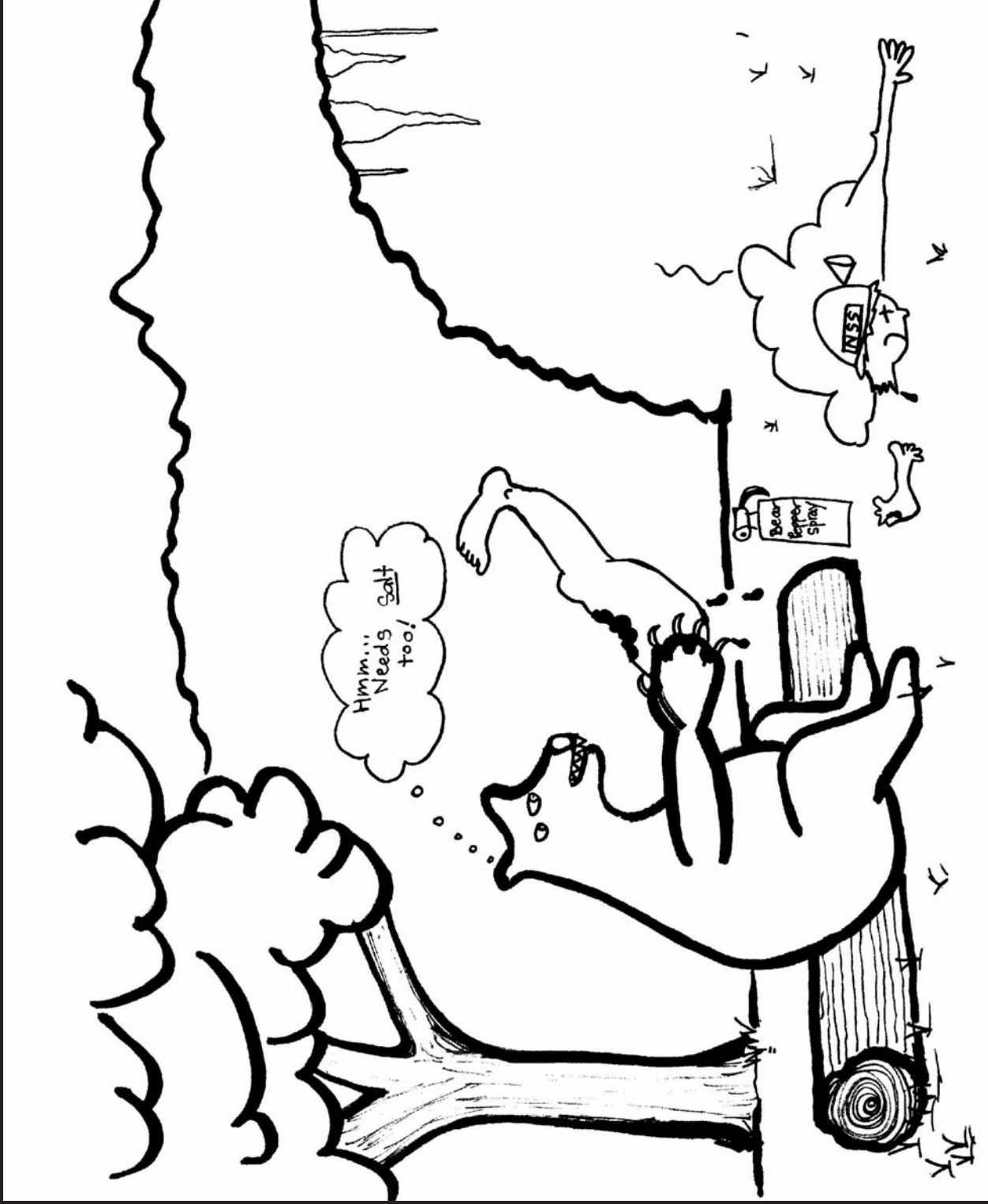


METROPLEX CAVERNS NEWS

THE

October 2003



A Combined Monthly Newsletter of the Ft. Worth Maverick & DFW Grottos

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The Metroplexcavers News is a joint monthly newsletter of the Maverick & Dallas-Ft. Worth Grottos, both internal organizations of the National Speleological Society. 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 Metroplexcavers News 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 Metroplexcavers News at the address herein.

Exchanges: The Maverick & Dallas-Ft. Worth Grotto will exchange newsletters with other grottos. Contact the editor.

Complimentary Newsletters: The Maverick & Dallas-Ft. Worth Grottos will provide complimentary newsletters to persons or organizations that provide cave access (i.e. landowners) or otherwise provide assistance to cavers. The Maverick & Dallas-Ft. Worth Grottos 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 & Dallas-Ft. Worth Grottos 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.

Photos and Artwork

Cover illustration: "Montana Caving" by Laura Goff

Pages 5 (left), 9, 10 (upper left & lower right), 11 (upper left), 12 (upper & lower left): Bobby de Vos

Pages 5 (right), 7 & 8: Jeb Blakeley
Pages 10 (lower left & upper right) & 11 (lower left & right): Diana Tomchick
Page 12 (lower right): Ed Goff

Page 14: George Veni

About this issue

Welcome to the first installment of the Metroplexcavers News, a joint newsletter of the Maverick and Dallas-Ft. Worth grottos. Mike Pearson and I hope you like what you read and that you'll join us at one or both of the grotto meetings this month and in the future (Maverick - Tuesday, Oct. 14th, DFW - Wednesday, Oct. 22nd, see under respective "Grotto Info" for more details on times and locations). We have mailed this newsletter issue to members and visitors of both grottos, as well as to current NSS members of the North Texas region, in an attempt to attract people interested in caving to join our groups. We know you're out there, we'd like to meet and go caving with you!

This joint newsletter is an experiment that we may choose to repeat in 2004, as a way to facilitate communication between the two grottos and to foster cooperation (and even joint grotto caving trips!). It would help Mike and I a great deal if you provide us with some feedback on the contents of this issue, and if you'd like to see the joint newsletter repeated. Read and enjoy! -- Diana Tomchick

Editor's Acknowledgements

A special thanks goes to R.D. Milhollin, who did a great job as guest editor, printer and mailer of the September 2003 issue for the Maverick Bull while I was in Europe. -- DRT

DFW Grotto Info

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Relevant Cave-oriented Information

DFW Grotto Webpage
<http://www.dfwgrotto.org>

Metroplexcavers Group
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The Texas Caver
U.T. Station
Box 8026
Austin, TX 78713-8026
\$25/year

Texas Speleological Assoc.
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U.T. Station
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Austin, TX 78713-8026
\$25/year

National Speleological Society
<http://www.caves.org>
Cave Avenue Huntsville, AL 35810
\$33/year

Texas Cave Management Assoc.
<http://www.cavetexas.org/tcma/home.htm>
P.O. Box 202853
Regular- \$15 Austin, TX 78720-2853

The meeting site for the Dallas-Fort Worth Grotto is at Recreational Equipment Inc., 4515 LBJ Freeway, Farmers Branch, TX 75244. The phone number is (972) 490-5989.

Dallas/Ft. Worth Grotto 2003 Meeting Dates

October 22nd

November 19th
December - No Meeting., Grotto Xmas Party TBA
All meetings are at REI at 7 PM, upstairs in the Clinic Room.

Maverick Grotto Info

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.

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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Cave Rescue

Call collect (512) 686-0234

Visit the Maverick Grotto Web Site!

You'll find copies of previous newsletters, cave photos, and a current activities calendar at:

maverickgrotto.org

Maverick Grotto Member Address Change

Alan Goodman has a new address:

P.O. Box 11053
Boulder, CO. 80301

Alan would be happy to have Maverick Grotto members come to Colorado to go caving with him, so maybe there will be a trip planned for the warmer weather in the spring.

October Maverick Grotto Meeting

Agenda items discussed will include: officer nominations, electronic alternatives to receiving printed grotto newsletters, possibilities for vertical training, grotto T-shirts, end-of-year auction and fall & Christmas parties.

The program for the October meeting will be the second half of the vintage Devil's Sinkhole film that Bill Steele showed at the September meeting, and Pacific Crest Trail slides from Dan Smith.

