



January 2006

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

VOLUME: 21 NO: 1

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PERMIAN BASIN SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

**Next Meeting of the PBSS**

The next meeting of the Permian Basin Speleological Society will be held **January 10th** at Murray's Deli located at 3211 W. Wadley in Midland at **7:00 PM**.

**On Going Projects:**

**PBSS Rock Haul at Carlsbad Caverns:** PBSS on going restoration in the Big Room of Carlsbad Caverns. For more information contact Walter Feaster <wdfeaster@cox.net> or 432-559-3297.

**Our Agenda**

**2006 Membership and Dues (form enclosed)**  
**WELCOME: Karen Perry & Donna Hayes**

**Sibley Center –Caving Display**  
**ESS Cave—Repair Gate-Replacing Rope**  
**Montgomery Video**  
**Dry Cave Survey/Man Hole Dig**  
**Meeting Places**

**Future Cave Trips, Events, and Projects**

**\*\*\*Jan 21\*\*\***

**PBSS Rock Haul at Carlsbad Caverns:** PBSS on going restoration in the Big Room of Carlsbad Caverns. For more information contact **Bill Bentley** <caverman@cox.net>

**\*\*\* Feb 18th\*\*\***

**Terlingua,TX-Blair Pittman B-Day Celebration**  
For more info contact **Cindy DiTullio**<cadzone@sbcglobal.net>

“The Hole News” is the publication of the Permian Basin Speleological Society. Articles and cartoons may be reproduced by cave oriented publications that exchange newsletters with the 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 Cindy DiTullio at <cadzone@sbcglobal.net> or mail to Cindy DiTullio, 2205 Independence Drive,Odessa,TX 79762

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

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

Regular membership dues are only \$15.00 and includes one voting right, associate membership is \$7.50 and does not include a newsletter. Dues should be made out to and sent to: **Barry Hayes**. If you are interested in caving or even if you think you might like to try it, then contact Barry Hayes at 432-333-8856 or <cavelizard@yahoo.com>. 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 go to <www.caves.org>.

**Thanks to You!**

**Lori Hales—**  
Donated 90' Rope for replacement needs at ESS Cave  
**Donna & Barry Hayes**  
2005 Host of “PBSS” Christmas Party



**The “PBSS” Home Page**  
**www.caver.net/pbss/pbss.html**  
built and maintained by  
**Bill Bentley**

**Remailers & Bulletin Boards**

**PBSS:** [http://caver.net/mailman/listinfo/pbss\\_caver.net](http://caver.net/mailman/listinfo/pbss_caver.net)

**CaveTex:** [www.cavetex.net](http://www.cavetex.net)

**2006 Elected Officers**

**President: Bill Bentley**  
**Vice-President: Jacqui Bills**  
**Secretary/Treasurer: Barry Hayes**

**Newsletter:**  
**Steve & Cindy DiTullio**



**164th meeting of the Southwestern Region & the 2005 Winter Technical Regional**  
**by Bill Bentley**

Saturday December 3rd, 2005, 5:00 AM; The alarm went off and I jumped out of bed and showered, dressed packed a few things and left at 5:30AM I stopped and got gas and a breakfast burrito & more gas! I arrived in Carlsbad about 7:45 AM (NM Time). I was met by Patty Daw and Rich Wolfert as I entered the BLM building. After getting settled in with a donut and coffee. I watched as chairs were organized, screens erected and projectors fine tuned in preparation for the days events. Carol Belski organized a fine meeting. She kept a kitchen timer there ready to ring and remind to keep all presenters on time, complete with a 5 minute warning wave.

After a brief introduction at 9:00 AM, the 164th meeting of the Southwestern Region of the NSS was called to order. Now figuring that at 4 meetings a year puts the SWR having been around a long long time! Minutes were read, business old and new discussed. Officers were reelected and elected. Now as I remember hearing there were 68 people in attendance that day with some coming in later in the day. I saw many cavers who I had not seen in many many years. Some looked the same and some looked older. I am sure glad that is not happening to me! The SWR meeting lasted until 10:00 AM, Peg Sorensen (Vice Chairman) did a fine job keeping the meeting in order, she also officiated the days events.

