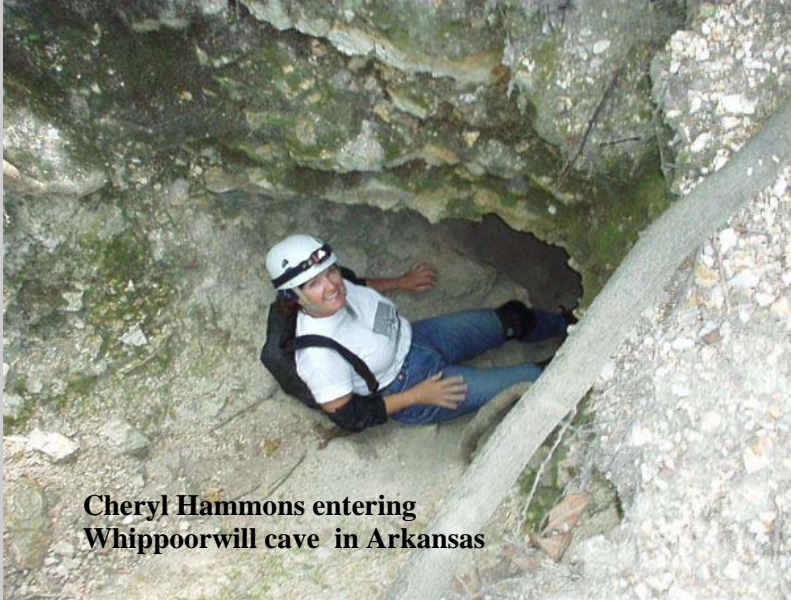
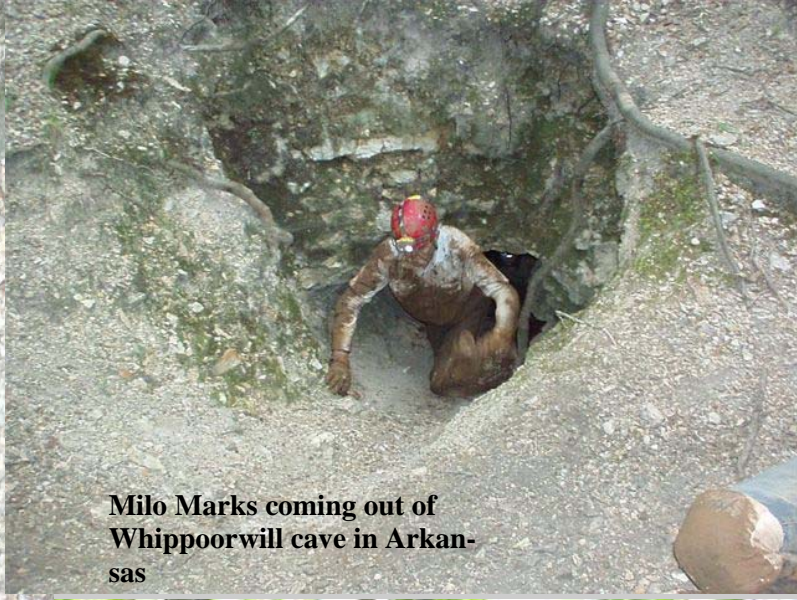


THE MAVERICK BULL

The Newsletter of the Maverick Grotto Volume 18 Issue 8 August, 2005



Cheryl Hammons entering Whippoorwill cave in Arkansas



Milo Marks coming out of Whippoorwill cave in Arkansas



Entrance to Whippoorwill Cave

Maverick Grotto Information

Copyright 2005 The Maverick Grotto.

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: Arkansas photos by Ed Malcom

Pg 5& 6 Maps and photo by Mark Gee

Pg 7 Sharon Welch

Pg 8 Michael D. Smith

Pg 9 Photo of Sharon Welch by Rich Collier, photo of Dan & Cheryl by Ed Malcom

Back Cover: Ed Malcom

Visit Our NSS Award-Winning Web Site! Butch has been hard at work 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!): Also, Butch has also done a wonderful job putting all the previous newsletters on the web site. Be sure and check it out.

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

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

Next meeting, August 9th, 7:00 pm

Bodacious BBQ

1206 E Division St.

Arlington, TX. 76011

(817) 860-4248

Program:

Butch will be showing a video he and Dale Ellison made at Rock Cave in Oklahoma. Come join us for the fun.