Maverick Grotto Officer Nominations

Nominations for grotto officers will be accepted at the October 14th general meeting. Serving as an officer is a wonderful way to contribute to the grotto activities and if you think you're interested in volunteering some of your time, you won't regret it!

The following description of officer duties is excerpted from the Maverick Grotto Constitution:

1. The Chairperson will preside at grotto functions, delegate authority, and appoint committee chairpersons.
2. The Vice-Chairperson will function as the meeting program manager, in addition to presiding at grotto functions in the absence of the Chairperson.
3. The Secretary shall record minutes of the grotto functions, maintain all non-financial records, and provide the minutes to the editor for publication in the monthly newsletter.
4. The Editor shall be responsible for producing and mailing a monthly newsletter for the benefit of grotto members and subscribers.
5. The Treasurer shall keep accurate records of membership dues, newsletter subscriptions, and grotto expenses, as well as maintain an up-to-date list of all members and subscribers. This list shall be published annually in the May newsletter.
6. All elected officers must be current members of the National Speleological Society and must list the Maverick Grotto as their primary grotto affiliation.

If a nominee is not a current member of the National Speleological Society, he/she must join the NSS before assuming office on January 1st, 2004.

If you think you might be interested in helping to maintain the Maverick Grotto as a great caving group and have questions about a position, please contact any of the current officers.

Maverick Grotto September Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order after 7 p.m. by Ed Goff.

Visitors:

Two new (Stephanie and Donald Selby), several repeat, plus one friend of Ernie's that was hiding in the corner whom I overlooked (he didn't speak up). Sorry!

Reports from Officers:

Treasurer: \$1,225.77

Announcements:

Officer nominations are coming up in October, and elections will be in November.

Old Business:

No good gear has appeared yet on eBay to purchase for grotto gear (the grotto authorized R.D. Milhollin to bid on helmets and lights a couple of months ago). No news on T-shirt artwork.

New Business:

R.D. mentioned having a fall party. Ed suggested we go to TCR and have it there. Jay Jorden reportedly has offered his homestead for a possible DFW-Maverick fall party. Ed proposed we reverse the meeting order and do programs before business, since we have limited time and tend to ramble on during the business portion. This would also be as a courtesy to guest speakers/presenters who currently have to sit through our lengthy meetings. R.D. moved that we try it next month, which was unanimously approved. Bat Conservation International has asked for a contribution of money from the grotto. R.D. and Ed suggested we approach it like Great X: solicit individual contributions, and then vote whether to match with grotto funds.

New Members:

Bobby DeVos, Bill Steele and Dennis and Sharon Welch were voted in by a very, very close unanimous margin. Bobby bought a pitcher of beer, qualifying him for immunity from elected office next year (if he wants it). Interesting note: one of Bill's qualifying trips with a grotto member was in the 70s and another in the 60s!

Trip Reports and Trip Announcements:

Butch announced that Milo has good connections in San Saba County and can arrange trips; talk to Milo if interested. Butch also said that access to a ranch near CBSP might be arranged soon. R.D., Mark, Bobby, Diana, Dennis and Sharon went to the TSA Bustamante Labor Day restoration project. Mark took the Minas Golondrinas tour. Bobby, Dennis and Sharon visited the Birthday Passage in La Gruta del Palmito with Pete Strickland. RD and Diana opted to see the rock art site at Chiquihuitillo with Jay Jorden. Bobby, Bill Steele, Robin and Ed went to Honey Creek the first weekend of September. In spite of the bad air, Bobby and Robin did the through trip. Bill checked eight virgin domes with an extension ladder imported from Oklahoma. Ed went upstream to return to a going lead beyond the Mile-Long Crawl, but the air worsened significantly above the waterfall climb-up, and the push trip was aborted in favor of playing downstream. Bill has recently been to Duncan Field Cave in OK and a to a cave he's working to open in the Edward's Plateau, Texas. R.D. announced a cold, muddy, vertical Christmas trip in the Purificación highlands, a New Year's trip to the Aquismón area, and upcoming fall trips needing survey teams and dive sherpas. Mark Gee mentioned the annual Thanksgiving Proyecto Espeleológico Sierra Oxmolon trip near Aquismón. Butch promised

a Hell's Gate Dig trip after the first freeze dissipates the CO₂.

Program:

The after-meeting program was the first half of Bill's video of the legendary vintage Devil's Sinkhole film, shot in the late 40's.

October DFW Meeting

Officer Nominations will take place at the meeting. Program: Introduction to cave survey. Techniques and usage will be discussed, and a short hands-on opportunity if time allows.

DFW Grotto Officer Nominations

Nominations for DFW Grotto officers take place at the October meeting. If you know of anyone you would like to nominate as a grotto officer, come to the October meeting and nominate them. Nominees must be NSS members to qualify. Here is a list of the current officers:

CHAIRMAN: Will Harris. Leads the grotto meetings, acts as a liaison between the NSS and other caving organizations.

VICE-CHAIRMAN: Mike Pearson. Leads meetings in the chairperson's absence, and finds programs for monthly meetings.

SECRETARY: Jay Jorden. Takes notes at meetings, and supplies minutes to the newsletter editor for publication.

TREASURER: Pete Lindsley. Keeps track of paid grotto dues and grotto expenses.

LIBRARIAN: Mike Pearson. Maintains Grotto library of newsletters and documents.

QUARTERMASTER: Mark Gee. Keeper of grotto-owned equipment.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Mike Pearson. Compiles, publishes, and mails the grotto newsletter each month.

DFW Grotto September Meeting Minutes

Visitors: Greg Sparkman, Judah Epstein, Christie, Phillip and Victoria Williams.

Old Business: Joint October newsletter between Ft. Worth Maverick and DFW grottos discussed. Diana Tomchick is gathering data, trip reports, member profiles, caving calendar, and contact info.

New Business: A get together is planned for late October or early November. Date to be determined and notice sent by e-mail.

Upcoming trips: Ed Goff offered to lead a trip if a suitable cave could be located. Colorado Bend State Park project starts in October. A potential grotto trip to Austin is planned for October or November.

Trip reports: Mark Gee – Bustamante Restoration Project, San Saba County, Joe's Cave. Bill, Ed, and Bobby de Vos - Honey Creek Cave. Diana Tomchick - four different caves in the Slovak Republic. Sheila Knight - Vertical workshop at NSS convention.

Treasurer's report - \$1258.32

The after-meeting program was the second half of "Dark Planet," a film by Zeljko Malnar. The story of a trip to one of the world's deepest caves in the Kras Mountains of Yugoslavia, "Dark Planet" includes what's billed as the first footage of a fish that evolved in total darkness. The eerie music of the soundtrack inspired this poem by Ed Goff:

The water was cold.
It made us grow old.
But we had to be bold
For it was our wish,
To find the mysterious fish.

New Member Profile

Maverick Grotto

Bobby de Vos

Back when I was nine years old my dad took me backpacking in the Sierra Nevada mountain range of California, and I have been hooked on outdoor activities ever since. At that time, I lived in California, so the outdoor opportunities provided by California and my Boy Scout troop included camping, backpacking, snow and water skiing, kayaking, rock climbing, biking, and a little caving.

Then I moved to Atlanta to attend college at Georgia Tech.



Bobby de Vos in the Birthday Passage of La Gruta del Palmito, Bustamante, Nuevo León, México

Here I was involved in the school outdoor program, and continued many of the aforementioned activities, but on a bigger scale. The biggest trip was hiking the length of the Appalachian Trail, from Georgia to Maine, over three summers. I also started caving with this group in the late 90s, learning vertical caving techniques and eating lots of Mexican food after coming out of a cave. The impetus to go caving was seeing an "after-cave" picture of a group of students who were covered in mud, and thinking to myself, "this looks like fun."

In 2001 I moved to Texas to work for Wycliffe Bible Translators. My job is to write software that helps translators all over the world to produce better translations more quickly. While living in Texas I have participated in the Colorado Bend project, learning how to survey caves. Other caving trips have been to New Mexico, Oklahoma, Bustamante, Nuevo León and to other parts of Texas. Continuing to learn to survey and maybe some rescue work would be enjoyable.