We took a break and then John Corcoran gave a talk and slide show about a proposed dig ( which is now in progress) in *Ft Stanton Cave* between the Don Sawyer Memorial Hall over to the Mud Turtle Passage which would make it easier to get in and out and for evacuation in case someone got hurt. I think they called it a priority 7 area when it was inaccessible for rescue with a stokes litter. Later at the party I got to see a video of the "*Snowy River*" discovery area in *Fort Stanton Cave*. All I can say is WOW!

Then at 10:30 AM Steve Peerman gave a slide show talk about the "Early Years of the Big Manhole Dig" (The PBSS has officially been invited to help participate in this) They had made 3 digs so far and have not found much except a lot of clay and mud. But the big discovery is not far away they say. At 10 50 Am John McLean from Arizona gave a talk and slide show about "Resistivity at *Big Manhole Cave*". This was over a lot of folks heads, but basically it uses electronics and sensors spaced out on top of the ground and it tells you where the hollow spots are under the ground. What ever happened to dowsing rods when you need them? I think Slim Baxter still uses that method.

After a short break Debbie Buecher gave a talk and slide show about the cave gate at *Yellowjacket Cave* and its detrimental effects on the bats and how the BLM let them take it out and move it as well as being redesigned for easier bat movement. Extensive bat counting by hand and with infrared sensors shows that with new gate now properly located has the bat population now much higher than it was before the original gate was placed. This was a cool program.

At 11:40 Louise Hose of the National Cave and Karst Institute gave a slide show and talk about "Snottites, Snot Curtains, and Snot Balloons". This sounded gross but was very interesting and showed caves in Italy that had these snot thingies due to being sulfidic type of caves. This was part of what she did during the International Congress of Speleology on one of the pre-trips.

After that, imagine them releasing us for lunch. I went with Susan Herpin and Laura Stark to Wendy's up the street and we all brought back our burgers so we could attend a lunch time meeting about fees for camping at *Fort Stanton Cave* campground and other areas in the BLM in that area. I am not sure but I think this is not going to set well with cavers, horse riders or the off road vehicles groups that use the areas. With some timer buzzing reminding the BLM meeting was shut down and the Regional was back in order and on time. (This was amazing as that this has rarely ever happened, being on time that is.)

At 1:10 PM Jessica Snider gave a talk about bacterial communities growing in some of the lava tube caves and how that had been incorporated into the High School Science Education program. Why didn't they have this when I went to high school? Of course that would have been fun with no caves around here.

Then at 1:30 PM, Mike Bilbo gave a slide show and talk program about historic names from Robin-son's and Coffee Cave. Some went as far back as the 1880's. I think they said that anything over 50 years old was considered historic. After that Stan Alison of Carlsbad Caverns National Park fame gave a short update of the recent activities of the Cave Resource Office at the park.

At 2:10 PM, John Lyles gave a slide show and talk about what is happening at Lechuguilla Cave. If I remember correctly it seems each trip seemed to yield about a mile or so of new cave being mapped on nearly every trip, even on resurvey trips. I think they said it was up to 116.29 miles and growing.

At 2:30 PM, Louise Hose of the National Cave and Karst Institute gave a slide show and talk about National Cave and Karst Institute building update. Projected to cost several million dollars and be located in Carlsbad near the Pecos River. They are a million or so short, so donate now. After that at 2:45PM, Jennifer Foote gave a talk and slide show about the 7 year long on-going project called the "High Guads Restoration Project". They do more than just restoration I found out. This might be worth checking out.

Then after we took a short break Jim Goodbar gave a talk about some dye tracing he is doing in cooperation with drilling companies in or near the cave area's of the BLM at 3:15 PM. After that Aaron Stockton & Stan Allison gave a talk and slide show about the *Dry Cave* Survey Project. Judging from the original map done a long time ago I was surprised to find out this cave is much more extensive than I thought it to be. They are still in need of help to complete this project.

At 3:55 PM, Tom Bemis gave a really good talk & slide show about the status of "Cave Rescue in New Mexico". Lots of training going on. I remember his saying don't be stupid and get hurt. He also said there are patients and victims, the patient you pull out of the cave and the cave is the victim due to the impact of rescues. Then at 4:15 PM, Mike Bilbo gave an "Overview of Caving in the Socorro Area" of New Mexico. It would seem they have a few caves over there and some are full of trash. Ranchers are friendly too once you get to know them.

