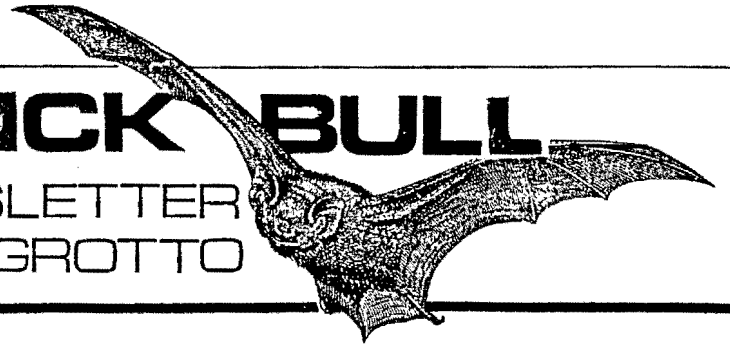
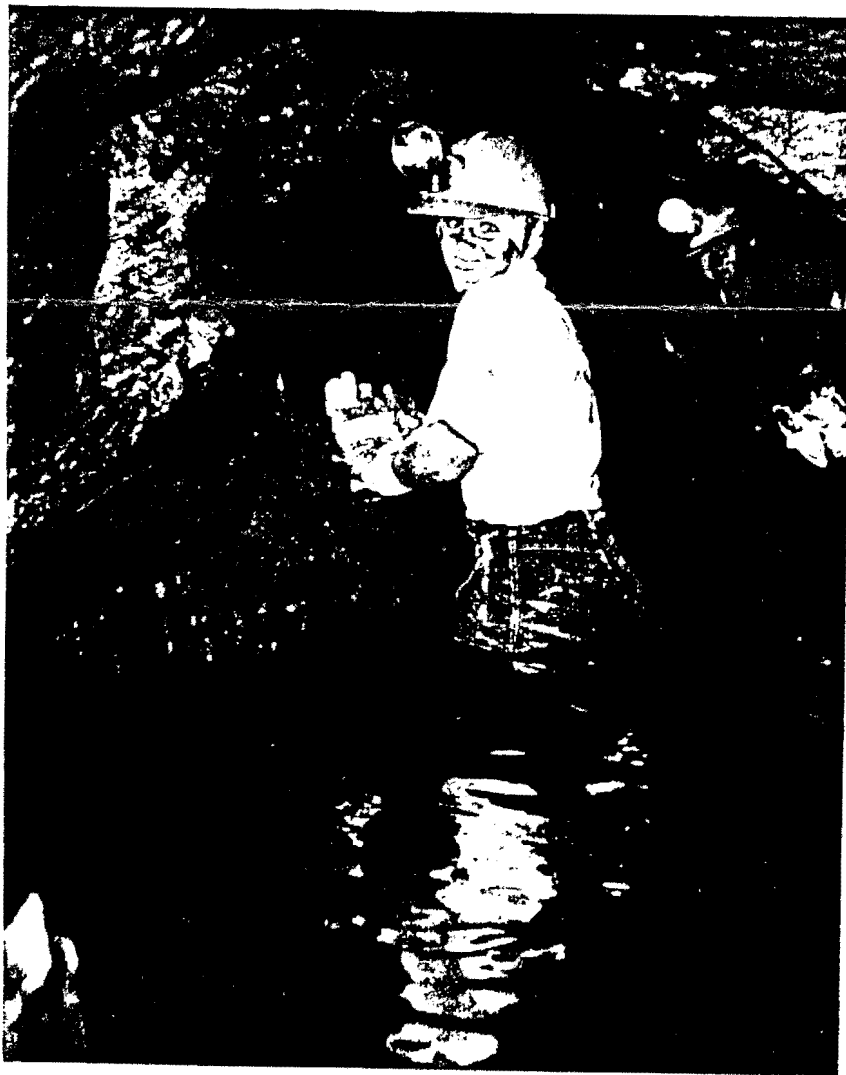

THE MAVERICK BULL

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
OF THE MAVERICK GROTTTO



VOLUME 5 NUMBER 11

NOVEMBER 1990



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THE MAVERICK BULL is the monthly newsletter of THE MAVERICK GROTTO, an internal organization in the National Speleological Society (NSS 6-322). The editors invite all cavers to submit articles, news, maps, cartoons, art, and photographs. If the material is to be returned, a self-addressed, stamped envelope should accompany it. Items should be of interest to cavers and be non-political in nature.

