

THE TEXAS CAVER



Showtime at Cascade Caverns

TCMA acquires new property

Kleck County Park



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COVER PHOTO by Bennett Lee

The Castle of Oz in the McMichael Chamber. Left to right, back row: Kevin Pride, Gregg Williams, Travis Scott. Front row: Rob Bissett, Pam Campbell, Katy Hoyle, Sean Hoyle, Dave Adamoski, Lindsey Adamoski, Jess Buckles, and Joe Schaertl.

BACK COVER PHOTO by Mike Harris

Texas cavers Charlie Yates and Blair Pittman are being honored with the firing of the cannon at the 2016 Texas Cavers Reunion at Paradise Canyon. Fusilier – Ronnie Fieseler

EDITOR

Grace Borengasser



Deep & Punkin Cabin

Painting by Grace Borengasser
Acrylic on wood panel – Dec. 2016
12" x 12"



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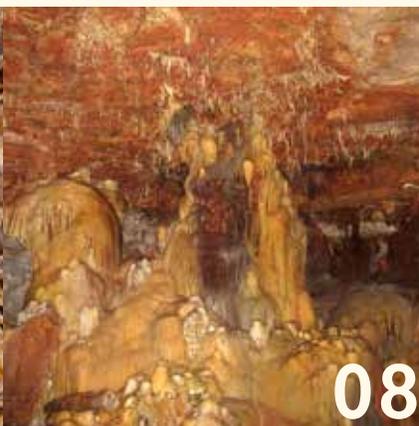
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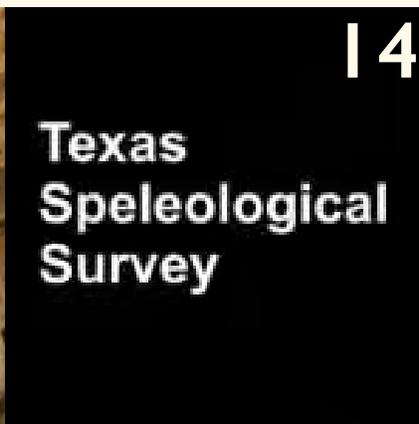
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Dinosaur and Ellie in staring contest by *Ellie Watson*

Showtime at Cascade Caverns

MANAGING A TOURIST CAVE WITH A DINOSAUR BREATHING DOWN MY NECK

by **ELLIE WATSON**

What did one tectonic plate say when it bumped into the other tectonic plate?

Oops, my fault.

I have seen my fair share of show caves but in the summer of 2016, I had the chance to never leave the show and became general manager of Cascade Caverns & RV Park. Cascade Caverns, located north of San Antonio in Boerne, TX, was founded as a show cave in 1932. It is a Texas Historical Commission site and was the first cave in Texas open for public tours. The tourist trail covers about 1,140 feet of cave passage and visitors walk through hallways, crouch under formations and might be lucky enough to see the Cascade Caverns salamander. On the surface, there is a 14-foot-tall dinosaur statue left over from a film that was shot on the property and in the cave. The dinosaur throws everyone for a loop but that's show business.

There are many differences between cavers caving and tourists touring but there are also similarities. Some of the stark differences are the selfies, photographs taken of oneself. I may see one in 1,000 of cavers' photographs be a selfie, but it seems like the tourists take about 950 of 1,000. Where cavers show up to a cave in boots, more than likely a tourist will arrive in flip-flops. A majority of tourists do not seem to understand what caves are or what touring a cave involves. I have heard tourists ask is it's dark down there or if it's dirty. I had a hard time convincing one tourist that the cave is real and the formations and passages are not man-made. Some similarities between cavers and tourists are their sense of adventure and I think, that just by showing up, tourists are exhibiting a raw sense of adventure. Both cavers' and tourist's eyes alike will light up when they see a new passage for the first time.

Over the summer, we had our share of adventures in the cave. When I started, the cave had already been flooded for two weeks and we were also closed a few days here and there for flooding throughout the summer. Thankfully we got our pump systems figured out but when it pours, there is always the chance of flooding. One time, during a rain, a pump failed mid-tour and the tour had to walk out through ankle deep water. Thankfully, they were an adventurous group and said they had a great time. Another time, there was a county-wide brownout during the tour, the tourists did not panic and just went with the flow with a few flashlights scattered throughout the group. We sold tourists on the excitement of "flashlight tours" until the brownout lifted.

I have also had some amusing interactions with customers from funny to unique. When a frail, 80-year-old woman from Mexico came in with her family, I warned her grandson about the 100 stairs to the cave and he confidently told me

she could handle it. Well, not only did she breeze by me on the way up the stairs, she challenged me to a race when we made it back to the surface. Another time an 8-year-old was visiting with her family from Houston and she kept asking her parents what was the noise she was hearing. After a few inquiries, I told her they were crickets and I had a sad realization this was probably one of her first times in nature.

A few times, we had tour guides from other Texas show caves come through and it was fun but awkward. It was fun to see them enjoy our cave and it was awkward when I knew they were going to predict my jokes. The weirdest, but most entertaining visitors initially had endless questions when they were buying their tickets, asking if they would see a salamander. Eventually, I told them that if they were the only ones on the tour, we could spend the entire time looking for salamanders. Come to find out, the three of them worked at the San Antonio zoo and they spotted more salamanders in one trip than I saw all summer.

It's funny when my friends would ask me if I have been caving lately and I would give a dramatic pause and remind them that I work at a cave. Despite the charm, working at a cave is still work and, even though it's much different from being a caver, I enjoyed the experience. I liked seeing the excitement in the tourists' eyes when they see a cave for the first time and hearing their whispers about everything amazing that they see. Just as I remember the awe and exhilaration from my first time in a cave, I was motivated knowing that our tour might be the most exciting experience of their entire life.

Did you hear what happened to the fault line on a diet?
It caved. 🦇



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Cricket Crap Cave

TRIP REPORT – AUGUST 13, 2016

by **BENNETT LEE**

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold crickets: and crickets sat on me; and crickets rained upon my head: and crickets went forth defecating, and to defecate.