New Member Profile

Maverick & DFW Grottos

Bill Steele NSS #8072 FE, CM, LB

I started caving in the early 60s in Ohio, and joined the National Speleological Society when I was 16 years old. While I was a teenager I caved in Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana. I went to college in Indiana and while there continued to go caving in Kentucky, including Mammoth Cave with CRF, Indiana, and pits and caves in Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia. I was one of the explorers and mappers of Ellison's Cave, Georgia, one of the deepest caves in the US.

My first trip to Mexico was in 1970, and I did Golondrinas, Guaguas, and several other very deep pits. In 1971 I explored and mapped Grutas de Juxtlahuaca, which at the time was the longest cave in Mexico, and is now a national park. I was very active in Mexican caving 1970 to 1996, including Sumidero Yochib, about which I published a book, and Sistema Huautla (1977 to 1994), about which I am presently finishing a book.

I caved every summer from 1974 to 1979 in wilderness mountain areas of Montana, exploring some of the deepest caves in the US on Silvertip Mountain.

I moved to Texas in 1976 and was active in projects at Honey Creek and Powell's Caves, the longest and second longest caves in the state. For five years I lived in Oklahoma, where I caved and in Arkansas. I moved to Irving in 2001.

With the NSS I've been an officer of three grottos, including chairman and editor, and served briefly on the NSS board. I was also involved with organizing three NSS conventions in 1973, 1978, and 1994. Currently I am the chairman of the NSS U S Exploration Committee, and a monthly columnist for the NSS News, interviewing prominent NSS members for Spelean Spotlight.

The letters behind my NSS number indicate that I am a fellow of the society, received the Certificate of Merit, and the Lew Bicking Award, awarded to one caver annually for exemplary cave exploration.

Personally, I'm single again, and I have two grown kids living in Austin. Professionally, I'm Associate Director of the Boy Scouts of America at their national headquarters in Irving. Besides caving, I like camping, backpacking, playing guitar, mountain biking, and gardening.



Bill Steele in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, Montana, July 2003.

Bad Air Detection

by Butch Fralia

"Bad air" is often the greatest danger that cavers expose themselves to during normal cave exploration. It is the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the cave atmosphere and is predominately in vertical caves or pits where there is little airflow to flush the carbon dioxide and keep oxygen levels in normal proportion. Carbon dioxide is a heavy gas which displaces oxygen, causing it to rise to some level above the carbon dioxide.

At the surface, oxygen represents 21% of atmospheric gas, OSHA has defined 19.5% oxygen as the point where oxygen content is sub-normal and a possible detriment to human health. Cavers have determined they can function quite well in oxygen levels of 17% though some cavers tend to experience headaches at this level. It should be also pointed out that oxygen deprivation is the primary cause of headaches in the first place. At levels below 17%, cavers experience blackouts. Some cavers may function in oxygen levels as low as 14% but this is greatly dependent upon the physiology of the person and the attempt to do so is highly discouraged.

For cavers frequenting bad air areas, oxygen meters are expensive with the less expensive models costing in excess of \$300, where the a lowly butane lighter can be purchased for 69 cents. Cavers frequenting the Hill Country of Texas and Arbuckle Mountain regions of Oklahoma, have long considered a butane lighter part of normal caving gear, and anytime a caver starts to pant, they start flicking their Bic. It is also known that carbide lamps tend to burn quite well when the human brain ceases to function.

During a Colorado Bend State Park volunteer work trip, the opportunity arose to study the butane lighter as a bad air detector and determine the oxygen levels required to cause it to exhibit an erratic flame and be completely extinguished. With the assistance of a state owned oxygen meter, and a cave with oxygen levels which dropped to 14%, research was conducted.

An area was located in which there was a degradation of oxygen levels over a distance of approximately 5'. The oxygen levels ranged from 20% down to 14% in this area. Using the oxygen meter, a profile of the oxygen level was determined and test begun. At 18.5%, the butane lighter began to flicker and a noticeable gap occurred between the jet and the flame. At 17.5%, there was a gap of approximately one inch between the jet and the flame but the lighter could be extinguished and relit. At 17% oxygen the lighter extinguished and could not be relit.

The measurements described were performed by Keith Heuss, who in another life is a professional technician whose livelihood depends on his ability to make precision measurements with a variety of precision (and not so precision) instruments. The test satisfied all present as

to the viability of using a butane lighter for a simple oxygen meter for cave atmosphere evaluation. It is suggested that the butane lighter be included in the normal cave gear, especially when caving in known bad air areas.

Where are the cabooses?

by Bill Steele

Eighteen years ago I wrote the following two sentences in a published article:

"As the group travels in a cave, have the most experienced cavers go first and last, a technique known as *caboosing*. Should the party become scattered, the caboose can bring the stragglers along." In those days there were still cabooses at the end of trains. However, there is not always an experienced caver at the end of a group of cavers. Based on my observations, more often than not the most experienced, strongest cavers leave less capable cavers behind and rush back to the surface. The lack of a caboose, or a knowledgeable, capable caver at the end of a group can cause problems. Here's a recent example:

In early September I went to Honey Creek Cave, Texas' longest cave. Caving friends of mine from another state joined me and conducted their own swim-through trip from the shaft entrance to the natural entrance. One of them had done the trip before, and he said that he was confident in leading his group of nine cavers. I did not join them and instead floated an extension ladder downstream from the shaft and used it to climb several virgin domes.

Several of the cavers doing the through-trip had difficulties. The caver among them who had previously done the trip took off and was only seen again when he had been out of the cave long enough to get alarmed and go back in to see if everything was all right, which it wasn't. Another strong caver on the trip also "high-tailed" it. The slower, older, perhaps even more curious cavers who wanted to move at their own pace and savor the experience, who were not in a hurry to see how fast they could do it, were left to fumble their way through the breakdown and low air spaces. It would have been better if there had been a caboose.

The caboose concept in caving is quite simple. If you are in a cave, which by its very nature is likely to cause people to get strung out, have the strongest two cavers be first and last. Deep multi-drop caves almost always cause cavers to get spread out. All it takes is one caver in the middle of the procession of cavers to cause the group to be split into two groups. A strong caver at the rear who knows the cave, or can fix people's lights for them if they have a problem, or is good for boosting morale if needed, is much more beneficial then getting out of the cave first, bragging about how long they have been out, and/or asking the age-old question that no one likes to hear, "What took you so long?"

Geezers Plus One

by Linda Gough, Adam Zuber, Bill Steele,
and Ed Goff

Linda Gough, Sheffield, England

My first sight of the pit in Limestone Peak's hanging valley was at dusk on a fairly chilly October day. I had climbed up Limestone Peak on a reconnaissance with Jim Chester—after a tip-off from the local horse packer about a possible pit below the summit.

It was late in the day and the hike in had involved scrambling up some cliff bands and thrashing through fairly thick vegetation. We were keen to make it back to the main trail before dark and had decided on a last-ditch turnaround time of four p.m.—whether



Back, left to right: Adam Zuber, Jim Chester,
David Brown, Linda Gough
Front, left to right: Bill Steele, Jim Smith, Ed Goff

or not we'd reached the summit. It was now after five and we were running farther down the ridge beyond the summit—trying to get a better view of what seemed to be an impressive rift about 300 feet below....

My experience of Montana cave exploring is quite different from anything I have done in Britain—where even the harder-to-reach caves are rarely more than an hour or two from the nearest road. Many of the areas in Montana are true wilderness, remote and sometimes difficult to access even without carrying caving gear. Mostly this seems to entail many hours of hiking in spectacular and rugged scenery, long drives back home in the middle of the night ... and no trips to the pub.

Jim and I returned to the area the following weekend, a day before I had to fly back to England. This time we decided to approach along the trail by the Spotted Bear River then attempt to cut up the hillside below the hanging valley. Again we ran out of daylight and opted for an "early" night with plans to return the following summer.

In late July 2003 we did return, this time bringing reinforcements, including my fellow compatriot David Brown. We camped at a point on the Spotted Bear River where Jim and I had turned back the previous autumn. The hanging valley was a stiff hike (a touch of British understatement here) about 2,500 feet up and the pit

when we reached it was indeed a fine entrance—well worth the trip.

