

# THE MAVERICK BULL

The Monthly Newsletter of the Ft. Worth Maverick Grotto

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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.

**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 complimentary 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 per year for nonmembers 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. 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

Cover photo of Pozo Clemente, a new 30m pit discovered by bulldozer at Minas Viejas, and mapped in August: Ed Goff  
Page 3: Ed and Laura Goff  
Page 4: Butch Fralia and TSS  
Pages 5 & 6: Mark Gee  
Pages 7, 8 & 9 (left): Diana R. Tomchick  
Page 9 (right): Chad Fenner

## Other Credits

Many thanks to all who helped me with my first newsletter, especially Mark Gee and the four former editors (Butch Fralia, Chad Fenner, Ed Goff and RD Milhollin), who provided computer files, articles, advice, addresses and info. You too could be published in the Maverick Bull! Just send me articles, photos, interviews, reviews of prod-

ucts, and other items of general caving interest. I'll do my best to present your contributions in the best possible forum.

-- Diana

## Visit Our Web Site

Check out the site at its new location:  
[maverickgrotto.batcave.net](http://maverickgrotto.batcave.net)

## Minutes for the September Meeting

The September meeting was called to order just after 7:00 p.m. by grotto chairman Chad Fenner.

### Visitors

Bobby De Vos  
Kline Parsons  
Chris Wright

### Reports from Officers

Vice Chair: Need programs.  
Sec: There may be another painting in the works.  
Treasurer: \$1301.73 (minus Sept newsletter).  
Newsletter: Still looking, though Diana Tomchick offered to edit the October edition.

### Announcements

TCR (Texas Caver's Reunion) is October 18-20, same place as last year, Horseshoe Ranch near Luling (see <http://www.cavetexas.org/tcr.htm> for info and driving directions).

Still no announcement from Ed and Laura (Editor's note: an announcement was made the day following the meeting. See elsewhere in this issue.)

T-shirts available:  
A handful of unclaimed Maverick Grotto T-shirts are available on a first-cash, first-served basis.

### Old business

Patches/T-shirts/bumper stickers: Wayne Peplinski commented that he felt that the bumper sticker voted on

last month was too busy and he will offer an alternative. The Tuckers provided a catalog from a company that does patches and embroidered shirts. We discussed at length the idea of some basic grotto gear. Karen Perry volunteered to make a list of potential gear with prices.

### New business

We discussed permanently moving the grotto meeting location to Dickey's Barbecue in Arlington. After some spirited debate, a motion was made to move, the measure was seconded, then soundly defeated. Butch Fralia talked briefly about updating the grotto website content. We noted that all of the visitors found us via the web page.

### New members

In a close vote, Jennifer Peplinski and Roger Mercer were voted in as new members. Congratulations!

### Trip reports

Mark Gee went to Bustamante, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. Bill Tucker talked about his trip to the Carlsbad region of New Mexico. Ed discussed the recent Mystic Cave activities.

### Program

Diana Tomchick presented a slide show from the Maverick Grotto 2002 TAG trip.

## October meeting

The next meeting will be Tuesday, October 8th, at Smokey's Ribs, 5300 Lancaster, at 7 p.m. See back cover for important new business agenda items. Program to be announced. 🦇

## New Grotto Member!

Audrey Milena Goff

By Chad Fenner, Diana R. Tomchick

Long time Maverick Grotto cavers Ed and Laura Goff would like to announce a new member of the Maverick Grotto.



The 6 lb. 8 oz. caver was dubbed Audrey Milena Goff as she made her way into this life at 11:58 a.m. on September 11 (Ed and Laura did go straight from the Sept. 10 grotto meeting to the hospital the night before!). Mother and daughter are reportedly doing well and looking forward to their first cave trip together. As you can see from the photo, Audrey already has a pair of gloves, now she just needs a helmet and light.

Congratulations to both Ed and Laura!

Additional pictures available at:

<http://photos.yahoo.com/egoffffoge33>

# TSS Fall Board of Director's Meeting

September 21, 2002

By Butch Fralia

The Texas Speleological Survey (TSS) held the quarterly Board of Directors meeting Saturday, September 21, 2002. The meeting was held at the TSS office in the UT Pickle Research Center in North Austin. TSS President George Veni called the meeting to order at or about 10:30 am.

Secretary Logan McNatt read the minutes from the last meeting. This didn't take an eternity but did seem like it. The minutes were approved with minor spelling corrections and the meeting move on. George Veni then gave the president's report. The most striking part of the presentation was that he said he'd been TSS President for a number of years. His consulting business takes a great deal of time and he feels like someone with more time might better serve the TSS. The consensus was that everyone's job or business is taking a great deal of time right now. He was pounded until he agreed to retain the position.

Secretary Logan McNatt gave his report consisting of a review of between-meeting business. Treasurer Orion Knox gave the financial report. There's money in the bank and the TSS Endowment fund has been moved to a CD with a little higher yield than the TSS was earning before.

Editor Jim Kennedy discussed the latest publication to be printed in time for the next TCR. It's the "Caves of Burnett County," compiled by Jerry Atkinson. It will have a lot of color and should be a nice publication that most cavers will want to add to their collection. There are other publications in the works but none of those will be ready for TCR. One that should be interesting to most cavers with a sense of history is "Fifty Years of Texas Caving" being written by Carl Kunath. It will cover every Grotto, past and present, in the history of Texas caving. There's even a coloring book in the works for children to learn about caves and caving safely.

Office Manager Ron Ralph wasn't present to give his report so Jim Kennedy gave that for him. This covered how many work sessions were held and the present status of the facilities and files. The TSS maintains many file cabinets of cave records. These are slowly being converted to electronic format to make things easier to find. There is a map room with several thousand cave maps donated by the cavers who drafted them.

As such, the meeting went on with various directors giving reports for their areas of responsibilities. The announcement was made that a new Conservation Grant from ESRI has been approved for six copies of ArcView 8.2. This is an upgrade from ArcView 3.1 that the TSS has been using since 1998. ArcView is a GIS software package that can be used to create maps electronically. A map can be created from scratch or data overlaid on existing maps. The majority of its usage by the TSS is the creation of cave location maps.

This sounds a lot like a cave organization meeting, doesn't it? Diana asked me to write a short summary of the meeting for her newsletter editing experience. I obviously agreed and above is about as much as I want to summarize. What is more significant is to introduce the caving public to the TSS.

