

# THE MAVERICK BULL

The Monthly Newsletter Of The Ft. Worth Maverick Grotto

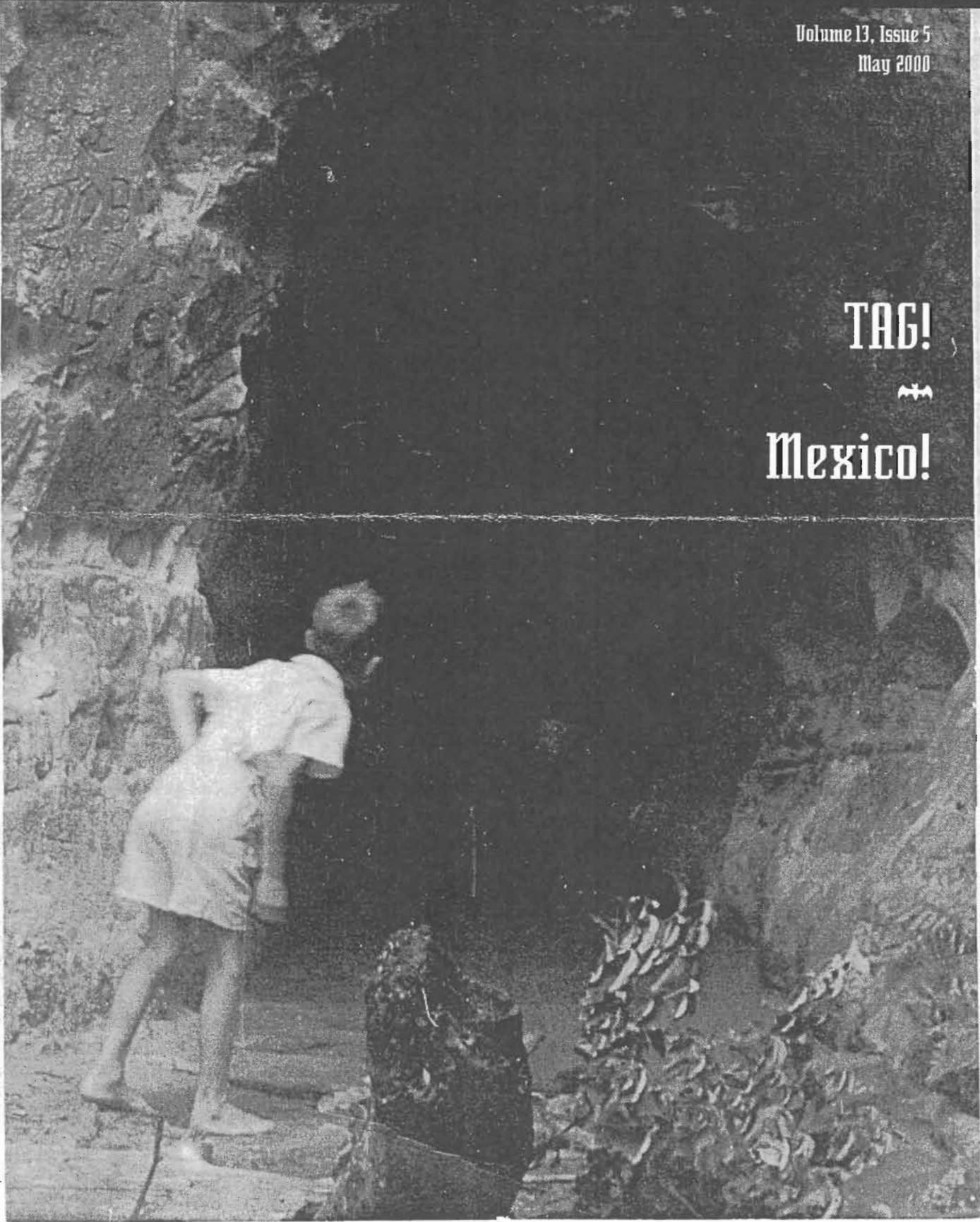
Volume 13, Issue 5  
May 2000

TAG!



Mexico!

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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, photographs, and other two- and three-dimensional goodies. If the material is to be returned, a self-addressed stamped envelope should accompany it.

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**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

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**Subscription Rates:** Subscription rates are \$15 per year for nonmembers and free for members.

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**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. The time is 7 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 (817) 220-7108

or Butch Fralia at (817) 346-2039 for more information.

**Library:** Support your grotto library. Russell Hill is accepting books, magazines, and videos related to caves and caving for our library. Thanks to Russell for his efforts in transporting the library collection to meetings.

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**Photos and Artwork**

This month's cover: Rune in the family? the editor's uncle at Gurnel's Cave circa 1945

Pages 4-5: Tumbling Rock Cave, Alabama, by Michael Coulter

Pages 7-8: Shots from Christmas '99 Mexico trip, by R. D. Milhollin

**Other Credits**

Mailing list: Sharon Mastbrook  
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**Visit Our Web Site**

The Maverick Grotto website is at [www.fwst.net/np/maverickgrotto](http://www.fwst.net/np/maverickgrotto).  
Webmaster: [maverickgrotto@fwst.net](mailto:maverickgrotto@fwst.net).  
Space donated by Fort Worth Star-Telegram Online Services.



