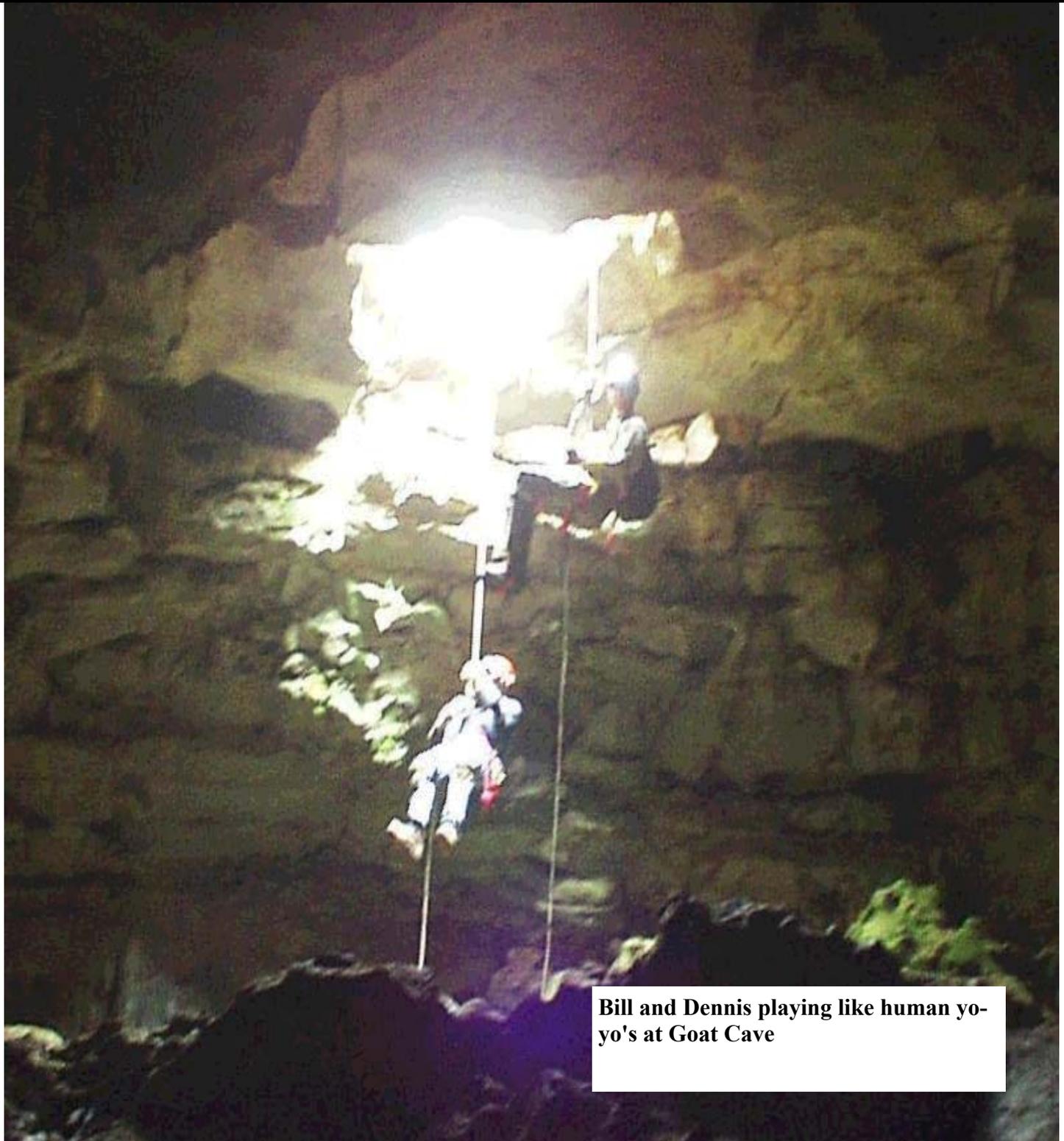


THE MAVERICK BULL



Volume 18 Issue 10 The Newsletter of the Maverick Bull October, 2004



Bill and Dennis playing like human yo-yo's at Goat Cave

Maverick Grotto Information

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

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

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

Complementary Newsletters: The Maverick Grotto will provide complementary newsletters to persons or organizations that provide cave access (i.e. landowners) or otherwise provide assistance to cavers. The Maverick Grotto will provide one free issue to persons interested in becoming members.

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

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

Meetings: Meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month at Bodacious BBQ, 1206 E. Division St., Arlington. The time is 7 p.m., and the food is good.

Carbide: Currently carbide is unavailable.

