

The TEXAS CAVES - 3rd Quarter 2007



## ***The TEXAS CAVER***

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**Back Cover** photo by Peter Sprouse, "Barbara nearing the bottom of Culebra" Trip report on page 4.

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The Texas Speleological Association is a not-for-profit organization that supports cave exploration and studies in and around the state of Texas. It is comprised of both independent members and local grottos. The TSA is an internal organization of the National Speleological Society and represents the greater caving community in Texas. The organization holds business meetings 3 times a year, organizes an annual convention for Texas cavers, and sponsors caving projects throughout the state.

# The TEXAS CAVER

*Written by Texas Cavers FOR Texas Cavers*

## Table of Contents

- **Sótano de la Culebra**  
By Terri Sprouse. Photos by Peter Sprouse 4
- **Día De Los Padre in the Guads**  
(or How I Discovered the Joys of Cave Restoration and Wilco) 11  
By Mark Alman
- **Cobb Cavern Confusion, April 21st, 2007** 16  
By Mark Alman. Photos by Travis Scott and Dr. Jean Krejca
- **Foundation Buys Cobb Cavern Preserve** 24
- **2007 NSS Convention Merit Award winner in Paint/Pastel—Jacqui Thomas** 25
- **Texas Cavers Reunion turns 30!** 26  
Paradise Canyon Park on the Medina River, October 19-21, 2007
- **“The Carbide Corner”. A new feature in every TEXAS CAVER!** 28  
This issue’s special contributor: Mark Minton
- **Our Sponsors of *The TEXAS CAVER* (Support ‘em!)** 27, 29, and 31
- **TSA Spring Convention 2007 Wrap Up** 30  
Photos submitted by Bill Bentley. Robo Bull Photo by Mark Alman.  
(Photos were inadvertently missing from the last issue and are reprinted here.)



# Sótano de la Culebra

By Terri Sprouse

Photos by Peter Sprouse

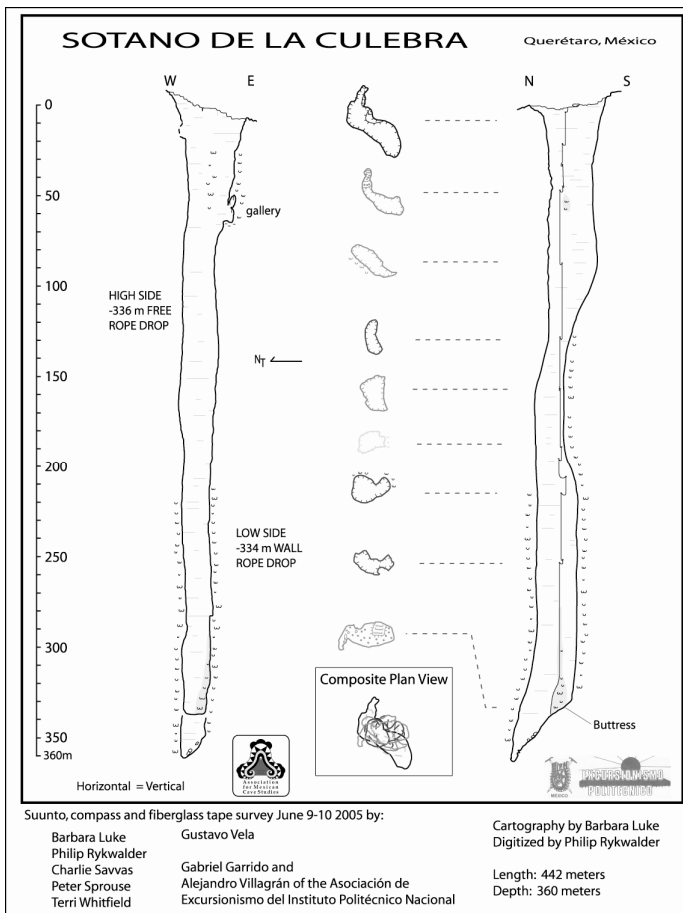
*After the vivid green mosses thick as a shag rug in the upper portions of the pit fade, beautiful black and thickly bedded limestone is found. The walls here are smooth and slick, and as I rappelled past them my feet stayed spread and planted as I skied down. With daylight fading in the pit's depths the shape morphed from a canyon at the surface into that of a well, and the rope continued to plunge into darkness. Faint light filtered down from the surface as I passed rebelay after rebelay; all the while the floor of the pit held amorphous shapes and colors that my eyes failed to piece into a picture. - Philip Rykwalder*



## Philip entering Sotano de Berrones

known to cavers until recently, when Mexico City cavers were told of it by the locals. The initial explorers had made several trips back to the cave early in 2004, but had underestimated its depth and ran out of rope before reaching the bottom. They had come back with stories of profound depth, possibly as deep as Golondrinas. In November 2004, the cavers returned with enough rope, finally reached bottom and then measured the rope length to determine its depth. A rough survey was made of the pit and its depth was estimated to be 337 meters. In order to make a detailed map, Gabriel Garrido invited Peter Sprouse to survey the new pit. In June 2005, Peter put together a rig team and survey team and traveled to the high mountain village of Santa Mónica de las Tinajas to join the initial explorers for a survey of the cave. Now, back at camp, the rig team, Charley and Philip, confirmed to the rest of the crew: "It's as deep as they said it was." Next day, the survey team would go in to take measurements and make a sketch of the pit.

It was during the 7th Mexican National Caving Conference in Monterrey in February 2005 that Peter met Gabriel Garrido, a member of the



Having rigged the pit earlier in the day, Charley Savvas and Philip Rykwalder were now relaxing back in camp, trying to describe the magnificence they found as they created La Escalera, a bolted route down the east wall of El Sótano de la Culebra. Hidden high in a remote area of the Sierra Gorda of Querétaro, the cave had remained un



## Cueva del Guano

IPN caving club of Mexico City. The club had put together a slick poster that described the discovery and contained a sketch of the pit. Gabriel and Peter maintained contact throughout the spring and discussed mapping the cave during the summer. In June, Peter, Philip, Barbara Luke, Charley and I loaded into Peter's Land Cruiser, and planned on visiting several caving areas as we drove south of the border before finally reaching Querétaro later in the week.

Our first objective was exploration of Cueva el Rutilo, a cave with an underground river that provided water for a ranch containing 2000 hectares. The ranch is located in Fe del Golfo, a small village near the town of Santander Jiménez in Tamaulipas. We spent some time locating our guide, who, once found, readily agreed to take us to the ranch. He took us down a long, dusty dirt road with many gates, only one of which was locked.

We passed several neighboring ranches and made many turns, finally arriving at a magnificent ranch house with stained-glass windows and tiled patios, that perhaps was used as a weekend retreat. An untended cactus garden there thrived despite neglect. Our guide first showed us a water well that tapped into the river, and nearby was a trap door opening into a pit. Upon raising the trap door we could hear the roar of the flowing river way down the shaft. This got us very excited and we geared right up. Charley went down first, creating a rebelay over a steel beam that stretched across the pit. Then he zipped on down the shaft and was already on bottom when he noticed the pit had an extreme O2 deficiency: bad air. Lightheadedness had set in even before he had completed a change over to ascend. He stayed down just long enough to notice that the cave led off along a fissure that extended only a few meters before ending at a T-junction. Beyond the fissure he could hear roaring water. Although the urge explore the fissure was strong, the effect



### Camp near Culebra

of the CO<sub>2</sub> was even more so. When Charley started feeling shortness of breath, he immediately turned around and started climbing out. Not only was there bad air below, the cave was also very hot and humid, making it a little harder to deal with. At some point during the climb out, he ascended beyond the cloud of bad air, and stopped to make further assessments of the shaft. There seemed to be an upper part to the fissure, leading off towards the river, maybe an upper in feeder. When Charley



### Gabriel peers into Culebra

emerged with the disappointing report of bad air, we realized that we would not be able to explore the roaring river, but most of us decided to go down the shaft to have a peek anyway. Philip actually made a quick dash through the fissure and was able to make it to the water before having to turn back. This exciting cave will need to be revisited in  
t h e w i n t e r .

Then our guide led us over to a bat cave on the ranch next door, about a one-kilometer hike. The locals called it Cueva del Guano. Fortunately, a cool breeze beckoned. The cave was in a 25 x 40 meter sinkhole that also contained large, elegant higuieron trees and cooing motmot birds. A short climbdown opened right up into a large chamber, with a borehole going straight ahead toward a bat colony. Although I am not certain that it had anything to do with the bat colony, it was here that the sketcher acquired her moniker of “Borehole Barbara” which I do know had something to do with her borehole sketching technique. The cave contained many tarantulas, and other spiders as well. Charley collected a pair of tarantulas and, not having a large enough specimen jar with him, he deposited them into his small camera bag. This would provide some entertainment later when Charley would offer to show his collection, and then a big hairy leg would come clawing out when the bag was unzipped. Team Borehole first mapped to the right and left in passages that circled the collapsed sinkhole entrance. Straight ahead the main passage of the cave was 25 meters wide and 15 meters tall, and went a ways to a small skylight. The cave continued smaller and wetter from there, but it got too wet and too full of bats to continue.

We hiked back to the house and left the ranch, saying goodbye to our guide in Fe del Golfo. Just north of Jiménez we stopped at the Tiniebla mescal museum. The museum turned out to be a real treat. We entered through the restaurant, and were presented with shot glasses and were allowed to sample the mescal. We tasted the young, the middle and the añejo versions. We then entered the museum and were pleased to discover that, in addition to the brewing vats and ageing barrels, original artwork lined the walls of each room, highlighting various artists. The paintings bordered on the surreal, incorporating agave in many of the images. We bought a bottle of the middle aged mescal. (This mescal was so smooth, we realized way too late that we should have bought a case). We continued on into Ciudad Victoria and got a room at the Posada Don Diego which was not far from the town square. There we showered and then had a late dinner at the Café Canton.

### Gomez Farías

The next day we drove on to Gomez Farías where we waited on the square awhile for our friend, Jean



## Derigging Culebra

Louis Lacaille Múzquiz. We passed the time by visiting Sótano de Gómez Farías, but we had only just located it when Jean Louis drove up. He warned us that a jaguar had been heard lurking in the area, so we were advised to be on the lookout. Although it is a crime punishable by jail time to kill a jaguar, some farmers have no choice but to hunt them when livestock are killed. He then offered to take us to a newly-found deep pit. We drove north of Gómez Farías toward El Azteca and stopped on the ranch of Don Pablo Berrones. First he showed us a nice looking 15-meter pit on the left side of the road, which is probably Sótano del Fin. We then geared up and started the hike, and saw that Jean Louis had done quite a bit of work in preparation for our visit; he had already chopped a path through the dense vegetation and flagged the trail to the pit. It turned out to be a wonderful discovery. The entrance drop to Sótano de Berrones was 12 meters wide and 67 meters deep. We rigged from a tree that extended over the entrance, making an easy free rappel. The pit belled out into a sloping borehole passage covered with breakdown, leading to a level mud floor. Team Borehole mapped the passage as it circled to the left and, after a short muddy drop, ended in a muddy room. We climbed out and de-rigged just as it got dark, and hiked back to the trucks. We rented the only room that had clima at the Posada de el Cielo, [www.posadadeelcielo.com](http://www.posadadeelcielo.com), which has a great eating and cooking area, and space for camping if desired.

