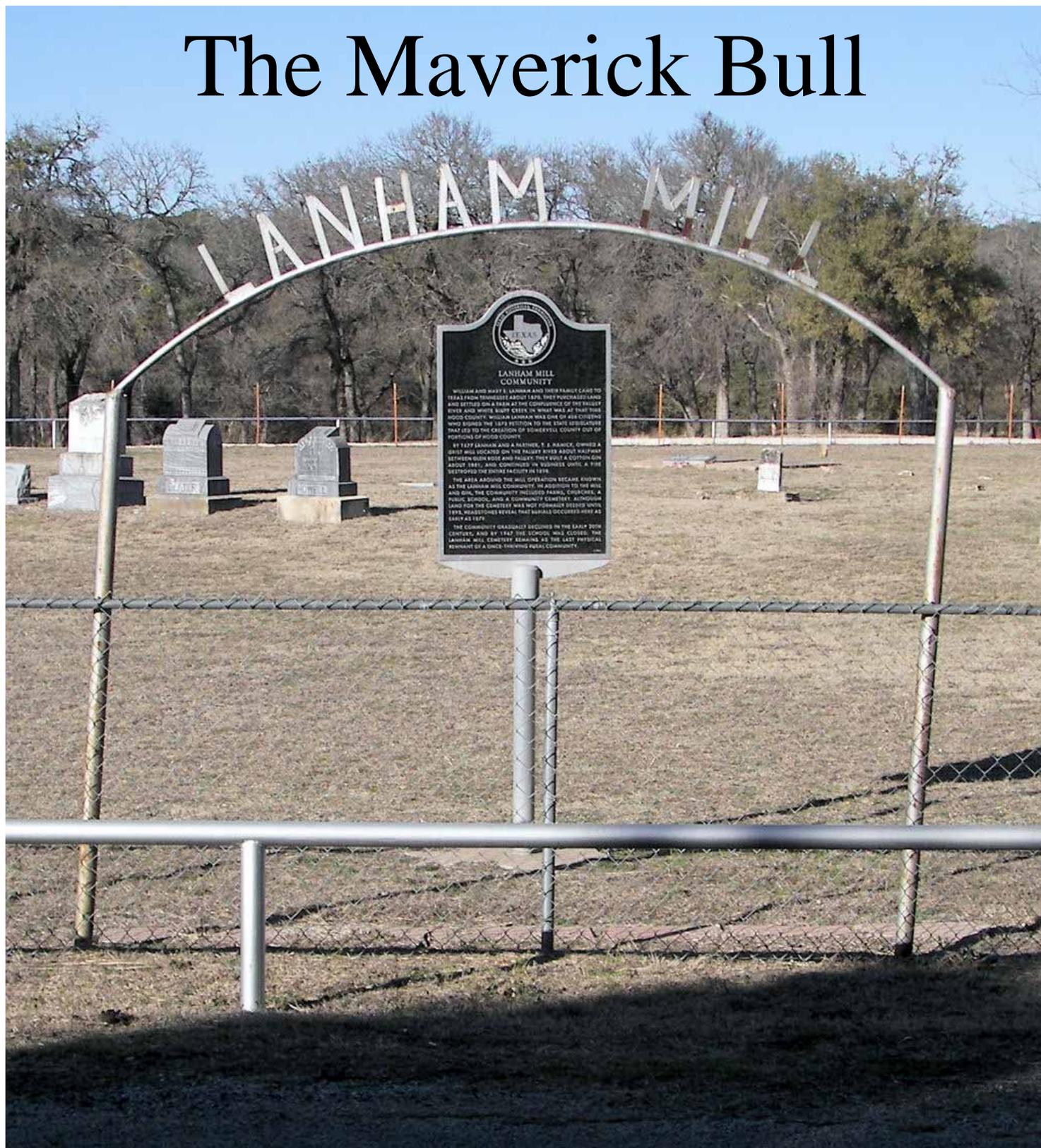


The Maverick Bull



The Rites of Spring Party 2007 Returns to The Metroplex!
It's behind the cemetery, not in it!

Volume 20, 3

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. Diana Tomchick or Bill Steele will be accepting books and magazines on cave-related topics, copies of homemade cave videos, etc. for our library.

Photos & Map Credits

Cover Photo: Lanham Mill Cemetery—Butch Fralia

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

Cave Emergency:

FOR A LIFE THREATENING EMERGENCY IN TEXAS DIAL 911. FOR CAVE ASSISTANCE START BY CALLING THE CLOSEST NUMBER:

BEXAR: 210-326-1576 **COLLIN:** 214-202-6611
HAYS: 512-393-9054 **KENDALL:** 830-537-6111
SUTTON: 315-387-3424 **TRAVIS:** 512-663-2287
PARKER: 817 657-5780

Next meeting: March 13th , 2007 7:00 pm

**Swinford's Pit BBQ & Grill, 1101 Terminal Rd.,
Fort Worth, TX 76106**

Program: "Expedicion Soplo de los Toros," a slide show by Diana Tomchick. Diana will review her end-of-2006 two-week exploration caving trip to the Purificación region of Mexico.

