite circuitous, so the path the bats take is still unknown. It may be possible that there is an unknown second entrance to the cave in this area.

No one on Saj's team had previously surveyed in Deep, so on the way to their designated location

Links

Photo by Joe Mitchell

beyond the Square Ceiling Room, they went down the wrong path. Eventually they got to some passage that did not have the most obvious routes surveyed. They tied two points together with a vertical chimney passage, and then continued to N13, which was the previous end of the survey in this area. However, they were unable to continue past this point because the next room was filled with bats! It was a surprise to find yet another bat room in the area after the bats in Gotham City. This, along with the frog observed previously above this location in the Topout Room, provides more evidence of another potential entrance. Rather than bother the bats, the team went down into a lower lead and tied up some loops, and found the Dominatrix passage described in the notes as "Don't go down there!" Finally, after tying back into the N survey, they had been beaten enough after completing 10 stations for 38.0 meters.

Bennett Lee led a team with Tom and Arron, and they worked on the "Wall of Leads" in Upper Metropolis. The first one led to an overlook of Norm's Room, while the second one led to a room. A climb-up led to an upper ledge area with a couple of too-tight leads, but another one came out above the Butterscotch Falls in Norm's Room. They surveyed 7 stations for 37.7 meters.

My team consisted of Wade, Jill,

Photo by Joe Mitchell

and Tom Rogers. We began at the end of the 0 survey that Ellie's team had surveyed on the previous trip. Our objective was to reach and drop the pit that they had discovered previously, so we hauled rope and vertical gear to the back of the cave. We came via the LA survey from Metropolis rather than through the Glass Castle, found the connection and tied in. We then proceeded to survey the connection room, and on down the slope at the previous end of the 0 survey. After picking up a dead-end side lead, we surveyed through a small squeeze into a decent sized room, and then through a small hole which led to the top of the pit. While Tom rigged the pit and Wade prepared to drop it, Jill checked a good-sized lead heading off from the top of the pit in hopes that it might provide another way down. Although it did lead to down-trending passage that kept going, no connection was found. Wade was the first down, and found the floor to be covered with a layer of dirt and mud that was completely undisturbed, indicating that the room was virgin. The drop had to be negotiated carefully due to the numerous formations under an overhang about halfway down.

The room itself proved large and spectacular! It was more than 20 meters long, 10 meters wide, and 4-6 meters high. The area around the drop was highly decorated, and had a 6 meters long slope coated with pure moon milk and punctuated with stalagmites and totem poles. Other good size stalactites hung in this area. Further along in the room, it split into an upper and lower half. The lower portion of the room continued into a small room with no further leads. The upper portion was more decorated and larger. The climb up to the upper part passed an area of large crystals, many coated with moon milk. At the top of this area, Jill found a hole through which another room, about 4-5 meters in diameter, could be seen that was also highly decorated, and included a large stalagmite in the center. However, entry was impossible without major formation damage, so it was named the Secret Garden. The upper level of the main room continued to another area that was quite wet, with many active formations. Another big slope of large moon milk coated crystals was found near the back end of the room. At the top of this slope, a traverse appeared to go to a lead, but is not reachable due to all the delicate formations. At least two other visible leads from this room were also inaccessible due to the proliferation of moon milk and crystals. At the very back of the room, a climbdown led to a good-size lead heading northwest, away from the main part of the cave. We named the room the Four Seasons due to the many colors present in the formations. Later evaluation of the line plot showed that the Four Seasons is at a lower level than anything in this half of the cave. After a full 12 hours in the cave, we dragged our gear back to the entrance, having surveyed 18 stations for 83.2 meters.

Deep Cave has no shortage of leads to keep us busy for years to come. New areas keep being discovered such as Highway 69, Ann's Ballroom, the Glass Castle, and Four Seasons, with ever more spectacular and unusual formations. Areas of breakdown are mixed in with true rooms and passages in a complex maze. Bats and wildlife present in remote parts of the cave hint at a second entrance. Although Deep has been long known, was the site of a major TSA project, is owned by TCMA and heavily visited, it still retains many secrets, and undoubtedly many discoveries wait to be made. For now, the length of the cave is 4586.3 meters, surpassing the adjacent Punkin Cave, to take the position of 11th longest cave in Texas (as of June 2013), while retaining its depth of 77.5 meters.

