

# The Maverick Bull

The Newsletter of the Maverick Grotto Volume 19 Issue 2 February, 2006



Diana Thomchick climbing above deep pools in the Los Toros resurgence cave



## Maverick Grotto Information

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Meetings:** Meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. The location will be announced prior to each meeting.

**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. Bill and Diana will be temporarily bringing and setting up the grotto library on Dennis' behalf.

## Photos & Map Credits

**Cover Photo:** Taken by James Hunter, see the article on page 6.

Page 5: TSS photo ?, photo of Milo Marks at Ellis Ranch taken by Dennis Welch

Page 6: Photo of Scott and Lex taken by Dennis Welch, photo of the campfire taken by James Hunter

Page 7 & 8: Bill Steele

Page 9: photos of creatures in Fitton by Jean Krejca, other Fitton photos by Charles & Tammy Goldsmith

Back Cover: Taken by Dennis Welch

## 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, February 14th, 2006 7:00 pm Buck N' Loons

3517 South Cooper Street  
Arlington, TX 76015-3410.

**Program:**

**Diana Tomchick will give a CPR demonstration**

**It is time to pay your dues again, if you have not already done so. I have enclosed a return envelope and grotto renewal information card for your convenience. Dues are \$15.00.**

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## January meeting minutes: Submitted by Scott Boyd

The Maverick Grotto met January 10th at Buck N' Loons, on S. Cooper St. in Arlington. There were 20 members and 6 visitors present.

Program: The program was a slide and Power Point presentation by Diana Tomchick of a caving trip in Slovakia.

Reports from Officers:

Chairman: Butch Fralia reminded us that this year is the 20th anniversary of the grotto. He asked the members to come up with some ideas for a celebration this fall. He also reminded everyone that it is time to pay dues.

Treasurer: Sharon Mastbrook reported that there is \$1006.84 in the checking account, \$70.23 in petty cash and she had \$161 in not yet deposited checks, for a total of \$1,188.08. She also reported that the grotto made \$112 on the auction in November 2005.

Old Business: None other than the issue with the meeting place. The grotto is going to try and reserve the bigger "party room" at Buck N' Loons for next month's meeting.

New Business: Sharon Mastbrook would like someone to come up with a design for 20-year commemorative T-shirt by October. Diana mentioned that we might be able to get Felicia Vreeland to do the T-shirts if we order enough.

Trip reports and trip announcements:

- \* Scott Boyd announced an upcoming trip to Becker Cave in order to check out the cave for a possible grotto project.
- \* Announcement of the TSS meeting in Austin the weekend of Jan. 14-15. The TSA winter meeting will be the following weekend.
- \* Diana Tomchick has been toying with the idea of using carbide in a cave. She'd like to do a carbide-only cave trip, and if anyone's interested, let her know. If would possibly be Jester Cave in Oklahoma the last weekend in February.
- \* After the program, Bill Steele talked about their Christmas caving trip to Mexico.

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## Caving Events Calendar

**Feb 10-12 Colorado Bend State Park Project:** Second weekend of the month, this is a terrific project for beginning cavers. A change in project leadership is expected soon, come down and see what the project is about and help in the re-organization. **Contact:** Butch Fralia (817)346-2039 [cavedba@charter.net](mailto:cavedba@charter.net)

**Feb 11-12 Kickapoo Caverns State Park Project:** The project weekend will focus on the two surveys left to finish, some work re-securing the shaft above Stuart Bat Cave, some light brush trimming on the trail to Kickapoo, some work around the

campsites and as always, ridge walking for anyone interested. **Contacts:** Travis Scott (979) 693-4088 [travis@oztotl.com](mailto:travis@oztotl.com) Allan Cobb [ac@oztotl.com](mailto:ac@oztotl.com)