## April minutes

### Visitors

Gabriella and Lee Perry

### Reports from Officers

Treasurer: We have \$462.84.

Need programs and trip reports.

### Announcements

Rites of Spring party at Jay Jorden and Shiela Knight's house April 22.

R. D. Milhollin could use help with a vertical course for Boy Scouts on Cinco de Mayo.

### New business

The idea of making some grotto T-shirts was kicked around.

So was the idea of offering a life-time grotto membership.

It was decided that a dues

envelope would be mailed out in December with the Christmas party announcement.

We discussed the possibility of meeting and/or holding a grotto event at the Dyno Rock climbing gym in Arlington.

### Trip reports

R. D. Milhollin and friends Jesus and Nacho, along with Phil Sanders, Richard Sultana, and Tony Sultana, were at CBSP.

Mike Cagle went to Mystic Cave, surveyed a nearby cave as far as the raccoon, and evaluated a trash sink on a neighboring property.

Upcoming: Karen Perry had a trip pending to Wind Cave; R. D. Milhollin was going to Mexico; and Chad Fenner, Ed Goff, and Angela and Shanon Seals were going to Mexico.

### Program

The program was the first half of a fascinating video on the strange life forms found in Movile Cave, Romania.

## May meeting

The next meeting will be Tuesday, May 9, at Smokey's Ribs, 5300 Lancaster, at 7 p.m. The program will be the second half of the video on Movile Cave, Romania.

## Ed-itor's note

There were two April Fools items in this section of the April issue. Grotto finances were greatly exaggerated, and it was reported that James Savage went caving. If you have any *good* ideas for April Fools 2001, let me know. ♣♣

## Sex and cavin'

"Sex and Cavin'" (Page 561) is one of the many insightful articles that you can find in the 1991 *Speleo Digest*, which will be available starting May 15. This 624-page book has information ranging from "The Human Q-Tip Effect" to the jovial "Fisher Ridge Rap." With over 250 authors contributing over 400 articles, the 1991 *Speleo Digest* is a value in every sense of the word.

For contents and other information, go to <http://www.caves.org/pub/SpeleoDigest/>

Supplies are limited, so order your copy today for only \$19.00

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## Outdoor Expo

Dallas Museum of Natural History,  
Saturday, May 13.

To those of you unfamiliar with this event, this is a *big deal* they have at the museum. Last year it was good exposure for the grottos.

We had info there about the DFW Grotto and the NSS, and if you Maverick folks and other Texas cavers and grottos would like to

bring info, you're more than welcome.

Please let Mark Alman know if you'd be interested in helping out and, if so, please bring all of the ropes and vertical gear, cave related info, surveying equipment, restoration equipment, pix, newsletters, brochures, etc. you can! We had one area set up, but if we have enough interest, we can rig another place on the front of the building. Hey, where else can you shimmy up and down four stories of Dallas-owned property with *permission*?! Contact Mark Alman:  
(972) 344-3614 work  
(972) 279-2386 home ♣♣

# TAG Revisited

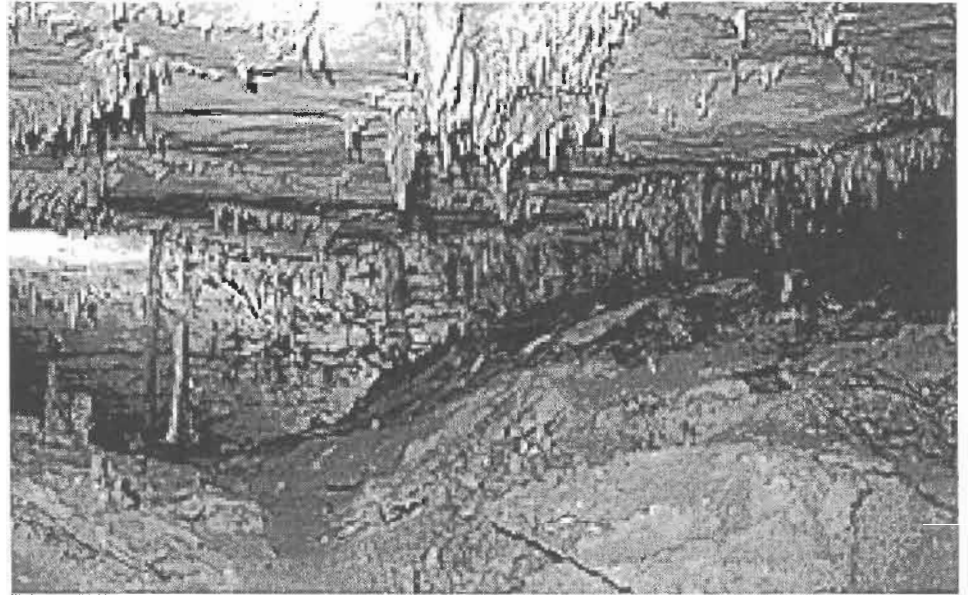
## Tumbling Rock at Last

By Michael Coulter

Tumbling Rock Cave, Jackson County, Alabama

Since my father, brother, and sister all have homes in the vicinity of Memphis, Tennessee, it has long been a custom for my own family to spend at least a few days there over the Christmas holidays. Once there, the fact that Memphis is more than halfway to TAG country has always presented me with the temptation to keep driving, but never before have circumstances allowed this temptation to become reality. This year, however, I suddenly found myself granted twenty-four hours to "cut for the hills," so my brother and I jumped in the family van, steered east, and locked the cruise control at . . . well, never mind that part.