Right: The survey team in the virgin room, waiting for team leader, Joe, to make the drop. From the top of the ledge, there was no hint of the intense beauty of the room.

All article photos are from the Four Seasons Room. Coral covered with moon milk, a breakdown pile looking as if it was oozing with whip cream and dusted with cinnamon, dual colored totems, soda straws, a wall font, the room was bursting with formations of all colors. Below right: Four Seasons survey team: Joe, Jill, Wade, and Tom.

Photo by Joe Mitchell

Photo by Joe Mitchell

Photo by Joe Mitchell

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Photo by Joe Mitchell

DEVIL'S SINKHOLE: CAVE-BOPPING YARNS

Bill Shults

BILL SHULTS IS AN OL' TIMER LIVING IN NEW BRAUNFELS; ANOTHER OF THOSE CAVERS OF WHOM IT IS A MIRACLE HE IS STILL LIVING!

My caving started out in 1973 below Austin working in a tunnel - we were there most of our waking hours, and began to see some of nature's wonders as we bored a huge hole the span of Austin. We all worked on it, Paul, Jim, and me.

We visited some other caves before I went back to school for a semester to get my head back on, change majors to business, and get the "easy stuff off and out of the way."

Then one day, I got a call from Jim - "Let's go caving!" A 'wild' cave! "You gotta rappel into it." No problem, I'm sure I could do that. "Come down and we'll practice the night before we go!" Sure!

I left after school Friday and blasted to Austin. Jim, Paul and I drank beer, told lies, and dared ourselves into rappelling off a second story apartment balcony - no problem, piece of cake!

We had just gained permission to do the Devil's Sinkhole. I was to understand it had been closed to access for 2 years. Some girl from U.T. fell to her death - Hmmmm? We just have to sign a release form - Hmmmm? Can't be that bad though.

We drove on this ranch for about 3 miles, and I learned why they call it Rock Springs - to the top of a mountain (for Texas) and there it is, about a 30-foot diameter hole right there, in the middle of a pasture.

Of course we trotted right up to the edge to view our adventure, looked over and – DAMN! We stood on a 2-foot thick rock ledge, nothing below us but blackness. NO BOTTOM and this smell: bat guano.

Someone takes a rock and tosses it in, and it takes a Loooong time to hit.

I realized don't need enemies, for I have friends.

You're out of your dang minds - that ain't no balcony – you might get me on that rope, but you will be bleeding, and I'll be unconscious! No wonder someone died in there!

I look at our harnesses, made of used seat belts, sewn together by us.

"Jim, what kind of thread did you use? How - just - how - did - she - fall?"

Just how deep is that hole? I can hardly make out the top of the breakdown mountain that is 200 feet tall itself inside of it. What have you gotten me into? How long is that rope? I don't need this! Well, with the magic of the campfire and about a case of beer each, we double dared each other to do it. We even lowered a lantern into the cave late at night - eerie. Dang testosterone syndrome.

The cave had had a tremendous bat flight that evening, and the next morning we awoke to the strangest sound. "Whit - whit - whit --- whit." It went on for a long time - in the middle of an empty pasture. It came from that hole. We cautiously approached the entrance, to discover it was bats re-entering it. They circled overhead, folded their wings, and dove like streaks in to the depths of it. Mach II, the hole to hell.

I looked from Jim and Paul, to that pit to hell - and wondered what I must do to appease the gods - certainly there had to be something other than that hole. What had that loose beer talk gotten us into? I graciously said I thought I had appendicitis. Didn't

Modern decent into the Sinkhole. Left: Tom Rogers and Jill Orr on-rope over the 140 foot drop. Right: The entrance shaft. Photos by David Ochel

gain much ground there, neither did the fainting spell. And when they had to pry my arms loose from the tree - they were almost bleeding.

We tied the rope to the rear axle of the car - which I parked sideways, and chocked the wheels with a mountain of rocks. If you ever heard the word 'pucker factor,' it was off of the scale - but you couldn't show it. You were a guy - enjoying this.

You couldn't have driven a pin up my butt with a pile driver (is there another way to rephrase this and get the same effect?) when I went over that edge. It was over 140 feet down, opened into the largest room in Texas, and the heap of rocks we landed on was bigger than the Texas State Capitol, filled with fluffy 3 foot deep bat guano.

