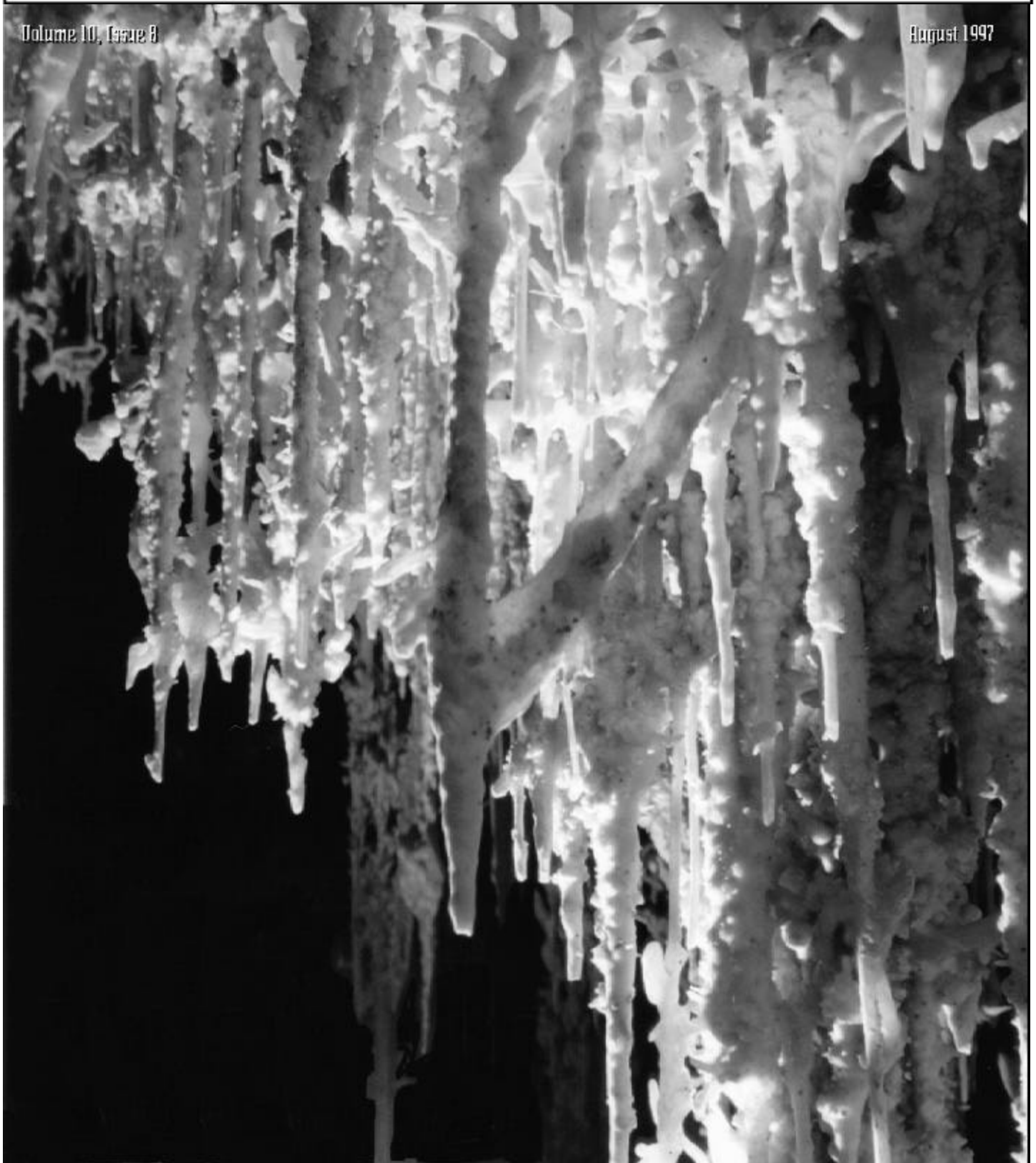


THE MAVERICK BULL

The Monthly Newsletter Of The Ft. Worth Maverick Grotto

Volume 10, Issue 8

August 1997



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The Maverick Bull is the monthly newsletter of The Maverick Grotto, an internal organization of The National Speleological Society (NSS G-322). The editor invites all individuals and other grottos to submit articles, news, maps, cartoons, art and photographs. If the material is to be returned, a self-addressed stamped envelope should accompany it.

