



the  
TEXAS COVER

a magazine written by and for cavers

Chuck Stuehm award  
2012 winners

Project Deeper continues  
the new season off to a fantastic start

BCI awards

# 2012 TCR **WINNERS** AWARDS AND CONTESTS

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2012 CHUCK STUEHM AWARD WINNERS



Austin McRee, Greater Houston Grotto  
 Kris Pena, UT Grotto  
 William Quast, UT Grotto  
 Natasha Glasgow, DFW Grotto  
 Gregg Williams, Bexar Grotto  
 Rachel Saker, Aggie Speleological Society

The award is named after Raymond Chuck Stuehm (pronounced "Steam") who was a member of several Grottos in the San Antonio area and was especially good at guiding, working with, and encouraging new cavers. Chuck's memory is honored every time a new, exceptionally exuberant caver receives this award. Thank you to all the Grottos for their participation.

Ellie Watson, TSA Vice Chair

## TSA Election Results

Congratulations to Heather Túček for being elected Texas Speleological Association's Secretary and Roger Moore as our new Vice-President. Three things - thank you for stepping up, you both have big shoes to fill, and a hearty "Welcome Aboard"!

VERTICAL CONTEST WINNERS

### Women's 30 Meter (Frog) Climb

- 1st Ellie Watson
- 2nd Kris Peña
- 3rd Vianne Euresti

### Men's 30 Meter (Frog) Climb

- 1st Sean Lewis
- 2nd Joe Datri
- 3rd Galen Falgout

### Women's 30 Meter (Rope Walker)

- 1st Ramie Schweers

### Men's 30 meter (Rope Walker)

- 1st Carl Frommen

CABLE LADDER

SECONDS

### Kids Under 15

- 1st Drew Rutherford 18.12
- 2nd AJ Dietz 18.20
- 3rd Journey Bissett 20.94

### Women

- 1st Mimi Alexander 14.17
- 2nd Ramie Schweers 14.43
- 3rd Kris Pena 16.90

### Men

- 1st Jake Emmert 11.63
- 2nd David Brankovits 11.94
- 3rd Carl Fromen 12.73

Thanks to all who participated. Also, to all who helped to keep time and book, couldn't have done it without such gracious volunteers.

Extra thanks to Galen Falgout for rigging up in the tree.

Special thanks to Whole Earth Provisions for whom we are grateful for their continued generosity.



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The editor reserves the right to edit inappropriate material, errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation, and to edit for clarity. In the event of significant changes the author(s) will be given an opportunity to review changes prior to publication.

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- 1st Quarter issue — February 15
- 2nd Quarter issue— May 15
- 3rd Quarter issue — August 15
- 4th Quarter issue — November 15

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## PHOTO CREDITS

### Front Cover

Michael Harris

### Back Cover

Bennett Lee: *Mayan Girl*,  
Angela Edwards

## FROM THE EDITOR

In Q3 issue, the photo on page 8 of Valhalla's entrance should have been credited to Ellie Watson.



## EMERGENCIES

For Cave Assistance,  
Call the Closest  
County Number:

BEXAR	210.326.1576
COLLIN	214.202.6611
HAYS	512.393.9054
SUTTON	325.387.3424
TRAVIS	512.663.2287

For Life Threatening  
Emergency: 911



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Texas Caver

THE BEST CAVERS' MAGAZINE

IN TEXAS

## 2012 TSA OFFICERS

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

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

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

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# VOLUNTEERS RECOGNIZED BY THE BCI



## Fran Hutchins

At this year's San Antonio Bat Fest Bat Symposium, the Bat Conservation International recognized Bob Cowell, Kurt Menking, and Rick Corbell, all members of the Bexar Grotto, for their years of volunteer service to BCI's Bracken Bat Cave.

Bob has been protecting Bracken for over 30 years - well before BCI's purchase in 1992, and was there in 1993 when the first trail was put in. Many visitors have met Bob during the summer bat flight tours.

Kurt is another long time volunteer, with over 30 years helping with the summer tours and various work projects. His skills with GIS mapping have been an invaluable resource during Karst surveys.

Rick too, for over 20 years, has worked tirelessly on many projects, and can often be seen in the background tinkering with some piece of equipment to keep it running.

Fran Hutchins, BCI's Bracken Bat Cave Coordinator said, "BCI could not have accomplished all that it has at Bracken, and been able to share this spectacular wonder of nature with its members without these guys or the thousands of volunteer hours all of our volunteers put in each year."



Top: Bob Cowell and Kurt Menking, accept awards From Fran Hutchins of BCI at the Bat Symposium held at Trinity University during Bat Week in San Antonio.

Bottom: Bob, Kurt and Rick Corbell display their awards.

To learn more about BCI and volunteer opportunities, visit [batcon.org](http://batcon.org)

# PROJECT DEEPER

August 4 and October 27, 2012

THE FIRST TWO SURVEY TRIPS OF THE 2012/13 SEASON FOR DEEP CAVE REVEALS RICHLY DECORATED ROOMS, MANY MORE PROMISING LEADS.

Joe Mitchell

After a summer intermission, Project Deeper resumed with a new season of trips this fall, one on August 4 and another in October. Last year, four survey trips succeeded in increasing the length of the cave from 2,730 meters to 3,610 meters. The main places we focused on so far are the area beyond the Crystal Waterfall and Lunchroom at the far west end of the cave, the area around and below the Helictite Room, and most recently a new area back underneath the Entrance Hall. All these areas have yielded significant new discoveries and all have numerous leads remaining (in addition to many other leads throughout the cave that we have not even looked at yet). Some of the places we've surveyed at the west end of the cave have been re-discoveries of areas on the 1965 map which have visited rarely if at all since, including the "Moonmilk Room" (now called Gotham City), the Junction Room, and the Square Ceiling Room. Unusual and some quite extensive and delicate formations have been found throughout the newly surveyed passages. Besides the numerous leads, there are still a number of areas shown on the 1965 map that awaited re-discovery and one of the efforts this season is to find these locations.

## THE AUGUST SURVEY

For the first trip was on August

4 and we assembled 18 people into five teams to continue the survey from last year and explore leads not looked at in some time. A co-worker of Gregg Williams, Steve Gutting and I, Trey Tolbert, generously offered to cook for us just to go along and hang out at the cabin. The food was excellent and having dinner prepared was much appreciated by the tired survey teams. Wade McDaniel also came, but due to a recent injury stayed on the surface with Trey.

Marvin Miller led a team with Gerry Geletske and Arron Wertheim to the Miller Time Room which had not had any survey work done in it since 2005. On the last survey trip to that room, which Marvin led, he had noted several interesting leads and a pit in the floor of the room. They first worked in the pit which they descended and followed only to have it connect to the Z-survey at Z19 which goes to the MCM Room. They next surveyed a lead at CF39 which went two stations before connecting into CF43. Then starting at CF41, they surveyed another loop that ended at CF38. In this area they found some nice Christmas tree spar formations. Finally, they surveyed another lead they had noted earlier for 4 stations to tie into CF50. The team surveyed a total of 13 stations for 62 meters.

The other four teams were focused

on a particular goal: to connect the front and back parts of the cave by a route other than through the Crooked Broomstick Room. The cave had taken the form of a sideways letter 'C' where the entrance is near one extreme of the C, the Crooked Broomstick Room is near the center of the letter and the new west-end discoveries are near the other end. Many leads headed into that gap, but no connection had yet been found. Each of the teams was assigned a different entry point into the gap, each coming from a different direction. The hope was that the teams would be able to communicate and find the links.