Internal organizations of the National Speleological Society may reprint any item (unless copyrights belong to author as will be stated in byline) first appearing in **THE MAVERICK BULL**, if proper credit is given and a complete copy of the publication is delivered to THE MAVERICK GROTTO address at the time of publication. Other organizations should contact the grotto at the address herein.

EXCHANGES: THE MAVERICK GROTTO, will exchange newsletters with other grottos. Contact any officer.

COMPLIMENTARY NEWSLETTERS: THE MAVERICK GROTTO will provide complimentary newsletters to persons or organizations who provide cave access (i.e. landowners) or otherwise provide assistance to cavers. The Grotto will also provide three free issues to persons interested in becoming members.

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

MEETINGS: Meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month, at SMOKEY'S RIBS, 5300 East Lancaster, Fort Worth. It is a little less than one mile west of Loop 820 East and next door to a K Mart. The time is 7:00 P.M., and the food is good.

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CAVE RESCUE: Call Collect 512-686-0234

CALENDAR

- Nov 1-6 Exploration of new ranch property near Del Rio
(Contact Danny Sherrod for details)
- Nov 10-11 Colorado Bend State Park Work Trip
- Nov 13 Maverick Grotto Meeting
- Nov 17 CRF survey trip to Fitton Cave in Arkansas
Contact Pete Lindsley (214) 722-2497
- Nov 18-19 Cavern course for certified divers to take place
in Florida. Contact Dave Milhollin
- Dec 1-2 Southwest Region's Winter Technical Regional:
Sponsored by the Lubbock Area Grotto in Lubbock.
Contact Kitty Parker (806) 792-9853
- Dec 8-9 Colorado Bend State Park Work Trip
- Dec ? Maverick Grotto Christmas Party (instead of the
regular monthly meeting)
- Dec 29 Lechugilla Survey Project ---Contact Pat Kambesis
at (404) 378-2836

ON THE COVER

Our Cover Cavers this month are Butch Fralia (in the distance) and Teresa White (in water up to her Well, in deep water!)

They are wading through Wild Woman Cave in Oklahoma, which was closed to caving after this trip a couple of years ago, but will hopefully be re-opened again in the future.

MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER MEETING

The regular monthly meeting of the Maverick Grotto was held Tuesday evening, 9 Oct 1990.

Dale Ellison opened the meeting and read announcements of upcoming events.

Dale then announced that we had received applications for membership in the grotto.

First was Jimmy and Pat Thomas, from Weatherford. Jimmy is a certified diver, and is currently working on his Master's Degree in geology.

Second was Steven Jung, who lives in Euless. Steve, Jimmy and Pat have been actively caving with the Maverick Grotto for some time, and are well known to the membership. Of course, they were speedily elected to membership.

Butch Fralia reminded everyone about TOTR, and offered raffle tickets for sale to raise funds for TCMA-owned Whirlpool Cave in Austin. Winners of the raffle were to be announced at TOTR.

Dave Milhollin announced his upcoming course on cavern diving (for certified open-water divers only) to be held in Florida on 18-19 November.

A CRF-sponsored survey trip to Fitton Cave in Arkansas was announced for 17 November.

Announcement of the upcoming election for officers was made and nominations were taken. (see article on this page for details).

Butch Fralia reported that his expenses for meat and charcoal for the fall party was \$64.22. Payment from the grotto treasury will be forthcoming.

Donna Anderson brought up plans for the annual grotto Christmas party. She mentioned that Danny Sherrod had graciously offered his house (again) for the Christmas bash. But since Danny was not in attendance at the meeting, a date could not be finalized. Suggested dates were 1 Nov or 14 Nov. Donna said she would check with Danny and have final plans to report at the November meeting.

Trip reports:

Butch Fralia and Ed Young reported on a recent trip to River Styx. They found that the '64 entrance was open, for the first time in years. Also, they discovered a new '90 entrance, close to the '63 entrance, but by-passing much of the crawlway.

Bruce and Donna Anderson told about their trip to Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. It was highlighted by exploration of Seneca-Thorn Mountain Cave in West Virginia, which included one immense 800-ft-long room, that was 80-ft-wide and 40-ft-high.

After adjournment, and an extended bull-session, Ernest Parker presented a much-needed program on Knot-tying. He also announced that the next vertical rope session at Mineral Wells State Park would take place either in early December or early next spring. If interested, give Ernest a call.