At 4:35PM, Victor and Paula Polyak gave a slide show and talk about "Caves in the El Malpais" area. Lots and lots of lava tubes. at 4:50 PM, John Lyles gave a really cool talk about "Hot Canyon" complete with slides of some recently declassified documents concerning the July 16th 1945 Trinity test of the first atomic bomb and the radioactive fallout cloud and how the vast majority of people to the Northeast never knew that they were being radiated with some very strong doses of Plutonium and Uranium. The half life is something like 35,000 years... The only saving grace is that most of the fallout hot spots such as Hot Canyon are less than lethal today due to rain, erosion and the wind covering and dispersing the particles. And the final show was by Mark Minton of New Mexico and he talked about Deep Caving in Mexico. The slides of this were incredible and they were of 4 different caves in climates ranging from Alpine in the mountains to tropical near the coastal plain. Dye tracing shows all 4 of these caves along a line connect and the cavers persistence will eventually make it happen. The regional ended at 5:40 PM.

I went and had supper and messed around and showed up at Steve Fleming's home which was South of town off of the Pecos highway a little after 7:00 PM. The people slowly started to arrive and within a hour it was standing room only. At around 8:00 PM we gave a minute of silence to remember the cavers who had passed away in 2005, (I think there were 5). This was led by Jim Evatt of New Mexico and then a toast of remembrances to them. It was an emotional time and yet a happy time. I feel truly lucky for having met a lot of the folks whom have passed on and without their early caving interests, we would not be as advanced and have as many caves to explore and protect. I reflected back on my 25 years of caving and I still feel like a beginner sometimes to those with 40 or more years of caving behind them. I am glad to be a part of the fellowship.

They had slides and videos of places like that deep mine in Mexico that has the huge spar crystals where it was 140 to 180 degrees and about 3 minutes was all one could stand to be in there. They showed of course the Snowy River video of that discovery. I left about 10:30 PM NM time and headed back arriving shortly after 1 AM Texas time. I arrived home tired but glad I had went. I got to see some folks like Tim George whom I had not seen in nearly 15 years. Others in attendance I got to see was Dave Gose who I had not seen in years. I networked with a lot of folks and have some great memories.

**PBSS - Looking back on 2005 by Stephen DiTullio**

At first glance, disorientation is inevitable. However, after closer inspection the realization materializes as if obvious from the onset. (that's confusing) Caving, as many can attest, is highly ritualized and seemingly unorthodox as pastimes go.

One may say it is something you're born into...

Now, the birth of a caver isn't as happenstance as a normal birth. It seems, that to be "born" can be as much an appointment as it can be voluntary. You see those "Born" voluntary, i.e. wander around looking for a cave to crawl into just to see what lurks inside, often recognize individuals who don't have a clue that they would rather be in a cave.

As it stands, I would be one of the latter. I was fortunate enough to be recognized by an existing caver (thanks Michael Anderson) who, without warning, and unsolicited, approached with an offer to rappel into to blackness for the sense of adventure and personal discovery...

Without a clue and with the reluctance of an expectant newborn 2 weeks overdue just before a "C" section, there we were. Cindy and I had verbally, financially and physically committed all in less time than it took for us to climb to the top of Michael's barn on an endless loop of rope.

Cindy and I have been members for just over a year now and offer this year in review

**Born into caving October 12<sup>th</sup> 2004.****Oct-22-24<sup>th</sup> 2004**

In our honor (all new members) the PBSS put together what would be one of many trips to ESS cave. Our first adventure would be both introductory and training and would initiate us into the darkness. (Unlike a normal birth, once born, you go into the darkness, not out of it).

In attendance were Barry and Donna Hayes, Mike Gray and daughter Crystal, Michael Anderson, Jacqui Bills, Steve and Brenda Franks as well as Cindy and I.

Before the weekend was over, we would test the skill, patience and equipment of all members present. Michael loaned his patience as well as his harness and climbing gear, while Barry and Jacqui loaned their patience.

We were in and out of the cave all weekend. However, after Jacqui introduced me to the chimney at the entrance she had to put up with me "till the end". Once inside the gate, Jacqui clamored across the upper ledge to the second dome room and I was right behind her.

Once there, Jacqui rigged another line where, under Cindy's supervision, she and Barry and would later spend many hours helping me to understand the rigging and techniques used when changing direction and changing ropes and changing ropes and direction and direction and ropes. Well you get it... for hours (thanks for participating in the "Speleolympics", Cindy, Jacqui and Barry)

With the arrival of the last attending members, we assembled. Mike and his daughter Crystal led the way on the first trip in. It wasn't long till Barry was demonstrating his "Jumar" hanging technique from the upper room. We all stood in amazement as he demonstrated his ability to ascend without the assistance of a "Croll" device.