Bennett Lee led a team with Galen Falgout, Zach Schudrowitz, and Geary Schindel which started into the gap from the northeast side, following leads left from their previous KB survey. Further clockwise around the gap, Don Arburn led a team with Mike Harris, Lori Harris, and Gregg Williams, starting from the Crooked Broomstick Room and heading north into the gap. Further around the 'C' of the cave, Ellie Watson led a team with Tom Rogers and Joe Schaertl off of the LB survey that her team had surveyed last October and headed east. Finally, I took a team to near the farthest extent of the survey at N9. This room had been named the N-Ate Room by the team the surveyed it, but since

then, it has been determined that this is actually the Square Ceiling Room from the 1965 map of the cave. My team was comprised of Tom Florer, Linda Palit, and Ryan Monjaras and our goal was to work on leads heading southeast. Based on the map, it was expected that if connections were made, my team would connect to Bennett's team and Ellie's team would connect with Don's team. However, that's not how things turned out.

Bennett's team began from the New Crystal Waterfall at KB12 and headed into an up-going lead. They climbed up past many delicate formations until coming to a drop at KB16. They stopped at KB17 but it split into a tight, teathy and impassible 'Y'. Beyond KB16, they found a short 'L' passage that ended. At this point, however, they heard voices which turned out to be Ryan from my team. However, after much searching from both sides, no connection was found. KB16 to KB18 continued as a tight downclimb into a large sloping room. On the climb down, they noticed a 3-inch long scorpion. Continuing along a lower route into a canyon, the team came out at the base of a long flowstone slope into a room they recognized – Metropolis! Connection achieved. Retracing their steps to KB18, they followed a second upper route which came out at the top of the same flowstone slope. They surveyed a total of 18 stations for 66.6 meters.

Meanwhile after Ellie's team analyzed the maps and determined which lead appeared most promising in the direction they wanted to go, they began scouting. Before long after some tight squeezes, they encountered another survey team, but it wasn't Don's team, it was

Bennett's! They made their way back to the LB survey and got cracking. At LB25, the Sofa Center, they passed up many promising leads in their aim to survey the connection. LB28, the Femur Buster, did not deter their team and they popped out into a small room with spar draperies. They soon connected to LB31, which was close to Bennett's KB24 station. Once they tied in the connection, they decided to continue on an upward lead where the floors, walls and formation were coated with gypsum dust. After surveying a total of 10 stations for 32.5 meters, they left the cave with going passage at LB33 and many more leads.

Don's team had less success due to the confusing breakdown in their area and lack of survey stations. They began by surveying a couple of leads off of the Crooked Broomstick Room which either got too small for them to pursue to did not go. They ended up surveying up into an upper area in which they could not find any survey markers in their search to find the "spongework maze" area shown in the old J-survey notes. However, it ultimately lead to what was identified to be Bear Scratch Hall which was part of the J-survey and the spongework maze was found but was in another direction (and comparatively tight). An old survey station in Bear Scratch Hall was finally located and identified from the old notes to be J15, so they tied into that and called it a day after surveying 9 stations for 49.1 meters. However, their misfortune turned out to be fortunate in that they were in Bear Scratch Hall at the right time.

My survey team proceeded to the Square Ceiling Room which was about the most distant known part of the cave from the entrance since

you had to go all the way around the 'C' to get there. We began surveying from N9 where an up-going lead had been indicated in the notes. While Ryan scouted ahead, Linda, Tom and I began the survey work. We went through a small crawl into a larger room with some impressively sized coral and found several leads including a climb and a pit. We elected to go up the climb since it headed more in the direction we wanted to go. It sloped up steeply to a point where we made voice contact with Bennett's team, but never found a connection. At the top, a hall took off to one side. This led to a climb up to a larger and longer hall, parallel and above the first one, which went in both directions. We first surveyed to near one end of this hall, where we found raccoon droppings and heard a frog. Later this room was identified as the Topout Room from the 1960's maps and it seems likely there is some sort of connection to the surface in this area since it is rather high, though there was no detectable airflow. It appeared that this end of the passage ended since everything headed off into small openings between formations which we did not want to break to follow (nothing visibly opened up.)

About this time, we heard Gregg from Don's team, though initially could not identify their location. After Ryan probed around in what appeared to be a formation plug, he found a tight squeeze that led between the formations and through a crack, emerging at the top of a long flowstone slope. At the far end of the slope was Don's team in Bear Scratch Hall – another connection made! If they had not been at that location at that time, it is unlikely we would have found the connection.





Dripping formations in the KC survey. Photo by Mike Harris <<



Ellie Watson takes a break from sketching in the new room they broke into beneath the western rift. Photo by Galen Falgout <



Formation in the CF survey. Photo by Marvin Miller <

White fishtail in the P survey. Photo by Ellie Watson >



Arron Wertheim looks at a large coral deposit near the Miller Time Room. Photo by Marvin Miller >

Steve Gutting explores a crawl way in the KC survey. Photo by Mike Harris >>



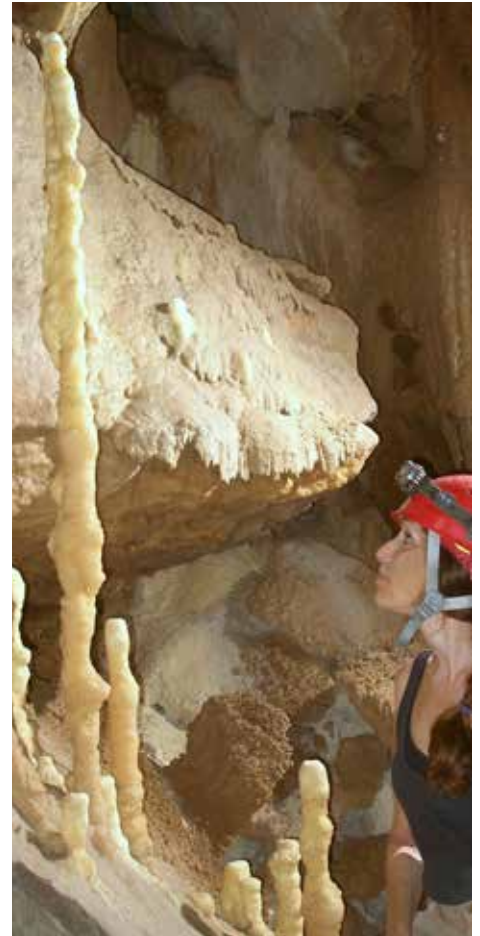
The mysterious 5/69 carbine mark on blasting debris at the far reaches of the CF survey, deep below the Crooked Broomstick Room. Photo by Marvin Miller <





The unique Square Ceiling Room in the back parts of Deep Cave. Photo by Joe Mitchell <<

Jill Orr admires the Twin Totem in the newly rediscovered Norm's Room. Photo by Joe Mitchell >



"The Cathedral" - a gorgeous grouping of formations in Norm's Room that contains an angel with an offering. Photo by Joe Mitchell >



Large spar crystals in the N survey. Photo by Joe Mitchell <<

The "Butterscotch Sunday" formation in Norm's Room. Photo by Joe Mitchell <



Strange mineral deposits in small domes on the ceiling beneath the Helictite Room. Photo by Pam Campbell <

**NEXT ISSUE:** Look for more photos of the beautiful rooms in Deep Cave, the Fern Cave trip, and a Chuck Stuehm tribute.

If you look at the 1965 map, it turns out that the Topout Room is directly adjacent to Bear Scratch Hall, not far separated as originally drawn.

After surveying through the connection and tying into Don's survey, we returned to survey the other leads in the Topout Room. Ultimately the remaining passages either reconnected back down to the next lower hall or ended. However, at one end of the hall, we found a small pit. Through a few tiny cracks in the wall I heard Ellie and was able to communicate with her clearly but there was no route through. We exited the cave by using our newly found connection via Bear Scratch Hall, cutting off more than half the time getting out of the cave. Our team surveyed 22 stations for a total of 71.1 meters.