Revelation 6:1–2

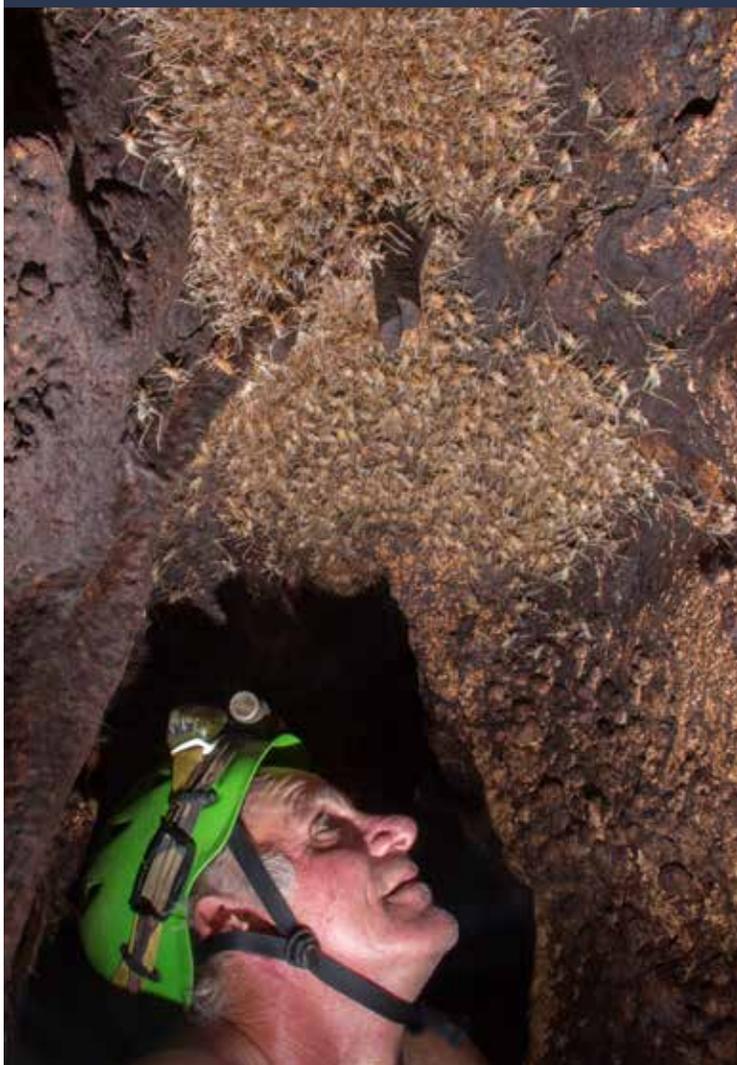
Geary Schindel needed help assessing eight known caves on a private ranch in Medina County. (Yes, once again, it all started with Geary.) Most of them were rumored vertical pits, and he easily gathered up San Antonio and Austin cavers eager for the chance to drop into unexplored vertical caves.

There were many adventures during this trip, like Michael Gibbons getting run up a tree by a 260lb wild hog — twice — and the subsequent search parties; Geary Schindel leading his group astray because he doesn't know how to read a GPS; and everybody skipping the first cave because it was "only horizontal" but turned out to be the biggest and most



Broken stalactites on the ceiling...surrounded with more crickets by Bennett Lee

Gary Donham beneath a few of the crickets that rained upon me by Bennett Lee



decorated cave on the ranch — that we know about so far. But I'll let those folks weave their own tales. This trip report is about one of the unnamed caves on the ranch, which I dubbed Cricket Crap Cave for reasons which will soon be apparent.

After leaving other teams to explore and map other caves on the ranch, the ranch owner led us to a pit on the side of a small hill. He said the cave opening has grown in size since he's known about it. It must have been really small initially because even with the "growth" the entrance is only about two feet in diameter. After the opening, the pit bells slightly and then narrows again near the bottom. It looked about 15 feet deep and probably climbable without rope. However, the walls were covered with a slick moss, so we decided to rig a rope for safety.

Gary Donham started putting on his vertical gear while some other cavers wrapped the base of a nearby juniper tree about 47 times with a rope. I hiked back to the cars, got my camera and vertical gear, came back, and put my gear on. In all that time, Gary still hadn't sorted out his vertical gear, so I cut in front of him and hopped on rope. There were huge clusters of harvestmen in the first few feet of the entrance. About halfway down there was a tiny, foot-high passage that curved around a corner. At the bottom, the cave became a narrow fissure about four feet high. One direction pinched off after a few feet. The other direction showed passage going slightly downward. The top was too narrow to pass through, so I laid down on the soft floor and crawled in head first. However, even at the floor level, it's so tight that I had to take off my helmet and lie on my side to fit through. After that, it opened into a small, narrow passage just tall enough to kneel in. I looked around — and that's when it started raining crickets.

Literally every square inch of the passage had crickets on it. When I barged into their underground lair with my light ablaze, all the crickets started jumping off the walls. The next few minutes were akin to the Battle of the Hornburg (a.k.a., Helm's Deep) — a nonstop onslaught of creatures attacked

me. My helmet was still off from the squeeze, so they flew into my hair and onto my face. I couldn't even see because there were so many of them, but I could feel them landing all over my body and arms and legs. They piled below me, and I could hear them crunching under my knees as I tried to move forward, away from the entrance constriction. I laughed at the absurdity of the situation, only to have some land near my mouth, so I quickly muffled my laughter. Eventually the torrential downpour of crickets subsided, and all the crickets huddled en masse at the top of the passage, forming layer upon layer of writhing antennas and spiky legs right above my head.

In this respite from the storm, I could finally see that I was in a passage about five feet high, two feet wide, and ten feet long. At the end of the room was a small section of formations. There were some dark brown stalactites on the ceiling, and along the right wall were crystalline formations, including a few more stalactites, a cracked column, and some flowstone. Across from the formations, the passage continued to the left, but shrunk down to about two feet high and four inches wide with solid bedrock on either side. Beyond that, it appeared to open slightly and continue to the right. On the other side of the restriction, there was a grey blur as a little mouse darted across the passage.

I heard Gary finally starting down the rope. I opened my camera case in the narrow passage and took some photos of the crickets, but my back kept itching. As I leaned forward to scratch it, my headlamp illuminated the floor, and that's when I saw that the soft dirt was speckled with fire ants. Fortunately, I was wearing a pair of CaveSkinz pants, which despite being so worn that Ron Rutherford recommended burning them, they were still able to provide some protection from the ants. However, once the fire ants got above the waistline, they were stinging my back. I made sure to kneel instead of sit on the soft floor to keep some distance between the ants and my fleshy midsection.

About this time, Gary popped his head through the restriction. He was shirtless, an unfortunate influence of hanging out with Tom Rogers too much. (If you don't know Tom, he usually caves in baggy shorts and boots and that's it — no shirt, no underwear. Not a pretty sight when you're behind him and look up.) So here we are, Gary and I alone, on our knees in this confined area, the high humidity starting to make Gary's naked torso glisten, his gray chest hair all wet and matted. I know what you're thinking — but no. Someone somewhere in the world might think Gary is sexy, but that person isn't me. (Sorry, dude.)

I snapped some pictures of the crickets with Gary for scale (trying to keep him restricted to the shoulders up), and then focused on the formations in the back. That little mouse showed himself again then quickly darted back into the depths before I could snap a photo of him. Shame. He was a lot more photogenic than Gary. At this point, the folks on the surface were wondering what we had discovered. All they could see was that we both disappeared from view at the bottom of the pit, so there was obviously more passage than they could see. We jokingly called up and asked for another rope — at least 50 feet. Maybe 100 feet just to be safe. And bring my extra batteries and water. Does anyone have a wetsuit? I think they figured us out pretty quick because no one got off their ass to trek back to the cars for gear.