**Feb 17-20 Annual Bustamante Restoration Project (Bustamante, Nuevo Leon, Mexico):** Ever popular restoration project is once again planned for the President's Day weekend. Check out the website for more info and pre-registration form. Pre-registration deadline is Feb. 11th. **Contacts:** Orion Knox (512) 453-4070 [Orion-Knox@alumni.utexas.net](mailto:Orion-Knox@alumni.utexas.net), or Rune Burnett [bburnett1@austin.rr.com](mailto:bburnett1@austin.rr.com)  
<http://home.austin.rr.com/ojknox/bustainfo.htm>

**Feb 18-20 Manhole Dig (Carlsbad region, NM):** Cavediggers welcome, come see if this will be the next big one. **Contact:** Stephen Fleming [swcaver@warpedriveonline.com](mailto:swcaver@warpedriveonline.com)

**Feb 25-26 Jester Cave (OK):** Come see the longest gypsum cave in this hemisphere. This trip is suitable for beginners, so bring along a friend/relative/significant other and introduce them to caving. Cave is water-filled but you won't need to swim. This is a "carbide-encouraged" trip, for all the nostalgia buffs in the grotto. If you don't have a carbide lamp, contact Bill and he may be able to get you equipped. **Contact:** Bill Steele (214) 770-4712 [leosteel@comcast.net](mailto:leosteel@comcast.net)

**Feb 25-26 Government Canyon State Natural Area Project:** 20 miles northwest of San Antonio. Activities include survey, exploration, ridge walking, and digging. Participants must enter by 9 am on Saturday, contact in advance if you want to camp and for directions. **Contacts:** Marvin and Lisa Miller (830) 885-5631 [mlmiller@gvtc.com](mailto:mlmiller@gvtc.com)

**Feb 25-26 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](mailto:highguads@yahoo.com)

**Mar 25-26 Spring NSS Board of Governors Meeting (Irving, TX):** Hosted by the Metroplex grottos, the meeting will take place in the Irving Garden and Arts Center. Parties on Friday and Saturday evening will be at the home of Diana Tomchick and Bill Steele in Irving. Saturday dinner will be at Spring Creek Barbecue. **Contacts:** Bill Steele (214) 770-4712 [leosteel@comcast.net](mailto:leosteel@comcast.net) Diana Tomchick (214) 418-5827 [diana.tomchick@utsouthwestern.edu](mailto:diana.tomchick@utsouthwestern.edu) See <http://www.maverickgrotto.org/nssbog/> for more details.

**Mar 25-26 High Guads Restoration Project**

**TBD Texas Speleological Spring Convention:** Date and place to be determined, typically occurs in April.

**TBD Southwest Region Spring Regional (Black Range, NM):** Hosted by the Mesilla Valley Grotto, date to be determined.



### Apr 29-30 High Guads Restoration Project

**May 20 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](mailto:gveni@satx.rr.com) Jim Kennedy (512) 663-2287 [jkenedy@batcon.org](mailto:jkenedy@batcon.org) Ron Ralph [ronralph@austin.rr.com](mailto:ronralph@austin.rr.com)

**Aug 7-11 NSS Convention (Bellingham, WA). Info:** <http://www.nss2006.com/>

## Announcements

Congratulations to Don and Stephanie. They are the proud parents of a beautiful baby girl. Raevan Lillie Selby was born on January 20th, 2006. Weight 8 lbs 1.5 oz, length 20.25 inches.

All are doing extremely well.



## Chairman's Corner

I want to thank Diana Tomchick for taking the time to call Buck N' Loons and setting up the meeting room for January. I didn't hear anyone complaining about the variety of food even if it didn't include barbecue. After the meeting several of us talked to the manager and arranged to have a larger room for February and March. It's got two televisions and more room to move around

While I'm thanking her, Diana also put on a good program. It was entertaining watching her move back and forth between the computer projector and slide projector. I thought it was pretty amazing that she was able to coordinate so well between the two. It's not like she did part on one then the other part on the other but kept switching back and forth.

