



The TEXAS CAVES - 1st Quarter 2010

The TEXAS CAVER

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Front Cover— A rather frozen Gorman Falls. Project weekend and TSA Winter Business Meeting at Colorado Bend State Park, Sunday, January 10th. Photo by Andy Zenker.

Back Inside Cover — A montage of photos of Gorman Falls. Top and lower left by Allan Cobb. Lower right by Andy Zenker.

Back Cover — The view from Gerardo's property near Laguna de Sanchez. Photo by Dale Barnard. Trip report on page 2.

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The Texas Speleological Association is a not-for-profit organization that supports cave exploration and studies in and around the state of Texas. It is comprised of both independent members and local grottos.

The TSA is an internal organization of the National Speleological Society and represents the greater caving community in Texas. The organization holds business meetings 3 times a year, organizes an annual convention for Texas cavers, and sponsors caving projects and events throughout the state.

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The TEXAS CAVER

Written by Texas Cavers FOR Texas Cavers

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Raising The Bar

Submitted by Anthony J. Garot

Edited by C. Brian Smith

Photos by Dale Barnard and Tone Garot

Protagonists:

Don Arburn	Dale Barnard
Jen Foote	Tone Garot
Erick Gonzalez Montell	Ben Hutchins
Carrie Hutchins	Goni Iskali
Ramona Josefczyk	Jim "Crash" Kennedy
Roger Moore	Kathleen O'Connor
Ashland Rutherford	Barbara Rutherford
Drew Rutherford	Kevin Rutherford
Ron Rutherford	Ann Scott
Jane Slater	Ben Tobin
Matt Turner	Steve Yochum
Carol Zokaites	Joe Zokaites

Introduction

I have entitled this trip report "Raising the Bar" because never before have I been on a caving expedition quite like this one. The number of participants superseded any previous trip's count; and the launch of a

new website devoted specifically to this project helped to organize and disseminate information in a way non-pareil to any other trip I have attended.

This particular trip to Laguna de Sanchez was quite possibly the most fun caving adventure that I've experienced. We started with 12 people and then upped it to 24, making this trip the largest Jim "Crash" Kennedy has thus far arranged to this area. The camaraderie was palpable. We had a huge campfire every night, and the local wine—vino manzana—flowed freely. I personally got to dig two days in a row (and digging is perhaps my favorite aspect of caving), and I bolted and dropped into an amazing, albeit noisome, room. In two words: bad air. According to Jim, the group found eight new caves and mapped 16. The meals were huge and delicious. Thanksgiving dinner with the landowner and his family brought the count to a whopping 36. We had fun trying to speak to them in Spanish since English was not an option for them. We also had a movie night, a slide show, and even an '80s dance party—all in the middle of Nowhere, Mexico. Despite sometimes inclement weather conditions, I had the time of my life.

There were two other Mexico trips over this same Thanksgiving break, either of which I would have liked to attend. Although I cannot guess how much fun those other trips were, I believe that I made the right

Photo by Tone.



choice choosing this trip.

2009 Nov 19 Thursday

A lot of the fun of a trip with Jim Kennedy is the pre- and post- trip activities. Although our plan was to leave Saturday morning, I drove the six hours from Sanderson, TX to Austin, TX two days early. Doing so gave me time to meet my boss and a colleague for lunch at 2:30 p.m. Knowing that there was a small get-together later that evening, I ate a light lunch. Then I headed to La Casa de Kennedy for cooked aoudad, killed and cleaned in a previous adventure with Jim. Vico cooked it; I ate it; life was good.

2009 Nov 20 Friday

The day started with the pre-trip errand of buying bulk groceries. Carol Zokaites, a Virginia caver, was like a kid in a candy store, enjoying the contemplation of meals by quantity and size. I picked up Ramona Josefczyk from the airport, holding up the requisite "Princess Caver" sign so she would know her driver. Steve Yochum arrived by car from Fort Collins, Colorado. Later that evening, Jane Slater arrived from Cincinnati, Ohio. La Casa de Kennedy was becoming full.



Dr. Ann Scott taking photo of Mexican flag in a surprisingly clean truck window. Photo by Tone.

around 6 or 6:30 a.m. Matt arrived soon after to load up his black 2WD truck with gear. Our two vehicles, loaded with gear and people, soon departed; we were on the road by about 7:30 a.m. Matt took the Virginians—Joe and Carol Zochaites—and Steve Yochumn. Jim's Tahoe, named Yeti, took Jim, me, Ramona, and Jane. Don Arburn, Anne Scott, Kathleen O' Connor, and Roger Moore drove in Moby—Don Arburn's white truck. If you have never seen Don's truck, it is large. Don's truck can hold five people comfortably, including gear. Don's truck is so large that there are smaller trucks orbiting it in geosynchronous orbit. Yes, Don has a big truck. Team Moby left a little earlier than our group from San Antonio.

En route, a rope holding the tarp on Matt's truck snapped causing some gear to come off. Everything was reclaimed except the toilet paper and a shovel. Apparently, the toilet paper exploded on the road, possibly causing a white-out!

Crossing the border, all vehicles met at the Módulo CIITEV to get our visas, car permits, and to exchange money. We met Team Moby (Don's group) there, said our hellos to them, took obligatory pictures of the Mexican flag, and handled our paperwork. This ritual is the same basic one everyone goes through when visiting Mexico. Fortune smiled upon me in the form of quick lines, but Matt apparently caught a slow line when getting his vehicle permit. Overall, the timing was not too bad.

The three vehicles tried to caravan from then on. The first order of business was lunch: seven chickens and multiple Cokes for 700 pesos. At first, the

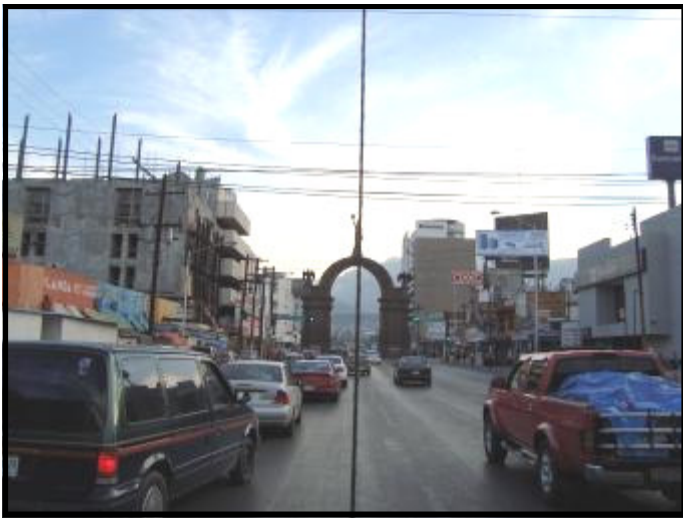


Ann Scott watching Don Arburn check a small cave. Photo by Dale

While Jim was in a meeting at Bat Conservation International, Ann Scott called to say she was coming to pick up Ramona to bring her to San Antonio. Huh? What? I must have missed that memo. Since Jim was out of reach, we decided to ship a bunch of the bulk food and my cave pack with Ann instead of Ramona. We got to keep her!

2009 Nov 21 Saturday - Departure

It was an early morning. People started getting up



**Driving through Monterrey is no treat.
Photo by Tone.**

price seemed a bit high, but \$54 USD for 12 people really wasn't too outrageous. That's \$4.52 per person for delicious chicken barbecued right in front of us.

On the road again, we eventually reached Monterrey, the capital city of Nuevo León and third largest city in the country. As this was Matt's first experience in Mexico, he was not used to aggressive Mexican driving; and Monterrey is known to be horrible even for the inhabitants. It was time for Matt to cut his teeth. Use of hand-held FRS radios helped keep us together.

We eventually arrived at the H.E.B. in Monterrey to meet Erick Gonzalez, who had picked up Jen Foote at the Monterrey airport. Erick owns a bar in town near "Filósofos Park" next to "Tecnológico de Monterrey Campus Monterrey." The plan: he would be joining us the next day; he would pick up Jen from the airport, then head over. Unfortunately, issues at work prevented this arrangement. Through cell phone coordination, we were able to meet Erick and Jen at H.E.B. to pick her up there rather than the more inconvenient airport. While people were stretching their legs and saying their hellos, I procured three bottles of tequila inside H.E.B.

It was dark before we hit the limestone cliff walls at the pass. We stopped for a few minutes to look around, but, alas, we didn't see much. Arriving at Laguna de Sanchez, we stopped to pick up vino manzana and a few necessary perishables for the trip.

As luck would have it, a wrong turn took us through a quick jaunt into the lagoon orchards . . . which we usually do in daylight! After a bit of creative driving, we finally made it to camp.

When we got to camp, we noticed a lot of "firewood" had been cut and was sitting around the old mud fire ring. My first order of business was to move the fire ring

out of the mud area. The "muddy fire pit" game was old hat. As it was getting cold, I finished up the new fire ring, quickly grabbed my tent, found a level spot, and then pitched it. I was tired, so I lay down for a bit. Do you know that I actually dozed off? Later Jim, Ramona, and Jane came by to find me. My mistake was getting up; I went to the fire, laughed, drank, and had a good old time chattering about nonsense. I paid for it the next morning.

The camp layout was different this trip because of the larger count of cavers. The kitchen was positioned under a screen tent. Two bathroom pits had been dug by the landowner, seemingly for a large party of people. This was somewhat amusing considering that Don had built a toilet box specifically for this trip. In the past, we simply ducked under the fence with a rock hammer, paper, and a promise. A few ill positioned tarps, providing a hint of privacy, completed the bathroom arrangement.

2009 Nov 22 Sunday

I woke up early and knew I was going to have a rough day. What is the saying? "For every ounce of pleasure, there is a pound of pain." Since no one else was yet awake, I put in my earplugs and decided to go back to sleep. My first realization of the morning was that I wasn't being inundated by jejenes! If you are unfamiliar with jejenes, they are nasty blood-thirsty creatures spawned from Hell. While the bite of the jejen is virtually unnoticeable, it spits a protein into its prey as it bites, the antibody of which causes red welts to appear on the skin. These inflammations are accompanied by a fierce itch that can last for several days; for this reason, I wear long-sleeved shirts while in Mexico. I later found out that the jejenes were around; it was just that the numbers were far fewer than the previous few trips. (I only received two bites the whole trip; poor Jane got over a dozen!)

It was a slow day overall; people headed out around 2 p.m. for a bit of caving and ridge walking. I stayed back at camp, nursed my hangover, and kept



Roger company. Roger had decided to remain behind to "keep an eye out" and acclimate to the altitude.

During these few hours of daylight, Matt, Crash, and Jane ridge walked and tagged caves. The tagging of caves was a new concept initiated this trip. Jim had procured blue, anodized aluminum tags that we nailed into trees nearby significant, or potentially significant, Karst features. The quantity of known caves and features was becoming too large to manage. GPS Waypoints taken at these features were averaged until the error was between 3 to 5 meters of accuracy

Folks started coming back shortly before dark. Ann and I made guacamole that was, if I say so myself, divine. Carol started cooking chicken and mole. People assembled around the camp fire to keep warm and discuss lofty topics. We typically had a huge bonfire each night, nearly wiping out a tree per night. Downed wood was plentiful in this area.