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Caving Calendar

Mar 17-18—Manhole Dig (Carlsbad region, NM): Cave diggers welcome, come see if this will be the next big one. If they didn't make it during the February trip, then this weekend could be the big breakthrough. If you plan to come, contact Steve as they need a minimum of eight people now to run the dig. Located on BLM land not far from Lechuguilla Cave. **Contact:** Steve Peerman gypcaver@comcast.net

Mar 24—Robber Baron Cave Work Day: TCMA-owned Robber Baron Cave work project will start at 8:30 a.m. and continue all day. Let Linda know you are coming and they will provide water and lunch for you. Work includes finishing projects from the February 11th Work Day, then landscaping plantings and trails. Caving is open after the work is finished. **Contacts:** Joe Mitchell (210) 679-8408 joemitchell@satx.rr.com Linda Palit (210) 699-1388 lkpalit@sbcglobal.net

Mar 24-25—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. **Contact:** Jennifer Foote highguads@yahoo.com

Mar 31—Honey Creek Water Cave (Spring Branch, TX): Bill is organizing an upstream tank haul from the shaft entrance for cave diver James Brown. One-way travel is estimated at 6 hours, so the trip length will be 12+ hours. Wetsuit required, if you don't own one then rent one from a dive shop. Overnight camping at the ranch will include a nice warm fire and some dutch oven cooking (peach cobbler). Contact Bill if you're interested. **Contact:** Bill Steele (214) 770-4712 speleosteel@tx.rr.com

Mar 31-Apr 1—Metroplex Cavers Rites of Spring Party (Somervell County, near Glen Rose, TX): No fooling, the three Metroplex grottos (Maverick, DFW and Cowtown) will host a joint picnic/campout/party at a county park on the Paluxy River. There's plenty of room for camping, dogs and partying, so join in the fun! Help the Maverick Grotto celebrate their 20th Anniversary. **Info:** <http://www.maverickgrotto.org/information/spring2007.html>

Mar 31-Apr 1—Southwest Region Spring Regional (McKittrick Hill, NM): Cave trips and conservation projects in the ever-popular Southeastern New Mexico area will be available. **Info:** <http://www.caves.org/region/swrl>

Apr 6-8—Colorado Bend State Park Project: Usually the second weekend of the month, the date was changed to avoid conflict with the TSA Convention. This is a terrific project for beginning and experienced cavers, and the project is under new leadership this year. Come help locate, survey and produce maps of the approximately 380 caves and karst features in the park. Work assignments are handed out by 9 a.m. on Saturday, so don't be late. Overnight camping and recreational caving on Sunday will be available. **Contacts:** Rafal Kedzierski rafal_13@hotmail.com Mark Gee [\[caver@yahoo.com\]\(mailto:caver@yahoo.com\) Butch Fralia \(817\) 346-2039 \[cavedba@charter.net\]\(mailto:cavedba@charter.net\) Keith Heuss \[caverkeith@yahoo.com\]\(mailto:caverkeith@yahoo.com\)
Info: \[CBSP@maverickgrotto.com\]\(mailto:CBSP@maverickgrotto.com\) **Directions:** \[www.maverickgrotto.org/maps/cbsp.html\]\(http://www.maverickgrotto.org/maps/cbsp.html\)](mailto:markageetx-</p>
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Apr 13-15—Texas Speleological Association Convention (Albert, TX): Albert is just south of Stonewall, which is on 290 between Johnson City and Fredericksburg. Saturday April 14th is reserved for talks, presentations and salons (Map and Photo), Saturday evening there will be a dinner and the TCMA auction. We may have some caving Sunday. If you are interesting in giving a presentation please contact Kel Thomas at kthomas@sonoratx.net **Contact:** Jacqui Thomas jlrills@sonoratx.net **Info:** <http://www.cavetexas.org/events/TSASC/tsasc2007.html>

Apr 14-15—Manhole Dig

Apr 28-May 6—Fort Stanton Cave Project (Ruidoso, NM): Join the folks working on extending the length of this cave on BLM lands. Weekends will be devoted to installing the new entrance into the Mud Turtle Passage, weekday trips will be scientific surveys. You can attend during the whole project week, or either weekend. **Contact:** John Corcoran III john_j_corcoran_III@msn.com

Apr 28-29—High Guads Restoration Project

May 25-28—Kentucky Speleofest (Upton, KY): The 36th annual Speleofest is billed as "Underground Heaven" and takes place on the 67-acre Lone Star Preserve, acquired by the Louisville Grotto as a caving preserve. Typical events include lots of caving trips (including special beginner's trips), food, speleovendors, karaoke and more. Camping and hot showers will be available. Proximity to such attractions as Mammoth Cave National Park, the Jim Beam distillery, and Fort Knox should provide enough fun for non-caving friends and relatives. **Contacts:** Sue Milburn 270-300-8800 (d) 270-737-1868 (e) Sherry Gowens 256-310-4522 **Info:** <http://www.caves.org/grotto/louisvillegrotto/>

July 23-27—NSS Convention (Marengo, IN). Held in the heart of Indiana caving country, this should be a fun one. **Contacts:** Dave Haun (812) 829-4077 Kathy Welling (765) 653-6352 **Info:** <http://www.nss2007.com/>