Before we were out of bed the next day, Jean Louis had already talked to the locals and obtained information on two new pits for us to ex-

plore on a future trip. We met him for breakfast in a restaurant surrounded by native palmas and plantas. The restaurant doubled as a nursery, serving up muchas gorditas and a great display of local flora. We did not go into the first pit that Jean Louis took us to, which was owned by the Alvarez family, but it looked real inviting. It took an arroyo and had a natural bridge formed over approximately a 22- meter drop. We marked the location and later determined it to be Sótano Escondido, which was mapped in 1974. Next, Jean Louis took us to Sótano de los García, which is a two-drop, offset well, 35 meters deep. It was located south of the highway near Sótano de Gómez Farías. The pit had recently been used as a trash dump, with a mat



## Terri at Culebra

press and twelve tires having been thrown in. The pit walls contained skid marks from the thrown tires, causing it to be known as the "Tired Pit." A bolt was set at the top of the second drop, just below a natural anchor, then there were two redirects. Afterwards we loaded up the trucks and headed down to the Río Frio for a swim at La Florida. The water was wonderfully cool, and many people went off the rope swing. We bade goodbye to Jean Louis



**Terri rappelling into Culebra**

and drove south toward Mante. We stopped at Cueva de El Abra, then drove on to Xilitla, where we got a room at the Hotel María Dolores.

### **Through trip in Huateacán**

Early the next day Peter stopped in to visit the municipal offices above the library, then we went on to Cruztitla, where we got permission to explore in what they called Huateacán. Peter, John Fogarty and a local guide had surveyed this cave the year before, calling it Cueva de la Chuparrosa, and had gotten only a short ways from the entrance when they came upon the first drop. Since they had no rope they left well-placed flagging at their last station, hoping to make a return trip. When the survey was plotted, Huateacán seemed to be a possible through-trip connection with a resurgence that was surveyed on last years' trip, Cueva Vidal Ramos. The goal for this trip was to bring more rope into Huateacán to determine whether the two caves would connect.

The approach to the cave is a steep climb-down into a sink formed in an arroyo. It was obvious that the cave took a lot of water,

since the rock at the entrance was washed clean. The entrance was a maze of sky-lighted rooms, then it took off in a series of down-climbs, but soon came to the first drop. Charley and Philip rigged in while Borehole Barbara and Terri surveyed. Peter had gone back into town to get gear we forgot, but soon followed them in. Peter passed the surveyors and carried rigging gear in for the riggers. He found them below drop 3 at a low airspace. Then Peter went back to rejoin the survey crew, and we mapped on to the low airspace. We knew early on that we probably would not be able to stay out of



**Terri landing on Culebra ledge**

the water. After the first drop we waded a shallow pool, then one a little deeper. About this time, Charley and Philip came back through, reporting that they had located the last survey station and made the connection. The rig team then left the cave while the survey team mapped on through the low air and into bigger passage beyond. At the fourth drop the survey tied in. Although the plan was for the survey team to climb back out after the survey was completed, Barbara and Terri decided to go for a through trip, while Peter de-rigged. Later that night we were surprised to find a road

side taco stand still open as we drove back to town. We must have had five or six tacos each, then made it back to the Hotel Dolores. We decorated the room with smelly, wet gear, and crashed well after midnight.

## Sierra Gorda

We got an early start leaving Xilitla the next morning, not eating breakfast until we had reached Jalpan. We needed to meet Gabriel, Alejandro Villagrán and Gustavo Vela across the Sierra Gorda in San Joaquín in mid afternoon. This drive through the mountain was scenic up until the part where we saw a dead horse on the side of the road with a dog feeding on the carcass; his head fully buried in the horse's ass. This, right before lunch. We made a brief stop at one of the highest passes in the range, the Pinal de Amoles, after which we noticed that the vegetation began to change dramatically on the western slope. The landscape changed from verdant forest to dry, dusty topsoil with fewer tall trees, less vegetation and occasional arroyos. After a full morning spent traversing the long, winding mountain roads, we met the D.F. cavers in San Joaquín and joined them for lunch. We picked up a few supplies, then got back on the mountain road for what we thought would be a short trip.

We were excited to learn that a new road had just been cut through the mountain, reducing our travel time to camp considerably, but the new road turned out to be very sporting. Cut three hundred meters above the canyon floor, the winding road was so narrow in places that you did not need to get out of the car to enjoy the scenic overlook. The new road still had loose rock above, but had already been scarred by massive rockslides, the remnants of which were visible down below. The road was in good shape because it was new, but we wondered how long it would remain stable since it was apparent it would need a lot of maintenance. After a long, winding trek around the mountain, we made it to the top, where the new road merged into an old one that continued on through a considerable number of villages. After many turns and much route finding, we finally made it to Santa Mónica del las Tinajas, which is a very remote village nestled way back in the mountains. Gabriel had befriended some of the locals, who arranged for us to camp in one of the few, vacant flat areas in town.



## Jean Louis rappelling into Los Garcia

Before setting up camp we all decided to hike down to get a quick peek at Sótano de la Culebra.

## Sótano de la Culebra

Hidden among the karst and dense vegetation in an arid, high mountain dolina, the long and sinuous entrance to Sótano de la Culebra (Pit of the Snake) gives no hint of its depth. There is no gaping hole wide enough for swallows to swoop or that would move thrill seekers to jump. In places, the narrow entrance could almost be jumped across. There is no dragon's breath of fog ascending from the pit's deep well. There is no ray of sun that illuminates the full length of the narrow shaft. Even the first few rock tosses were inconclusive, seemingly lost in the void. But our pulses raced when the last tosses were answered with a much delayed, quite muffled, but very definite and echoing - BOAAAAM!

We got up early the next day and headed off to the sótano. The survey team of Barbara, Peter and Terri began the perimeter survey while the rig team, Charley and Philip, scouted for a good rig



### **Barbara in Sistema Huatecán**

spot. The rig team decided to drop a rope on the low side just to get down into the pit in order to get a better view of the entrance drop and to determine where to place the main rope. In order to survey and sketch a pit of this depth, we needed rebelay which would be used to set survey stations. We looked for a route along the wall of the pit that would not produce an overhung drop.

The low side was rigged, but soon dropped to a leaf and rock covered slope, which then poured over into the main well. Rigging here would cause major debris and rock fall on anyone climbing in the pit. The rig team briefly considered bolting a traverse line over the debris slide, but decided it was still too risky a place for rock fall, and would take too much hammer drill battery juice. When those of us at the top heard Charley exclaim “it’s not gonna work, dude,” we realized the rig team would have to abandon this placement for the main rope. However, the rope was in perfect position for the survey team to gain access to a side passage going off on the north end of the pit. So the rig team came out and started looking for another rig point while the survey team surveyed down the side lead to a small room.

While this side passage was surveyed, Charley and Philip then chopped a path along a high ridge that was covered with magüey de peña and solid limestone boulders. The rope was tied around a huge boulder, then 300 meters of rope was gently fed over the drop. It went slowly at first, hanging up a time or two, and then it started to whiz. Soon the rope was taut and Charley and Philip (who carried the coiled 60-meter rope) began the arduous task of bolting the drop, setting rebelay so that the survey team would be able to set stations. The drop began with a long moss and lichen covered rock wall that ended in a fin, then changed to smooth rock, making it difficult for Charley to brace himself in order to drill the bolt into the rock. In places he was able to use bedding plane gaps to wedge a finger inside to provide enough pressure to drill a hole in the rock. After tapping in a bolt and placing the hanger, he then had to lift the heavy rope with one arm to release the tension and then hold it long enough to tie a knot with the other hand and then slide in a mallion and attach it to the hanger. At the end of the moss slope, the pit narrowed into a deep well, allowing the route to continue down the rock wall. Charley and Philip put in fourteen rebelay, using three 10 mm Cancord ropes (183, 115 and 60 meters) with the last rope tied to the second midway through the last long drop, leaving 15 meters on the floor. So, what could have been a daunting task for the survey team was transformed by the creation of a climbing route that came to be known as “La Escalera” meaning “the ladder.”

The next day the survey team had a hearty breakfast and then headed off to the cave. Taking the high trail past the school along the fence line we soon reached the dolina that led to the pit. We were anxious to see the shape of the culebra, looking up from underground. The pit was magnificent. Negotiating the route was easy with the skinny rope and use of an SRT descender. For part of the rappel, the route flowed down a ridge that formed a curve of the culebra, allowing the rappeller to pull himself across the ridge to view around a bend as it snaked around the canyon wall. After a while the pit air started to cool. The bend in the canyon walls smoothed out and dropped into a deep, dark well, defined by massive flowstone columns along the south wall. The pit depth was hard to judge as we continued to pass down the rebelay. At some point towards the end, the rope hangs free, leading to one final knot to cross before descending towards an

enormous flowstone slope. Beyond the slope, the pit bottoms out at 336 meters, one meter deeper than the short side of Golondrinas. At the bottom of the flowstone slope, the well was quite cool, sending the survey team on a search for polypro. Beyond the flowstone slope, the rock and leaf covered floor slopes steeply down to a small room, then ends. Total depth of the cave was 360 meters.

The cool temperature and forced stops at the rebelay made for perfect conditions for climbing back out. I was really stoked about making this climb, not because of the depth of the pit or the technical challenge of crossing 14 rebelay and one knot. But I mainly anticipated the powerful spiritual experience of climbing towards the light from such a deep, dark place. La Escalera is a gloriously intimate route, revealing the crags, crevices and many colors of the rock face. In some places, the rock wall was smooth and dry, in other places, algae grew. Some cracks had small ferns, others just composting leaves. Only a few ledges had rocks, which the rig team had placed out of reach. As I climbed, I developed a growing sense of satisfaction - for being able to see the pit walls, up close, slow and relaxed enough to feel the natural air, to be in that space, suspended, - yet, not. I felt safe and secure, on a short pitch of rope. No bounce. No dangle. No tandem climb, just me, on rope, in a deep, dank, cool-ass pit. I established a rhythm as I felt my mind, body and spirit all engaged in negotiating the climb. I slid into the zone and, with my senses heightened, climbed toward the ever-widening circle of light.