2009 Nov 23 Monday

On this day I led a group into Cueva Culo de Pollo, a cave found on the previous trip by Jim, Devra, and me. At that time, we knew the cave to have a large drop, the extent of which was unknown because we ran out of bolts. Team "Chicken Butt" consisted of me, Steve, Joe, and Jen. Jen began to feel ill after the initial entrance survey and did not continue past the keyhole. For rigging, we used a natural initial point; then Steve commenced to bolt a hanger directly above the pit. Unfortunately, the hammer drill battery was drained after only two inches of depth! Unfortunate indeed, now our day was nearly done.

Before leaving, however, our sketcher, Joe, tried to fit through the keyhole just to see if he would be

coming back the next day when batteries might be fresher. After some maneuvers you might see in a yoga class, Joe's final assessment: he was just too big. Steve took over sketching just past the keyhole to mop up the point right above the pit where he drilled.

As team "Chicken Butt" finished up and headed toward the entrance, I heard thunder. What?! That sound reminded me that I had left my tent fly open—oh no! The rain proceeded to come down, and then came harder and harder. Then came hail chunks which were



Ron Rutherford's truck was safe. Photo by Tone.

about 8mm or better. As our group descended the hill, we overtook Jim's group who were also headed down. Jim decided to take the merged groups to El Infierno for a peek, but my thoughts were only of my potentially disastrous tent. I walked back with a feeling of foreboding doom. The time must have been approximately 2:00 p.m. Don's group had already returned back to camp only moments before I arrived. It turns out that although my tent was sloppy, it was salvageable. I used a rag to remove the excess water; then, later that evening, I dried my sleeping bag near the fire. That helped my mood considerably.

Ramona later found out that her tent leaked. Oh, no!

Gerardo, the landowner, walked by the campsite accompanied with two relatives who spoke some English. It was conveyed to me that we should not burn the "chairs" around the campsite. Ooops! Not long after, Jim returned with the El Infierno group. Then Jim grabbed a chainsaw to decimate a fallen tree. Matt, Joe, and I loaded the fire wood onto



Staying warm by the campfire. Even in the daytime, temperatures rarely exceeded 50 degrees F. Photo by Dale.



**Chicken Butt Cave was nicely decorated.
Photo by Tone.**

Matt's truck. Jim cut several chair-sized logs as replacements for the "chairs" Gerardo wanted saved. He also cut several larger logs for use in making a rich and robust camp fire experience.

Dinner was costillas, ribs cooked over the fire. Corn and baked potatoes finished the ensemble. The salt on the potatoes was a little heavy, but the rosemary was a nice touch.

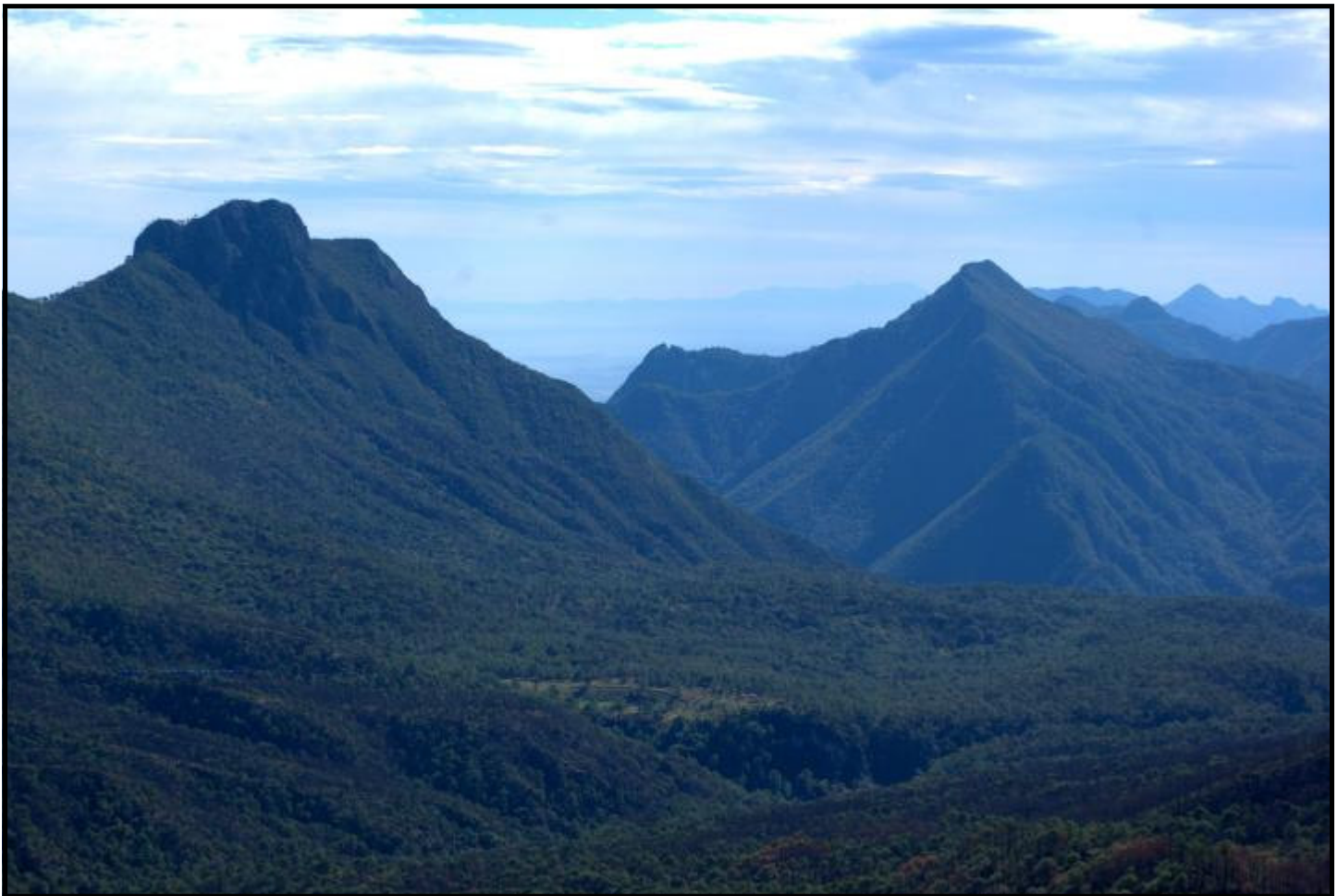
Later that evening, around 10:00 p.m. or so, Ron Rutherford arrived with his family. The red dirt road was slippery as snot due to rain. Ron's vehicle right-rear tire nearly was in Cueva de Los Baños. He was rightly worried. A group of the guys headed over in trucks to assist. Don Arburn's truck was the tool of choice (actually, Don's truck is often the tool of choice). Using approximately 75 feet of combined tow-straps, chain, and rope, the pulling commenced. Ron's truck went forward but also slid to the right. If it wasn't for the forward component, there would have been some extremely unhappy folks. Finally, Ron's vehicle was out of danger. Crisis assuaged.

The foul weather changed the dynamic of the trip. The slippery roads to Laguna de Sanchez meant no restocking of supplies. Although we were chock full of food, those who drank beer found the supply limited.

The music switched to 80's fare, and a dance party soon ensued. Jen said she was starting to feel better; I hoped she would be able to cave soon.

2009 Nov 24 Tuesday

Team "Chicken Butt" needed a sketcher because Joe didn't fit through the keyhole in Cueva Culo de Pollo. First, I recruited Ramona who was then supplanted by Ron Rutherford. The group of the day was,



View from the landowner's house. Photo by Dale.



**Matt tossing rocks like they were pebbles.
Photo by Tone.**

therefore, me, Steve, Jen, Ron Rutherford, and Ron's son, Drew.

Steve decided to enlarge the keyhole a bit, then passed through and completed the bolt started the previous day. He used Ron's hammer drill. This time, the bit went into the limestone like a hot knife through butter. After securing the hanger and rope, Steve rappelled down the pit. After some deliberation, a rope pad was put in place, and he continued further down. A particularly jagged and nasty section concerned Steve, so he sat on a ledge, "Steve's Ledge," while I dropped down to take a look. I brought Ron's potent hammer drill with me, just in case. I decided to put in a rebelay bolt for one final drop into a vast room. The oxygen was scarce, the hammer drill was heavy, and I was in an awkward position hanging by a thread. This was just cause for heavy breathing on my part as I made short order of the task at hand.

Below me, the floor looked a long way down, and I would have sworn that the rope didn't actually touch bottom (it did). The total rope length was 50m, by the way. I was already breathing with effort, and since I didn't have a lot of experience with bad air conditions, I decided to let Ron take the lead. I ascended back up the rope, past Steve, all the way to the rigging point near the keyhole. Ron then carefully rappelled down the drop using a lighter to test the air, and made it to the bottom without difficulty. He stated that the air was tolerable, so Steve joined him to assist with the survey. My plan was to wait up top until they were done.

Jen, who was just up at the keyhole, and I had a chat. She decided that she didn't wish to go down. Instead, she took Drew to look for caves, then back to camp. Fifteen minutes later, I became bored. I yelled down to see if it was safe for me to come down. It was, and I descended.

The big room was cool! It was decorated and even appeared to continue; though no one was willing to go further because of the lack of oxygen. Ron continued sketching while Steve and I took photos. Even-

tually Ron neared completion, and since he was getting a headache, Steve began his ascent up the rope. Positioning the single rope pad proved to be futile. It was tied and retied back into position, but the rope moved to a different position once Steve got higher. Eventually the Steve and Ron were out; then I ascended derigging as I went. I left one hanger in the cave because of lack of wrench. Oh well.

The three of us got back to camp late, around 7:30 p.m. At this time, it was dark, and, unfortunately, it was raining again. Within the cloud canopy that enveloped us, large drops formed from condensation on tree branches, making it seem to rain even when the rain stopped. A dinner of Mac-n-Cheese blended with canned chicken was already piping hot. Way better than Beanie Weenies! Jim and Joe ran out to us with bowls of the steaming, delicious victuals for us.

After dinner, I helped coordinate the washing of dishes and after-meal cleanup. There was a huge drum of water on the stove—way more than was necessary for the dishes. We started with the normal amount of heated water to wash, then 15 minutes later used the rest as the rinse water. Perhaps 30 minutes after that, Ron came by to collect the heated water he requested to clean his family from poison ivy. Apologies Ron, but we missed that memo

The incidence of poison ivy wasn't bad the prior trip because it still hadn't grown back since the forest fire. This trip, however, poison ivy reared its ugly head. Carol Zokaites got the worst batch; Matt probably got the second worst; and luckily, I only got a small dose.