Chair

Ed Goff
737 Bizerte Ave.
Dallas, TX 75224
(214)942-6024
egoff@rice.edu

Secretary

Scott Boyd
509 E Glendale St.
Crowley, TX 76036
(817) 297-4427
sdboyd56@yahoo.com

Newsletter Editor

Tammy Cox
237 Gwen St.
Azle, TX 76020
(817) 444-0186
tammy.cox@charter.net

Vice-Chair

Mark Gee
3819 Portland
Irving, TX, 75038
(972) 358-5105
Markageetxcaver@yahoo.com

Treasurer

Sharon Mastbrook
3412 Walton Ave.
Fort Worth, TX 76133
(817) 346-2039
cavedba@charter.net

Webmaster

Butch Fralia
3412 Walton Ave.
Fort Worth, TX 76133
(817) 346-2039
cavedba@charter.net

July 2005 Meeting Minutes

By: Scott Boyd

The Maverick Grotto met July 12th at Bodacious BBQ, on E. Division St. in Arlington. There were 18 members and 5 visitors present.

Program: The program this month was a video of a caving trip to Fence Line Fissure in San Saba County by Butch Fralia and Dale Ellison.

Reports from Officers:

Treasurer: Sharon Mastbrook reported that there is \$206 in petty cash, \$149 that needs to be deposited and \$1,059 in the bank account, for a total of \$1,414. She also reported that the member list has been updated, and a list of paid-up members has been created. The grotto then went on to discuss a few ways to get members to pay their dues on time.

Old Business:

Bill Steele updated the grotto on the NSS BOG meeting to be held March 2006 in DFW. The BOG meeting has been approved by the NSS.

Ed Goff reported that there are some t-shirts left over and are for sale if any one wants one.

New Business: Bat conservation catalogs are available.

Trip reports and trip announcements:

Milo Marks went to Deep & Punkin Nature Preserve during a recent work weekend.

Bill Tucker and Rafal dove a sump in Three-Whirlpool Cave. Bill started the trip report, but Rafal finished it up, as Bill had left the cave earlier than others.

Sharon Welch reported that she visited 7 caves during the NSS convention.

Diane and Bill both gave reports on their trip to the NSS convention and caving during the convention.

Secretary's note:

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Kristopher Megahan for taking the meeting minutes in May, and thank you Sharon Mastbrook for doing the same in June. In May, I was on call, and didn't know until the last hour that I would not be able to attend the meeting. Kristopher took minutes, and I had no idea that he had until the July newsletter came out! Sharon also took the minutes in June, as I arrived late that month. I appreciate the efforts of both of you - thanks again!

Scott Boyd

Caving Events Calendar

August 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 the Devil's Sinkhole and bats. Visitors are shuttled in a tour bus from Rocksprings Visitor Center to the site. Call for times; fees \$10 adults, \$8 senior citizens, \$6 children 12 and under; reservations required. (830) 683-BATS (2287), (830) 683-3762.

August until Oct Bat Flights at Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area (Fredericksburg): Observe an estimated 3 million Mexican Free-tailed bats and 1,000-3,000 Cave Myotis emerge from this abandoned railroad tunnel in the evening. All nightly programs begin one hour prior to estimated bat emergence times. These vary during the year so call ahead for times [(830) 367-7923]; seating for lower viewing area programs is on a first-come, first-served basis. **Contact:** Amy Sugeno (830) 990-2860. **Info:** http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wma/find_a_wma/list/?id=17

August 13-14 Manhole Dig (Carlsbad, NM): On-going dig project on BLM land. **Contact:** Stephen Fleming swcaver@caverns.com

Aug 13, 27 Wild Cave Tour, Kickapoo Caverns State Park (Bracketville):reservations required (830) 563-2342

August 14 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

August 14-19, 2005 - Bat Conservation and Management Workshops - Barree, Pennsylvania. For more details visit the BCI website <http://www.batcon.org> or contact Kari Gaukler at kgaukler@batcon.org.

August 21-28 14th International Congress of Speleology (Athens, Greece): All subjects and activities of interest to caves and karst will be covered, including paper presentations, exploration reports, caving techniques, speleo equipment, films, media, art, and more. The Union Internationale de Speleologie hosts an International Congress once every four years. **Info:** www.14ics-athens2005.gr

August 27, 2005 TSS Quarterly Board Meeting and Work Session: Beginning at 10:30, the board of directors will meet at building 18A of the UT Pickle Research campus, Austin, TX. Afterward there will be a work session. If you haven't been to the office before, this would be a good chance to get familiar with the type of data maintained in the TSS files. Contact: Jim Kennedy at: jkennedy@batcon.org or Butch Fralia at: bfralia@maverickgrotto.org

August 27-28 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 *high-guads@yahoo.com*

September 1-5, 2005 Old Timers Reunion- Held in West Virginia every Labor Day weekend. This is the largest congregation of cavers in the world. There is no pretense of science or cave exploration; just lots of partying and socializing. There are many easily accessible caves nearby. Daily, WV (Randolph County) . . . <http://www.otr.org>

September 10 Bat Flights at Stuart Bat Cave, Kickapoo Caverns State Park (Bracketville)

Sep 10-11 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*

September 17-18 Manhole Dig (Carlsbad, NM): On-going dig project on BLM land. **Contact:** Stephen Fleming *swcaver@caverns.com*