ELECTION OF 1991 GROTTO OFFICERS

At the regular monthly grotto meeting in October, nominations were made for officers who will serve in 1991. At that meeting, the following nominations were made:

Chairman:	Dale Ellison
Vice-Chairman:	Bruce Anderson
Treasurer:	Jimmy Thomas
Secretary/Editor:	Steven Jung

The election of officers will take place at the November meeting, and of course, additional nominations may be made from the floor. However, any nominees must be members of the NSS and also must have agreed beforehand to serve, if elected.

Make sure you come to the meeting on November 13th and cast your ballot. You've got to admit, your choices here are a lot more attractive than "Claytie or the Lady".

LECHUGILLA CAVE UPDATE

Here are a few details on the latest survey expedition in Lechugilla Cave conducted on 3-10 August 1990.

Carlsbad Caverns National Park Superintendent Wallace Elms and expedition leader Richard Bridges reported that the surveyed length of Lechugilla Cave is now 51.4 miles. That makes it the fourth-longest cave in the U.S., and at 1565 ft. deep, it is already the deepest cave in the country.

Additional cave passages were located which have not yet been explored or surveyed, so that the next expedition, scheduled for late December, will likely see Lechugilla vault into third place on the longest caves list.

NSS SPELEODIGEST

Each year the NSS publishes a round-up of some of the best and most interesting articles from grotto newsletters from around the country and around the world. This year's recently published 1989 SPELEODIGEST was edited by Scott Fee of Indianapolis, and includes information from 35 states and 15 foreign countries. Over 60 grotto newsletters are represented in the 470-page book, with articles on exploration, caving equipment, techniques, history, science, and humor that were published during 1989.

If you want your own copy, order it from the NSS BOOKSTORE, CAVE AVE, HUNTSVILLE AL 35810-4416. It's just \$14.00 plus \$2.00 shipping. And that's a lot cheaper than subscribing to over 60 different newsletters.

MORE WILLIAMSON COUNTY CAVING

Alvis Hill

What do bored cavers do on a Friday night? A quick call from Bill Larsen was all it would take to transform this mundane Friday in August into a miniature caving trip. It seems that another one of Bill's many digging projects had paid off, and tales of beautiful formations and walking (yes, WALKING) passage were beckoning. The pickup was loaded with gear and ready to go right after work.

The trip to Bill and Pat's took the usual 45 minutes and I got there just as Dawn arrived from an Austin shopping trip. We took the truck and followed Bill and Pat to the site, parking at a newly-erected barricade. This particular area is in the process of being developed. Hopes are that the barricade will discourage traffic to the area, which contains caves known to harbor endangered species.

As we made the short hike, I realized that we had caved in the area before and wondered where this new find might be. All of the sudden, Bill stops and proceeds to get his helmet and light on. Where is it? (I hate to ask!) Right there at my feet, cleverly covered with rocks and leaves. Once Bill finds a cave, he goes out of his way to make sure no one else does. Rocks and soil are quickly shifted around, revealing a nifty drop of about eight feet.

Bill entered first, then yelled up directions as to how to best contort ourselves in order to make the squeeze at the bottom. (Oh goody, another one of those!) I followed next, reached the bottom of the drop, then turned face down and slid feet-first through the squeeze, popping out into a small, low room. Dawn and Pat felt that the passage was too tight and hot to maneuver and elected to stay topside. Bill and I decided to continue since we had already negotiated the entrance.

We maneuvered through a short breakdown crawl and down a small pit which brought us to a junction. The passage was roughly 3' in diameter and muddy. We opted for the left passage and about this time I began wondering when the walking passage would start. After crawling about 100 feet, the passage opened up a little and then sloped down into a junction with a stream passage. Bill chose the downstream passage, and we were able to comfortably stoopwalk in ankle-deep water. This, of course, never lasts. As we continued down the passage, the ceiling got lower as the water level rose and it wasn't too long before we found ourselves crawling in belly-deep water. We also found ourselves crawling through an obstacle course of very delicate formations. After awhile, the passage opened up to stooping size again. The water continued to get deeper and we soon

found ourselves behind a large rimstone dam. We crawled over it, and the passage dried up somewhat. As we continued, the passage became larger and we were actually able to walk upright. (Noteworthy for Williamson Co.) We found ourselves in a room, with a steep mud slope to the left. Bill directed my attention to the passage up the mud slope.

What I saw really caught me by surprise -- a room filled with some of the best soda straws I have seen, many of them four to five feet long.