The New Year is starting off well with Dennis Welch providing 71 digital photographs from the San Saba caving trip for use in the newsletter, on the website and of course they will end up as part of the TSS data files for that project. He's got a hot digital camera that takes 8 mega pixel photos, pretty close to film quality. We've got an FTP site set up on the Maverick Website to use for such things if anyone would like to use it and upload something.

Sharon Mastbrook made an interesting suggestion about a 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary T-Shirt and possibly a baseball cap. Maybe we can get some folks who want to try their hand at a design for either or! I've got a friend who's a graphic designer whom I could probably talk into cleaning up it up for artwork. It would probably be a better job than we got out of the old grotto patch.

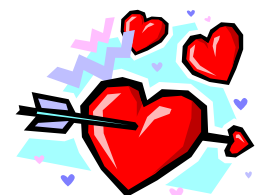
Once again (you'll probably hear it a lot this year) I want to beseech everyone to be as involved in the grotto as you possibly can. Newsletter articles and meeting programs are always welcome. Variety is the spice of life so everything we can get is most welcome.

The website can always use something new, you don't have to put up there but you can always make suggestions, maybe provide an article for a new page or something. Photographs are always welcome. Our website visitors seem to love to look at cave related photographs and read old newsletters. Seems like most of our meeting visitors find us on the website so it needs to be kept up to date and be somewhat dynamic (new stuff on occasion). I will take care of keeping it up but need some help in keeping it dynamic. If anyone is interested in having a little web space to talk about their caving adventures, the grotto can provide that. It can even be set up where you maintain your own little piece of the World Wide Web if you're interested.

Next month the NSS BOG meeting will be held in Irving with Bill Steele setting stuff up and also needing all the help he can get to take care of them when they get here. This is a good opportunity to hob knob with some of the NSS bigwigs and find out that when it's all said and done, they are just cavers like the rest of us. The Maverick Grotto along with Cowtown Grotto and DFW Grotto are sponsoring this thing so get involved! Bill's going to need help getting people picked up at the airport, then to their hotels and to the various parties and the meeting. Contact him if you can help!

Oh Yeah, I'm going to change the meeting format up just slightly. Instead of going immediately into the program, I want to call the meeting to order, introduce any visitors then do the meeting. Not a big change but we need to make our visitors welcome as soon as possible.

Happy February everyone – lets get some new stuff going and keep the good stuff going on.





## TSS Meeting January 14, 2006

By Butch Fralia

The Texas Speleological Survey held its first board of directors meeting for 2006 on January 14 at the Pickle Research Campus in Austin. One of the most discussed items is the International Congress of Speleology to be held in Kerrville Texas, July 19-26, 2009. That's a ways off but there's a lot to be done before it all happens. Of course, the TSS will be involved.

OK, so it's going to be in Texas in 2009 so why worry about it now? It's like an NSS Convention on Steroids with cavers from all over the world attending! It doesn't happen in the US very often so it's something to look forward to. There's going to be a lot of Texas Caver involvement making transportation arrangements, arranging events and creating new publications.

There's been a little shuffling around with officers. Ron Ralph is taking over from Orion Knox as Treasurer. Jerry Atkinson is taking over as editor from Jim Kennedy.

For all you folks who aren't familiar with the TSS, it's the keeper of the records on caves in Texas. The records are in paper files, electronic files and there are lots of cave maps in the collection. If you need information on a cave, this is the organization to contact. For most cavers, you can make a casual data request and find out if we have information on your favorite cave. If you have cave data, you can submit it to the TSS to include in their records. Photos, descriptions, maps, survey data and especially locations are helpful. If you have some old caving gear that's not in use anymore, it would be welcome for inclusion in the TSS museum, just a few shelves right now but it's growing all the time and some of the stuff is pretty interesting!



Sometimes the TSS gets a bad rap for not sharing information with cavers, I don't know of anyone who's come to me for information that didn't get what they ask for. If you ask for too much of course, like a whole county then you'll have to file a formal data request to be approved by the officers. That seldom happens with cavers however. Bill Tucker recently asked for a map of a cave he's working on and the TSS was able to help him out. All it took was an e-mail. Ask and you'll

probably receive assuming there's any information in the files.