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

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Page 4 : Diana Tomchick

Page 7: Scott Boyd

Back cover: Jan Zelinka

Visit Our NSS Award-Winning Web Site! Butch has done an excellent job at constructing the grotto web site and keeping it up-to-date. You'll find information about getting into caving, trip photos and the PDF version of this newsletter (with color photos!):

[Http://www.maverickgrotto.org](http://www.maverickgrotto.org)

Cave Rescue: Call collect: (512) 686-0234



Next meeting, October 12th, 7p.m.

Bodacious BBQ

1206 E Division St.

Arlington, TX. 76011

(817) 860-4248

Program:

The nominations for officers will close at the October Meeting. Nominated for Chair is Ed Goff, Vice Chair is Mark Gee, Secretary Scott Boyd, Treasurer Sharon Mastbrook, Newsletter Editor Tammy Cox. Elections are Held at the November meeting.

September 2004 Meeting Minutes

submitted by Scott Boyd

The Maverick Grotto met Sept. 14 at Bodacious BBQ, on E. Division St. in Arlington. 19 members and five visitors attended the meeting. Program: The program was a slideshow and commentary by Chad Fenner on his trip to Belize with Boy Scout Troop 17 this past summer.

Reports from Officers:

Treasurer: Sharon Mastbrook was not in attendance, but Butch Fralia reported that the totals were about the same as reported last month.

Newsletter Editor: Diana Tomchick said that Lex did a great job on the newsletter, and she talked about the status of the Texas Caver.

Old Business:

* No new status on possible joint projects with NTSS and/or COG.

* Dennis Welch is now the new librarian of the grotto.

New Business:

* There were no new member applications this month.

* Ed Goff explained the membership requirements for the benefit of the visitors.

* Chad announced that the grotto will hold an auction during the November meeting, and Bill Steele volunteered to be the auctioneer. * We need a host for the grotto's annual Christmas party.

* Nominations for next year's officers:

* Ed Goff was nominated for Chairman.

* Bill Steele was nominated for Chairman, but declined the nomination.

* Mark Gee explained that he is looking for a new job, and may not be available for many meetings next year, but he will run for Vice-Chairman if there were no other nominations.

* Sharon Mastbrook was nominated for Treasurer.

* Scott Boyd volunteered to run for Secretary.

* A raffle was held for an LED headlight. It was won by Lex Cox Jr., and \$17 was raised for the grotto.

Trip reports:

* Kris Megahan attended the recent High Guads Restoration Project and went to Virgin Cave and Red Lake. He also went to Florida and did some cave diving.

* Dennis & Sharon Welch, along with Tammy & Lex Cox III went to Whirlpool Cave in Austin. Dennis & Sharon also went to some caves in Kentucky and Tennessee, and went to the CRF at Carlsbad Caverns.

* Sharon Mastbrook went on a river rafting trip in Alaska.

* Bill Steele took the "Lantern Tour" in Mammoth Cave. He and Diana also went to Honey Creek Cave last weekend.

* Mark Gee went to the Southwest Region Regional meeting, which was 140 miles NW of El Paso, TX. He went through several caves in that area, one of which was Robinson Cave.

Trip announcements:

* Ed Goff described TCR for the visitors that's to be held on Oct. 16th- 17th.

* TCC is holding their 10th anniversary celebration this weekend, and there is more info about it in the newsletter.

* The Cox family is going caving in northwest Arkansas the weekend of Oct. 8 -10, and invited along any other cavers that wanted to go.

Caving Events Calendar

Second Saturday of every month Hilltop Project (Capitan, NM): Ridge walking and digging in windy blow-holes on USFS and BLM lands, about 5 miles south of Fort Stanton Cave, NM. Meet for Cave Diggers Breakfast on Saturday between 7:30 to 8 a.m. at the Smokey Bear Restaurant in Capitan. **Contacts:** Lee Skinner (505) 293-5723 skinner@thuntek.net or Dick Venters (505) 437-3712 cavedigger@msn.com

Oct 15-17 Texas Cavers' Reunion (Flat Creek Ranch): The annual get-together/party returns to this popular Blanco County site. Speleo-olympics and vendors, swimming, hot tubs, live music, food and more will be available. A great chance to meet and greet old and new friends, and to fill your caving calendar for the next year. TCMA will hold their business meeting on Sunday morning at 9 a.m.; the TSA Business meeting will be held following, at approximately 10 a.m. **Contact:** Allan Cobb ac@kihikihi.com www.oztotl.com/tcr, see page 5 for more info

Oct 30-31 High Guads Restoration Project (Carlsbad, NM): 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 30-31 GypKaP (Carlsbad, NM): Long-running cave survey project in the gypsum plain of southern New Mexico. **Contact:** Blake Jordan (505) 260-1096 blandevoid@comcast.net