Barry's graceful albeit, lubricating descent from the top of the "Snot Rock" compelled me contribute equally, so I got down and dirty in "Barry's Crawl" and in the spirit of the cave found my way to the end of the passage exiting at the feet of the gagging crew standing motionless in the dark.

On the way out, Mike Gray demonstrated his overhand ascending skill! His effortless "hand over hand" technique both inspired and motivated us newcomers.

Before the weekend was over, Cindy and Brenda found their courage and inner strength, Barry would give me a lesson in winding up and storing "borrowed rope" (thank you Lori Hales) Barry also nursed at least one scorpion sting and, in spite of the residual affects from the previous evening's "campfire social" (where Donna provided the "Cave Cuisine") staved off a rattle snake bite by being attentive.

The weekend ended for many of us with personal introspection. As for me, as I reflected and determined I lost my wrist watch... Some may think it was just a ploy to return to the cave one last time. However, the final descent did result in recovery wherein I found my watch at the bottom of the chimney (it was one of my three points of contact) Everyone bestowed their friendship.

**December 12 2004 Caving Christmas party**

In attendance were Bill and Debbie Bentley, Barry and Donna Hayes, Walter Feaster, Jacqui Bills, Mike Gray and daughter Crystal, and Crystal's friend (Mandy), also Michael Anderson, Ruel and Carolyn Metcalf as well as Cindy and I along with our family including our 12 day old Granddaughter Kelsie.

After the PBSS's immediate response and involvement with our introduction to caving, Cindy and I were compelled to act in-kind and offered to hold the 2004 Christmas party at our home. The club provided the financial support and everyone brought their favorite accompaniments.

Cindy and I provided grilled ribs, chicken, and sausage as well as my (now infamous) "Guacamole Live" and chips. Ruel and Mike Gray dominated the Christmas card toss, but Barry took home the grand prize with his scoop on the "Potato Pooper". We had a poor attempt (on my part) for "Speleo trivia". It turned out that my lack of knowledge was overwhelmed by my enthusiasm and speed to down-load unfamiliar terms from a UK knowledge bank. Oh well...

Hopefully everyone received a complimentary baby "Agaves" Christmas pail with crystal clusters or chalcedony cave's for showing up. Others were awarded Agaves' plants embellished with quartz "crystal cave" in hastily formed concrete like containers. Even fewer succeeded in carrying home one of the few hand carved stone bats I managed to squeak out (pun intended) with new skills and knowledge only days old.

The daylight exposed the obvious and found everyone had made it out and home alive. We feel it was fun for all.

**March 12<sup>th</sup> 2005 caving Cottonwood**

This started a weekend to remember. John Hancock and his girl friend Tracy put together a trip to Cottonwood, Sitting Bull Falls and Boyd's Cave.

We met at HEB in Odessa where John picked up a Hibachi grill and some steaks. Cindy and I had already stocked up on water, jerky, fruit, nuts, beer and ice. The total contents required us to tote our wagon (12' utility trailer) carrying our remote access vehicle (dirt bike) we started with good intentions but before long it was painfully obvious that our combined caving utility convoy was no match for the March winds.

Cindy and I drug the combination up through Queens and into the forest. The load on the Jeep taxed by the hills and wind resulted in below average fuel economy 3½ to 4 miles per gallon.

Our worsening situation obligated us to stop briefly at gas station "replica", which did offer some food and friendship. However, there was no gas to be had as the pumps had been rendered inoperable. With a heightened sense of concern, we proceeded to our destination on "E" with the promise that the trip back to Carlsbad was "all down hill" and the store owners had a lawnmower outback if they determined we really needed the gas.

We made base camp near a pool of water just before the last leg up the steep climb to Cottonwood. It wasn't long before we were standing at the entrance. Pausing briefly for posterity, we descended into the realm of darkness.

The huge hall like cavity was interrupted by equally massive columnar structures and immense bulbous protrusions. We traversed the expanse pausing briefly at the scalloped and fluted travertine like flowstone and on through the darkness to the gated entrance for the "Second Parallel" we hoped this could be a future trip.

Near the furthest reaches of the cave, the girls paused while John and I proceeded to descend even further down a broad steep decline. Quickly their lights diminished in the distance and even their occasional shout was muffled and indistinguishable from our footsteps and chatter.