Reprinting Articles: Internal organizations of The National Speleological Society may reprint any item (unless copyrights belong to the author as stated in the byline) first appearing in *The Maverick Bull* if proper credit is given and a complete copy of the publication is delivered to the editor at the time of publication. Other organizations should contact the editor of *The Maverick Bull* at the address herein.

Exchanges: The Maverick Grotto will exchange newsletters with other grottos. Contact the editor.

Complementary Newsletters: The Maverick Grotto will provide complementary newsletters to persons or organizations that provide cave access (i.e. landowners) or otherwise

provide assistance to cavers. The Maverick Grotto will provide one free issue to persons interested in becoming members.

Subscription Rates: Subscription rates are \$15.00 per year for non-members and free for members.

Membership Policy: Any individual with interests, beliefs and actions consistent with the purposes of The Maverick Grotto and The National Speleological Society is eligible for membership. Acceptance of new members is based on payment of dues and a mandatory three trip requirement with at least three different grotto members. These three members shall act as sponsors. At least one sponsor must attend the meeting at which the membership vote is taken. A two-thirds majority vote of the members present will be required for acceptance.

Meetings: Meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month at Smokey's Ribs, 5300 E. Lancaster, Fort Worth. It is located less than one mile west of Loop 820 and next to K-Mart. The time is 7:00 p.m., and the food is good.

Carbide: Grotto carbide is available at the meeting if prior arrangements

are made. Carbide is free for the asking. Contact Russell Hill at 220-7108 or Butch Fralia at 346-2039 for more information.

Library: Support your Grotto Library. Russell Hill will be accepting books and magazines on cave-related topics, copies of homemade cave videos, etc. for our library. We wish to thank Russell for his efforts each month to bring and set up the Grotto Library.

Chairman:

John Langevin
4700 Trail Lake Dr.
Fort Worth, TX. 76302
(817) 924-1919

Vice-Chairman:

Pam Massey
3008 Barnes Dr.
Denton, TX. 76201
(817) 387-2595

Secretary/Editor:

Chad Fenner
3700 Wayland
Ft. Worth, TX. 76133
(817) 292-7722

Treasurer:

Sharon Mastbrook
3412 Walton Ave.
Fort Worth, TX 76133
(817) 346-2039

Cave Rescue: Call collect:

Photo Credits

This month's cover photo was taken in Midnight Cave by Shanon Seals.

Page 4: Midnight cave shot by Shanon Seals.

Page 5: Castle of Oz in Midnight cave by Shanon Seals.

Page 5: One more Midnight cave shot by Shanon Seals.

Other Credits

Editor: Chad Fenner

Editor-in-charge-of-English: Lisa Fenner

Visit Our Web Site

The *Maverick Bull* is available as a World Wide Web site at: <http://www.why.net/user/caver/bull/>

Minutes for the July Meeting

Maverick Grotto July 9, 1997

The July meeting began at approximately 7 p.m. The business portion of the meeting was called to order shortly after 7:30 by Grotto Chairman

John Langevin.

Visitors

Ed Holloman, Fort Worth
Wes Jones, Mansfield
Chris Yarborough, Arlington

Announcements

The North Texas Speleological Society's yearly summer swim party will be on Sat. Aug. 9th on Amon Carter Lake near Bowie, TX. It will be at Hudspeth Beach, a private camping area with lots of shade and a nice sandy beach.

Meat will be provided by the club. Bring snacks, covered dish, or something to share. Bring your own drinks. Dinner will be at 5ish PM, and the NTSS August meeting will be at 6PM.

The NTSS will have a cave trip August 17th at Walkup/Little Crystal in Quanah.

The Graphic Arts Salon ribbons were displayed.

There was a discussion about the Digitized Format for geographic maps.

OTR is the 3rd week of October.

Officers' Reports

The grotto treasury has \$562.76.

Old Business

We discussed the Vice Chairman's

position currently held by Pam Massey. Dave Milhollin was voted in as Acting Programs Chairman for the remainder of the year.

Dale Ellison gave a pep talk about the newsletter.

New Business

Educational plea for Project Underground - Karst Education for teachers.