Most people went to bed early because of the cold, damp, dark evening. Me, Jane, Jen, and Steve decided to watch a movie in Jim's Tahoe off of my laptop. The movie selected: Army of Darkness. At intermission, Jen and Steve ducked out.

2009 Nov 25 Wednesday

The rain seemed to have stopped, but camp was still in the cloud cover. I was not entirely enthused about these



Jane Slater models a herbivore skull. Photo by Tone.



Jane Slater with a kid. Photo by Tone.

bleak conditions. Since most of my gear was dry, though, I made due.

My team today consisted of me, Joe, Jen, and Jane. Everyone's name started with a "J". Well, sort of. We surveyed two caves: Cueva de Llano Sumidero (Field Drain Cave) and a new cave called La Cueva de Muchos Adversarios (Cave of Many Nemeses). Then we did a fun "sport" trip through Cueva Tres Luces (Cave of Three Lights). These were all within about 300m of our campsite. The weather was somewhat cold outside the caves, but at least the rain had stopped.

Field Drain Cave was a simple cave that went in a few meters, and then turned left into a tight passage plugged with a log. Using a strap, I was able to haul the log out. I then squeezed into the passage where the log had been to look around. Jane accidentally shifted a rock which dropped down and hit me directly in a muscle of my upper back. Fortunately, this baseball-sized rock didn't hit a bone. The thud knocked the wind out of me. I crawled out of the cave, not feeling quite right. I drank some water, ate a granola bar, walked around a bit, but I still didn't feel quite right for perhaps 30 minutes. I was even slightly nauseous. Light shock? Perhaps. Thankfully, the strange feeling abated, and I was back in the game. Game on!

Cave of Jane's Nemeses was named in honor of the abundance of gnats flying around the entrance. I often enlisted Jane's assistance when scouting new

caves—she's small. Usually enthusiastic, Jane wasn't too pleased with this cave. She went into the cave, came out, and declared that the infernal pests were everywhere throughout. I pulled my hood over my head, then went inside to assess the insect population density. I soon realized that the volume of gnats dissipated quickly once I turned off my headlamp. Thus, our group decided to survey the cave.

Cueva Tres Luces required some exposed climbing, which is primarily the reason it was so much fun. Jane had been in the cave before, so she became our de facto guide. We had a lot of fun exploring the cave, taking pictures, and otherwise enjoying the afternoon.

A hot, plentiful, and delicious dinner of spaghetti and meatballs was nearly prepared when our group arrived back at camp. Earlier, the San Marcos cavers had arrived. Due to road conditions, they hired a truck at Laguna de Sanchez to take them down the treacherous road for 300 pesos (about \$23.25 USD). They left their truck in Laguna de Sanchez at the edge of town.

2009 Nov 26 Thursday - Thanksgiving

Today there were three teams: a large team assembled to drop El Infierno, a 55m drop; the San Marcos team went to survey Pino del Oso #2; and I led lead team "Dig Dug" up the hill to dig.

Team "Dig Dug" consisted of Matt, me, Kathleen, and Ramona. Our objective was to push La Cueva de la Vaca Púrpura (Purple Cow) and La Cueva de Más Cencerro (More Cowbell). Other holes we dug were icing on the cake.

Purple Cow turned out to be just a simple chimney down about 10 meters, measured in Tone-lengths. It continued down and diagonally as a narrow fissure crack—humanly impassable.

More Cowbell showed more promise. Kathleen and I alternated attempts to pry a wedged rock out of obvious passage. The rock was below, at foot level, and none of the tools we brought quite reached it. This elu-



Another small pit, perhaps 8m deep, with gnarly and sharp features. Photo by Dale.

sive rock taunted us by shifting to and fro, but it simply would not drop. Kathleen's tenacity was noteworthy, and since there was only room for one, I looked for other digging options.

I pulled rocks out of a likely possibility and found obvious cave passage below! Woo hoo! I passed the baton to Matt who continued excavating approximately one ton of rock. Matt wanted to call it El Toño Baño, and that's exactly what we did. When Matt pointed out that Tone's Bathroom was "filthy and filled with stuff," I was less sure of the compliment.

Ramona had found a dig location down the hill and wanted my opinion. I was a bit skeptical, but her enthusiasm warranted some effort. I recommended that she get Kathleen and Matt to assist. My idea was that Kathleen would go head first, and Matt and I could lift her back out once she looked around. While Ramona was gone, I brutally smashed several limestone fins out of the way. With a little more cleanup, we wouldn't have to do the Kathleen-hoist after all. Once Matt finished the cleanup, and I removed one boulder, Kathleen easily maneuvered into the hole. Unfortunately, my initial assessment was correct: the hole didn't do anything. Foo.

After a few hours of wielding hammers and pry bars, we were getting tired. It was Thanksgiving, so we wrapped up early and started back toward camp. Along the way, we tagged and recorded waypoints for a few more features. The day was tiring, but satisfying . . . even if we didn't break into major cave passage. Matt and I plan to return on another .

After a few hours of wielding hammers and pry bars, we were getting tired. It was Thanksgiving, so we wrapped up early and started back toward camp. Along the way, we tagged and recorded waypoints for a few more features. The day was tiring, but satisfying . . . even if we didn't break into major cave passage. Matt and I plan to return on another trip with wedges and feathers to remove a few irritants, especially in El Toño Baño.



**Small pit, perhaps 8m deep, with smooth walls.
Photo by Dale.**



**The Lov Pub in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico.
Photo by Tone.**

That night Erick showed up with much needed cerveza as well as some pork and chicken soup dishes. Being a holiday, and always wanting to keep good landowner relations, an invite had been extended to the land owner and his family to join us for dinner. Gerardo, Gloria, the three girls, and two of the boys showed up. Alan, the nephew, and Edsger, the son were unable to make it due to chores. None of Gerardo's family speaks English which I think created a slight initial awkwardness. Later, the Rutherford boys and Gerardo's kids tried to converse through Dale Barnard and Kathleen. Carol mentioned to me that she had a nice time earlier in the day trying to communicate with Cynthia and one of the younger girls.

The feast was deep-fried turkey, baked honey-glazed ham, mushroom stuffing, garlic mashed potatoes, and asparagus in butter sauce. Although we had 34 people, there were still plenty of leftovers. Unfortunately, leftovers were of little use because of the sheer volume of food that we brought. Therefore, leftovers were typically thrown over the fence to the pigs.

Misfortune hit me when a terrible headache vexed me. Since I was physically exhausted from digging all day, I went to my tent to lie down. I woke about 1.5 hours later feeling much better. It was probably just a muscle tension headache due to smashing rocks. I got up, put on an extra coat, and then went to sit around the campfire again.

2009 Nov 27 Friday

Matt enlisted me to take a look at Hoyo Encantador (Lovely Hole). He had reported that it blew considerable air, and in the cool weather, vapor. Jane joined us making a group of three.

We hiked the 660 m from camp over rocky terrain. The hole didn't need to be rigged at all, and after a bit of cleanup, I sent Jane inside to take a look. Over the course of the day, we pushed the cave some 10



Goni Iskali in the hole with Dan Arburn sitting nearby. Photo by Dale.

feet. We used Jane's bat bag (actually Jim's) to haul dirt and rock out of the hole. We found a herbivore skull as we continued. We made a fun crew. We had tunes, we had laughs, and we pushed cave; what could be better?

Jen and Kathleen showed up after a few hours from dropping El Infierno. Jen went into the pit to take a look, and then apparently she started to dig. Tap, tap, tap . . . ouch! She soon emerged saying that a rock dislodged and hit her in the mouth. Later, Ron and Drew came by to take a peek inside.

Since this was the last day of the trip, we finished early to eat dinner and to start the chore of packing. After dinner, Jim and I took care of the finances, which I had been tracking in an Excel spreadsheet. This was my first caving trip with a NetBook. I found the NetBook to be useful for taking trip notes, doing the finances, and even watching movies. While Jim and I worked out the financial details, Ramona and Steve sifted through more than 6 GB of collected images to prepare a slide show. They whittled down the count to a little more than 200. The projector was run from Ron's 500 Watt inverter connected to an extra truck battery brought specifically for inverter use. Nice! I can-



Goni Iskali, Don Arburn, and Ann Scott, with Jennifer Foote standing behind a tree. Sink holes like this are typical of the area. Photo by Dale.

not speak for everyone, but I enjoyed reminiscing and seeing what other people had been doing during the trip.

2009 Nov 28 Saturday - Return To USA

Erick and Jen departed camp first because her flight out of Monterrey was at 1:45 p.m. The rest of us broke camp and packed trucks. I knew that Matt was dreading the drive because of how slippery the mud had been. Don's truck, Moby, had battery trouble requiring two vehicles to jump start.

Our first stop was to Gerardo's home to offer him excess food and supplies that we didn't use during the trip. We took a tour of his place to see piglets, kids (both types!), and other livestock. We said our good-byes then headed toward Laguna de Sanchez. Caesar, Gerardo's son, joined us for the ride. He would eventually walk back home on his own.

Reaching the town of Laguna de Sanchez, we first dropped off the San Marcos folks at their vehicle. Then we stopped to buy a few snacks and consumables to take home. Since the weather was much nicer than during the previous week, we looked around a bit, took a few pictures, and otherwise enjoyed the town. The rain had prevented us from a tourist visit or lunch, and I must admit that I missed that.

Continuing down the mountain, Ramona and Jane jumped atop Yeti (Jim's Tahoe) for a roof ride through breathtaking limestone scenery. We stopped at El Cercado to collect the deposit on beer bottles and toss the garbage from the trip.

Our motley caravan stopped for lunch in the town of Los Cavazos, a tourist trap some 16 miles south of Monterrey. Los Cavazos specializes in furniture, art, knickknacks, etc. Our sizable group dined at an all-you-can-eat buffet for 40 pesos, plus 13 pesos per drink (with tip, about \$5.50 USD). I found the buffet to be most agreeable! After lunch, the groups fragmented such that only Jim's and Matt's vehicles remained. Before departing Los Cavazos, we scoped out several of the stores. My sister-in-law loves these sorts of consumer items, so I dutifully snapped many photos. Las tiendas!

Continuing with our journey, the two vehicles arrived in Monterrey where we took a detour to visit the "Lov Pub," the restaurant/bar owned by Erick Gonzalez; remember that he had left camp earlier this same morning. The pub was just off of the ITESM Campus Monterrey, which meant difficult parking. The restaurant wasn't actually open for business at this time; we were a private party of friends. I had no idea what to expect. The place was actually mellow, relaxed, and subdued. We chilled for a bit before continuing our journey home.