We prodded and poked our heads and arms into every crack looking for new discoveries or access to more passage. After what seemed like just minutes, we returned to the girls at the top. We were quickly informed that the duration of our jaunt nearly exceeded their patience.

On the way out, John and I took another jaunt across the right upper ledge. We followed it to a cluster of small columns resembling a prison cell. From that vantage point we snapped a few more photos then we all escaped to daylight.

Back at camp we shared food, beer and stories. John and I hunted firewood and returned with a 12 pointer (footer). We stoked the fire with new kindling and the 12 ft log and turned in for the night.

The next day we were able to coast using little power, back to Carlsbad to refill our selves and our tanks but not without stopping in Queens to take up the offer for the lawnmower gas. The owner had offered the gas the previous day but for some reason on this day he was reluctant to provide it when approached. I influenced him to sell me a gallon for a five dollar bill. Before long we were off through Dark Canyon over to Sitting Bull Falls.

It was a sunny but cool day at Sitting Bull falls. The excitement of the new experience would provide the energy we need to fuel the climb through the falls and into the wet cave.

John went up first and I was right behind him. At the top John rigged a hand line to assist the girls in this first time experience across the slick rock face. It was breathtaking "literally".

As the cold water and March winds combined synergistically to cause undesirable effects, I made several trips in both directions to assist the girls one by one through the falls. Soaking wet, we assembled just inside the entrance and the heat from excitement cancelled out our shivers from the soaking wet cold and improved the experience.

Small in comparison to Cottonwood, it was breathtaking in its beauty. Swiftly flowing falls hid crystal clear pools that seemed endless in depth. We trudged to the furthest reaches of the wetness exploring the labyrinth and stopping often for pictures. The colors were vast from transparent root beer and orange to deep purple and blue, the formations were magical and alive.

As we explored the pools, ponds and cavities of the cave, it was clear we would have to return when the temperature was more conducive to the frolic this cave deserved.

With the exception of the descent (sort of rappel) and the glow from the sun that quickly warmed us, our trip out was in reverse of our entrance. We paused to submit our permits and enlisted a tourist, who watched our return, to take a group photo.

By this point in the trip, John had conceded and agreed to pull "my wagon" with his BIG diesel, within minutes we were on the road to find Boyd's cave. John was "breaking us in right" and now with a new time advantage (the Jeep would barely go over 45) we quickly made up time.

We nearly reached our destination (after 10 miles of bad (no) road) but could not pin down the spot. After exiting the vehicles and checking the GPS coordinates again, we decided to fan out and start walking. It wasn't long before Tracy found the entrance.

Just inside the entrance was a huge tree trunk laid over in a make shift fire ring, reminiscent of our camp the previous night. In no time we found ourselves at the back of the huge void literally featureless.

The cave resembled an underground football field with proportionate symmetry. And without much distraction we headed home.

### **March 16<sup>th</sup> Caving ESS cave once again!**

Kerry Lowery, his sons and a group of Boy Scouts from Big Spring were the inspiration for this next trip to ESS cave. John Hancock offered to lead the way for me and I was ready to follow.

We made good time getting to the general area but ended up taking a while to find the location once there. Determined, we poked up and down the wrong canyons and through process of elimination and a little help from previously stored GPS coordinates we ended up at camp.

Barry and Mike were already settled in. John and I quickly geared up and went in for a look! Within a few minutes we were at the back of the cave staring straight up the rope to the upper room. With little hesitation I was hooked on and ascended with John "On Belay".

Across the "snot rock" up to the first passage on the right, it was time to unhook and kickback to evaluate the next leg. I took a brief jaunt down the passage to see Barry's "Mail Box" where he wanted his ashes placed. I wanted to see if they would stay on their own or if they would need to be watered in... Soon I moved on back to the main vertical passage and up even further to the highest level of the chamber.

At the top of the chamber it was easy to see how the “Snot Rock” must have developed, as the sweat literally drizzled from my appendages on to the walls below. After making my way to the furthest end of the rope I wriggled into a narrow extension that holds promise for another day.

It was obvious; the only way into the passage would be with arms outstretched laying on my side, literally spooning the rippled contours of the narrow passage. I returned to the bottom and in no time John and I quickly planned a trip for the following day.