Trip Reports

Dave Milhollin told about the rainy NSS Convention in Missouri.

Several people went to the Emu Ranch Dig Trip.

John Langevin and others went to Gunner Cave on 7-26-97.

The meeting was closed by Grotto Chairman John Langevin.

Editor's Ramblings

Happy August!

Well I finally get to do a newsletter again after a couple of months. Thanks to Ed for helping me with the June issue and to Butch for doing the July issue while I was out of town (at the convention). It's great having such talent in our grotto. In most grottos, if the editor is out a month, so is the newsletter.

Speaking of the convention, wow, that was fun! If you've never been to an NSS convention, you should really start planning for Tennessee right now. I planned on writing a trip

report, but I already had two great reports, so I decided to save it for next month.

In short, not only did I get underground three times (I had many more chances had I not gone to so many other convention activities!), I attended the photography section meeting, the photography workshop, the technical workshop, the conservation workshop, the LEARN section meeting, the newsletter workshop, and watched bits of the vertical contest. I also got to check out the various salons.

One other thing I also brought back was the fact that "Fort Worth" is not on our newsletter cover anywhere. At the Graphic Arts display, I gloated when anyone asked what grotto was I from and how did we do, but the next question was always "What's a Maverick Grotto?" I liked the new masthead Ed did for the June newsletter, but I asked him to go back and add "Fort Worth" to it. I bet you never even noticed that omission. I know I didn't.

Good Caving.

CF

August Meeting

This month's meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 12 at Smokey's Ribs, 5300 E. Lancaster, at 7 p.m. For a change, this month's program **WAS** available at press time. This month we will see a set of short videos from various sources. First,

we'll see Don Abercrombie's video he made at Harold's Cave (see trip report this issue!). Next will be a Dale Ellison/Butch Fralia production, and finally, we'll see some vintage Maverick Grotto video supplied by Russell Hill.

Our new program chairman has stated that this will also be open video night. If you have some short caving video, bring it.

Join us for good food and good cave talk.

Looking Ahead at Next Month's Program

Next month's program will be presented by Barbe Barker on the topic of conservation. She has asked that if anyone has any before-and-after pictures from any restoration that they contact her. She would like to use them in her presentation.

Are You Sure We're Still in Texas?

Trip Participants: Too many to possibly name without taking a lot of space (Sorry Chad, you don't get off that easy.)

Trip report by Shanon Seals

Thirty some-odd cavers met at an intersection near Rocksprings Memorial Day weekend. When Angela and I got there, most of the group had already headed for the cave. While the few that were left were checking gear and making final

preparations, a Highway Patrol was kind enough to come by and drill us on what we were doing, where we were going, and whose land it was on.

After the inquisition, we all headed for the cave. We met the rest of the large group at the ranch entrance, and the caravan headed out. My Cobra made it almost to the parking site, but finally had to be pulled to the side and Gary and Sheri Mahan were kind enough to give us a lift to the end of the road.

Our large band of cavers straggled off to the entrance, and after a few tries, someone finally fished around and got the gate unlocked. Some of the group headed higher up to drop the pit

entrance. Angela and I waited our turn and crawled through the half-pipe entrance. Up until this point, my Texas caving had consisted of several commercial caves (not including Sonora), River Styx, and a few holes in the ground on a South Texas ranch. I had no idea what I was in store for.

We were greeted by a large breakdown room, some 70 to 80 feet across, sloping off to the left, and a narrower hall sloping down to the right. We

followed one group off to the left, down the breakdown.

Once back on solid ground you start to realize that everything around you is translucent; the walls, the ceiling, the floor, and all the formations. There was a group of unusual stalagmites with sharp, stubby points on top. One that I thought unusual had four separate points on top and was the same translucent orange as everything around us. Sections of the walls were decorated with large helectites that must have been an inch thick.

Going all the way to the back, you came to a short slope that leads to a small room. There were speleothems covering everything. It was somewhat overwhelming. There were soda-straws, helectites going in every possible direction, more fishtails than I have ever seen, globs of helectites hanging from a few strands. You could almost see butterflies. Most of the sights in the room had a dull, dusty appearance, but that did nothing to diminish them. Since I hadn't yet been to Sonora, I didn't have any idea there were caves like this in Texas, and I certainly didn't think this cave could get any better.