Our chosen destination was Tumbling Rock Cave, located approximately ten miles north of Scottsboro, Alabama, and only about three miles from Never-sink Pit, where R. D. Milhollin and I had visited last summer. We had decided upon Tumbling Rock for several reasons: first, its largely horizontal layout was well suited to my brother's skills (Ron had logged hundreds of hours caving during his teens and twenties, but none of it vertical); second, it was a cave with a considerably positive reputation (be sure to read the extensive articles about it in the 1998 convention guidebook); and third, I knew exactly where it was. This last fact was especially crucial given our time constraints, and running low on time is what had caused R. D. and I to cancel a visit to Tumbling

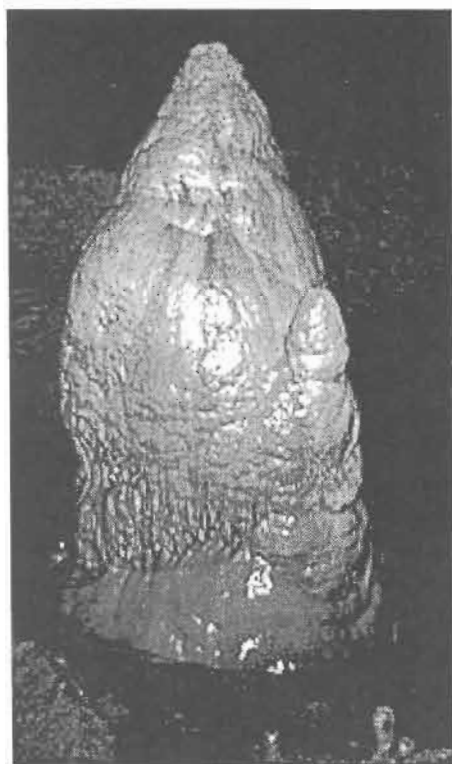


Rock during our summer trip. On this trip, Ron and I arrived in Scottsboro in the early afternoon, and drove directly to the cave without a single missed turn. Tumbling Rock ("TR" from here on out) is located underneath Crow Mountain, at the head of a valley that could have inspired a Currier and Ives painting. The landowner requires that visitors to the cave sign a release waiver, as well as charging a \$5.00 per person "parking fee." Some TAG cavers fear that this sort of fee may become commonplace throughout the south, but I don't really have a problem with someone charging me for the use of their land, above ground or underneath. Besides, after having driven hundreds of miles, \$5.00 seemed like a pittance, and it was obvious that the landowners have used a portion of the money to support the cavers who come to visit. The entrance to the cave (barely thirty feet from the road) is well fenced and gated, and the owner has provided a shed across the road with a restroom and changing rooms for both men and women. It's really only an extension on the back of their garage, but it sure beats unintentionally mooning people!

TR's total survey is in excess of six miles, and there are many who believe

that a good deal more than that may still be hidden. Judging by the airflow at the entrance, I had to wonder the same thing. Granted, the barometer may have been changing, yet this cave was sucking in enough air to create a strong wind inside the stoopway entrance, even though the air outside was completely still (historical note: TR's original name was "Blowing Cave," and it still appears that way on topo maps). Within twenty feet or so, the entrance passage enlarged to walking height, and one could almost immediately hear the stream, which is still in the process of sculpting the cave. (At this point in the cave, the stream is flowing under the main passage and exits to the surface at a spring not far from the cave's entrance—from there it becomes Mud Creek, one of the major surface drainages in the area.) Our first sight of the stream occurred at a small step-across about 70 feet or so from the entrance, where a three-foot-wide slot in the floor afforded a view of the water, some ten feet below our level. After the step-across, the passage remained walking height for a short distance further before coming around a slight turn into what appeared to be a vast room. Given the large area and the fact that we had just entered the cave from the

mid-afternoon sun, our headlamps suddenly seemed useless, so we paused at this point to give our eyes time to adjust to the darkness. After our wait, we swept beams of light in each direction, gradually getting a better idea of the room's dimensions. From where we were, we saw that the floor dropped steeply down to stream level, while the ceiling rose upwards and the walls expanded outwards to around sixty feet. Though not huge by most standards, what had given the area the appearance of vastness was its depth. Headlamps aimed directly ahead simply disappeared into the distance, since what we were really in was a stream passage of borehole dimensions, and the end of this passage was far out of sight. Climbing carefully down to the stream's level, we moved with the usual slowness one exhibits on a first visit to a new cave. I didn't mind the slower pace; in fact, I was so happy to be underground in TAG again that I was content to savor every step. Besides, I'm also an optimistic egomaniac, so I can never resist the temptation to believe



that I might spot an opening no one's noticed before . . . even in a heavily visited cave like this one. This means I tend to poke my lights into every corner and shadow, which makes the going slow . . . but you know as well as I do how addictive this temptation can be.