There are a lot of paper files in Austin that haven't been entered electronically but all that's happening, the electronic data files are up to 30GB now and grow a couple of GB every quarter.

If you'd like to get involved with the TSS, let us know what your interest are and we'll likely be able to make a slot. We always need people who can put together publications and serve as county data managers. In fact, we need some young blood, some of us are going to croak one of these days and then who can you ask for data?

## Trip Reports

### Ellis Ranch and Becker Cave Report

by Scott Boyd

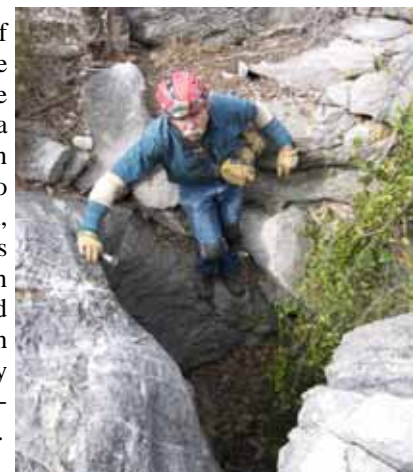
Friday - Jan. 20 - a San Saba Co. ranch

Friday afternoon, I left home to go caving at the San Saba ranch where the Maverick Grotto has an on-going project. I arrived about sunset, meeting Milo at the ranch house, and followed him to the campsite. Milo and I were the only people there Friday night, as everyone else were planning to arrive early the next morning. We didn't stay up very long, since the wind was too cold for me, and we couldn't have a campfire because of the fire ban.

Saturday - Jan. 21

Saturday morning we were joined by Lex and Tammy Cox, Dennis and Sharon Welch, and John Langevin and his daughter Kelby. Milo first took us to ELL-001. Dennis, Sharon, John, Kelby and I all went through that cave, while Milo, Lex and Tammy went to go drop a pit in the back of Von's Cave. After we left ELL-001, the five of us went to Von's Cave. John, Kelby and I went into the cave, and went to the back where the other three were coming back up out of the pit. Meanwhile, back on the surface, Dennis and Sharon were doing a little ridgewalking between Vons' Cave and a creek nearby. They later reported that they didn't find anything.

After we came out of Von's Cave, we all drove to the southern part of the ranch. We checked out a nearby cave, and then went back to the trucks to have lunch. After lunch, we all went through Joe's Cave, the largest cave on the ranch. I was impressed by the size of the rooms in this cave. I thought they were pretty big for a non-commercial cave in Texas.



Milo Marks entering Joes Cave



Next we went to ELL-041. Two or three people tried squeezing into the opening, but said that it was too constricted and they couldn't get anywhere. We then started looking around for some other caves and Kelby came across a pit and called us all over to it. We found out that it was tagged as ELL-028. It was a pit that looked to be about 30 feet deep, and Milo said he had never been in it before. We went back to the trucks and got our vertical gear and returned to the pit. Milo dropped into it first, and I followed him down. He discovered that there weren't any leads off the main pit, so we went back up. By this time, it was mid-afternoon, so I went back to the campsite to pack up and leave to go to Spring Branch.



Scott Boyd preparing to enter ELL-028  
Lex Cox observing.

Sunday - Jan. 22 - Becker Cave

Sunday morning, I followed B.T. Price the short distance to Becker Cave. There was a cave rescue class this weekend at the cave, so there were about a dozen other people there. I went in first by myself, with B. T. assuring me that if I got hurt or stuck, there would be enough people coming in behind me to help out if needed.