Although blocked with snow the potential is tremendous, and Jim Chester and Adam Zuber hope to return again in October to try and dig a way through the snow. We will wait to see how they get on....

Adam Zuber – Seattle, Washington

Let me start out by saying that I am 18 years old and am the son of a famous Montana caver, Ronald Zuber. For many of my childhood years I was always interested and greatly intrigued by my father's stories. Among those stories were some of great adventures in the Montana wilderness. As I got older we would talk about his journeys and explorations. This prompted me to ask numerous questions about caving. After these discussions, I caught the caver's disease. I needed to explore and find out for myself.

This trip was the start of a life-pursuit of cave exploration and adventure. It was my first trip to a cave or pit, and what an impressive pit it was. We camped near the Spotted Bear River in the beautiful Bob Marshall Wilderness, Montana. From this camp we trekked up to our new found pit. For three days in a row we gained almost 3,000 feet in elevation and sweated enough to water the plants along the way. For me, some of the older folk were too slow for a strapping young man like myself to walk behind. As our hikes progressed, I quickly found out that these older (experienced would be a better term) people could keep a good pace and wear out any strapping young man.

When I saw the pit for the first time I found myself standing on the edge, not saying a word, thinking how bad I wanted to go in. The pit is a dream! It's about 70 or 80 feet long and probably 40 feet wide. Bill described it as "a fine entrance." We all were in awe of its beauty. The only problem is that this gorgeous pit is conveniently plugged with snow.

This represented a challenge. This particular obstacle could be overcome with shovels, dynamite, a giant magnifying glass, or a flame-thrower. Besides that, every one of us said that there has to be some really great cave underneath all that snow.

Referred to as "the dream team" (by Linda Gough), Jim Chester and I are going back in October to dig. We decided that digging would be the safest, most obvious route. There is a lot of snow to dig, but this "fine entrance" looks to be worth our sweat.

Bill Steele, Irving, Texas

My trip this year was a return to familiar territory. I caved on Silvertip Mountain in 1974, 1976, 1977, 1979, and 1999. In 1975 I went to Green Fork Falls Cave in the adjacent Scapegoat



Ed Goff approaches the edge of
A Fine Entrance upon its discovery.

Wilderness. Three of those years I spent six to eight weeks at a time in "The Bob."

A big consideration that sets caving in Montana wildernesses apart from anywhere else I've ever caved is that they are habitat for grizzly bears. Nowadays it's much more of a factor than it was in the 70s because grizzlies are no longer hunted. One estimate is that their population has tripled. We didn't see one this year, though in 1999 at Silvertip we saw two griz without incident. We did see logs which had been ripped apart and joked about angering them as we reached out and plucked delectable huckleberries as we hiked. Huckleberries, which explode with a wonderfully delicious flavor, happen to be a favorite of the mighty griz.

Our means of defense against these 1,500 pound behemoths, the top of the food chain, was grizzly pepper spray. Costing \$39.95, and looking like mace times ten, we wore it sidearm style, ready to quick draw and nail a griz once it was charging and within the spray's 20 foot range. Jim Smith said that he slept with his hand on his can.

In 1979 I hired a local hunting guide with a small plane to fly me up the Spotted Bear River to Silvertip Creek and up Silvertip Creek to Silvertip Mountain. We circled the mountain and I got



A Fine Entrance as it's being rigged.

some good aerial photographs, and then flew over Limestone Peaks looking for caves and pits. As we flew over the top of Limestone Peak we spotted a hanging valley and what looked from a distance like it might be a pit. As we neared the karst feature I put my camera to my eye. Just then an alarm sounded in the cockpit, so I lowered the camera and asked what that meant. The pilot said it was the stall alarm and we would have to pick up speed immediately. We

banked steeply, the plane blocked my view of the pit, and we dropped in altitude into the Spotted Bear River valley to pick up air speed. I never forgot that lead. I had a lot of interest in the hanging valley of Limestone Peak when Montana's Jim Chester wrote me and told me that he and Linda Gough had climbed to a cliff above the pit a couple of years ago. They got within sight of it and thought it looked good enough to devote a trip to do it.

Ed Goff responded to an invitation I posted on CaveTex and we drove his Isuzu Trooper to NW Montana. On the way we picked up Jim Smith at the Denver airport. We had left Dallas at six p.m. on Friday, and early in the afternoon on Sunday we hefted our backpacks and headed into the federally designated wilderness area. Three days in a row we climbed between 2,000 and 3,000 feet in elevation from our camp on the Spotted Bear River.

As we approached the pit in the hanging valley we quickened

our pace because of how fine it looked. Seventy-five feet long, 40 feet wide, its walls dropped vertical, reminding me of photographs I've seen of an entrance of one of the world's deepest caves in the French Pyrenees. But it was snow-plugged. I'm convinced that there is a major cave there, fed by glacier runoff during the Ice Ages, and snowmelt since then. However, it will take a lot of digging to get to it.

Ed Goff, Dallas, Texas

I was moping around the house on a Saturday, trying to think of how I could invent an extra week of vacation to join a two-week Montana caving trip coming up. I had heard about the deep alpine caves of Silvertip Mountain in "The Bob," and I badly wanted to go. But most of my time off was already scheduled or used up for the year. There was no getting around it: I could only squeeze out one free week. About the time I gave up hope on the two-week Montana trip and accepted that I wouldn't see Montana for another year, I noticed a CaveTex message in my inbox, from Bill Steele. He was soliciting participants for a ONE-week caving trip to Montana.

Anyone familiar with the Texas caver e-mail forum knows that trips are almost never announced on CaveTex. When they are, it sometimes results in volleys of abuse directed at the announcer, a canceled trip, or even the cave being closed. I thought: What's the catch? Well, the catch turned out to be that I would have to drive my truck, but I thought this was an okay deal to get to go to Montana after all. Bill bought me lunch in the cafeteria at the Boy Scouts of America headquarters, where he works. He showed me a full-page color printout of the hanging valley with its tantalizing sinkhole that Linda and Jim Chester had photographed from atop the cliff. I was hooked.

After an almost 48-hour near-sleepless odyssey that included running out of gas in the middle of the night in the middle of nowhere (thanks to Bill, but quickly rectified thanks to his magic hitchhiking thumb); a dead battery (thanks to me); a detour to the Denver International Airport to pick up Jim Smith from Georgia; a flat tire (thanks to an evil drywall screw); and Montana skies filled with choking, stinging smoke from forest fires



Ed Goff and Jim Smith look for a way around the snow plug in A Fine Entrance.

burning out of control, I was beginning to wonder if it had been such an okay deal. But we were finally there, and once the smoke cleared to reveal the stunning Montana scenery and I started to get to know the others on the trip, I had no more doubts about having decided to go—this was a great bunch of people, and a great place.

We were one 18-year-old javelin champion/first-time caver, five variously-grizzled veteran world-class cavers—and me. It turned

out my age, 34, was exactly halfway between Adam's 18 summers and what I guessed was the likely median age of the rest of the group, 50. It was an interesting perspective being in the middle this way, the only thirty-something among forty-to-fifty-somethings and a teenager. Watching Adam hurling rocks to the opposite bank of an impossibly wide glacial lake made me look back 16 years and lament my wasted youth. Bill's and Smith's and Chester's and Jeb's incredible stories, as well as Linda's and Dave's cheeky British cheer and relentless metronome-like legs, made me resolve not to waste the next 16. (Not to mention Jim Chester, the senior member of the group, hiking me into the ground on our fabulous mini-death-march ridgewalk on the last day in The Bob, when everyone else went caving near the trailhead. My feet have never swelled up like that before.)

You might think that driving across a continent, hiking with a heavy pack, and climbing a mountain just to discover a hole filled with snow might lead to disappointment. But somehow I'm glad the Fine Entrance didn't let us in on the first knock. It would have been too easy. And anyway, I enjoyed every minute of it.

Bustamante Restoration Project

Aug. 29 - Sept. 1, 2003

by Diana Tomchick and Bobby de Vos

Diana Tomchick

"What should we bring on our first caving trip to Mexico?" Dennis Welch asked R.D. Milhollin. "Sharon and I would like to be prepared, and it's our first 'tent-camping' trip in a long while."