We made our way up the mud slope, carefully picking our way through pristine formations. Several of the soda straws were speared into the mud, apparently undisturbed for many years. One noteworthy formation was a soda straw that had fallen and landed against a "live" stalagmite, lodging there vertically. Calcification had fused the two formations into one, which created a very interesting sight. After exploring for a few minutes we backed out again, grateful that we had made minimal impact on the area.

At this point we decided that it would be best to turn around and head out so those topside wouldn't get too worried. We exited via a side passage which brought us back to the first junction, and left the cave after almost three hours. A quick trip back to Bill's, a shower and a late supper rounded out the evening.

Since making this trip, a team has begun surveying the cave and, hopefully, a map will be forthcoming. Williamson County continues to produce new caves regularly and there's a lot of survey work that needs to be done. Volunteers would be appreciated.

DEATH UP YOUR NOSE

Yeah, I know it's a strange headline, but it got you to read this article, didn't it.

Actually, this information is copied from the Sept-Oct 1990 DC SPELEOGRAPH, which copied it from the June 1990 Cleve-O-Grotto News, who originally found the information in the Oct 1989 Outside Magazine. (Whew!)

So you've gotten this far, but what's it all about?

According to Outside Magazine, some caves that are fed by warm spring water can represent a real health hazard. Amoeba Naegleria Fowleri is a commonly found amoeba that thrives in hot water. Entering your nose, it crawls up the olfactory nerve and into your cranium. It lives on protein; in this case, your brain. Death occurs in five to seven days, with diagnosis generally made during the autopsy.

Remember that, the next time you complain about cold cave water!

THE MAVERICK GROTTTO FOURTH ANNIVERSERY
by Butch Fralia

I would like to remind everyone that November is the fourth anniversary of The Maverick Grotto. We've had fun and some success as an organization but I sense a need to look back and remember where, why, and how it all started. I've a few thoughts to express and questions to ask which are my own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the officers or the membership.

The grotto was organized by; Donna Anderson, Corky Corcoran, Dale Ellison, Butch Fralia and Joe Biddens. Other Fort Worth cavers had expressed an interest but hadn't taken an interest in carrying the ball. Joe is now living and working in Arkansas while infiltrating the MOLES in his spare time (much to their surprise) while Corky is still living in the area but is seldom seen but always welcome.

There was a great deal of controversy over the new grotto. Some saw it as an attack on and desertion of the DFW Grotto and for a time there was even fear DFW Grotto would possibly collapse. Fortunately this was not the case, DFW has reorganized and may be stronger now than when the Fort Worth Cavers left. There was some animosity but for my part, it was simply that I didn't like driving to Dallas every month and the people I caved with lived in Fort Worth.

I still hold membership at DFW, cave with people there and about once a year brave the traffic to attend a meeting. I always enjoy going. What ever animosity may have existed early on, has faded away and can stay that way. There are good people in both organizations. I would like to think of the Maverick Grotto as being organized for reasons geographical rather than political.

Joe Biddens received the blame for forming The Maverick Grotto but he was contacted for assistance rather than calling upon the others. Joe bore a lot of criticism but cranky old fart he is, he has strong shoulders and held up better than most people would have. He was instrumental in creating the Grotto Constitution as well as cutting through the NSS red tape to get the Grotto Charter through in record time. If one wants to seek out those most instrumental in making the initial contacts, the credit should go to Donna Anderson and Corky Corcoran.

The original intention of the Grotto founders was to create a close knit organization of people interested in caving. A Grotto which organized trips to bring both new and experienced cavers together; giving the new an opportunity see if caving was something they would like on a regular basis, and the experienced a chance to get together and reinforce their interests and friendships. There would be Grotto activity for the purpose of getting people together and primarily out on caving trips. Hopefully there would be active cavers who would take an interest in keeping the whole thing running.

Early on, a Grotto newsletter was recognized as one of the most important parts of the organization. There has been a monthly newsletter from the beginning. There was almost a newsletter before there was a Grotto. It is an important part of the organization, the media by which members are notified of events and the current trends in caving. The newsletter is as good as the members want it to be by their contributions to the Editors. A great number of interesting articles have been printed over the years. David and Shari must be commended for their efforts in assuring the monthly publication has continued. They indeed have put in their time and someone else should come forward and pick up the ball.