September 24-28, 2005 - Karst 2005

DoubleTree Hotel, San Antonio, Texas Tenth Multidisciplinary Conference on Sinkholes and the Engineering and Environmental Impacts of Karst Sponsored by the Geo-Institute of ASCE, P.E. Lamoreaux & Associates, Inc., Edwards Aquifer Authority, and co-sponsored by Southwest Research Institute. For more information visit the website:<http://www.asce.org/conferences/karst2005>

September 24-25, 2005 High Guads Restoration Project

October 6-9, 2005 TAG Fall Cave-In - Lookout Mountain, Georgia . The cavers of Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia get together in early October for a weekend of parties, speleo-competitions, and lots of "pit bouncing." <http://www.tagfallcavein.org/homex.html>

Oct 8-9 Colorado Bend State Park Project: long-time favorite of Mavericks, pretty close to home, excellent project for beginners, second weekend of month. Caving weekends will occur in October 2005, January and April 2006; during other months people will work on drafting maps and organizing data. **Contacts:** Terry Holsinger (512) 443-4241 *trhli@sprynet.com* or Dale Barnard *Barnarddale@yahoo.com*

mid Oct Texas Caver's Reunion: No word yet on the actual dates or place for this annual reunion of old and new Texas Cavers, but usually it occurs on the 3rd week of the month.

New Caves Found and Surveyed by Mark Gee, June 6th, 2005

Mike Burrell who manages Cave Without A Name, held a restoration and survey project at the property on May 14th. Bob Richards from Houston did some photography and surveying, with a digital range finder. Bob told me this range finder was accurate to within 1/4 inch. That's close enough for government work.

R D. Milhollin and myself rendezvoused at his house and left Haltom City at 5:45 pm. We arrived and had our tents set up by 1:30 am. We had a cold beer, relaxed and went to bed. The skies were cloudy and some time later, around 4:00 am. it rained. I'm thankful that my tent never leaks.

Saturday morning started much too early for someone who had not gotten to sleep before two in the morning. I was awake by 7:30 and R D. soon followed and we enjoyed our breakfast. Yogurt and a bagel, Umm, Umm good! But on the other hand, we didn't have any dishes to wash.

Mike came down to camp and asked what everyone wanted to do. Bob chose his project in the big cave and the rest decided to go on the adjacent property and search for a cave that Mike had seen almost two years earlier. He had named it Flat As A Pancake Cave. Mike was unable to show us where the cave was because he had a large school group coming to tour Cave Without A Name and he had to go and attend to them. He told us what he remembered about where and what to look for.

Christy Burrell. Joe and Evelyn Mitchell, R D, myself and a couple of others went to look for the cave. In less than an hour we had found the cave. I asked who wanted to help survey and no one jumped at the opportunity. Then R D spoke up and then Joe Mitchell agreed to help. Joe took lead tape and R D shot the instrument. I held the dumb end of the tape and Joe set the first station. We took only four shots for 46 Feet and I sketched in the low passage that was too tight for us large type cavers. Even Joe wasn't going to crawl into this passage. He commented that Rainbolt O'Daniel might be able to fit. It was very low, about 8 inches. Where were you Rebecca?

With this little cave surveyed and sketched we went down to the visitor center at the entrance to Cave Without A Name and met up with Mike Burrell. He took care of a few details with his employee and then we loaded up in his truck and went to three pits that he had found a few months earlier when they were clearing cedar trees for an R V campground. The first one we saw was pretty tight and was named Berra Cave. We didn't go down this one. We walked a short distance to the second pit named Yogi's Den. It stair stepped down into darkness and looked promising. Then we walked to the third pit named Boo Boo's Pit. It had an opening of about 30 inches diameter go-

ing straight down. I rigged the rope, put on my harness and went down to the bottom. Joe dropped the dumb end of the tape down to me and it tapped in at 30.7 feet. I began the sketch while Joe and R D. came down to finish the survey. The first room measured about 8 feet by 9 feet with an eight-foot ceiling. The East wall had some pretties, some flowstone, stalactites and one 7 foot long drapery. We needed someone small to crawl through a small opening to a second room and Joe volunteered. I handed him the tape and we finished up the survey with a few measurements to draw up the room that Joe had crawled into. The second room was a little bit smaller than the first. We ascended back up the rope and cleared the lip of the pit. I coiled up my rope and went back to Yogi Pit. R D. had already gone down and was waiting for us to come down. I was so tired from lack of sleep from the night before that I had decided that I didn't want to survey another cave today. I haven't been caving much lately and I am out of shape. Still it was a good day with a couple of newly discovered caves surveyed and maps soon to be drawn and two other pits to survey the next time.

I had a good time getting back underground. Thanks to Mike for his hospitality and sharing his cave discoveries with us. I enjoyed drafting the maps.

Happy Caving!