Participants: Gabriel Garrido, Alejandro Villagrán, Barbara Luke, Philip Rykwald, Charley Savvas, Peter Sprouse, Gustavo Vela, Terri Sprouse

## **Día De Los Padre in the Guads (or How I Discovered the Joys of Cave Restoration and Wilco)**

Submitted by Mark Alman  
Photos by Alex and Mark Alman

It started out many weeks ago as a trip to



Carlsbad Caverns with my daughter, Allison, as a chance to see one of my old caver friends, Karen Perry, and to assist her in her efforts on the restoration project in the Mirror Lake area of the Big Room.

Surprisingly, my 18 YO son, Alex, indicated an interest in going, and I thought, “Great! A true family trip and an excellent way to spend Fathers Day!”

My daughter then dropped out, preferring the social activities with her friends that weekend than cleaning rocks. Exhibiting a wisdom beyond her thirteen years, she implored me to go anyway and to enjoy a “bonding” weekend with my son, as she and I have done many trips of late and my son and I have managed too few father/son activities, due to his going to college to be a nurse anesthetist and working full time.

So, what started as a family outing transformed into a buddy road trip and one of the most memorable and enjoyable Fathers Days of my life!

After loading up the previous evening, we headed out Friday morning in a light drizzle. June in the Dallas area had been VERY wet and this day started no different. We were in and out of rain some, very heavy, all the way to Abilene.

On the way, each of us swapped use of the CD player in the truck in order to widen the others



musical horizon and enlighten each other as to where our musical tastes had taken each of us.

Alex would play the first CD by the Foo Fighters. I would respond by playing one of my current favorites, Freddie King—The Shelter Years. (Mr. King was a Dallas-born blues guitarist and a HUGE influence on another blues guitarist from Dallas, Stevie Ray Vaughan).

Alex responded by attempting to play a couple of CD's by Lamb of God and Static-X, and after voicing my displeasure and subsequent pain in my ears (I can't believe I used to listen to music like this!) he settled on a quite tasty CD by a band I had heard of but had never listened to by the name of Wilco.

They are a rather pleasant alt-rock outfit and made for some rather soothing and enjoyable accompaniment through the barren beauty of west Texas and southeastern New Mexico before arriving at our destination.

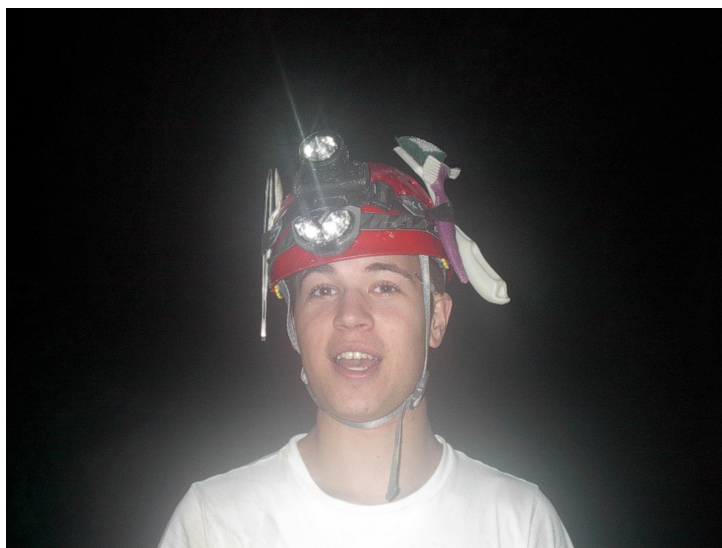
We usually take the Andrews, TX route, but this time, decided to come in from the south, via Pecos. By doing so, we traveled through (tongue firmly in cheek) the bustling 'burbs of Orla and Malaga before heading west through the very pretty vil-

lage of Black River. As we headed south to the National Park, I tried in vein to find the location of Parks Ranch Cave, but was unable to do so.

We listened to one of the many best of CD's of Stevie Ray Vaughan and, indulged in another Wilco CD my son had and, finally, hit some good weather and dry roads and made good time till we pulled into Carlsbad National Park at around 6 PM local time. After wandering around the staff residential area, we finally came across the cabin that would be our home away from home for four days and was greeted by our host and cave restoration instructor, Karen Perry.

Karen used to be an active caver in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area and was an important member of the DFW and Maverick Grottos before deciding to pull up stakes and head west to Andrews. Karen was a very pleasant caver and made me feel extremely welcomed and wanted when I first got involved in caving in Texas. She also has assisted me on several youth caving trips and, even though we don't communicate as much as we did before, this weekend and the opportunity to work in the cave that initially piqued my interest in caving as a wee lad was too much too resist.

Karen showed us around the cabin that had actual beds (!), a working kitchen (!!), and a hot shower(!!!). This would be very enjoyable indeed and much more pleasurable than some of the other cold, wet, not, and dirty caving trips we had made in the past that involved sleeping in the back of my pickup and cooking over a back pack stove.



**Alex, displaying the tools of the trade.**



### Alex refilling our “Super Sprayer”

After supper, we grabbed some drinking water and went down to enjoy the very entertaining bat talk conducted by one of the park rangers and waited with eager anticipation for the first bat to begin exiting the mouth of the cave. Despite all of the trips we have made to CaCa, they have always been during the cold season, so we have never had the chance to watch this marvelous spectacle.

Another neat feature they have for the bat party is a speaker setup with a high frequency microphone that allows you to hear the echolocation utilized by the bats. We were instructed by the Ranger to immediately be quiet and await the oncoming spectacle of the hungry hordes exiting for the evening. We sat patiently listening to the Rangers presentation and listening to questions from the enthusiastic audience. They all had some good inquiries and I even learned a thing or two that I didn't know about these intriguing mammals. After a very entertaining program, we enjoyed the flights of the cave swallows that live juts inside the entrance, their aerial ballet taking advantage of what daylight was left to partake of food for themselves and whatever chicks they had in their nests. We sat patiently listening to the Rangers presentation and listening to questions from the enthusiastic audience. They all had some good inquiries and I even learned a thing or two that I didn't know about these intriguing mammals.

Eventually, though, we heard the first clicks and squeaks from the bats and shortly thereafter, more and more bats exited the cave and circled the immediate area outside the entrance until they had gained enough altitude to join their compadres in heading southeast for a night of consuming various insect delicacies. We watched this awesome display

until most of the visitors had left, upon which we hiked back to our cabin to enjoy the brilliant stars visible in the Chihuahuan desert sky, talked and reminisced, and then headed for our luxurious bunk beds to rest up before heading into the cave early Saturday morning to get our first taste of resto work.

I was awake very early Saturday morning, still being on Dallas time, and got up to make some coffee and enjoy the serene desert landscape and to watch the sun slowly rise in the east to the left. Karen and Alex joined me about an hour and a half later and we enjoyed breakfast on the stone stoop of our cabin and enjoying the cool mountain air before heading into the cool confines of the cave.

We loaded up our gear after breakfast, filled out the always present waiver forms whenever one works at a state or national park, and headed towards the main building. Karen let us all in and we descended the 750 feet from the main building into the cave, via elevator. I was looking forward into getting into the cave to work, but not the long hike from the natural entrance back to the Mirror Lake area of the Big Room where we would be working. It is almost .75 miles from the elevator to Mirror Lake, not to mention having to haul all of the equipment we had with us.

This by far was the COOLEST part of the trip. I originally thought that we would be turning on the lights to get to our destination but, no, we used our own headlights to illuminate our travels. Having seen the cave several times fully illuminated, I was truly awestruck in how feeble our new headlights were in lighting our way. In the ancient dark we traveled and I was sincerely aware of how Jim White and some of the other early explorers of the cave must have felt and the sense of excitement. We traveled for over a half hour in this fashion, pausing occasionally to rubberneck or to listen as Karen pointed out some feature or landmark that we had overlooked in prior trips or took on a strange new appearance in the near total darkness.

After arriving at Mirror Lake, Karen showed us the areas that she had cleaned and wanted to work on this weekend. Karen had accomplished a lot, but told us that she had been working this area, on and off, a couple of weekends a month for almost two years. The park has benefited immensely from the tireless efforts of Karen and other volunteers like her that work behind the scenes to help maintain and improve the condition of the cave.

We would be working on removing old trail



### **The formations we were working on, near Mirror Lake.**

debris that had been put down by the CCC using material found in the cave, but had covered some very intricate flowstone patterns around mirror lake. We first used little brushes, dental picks, tweezers, and small spray bottles of water that we collected from Mirror lake to clean debris, mainly gypsum, from the formations. About a half hour into our work, the main lights were turned on and, about a half hour after that, the first visitors of the day came strolling by and so began a steady stream on inquiries all day as to what were we doing, why were we doing it, who had done this, why do it, how much do we get paid (Ha!), etc. We didn't mind answering their questions, as some of these folks asking the question may end up being future cavers and fellow volunteers!

About an hour and a half after we had started, we had to make a bathroom trip back to near the elevator. Karen, being excited about the extra help she had, but dismayed by the slow progress, suggested that Alex go back to the surface and go the Cave Services Office to see if we could procure a large pump up sprayer to help dislodge debris and to clean the formations much faster. We traveled against the flow of traffic back to the cafeteria area and, after visiting the Lil' Boys Room, I venture back to Mirror Lake while Alex went to the surface to retrieve said sprayer.

Alex returned with a LARGE five gallon pump up sprayer that you could carry on your back and that had a handheld nozzle. After carefully filling it up with water that we gently scooped from Mirror lake, we pumped it up and gave it a try. It worked extremely well and we were able to clean a

vast area of rimstone around Mirror Lake and beyond. After working for another couple of hours and several refills of the sprayer, we were pleased with our progress and broke for lunch.

After partaking of the microwaveable cuisine in the cafeteria and enjoying lunch so far underground, we picked up where we had left off. Alex and Karen were content to do the "picking and grinning" with their dental implements while I lugged the sprayer around and kept it pumped while they sprayed and removed debris. While they worked, I answered the lions share of question from visitors passing by and kept the sprayer pumped and filled. This system worked very well for us and Karen was downright giddy as to the progress we had made in just one day!

Satisfied with our efforts. We stopped for the day around 5 and headed to the surface to clean up and head into beautiful downtown Carlsbad to partake of authentic New Mexican cuisine at the new Chili's! Upon our arrival back from town, we decided to grab our lawn chairs and set ourselves down to observe the bat flight from the black top road that meandered in front of our cabin and above the entrance to the cave.