Driving through Monterrey is always tricky, which is a nice way of saying that it's a bitch. Jim previously mentioned to me that the locals also find it difficult to get around. The traffic is heavy, and the roads



BACK TWO ROWS LEFT TO RIGHT: Erick Gonzalez, Dale Barnard, Goni Iskali, Jennifer Foote, Joe Zokaites, Kathleen O'Connor, Matt Turner, Ramona Josefczyk, Ann Scott, Don Arburn, Ben Tobin, Roger Moore

FRONT TWO ROWS LEFT TO RIGHT: Ron Rutherford, Barbara Rutherford, Carrie Hutchins, Ben Hutchins, Carol Zokaites, Kevin Rutherford, Drew Rutherford, Tone Garot, Jane Slater, Jim Kennedy, Ashlynn Rutherford, Steve Yochum

Photo by Dale.

follow no regular or discernible patterns. Often you are upon a street sign too late to take the correct turn. Hand-held FRS radios helped keep Matt attached to us, but they were not enough. Matt went through a yellow light, which he later said did indeed turn red. Matt didn't want to lose us in this crazy city. A police officer on motorcycle pulled the black pickup over. We tried to tell him via radio not to give up his license, but it was too late. We then heard via radio that they were being directed to court. Since there was no interpreter, another officer soon arrived. While this scene was unfolding, Jim tried to turn around to meet with Matt in the horrendous Monterrey traffic. The end result: Joe and Carol paid the cops 750 pesos (just shy of \$60) as a bribe, which later was split among the group. This was just the cost of travel in Mexico. As we turned around, the same cop tried to pull us over. Jim just ignored him, which worked surprisingly well! Jim stated "make them work for it." True that. We met up with Matt at

the next Pemex where we all took a moment to calm down.

Later, we heard that both Ron and Don were also extorted by the Mexican "law" at the bridge before the border. Although I have been extorted before in Mexico, this occurrence was the first for me in Nuevo León. We arrived home late.

Summary

According to Jim, our group mapped 16 caves, including about eight new ones found on this trip. We placed anodized aluminum tags on more than 70 cave entrances and Karst features. GPS waypoints and track logs were abundant.

The general consensus was that the trip was good.

Congratulations to Jim "Crash" Kennedy for pulling off an amazing adventure.

An interview with Chris Nicola, NSS #37847

By Bill Steele, NSS NEWS, January 2005

Editor—You may recall from the fourth quarter 2009 issue of the *TEXAS CAVER*, a report on a Houston Party that was held at Louise Hose and Paul Dye's Home.

One of the many guests that attended was a caver from New York by the name of **Chris Nicola**. He had just recently written a book about the Jewish inhabitants of a Ukrainian village who had survived the worst of WWII by hiding in a nearby cave for almost a year. After trying for nearly a decade, New York caver Chris Nicola made contact with these survivors of the Holocaust of WWII.

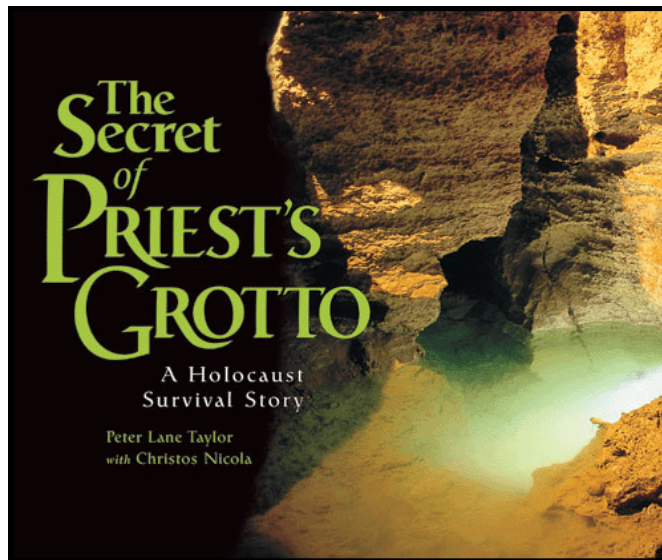
I have had so much positive feedback on that report, that I am pleased to announce that Chris Nicola, Bill Steele, the NSS, and Scott Fee have graciously given me permission to re-issue Bill's excellent interview with Chris in its entirety.

One esteemed Explorers Club member being interviewed by a fellow esteemed Explorers Club member.

Enjoy!

Please tell me how you started caving, and where all you've caved.

My caving experience began in the underwater caves of Florida in 1976. I continued to dive in some of

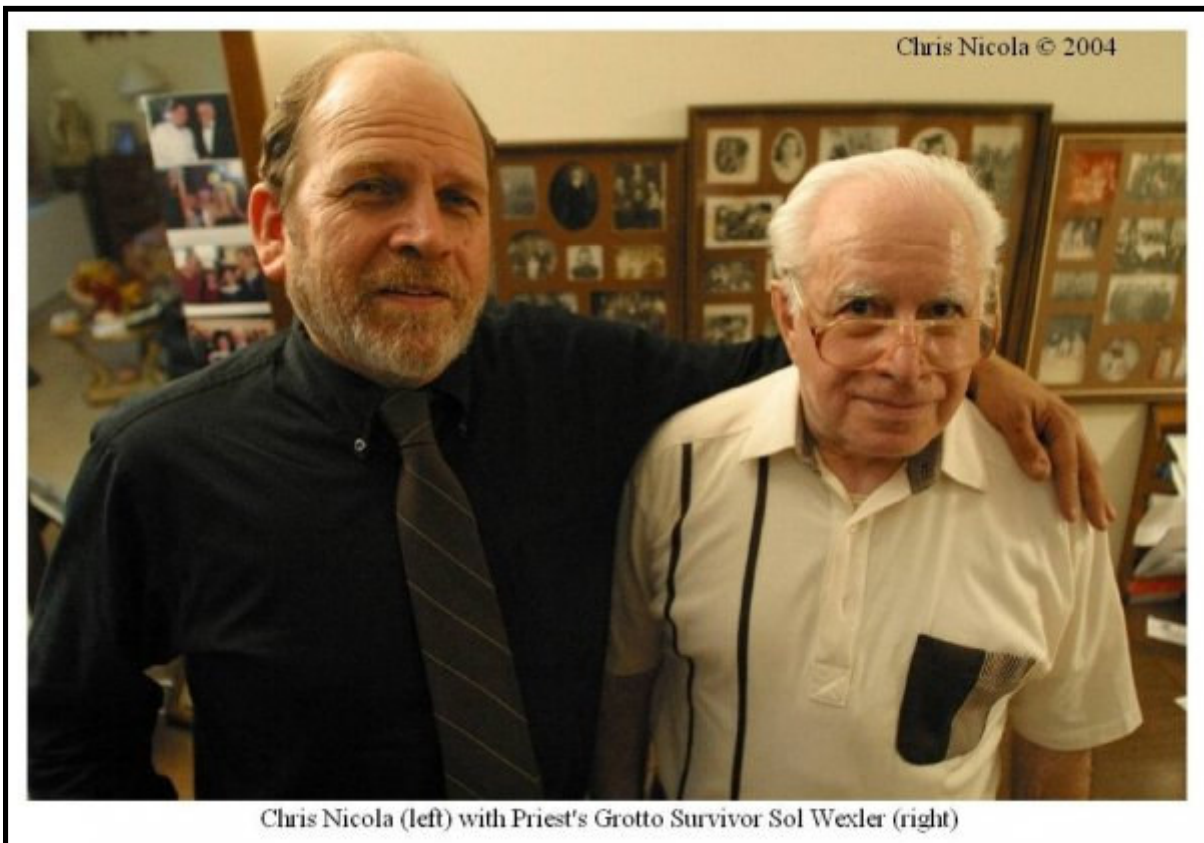


these same caves up until the early-1990s. The caves I visited during those years included Manatee Springs, Peacock and Orange Groves, Jenny Springs, Devil's Eye, and Devil's Ear. When not diving in caves, much of my time was spent diving in another type of enclosed underwater environment: that of the wrecks off the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

As for my dry caving experience, it started around 1992 in the Albany/ Schoharie region of New York State when I took an Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) Caving workshop. Since that time I have visited a variety of caves throughout the U.S., Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, England, Brazil and the former Soviet Union. To date, I have organized and/or lead a total of 33 international caving trips, including over a dozen annual

trips to Western Ukraine. Much of my time there has been spent exploring the "Giant Gypsums."

My introduction to dry caving was rather atypical in nature. For about a four year period between my diving years and the start of my dry caving years, in the early 1990s, there was a four-year period where my main hobbies were long distance running and triathlons. It was at the end of a triathlon that I sat down next to a



Chris Nicola (left) with Priest's Grotto Survivor Sol Wexler (right)



Chris viewing the names of some of the Priest Grotto inhabitants. Photo by Peter Taylor.

doctor friend of mine who had also participated in the event, and told him that I did not feel well. After he took my pulse he told me not to move and called an ambulance; the ephedra in the cold decongestant which I was taking brought on a heart attack.

Several days later I was in a hospital, feeling that my active lifestyle had come to an end. Then a friend of mine, who had been asking me to take her caving for quite sometime, brought me an article, about the caves of upstate New York, which changed my life. My friend showed me an article.

A week after being discharged from the hospital my friend and I were crawling in the narrow passageway of a tight, damp New York cave. And, when I came out, I felt like I had been reborn! My life was not over. Six months later I did the New York Marathon again, and I have been caving on a regular basis ever since.

I'm totally fascinated with the Priest's Grotto (Popowa Yama) Ukraine story. Please tell me how your first trip there in 1993 came about, and what happened.

In 1993, having gotten over my heart attack, and becoming deeply involved in dry caving, I had the good fortune to receive one of two very special emails in my life. It was an e-mail from Ed Sira, former NSS BOG member, Northern New Jersey Grotto Chairman, and longtime friend. Ed advised me that a friend of his, Valeriy Rogozchikov, was visiting from Ukraine, and currently living in Brooklyn. Ed's message went on to say that he would be very appreciative if I could entertain Valeriy while he was visiting the area, and get him to some New York caves. Ed had met Valeriy during his '91 trip to Ukraine, with Tom Rae, Maureen Handler, John Schelten (then NSS President), and Allen Padgett.

Shortly after receiving Ed's above email, I contacted Valeriy and took him caving in upstate New York, West Virginia and Pennsylvania, and sightseeing in Washington, DC. For the few months that Valeriy was here, he became a fixture in the Northeast caving

community, and at Met Grotto's vertical workshops, showing us all sorts of unique vertical techniques and equipment.

When Valeriy returned to Ukraine he invited me to come there to visit him in order to explore the caves of Western Ukraine and Crimea. Several months later, I was in Kiev, visiting with Valeriy, his wife Luda and their daughter Sasha. Today NSS/UAYCEF member Valeriy lives in Florida, and I'm the godfather of his grandson.

It was during my first visit to see Valeriy in Ukraine that he and his wife introduced me to the Giant Gypsum Caves" of Western Ukraine; to include the Priest Grotto." From the first time I saw the "Khatki" section of Priest Grotto, which is the area inhabited by the Jews in 1943, I felt that something special had happened there. Unfortunately, as a result of the language barrier (I spoke no Ukrainian or Russian, and Valeriy spoke no English), all I could pick up was that some Jews lived there during the war. I also picked up the fact that whenever he or the other Ukrainian cavers would sleep overnight in the area, a "heavy heart" and strange feeling would affect them during the night. And, I found out that the Ukrainians that opened up the cave in 1963 used this same area for several years as a bivouac.

