



THE
**TEXAS
CAVER**

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COVER PHOTO by Bennett Lee

Closeup of Lee White high on the wall in Natural Bridge Caverns. Sadly, Lee perished on September 12, 2019.

BACK COVER PHOTO by Bennett Lee

Large room beyond the travertine dams in at Natural Bridge Caverns. L to R: Justin Royce, Travis Wuest, Brad Wuest

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New Discoveries at Natural Bridge Caverns

BY BILL STEELE



Group photo day of the ascent. L to R: Dillion Ellis, Justin Royce, Bill Steele, J Teal., Travis Wuest, Joy Wuest, Brad Wuest, Bennett Lee, Lee White, Orion Knox. **Bennett Lee.**

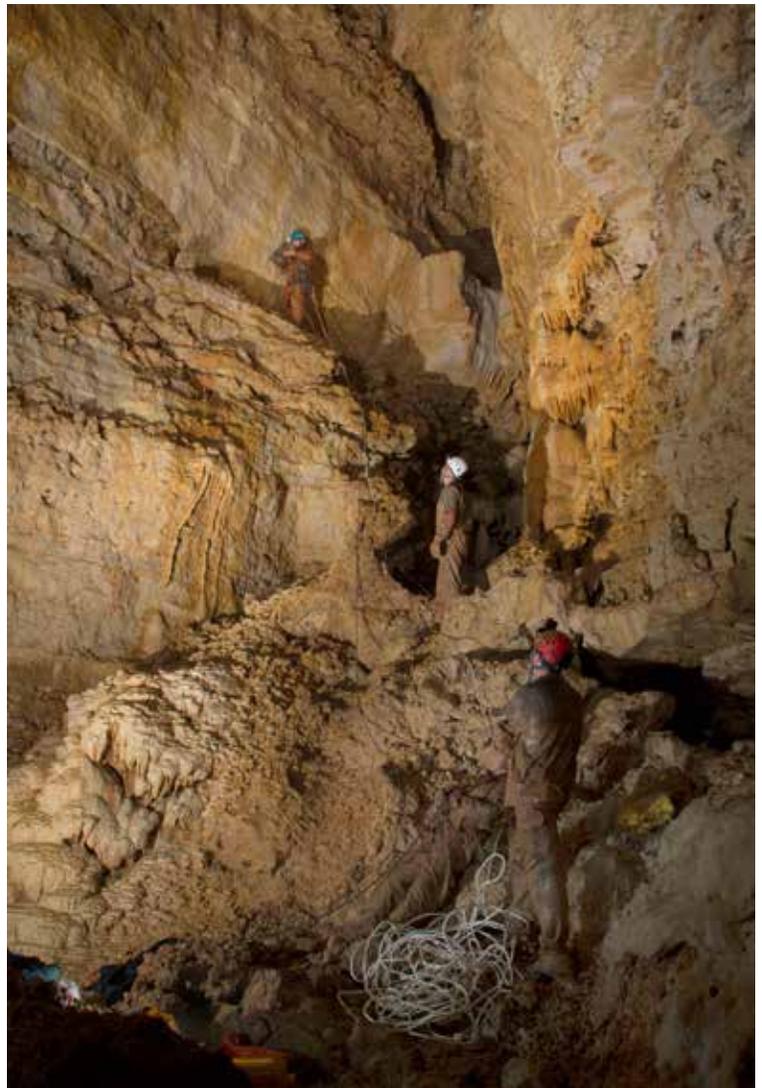
The most virgin cave passage found in all of Texas this year was in one of our premier show caves, Natural Bridge Caverns. It was the first virgin cave passage found in this cave since it was initially explored and mapped in the 1960s. This is the story.

Bill Stone and I joined The Explorers Club (see explorers.org) at the same time in 1979 at the suggestion of former Explorers Club and former NSS president Russ Gurnee. We went to lunch with Russ during the 1978 NSS convention in New Braunfels and asked for his advice about organizing a speleological project to conduct speleology in the caves of the Huautla de Jimenez, Oaxaca, Mexico area. There is a Texas Chapter of The Explorers Club. I've been active with it since it was formed in 1982. I've served as its chairman and I go to its quarterly dinner meetings when I am home. I've met some illustrious people at these meetings: Sir Edmund Hillary, Conrad Ankar (mountaineer), Franklin Chang Diaz (ISS astronaut), Charles Duke (lunar astronaut), Wayne White (South Pole Station manager) and more. Last year I was invited to speak at the fall Texas Chapter of The Explorers Club dinner meeting about the project in Mexico I lead, Proyecto Espeleologico Sistema Huautla (PESH), the speleological project exploring and studying the deepest cave in the Western Hemisphere. Working with the chapter's program chair, I suggested that the dinner be held at Longhorn Caverns and the attendees be given a tour of the cave. Further, I offered to contact my old friend and one of the first Huautla cavers from the 60s, Orion Knox, and see if he would give us a narrated tour of Natural Bridge Caverns at midday, telling us about those days of discovery in which he was a key player.

After our Orion Knox led the tour of Natural Bridge Caverns, back at the visitors' center, looking at a map on the wall, Diana Tomchick asked Orion if there were any remaining leads in the cave. Diana and I had talked on the drive down about how we would like to offer to explore and map any leads that may remain in the cave. Orion immediately pointed to a place on the map

named the Dome Pit. He said it was one of the tallest domes in the cave and it was suspected that there may be a passage at the top. He said the dome was about 100-feet tall and their carbide lamps back in the 1960s were not bright enough to see that far to determine if there was a passage there. He also said that the limestone walls of the dome were soft in places and it probably couldn't be climbed. I smiled at Diana. Following this late October 2018 visit to Natural Bridge Caverns, Orion got me in touch with the owners of Natural Bridge Caverns (NBC), Brad and Travis Wuest, young family men who are the third-generation owners. Brad is the president of NBC and Travis is the vice president. Brad remembered me visiting back in the early 90s and giving a slide show about Huautla caving to the Venture Crew based at the cave. He was a teenager then. We planned a trip to go see the Dome Pit, taking powerful Scurion caving headlamps Diana and I own to take an illuminated look at the Dome Pit and its walls.

In mid-February the trip to see the Dome Pit happened. No one had been there in eight years. We went in the exit tunnel of the



Lee White setting the first bolt for his climb. L to R: Lee White, Travis Wuest, Brad Wuest. **Bennett Lee.**

paved tourist trail through the cave, over a handrail, down a flight of concrete steps and into the undeveloped passage. Immediately we were squeezing, climbing slippery muddy slopes, stoop-walking, and working our way through constrictions necessitating contortion moves. In an hour and a half, we came to a cable ladder drop. This was belayed and we all climbed down it. In a few minutes, we were at the base of the Dome Pit. The walls towered straight up for around 80 feet. The limestone was light-colored and uniform. Our Scurions lit up the dome to its ceiling, and it appeared there was a big passage at the top. My read on it was that it could be climbed by an experienced cave wall climber, and I already had in mind just the right guy for it.

The Wuest brothers expressed interest in our gear and asked lots of questions. Obviously, they were gung-ho to explore some of this cave they own. And they wanted to be properly equipped cavers. I told them about our Scurion headlamps, about Gonzo Guano Gear and the frog vertical climbing system, CaveSkinz pants and jackets, On Rope 1, etc. They kept notes. I also told them about Lee White, TAG (Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia)-based cave wall climber extraordinaire. I told them that when I returned from my annual PESH expedition to Huautla in early May I would have with me the best cave wall climber in the USA. We planned a trip for May 8, 2019, to support Lee in climbing the Dome Pit. While I was in Huautla for the month of April I heard from the Wuest brothers

who said they had returned to the Dome Pit with a drone operator and had flown a drone up the wall and into the passage at the top.

They said there were large stalagmites and it looked good. In early May, Lee White and I went to Natural Bridge Caverns for his climb. We realized upon arrival that it was a bigger deal than we envisioned. There was a planning meeting around a large conference table upstairs at the visitor's center. A printed Excel sheet timetable of the trip was presented. Various people were introduced. There were two people from a public relations firm. If the passage at the top of the dome went to some nice cave, they wanted to tell the world. Over 20 people entered the cave for this effort. The Wuest brothers wore new CaveSkinz caving pants and jackets. They sported Scurion headlamps. They had gone to Llano, bought frog climbing rigs, and had a lesson from Becky Jones on how to use them. There was a video team. There was a drone team. There were young NBC employees going to haul bags. When they took the drone back there the prior month, they had left a new 200-foot length of PMI rope. I was asked by Brad Wuest how long I thought it would take Lee White to climb the 80-foot wall if it could be climbed on account of the likelihood of "bad rock". I said two hours. His eyes bulged with surprise. For 59 years people have wondered about a passage at the top of the Dome Pit and it may be climbed in two hours? Our entourage arrived at the Dome Pit. Lee White, who lives in the Chattanooga,



Travertine dams found in the lower passage.
L to R: Brad Wuest, Travis Wuest. **Bennett Lee.**



Travis Wuest in Midnight Dome, the second large room beyond the travertine dams. *Bennett Lee.*

Tennessee area out of his Jeep truck, goes caving all the time, says he climbs a wall in a cave at least once a week, sometimes twice, and works in rope access on towers, wind generators, and tall smokestacks, immediately scanned the walls with his bright headlamp and eye-balled his route. He chose to go directly up toward the left wall to the passage above. There was a ledge that could be reached about 15 feet up which would be where he'd place his first bolt. I was to belay him using a dynamic rope and a belay device. He would carry the end of a static caving rope with him that would be fed out as he climbed. Lee steadily drilled and hammered bolts as he ascended. Two drones buzzed around him, shooting video and still photos. Bennett Lee took out his big gun camera and took still shots. A professional videographer recorded it. In 1.5 hours, Lee was at the top. "It goes!", was his report. There was jubilation.

Lee pulled up the belay rope, rigged the static rope, rappelled back down, removing the hangers as he did. Then six of us, including Brad and Travis Wuest, Lee White, Bennett Lee, Justin Royce, and I, climbed the 80-foot rope and went off into virgin cave. The passage was a canyon consistently around 15-20 feet tall. The mud on the floor of it stuck to boots and caused them to be heavy. We explored around 600 feet to a pit in the floor that was covered with gray slurry from an adjacent well and the passage continued. Justin shot some video with a GoPro, and Bennett Lee shot some still photos. When we emerged from the undeveloped part of the cave to the tourist trail a golf cart awaited us. It was 1:30 a.m. and Joy Wuest, mother of Brad and Travis, was there to

lighten our loads of heavy caving packs. Greg Passmore was there with his assistant Sabine Bredow. Greg and Sabine are working for Natural Bridge, shooting LIDAR video throughout the cave, to make a state-of-the-art virtual reality video.