After observing storm clouds in the distance and failing to see any bats emerging from the cave and from our vantage point, we initially thought that the bats had failed to emerge on this evening. Since we hadn't observed the steady stream of bats flying to the southeast, we hypothesized that maybe the bats could sense the bad weather in the area and decided to hole up for the night. After we again viewed them Sunday night, after Karen had departed for her home in Andrews, Alex and I noticed how the bats on this evening seemed to be flying out in a random and widely dispersed pattern, unlike the steady flock we first observed. This would explain why we thought we hadn't seen the mass exodus the previous evening, but UI get ahead of myself.

Sunday morning dawned clear and cool, but with ominous clouds forming to the south, towards Guadalupe Mountain National Park. After another pleasant breakfast on the stoop, we essentially repeated our previous days sojourn into the blackness of the cave before opening time, all the while enjoying the dark solitude any mystery experienced by the early explorers of this cave.

We once again made excellent progress in the area immediately to the left of Mirror Lake and knocked off for the day at around 11:30. We gathered up our materials and after the trek back to the



**Sitting Bull Falls.**  
**Alex in foreground to the left.**

cafeteria, we enjoyed one more lunch deep in the depths before heading to the surface.

Upon our return to the cabin, we showered and Alex and I prepared to visit the surrounding area of the park, including Sitting Bull Falls. During this time, Karen completed her report for the Park and packed up her belongings. We helped Karen load up and thanked her profusely for inviting us along and allowing us to assist the NPS and to enjoy this wonderful cave.

She headed east about 2 PM and Alex and I dropped off the sprayer and other gear at the Cave Services Office and headed out to explore Lincoln National Park and to see what the area had to offer.

We traveled north and then west, following the signs and enjoying the stark beauty of the high desert on our way to Sitting Bull Falls. As we travelled, we kept a wary eye on the storm clouds that were starting to form to the north of us, wondering if we would be caught in them.

We finally arrived at the falls and were greeted by a beautiful box canyon and a virtual oas-

sis, thanks to the vegetation that grown up along the stream that flowed from the falls. We visited with some Park Rangers there, securing a phone number to call for permits to visit caves in the immediate area and took many pictures and enjoyed the view.

While wondering around the top of the falls and enjoying the view and the cool pools to soak our heads, we couldn't help but notice the storms we observed north of us rapidly approaching. I commented to Alex how I hated to leave, but now may be a good time, as I didn't want to get stranded between low water crossings. Besides, the Rangers were coming up the hill to chase everyone off, as high points and lightning usually don't mix.

We made a beeline to the truck and headed back to Carlsbad. On the way, we took advantage of many "Kodak moment" views of the storm and just stopped to observe the "coolness" factor of a storm moving across the desert and dropping its gift on a parched and appreciative landscape.

After driving through much rain, we made it into Carlsbad for pizza and it was back to the cabin for more bat watching and to enjoy a cold Shiner on the stoop. We were treated to an awesome lightning display from east to west, looking south. We later found out that this was the same system that flooded out many areas of Dallas back home.



**The Grotto in McKittrick Canyon.**

The next day found us loading up and cleaning up the cabin before heading to Guadalupe Mountain National Park. We hiked back to the "Grotto" on the McKittrick Canyon trail and marveled at the rugged beauty of this area before heading back to Dallas.

What a great weekend and memorable Fathers Day!

# Cobb Cavern Confusion, April 21st, 2007

Participants: Travis Scott, Anna Beach, Jeannette Joost, Bill Larson, Tone Garot, Sandi Calhoun, Devra Heyer,, Shannon Summers (top blue), Wes Schumacher (in orange), Allan Cobb, Jean Crejka, Mark Alman, Chris Crejka, Peter Sprouse.

Written by: Mark Alman

Photos (pages 16—22) by Travis Scott

Photos on page 23 by Dr. Jean Krejca

It was dark and foggy early that Saturday in

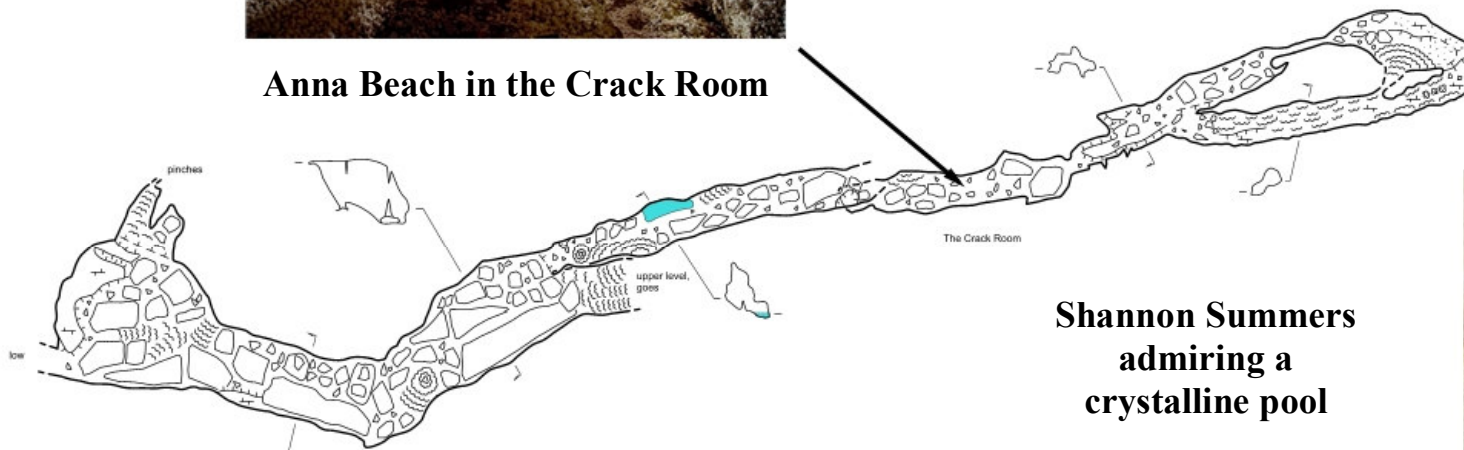
April morn.

It was the same way outside, as I stepped out the door and made my way to the truck. My mind was rather fuzzy and the lack of sleep was a definite concern, having spent the last few hours of the day before waiting for my daughter to arrive home from a movie she left the house at 7 PM earlier. A ride home from friends, a "missed/full" movie and having to watch a later show, cell phone being unreachable when it should have been on and



Anna Beach in the Crack Room

Anna in a small side alcove



Shannon Summers admiring a crystalline pool

**Cobb Cavern**  
**Williamson County, Texas**



in the possession of my daughter on her way home. 10 PM became 10:30, and then 11:30.

Ah, the joys of having teenagers, especially the variety who are 14 going on 21! Maybe I'll write an article for the TC someday about THAT!

After a serious tongue lashing and the accompanying grounding, I finally drifted off to sleep well past midnight, dreading the drone of the alarm clock far too soon as the day dawned.

I had been looking forward to this trip for quite some time, first having heard about it from Peter. I had read/heard quite a bit about this cave

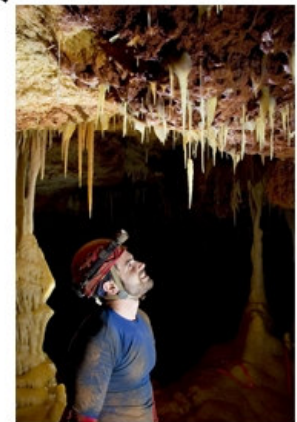
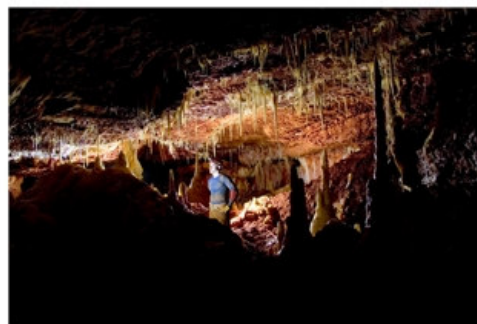
and, due to its limited visitation and infrequent availability, I jumped at the chance to visit the cave. Descriptions of the cave include "formerly a commercial cave", "beautiful formations", "long passageways and impossible to get lost", and, the most misleading "virtually all walking".

The latter two proved to be the most questionable, especially the latter comment, which left out one descriptive tidbit I would add later: "Virtually all walking, except for the LOW muddy squeezes connecting these areas"!

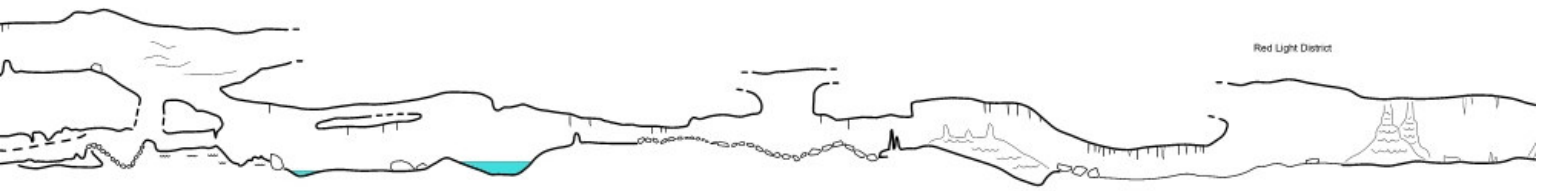
But, I digress.