July 29-Aug 4—Speleocongreso 2007 (Aquadilla, Puerto Rico): Fifth FEALC (Federation of Latin America and the Caribbean) Congress will include talks, speleovendors, salons, all the activities you might find at an NSS Convention, but the focus is on caving in the FEALC countries. **Info:** www.speleocongreso2007.org

Oct 8-12—National Cave & Karst Management Symposium (St. Louis, MO). Held at the Holiday Inn Southwest/Viking Conference Center and Powder Valley Nature Center. Co-sponsored by Missouri Department of Conservation and Missouri Caves and Karst Conservancy. **Contacts:** Bill Elliott Bill.Elliott@mdc.mo.gov Jim Kaufmann president@mocavesandkarst.org

Oct 16-21—Cave Research Foundation 50th Anniversary Celebration (Hamilton Valley, KY). Come celebrate 50 years of exploration of Mammoth Cave (and other caves around the U.S.) at the CRF Hamilton Valley Field Station. Caving, guided tours, camaraderie, food, song, camping and general good fun. Field trips will be conducted from Oct. 16-18th in the Mammoth Cave System, general celebration will occur from Oct. 19-21st. **Contact:** Pat Kambesis pnkambesis@juno.com

Meeting Minutes

Submitted by: Butch Fralia

The last meeting of The Maverick Grotto, was held February 13, 2007 at Swinford's BBQ and Grill. Sharon Mastbrook chaired the meeting as both Diana Tomchick and Bill Steele were out of town on business.

Visitors were recognized, Russell Hill and James Savage were both present and it's been long enough they are almost visitors. Daniel Dase who was at last month's meeting returned for a second round. Bobby De Vos is back in town for 14-18 months and expects to be involved in caving again. Bobby has been working in Thailand with side trips to caves in China.

Members in attendance, Scott Boyd (and Debby), Mark Gee, Dale Ellison, Butch Fralia, Russell Hill, Sharon Mastbrook., and Mike Swinford.

The program was "Tag You're It!" a very entertaining video detailing a lot of the history of T.A.G. caving, how the name was derived, etc. Many of the early T.A.G. cavers were featured talking about their adventures.

After the program:

Reports from officers:

Chairman—not present

Vice-Chairman—not present

Treasurer—We still got money

Secretary—Need newsletter material.

New Business: - None

Old Business

Metroplex Cavers "Rites of Spring Party", The DFW Grotto has voted to join the Maverick and Cowtown Grottos in the return of the "Rites of Spring Party" March 31. The question was asked if we should have the party, the question was asked how many would come (most said yes). Russell Hill will check his calendar and will bring his trailer mounted smoker if he's available that weekend. \$75.00 was allocated for meat and other food.

Trip Reports:

Mark Gee and Butch Fralia discussed the CBSP trip the previous weekend.

Correspondence

From Diana Tomchick:

This last weekend Bill and I took the British visitor to Austin for the TCC Winter Conference. We stuck around there for awhile to do a little tour and some talks, then cut out and went to Airman's Cave. I have wanted to visit Airman's for a long time now. Bill couldn't fit in the entrance but Simon and I spent about 3 hours searching for the Aggie Art Gallery and trying to locate our Cocker Spaniel, who seemed to enjoy the cave most of all. It's just the right size for her to explore; I just wish she could have talked to us about the things she'd found. We never did locate the Gallery but I think after talking to various people that we were in the right area but Simon didn't want to push a particularly tight squeeze, probably the one that leads right to it.

I came back with bruises on my hip bones from sliding through that entrance squeeze. That's a first for me. I guess next time I'll wish I had hip pads in addition to knee and elbow pads--but if I did, I probably wouldn't get through the squeeze. On Sunday night I had to wash the dog and she was so dirty I had to soap her up three times. It took several hours before she warmed up to me again--she always acts as though I'm the meanest Mom in the world for giving her a bath.

From Bill Tucker:

I found out today that Dr. Brindley (owner of Harrell's Cave) died about a month ago. We were trying to set up a trip to the cave, and had not been able to reach him at the known phone number. I finally called it during the day and talked with his "caretaker".

I got the contact info for his son, but he and I both agreed that it was too soon to contact him about permission. Also found out that the property is being used as some type of conservation project... don't know much about it yet, but I will let you know when I find out more.

Metroplex Cavers Rites of Spring 2007

By Butch Fralia

After a long hiatus, the Rites of Spring Party **is returning** to the DFW Metroplex. The Cowtown, DFW and Maverick Grottos are joining together to enjoy camaraderie, good food and good fun March 30-April 1. The location is the Somervell County Park behind the Lanham Mill Cemetery. We've held parties there before and the only weird lights we expect to see are the LED lamps some cavers tend to have on their head!

The Maverick Grotto has allocated \$75.00 for meat for the event. Russell Hill is checking his schedule and if clear will have his trailer mounted smoker at the event. Attendees should



The scenic Paluxy River, just upstream from Dinosaur Valley State Park.

- Photo Butch Fralia

bring side dishes to share with their caving friends and their own booze.