I had stopped by R.D.'s house on the Tuesday evening before the Labor Day weekend trip to Bustamante, Mexico to discuss plans for the trek and general grotto business. When Dennis called, R.D. put him on the speakerphone so we could have a 3-way conversation. Dennis and Sharon were new to the grotto and new to caving, and R.D. had met them at the San Saba County project spearheaded by Bill Tucker and Milo Marks. That weekend R.D. had encouraged them to carpool/caravan with us to Bustamante, as an ideal introduction to the Texas caver community and to caving in Mexico. Dennis and Sharon were planning on driving their truck, and Bobby de Vos and I would be riding in R.D.'s pickup. We just needed to work out the details of what time to leave, how much camping gear and food to bring, and remembering to bring the appropriate personal identification and car papers for the border crossing.

Last year's Restoration Project of La Gruta del Palmito was my first trip to Mexico, and I had a great time. Only one thing had marred the trip, which was the late departure time for the border. When we arrived at 12:30 am on Saturday, we had to wait for four hours at the crossing in Nuevo Laredo to obtain the car permit. We arrived in the campground at in Bustamante at 8 am, just in time for the trip to the cave! I vowed I'd do anything in my power to prevent this from happening again, so I was urging everyone to meet at R.D.'s house on Friday morning at 10:00 am. With all of the delays and possible mishaps during such a trip, it never hurts to start a little early, and we should be able to cross at the Columbia Bridge by 4:00 pm if we left the Metroplex by noon.

On Wednesday morning R.D. sent an email message to

Bobby and I—Jay Jorden needed a ride to Bustamante, would it be okay with us if we squeezed four people into his extended cab pickup? "Sure," I answered, "I'm short and Bobby's young, so the lack of legroom shouldn't bother us too much." It would be great fun to have two 8-10 hour drives with Jay's addition to the friendly conversation, so we were set.

On Friday morning we met and loaded down both trucks with loads of gear and everything went smoothly, even though I was stung on the ankle by a bee (fortunately I'm not allergic to them). We equipped each truck with FRS radios and agreed to stick



Bobby de Vos prepares to clean graffiti from cave formations.

close to each other, as Dennis and Sharon had never crossed the border with a vehicle. As usual, the radios came in handy when we were bored and wished to comment and joke with our compatriots. Much discussion of speleopolitics ensued in our truck, as Jay is a font of information about Texas caving and the NSS, so we rarely experienced a dull moment.

The drive to the border was delightfully uneventful, and we arrived at the Columbia Bridge around 4 pm to find hordes of Texas cavers on their way south. Who would guess the odds that we would arrive at the border at same time as former Metroplex caver Dave "Cave" McClung? After a half hour of laughing and joking, the border officials finally despaired and handed us all of our tourist visa paperwork and exhorted us to fill it out and "vamonos." This meant we still had to wait for the auto drivers to stand inline for the vehicle papers, so when Dave offered me a beer, how could I refuse? We spent the rest of the time commiserating with a father/son duo that had been trying since 2 am that morning to obtain permission to take a helicopter (on a trailer) back to the US, with little success. As luck would have it, all the drivers returned to their vehicles at the same time as the helicopter duo obtained their long-desired permission, so we were off to our respective countries.

We stopped for a leisurely dinner with Dave McClung and the aforementioned cavers at a nice little restaurant about an hour south of the border. Dave and Jay delighted and regaling Dennis and Sharon with horror stories about driving in Mexico. I watched from the opposite end of the table as they laughed nervously, especially when Jay would affirm, "every word Dave says is true." I figured they'd eventually learn that cavers are a rather flaky bunch in general, and Dave is especially good at embellishing his tales.

After dinner we still had several hours to go until we reached our destination. R.D. continued to drive, Jay and Bobby slept, and I tried to stay awake and make conversation to keep R.D. from falling asleep. We arrived at midnight and I didn't get my tent up and to sleep until almost 2 am. The only space left for

my tent was close to a small waterfall in the stream from the spring, which was higher this year due to recent rainfall. Several



Justin Shaw displays bare-footed ascension techniques while cleaning particularly nasty graffiti.

people laughed at my choice of tent site and warned that I might get flooded out. "Better to have it near the noisy water," I said, "than to have it next to the loud drunk cavers." As a result I slept better than most people that weekend, and no one stumbled into my tent.

R. D. had wandered around the campsite and discovered Felicia Vreelend (from Austin) and her 10-year old daughter Erin struggling to erect a very large, complex tent. Felicia was so grateful for R.D.'s help she offered to cook us breakfast the next day. This offer eventually was extended to additional cavers and more

meals, so that it seemed that Felicia was feeding half the campground. Everyone loved her cooking and she loved feeding us.

After breakfast we were off to the cave for cleanup duty! Bobby, R.D. and I wound up cleaning formations way in the back of the cave with Aimee Beveridge, Fofu Gonzalez (from Monterrey, Mexico) and Justin Shaw (currently of Sonora, TX), Dennis and Sharon helped clean in an intermediate location, and Jay and Dave McClung worked on the electrical lighting systems. I almost fell in the pool of cave water the first time I refilled my spray bottle, but otherwise the trip was enjoyable but uneventful. Fofu and I spent some time discussing the missing Goff family (who had to back out of this year's trip) and Mexican caving. He and I and R.D. continued this discussion until we were forced to exit the cave at around 5:30 p.m., whereupon we met up with the rest of the Metroplex crew. Dennis and Sharon were tired but happy and Bobby was fired up about



Sharon Welch after her first cave restoration trip.

the possibility of visiting the cave the next day. Other options for Sunday trips included a visit to Minas Golondrinas, which left the town square at 7:30 a.m., and a visit to the prehistoric rock art site of Chiquihuitillo. Jay, R.D. and I soon settled on sleeping in and visiting the rock art, which I had never seen.

One of the delights of camping during the Bustamante trip is the opportunity to swim and relax in the natural spring, which

is poetically referred to in Mexico as an "ojo de agua" (literally translated as "eye of the water"). It's an opportunity to not only clean away some of the cave grime, but to meet and converse

with other cavers, both old friends and new acquaintances. After an hour or so of yakking and drinking beer, Felicia's dinner was ready to eat so we gathered around her campsite with plates in hand. Unfortunately, someone had fed one of the local goat herder's dogs while at her campsite, so now all of the dogs in the area gathered along with us. We managed to keep them away from the food and have a good time observing their antics, too. Once the meal was eaten and dinner dishes cleaned up, Felicia convinced us to pile in our vehicles and head into town to "check things out." Not much was going on, so we returned to the campground at 11 p.m. to discover several Bexar Grotto cavers were still drinking and talking loudly near our tents. "Better go check out the spring, I won't get to sleep for another hour or so anyway," I thought, so Jay and I grabbed some beer and left. Who should we discover there but Dave? Our party was now complete, and we even had numerous locals who came to witness our clothing-optional late night swim. By 1 a.m. I left Jay and Dave to return to my tent, and fortunately the Bexar Grotto was now asleep.



Dennis Welch after a hard day of cleaning cave formations.

Bobby de Vos

While many of the cavers were headed off to see Minas Golindrinas on Sunday morning, Pete Strickland led a small group of cavers to the Birthday Passage in the La Gruta del Palmito. This group included Dennis and Sharon Welch, Justin Shaw, Bobby de Vos, and one other caver.

Justin started up the slick flowstone with a rope, and after some difficulty with the slippery slope reached a ledge. Pete followed him up, and then continued to climb as Justin belayed him. After two hours, Pete reached a second ledge and rigged a large diameter rope so the rest of us could haul ourselves up the sloping flowstone.

We headed off to the Sand Room, which was most impressive. The ceiling is covered in soda straws, stalactites, helictites, and lion's tails. One of the helictites had grown together with two other helictites that twisted together like a braided rope, over an inch in diameter overall.

On the way out of the Sand Room Justin pointed out a very



Justin Shaw admires a complex formation in the Birthday Passage of La Gruta del Palmito.