**Allan Cobb in the Red Light District**



**Shannon Summers near the Red Light District**

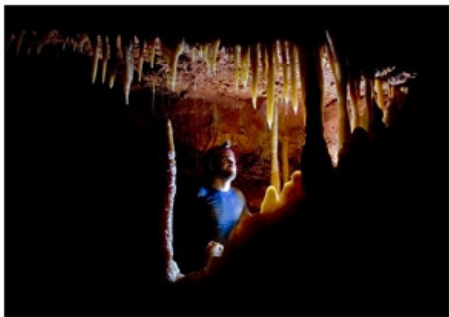
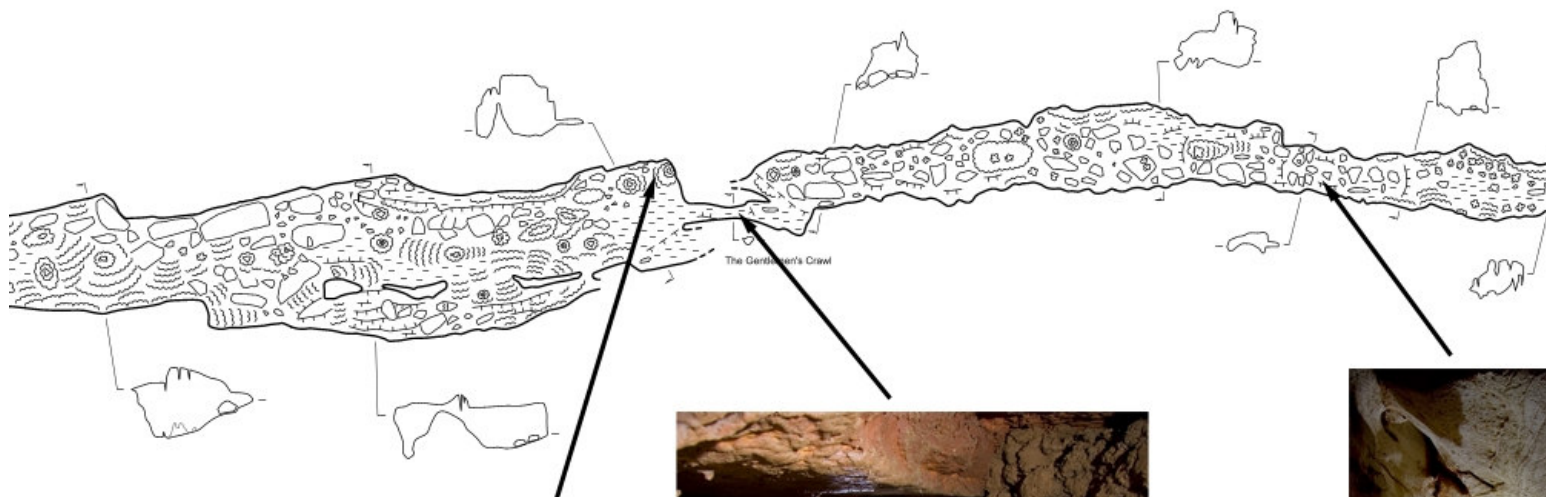


Having made it to the truck with a large cup of non-Starbucks coffee in hand, I left the house heading towards Austin and listening to the lilting voice of Art Bell and the strange and eclectic discussions of his regular listeners to his "Coast to Coast" show on glorious AM radio. Ah, who could possibly get tired to listening to the adventure and misadventures of encounters and theories of alien abductions, Bigfoot and UFO sightings, out of body experiences, previous lives, and government conspiracies. My favorite terrestrial-based radio junk food! Art has rode shotgun with me on many a

cavin' trip, mostly to CBSP and youth caving trips in Austin.

It was an uneventful trip, other than stopping in Venus, TX (site of the strangely appropriate Star Trek replica and waving aliens along I-35) for sustenance and more caffeine! My body being sated by its USDA daily allowance of cholesterol and trans fat, I made my way through the early fog to the Walmart in Georgetown to meet up with my other caving compadres.

Surprisingly, for a change, I was the first one to arrive and heeding my increasingly painful



**Shannon Summers near the Gentleman's Crawl**



**Anna Beach making the Gentleman's Crawl look easy**



**Anna in a rare section of white lime**



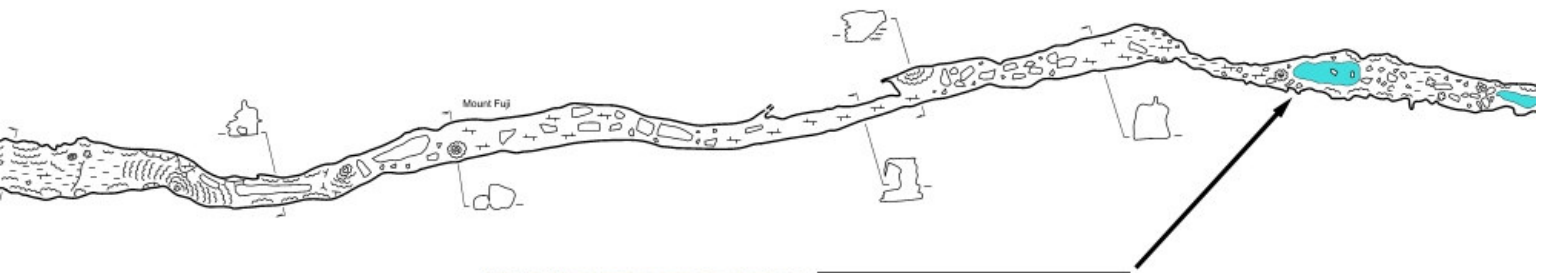
bladder, I made my way into the Walmart and back out to the truck to read the paper while waiting.

Allan Cobb, Peter Sprouse, Travis Scott, the Krejca sisters, and the rest of the gang finally arrived and after a good bit of breeze shooting, we followed Peter out to the ranch.

We all caravanned a considerable ways west of Georgetown and pulled into a non-descript ranch road, where we were met by the ranch manager. We followed him back a good ways until we came across a pretty dilapidated building that, at one time, served as the main building for the cave

when it was a commercial operation.

A little history from *The Handbook of Texas Online*, "COBB CAVERNS. Cobb Caverns is on the Cobb Ranch halfway between Florence and Georgetown in northwestern Williamson County. Although the cave had been known for several decades, it was not opened to the public until June 1962. A commercial trail follows a high-ceilinged, linear passage for 1,000 feet, past flow-stone-coated walls, "totem poles," and boxwork. An additional 1,000 feet of passage is not open to tourists. Indian artifacts have been found in old



the area  
stone



**Cruizin' through the cave towards the pretties**



campgrounds at nearby Cobbs Springs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: James R. Reddell and Richard Finch, "The Caves of Williamson County," Texas Speleological Survey 2.1 (October 1963)."

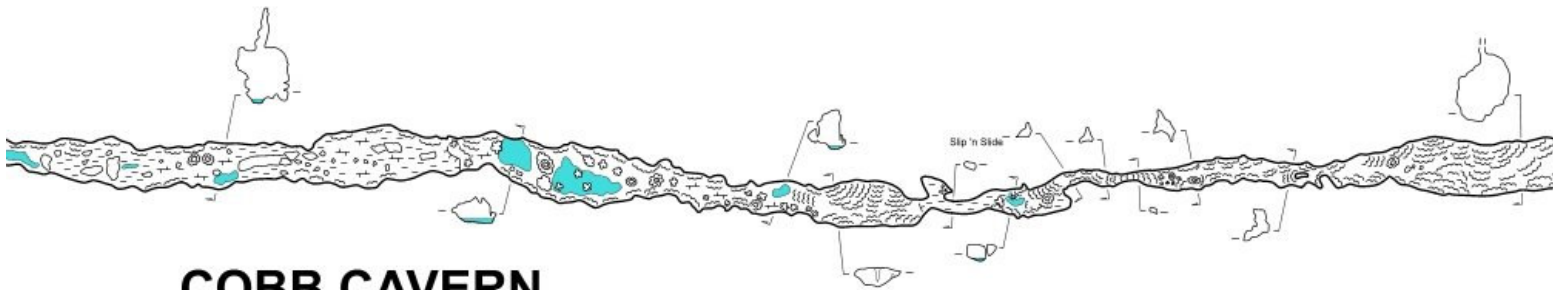
We all disembarked and proceeded to don our caving garb. After the obligatory "before" photo was shot, we decided who would be on which team. We would all initially be going down the undeveloped portion of the cave for varying tasks, which is to the left of the entrance symbol on the map on page 21.

Travis Scott, Anna Beach, Shannon Sum-

mers, and Allan Cobb were part of the photography team and wanted to capture images for the trip and I was glad they did. Travis' and Allan's eye for content, mood, and lighting is unrivaled, IMHO, and in regard to this trip report and issue, I'm very happy with their results and hope you are too.

Jeannette Joost, Bill Larson and Tone Garot split off to head off towards a promising lead and to see if they could push it any further. I never heard if they did or not, though.

A couple of ladies from the UTG, Sandi Calhoun, Devra Heyer, and Jean Crejka and Chris

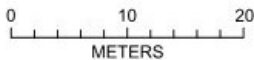


## COBB CAVERN WILLIAMSON COUNTY, TEXAS

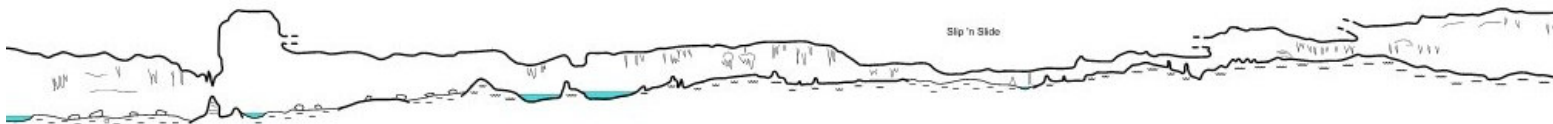
SUUNTOS AND TAPE SURVEY  
SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 1996

CHRISTINA CHENG	LIBBY MOJICA
ALLAN COBB	CHRISTIE ROGERS
MICHAEL CRAWFORD	CHARLEY SAVVAS
CARMELITE DUHON	RACHEL SAVVAS
SHANE GALLOWAY	VICKY SCHILLER
SUSIE LASKO	ANN SCOTT
ALYSSA LOWE	PETER SPROUSE
PATRICK LYNOTT	KEVIN STAFFORD
JAKE MCCLURE	CHAD VALADEZ
JON MCCLURE	GEORGE VENI

LENGTH: 1334 METERS DEPTH: 16 METERS  
DRAWN BY PETER SPROUSE



**A Pre-mud pic of the group**



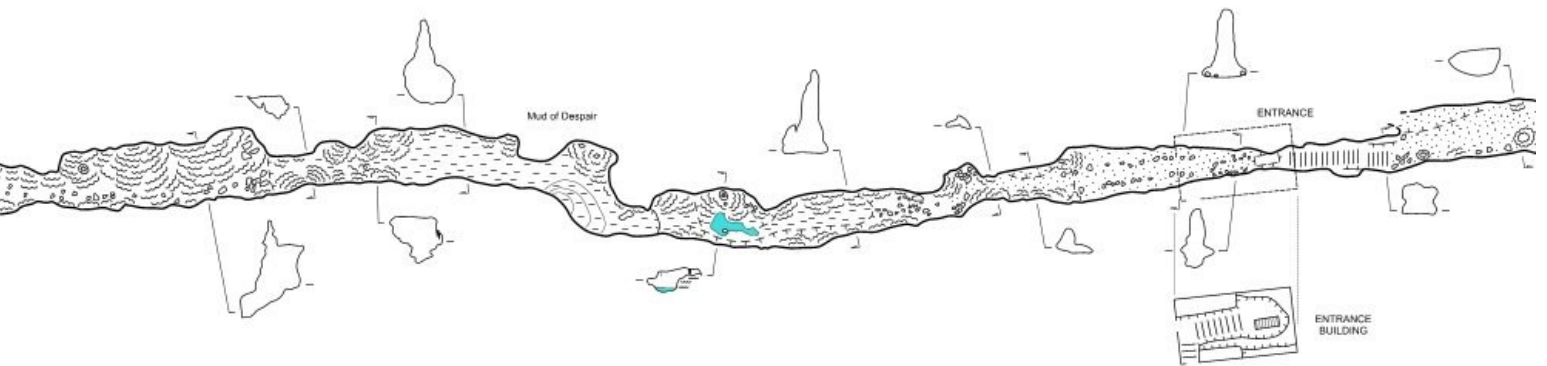
Crejka split off to photograph, document, and, hopefully, collect some samples of various creepy crawlies they anticipated seeing in the cave.