You have never experienced anything slicker than wet bat guano on a flat rock. Found that out fast. I saw my feet in the air - head high and in front of me - and thought it just must be the shock of the rappel - wrong. I landed so hard I tasted my underwear.

The climb back up was a real time of life, that if you could, you would cold blooded, murder your dear friend. Not a court of law in the land would even try you. You might get a medal! And trust me, once we got off that rock pile I would have, if I could have just swung close enough to him on the way up.

I was to ascend with Paul. I've learned a lot from Paul over the years - by his mistakes. The learning curve started here.

He rigged me up - for I knew not how but for that balcony experience. It didn't look that hard, but he had trouble. A five-minute rig drug out to 35 - and frustrations set in on him. He is going to go up with me to keep me calm. It's not looking good. He is in a mild panic - high anxiety, and the pants he wears are visibly up his butt. Keep me calm. Right.

We got the stretch out of the ropes. I start up, but swing - he reaches out and grabs my arm as we pass - and guess what, we twist the ropes with the ensuing momentum. Just lovely.

Not to say he lost it here, but his glasses did fog up. I told him not to touch me, we would unwind – someday, and every time we plundered across – I slapped his hands away. Keep me calm. Right.

About 60 feet off of the mountain the ropes lay on the edge of the roof, well you gotta take those hands off the rope and do a push up to clear the chest ascender. He didn't do it - got mud in it and it jammed. He almost cried. Keep me calm. Right.

Ain't this great. I never wanted to see the surface so bad in my life - which could be real short. Ol' Paul- well - it musta been a real slice of life for him. Sweat and tears poured off of him while we

just hung there on ropes 60 feet up - 100 feet to that edge - of life.

He finally cleared it and up we went. Then at about 100 feet up - the strap that held the knee ascender to his left knee snapped, and that's when he really lost his cool! He couldn't fall - no way. Tell him that.

He spoke in an unknown tongue until finally I saw the problem. I called up top for Jim to lower a strap. After the raining stopped, and he promised not to grab me, I swung over to Paul and tied the ascender on. When I said 'OK,' all I heard was click - click - click - that ass left me! He shot up like a bullet.

I really wanted out of that place then. Suspended by a rope 5/8 inch diameter, which had been rubbing on the edge - and my friend that got me to do this - who goes up with me to keep me calm, has just left me alone - he himself in full bore panic. I envisioned that balcony.

In friends you trust – right? I'm about to lose one at my own hands – him, and soon.

But, when I got up, I took empathy on him. It was almost an hour before we could pry him loose from the nearest tree. Kept muttering stuff- oh well, everyone has their own sack of rocks to carry. He was mine. But it really, didn't bother me - a lot.

Devil's Sinkhole was a real nice do. I've been there 3 times, and taken some spectacular photos. It's a really neat place. But one needs to know one's limits lest you bite off more than you can chew.

Paul Ed did. He was a wonderful teacher, I learned so much by just being around him, like not to take a Nikon camera in a cave with wet bat guano.

He was in front of me when he found it. Couldn't believe how high his feet went, as his arms went out and so did that Nikon. He fell for years and made the funny watermelon type thumps when he met earth again. Not the camera.

Later, in the same cave, he went off exploring alone. A NO-NO.

When we gathered at the exit – no Paul. We searched the cave – no Paul. This was a small cave, but still – no Paul. We went out, checked the truck – no Paul. We went back in. Paul – where are you?!

By now 45 minutes have passed, and as we sat in the far back of the cave, we hear a noise, a human type noise. Somewhere, muffled? Hmmm.

We followed the noise to a hole between the rocks, straight down, and low and behold, it had a pair of boots in it – Paul's. I loved it!

He had gone in head first - it dead ended, and got his butt stuck. To say he was humble was an understatement, and it couldn't happen to a better person. I still had the sinkhole in my mind, and I did enjoy pulling him up.

Another trip we did was a cave called H.T. Meyers. A real challenge of a cave. It was a series of 20 - 30 - 15 foot drops. It dropped some 300 feet in all, in a distance less than 50 yards. On one drop ol' Paul decided to hand rappel it. You just don't do that. When he released the rope - his gloves smoked. I was in awe at how he moved so fast and got those things off! Impressive! Then he got pissed and of all things - slapped a bat.

