

THE MAVERICK BULL

The Newsletter of the Maverick Grotto Volume 18 Issue 3 March, 2005



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.

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.

Photos & Map Credits

Cover Photo: Pat Cicero– Speleogasm room in Pink Panther Cave, NM

Page 5: Bill Steele– Honey Creek Cave, TX

Page 8: Don Broussard-La Macha

Page 9: Butch Fralia– Hills Gate Dig

Back Cover: Tammy Cox-Maple Run Cave, Austin, TX

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, March 8th, 7:00 pm
Bodacious BBQ
1206 E Division St.
Arlington, TX. 76011
(817) 860-4248

Be sure and come to the meeting to vote on your favorite T-Shirt design and place your order.

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February Meeting Minutes

submitted by Scott Boyd:

The Maverick Grotto met Feb. 8th at Bodacious BBQ, on E. Division St. in Arlington. There were 12 members and 2 visitors present.

Program: video titled "Lechugilla Cave - The Hidden Giant", followed up by a discussion of the video.

Reports from Officers:

Treasurer: \$1,129.83 in the grotto checking account and \$236.70 in petty cash, for a total of \$1366.53.

Old Business: Ed Goff explained the current status of new grotto t-shirts.

New Business: Butch Fralia talked a little bit about the traffic that the grotto Website is getting.

Trip reports and trip announcements:

- * Butch Fralia gave a trip report on a recent Hell's Gate Cave dig project.
- * Tammy Cox gave a trip report on a caving trip to a San Saba County ranch.
- * Lex Cox gave a trip report on Honey Creek Cave.
- * Mark Gee gave a trip report on a caving trip to Deep Cave.

Caving Events Calendar

Mar 12-13 Southwest Region of the NSS Regional Meeting (Carlsbad, NM): Hosted by the White Sands Grotto at McKittrick Hill. **Contacts:** Dave and Carol Belski belski@caverns.com

Mar 19-20 Manhole Dig (Carlsbad, NM): On-going dig project on BLM land. **Contact:** Stephen Fleming swcaver@caverns.com

Mar 21-25 NOLS Leave No Trace Master Educator Course (Carlsbad, NM): National Outdoor Leadership School intensive five day course held at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. The primary focus is on caving related impacts. NOLS invented the Leave No Trace outdoor ethic. **Contact:** Nate Hintze 1-800-710-NOLS ext.

2213 <http://www.nols.edu/lnt/>

Mar 26-27 High Guads Restoration Project (Carlsbad, NM): 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

March ? Kickapoo Caverns State Park Project (Uvalde): Photo-monitoring workshop, Jan and Val Hildreth-Werker will appear as guest instructors. Exact date to be determined, watch for announcement on CaveTex. **Contacts:** Travis Scott travis@oztotl.com Alan Cobb ac@oztotl.com

Apr 02, 16, 30 Bat Flights at Stuart Bat Cave, Kickapoo Caverns State Park (Bracketville): Observe an estimated 500,000 bats emerge from Stuart Bat Cave in the evening. A program will be given regarding bats, the environment and the resources of the park. Call for times; fees \$5 per person; reservations required (830) 563-2342.

Apr 08-10 Colorado Bend State Park Project (Bend): January and April this spring only. This is a terrific project for beginning cavers. **Contacts:** Terry Holsinger (512) 443-4241 trhli@sprynet.com or Dale Barnard barnarddale@yahoo.com

Apr 16-17 Manhole Dig (Carlsbad, NM)

Apr 23 Earth Day Celebration, Colorado Bend State Park Project (Bend): Take a self-guided 1-1/2-mile scenic, round trip tour to spectacular Gorman Falls, a 65-foot waterfall in a beautiful Hill Country setting. See Gorman Cave in a walking wild cave tour. Hike to Gorman Springs, a beautiful area of the park open to the public only twice a year, on this self-guided tour. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Gorman Falls tours 9 a.m.-4 p.m.; wild cave tours hourly 9 a.m.-3 p.m.; fees Gorman Falls tour \$4 adults, \$2 children 6-12, free children 5 and under; Gorman Cave tour

\$15 per person-reservations recommended (325) 628-3240.