Needless to say, I didn't find anything ( . . . yet . . . ), and we continued down the passage, sometimes following an easy route adjacent to the stream, but more often picking our way over and around breakdown. Some five hundred feet later, the obvious route is nearly blocked by a very impressive flowstone waterfall, approximately fifty feet in width and about six feet in height. There appeared to be several ways to proceed under the flowstone (via the stream), but these all looked low, wet, and nasty, so we opted to go over. Normally, I would avoid climbing over flowstone, but a quick search revealed a clear route following the far corner of the mound. This upper passage soon led back down again (over more flowstone), rejoining the stream level in a chamber that was even larger than the one we'd left. As we proceeded further into the chamber (now more than a quarter mile from the entrance), several very unnatural looking formations appeared on a broad, flat, higher level to our left. Having read several articles about this cave beforehand, I had a feeling that I knew what I was looking at; nonetheless, this was not what I had expected. Several very large (10' x 8' x 3') rectangular formations were positioned in an area where they seemed to have no reason to exist. From all appearances, these "formations" were solid stone, yet they looked eroded rather than being built up by flowstone. What we saw before us were the remnants of TR's once extensive saltpeter operations, the remainders of vats whose casing boards had long since rotted away. Since my fascination with the Civil War is nearly obsessive, I had to just sit and marvel at the fact that these were about as con-

crete a link to that time period as I was ever likely to encounter. I couldn't help but imagine the difficulties the miners had faced; after all, they had operated a considerable distance from the entrance, over rough terrain, with nothing more technologically advanced than torches to light their work. Considering the end result, it was an amazing exercise in futility.

The passage we had been following all this time split at the saltpeter vats, with the lower, active stream passage veering off to the right, and a much drier, upper-level passage continuing on to the left. A striking flowstone drapery had caught my attention to the left, so we followed the upper passage. We didn't have a map (woe is he who comes to TR without a map!), but I remembered enough from my reading to know that the two passages would rejoin within a few hundred feet. After a period of stooping, the upper passage began a long descent over a flowstone slope as the two passages came back together in a considerably decorated corridor. Several large columns (15'-20') and stalactite groupings caught our attention to the left, while rimstone pools spread out in the center of the corridor. To the right, the floor dropped down to stream level. We opted to stay above the stream, and within another fifty feet or so we were once again in upper-level passage completely separate from the stream. As before, it was not long before this bypass rejoined the main passage, but this time the situation had changed. Up until this point a headlamp beam directed straight ahead would always find some area it couldn't reach; i.e., the way on. Now, however, straight ahead was clearly not the way to proceed, as the stream was turning almost ninety degrees to the right. Since we had become accustomed to seeing the stream come and go, however, we still took the time to poke around in some interesting holes before finally taking the stream at

its word. Climbing down over large blocks to reach the stream's level, we made relatively rapid progress along the edge of the water. The stream here was wider and shallower than before, and it was occasionally necessary to jump (or wade) from one side to the other in order to follow the "beach." The passage as a whole here was only thirty to fifty feet wide, which finally made it feel like a stream passage instead of room. Eventually, after another ninety-degree bend back to the left, the walls and ceiling began to open up, and once again our headlamps were swallowed up by the darkness ahead. In front of us, the stream disappeared into breakdown, and as I began to climb up the first big blocks, I panned my headlamp upwards, amazed at what I was seeing.

In front of me stood an enormous mountain of breakdown called the Wildcat Rockpile, rising to meet a high ceiling and spreading out like some primordial pyramid. The peculiar shape of the pyramid made it impossible to see the way on from our vantage point, so we began to climb upwards following the angle at which we had entered the room. I vaguely remembered reading something in one of the Tumbling Rock articles about a "well-worn" path over the breakdown . . . "just look, you'll find it," the words jeered. Yeah, right! We tried following boot prints, but mud covered the rocks everywhere, and there certainly wasn't any "well-worn" path that either of us could see. Ever the optimist, I found a deep chimney between some blocks and the far left wall, and began to squeeze downwards to where I could clearly see water flowing at the base of the pyramid. My brother chose to stay above, snickering and mumbling something about my idea of a well-worn path. He and I have always enjoyed annoying one another, so I didn't mind working hard to prove him wrong, especially since his greater bulk would make it more fun watching him try to

squeeze through all these rocks. Once reaching the water, however, I came to realize that this couldn't possibly be a well-worn path unless you were a cave cricket, and this definitely wasn't the creek we'd come to know so well. %&!\$%@!!! This meant I was going to have to climb back up, with a pack, and now Ron was nowhere to be seen. He had conveniently given me up for dead and was exploring higher up on the pyramid, probably laughing the entire time. Am I the only one who hates it when you're working yourself to death alone in some tight chimney, and your partner is off somewhere in the distance gleefully yelling "I think I found the way . . . WOW! . . . you should see this!"? Sweating like mad as I climbed upwards, I began hoping that some hodag militia group would find him instead. I finally extricated myself from the chimney and yelled after him, following his voice up and around the mound's left shoulder until I was looking down into a tempting and attractive room. Ron was somewhere out of sight around a corner below, noisily poking into some hole I couldn't see, so I decided to rest. After twenty minutes or so of watching him scurry in and out of several hidden spots in the back of the room, I couldn't help but start giving him a hard time. "Found it, did ya?" . . . "Just how well-worn is that path, anyway?" Before long we were both back near the top of the pyramid, having gotten nowhere in quite a while. Still, we were having a great time laughing at each other, and we were both getting really ugly with mud, which was funnier still.