We had succeeded in making not one, but two connections were made through the gap between the front and the back of the cave that bypass the Crooked Broomstick Room. However, since both routes are rather tight and go through areas of delicate formations, it is unlikely that either will become a major route. However, more leads exist in these areas, so discovery of additional routes is likely. Since this were the first large scale loops closed around the perimeter of the known cave, this trip provided an indicator as to the overall quality of the survey of the cave. Fortunately, the closure has proved good and there was little shift in the cave as a result of these two new connections.

#### OCTOBER SURVEY TRIP

October 27 marked the second trip of the season, attended by a total of 19 people, with 16 going underground. Surface support on this trip was

provided by Jenni Arburn, Evelyn Mitchell, and Kayla Mitchell who spent the day relaxing in the cool weather, carving pumpkins and preparing a great dinner of spaghetti, salad and pies for the tired survey teams to enjoy upon their return. On this trip, five teams again tackled various areas of the cave, with a focus of expanding the limits of the cave in several directions as well as downward.

Don Arburn led a team with Pam Campbell, Ted Lee, and Joe Schaertl to the area below the Helictite Room. They started by having Joe recheck the pit into the V-survey and Mary's Pit for possible unmarked leads. Nothing new was found in the V-survey pit, but Mary's Pit had an ongoing, un-surveyed lead that heads back under the Helictite Room. After rigging the drop into Mary's Pit, it became clear that it can be free-climbed by a strong climber who could spot remaining climbers. After checking these pits, they began their survey at BL1E with the goal of getting meters and descending to greater depths. They came across some interesting brownish/yellow formations in small domes in the ceiling that looked like dirt patches from a distance, but upon closer inspection were in fact isolated formations. The area was mostly breakdown maze with many leads along with airflow near a pit at PC6. They managed to achieve significant depth and stopped only 10 meters above the depth of the deepest known part of the cave, with several leads and at least one going deeper still. Their survey totaled 10 stations for 41.5 meters.

Bennett Lee led a team with Steve Gutting and Mike Harris back to the KB survey below the Entrance Room to explore some down-going leads.

They started their survey at KB3 heading down into a sizeable room they named "Popcorn Heaven". It had numerous narrow fissures in the floor that were humanly impassible. They did observe an apparent connection to the D-survey behind KC8 and Bennett was able to prove it (though Mike and Steve didn't fit). They also discovered a foot-deep standing pool of water near KC6, which may be the only one yet to be found in the cave. They surveyed 12 stations for a total of 44.2 meters.

Ellie Watson led a team with Galen Falgout and Wade McDaniel to pick up the P survey from 2008 below the West Chasm beyond the Crooked Broomstick Room. They started by breaking through a tight squeeze at P7 which had stopped the previous survey. This lead to a couple of rooms but eventually ended with no leads at a flowstone plug. Then they returned to P5 and followed a lead, rediscovering Dickey's Coral Crawl from the 1965 map. After surveying the crawl back to its connection along the main Western Rift, they then checked leads in the vicinity of Nutcracker Chimney. They ruled out one but a second one appeared to go. Galen was determined to follow it since it appeared promising, but Wade could not fit. Another lead from the top of Nutcracker Chimney was found to connect through a tight squeeze to L3 near the Crystal Waterfall. However, with a lack of findable survey stations in the area, the team was at a loss of how to proceed, but knew that leads remained. They ended their survey, having surveyed a total of 16 stations for 66.3 meters.

I led a team with Jill Orr and Tom Rogers out to Metropolis at the west end of the cave. We started

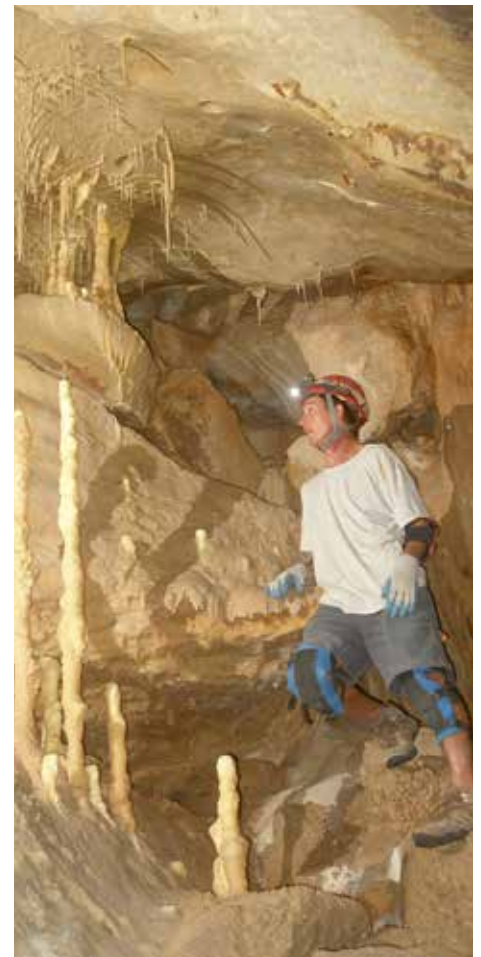
by cleaning up the previously unfinished sketch of Lower Metropolis, checking out a few leads along the southern wall. Then, we surveyed up into the large lead at the west end of Metropolis, naming it Upper Metropolis. At one location was a wall with six leads, most of which were high up on the wall and we named it the "Wall of Leads". We continued surveying upward to the top of Upper Metropolis where there were several older but pretty formations (including some 12" wide sections of drapery) but no leads. We returned to the Wall of Leads and followed one near floor level, which led to a steep climb down to a large room. Tom went to go check it out but was gone a long time while we surveyed up to that point. Eventually he returned with reports of extensive cave. Since the climb was pretty steep, we felt better rigging some webbing as a handline. We dropped down into a large room that was highly decorated. After examining the 1965 map, we concluded that we had re-discovered "Norm's Room". Among the formations here were extensive amounts of coral and popcorn on the floor and walls, a number of stalactites, a 10 foot tall Butterscotch Waterfall, a giant Butterscotch Sunday formation, and the Twin Totems (a pair of 4-5 feet tall totem poles). We spent the remainder of the day surveying this room. A couple of small leads led in a various directions with one going down to a large walking corridor passage that continued. We surveyed 19 stations for a total of 74.6 meters.

Finally Marvin Miller led a 14 hour marathon survey with Gerry Geletzke and Ryan Monjaras to the Miller Time area. They surveyed from the end of a previous survey from 2005 (CF58) into a southeast-northwest trending

passage. After 8 stations, they found a re-connection to their August survey and a bat roosting at that location. Their survey then headed into a new section of the cave that goes to the west from the Miller Time area and eventually loops back under the Crooked Broomstick Room, but at a much lower level than anything else known in the area. At the end of their survey, Ryan found "Can't Fit Pit", a tight down climb to a nice 3x3 meters southwest trending passage but didn't survey it since Gerry didn't fit. Ryan estimated that there was more than 100 meters of passage beyond the pit. Most interestingly, there was evidence of blasting and a smoke inscription of "5-69" at this location but it was apparent to the team that no one had arrived at that location by the route they took. Since there are no currently known down-going leads in the vicinity of the Crooked Broomstick Room, the route by which the blasters got to that location is unknown as is the identity of those individuals and their reasons for going to this obscure spot. Marvin's team surveyed an outstanding 31 stations for 102.1 meters.

