

# THE HOLE NEWS

January

2000





January 2000

Chartered 1984 as the 300th Grotto of the National Speleological Society

Volume 15 Number 1

## THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PERMIAN BASIN SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

### Next Meeting: PBSS

The next official meeting of the Permian Basin Speleological Society will be held on Tuesday, January 11, around 7:00 P.M. in the back meeting room of Murray's Delicatessen. Murray's is located at 3211 West Wadley, Midland, Texas.

### Our Agenda:

Meeting

Our project at CACA

We now have Mass Quantities of Texas Bat Stickers!



If you need more directions or information call our official contact person, Walter Feaster @ (915)694-1824 or (915)559-3297, or E-Mail: <waltfeast@marshill.com> or <wfeaster@caver.net>.

"The Hole News" is the monthly publication of the Permian Basin Speleological Society. Articles and cartoons maybe reproduced by cave oriented publications that exchange newsletters with PBSS, as long as proper credit is given to the author. Please observe copy righted © articles. Items for this newsletter can be sent to the Editor, "The Hole News", c/o Walter Feaster, 4307 Harvard Ave., Midland, TX. 79703. Regular membership dues are only \$10.00 and includes one voting right, associate membership is \$ 5.00 and does not include a newsletter. Dues should be sent to PBSS Secretary/Treasurer, c/o Walter Feaster, (address above). If you're interested in caving or even if you think you might like to try it, then contact Kerry Lowery @ (915)394-4230 or <lowery4@rcrom.net>. Or if you are not from this area and some how through circumstances beyond you're control or ours found a copy of "The Hole News" then you should contact the National Speleological Society at 2813 Cave Avenue, Huntsville AL, 35810-4431, or <www.caves.org/defaultjs.htm>.

### "PBSS Home Page"

<http://www.caver.net/pbss/pbss.htm>

Web space donated courtesy of Bill Bentley & Caprok.net ISP.



### Future Cave Trips and Events:

**Editor's note:** I could not find to much information on events in our area. I guess cavers didn't want to plan to far ahead because of the Y2K bug or the uncertainty of the new millennium. More next issue.

### 12-16 June--CRF Restoration Field Camp @ Carlsbad Caverns:

The Cave Research Foundation in association with the National Park Service and the NSS, is sponsoring a week long restoration field camp at Carlsbad Caverns. If you are interested contact Bill Bentley at (915) 697-3079 or <caver@caver.net>.

\*\*\*\*\*Denotes a PBSS Grotto Trip\*\*\*\*\*

\*Due to permit restrictions or other limitations Grotto members have priority.\*

### Grotto News and Stuff

Grotto membership dues are **past due**. If your name is listed below, this is **your last** newsletter. So don't miss even one issue of this fine publication. If you send a check make it payable to Walter Feaster.

Black  
Carroll  
Coffin  
Franks  
Gray, L.  
Gray, M.  
Gray, S.  
Ivy  
Kaler, T.  
Kaler, R.  
Laman  
Metcalf  
Russell  
Snelson

**On the front cover:** NO, the National Park Service does not have an adopt a cave program! We made this sign up for our last Rock Hauling at Carlsbad Caverns (August 99) to emphasize a point. Why pick up trash along some highway, when you can work ten times harder in a cave? **Front row:** L-R, Ruel Metcalf, Bill Bentley, Cheryl Kettle, Felder Hogan. **Back row:** L-R, Walter Feaster, Lori Hales, Mike Gray, Dwaine More, Don Ross, Elizabeth Ross.

***Editor's Note:*** One of the projects PBSS keeps coming back to is restoration or rock hauling at Carlsbad Caverns. Below is a trip report of the first rock hauling, November 21, 1992. An edited version of this story appeared in the "Texas Caver" in September 1993.

## PBSS Continues Restoration in Carlsbad

*Permian Basin Grotto Hauls Where no Grotto has Hauled Before*  
By Gralin Coffin

Carlsbad Caverns in Southeastern New Mexico has been one of the wonders of the cave world since the turn of the century and remains so even today with hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. The Cave Resources office of the National Park Service, always striving to better portray the cave in its natural and untouched way, has enlisted the help of certain volunteer groups to restore areas of the cave that require cleanup, trash removal and general restoration to areas of the cave that have been changed by the human element in order to make the cave more assessable for the park visitors.