You're all familiar with grottos and regional organizations like the TSA. The TSS isn't just another cave club. In fact, it's not a club at all but a non-profit private corporation (all cash or equipment donations tax deductible). Its origins go back to 1961, when it was founded. Over the years, the TSS has published a number of books on the caves of Texas. Most cavers are familiar with "The Caves and Karst of Texas" and the numerous publications on "The Caves of xxxx County". The TSS was founded to be a study to promote speleology, the study of caves and karst. It maintains records on caves, karst features and springs. Its study area is of course Texas. The TSS has held a number of classes on cave related activities. Courses on cave photography, GPS, Cartography and others are in the works.

Did you know for instance that the TSS has electronic records on 5206 caves, karst features and springs? Three months ago, the number was 4900. Of the 5206, 3226 of these meet the TSS definition of a cave. A cave has a minimum of 5 meters of humanly traversable horizontal or vertical passage. Of the 5206 records only 2490 have location data. We know what county they are supposed to be in but not where they are. In some cases we know what topographic map the cave is located on but that's it. Most of the remaining records have only a county name. The number of caves with location data grows gradually. With the advent of reasonably accurate GPS units, cavers are encouraged to get the location of any cave they visit.

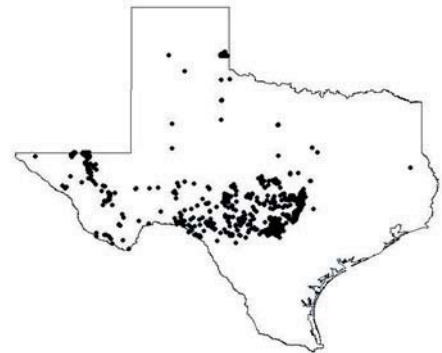
My personal project is to collect as much data as possible and get it into an electronic format, in Database and Cave data sheets. I'm particularly interested in locations. Why? Be-

cause cavers are fickle. They will get access to an area and cave there for a while, then either lose access or move on to another area. Twenty years from now, access or interest will be regained and back into the area cavers will go. If there is location data on a cave, you can check and see if you've discovered a new cave or "rediscovered" a cave.

Where does all this information come from? It comes from you, the cavers of Texas. Any information you provide the TSS in the form of data, descriptions and maps is compiled and becomes a part of the cave literature of Texas.

Did you know that data sharing is a two way street? There are limits to the amount of information that can be given out for various reasons, but it's available. If you are going caving and want to know about caves in a particular area, all you have to do is ask. Contact me via phone or e-mail [(817)346-2039; sharbu@flash.net] before your next caving trip and I'll check out caves in the area you're going to. I'll expect information back. The TSS maintains data on a lot of proprietary caves that I can't give you. I can't give you the complete records for a county or a complete copy of the database. That would require a formal request complete with explanation of what's to be done with the data and a justification of why you should get it.

That's it folks. We had a meeting and now you have a little glimpse of why we meet and do what we do! Oh, and one more thing. You know those books the TSS sells? I have a good collection of the current in-print publications and will be more than happy to sell you one so you don't have to order out of Austin. In fact, it's about time to bring the box to a Grotto meeting again.



*Distribution of Texas cave locations in the TSS database. One dot = one cave. Overlap of the dots on the Texas border is due to the size of the dots, and is not meant to imply that the caves are located in New Mexico.*



# Hell Below

## Lincoln National Forest

by Mark Gee, 7-19-2002

Friday, July 20, 2001—

It was a beautiful day, and we were all excited about our trip to the High Guads. All of us had either taken a full or half day off and were to meet at Ed and Laura Goff's home to pack up in Will Harris' truck. We got away from Dallas about 1 PM. The drive out to Texas Camp in Guadalupe National Forest is a boring drive, until you get to Carlsbad where the mountains make the drive much more scenic and beautiful. When we got to camp the sun had already set, so we put on our headlamps and set up our tents. The campsite was a little wet from rain the day before, so a dry tent site was not to be found. After a little get together around the soon-to-be fire, I called it a day and went to bed.

Saturday morning, July 21, 2001—

After dressing and a quick breakfast, we split up into two teams. Ed Goff, Will Harris, Mike Huber, RD Milhollin, James Lopez, and Aaron (a Carlsbad caver) were going to Madonna to continue their work surveying the passages in the cave, in order to draw up a complete and current map of the cave. Laura Goff, Alan Goodman, Marc Italiano, Dave Hughes, Shaun (another local caver) and myself were headed to Hell Below for a day of fun and exploration.

Two hundred and fifty million years ago, a vast ocean had covered this part of New Mexico, then the earth shifted and formed a mountainous reef and the waters subsided. Today this area is known as Lincoln National Forest and is maintained by the forest service.

August 6, 1933 – Dave Wilson, Julian Shattuck, Ted Fullerton, and Robert Nymeyer, on the way back from Black Cave, headed to their car at Dark Canyon Lookout. On the trail they came across a short Mexican fella with a red bandana and a small black dog. He said, "Hi, she's plenty hot today. What are you doing up here, are you hunting for deer?" The four cowboy cavers said, "No, we are looking for caves." The reply to this was, "O, they plenty dark." Then Nymeyer said, "No, we explore them, what are you doing up here?" The Mexican man said, "I and my dog, Perro, look for damned lost goat." Nymeyer asked, "O, have you seen any caves up here in these mountains?" The man says, "O yes, just last week, I think – over yonder," as he pointed to the south, "a hole in the hill. Not very big hole, but mucho frio!" They pressed him for more details. He pointed to a large pine standing boldly on a ridge top a couple of canyons over. "You see big tree, hole in bottom of bench below tree, down in hollow against rock wall, plenty of oak brush. Almost not see hole till you fall in!" They walked across two ridges towards the large pine tree and right up to the cave. They entered the cave and had to climb down a steep slope and then a vertical crevice, then through a small keyhole but were unable to explore because of a deep drop. "We won't go any farther, there's Hell Below." It was a month before they could organize another trip.

On their next trip a few additional people joined them, and they climbed down to the deep drop and rigged the rope. Tommy, one of the new cavers on the expedition, grabbed the rope and with his back to the chasm, shone his light down, and stood thus for many seconds saying nothing. Then he stepped back saying, "You know," in his slow Louisiana drawl, "I just don't think it'd be right for me to be the first, you found it, you lead off." No one felt inclined.