The October trip was extremely productive with a total of 328 meters surveyed. The northwest corner of the cave continues to surprise and delight us with well decorated areas and good size rooms. The Helictite Room, so often the destination of recreational trips, constantly reveals new passages and leads trending ever downward. A whole new area has been opened up in a lower level along the southern side of the cave from Miller Time. Connections across the northern side of the cave have revealed a complex web of passages, still being explored. At this point in time, there is no indication

of running out of cave anytime soon. After the first two trips of the season, Deep Cave, topped the 4 km threshold, and even inched ahead of Spring Creek and is challenging Punkin (4,400 meters) with a new length of 4,145.5 meters, while the depth remains at 77.5 meters.

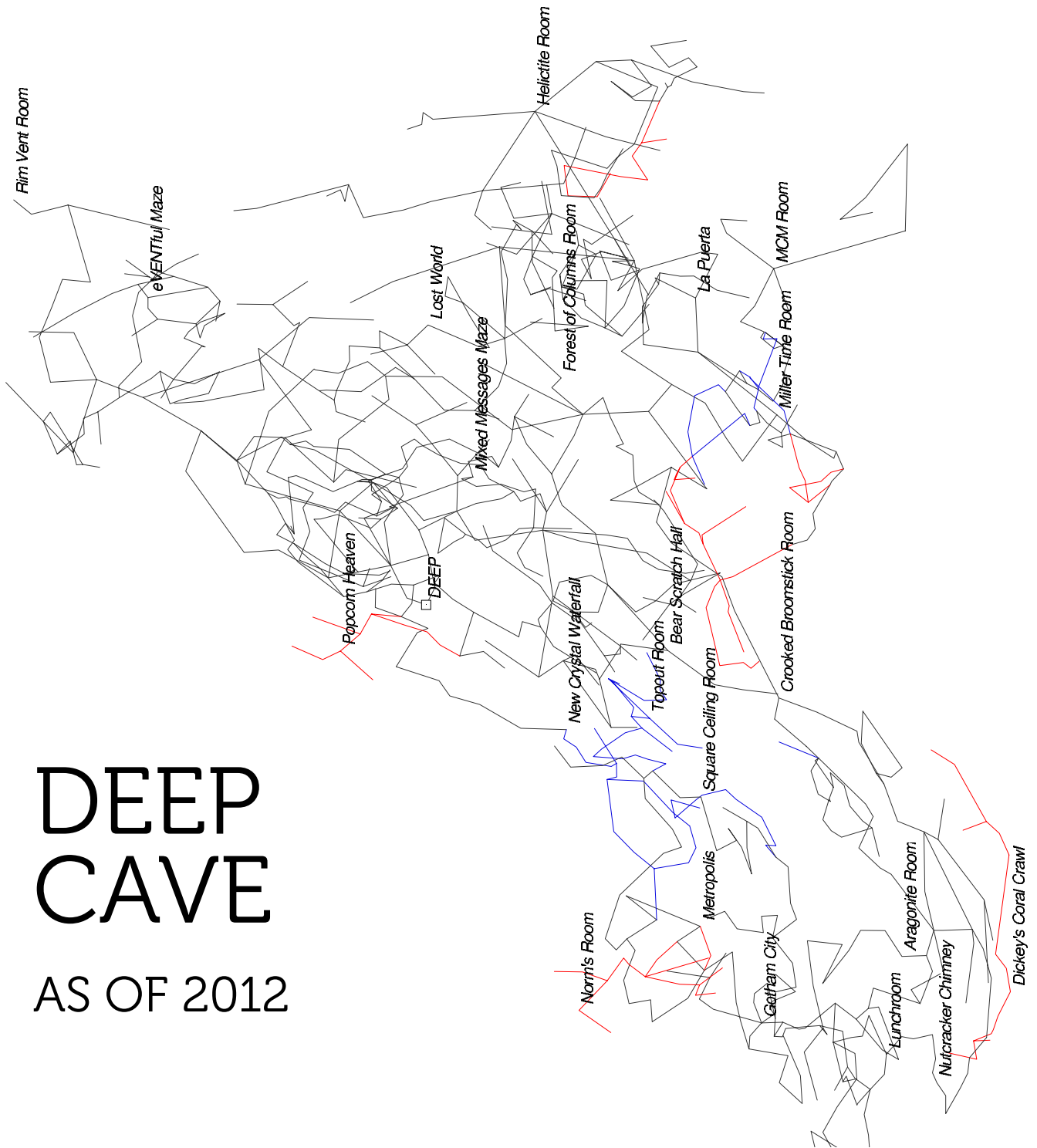


Tom Rogers admires the Twin Totem in the newly rediscovered Norm's Room in the far reaches of Deep Cave. Photo by Joe Mitchell



# DEEP CAVE

AS OF 2012



# HONEY CREEK CAVE

AGGIE TRIP - OCTOBER 6, 2012

Photos by Weston Green, an Aggie Caver



## CIBOLO BLUFFS KARST SURVEY

Marvin Miller

Texas Nature Conservancy Cibolo Bluffs Preserve covers 1,244 acres along Cibolo Creek in Comal County near Garden Ridge, Texas. The property was purchased in late 2011 from a local developer and important part of the recharge zone.

Nineteen cavers and non-cavers gathered around on a beautiful fall morning to begin the survey. TSS records from the 1960's show four possible caves on the property and with Bracken Bat Cave a mile away the odds are good that we find some more caves.

Team leaders Kurt Menking, Marvin Miller and Rick Corbell did a great job! Over-all 95 acres were surveyed and 17 features were found.

Surveys will be held on the third Saturday of each month till March. Contact Fran Hutchins at fhutchins@batcon.org or 512.848.9404.



Volunteers gather around for their team assignments at Cibolo Bluffs.

# TRIP REPORTS

A COLLECTION OF  
TEXAS CAVERS'  
TRIP REPORTS  
FROM WHEREEVER  
CAVING TAKES US

## CAVE RESCUE SEMINAR

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION OF  
THE NATIONAL CAVE RESCUE  
COMMISSION WITH TEXAS  
PARKS AND WILDLIFE PRESENTS  
CAVE RESCUE OPERATIONS AND  
MANAGEMENT SEMINAR  
FEBRUARY 9-16 AT COLORADO  
BEND STATE PARK BEND.

The seminar consists of extensive classroom and fieldwork in all phases of cave rescue including underground environment, vertical rescue, hauling systems, extrication techniques, medical management, communications systems, and the organization and management of cave league operations.

Basic and advanced course material is presented for students who typically include cave emergency service personnel and emergency managers. The seminar provides approximately 80 hours of instruction over eight days. Classes are physically strenuous and participants must be in good physical health. Students should be prepared to work in difficult situations, both above and below ground.

There are two levels offered: Level I teaches current cave rescue and emergency techniques, and Level II teaches prepares the student to function as a rescue team leader.

An optional Vertical System Workshop provides participants an opportunity to practice personal single rope technique.

For more information visit [www.caves.org/commission/ncrc/national](http://www.caves.org/commission/ncrc/national) or call DJ Walker 512.751.6010.



# CAVER COPPER B-DAY PARTY

HOW A CAVER COP'S  
BIRTHDAY IS CELEBRATED

Tom Florer

On Saturday December 1st, Bexar Grotto members Mike Harris, Lori Harris, and I gave a tour of Robber Baron Cave to the Outdoor Club of Trinity University. The seven students were excited to have a break from cramming for their upcoming finals, term papers, and all the good old college stuff. Some of them had some experience in wild caves and others did not, but everyone was excited to get underground.

We started with the standard talk on cave safety and the history of Robber Baron Cave, and after getting everyone geared up, we entered the cave. After admiring a few bats who had set up shop in the entrance passage, we made our way past the second entrance towards the Graffiti Room. The students were amazed that two entrances that are only five feet apart on the surface require 15 minutes of caving to go from one to the other underground.