You can do a lot of things in a cave, maybe even slap a bat – in a big cave, but in a passage the size of a hallway, only after you lie dead still in the dirt floor for 15 minutes while swarms of them buzzed you, and you cursed him in whispers, do you really appreciate Paul Ed, and the lessons he taught you.

Next day on the way back home we all agreed that we must do this again, just too much to see down there - and what a time! We began planning our next trip, there were supposed to be a lot more caves in the area, and some were deeper. And as to what we saw when we were down there - was kinda out of this world for an old farm boy. It was all bigger than life, and a beautiful place on this Earth... the Big Guy in the Sky had a good day when this was made, and I got to see it!

We used to attend the U.T. Grotto meetings to get directions to folk's ranches. We would go knock on their doors and ask permission to do their cave. We were warned about this crazy old man in the Carta Valley triangle who owned the property that M.F.P. was on. They said either he'd be nice to you or come out with a shotgun and run you off. We found his place and went up on the front porch only to find a note tacked on the door. It read something like he had gone on vacation and

enter the house at your own risk.

We peered thru the little curtains - and found ourselves looking right down the barrel of a shotgun strapped to a chair... did we move fast and far! We never attempted to go back there. But when we would take a cold bath in a rock water tank not far from the his ranch, we always kept an eye out for someone sneaking up on us with a shotgun. Lord, that water was cold, but a good way to wash off the day after another adventure.

Anyway, that is how exploring the wonders of Mother Nature down under started. A lot of it was pretty neat. I was happy to be just a cave bopper - no desire to spend a week underground - as they do in the large caves in Mexico.

While Paul and Jim went on to cave in Mexico, I started drag racing with my 1959 Austin Healey stuffed a chevy engine. I personally would rather take the beast down the 1/4 mile track than go over the edge again, which is totally safe. But tell my mind that!

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CAVING & STARGAZING

Jill Orr

THE TRIP HAD BEEN AN IDEA MULLING IN MY HEAD FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS, BUT THIS YEAR WE FINALLY WERE ABLE TO PULL IT OFF.

The Perseids, a highly anticipated annual meteor shower, is known for intensity of numbers. You're lucky if you are able to see any of the Perseids in the city. I've tried, with no success. So going out to Deep n Punkin, even in August, was the ideal plan. Besides, during the May survey, Saj Zappitello's survey team discovered a large number of bats in Gotham City; I wanted to see if they were still there, and look for evidence of another entrance to the cave. Jim Kennedy assures me there is not; however, there certainly have been enough clues to make it worth the effort to look (see Deep Survey Update).

So on August 8, Don Arburn, Ellie Watson, Galen Falgout, Tom Rogers, Tom Florer, Wade McDaniel, Jon Truss, Gary Donham and I converged at the preserve for a weekend of Caving and Stargazing! The ICS and NSS Conventions kept some from attending, but the number that came turned out to be just right because nobody wanted to camp out.

As the groups trickled in throughout the night on Friday, they joined the circle in front of the cabin with heads arched back to view the show. The very first meteor I saw was the most spectacular. The wide flashing streak of green-white was strikingly beautiful.

"Oh there's one!", echoed through the night each time someone spotted one. "Where?" "Over there," was repeated over and over. We began laughing at ourselves for the silliness of trying to point out where one had been. Also repeated over and over again was Tom Florer's, "I missed it." Poor Tom! The last of us went to bed around 2AM. No one planned on being up early.

Next morning we started stirring around 9:30, and I woke everyone up with the smell of coffee brewing.

We LEISURELY ate breakfast, cleaned the cabin, and began getting ready to head to the cave. The plan was to tour some of the newly discovered areas that none of us had seen, let Galen work on photography skills with his new camera, and to check out the bats.

We quickly discovered the bats were still in residence. One goal accomplished. However, we didn't want to disturb the bats, so the way was blocked to the back of the cave we had intended to tour. We headed back to the Helictite Room to eat lunch. Lunch hour turned into a full fledge nap for most of us, with total lights out, and fortunately only the sound of gentle snoring.

After our impromptu nap, Tom Rogers wanted to check a lead in the Rust Room. This is one of the rooms that the rest of us had not seen yet, so we headed over.