Nov 06-07 Powell's Cave (Powell's Ranch, Menard, TX): Come see the second longest cave in Texas! Cavers of all skill and experience levels welcome. A cave sketching workshop co-sponsored by the Texas Speleological Survey and the Texas Speleological Association will take place in Powell's Cave this weekend, stay tuned for details. **Contacts:** Jerry Atkinson (281) 360-2244 JerryAtkin@aol.com Terry Holsinger (512) 443-4241 trhli@sprynet.com

Nov 12-14 Colorado Bend State Park Project (Bend): Second weekend of the month, from October to May. This is a terrific project for beginning cavers. **Contacts:** Terry Holsinger (512) 443-4241 trhli@sprynet.com or Dale Barnard Barnarddale@yahoo.com

Nov 13-14 13th Annual Sonora Restoration Project: Only 70 people get to haul rocks out of Caverns of Sonora, so contact George ASAP. **Contact:** George Veni (210) 558-4403 gveni@satx.rr.com, See page 4

Nov 20-21 Government Canyon State Natural Area Karst Survey (San Antonio): This long-running project has lots of opportunities for both beginning and advanced cavers. Ridge walking, digging, surveying and camping are

available. **Contact:** Marvin Miller (830) 885-5631 mlmiller@gvvc.com

Nov 21-27 Proyecto Espeleologico Sierra Oxmolon (Mexico): Survey and mapping project over Thanksgiving week near Aquismón. **Contact:** Jerry Fant jerry-fant@worldnet.att.net

Nov 27-28 High Guads Restoration Project (Carlsbad, NM)

Nov 27-28 GypKaP (Carlsbad, NM)

Dec 04 Winter Technical Regional, Southwest Region NSS (New Mexico): Sandia Grotto hosting (tentative).

Dec 11-12 Colorado Bend State Park Project

Dec 11 Government Canyon State Natural Area Karst Survey (San Antonio) Saturday only this month.

Feb 02-06, 2005 7th Mexican Congress of Speleology & 5th Congress of FEALC (The Speleological Federation of Latin American and the Caribbean) (Monterrey, Nuevo León, México): "Legislation and Protection of the Subterranean Environment." Cost: US\$50 until October 1, 2004, US\$100 later. **Contact:** Rodolfo Gonzalez rogonzalez@cydsa.com

Maverick Grotto Auction Will be Held at the November Meeting. It's time to clean out your closets and garage and find items to donate for the Maverick Grotto Auction! Suitable items include caving and camping gear, caving books and videos, jewelry, calendars, vertical gear, well you get the idea. At the last auction the grotto raised more than \$300. So start searching now for items to donate and remember to show up in November with money or checkbook in hand!

Announcement

13th ANNUAL CAVERNS OF SONORA RESTORATION PROJECT

November 13-14, 2004

The cave restoration project at Caverns of Sonora will be held on 13-14 >November 2004. This year's project again will complete 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.

This may also be the last big rock hauling project for a few years, so if you've been putting off joining the fun (yes, it really is fun

considering how fast people sign up these projects), then be sure to be there this year.

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 electric headlight will be useful in the pit. 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 will also be available on the TSA web page, under the "Projects" link at <http://www.cavetexas.org/> (if you find information for the 2002 project, don't worry, nothing significant has changed). To unsubscribe, send an e-mail to mail:majordomo@cavetex.net with the following message--unsubscribe cavetex. For help and information go to www.cavetex.net. List administrator: [mail to: jswhite@cavetex.net](mailto:mail to:jswhite@cavetex.net)

"Just a small sample of the rubble you'll remove from the cave."



2004 Texas Cavers Reunion



Texas Cavers Reunion Flat Creek Ranch October 16-17, 2004

Come one, come all, y'all are invited to the 27th Annual Texas Cavers Reunion. This year, we will be back at the popular Flat Creek Ranch located near Pedernales Falls State Park.

Be sure to join the fun...

*Caving, swimming, hot tub, and sauna
speleocompetitions
great food
vendors
live music
and best of all...lots of fun times.*

The Fine Print:

- Please remember to bring your own reusable eating utensils to the Grand Feast and to come prepared to take your garbage home.
- Well behaved dogs, friends, and family members are welcome, in that order, those that may tend to be obnoxious should be left elsewhere.
- Port-a-Potties will be provided.
- The TCR staff is not in the police business. That means everyone should police themselves and those in their clan. In other words.....you are responsible for the behavior of your children and your guests.
- Using Common Sense and Common Courtesy is the best policy.
- Remember, this is primarily a caver event. People who will contribute to the general craziness are encouraged to attend, those who will detract are discouraged.