Apr 29-May 1 TSA Convention, Fort McKavett State Park (Menard): Hosted this year by the Permian Basin Speleological Society. Talks, vendors and the TCMA auction will be Saturday, trips into Powell's Cave (15 miles away) will be early Sunday. Early registration will be \$20 for single, \$30 for family, on-site registration will be \$25 for single and \$40 for family. **Contacts:** Jim Kennedy (512) 663-2287 jkennedy@batcon.org Bill Steele (214) 770-4712 Speleosteele@aol.com <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/fortmcka>

Apr 23-24 High Guads Restoration Project (Carlsbad, NM)

Apr 30- May 7 Fort Stanton Cave Project (Carlsbad, NM): Join the folks working on extending the length of this cave on BLM lands. **Contact:** John Corcoran III john_j_corcoran_III@msn.com

May 07 The Bats of Government Canyon, Government Canyon State Natural Area (San Antonio): Join Professor David Ribble of Trinity University and learn about the species of bats who call the caves of Government Canyon their home. Learn about bat ecology and then help set mist nets in hopes of catching a few as they feed in the night. Group size limited. 6-11 p.m.; suggested donation \$10 per person, benefiting the Government Canyon Natural History Association; reservations required and will be taken beginning at 7:30 a.m. April 27. **Contact:** (210) 688-2208 educmte@hotmail.com

May 14 Texas Speleological Survey Board Meeting (Austin): Held at the TSS offices in Austin at 10:30 a.m. Open to anyone interested in Texas cave information, its organization and publication. **Contacts:** George Veni (210) 558-4403 gveni@satx.rr.com Jim Kennedy (512) 663-2287 jkennedy@batcon.org

May 14-15 Manhole Dig (Carlsbad, NM)

May 21-22 Orientation to Cave Rescue (Carlsbad, NM): **Contact:** Bob Rodgers motocaver@zianet.com

May 21 Snakes and Bats Double Header, Copper Breaks State Park (Quanah): Laurie Hall of the Waggoner Ranch will present her program about Texas snakes in the museum.

Afterwards, Monte Lumpkin of Quanah, Texas and an active member of Bat Conservation International will give his popular program about bats in Texas. He will begin his presentation in the museum and then accompany visitors to the Comanche camp ground at dusk to watch the bats fly. Snake program 4-5 p.m., bat program 6:30-7:30 p.m.; fees \$2 adults, \$1 senior citizens **Contact:** (940) 839-4331.

May 28-29 High Guads Restoration Project (Carlsbad, NM)

May 28-30 Southwest Region of the NSS Memorial Day Regional Meeting: Location to be determined.

May until Oct Evening Bat Flight Tours, Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area (Rocksprings): Every Wednesday through Sunday the Devil's Sinkhole Society leads tours. Peer down into the depths of Texas and observe up to 3 million bats emerge. A short program will be given on Devil's Sinkhole and bats. Call for times; fees \$10 adults, \$8 senior citizens, \$6 children; reservations required. (830) 683-BATS (2287). (830) 683-3762.