One thing that stood out immediately was the size of the stone walls that had been built in the Khatki area. The sizes of these walls were certainly not indicative of something that weekend cavers would have built. These were structures built by people that had more time on their hands than did cavers, and probably a much different mission—one of long term survival underground.

In December 2002 you got an e-mail from a man saying that his father-in law was one of the original Priest Grotto survivors and living in the Bronx, not far from where you live. It must have been quite a shock. Please tell me the story.

I was just finishing up deleting a whole bunch of junk e-mails when something in the Subject line of the very last email caught my attention. It said something like "Jewish cave Survivor from Ukraine." When I saw these words my finger immediately froze over the "delete" key. Then I slowly clicked on the "read mail" key in order to open the message. When I saw what it said my entire body froze. It was from a fellow named Ed Vogel, who said that he was researching the story of his father-in-law, who had survived the Holocaust by hiding in a cave in Ukraine. The message then went on to ask if I had any information about this cave survival story.

I sat back and stared at the screen of my computer for several minutes before I did anything. I had searched for leads on this story for over ten years. I had visited numerous libraries and bookstores, and had spent an unbelievable amount of time on the Internet looking for information about the Jews who lived in

Priest Grotto. To date, I had gotten just two leads. I found an article in a magazine about a person whose mother had survived the Holocaust by living in a cave in Ukraine. And I had secured a report in Ukrainian, which reportedly told of how three “Survivors” had briefly visited the Priest Grotto just before the fall of Communism in 1991, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to get into the cave. But now, I had a third lead; a definite one; which confirmed for the first time that there was someone still alive from the group that lived in Priest Grotto in 1943.

In the late 1990s I had embedded certain key words in my webpage (www.uaycef.org) with the intent of setting it up so that others looking for information on the story of Priest Grotto would find their way to me. My thought was that perhaps a son or daughter of one of the Priest Grotto Survivors would do some research, and subsequently end up contacting me. Well, it worked: one night in December of 2002 when I received Ed’s message, the second most important e-mail of my life.

Still in shock, I took a nearby notepad and copied everything down from the screen of my computer. I was hesitant to touch anything on the computer itself for fear of this being the time when it would once again crash. It was only after I copied everything down that I finally hit the key on my computer to save the message. The very next day I contacted Ed and a short time after that I meet Sol Wexler, a Priest Grotto Survivor. Sol eventually led me to the Stermers.

The Ternopil Speleo Club has been pushing Priest’s Grotto for 40 years, and its 77 miles long?

Sometime in the early 60s, local Ukrainian cavers, including NSS/UAYCEF members Vladimir Radzievskiy and Josef Zimels, opened up an entrance into Priest Grotto, which is currently the 10th longest cave in the world. There had been rumors that the KGB sealed many of the caves in the area after WWII in order to stop the local resistance fighters from using them as places to hide weapons and explosives. However, the entrance opened up by these cavers was not the same one used by the Jews in 1943. This was a new entrance, one about 70 feet uphill from the original entrance at the bottom of a sinkhole.

Ever since opening the cave, Radzievskiy, Zimels, and other members of the Ternopil Speleo Club, including the club’s current president, NSS/UAYCEF member Sergey Yepifanov, have devoted years of hard work, at great personal and economic expense, in an effort to protect, map, and preserve the cave, along with its Khatki area. And they have spent years digging the cave to ever-increasing lengths (much of the expansion of this cave came about as a result of numerous digging projects over the course of five decades). As told to me by numerous cavers over the years, “this cave is part of their lives. It is a very special place.”

The work of these cavers has been documented

on a map, measuring about 4 by 20 feet, which adorns a wall of the Ternopil Speleo Club. The unique nature of this map, along with the pride exhibited by its creators, is best illustrated by the manner in which foreign visitors are routinely welcomed to the club. Visiting cavers are led to a spot facing a red curtain, which covers the entire length of the wall of one of the club’s room. Then one of the local caver flicks a switch which starts the theme song from “2001 A Space Odyssey” as the curtain is slowly drawn to the side in order to reveal the map behind it.

I read in National Geographic Adventure magazine that in 2003 you took five trips to Montreal, Canada to interview members of the Stermer family, who had lived close to two years underground. Please tell me about those visits.

At first there was reluctance on the part of the Stermers to meet with Peter Lane Taylor, the author of the *Adventure* article, and myself. But given what they had gone through, this was perfectly understandable and expected. After all, we were strangers asking them to share some of the most personal and terrible experiences of their lives. However, eventually they did agree to meet with us in February of 2003.

Wanting to take no chances of giving a wrong impression by being late to our first meeting with the Survivors, Peter and I arrived in front of Schulim Stermer’s apartment building about 45 minutes ahead of time. We wanted to make sure we knew exactly where it was. Then we drove to a nearby kosher bakery in order to purchase a cake or something. At one point in the bakery we found ourselves faced with having to make a decision as to whether we should purchase a cake, a cake and a box of candy, or just a box of candy. We decided to buy a small cake when Peter said, “you realize that we are only going to meet five of them?”

A short time later we were in the lobby of Schulim’s apartment building, when Peter asked the doorman if he could let him into a nearby restroom. Meanwhile, since we still had about ten minutes to kill, I



**Chris atop a man made wall in Verteba cave..
Photo by Peter Taylor.**



Chris Nicola examining a key found buried under someone's bed in Priest's Grotto cave.

Photo by Peter Taylor.

went to sit down on a couch to wait for Peter to return. As the doorman led Peter from the area I heard him say "Okay, follow me. But I can't be away too long because somebody is throwing a big party, and I have to be at the door in order to welcome and direct the guests." As I sat there waiting for Peter, I noticed quite a few groups of people arriving, and then being directed to the elevator by the doorman. I remember thinking "somebody is indeed having a big party."

When Peter returned we took the elevator to the door of Schulim's apartment; Peter was holding the small cake box in his hand. When the door of Schulim's apartment opened we were greeted by six of the nicest and friendliest people I have ever met. There were Yetta Katz, her brothers Shlomo and Schulim Stermer, along with their wives, and Pearl Stermer, the wife of Priest Grotto Survivor Nissel, who had passed away in 2000. It was as we were shaking all their hands, and being lead into the living room, that we noticed another ten people waiting to meet us. And when I looked to my left into another room I said to Peter there's another ten in there. I think it was at this point Peter and I both looked at the little box he was carrying, then looked at the huge dining room table covered with enough food for a banquet of twenty or more, that I said to Peter, "I guess we should have bought the box of candy as well."

Anyway, Peter sat down on one side of the room, and quickly became encircled by a dozen or more people. Meanwhile, I met a similar fate on the opposite side of the room. Simultaneously, each of us was engaged in a minimum of three to four different conversations from everyone asking us questions about the cave, and the experiences of their fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, and grandparents; three generations of Stermers were present. It wasn't long before one woman stood in the center of the room, took charge, yelled something in Hebrew, quieted everyone down, and led all of us in an organized discussion. It was by these actions that I immediately knew who she was; she was Pepkale, the four-year-old who had lived in the cave.

Because this was our first meeting with the Sur-

vivors, Peter and I had decided ahead of time that we were not going to bring out the video cameras and tape recorders immediately. We wanted to first give the Stermers a chance to know who we were, and with whom they were going to be sharing some of the most intimate parts of their lives. And since we knew that one of the key things of shooting any documentary was to make sure you catch those spontaneous one time statements on tape as they happen (you can't get someone to repeat it later and fake the associated emotion of the moment), we had also decided to hold back on certain questions until the time was right, and when we could be in a less crowded room with fewer distractions. So, our first meeting was mostly for the purposes of getting to know one another before the hard work started. But nevertheless, we did conduct a few preliminary interviews.

In preparation for our meeting with the Survivors, Peter and I had come up with a plan on how to conduct our interviews. Capitalizing on my 25 years in law enforcement and investigations, I would handle the bulk of the interviews while Peter and his crew handled the cameras, lighting, and recording equipment. Next, I brought up the matter of what the most appropriate response should be to those telling us what were probably going to be some of the most horrific things that one could imagine that one human being could perpetrate against another, in describing how the Nazis treated the Jews. I suggested to Peter, in light of the fact that there would be no way that either one of us could truthfully say "I can only imagine," that nothing be said, and that I simply look into their eyes, and allow myself to be pulled into their very souls, to the point of experiencing what they were describing. In such a situation, they would know what I felt, and there would be no need for me to verbalize it. Peter agreed. However, we both realized that there were certain risks: I ended up having some of the same nightmares as the Survivors in connection to what took place in Priest Grotto, and in their lives so many years ago. I now know the difference between a trained professional interviewer, and an inquiring friend who feels as if he has gained an extended family. But I have also seen the difference between the videos which Peter and I have made, and those made by others who have done interviews of Holocaust survivors. Our videos capture the emotion and realism to an extent seldom seen in many Holocaust survivor interview tapes.

The interviews that I did were very hard and emotionally draining at times. There were times when I was about to "lose it," but gained inspiration from those I was interviewing by marveling at how they could continue their tales uninterrupted, while I, the interviewer, was fighting so desperately to "keep it all together." At times I had to intentionally think of some very cold-hearted things in order to fight back tears, so that the flow of the interview would not be interrupted. It was not easy looking into the eyes of someone telling you of

the horrific things they had experienced at the hands of the Nazis. And the process continues today, with other survivors, which I have located over the last two years.

It is still difficult for me to think about such memories as those of Pepkale. She was four years old when she was carried in her mother's arms into a mass grave, had her head covered by her mother's bosom as she laid next to her, and then heard her mother say "I love you, everything will be okay." A short time later, she heard gunshots, and her aunt and nine-year old cousin were dead, lying next to her. Pepkale remembered all of this, and vividly described it to me as I looked into her eyes the entire time.

Compounding the difficulties I faced with the stories of the Survivors, were those discovered through my research of such things as the transcripts from the Nuremberg trials. To do the job properly, I also had to have knowledge of what went on above the cave as well. For the story of the Survivors is actually a twofold miracle. Not only did they survive in a cave for an extended period of time, but they also were Jews who survived the Western Ukraine during some of the most horrific time of this century. The chances of surviving as a Jew were less than five percent in this region. And the chances of a family surviving intact were less than one percent.

In traveling to and from Montreal, Peter and I used a variety of transport, to include car, bus and train. On some occasions we did one-day trips; nine hours driving north, six hours of interviewing, and then nine hours driving south. However, we have also done weekend and three-day trips there at a much more leisurely pace.

There was a memoir in English published in 1975 by Esther Stermer? Is it still in print?

Since this particular book was published in limited quantities, solely for friends and relatives of the Stermers, there are not many copies available. However, Ester did make it a point to donate copies to many of the Holocaust museums in the US, Canada and Israel, along with personal copies to two Prime ministers of Israel.