After finishing one roll of film and shooting pretty far into another, we headed back and continued past the entrance. About 80 feet past the entrance, the hall narrows to about 10 feet and opens into another large room. We stayed to the left-hand side and tried to find someone to direct us to the other areas we had heard people mentioning, including the mystical "corkscrew" we kept hearing about. We climbed over more large breakdown and came to what was obviously the pit entrance since there was a rope hanging from a hole in the ceiling. To the left there was what looked like a 15-20 ft, chimneyable drop to what looked like another room. We debated trying the climb, but hearing no voices from below we decided to keep going.

We met a few people and asked if they knew the way to the corkscrew.





No one we met knew exactly where the corkscrew was, so we kept on going. There was more large breakdown and finally a larger room. The room was pretty much featureless except for the far end, which looked like the ceiling had sprung a leak of concrete. The ceiling was fairly decorated, and there were some very interesting and diverse columns and a large shelf with draperies below. The map calls this the "Castle of Oz."

We heard voices and saw flashes coming from a crack in the left corner. We headed over and looked into a small, crowded room. We decided to wait until it opened up a bit, and sat down for lunch.

After a few group shots had been taken, the group started chimneying out of the small room. We headed down and were met with a room even more amazing than the one at the far end of the cave. Here there were even more fishtails, even wilder, longer helectites, and most of the walls were obscured by very narrow columns which sprouted helectites and soda straws in every direction, shape, and size. Most of the formations in this room were a clean white color with some bordering on transparency. We rolled off almost a full roll of film and

headed out.

I set up some borrowed slave flash equipment (thanks, Chad) to try and get the "Castle" in one shot. After several adjustments, I got both flashes to go off at once and stopped to change film again. A few people started coming out from around the formations, and we found out that the corkscrew was further on.

Angela and I headed around the castle and down a 20-30 ft. wide hall. The hall led into another large room somewhat divided by breakdown. The left side had a lot of brownish helectites, fishtails, and draperies. The right side was somewhat roomed off by breakdown and walls of formations. This room area was solid formations. They were a very yellow color and all of them seemed much thicker than normal. There were very thick helectites twisting around like snakes, yellow fishtails, and large, pointed extrusions. We rolled off some more film

and then joined a large group waiting at a small hole at the back of the room.

This was the start of the infamous "corkscrew." We watched a few small groups exiting the hole and discussing whether headfirst or feetfirst was better, if you should put one or both arms ahead of you, and one spot where you had to make sure to roll from stomach to back. We finally got tired of waiting and headed in. There was a body-sized hole that led to a very small crack big enough to stand up leaning to one side. There was then another hole slightly off the ground. Angela looked in and said, "I can't do this." We backed out and she told me to go ahead by myself. There was one last group on ahead and everyone else had headed out. I went back in and looked in the second hole. I had to stop and take a breath and tell myself that many others had already been through here.



The tiny hole goes flat for about 6 to 10 feet and then makes an almost 90-degree bend just slightly off of straight up. This is where you have to roll over to make the bend. If you reach up, you can reach a handhold and pull yourself up.

The upward part is pretty short and opens into another room about 50 by 70. At the end of this room is a small crack that opens in helectite hall. You are standing on a narrow ridge with very clean, wet-looking walls of helectites on both sides within reach. This short hall was still prettier than any section I had seen so far, and yet everyone had been going on and on about how amazing the room was at the very back.

I went through the hall and into a room with a ridge of breakdown down the middle. I went up and over to the right where more white formations were. I looked up under a hollow formed by small draperies and columns, and there were some very pure, frail helectites coming so straight from several different directions and meeting in angles that they looked like a spider must have spun them.

I kept on going to the back of this room and found the "whale's tongue." This is a large block that has leaned out from the ceiling. The wall and ceiling look somewhat like a mouth, and the block does look very much like a tongue rolling out. You go around and under the tongue, through a small opening, and into another large room going off to the right. The whole room seems to be a large dome almost filled with breakdown. At the very back, the room ends in large breakdown walls with small openings you can almost see through.