What I didn't see coming following the successful wall climb and discovery of going passage at the top of the Dome Pit, was the amount of publicity. I don't know that ever before have there been television news stories, newspaper stories, and social media stories about the discovery of 600 feet of virgin cave passage like this. I should have realized it would happen like this, given the marketing firm's reps I sat next to at the meeting prior to the caving trip, but still, it amazed me. I thought the coolest part of it was the video footage of Lee White up on the wall shot with the drones. I had asked him after the trip what he thought about the drones flying near him while he was climbing. He said, "Actually, it was pretty cool."

In June, while I was at the National Speleological Society (NSS) convention and then caving with the Cave Research Foundation at Mammoth Cave, they went back to explore more. The upper-level canyon went about 300 feet farther, came to a "T" intersection, and ended both to the left and the right. To the left, it dropped down into a room, but there was no way to continue out of it. On the way out, the plan was to exit via the pit at the well, expecting it to be a shortcut through the lake passage below. Brad Wuest descended first. It was around 100-feet deep. It dropped into a nice-sized passage with rimstone dams, pools of crystal-clear

water, and large stalagmites. It clearly did not connect to the lake passage on the lower level, but was more virgin passage. Subsequent to that, another trip went down the drop, this time with Bennett Lee to shoot photos and an NBC employee with a video camera. They crossed the travertine dams, found huge rooms with impressive formations, including massive flowstone bigger than a house.

The Wuest brothers told me they might want to drill a shaft entrance into the lower level. The primary reason for this is that the mud is thick and unavoidable, but leads to the lovely flowstone covered floor of the lower level with its delicate rimstone dams. They had taken their boots off when exploring down there and wore only their socks. So, I contacted a caver I know in Vermont who tinkers with electronics and has loaned me a cave radio before. He said he would loan us his cave radio for our late July trip. On July 27 we met at Natural Bridge Caverns and again started the day in the conference room. The plan was very detailed. Our objectives included surveying what had been explored, photographing and transmitting at two locations near the end of what had already been explored, and a LIDAR scanning team coming in a little later. I was able to invite two more cave mappers, so I invited Andrea Croskrey and David Ochel from Austin. Diana Tomchick, Justin Royce, and I did a line survey only from an established survey station at the base of the drop into the Inferno Room. The survey station was a length of PVC pipe hammered into the mud on the floor. We were to survey up the Dome Pit, begin sketching at the top, and get as far as the top of the 100-foot pit to the lower level where Andrea's team would begin their survey. There were several teams. One was made up of Andrea Croskrey, David Ochel,

Bennett Lee, Dillion Ellis, Brad Wuest, and Travis Wuest. They went down the 100-foot pit to the continuing big, well-decorated big passage to map it, take photos, do cave radio transmissions, and shoot video. My mapping team was Diana Tomchick, Justin Royce, and me. The surface cave radio team was Orion Knox, Kurt Menking, Jack Oliver, and Brian Vauter. Brian is the staff geologist at Natural Bridge Caverns. The in-cave LIDAR team was made up of Derek Bell, Colton Windham, Darren Zipp, and Tristan Ipock. The surface video team was Sabine Bredow and Greg Passmore.

My team went into the cave at 10:30 a.m. and exited at 4:30 a.m., an 18-hour trip. The LIDAR team's trip was far shorter, and Andrea's team's trip was an hour longer. Food and beverages awaited us back at the garage by the visitors' center. We washed gear, talked, and told tales until dawn. In all, about 2,000 feet of new cave has been explored and surveyed in Natural Bridge Caverns this year. It goes on in nice-sized passage. There is good potential. The Wuest brothers got cave radio locations with the plan to sink a shaft to the new, large, well-decorated passage and avoid the muddy passage before it. Stay tuned for more developments. 🦇

ON A SAD NOTE: *Lee White, the TAG and Huautla caver who on May 8, 2019, successfully climbed the over 100-foot-high sheer wall of the Dome Pit in the far reaches of Natural Bridge Caverns, leading cavers to hundreds of feet of well-decorated, large passages that are still being explored, died in a car wreck in North Carolina on September 12. There was an outpouring of mourning from cavers from across the US and other countries. Lee was considered to be the best cave wall climber in the US and one of only a handful of US cavers ever so skilled.*



Muddy post-trip shot. Back, L to R: Bennett Lee, Bill Steele, Brad Wuest, Travis Wuest, David Ochel, Andea Croskrey, Dillion Ellis, Justin Royce. Front: Diana Tomchick. **Bennett Lee.**

Powells Cave Carbide Adventure

BY PETER DRUSCHKE



Mallory in the spongework crawl. *Peter Druschke.*

The story of Powells Cave Carbide adventure begins on a pleasant April evening within a loud and sweaty barn at Hill Country State Natural Area. It was Texas Speleological Association (TSA) Spring Convention, and the climax of the event, the Texas Cave Management Association (TCMA) charity auction, was in full swing. The Shiner was flowing and the bidding on the usual raft of Shiner swag, booze bottles and slightly used caving gear was lively and competitive. While the mood was high and the bids were generous, many of us were waiting to see what coup de grace would be offered to bid some serious money on. At last Ken Demarest, the master of ceremonies (MC) for the night, announced a charity trip would be led by the Most Interesting Man in the World, Bill Steele, and it would be a carbide light trip of Powells Cave, the second longest cave in Texas. The bidding was going in earnest with hundreds of dollars being thrown down and the crowd getting involved with shouts of encouragement.

Crazy money followed good money bids, and soon our cavin' Cajun Queen, Mallory Mayeux, rose to the top of bidding while locked in a bidding battle with some of our Austin caving friends. There were audible gasps as the bids neared a thousand dollars and the room quieted down. At 900 dollars Mallory's face began to look a little uncertain, and I deftly maneuvered and offered to throw down an additional 200 bucks if I could go on the trip. Other friends joined in the action and even our MC, Ken, chipped in to bring the bid to \$1,500 dollars. This sealed the deal and made the 2018 TCMA auction one of the best in TCMA history. What better way to contribute to TCMA than through what would have to be an epic caving trip! Soon afterward I inquired from Mallory when this trip might actually happen. I was informed that since Bill had numerous speaking engagements, a cave diving expedition to

Cave of the Swords in Mexico, and a project surveying active lava tubes in Hawaii, the trip wouldn't take place until November at the earliest! It was difficult to wait all those months but it was better to have a trip when the resident bats were wintering in the Mexican Riviera.

By November the discussion about dates came up again and the trip slipped into January before everyone could finally agree on a weekend. Powells Cave is located on a private cattle ranch outside of the town of Menard, Texas, which is pretty far from anywhere. Given that trip participants were coming from Dallas, Houston, Austin, and San Antonio, it was agreed that we would all meet in Menard on a Saturday morning and camp near the cave entrance on Saturday night. I carpooled with Mallory and Courtney McClymont from Houston. We traveled to the cellular black hole that is Junction, Texas, Friday night and stayed at the Best Western. Our trip began a bit bumpy when Mallory showed up about 3 hours late coming from Baton Rouge and while gabbing in the car we missed the exit on 290 that is required to remain on 290. What is it about having to take exits to STAY on Texas highways? We noticed a bit later on Courtney's navigation system that we were north of Austin! We re-routed our way on country roads through the area that was apparently the inspiration for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and rolled into Junction around 10 p.m. It was a cold and windy night, and we were all thankful for having rooms. We met up with Wes Cavekarstly and Scott Santiago Cogburn from the Greater Houston Grotto (GHG) and headed over to the Riverside Saloon, which had formerly been named the Bucket of Blood, to get some beers and a healthy sampling of Guns N' Roses and Creedence Clearwater Revival. The next morning the meeting location was changed about three times - no doubt Bill trying to trim the herd. We ended up at the Lazy Ladle

Café in Menard. A bunch of us had already eaten the standard complimentary cereal, waffles, and toast at the motel. I watched with growing concern as many of the folks on the trip loaded up on eggs, bacon, chorizo, and beans. I was desperately hoping for good airflow in the cave. Joining Bill was his daughter Audrey Steele and Gerardo Morrill, a caver of some renown in Mexico and a survivor of an expedition to Huautla. Ken caught up with us, as well as Jill Orr and Caleb Mayeux. Eventually, the group congealed and headed out of town for Powells Cave. After a brief drive on the highway and muddy ranch roads, we arrived at the site in a clearing surrounded by small oak thickets and brush. The entrance to the cave and its fabulous bat-friendly gate were plainly visible. We hastily set up tents and began the process of gearing up. In order to run this as a full-time carbide trip, step one was to affix metal brackets to our helmets. I was dubious about drilling holes in my helmet, but I relented when it was clear that duct tape would not be sufficient. The next step involved attaching the carbide lights. When I began my caving career in the 1990s, many of the more “seasoned” cavers still used carbides since LEDs were not yet available. These carbide lamps were fairly modern with carbide canisters that clipped to the belt and fed acetylene to the lamp through a hose system. I saw that Bill had one of these “ceiling-burners” for himself. Wes brought out the carbide lamps the rest of us would use - vintage equipment kindly supplied by Bill, Roger Moore, and Sid and Don Formanek. This gear looked like Civil War memorabilia. It had heavily oxidized brass lamps that

would affix flammable and potentially explosive carbide canisters to your helmet, inches above your eyes. Wes had managed to clean these and verify that they worked, which was a miracle as I strongly suspected they had last been used in Vietnam-era tunnel warfare. This gear looked like it belonged in a museum exhibit on the horrors of 19th-century coal mining. We gathered around for a primer on how carbide lamps work. By filling the first canister with chips of calcium carbide and adding a small amount of water, we created a chemical reaction that released flammable acetylene gas. The gas exits a small nozzle at the top of the lamps where it can be ignited and the size of the flame is controlled by a primitive choke on the nozzle. The flame’s light is reflected and dispersed by a polished, or in this case half-corroded, metal disc to provide illumination. We watched in trepidation as one of the first lamps to be tested leaked acetylene from the ancient gaskets holding the thing together and was soon wreathed in flames. Doubts were raised whether we would be able to use these lamps for more than an hour or two, and I was just hoping that no one would need facial reconstructive surgery after this trip. I stowed two zebra lights and another headlamp in my cave pack.

Having safely passed the danger of getting into Powells Cave before noon, the group gathered for a photo at the cave entrance. The entrance is a vertical shaft that was originally opened by prospectors early in the 20th century looking for silver. Today a vertical concrete conduit pipe keeps the entrance shaft from



Group photo at the entrance to Powells Cave. *Peter Drushcke.*



Scott poses with one of the few formations. *Peter Druschke.*

caving in, and a rickety aluminum extension ladder affixed to the top on one side provides access to the cave about 25 to 30 feet below. The ladder worked well enough but did give an uncomfortable and insecure feeling on the way down, like at any moment it could either come away from the wall or spontaneously collapse back down to its pre-extension height. Once inside the cave proper, we all worked to get all our carbide lamps lit. To my surprise mine lit quite easily and held a small steady flame (similar to what you might get from a Bic lighter). With the reflector in place, it gave a soft, warm glow, ample to see with, but not overly bright. Other folks struggled to get their carbide lamps lit or stay lit, but with some monkeying everybody was eventually with carbide lamplight.