Flat as a Pancake Cave

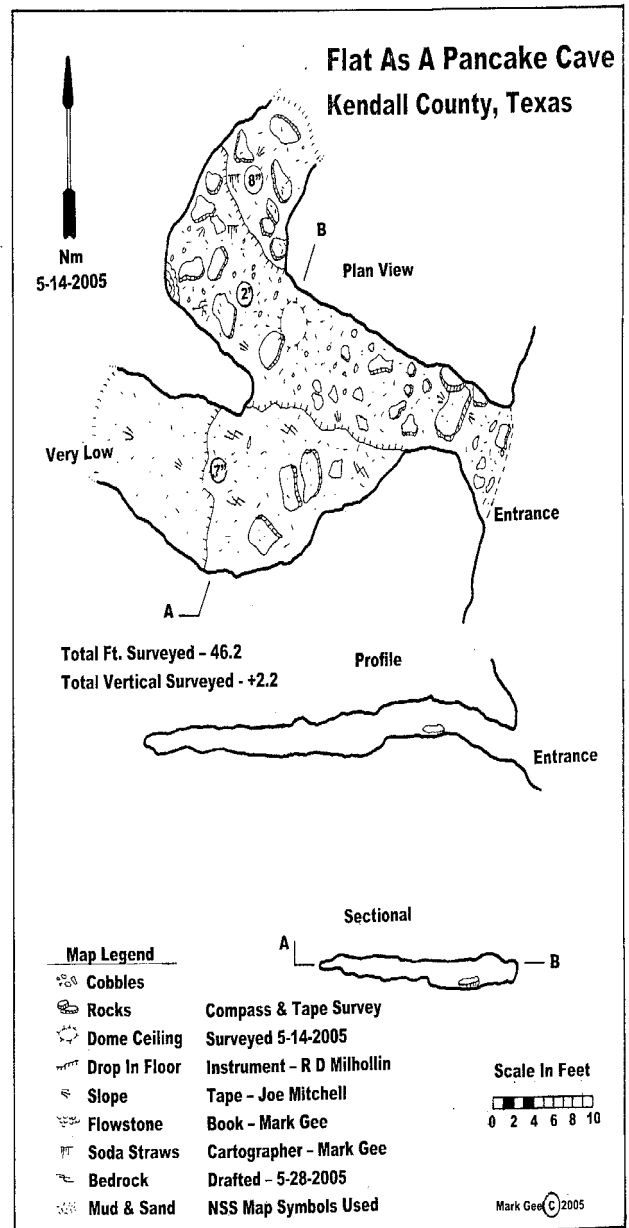
Kendall County, Texas
Cave Without A Name property

Cave Description by Mark Gee 6-5-05

The entrance is on a steep rocky slope. It is 8 feet wide by 2 1/2 feet tall. The passage narrows to 6 feet wide as it climbs at a 14 degree angle for 9 feet. Then it slopes down at a 14 degree angle for 9 feet. The ceiling is two feet tall at this point. To the left the passage continues 18 feet wide but quickly becomes very low for another 12 feet. The passage then turns to the right but very low. It was not surveyed due to the very low, 8" ceiling. A room on the other side of this low area could continue but we were unable to see this for sure.

Back at the 2-foot ceiling point the cave continued straight ahead for 13 feet level. To the right the cave

continued 15 feet wide by 7 inches tall for at least 25 feet but was not surveyed because of its height. The floor was mostly solid rock with some breakdown covering parts of the floor. Some dirt covered parts of



the floor. The cave was damp a little.

The cave needs to be checked and surveyed by a very thin survey team. These two leads need to be checked.

Boo Boo's Pit

Kendall County, Texas
 Cave Without A Name property
 Contact: Mike Burrell

Cave Description by Mark Gee

The entrance is a 30-inch diameter hole in solid rock. The passage is a 30.7-foot deep pit. The drop is

alongside the wall. The diameter of the passage is about four feet until you near the floor. The passage open's up about 8 feet from the floor.