In the Graffiti Room, Mike showed the students the historical and not-so-historical graffiti (C.C. 1492, anyone?). Here he also took out a cigarette lighter to explain about "bad air," and how you can check for it in a cave. Fortunately for us, Robber Baron had very good air on this particular trip. We also did the standard "lights out" experience, and spent a few moments listening for cars travelling on the road above us.

As we prepared to leave the Graffiti Room, I announced that



Tom Florer and Mike Harris (foreground) with Trinity students in Robber Baron.

I wanted to add a bit to Mike's comments. I said, "Mike didn't tell you this, but in his day job, he's a cop. And what do cops like?"

After a moments pause, a couple of the students said "doughnuts?"

"That's right," I continued. "Mike's a cop, and cops like doughnuts. And the other thing that Mike didn't tell you is that today is his birthday."

I reached behind me and picked up a Tupperware container filled with a dozen doughnuts that I had been carrying in my cave pack, with two lit candles on top (you see my hidden agenda behind recommending doing a demonstration on checking air quality with a lighter). "So to that end," I said, "we should all sing Happy Birthday."

Mike of course had no idea that this was coming, and was almost speechless for a moment, which is really rare. But just for a moment. We sang Happy Birthday, ate doughnuts, and had a great time seeing the rest of the cave.

## A CHRISTMAS CAVING STORY

Herman Miller

After twelve hours bottoming out a multi-drop cave a short distance outside of Las Vegas, my group and I came up to the entrance pit to find everything - including the rope covered in ice from a freezing rain. Not only did this necessitate carefully negotiating the large breakdown, it also required shaking off the ice that had copiously sheathed the rope. The rain increased in intensity as we made our way up the rope, and before the first person had made their way out of the cave, they were having to drive the ascender up and through the ice.

This made for a very chilly ascent on what was a great caving trip with a great group of friends.

# RARELY VISITED FERN CAVE

IT'S BEEN SEVERAL YEARS SINCE THERE'S BEEN A GROTTO TRIP HERE. ON NOVEMBER 16, CAVERS FROM AROUND TEXAS MET AT FERN CAVE IN VAL VERDE COUNTY, TO CLEAR BRUSH FROM THE ENTRANCE, AND ENJOY THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT THIS UNIQUE TEXAS CAVE.

Jill Orr

Jim Kennedy from the UT grotto graciously helped me organize this trip which included Ellie Watson, Wade McDaniel, Bennett Lee, Joe Schaertl, Tom Rogers, Tom Florer, Rob and Journey Bissett from Bexar Grotto; Galen Falgout, Lee Jay Graves, Geoff Hoese, Aimee Beveridge, Kris Pena, and Will Quast from UT Grotto; and Rachel Saker from ASS.

Friday night Bennett, Wade and I began the trip with a private bonfire on the next property over before we thought it was time we should join up with the rest of the group. Actually, we were sort of lost - but it makes for a good story. It looked like we were at the right place.

Saturday morning began with Galen, Jim, Rob, and Bennett on rope cutting the brush in the first ledge in the main sink, with surface support hauling up the brush. There are three ledges in the main sink and each has its own unique ecosystem. A gorgeous light brown owl watched from her perch in on the ledge until she felt the activity was getting a little too close and flew off. Some of us felt a little guilt over the loss



Photo by: Ellie Watson

of that perch. With everyone's help, it only took a couple of hours to completely clear the ledge of three years growth of brush and scrub.

Then it was time to cave. Most of the group dropped into the main entrance, but Jim took me to the mine shaft entrance near the back of the cave where he let me help him rig. We dropped in there and worked our way to the front.

Jim gave me a mini tour before we met up with the rest of the group, pointing out pretty formations, and telling me some of the history of the cave.

Fern Cave is the largest volume cave in Texas, an enormous borehole, with smooth, layered walls. It was once a guano mining cave and during that time, had electrical lighting. The cave is still a bat roost and has huge guano mounds about 20 feet tall.

Jim pointed out some very pretty and decaying brown calcite. We also found a goat skull and bat skeleton.

Groups kept intermingling and reforming depending on picture taking and posing, and how long a sight was holding someone's attention. We all stopped to admire the breakdown pile with the lush mound of ferns.

Tom Rogers, Rachel and I went off to explore possibly the only passage in the cave that could keep out all but the thinnest of cavers. Journey had such a great time he wanted to rappel in a second time, so Bennett took him back in. Saturday night we were also treated with the bat flight.

Given the volume of, and dry, dusty condition of guano we had waded through, on the drive home we thought it would be a good idea if we look up Histoplasmosis symptoms - just in case...





Photo by: Bennett Lee



Photo by: Ellie Watson



Photo by: Ellie Watson



Photo by: Ellie Watson



Photo by: Bennett Lee



Photo by: Ellie Watson



Photo by: Bennett Lee





Photo by: Bennett Lee

# A MEMORABLE FIRST

Chris Lafferty

I imagine that most cavers remember their first cave. Perhaps their recollection of the trip is far from complete, but the memory is nevertheless there. The initial trip through dark tunnels, large breakdown, and past beautiful formations was likely the catalyst that drove them drive them back underground on future trips. I was fortunate then to experience some of the best Texas has to offer as my first caving experience.

We began the trip on a Friday evening. The long drive took us through San Antonio, where we joined

some cavers from the Bexar Grotto, before arriving in Carta Valley, TX. The drive was largely uneventful except for the suicidal deer which routinely played chicken with passing cars. After arriving at the small, but cozy cabin on the preserve, we settled down for the night in anticipation of a long day of caving.

After an early breakfast (for tired cavers), 16 of us headed to Deep to begin the trip around 10 am. My initial assumptions of the cave were far surpassed. It was a blast! Despite the constant climbing and ever-present humidity, I had an

abundance of energy as we saw the prominent features of Deep. These included the Wall of Faces, the Forest of Columns, the Helictite Room, and the Crystal Waterfall. Throughout the trip, Bennett Lee from the Bexar Grotto was kind enough to snap several pictures of the grotto and the cave, including an impressive picture of the group sitting on a large breakdown slab in the Helictite Room.

In addition to the spectacular sites, the trip was also an introduction to standard caving practices and etiquette. This was learning experience on how to move softly and carefully through a cave. There was evidence of past travel through the cave, such as broken helictites from careless helmets and chips in the limestone from boots. I hoped to add as little as possible to these trails. Still, I had a few frights, including a hop unto some unstable breakdown and a glancing helmet tap to some cave bacon which caused a low, reverberating



note to play from the cave wall. Thankfully, the bacon was not harmed (and my bacon was saved)!

About halfway through the Deep trip, Ray, Nikhil, TJ, Mallory, Austin, and I got to squeeze through the breakdown underneath the Helictite Room. It was likely the highlight of the trip for me. We left our bags behind as they would have slowed us down going through the squeezes. Then, we picked a long, haphazard route through the breakdown to arrive at a 20 foot wide doom with a flat, mud floor. This dome was beneath the Helictite Room, but at least 50 feet vertically down. The flat, mud floor made me think that the room was at the bottom of the limestone layer. Better yet, TJ, Ray, Nikhil, and I picked a different route to return to the helictite room. It involved climbing a couple short walls and chimneys to arrive on the opposite side of the Helictite Room!

We spent another few hours in

the cave before returning to the surface in the late afternoon. As everybody sat around the entrance, resting and relaxing, we had a friendly challenge of fitting through an alternate entrance to Deep. Some were successful, some were not, but we had a fun time with it.