For more information:

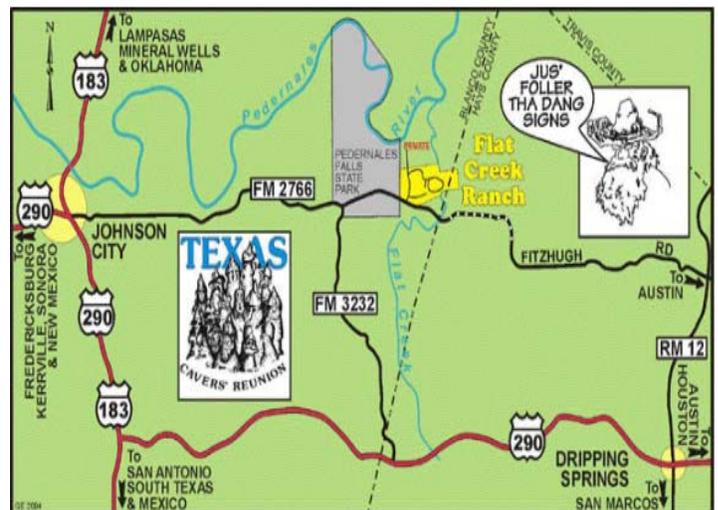
www.oztotl.com/tcr
or
tcr@oztotl.com

Directions

Texas Cavers Reunion

From Austin: Head west on Highway 290 to FM 3232, go north until the road ends at FM 2766/County Road 201. Take a right, go past the entrance to Pedernales Falls State Park and continue until you reach the entrance to Flat Creek Ranch. Follow the signs to the campground.

From San Antonio: Head north on Highway 281 until you reach Highway 290. Go east on 290 until you reach FM 3232 and go north until the road ends at FM 2766/County Road 201. Take a right, go past the entrance to Pedernales Falls State Park and continue until you reach the entrance to Flat Creek Ranch. Follow the signs to the campground.



TCR Hot Tub

One of the best things in caving is the selflessness and caring by cavers. They don't get much help, they just do what needs to be done. One of the many folks who always seem to do so much is Pete Strickland, "Mr. Hot Tub". Pete hauls the hot tub, sets up, fills, fires the heater box, keeps it fired for Friday night, refills for Saturday, refires for Saturday

breaks down and hauls everything off on Sunday. Oh, I didn't mention the seating and carpeting, sauna, big fire circle, etc. He mostly misses the events so all of us can have fun. What can the rest of us cavers do to help? While you are scouting out the beautiful setting at Flat Creek carry a few sticks of firewood (3 to 4 inches in diameter, thirty inches or less in length) down to the hot tub and ask Pete to let you help him. He will not ask you to help. You must ask what he needs and just do it. Have a few sticks of seasoned oak or other hardwood you can bring? Find the hot tub and drop 'em off. Volunteer to load the firebox for a while and give Pete a break. You'll be fascinated by how the firebox works. Plan to get there

early on Friday and help unload and set up the hot tub. Work up an appetite for the Bexar Grotto fish fry at dark and enjoy TCR fun guilt free knowing you contributed.

The majority of TCR attendees come from areas within two or three hours drive. Instead of leaving early Sunday, plan to pitch in with the take down and loading the hot tub stuff. It is not uncommon for it to take four to five hours for Pete to do this with only three or four folks. All 400 to 500 people can't possibly need to leave in a hurry on Sunday. Get a couple of buddies and make it a party. The more the merrier.

While I'm at it, if you see someone setting up a tent or cover along vendor row, stop and help. They are volunteers for their cause and since we are all in this together their cause is our cause. What goes up must come down. The friend you make on Friday setting up will need help on Sunday for the take down. Its party time for the Caving universe, let's make it the best ever for everyone, by sharing the load.

Rick Corbell
Bexar Grotto

Trip to Goat Cave and Maple Run Cave - Austin, TX - Sep. 27, 2004 : By Scott Boyd

Participants: Scott Boyd, Dennis Welch and Bill Tucker

The three of us met at the Home Depot on the South Freeway at 6:30am. We loaded our gear into Dennis's truck, and headed to Austin. We arrived in Austin

three hours later, and first went to the ground safe located near Whirlpool Cave to get the key for Maple Run. While we were there, Dennis showed Bill the entrance to Whirlpool, as Bill had never been to Whirlpool. We then drove the short distance to the Goat Cave Karst Preserve.

When we arrived there, we gathered up our gear, and walked the short distance to Goat Cave. Bill and Dennis both rigged up ropes to nearby trees, while I put on my harness.

This was my first time going into a cave with my new harness, so I was really looking forward to getting some vertical practice. I thought Goat Cave was perfect for a beginner like myself, as the drop is only about 20 feet. Dennis rappelled in first, since he wanted to shoot video of us entering the cave. Bill stayed up top and helped advise me to how to negotiate over the undercut lip of the cave. Once I got past that part, I made a smooth rappel to the bottom. Bill came on down, and we spent an hour or so looking around in the cave, poking our heads into leads that didn't go anywhere, and admiring the various decorations. We also spotted a small frog on the floor, below the opening.