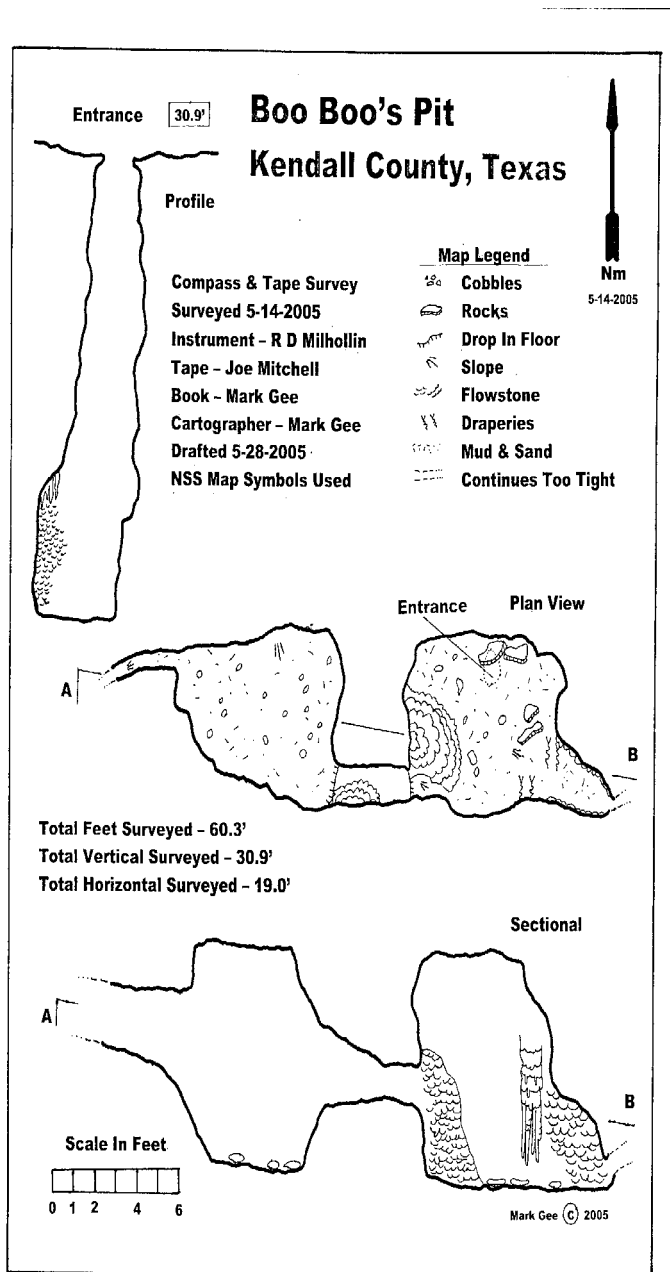
The room at the bottom of the drop measures 8 feet by 9 feet with one small body size passage.

The east wall has some flowstone, stalactites and drapery formations. The floor is mud and cobbles.

Through the small body size passage is a second room with an 8-foot ceiling. The room measures. 7 feet by 6 feet with a dirt floor.

Several salamanders were seen. They were black, with a little yellow on their sides.

The cave takes a little water from rain. The pit walls are very sculpted from dripping water.



Entrance to Boo Boo's Pit with Dottie the cave dog (owned by Christie Burrell) on cave without a name property.

N.S.S. Convention & T.A.G. Caves

*Dennis & Sharon Welch,
Maverick Grotto, Visit:*

Hooper's Well, Limrock Blowing Sink, Shelta Cave, Sinking Cove Cave, Tumbling Rock Cave, Neversink & Valhalla

July 2nd – 10th, 2005

By Dennis Welch

The following is an account of the Welch's first trip to a National Speleological Society Convention and first trip to cave in T.A.G. (Tennessee, Alabama & Georgia). The convention took place in Huntsville, AL from July 4th through July 8th and was hosted by the Huntsville Grotto (and maybe others, too). Most of the caving was accomplished east northeast of Huntsville in mostly Alabama and once in Tennessee. We would like to express a very special thanks to everyone involved in hosting the convention and coordinating the caving. They all did an outstanding job, leaving an everlasting delightful impression on us. This is how the story goes...

We arrived at the Ditto Landing RV Campground, south of Huntsville, on Saturday afternoon and headed to registration that evening. We chose to stay in an RV Park because pets were not allowed on the convention campgrounds and we wanted to bring along our dog. Registration was a breeze, as everyone was courteous, friendly and organized. We received our guidebooks, programs, t-shirts, drink mugs, parking stickers, etc. and met lots of nice folk from HQ. After picking-up literature on what's to do in Huntsville, we headed straight out to the Cave Trip Info Pavilion where we met Peter "Mudpuppy" Michaud, Maureen Handler, and Jim Wilbanks. As the story goes, Jim was the first to coin the acronym, **T.A.G.** (tag). Upon sharing with them that we were here to see what TAG caves were all about, we let them know we didn't have much vertical experience. Mudpuppy and Maureen took us under their wings and steered us towards an easy pit for Sunday after church.

Sunday afternoon, we solicited a couple of new friends, Dale Purchase, a cave diver from Michigan, now living in Florida and Texas' own Ernie Garza from the UT Grotto to join us. We all headed out to Hooper's Well, a 90' drop, located near Monte Sano State Park east of downtown Huntsville. The rigging was straightforward, but the entrance was a bit restrictive with a pack on. Once on rope, it was a simple, straight drop to the floor. We used



Dale Purchase and Dennis Welch at Hooper's Well

a fairly new rope and it was fast! All the way down, the walls were either beautifully scalloped or covered with flowstone. It was a great start to our week in TAG.