Gary had pretty much seen everything the cave had to offer at this point, so he headed back through the squeeze and started up the entrance climb. I snapped a few more pictures and started

to put my camera away. That's when I noticed some little brown specks on top of the foam in my camera case. I thought it was maybe some dirt that I kicked up, but the brown specks were very random across my case, not like a spray of dirt. And the specks were all relatively uniform in size, about a millimeter or two in diameter, and didn't have any other fine dirt particles around them. And they were sticky. That's when I thought, "Shit!" Not the exclamation, but the noun. "It's cricket shit! These crickets are crapping all over me!" And if there's that much cricket crap in my camera case in the very short time that I had it open, I realized this dirt floor that I crawled across and have been sitting in and kneeling in is probably all cricket crap. Nasty!

I cleaned all the cricket crap off my foam, loaded up my camera, and started crawling back through the restriction across the cricket crap floor, trying to avoid exposing any flesh to the cricket crap and angry fire ants. Once in the entrance pit, I stood up and the cricket crap that stuck to my midsection began sprinkling into my waistline, either smearing there or trickling further down my pants. The cricket crap on my arms rolled into my gloves. Ugh! Damn cricket crap everywhere! I picked my harness off ground. It was at the mouth of the restriction, so both Gary's and my emergence from the lower constriction had smushed it into the cricket crap. I brushed it off as best I could, and put it on, straps grinding cricket crap into my CaveSkinz (at this point I'm thinking Ron's suggestion to burn them is sound advice).

I tried to take some photos of the entrance from below, but my camera lens fogged up. Odd because it was August in Texas, which means about 118°F on the surface, so my camera should have been much warmer than the cool cave and not prone to condensation. I guess even my warm lens was no match for all that fresh, steamy cricket crap. Gary free climbed out. I did, too, but I attached one of my ascenders to the rope as a safety. I'm glad that I did because the cricket crap that was smeared all over my boots combined with the slick moss made the climb out a little tricky, but the ascender kept me moving upward.

Once on the surface, I headed back to the car and cleaned up the best I could (Pam, I still owe you three boxes of handy wipes). I didn't want to put on my street clothes yet because we still had a few caves to explore, so I set about cutting up a trash bag to protect my seat covers that were already protecting my actual seats. A couple of cavers made fun of me for protecting my seat protectors. They could laugh all they wanted. I knew what was smeared all over my clothes. It wasn't mud. It was cricket crap. Hence, the name Cricket Crap Cave. (Say that three times fast.) 

EPILOGUE

Cricket Crap Cave is a great cave, filled with troglloxenes and a variety of formations. It has everything: vertical for those who want to get on rope; tight, squeeze passages for those looking for a true caving experience; a formation room; and abundant wildlife, both in the cave and on the surface — hopefully Michael Gibbons will write an article about his wildlife experiences there. I highly recommend Grottos across Texas contact Geary Schindel to schedule a trip. (Apologies to Geary for the onslaught of visitation requests this article will undoubtedly inspire.)

Oh, and bring a change of clothes when you come.



Avery Ranch Cave



TCMA acquires new preserve

TEXAS' OLDEST CAVE CONSERVANCY ACQUIRES NEW PRESERVE IN SUBURBAN AUSTIN AREA

by JAY JORDAN

Looking back, 2016 was a great year for Texas cavers for a lot of reasons — plenty of great trips along with big-time exploration and mapping. Also, the Texas Cave Management Association (TCMA) has been successful in acquiring caves for Texas cavers, including our latest acquisition: the Wilcox Cave Preserve in Williamson County. This deal, completed in December, follows TCMA's acquisition of Avery Ranch Cave in late 2015. The new preserves are both in far north Austin. They help ensure that unique cave resources in Central Texas will continue to be protected.

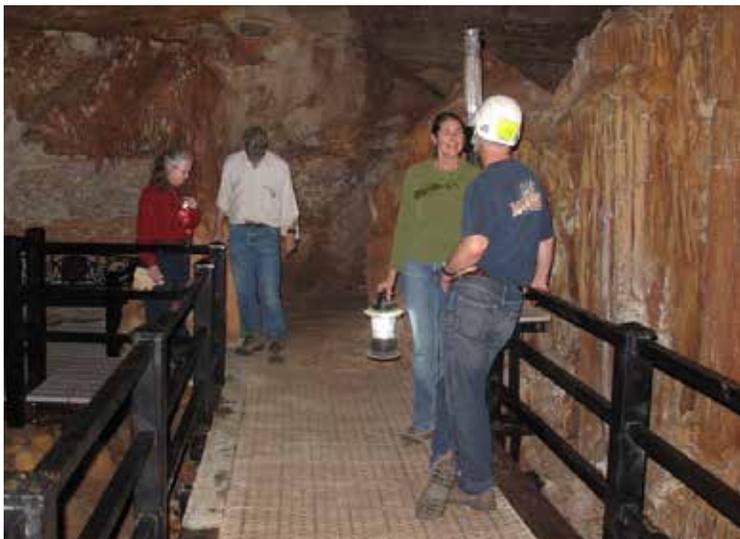
TCMA, the state's oldest non-profit organization, is an all-volunteer group dedicated to the study and management of Texas cave resources. It depends on donations for funding acquisition efforts. TCMA closed on the Wilcox property following negotiations that began earlier this year. "After months of negotiations, we received the Wilcox Preserve, which includes at least three caves. These exceptional resources may also be habitats for endangered species," said John P. Brooks, TCMA president of Dallas, adding the

final settlement in the property closing was reached early in December. "This real estate came as a donation from the development company that had owned it."