We worked our way back around to the front of the pyramid, hoping our luck would be better on the other side. Moving around on this mound was a little time-consuming, since a misstep on the edge of a mud-slick block would mean either a broken leg, a really bad fall downhill, or some crude version of a vasectomy—and I didn't really want to find out which. By

this time, we had been messing around on this pile of rocks for more than an hour, and it took still more time to check out possibilities down from the top of the hill's right flank. Finally, at the base of the righthand side of the pyramid, I noticed an opening leading downwards towards the front of the cave. Unlike everything else in the vicinity, the opening itself was relatively smooth, and it dropped down into an area which was gentler still. Crawling and stooping (towards the "front" end of the cave) for a few more feet, I came out on top of a shelf with about a five-foot drop into a lower and larger passage. As I spun round the edge of the shelf and my light spotted a broad stream, I knew we'd found what we'd been looking for all this time. This was one of those times when having a map would have saved a lot of effort; a later look at the map of TR clearly shows the main stream passage continuing just beyond the right side of the rockpile. In our defense, I must say that the map makes it look a lot more obvious than it is, especially since we first came into the room angling to the left instead of the right. Oh well, live and learn.

Now short on time, we hurriedly made our way down the passage, walking along mud banks under a five- to eight-foot ceiling. The passage meandered back and forth, usually only twenty feet wide or less, for an additional five hundred feet. We both wondered what was coming up, because there was enough air moving through the passage to qualify as a breeze no matter where you stood. There are often times in a cave when you think you feel moving air, but this wasn't a wispy breath that you notice and then it's gone—this was a wind. At last the ceiling shot up, and we climbed once again onto huge breakdown blocks to enter a large room. Some of the blocks were coated with a glossy black substance, and further into the cave I knew that there were supposed to be asphalt deposits of some sort. If these blocks were a hint of what

was to come, I was anxious to see more. Unfortunately, our trip clocks were rapidly spinning down. It was already nearly eight in the evening and we were tired; worse, the long drive back to Memphis was seeming longer every moment. There was no doubt in my mind that we needed to turn back, but it was a disappointing decision to make. So much still lay ahead of us in the darkness . . . the King's Shower, Topless Dome (20' in diameter and 396' high!), the Great Hall of Mysteries, the Suicide Crawl, the Hall of the Gods, Mt. Olympus (which, according to its description, makes the Wildcat Rockpile sound like a kid's sandbox), and a host of others I'd really wanted to see. On the other hand, I knew that the future would be bringing me back to Tumbling Rock, and when I do return all of those places will still be there, waiting in the darkness like I'd never left. With this in mind, we reluctantly headed for the entrance, and climbed out into a freezing night under a blanket of stars. Even though the drive back home was every bit as terrible as we'd expected, the trip was well worth the effort. Don't pass up a trip to this one the next time you find yourself in Alabama!

Note: There is an excellent article regarding the history of TR's exploration in the 1998 NSS Convention Guidebook, pp. 94-104, as well as an outstanding eight-page map drawn by Pat Kambesis (the result of a six-year-long resurvey effort, 1990-96). In the same book, you will also find an extensive cave description (pp. 197-200), and a thorough bibliography of additional articles that have been written about TR. It is also worth noting that TR may yet hold many secrets; considerable airflow is present at the very rear of the known cave, and one well-known caver has informed me that he believes the cave is perhaps twice as large as is currently shown. Others argue for a second entrance. Either way, there are apparently still thresholds to cross. ➤➤

## Two weeks in northern Mexico

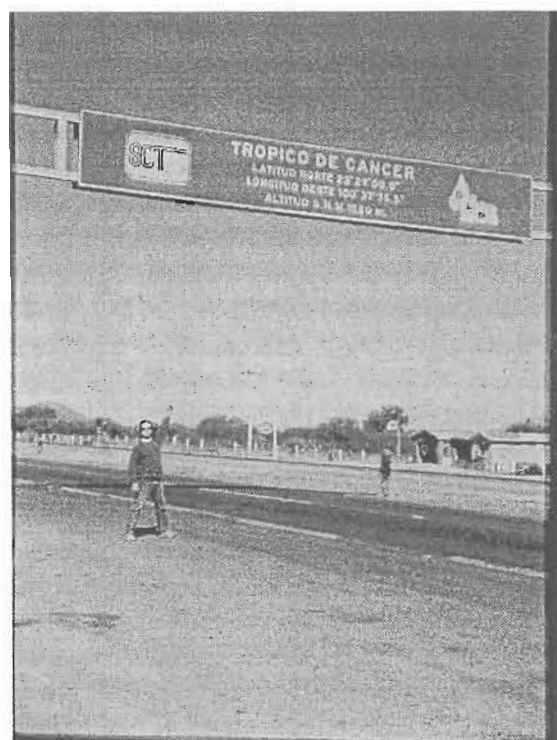
### Part I: The Bridge over the River Styx