The site is on the banks of the scenic Paluxy River just upstream from Dinosaur Valley State Park. Who knows, if you poke around the river bed, you might find your own dinosaur tracks! There's plenty of room for tent camping with a few trailers thrown in. It should be a great event.

Bring your family and all those want-to-be cavers to share in the fun.



Lot's of room for camping, cooking and partying.

- Photo Butch Fralia

To get to the site, go to Glenn Rose from where ever you coming from. Just west of town take FM 205 north to CR 1008, just past the entrance to Dinosaur Valley State Park. Drive north on CR 1008 until you come to the cemetery. The entrance to the park is just past the cemetery. The drive is about 45 minutes from SW Fort Worth.

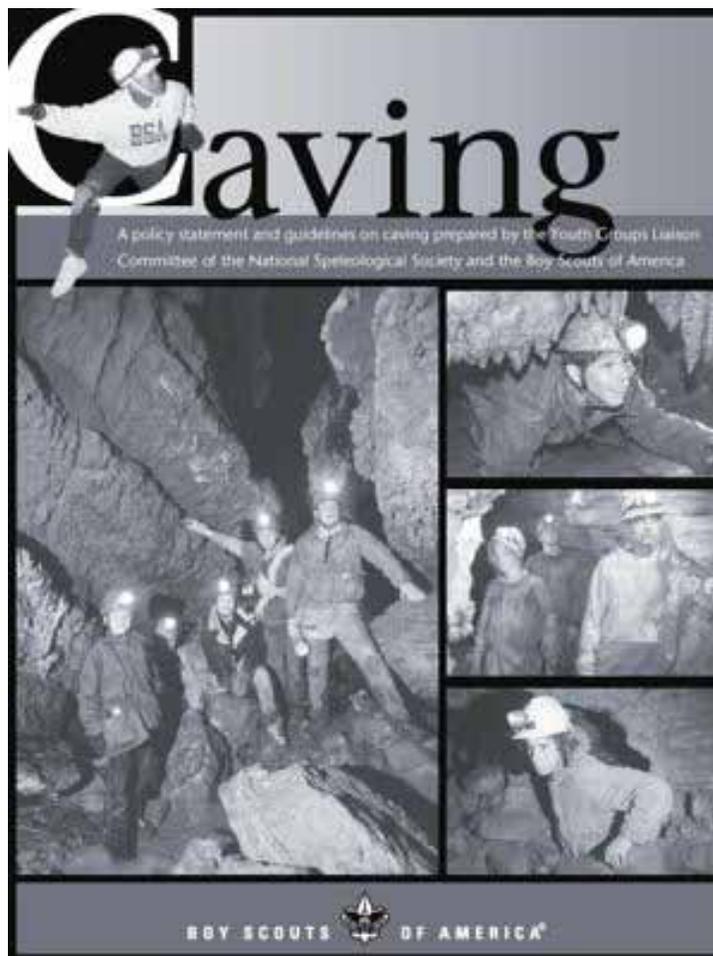
The county has put up guard rails along the river to prevent 4wd vehicles from tearing up the river bank so there's no longer a

private area for a hot tub. Looks like we'll have to pass on that though Mike Swinford was thinking about hauling it down for the event.

More information is available online at <http://www.maverickgrotto.org>. There's a link from the home page to party details and a map.

What to Tell Boy Scout Troops About Caving

By Bill Steele



I work for the Boy Scouts of America at the national level, and in my capacity at national director of health and safety services, the guidelines for Scout caving activities fall under me. The BSA publishes caving guidelines, which can be found on the NSS Website (<http://www.caves.org/>) as a PDF file. The guidelines list 35 numbered points, the first of which states the following:

1. All caving, other than simple novice activities, should be limited to adults and young people 14 and over – members of Venture Crews or Learning for Life posts, and older Scouts in troops and teams. "Simple novice activities" means commercially operated cave excursions.

For the past 30 years I've taken a Scout troop, Explorer post, or Venture crew caving once a year. That's all I'm willing to do.

Other cavers are willing to take Scout groups caving more often than I am, but others don't want to at all.

So what do we tell Scout groups who contact the grotto to go caving? My advice is to tell them about the guidelines on the NSS Website. As far as where they can go caving, I suggest telling them about the following caving opportunities:

- Colorado Bend State Park – 3 hour drive from the Metroplex – guided wild caving trip
- Longhorn Caverns – 3 hour drive from the Metroplex – guided wild caving trip
- Inner Space Cavern - 3 hour drive from the Metroplex – guided wild caving trip by arrangement
- Enchanted Rock Cave – 4 hour drive from the Metroplex – self-led trips. Easy cave. Map available at park office upon request.
- Natural Bridge Cavern – 5 hour drive from the Metroplex – guided wild caving trip
- Old Spanish Treasure Cave, Arkansas - 5 hour drive from the Metroplex – guided wild caving trip – camping in the cave.
- Kickapoo Cavern State Park - 7 hour drive from the Metroplex – guided wild caving trip
- Alabaster Caverns State Park, Oklahoma - 7 hour drive from the Metroplex – guided wild caving trip
- Carlsbad Caverns – 8 hour drive from the Metroplex – guided wild caving trip.