Next, Bill plumbed his hazy recollection of this cave to remember our route. The cave may be divided into three main areas: the Maze which is a series of labyrinthine crawlways, the Crevice which is a tall walking dry stream passage, and a water passage which is a difficult active stream passage. Bill had envisioned a simple walking pleasure trip in the Crevice, but first, we had to find it. A number of obvious red markers led to a crawling passage straight ahead, and a stooping passage veered to the right. Guano was everywhere. Powells Cave is an important summer roost for a large colony of migratory bats. Bill was pretty certain the markers led to the water passage, and he remembered the climb down to the Crevice existing somewhere to the right. We began crawling through the thick piles of accumulated guano and a number of us had been forewarned about the guano and had brought dust masks (Editor's note: Simple dust masks are ineffective against histoplasmosis spores). To my relief, the guano was just the right

consistency. It was dry enough that it wasn't squishy and wouldn't leave unsightly stains on your clothes and moist enough that it wasn't noticeably dusty. After stoop-walking and crawling a few hundred feet and checking a number of side passages without finding the Crevice, Bill stopped and admitted that he didn't remember where the route was. It had been more than a decade since Bill had been in the cave, and he had probably forgotten more caves than I have been in. Ken and I volunteered to scout ahead while the rest of the group ate lunch while sitting in feces. The passage ahead was a wide, low crawlway, and Ken and I crawled out of view of the others. Soon there was a junction with another crawlway to the right and the passage continued ahead. Since Bill was sure the passage was somewhere to the right, Ken scouted down the passage and found another junction without any signs of the Crevice. I noticed that the rocks ahead of me formed a cairn with a survey station, so when Ken came back I scouted ahead and quickly found a junction with a tunnel to the right, a tunnel straight ahead with another cairn, and a tunnel to the left with at least three additional tunnel intersections, each with its own little cairn at its entrance. My mind flashed back to the early 80s and some Dungeons and Dragons artwork that showed a band of adventurers in the distance exploring a labyrinth by torchlight, unraveling a ball of twine behind them to avoid getting lost. In the foreground of the picture was a minotaur lurking behind them who was busy balling the twine back up. There was no doubt that we had found the Maze, and after a brief consult, we headed back to the group.

When we rejoined the others we learned that Bill had sent Scott and Gerardo to scout the red markers back toward the way we had come from, and Bill took off to scout another junction. We

used the opportunity to rock his pack. When Scott and Gerardo returned, they informed us that the red markers led straight to the Crevice, so the group backtracked and followed the red markers through a crawl with an interesting spongework ceiling. The crawlway here opened to a wide fissure and one by one we made the 10-foot downclimb onto the floor of the Crevice. Here we found a slightly sandy floor of a tall canyon passage just wide enough to walk single file. Walk we did, and walk and walk. The Crevice passage widened enough in places for a few people to stand abreast and in other places, it was narrow enough that you nearly had to walk sideways. It is an impressive old stream passage with dry floors, scalloped walls, and ceilings towering 20 feet or more overhead. While the bottom of the passage is the narrowest part, higher up the passage bellows out in a series of ledges in a classic wine glass shape giving the passage an open feel despite the narrowness of the bottom. There are few formations in the cave, but the ceiling is adorned with numerous solution domes and joints, and if you look closely the limestone making up the cave is highly fossiliferous with echinoderms – sea urchins and sand dollars – and oysters making up the majority of the fossils, which were highly concentrated in particular layers.

The long hike underground was broken up in places by restrictions formed by breakdown, which form large chockstones in the narrow stream passage and force you to either crawl under or climb up and over, sometimes with options to do either. We reached a point where the passage branched with a lower passage visible, and a climb-up route continuing ahead. After exploring the lower passage and reaching a dead-end, we climbed up approximately 15 feet to a wide series of ledges with solution domes overhead and saw a climbdown with more walking stream passage on the other side. At this point, I need to mention that the Civil War era carbide lamps were working admirably. Everybody was still using their carbide lamps and their light made a soft, warm glow that you don't get with electric lights. The acetylene burning gave off a pleasant smell, one that brought back memories of my earliest caving trips in California's Mother Lode region. The only trouble with the carbide lamps is the awkwardness of entering a tight crawl with contortions and having a naked lit flame on your head. After a brief break, we continued our hike. The passage began to noticeably restrict with the floor and ceiling gradually coming closer together. Soon there were areas of alternating stooping and walking passage, and we reached an area with some flowstone formations with remnants of soda straws that were mostly broken overhead. This was about the extent of the formations, and as the passage began to restrict again, we arrived at an area of heavy graffiti. There were carbide signatures here, but most were spray-painted names, mostly from the 1970s to 1990s. One old signature appeared to date back to the early 1960s, and even older signatures may have been masked by the more recent paint. This was the only area in the cave that was heavily impacted in this way, and fortunately, it is localized to one area from what we saw; although, there is still much cave we didn't see.

We were increasingly forced to stoop. Bill and Wes decided their backs were not up to stoop much longer so they decided to wait while the rest of the group pushed ahead to find the ultimate end of the Crevice passage. During a brief break, many people refilled their carbide canisters for the first and only time during the approximately 10-hour trip. After traveling a considerable distance, the stooping turned to hands and knees crawling. There was another junction with some confusing arrows marking the

walls, and we decided the left junction looked the most promising. We continued to crawl for several hundred feet, and the passage restricted further to a belly crawl. At this point, several of us were feeling weary after many hours in the cave. It had been well over an hour since we left Bill and Wes behind, so some of us turned back while Ken, Caleb, Gerardo, and Audrey pushed a bit farther into the belly crawls before returning as well. We had not found the ultimate end of the Crevice, and at this point wondered if we should have followed the other passage at the last junction. In the end, it didn't matter. We had been in the cave for many hours, traveled many miles, and had an excellent time.

We rejoined Bill and Wes after having left them for over two hours, but they seemed to not mind, having spent the time talking. Wes did have an anxious look on his face and it turned out something was bubbling inside him from breakfast time. We quickly evacuated this stretch of the cave once Wes declared we should either get moving or witness what was about to happen in his Go-Anywhere bag. Without hesitation we started for the entrance. Making good time toward the entrance I began feeling tired and hungry. Climbing back up and out of the Crevice and through the spongework crawl, we were momentarily unsure of which passage led to the entrance. I checked a passage to the right and found some rusted out buckets and some hibernating little brown bats clinging to the walls. Backtracking, others had found the correct passage to the entrance, and a cool fresh breeze verified that we were almost out. One by one we ascended the ladder and exited into the cold night air. It was nearly 11 p.m. A few of us had switched to led lights for the last part of the journey out, but most still had our carbide going, which is not so bad for dubious-looking antiques.

Back on the surface, I lit the campfire while Bill and Gerardo got a spaghetti dinner ready for everyone. Caleb brought out a plate of chocolate chip pecan cookies that I suspected were just discs of melted raw dough from their consistency, but they were delicious. We also enjoyed dry venison sausage and margaritas. After scarfing down some delicious spaghetti, we sat around the campfire. Caleb shared the story of when he tried to tow an air-mattress behind his kayak for a mile off Galveston so he could lie back and chill on it in the open Gulf but got seasick paddling through the surf and ended up vomiting uncontrollably on Galveston beach. Caleb had seemed normal and balanced, so it was hard to think of him the same way after relating that little adventure. The night was cold, and I felt a chill through my mummy bag even with a bag liner and blanket wrapped around me while inside my tent. Waking up early, I broke down my camping gear and got some water for coffee started. The sun was up, but it was still pretty chilly so I thought about rekindling the fire. Then I saw my firewood box was empty and overturned next to a shapeless mound near the fire ring. It was Caleb, parked on the open ground in a square cut sleeping bag that looked like the kind you purchase from Walmart for kids' sleepovers. Apparently, he had burned through all the remaining firewood during the night in an attempt to stay warm.

After a bit of breakfast and coffee, we finished breaking down camp and said our goodbyes before dispersing in separate vehicles back toward civilization. The trip had been worth the wait and a great reward for the donations to TCMA. I certainly hope that TCMA can keep trips like this a part of the auction at Spring Convention, and hopefully, more folks will get a chance to take part in the future. 

Coyanosa Draw Exploratory Trip

BY FOREST CROFT



Coyanosa Draw campsite. *Forest Croft.*

On June 17, 2019, Cait McCann, Gary Franklin, James Williams, Jessica Gordon, Peter Sprouse and Forest Croft headed to West Texas to explore a sinkhole that opened in a draw on a property between Alpine and Fort Stockton. In the West Texas landscape of mesquite and dust, our contact described a rain-driven creek whirlpooling into the newly exposed fracture. The photos sent with the request showed the shallow draw in the deep dirt, with a fractured bedrock crevice and a man standing in the opening and looking deeper into a drop.

We met the ranch staff at the gate to the property a couple of hours before sunset; sandal shod cavers shaking hands with the ranchers

wearing snake boots. After a dusty and bumpy 20-minute drive into the property, we stepped out and started searching through the mostly-dry draw for the opening. The draw held muddy patches with pig and small animal tracks, cuts exposing the worn limestone and igneous rocks, and bunch grasses among the patches of mesquite and acacia. Cait and Gary hopped down into the cut in the draw, onto landings at 8 feet and 15 feet below grade, then under a shallow overhang they reported that a large rock now blocked the opening to the main drop. After tossing a few rocks, Gary described a declining slope with an estimated depth of at least thirty feet. “We have a cave!”

Peter drove through the sparse desert brush to a clearing that was large enough for a comfortable camp above the draw about 100 feet from the entrance. We set up tents, some of us choosing the slight shade of a mesquite bush, and stacked gear ready for the morning’s exploration. Jessica provided dinner under a mostly clear sky, and we watched a colorful big-sky sunset. As the frog-chorus rose, Peter brought out a black light and we searched for fluorescing critters, the scorpions we expected and others that we did not. “Hole-ducker!” became a common call as we watched tiny spiders retreating into their burrows like cavers. Our sandals danced and tried to corral the surprisingly fast solifuge (an arachnid of the order Solifugae also known as wind scorpion, sun spider, camel spider, or solpugid) between pairs of feet long enough for us to get a picture. As the waxing quarter moon set, we enjoyed a starscape that nearly touched the horizon.

Waking up in the cool morning, under a vibrant sunrise, we ate a hearty breakfast and gathered gear for exploring the cave. James left the diving tanks on standby in hopes of a wet day. Gary and Cait secured our rope to the boulder blocking the entrance, then Cait was first to squeeze through and assess the passage beyond. The rock support behind the boulder was “not great” but deemed strong enough to make the drop. The two landings on the way down were broken rock and sediment. “It stops being so flaky and there are a couple of nice walls... we’ve got a dig lead! Let me put myself in this mud and get a better look.” Cait found a host of cave crickets and horizontal opening that suggested the cave continues on for a while, at least in cricket-passable form.