By the time we returned to the cabin, many of us were tired. With the sun setting, we discussed whether we should visit Punkin. Half of the group decided to remain at the cabin, and the remaining members, myself included, soldiered on to Punkin. With the sun on the decline, we had only enough time to rig our ropes and harnesses and descend into the pit. Nikhil and Austin volunteered to be top support, and the remaining members had enough time to see some of the leads and snap a picture at the bottom of Punkin. We then ascended the pit just as the sun set. We were fortunate enough to ascend as the bat population of Punkin was leaving

the cave. Many of these bats can be seen as Caleb is ascending below.

We returned to the cabin and left in the morning after a thorough cleaning. The trip was a memorable experience, thanks in part to the TCMA and our trip leaders. The caving bug has definitely bitten me, and I expect I'll be back underground sometime in the near future.

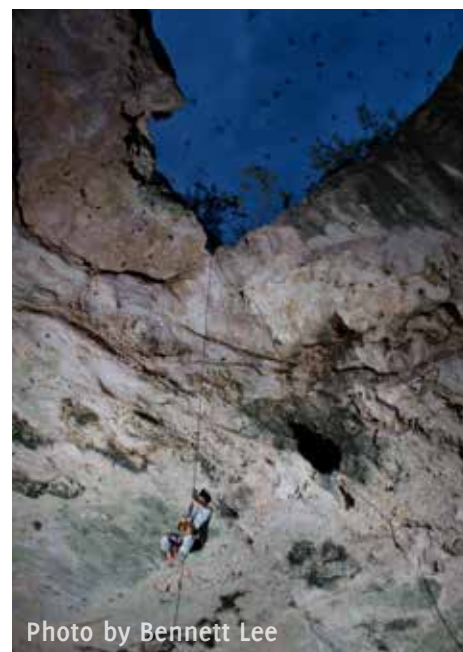


Photo by Bennett Lee

# TEXAS GROTTO PROFILES

## Bexar Grotto

Missy Eagan and Jill Orr

Originally San Antonio had two grotto's: St. Mary's and San Antonio. Eventually the two merged and since 1983 Bexar Grotto has provided a forum for cavers to meet and participate in various caving activities.

The Bexar Grotto is committed to the protection of caves and cave conservation. Bexar Grotto members have contributed many hours of volunteer work and enjoyed ourselves in the process! Some of our major volunteer efforts include fund-raisers for the Grotto and TCMA, and donations to the NSS. Bexar Grotto was instrumental as the major organizer for the 2009 ICS held in Kerrville, and we have spearheaded three open house events at Robber Baron for the TCMA with the support and assistance of Houston, UT, and San Marcos grotto members. Recently the Grotto, under Gregg Williams, conducted a restoration project at Robber Baron, removing unsightly graffiti from the Lighted Passage and Devils Kitchen.

Bexar Grotto meets on the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month. Our meetings consist of reporting on grotto business, updates on Texas caver organizations TCMA, TCC, and TSA, trip reports and a program. 2012 officers are Marvin Miller, President; Missy Eagan, Secretary; Bob Cowell, Treasurer; Joe Scheartyl, Program Chair; and Jill Orr, Trip Chair. Officers are elected each January.

## DFW Grotto

Bill Steele

The Dallas-Fort Worth Grotto is about 52 years old. It meets once a month at the Dallas REI on the fourth Wednesday night of the month. The meetings last two hours with an hour of it being business, announcements, trip reports, and upcoming caving trips, and an hour devoted to a presentation, almost always a narrated slide show. After the meeting most people go to a nearby Taco Cabana restaurant for fellowship and talk of caving past and future.

Members of the DFW Grotto are conducting a project to

thoroughly explore and map Spring Creek Cave, Kendall Co., Texas, one of the dozen longest caves in the state. Its members go caving in a multitude of places such as Texas, Arkansas, New Mexico, Arkansas, TAG, Kentucky, Mexico, China, etc. The current grotto chair is Steve Webb, with the chair-elect being Natasha Glasgow. Besides Steve Webb as chair in 2012, the vice chairperson (in charge of grotto programs) was Natasha Glasgow, secretary Charles Goldsmith, and treasurer Diana Tomchick. Other incoming officers are Jay Jordan - vice chairperson, Jake McLeod - secretary, and Diana Tomchick will remain as treasurer.

## Greater Houston Grotto

Mallory Mayeux

The Greater Houston Grotto meets on the third Tuesday of every month. Traditionally, we meet for a meal around 6 pm at a predetermined restaurant (which changes every month) then head to the Texas Rock Gym on Campbell Road for our 7:30 meeting.

GHG meetings consist of different cave-related programs, and every few months we have a vertical session held on one of the rock gym walls. Our November program was a lesson by Kevin McGowan in different rigging methods and knots that are helpful in caving.

The GHG has been very active in 2012! Over the last few months, GHG members have participated in the See My Shovel tank haul, visited Whirlpool Cave, Logan's Cave, Honey Creek Cave, and the Deep/Punkin cave preserve. We had several Houston grotto members participate in the Laguna de Sanchez survey trip with Jim Kennedy in November, and others went caving in the Mammoth cave region this fall. Tommy Joe and his crew of Houston volunteers also created a dish for TCR.

The current officers are Clint Ladd (chairman), Kevin McGowan (vice-chair), Lyndon Tiu (treasurer) and Mallory Mayeux (secretary). GHG will be holding elections at it's January meeting. Be on the lookout for exciting new happenings from our grotto in 2013!



# Lubbock Area Grotto

Derek Smith

Lubbock Area Grotto obtained Charter #G-317 on January 28, 1986. The founding members of the caving family included Jeff Thom, Don Horton, Victor Polyak, John Polyak, Jeff and Marcia Steele, Edward Hudgeons, Noble Stidham, and April MacDowell. Evolution of the club came when Noble wrote a letter to Bill Elliott, TSA, inquiring as to his knowledge of other cavers in the Lubbock area. Mr. Elliott responded with Victor's name and address. A phone call from Noble to Victor quickly netted enough interest to have an initial meeting and luckily, the beginning of a grotto. While none of the original members remain active, today the group numbers around twenty.

However LAG takes much pride in the fact that all of its members are active in one form or another in most of LAG activities. Most members participate in at least one activity per month. The majority of the club activities center on exploration and surveying of new caves. Contributions to the total survey include membership expertise in geology and biology. LAG members are eager to participate in any conservation project involving cave management and work with the BLM, National Forest Service and National Park Service. Since its inception, LAG has participated in surveying: Sinkhole Flats, River Styx Cave, Dry Cave, Endless Cave and Carlsbad Caverns. Restoration work has been done in many caves throughout the Guadalupe Mountains.

# Permian Basin Grotto

Jacqui Thomas

The Permian Basin Speleological Society was formed by Tony Grieco and Bill Bentley in September of 1983 with a membership of thirty people - mostly cavers - who soon referred to themselves as "spylunks." (The origin of the name is at best mysterious.) In 1984 PBSS was chartered as the 300th grotto of the National Speleological Society. PBSS is also a member of both the Southwest Region of the NSS, and the Texas Speleological Society. Although original members were in the Midland-Odessa area, PBSSers are also currently as far-flung as Alpine, Sonora, and various locations in New Mexico.

PBSS generally has about thirty members, mostly cavers. Members have varied interests and the grotto has participated in exploration, digs, rock hauling for the National Park Service as Carlsbad, and introducing the unsuspecting to caving by taking them to such grand locations as Amazing Maze, Deep (Carta Valley) and Ess Caves.

The Grotto meets monthly at Murray's Delicatessen in Midland, where topics of discussion include trip planning, landowner-caver relations, new discoveries, picture showing, and general caver-style socializing. 2012 officers are President: Matthew Ormsby; Vice President: Patrick Ray; Treasurer: Walter Feaster; and Secretary: Jacqui Thomas.