I started caving as a Boy Scout, so I think it's a good thing for kids to learn of the wonderful underground world. But there are hundreds of thousands of Scouts out there, and I feel that caving should be something they come up with on their own, and not something advertised to them. There aren't enough cavers interested in taking them caving, not enough caves to take them to (not in Texas at least), and caves are such a fragile and non-renewable resource that they can't handle the multitudes tramping through them.

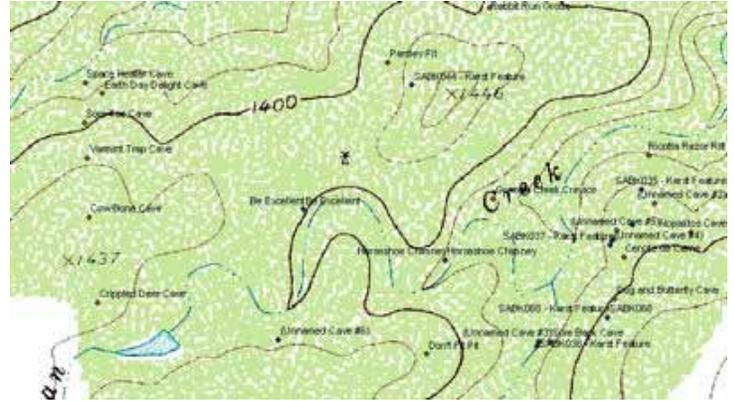
Texas Topographic Maps Online

By Butch Fralia

Just about everyone who lives in Texas, knows we're pretty lucky. We have information resources that aren't always available in other states.

Case in point is The Texas Natural Resources Information System: <http://www.tnris.org/>. You can download digital topographic maps at no cost. With readily available free software you can view the maps on your home computer. The maps are georeferenced meaning that each pixel (digital dot) on the map contains geographical coordinate information. This information can be readily transferred to your GPS receiver.

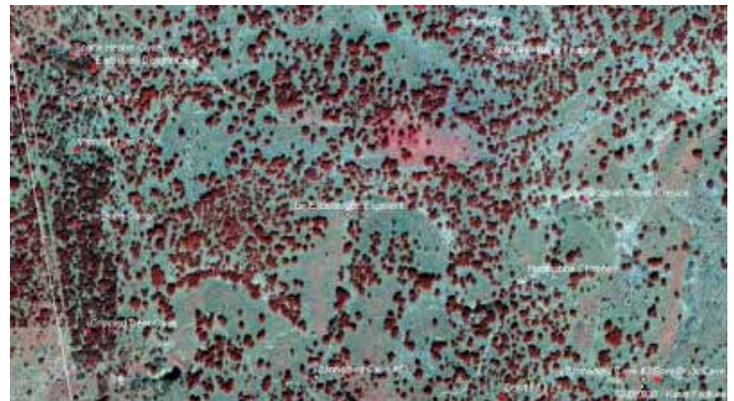
Digital Raster Graphics (DRG) are scanned and georeferenced calibrated versions of the topographic maps that just about any caver has used at one time or the other. A free reader for this type of map may be downloaded from: <http://www.esri.com/software/arcgis/arcreader/index.html>. Note that DRG maps are calibrated using the NAD27 datum. The free reader displays the



Example of a Digital Raster Graphic (DRG)
From the CBSP Project Files

geographic coordinates based on where your cursor is located on your computer screen.

Digital Ortho Quads (DOQ) maps are available as well. These are essentially aerial photographs with geographic information embedded. Because of the size, a quadrangle is broken down into four sections. The maps are compressed using Mr. SID compression software. You can obtain a free viewer which is a browser plug-in at: http://www.lizardtech.com/download/d_l_d_o_w_n_l_o_a_d_p_h_p/?detail=geo_expressview_plugin&platform=win. DOQ maps are calibrated using the NAD83 (WGS84) datum.



Example of a Digital Ortho Quad (DOQ)
From the CBSP Project Files

DOQ maps are available in 1 meter/pixel views from TNRIIS. The USGS is working on 1'/0.3 meter/pixel views and some are available now for major cities. This should be a boon to ridge walkers. The detail is good enough to locate karst features from the map BEFORE a caving trip when they become readily available for your favorite caving areas. We'll have to wait for these to become available. You can keep track of availability and download what is available at: <http://seamless.usgs.gov/>.