They ate their lunches and called each other several different kinds of sissies. Then they coiled up their rope and left the cave only to return a month later – on October 1.

They again gathered at the black opening of Hell Below. Tommy had brought 150 ft. of half-inch manila stake line. They doubled it and tied knots every three feet to aid them on their ascent out.

They had stopped and picked up Seth McCollum and a couple of others on the way to the cave, because he was curious about what these fools had discovered. Nymeyer had maintained that since he had been the first to find the cave, it was his right to be the first one down. The four rigged the rope. Someone thought it would be a good idea to have a light at the bottom of the drop so they lowered a light on some strong string to the floor of the chasm. "Well, we all came to see this cave. You guys stand back and let me on my way." No one was blocking the way. Robert Nymeyer slid down the rope slowly, but as his strength was sapped from his arms, he began to lose his grip and go faster. The last ten feet he plunged like a rock, landing on the lantern and putting out the light. After looking around at the cave floor, finding the lantern and re-firing it, he looked back up the rope and knew that he wouldn't be able to climb back out. He yelled back up to the others not to come down. As he looked up at the rope, it began to move and swing. Then Dave came down bumping over the knots in the rope. Then they heard Ted come down and he landed behind them. It didn't take much persuasion to tell the others not to come down.

Two of them rode off to the McCollum ranch to get help to pull these three would-be cavers up out of their predicament. All three of them, with the help of a second rope tied under their arms, were pulled up out of the cave.

This was a story of the cave discovery, now my story of our discovery and exploration.

A few weeks before our trip to Hell Below, I had purchased a video called "Wild Caving In New Mexico and Arkansas" that included a 25-minute description of Hell Below, so I knew a little about the cave. We left camp at 10 a.m. and headed to Hell Below. Our trip was lead by a caver from Carlsbad named Marc Italiano and his friend, Dave Hughes. After a quick meeting with Ranson Turner covering the rules of the cave, four of us got into Marc's 4-wheel drive vehicle and drove across the Dragons Teeth to a short road and parking area at the trail head to Hell Below Cave. After a short walk of only about 400 yards we were at the cave entrance. We had been warned about a rattlesnake that lived at the entrance, but going in we didn't see it. Later on we did see it, but more about that later.

Marc had opened the gate, and before going in we all talked about the hazards and rope work needed to negotiate the cave passages. We all satisfied him that we were competent before we entered the cave. Its entrance was framed by rock and steel. We all took our packs off. After Marc and Shaun, a new caver, had climbed into the cave, we passed all our gear into the cave. Then the rest of us entered the cave. Just inside we stopped to put our harnesses on and let our eyes get used to the darkness. The entrance opened into a small room with a breakdown-covered, sloping floor that funneled down to a steep crevice that continued down about 75 feet to a flat floor. In the middle of the floor was a much narrower crevice that went straight down. To my surprise, Marc and Dave had come to the cave earlier



*Robert Nymeyer admiring the speleothems in Hell Below Cave, Lincoln National Forest, July 2001*

and rigged the rope for the drop. After checking the knots and anchors, each one of us, lead by Dave, proceeded down the first 20-foot drop to a flat floor about 2 – 3 feet wide and 20 feet long. At one end was a keyhole shaped exit to a small balcony above a dark chasm. My light was not strong enough to light up the floor below. All I could see was the rope disappearing into the fading light. As we entered through the keyhole, we clipped on to the rope for safety, and after reaching the balcony we slipped the rope into our racks for our descent. After removing our safety from the rope we eased ourselves off the ledge with our full weight on the rope and slowly descended. In the first fifteen feet rock surrounded you but then it opened up with a large flat ceiling to your back and a wall completely covered all the way to the floor with flowstone the color of every sweet caramel and white chocolate you've ever eaten. I can't fully describe the beauty of the formations covering the wall. At the bottom of the drop was a small pool of water filled with cave pearls. We had to be careful and watch our step. Some careless caver will surely, some day, destroy these pearls. We can hope not! As we got off rope we walked to the far wall away from the fall zone, but had to be careful not to step on the animal bones, which had been flagged with bright orange tape to keep you from walking on them. These bones appeared to be raccoon, rabbit, or maybe possum bones.

To stop and think of those cowboy cavers who had first made the descent into this cave and how they must have felt; to look back up the rope and the feeling of helplessness, standing there in all the mystery and beauty of this dark and lonely place: these must have been brave men.

The cave has a long history. It is about 11 million years old. The cave was formed when water from the surface moved down through the rock and soils to mix with hydrogen sulfide gas rising up from deposits of oil and gas. When these two mixed together they created sulfuric acid, which dissolved the rock from below. The cave seems to follow two major joints that run parallel to each other.

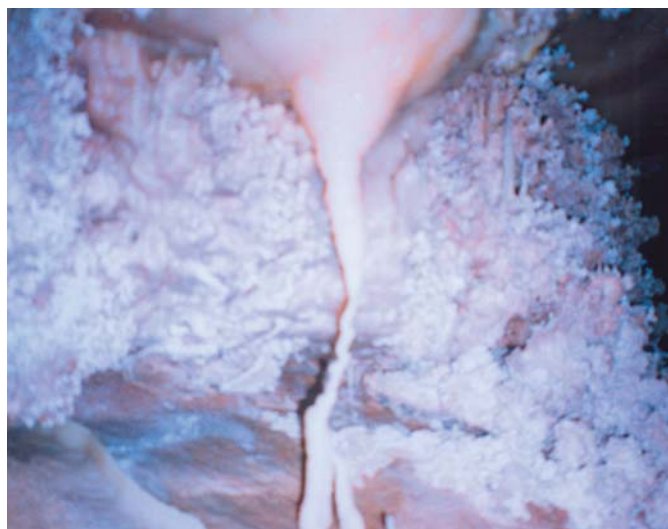
Shaun was the third person down the rope. This was very special to him because it was his first time to drop on rope into a cave. The others rappelled down, with Marc being the last. Dave, Marc and I congratulated Shaun on his first rope drop, and shook his hand. Then, led by Dave, we rappelled down the next 20-foot drop. Once we were all down, we took off our harnesses and left them for our later ascent. Marc then led us along the trail. The cave followed a deep fissure that varied in width from 25 to 75 feet. The ceiling was always just in sight of our lights, from 40 to 100 feet high. There were several emerald green pools and many deep crevices along both walls of the cave. Huge house size breakdown blocks, covered with stalactites, had fallen to cover the floor. Some had become wedged between both walls of the cave to create a bridge effect. There were several deep pits, some as deep as 210 feet. Sometimes deep pits lay along both sides of the trail and you were forced to be very careful. The ceiling of the cave had formations but the great height of the passage would not allow us to enjoy their beauty. The walls of the cave, and the numerous breakdown blocks, were covered with stalactites and flowstone of every imaginable shape and color. As Marc led us along the path, we walked through a small passage into the second fissure. On our left was a small rock overhang covered with flowstone and popcorn. A small stalagmite and stalactite had grown together. But one was not above the other. Like a helictite, they had somehow found a way to join together. This formation, the color of caramel, was known as the Butterscotch Dribble or Moon Dancer. Beyond this was a wall covered with gypsum flowers, some up to ten inches long. Beside them was an oozing mass of flowstone. In amongst the columns and draperies was one solitary white mass that resembled icing on a German chocolate cake. As we continued along the trail we came to the edge of a deep pit. Marc told us the drop was 210 feet, but the room at the bottom, which had beautiful formations and was known as the New Year's Gallery, was closed to recreational caving.