By R. D. Milhollin

For the annual school break at Christmas of 1999 I decided to visit the northern part of Mexico. My friend Micki Feakes arrived from Missouri Friday night, December 17, and we spent that night getting the little truck packed and repacked; there was a lot to take for a trip that would involve caving as well as cave diving. There were what might have been interpreted by those more prone to superstition as bad omens for beginning a trip on Saturday, but we still chose to delay the start of the trip in favor of a Chamber-of-Commerce type tour of the area attractions, outdoor stores, the Water Gardens, the Kimbell, etc. We left town Saturday night driving straight through to within 1 hour of the border at Laredo, spending the chilly night camped along the interstate in a dusty rest stop. We were at the border crossing at 0900, spending 3 hours in multiple lines to clear the vehicle for travel into the Republic. We drove on to Matehuala stopping only for fresh fruit, gasoline, and to avail ourselves of the public conveniences. In Matehuala we had tortas on the plaza, and drove out to Real de Catorce where we spent the night in a windstorm with the tent corners

tied to whatever was heavy and available, including ruined buildings and the truck tire.

Monday morning we walked into the old mining town through the kilometer-long horizontal mine shaft that had been turned into a road by royal engineers on the king's orders. We argued as to whether the cobblestone road leading from the modern highway to the old mining city was old or modern, nearly everyone we met and asked over the next six days had a different story to tell. Especially interesting to me was the room of votive offerings to St. Francis of Assisi behind the altar in the town's church. We were glad to have worn hiking boots into Real due to the steep vertical angles the road takes as it winds through town. We agreed we could have stayed for several days in Real de Catorce, but our schedule would not permit it on this trip. Next time I plan to hire horses for the day and ride into the surrounding mountains. We left in the early afternoon for the dusty drive into San Luis Potosí, the northernmost colonial city in Mexico. We located a comfortable hotel

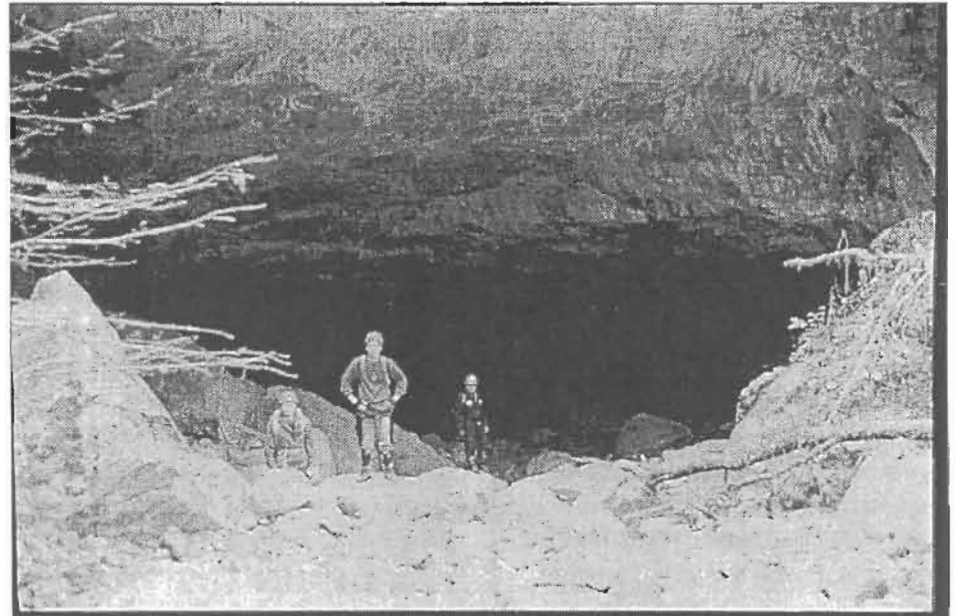


in the University section of the city with the unlikely name of "Fantasy Lomas." No obvious trait of this rather plain, affordable lodging suggested the origin of the name. By Tuesday morning we were both itching for some caving and/or diving, after all we could have stayed in any city along the way but this was not the reason we had driven so far. I contacted Dr. Sergio Sánchez-Ármas, our principal APME (Potosino Mountaineering and Speleological Association) contact, at home and found my cave-diving friend Andres LaBarthe via phone. We used the rest of the day to sightsee and to get plans together for the next few days in the region. One highlight this day was an incredible seafood lunch at the La Bocana restaurant just down the street from the university. I highly recommend the "Vuelve a la vida" which translates as "come back to life." The story we were told was that the family who owns this eatery owns the boats in Tampico that catch the oceanic denizens, as well as the trucks that transport the catch fresh daily up into the mountains.