May 14,28 Bat Flights at Stuart Bat Cave, Kickapoo Caverns State Park (Bracketville)

Jun 04-05 Hilltop Project (Capitan, NM): Ridge walking and digging in windy blowholes 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. **Contact:** Lee Skinner (505) 293-5723 skinner@thuntek.net

Jun 11-12 Manhole Dig (Carlsbad, NM)

Jun 11 Bat Flights at Stuart Bat Cave, Kickapoo Caverns State Park (Bracketville)

Jun 18-19 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

Jun 24-Jul 02 National Cave Rescue Commission 2005 Cave Rescue Operations and Management Seminar (Union Hill, AL): Basic and advanced cave rescue courses offered the week before the NSS Convention. More info found at <http://caves.org/io/nrcr/2005Seminar/seminar2005.htm> **Contact:** Berta Kirchman 2005registrar@nrcr.info

Honey Creek Cave Trip Report

By: Lex Cox, AKA, CB

Yep, Tammy rented wetsuits and we went to Honey Creek Cave in January. Who would have thought she could have talked me into going, but she did. It was about a 4 hour drive from our house in Azle to get to the cave. This was our first time to go to a river cave so we didn't really know what to expect. I thought we were going to have to rappel down a 150 foot hole to get to the starting point and was pretty unsure of doing that.

When we got there I saw the shaft that had a cable attached to it and was relieved that we were going to be lowered in. This was a very technical operation. It seems that an old tractor is used in low gear to hook up to the cable and lower three people at a time into the shaft. This worked fine. Tammy, Megan and I were lowered in with no problems. Kurt had been operating the tractor. After he lowered everyone in he pulled the cable out and dropped a rope down the shaft. This is done because there is not enough room to rappel down or ascend back out safely with the cable in the shaft. Once Kurt was down we walked, crawled, swam and squished through mud for about 2 and a half hours before we reached the point where some diving tanks had been left in the cave about 4 years ago. Three of us decided we could carry the 2 tanks back the way we came and some how get them up the shaft.

Bill had brought 2 packs for us to put the tanks in to help carry them. Michael, Don and I parted ways from the rest of the group and started our long haul out. The others went on to find the shower stall room. We stopped two times to rest on the way out. It seemed like the tanks were getting heavier and heavier. Finally we made it back to the shaft. Don volunteered to ascend up the rope and operate the tractor to lower the cable down to us. Don had not driven the tractor before, but Kurt had given him

instructions before we started out. Don started up while Michael and I waited with the 40 degree cold air blowing down the shaft. Michael and I talked about his pack, he was afraid it wouldn't hold his tank. He decided I should go out first and then send my pack back down to him.

Forty five minutes later the cable was lowered down to us. I went to go to the cable to hook on and told Michael I would send my pack back down as soon as I got out. He said bologna, I'm frozen, I will hold my tank and go out at the same time.

He hooked onto the rope one loop above me holding his tank. I hooked my pack onto the loop just above

me. We shook the cable and Don started pulling us up. When we were getting close to the top the cable started jerking up and down repeatedly. Michael and I with very choice words asked each other what the heck was going on. We were worried that Don might have fallen off the tractor or had a stroke, who knows. All we knew is that we were about 140 feet from the bottom. Michael was about 5 feet from the top and I was 15 feet under him. We were still jerking around so we both braced ourselves against the walls.

Then we had a sudden jerk about two feet upwards. At

that point Michael was close enough to throw his tank out the top and pull himself out of the hole. He yelled to Don that there was still one more in the hole. Don could not hear him because of the noise from the tractor and he was too far away. I braced myself in the shaft again while Michael ran to Don to tell him I was still in there. Meanwhile Don had pulled forward several feet and the tank above me had landed in my lap.



Couples that cave together stay together. Lex and Tammy Cox getting ready to enter Honey Creek Cave.

Michael came back and said my voice had changed a few octaves. Hmmm, wonder why. He told me that Don had backed into a tree and needed to pull forwards some more to go around the tree. I told Michael that I had ten feet of rope and a tank in my lap and there was no way I could go back down. I was not sure how much longer I could hold myself against the wall with the weight of the tank. Don hurried and before long I was being pulled out to safety. This is an experience we will remember for a long time. The next time I go to Honey Creek I think I will stay top-side and have a fire and dinner ready for the tired, cold and wet cavers.

Announcements

New Grotto T-Shirts

Howdy cavers!