Gary and Peter made the squeeze, joining Cait in close quarters to help move material. When Cait rotated out, she had a layer of mud from head to toe. After a few hours of digging sticky and sometimes



Peter Sprouse, Cait McCann and Forest Croft at the cave entrance. *Jessica Gordon.*

slick mud, terracing the material behind stacked rock walls, we had good access to an exposed horizontal separation between the bedrock. "This thing is twenty-feet long and I can almost fit my helmet through" reported Peter after one of his stints digging. The crack was blowing cool air, and we were hopeful that a bit of digging would open up access through the floor. Eventually, we decided that without several more days and buckets, or a five-inch caver, this was the end of the push for this trip. The cave has potential but was not passable beyond 20 meters on this trip.

From ground level, there are two drops over jammed rocks that were free-climbable for everyone. The entrance is located under the overhanging rock and dirt base of the draw, with a squeeze around the boulder at the top of the vertical portion. Another large rain event could change the passage again, but for now, the drop has solid walls, about four feet wide, with the boulder supported by a jumble of rock squeezed between the walls. The bottom of the vertical portion now has three three-foot-tall mud terraces that lead down between the walls - which narrow to three feet - to the horizontal pinch at the bottom. After four hours in the cave, we did not create further access beyond the pinch nor find another lead, so we stopped digging. Peter, Jessica, and Cait set up four survey stations through the cave, with Peter sketching the map.

We packed camp and cleaned up in the nearby windmill's soft-bottomed holding tank, not to be confused with the stock tank that reportedly hosted a dead pig. In search of colder swimming, we headed to Balmorhea Springs, only to find that they were full and required an online reservation. The next best option was the irrigation canal near Lake Balmorhea. Skirting the lake, we took off on the dirt and mud roads, guided by a satellite map that showed most of the routes through the brush. After testing Peter's winch, we hauled a van and very grateful family out of the muddy ruts on our path and continued on to find our way blocked by a deep muddy ditch that even the Sequoia did not want to challenge.

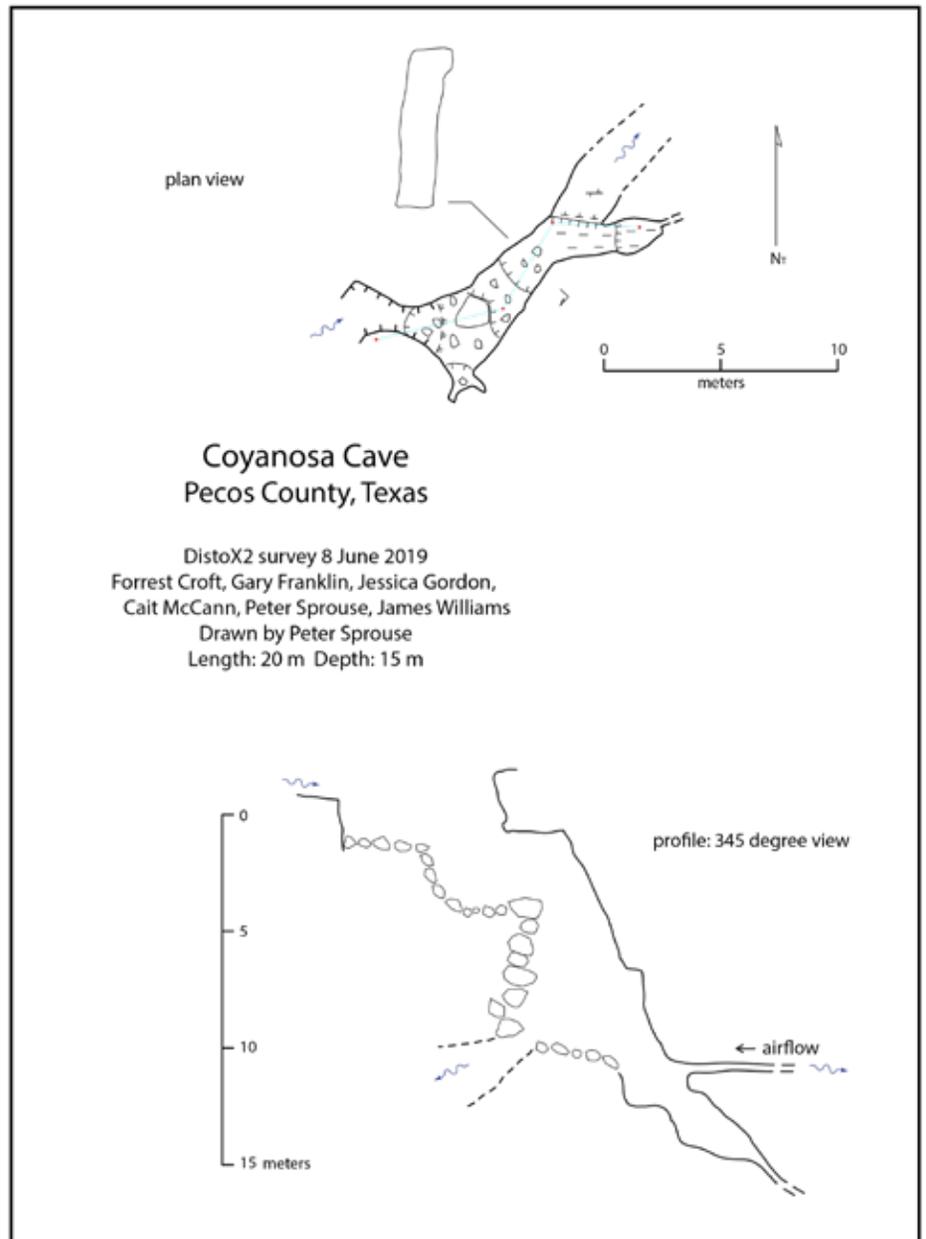
We found a site open on a small peninsula on the lake and set camp, all refreshed in the cold waters and a beverage in hand. Dinner entertainment included the begging ducks, a talkative grebe, and another fantastic sunset reflected in the lake. As we watched the color give way to stars, the moon's light on the gentle ripples gave the impression of bioluminescence. As with any trip during a Texas summer is likely to find, the experience was defined by bright heat, big skies, and muddy waypoints in search of cool water. 🦇



Cait McCann enjoying the cave. *Forest Croft.*



Scorpion. *Jessica Gordon.*



Logans Cave Trip Report

BY KORI DUNAWAY

On June 15, 2019 I went into Logans Cave for the first time with a group from the Bexar Grotto. The group consisted of Rob Bisset, Richard Silver, MJ Gibbs, Jim Funk, Mark Ross, Sriram Madalhushi, Nate Clark, and me, Kori Dunaway. The purpose of our visit was to refresh the minds of those who had not been in a while as well as to show off the cave to those who had never had the chance to see it. We met in Helotes and carpooled to the property, where we ran into Elizabeth and James Loftin, ever-entertaining, long-time cavers who come complete with many years of experience at Logans Cave and awesome stories of fried chicken and beer.

Once in the cave, Rob took the group to the main room. Nate and I were able to scurry up some breakdown passage into a small room that overlooked the larger room. This tall, narrow room contained a cluster of stalactites that was nearly completely black and hung from the ceiling as if it were a giant squid swimming to the surface. It was a poor decision to leave my camera at home. From there, our group split in half. Richard, MJ, Nate, and I were on one team. Our team

was split again to allow Nate and I to take the corkscrew passage up the pancake room where MJ and Richard would be waiting. From there, the four of us poked in every hole we could find, squeezed our way through passages that were fun and awkward to maneuver, and wall-climbed across canyons that are far deeper than those found at Robber Barron in San Antonio.

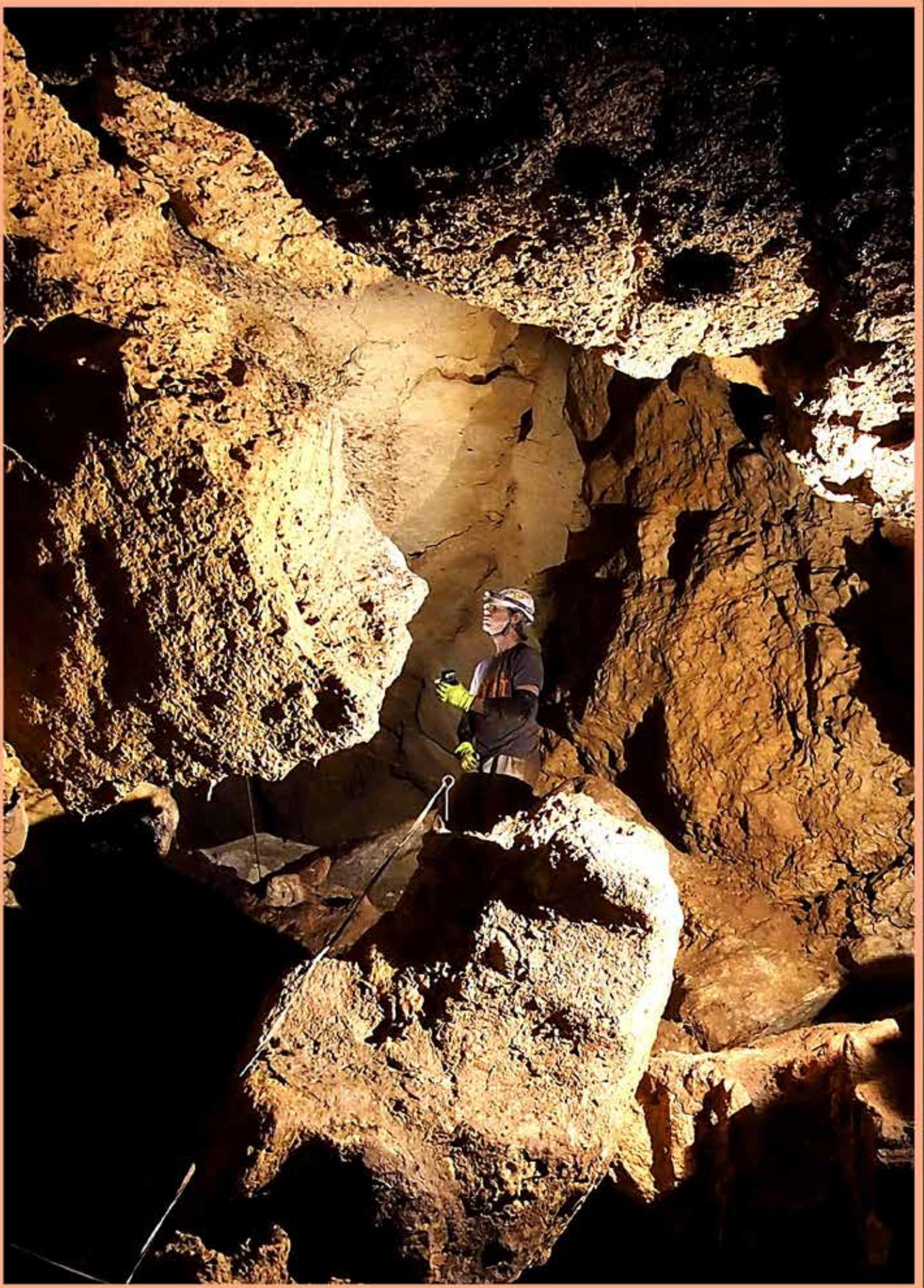
The most difficult part of this trip was the mental aspect. The sharp rocks at the bottom of deep canyons and the extremely jagged nature of this cave keep you on your toes, or in the fetal position. As the cave passage mainly consisted of breakdown, lamplight quickly disappears and the person in front of you vanishes if more than three feet away. The countless unexpected pits and up-climbs keep your head on a swivel, so long as your helmet does not get stuck. Despite the cave's best efforts, everyone in the two teams made it out safe and sound, though covered in mud and lesions. Leave no trace, except some skin and blood.