Over the past eight years the Cave Research Foundation (CRF) in cooperation with the NSS and the NPS have held a week long restoration field camp for this purpose. In June of 1992 Walter Feaster, Bill Bentley and I attended the CRF Field Restoration Camp and although working extremely hard for a week's time, we felt that this was a very worth while endeavor that enabled us to give something back to nature (the cave) since it is so much a part of our lives. After that week of work we came back to our grotto telling of the good times we had and the work we had done to help ensure that the beauty of the cave is around for the next century's generations.

Although the Permian Basin Speleological Society (PBSS) has a fairly good group of cavers we had no idea that any would want to do what most folks would call hard labor in a cave that is. Walter and I threw the idea around for a couple of months between ourselves and decided that permission from the NPS would have to be first order of business. Walter contacted Dale Pate, Cave Specialist, and Jason Richards, his assistant with the Cave Resources office of the NPS to get their thoughts on the idea.

Granted there had been several groups of cavers in Carlsbad doing various types of volunteer work for the NPS and the CRF had been doing their week long restoration camp for the past several years however, this was a first for a volunteer grotto. Dale and Jason knew that Walter, Bill and I had been involved in a number of projects with the NPS via the CRF in Carlsbad and other caves in the surrounding area and that Walter and I as members of the Texas Cave Management Association (TCMA), a conservancy of the NSS, and cave managers for Amazing Maze Cave had arranged a cleanup trips for it and therefore should likely have some idea of what we were asking for. This is not withstanding the fact that Dale needed a lot of rock moved and whether he understood it or not, we were asking to do it!

The job we were asking for was fairly easy to describe though maybe not that easy to accomplish - shovel rock into 5 gallon buckets, then into wheel barrows and then transport the wheel barrows via the visitors trail (with the rock) approximately 1000 feet (1600 feet round trip with the wheelbarrow).

The restoration work we were to accomplish on the Saturday work day was a continuation of the job started and worked on by the CRF restoration crew for the past two years. It consisted of removing rock from a flow stone floor area immediately west of the present lunch room. The east portion of this area is known to be the first "lunch room area" and the remainder of the area is believed to be flowstone floor with a pit in the center covered with rock from 3 to 60 feet deep. The question first asked by the people on any of the past restoration

crews and subsequently by a great majority of the visitors as they pass the area is "Where did all the rock come from and where are we going to put it now?". The rock is the material blasted for the installation of the elevators in the 1930's. At that point in the history of the cave, restoration and conservation were not at the top of the priority list. The rubble needed to be put some place and the area of the pit was close and convenient and there was plenty of cave left to see. Cave conservation is a key item with any good caver in today's society and already we've uncovered some very nice flowstone and popcorn areas. Of course, on the way down to the flowstone floor while shoveling the rock we've also uncovered a number of other unusual items including power cables, a water line and meters and meters of abandoned "phone type" cable used as blasting wire for the detonation of the explosives used on the elevator shafts. During the course of the day we uncovered various other antiquities such as old coins, an old catsup or mustard bottle, other pieces of glass, and several rock embedded fossils and even our share of chicken bones - yes the Cavern Supply Co. was selling "Chicken box lunches" even back then. All were turned over to the Park Service for examination and possible inclusion in a possible exhibit in the visitors center at a later date.



(Those present at first rock hauling) **Front row:** Bill Bentley, Tony Jones.  
**Second row:** Walter Feaster, Don Carlton, Tony Grieco, Terry Cargile.  
**Third row:** Gralin Coffin, Steve Franks, Ken Kamon.  
**Not in picture:** Larry Gray

There were to be eleven workers on our crew for the entire Saturday, therefore we decided that in order to get the most work out of that number of people that we would concentrate on "just hauling rock" and leave the precision and more delicate work to the CRF restoration crew, our thought being -do as much work and haul as much rock as possible and make a good impression on Dale and his staff in the cave resource office (not to mention the top brass in the CRF). Why, we might even get to come back and work our butts off again some Saturday. All we had to do is show up, pay a minimal fee for housing, supply our own food and beverage and HAUL ROCK! Nuth'n wrong with that scenario - Right - RIIIIIIIIII GHT! **(Continued page 3)**