That left Wes Schumacher, Peter Sprouse, and myself to head to the very back to complete some survey work and to finish some sketching that Peter wanted added to the map. I was mainly along to see the cave, rubberneck, and to not get in their way or slow them down.

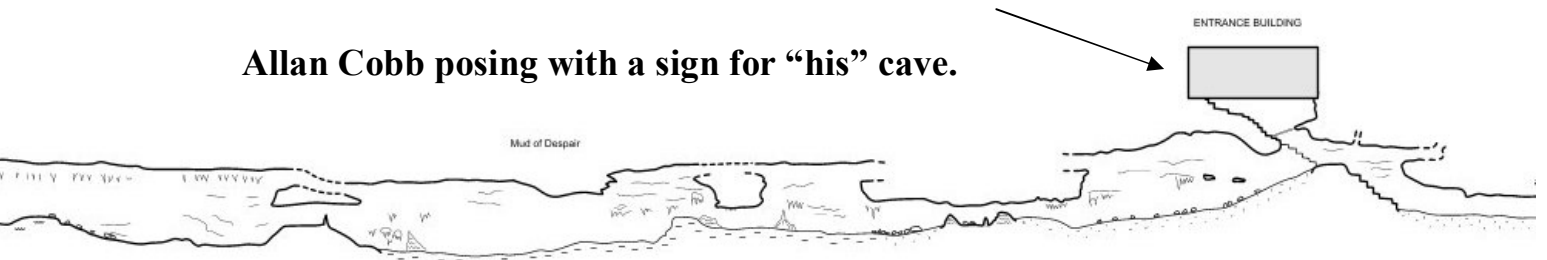
The latter, I'm afraid, I might have succeeded in doing, despite the fact that Peter is a few years older than me (Wes is MUCH younger than

me!), but Peter is in MUCH better shape! Too many Shiners and chicken fried steaks over the years were to be my undoing this day.

We all formed a single line and followed Peter into the darkness. It was easy going, at first, as we passed through mud and water and areas full of very exquisite formations and other pretties. We continued to traverse portions of the cave with such exotic names as "Mud of Despair" and "Slip and Slide", the latter being a very low and narrow crawl that, thankfully, had a sheet of Tyvek down on the floor that greatly aided passing from one "walking



Allan Cobb posing with a sign for "his" cave.



area” to another. I almost felt like a penguin, sliding on its belly, yet being careful not to bash its head on the ceiling.

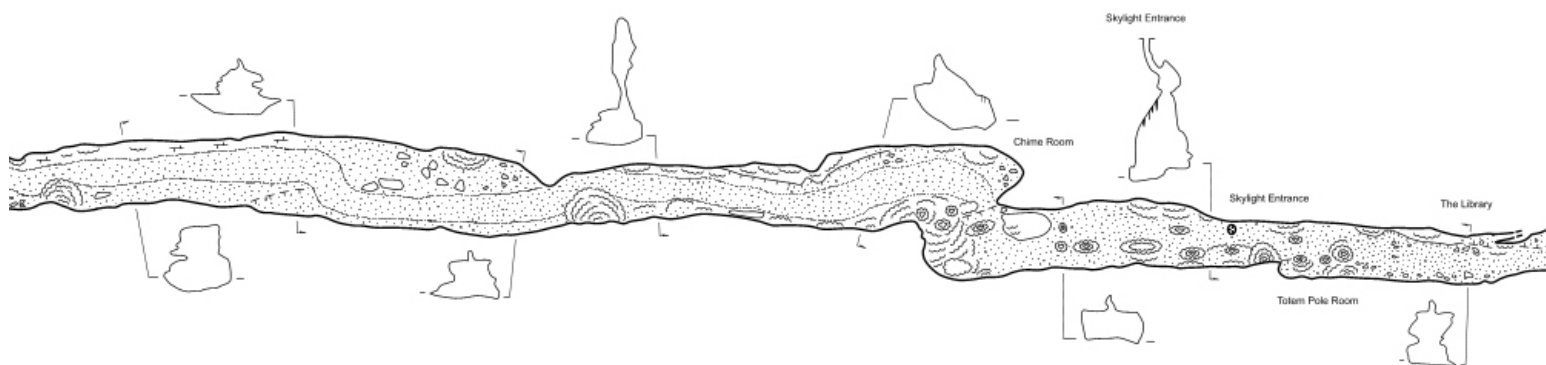
Huffing and puffing to keep up with Peter and Wes, we stopped several times in our travels to admire the formations and the reddish color which seemed to permeate this cave. We encountered quite a bit of water along the way, but tried to do our best to tiptoe around it in order to not stir it up for aesthetic and scientific reasons.

The room in this area was quite spacious and I was quickly seeing why this limited access

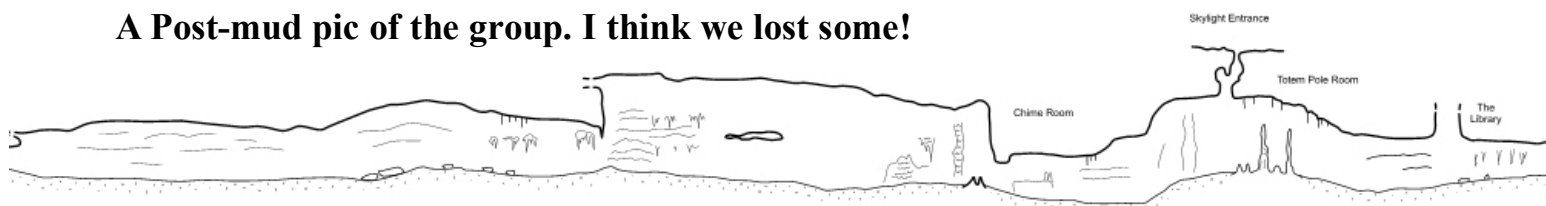
cave was so protected and safeguarded. Admiring the pretties, we made it under a low duck under and entered the Mount Fuji room.

True to its namesake, the center of the room was dominated by a mountain shaped formation with almost a snow capped appearance in flowstone. This was the most beautiful and impressive area of the cave and was my favorite. Little did I know that this impressive area was a precursor to the most miserable, namely, “The Gentleman’s Crawl”! All 10 meters of claustrophobic torture.

This was an extremely low and, seemingly,



**A Post-mud pic of the group. I think we lost some!**



endless squeeze and I had to scrunch myself to get into the opening, remove my helmet, lower my head, and press forward using my padless elbows to pull me forward while striving to avoid opening my bald head on the ceiling. What fun!! Not.

I did manage to get through, untraumatized and unstuck! Our trio continued onward thru the cave and into The Red Light District room which lived up to its name. We carefully moved around more water, as the cave seemed to start getting increasingly smaller. My gut was beginning to speak and to tell me, "Mark, I think your body has about

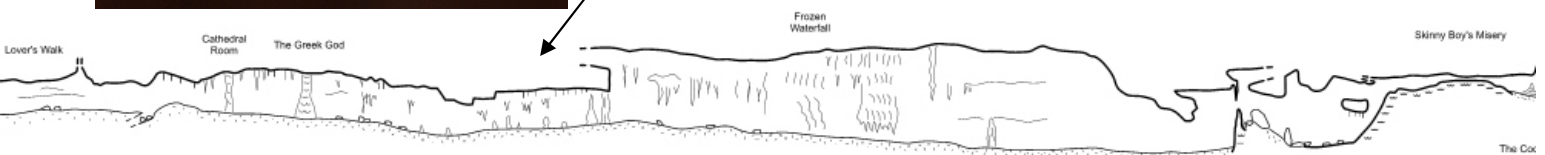
had it and it may be time to turn around."

Hating to abandon Wes and Peter (like they need my help!?), I have learned to listen to my gut and told them I felt like I needed to head back to the surface. So, shortly before The Crack Room, I bid them adios and let them continue onwards.

I started back and, decided to stop for a short bit and take a rest. This was in the area of the cave shown on the map on Page 16 where there is a "high road" and a "low road". Thinking the low road was the way I needed to go, I went a short



**Jean, Chris and others searched extensively for  
Texella harvestmen, but found none.  
Blind Cicurina were found**



ways and found a nice area to rest and get a drink. Inexplicably, I must have fell asleep and the rest of the crew passed me up using the “high road” route, as everyone managed to go around/ahead of me without me ever hearing them! That, or they just left me for dead, took my gear, and moved on!

Anyway, I drank some more water and leisurely headed towards the exit. Finding the exit stairwell, I ventured to the surface, wondering where everyone else was. “Still underground having fun!”, I thought. I rested a short bit on the tailgate of my truck, ate a couple of snacks, drank a LOT more water, and watered a pathetic looking prickly pear before heading back in to check out

*(Continued on page 25)*

## An update:

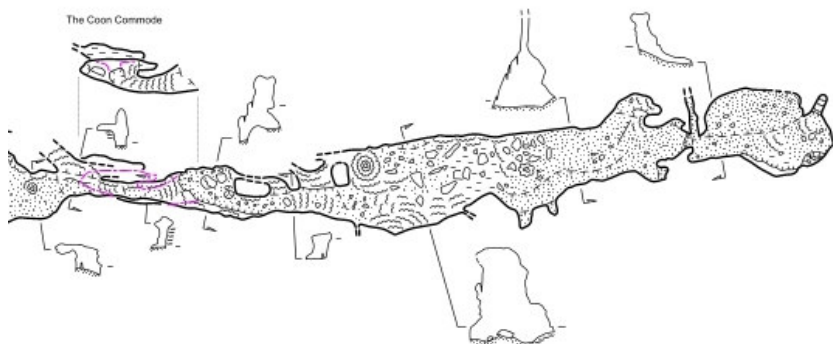
# Foundation Buys Cobb Cavern Preserve

The Williamson County Conservation Foundation (WILCO) has finalized the purchase of a 64-acre conservation easement for Cobb Cavern Preserve, located northeast of State Highway 195 and north of Georgetown. The foundation bought the property from the Lyda Family Trust. Cobb Cavern Preserve contains a valuable portion of Cobb Cave one of the longest caves in Texas and home to two endangered species. The property also includes a portion of the springshed for Cobb Springs, home to the Georgetown salamander.