I could see flashes and hear voices but couldn't find any holes that looked near big enough to fit through. There was one borehole that looked promising, but not anywhere near my size. I waited for a while and finally I could hear someone coming. I looked round and saw a head and shoulders squeezing through the

borehole. Three more came out and said they'd wait if I wanted to take a look, because it was well worth it. I stuck my feet in the hole and got as far as my hips. I tried and tried to force through but just couldn't. I could just look through the opening and see huge, pure white helectites curling from the walls.

Sadly, I headed back and snapped shots of some of the parts I had rushed past to catch this group. Everyone was heading out of the cave, so I rejoined Angela and we joined the throng and made our exit. We got a lift back to the car and headed back to our hotel room in Junction.

The next day we headed to the Caverns of Sonora and saw a whole cave that looked like the best we had seen the previous day. Definitely two of the nicest caves I've seen, and right in my home state. Everyone kept telling me how iffy the Midnight trips were, but I'd say it's definitely worth taking a chance on.

Harold's Cave

by Don Abercrombie

It was Friday after school when we took off for our next caving adventure. Eric, who is 15, Nicholas who is 7, and I headed for Sulphur Springs camp with hopes of setting up camp before dark.

About 2 am, I was awakened by the sound of three masked invaders eating our Doritos. The next morning there was not a Dorito to be found.

After a good breakfast, we headed for Harold's Cave. I was not completely comfortable taking the boys by myself to the cave. However, I had set time limits when we would be out with the owner and others. So if we had a problem, help would not be long in coming.

The entrance to Harold's Cave is about 50 feet straight down, so you must rappel, and then ascend to get back out. The boys and I had spent several afternoons at Mineral Wells State Park practicing rappelling and

ascending. The boys and I felt very comfortable with our equipment and our knowledge of how to use it.

Once everyone was in, we wanted to attempt filming the cave. We began by just walking the sides of the larger room we had rappelled into. The room is very round and maybe 50 yards across. The ceiling has caved in, so there are large boulders all around. Some of the boulders look unstable with holes you can fall in between, or they could shift. I recommend staying on the outer edges and watch where you put your weight.

Harold's Cave has some smaller, but well-defined formations. There are two places where spring or runoff water comes out of the wall and a nice pool below them. If you like bats, Harold's Cave has a thriving colony with lots of guano and gnats to go with them. There are several places in the room that suggest more passages, but, I wasn't about to pursue any of them without some adult backup.

I really enjoy being in a cave, seeing things that took thousands of years to form, untouched by man for the most part. I like the feel of a cave. It's alive and full of nature, but yet it's like time standing still. I also have a strong explorer spirit, to go where I have not been before.

I am also aware of the dangers lurking in a cave. Harold's Cave has several, such as loose rock, the entrance, and the tight passages in the east wall during a rain storm. I also noticed the runoff water below one of the springs quickly disappears into the floor and decided it was not a good place to step. It may be very solid, or it could be a false floor. I hope I never get too comfortable or confident in caves, because that's when you make a mistake.

We went into Harold's Cave a total of three times on this trip -- twice Saturday and again on Sunday morning before leaving to come back to Fort Worth. The first day of filming was okay, but not great, but the second day I got closer and had

more light on the formations as I filmed.

This cave is a neat cave and it even has the potential of more passages that remain to be discovered. That's one of the reasons I enjoy caving, to maybe someday find what no one else has seen before. But just being in Harold's Cave was a thrill for me.

TSA Labor Day Project

This is a clean-up project to the much-acclaimed Gruta del Palmito at Bustamante, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, just 70 miles south of Laredo, Texas, USA, 29 August through 1 September 1997. This is a great chance to have one last big caving filing before school gets going again. Don't miss this one!

This is a cave of mind-boggling proportions, huge formations, and tiny helictites. Palmito is totally off the scale of most Texas caves. It is a huge chamber on the order of the Big Room at Carlsbad, with highly decorated side passages. It is also in need of clean-up and graffiti removal.

If you've never been to Palmito, this is your chance to have a mind-altering experience and see one of the classic caves of Northern Mexico. If you've never been to Mexico, this is your chance to do that, too. Do not let this opportunity go by to do some good caving and help restore this big cave.