This cave is astoundingly beautiful and exciting to explore. We will be forever grateful to have been given the opportunity to see it, and we look forward to returning. The razor blade passage eluded Nate and me on that trip. However, it is best to leave something unexplored in a cave as to always have a good reason to return. We look forward to the next trip into Logans Cave. 🦇



Group photo before the cave trip. L to R: Jim Funk, MJ Gibbs, Kori Dunaway, Nate Clark, Rob Bissett, Richard Silver & Sriram Madalhushi. *Mark Ross.*

Jim Funk lights up the cave. Mark Ross.



Ghost Cave

BY BILL STEELE

In 1980 I began a career in professional service with the Boy Scouts of America in the local council headquarters in San Antonio, Texas. Soon I visited their thousand-plus acre camp, the Bear Creek Scout Reservation, in Kerr County. It lies just off the North Fork of the Guadalupe River, about six miles from Hunt, Texas. Seeing that the camp sits on limestone, with dramatic cliffs soaring above the creek with evidence of solution, I asked the resident caretaker if there were any caves of note on the property. He told me that the South Texas Archaeological Association had done an inventory of the entire property a few years before and that they had noted a cave on the northern end of the property. It appeared to be one room about the size of a large room in a house. They noted no significant archaeological evidence. A javelina had emerged from it as they looked into the four-foot high, four-foot wide entrance, so he cautioned me to make plenty of noise near the entrance if I found it and wanted to go in it.

A year later I was assigned to be the program director at Bear Creek. Besides the usual merit badges taught, I wanted to add some “sizzle” to the program to make it fun and add something new. I visited the camp and found the cave. I noticed a historic archaeological artifact, a square-headed nail, hammered into a crack near the entrance opening. There was also a large flat rock that appeared to have been lifted, with rocks placed as legs beneath it, and set like a table. It looked like someone had lived in the cave at one time. I asked the resident caretaker about it. He told me that near the rifle range there is the concrete foundation of a house. A family used to live there. The man was in trouble with the law from time to time. For a while, he was wanted for a crime, and when the sheriff rode up to the house, the man would duck out the back and disappear for a few days. Rumor had it he would hide out in a cave. I decided to make up a story about this man and use the cave as an evening program of a ghost story. We advertised it as “the real thing” with an actual ghost called from the hereafter. If he appeared, you may be sorry you went. Just remember: you asked for it!

During summer camp 1983 we had nightly Ghost Cave shows. It was theatre. We would do two shows per night. Groups would sign up and walk in single file through the woods to the cave entrance. There, they would crouch to enter the low cave opening. We took their flashlights and piled them on the stone table and showed them where to sit along the wall of the oval-shaped room. Without their light, they were committed to staying still. Once everyone sat, things got serious. The person leading the “ghost call-out” would tell the Scouts and their leaders that this was not fooling around. Yes, there is a tradition of telling ghost stories at Boy Scout camp, but this was for real.

The story went that the son of the bad man who had gone to prison and died there was a good man, up to a point. He ended up becoming a Scoutmaster in Kerrville. He brought his troop to Bear Creek, but his Scouts just goofed off, did not attend merit badge classes, and lied to him. He brought them to the cave to talk seriously with them to try to get them to change. They rudely laughed in his face and he got furious. It was as though his violent father surged up in him. Before he realized what he had done, he buried all twelve of the Scouts beneath the rocks on the floor of the cave. Knowing that he could not go back to

his life, he laid down, buried himself beneath rocks, and stayed there. Sometimes people feel the floor moving a little bit when we call out the ghost of the Scoutmaster.

A lit candle was within sight just outside the entrance. We told the audience that it would go out just before the ghost appeared. Watch for it. Then the song began with the audience told to follow each line of the “ghost call” by singing ou-ou-ou-ou in an eerie tone. “You have to want creepy things to happen for them to happen.” There would be a carpet of harvestmen on the ceiling and the “ghost caller” would rake them off onto his face and head and appear to like it.

THE SONG:

Henry Miller
ou-ou-ou-ou
Of Troop 45
ou-ou-ou-ou
Brought here twelve Scouts
ou-ou-ou-ou
And buried them alive
ou-ou-ou-ou
The Scouts were bad,
ou-ou-ou-ou
Didn't earn merit badges,
ou-ou-ou-ou
Drove him insane
ou-ou-ou-ou
That's why he did this thing...
ou-ou-ou-ou
Come and see us Henry Miller
ou-ou-ou-ou
Come and see us Henry Miller (diminishing volume)
ou-ou-ou-ou
Come and see us Henry Miller (almost a whisper)

Then silence. If anyone giggled, coughed, or did something other than being perfectly silent, they were chastised and the ghost call had to start over. Once it was done right, and there was silence and everyone was staring at the burning candle, the candle would begin to flicker and go out. At that same instant a brilliant white light would light up the woods outside the cave entrance and the ghost would suddenly come into the cave. His face was a strange glow. He was angry that his eternal, tormented rest was disturbed and he had been called back to where he had done his ghastly deed. He would shout at the Scouts and ask them if they were good Scouts. No one ever talked back to the ghost of Henry Miller. Then he would exit the entrance as fast as he had arrived. Most nights the Scouts were afraid to leave the cave to return to their camps. The ghost was in the woods.

Here is how it was done. The staff member acting as the ghost wore old worn-out clothes from Salvation Army. His face was marked with brown and black makeup. He wore an old hat. The candle was blown out from about three feet away using a hollow tent pole. The bright light in the woods was a strip of magnesium ribbon lit with a carbide lamp. The carbide lamp was held in the hand of the ghost and turned on himself to light his face. Few if any had ever seen a carbide lamp before. I had caver friends who heard about our Ghost Cave shows and wanted to come out to the camp to do a cameo appearance as the ghost. Several did it.

The next summer we needed to do something different. A lot of the same Scouts and their leaders would be back to our camp again. They

would know what was going to happen. So we came up with a new story. We bought a Hollywood-quality, full-head mask of a wild boar. We bought some dark brown full body tights and had fake fur sewn to it. We were to have the Pig Man. When we got an audience into the Ghost Cave during the next summer's camp, many were laughing because they thought they knew what was going to happen. Then they were told that we had explored more of the cave and discovered a creature lived back inside the hill. It appeared to be half man and half pig. A remnant creature from the Ice Ages. A Pig Man. We can call it out and it will appear. A Cyalume light stick was then cracked and glowed bright green. "It will be held in front of the Pig Man's face so it will follow it and not attack you," they were told. Then we would point to a hole at the back of the cave room where it will emerge.

So, instead of the Ghost Call, they were led in a Pig Call:

Sou-ee, pig, pig, pig
 Sou-ee, pig, pig, pig
 Sou-ee, pig, pig, pig
 Sou-ee, pig, pig, pig

And then snorts and pig noises would emit from the hole. The light stick was held in front of the hole for the Pig Man to see. Then he emerged suddenly, growled, and snorted. In the dim light, he looked real. The first time the Pig Man appeared was the funniest time. Once he stood up out of the hole (a staff member in the costume had crammed himself into the hole out of sight shortly before the audience arrived) a Scout screamed, "What is it?" The Pig Man followed the light stick until it was thrown out the cave entrance, and he crawled out into the night.

The Ghost Cave ran for two summers. We had a total of around 2,000 Scouts and leaders in our audiences across the two shows per night at up to 50 per show, four nights per week, for six weeks. It was probably the most people in any cave in Texas those two summers, except for commercial show caves.

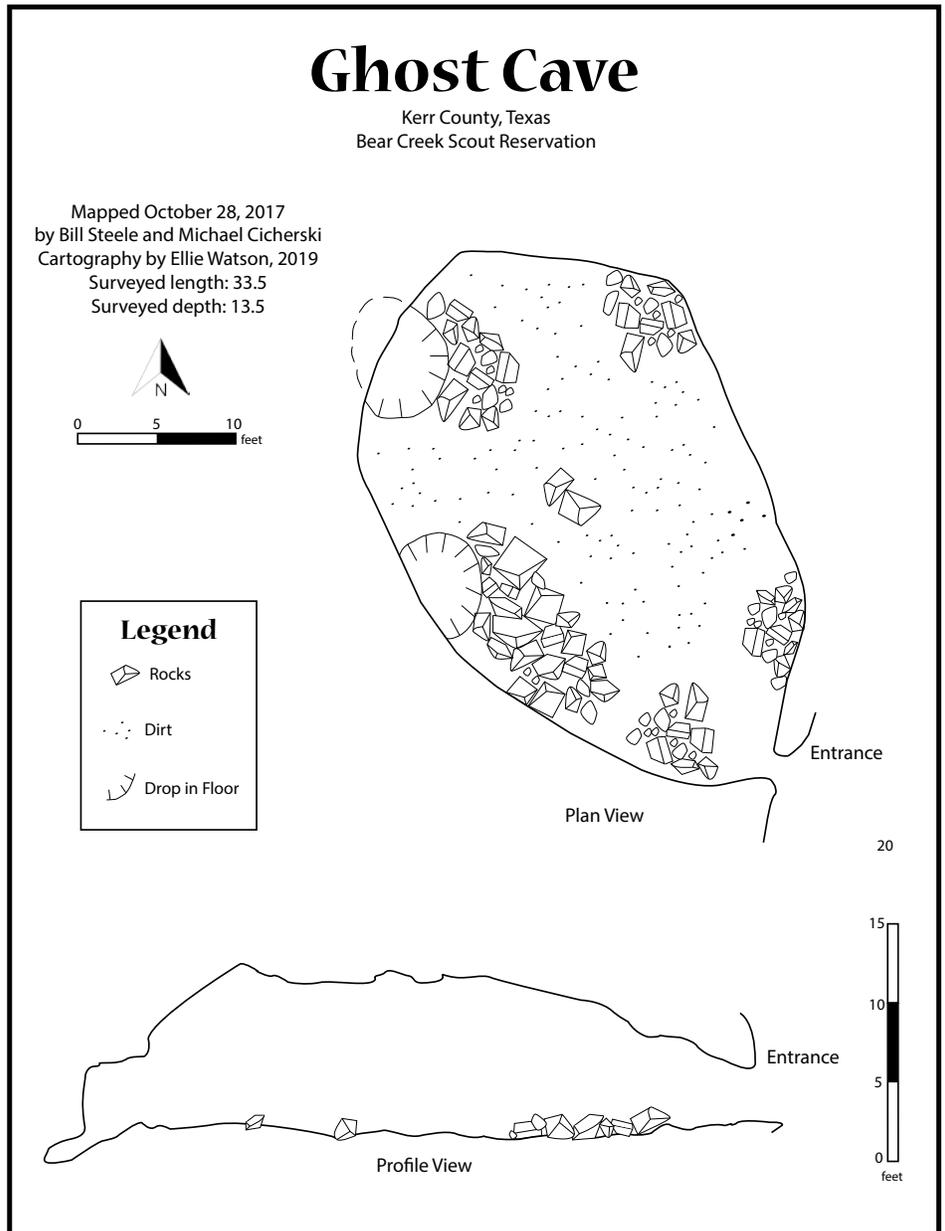
At Halloween time in the late 1980s, an article ran in the San Antonio Express-News about the legendary ghost stories of South Texas. To my utter amazement, it included the Ghost Cave tale that I had made up. I guess that with so many people experiencing our theatrics, the ghost story made its way into legend. 🦇