A great deal of emphasis during the formation of the Grotto was that it be a non-political organization. Unfortunately this can not always be the case. This doesn't mean we have to harp at each other, snipe at other organizations but there are areas which we who are not only cavers but citizens of the State of Texas have to be concerned with. The cave bill is a good example. It had

import to a great cross section of the state. Caves are a vital resource in areas where there are Karst fed aquifers. Protecting caves is critical to protecting the water source. When events transpire which affect the future of Texas Caving, we cannot remain aloof. Those who do not get involved can at least remain aware. The cave bill didn't pass but it must be remembered that we did get the land owner liability amendment to an existing law which has been of benefit to cavers.

The organization is still in existence and as far as anyone can tell it is still healthy as far as meeting attendance is concerned but there's one small detail. There seems to be few people who get involved in actual caving trips. There is a lethargy which seems to prevail which I cannot completely understand but would very much like to. We seem to get fair turnout at parties but very poor turnout on caving trips.

There are constantly trips available to those who don't choose to organize their own but the turnout is poor. Over Labor Day weekend, Donna and Bruce organized a trip to New Mexico with plenty of permits but they weren't filled anywhere near capacity. A few years ago, there would have been a waiting list of people to get on a trip like this. What will it take to garner interest and get people interested in caving again.

I am in a unique position that I can cave with great frequency and realize that not everyone can do this. Some people are lucky to be able to organize the time to get out on two or three trips a year. This is understandable but the problem which manifests itself now doesn't seem to be a time factor but a general lack of interest.

I'm not the doomsday cryer saying the Grotto is about to fall apart, this doesn't appear to be the case. What I do see is a group of armchair cavers who like to talk about caves and caving but don't seem to want to cave. Sometimes they act offended if someone talks about recent cave trips or invites them on a trip. What does it take to change this or can it be changed? What can be done to generate interest in actual trips? What can be done to lure people back into caving, into exploring the underground mystery which brought them into caving in the first place?

Studies have been made on caving and cavers. Why do people cave? The answer is that more than seventy percent of cavers, nationwide, cave for the adventure of going where no one else goes, seeing what no one else sees, and feeling what no one else feels. Where is this sense of adventure? Are the cave trips available not capable of providing the experience people seek? The remaining thirty percent are involved for scientific interest, special interest within caving (vertical, electronics, surveying, etc) and a very few less than five percent admit to being macho types who have something to prove to themselves or the world.

Several meetings ago, Mike Cagle came forward and spoke. He pointed out that meetings, parties, etc., are all nice but the purpose of caving organizations is to get people underground. I can't agree more. I'd like to know what people want, what do they expect? I'd like a little local company on trips once in awhile. It's lonely out there when you're the only member of your organization present and someone asks; "Where's the other members of your group?" That's all fine and good but I'd also like to feel I belong to an organization of people having fun, enjoying and participating in caving.

As one of the original founders of this Grotto, I feel an obligation to investigate what can be done to restore the Grotto to it's original purpose, getting people underground. Where do you want to go and what do you want to do? If you can't create the situation for yourself, let someone else know, we might be able to help. Do you need a ride? Call I'm probably going that way!

ADVENTURES AND EXPERIENCESAnother River Styx Trip!by Butch Fralia

Destination: Bateman Ranch, King County, Tx.

Dates: October 28-30.

Personnel: John Brooks Fort Worth Country Day School
 Butch Fralia Alvis & Dawn Hill and friends
 Gregg Mooty Danny Sherrod
 Ed Young Shane the Wonder Dog

You read the title and shudder thinking, it's another stupid River Styx Trip report. You've read a million of them and you're ready for something different. A grand adventure eating breakfast at Denny's or something involving parties. But no, you've got to read another River Styx Trip report! Well, this is a little different. During recent months, the author has been made aware of several leads on the Bateman Ranch. Leads which certainly tweak the curiosity and make a ridge walker's blood boil. It's time to find out whether they're really there.

It's going to be a quiet weekend in the River Styx area think Butch, Danny, Ed, and Shane as they arrive at the traditional campsite, pull out lawn chairs and settle down with a brew for an after drive wind-down. The head is barely off the brew when head lights are spotted bearing down on the camp. Wow! Are these folks going to be surprised when they find out they're not alone. A blue Toyota pickup arrives, tons of people climb out and voice ring through the night; "Is that Butch?" "Is that Alvis?" "Gee, Danny's here too!"

Suddenly in remote west central Texas it's a Colorado Bend Reunion. Alvis and Dawn have four boys from church to break in as cavers. Not to be beat, Ed is on his first caving trip!

Wound down, everyone locates a camp spot. Danny unfolds a camp cot, places his sleeping bag on it and commences to saw logs under the stars. Butch retires to the big blue van leaving everyone else driving tent stakes.