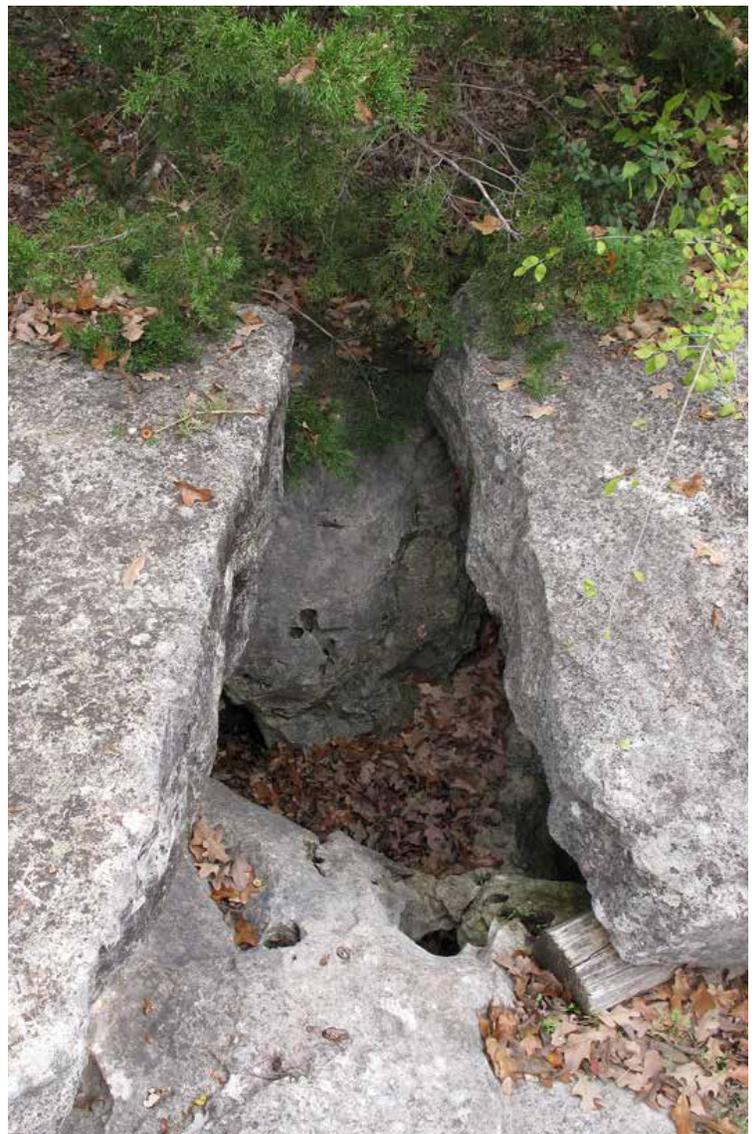
Covering more than four acres in the North Austin suburb of Cedar Park, the cave preserve was once part of a large ranch that had been subdivided over the last 40 or more years. Until two years ago, the property served as the headquarters of the Texas Cave Conservancy (TCC), another cave-focused conservation organization which has since been dissolved. Known as the Wilcox tract, the new site was originally developed by Mrs. Bertha Wilcox in the 1970s and later acquired by Fox River Austin Properties LP for use in endangered species mitigation. Fox River worked with the TCC from 2003 to 2014 to protect and preserve the caves on the property. The TCC consulted with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) in conservation activities, including the protection of caves on the property and performing fire ant removal to ensure the endangered species' viability. This spring, Fox River approached the TCMA with a proposal to donate the property.



Wilcox House



Avery Ranch Cave walkway



Wilcox Cave No. 2

Shout-outs for amazing work

The TCMA gratefully acknowledges the efforts of Drew Thompson and Rich Zarria, who were instrumental in the Wilcox acquisition. They represented TCMA at a conference of conservancies and land trusts and worked behind the scenes to make the deal possible.

The TCMA Acquisitions Committee has also been of tremendous help. Additionally, TCMA would like to thank Austin Realtor Bradley Pounds, who assisted with preparing contracts on a pro bono basis. He has been a great friend of the TCMA and an excellent resource in dealing with the recent acquisition efforts.

These efforts also included acquiring Avery Ranch Cave in far North Austin. Discovered in 2001 by contractors excavating a sewer line with a rock trencher at a housing subdivision, the cave had no existing entrance and was in pristine condition when cavers entered it for the first time. Avery Ranch Cave was originally acquired by the TCC, which worked with landowners, state regulators and the USFWS to gate the entrance and protect the resource.

The preserve was also fenced to manage access. Annually, the cave was opened to the public for “Cave Day,” which proved very popular. Hundreds of residents in surrounding neighborhoods have visited the cave over the years. TCMA plans to continue and accelerate this community outreach.

Founded in 1986 as a 501(c)3 organization, TCMA was the first organization in Texas dedicated to the preservation of caves and our underground resources. TCMA owns nine cave preserves across Central and Southwest Texas, including Robber Baron Cave in San Antonio; Ezell’s Cave in San Marcos; and the Deep and Punkin Cave Preserve in Edwards County.

TCMA is one of 34 land trusts in Texas directly involved in protecting land for its natural, recreational, scenic, historical, or productive value. Statewide, TCMA is affiliated with the Texas Land Trust Council, Texas Speleological Association, and Texas Speleological Survey. Nationally, TCMA is affiliated with the Land Trust Alliance, National Speleological Society and Bat Conservation International. 🦇



Kleck County Park

TRIP REPORT by **GREG MOSIER**

Serendipity leads us to the unexpected; however discovery is never completely by chance. Late on a Sunday afternoon in early spring my wife Sherry, my daughter Lauren and I decided to take a stroll in a county park that recently opened up in our area. Having an eye for karst terrain I immediately began to notice 'suspicious' rock outcrops along the trails established by Comal County. Of course, I could not stand it so I ventured off trail and I was immediately rewarded with a surprising density of sink holes and small caves covering the top of a hill.



Upon informing Marvin Miller about the discovery, he and I returned on March 13, 2016 on a recon mission. We photographed the site and collected GPS coordinates for the features. Thus, I embarked on contacting Comal County representatives to inquire about establishing a Grotto project to investigate the nature and extent of the karst features at Kleck Park. We were rewarded with a positive response by Comal County and now have an official project at Kleck Park.

Our first trip was on was on July 9, 2016, yes in the middle of hot summer. Attendees were Arron Wertheim, Victoria Sommers, Lauren De Leon, Marvin Miller, Christin Miller, Leah Miller, Joe Schaertl and I. We spent the morning dropping into the pits and digging within some promising looking sinks. Arron was able to free climb the most promising looking pit (now named Kleck Park Cave), however it appears to pinch out just out of sight from the surface into a soft layer of marl. Most of the sinks are filled with soil and do not appear to take much runoff so digging has not been fruitful as of yet.



We also were able to drop into another small cave (KL-2) with a tight squeeze down to a floor about 1.7 meters below the land surface. The floor then drops to the northeast about another 1.8 meters to a small room filled with cobble sized rocks that plug a dissolution fracture that appears to lead to another promising looking sink about 150 feet away. The rocks would be easy to remove and right now this is the most promising feature.

The interesting thing about Kleck is the sheer number of significant looking karst features including sinks, small caves, and dissolution fractures that all occur in an area just a few acres in size. I personally have never seen so many features in such a small area. Hopefully at least one nice cave will be revealed by our efforts.

I would like to thank Scott Haag, Comal County Commissioner Precinct 2 for facilitating our efforts at Kleck Park. 

Photo descriptions and credits, from top left

- 1 The entrance to Kleck Park Cave well guarded by poison oak **by Marvin Miller**
- 2 Greg Mosier squeezing into KL-2 **by Marvin Miller**
- 3 Victoria Sommers watches Leah Miller squeeze into KL-2 **by Greg Mosier**
- 4 Greg Mosier viewing a solution sink **by Marvin Miller**



Midnight Cave

TRIP REPORT by LINDSEY ADAMOSKI

On the evening of July 15th, several groups of Bexar Grotto members set off towards Carta Valley for what we knew would be the experience of a lifetime. The cavers: Bennett Lee, Dave Adamoski, Gregg Williams, Jess Buckles, Joe Schaertl, Katy Hoyle, Kevin Pride, Lindsey Adamoski, Pam Campbell, Rob Bissett, Sean Hoyle, and Travis Scott. The destination: Midnight Cave. Midnight Cave is an exceptionally decorated cave located on a large ranch in Carta Valley. The cave is 2,717 feet long and 148 feet deep. Apart from the extraordinary cave formations, Midnight Cave is most notable for being the temporary home to French scientist Michel Siffre. In 1972, Siffre spent 6 months in Midnight Cave as part of a study on circadian rhythms. Our group was able to explore the room in which this famous experiment took place.