After we climbed back up to the top, Dennis couldn't find his glasses, and thought that he might have left them somewhere in the cave, when he was videotaping. He and Bill rappelled in first, and I followed to get more vertical experience. When I got about 2 feet off the floor, I tried to do a changeover, but didn't do it correctly, and ended up undoing the web strap that connected my ascender to me to finish repelling to the floor. Dennis found his glasses eventually, and we all climbed back to the surface.

By this time, we were all very hungry, so we went back to the truck to go find a fast-food joint for lunch. We located a nearby Sonic and ate lunch there. We then went back to the Preserve to go into Maple Run.

We once again loaded up our gear, and made the short hike to Maple Run. Dennis was the only one of the three of us that had been in Maple Run before, so he led the way towards the back where it's most highly decorated. It took us a couple of hours to get to the back of the cave. I was trailing along behind Dennis

and Bill as we approached the "Garden of Earthly Delights" in the back of the cave, so both of them got to look around and rest before I got there. Even though there isn't much room vertically in this area, I still took several photos of the formations.



After a short rest, we headed back to the entrance, and exited the cave about 6 pm. We made the short hike back to the truck, where we cleaned up somewhat and changed into clean clothes.

On our way back towards the freeway, we decided to stop at a Subway to eat dinner. We then drove back to Ft. Worth, arriving back at our vehicles a little after midnight.

First Aid in the Outdoors and Wilderness: What Do You Need to Know?

First aid has been on my mind lately. A few weeks ago another birthday came around and I realized it had been over 25 years since my last formal first aid class. Surely there have been advances in first aid since that time, and now that I'm spending more time going caving in remote locations in Texas and Mexico, I thought I should look into the first aid training opportunities in the Metroplex. In addition, I wondered about my preparation for in-cave emergencies. Sometimes I take a small first aid kit, and other times I take nothing more than a trash sack. How prepared do I really need to be?

I decided to start my search for answers by asking a recognized leader in outdoor training programs. The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS, <http://www.nols.edu>) is a leader in outdoor skills training and formulated the Leave No Trace Ethic. It is a non-profit school that started in 1965; NOLS instructors get their start at other outdoor programs and then are trained by NOLS staff. John Gookin is the Curriculum Manager for NOLS and one of the most experienced cavers on their staff. I wrote to him and asked about the NOLS Wilderness Medicine Institute first aid courses.

John replied:

"Our intro level of Wilderness First Aid is an approximately 20 hr course called WFA
<http://www.nols.edu/wmi/courses/wildfirstaid.shtml>

The next level is the 40 hr Advanced First Aid
<http://www.nols.edu/wmi/courses/wildadvancedfirstaid.shtml>

To work somewhere like NOLS, you need Wilderness First Responder (WFR)
<http://www.nols.edu/wmi/courses/wildfirstresponder.shtml>
I consider this the minimum level that you need at least one team member on a serious caving expedition.

Our 180 hr Wilderness EMT
<http://www.nols.edu/wmi/courses/wemt.shtml>

There is a big difference between the regular First Aid classes and a good WILDERNESS first aid class.

No matter what level of training, every caving expedition also needs a first aid reference book to look things up when weird stuff happens. I prefer the NOLS Wilderness First Aid book, which is written at the WFR level, which is the level I am currently trained at. (I have taken EMT twice, but since I am a WFR now, I need to work within that level of training.) This book is also consistent with the national wilderness first aid guidelines developed by the Wilderness Medical Society.

It is important that whoever is teaching your first aid class there is dialed in to Texas-specific wilderness first aid practices. Some states are pretty conservative about what they will or won't allow people to do.

I tend to have a big tackle box of a first aid kit in my speleovEHICLE. It has all sorts of ointments and things, but is also fat on tape, gauze, and especially those clear bandages. They are great because you can still go caving if they are sealing off that new goober on your shin. I also have different syringes for power-washing wounds. And I like Sam splints.

In-cave I carry little more than tape and a little gauze.

Some first aid kits like we carry on NOLS expeditions are at http://www.nols.edu/store/wmi/firstaid_index.shtml
This sort of kit is great for folks new to first aid, because it tends to have the little stuff they wouldn't have thought of, then they can add stuff as they go, based on what they are trained to use."