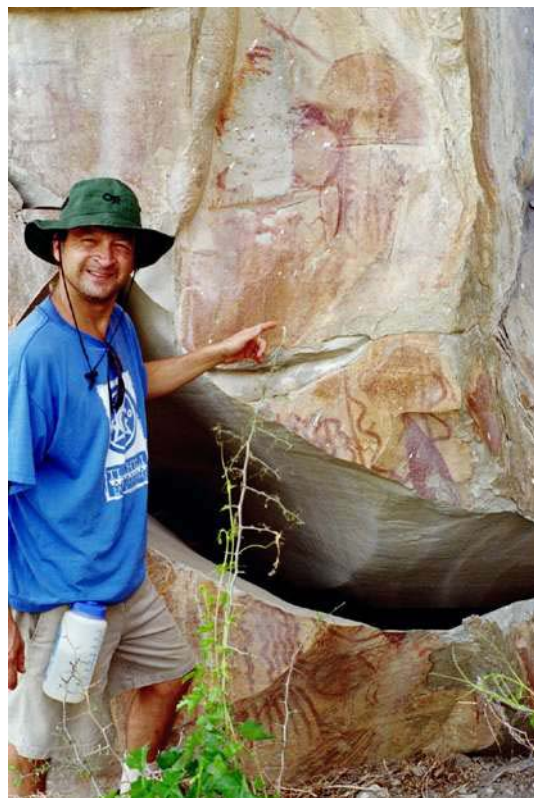
unusual helictite (see photo). A soda straw was coming down off a small, twisted helictite that had come from another helictite, which had in turn come from another soda straw. The whole formation had made a spiral. Justin was very impressed, which



Pete Strickland in the Birthday Passage.

then slid down the rope and the sloping flowstone. After derigging the rope, we headed out of the cave and towards the banquet. After washing up, we managed to get to the banquet just before the food was served.

Diana Tomchick



R.D. Milhollin points out the "bad karma rock art" that doomed this rock to fracture.

up and accompany Felicia on a brief photo tour of the canyon, where we discovered a secluded downstream swimming hole, complete with travertine dams, deep pools and even a rope

says quite a bit, since he now works at the Caverns of Sonora as a tour guide.

Pete led us to the Cloud Room, where large, spherical formations hung down from the ceiling. On the way out we admired rooms full of stalactites, stalagmites, and columns.

We exited the Birthday Passage, and

At 8 a.m. the next morning I stumbled sleepily out of my tent to discover that Bobby, Dennis and Sharon were leaving with Pete Strickland for a tour of the Birthday Passage section of La Gruta del Palmito. "Oh well, I'll have something to look forward to on next year's trip, have fun," I told them, and I went in search of breakfast. Felicia was almost ready for us to eat, so I woke up Jay and R.D., and we spent a deliciously relaxing hour eating, lounging and discussing caving topics. We eventually decided to clean

swing! We decided on the spot that this would be our final destination for the evening.

We returned with Felicia and Erin to the campground, and then Jay, R.D. and I headed off for the rock art site. We relied upon Jay's memory to lead the way, as we had dawdled so long that the organized trip had left more than an hour ahead of us. Since the cassette player in R.D.'s truck refused to accept Jay's tapes, and the radio reception in this area of Mexico was limited, I suggested that Jay serenade us with cave ballads. Jay was delighted, and the time passed quickly as he tried to teach me the lyrics to such classics as "One Ton of Guano" (sung to the tune of "Guantanamero"). R.D. proved especially adept at on-the-spot invention of appropriate and funny cave ballad lyrics to popular head-banging music.

Before we knew it we were at the rock art site and ready to climb the mountain, just in time to meet the organized trip on their return. Terry Raines told us we should pay special attention to the pictograph that reminded him of a particular factory in Monterrey, as it resembled a building with a smoke stack. R.D. blazed a virtually vertical trail up the mountain, through the prickly pear and lechuguilla, as Jay and I struggled to follow. Once at the top we soon discovered that the best art was found near the most comfortable ledges—which seemed only logical, given the



R.D. and Jay Jordan relax during the Sunday evening banquet.

amount of time someone would spend to create the pictographs. It seemed as though the images became increasingly bizarre, and culminated with the afore-mentioned factory image which was next to a pictograph that resembled an alien spaceship. "I wonder what these people were smoking when they created these images," I told R.D. and Jay.

On our return to the campground we were caught in a small downpour, which was localized to the rock art valley, and never made it to the campground. I was especially happy that the water didn't rise; I didn't want to have to chase my tent down the valley. We spent another hour lounging in the ojo, where Jay introduced me to Carl Kunath and Jerry Atkinson, before dressing and returning to town for the banquet. Dave McClung informed us that there had been a "goring" incident on the Minas Golondrinas tour—a bull had attacked a red mini van! When told that we had visited the rock art site instead, he asked, "Did you see the Mother Ship?" which made me laugh.

The banquet was held at a city facility that combined outdoor activities (swimming pool, swing sets, playground) with an indoor building with cooking facilities. Everyone quickly decided to move the chairs and tables out of the building and hold the festivities outside in the pleasant evening air. When the food was served I somehow wound up at the end of the line (as I did last year),

probably because I was too busy talking, and thus ended up with very little to eat. I decided that worse things could happen, such as having too much food and not enough beer, so I settled for a large bean burrito and another Tecate.

Gift donations were handed out to the participants after dinner, which resulted in some good-natured heckling, as at least one man received gifts intended for a woman (such as a pair of dangly, feminine earrings). Terry Raines initially received a map of La Gruta del Palmito, which he politely refused as he already owned one, and then was awarded a copy of his own 2004 Caver's Calendar.



Felicia Vreeland

When the last gifts were handed out, Bobby, R.D., Jay and I decided to go in search of ice cream. Along the way we encountered James Lopez (of Austin), and asked him to join us at the secret swimming hole later. This appealed to him, as his weekend-long attempts to woo a young woman from the Bexar Grotto had been unsuccessful.



R.D., Dennis, Jay, Diana and Mac the Cave Dog, after being rescued by Dennis & Sharon with gasoline for R.D.'s truck.

After I told him about our rock art trip, he asked, "Did you see the Mother Ship?" and I realized that James and Dave share a lot in common.

It took R.D. and I three attempts to find the secret swimming hole on our return trip to the campground. "It's now dark and we were headed in the opposite direction this morning" was our excuse to James. "Trust us, you'll love it." James took such a liking to the swimming hole, and especially the rope swing that we simply cleared a place for him to repeatedly jump in. Much beer was consumed and jokes and tall tales were told before we became too cold to stay in any longer. Upon return to the campsite, Pete Strickland found us and wondered, "Why weren't you skinny-

dipping with us in the ojo?" and we asked him why he hadn't joined us the previous evening. He then chastised us for scandalizing the locals, and we assured him that they didn't seem so scandalized, in fact "entertained" seemed like a more appropriate term. We excitedly described the new swimming hole and Pete thought long and hard on this before saying, "You'll have to show me this place next year."

The next morning we ate our last meal from the Vreeland camp kitchen and packed our gear in time to avoid the rain, which followed us back to the border. The crossing was uneventful, and Dennis and Sharon decided they would drive a little faster so we soon lost radio contact with them. A few miles past the Columbia Bridge R.D.'s truck ran out of gas. Fortunately Bobby was able to get Dennis on his cell phone, and they graciously agreed to return to us with a few gallons of gas. In surprisingly short notice we saw their truck and we were hopping up and down in glee (well, at least I was hopping), we were Saved!

We arrived at R.D.'s house around 10 p.m., repacked our gear into our vehicles and headed home, but not before wishing everyone well and promising to "do it again next year."

Vertical Practice Session Trinity River Bridge, Ft. Worth September 28, 2003

On Saturday, September 29th, a group of Metroplex cavers descended upon the Trinity River Bridge in Ft. Worth for a vertical practice session. Around 10 people actively participated in practicing ascending, descending, crossing rebelay and various other vertical skills. An additional 5-10 people and dogs watched and helped pass out cold drinks. More photos from the session can be found on the Maverick Grotto web page, www.maverickgrotto.org



Diana Tomchick was observed biting the head off an unknown Metroplex caver during the September Vertical Training Session. The Horror!