Discovery and Survey of Hissing Bat Cave

By Mark Gee NSS #49625

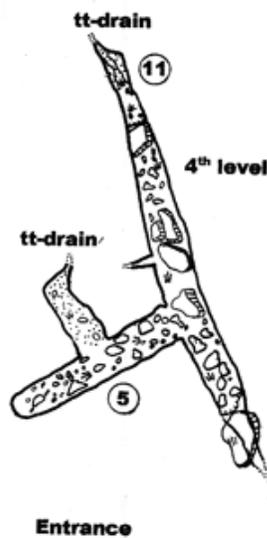
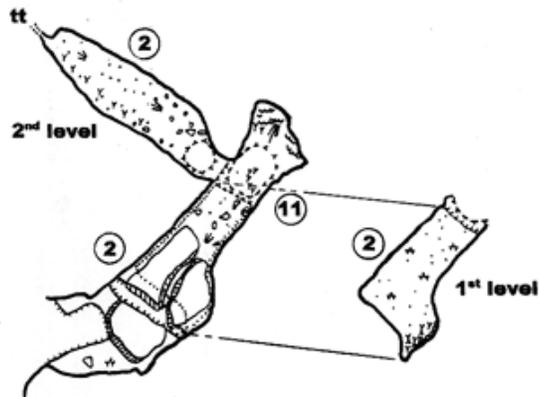
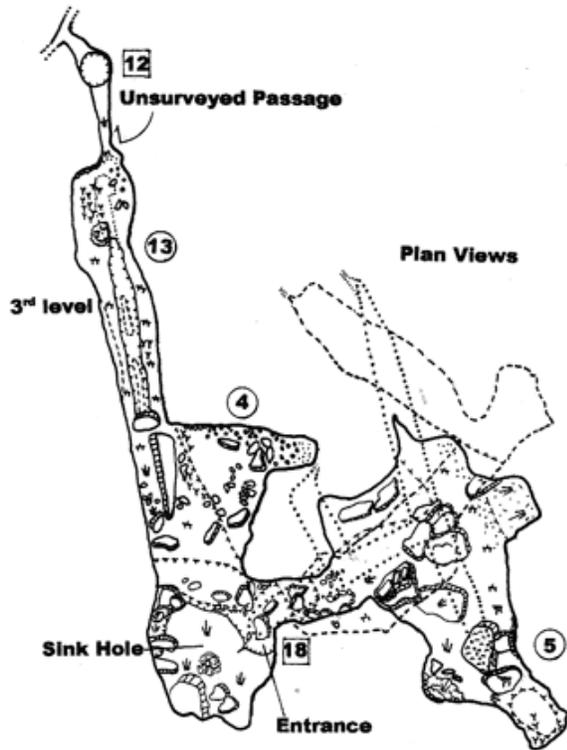
The Texas Speleological Association has had a karst and research project at Colorado Bend State Park since November 1987. More than 378 cave and karst sites have been found and

Hissing Bat Cave

Lampasas County, Texas

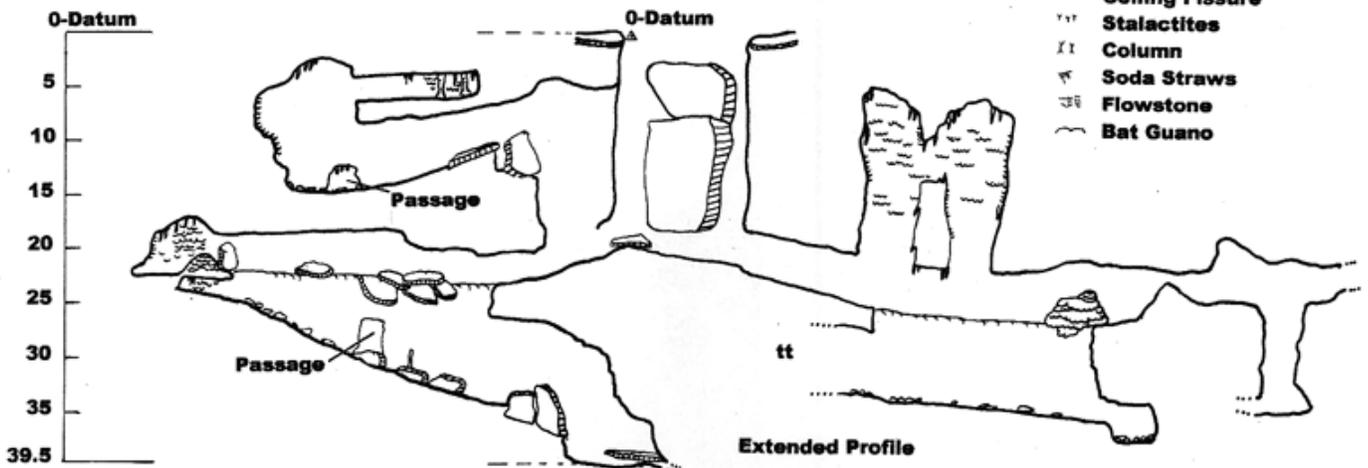
TSA-CBSP Survey Project

NT November 2006



Legend

- 12 Depth of Drop
- 2 Height of Passage
- ☉ Cobbles
- ⬢ Large Breakdown
- ★ Bedrock
- ⊙ Mud & Clay
- ⋯ Undetermined Passage
- Pit
- ⊙ Dome Ceiling
- ⋯ Ceiling Drop
- ⋯ Drop in Floor
- ⋯ Slope
- ⋯ Ceiling Fissure
- ⋯ Stalactites
- ⋯ Column
- ⋯ Soda Straws
- ⋯ Flowstone
- ⋯ Bat Guano



Compass & Tape Survey
 Surveyed Jan 14 & Nov 2 2006
 Instrument- Rafal Kedzierski, Marshall Gee
 Tape- Rebecca O'Daniel, Ryan Rap
 Book & Sketch- Mark Gee
 Cartographer- Mark Gee



Surveyed Length - 274.95 ft.
 Vertical Depth - 39.5 ft.

logged into the record, more than 220 of which are caves. Many cavers from around the state have been to the project to ridge-walk to locate caves. Many have cut their teeth learning to crawl, climb, to use proper rope techniques, to survey and sketch at the park since a lot of the caves are fairly friendly and easy to negotiate, though many do require rope and vertical gear to explore. Don't ever attempt to explore any cave of any size without the proper gear!