Back at the convention campgrounds, we wanted to see what cave we should try next. The Cave Trip Info Pavilion was abuzz with activity. By the time we left for the evening, we were put in charge to lead a group to Limrock Blowing Sink cave on Monday morning and a trip to Neversink pit on Tuesday evening. The Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc (SCCI) owns both of these caves. Before the week was over, we had been to four SCCI caves, signed on as sustaining members and bought a piece of Neversink.

Early Monday, we again headed for the cavers campground. The other cavers joining us for Limrock were Don and Sid Formanek, Kelly Jessop (a cave diver on his first dry cave trip and a brother to Sid), Steve Johnson

and Bob Straub. Arriving at the cave entrance, we were impressed by the cool misty breeze blowing out. Bob led the way as we were off on another underworld adventure. We had snagged the map from the Convention Guidebook which helped us some, but we were often unsure of which way led to the driest route. This cave offers several opportunities to get wet. For part of the cave, a stream passage flows two to three feet deep, but we wanted to stay as dry as possible. Our route intersected the stream in several places and we eventual had no choice except to follow the water route. We got to stroll, stoop, duck-walk, hands-and-knees crawl, and belly crawl. Throughout the entire cave, the walls and ceiling were very sculpted with nearly all the speleothems on the floor. We saw a few bats, cave crickets, and beetles, plus a big stream crawfish along the way. We had reached about the three-quarter point when we ran out of time and headed out. All of us had a good time exploring the cave.

We got back to the convention before 1 P.M. because Sharon had the opportunity to take a sketching class from Pat Kambesis. After about two hours of intense classroom instruction, they all went into Shelta Cave under the N.S.S. headquarters and practiced their newly learned skills. It will be so nice to have a well-trained sketcher to go along with the survey gear she bought me for my recent birthday.

Tuesday morning, we were honored by Mudpuppy with a "secret" trip to Sinking Cove Cave, just across the border into Franklin County, Tennessee, and another of the SCCI's caves. We planned to do a "through trip", so our arduous hike over the mountain to the cave was lengthy and just about did us in. Arriving at a beautiful sinkhole setting, complete with a pretty little waterfall and at least two entrances to the cave, Mudpuppy

rigged a 20-foot hand line for us all to use on the steep muddy slope down into the sink where we shot several pictures. It was quite refreshing to reach the cool breeze coming out of the entrances. I think we were told there are about 12 entrances total, including a pull-down through trip. So, off we went into the dark vast unknown expanses of Sinking Cove and began wadding a stream passage within sight of the entrance. Actually, Mudpuppy had been on more than 20 trips through this cave and knew the route well. He had prepared us for the through trip by telling us



Mary, a.k.a. "Thumper" admires an impressive terraced flowstone in Sinking Cove

about the intermittent wading through up to thigh deep water on most of the journey and waist deep for the last couple hundred feet before our exit. This cave was a blast and oh so beautiful. As long as we kept moving, the wading kept us cooled off without getting too cold. If we took a break for too long, some of us began to feel the results of soaked shoes and clothing. Upon nearing the exit, we had no choice but to wade through water up to the tops of our legs. Short little Sharon was in it up to her waist and it was really cold. There was lots of howling from many in the group. At one point, while trying to assist Sharon through a rock-strewn section of the stream, I tripped on a rock and fell almost completely in the water, nearly dragging her down with me. Everyone seemed to get a good chuckle out of me trying to drown my wife. After leaving the cave we all laughed and cut-up about the experience, took more pictures and made the short hike to our vehicles. What a cave trip! We won't soon forget this one.

On Wednesday, we joined up with Mudpuppy, Hazard (another local guide), Phil Davis, Bob & Mary Anne Robins, Kevin Branscum & Genevieve Mattar, Bob "Nuke" Thompson, David Lilly, Daniel Veelik & Beatriz Farfan, Todd Armstrong, Nina Pietroiusti, Sid Formanek, and Ray Kutnar to do Tumbling Rock Cave northwest of Scottsboro. This cave was drier than Sinking Cove, with a smaller stream and more passageways above, clear of the water. We saw a wide variety of colors and formations, had great time and especially enjoyed the beautiful King's Shower & Topless Dome.

The Convention had arranged a free tour of the Space and Rocket Center in the early evening, but the four of us missed it because of the late hour of our return to Huntsville.

Thursday dawned to beautiful sunny skies. Our agenda for the

day did not begin until an 11:00 A.M. Vertical Section Workshop. It was a welcome morning off to start the day more relaxed, not scrambling to get to the campgrounds in time to join a cave trip. This gave us a chance to dry and sort some of our gear. The Vertical Workshop was a basic practical familiarization course on some of the equipment and systems that are popular in various parts of the country. It was not intended to be a vertical skills training class. The class was quite rushed, yet we are convinced they achieved their objective of exposing us to the various equipment choices.

The evening activities were for us all to go the Von Braun Center's Concert Hall for a photo salon. We were disappointed to miss this opportunity to view some of the world's best caving photographs, videos and multimedia presentations. Instead, we had a nice sit-down supper, went back to the campground to visit and burn some pictures to a cd for some friends and then back to the RV Park to call it a night.