We were unaware that the night of the 15th would begin in an above-ground rescue mission. When the Hoyles had not arrived to the cabin by midnight (no pun intended) and they could not be reliably reached by phone, Travis and Gregg decided to search for them on the dark and lonely roads of Carta Valley. Dave, Kevin, and I jumped into the back of the truck for moral support. Tejano music was blasted on the radio and our group began our search. The long search was fruitless, as the Hoyles were nowhere to be found. After coming back to the cabin, we received word that the ranch foreman's son had found the Hoyles on the side of the road and was leading them to the cabin. Once the group was intact, we quickly fell asleep.

We woke up bright and early Saturday morning prepared to go into the deep and magnificent unknown. Rob drove in that morning from the cabin at Deep and Punkin. Being an experienced caver, he promptly informed us that he had forgotten anything and everything necessary for entering a cave. After some scrambling, Rob was outfitted with an extra helmet and Zebralight. We were on our way. We had a short road trip to a hunting blind and then a short hike to the gated entrance of Midnight Cave. During the hike, somebody discovered a small fossil of a seashell to be passed around and examined. At the entrance, Travis discovered that animals had tampered with the gate and noted that he would need to prevent that from happening again on the way out. One by one we entered the cave as Bennett took photos of our backsides.

Photo descriptions, from top right – Photos by Bennett Lee

- 1 The Castle of Oz in the McMichael Chamber
- 2 One of several “onion ring” helictites near Helictite Hall
- 3 Helictite Hall, roughly 30' long and covered floor to ceiling with helictites
- 4 Perfectly framed little stage of Nature's creations



Upon entering Midnight Cave, we encountered a large room that expanded in all directions. There were throbbing swarms of millions of harvestmen all over the ceiling. To begin our trip, we ventured to the right towards a small slope that would take us into the first round of interesting decorations. The small incline contained a hurricane of crickets, which were literally raining down around all of us in vast numbers. Rob remarked that he was glad the women on the trip weren't "girly girls." After climbing down the short incline, we came to large passage with numerous worn and eroded formations. As we navigated several tired-looking stalagmites, we admired the wall of weathered helictites and formations to our right. After waiting for Rob and Bennett to catch up with Bennett's huge load of camera equipment, we moved on to explore the next room, which contained the pit entrance to the cave.

According to Travis, the pit entrance had been the only entrance to the cave for some time until cavers discovered the other entrance, which had subsequently been gated. The pit entrance was in a large room that had several cupolas in the ceiling as well as old bat roosts. From there, we moved on to the McMichael Chamber. This enormous room was where we found Jesus. In a large group of speleothems known as the "Castle of Oz," one can depict a particular formation that apparently looks like a statue of Jesus. In front of the Castle of Oz was a large mound of guano that was about the size of a Smart car and then some. This room was the first of some truly amazing sights. Moving past the McMichael chamber, we found ourselves in the Pancake Room. The Pancake Room was long and low, with a soft, chalky floor and a smooth, white, limestone ceiling. There was just enough room to sit with poor posture and have some snacks.

After eating in the Pancake Room, we moved very delicately through a tunnel of formations. For this particular area, we had to belly crawl to ensure that our helmets and backsides would not damage the formations above us. We came out in a large waiting room where Gregg would spend the next few hours hallucinating in the dark. Gregg decided to wait for us in this particular and unnamed room because his buff and manly shoulders wouldn't fit past the first squeeze in the Corkscrew.

The Corkscrew was the turning point in the cave. Though we were awed and amazed by the vast number of formations we had seen up unto this point, we had no idea what was waiting for us beyond the Corkscrew. The Corkscrew itself was a fun little tunnel at 3.7 meters long. I'll admit that upon first entering the Corkscrew I became a tad bit claustrophobic. This surprised me, as I usually feel comforted by small, dark spaces. I had to lay on my left side with both arms above my head in order to enter the tunnel behind Travis. His foot was waiting for me to latch my bag onto as I got closer towards the end, as

the Corkscrew wound up with few footholds to keep one from sliding back down after getting through the initial squeeze and curve. I made my way up and pulled myself out into another large room full of formations named the Onyx Palace. Travis informed us that the way back down was much easier than the way up.

Kevin followed shortly behind. While we waited for the rest of the group, Travis showed us an amazing passage that led up from the Onyx Palace at a steep angle. At first I was scared to climb up the slippery slope on the left side, for fear of breaking the delicate helictites on the right. However, Kevin did so without incident, so I gained some confidence and followed. I was not disappointed. To the left was a cupola with some of the longest (and pristine white) helictites in the cave, some estimated to be about a meter long. It was awe inspiring.

On the cautious trek back down the incline, one notices remarkable chert nodules as well as broken gypsum on the ground. We returned to the Onyx Palace and snacked while we waited for the others to get through the Corkscrew. This process took a very long time. Pam was having particular difficulty actually exiting the Corkscrew, as it was quite slippery and there were few footholds to keep oneself from sliding back down. Eventually, we all made it through. From this point, we wall-walked through a 6 meter fissure and emerged with trepidation into the Helictite Hall. It was a precarious point in the cave, as you had to transition from wall-walking to go down several feet into the hall without breaking a large group of helictites on the right. Our group navigated this area without incident. Once in the Helictite Hall, the views were breathtaking.

The Helictite Hall is aptly named. The entire left side and ceiling of the hall is adorned with millions of helictites. In order to progress through the hall, we all had to lay down on this large craggy rock and straddle it with one leg on each side, being careful not to move any body part in any direction away from the rock. In addition, each of us was taxed with closely monitoring the caver in front of us to ensure that their limbs, helmet, and rear did not come too close to any formations. It was quite a sight.

After straddling our way through the Helictite Hall, we were granted a reprieve from being overly cautious with a rest in the White Hall. Don't get me wrong, the White Hall had a million beautiful formations as well, but there was also a smooth white ceiling under which we could rest and be free of fear of breaking anything. In the White Hall we found several onion rings as well as a helictite that resembled a wolf howling at the moon. We spent some time in awe of the formations in the White Hall while Bennett took millions of photographs.

Off to one side there was a large area covered with tiny, inches-long stalagmites that almost looked like a bed of nails and surrounded by other larger stalagmites and columns.