It's been a few years since we last made grotto t-shirts (the blue tie-dyed shirts with Wayne's bat artwork), which were a big hit. It's long past time for new shirts. So we're just gonna go ahead and do it

The price of the new grotto T-shirt will be \$15. This reflects the \$14 cost of the tie-dye shirt with 1-color screen print, plus \$1 each to cover shipping.

Come to the meeting March 8th to vote on your favorite shirt and design and place your order! If you can't attend the meeting but want to order a shirt or shirts, please contact Ed Goff and let him know what size (S M L XL) and quantity. Ed.Goff@tm.com

WWW.MAVERICKGROTTO.ORG

By Butch Fralia

All Maverick members know the grotto has it's own website. All members with web access visit it, at least occasionally. I own the domain name but the website belongs to The Maverick Grotto. I'd like to encourage anyone with ideas or material to enhance the website to contact me.

The website is in it's third year of commercial

hosting with it's own domain name. The advantage to commercial hosting (meaning we pay someone to put our website on their servers) is that we have complete control over the website.

We've had 664 unique visitors from 30 different countries. That's pretty impressive for a local organization website. Six people have added our website to their favorites this month!

The top page visited (as has been the trend for months) is the Phantom Springs photograph page. Apparently people like Bill Tucker's underwater photography though all the photograph pages are popular. The T-shirt page just put up is getting on up there but will be short lived. Old newsletter downloads are still popular. The top newsletter downloaded this month was the April 2004 issue. You'd think that after awhile, those interested in old caving newsletters would have what they wanted but it never seems to end.

As was well publicized, we won the NSS web award for part of last year. Even though the link has been relegated to a sub-page, a lot of people (cavers?) are linking from the NSS Web Awards page..

Continued from last month.

So You Want to Shoot Cave Video By Butch Fralia, Pete Lindsley, Dennis Welch

Butch: Dennis, By now I'm sure you're catching up with Pete and I intellectually. It wont take much practice and you'll be up with us on practice. Just trying to be of assistance where possible. You're the one who's going to have to pay for and use this stuff so the final decision is of course up to you. There are even other cameras besides Sony but other than the old Panasonic VHS that I used to use, it's what Pete and I have the most experience with. You can get good video out of most of them. I mention that so you wont think you'll be an outcast if you get something else. I was at Fry's today (twice) and they have the camera you're interested in, the HC-65. I played with it for a couple of minutes and generally like the feel of it. It's a little smaller than what I'm used to but it's pretty cool. It's the usual 7 lux camera so it's light sensitivity is about the same as most of the other Sony cameras. I tried looking through the view finder with it pointed under the table but since they now have curtains all around the table it was

inconclusive in a low light test. It certainly has good lenses and a good sized CCD so you should see some pretty good video out of it.

While I didn't fall in love with it, the only thing I don't like about it is the battery. I'm used to the FM series batteries (Pete's camera uses the same). They are a little bigger and last a lot longer. Having been around longer, they are also cheaper. Their FM70 battery is good for about five hours if you're not using the LCD to shoot and cheaper (\$77.00 locally). You can never have enough batteries even keeping in mind that you probably won't be able to shoot everything in a cave on one trip.

A note while I'm thinking about it. I don't use the side LCD very much except to check framing. It's a real battery eater and shortens your battery considerably. Look at the shooting time specs with the LCD on if you think you want to use it and think about how much video you might want to shoot, say on a Carlsbad trip and you can sort of figure where you are from there.

I'm with Pete on the external Infrared light. I think a white lighting system is going to be more useful. If you are going to do a lot of wildlife studies at night it would be cool but I think it would take more light than that. As for white light, you can pick up track light bulbs, a 55W Halogen with reflector attached for about \$12.95 at Home Depot, Lowe's and other places. If you want, you can get the track light housing (I'm not sure what that costs) to mount the light. It's a nice bright area light that runs off of 12v batteries. A 12V 5AH gel cell battery (about \$12.95 at Fry's) will give you about an hour of useable light. Several of those are pretty potent. It's a broad area light without much hot spot. By hot spot, I mean it's brighter in one area than another.