The entrance to the cave is a hole about 8 - 10 feet in diameter in a small bluff in the landowner's back yard. Right at the entrance there is equipment to sift the dirt that's being removed, checking for Indian artifacts. About 20 feet beyond that is the current dig area, where the floor is being dug out to allow easier access through the crawlway. Misery Crawl, an 80-yard belly-crawl, is aptly named. The ceiling in the crawlway varies from 12 - 24 inches high, but fortunately, the floor is mostly packed down dirt, not all rocks. At the end of Misery Crawl, you squeeze over or under a large rock, entering into a larger passageway. This passageway continues to the left for about 200 yards. Along the way, there are a couple of large guano mounds to cross over, but at least the ceiling is high enough to be able to walk, not crawl across them. At the end of the passageway is a mud plug, which is in the process of being dug out. There's a small, tight hole at the edge of the mud plug that leads to a passageway that goes around the plug into "Marvin's Standup Room". (I didn't go into the small passageway.) On the way back through the large passageway, I noticed a small opening among the breakdown along

one side wall. I took a look into it, and saw that it leads to more passage in a lower level that isn't on the map of the cave. I plan to explore this area on a future trip.

I had gone to Becker Cave to check it out for a possible grotto project that I'm willing to lead. The mud plug might well be dug out by the next time I'm able to go down there. But there is plenty of work for us to do on the lowering of the floor through Misery Crawl. There is also further exploration and surveying waiting to be done. If you would like to join in on this project, contact me via email or phone and let me know. (My contact info is on page 2 of the newsletter.)

## Christmas Holidays Spent Caving in Mexico

By Bill Steele

For the third Christmas holidays in a row, Diana Tomchick and I joined former Texas caver Mark Minton, who now lives in Las Vegas, New Mexico, on a caving trip to the mountains northwest of Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas (roughly 200 miles south of Laredo, Texas). That mountain range, the Sierra Madre Oriental, is about 100 miles long and 50 miles wide, but there's probably not more than 200 people living in them. There are lots of roads, though, roads built four or five decades ago to log the area. In order to accommodate heavy logging trucks, the roads were built well, but those that are not used by present day logging trucks have the occasional fallen tree, or rocks which have rolled downhill onto them, or the rare washout. With a stout 4-wheel drive truck, a chain saw, and the strength to roll rocks off the old roads, you can drive to new caving areas. The chief caving lure is that there is excellent proven potential. There are over 500 other known caves in these mountains. Sistema Purificacion is the big one. It's the second longest cave in Mexico, and the longest air-filled cave at almost 60 miles long and 3,000 feet deep. PEP, or Proyecto Espeleologico Purificacion, was founded 30 years ago and hundreds of cavers from many different counties have contributed to the project. In our three years of going there over the Christmas holidays, we've added over 50 caves to what is known. See: <http://www.purificacion.org/history.htm>

The weather this time of year and campsites you can find are excellent. It's cool at night, sometimes even cold, and sunny and warm during the day. There is a b u n d a n t firewood, and you can have a campfire every night. When you run into people, they're very friendly and usually willing to guide you to



**We had a campfire every night**



what caves they know about. There are no snakes, almost no bugs, hardly any wildlife, and almost no water. We get water from pools of water in the Arroyo Luna streambed, treat it, and carry 35 gallons which lasts four people the 12 days we're in the mountains.

We anticipated it being difficult to find Mark Minton and Yvonne Droms in the mountain when we got there. Due to our jobs, Diana and I and our riders James Hunter and Tanja Pietrass from New Mexico who had flown to DFW, left for Mexico two days later than Mark and Yvonne. Mark wrote us a couple of paragraphs of directions, Diana had her GPS log from last year, and put together we had no problem finding them at their camp in the middle of nowhere. From a quarter mile away we saw a blazing campfire through the trees.

We started caving the next day by returning to a cave we had started last year. We had explored and surveyed it on Christmas Eve 2004, so it was named Nochebuena. As soon as we got to Nochebuena we saw that it had flooded, presumably during hurricane season, and it appeared that water had backed up in the sinkhole around the entrance. We expected the cave to be blocked by flood debris, and it was. We had to dig it open not far into the cave where there was a tight squeeze last year. We uncovered the squeeze and dug out rocks until we had a climb-



The tight squeeze in Nochebuena is full of dirt from a flood

able pit. The cave is tight the whole way to a sump found this year.