Back to the "Fantasy Lomas" that night, still concerned about how it earns that name and now positively itching, yes but not from bugs, just to get out of the city and into the caves. We got up early Wednesday, had breakfast at Andres' around 0700, borrowed his father's Jeep, and went to pick up Gerardo Rodriguez, a locksmith and expert caver we had been introduced to the night before at his family's shop on Avenida Carranza. We stocked up on caving snacks and supplies at the Super WalMart, and drove south and east into the Sierra de Alvarez toward Zaragoza looking for Cueva de la Puente. We turned off the highway and took a well-maintained but very dusty road to the "Minera de las Cuevas," a large mining operation specializing in the extraction of Fluorite. We passed easily through the company gates since Gerardo knew the people up in a hamlet near the cave. Several members of his family are cavers,

and have been exploring La Puente for many years. We drove for about 1.5 hours over a single-track mountain road clinging to the side of the mountains, in the process passing from the dusty desert climate of the inland plateau into the cool clouds being blown up the mountains from the tropical lowlands of the Gulf of Mexico

height as we moved further into the cave, and we stopped briefly to enjoy a beautiful rimstone formation carrying water out of a high wall down to the dry streambed passage we were following. From here on the water flowed with us, a little at first, growing in volume as more infeeders joined along the way. We continued to follow the



many miles to the east and several thousand feet down. The fully loaded-down little Isuzu truck performed fine, although the going was slow and I had to get out to assess the roadway at several points along the way. At the end of the road we found a remarkable view of the surrounding mountains well above the local cloud cover. The hike to the entrance was steep and downhill. The mouth of the cave is very impressive, obviously taking large amounts of water on occasion. We paused for a few photos before plunging into the dark recesses.

The name "La Puente" means "The Bridge," and there were a few places where the easiest path through the cave passed along large breakdown overlying lower levels. Within a few minutes we found ourselves in a large room with a few bats roosting, then the tunnel transforms into a wide hands-and-knees crawl for a few hundred feet. The passage grew slowly in

water through some rather large breakdown piles into canyon passages and occasionally through small restrictions. Then unexpectedly, the ceiling suddenly soared high above us as we entered the Comedor, or Dining Room. Here was an excellent place for a well-deserved snack, as I suppose earlier explorers had done. This was also a fine place to pause for photographs, for from here on we entered into the now sizable stream passage to continue downstream. There are fine decorations, as well as flood debris festooning the ceiling at every point I inspected, reminding us that this cave would be best visited during the dry season. There are a few serious duckunders which required us to remove our helmets and hold our breaths, but they just added to the sporting nature of the cave. Past the second of these, we began a gradual descent down a series of small waterfalls to where a 90-foot (27 m) waterfall cascades down into a deep



crack. We stopped our progress here, as we had not brought rope for the pit, but this would be an excellent place to return to when more time permits.

The trip out was uneventful with fewer stops, and when we reached the entrance we changed out of the wet, muddy cave costumes, cleaned up as well as possible with cold water and chilly air, bundled up with warm woollies, and wished our friends "adios": they were ready to return to San Luis Potosí and we were heading down the mountains to Rio Verde. We were healthy and in fine spirits as we left the mountain, and stayed that way for about 30 minutes. I asked Micki to open the several cattle gates along the way so we could drive through. She assured me this was not a problem, that she was perfectly qualified for the assignment. I believe her statement was "I can do this, we have gates in Missouri." But the second gate was sort of stuck on a rock at the bottom edge opposite the hinges, and when she pulled it hard toward her, the gate suddenly came loose and the rusty angle-iron frame smacked her hard right across the eyebrow. There was bleeding, and we were facing a setting sun on rough mountain roads far from pavement. She made emergency repairs with the on-board first-aid kit as well as possible. The trip down the mountain pass was harrowing, with courageous or foolhardy cars and overloaded tractor-trailer rigs jockeying for position along the narrow two-lane roadway. Eventually Rio Verde came into view at the base of the mountains. We immediately went to locate APME cavers Gustavo Samperio and Juan Cancino to find out the best way to deal with Micki's wound which had now stopped bleeding but appeared swollen. Gustavo said he would try to locate an uncle who was a pediatrician and knew about cuts. We would need to check back in the morning about 0900.

We camped that night at a public park at a lake known as La Media de la Luna (the Half Moon). The place is strangely beautiful, with steam rising off the surface

where 85 degree F (30 C) water meets the cool mountain air. There were strange sounds in the park, from the cattle that seemed to wander at will, and from the young campers who stayed loudly awake until early in the morning. In the morning we were in town early and found that Gustavo's uncle was out of town, but he had us jump in his truck and we headed across town to the offices of another doctor who is a family friend, and who kindly and efficiently and very economically cleaned the wound and declared that no major damage was done. He did recommend two courses of precaution however, a tetanus shot and no diving for 6 days. These did not go over well with Micki: she is a devotee of natural medicine and does not care for injected immunizations, and her overriding interest in taking this trip was to dive. Now that we were camped on the edge of a remarkable body of crystal-clear warm water she was being told she shouldn't get wet.