Tod Schimelpfenig, the NOLS Risk Management Director, also wrote to me:

"I'm clearly biased, but I think our Wilderness First Aid course is superior to the Red Cross version. Our curriculum is evidenced based. We look at what happens in wilderness medicine and teach a relevant and practical curriculum. We've been teaching this for 20+ years and work hard at delivering

the most education we can in 16hrs. Our staff are carefully selected for their skill as educators and their wilderness and their medical experience. They have a week of training before they even apprentice with us. We're proud of what we do and think we do it well."

I think that I'd add a few extra items to John's list for his in-cave first aid kit. If someone is injured and can't exit the cave under their own power, they'll need to be kept warm. A space blanket and/or a trash bag or two are great for this purpose. I also like to take ibuprofen and Pepto-Bismol tablets—these are not necessities but they sure are nice, and I've shared them many times with fellow cavers.

The wilderness medicine courses are expensive and time consuming (see below), but if you're thinking about expedition caving, the skills you could learn would be a good investment.

Even if you don't decide to sign up for a full-blown wilderness medicine course, you should have current CPR skills. You may not be able to save someone who has a heart attack in a cave (or anywhere else, for that matter), but it's good to know how to make sure that a victim's airway is kept clear and they'll teach you how to do that in a CPR class.

Here's a current sampling of first aid classes being offered in the Metroplex. Red Cross courses are listed first, followed by Wilderness Medicine Institute classes. Consult the web sites listed for more detailed information about course content, registration information, dates and locations.

American Red Cross, Chisholm Trail Chapter (<http://chisholmtrail.redcross.org/>)

Community First Aid and Safety

Cost: \$ 55.00 Time: 8:30am-6:30pm
Locations and dates: offered weekly (on Saturdays) in Ft. Worth, once per month in Cleburne and Weatherford, and in December only in Grapevine.

Wilderness First Aid Basics

Description:

Trains individuals in the basic knowledge and skills to enable rescuers to make decisions about emergency care in the wilderness settings, including patient protection, protection of other members of the party, care of injuries for extended periods of time while waiting for professional rescuers, and simple evacuation techniques. Course includes "When Help is Delayed" (can also be taken separately). Requires two Saturdays. Prerequisite: Community First Aid and Safety Course Length: 18 hours. Cost: \$ 80.00 Date(s): November 13, 2004,

8:30am-6:30pm November 20, 2004 8:30am-6:30pm
Location: 1515 S. Sylvania Ave. Ft. Worth, TX 76111

American Red Cross, Dallas Area Chapter (<http://www.redcrossdallas.org/>)

Courses offered weekly (on Saturdays) in Dallas range from Adult CPR (\$35, 3 3/4 hrs.) to First Aid plus Adult & Infant CPR, AED (\$60, 9 hrs.). No Wilderness First Aid course is offered.

National Outdoor Leadership School Wilderness First Aid courses (<http://www.nols.edu/wmi/>)

Wilderness First Aid (<http://www.nols.edu/wmi/courses/wildfirstaid.shtml>)

Introductory level course, covers patient assessment, spinal cord injury management, head injuries, breaks, bleeding, shock, wound management, cold injuries, and more. Detailed course outline is available at the above web site.

Cost: \$ 165.00 (REI member price)
Date(s): January 29-30 (about 20 hours)
Location: REI, Dallas TX (972) 490-5989

Advanced Wilderness First Aid (<http://www.nols.edu/wmi/courses/wildadvancedfirstaid.shtml>)

River guides and other trip leading staff often require a more extensive training program than the Wilderness First Aid course.

This five-day course focuses on stabilization, treatment and evacuation guidelines of patients in backcountry environments. More emphasis is placed on long term patient care management and specific injury evaluation. Includes CPR. The class is 40 hours of instruction over two weekends, 6-10 p.m. on Fridays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. There are no prerequisites for this course.

Cost: \$ 325
Date(s): February 4-6
February 11-13
Location: BSA Camp Wisdom, 6400 Redbird Ln., Dallas, TX (972) 699-0339.
Sponsored by Venture Crew 890. More registration info is available at the web site listed above.

A Day Around Mammoth Cave, Kentucky

by Bill Steele

My niece set her wedding day for the Saturday of Labor Day weekend, so Diana Tomchick and I decided to go to Kentucky for it and then spend the Sunday of a four-day weekend around Mammoth Cave. Leaving Dallas at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, September 2, we got to Memphis around 1:30 a.m. A half an hour later we

settled into a campsite at Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park, about ten miles north of Memphis. I've camped there a couple of times before while traveling I40 to and from caving trips to TAG. They have hot showers, they only charge \$3 to camp, and I've always found an available campsite.

On Friday we drove on to Nashville, north to Bowling Green, Kentucky, east to Somerset, and arrived at 6:00 p.m. in time for the rehearsal dinner and a bluegrass pickin' session. My new in-law is a banjo player.