Friday, we spent the day taking a class called "Speleology for Cavers", presented by Steve Stokowski (SS), Larry Spangler (LS), Fred Grady (FG) and Bill Elliot (BE). The class dug on at times, however, most of the topics were interesting and educational. It was well worth the time and expense for the presentations and materials we received. Sharon's favorite was the information on cave critters, while I enjoyed the geology/chemistry/geomorphology the most. We look forward to studying the handouts in more detail.

After the class, we headed back to the cavers campground to visit and finalize plans for Saturday's cave trip.

On Saturday morning, we met Daniel Veelik, Betty Farfan, Scott and Jenny at the convention campgrounds to caravan out to Valhalla, our final SCCi cave for the week. Will Heltsley, Rich, Lindsey and Frank were already there when we got to the gate for the two mile four-wheel drive road to the cave preserve parking area. They had two-wheel drive suv's, but made it just fine because it wasn't that muddy. The cave is only about a 200-foot hike from there. When I got to the top of the pit, Will was already busy rigging the drop with my rope. You see, as it turns out, Will had previously locked-up the permit for Saturday morning, but I had the rope long enough to make the drop. Therefore, we all joined up to do the cave together. Ten cavers is a rather large number for one rope and a deep pit. While the last of us rappelled down into the pit, the first few had already begun exploring the nearly one mile of cave passage below. When all were down, most of us joined together to try to find a specific room shown on the map. Our journey took us along some very cool, yet challenging passageways. We had to make three up or down climbs of 15 to 17 feet, assisted by handlines already in place. Other times we had to crawl. Sometimes we had to straddle a deep fissure through winding passageway. This was turning out to be so diverse and an awesome experience. The trip was rewarded with finding Rain Drop Falls and the 200-foot Mega Dome at the end of the route. It was so high, our best lights could barely reach the top. The mud-covered floor was decorated with formations of mud from the dripping splattering water. Very unique! Although I don't remember the portions of the cave we explored having a lot of speleothems, the journey through it was the real treat. We spent three to four hours exploring the passages and then decided it was time to start the slow process of getting everyone out. I took about 20-30 minutes per person to get on



Sharon Welch on top of a climb in Valhalla

rope, make the climb, negotiate the lip and slope beyond and get off rope. All the while, the cavers at the top were steaming in the hot late afternoon/early evening sun, while those waiting at the bottom were donning polypro and plastic bags in an effort to stay warm. We all had a great time at Valhalla and were so glad we saved this cool pit/cave for last.

Before closing out this report, I must thank every one of you who helped us have a wonderful time at our first convention and our first trip into TAG. We had a great time thanks to the dedicated servant spirit of the members of the Huntsville Grotto and the many volunteers who put on the convention and coordinated/led the caving trips.

We are really looking forward to next year's convention in Bellingham. We hope to see each of you there again!

OBSERVATIONS OF THE ARKANSAS UNDERGROUND FROM A CAVE-VIRGIN'S PERSPECTIVE July 15-17, 2005 by Cheryl L. Hammons

The group met at Roaring River State Park in MO on Friday evening. Tammy and Lex Cox and their family were on their vacation and made an open invitation to join them for some caving in Arkansas on Saturday and Sunday. Being a "cave-virgin" (as I found myself being referred to), Dan Smith invited me to ride with him and show me the ropes (no pun intended!). I guess that since I had recently passed his "tests" as a canoeing parner, he figured I wouldn't wimp out! Milo Marks and Scott Boyd also drove up and the four of us shared a tent site at the park. We arrived at Whippoorwill Cave late Saturday morning along with several of the Cox's caving friends (all of whom offered great advice, helping hands, and some hilarious caving stories). It was my very first time to go down through a pit into a wild cave and I'll never forget that initial feeling of excitement and wondering what I was getting myself in to! I learned quickly about belly-crawling, butt-crawling, and