The next day we relocated our camp and camped near a deep pit we found the last day of our trip last year. It's a deep natural pit, but it had a retaining wall built on one side of it, and we

were told that it had been mined for phosphates. James Hunter went down it, and it was over 300 feet, but didn't lead to additional cave passages.

Next we hiked logging roads and looked for new caves. We found lots of pits, and descended them all. The deepest one of them all had a 200 foot free fall pit as its second drop.

One place we visited had never been checked out before named Los Toros (The Bulls). It's on a mountaintop with a view all the way to the coastal plain. Los Toros was well-kept, with healthy livestock, nice fences, and good looking soil. However, the old road to it went up a streambed which had become undriveable due to erosion.

At Los Toros we asked about caves. The elderly man of town took us to the edge of the mountain and said there was a resurgence way down below, sale aqua; he called it, "where the water comes out." We arranged to return in two days, after Christmas, to be taken to it.

Sale aqua turned out to be an enticing resurgence cave. It had deep pools, and lots of flowstone, but no air flow, so it probably sumps soon. Given that it was so far to it, and it was going to take hours to hike back up to Los Toros, our group that made it to the resurgence climbed around in the entrance above deep pools of water, but didn't get wet, and then barely made it up the mountain before nightfall.

On the way back to camp we ran into two goat-herding girls. They said they knew of a couple of pits, so we followed them and their goats to the top of the mountain. The first pit they showed us was impressive. They called it Poza Honda, or wide well. Rocks dropped in caused us to guess that it was around 160 feet deep. Then they took us to something they didn't seem to be sure we would want to see. It was a hole in the dirt that blew a lot of air! When I first looked into it I couldn't see where the air was coming from. Then I saw a four-inch wide crack. I stuck a tree limb into it and enlarged it slightly. The bigger it got, the more air blew out of it! They also showed us to a second pit, and when there we noticed the faint odor of wood pussy, in Spanish zorillo, also known as polecat – skunk.

The next day Diana and I maintained radio contact with the others as we hiked to the top of the mountain. The others were already digging on the blowing crack. Yvonne and Mark had rigged the stinky pit, so Yvonne, Diana and I went down it. As we went down the 80 foot entrance pit the smell got stronger. Then, at the top of a 20 foot second pit, it was very strong. At the bottom of it we found out why. A skunk carcass was there to greet us. The smell was close to overwhelming, so once we were satisfied that this was the end of the cave, we started our survey and climbed out.

Meanwhile, at the blowing crack, Mark, Tanja, and James were busy enlarging it with a small crowbar and a hand sledge. The amount of air was impressive. Mark posed for a photo holding a length of flagging tape into the pit and it blew up vertically



from the wind issuing out of the cave. James was down the 35-foot entrance pit, and yelled up that he was at the top of a four second pit. We guessed that one to be deeper than 150 feet.

Diana and I went on to Poza Honda. The best place to rig it, to have a free fall drop and a convenient place to get on and off rope, was right new to an agave plant with dagger-like leaves. I cut them off with my pocketknife and gardened a place for the rope. I went down first, marveling at long draperies on the walls, and soon was on the bottom. Diana came down and we surveyed the bottom of the pit. I tied a knot where the rope hit the bottom, and as we pulled the rope out we measured it with a survey tape and saw that our guess of 160 feet had been pretty good. It was 163 feet deep, measured in meters at 49.75.

Diana and I got back to the blowing pit and the others had gone down it. We had passed some men nearby as we walked up to it from Poza Honda, so we hesitated going down in case they might help themselves to our entrance pit rope and leave us marooned in the cave. Feeling brave, we went on down it, but at the bottom of the pit I made sure that the rope was tied off so it would be hard to steal, and also eye-balled the pit to see if it could be climbed.