# UT Grotto

Gary Franklin

The Underground Texas Grotto is a group of cavers from the Austin area that explore caves in Central Texas and beyond. Members range from raw beginners and occasional cavers to hardcore international expedition cavers. UT Grotto was founded in 1951 and still operates under the original charter. Meetings are held on the 1st, 3rd and 5th Wednesdays. Meetings feature accounts of recent caving expeditions, slide shows, and a chance to sign up for caving trips and training sessions. Occasionally, we meet underground for a full meeting and program.

UT Grotto meetings are full evening events that begin and end with food and drink. Before the meetings, some take advantage of Sao Paulo for happy hour, and meet folks walking over to the meeting on University of Texas campus. After our official meeting, we continue with the decades long tradition to reconvene for burgers and beer at Posse East, which is a great place to visit and network about previous and upcoming caving trips. Be sure to introduce yourself at the meeting and talk to people who are leading upcoming caving trips. New caver training remains active with two beginner caving trips each month as well as an introductory rope night the second Tuesday of each month where you can learn how to rappel and climb rope safely.

Caving trips cover the spectrum from local projects such as Colorado Bend State Park, which continues with ongoing cave documentation in a region rich with karst. Ongoing cave digging projects at Kiwi Sink and Cedar Park occur once or twice a month. We have cave divers that stay active pushing leads in local water caves in Kendall County such as Honey Creek and other caves in the Spring Creek area that attracts large groups of newer and seasoned cavers for adventure and fellowship. The UT Grotto calendar remains current to help recruit folks for the wealth of caving activities available.

Current Officers are Sean Lewis – Chair, Gary Franklin – Vice Chair, and Ryan Monjaras – Secretary/ Treasurer whose annual terms expire in January.



Photo by: F. Binney



Photo by: Lyndon Tiu



Photo by: F. Binney



Photo by: F. Binney



Photo by: B Lee



Photo by: Lyndon Tiu

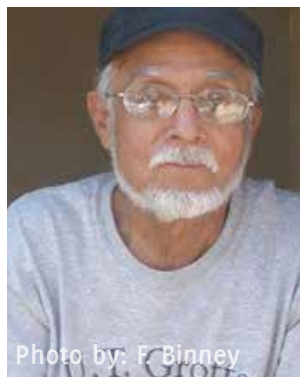


Photo by: F. Binney



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Photo by: Carl Kunath

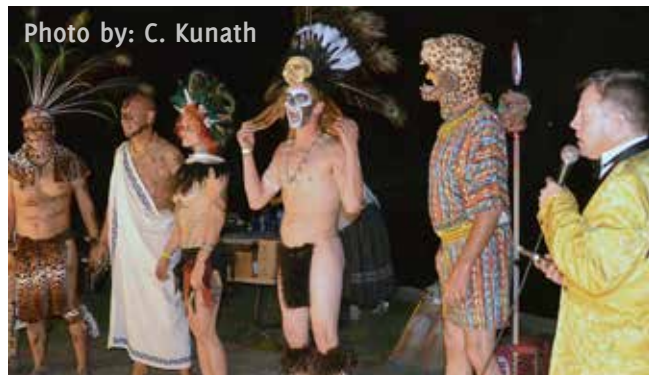


Photo by: C. Kunath



Photo by: F. Binney



# CAVER IN THE HEADLAMP

## How Legendary Caver **Pete Strickland** Began Caving

Linda Palit

PETE STRICKLAND IS A FAMILIAR CONSTANT IN TEXAS CAVING: GIVING SLIDE SHOWS AT UT GROTTA MEETINGS, LEADING TRIPS TO THE BIRTHDAY PASSAGE IN PALMITO AND ALWAYS SUPPLYING THE PORTABLE HOT TUB TO EVENTS SUCH AS THE TEXAS CAVERS' CONVENTIONS. PETE IS ALSO WELL KNOWN FOR HIS STORY TELLING. HERE IS THE FIRST QUESTION I ASKED IN MY INTERVIEW.

### **How and where did you start caving?**

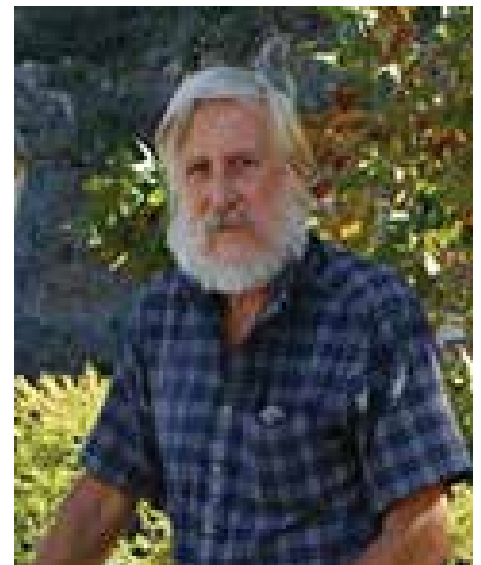
I grew up in Western New York outside of Niagara Falls and Buffalo. There were no real caves up there. As a kid I liked to find cracks between rocks and climb around in them. My brother read books and found books about caving.

He saw a 1964 article in National Geographic that had the NSS address. He then became an NSS member, bought how-to books, and a book on the Caves of Pennsylvania. It described caves you could go into

without permission, descriptions of the locations, and latitude and longitude in case the description of location did not get you there. Our first trip was to central PA with five of us. We geared up in army helmets and flashlights. We crawled around the caves we found which were nothing but groad holes. We loved every minute of it. It was better than anything in our area.

In the spring of 1965 my brother wanted to know if I wanted to go to the NSS convention in Indiana. He told me that for \$2 I could join the NSS as an associate member, and then the NSS convention will be cheaper. I got the NSS number of 8298 before my second caving trip. We drove all night in my father's station wagon traveling to convention. Upon getting to Bloomington, we saw a person with a backpack and asked if he was a caver. He was, so we gave him a ride to registration.

We all registered, got the guidebook, and it told us how to visit caves. We had no real sleep but decided to visit



a cave called Shiloh Cave. This cave had a stream entering the entrance. The stream flowed through a large, well decorated, passage, much better than anything we had seen in PA. It was a through trip, and near the end, you get fully wet, then emerge to a deep quarry full of sunshine and deep blue water for swimming.

There were several caving trips that week to decent caves. I also went to a vertical session where they talked about ideas on climbing systems and

rappel devices. I saw my first Goldline (stretchy laid nylon rope) and my first Jumars (handled ascenders). Another indoor event I went to was whatever passed for “international exploration” back then. The only international cave trips mentioned were ones the UT grotto was doing. Cavers from the UT grotto had been going to Mexico, and had achieved notable successes. They had been a thousand feet deep in Sótano de Tlamaya down to a big room and had run out of rope at a stream passage that was going down drops and headed deeper. The most notable achievement was moving the deepest pit in Western Hemisphere from the United States to Mexico. The pit that lost the record was Alabama’s Surprise Pit at 426 feet. The new record was a skylight entrance to Ventana Jabalí (503 feet) north of the Naciemeno del Rio Choy. They went in the horizontal entrance and saw the skylight above them with a shaft of sunlight, illuminating the entire room. Some of the team hiked overland, found the small entrance, rigged it, and somebody rappelled down. When the person was halfway down, his silhouette was an extremely small dark shadow in front of the beam of sunshine. It was the most amazing cave photo of the entire convention. It really knocked my socks off. So at that moment, I realized that Austin, Texas was probably the place to be. But I had a little thing called a “military obligation” hanging over my head, so it would be four and a half years before I could get to Austin. I was 19, and got to Austin when I was 24. I saw real caves and really became inspired at that convention

Fall of '65 and spring of '66 I had a few more trips to PA and WV. to go caving. I decided to go to the '66 convention. I had met a caver at the '65 convention

named Charley Townsend. As the '66 convention approached, he and his 13 year-old brother, and my older brother and I traveled to Sequoia National Park for the '66 NSS convention. I went to Soldiers Cave which was my first vertical cave; I used my new jumars. During that convention, I was in the “out crowd,” and the “in crowd” in the vertical scene snuck off with a 1,200 foot piece of Sampson rope owned by someone in the Huntsville Grotto and rigged a 1,125 foot drop against the face of a cliff called the Watch Tower. A number of people rappelled down. Some even climbed back up. When they got back to the campground and described their feat, those of us in the “out crowd” were very envious.