The Williamson County Conservation Foundation received a \$725,000 federal grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in coordination with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 2005. The grant provided 75 percent of the cost to buy the property, with the remainder donated by the seller.

"This significant conservation acquisition allows the Foundation and Williamson County to take a positive step towards conserving key endangered species while balancing the needs of economic growth faced by the county as one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation," says Williamson County Precinct 1 Commissioner Lisa Birkman, president of the Williamson County Conservation Foundation.

In recent years, the foundation and Williamson County have coordinated on acquiring a number of preserves to in an effort to protect endangered invertebrate species, including: Sunless City, Wilco and Millennium preserves within the Southwest Regional Park, and Beck Preserve. In April, the foundation was recognized as a nominee for the "Best Real Estate Awards - Community Impact" award by the Austin Business Journal for the purchase of the Beck Preserve. The approximately 42-acre Beck Preserve is located on the southwest corner of RM 620 and Great Oaks Drive, and is home to the endangered invertebrate Bone Cave harvestman.



## A Post-mud shot of the Dirty, Bald, and Over-the-Hill Author.





Congratulations go out to Texas' and the TSA's own Vice President, **Jacqui Thomas**, who is the Merit Award winner in the Paint/Pastel Category at the 2007 NSS Convention for her painting *Devil's Sinkhole* (above), which was inspired by an excellent photo by our own Allan Cobb!

*(Continued from page 24)*

the old commercial end of the cave.

This area of the cave was indeed much larger and spacious and more conducive to a commercial operation. I enjoyed a pleasant walk through the cave, admiring formations and rooms such as The China Room and The Totem Pole Room. I passed by the Skylight Entrance, but never saw it. I imagine this was sealed up sometime in the past to restrict trespassers.

I traversed through the Library and Lovers' Walk until coming to The Cathedral Room and viewing the Greek God formation. Going past this and the Frozen Waterfall (it seems every commercial cave uses these names), I came to the end of the commercial area, even though the cave goes on for a bit more through Skinny Boy's Misery (that's a new one) and The Coon Commode (ditto) before ending.

This latter portion may be ideal for pushing, as it does appear to go further, if we can find

someone skinnier than me to push it! Especially now, given the fact that the Williamson County Conservation Foundation has since bought this cave, this may allow for easier access.

See opposite page for announcement.

We all exited the cave around 4 PM and took one more gratuitous photo, that being the ever-popular "after" shot. We all then discussed our plans for the evening, while trying to remove as much mud as possible. Approximately half us agreed to meet for supper at The Monument, a restaurant that is owned by the same family that own (or did own) Cobb Caverns.

After finding this fine dining establishment, we were met by Kate Walker, and us chronologically-challenged cavers gazed in awe at the energy and exuberance of the UT youth.

Texas caving needs more energy and youth like these folks and getting old sucks. But my chance to explore this great cave was anything but! It's an excellent cave and experience!

# Texas Cavers Reunion turns 30!

## Paradise Canyon Park on the Medina River

**October 19-21, 2007!**



Howdy Y'all,

The 30th Annual TCR will be on the weekend of October 19-21.

The magnificent site is located just outside of San Antonio below the Diversion Dam on the beautiful Medina River. The site has a half-mile of river front with many good camping areas. The swimming will be superb and there are even some small caves across the river.

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

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

For the latest information about TCR 2007, visit the website at [www.oztotl.com/tcr](http://www.oztotl.com/tcr).

Start making your plans to attend and wish the TCR a "Happy 30th birthday!" All cavers are invited to attend so don't be left out.

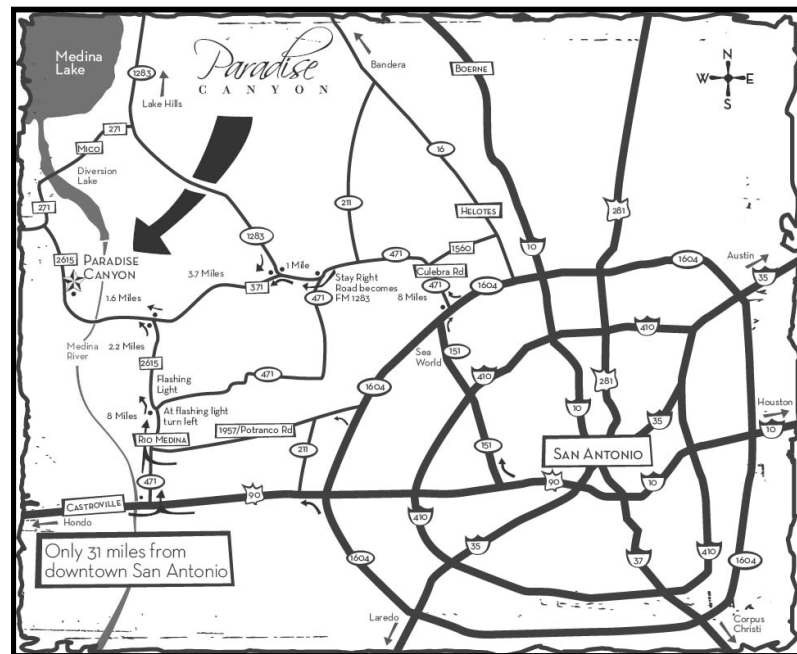
A few general rules and fine print:

- Please remember to bring your own reusable eating utensils to the Grand Feast and to come prepared to take your garbage home.
- Well behaved dogs, friends, and family members are welcome, in that order, those that may tend to be obnoxious should be left elsewhere.
- Port-a-Potties will be provided.
- **JOIN THE TSA!** - As a convenience to cavers and in support of the Texas Region of the NSS, the TSA will be collecting dues for the 2007 membership year. If you are not a TSA member, this is a

very good opportunity to join and to show your support for the organization that cares about cavers and caving in Texas. *The TEXAS CAVER*, and the many caving projects are obvious benefits provided to you and other cavers by the TSA. The TSA provides many other benefits that aren't so obvious--so please join and support the TSA.

- Vendors of caving equipment and publications will be set up.
- The TCR staff is not in the police business. That means everyone should police themselves and those in their clan. In other words.....you are responsible for the behavior of your children and your guests.
- Using Common Sense and Common Courtesy is the best policy.
- Remember, this is primarily a caver event. People who will contribute to the general craziness are encouraged to attend, those who will detract are discouraged.

See y'all there... Allan Cobb



Directions to Paradise Canyon Park: From Loop 1604 in San Antonio, take FM 471 (Culebra Rd.) west approximately 7.5 miles until the road forks with FM 471 going left and CR 1281 goes to the right. A sign will say "Medina Lake - 9 miles" on the right fork. Take the right fork toward Lake Medina. Approximately one mile on the left will be a sign "Paradise Canyon". Turn left. Turn right at the next fork (CR 2615) and follow that road until it crosses the Medina River. Paradise Canyon Park will be on the right one-half mile after the river (just past Paradise Farms).

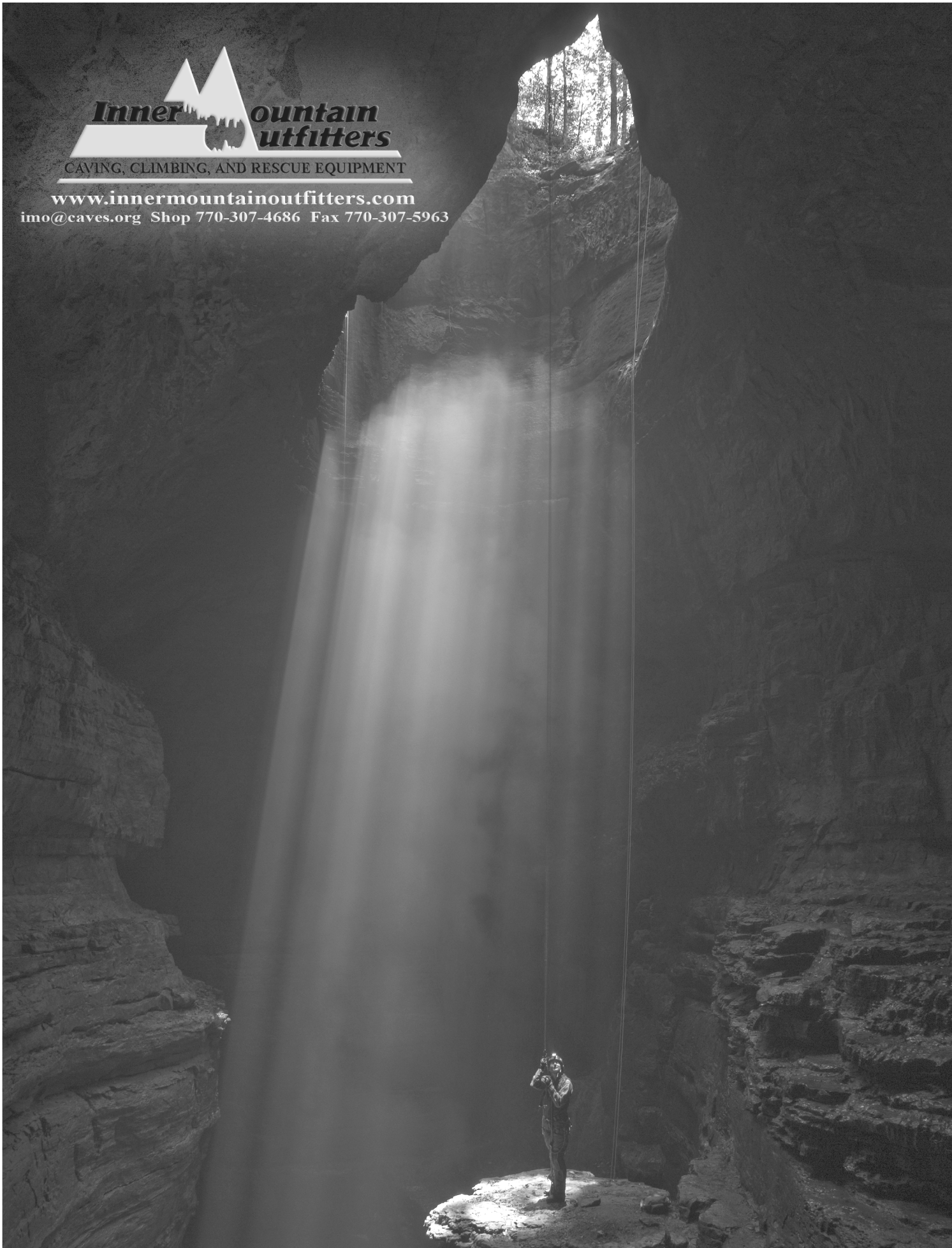
More info at [www.paradisecanyon.com](http://www.paradisecanyon.com)



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# The Carbide Corner

This edition of The Corner highlight some of the exploits of longtime caver, **Mark Minton**.