After our much needed break in the White Hall, we ventured towards the finale at the very end of the cave. Following a careful trek through more miraculous formations, we hopped over some smooth stone past The Tongue...an aptly named, huge white stone that appeared to be teasing us at eye level. After passing The Tongue we made our way into another large hall that would take us to the very last room. In order to enter the final room, one had to insert themselves feet first into a very small hole in the floor.

After so much exertion and painstakingly careful crawling through the cave, we didn't know what to expect. Upon entering this room, we were absolutely blown away by the incredible number of gorgeous, clean, and active formations. Two little bats quickly made themselves known and then disappeared. Jess, who wasn't sure she wanted to venture through another tiny squeeze, was soon motivated into action by our periods of speechless silence peppered with audible gasps of wonder. I actually became a bit emotional at the indescribable beauty in this room and my husband Dave exclaimed, "Okay, I'm done caving. I've seen it all. Nothing can top this." It is hard to imagine anything "topping" that room. The far back wall of the room was like Deep's Crystal Waterfall, but it was a large Crystal Wall. I only wished that I was a seasoned geologist so that I could have named all of the amazing, glowingly white formations. However, that might have taken away from my amateur appreciation of the beauty of it all.

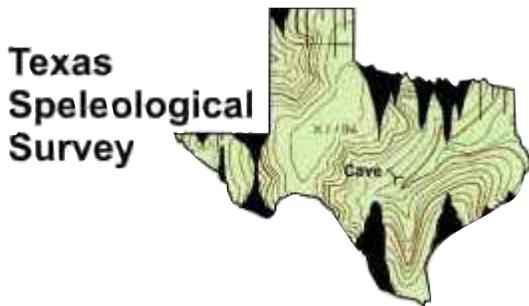
We spent a long time admiring the growing formations in that last room before we decided that Gregg (who at this time had been waiting for hours) was probably wondering where the heck we were. So, with much hesitation, we decided to turn back. The group slowly but surely crawled back through the White Hall before stopping again in the Helictite Hall to rest and wait for Bennett and his photos. We joked about peeing in bottles and about the interestingly shaped pieces of broken chert on the floor. We leisurely made our way back through the Onyx Palace and down to the Corkscrew, where Travis obligingly talked us through the tiny passage that would lead us back to Gregg. Upon entry to the room where Gregg was waiting, we learned that in our absence he'd been visited by bats as well as some auditory hallucinations. We snacked and told Gregg about what a boring trip we'd had to a basically plain and Robber Baronesque cave. He didn't believe us for a moment. On our way back through the McMichael Chamber, Bennett took an amazing group photo that demonstrates a fraction of a percent of the beauty of the amazing Midnight Cave. While going back through the pit room Dave and

Kevin decided to run up a very slick and chalky slope before proceeding to slide back down with what seemed like reckless abandon. Pam almost had a heart attack until Kevin assured us that he was indeed able to stop himself before the drop off.

Upon returning to the entrance room we decided to go back in the other direction for a few minutes to allow Kevin to try to dig to China, or to at least find another exit to the cave. That was fruitless and we were all very tired and hungry, so we decided it was finally time to end this remarkable trip. All in all, Midnight Cave was one of the most amazing experiences I've ever had and I think many in our group would say the same. Travis was a skilled leader who managed to keep our entire group from breaking anything significant in the cave (we might have broken a few crickets). With more careful planning and mindful caving, we hope that Midnight Cave will continue to be an opportunity for future cavers for years to come. 🦇



Distinctive formation that looks like a howling wolf, found under Helictite Hall in Midnight Cave by Bennett Lee



That Other Texas Cave Organization

THE TEXAS SPELEOLOGICAL SURVEY (TSS)

by JOE MITCHELL

You've probably seen us at grotto meetings, at TSA Spring Convention or TCR as the people selling books about Texas Caves, but you may not know much else about the Texas Speleological Survey. The TSS is the lesser known of the three major Texas caving organizations, but serves an equally important role and does much more than just sell publications.

The TSS's mission is to collect, manage, and publish information on Texas caves and karst features. This includes soliciting data from cavers, organizations that document caves, and government agencies, and then compiling and organizing that data. The TSS prepares maps, maintains records for each county, responds to requests for information from both cavers and organizations, and publishes books and articles about the caves and karst of Texas. In addition, the TSS collects physical artifacts to document the history of Texas caving.

WHAT IS THE TSS?

The TSS was formed in 1960 by James Reddell, William Russell, A. Richard Smith, and others to begin a comprehensive collection of information about Texas caves. For many years, it remained an informal but productive organization, issuing 32 publications, until 1995 when the TSS incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit. The TSS is an official project of the National Speleological Society (NSS) as one of the nationally recognized cave and karst surveys that are permanent repositories of cave data. The TSS is also affiliated with the Texas Speleological Association and the Texas Natural Science Center. The TSS

has its office at the Pickle Campus of The University of Texas at Austin. Our holdings include extensive cave and map files, a reference and lending library with materials of all sorts focusing on Texas caves and caving, and a museum of historical Texas caving artifacts. The TSS maintains as near to complete collections as possible of all Texas cave periodicals including the Texas Caver and grotto newsletters.

The TSS also has a very extensive photo library and a collection of cave videos. One of the centerpieces of the TSS is our custom-developed, in-house electronic database of entries on all known Texas caves, karst features, springs, and other related features. The database is accessed through a software application known as WallsMap. The software and database structure was developed by the late David McKenzie and the WallsMap program can be freely downloaded from our website. Although the downloadable version only contains a small sample of data, it is available for use as a free GIS viewer or Shapefile editor. The database contains easily searchable information in numerous fields to quickly identify a particular feature or sets of features for which information such as location, description, fauna lists, maps, photos, and other information can be retrieved.

The TSS maintains other freely available software products that can be downloaded from our website. Walls cave mapping software was also developed by David McKenzie and is a widely used tool for managing survey data and generating cave maps.

Survey measurements are entered into Walls to produce a line plot of the cave. Sophisticated tools allow for statistical analysis of loops within the survey allowing for errors to be identified and corrected. Walls has the capability to accept a wide range of data including LRUD measurements, GPS coordinates, LIDAR data, old survey data in quadrants or mils, underwater surveys using depth gauge data, imported survey data from programs such as Compass, and USGS digital elevation model data. In addition, Walls allows “round tripping,” a process which allows a digitally drafted map to morph as new survey data changes previous station locations and drafted cave features. TexBib is TSS’ bibliographic database for Texas caves, caving, and cave science that contains over 14,000 bibliographic entries dating from 1866 to the present, searchable by cave name, author, keywords, dates, or combinations. TexBib entries reference the broadest possible range of published sources from caving newsletters (Texas, national, and international), books, science journals, newspapers, magazines, theses, agency reports, and more.

The most well-known role of the TSS to Texas cavers is our active publication program, with more than 3,500 pages and 2,500 maps. The primary publications are the county survey reports, for which data has been published on 68 counties represented in 28 volumes. Other special interest publications either on a particular locality, a karst-related scientific specialty, historical reprints, or for general interest and education, are also occasionally published. These have included volumes on paleontology, bats, paleoclimatology, hydrogeology, and guidebooks. The publication process is ongoing and several new TSS publications are currently in the editing phase including reports on the Caves of Government Canyon State Natural Area and the Caves of Sun City.