Following the Saturday afternoon wedding and reception party, Diana and I drove back west to Cave City and Mammoth Cave National Park. My good friend Preston Forsythe, a Kentucky caver who lived in Austin when I did in the mid-70s, and we organized a Silvertip Mountain, Montana caving expedition together five years ago, had sent me directions to the Cave Research Foundation's Hamilton Valley, fairly new, speleological research center.

We saw Patty Kambesis that first night. Patty's lives in Kentucky, but used to cave in Texas many years ago, and has been the president of CRF, and co-author of the book Deep Secrets about the exploration of Lechuguilla Cave, the deepest limestone cave in the U.S. We also saw Scott House and Bob Osborn, Missouri cavers we know from Fitton Cave, Arkansas, another CRF project. Scott and Bob are computer experts, and these days are the main people working with the immense quantity of data for the world's longest cave.

In the morning we ate breakfast with cavers from Ohio, Missouri, Kentucky, Texas (Bill Koerschner of Houston) and probably elsewhere. Preston, Shari, Diana and I started our day by seeing Adwell Cave on the CRF property, which is a large truck passage that ends in breakdown a few hundred feet from the entrance. Someday someone's probably going to mine into that breakdown to find the rest of the borehole that's got to be there.

Next we drove Park Ridge Road, a narrow paved road through thick trees, and a tract Preston said Floyd Collins had known well, back to the park entrance, and went to The Wayfarer Bed and Breakfast (www.bbonline.com/ky/wayfarer). This B & B is near Sand Cave where Floyd Collins was trapped in Sand Cave for 18 days in early 1925; an incident cavers know well, which has been recollected since in books, musicals, movies, songs, and a museum at The Wayfarer. Normally the cost is \$2 a person to tour their little Floyd Collins Museum, but since we are all NSS members it was only \$1 each. The museum is small, but well done and interesting. An interview with a local resident played, a pane of glass looked down a painted, gloomy, narrow cave passage representing where Floyd died, to grim-faced Collins' face with the look of utter doom. The last thing in the exhibit is a replica of the casket Collins spent more than 60 years in, sitting in a large passage in Floyd Collins Crystal Cave. A few years ago the casket was relocated to a regular cemetery on Flint Ridge. Next we four ate lunch at the Mammoth Cave visitor's center, looked around in the gift shop, saw the displays, the 20 minute film about Mammoth Cave, and looked at books in the bookstore. I had ordered tickets for us on the Internet for the Violet City lantern tour Preston recommended, and it was a good thing I had. It was sold out with 58 participants and two rangers. Fifteen old-fashioned kerosene lanterns were given out, and we walked down the wide walkway beneath towering hardwoods to the famous entrance. As we gathered

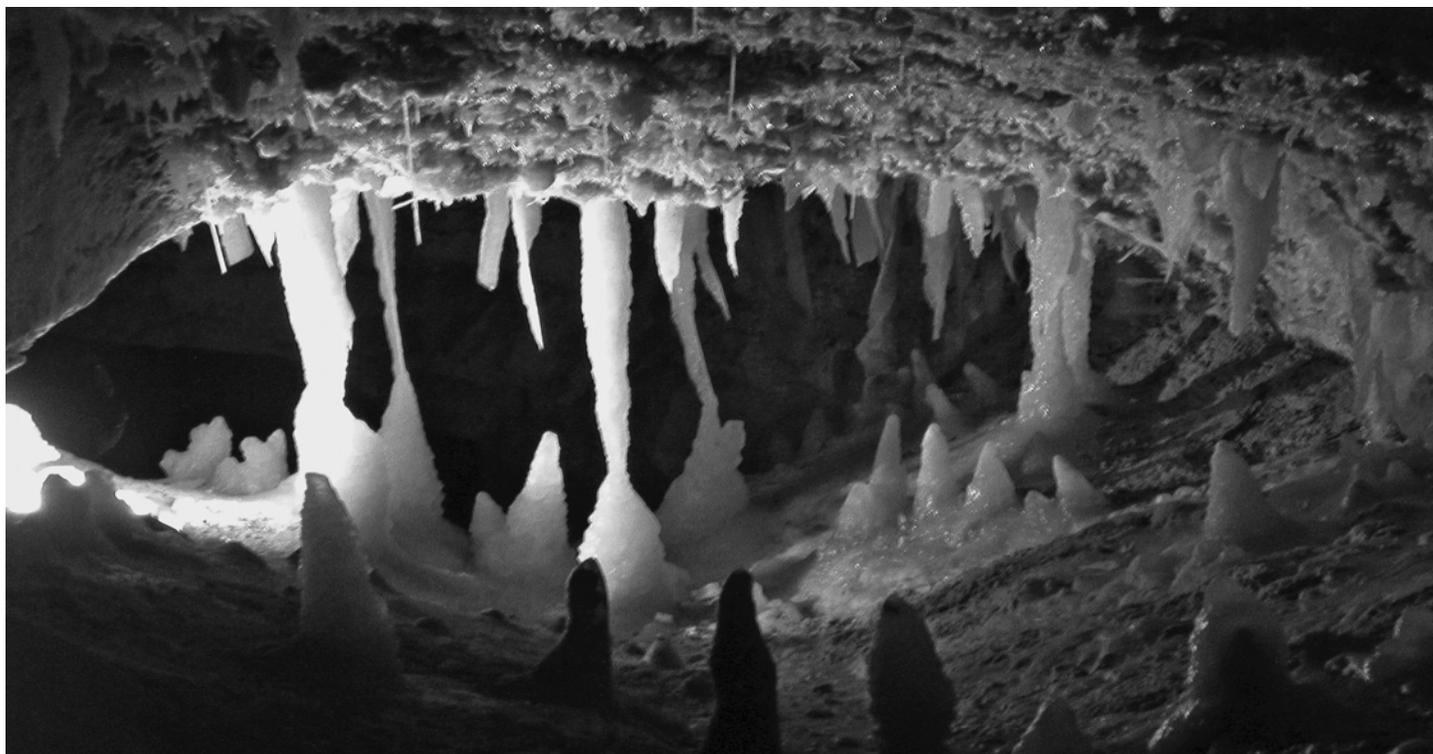
we noticed the blast of chilled air emitting from the 25-foot wide perfect cave entrance. The lead ranger stood on a rock wall and told us that the cave is full of spirits. These spirits could take his body over and speak through him. He said that when that happened he would not be himself, and wasn't accountable for what was said.