The project has changed little since its inception and still 15 to 30 cavers show up each project weekend to explore, describe, survey and map caves found in the park.

Back in 2002 cavers started crossing the Colorado River to a newly purchased eight hundred acre section of the park to look for caves. Forty-five cave and karst features have been found and locations logged in this new section. Several caves have been surveyed and maps have been drafted for some. One cave named Three Skylight Cave has been surveyed for 372 feet and no one has been to the end of the cave yet. Wayne Peplinski has been further than anyone else but suffered from heat exhaustion on his trip of an estimated 800 feet from the entrance. He told me that the cave continued with no end in sight. The passage is described as a low uneven ceiling over never-ending large rocks and cobbles. Another called Hissing Bat Cave has continuing passage through a very small lead. You couldn't fit a basketball through the hole but one small caver named Mica Fell has made it through and discovered a 12-foot deep pit and more passage across the top of the pit. Since she was the only one who could fit into the on-going cave we asked her not to attempt to cross the pit, because if she got hurt no one would be able to help her.

This brings me to what I really want to talk about. Our first survey to the cave was January 14th, 2006. After following our GPS location to the entrance, Rebecca O'Daniel and I walked up and found Rafal Kedzierski sitting outside the entrance eating his lunch. Several others were already in the cave exploring.

The entrance was found in a large sink, 18-foot long and 12-foot wide with the floor sloping down from the south to a climbable drop of another 12 feet. The depth of the cave to the first station was 18.4 feet. At Station 1 the passage split into two parallel passages, one nine feet to the left heading 350 degrees and one 19 feet to the right heading at 333 degrees. The passage to the right has two upper levels. The second level at Station 3 is 9.4 feet above and at 40 degrees, travels 23 feet to Station 2A, with a low passage to the left at 304 degrees for 20.2 feet. Eight feet above Station 2A is Level #1, a low passage that doubles back at 220 degrees directly above level #2 and travels for 11 feet. Back

at Station 3, through a low rock-filled crawl, the cave opens into a room measuring 33 by 18 feet with cave continuing down into a floor crevice. The room is mostly standing height with a few small alcoves and is decorated with a little "cave cancer" of flowstone, stalactites, stalagmites, gours and calcite crystals. The lowest level, Level #4, travels to the NNW for 43 feet and ends in a too-tight drain, inaccessible to even the smallest of cavers.

Back up to Station 2 our survey took us into a long room measuring 25-feet long by 5-feet wide. The floor, as in the other passage, had a crevice that was 8-feet deep with a parallel passage directly below continuing on for 10 feet. The ceiling revealed a slot about 1.1-feet wide by 15-feet tall filled with stalactites, popcorn, flowstone and small helictites. At the end of the passage is the less-than-basketball-sized hole mentioned earlier that Mica squeezed through. On our second survey trip, while I was surveying, others were trying to shave a little rock from this hole so we could fit people through to continue exploration and survey. We were not successful on this trip but maybe you can pick up where we last surveyed and continue through and find virgin passage both beyond the pit and also at the floor of the pit! Hurry or I might beat you there!

The total horizontal passage surveyed was 274.95 feet, and the depth was 39.5 feet. The survey made for a difficult map to draw in order to portray the features in the cave. I look forward to adding more survey and cave to the map. Hope you too will come out to one of the CBSP—TSA survey projects and we will send you to a cave so you can explore and survey one of the many cave locations in our files.

—Happy Caving!

Airman's At Last!

By Diana Tomchick

I've caved in a lot of places in the last six years: Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, New Mexico, TAG, Mexico and Slovakia, for example. But one cave, practically in my back yard, continued to elude me. The siren call of Airmen's Cave in Austin beckoned to me, tempting me to test my willpower and my kneepads, but circumstances conspired to keep this destination out of reach—until last month.

In early February the officers of the DFW Grotto were contacted by email by an English caver who would be in Dallas for a business trip. He hoped to go caving over the weekend and then