The cave was well decorated in this section. The trail that we followed went right through a floor covered with popcorn and cave coral of every imaginable color. It looked like a miniature forest, and some trees still had snow covering their branches. Following the path was a large rock that needed to be hugged to pass, and in such a way that it was known as the Sex Rock. I think that Alan Goodman enjoyed this rock just a little too much. Next time we'll have to tie him up outside the cave. Another hundred

or so feet beyond Alan's love toy, another deep pit was before us. Marc didn't know the name of this pit, but since this was the end of the trail, the term, "That's the Pits" seemed appropriate.

We turned around and headed back to the second rope drop. The wall looked almost like a cloud that was fixing to burst forth with rain. Flowstone completely covered the wall from top to bottom. To aid our ascent up the wall, we used our ascenders. The wall was very wet and each one of us slipped as we climbed the rope. At the top of the drop, we were now half way through our journey. At this point we stopped under the first drop to eat some lunch. Our lunch eaten, and our trash put away, we put our packs on our backs and headed to the other end of this awesome cave. Again, and even more so, the floor was covered with wet flowstone and cave coral. As this point great care was needed. We had to pass over a large smooth rock covered with wet flowstone, and on either side was a deep drop. We started to cross over and down the rock, then thought better of this and rigged a rope so our trip out would be possible. Crossing the flowstone we headed down the cave. Down, down, down, across loose rock and dirt, back and forth, around and over, we carefully followed the trail. Along both sides of the trail were long rock ledges that had fallen to the floor. On these rocks were many formations but something was strange. These stalagmites were not growing straight up, as they should. What must have happened was that they had formed on the rock ledges long before the ledges had broken away from the walls. Where the stalagmites had formed before on the ledges, they continued to form on the floor, below, where the ledge had been. They continued to form new growth and new stalagmites were growing up from the floor. This cave was still active; many of the formations were still wet and growing. At the end of the trail, Marc looked to the pit below and told us this was a sensitive area and we would not be able to proceed. At this point we all turned around and carefully made our way back to the rope for our final ascent out. First up was Dave. He had hurt his back somehow and was experiencing some pain. Thank God he was climbing with a ropewalker system. Next up were Laura, myself, Alan, Shaun, and finally Marc.

Sitting at the bottom of the 20-foot chimney, I could hear Dave groaning all the way up in pain, but he finally did make it without our assistance. One by one, like ants, we all free climbed up the last vertical section of the cave and continued on up and out the entrance. Once outside, I dropped my gear and climbed back down the crevice to help de-rig and remove the gear from the cave. With the de-rigging done, we left the cave. To our surprise, it had rained while we were in the cave. We looked around for the snake but didn't see it. We locked the gate, gathered our gear, and headed for Marc's four-wheel drive Isuzu.



*The 'Butterscotch Dribble' or 'Moon Dancer' speleothem*



Marc stopped and looked at me and asked, "Do you have the key?" I said, "No, I laid it on top of the permit." He said, "I picked up the permit and don't remember seeing the key." So Marc and I headed back down the trail to look for and hopefully retrieve the lost key.

When we arrived at the cave, Marc spotted the rattlesnake. Maybe he had been there all along. I got a stick and picked up the snake. He was about 2 feet long with green and brown markings, five buttons on his rattle, and his tail was black for the first five inches. I put the snake down and it crawled back up into the grass behind the rock and went to sleep. We continued to look for the key and couldn't find it. We looked under every rock at least three times but the key was not to be found. I'm sure the park will have another key, but if you find a key around the Hell Below entrance, get it to Ranson.

It was a short drive back to camp and after we arrived, Laura got dinner going. Laura did all the work but I did cut up some tomatoes and avocados. Laura had prepared frito pie and it was very good. After eating I realized how tired I was and I went to bed and was counting sheep by 11:30 p.m. Sometime during the night, I don't know when it was, I was awakened by Alan yelling, "Get out of here! Hey, hey." Then he clapped his hands together. Something had been tearing into his trash sack. Later we decided it was probably a ringed-tailed cat. A short time later, about 2:30 or so in the morning, I think my eyes were a little crossed when I looked at my watch, the other group of cavers that had been surveying Madonna finally pulled into camp. Trying to go back to sleep was futile. They were talking loudly and banging pans. I heard the cork of a wine bottle being opened, so I just joined in. Hell, I got another bowl of frito-pie. We talked till 4:30 and then I went back to bed. The party broke up soon after.

Next morning, with little sleep, I got up at 6:30, packed up my things, and went exploring. I was fortunate enough to see a mule deer and watch a beautiful sunrise. It didn't take long for the sun to warm up and to feel hot. It had been a cool morning. Around 8:30, Laura and Ed fixed breakfast, potatoes and eggs in a flour tortilla, with all the condiments. Breakfast was very good. My compliments to Laura, and thanks a lot.