Sophia Worrell at the entrance to the Ghost Cave on the north end of the Bear Creek Scout Reservation. *Bill Steele.*



The sign at the front of the Bear Creek Scout Reservation, Kerr County, Texas, 2019. *Bill Steele.*



The Hall of Texas and Mexico Cavers

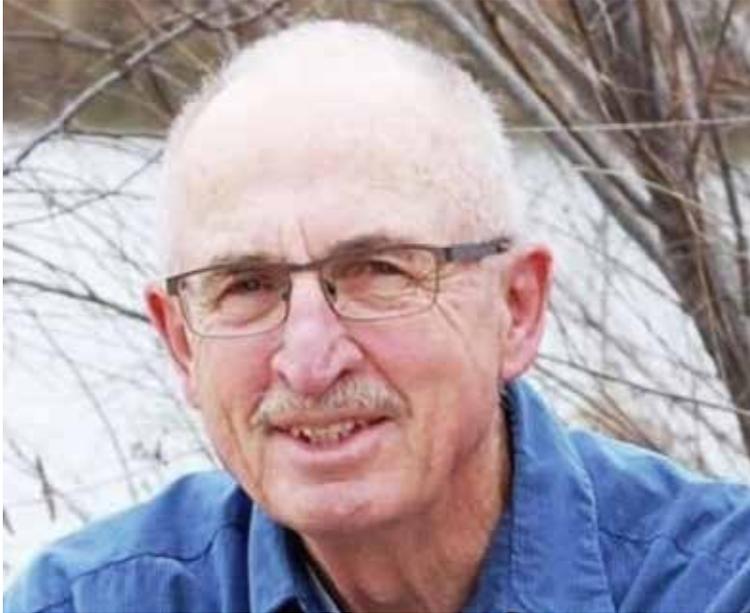
BY WILLIAM R. (BILL) ELLIOTT

Cavers are encouraged to read more about our departed friends by visiting www.cavelife.info/hall/hall.htm

We are experiencing increasing and heartbreaking losses from our caving community. Here are six cavers who passed away in 2019.

TERRY PLEMONS

9 February 1941 – 19 August 2019, 78



Terry Plemons was among the early explorers of deep Mexican caves from Austin, Texas. The first Association for Mexican Cave Studies (AMCS) trip report about him was in 1962-1963 to Sótano de Huitzmolotitla and the Xilitla area of San Luis Potosí. The cavers camped in the cave during exploration, a first. Their single-rope technique work extended the exploration by Robert W. Mitchell and friends, who had used a winch in Huitzmolotitla in 1958. Terry did a stint with the Peace Corps in 1964-1966 at Gwalior Fort, India. He earned a PhD in physics and worked at the University of Texas and Tracor.

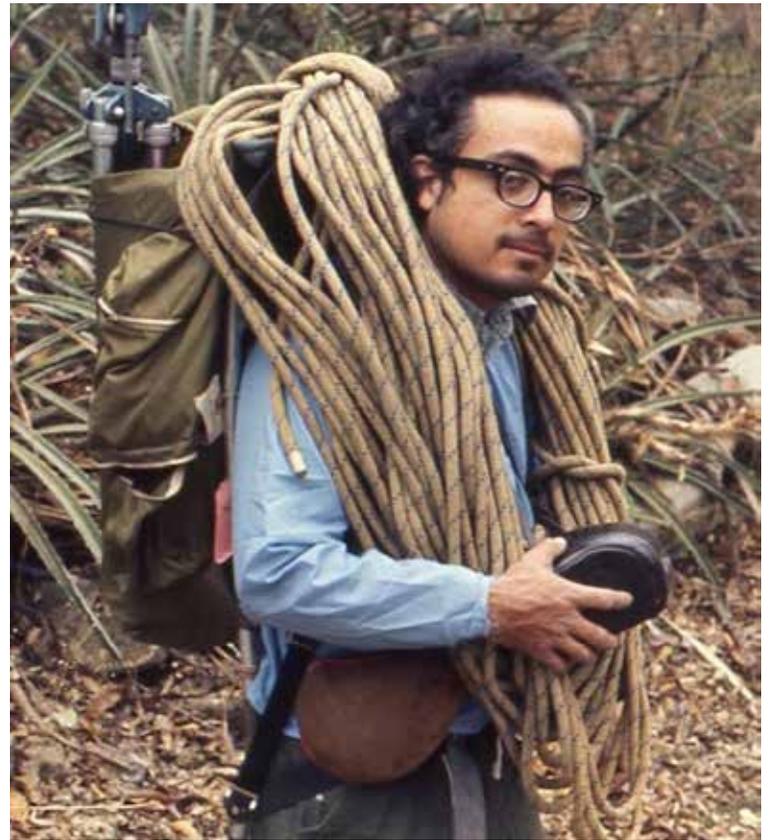
I met Terry at the cavers' table in the Chuck Wagon at the Student Union after joining the UT Grotto in 1967. He was funny, witty, smart, and a good influence on me and others. He visited Bustamante (Gruta del Palmito) in 1966, and returned later in life for cave restoration work with other Texas cavers. He was among the early explorers of Sótano de San Agustín, Huautla, Oaxaca, helping establish it as the second deepest cave in North America at -449 meters in 1967.

Terry was the chief cook at the Texas Caver Reunion for years, and he wrote an entertaining article about the great variety of barbeque cooked by the cavers. Carl Kunath took photos of Terry at the 2003 Amigos de la Gruta event in Bustamante, Nuevo León. Terry was an important, contributing worker to that project, and may be remembered as the knowledgeable guide for the tour of the mescal factory at the edge of Bustamante.

Terry is greatly missed by his wife Kathy, family, and friends.

ERNIE GARZA

20 July 1938 – 16 August 2019, 81, NSS 13484, FE, CM



Ernie in the spring of 1970 on a trip to Sótano del Caballo near Gómez Farías, Tamaulipas, MX. *Frank Binney.*

International caver and creative photographer, Ernest Garza was a friend to many and will be missed dearly. He was born in Brownsville, Texas and grew up in Corpus Christi and southern California. He was in the Los Angeles area for junior high, where he started learning photography and then attended W.B. Ray High School in Corpus Christi. As a young diver he worked in undersea welding and would bring sea collections home to his family. He became independent of his parents at age 15 or 16. He worked in studio photography in high school. He served in the Army at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, in 1961-1963, where he learned advanced photography. He was back in Corpus in 1965 and California 1966-1994. He often came to Austin via expeditions to Mexico, and in 1994 he settled in Austin, ending up at his country place on 444 Billie Brooks Road, Driftwood.

The first caving photo we have of him was at Xilitla, San Luis Potosí, in 1966. He made trips to the Sierra de El Abra, San Luis Potosí and Cuetzalan, Puebla. He focused on Oaxaca, where he caved in the Huautla Area and the Cerro Rabón. His name is on at least 23 Mexican cave maps, and he explored and photographed many others. Ernie went on many trips to Mexico and to a few Texas caves. He published cave photos, trip reports, reviews, and articles. He received an NSS Fellow award in 1988, and he and Karlin Meyers received a Certificate of Merit Award in 1993 for pioneering the Cerro Rabón Area in Oaxaca.

Ernie was a member of the Southern California Grotto. He went caving with many people to Lilburn Cave (survey trips), Church Cave, Soldier's Cave, Cave of the Winding Stair (survey trips), and Crystal '67 (Houghton's Cave). Ernie caved in Arizona at Onyx Cave (survey trips), Cave of the Bells, SP Cave, Fort Huachuca Cave, and Dante's Descent. He also travelled around Nevada and made brief sorties together into the Grand Canyon and Northern Mexico around Hermosillo. In mapping Painted Cave, California, he surprised everyone by pulling out two helium-filled Snoopy balloons that he used to measure the 130-foot ceiling. Ernie also went on a big 1982 expedition to Mount Kaijende, Papua New Guinea.

Ernie continued attending grotto meetings and caver events and was present at the memorial for Broussard and Mixon, held on 10 August, just days before he passed. After recent stays in the hospital and nursing homes, Ernie spent his final weeks in Austin, living under the watchful eyes of cavers Yazmin Avila and Jim Kennedy. Ernie passed away at home, with Vivian Loftin by his side.

John Woods said, "Ernie Garza is the studliest nerd who ever walked the planet and an eccentric among eccentrics. He has done things that macho men fear and yet has always remained self-effacing, gentle and kind. He is one of the most soft-spoken men I have ever known. I used to joke that he had no adrenal glands. Both his eccentricity and his humility are legendary among cavers. I can truly say that all who meet him - care for him. I have never met a more affable man."

JENNI ARBURN

7 February 1964 - 26 May 2019, 55, NSS 56826FL



Jenni Arburn in Midnight Cave. Kurt Menking.