This will be a three- or four-day weekend and we will have other caves in the area open for caving, including the famed Precipicio, overlooking the beautiful Cañon Bustamante, where we will camp next to the warm springs which are the headwaters of the clear-flowing Rio Sabinas. There will be a big feed put on for the cavers by the people of Bustamante on Sunday night. Look for maps on the following pages and other information below. A registration fee of \$10 for adults & \$5 for teenagers covers the banquet,

camping, and administrative costs.

Here is information and tricks for getting into Mexico and having a good time at it:

(If you have further questions, check out the TSA Web Page at <http://home.sprynet.com/sprynet/trhli/tsahome.htm>)

CROSSING INTO MEXICO

The latest word is that after the 1st of September only passports and birth certificates will be accepted as proof of citizenship for obtaining Tourist Cards to visit Mexico. Although voter registration cards and notarized affidavits may still work in August, we suggest that you have one of the other items with you at the border. Birth certificates must be the original or a certified copy! A simple Xerox copy won't do. Order yours now if you don't have a passport. Dogs are OK if you have the vet's vaccination receipt.

GETTING YOUR CAR INTO MEXICO

Driving in Mexico is nothing to be afraid of. The roads are generally good, and all fuel is now unleaded. To obtain the Temporary Importation Permit for your vehicle you will need:

1) the clear title to your automobile, or the red title and a notarized letter from the lien holder (your bank) stating that you have permission to take it to Mexico,

2) a major credit card (Visa or MasterCard work well) in the same name as the title, and

3) a current driver's license in the same name. Minor variations in the names--such as initials only--are usually acceptable, but if there are major differences, don't expect to get the car in. This is actually a very easy process if all of your papers are in order. Don't be afraid. There is a fee of about \$12 which will be charged to your credit card. Trailers and motorcycles will need titles and tags of their own and have the same requirements as a car.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

You will be asked several questions at the Border and at various checkpoints, usually in Spanish, then

in English. Playing dumb is sometimes advantageous, but it is OK to speak Spanish if you can, or to try if you can't. Q. Where are you going? A. To Bustamante! Q. What are you going there for? A. To visit the cave. (A cave is a GRUTA in Spanish and they are familiar with the cave at Bustamante, so it is a logical answer) Q. How long are you going for? A. Four days (unless you have other plans). Q. Do you have any guns, drugs, electronic items? A. No!

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE BORDER

If you cross at Laredo, use the Old Bridge (Bridge 1) and take a right at the end of the bridge. Customs officers will stop you and inspect your luggage. They are a friendly bunch, looking for guns, drugs, TVs, electronic crap, explosives, and other contraband.

Then you may proceed to the Mexican Customs house noted on the map. There you will get in line, first for your tourist card, and then for your car papers. You will be instructed to go to various places in the building to complete paperwork. Most tourists there will speak English and Spanish, so if you get confused or feel lost, just ask anybody where you should go next. This whole process usually takes about an hour. Then an inspector will walk you out to your car and put a sticker on it and tell you to leave.

Follow the map out of Laredo. If you cross at Columbia, your crossing will be faster and easier, but the offices usually close at 11 p.m., sometimes earlier. Pass through the "Aduana" (Customs) covered lanes and go first to the "Migración" office which is beyond the Aduana. Everyone should get Tourist Cards there. Then return to the Aduana for car papers. An inspector will then put a sticker on your car and you are free to go.

CHECKPOINTS

There are usually two checkpoints between the border and Bustamante. We intend to have the local

government warn the checkpoints that we are coming and that, hopefully, should make things go more smoothly. The magic word will be BUSTAMANTE.

The Customs and Immigration Checkpoint is at a large building along the highway and marked by an obvious flashing red light and a sign with the word ADUANA on it. The first inspector will want to see your Tourist Cards & car permit. He may ask where you are going, etc. Answer the questions correctly. He will direct you to the next inspector who will want to look at your car papers and may ask more questions. He (or she) will then point at a signal light and tell you to drive through.

Now comes the trick. If the light turns green, you are free to drive on. But if it buzzes and turns red you must pull over to the right and have your luggage inspected again. They will ask questions about guns and drugs and the usual stuff. When they are satisfied that you are not a smuggler or a terrorist, they will let you go on. Always be polite.