Unlike the TSA and TCMA, the TSS is not a membership organization. It is run by an all-volunteer Board of Directors with the help of dedicated volunteer assistants handling tasks such as management of individual county files, maintenance of the software, and managing our physical and digital assets.

WHAT CAN THE TSS DO FOR ME?

Since the TSS is the central repository on Texas Caves, it is also a great resource for cavers. If you are interested in a particular cave or want to hunt through the files for a particular area looking for caves for which information is sparse, or to determine where new caves might be likely to be found, combing through the files is a good place to start. The best place to go is the TSS office where all the original paper files and maps can be perused in our extensive collections. Convenient times to do this are when meetings are being held at the office or at a scheduled work event, but it is possible to arrange visitation at other times. Dates of upcoming meetings will be placed on the TSS Facebook or website, or you can contact one of the individuals listed in the TSS contacts sidebar about arranging a visit.

If getting to Austin is not practical or you need to find something quickly, you can also contact the TSS county data managers or the TSS Officers. Although it is best to speak with the data manager for the county which you are interested in, most data managers can help you with any county. The TSS has 14 county data managers, so more than likely, you know one or one lives in your area. A list of the county data manager is provided in the TSS contacts sidebar and they will be happy to help you out.

Other ways to obtain cave information from the TSS are to purchase publications for the areas you are interested in. These provide detailed descriptions, maps, and photos for caves in the region they cover, and are the most definitive cave information resource for those areas that is publicly available. The TSS also produces and sells a cave maps CD containing copies of most of the TSS’s extensive scanned and digital maps collection. Publications and maps CDs are sold at caver events such as the TSA Spring Convention, TCR, or other events such as the Texas GeoHydro Workshop. TSS representatives sometimes also bring a collection of publications to local grotto meetings for purchase. Additionally, you can contact the TSS directly to purchase a publication and have it shipped to you. A list of publications and their prices can be found on the TSS website.

Many of the older TSS county reports can be downloaded for free as pdfs from the TSS website. Other ways the TSS supports the Texas caving community is through occasional survey workshops, where you can learn about all aspects of cave survey from basic instrument use to sketching, data reduction, and map drafting. Contact a TSS Director if you are interested in having a workshop held in your area. The TSS also donates instruments and other prizes to the survey contests held at TCR each year. Enter one of these to show your survey skills and win new gear!

WHAT CAN I DO FOR THE TSS?

The TSS is always collecting new cave information to enhance the completeness and usefulness of the archives. The best and easiest way to help is to submit data you collect when you visit a cave. Information about new cave and karst features is especially valuable but so is information about known features. Some caves have not been visited in decades and information about them may be very limited or incorrect. Submitting information is easily done through our online submission form on our website, texasspeleologicalsurvey.org. You only have to fill in the fields you want and any personal information you provide is kept confidential.

Another way to help out is to ensure that cave files in your personal collection are designated to go to the TSS if you are no longer able to retain them. Many sizable donations of files and historical artifacts have arrived at the TSS when bequeathed by a caver or when they were downsizing their living arrangements. However, much information has also been lost when cavers have passed away and did not inform their family of their intentions, resulting in the destruction of a lifetime collection of possibly unique cave data.

The TSS has also held occasional workdays at our office where volunteers sort and file the numerous donated paper materials. If you have an interest in a more significant role in the TSS, the TSS is happy to accommodate volunteers with specific skills related to our mission. Finally, financial donations to support our work are always appreciated! 

TSS Officers

President – Joe Mitchell
Secretary – Jim “Crash” Kennedy
Treasurer – Marvin Miller
Editor – Jerry Atkinson

TSS Directors

Allan Cobb, Butch Fralia, Andy Gluesenkamp, Carl Kunath, Logan McNatt, Ron Ralph, William Russell, Ann Scott, Peter Sprouse, Travis Scott, Kevin Stafford, M.D. Turner, and Officers
Contact information for the Directors can be found on the TSS website
www.texasspeleologicalsurvey.org

TSS County Data Managers

Jerry Atkinson – *Burnet, Edwards, Kimble, Kinney, Mason, Medina, Menard, Schleicher, Sutton, Val Verde, all other West Texas counties*
Butch Fralia – *all Texas Panhandle region counties*
Chris Franke/Leslie Bell/James Reddell – *Williamson*
Jim Kennedy/Will Quast/Kris Pena – *San Saba, Lampasas*
Kurt Menking/George Veni – *Comal*
Marvin Miller – *Blanco, Llano*
Joe Mitchell/George Veni – *Bexar*
James Reddell – *Bell, Coryell*
William Russell – *Travis*
Travis Scott – *Bandera, Kerr, Real*
Peter Sprouse – *Hays*
Kevin Stafford – *Culberson, all other East Texas counties*
George Veni – *Kendall*
Gregg Williams/Jerry Atkinson – *Uvalde*

HIGHLINE

ROPES AND ACCESSORIES

Jim “Crash” Kennedy, your Texas Highline distributor, has the lowest prices in the state! See him at a caver event or contact cavercrash@gmail.com.

Texas Grottos

LOCATION	MEETING INFO
AUSTIN Underground Texas Grotto (UT Grotto) http://www.utgrotto.org/	1st, 3rd & 5th Wednesdays at 7:45 PM University of Texas Campus, Burdine Hall 2505 University Ave Austin, TX 78705
BRYAN – COLLEGE STATION Aggie Speleological Society (A.S.S) https://cavetamu.com/	Every Thursday at 7:30 PM Texas A&M University CE137 (Civil Engineering Building)
DALLAS – FORT WORTH DFW Grotto https://dfwgrotto.org/index.htm	2nd Wednesdays at 7:00 PM Dallas Makerspace 1825 Monetary Ln. #104 Carrollton, Texas 75006
EL PASO Guad Grotto http://www.vcrux.com/grotto/	1st Saturday at 6011 Hueco Tanks Road, El Paso Texas 79938
HOUSTON Greater Houston Grotto https://www.greaterhoustongrotto.org	3rd Tuesday at 7:30 PM Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary 440 Wilchester Blvd, Houston, TX 77079
LUBBOCK Lubbock Area Grotto http://www.lubbockareagrotto.org/	1st Tuesday of each month at different member's homes. See website for location and time.
MIDLAND – ODESSA Permian Basin Speleological Society http://www.caver.net/pbss/pbss.html	2nd Thursday at 7:00 PM Murray's Deli Midland, TX
WITCHITA FALLS North Texas Speleological Society	1st Tuesday of the month, 7:00 PM Texas Best BBQ & Burgers Crossroads Center, 2708 Southwest Pkwy # 136B, Wichita Falls, TX 76308
SAN ANTONIO Bexar Grotto http://www.bexargrotto.org	7pm on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month Chester's Hamburgers 1006 NE Loop 410, SA 78209

Caving Organizations

TEXAS SPELEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION – TSA www.cavetexas.org

Non-profit organization supporting cave exploration and cave studies by cavers in and around the state of Texas.