Their underground camp was only 400 yards from the entrance? What's that passage like to traverse? It's 50 degrees and there's crawling?

Today's entrance drops into the same passageway the Survivors used at a point about 70 feet closer to their campsite (i.e. originally their campground was about 425 yards from the entrance). The entrance they used, which lies at the extreme bottom of a sinkhole, was blasted closed by the KGB shortly after WWII. This was done in an attempt to stop local resistance fighters from hiding explosives and weapons in the area's caves. The section from the original entrance to where the base of the current entrance begins (i.e. the closed 70 feet) was reportedly much tighter, narrower, and lower than the current entrance passageway.



**Chris Nicola examining the lake where the cave dwellers got drinking water in Priest's Grotto.
Photo by Peter Taylor.**

Today's entrance was opened up in 1963 by local cavers. For many years after that the shaft had to be dug out time and time again after each spring thaw brought mud and water down the sides of the sinkhole. In the late eighties a metal conduit was dropped down into the shaft to stop the annual spring collapses. However, by the mid-1990s so much soil had washed down the sides of the sinkhole that the surface was now only within a foot of the top of the shaft. The solution was the addition of another section of conduit welded atop the first section. So today there is a single 25-foot high metal conduit within the shaft. The top of the conduit, which measures about four feet in width, rises about six feet above the surrounding surface.

To get into the cave you walk about one half the way down the side of the sinkhole to the conduit. Then you climb up some metal rungs to what looks like a submarine hatch atop the conduit. After dealing with a fairly elaborate locking system, the hatch is raised to expose a series of metal rungs inside the conduit, leading down to a horizontal passage. The first ninety feet of this horizontal passage starts off rather narrow, is about three to four feet in height, and is fairly straight, with some short winding sections. One usually progresses on their knees, or doing a duck walk while pulling and pushing their cave bags. The passage is narrow enough to make it uncomfortable to attempt to carry any packs on your back, or from a shoulder. And in a few spots, barrel-chested people need to turn sideways in order to continue forward.

Once you get through the first 90 feet, the passage opens up and you can easily walk upright the remainder of the distance to the "Khatki" campsite about another 370 yards ahead. However, you will have to remember how many left-hand and right-hand turns to make, and in what specific order. Otherwise, these 370 yards can turn into miles and miles of endless passage. Such, is the danger faced by inexperienced explorers in maze-like caves such as Giant Gypsums like Priest Grotto. Occasionally, the surrounding water table is high enough (usually in 22 year cycles) to make wet-



Chris Nicola examining mill stone which allowed the Priest Grotto inhabitants to make bread.

Photo by Peter Taylor.

suits necessary in order to float and swim to the Khatki area. However, in 1943 the water level was extremely low. However, not to the point of being at its lowest point. Thus, the reason for steps on the shore of a nearby lake, within a ten minutes walk, not going completely down to the shoreline.

Upon reaching the “Khatki” area, which means “little cottage” in Ukrainian (the local Ukrainian cavers named this section) you make a right hand turn, and then walk down about ten earthen steps into the first of the four parallel passageways, which made up the campsite of the Jews. In order to make each of these passageways more resemble chambers (i.e. rooms) mud and/or stone walls were built at various locations. The result was four parallel chambers, all with interconnecting passageways, and each measuring from 60 to 80 feet in length, about four to eight feet high, and anywhere from four to twenty feet in width. While some walls were built from the floor to the ceiling without any openings, others, such as those in the sleeping area, were built with narrow doorways at opposite ends of the passage. So, in the case of the sleeping area there were both front and rear entrances, each of which could be blocked by canvas blankets to cut down the draft.

In one chamber digging the floor down around a square section of floor had created a bench. This resulted in an area large enough for approximately 12 people to sit around an earthen table (i.e. the undug section in the middle). In the sleeping chamber, which is the farthest of the four chambers and also the one with the lowest ceiling, portions of the floor had been dug down in order to allow the Jews to stand upright instead of stooping. In addition, the bed areas had been prepared by leveling the ground into rectangular shapes, and then placing four to six-inch high wooden posts into holes dug in the earth at each of the four corners.

It is of interest to note that because the sleeping area is about fourteen feet higher than the three adjacent chambers, it was never subjected to the cyclic rising waters. Consequently, this particular area was found to have been relatively undisturbed for over six decades.

So, on May 5, 1943, thirty-eight Ukrainian Jews started a 344 day underground stay?

Yes, however several days before, five of them, in the dark of the night, went to the sinkhole in order to explore the possibility of finding a small room at its bottom. They chose this location based upon hearing a story of how someone had seen a fox run into a hole at the bottom of this same sinkhole. However, after climbing through several animal carcasses, and fighting off the instinct to vomit, Nissel Stermer found not a small room, but rather what would have then been the fourth longest cave in the world at that time.

Thirty-eight Jews entered Priest Grotto cave several days later. The youngest was an infant, and the oldest was a woman of 74. Of the 38, about 10 were under the age of 17. With the exception of the younger males, everyone stayed in the cave the entire 344 days. It should be noted that each of the families had to have their own “breadwinners” in order to occupy the cave. Thus, there were some relatives who had to resort to living in hidden attic spaces and bunkers on the surface due to the fact that the males in their families were no longer around. Unfortunately, most of these people were found by the Germans and executed.

How did they get their food?

In the case of Priest Grotto, every five to six weeks the breadwinners of each family would leave the cave together very late at night. Their first job on the surface was to work in unison to chop down trees, and collect firewood from a nearby forest. Then, after passing this firewood into the cave, with the help of some of the children inside, each group of breadwinners would go off on their own to secure provisions by whatever means necessary.

In the case of the Stermer work-party, which consisted of the three boys, Shlomo, Shulim and Nissel, they would either take beets and potatoes from piles which had already been dug up by local farmers, “borrow” the ducks of some local drunken Ukrainian police officers who had passed out, or purchase supplies from one loyal Ukrainian friend who stuck by them during their entire two-year ordeal. The other work parties did similar things in order to secure provisions. The other thing that they had in common was that all of them had to be back in the cave before sunrise so that nobody would see them.

In the case of Verteba Cave (the first cave in which they lived), three of the group had special badges issued by the Germans which allowed them freedom of movement with their horse-drawn wagon in order to collect scrap metal. So, every week or two these same three would bring provisions to the entrance of the cave late at night. However, to get water the cave occupants would have to place cups under formations. If they were lucky, each would get about one cup of water a day. But, when it snowed they would go to the entrance and bring some snow into the cave, making sure that they



The Koma base camp was where Chris Nicola and Peter Lane Taylor lived during their five day research expedition to the Priest's Grotto in 2003. Note that the blue light in the background is from an electronic flash, not sunlight.
Photo by Peter Taylor.

did not leave any tracks or indication in the snow that anyone had been there.

By the time they had occupied Priest Grotto the Nazis had declared the area "Jewish Free." Now, the only options you had if you saw a Jew were to report the Jew to the Germans or police, kill the Jew and keep all of his/her property, or do nothing and be executed by the Germans in place of the Jews. Consequently, the above-mentioned three had to turn their badges into the police, and lost their freedom of movement in the area. In fact, they were now subject to the same rules as every other Jew in the area.

I read that their cooking fire smoke was "quickly ventilated." How so?

In one of the four chambers of Khatki there is a wall going from floor to ceiling and they had stoves on each side. When one looks up on the ceiling immediately above this particular wall, part of which has collapsed over the years, you see a sharp band of soot extending as far back on the ceiling behind the wall as you can see. Apparently, the wall was originally created to allow for safe cooking by taking advantage of the cave's draft to draw the smoke way from the campsite, and into the section behind the wall containing the stoves.

This was quite different from the situation in Vertebea. At one point, just after cooking something, one of them discovered that a four-year-old had passed out in the darkness, and was close to death as a result of suffocating from the smoke. Luckily enough they were able to quickly remove her from the area, and take her to an area closer to the cave's entrance in order to revive her.

Later on in Vertebea they rigged a pipe as a chimney, which they could raise up through the surface at night when they would cook. Of course, they would always have someone go near the entrance of the cave

whenever they did their cooking in order to make sure that nobody was in the area to see the resulting smoke.

There have been a dozen different caver camps in the cave?

A number of bivouacs have been established in Priest Grotto over the years, and they are used in the same manner as those of mountain climbers; i.e. as staging areas to proceed further and towards the targets of their continuing exploration within the 77 mile cave system. Thus, during typical one-week trips in the cave three to four different bivouacs are occupied during the course of the expedition to the deepest regions of the cave.

Interestingly enough, Khatki was used as the first bivouac for those cavers who opened up Priest Grotto in 1963. However, several years later, when the surrounding water table began to rise, the floor in Khatki became progressively damper. Consequently, another bivouac was built about 400 yards away, on higher ground. This particular bivouac is still in use today, and was the one that Peter Lane Taylor and I used as a base camp for three days and nights during our July 2003 expedition.

The article I read said that the record for a person staying underground without coming out is 205 days by the Frenchman Michel Siffre. Didn't the people in Priest's Grotto stay longer?

Yes, as mentioned above only the younger males came out every fifth or sixth week. Thus, all the others exceeded Siffre's record. In fact, as I'm writing, the Guinness Book of Records is considering my application to have some of the Survivors be awarded the record for longest period of underground survival.

The first cave they stayed in was named Vertebea, right? They were discovered by the Gestapo, weren't they? Please tell me about that.

Around six months into their stay in Vertebea several Nazis found them after crawling through a narrow passageway that led to a section of the cave that nobody knew about; not even the guides who led tourists into the cave prior to the war starting (Vertebea was a well-known commercial cave). The section that was occupied by the 28 Jews (there were twenty-eight in Vertebea, and thirty-eight in Priest Grotto), consisted of a fairly straight passageway, high enough to walk upright in most places, and long enough for each of the four family groups to space themselves out each 15 or 20 feet. The Stermer family was the first group encountered by the Nazis, and eight of them were captured.

Later it was learned that the Germans became aware of their presence in the caves as a result of some potatoes, which had fallen into the snow near the entrance to the cave. A local subsequently passed by the entrance, noticed the potatoes, and then promptly advised the Germans that he thought some people were

living in the cave.

There was a second dug entrance to Vertebe, dug from the inside and some of the people escaped through it. Did you see that entrance?

Unfortunately, this section of the cave lies beyond a collapsed section. Consequently, we were not able to access the Jew's campsite in Vertebe. In addition, the entrance on the surface caved in many years ago. It is believed that both collapses can be attributed in part to heavy farm machinery brought into the area in the 1950s as part of the Soviet Union's collective farm system.

Do I have it right that Easter confronted the Gestapo, demanding that they leave them alone? But they took eight of them away, six of whom escaped, and two of them were shot? Meanwhile, others were lost in the dark in the cave?