The Military Checkpoint may be anywhere between the Border and Bustamante (they move it a lot). Usually the only sign you will see is a red, flashing light on top of a HUMV or a can of oil burning in the center of the road. Approach slowly and answer their questions, which are usually the same as everybody else has asked. Although they will have automatic rifles, don't be afraid, they aren't looking for you. They are looking primarily for guns and explosives. When they have looked at your luggage and asked two or three questions, they will let you go.

WHAT TO BRING AND WHAT NOT TO BRING

You should purchase car INSURANCE in the US several days before leaving. AAA offers Mexico insurance, even if you're not a member. Some insurance companies will write you a Mexican policy over the phone if you already have your regular coverage with them. Check with your company

several days ahead of time since they will need to send you a copy of the policy by mail. You should have it in your possession in Mexico.

Minor children (under 18) traveling with only one parent should have a notarized affidavit from the other parent saying it's OK for them to be there. Likewise, any minor children guests you bring will need affidavits from both of their parents.

Bring enough DRINKING WATER for your passengers for the four-day weekend. Afternoons will be hot. FOOD and most other things can be bought in Mexico, but Bustamante is a small town with no supermarket and is not geared for supplying large numbers of people. Bring enough cave and camp food for your stay.

If you require PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION, bring it in the original container with the pharmacy label!

You probably can leave your sleeping bag at home. Sheets and maybe a blanket are more in order in Bustamante Canyon in September. Bring sun screen, a big hat, long sleeves, and long pants for extensive outdoor activity. We'll be camping in a beautiful canyon with a running warm stream, swimming holes, and some small mosquito pools, so bring bug spray.

What you don't need to bring are guns of any sort (there are military checkpoints looking primarily for guns), fireworks, ghetto blasters or other electronic equipment (there are customs checkpoints looking for such items), and suitcases (pack your stuff in duffels and back packs). You can bring in a reasonable amount of beer, but don't load up like you're an importer -- they don't like that. Besides, beer is cheaper in Bustamante. You can have a CB in your vehicle.

Pesos are not necessary but are a little easier to deal with. All businesses between Laredo and Bustamante will accept dollars. We'll accept dollars or pesos at registration.

JUDGMENT

Cavers have been going to Mexico

in large numbers for over 40 years now. In that time cavers have come to be known to Border Officials on both sides as weird people, but not as troublemakers. As a result, border crossings have become relatively easy, and we would like to maintain that reputation. Please be aware that the exercise of poor judgment (such as smuggling and disrespect) will cause bad results.

GPS in the Year 2000

Butch Frailia

Looking at the newsgroup SCI.GEO.SATELLITE-NAV, several people have reported an expected problem with GPS starting AUG. 26, 1999, I think. The problem deals with the fact that the receivers were designed with a 10-bit week counter that started in 1980. 10 bits comes to a total of 1024 weeks, which comes to 19.7 years. What this means is that late in August 1999 the counter will roll over to week zero and confuse the heck out of the receiver.

Some of the GPS manufacturers have posted there saying it won't be a problem with their equipment. Garmin in particular has done this. According to all the claims, any GPS unit bought now will be year 2000 safe. Some of the older units, like from about 1992-1993, may have a problem. Since the price came down to caver level about two years ago, it's not likely there will be much of the older equipment laying around.

The guys who could expect problems are probably those who bought \$10,000->\$20,000 survey systems in that era and are still using them. Their equipment should be amortized out by then and besides, sub-centimeter, post-processing survey equipment can now be bought for under \$10,000. If any cavers had the money to buy equipment back then, it probably is laying around replaced by much cheaper equipment that works better. For more info see <http://www>.

yachtingnet.com/forums/powers/1.html

Light Sticks

From various reports.

Recent reports on the net have it that many people are finding that their Cyalume (TM) light sticks are not working when they need them most. Several people reported that after having a supply in their pack for a couple of years, that most of them were "duds."

There were several explanations and suggestions. One was that light sticks deteriorate when exposed to air, thus the air-tight wrapper they are encased in. The suggestion was to keep them in their wrapper until use. Another explanation was that the inner container can develop slow leaks after a shock (such as dropping your pack six feet or so). The suggested fix was to make sure they are in a crush-proof, padded container. Possibly a toothbrush holder or something like that. Yet another theory was that heat caused the decay, and this caver stores his in his fridge between trips!