Our tour entered the sloping entrance and walked down the oval-shaped passage with other tours walking past us the other direction. The walls flared out and we entered the Rotunda junction room. As we gathered to hear about the saltpeter works here, Preston whispered to me that we had just walked past George Corrie, Sara Corrie's son. He had mentioned during the morning George works for the NPS at Mammoth Cave. Being the chairman of the NSS U.S. Exploration Committee, which awards grants for cave exploration from the Sara Corrie Fund, I turned around to meet George. His mother is somewhat of a legend among U.S. cavers. During the 60s and 70s she took up caving in perhaps her 60s, and did many deep pits, including Sotano de Golondrinas. I told George that I had witnessed his father rappel on the side of a barn in Indiana many years ago, sitting on the neck of a Coke bottle with the rope wrapped around the body of the bottle. George laughed and said, "Oh, you saw him do that!" obviously knowing about it. We talked about the grants my committee awards for a few minutes, then I rejoined my tour group.

The Rotunda, and the large passages gained through it, saw extensive saltpeter mining during the War of 1812. Slaves did the work, and the talented NPS ranger played the roles of boss and slave. I asked a question of the slave character down in the hole, "Boy, when the New Madrid earthquake happened, and blocks of rock fell in this room, did it scare you?" He said it did, and later in the tour the actor/ranger said that the earthquake disrupted work so much that the saltpeter of Mammoth Cave may not have made as much of a difference to the war effort as is commonly thought.

On our three-hour tour, through three miles of gigantic passage, we passed through six of the eight largest rooms in the cave. We passed the huts of TB patients who lived in the cave in a failed experiment. We were told that Woodland Indians 3,000 years ago ventured deep into the cave, mining gypsum, epsomite, selenite, and maraballite for many hundreds of years. I do believe that the tour was the best show cave tour I've ever taken, and I've taken lots of them. We emerged from Mammoth Cave out the Violet City entrance to awaiting buses, which returned us to the visitor's center. Preston asked if we wanted to see the "old cave guides' cemetery," which of course we did. He forewarned us that a "squall" had blown through recently and downed a lot of big trees, one of which was down in the cemetery. He also told us that most of the graves had been black slaves. The most famous of them was Stephen Bishop, and accomplished cave explorer, and we saw his headstone just a few feet from being crushed by the fallen tree.

On the way back to the Hamilton Valley facility we stopped by Floyd Collins' grave at the Flint Ridge Chapel cemetery. On top of his headstone, which says on it "Greatest Cave Explorer Ever Known," ere pennies, a plastic Cookie Monster, and a scattering of other mementos. I left a dime. We enjoyed the company of cavers and a good meal back at Hamilton Valley, and went to bed early. I woke up in the starry night to heed the call of nature, and heard coyotes howling in the distance. Before I got back to sleep I enjoyed hearing doves cooing, and an owl hooting. In the morning we began our 12-hour drive back to the Metroplex.



Caverns of Sonora photo by Jan Zelinka

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