Important Cave States in the USA					
William R. Elliott, March 8, 2007					
Note: This is still very incomplete. Please send corrections to Bill.Elliott@mdc.mo.gov					
Caves	State	By	Survey	Date	Remarks, Cave Definition (need more info.)
9,031	Tennessee	Gerald Moni	TCS	3/5/2007	30 ft. min. for pits etc.
6,210	Missouri	Scott House	MSS	3/5/2007	No minimum, but very small caves not usually included.
4,700	Kentucky	Randy Paylor	KSS	3/8/2007	Could be 4,700-6,000.
4,378	Virginia	Phil Lucas	VSS	3/6/2007	
4,252	Texas	Butch Fralia	TSS	3/5/2007	5 m of humanly traversable passage, horizontal and/or vertical.
4,233	Alabama	Bill Torode	ACS	9/1/2006	50 ft. min.
3,112	Indiana	Dave Everton	ICS	3/5/2007	Minimum 25 ft. traverse length.
2,175	West Virginia	http://www.wvass.org/	WVASS	3/8/2007	Min. number. 2,175 cave descriptions in 14 counties.
38,091	Total				

return to the U.K., and asked if we could help him out. That weekend turned out to be February 24-25th, and he knew from an Internet search that the Texas Cave Conservancy would be hosting their Winter Conference in Cedar Park that weekend. He was open to attending the conference but was also keen to get underground. Since time was limited, Bill Steele and I volunteered to take him to the conference and also to a side trip into Airman's. What better way could there be to introduce an English caver to the typical Austin-area Texas cave? It was sure to be quite a change from the cold, wet, muddy, grim caves he was accustomed to visiting in the Yorkshire Dales as a member of the Craven Pothole Club.



Bob Finger (far right) and Bill Larson (second from right) led the tour of Dies Ranch Shelter Cave.

- Photo Diana Tomchick

We picked up Simon on Friday evening outside his hotel and headed to Cedar Park, where we planned to spend the night. When we arrived at the TCC Headquarters we settled in for a beer and had been there no more than 20 minutes when Metroplex Caver Jay Jorden walked in the door. We had not expected him so we all had a good laugh and

continued to socialize until almost 2:30 a.m. before calling it a night.

The next morning we participated in the tour of the Twin Creeks Historic Park property, which is owned by the City of Cedar Park. The TCC manages the Dies Ranch Shelter Cave on this property for the city. The heart of the historic Conference Center is a more than one hundred year old log cabin that has several more recent additions to it. The natural-stone patio area outside the Center includes a built-in grill and a gorgeous view of the creek. The weather was mild, sunny and warm and our tour guides Bill Larson and Bob Finger were entertaining and informative. A walk up the creek to the shelter cave was enlightening, as we suddenly came up against the boundary fence between the park and privately owned zero-lot line homes—"MegaMansions," in fact. The greater Austin area is simply exploding with housing developments, which threaten to gobble up open spaces and negatively impact the Edwards Aquifer, and this was a very visible reminder of the menace. On our walk to the cave we crossed an old midden used by the Native



Mike Walsh (right) opened the TCC Winter Conference at the historic Twin Creeks Conference Center site.

- Photo Diana Tomchick

Americans of the area and stopped to look for stone chips from arrowhead production. The tour lasted until about noon, and by that time we were very hungry indeed as we'd missed out on breakfast. We soon decided it was time to eat lunch and go caving.

After a tasty Mexican lunch, we headed for the Barton Creek Greenbelt and suited up for the trip. Simon brought a bright orange jumpsuit to wear on the trip, which prompted some good-natured jokes about the dangers of being mistaken for a runaway prisoner. Marley the Caving Cocker Spaniel was getting excited about the trip, despite the fact that, according to Bill, she's the only one on the trip that doesn't know she's going caving until she arrives at the cave entrance.

Unfortunately Bill wasn't able to get through the infamous entrance squeeze, which I have to say ranks right up there as one of the more difficult and interesting entrances I've had the privilege to visit. Simon and I decided to see if we could find the Aggie Art Gallery so off we went, following Bill's directions. Marley had a blast in the cave, and at one point we lost sight of her for about five minutes. "Oh no," I thought, "we're going to have to start a dog rescue!" I called and called, and she didn't return, so we backtracked a few hundred feet back through a tight spot and I called for her again. After a few minutes she bounded up, looking happy and acting as if nothing had happened. I decided I needed to keep a closer eye on her after that.

We never did find the Art Gallery but we sure did try a lot of different tight squeezes. After awhile we decided it was getting late and we returned to the entrance to find Bill waiting for us. While we were contorting our bodies in the cave for three hours, he'd spent the time lying in the sun and enjoying the weather, occasionally talking to the many people who walked by on that fine day. We returned to the TCC Headquarters to find that the fajitas had been eaten but there was plenty of black beans, tortillas, rojas con queso and snack food to satisfy a hungry caver. I drank too many of the tasty strawberry margaritas that Gordon Birkhimer mixed up in the Hall of Texas Cavers. We stayed awake until about midnight partying but our lack of sleep from the previous night (and jet lag for Simon) caught up with us so we sacked out. We arose quite early (6 a.m.) the next morning to return to the Metroplex, as both Bill and Simon needed to catch airplanes—Bill for a work trip, Simon to return to the U.K.



Gordon Birkhimer, NSS Executive Vice President and TCC Director, demonstrates his bartending skills.

- Photo Jim McLane

Put the TCC Winter Conference on your caving schedule for next year. It was a well-organized event and everyone seemed to have a good time. Thanks to Mike Walsh and the TCC Directors for their hard work in hosting this event.



Diana Tomchick, Simon Ashby and Marley the Caving Dog at the entrance to Airman's Cave.

- Photo Bill Steele

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