TEXAS SPELEOLOGICAL SURVEY – TSS www.texasspeleologicalsurvey.org

Organization dedicated to collection and management of cave data, which is done in support of research, exploration, and conservation of cave and karst resources.

TEXAS CAVE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION – TCMA www.tcmacaves.org

TCMA is a nonprofit organization existing to acquire, conserve and manage caves and to promote research and education regarding caves and karst while providing responsible access to our preserves.

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION – NSS www.caves.org

NSS is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the scientific study of caves and karst, the protection of caves, the responsible exploration of caves, the fellowship of cavers, and the conservation, stewardship and ownership of caves.

SOUTHWESTERN REGION – SWR www.caves.org/region/swr/contacts.html

Non-profit organization promoting safe cave exploration and promoting discovery, exploration, scientific study and conservation of caves.

ASSOCIATION OF MEXICAN CAVE STUDIES – AMCS www.mexicancaves.org

AMCS is a volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the exploration, study and conservation of the caves of Mexico, chiefly through a program of publication.

BAT CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL – BCI www.batcon.org

Education about the value of bats, conservation of bats and bat habitat, and research of the same.

THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SPELEOLOGY – UIS <http://www.uis-speleo.org/>

International organization fostering and promoting cave exploration, science, education, management and fellowship of cavers internationally.

KARST INFORMATION PORTAL – KIP www.karstportal.org

Information network linking scientists, managers and explorers to archive information and promote collaboration.

NATIONAL CAVE AND KARST RESEARCH INSTITUTE info@nckri.com

Congressionally formed institute to advance cave and karst science, research, promotion, education and development of environmentally sound practice of management of caves and karst.

ORGANIZATIONAL SPOTLIGHT – TSS

James Reddell, dedicated TSS board member and contributor, received the Karst Waters Institute 2016 Karst Award and the TSS Outstanding Service Award on March 4, 2017 at the 2016 Karst Waters Institute annual banquet. Educational presentation from the banquet can be accessed at <https://www.texasspeleologicalsurvey.org/cavephotos/Reddell-AwardPresentation>

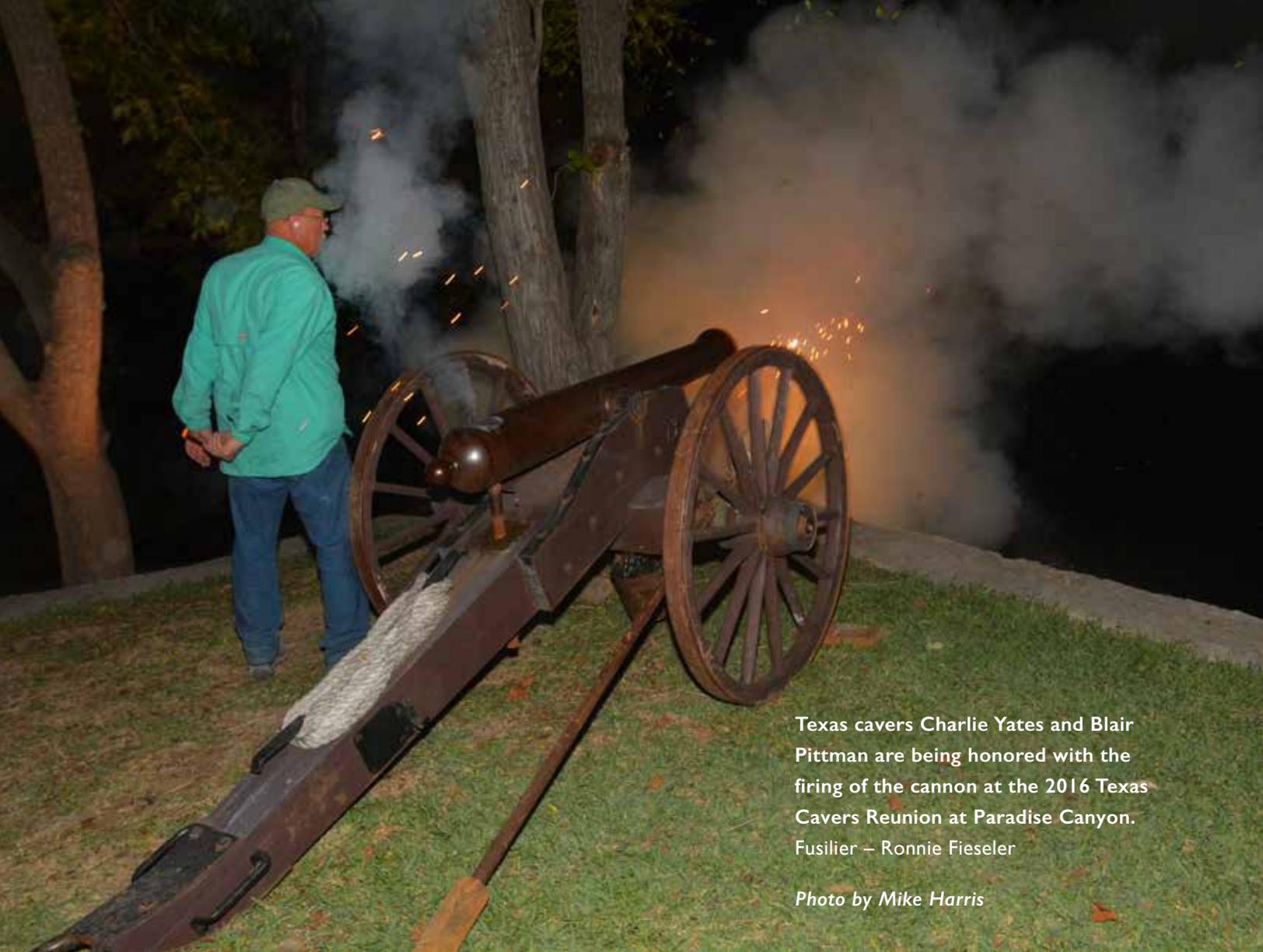


Kokopelli invites cavers to the Land of Enchantment, where the New Mexico state question for your chile is Red or Green or Christmas.



We have over 20 National Parks and Monuments. One of our nicknames is the Volcano State. We have three UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The Sandia Peak Aerial Tramway stretches 2.7 miles. We have a great view of the Sandia Mountains, which can be seen from the Santa Ana Star Center, our venue for the 2017 NSS Convention. Visit us at <http://nss2017.caves.org> for info.





Texas cavers Charlie Yates and Blair Pittman are being honored with the firing of the cannon at the 2016 Texas Cavers Reunion at Paradise Canyon. Fusilier – Ronnie Fieseler

Photo by Mike Harris