When Easter saw the German soldiers coming, she immediately confronted them, speaking in a voice loud enough to be heard by the others farther back in the cave, and said such things as "what, you will lose the war if you let us live? Look at us, we live like rats. All we want to do is to survive" At this point one of the soldiers said something like "Get dressed, otherwise I will shoot you. You won't be harmed. We only want to take you to a camp." Then Ester, her four year old niece, along with her niece's mother and a male relative, Easter's son Shlomo, and daughter, along with her nine-year old son, Leo, all got dressed, and were marched out of the area at gunpoint. Meanwhile, the others quietly slid into the darkness, with some hiding under beds.

At one point while being marched through a narrow winding passage by the German soldiers, Ester, her son and nephew, realizing that at this particular point neither the German ahead, nor the one behind, could see them, slipped into dark alcoves and remained motionless as the group passed them. Consequently, by the time the Germans got to the cave's entrance they now had only five prisoners instead of eight. Eventually, the five of them were handed over to the Ukrainian police, who were ordered to kill all five prisoners in two days time.

Three of the five prisoners survived as a result of a bribe paid to the commander of the Ukrainian police, and an elaborately staged fake execution which involved several of their relatives providing the police with five adult and one little child's body. The agreed-upon plan called for all five prisoners to be placed into a mass grave, and then shot (actually, they were to miss them when they fired). These additional bodies, which were dug up late the previous night from a mass grave containing thousands of bodies, were then to be substituted for the prisoners, and then buried. It was in this manner that the Ukrainian commander hoped to protect his secret and that of his men from being discovered by

the Nazis, and then being executed themselves.

Unfortunately, something went terribly wrong with the above plan, and although the police intentionally missed when shooting at Easter's 4-year-old niece, her mother and male relative, Sol Wexler's 9-year-old brother and his mother were executed.

As a side note, one of the hardest interviews for me was that of Pepkale Hochman. She recalled what it was like to be four years old, being held tightly against her mother's chest in the bottom of a mass grave, and then to hear the gun shots, which brought about the death of aunt and cousin, just a few feet away.

Tell me about Shulim falling while trying to escape out the second entrance, and carried up the shaft by his two brothers. Ester had found him? How did she get away from the Nazis?

After escaping from the soldiers in the cave, Ester and the others found their way, in complete darkness, to the base of the secret exit shaft, which they had dug. It was during her way to this area that Easter found her son Shulim, who was wandering around in a daze, somewhat catatonic; he was in shock. The last thing he remembered in the cave was the sight of the shiny boots of a soldier, just inches from the front of his face, as he hid quietly under a bed. Almost 60 years later he would tell me that the sight of these boots would haunt him in nightmares for many years.

Unfortunately, Shulim, who designed and built the elaborate trap door at the top of the shaft, was in no position to help open it. While he was being seen to by Ester and her other sons, 13 year old Sol Wexler figured out how to open the door; leading to an open field, devoid of any cover.

After Sol opened the trapdoor the remaining 23 Jews crawled on their bellies across a field, into a nearby forest. From the description given to me during interviews of some of the Survivors, the scene was very reminiscent of that from the movie "The Great Escape," where the prisoners escaped amidst numerous Germans, dogs and spotlights, crisscrossing the area in search of them. Unlike the movie though, the Stermers and their relatives all made it to safety. However, because of Shulim's condition, Easter had to literally drag and carry him a good portion of the way across the field, and then into the woods.

There were dead animals in the entrance of Priest's Grotto when they went there? Was it a virgin cave? Were they exploring it with candles?

As mentioned earlier, several locals knew that there was some sort of hole at the bottom of the Priest Grotto sinkhole, but not many knew what was beyond. The most anyone knew was that foxes might have a den at the bottom of the sink, and that water drained into it.

Of course, farmers back then did what farmers do all over the world with sinkholes; they disposed of



their dead animals in it. I believe the presence of the dead animals, combined with the water, along with the fact that foxes were present, served to deter many from exploring the sink's bottom prior to the Sterners doing it.

In regards to their original exploration of the cave, this was done with the aid of small cups of kerosene containing a wick, in combination with ropes being tied around their waists. I believe that some of them also carried candles as well.

They slept for twenty-two hours at a time for long periods of time?

They slept for seventeen to twenty-two hours at a time. The rest of the time, as mentioned above, they remained motionless, conserving calories, on their beds telling stories. All the Survivors seem to agree, as uncomfortable as it was, that limiting their activities as much as possible allowed them to survive off of the limited rations that they had. And they all knew that the longer their rations lasted, the longer it would be before some of them would have to put themselves in danger again by leaving the cave in order to get additional supplies.

At one point the entrance caved in and it took them four days to dig it open. Then they found out that villagers had filled the ravine and blocked the entrance to the cave?

Yes, towards the end of their stay in Priest Grotto they discovered that some locals had blocked the entrance. Apparently, someone had seen them one evening as they were returning to the cave. Ironically, the new entrance, which was about twenty feet to the side of the original one, was even more secure than the first. This was because that now the only way to enter the cave was feet first. Later, it was learned that on several occasions the Nazis and police ordered some peasants to go into the cave to see if any Jews were inside. However, the peasants refused, for fear that their "legs would be cut off" by anyone inside protecting the entrance. It was also learned that after staking out the area for several weeks, the Germans gave up, saying that the Jews probably had numerous secret exits, just as they had had in Vertebe cave.

The article I read said, "Nissel and Shulim ventured even deeper into the cave's labyrinths, looking desperately for a breach where they could begin digging a secret exit. By this time the two older brothers were finely attuned to the state of sensory deprivation underground. They could walk for hours without retracing their steps, recognizing each passageway by its feel." Were they exploring the cave in the dark?

Their exploration was limited by their need to conserve what limited kerosene they had. However, because of the success they had with the second entrance that they had dug in Vertebe, they did spend several weeks exploring Priest Grotto for the sole purpose of finding a place where they could construct a similar escape shaft. However, they eventually accepted the fact that there was only one way in and one way out of the cave, since the ceiling was solid bedrock throughout.

Whether they were on explorations or just moving through those passages connecting the sleeping, cooking, latrine areas and lake, there was always the need to conserve kerosene. So, whenever they were moving through areas with which they were familiar, they would try to do so in darkness, in order to conserve the kerosene.

During the course of their stay in Priest Grotto certain passages became very well traveled. On a daily basis they would go from the camp to the latrine, from the camp to the cooking area, from the cooking area to the lake, and from the camp to the entrance (they had someone on guard duty at all times), etc. Consequently, many leveled trails developed over the months. Meanwhile, their shoes were wearing out, and eventually, despite the efforts of Nissel, who became the in-cave shoemaker for the Stermer family, many ended up going barefoot. To the surprise of some of these barefoot cavers, it was discovered that they could use their feet in the darkness, in the same way blind people use their fingers to read Braille. It was the combination of this ability to read the passages with their feet, in combination with reading frequently traveled walls, and their ability to gauge the size of the passage by the echo created upon talking, that they were able to travel much of their campsite in the dark.

Whenever they were in light, it was usually never longer than twenty minutes at a time, and never more than two to three times a day. Whenever they weren't sleeping, eating, or traveling between the different areas of their campsite, they remained sitting on their beds, in the darkness, telling stories to one another. In most cases, these stories were religious in nature.

Please tell me about plans for a documentary movie, or even a feature film, which I've heard mention is a possibility.

All that I can tell you is that Frontier Media Ventures is currently exploring the possibility of mak-



ing a documentary and/ or feature film about the Priest Grotto story.

What is the most frequently asked question of you from the Survivors?

The most frequently asked question came the first time I met Sol Wexler, when at the end of a three-hour meeting, he said: “Now, I have a question to ask you. In my case, and that of my relatives, we had to go into a cave in order to survive. Why would somebody like you, or anyone else with any common sense, want to voluntarily go into a cave?”

I answered Sol as follows:



**Chris with Joy Vogel, granddaughter of PG survivor Sol Wexler. And Bernie Chowdhury.
Photo by Peter Taylor.**

“To date there have been over 1,300 people who have summated Mt. Everest. There have been quite a few who have visited the North and South Poles. And, there have been twelve who have walked on the surface of the moon. But when you cave there is still the possibility that you might be the first to see something that no other human being has ever seen. You might be the first one the make a left turn instead if a right. Or lift that rock up, instead of climbing over it. And, in doing so, discover a new life form. Or, an old life form, long thought to be extinct. You might even discover buried treasure, or a valuable diamond. Or, perhaps even a rare gem; such as in “a gem of a story” - like the one about the Survivors of Priest Grotto; a treasure that had lain

buried for six decades. That’s why I cave.”

What do you attribute their success to?

In the case of the Stermer family, they had a strong matriarch, Easter Stermer, who could maintain control, and make those hard decisions that had to be made, uch as smaller food rations for those who did not go out on work parties. They had Nissel Stermer, who had served four years in the Polish Cavalry, and consequently had some knowledge of military logistics and survival techniques. They had knowledge of the fact that for as far back as 3,000 BC the local inhabitants had survived numerous invasions of foreign forces by taking refuge in the surrounding caves. And they had luck in that Priest Grotto had plenty of water, nobody got sick, the natural ventilation allowed for cooking to be done in a safe manner. Finally, they had each other, and the bond and love of a very dedicated, supportive, and loving family.

What was the one lesson that the Survivors brought with them out of the cave.

Time and time again the Survivors answered this question by saying: “sometimes you have to fight to survive.” You might remember that Ester’s book was entitled “We Fight to Survive.”

How has this project affected you?

It has made me marvel at just what the human spirit can endure and accomplish, under the most extreme of circumstances and conditions.

It has also put a face to the Holocaust for me. I grew up learning about the evils of slavery, the persecution of Native Americans, and other horrific things man has perpetrated against man. But the number “six million” was always just a number; a large number—one which always seemed to overshadow the stories of the individuals involved. The interviews in which I participated, along with the review of some transcripts from the Nuremberg trials and other materials giving first-hand accounts of what took place in Ukraine, has put a face to the Holocaust for me. Looking into the eyes of the Survivors as they told their stories had an effect on me.

Do the Survivors have any specific behaviors today which they directly attribute to their caving experience?

Pepkale always carries food with her so that she will never experience hunger again. Her older sister Shunkale retreats into a darken room, and closes her eyes in times of stress. Each of the Stermer brothers built houses which had extremely high ceilings in the entrance vestibules. None of the Survivors waste any food, and some are known to hoard things, finding it difficult to throw anything out which could be of any possible use in the future.

Why hadn't anyone heard of this story before?

Peter Lane Taylor, author of the *Adventure* magazine article, asked me the same question when I first approached him about this story. In answering this question I had him recall the way in which the Indiana Jones movie "Ark of the Covenant" ended. In the last scene of this movie you see this priceless artifact, the Ark, being placed on a shelf in a vast warehouse of the Smithsonian, among thousands of other artifacts; only to be forgotten over time. The Priest Grotto story was unfortunately just another one of thousands of Holocaust stories. It got lost among all the other stories about the horrors of being a Jew in Nazi-occupied Europe. Nobody recognized its uniqueness as a cave survival story, or as, to quote the son of one of the Survivors, "a story of triumph, rather than one of defeat."