Jennifer "Jenni" Anne Bucha Arburn, passed away on 26 May 2019 in her home. Born on 7 February 1964 in Sands, Marquette County, Michigan to Joseph and Andrea D. Bucha, she came from an Air Force military family. She graduated in 1982 from Samuel Clemens High School in Schertz, Texas. Jenni married Donald Arburn on 9 June 9 1990 in San Antonio, Texas. Jenni was a beloved wife, mother, and a member of the San Antonio caving community. She enjoyed caving, cooking, camping, fairies, traveling the world with friends and family, Italian food, a good cup of tea, genealogy, and reading. Jenni was always one to "tell it like it is" and support each person around her to the best of her abilities. Jenni was an early member of the Bexar Grotto Caving Club as well as a member of

the Texas Cave Management Association, the Texas Speleological Association, and the National Speleological Society (she was a Family Life member). She is preceded in death by her son, Nicolas Joseph Arburn (2012), her mother, Andrea D. Hood Bucha (2007), and her mothers-in-law, LaVonne Kennedy Bradfield (2018) and Theresa Morkovsky Arburn (2008). Jenni is survived by her husband Donald Arburn, daughter Jessica Waters, father Joseph Bucha and spouse, sisters Angel Bucha and Audrey Bucha Abbey, sister-in-law Ginger Arburn Rogers and her husband Bill, brother-in-law Scott Trautman and his wife Jennifer, fathers-in-law Charles Bradfield and Robert "Bob" Arburn, as well as many nieces, nephews, and cousins. Jenni was cremated per her wishes. No funeral was held. For those who would like to donate in her name, please consider the San Antonio Botanical Garden, Texas Cave Management Association, or one of your choice.

DON BROUSSARD

17 August 1948 - 16 May 2019, 70, NSS 9514RL, FE



1989 Venadito - Don Broussard, Bill Storage, and Sarah Gayle.

A famous caver from Driftwood, Texas, Don Broussard (pictured above, left) passed away apparently from an unexpected heart attack on Thursday, May 16. We all miss our dear friend, Don!

Don was an active caver who went on many hard caving trips from 1967 through the 2000s. He continued to be part of the support crew for major expeditions to Huautla and other destinations until recently. Don was always cheerful and helpful. His trademark was to walk up and say "Good morning!" even if it was late at night. Everyone noticed how unassuming, modest, and quiet he was.

Don and David Honea were good friends in Houston schools from 1st through 12th grade. They shared an interest in telescopes, rockets, and ham radio. They built a homemade diving helmet air-supplied by a converted bicycle pump. As teenagers they went to their first cave near Lake Travis. Don went to the University of Arkansas for two years, then to the University of Texas, where he got a BS in EE and joined the UT Grotto. David Honea also moved to UT. The two friends visited Gruta del Palmito (Bustamante) in Mexico and explored/mapped a nearby pit. Don, David, and Bill Elliott were caver pals and UT roommates in 1968-1969. In the summer of 1969 Don worked with Bill and Jim McIntire in the

Sierra de El Abra, mapping and making cavefish collections in many caves for Robert W. Mitchell's cavefish research. After that he worked for John Fish from 1971-1973 in the El Abra as part of John's dissertation work on hydrogeology. Most of Don's work in the El Abra is documented in AMCS Bulletin 14 by John Fish, *Karst Hydrology of the Sierra de El Abra, Mexico* (2004) and AMCS Bulletin 26 by Bill Elliott, *The Astyanax Caves of Mexico* (2018). In 2018 Don was declared the "King of the El Abra" because he went in more caves for science and mapping than anyone else. Friends presented him with a free copy of the cavefish bulletin and held a lunch in his honor.

David Honea says that Don had the indomitable spirit of a true explorer. In the 1980s Don led efforts to explore and survey the Crevice in the deepest part of Sótano de las Golondrinas. Don participated in mapping at least 63 Mexican caves from 1968 to 2009 in Nuevo León, Coahuila, Oaxaca, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, and Tamaulipas. Don was involved with mapping Sótano del Venadito, Tamaulipas, from 1969 to 1998. He led the re-survey of the cave from 1989-1998, the longest project in the Sierra de El Abra. Bill Steele said, "Don and I did a lot of caving together. It wasn't just caving, either. Don was an active member of The Explorers Club... Don had the greatest tenure in caving at Sistema Huautla. He first went there in 1969 and the last time was in 2018..." As an older caver, Don often was in support on the surface, always to be counted on.

Don had several close calls while caving and became legendary for those as well. He survived free diving into a pocket of bad air and passing out in the Sierra de El Abra, a plane crash in the Sierra de Guatemala, and getting short-rope in Sótano de San Agustín, causing him to nearly run out of insulin (Don was diabetic), to name a few. Friends began to talk about the nine lives of Don Broussard because he survived so many potentially fatal scenarios. Don was a diminutive man who lived a simple life, but made a big impact on caving.

Don's family was originally from the Houston area and Louisiana. He is survived by his mother, Madeline Skinner of Brenham, Texas; sister, Linda Broussard, Los Angeles, CA; nephew, Morgan Broussard, Houston area; and cousin, Wendell Broussard, Smithville, TX. Don's ashes will be scattered in several areas that he loved.

Contributors: *William R. Elliott, John Fish, David Honea, Logan McNatt, Mark Minton, Peter Sprouse, Nancy Weaver, Bill Steele, Mark Minton*



Ernie Garza, David Ochel, and Don Broussard at TCR 2018. *William R. Elliott.*

BILL MIXON

29 December 1940 – 8 May 2019, 78, NSS 5728RL, OS, CM, AL, FE



Bill Mixon at home, working at his computer. *William R. Elliott.*

After a long battle with myasthenia gravis, William Weston "Bill" Mixon passed away on 8 May 2019. He worked tirelessly over many years on faithfully producing multiple caving publications. He maintained the AMCS files at his house, which today is the Texas Speleology Center. Mixon was editor of the AMCS Activities Newsletter for 21 issues from 1992 to 2018, which accounts for more than half of the 5272 newsletter pages published since 1965. He served as layout editor and production manager for many issues of the AMCS Bulletin with little or no credit. He bankrolled the AMCS at times too. He also placed images of 4065 cave maps on the AMCS website (he received an NSS Certificate of Merit for that). We now have a project to carry on his tradition and index all the cave maps that he put online. Bill was a very patient and resourceful layout editor for Elliott's AMCS Bulletin 26 on *Astyanax* cavefishes in 2018. Mixon excelled at service in the administration or governance of caving organizations and in production of cave literature. One pictures him, with his wry smile, in his tuxedo tee shirt at the NSS Convention.

Bill was from Hammond, Indiana. He earned a BS in Physics (1962) and an MS in Mathematics (1965) at the University of Chicago. This led him into computer programming and its application to support experimental physics. He would spend his professional career pursuing this at physics labs at the University of Chicago and later at the University of Texas Tokamak (fusion) project. In 1960, he started caving with the university's Outing Club. Then he was a founding member of the Windy City Grotto, Chicago, and attended his first NSS Convention, in 1964. He became the editor of the grotto's *Speleonews*, a position that lasted for 17 years. He caved in south-central Indiana, Kentucky, southern Illinois, then expanded his caving to southeastern Missouri and TAG.

In the early '70s he began to take on offices in the NSS. He served on many committees, and in 1971 he was elected to the NSS Board of Governors, which lasted for 25 years. He often was a contrarian to the other members, and delighted in it. At regional and national gatherings he assembled a portable geodesic dome of wood-framed plastic and aluminum triangles, which he hauled around to events in his Suburban and stapled together in the campground with some recruited cavers. It was a prominent feature at caving events for years.

In 1978 Bill attended the NSS Convention in New Braunfels, Texas. Then he caved in Mexico for a short time. Already an AMCS member, this seems to have been his first trip to Mexico. His interest in Mexican caving increased. In 1981 Bill completed his 100th issue as editor of the *Speleonews* and left Chicago to relocate to Austin. He built his house on rural property southwest of Austin. In 1986 he moved to the house, which was custom-made for his literary work. It became one of the most important, private speleological libraries. He published hundreds of book reviews. Many well-attended New Year's Eves were held there.

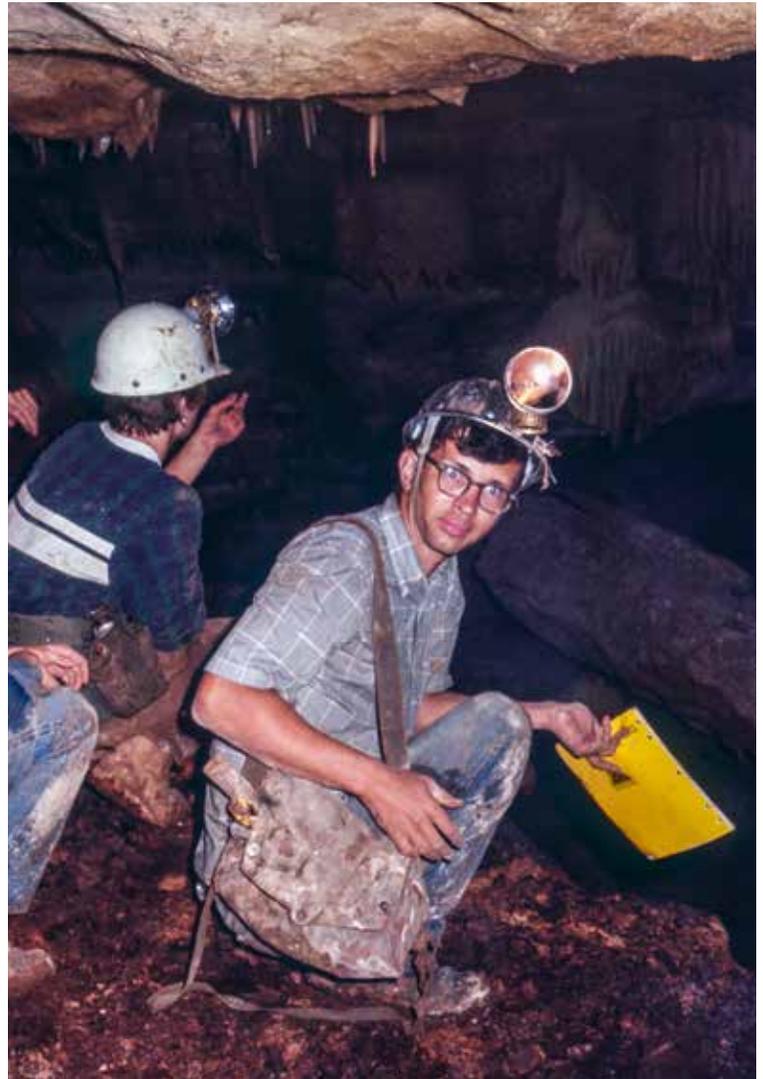
He had a succession of Saluki dogs, variously named "Silly" or "Sally." A newer construction was Bill's "Longest Cave in (insert name)". This is a large, plywood box structure, subdivided into smaller interior cubes, which one enters and follows in a labyrinthine pattern to the exit. It was deployed at many caver gatherings and enjoyed by young and old crawlers. It is still around.

A Fellow of the Society since 1971, he was honored with the William J. Stephenson Outstanding Service Award in 1987, followed in 1999 by the Spelean Arts and Letters Award. In 2014 he was recognized with a Certificate of Merit. And in 2016 and 2017 he received NSS President's Certificates of Appreciation for significant assistance to the IT Committee in creating an archive of NSS publications, and for many years of service to the *Journal of Cave and Karst Studies* and to the NSS. He was honored by the scientific description of *Cabralcandona mixoni*, a small aquatic invertebrate.