(Continued from page 2)

The story begins on Friday night, like any other good mystery. Walter and I got to the CRF huts at CACA around 11 pm. Bill was already there - but that was it. No problem, it was early, plenty of time for the other folks to show up. Before the night was over, a few had -just that - a few like maybe three. Bill and I were getting a little worried so we knew Walter was a little more than that because he had set the work trip up and his name was on the line. But there was always in the morning and at that we finally called it a night. The next morning when we awoke we were sure or at least hoping that cavers turned work-a-holics would be beating a path to our hut door. Alas, there were no work-a-holics or even cavers, just 'very cold air, a little mist, and snowing like hell to the south toward Guadalupe Peak. It was coming this way. We knew that if the bad weather persisted the chances of getting anything close to another six people there would go down the tubes. The weather did blow in, boy did it blow and snow. Too much wind, however, and the snow continued on to the North. But the wind did blow in six more cavers. We had our eleven caver/rock haulers and we were off to the caverns to start our excavation.

I don't know if any of you have ever been faced with a task that seems "bigger than life" so let me tell you when you walk up to an area of just under an acre knowing that the rock within that area is anywhere from three feet to an estimated sixty feet deep -it's a pretty big thought. Now we knew we weren't going to move it all or probably even make much of a dent but we did know it was there and there was a whole lot of it. The objective of course was to shovel the rock and transport it via a stout person and a wheelbarrow some 1000 feet to an area in the back of Pickle Alley (a bone yard area at the edge of Left Hand Tunnel used in the early days of the Cavern as a trash dump). Notice that I said "shovel" rock. Done any of that lately? Not dirt, not dirt and small pebbles, but ROCK. Its no mall walk through the Big Room of Carlsbad. Rock doesn't want to go onto a shovel and that's that.

Well now you know it was hard and that it was tough. But what I haven't told you was that in a spooky sort of way I had fun and I think that everyone else would agree to the same. All our hard work and the fun we could muster from about 9 to 6 tallied up to approximately 900 cubic feet or about 15 tons of rock. Each pound lovingly dumped four times from shovel to bucket to wheelbarrow to Pickle Alley. All in all, a very good day. We will be back

**Authors Note:** PBSS did go back and did haul another Big Bunch of Rock. This time all the way to the surface via the elevators to a waiting truck at the back dock. Although I was unable to make the second trip, I'm sure that the guys still had some fun in spite of all the work and we can all take pride in knowing that we are making a difference in the work necessary to preserve this natural wonder for the generations to come. As of the date of this writing we have a already scheduled another trip for this fall and have discussed as our most recent grotto meeting the possibility of speaking to the Cave Resource office of two trips a year. At least it's out of the weather.

### THE BAT CAVE BLOWOUT

By Tony Grieco Comments by Mr. Bill in *Italics*

The year was nineteen ought eighty six, as I recall; of course, my memory, fogged by my many years of inhaling carbide fumes, is a bit hazy... The PBSS was young, new and very active, and it was decided that an annual party was in order. Thus was born the BAT CAVE BLOWOUT, held at Bat (Blackstone) Cave in Terrell County (?),

Texas!

Bat cave is a small, ugly, undecorated cave of little repute, but it did have nice places to camp (and otherwise carry on) nearby. Most people arrived on Friday and made a short visit to the cave, and Saturday was spent in hauling out trash (quite a bit, as I recall) from the cave and just generally farting around. The only clear memories of caving are that of taking my oldest boy, Andrew, then 18 months old, through the cave (his first). Since he couldn't wear a helmet with a light, 3 or 4 of us followed him around with our lights shining in front of him. He left an awful lot of really tiny footprints in the dirt all through the cave! I also recall crawling through a small opening in the cave and hearing weird, unearthly music. At first I thought it was hallucinations caused by those pesky carbide fumes again, but it turned out to be the late-but-great Wild Bill Greenlee strumming on his guitar in the very back of the cave.