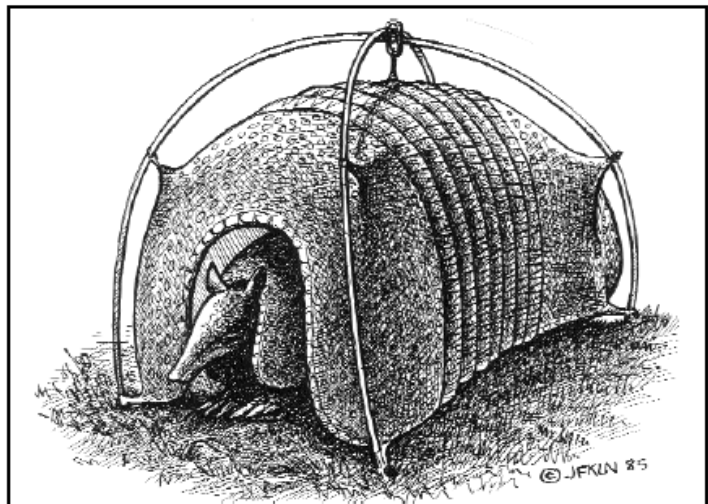
As good as I thought the above answer was, I eventually discovered, during the course of interviewing the Schulim, that there was another reason as well. Schulim answered the same question by referring me to his granddaughter Erin. She told me about when she was eight years old and how she would brag about the adventures of her grandfather to her classmates, only to be teased and become the object of their jokes. So, one day she begged and pleaded with Schulim to come to her class in order to tell his story. After Schulim visited her class, her classmates teased her even more about her crazy grandfather with the vivid imagination. So, Erin stopped telling the story; and so did Schulim and the others. Nobody believed them.

Schulim and Schlomo then went on to explain how they eventually came to understand the perspective of those who doubted their story. They said to just imagine how their friends felt, many of whom still bore tattooed numbers on their wrists, when they heard that while their loved ones died on cold, lice-ridden floors in death camps, the Sterners were lying under warm down comforters eating duck. Thus, they stopped telling their story because nobody could believe that any Jew could have survived Nazi-occupied Ukraine.



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PBSS Rock Haul

Saturday November 14th, 2009 at Carlsbad Caverns National Park in Eddy County, New Mexico in the Big Room inside Carlsbad Caverns.

Submitted by Bill Bentley

was the old Lunchroom. This project was started in 1986 under the direction of Dick Ventors and later many others from the Cave Research Foundation in cooperation with the National Park Service and the National Speleological Society, they with the help of many volunteer cavers started removing this blast debris for a couple of days during the week long Restoration Field Camps that lasted for several years. That work contin-



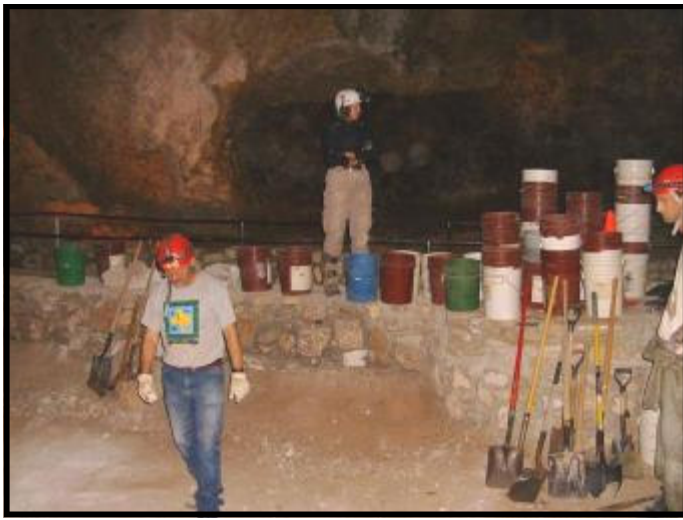
In this photo: **Katy Roodenko, Walter Castruita, Kerry Lowery, Charles Goldsmith, Lori Hales, Jacqui Thomas, Patrick Ray, Sharon Long, Ruel Metcalf, Bill Bentley, Jim McLean, Martha McArthur, Walter Feaster, Steve Webb, Jamie Lankford, & Udi Fuchs**

On Saturday November 14th, 2009, 16 cavers from all over showed up at Carlsbad Caverns National Park to participate in a now over 2 decade old continuing project of hauling out rocks and debris left over from the 1930's elevator blasting.

It would seem as the story has been told and retold, that many years ago when the first and second dual shafts were blasted out of the solid limestone reef, that rocks were blasted from both above and from below and met with precise accuracy. The fill material from below was spread about in areas that we are told

ues today but is being organized by the Permian Basin Speleological Society off and on since 1991. This consists of an all day Saturday project. It is the PBSS's goal to attempt to accomplish this day long work project at a minimum of one day twice a year, once in the Spring and Once in the Fall. The National Park Service reserved the 2 Research Cabins for all of us caver volunteers to use for the weekend.

This trip consisted of the following volunteer cavers who have so generously donated their time, expense to travel and make this project possible. Walter Feaster and Bill Bentley from Midland, Texas. Patrick



The tools of the trade.

Ray, Lori Hales, and Walter Castruita from Odessa, Texas. Jacqui Thomas from Sonora, Texas. Ruel Metcalf from Big Spring, Texas. Kerry Lowery from Coahoma, Texas. Jamie Lankford from near Lubbock, Texas. Martha McArthur and Jim McLean from Sandia Park, New Mexico. Charles Goldsmith, Steve Webb, Katy Roodenko and Udi Fuchs from the Dallas Fort Worth area of Texas. Sharon Long from Kansas. Also our most gracious National Park Service liaison Stan Allison.

Saturday morning we awoke and made our individual coffee and breakfast. Then at 8:00 AM MST Stan Allison briefed us all on the purpose of our trip, safety, rules and thanked us all for coming, we signed the appropriate forms and then set off for our days work and began digging around 8:30 AM MST. We had some where in the neighborhood of 200 five gallon plastic



Workin' in the hole!

buckets that were filled over and over by several cavers who immediately started excavating the rubble pile area upon our arrival in the designated work area. They looked like ants, all busy with their dedicated tasks. The silence of the big room was broken by the occasional dumping of half filled buckets into eagerly awaiting wheel barrows or the banging of a sledge hammer on huge boulders that later became little manageable rocks. I was told I had a future at the big house making big rocks into little ones. Once the belly's of the wheel barrows were filled, off they went down the visitor's trail to the freight elevators for a quick several minute trip to the surface. Once on the surface and out the loading dock doors and into the cool autumn air they were relieved of their loads being dumped into a NPS dump truck. This process was repeated over and over





Stan Allison receiving a PBSS T-shirt from Bill.

until at around 11:00 AM MST we broke for lunch. Half the group went back to the cabins to eat and the rest ate at the visitors center restaurant. The ice cream and pecan pie were a big hit.

After lunch we all went back to work and it soon became apparent that the dump truck was nearly full and with no NPS workers to dump it in the quarry we would soon be out of a job.

We managed to fill the NPS dump truck up completely by 3:00 PM and shut down early than planned. No one complained and several people who had never been on the tours at Carlsbad Caverns took off to take a free tour of one of nature's most scenic wonders of the underground. We meticulously carried all the picks, rock bars, shovels, buckets and wheel barrows out and had you not been aware you would have never known we were there. One visitor asked if we were lint pickers. The traffic was fairly light and I saw only a few children walk by. Nearly every visitor that asked what we were doing thanks us for helping out.

After regrouping and cleaning up at 6:00 PM we all headed for Lucy's in town to enjoy margaritas



Charles Goldsmith gathering up his toys and going home.



Jacqui "admiring" Bill's technique!

and Mexican food except Martha, Jim, Sharon and Lori who had to all leave early.

It was good to see old friends and make new ones, cavers are indeed a rare breed (I am not sure they have all been identified as to what breed though) and I am glad I am one of them.

The next rock haul event will be Late April or early May 2010.



Sixteen tons and what do you get? Just rewards at Lucy's!

Girl Scouts Invade Colorado Bend State Park, Saturday, January 23rd!

Participants: Alex Alman, Andrew Alman, Mark Alman, Brandi Hyre, Lyndon Tiu, Bonnie Longley, Gerry Geletzke, Matt Sanders, Cephas Wozencraft. Photos by Brandi Hyre, Beth Lorenz, and Mark Alman.





The TSA and the NSS—Working to promote cave education, conservation and safe caving!



TSA Spring Convention 2010

TCC Headquarters

1800 West Park Street, Cedar Park, TX 78613

March 26-28th, 2010

TSA 2010 Spring Convention Event Page: <http://www.cavetexas.org/events/TSASC/tsasc2010.html>

The Texas Speleological Association (TSA), founded in 1956, has been bringing cavers from around Texas for over 50 years. TSA Spring convention is a great time for all of us to come together with family and friends to enjoy group meals, presentations, workshops, new works at the Map & Photo Salon, treasures at the TCMA auction, business meetings, and your favorite vendors.

The spring convention is the annual technical meeting featuring presentations on projects and information on the scientific aspects of caving.

Fees: \$15.00 per person and \$40.00 for a family of 3 or more.

Map to Convention: <http://www.cavetexas.org/maps/spring2010.html>

The Texas Cave Conservancy (TCC) headquarters will be a great place for the 2010 TSA Spring Convention on March 26-28th in Cedar Park, TX and here are some great things that the new location adds:

- Urban convention (seconds from Austin) where locals have the choice to go home to their fuzzy beds at night
- Local Methodist Church at 600 West Park Street seats 100+ and is suitable for digital presentations
- The option of having Saturday workshops on cave mapping, vertical, and cave photography (instructors permitting)
- Maps and photos will be set up in the headquarters and a room will be available for everyone's personal evening slideshows
- Pets are allowed off leashes, at your own risk
- Loads of nice camping
- Caving available very nearby
- A nice, cozy place to hang out during the evening
- A party on Friday night hosted by the TCC
- Movie night showcasing best/worst/favorite caving related movies
- Convenient cooking facilities for our wonderful cooks

Diana Tomchick & Bill Steele have graciously agreed to host the program this year and are no doubt ready to wow us with another year of great talks on cave geology, biology, conservancy, and exploration. Please be thinking about interesting topics to present at the convention.

Stefan and the TCCC (Texas Caving Cooking Crew) are going to bless us again this year with a wonderful catered meal! We are all lucky to have the cooks. Lyndon and the Greater Houston Grotto have agreed to be the registration team.

If you would like to volunteer, please contact me directly at ellie.thoene@gmail.com

Please show your support to Texas Caving by attending.

Ellie Thoene

Your TSA Vice Chair

Facebook Event Page: <http://www.facebook.com/settings/?tab=privacy#/event.php?eid=219361835478&ref=share>





Texas Speleological Association
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Attn: Editor