We surveyed down the entrance pit, and the 160 foot deep second drop, before we heard the others ever so faintly yelling to each other below us. So, we left a note so they would know where our last survey station was, and climbed out.

We named the cave Soplo de Los Toros, or Breath of the Bulls. We found out when Mark, Yvonne, James, and Tanja joined us around a campfire we had built back where the truck was parked, that they had run out of rope at a depth of 262 feet at the top of a pit. One crawlway between pits was named The Wind Tunnel because there was such a gale of air.

On the way north Diana and I took the tour of the commercial cave Grutas Garcia, located northwest of Monterrey. It's been renovated recently, with a shiny new, state-of-the-art, Swiss-made gondola ride up to the entrance. In the cave the lighting



**Gondola ride to entrance of Grutas Garcia**

is well done, and the walkways are new, steel, and solid. The cost was 60 pesos each, or about \$6.00.



**On tour of Grutas Garcia**

We got to Austin in time for the caver New Year's Eve party at Andy Glusenkamp's and Shannon Summers house out near Driftwood, and next door to Terry Raines' homestead Tick Acres. New Year's Day we drove on to Irving.

## **Arkansas trip to the Buffalo National River, December 2005**

By Charles Goldsmith

Mike Pierce of DFW Grotto invited us along on a survey trip to Fitton Cave, and gladly we accepted. We had seen one of the entrances to it back in 1998 on a trip to Mud Cave and had been told a bit about this huge cave and have been entranced by it ever sense. Other local cavers from the metroplex were Bill Steele, Diana Tomchick, Pete Lindsley and Will Harris.

Whatever you have heard about this cave, it doesn't do it justice, it has a little of everything it seems, and we only saw a small part of the cave. The goal for the trip was to re-survey some parts and there was also going to be a bio-survey of a section. Tammy and I were assigned to the bio-survey, and I was disappointed at this initially, since I wanted to learn some things about mapping, surveying and sketching cave maps. Turns out I enjoyed the bio-survey more than I expected. I learned a lot and had a great time. I met and worked with some great folks along the way to boot!

First stop in Fitton was an introduction to bio-surveying. Wade Baker, the survey leader, took us to the very back of the first main level, back where the roof is low, the mud feels very sticky, like peanut butter smeared everywhere, and there are many small, shallow pools of water where the salamanders live. <http://netcavers.org/gallery/fitton05/PC030100> (taken by Tammy Goldsmith)





Once we got started with the survey, we crawled along pretty slowly, counting anything alive, and noting anything dead. You would be very surprised at how much life was in this cave, and not just bats and salamanders. Things called amphipods that look like miniature shrimp, campodeid that look like a small walking stick/centipede and little spiders called harvestmen. All three of these pics are courtesy of Jean Krejca from Austin. She was one of the members on the bio-survey team.



amphipods



campodeid



harvestmen

One thing to note was a few of the fossils that can be seen, this picture is probably the best we saw of the starfish.



Once we hit the end of the section to be surveyed, a few of us split off and went to go see the Kansas Turnpike, which is the connection from the East the West passages, wish I had a map of that to show you what I mean. We had to go through the



The Needle's Eye

needle's eye on

the way to the turnpike, which is an interesting little passage. The turnpike itself is a tight squeeze, Tammy had to take her helmet off as you can see. After the tight crawl, it opens up into the West Crystal Passage and about this time, our battery on the camera finally gave out.

After almost 10 hours in the cave, we were both pretty tired and ready to hit the sack. The next day, we did a small cave (couldn't waste the final day without caving in that area), so Wade took us to Little Devil's Den cave (sometimes called Sunshine) and we practiced our vertical technique on the small pit. Wade didn't have his vertical gear with him, so he used my trusty old rope ladder. All in all, the trip was great fun and look forward to another venture into Fitton and that area.



Tammy Goldsmith in the Turnpike



The West Crystal passage



John and Kelby Langevin entering cave ELL-001 at Ellis Ranch in San Saba

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