I described the passage and John agreed, lacking the musculature and shape of a serpent once inside the “claustrophobic pass” one would have to either make it to an unknown larger turnaround space, room or otherwise, or require the assistance of someone strong enough to perform an unassisted extraction.

We returned topside and the 4 of us spent the rest of the evening sharing stories around the campfire. After a pounding from a huge thunderous storm we woke at day break. Apparently John had received an early morning “Service Call” and had to head out through the storm while everyone else slept.

Soon the others arrived, Kerry and his boy along with a friend, several Boy Scouts and the Scout leader along with a chaperone or two. Mike Gray’s daughter came with a friend as well and also her son. Before long everyone was donning borrowed gear.

Kerry and his boy inspired their young friend, with skill, agility and knowledge. Mike Gray and daughter Crystal were down as well. Crystal lead often and demonstrated with confidence her skill and leadership. Barry, narrated and pointed out “Hercules the Holder of the cave” as well as other fine points.

When challenged, the youngest were quick to succumb to the allure of “Barry’s Craw” and I didn’t waste anytime (since I came prepared) to ascend past the “Snot Rock” into the upper room once again.

My jaunt to the upper room earned the recovery of a “Mini Mag” light that I didn’t even know I left the day before. Kind of like the wrist watch I had to recover on the previous trip... Unlike the watch however, I decided to reward the youngest “Trooper” on the team and donated it “in the name of science”.

After a full day in and out of the cave, and the realization that the plans to enter the “claustrophobic pass” could not be realized (no one else was compelled to pursue this adventure), we settled the camp for the night.

Some left, others stayed the night, and all had a great time.

#### **April 16<sup>th</sup> 2005 McKittrick, Endless and Sand.**

Cindy and I chased Bill Bentley up through Carlsbad and on to location near McKittrick cave. On arrival we found Mike Gray and Barry Hayes all ready there. Soon Jacqui Bills and Noel Pando arrived with his son and a couple of friends. We quickly set up camp and began to wonder about.

It wasn’t long and we divided into a couple of groups and headed to different directions. Barry, Mike Gray and Noel’s group went into endless while Bill and Jacqui led John Hancock, his girl friend Tracy, Cindy and I into McKittrick.

We drove as far as we could, to the point we had to cross over the barbed wire fence and descend to the gated entrance. The hike across the top offered a spectacular view of the surrounding region and, on close inspection the brilliant colored flowers dappled color within the palette of green Prickly pear and Cholla cactus.

The flat plates of limestone gave way to the void which hid the gate inconspicuously from view. Jackie took the honors and with a few clicks on the combination lock, we were all assembled inside.

The interior resembled a parched desert landscape. Dry powdery brown residue muffled footsteps as we trudged through various passages. Eventually the passage choked down to a barely noticeable opening beneath a huge stone wall. Bill wriggled quickly to the other side and I scrambled to get pictures before the others disappeared.

Eventually life began to appear. Bill and Jacqui were quick to point out the active formations as they were noticed. One of the features along the way that was barely noticeable to the discerning eye, was a carbon black mark on the ceiling that Bill pointed out.

The cave was mostly dry and featureless but we stopped occasionally, when there was opportunity, for a group photo. After signing the register, we exited the cave at the lower entrance and headed back to camp.

At camp, a multitude of resources were employed to provide sustenance. The wind challenged the grill to heat long enough and eventually compelled many of us to reconsider the acceptable level of “doneness”

Before long everyone was carrying rocks big enough to build the combination “Wind Break / Fire Ring that would provide the center point for the night festivities. With my Jeep offering additional deflection we gathered to share our group experience past and present.

The daylight brought new directions as the groups traded permits and again headed into opposite directions. Jacqui and Bill lead our team to Endless, while Mike Gray and the others trogged over to McKittrick.

Once in the entrance the daylight was slow to concede. We were given a brief history on the breakdown sump and the “Grand Daddy” snake that was known to frequent it. Luckily he was absent this day.

Past the “snake pit” the grueling stretch of passage would set the tone for the day. For Cindy, the promise of equally challenging passage would demand more than her strength had granted. After safely escorting her back to the entrance I returned to the team.

Quickly it was evident, the decoration were more prevalent than at McKittrick. In several areas, beautiful cave coral and popcorn adorn the walls and we past over and around translucent blue and brown flowstone.

On the “expressway” We clambered over huge piles of breakdown and at one point Jacqui and I crawled into, and wriggled down twin tubes that choked down to nearly impassable dimensions. Squeezing through the choke point, we were able to reach an expanded area where we could turn around and return to the group.