Mark has 38 years caving experience in most of the major cave regions of the United States and Mexico. He was also a participant in three paleontological expeditions (1992-4) to the caves of Madagascar, which visited that country's longest and deepest caves. He has been the leader and/or member of many expeditions to the deepest caves in the Western Hemisphere, including five caves over 1000 meters deep, two of which are among the 10 deepest caves in the world (Sistema Cheve, -1484 m and Sistema Huautla, -1475 m). He was on the bottoming trips to the first three of these known (Li Nita 1980, Nita Nanta 1983, and Ocotempa 1987), which alerted the world to the world-class potential of Mexican caves. In Texas, Mark led the exploration of Honey Creek Cave, longest in the state at 32 kilometers and almost entirely wet. He was also deeply involved with the Powell's Cave Project, the second longest cave at 23 kilometers, and with Sorcerer's Cave, Texas' deepest at 170 meters. He participated in several rescues from major caves in Mexico and New Mexico. Mark received several flag awards and exploration grants from the Explorers Club for his work in Mexico. He has had numerous articles published in various caving journals and the *Explorers Journal*. He was a technical consultant for the *National Geographic* feature on Huautla caves in Sept., 1995 and for the 2004 live web coverage of the Cheve Expedition. He continues to be active in original exploration in Mexico and West Virginia.

## Breaking and Entering the U. S.

Nancy Weaver and I had been camping in the proposed Sierra El Carmen National Park on the Mexican side of the border near Big Bend in August of 1996 and decided to cross back into Texas at the La Linda bridge. Unfortunately when we got there the Mexican customs agents informed us that the bridge had just been closed by the U. S. They showed us a letter to that effect. We couldn't believe it! I guess an unguarded U. S. point of entry was too good to last. We argued and pleaded, and they walked across the bridge with us and showed us the lock and chain. They had no key, they said. Nancy suggested cutting the chain



or disassembling the gate - not possible, they said. How about a ramp? "Me encanta!" one replied! Damn! The next nearest crossing was a hell of a long way away. It was evening so we camped down by the river with their graces.

Just as we were getting ready for dinner we saw a vehicle with a search light coming toward us. It was a truck full of heavily armed Mexican police! They said there were some bad men loose in the area and it was no longer safe for us to camp there. We asked what we should do and they said they had changed their minds, and to follow them with our headlights off. What the heck? We weren't sure what to think as we drove back toward the bridge in the dark. At the customs station they told us to follow an old man who walked toward the gate armed with a rag and a single wrench that happened to be the proper size. As he began to undo the bolts holding the gate we noticed immediately that the previously rusty threads were now well oiled. They had already tested this idea! Just as he got the gate loose we saw headlights coming from the U. S. side, so we quickly pushed the gate back into place and retreated to the Mexican side. An official vehicle came to the gate and scanned it with a spotlight. Convinced that all was secure he

turned and left. Whew! We then quickly took down the gate and drove through. We hastily helped to reassemble the gate and then drove off down the road.

We weren't quite home free, however.

After a while we saw headlights approaching again. A car pulled off and a man got out and waved his arms at us. We did not stop, but began concocting a story of how we came to be on that road from nowhere. We wanted a consistent story we could tell even if questioned separately. Who, us, paranoid? :-). We couldn't claim to have come from the Heath Canyon guest ranch because that would be too easily verified, so we decided to say we had earlier pulled off into the bushes to camp after finding the bridge closed but then decided against it and were headed for the Gage Hotel in Marathon. Fortunately the car never came after us, but we were still concerned that the immigration check point on US 385 might be alerted to detain us. However when we got there it was closed. Safe! We had successfully broken and entered into the United States! We proceeded to Chuck Cluck and Susan Penney's place in Alpine for the night and told our wild story over a bottle of wine. That was probably my most exciting border crossing ever!

### TSA Notes:

Congratulations go out to Texas' and the TSA's own Vice President, **Jacqui Thomas**, who is the Merit Award winner in the Paint/Pastel Category at the 2007 NSS Convention for her painting *Devil's Sinkhole* (above), which was inspired by an excellent photo by our own Allan Cobb!

Great job and it's nice to see the NSS recognize that we have some great artists in the Lone Star State, as well as great cavers.

Also, we are sad to report that our longtime Treasurer, **Michael Cicherski**, is stepping down, due to a promotion and move to Corpus Christi. While we are happy for his promotion, we are sad to see Michael step down and appreciate all he has done for the TSA and getting the financial house in order.

That house will be kept in great shape by his capable and well-trained replacement, **Darla Bishop**.

Thanks for stepping up to the plate, Darla, and we all look forward to working with you. Good luck, Michael and Darla!

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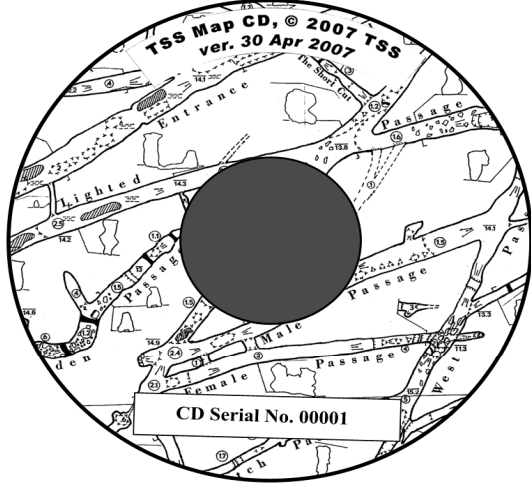


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# TSA Convention Report

# Cartography Salon Winners



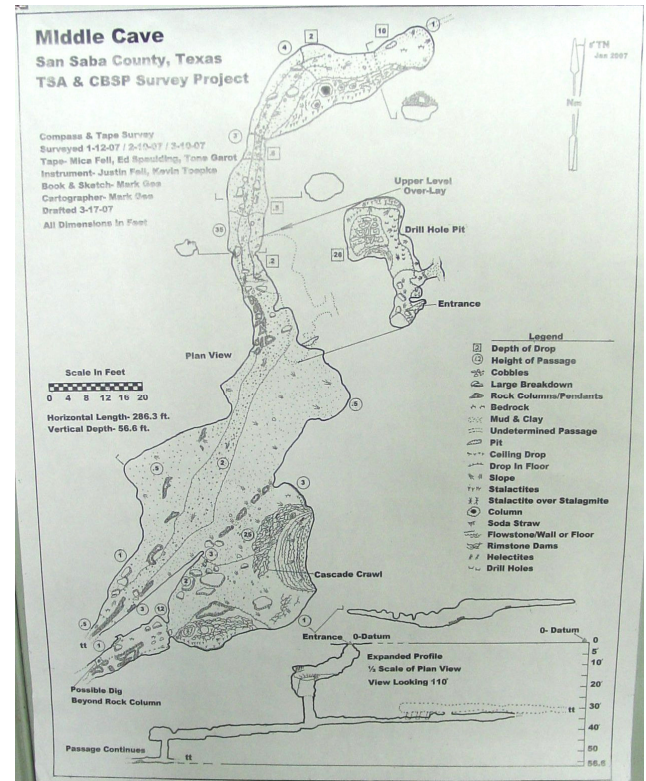
An unusual looking bull observed on the way to Convention.



Don Arburn, a.k.a. "Banner Guy" with his wide assortment of goods, of which the proceeds were all donated to the TSA!



A sampling of some of the items donated for the TSA Auction.



- 1st place - Middle Cave, by **Mark Gee** (above)
- 2nd place - Hissing Bat Cave, Mark Gee
- 3rd place - Canyon View Cave, Marvin Miller

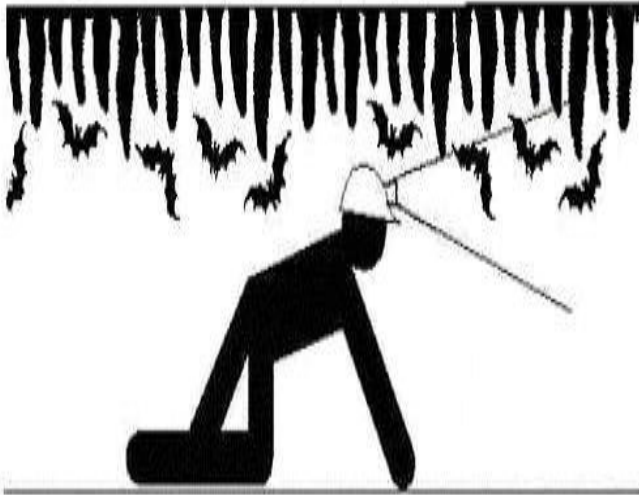
## Photography Salon

- Prints:
- 1st place and 2nd place— **Joe Ranzau**



**Digital:** 1st place - "Asking Permission to Enter," by **Allan Cobb**. Above

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## Mark Your Calendars!

The Combine  
**2009 National Speleological Society Convention**  
and  
**15th International Congress of Speleology**  
is in  
Kerrville, TX  
from July 19-26, 2009.

The Advertising Committee is looking for folks/businesses who would like to advertise in the ICS publications that the visitors will receive. Ads could be for a business or from a grotto or individual who would like to welcome the visitors.

We are also looking for corporate sponsors, so if you or someone you know would like to be an ICS Corporate Sponsor, please contact Matt Bowers, who just joined the ICS committee for fundraising via email: [matt66@ThirdMedia.com](mailto:matt66@ThirdMedia.com).

For all the information currently available on the 2009 International Congress of Speleology, please see the website: [www.ics2009.us](http://www.ics2009.us).

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Cat Kennedy: [ckennedy@batcon.org](mailto:ckennedy@batcon.org).

Thanks,

Julia  
Advertising Committee  
International Congress of Speleology  
[germanyj@aol.com](mailto:germanyj@aol.com)

**Check Out the NSS Website**

National Speleological Society: <http://www.caves.org>

Don't forget, the 2007 NSS Convention is in  
Marengo, IN from July 23-July 27.