He made at least one loan to the NSS to enable publication of the NSS Bulletin. A gift from his library to the Walter Geology Library at UT Austin comprised more than 1000 books and over 1000 periodical articles—all new material to UT Libraries!

WILLIAM H. "BILL" RUSSELL

30 June 1937 - 21 March 2019, 81, NSSRL, HM, CM, FE

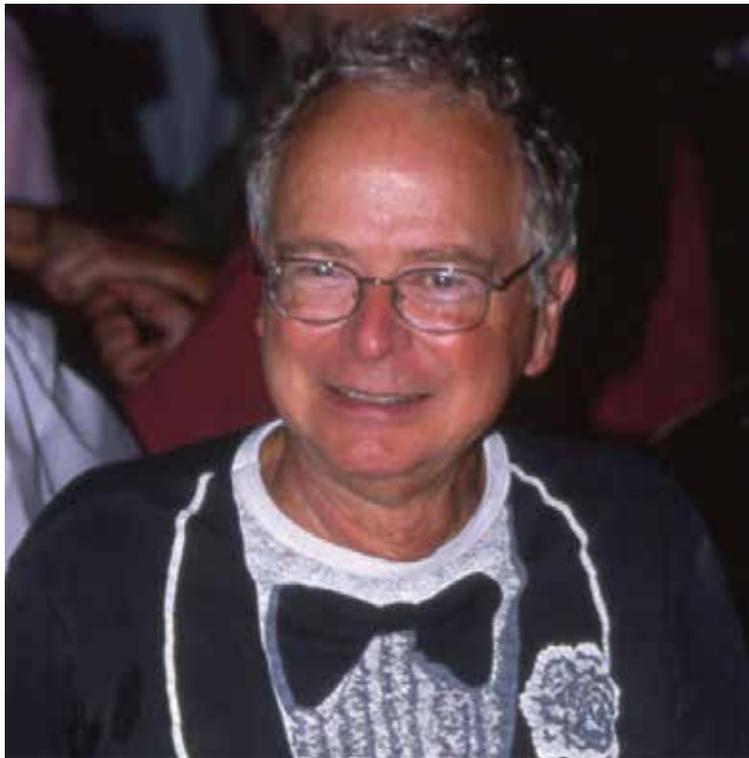


William Russell in Innerspace Caverns, 1969. James Jasek.

Bill was a primary force in Texas and Mexico caving since the 1950s. He talked faster than any Texan I ever heard, probably because he had a lot to say and not enough time to say it. He also had the most flexible frame I've ever witnessed in a caver - he could sit flat on the ground with his legs splayed sideways at the knees, even into old age. This flexibility came in handy in his expert digging, which revealed many new caves in Texas. Bill Russell was honored at a memorial gathering on 27 April 2019 at the Texas Speleology Center.

Here are excerpts from two news articles about Bill Russell:

OBITUARY: WILLIAM HART RUSSELL, cave scientist and caver extraordinaire, passed away on 21 March 2019 after a brief illness. Born in 1937 in Houston, Texas, to a professional librarian, Leonore Schuppert Russell, and a geologist, William Low Russell, he grew up in Bryan, Texas, with his brother, Philip, where his father taught at Texas A&M University for several decades. Their father took them on fieldwork trips which inspired William's very early engagement with caves and cave science. After serving in the army in Germany, returning to the University of Texas at Austin to complete his degree in geography, and then working for the IRS, he became a central force in caving, cave exploration, and



Bill at the 2005 Convention in Huntsville, AL.

Excerpted from online material by William R. Elliott. The NSS obituary by Gary Napper and Susan Souby, with contributions from many friends and fellow cavers.

cave science, particularly in Texas and Mexico – a role he played for over 60 years, inspiring generations of cavers and helping preserve cave data, natural resources, and water quality in Austin, Texas. He is survived by his brother Philip and his life partner Katie Arens...Donations in his name may be made to one of the cave archive and conservation groups that he co-founded:

Texas Speleological Survey (www.texasspeleologicalsurvey.org), Texas Cave Management Association (www.tcmacaves.org), or the Association for Mexican Cave Studies (www.mexicancaves.org).
Published in Austin American-Statesman on 27 March, 2019.

A snippet about an honor Bill received posthumously:

CAVE SYSTEM RENAMED FOR PROLIFIC CAVER

William H. Russell Karst Preserve includes Blowing Sink Cave that Russell discovered.

Tax examiner by day, a world-class explorer by night, William H. Russell loved looking for caves. “He would get out of work at the IRS and within a few hours be trying to find the air in a sinkhole,” Jerry Atkinson said of his longtime friend Russell, an Austin caver who played a major role in discovering, documenting and preserving many of Travis County’s cave systems.

The Austin City Council honored Russell last month (*June 2019*) by renaming the Blowing Sink Research Management Area, a cave system in Southwest Austin that Russell discovered in 1984, the William H. Russell Karst Preserve... Council Members Ann Kitchen and Paige Ellis were the lead sponsors of the resolution, which was backed by a petition that garnered more than 1,200 signatures. Kitchen said that, beyond honoring Russell’s legacy as a local caver, the resolution is meant to help continue his work to protect caves and water quality. The resolution requires city staffers to report to the City Council about cave restoration projects and opportunities for improvement and calls for the creation of a land management plan for protecting the preserve. Kitchen said ensuring that area caves are recharged with fresh rainwater is critical to Austin’s water quality.

Geary Schindel called him a “fanatical digger” who could identify subtle features in sinkholes to uncover caves. Katherine Arens, Russell’s partner, said he jokingly called himself a “claustrophiliac.” Russell focused his caving efforts in Central and South Texas, as well as Mexico, Schindel said...

“He would say that, for a very low cost, you could go to places people had never been before and make some real discoveries for yourself and science,” Atkinson said of Russell. “Anyone could do it. And in Austin, you could do this 30 minutes from your home.” Atkinson said Russell’s discoveries in Travis County had a big impact on Austinites’ understanding of Barton Springs, helping them monitor and protect the city’s water quality. Russell also worked with city staffers to develop land management plans for preserving Austin’s karst areas... At Blowing Sink, Russell discovered the only humanly accessible route to water table level in the Barton Springs segment of the Edwards Aquifer. He originally named the cave for the strong air currents that flow from its entrance, and, in the late 1990s, he led efforts to have the cave system donated to the city to ensure its protection.

...In 1960, William Russell helped found the Texas Speleological Survey...to record information about the state’s caves...In the

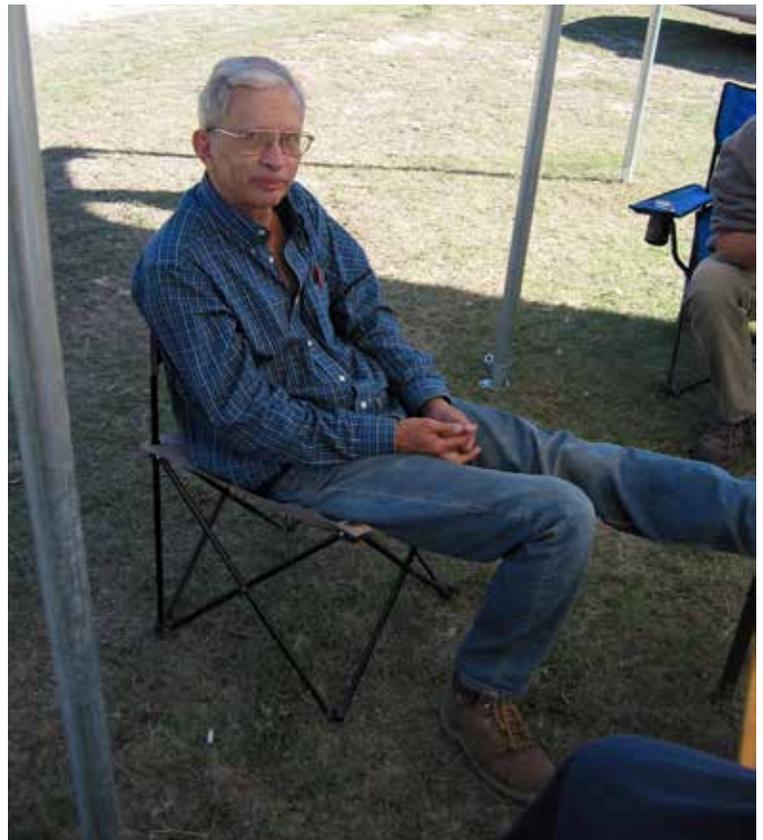
1960s...caving in Mexico became more accessible because of improved equipment, and it presented grand opportunities for spelunkers because of the prominence in Mexico of limestone, which is conducive to cave formation. One of Russell’s biggest discoveries was the Huautla cave system in the southern Mexico state of Oaxaca in 1966. Sistema Huautla was known as of 2018 to be 53 miles long and have 25 distinct entrances...



William Russell in Huautla in June of 1966. *Rune Burnett.*

Arens said Russell liked seeing where the water in caves went and wanted to understand the geology at work. “Some cavers do it for excitement,” Arens said. “He did it for science.”

Excerpts from Susannah Sudborough ssudborough@statesman.com, Austin American-Statesman, Wednesday, July 3, 2019, pp. A1 and A10.



William Russell at TCR, circa 2009.

CAVING ORGANIZATIONS

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

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

BAT CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL - BCI www.batcon.org

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

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SPELEOLOGY - UIS www.uis-speleo.org

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

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.

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION - NSS www.caves.org

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.

TEXAS CAVE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION - TCMA www.tcmacaves.org

Non-profit 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.

TEXAS SPELEOLOGICAL SURVEY - TSS www.texasspeleologicalsurvey.org

Non-profit corporation established in 1960 to collect, organize, and maintain information on Texas caves and karst

TEXAS GROTTOS

AUSTIN

Underground Texas Grotto (UT Grotto)
www.utgrotto.org

BRYAN - COLLEGE STATION

Aggie Speleological Society (A.S.S.)
www.cavetamu.com

DALLAS - FORT WORTH

DFW Grotto
www.dfwgrotto.org

EL PASO

Guad Grotto
www.vcrux.com/grotto

HOUSTON

Greater Houston Grotto
<http://greaterhoustongrotto.org>

LUBBOCK

Lubbock Area Grotto
www.lubbockareagrotto.org

MIDLAND - ODESSA

Permian Basin Speleological Society
www.caver.net/pbss/pbss.html

SAN ANTONIO

Bexar Grotto
www.bexargrotto.org

WITCHITA FALLS

North Texas Speleological Society

EMERGENCIES

For cave assistance, call the closest county number:

Bexar	210.865.2061
Collin	214.202.6611
Hays	512.557.7965
Midland	432.438.5076
Sutton	325.450.3905
Travis	512.663.2287

For life threatening emergency:
CALL 911

Whole Earth
PROVISION CO.

Providing essentials
for an active life.

STORE LOCATIONS
Austin • Dallas • Houston • San Antonio • Southlake