By 11:30 we had packed up and were headed to Sitting Bull Falls. Driving back from the Guads, there is no sign to point the way to the falls, so we drove right past it and then drove right past Dark Canyon Road, too. I asked myself, "Am I tired, hung over, or what?" Hung over—no, tired—yes, lost—yeah! That's it! Anyway, Ed, in a moment of brilliance said, "We've gone too far." So we turned around and discovered that we only missed our turn by 15 miles. Continuing on, we did finally get to Sitting Bull Falls. Because the park was full, we had to park in the overflow parking, and then walk a half-mile to the falls. On the walk, Laura showed us a little fancy footwork when she slipped on a creek crossing the road. She didn't bust her ---, but it was real close. We stopped at the bathrooms to change our clothes, and headed to the cave behind the falls. The cave is up behind a waterfall that falls about 80 feet. You carefully walk up the hand carved steps into a very wet, but pretty cave. The cave had several pools and a lot of dripping formations due to the creek flowing over the falls. A few pictures were taken of Will and Ed going for a swim in the 50+ degree water. After checking out the cave we headed back out. The others wanted to go for a swim in the warm 60+ degree water outside the cave. After their swim, we headed back to the truck for the long drive home. It had been a good trip. To this day this is the best cave trip that I have been on. The beautiful mountains and deep canyons were picturesque. The formations in the cave along the rope drop and through out were very special. New friendships and old were made and enjoyed. I look forward to the next trip. Thanks to Marc and Dave for taking us to, and showing us around, Hell Below.

Happy Caving!



# Maverick Grotto Annual TAG Trip 2002: Part I

by R.D. Milhollin NSS 29962

Personnel: Michael Coulter, Anastasia Coulter, Ed Goff, Kris Green, Chris M. Hall, Milo Marks, R.D. Milhollin, Brian Pate, Diana Tomchick, Bill Tucker

This year's installment began with discussions between Michael and myself about places we would like to visit in TAG that we didn't have time for during the everyday rush that typifies teaching school, as I do, and running a band program, as Michael does. The trip plans were publicized well in advance, and people began to sign up. On Thursday June 6, the day before we were slated to depart, Chris Hall called up from Houston and said, Hmmm, yeah, well I guess I want to go on the TAG trip, so we switched plans around and he was on the road by 4:30 AM Friday. The rendezvous place was the Tucker residence in Grand Prairie, where Chris met Bill, Francie and Milo. Milo was chomping at the bit, and had arrived two hours early. I was of course 15 minutes late, and as vehicles were preparing to pull out of the driveway we decided to take two vehicles instead of one since the number of voyagers had increased at the last minute. Since I had forgotten to change the engine oil we piled into Milo's big Ford F350 diesel and Bill's Explorer. We actually departed for cave country at 11:00, only one hour late. The ride out was relatively uneventful, and we arrived at the appointed gas station in Dalton, Georgia at 2:30 AM EDT. The Coulter's place outside of town is high up on a heavily wooded hill, with a first level that has a bedroom, den, and bathroom adjoining the garage. Aaron Coulter gave up his bedroom for the time we were there. Thanks Aaron.

Saturday we rose late, had a big breakfast, sorted gear, and waited for Ed and Diana to arrive from Dallas. They had gotten on the road about 7:00 PM Friday and drove as long as they could, camping at a state park along the way. We wanted to begin the caving at Rusty's Cave on the Fox Mountain Preserve owned by the Southeastern Cave Conservancy, a remarkable organization that has been extremely successful at acquiring and managing caves previously closed to caving. The cave was between where we were and where Ed and Diana were coming from so we wanted to meet along the way, but we didn't have their cell phone numbers. When they checked in at 3:00 PM they were just down the street.

It was 5:00 when we left for Rusty's, and 7:00 when we arrived. It was an easy hike up to the entrance, a 40 foot drop to a streambed passage, and then a gradual hike downhill through wide, decorated, flat-ceilinged



*Soda straws and column  
Rusty's Cave  
Fox Mountain Cave Preserve*

passage that gradually narrowed into canyon. After about an hour of hiking the cave changed character, becoming crawlway tubes forming an upper level maze. We found an appropriately sized room that allowed all of us to stop for snacks, and after observing a "curious" salamander moving about on the floor, first Ed and Chris, then Milo and Diana, began searching for the way on. Michael finally found a way through the floor jumble to a stream-cobble crawlway that intersected the main stream-passage, but it had narrowed down to a wet crawlway that closed down to a 5' by 10' hole where the water continued through but we couldn't. We checked a few side leads while exiting, but nothing presented itself. Chris and I thought we had something when we strayed down into the stream canyon and simultaneously saw a sparkling flowstone cascade in our headlights. The flowstone was partially blocking the stream passage, so we carefully found our way through to the other side. Perhaps we had found a rarely visited extension to the cave, with fantastic formations most visitors never see. We carefully picked our way along trying to minimize impact, admiring the scenery. Then we saw it: a 12 foot high totem pole rising from the side of the stream bank. It was fantastic, but it looked strangely familiar. It was! We had noted the same totem on the way in. We were back in the entrance room, and the curtain we had gone through with such care was completely unnecessary. We were not amused!

The last caver exited Rusty's around midnight, de-rigged the cave, and enjoyed a comfortable walk down the mountain. We made a beeline to Huddle House for dinner or breakfast, depending on how you felt and what you ordered. We naturally segregated into two tables across the aisle from one another, one for cavers who had brought along a clean change of clothes and those who still sported their "muddies". The place was packed, and we "cleanies" asked the waitress to demand the "muddies" to leave. The waitress was in a momentary quandary as to what was the right thing to do until she realized we were together and it was a joke. Bill, Chris and Diana, the "muddies", carried on the game a little while longer, amusing the locals and the other cavers alike. In reality, the difference in cleanliness between our two tables was superficial at best.