The most memorable part of the trip, of course, was the party on Saturday night. Before these festivities could begin, however, certain preparations had to be made for the ritual of the SKIPPER ROAST! For those of you who are unfamiliar with this important, though mystery-shrouded ritual, a little background material is in order:

When most of the original PBSS cavers began to cave, we tended to purchase the same basic equipment. One item that many of us procured was a type of waterproof flashlight, made by Eveready, and called a 'Skipper'. The Skipper proved to be an unfortunate choice for caving (or for any other application requiring a functional light), and they were soon abandoned. We decided, as would anyone with even an elementary grasp of theology, that the failure of these flashlights was due to the cave gods being angry. We thus determined that the safest course of action was to appease these gods with a sacrifice! Since we couldn't find any sacrificial volunteers (where are all those virgins when you need them), we decided that the next best thing was to put the SKIPPERS to the flames!

The Skipper roast, being based on ancient mystic rituals that we made up as we went along, turned out to be very complicated and intricate. First, all of the Skippers were impaled on sticks, and left out to suffer in the broiling sun all day. Next, the Skipper Water was prepared, made from an old family recipe of Coy Costen, and consisting of Everclear with a few drops of fruit juice. This mixture was then carefully filtered through a Skipper into a plastic container (*which managed to eat the lining out of the container and made the concoction taste like plastic*). The fire was then prepared, and the High Priest (Bill Greenlee) uttered the sacred, mystic chant:

REMEMBER ALL THE TIMES YOU FAILED ME?  
I HAD TO BEAT YOU AGAINST MY LEG TO GET YOU  
TO WORK-AND STILL YOUR LIGHT WAS FEEBLE!  
YOUR STAYING POWER WAS SHORT!

REMEMBER?

At this moment, the Skippers were thrust into the flames and reduced to gooey masses of red plastic. It stirs my heart, even now, to remember it.

After the Skippers had been sacrificed, the Skipper Water was consumed! As I was the only non-drinker in the group, I may be the only person with a memory of the events that followed. I won't go into any grim details, lest I destroy the reputations of many fine cavers (*like howling at the moon*). Suffice it to say that it was the probably the quickest I've ever seen any group of people get drunk; about one cup of Skipper Water was all it took!

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We did hold a second annual Skipper Roast, but after that, the ritual (and the PBSS for a time) faded away. I don't know why it was never revived- perhaps the gods were finally appeased, or it might be that Eveready discontinued production of the Skipper, and we ran out of them to sacrifice.

In any case, it was fun while it lasted, and is a very pleasant memory for me from the early days of the PBSS.

THE END

*Somewhere in my out building in the back yard between the rope that was used to pull out "Baby Jessica" and the stack of old used caving helmets I have saved in a small plastic bag the metallic springs and switches that were all that remained of the "Roasted Skippers", thus being all that was left after the fire had become a memory!*

**I'm Back!**

(Like you really care)

When asked by Walter Feaster to write a special trip report for the millennium issue of "The Hole News," I was somewhat apprehensive. And it's not because we've been force fed Y2K since the turn of the century. For those of you who may not know, I have been a prolific trip reporter since I began caving in 1995. In fact, I've written over 47 trip reports. It seems a lot of people have trouble writing and rambling about all of their caving triumphs and defeats. I, on the other hand, found it easier than I probably should have and in return have suffered some of the consequences. Regardless, Walter and the PBSS have been very good to me and I shall be honored to place my silly words among those of the first of the new millennium.

1996 was really the year for me as far as caving goes. This was the year I was going on at least two caving trips a month sometimes more. This is how I racked up so much caving experience in such a short amount of time. But, I can't talk about my caving career without mentioning that I may never have been able to do as much as I have without the support of Ruel Metcalf. I talked Ruel into going with me on the Hall of the White Giant and Spider Cave tours at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. Together we were bit by the caving bug and it left some bruises.