Morning comes, breakfast is served and Danny brews a huge pot of deer camp coffee. A cup of Danny's coffee is a definite if not rude awakening (it's good though). You pick the coffee grounds from between your teeth and you've got energy! You smell cave, you want to cave, you're knees ache to feel cave floor under them. Get on 'dem pads, load 'dat pack, stoke 'dos lights, times a wasting! At least it's wasting if your going to River Styx.

The P.O.D. (Plan of the Day) for you pacifists, is for Alvis and Dawn to take the boys on a Grand Tour of Styx. Gotta get them tuned up for Colorado Bend. Butch, Danny, Ed, and Shane will deliver releases to Mrs. Mongrain then head out to check new leads. Caves and rumors of caves, who could ask for anything more.

While the final preparations are being made, Ed browses the country side with a pair of ten power binoculars. How many times have you seen someone do this? How many times have you done it yourself? Every time, you come up empty handed, it's a shelter, something someone else has already checked out. Would you believe he spotted an honest to goodness hole? Across the river, south of Salt Spring, it's something new, something to check out later.

The big blue van loaded to the gills, rumbles down the road but comes to an abrupt halt not 200 feet from where it started. "While we're here let's find Dale's cave." Stand by the sinkhole on top of the hill, look across the valley for a rock outcropping on yon hill. There it is, walk toward that mound and look for blue flagging tape. Down the hill, up the mound and there's a hole. "Wow, it's really here!" "There's the flagging tape." Offerings are made to Ralph and Danny is the human sacrifice. "Does it go? Does it go?"

"Not far to say the least!" It's a solution pocket which has caved in. It's there, so something else may be there, a massive dig to go at all but not today.

The van moves again, the grand tour resumes, look at the sink on the Rig Pad. They've been filling it in for years and everytime it rains, it collapses some more. How's the old dirt sink doing down by the river. Five years ago it looked like an armadillo burrow but now it's about 10 feet across, 6 feet deep and you can see rock down there. It takes water that's for sure.

Releases are delivered to the Ranch House and it's off, off and away to high adventure. There's caves out there boys, we've got virgin passage to find.

Due to a recent misadventure, Butch has become acquainted with Bobby Skidmore, County Commissioner, Restaurant, Liquor Store, and gas pump owner. You know Bobby, owns that restaurant out on highway 114 where 222 comes up from Knox City. Bobby in turn introduced Butch to Dwain, the maintainer man.

"You one of them spelunkers?" "Reckon so if that's the way you want to put it." "We was diggin the gravel pit on the Bateman the other day, hit a cave. Thought that loader might just go right on down." "Where's this pit, sounds good to me!" Directions are given. "Ever been down to the old dugout, where the old indian camp was? There's sink holes out there, likely a cave or two." "Aint been there either."

For Danny, Butch, Ed, and Shane, that's what this weekend's about, chase legends and find holes at the very least, have a great time. Even if there are no holes, it's got to be pretty neat, poking around the old indian camp. So it's drive and drive, never find a river, where is it anyway? "Let's go ask Bobby." From the bowels of the Bateman, drive to the restaurant. Bobby don't know, and aint got no phone to call Dwain. He seldom goes out there except to check on the road crews.

Danny made a small purchase of liquor while Butch made a large purchase of gasoline. Bobby allows that his gas at \$1.36 a gallon is cheap, the station at Gutherie is charging \$1.61 a gallon. "Aint never been to Gutherie when their gas wasn't at least a quarter a gallon more'n the rest of the world, those hands on the 6666 must get paid awful good!"

After all this lets try Shorty (Mrs. Mongrain). On the way back to the ranch house, Dwain Daniels is spotted. Not maintainer Dwain but the Dwain who has the surface lease on the Ranch. "I remember you he says, how can I help you." "Where'd you hide the dug out and Gravel Pit?" Dwain gives directions and explains the other dwain has spoken of finding arrow heads at the junctions of two creeks, he doesn't know of an indian camp but does know the gravel, where one of the early county settlers lived. Again it's back to the bowels of the Bateman.

Out toward the dugout, the land marks are spotted just about the time it starts raining. For three wet and soggy hours the group ridgewalks in the rain. Saw lots of earth mounds, looked like something happened up here, in fact it looks kind of strange but no dugout. The clay ground is gettin' slick even to walk on, better head in the direction of camp. One of these days, we got to come back with one of

the two Dwains and figure out where this thing is.