The Rust Room is small, but the colors are dramatic - as if someone poured several shades of maroon sulfur paint on the walls. Tom, Gary, and I opened up a tight crawl that confirmed Tom's hunch and connected with the telephone wire passage. One of the rooms in the connection had about five pink crystal patches on the ceiling of about three to four inches in

Left and Center: The Rust Room. Right: After Ellie gave Don a beard-do, he needed to look tough for his head shot.
Photos by Galen Falgout

diameter each. While helping to make the connection, I saw something pure white dart under a rock. First time only the tail, the second time, more of the body, but it was so fast, and disappeared so quickly, that if I hadn't seen two - I would doubt I saw it at all. A Deep mystery, because I have no idea what it was.

We were getting tired and everyone was anticipating dinner of paella and sangria, so we began heading to the surface. To our delight and relief, it had rained while we were underground, lowering the temperature, making the walk back to the cabin pleasant. Wade, Tom Florer, Galen, and I headed back, while Tom, Ellie, and Jon took Gary for his first drop into Punkin and a guano haul.

Back at the cabin, we found that Don had gone back to sleep, and slept till 3PM. He had planned to walk the surface and watch for a bat flight, but we returned so early he decided to hang with us instead. It's funny how when we are surveying, we can easily spend 8-12 hours or more in the cave. But when there for leisure, it turns out 3-5 hours can wear us out. I guess it's because we're moving so much more. Forget about that group nap though.

I had prepped gazpacho, the paella, and sangria the day before in San Antonio, so there was little to do for dinner. The paella pan was too big for the oven, so we put it on the grill, and probably had even better flavor because of it. Everyone had been asking for several days before the trip, "What is paella?" Paella is a traditional Spanish rice dish made with chicken, shrimp, pork, ham, peas, and chorizo sausage, white wine, and chicken broth flavored with saffron, and cooked in a special pan. Now you know more than you ever wanted to know about paella.

I learned after the fact that Don had brought a backup dinner based on a surprise dish from our last Deep n Punkin breakfast - just in case. He also took everyone aside and warned them not to let me catch them putting hot sauce on their paella. He thinks I'm sensitive about my cooking. I have no idea where he got that idea from. But, the dinner was a huge hit, with people going back for thirds, and no need for extra flavoring - at least that I knew of!

After dinner we reassembled in front of the cabin to sip sangria and beer, and watch the show in the sky again.

IN-CAVE REPAIR TIP

Bill Steele

Photo by Diana Tomchick

"AWL" CAVERS ON SERIOUS TRIPS SHOULD CARRY AN AWL IN THEIR PACK

For several years, on all of my caving trips I have carried a half gallon Nalgene bottle which is waterproof, and in which I place things I want protected and dry.

I carry spare AA and AAA batteries inside of it and inside yet another waterproof container, and use rubber bands to wrap around used batteries as the trip progresses. I carry two backup headlamps in it. My Nalgene bottle also holds a pair of pliers, a "spork" (combination spoon, fork, and knife), a knife, the cutting blade of which I sharpen before every trip, a can opener, a bottle opener/screwdriver blade, and an awl. It's the awl of the knife, and an assortment of zip-ties I carry, that this article is about.

When caving in China over the recent Christmas/New Year's holiday, we were camping far back in an extensive cave. Our expedition leader, Erin Lynch, had a pack strap break, and it was crucial that it be fixed. There were several days of caving ahead of us, and there were no extra packs in camp. We planned to carry large loads of gear out of the cave when we left. Erin was worried.

"Never fear, I can fix it," I announced. I had my knife with an awl and zip-ties. With an awl you can poke or drill a hole through even thick material. I've fixed boots, cave suits, attached headlamps to helmets when the elastic strap broke, and now I was faced with a cave pack with a broken, thick webbing shoulder strap.

I drilled three holes on each side of the break, and passed through three of the widest and largest zip-ties I carry. I cut off the excess, and it was soon ready to go, as strong as ever. Diana Tomchick took a photo of me as I repaired Erin's pack strap, which is included in an album of photos I posted on Facebook, to which caving legend and Lew Bicking Award winner, Pat Kambesis, commented, "Everyone should have a Bill Steele on every caving trip!"

I don't agree with that. I say, "Someone should have a knife with an awl and an assortment of zip ties on every caving trip. And if I'm there, that will be me."

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