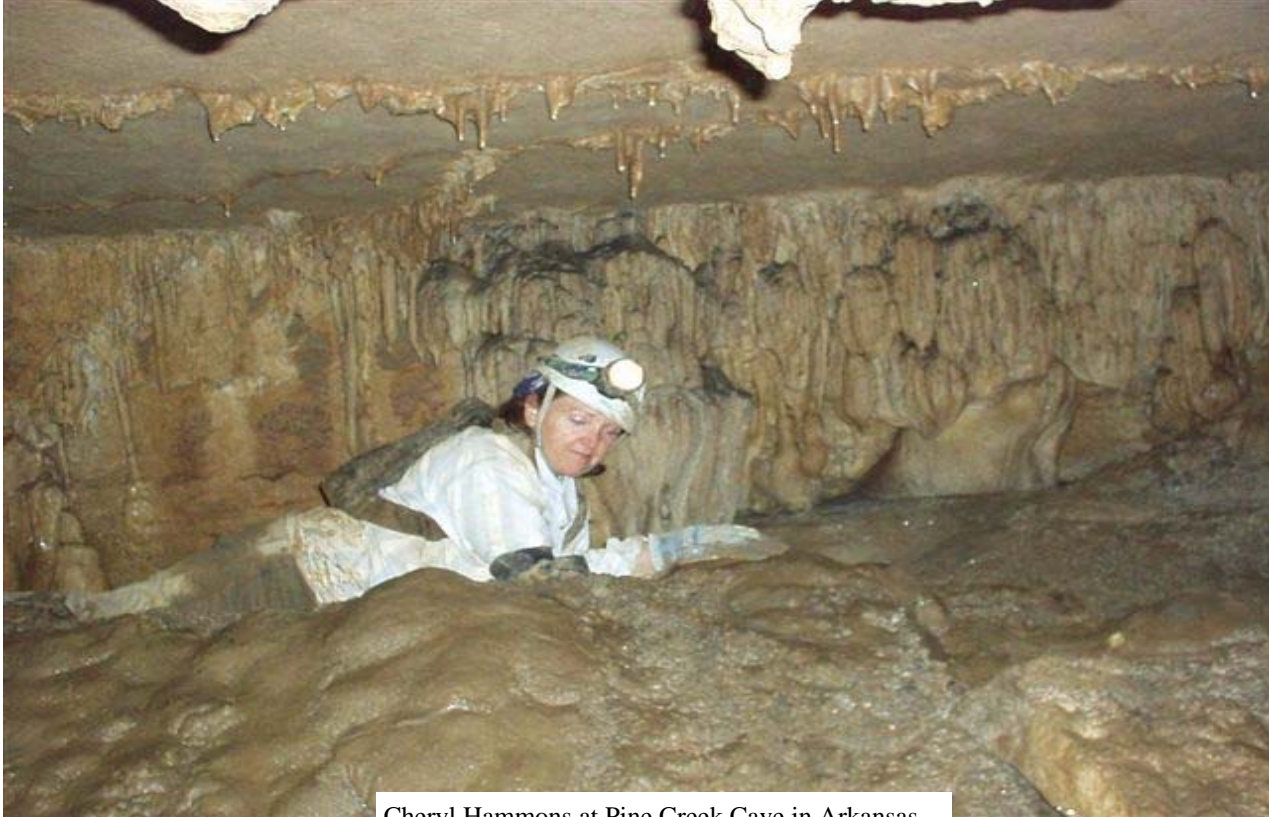
my personal favorite, dragging-yourself-through-the-mud-crawl! One in particular where Tammy and Milo were following me. I was so relieved it went through, since there was no way to turn around! Remember that one??? Another long, wet crawl led us to a spectacular room full of formations, where we all just sat for awhile, having a snack and looking around in awe! There were even a few bats here and there. We emerged from the cool darkness about 4:30 p.m. and drove to Pine Creek Cave for another adventure. It was a lot different. There was more water flowing and a whole cluster of about twenty bats that we were able to climb up pretty close to for pictures. There were several slippery vertical climbs, that with the help of my new caving buddies, I managed pretty well. After four hours of exploring, we got out of our muddy clothes, rinsed off in the creek and drove back to camp. Lex had the charcoal ready for everyone to throw their supper on after much needed showers. Dan made homemade ice cream and thanks to the 18-year old guys for doing most of the churning! Around 11:00 p.m., after filling our tummies, we all made our way back to the tents. We woke up Sunday morning a bit sore and with a variety of bruises and praying that cave #3, Lynn's Cave, wouldn't be as challenging! Just the drive there proved that wish rong! Thanks to Lex for the safe 4-wheel drive trip up what seemed like "100 miles of bad road", especially to Dan and Milo, who were riding in the bed of the truck, dodging large tree limbs that were hanging over the path! Once we climbed up the hill and found the opening, we slipped

down inside once more. This one was more like a maze and we saw a couple of species of salamanders inside. It appeared from all the hand dug pits that there had been some kind of mining going on there in the past. After crossing several of the pits we realized they didn't



Cheryl Hammons & Dan Smith

go anywhere and had to go back, but we found some interesting rocks in the process. We only stayed down a couple hours as a few of us had a 7 hour drive home that afternoon. Thanks to everyone for all the encouragement, answering my many questions, new friendships, and unforgettable memories! What an incredible personal challenge along with great, colorful company! And finally, a special thanks to Mountain-man Dan for "not making me cry, so I'll come back again" (per Tammy), for hosing down my muddy clothes and sharing your equipment with me! I'm anticipating the next trip and becoming a member of the Maverick Grotto - and yes, Lex, I'll bring my Visa card!



Cheryl Hammons at Pine Creek Cave in Arkansas

**Maverick Grotto
c/o Tammy Cox
237 Gwen St.
Azle, TX. 76020**