I once made a light bar using four off-road lights. I had to use wax paper to diffuse them but that cut the hot spot way down. Every once in a while I had to change the paper because it would dry out but it's cheap and what the heck. Of course, that needed power so we (Dale Ellison and I) used a 300 cranking amp car battery that we got about 12 hours of light out of. It worked pretty well and did a surprisingly good job of lighting up Kickapoo Cavern; one of the big volume caves in Texas. I've located the video and one of these days hope to get time to edit it down to something people will watch.

I've done some fieldwork with the Texas Parks and Wildlife media department using commercial powered lights. They had a 300W Sun Gun that had a huge battery pack and only lasted about 15 minutes so you were careful about selecting what you wanted to shoot with it. They also had a smaller light that also had a bandolier-type battery pack. It didn't last long either. They were also very expensive!

I was also involved with the Wichita Falls TV station doing a spot on River Styx Cave. When we got out there, we had to use my clumsy video light system because they didn't have enough light. The cameraman was too fat to get in the cave so I ended up being the cameraman using a commercial camera that was really great in low light and an external 3/4 inch tape deck that was about as big as an HP laser printer. It was fun, educational and I never even got to see the video. All I know about it is

that it was shown over three evenings in 1-1/2 minute segments. I was supposed to get finished copies but....

A word here on attachments, most of them are available locally. Before you load up on them you might want to get the camera and one additional battery and use it for awhile before you decide on the other stuff. I ended up with two five hour batteries and a wide angle lens. You may want to see if you even think you need the wide angle lens before you buy one.

If you should accidentally have a fire wire card (also known as IEEE-1394 interface) and cable, you can buy Studio 9 all over town for about \$99.00. Best Buy, CompUSA and probably some others have the full kit with the fire wire included, probably about the same price if not a little cheaper. If you have time, you might want to see what you can get the fire wire card and cable for separately from the software. It probably doesn't make much difference. Most newer computers are coming with built-in fire wire so you might want to check your computer depending on it's age and make sure it doesn't already have one in it.

We might need to talk about how fast your computer is and how much disk space you have before you get to dedicated to the editing idea.

My comments here on on-line vendors: I've got a good one that I use to source GPS equipment. I read the GPS news group and people's opinions about who to trust. Of course, GPS receivers that I want aren't always available locally so that sort of sets the stage for that.

My first digital camcorder, I bought locally and new. I had it ordered from an on-line vendor and it never showed up. I wanted it it time to shoot my stepdaughter's college graduation. It's been \$506 online, \$809 locally. The camera didn't show up and didn't show up and I finally made two or three calls to them before someone finally asked why I thought I had something ordered from them. I said because I have a confirmation number, etc. They said I didn't have an order, did I want to place one? It was too late then, I had to go down to Best Buy and get it two days before the graduation. Just about enough time to charge the batteries and not much time to play before the graduation!

What the camera guys seem to want to do is sell you the camera at probably what's a wholesale price then sell a LOT of attachments at prices higher than you can get them at Best Buy. I just ordered the camera so they ordained they couldn't make enough money that way and conveniently lost my order. If I can remember tomorrow, I'll get the name of a place that a couple of my friends have used successfully. There are some sites on-line that rate on-line vendors. I don't have any links for them right now.

From here, the discussion broke off into video lighting and digital still photography. These are subjects for a number of separate articles for some later time.

The Legend of La Macha is Born

By Bill Steele:

They'll surely be talking about it for many years to come. There we were, camped in the rural wilds of mountainous Northern Mexico, when along came these stout men, lords of their cattle, but in this case that did not seem to be the order of things. With two frisky cows on long ropes, these burly men were being tugged through the woods in a dangerous operation. Someone was going to get hurt was my first thought, and it appeared that it might be Ernie Garza. He was taking down his tent when a wild-eyed heifer came at him, looking like it might stomp him into the ground.