Several areas displayed interesting translucent root beer brown Helectites, but the most impressive room was a huge expanse lined with Gypsum. It had a comparatively low ceiling and unusually inclined floor, full of a variety of Gypsum anomalies.

We found the “Commode”, a bulbous yet cylindrical cavity that extended into the floor. It looked to be formed like a decapitated thin crusted blister or bubble, like that of a potato chip. There were many similar unusual formations including one 6 to 8 ft semi sphere that resembled a hollow crusty brown sugar mound with an entrance on the backside.

Prodding my head inside I could see it went on. I shed my gear to reduce my size and quickly slid, as if through a submarine hatch, to the inside. The absolutely pure white gypsum crystal lining lit up with just the luminescence of 1 lamp. Excited, I stood up to confirm my suspicion. The outside of the mound glowed whimsically honey brown.

I escaped through the passage and returned to the main room out of a hallway through the floor. Everyone explored to their content. We collected, gathered our bearing, and headed up through the flowstone passage where we had come. Soon found the entrance and were back at camp for lunch.

We returned to learn that several members had left. Not deterred by their absence, I grabbed a handful of trail mix, more water and some jerky and we soon reconvened for a trip to Sand cave.

Bill decided to forgo the trip to do some “Ridge Walking” while Jacqui, John, Tracy and I headed for Sand. Cindy held down the fort while Barry and Mike Gray were gathering firewood from the upper camp area.

Jacqui rigged a rope for the short drop in through the entrance. The crevasse opened and quickly gave way to a large chamber. We chose a route just past a drain hole that allowed a glimpse into sub chambers below. .

Unassisted, the next drop was a bit of a challenge. At he bottom Jacqui and I encouraged John and Tracy to continue. With little protest Tracy was soon at the bottom but John would succumb to the allure of quality time with Bill up on the ridge looking for other named but elusive caves.

Marginally smaller in number, the 3 of us pressed on. With map in hand Jacqui led us through some amazing and alluring passage. We went through several good crawls and saw some delicate decorations. With camera in hand, we made it into Lily Pad room.

Jacqui and I proceeded below the lily pads to the back of the room. Here we found a labyrinth completely encrusted with “Cave Popcorn” which demanded delicate placement of every appendage. We slowly inspected a variety of the many cavities before retreating to the main corridor.

The returning view from between and below was surreal. We paused for some pictures than advanced. In lieu of climbing back through and above the thin floating plates that made up the floor, I chose to take the subterranean passage.

I re-entered the passageway from a huge travertine drain in the cave floor behind the others. From this vantage point I could see the passage continued and eventually opened into the main chamber.

After considerable time lapsed we exited Sand and learned the group had again been reduced. Having visited this area many times before Bill Bentley had apparently fulfilled his immediate caving desire.

The night ended with the group photo by the fire and capped a wonderful weekend of exploration and friendship.

### **April 30<sup>th</sup> -TSA spring Convention (Powell Cave)**

Bill Bentley took advantage of an invitation to have our Grotto participate with convention registration. This voluntary act on behalf of the Grotto would eventually reward the club significantly.

Cindy and I arrived late in the afternoon and found the camp had already been established. Michael Anderson, Bill Bentley Noel Pando and Walter Feaster were present and Jacqui Bills showed up with her friend Kell, a short period later.

After the feed that evening, we met at the main hall and participated in the auction. Cindy and I ended up with a pair of tickets to the Devils Sink hole bat flight and a pair of Bat ear rings but not after an outrageously fun evening of active participation and shenanigans by all present.

Despite the uncomfortably cold conditions, more than occasional snores, and laughter from an all night party, we rose in time for breakfast burrito's, then, off to Powell's Cave.

After a short drive "down the road" and past a few "bump" gates we arrived at our destination. Within minutes, Bill Bentley, Michael Anderson, Cindy and I collected at the bottom of the inverted concrete culvert entrance and began our short jaunt into the cave.

A small Bat scampered from the wrong side of his roost and was soon on course to higher ground. This was the first indication of the scene to come as we soon found ourselves in a narrow passage softened by guano.

The deposits were huge. On more than one occasion I anchored myself to the mounds by thrusting both hands in, up to my elbows, allowing others to traverse an expanse or gain leverage to pull onto more stable footing.