Michael had been in touch with Kris Green of the Pigeon Mountain Grotto, and had arranged for him to accompany us on our first serious vertical trip to Neversink. If Kris was happy that everyone was vertically competent at that open-air pit, he would lead a trip the following day to Ellison's Cave and the deepest drop in the U.S., Fantastic Pit. Sunday was a beautiful day, and we enjoyed the scenic drive over to the area where Neversink



*Diana Tomchick at the bottom of Neversink*

is located. This place is one of those sights you don't easily forget. This time of the year it is very green, and a sizeable stream was cascading over the far lip and atomizing as it fell through the air down to the lush, moist bottom. Neversink is another of the properties owned by SCCI. When we all gathered at the lip, Kris gave a little intro to the site and showed where the two best rigging points were located. Shortly, we had two ropes rigged and the descents began. On the first rope the tree we had rigged to in

the past had been removed, and the remaining stump was testimony that this dead but "solid" tree used for years to tie ropes to had been hollow! The new tie-off is several feet back on a live tree, and the old roots at the lip serve as a sort of "rope pad" as the rope drops off vertically 165 feet. Milo was winded from the steep hike up and elected to just enjoy the view from the top. All who geared up and made the descent returned just fine. As I was going over the edge my watch band snagged on the root and my "TAG" Heuer fell straight down to the bottom. When I recovered it later the watch was working just fine, sort of like a TV commercial. The moistened air provided relief from the rising temperature of the afternoon, and when we finished there we found additional relief at an "award winning" Mexican restaurant along the highway at South Pittsburg.

Apparently, we passed muster with Kris Green. Monday, June 10 we arose early and met him at the base of Pigeon Mountain near Trenton. At the parking area next to the cave's spring resurgence, another Blue Hole, he briefed us on the nature of the Ellison's Cave System. This would be a challenging trip, and only the more experienced vertical cavers would be able to make it to the planned destination, TAG Hall, which lies at the bottom of Fantastic Pit. The hike would be about a mile up the mountain, Milo and Bill decided to make the hike but not the cave, and to do it at their own pace. Diana, Chris and Michael would cave down to the "balcony" overlooking the pit, and once there, Kris Green would decide who would make the actual descent. He was unsure at the beginning of the trip whether he would drop the pit himself, as he was not feeling top-notch that day and been down many times before. I carried the bullet-proof aluminum camera case up the mountain and didn't realize until the cave entrance I had failed to load film.

The entrance to Ellison's was a wide crack at the bottom of a significant sinkhole, and had been dug open by members of the Huntsville Grotto after survey data showed the sinkhole was directly over a passage they had been following from the natural entrance, thus bypassing a route known affectionately as "The Agonies". The "new and improved" path we followed was dubbed "The Ecstasies", and both stream-carved tunnels merged as we approached the 150' deep "Entrance Pit". Kris Green rigged his special Glow-in-the-Dark rope to bolts placed in the upper surface of a boulder defining the lip of the pit, and one by one our team descended the scenic drop. When we all arrived safely at the bottom, Kris led us off to the short series of drops that would lead down to Fantastic Pit. Two-by-two we left the big pit room, climbed up a short slope and through a crack in the side wall, then down to a jumble of boulders piled above a drop rigged with a thick and very muddy rope. At the bottom of this drop one had to be careful with foot placement to avoid stepping down into a crack that continued several feet further down to stream passage. A short canyon route led to a second pre-rigged drop that featured a smaller diameter rope. We again traveled in teams of two, continuing down and through a small dome room through a high and tight squeeze that once sported a gate, and then back to the cave stream that crossed a nice sized room and then disappeared out of sight and sound under a wall. Kris was waiting for us here, and he stated matter-of-factly that we should not follow the stream since it plunged off a 54-story drop just under the ledge. The rigging room known as the "Balcony" was just past here, accessible via a 10' long crawl that was 1.5' high and featured one solid ceiling, one downward-sloping floor, and one rock wall. The other side was open, and about a foot from the crawlway the open air of the pit loomed. At the end of the crawl was a torso-sized hole between ceiling, floor, one wall, and a few largish rocks one needed to pass through to get to the Balcony. Once wedged into this passage the caver was effectively blocked from slipping, sliding, or rolling off into the chasm. Kris pushed through with the 600' rope coiled and contained in a compact and bombproof backpack, but he made it look difficult, especially as one of his feet was actually dangling off into space at one point in his passage to the other side. As each subsequent caver passed it began to look more do-able, and in time most of the team was inside the Balcony room. Above us was the "Attic", another rigging point accessible by a climb that made the drop down Fantastic closer to 600' deep, but we agreed that the Balcony was high enough for that day. Kris rigged the rope into a set of bolts along the wall of the pit and tied back to a large boulder back from the lip. Both "Chris's" had delayed their decisions whether to drop the pit



until they arrived there, Green decided what the heck, he was in the cave, might as well go for it, and Hall decided that the view from the top would be fine for that day. He, Michael and Diana put on warm shirts from their cave packs and hung out while Ed and I prepared to join Kris Green below. The pit itself was not anywhere as intimidating as Neversink was initially, since it was completely dark, and even when on rope the vaporized water from the plunging stream filled the huge chamber with a dense fog. For much of my descent only one wall was visible, while I was occupied raising the heavy rope to feed through the rack for most of the way down.

Fantastic Pit is really one end of a large canyon, with another pit called "All-in-One", at the other end. The combined space from end to end and ceiling high above to floor far below is known as TAG Hall. At the bottom, Kris led us down the canyon and across several large debris piles to where the passage plunges downward and leads eventually under Pigeon Mountain to the other side, ending at the bottom of "Incredible Pit". Kris started back up the rope first, and as he was climbing Ed and I took a few photos before heading back ourselves. Once all were on top and the pit de-rigged, snacks were in order, then we crawled back through the "squeeze-at-the-lip" passage, and began the descent back toward the surface. Again traveling in pairs, everything was going fine and I was the last one up the glow-in-the-dark-rope at the entrance pit. Kris was genuinely



*R.D. Milhollin in the Crawlawy on his way to the Balcony, Ellison's Cave. The drop to the bottom of Fantastic Pit is to his left.*

surprised when I stated "On Rappel!" just as I was in front of him at the top of the entrance drop. I had a little trouble getting started on the climb up, and had inadvertently lost my tethered bag off a non-locking carabiner, so I had to return to the bottom to retrieve it. This added operation cost us an extra 10 minutes. If I had not made this mistake our team would have left the cave at exactly the time Kris had estimated at the beginning of the trip. How's that for planning and execution!