Several people pointed out that the only way to test a light stick was to sacrifice it. And testing one does not ensure that a whole batch is still good. One person said that his procedure was to break one at the entrance. As long as it was a long lasting one, his emergency light source would be ready when he needed it. Another person said he just made sure and bought a new batch at least once a year.

As a result of this reported unreliability over time, many people are no longer using light sticks as their third light source.

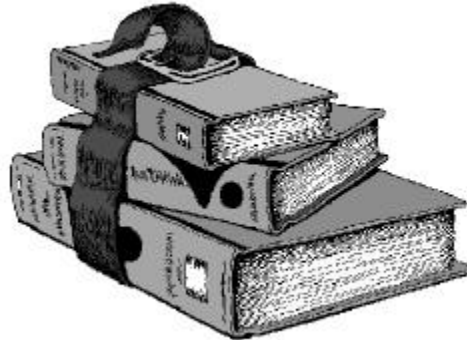
What's in a name?

Posted to cavers Digest by Bill Mixon

At the instigation of Gill Ediger, I have refreshed my memory about the origin of the word "spelunker." The revised edition, which I don't have handy, of the "Oxford English Dictionary," bible on the origin of

English words, lists, I believe, an earliest published use in the magazine article "Life Goes Spelunking" in early 1941 or 1942. ("Spelunking" and "spelunker" are pretty much the same word, both referring to the act of exploring caves.)

However, I know of one earlier published use of the word in a book,



Clay Perry's 1939 "Underground New England," where he writes, "There is an informal caveman's club in New England, a group of men and boys who for several years have been making a more or less systematic study of the caves and old mines of the country, extending their research throughout eastern New York state as well. They call themselves 'spelunkers,' taking the name from the snappy Latin title for a cave, 'spelunka' and from the high-sounding British caveman's club which is 'British Speleological Association.'" (This group became the New England Grotto, chapter number 1 of the NSS.)

I wouldn't be surprised if there were earlier uses of the word in print in a newspaper or newsletter. Does anyone know of an earlier use in a book? Anyway, it appears that the term was coined by Clay Perry or some other New England spelunker in the late 1930s. It was in pretty common use by the late 1940s and 1950s.

The root "spelunk" has a much longer history of referring to caves in English. The OED gives an example

from 1563: "Our recluses haue grates of yron in their spelunks and dennes." "Speluncar" and "speluncean" were used as adjectives referring to caves starting in the nineteenth century, the latter from 1803. I have an example of "spelunkean explorers" being used for cavers as late as 1949.

"Speleology" (and "speleologist," etc.) date from about 1895; the OED gives several examples from the period 1895-1900. The French version of the word dates from about 1890. Originally, "speleology" was spelled "spelmpology," with the a-e ligature. (No idea how that will turn out on your screen!) Any classical scholar will of course shudder at "speleology," since it is a bastard combination of Greek and Latin.

All these words, of course, ultimately derive from the Latin "spelunka."

(Editor's note — After Bill posted this, many "scholars" posted rebuttals, replies, and arguments to Bill's original post. Their comments ranged from "Spelunka can't be Latin because Latin has no 'K'" to a very technical analysis of Bill's use of Latin and Greek. In any case, no one could dispute, and actually several people corroborated, Bill's basic story, and dang it, I just plain thought it was quite interesting! - CF)

**Maverick Grotto
C/O Chad Fenner
3700 Wayland
Ft Worth TX. 76133**

Calendar of Events

August 12, 1997, Grotto Meeting

August 29-September 1, 1997, TSA Labor Day Project — Bustamante Contact TSA.

August 29-September 1, 1997, CRF Carlsbad Caverns Labor Day Expedition. Contact Barbe Barker, (214) 594-1183

September 9, 1997, Grotto Meeting

October 14, 1997, Grotto Meeting

October 17-19, 20th Annual Texas Cavers' Reunion. TBA

November 11, 1997, Grotto Meeting

August 3-7, 1998, NSS Convention, Sewanee, Tennessee. Contact William Shrewsbury, (423) 886-3296

July 12-16, 1999, NSS Convention, Twin Falls, Idaho. Contact David W. Kesner, (208) 939-0979