The roads are slicker than greased glass, put the old van in four-wheel drive and plow your way back. Coming to the gravel pit turn off; "let's try it!" Down that road away, open the steel gate and there's the cattle pens. Straight down the road and it comes to the gravel pit. What the hey, this road slopes about 15 degrees to the east. Can't keep the van on the road, better turn back. We'll do this some other time.

Toward the West side of the ranch, the roads are better. "Let's at least do one cave today, let's do Bad Dog over in Salinas sink." "Great!" Butch aint ever been in the cave, Danny aint never been in the sink, and Ed aint never been in a wild cave but lord help us is he ever ready. Slipping and plowing through the mud, we finally come to Salinas Sink. If you've never seen it, you've missed one of the most impressive sink holes in gyp country, it's quite a sight. It's big, several hundred feet across and perhaps 70 feet deep, a true sink hole no mere depression this. Each time you see it, there is more collapse, it seems to constantly grow and you just know there's going to be a new cave entrance discovered someday.

Parking by the road, they set out to see if the entrance is still open before putting on all those pads and such. The sink is a magnificent sight to warm any caver's heart. On the west side of the sink, there's new collapse, an entrance can be seen deep in a crack. A quick check, it's just a talus but maybe it'll grow one of these days. At the target cave, we go just far enough into the entrance to shine a light and decide it's open. "Quick, back to the truck, get that gear!"

The cavers rig themselves out and Butch remembers: "My wheat lamp is still chargin' on my kitchen cabinet." Always prepared, two back up carbide lamps are located and one fired up. This lamp looked pretty familiar to Danny, it's the one he dropped 180 feet out at Madonna.

Now there's a real problem with this cave, for one thing, it's has too many names. It's been called Big Dog Cave, Bad Dog Cave, and Mad Dog Cave but if you just say that cave over in Salinas Sink, most anyone will know the one you're talking about. Not many people come here, because of the horror stories about how bad it is, it's unstable and just any minute now, it's going to cave in. After five years of listening to these stories, it's still open so it may not be so bad. After all, there's a pool of water down there which effervesces when you toss rocks in it, that's worth a the trip isn't it?

To enter this cave, you climb down into Salinas Sink (which is sometimes an experience in itself). The entrance is on the east side of the sink, you go down between the native formation wall and breakdown. Sure enough, there's loose stuff, just knock it loose and let it fall, it's better than having it on your head. Suddenly the entrance and downward climb "seems" pretty steady. Butch is elected human sacrifice but Oztotl must be sated today and he makes it without incident. Danny and Ed soon follow and the cave is thoroughly checked out.

The cave is a talus formed by break down against the native rock wall of the sink hole. The general trend of the passage is north and south. It's large enough to stand and move around in and there's really a pool of water down there. Tossing in a few rocks it sounds quite deep and using Danny's Wheat Lamp, you can't see bottom though the water's relatively clear. It seems to go nearly straight down and rocks do cause the water to effervesce. Just to the north of this pool is a low impassable stream passage where water comes from under the break down and flowing into the passage. A quick taste assures you it's not just rain water, it's salty, another salt spring. Perhaps water in the pool is being forced up then runs under the break down to supply this passage. There is perhaps a hundred feet of passage through the breakdown but solution passage (other than the stream passage) into the native rock isn't located.

Leaving the cave, there's speculation about where the spring comes out. It's not likely to be part of Salt Spring

Cave System since that comes from another direction.

You may have forgotten with all this meandering around but this morning Ed spotted a hole across the river from Styx and while in the area it's only natural to check it out. It's up river from Salt Spring Cave and was located but turns out to be a collapsed area on the side of a hill. There are fissures forming but as yet haven't exposed any passage.

While we're so close and it's getting late, it's only natural to find a good place to sit and wait for the bat flight from the Styx River entrance. The bats fly but there seem to be fewer than earlier this summer. The most entertaining part of this is a large owl trying to feed on the bats. It flies down into the exodus several times but it's too dark to tell whether the hunt is successful.

It's dark now but Danny liked the liquor he bought earlier and decides a little more just can't hurt anything. Returning to camp by way of the liquor store and we find more vehicles. A large van marked Fort Worth Country Day School and a Mitsubishi Montero are now on location. In a second, there's Gregg Mooty and John Brooks who are the official guides for the group. They've already toured River Styx and are recovering from the experience.

Around the camp fire, everyone tells of the day's experiences, develops a warm glow (Danny shared his bottle) then retires for the night.