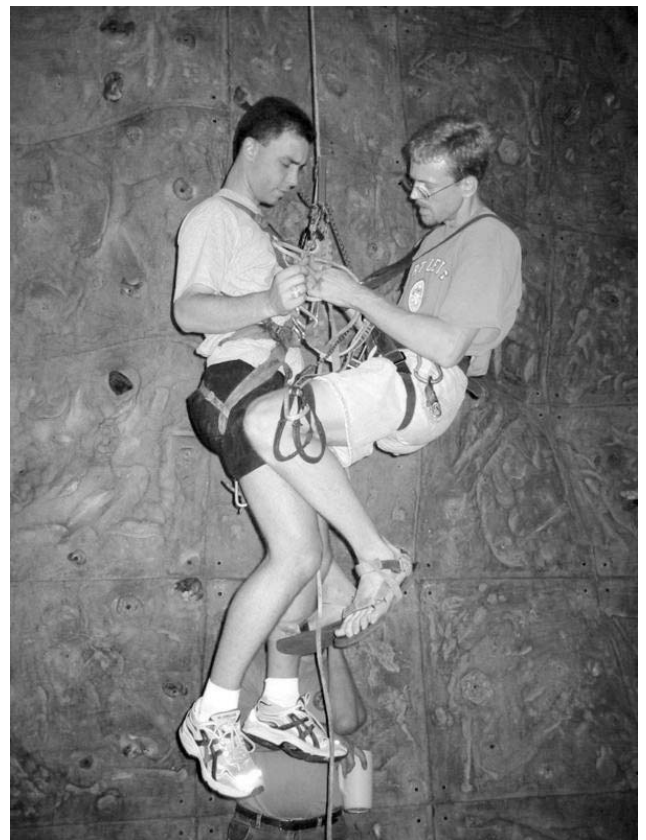
On the way down the mountain Chris Hall's boot sole neatly separated from the rest of his footwear, but an application of emergency reserve duct tape allowed him to finish the hike in comfort. Milo and Bill had waited for us at the vehicles until 10:00 p.m., then left to return to the Coulter estate, and we arrived at 10:20. Everyone agreed food was in order, but at that time of night in the country the only place open for dinner was, you guessed it, the Huddle House. This one was in LaFayette (pronounced La-FAY-yet) and was staffed by two women, one friendly but dingy waitress, and a cook who could only manage one order at a time. Kris Green was hilarious and kept us entertained the entire time we were watching the food arrive plate-by-plate. We made it back to the Coulter's house late, and Bill and Milo barely stirred as we fell wearily into our beds.

## Vertical Skills Demo

DFW Grotto September, 24, 2002 meeting

by Diana R. Tomchick

All who attended the September meeting of the DFW grotto were treated to a special after-meeting program presented by two Metroplex cavers and Maverick Grotto members. Will Harris' and Ed Goff's demonstration of various vertical skills on the REI climbing wall included a healthy dose of cave dirt from Ed's shorts and Will's dusty vertical harness. Their presentation began with a display of simple ascending and descending techniques, followed by changeovers and culminated in a demo of a pickoff rescue. This maneuver generated quite a lot of interest from people shopping at the REI store and considerable ribbing from several DFW members. Particularly amusing was the reaction from the REI employees to the not-pristine equipment (Ed's rope had obviously seen more use than an indoor climbing wall). Afterwards, everyone agreed that it was a useful demo and several wished they had thought to bring their vertical gear in order to practice some of the techniques demonstrated. Much discussion followed concerning the desire to practice these skills at Trinity Park in the near future, and several people new to the Metroplex were provided with directions to the Maverick Grotto meeting place. We look forward to seeing some of these potential cavers at our October meeting.



*DFW Grotto Chairman Will Harris (left) and Ed Goff demonstrate the proper techniques for an on-rope pickoff rescue. Ed is the rescuer.*

# 11th Annual Caverns of Sonora Restoration Project

November 2-3, 2002

by George Veni

The cave restoration project at Caverns of Sonora will be held on 2-3 November 2002. This year's project again will involve hauling rock and rubble out of the cave's Devil's Pit area, which was generated during development of paths for trails. Remember, this work is hauling rocks!! It will be heavy, tiring, and in a hot and very humid cave. If your physical or medical condition is not up to it, please wait until a less strenuous project is planned before volunteering to help.

In return for a hard day's work, the owners will provide a light breakfast, a hearty lunch, and a catered dinner, but please bring your own washable plates, cups, and utensils. Also that evening, guides will take cavers along the trail to photograph the cave's splendors. Those not wanting to do the night tour, bring slides for showing in the Visitor Center. The next day I'll lead a 3-4 hour lights-on tour of the cave. Regular tours will also be available at no cost. There will be absolutely no off-trail access -- the cave is much too delicate. Camping with electricity and hot showers will be available.

Bring gloves, small army-type folding shovels, plastic 5-gallon buckets, and upright dollies if you have them. Carbide lamps are not allowed in the cave. Helmets will only be needed if you are digging in the pit. Lights will generally not be needed, although an elastic-band headlight may occasionally be useful. Do not bring significant others unless they are registered to work on the project. Sorry, but it has been problematic in the past.

There are 70 slots and they will fill fast. Don't despair if you end up on the waiting list, there are usually several cancellations due to work, illness, etc. Anyone who wants to come and help is welcome, but please let me know ASAP if you have to cancel!!! When you register, let me know if you're a vegetarian. To reserve your space or for more information, call, write, or e-mail me: George Veni, 11304 Candle Park, San Antonio, TX 78249-4421, 210-558-4403, gveni@satx.rr.com. More details are also available on the TSA web page, under the "Projects" link at <http://www.cavetexas.org/>

# TSA Fall 2002 Meeting and 2003 Elections

October 18-20, 2002

The Fall 2002 Texas Speleological Association (TSA) Meeting will be held at the Texas Cavers Reunion (TCR), October 18-20<sup>th</sup>. All TSA members and non-members are welcome to come to the meeting, however only TSA members can vote. As of press time a meeting agenda was not available.

This year's 2003 TSA election will not be held at TCR. Ballots will be mailed out to members the week after TCR. Be sure to VOTE for your 2003 TSA Officers!

The nominees for the 2003 TSA Executive Council are as follows:

Chair: Terry Holsinger Jim Kennedy	Vice-Chair: Aimee Beveridge
Secretary: Jerry Atkinson	Treasurer: Joe Ranzau

Officers begin their term effective January 1, 2003.