Notes from Cheve (Part II)

by R.D. Milhollin NSS # 29962

(Note from R.D.: As of press time the National Geographic Society was still holding all the photos taken on the Cheve 2003 Expedition pending a decision whether to publish a full article on the project. Once the decision has been made, the photos will be returned to the photographers. Once photos begin to circulate I will try to get some for publication in the *Maverick Bull*.)

The main exploration crew had surfaced two days before, and was not planning on going back down for several more days. Life on the surface was very pleasant, more appreciated than usual after eight or nine days underground. Little things like sunlight on your back, a regulated and obvious difference between day and night, and stars at night make one just a little reluctant to go back down for a while. Knowing we had one window of opportunity to make a long cave trip before we had to be back on the surface to prepare for the trip back to Texas, we began to feel around for a project we could do with a small group. That group was Philippe from France, Melanie Alspaugh (originally from San Antonio and currently from France), Lewis Carroll from Washington D.C., and myself. Bill Stone agreed that we could proceed down to Camp Three and pick up dive cylinders left over from the 1995 expedition, and some climbing rope and other used gear left at that deepest camp that would no longer be used during the remainder of the expedition. Unfortunately, since we were all new to the cave, there would be no opportunity for original exploration or survey.

We took all morning to pack. I took a close look, then another, at everything I put in the cave pack. How much did it weigh, was there an absolute need for that item, could another item do double duty so only one was needed, could a lighter one be substituted instead, how many meals would be eaten, how much for each meal, how much would we need to be completely filled, but not wasteful or gluttonous? All these questions flashed by, over and over again as we packed and repacked in the morning shade. Each camp had a stove with limited fuel and treated water. We needed a light cook pot to boil water and each team member needed a bowl and a spoon and a cup. We packed soup and dehydrated meals, in a variety so we could trade around and not get too bored with the same thing over and over. Bill showed how he put his dehydrated food through a "salad shooter" food processor to further reduce the volume needed in the half-gallon Nalgene wide-mouth containers we used to transport food. Nalgene was one of the expedition sponsors, and a small mountain of used containers was sitting around the cooking tent once everyone from the last team had dumped out their packs. A few of the experienced expeditioners pulled me aside and advised not crunching the food, since what little texture there was in the food would be destroyed, and hence one of the few small non-caving related enjoyments. Bill advised that each team member choose one small luxury to take along, since at camp the pleasure it provided would be of huge enjoyment. I chose Earl Grey tea bags, since they were light and would be easy to carry, and if I left them in with the communal food then the Brits may have exhausted them before I would have been able to return to the surface. By around noon all of us were beginning to look as though we were to make the trek down into what Bill already realized was going to be the deepest cave in the hemisphere once the numbers were properly placed in the map database. One of the last preparations was deciding what to wear into the cave. The pre-expedition notes indicated a need for expedition-weight polypropylene and PVC-coated caving suits, especially as we would be passing through, or very near to high waterfalls on the way to Camp One. But we had seen Bill and a few others

venturing downward in reinforced shorts over medium-weight underwear. I opted for a compromise: medium weight with the oversuit. For the first several hours of steep downward climbing things were hot, but I did not regret the cumbersome PVC suit later that night.

We made our way down the five short-rigged pitches leading to the Birthday Passage, and carefully made our way around and down the steeply stacked boulders with our loaded packs. After several closely and deeper spaced drops we were facing the Elephant Shaft, at about 165 feet the second deepest single drop we would encounter, and rigged with only three rebelays. Three hours had passed when we began negotiating through the Angel Falls series, not a major thing, but meticulous and a little time consuming unless you had done it a lot. At the bottom things got a little wet as we waded through a spray canyon in to the Camel's Hump and down the last short drop for a time. About thirty minutes ahead, through a serious boulder breakdown, was the site of Camp One, which had been moved down to the previous site of Camp Two to accommodate a larger number of people staying there during the previous several days. It is interesting to note at this point, that while all this was going on down below and we were on the surface speculating, what we came up with for the number of sleeping bags and number of cavers led us to believe that there would have been a necessary regimen of teams working and teams sleeping, as on a navy ship, with two cavers sharing the same bag but at different times. Interesting idea, and perfectly workable, since bags were in place at the camps and every caver carried with them a personal bag liner to keep the inside of the bags dry. It turned out this was idle speculation since we had miscounted either the number of people entering and leaving the cave, or the number of bags supposed to be at each camp.

We continued from Camp One down the Giant's Staircase, which was about an hour and a half hard hike, to the top of Sacussem's Well, the deepest drop. It was rigged with somewhere between 13 and 15 rebelays, which everyone remembered differently when we got down to writing notes. It took a couple of hours for all cavers and gear to descend, even though we could all be on the rope at the same time. At the bottom the cave turned wet, and stayed wet for hours. Here was where the PVC suits were most appreciated. We waded down a short way until the passage narrowed to the point that the through way went up into an aven, most likely a relic passage that was cut downward by the rushing water [Editor's note: "aven" is a British term for a vertical hole in the roof of a passage, sometimes leading to higher passages.]. There was a small supply depot here with one of the lightweight fiber-wrapped SCUBA tanks we would be transporting to the surface. Onward we rappelled, down into the racing river, and we were in and out of that stream for several hours. As we approached the Salmon Ladders, the cave walls were smooth and black, polished by running water. You could look up into the ceiling and see how seasonal floods would completely fill the massive canyons we were traveling through. We passed the Turbines, and continued to drop in elevation, although since the rope-work was so consuming it was hard to tell how much absolute depth we were gaining. The water roared so loudly that communication between team members was impossible, and it was here that I first felt the immense sense of loneliness or isolation that can come from deep cave exploration. On this portion of the trip you could not reasonably depend on anyone else, we were each on our own. At the Piston, we dropped down into more level passage. Although the cave was formed by stream flow, upper passages, some relic stream passages, some active, abounded. We were in the Sumplands, and at a critical junction a trail was marked through an upper, dry, passage known as the Wind Tunnel, which presumably saved one from spending lots of time in the water. We passed along precariously perched sand dunes far above the barely audible stream below. At one point, and for no apparent

reason, we entered a chamber that was highly decorated. Most of the passage we had been traversing for the past eight hours was carved by running water in the cave; there was little depositional decoration. But in one area of the bypass we encountered soda straws many yards long, and lots of them. The ceiling was brightly decorated with multi-colored flowstone, no doubt a result of dissolved metals flowing through the many fissures feeding the river in the bottom of Cheve. The beauty was serene, and we stopped to admire this curious and strangely beautiful display of nature.

Almost as soon as we began moving again we were jarred back into the reality of the dangerous nature of deep cave exploration. To the right of the path and up a small slope was a fantastic collection of stalactites and intricate flowstone. We climbed up and looked into an empty grave. We were in the Avalon Connection Room, where another cave that descended from the surface intersects the Cheve System. In 1991, 19-year-old Chris Yeager died as the result of a fall at the next drop we were expecting to come across, the prosaically named 23-Meter Drop. His body was brought up the drop ten days later and buried in the alcove we were looking into, until an international caving party removed it a year later. The temporary headstone was still in place. It contained his name, dates of birth and death, and his expedition nickname, "The Kid".

This grim discovery put somewhat of a damper on our fun, and we realized we were tired and hungry, and needed to get to the shelter of Camp Three. There was some steep hiking left in the Connection Room, and then a tricky climb-down to the 23-Meter Drop. Everything was rigged, but we stopped to inspect all anchors we could find and access. One by one we dropped the three pitches of the drop and descended into the East Gorge. Suddenly we were transported from a quiet, dry, sandy floor to a slick-wet-screaming rock world. The walls of the canyon were marbled black and white stripes, a very distinctive look. Philippe was eager to get on, and Melanie was compelled to follow ahead on a fast-track while Lewis and I took a slower, more controlled pace. We trudged on through the knee-deep water looking up for an obvious way to the camp we knew had to be in the vicinity.

We were feeling exhausted, and after what seemed too long we found some indication that others had made what seemed a tricky crawl up some flowstone on the right. In our tired state it took some time to find the correct route, but about eleven hours after we left the surface we crawled into camp. Melanie and Philippe were already set up in a comfortable spot next to the supplies, and showed us where the stove, water and latrine were located.