Up stepped La Macha, aka Diana Tomchick. With nerves of steel, and jaw muscles tensed with determination, she grabbed the wild heifer by the head and began to twist its body to the ground. The strong, agile cow didn't waiver. It fought and looked like it would win, but we were those of little faith. We didn't yet know that La Macha doesn't lose, not to a mere mortal bovine. She squinted that squint of a gunfighter, and gave the heifer another twist. Down it went, and La Macha sat on it and tied its feet together.

The Mexican cowboys were speechless. Though they had seemed to be in a hurry, now they sat and stared at this tough woman, who no doubt was to now be a legend in these parts. The cow stared too. It stood in place with a look of affection for La Macha. Perhaps it had never before been wrestled to the ground. How could this much smaller being win a wrestling contest with a cow? We all wondered that, but seeing was believing.

And yes, we got the photo.



Diana Tomchick wrestling a wild heifer to the ground

Trip Report: Hill's Gate Dig

Trip Date: January 28-30, 2005

Participants:

Evan Anderson, Meta Anderson (and boyfriend Gary), Michael Anderson, Butch Fralia, Milo Marks, Roger Mercer, Wayne Peplinski.

By: Butch Fralia

Friday night, January 28, saw the beginning of another chapter in the never-ending saga of Hill's Gate Cave. Several people expressed an interest in going back to Hill's Gate Cave. I contacted the landowner who readily agreed though he's working down in Florida at the moment. He said he'd make arrangements for a caretaker to let us in if I'd call him the day of the trip.

The day of the trip, I called and he didn't answer so I left a message on his cell phone. I'd planned on arriving by 7:00 pm but as it were, the best laid plans and all that, it was more like 8:00 pm. When I arrived there were chains and padlocks adorning the gate. Apparently the message wasn't received. I tried to call the owner in Florida but didn't get an answer. I hung out for a few minutes thinking about the other people on their way and how I'd contact them. I tried calling again and got him on the second try. Of course he didn't get my message but said he could tell me where a key was hidden under a rock near the gate. OK, maybe close to the gate but not "near" the gate. I'm walking around in the brush with my cell phone in one hand and a flashlight in the other trying to follow directions. I went bore you with the details of the hunt but let us just say it was interesting, lots of briars. I did however find the key and managed to put it back where I got it.

Once inside, I looked for a suitable place for my antique trailer. I'd been told that if I parked it close to the water tank, there was a 110 plug. That sounded cool because I never camp where I can plug into local power or have any kind of hookups. What I wasn't told is how close one of the old work trucks had been left to the recommend-parking place. I managed to get the trailer in without hitting the truck but did take out one cedar tree that I didn't find out about until the next day.

I got set up, plugged in and was in pretty high cotton using the 110 V lighting instead of battery power. I discovered one of the lights was burned out and had to use the battery light for it anyway. I've got an 18' 1968 model Mobile Scout trailer, a real antique. Modern trailers, often have 12 VDC lights all the way through. There's a power converter that steps the 110 V down to 12 V. This one is so old that it has complete 110 V and 12 V power systems. There are 110 v and 12 v lights in every fixture, which isn't a bad thing. So anyway, I had 110 but still had to use the holding tanks, no other hookups (not that I'm complaining).

I had just finished getting everything set up and mixed my first

drink when Michael Anderson and his contingent pulled in. We worked out camping arrangements then renewed old acquaintances. I hadn't seen Meta since TCR 2003. She started caving with me back in 1986 when her Aunt Donna took her on some trips, even before her dad Michael. I've always been partial to her because she and my daughter share some character traits. Both are strongwilled, outspoken, and open to adventure. I hadn't seen Evan since he was about six and now he's taller than I am. Michael was his usual self; someone you always enjoy having around.