To join the TSA:

If you want to join send a check with the membership type (additional info on family members) and amount to:

TSA  
Box 8026  
Austin, TX 78713

Or online at  
<http://www.cavetexas.org/join.htm>

Single membership \$25/year  
Family \$35/year  
Libraries/Students \$20/year

Joining TSA will get you a subscription to The TEXAS CAVER as well as any TSA Special Activities Newsletters, plus the TSA Members' Mailing list.

# Caving Events Calendar, October 2002

compiled by R.D. Milhollin (mostly) with some help from D.R. Tomchick

- Oct 5, 6**      **Government Canyon State Natural Area Project:** 20 miles northwest of San Antonio. Survey, exploration, ridge-walking, enter property with group, contact in advance. **Contacts:** Marvin and Lisa Miller [mlmiller@gvtc.com](mailto:mlmiller@gvtc.com)
- Oct 11-13**     **Colorado Bend State Park Project:** long-time favorite of Mavericks, pretty close to home, semi-regular schedule, second weekend of the month, starting in October for 2002. **Contacts:** Terry Holsinger (515) 443-4241 [trhli@sprynet.com](mailto:trhli@sprynet.com) or Dale Barnard [Barnarddale@yahoo.com](mailto:Barnarddale@yahoo.com)
- Oct 18-20**     **Texas Cavers Reunion:** Annual gathering of Texas Cavers, share lies, cave legends, swap road-kill recipes, Fall 2002 TSA meeting. Horseshoe Ranch on the San Marcos River near Luling, Texas. \$20.00 admission, visit <http://www.cavetexas.org/tcr.htm> for all the info.
- Oct 21-28**     **TSA 2003 Elections:** Ballots mailed to all current TSA members. This is the umbrella organization that sponsors many caving projects including Colorado Bend, Government Canyon State Natural Area and Honey Creek Natural Area. It's not too late to join, see article on Page 10.
- Oct 26**        **Hard Bargain Dig Project:** All the stories you have heard are true! Will you be there when the big breakthrough is made? **Contacts:** Mark Gee (972) 557-1503 or Keith Heuss [Keith.Heuss@lcra.org](mailto:Keith.Heuss@lcra.org)
- Oct 26-27**     **High Guads Restoration Project (New Mexico):** On-going work in the Lincoln National Forest, spectacular scenery and caves. Last weekend of the month, caves include Three Fingers, Virgin, Pink Dragon, Pink Panther, Hidden, Wonderland, Black. **Contact:** Susan Herpin [sherpin@zianet.com](mailto:sherpin@zianet.com)
- Nov 2-3**        **11th Annual Caverns of Sonora Restoration Project:** See article on Page 10 of this issue.
- Nov 8-10**      **Colorado Bend State Park Project**
- Nov 9-10**      **Government Canyon State Natural Area Project**
- Nov 16**        **Hard Bargain Dig Project**
- Nov 25-29**     **Proyecto Espeleológico Sierra Oxmolon:** an annual project in the Aquismón area of México, several large caves that need to be surveyed. Limited number of spaces, apply in advance. **Contact:** Jerry Fant (512) 847-7245 [jerryfant@worldnet.att.net](mailto:jerryfant@worldnet.att.net)
- Nov 29-Dec 01** **High Guads Restoration Project**
- Nov 29-Dec 01** **CRF Carlsbad Caverns Thanksgiving Restoration Trip:** No prior caving experience is required for this project trip, good experience can be gained. CRF trips are "a little different", ask around or call Barbe **Contact:** Barbe Barker (505) 687-4270 [cloudcaver@pvtnetworks.net](mailto:cloudcaver@pvtnetworks.net)
- Dec 22-Jan 4**   **Exploration in the Sierra Madre Oriental of México:** Two week intensive exploration of high altitude caves in extreme southern Nuevo León and northeast San Luis Potosí. Limited number of participants, Vertical caving, survey, wilderness emergency medicine, and vehicle repair skills given priority. Spoken or written Spanish a plus. **Contact:** R.D. Milhollin (817) 834-2327 [rdmilhollin@academicplanet.com](mailto:rdmilhollin@academicplanet.com)
- Dec 26-30**     **Mexpeleo 2002:** an international caving event, will be held in Acahuizotla, Guerrero. Features trips to local caves during the day, and presentations on Mexican caving projects in the evenings. Included will be a number of spectacular through-trip stream caves. **Contact:** visit the Mexpeleo website at <http://purificacion.org/mexpeleo/>
- When Scheduled **CRF Fort Stanton Cave Restoration:** New Mexico restoration in a large, sensitive cave. **Contact:** Barbe Barker (505) 687-4270 [cloudcaver@pvtnetworks.net](mailto:cloudcaver@pvtnetworks.net)
- When Scheduled **Val Verde and Sutton County Caves:** Sensitive landowner relations, visits by appointment only. **Contact:** R.D. Milhollin (817) 485-0733 [rdmilhollin@academicplanet.com](mailto:rdmilhollin@academicplanet.com)
- When Scheduled **UT Grotto Trips and Vertical Training:** The UT Grotto (in Austin) is offering a full lineup of training trips this fall, aimed at new cavers. If you have a friend who's been wanting to get into caving, here's the chance. There are currently a dozen cave and vertical training trips listed on the schedule at <http://www.utgrotto.org>



## October 2002 Maverick Grotto Meeting

Don't miss the October 2002 Maverick Grotto meeting! Officers for 2003 will be nominated at this meeting, so if you DON'T want to be nominated for a job, show up!

The November 2002 Grotto meeting is elections month, a VERY good meeting to attend!

Should we have a December meeting this year?

Shall we have a Christmas Party, and where should it be?

Shall we purchase assorted caving gear for beginner's use on trips?

All these items and more will be discussed on October 8<sup>th</sup> at our usual meeting place, Smokey's Ribs, 5300 E. Lancaster, Fort Worth.

## Next month in the Maverick Bull

Trip report from Ed Goff on the August trip to Pozo de Montemayor in Nuevo León, México.

Part II of the Maverick TAG 2002 trip, by Chris Hall and R.D. Milhollin.

New member profiles of Jennifer Peplinski and Roger Mercer.

Trip reports from Colorado Bend and Caverns of Sonora Restoration Project (any volunteer reporters out there?).

Nominees for Maverick Grotto 2003 offices.

Results of TSA elections.

Maverick Grotto  
c/o Diana Tomchick  
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Dallas, TX 75206