Lots of words have been written about camping in caves, but the latrines in Cheve need a special mention. Members of the 2003 team came out complaining about them, but like so many things in this life, they must be experienced to be fully appreciated (or perhaps not). The initial expeditions exploring here were rather small, and so latrines at the camps were established in specific locations near the sleeping and eating areas, but not too close, and preferably downwind of any prevailing air currents. More recent expeditions, rumored by expedition participants to be European in origin, were less systematic in establishing limited-extent latrines, so around the camps one has to tread easily, or at least pay attention to the signals your nose detects in advance. There are of course all kinds of molds and bacteria living in caves, some unknown or at least rare on the surface. But the latrines are certainly meeting grounds for the various worlds of super-and-sub-surface microbes. It would seem that courtesy and respect for fellow cavers and the cave environment would include limiting the impact of underground latrines to a minimum. Most of the other long caves I have had the privilege of exploring were located in dry climate areas, so the operational rule was "pack it out". But expedition caving in Mexico and apparently other parts of the world depend on underground latrines to dispose of solid waste. It would be well

advised for international cavers to seriously consider the potential impact that poorly placed, widely scattered, and un-maintained latrines have on the cave and other cavers.

Continued next month

12th ANNUAL CAVERNS OF SONORA RESTORATION PROJECT, November 8-9, 2003 by George Veni

The cave restoration project at Caverns of Sonora will be held on 8-9 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. I will be out of the country between 25 September and 1 November, so contact Linda Palit during that period at 210-699-1388 or lkpalit@swbell.net to sign-up, cancel, or get more information on the project. More details are also available on the TSA web page, under the "Projects" link at <http://www.cavetexas.org>



Walter Feaster and Diana Tomchick haul rocks at Sonora, Nov. 2002.

Caving Events Calendar, October 2003

compiled by R.D. Milhollin

- Oct 10 –12** **Colorado Bend State Park Project:** long-time favorite of Mavericks, pretty close to home, semi-regular schedule, second weekend of the month. **Contacts:** Terry Holsinger (512) 443-4241 trhli@sprynet.com or Dale Barnard Barnarddale@yahoo.com
- Oct 11-12** **Government Canyon State Natural Area Project:** 20 miles west of San Antonio. Activities include survey, exploration, ridge walking, and digging. Participants must enter property with group, contact in advance for times and directions. **Contacts:** Marvin and Lisa Miller (830) 885-5631 milmiller@gvtc.com
- Oct 11-12** **Robber Baron Cave, San Antonio:** second weekend of each month, a new and ongoing project to restore the collapsed entrance to this popular Texas cave. Initial tasks include clearing dead trees and surveying. Plans for the entrance ramp, bunker and surrounding grounds will be developed. Please contact if you are coming, and if you are bringing a truck or a chainsaw for clearing the bigger trees. **Contacts:** Linda Palit (210) 699-1388 lkpalit@swbell.net or Evelyn Mitchell, joe-evelynn@satx.rr.com
- Oct 13-17** **National Cave and Karst Management Symposium:** Gainesville, FL, hosted by the NSS Cave Diving Section. Theme for 2003 is "Protecting the Aquifer in Karst Regions." Learn the latest in a range of cave and karst management topics, meet and network with people involved in cave and karst management in many fields, and visit and learn about Florida's famous large springs. Register NOW on line at <http://www.nckms.com/>
- Oct 17-19** **Texas Cavers Reunion:** At Honey Creek Cave. Various trips into the cave, along with the usual vendors, vertical contests, food, beer, hot tub, noodle wrestling and all those special events of a TCR. The owner likes visiting cavers to help trim the cedars on the ranch, so come prepared with loppers. See details at www.cavetexas.org/tcr2003.htm
- Oct 25-26** **Basic Vertical Training Workshop:** at Government Canyon State Natural Area. Workshop will follow the course manual prepared by the NSS Vertical Section A nominal fee of \$20 per person will be used to help offset the price for lunch and drinks as well as course materials. This will be a full two-day intensive field course that will cover rappelling and ascending methods, rope, equipment, and techniques. Course materials will be sent to participants and include a recommended equipment list, liability release, and study materials. **Contact:** Geary Schindel 210-479-2151 (home between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m.) 210-326-1576 (cell) gschindel@mindspring.com
- Oct 25-26** **High Guads Restoration Project: (New Mexico):** On-going work amid spectacular scenery in beautiful caves of the Lincoln National Forest. Last weekend of the month, permits often include Three Fingers, Virgin, Pink Dragon, Pink Panther, Hidden, Wonderland, and Black Cave. Activities vary from month to month. **Contacts:** Susan Herpin or Jennifer Foote highguads@yahoo.com
- Oct 25** **Bat Discovery Day:** at the Dallas Museum of Natural History, Jan MacLaughlin, "The Batlady," invites you to "comBAT " your way through the Museum. Listen as "The Batlady " (and live bats) dispels the myths about these fascinating creatures and explains their role in our ecosystems! Scheduled presentations: 1:00 & 2:00 p.m. Make unique bat crafts and feast on fun snacks! Halloween Costume Contest for kids under 12, judging begins at 3:00 p.m. Museum members are free, non-members admission charged.
- Nov 1-2** **Powell's Cave Trip:** This will generally be a sport trip for those that would like to see the cave; regularly scheduled trips to the cave may not take place in the future, so this is a good opportunity to visit this classic Texas cave. Directions to the cave will be posted a few weeks prior to the trip on CaveTex, along with any last-minute logistical information. **Contacts:** Jerry Atkinson (281)-360-2244, Marvin Miller (830)-885-5631, Terry Holsinger (512) 443-4241 trhli@sprynet.com
- Nov 7-9** **Colorado Bend State Park Project:**
- Nov 8-9** **Caverns of Sonora Restoration Project:** Annual rock-hauling project from the Devil's Pit area of the cave, evening photographic and Sunday morning tours for volunteers. See article elsewhere in this newsletter. **Contacts:** George Veni, 11304 Candle Park, San Antonio, TX 78249-4421, 210-558-4403, gveni@satx.rr.com From Sept. 25 to Nov. 1, contact Linda Palit 210-699-1388 lkpalit@swbell.net More info on TSA website under the "Projects" link at <http://www.cavetexas.org/>
- Nov 14-16** **Kickapoo Caverns State Park Project:** Surveying, drafting, ridge-walking for new caves, relocating known caves, photographing caves, and working on the campsites as well as on a new project. The TPWD has asked for help in removing a portion of the bat viewing platform at Stewart Bat Cave. This project will need to be finished by March of next year before the bats return to the cave. TPWD is providing most of the equipment needed including a

Caving Events Calendar, October 2003

compiled by R.D. Milhollin

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backhoe, dump truck, bobcat, and jackhammer. Campsites, fire rings, bathrooms with cold showers, bunk house, caves to explore, volunteers will be rewarded with trips to Kickapoo Caverns (photo and regular), any of the other caves on the property, and Devils Sinkhole tours on Sunday. There has been mention of perks for returning volunteers as well. **Contacts:** Travis Scott (979) 693-4088 tscott@collision-research.com Kurt Menking (210) 325-5598 kmenking@bcad.org

Nov 22-23 High Guads Restoration Project

Autumn Maverick Anniversary / Rites of Fall Party: Where, When, How?

Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's weeks: Traditional seasons for caving in Mexico. Time to begin planning trips.

When Scheduled Carlsbad Caverns and Fort Stanton Cave Restoration: New Mexico restoration trips in large, sensitive caves. CRF trips have unique requirements, long holiday weekends. **Contact:** Barbe Barker (505) 687-4270 cloudcaver@pvtnetworks.net

When Scheduled Val Verde and Sutton County Caves: Sensitive landowner relations, visits by appointment only. **Contact:** R.D. Milhollin (817) 834-2327 rdmilhollin@maverickgrotto.org

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. Check out their Caving Calendar and New Caver Training web pages at <http://www.utgrotto.org>

Maverick Grotto
c/o Diana Tomchick
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