Micki decided to spend the day relaxing at the camp, and I took off with Juan, Gustavo, and a novice Rio Verde caver named Daniel Izar to a local river cave named "La Loma," which I had visited with them on a previous trip. Juan and I had previously free-dived the sump in the back of the cave from which the stream flows, but we had not succeeded in finding continuing air passage. For this trip we packed small SCUBA tanks and side-mount gear up the mountain trail and into the cave. On the previous trip the river running out of La Loma was rushing; this time there was no discernible flow. We changed into caving equipment at the base of a short cliff and climbed up into a window in the wall to begin transiting the passage. The floor is very uneven, having been carved by running water, and the walls are at places very sharp so that gloves are a necessity, not a luxury. We did notice a very pungent odor that had not been present the previous trip, and a little investigation revealed a colony of vampire bats that had not been apparent before. At the end of the cave passage I kitted up

with the help of the experienced caving crew, and entered the still sump waters. I took my time during the dive, noticing the structure of the submerged passage on the way in, as I anticipated no visibility on the return trip. At the point where Juan and I had both turned back when breath-hold diving the year before, I noticed that the passage began to head upward slightly. I followed this trend a few more feet and then noticed the shimmer that indicates an air surface. I quickly surfaced in a large decorated room filled with fresh air. Reconnaissance of the room showed continuing underwater passage and no obvious air-leads. On our return to Rio Verde that evening I drew a sketch map from memory for Juan. The next trip I hope to make this dive with another cave diver and survey the new room as well as continue to push the ongoing passage.

When I returned to the park Micki explained that she had experimented with dive masks and had been able to make a snorkel dive without getting the cut eye wet. We made plans to dive the next day. Media de la Luna is worth the trip itself for a SCUBA diver. On Friday we devoted the morning to seeing it from all angles. While suiting up we met a group of fellow travelers accompanying Austin caver Terry Sayther. They were enjoying springs, waterfalls, and swimming holes as they progressed through the area. We talked a few minutes about the area attractions and about the dive we were getting ready to do. When we got in, Micki stuck to skin diving on the surface and I dove on SCUBA along the bottom, and we were both amazed by the clarity of the water as well as the bottom structure. The warm water rises from vents located at the bottom of what appear as inverted cones with caves at the bottom. The outflowing currents are strong, and the deepest of the pits was around 110 feet (33m). Again plans were made for the next trip here, and they include provision for an underwater camera.

To be continued. . . 

# T H E M A V E R I C K B U I L I

5-7 May 2000, TSA Convention, John Knox Ranch, Fisher, TX. Details at [www.caver.net/tsa](http://www.caver.net/tsa). See map below.

13-14 May 2000, Colorado Bend State Park Project. Contact Terry Holsinger (512) 443-4241, [trhli@sprynet.com](mailto:trhli@sprynet.com)

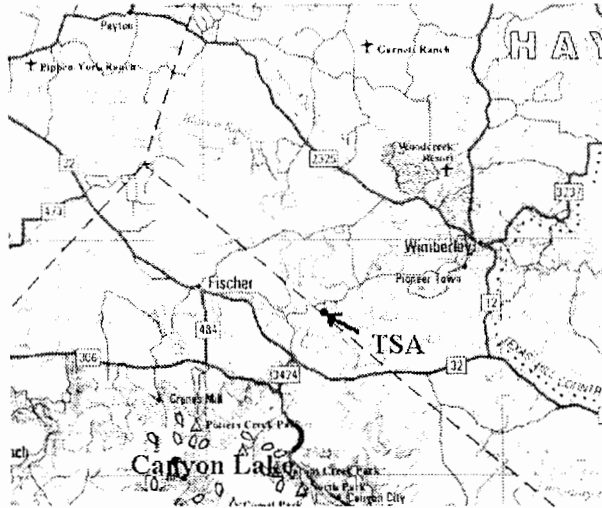
27-29 May 2000, High Guads Restoration Project, NM. Contact David Jagnow. (505) 332-4452, [david@jagnow.com](mailto:david@jagnow.com)

27-29 May 2000, O-9 Well Project, Crockett Co., TX. Contact Walter Feaster (915) 694-1824, [waltfeast@marshill.com](mailto:waltfeast@marshill.com)

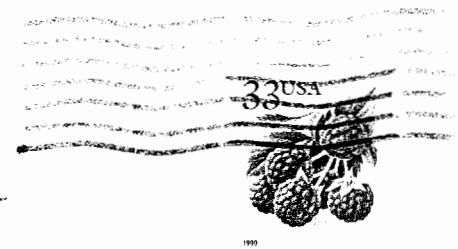
Late June 2000, TAG grotto trip. Contact Michael Coulter [camelot@wf.net](mailto:camelot@wf.net)

26-30 June 2000, NSS Convention, Elkins, WV. Contact Kelley L. Deem (304) 725-9812, [deem@mammoth-geo.com](mailto:deem@mammoth-geo.com)

2-6 July 2000, Small Party Self Rescue Course, Greenbriar County, WV. Contact Joe Ivy (512) 292-1878, [joeivy@interserv.com](mailto:joeivy@interserv.com)



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