Sunday morning finds everyone but Butch and Ed, packing and heading home. Butch and Ed think they will find the gravel pit since the roads have dried out but since Ed has never been here before he gets the grand tour. Down to the River Entrance, back inside away then over to the big dolenes. At Vertical Sink more rock has fallen from the high side and a large rock is now wedged inside and may possibly make entrance easier.

The good old '63 entrance is still there but there'll be a surprise for your next trip, there's now a '90 entrance. Butch and Ed got energetic and removed a lot of loose break down about ten feet from the '63. The hole kept getting bigger and bigger and looking easier and easier. Pulling out rocks is like eating Lay's potato chips, you can't stop with just one. The entrance is somewhat larger and easier than the '63. It goes into a small room where you drop into a small fissure and come into the main passage. There's a spot which could be a little larger but most folks will find it an easier entrance. It's also higher than the '63 so it may not be as prone to collect sticks and debris during rain. The poor old '63 entrance continues to degrade and may completely collapse at some future time.

At the '64 sink hole, Ed views the old '64 entrance now closed up due to rocks shifting during heavy rains. Looking around, another hole has opened up on the east side of the sink which may just be another talus or could lead to passage. It's something for another day.

The day is passing rapidly and the quite weekend is coming to a close. There are always so many things one can do but time goes by so fast when you're having fun. The indian dugout has yet to be located, it was too wet to get to the county gravel pit but Big Dog, Bad Dog, Mad Dog or what ever you choose to call it cave was explored for the first time in years and it's still there. There's a 1990 entrance to River Styx cave and quite a few people showed up for independent reasons. It wasn't "just" another River Styx trip after all. They're all fun and you never know what to expect, something else to mark in your diary of adventures and experiences.

Notes on River Styx:

River Styx is the 13th longest cave in Texas. Some time ago, Corky Corcoran, Donna Anderson and I spent a great deal of time locating passage not on the map. A connection has been made from Styx Drain Cave. This added passage would bring the cave from 13th longest to 10th or perhaps even 9th if anyone should become interested in a resurvey project. Maverick Cavers always speak of worthy causes but nothing comes of it, can there be a better grotto project?

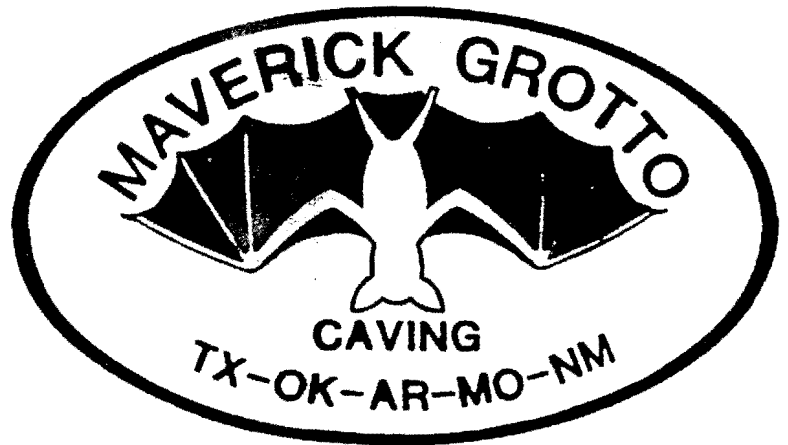
TEXAS NATURE CONSERVANCY

If you are looking for an end-of-the-year tax deduction, have I got a deal for you.

The Texas Nature Conservancy is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving biological diversity across the state of Texas. They do that by purchasing and preserving ecologically significant tracts of land that harbor threatened or endangered wildlife.

The most recent purchase by the Texas Nature Conservancy was the Eckert-James River Bat Cave. It was bought when the Eckert family was looking for a responsible group that would carry on the family's tradition of safeguarding the bats' home. The Bat Cave near Mason provides a haven for five to eight million freetail bats. And now it has permanent protection from the Nature Conservancy.

However, simply purchasing the property is not enough. The Conservancy must ensure the future safety of the colony by maintaining a fence, developing educational material and a self-guiding interpretive trail, and running a visitor program so people will have the chance to see the nightly, spectacular bat flight. To do the job right, they have teamed up with the world's foremost bat experts, Bat Conservation International.



Together, the two groups have assumed long-term care for the cave.

If you would like to join in that effort, send your tax-deductible check to protect the Eckert-James River Bat Cave and 25 other Texas nature preserves to: TEXAS NATURE CONSERVANCY, P O BOX 1440, SAN ANTONIO TX 78295-1440.