The first trip report I wrote was about a trip Ruel and I took in February of 1996 to Kickapoo Cavern. When I sent it to Walter, I was afraid it was too long. Ironically, it became one of my shortest. The first grotto trip I took was to Amazing Maze Cave and this would lead to an unwritten story Ruel and I continue to tell and also the reason why people should listen to me (mainly Ruel, probably Kerry, and oh yeah, you too Tom). I learned something else from this trip. Many times it's not the story of the cave itself that is so compelling rather it's the story behind the story that is really worth telling.

The story begins the day after the actual caving. The land surrounding Amazing Maze is hilly, rocky, and interesting. Ruel and I being novice cavers and climbers knew there had to be other caves in the area. So after Walter and Bill Bentley left, we set out in search. We climbed to the top of the nearest mesa and poked our heads into every little hole. We even found one that Ruel could fit his whole body into but that was it. As we skirted the cliff edges, they became increasingly shear and unstable until coming to a corner where we could go no further. Ruel was in front of me and I noticed him getting closer to the drop off. I shouted, "Ruel, don't trust that hand hold!

Ruel come back!" His curiosity raging, he clutched the crumbly rock wall and leaned out to look around its corner. Just as I screamed, "Ruel come back," the wall let go of Ruel and he plunged 20 feet.

It was a mesquite tree that stopped Ruel's descent but not in a nice way. A branch of the tree shoved into Ruel's, well, let's just say it was his upper thigh. The branch withdrew but not without leaving a gaping hole in Ruel and also a few mesquite leaves. At this point, we were two miles from our vehicle and many more miles to the nearest hospital. I gave Ruel a bandana to tie around his thigh hoping it would stop the bleeding and we walked slowly to the vehicle. Ruel drove because he wanted to do something to keep his mind off of the blood seeping from his wound. Later at the hospital, Ruel had to have surgery to remove those mesquite leaves. The doctor told us that the branch entered Ruel's leg at a point less than an inch from his femoral artery. That could have been the last caving trip Ruel and I ever took together.

A story I should probably keep to myself is a lesson I almost learned the hard way. Noel Pando offered to teach Ruel and myself how to rappel and climb in the gym of Andrews High School. A pulley on the ceiling allowed a caving rope to be fed through thus allowing climbers the "joy" of climbing 300' of rope or more without stopping. Once the climber was allowed to reach the ceiling, there was a platform for the climber to rest on and rig a rack for the rappel to the floor some 20' below. This is what I did and cautiously wove the rope through my rack. But just before I took the plunge, Noel yelled, "Stop! Where is your rack?" I looked at my rack and thought everything was right until I took a second look and discovered that my rack was attached to the accessory loop on my hip. Oops. Who says you can't rappel that way?

My thirst for caving was not being quenched by the PBSS trips. I needed to cave more so I joined the Central Texas Grotto. My first CTG trip was to the Colorado Bend State Park where the CTG sponsors a yearly Earth Day Project to guide tours for visitors to Gorman Cave as well as clean up a few other caves. Here I discovered that I didn't have to cave with only men. "Hallelujah!" I thought, "There are other female cavers." But, it wasn't just the presence of female cavers and the many new friends I found that made that trip special. On that trip, I met a young, bearded caver named Tom Kaler and ten months later married him in Gorman Cave while a snow flurry powdered the surface.

I've never felt particularly lucky. But, I guess luck and my caving career have had a lot to do with each other. How many people go to Lechuguilla Cave within the first year of beginning caving? I did and I have always been extremely grateful for that. However, with that privilege also came responsibility and it was my first trip to Lechuguilla that drove home a very important lesson in caving. It is true that only cavers can protect and save each other as I learned on that trip when I and other grotto members had to assist one of our own out of the cave.

I sometimes marvel at the things I've been able to do like restore a badly damaged area of a cave or rappel into a 300 foot pit. And, I'm sometimes tickled by the quirks of caving with different people like how the PBSS can't cave together unless everyone eats a piece of Werther's Original candy. Before October of 1995, I held an appreciation for caves but never thought that they could be responsible for changing my whole life in so many ways. Caving has given me self esteem, a career, life long friends, a husband, and more. I owe a lot to caving. I had no idea when I attended my first grotto meeting and was surrounded by a room full of strange men that life after that for me would never be the same.