We shared camaraderie until about 2:00 am when we crashed in our respective camping domiciles. I woke up the next morning with Meta screaming something about sleeping all day just outside my window. I was in shock to discover it was 11:00 am. I haven't slept that late in years, maybe not having the dogs for once was a good thing. I went outside to see that Milo, Roger and Wayne had arrived and everyone was ready to dig.

After a short awakening period, we all headed to the other pasture where the cave is located. We rigged Mark Gee's hauling tripod then lowered the various ladders into the cave. There's one to help get in and out of the sinkhole and another that lowers into



the hole where the dig occurs. The owner had a welder make up a steel ladder that's 30' long so we wouldn't have to use cable ladders or vertical gear to get down the hole. After this trip, he's going to have to get about 10' added to the ladder which was already getting short.

After rigging, Wayne decided to try digging a shallow hole adjacent the main sink. Several people decided to climb down into the pit where the dig is going on. Milo opted to be the first one down to dig. Once down, we ran a tape measure from the surface to the bottom of the dig and measured it at a starting depth of 39'. Milo started digging and proceeded to fill buckets faster than we could haul them out. I'd added a second pulley to the haul system with the idea that it was supposed to cut the haul weight in

half. On the previous trip, we'd worn everyone out hauling buckets out of the hole. If it was half as heavy it sure didn't feel like it, so much for physics. It's getting to be a long haul anyway and pulling 40-70 lb bucket after 40-70 lb bucket is a real chore. We had trouble with the rope twisting which didn't help a thing. I'm going to have to rethink the whole haul system before the next trip out.

Milo worked us all to death. By the time he decided he didn't want to dig any more, everyone on the surface involved in hauling and dumping buckets was exhausted! He'd dug out 5-6' of dirt and small rock taking the hole down to 44' to 45'. Unfortunately, in our weakened state, we didn't think about dropping the tape down and getting a precise depth measurement.

Roger and Wayne had to leave so Roger could get back for a family function. Milo was still full of energy and decided that since everyone had wimped out on him that he'd head back toward Midlothian and hunt for meteor fragments at a meteor crater somewhere near home.

The rest of us decided to stay the night and just enjoy a little R&R at a pretty location. We had lots of company as the curious EMU hung around to see what we were doing. We'd been warned that if we saw any sitting males to stay away because they get testy if you mess with their eggs. Meta and the boys saw one male sitting on two eggs along side the road going to the cave. Somehow I never saw them myself but apparently the EMU didn't want to take on a big red truck and vacated when I came through. The rest of them just visited us around the camping area. I'd intended to take some pictures but.. Oh Well!

It's an interesting time to visit. The EMU are beginning to lay eggs and rather than collect and incubate them because there's not much of an EMU market these days, the owner lets them hatch naturally. Once the female lays the eggs, her jobs done. The males take over sitting the eggs and raising the hatchlings

We spent the night; all had more camaraderie, shared food, drink and a great time. We left fairly early Sunday morning because it was supposed to start raining and nothing is more miserable than taking down a camp in the rain. Nothing is more miserable than drying everything out when you get home. Of course if you have a trailer, the worst thing that happens is you have to dump the holding tanks and maybe open the door for it to air out.

It's almost shocking to realize this dig has been going on since April 1997. Hill's Gate Cave has some interesting potential. It's located in the Winchell Limestone, the same rock that the other know caves in Palo Pinto County are located. In the area of Hill's Gate Cave, the formation is supposed to be about 200' deep. Of course it's 110' above Possum Kingdom Lake and we're nearly half way down to lake level. We don't know if we're at the floor of the cave or digging on top of a talus that we might dig out making the cave deeper very quickly. The cave is begging to get wider as we dig deeper. You can see a ways through passage to narrow for human traverse. It's in an area where there are other sink holes but none as promising as this.



Amber Cox in Maple Run Cave in Austin

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