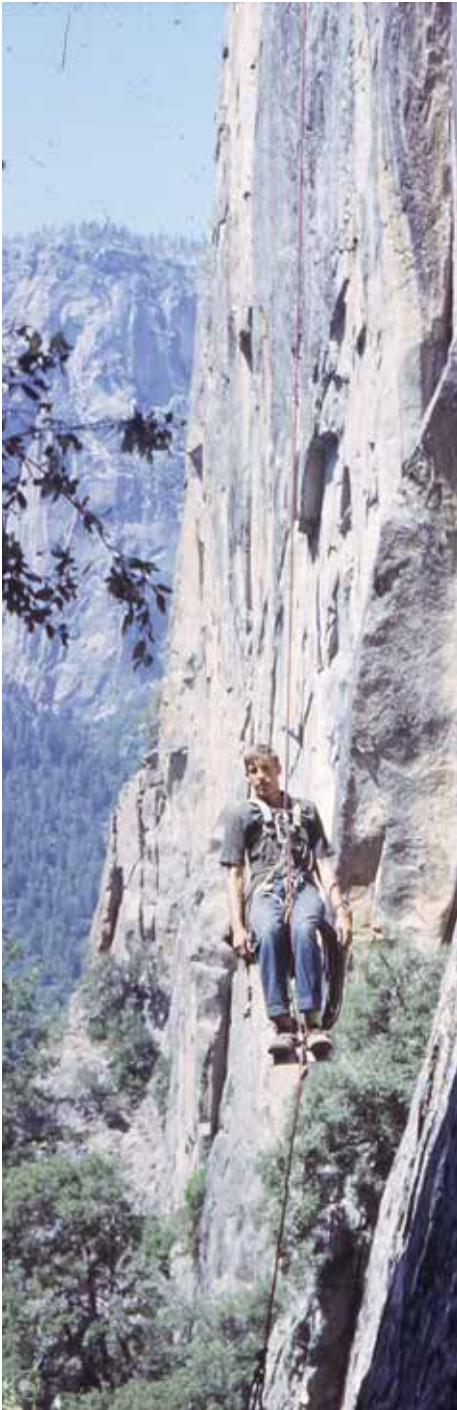
At the '65 convention my friend Charley had been rescued by the Texans when his gear left him with his ankle packed against his chest and his carabineer packed against his chin. Before the '66 convention, Charley invented a climbing system he called the 'inchworm'. It was like a frog but with a Jumar attached low between the feet, a rigid bar under the boots, and a strap over the toes. Charley taught the system to me, At convention, we rigged a rope on the

outside of the meeting hall, and we taught the system to all comers. When convention was over, we headed for Yosemite Valley. Upon entering the valley on the south, you are in a tunnel. As you approach the far end of the tunnel you are greeted by an amazing view of Bridalveil Falls and a cliff called the Leaning Tower to the right. This looked like it might be at least as tall as the cliff done by the “in crowd” at convention. And it was overhanging cliff.

Charlie and I seized on the idea to see if we could rig the cliff, rappel and ascend. He had his 600 foot Goldline. I had a 200 foot Goldline. By borrowing rope from people in climbers’ camp, we came up with a little over 1,200 feet of rope.

A group of seven decided to try to reach the top by starting from the glacier point roadway upstream of the falls. The distances were greater than expected so we stacked the rope on the side of the creek and hiked down the talus slope to the valley floor and hitchhiked back to camp. The next day we rested. We had to bum a ride to retrieve the car. On the third day, three of us started up the route called the Gunsight to get to the Leaning Tower. It was overhung before getting to the top. The Gunsight got us to the creek easy enough, but we had to go way upstream to get the rope, and take it back to the starting point of the climb on the backside of the Leaning Tower.

At that point darkness overtook us. Charley, brother Mike, and I huddled together during a miserable night trying to keep warm. In the morning, Mike had had enough, and headed down the Gunsight. Charley and I found a route up the backside of the



Leaning Tower, got all the rope up, tied the rope together, and lowered it over the edge. It was mid-afternoon when Charley started his descent on double break bars in carabineer, the descending system we used back then. He was against the face for 200 feet, then went vertical and he was out of sight and out of voice contact. He reached the first knot 600 feet down, and transferred to the new 200 foot length of Goldline. He did not

notice his breakbars were twisted, leaving much less friction than before. As soon as he began to rappel he was immediately out of control. He hit the knot at the end of the 200 foot length hard enough to flip upside down in his seat and bruise his hips from the seat sling stopping him. Painfully, he continued descended to the bottom over multiple knots. He was in no shape to climb back up, as we had previously agreed. When it was approaching dark, I hiked down the Gunsight, finding Charley and his brother in the parking lot with Charley's sad tale. We were almost out of time for the trip, so the next morning it was decided I would climb the rope, untie it, drop it, and descend by the Gunsight route. I had no trouble making the climb with the new inchworm system. I had three Jumars so it was easy to go over knots. Upon reaching the top and dropping the rope, the people on the bottom observed that the rope fell as a unit, zinging as it hit the ground, making a pile.

I descended the Gunsight with no incident. We packed up the rope, returned the ropes we had borrowed, with some of it having to be mailed back to the climbers. By calculating using rope lengths, we determined the drop was approximately 1,200 feet, beating the previous 1,125 foot record of the "in crowd" set at the convention the week before. The free hanging portion was approximately 1,000 feet. Guinness was not keeping records at that time, but to the best of our knowledge, Charley had claimed the longest rappel and the longest free rappel ever done. I had claimed the longest ascent and the longest free ascent ever done. The 1,000 foot free fall records were lost when Sotano de las Golondrinas

was descended nine months later at 1,094 feet, and the 1,200 foot total record was lost when someone rigged the 1,240 foot side of Golondrinas. Feeling elated, we headed east toward our more normal existence.

On that trip, we were completely green, but sometimes you get lucky.

In the fall of '66, I started vertical caving in West Virginia. I remember doing Hellhole that fall. Selective Service had made me 1A. There was no lottery, and they were drafting everyone. I decided to see if I might land better if I jumped before I was pushed. Only the army had any specific guarantees if you joined instead of being drafted. My father worked in aerospace and found out there were no Nike missiles in 'Nam. So I asked the army recruiter if he had anything Nike that would come up before I was drafted. He said it was all booked up until after my draft date, but there might be cancellations that would be coming in on the Teletype. So I asked him to give me a call if something Nike comes in. Nike courses were split between Fort Mammoth, New Jersey, Fort Bliss, Texas, and Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. A week later the recruiter called with a cancellation; he had a slot for a six month course in Nike missile repair that I could join before my draft date, and go to Huntsville. I said "SOLD!" I couldn't believe it!

Huntsville, vertical caving capital of the Western Hemisphere, would be my home for six months, I would have taken Nike anywhere, so going to Huntsville was icing on the cake. I was set up to do more caving in the next six months than any time before or after.



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