The cave was hot and dirty without many features and with little encouragement all had agreed to forfeit the rest of the cave. As we exited the culvert we met Jacqui and Kel. We had little to offer as encouragement and headed to the parking area where the 4 in our group paused for a group photo before calling an end to the trip.

Michael, Cindy and I proceeded to the town of Mason to finish off our weekend with a relaxing Topaz hunt on Honey-creek ranch.

### **May 21<sup>st</sup> - Carlsbad Orientation to Cave Rescue (Parks Ranch)**

Considering the extent of our interest, Cindy often monitored the activity and correspondence of the caving community. When discovered, she was compelled to expose the opportunity to participate in a training event that would be both challenging and rewarding in many ways.

Others from our Grotto that attended were Ruel Metcalf and Kerry Lowery. Cindy and I drove up the night before so as to be prepared for the planned 8hr classroom instruction.

We assembled @ 7:00 am on the University Of New Mexico Carlsbad Campus in the room specified. Ruel and Kerry showed up promptly along with about 25 others who participated to the highest degree for the next two days. After several hours of instruction and commentary by leading authorities involved with the NCRC we broke for lunch. Most attendees shuttled next door to Subway and all returned with replenished enthusiasm. We assembled as instructed in the lobby for some applied training. After a couple more hours of demonstration and explanation using real equipment, we were tested.

As a team we were required to spend the next three hours demonstrating our comprehension of the skills training with a live subject. We loaded an instructor into a litter, strapped him in and proceeded through a predefined obstacle course.

The course was prepared to resemble the location where the following day we would be tested again under real world conditions. The 110 degree temperature of the day was cooled by the friendship and teamwork of all present.

The day ended with an instructor evaluation and comments for improvements necessary for a successful mock rescue planned for the following day. After which, the four from our Grotto, Kerry, Ruel, Cindy and I met for dinner along with our daughter, her husband and our grand daughter who came up from Odessa to visit the caverns.

The morning began as planned. The cavers in attendance all convened at Parks ranch and within no time the event unfolded. The event was sanctioned by the state and included professionals from several agencies including NCRC, State police, Fire and Rescue as well as BLM and the Forest Service.

With the Command center established and authority defined, several "Hasty" teams proceeded to locate the "mock" victims. Ruel, Kerry and I were assigned to manage the patient and the extraction with a medic team of six.

We successfully managed the patient as we navigated the passages, which included several long and low sections, as well as 12 ft vertical hand off, and a couple of horizontal lap passes submerge up to our ears in cold water.

With our exit we encountered several unexpected situations, including one that involved Cindy who previously had been assigned to logistics at the command center topside.

Apparently one of the mock victims was lost in the cave and the rescue training event went "For Real". Cindy was reassigned to a "Hasty" search team and had spent quite some in the labyrinth. She returned topside looking like a soldier returning from the front line.

The event ended with all safe and accounted for. After the instructor's comments and evaluation, most everyone departed, however, I took advantage of an invitation to explore for a couple more hours before Cindy and I headed back home.

### **June 18<sup>th</sup> – Summer Party (Our House)**

Attending were Ruel and Carolyn, Walter , Mike Gray, Michael Anderson, Bill and Debbie, Jacqui and Kel, Barry and Donna, Cindy and I

As the adventure developed, our yearning for group therapy strengthened. It was time for a party. Most everyone agreed and again funds were dispensed in the honor of friendship and bonding.

Cindy and I hosted a club sponsored event which brought some private stock video and photographic footage narrated by individual experience.

Bill Bentley brought DVD's of the Devils Sink Hole , Mammoth Cave , and some personal footage and Walter brought an Amazing caves DVD.

Jacqui and Kel arrived with a complimentary limestone planter wrestled fresh from the ranch and presented as an addition to the natural scenery which enveloped our abode. Thanks, guys, it fits perfectly...

The food was good and the company even better as we socialized into the night. As the group dispersed, Michael Anderson stayed to encourage an alcohol fueled debate between Mike Gray and myself which covered a variety of subject matter and changed often and always ended on the same subject, have another one...

**To Be Continued...**

**August 20<sup>th</sup>- Midnight Cave**

**September 24<sup>th</sup>- Sonora Reenactment**

**Oct 14-15-16- TCR ( Flat Creek Ranch)**

**Nov 12<sup>th</sup>- Sonora Restoration.**

# 2005 Memories



PBSS Grotto NM Cave Trip  
April 16, 2005