

January 1998

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

Volume 13 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 13, 1998 around 7:00 PM. at the residence of Walter Feaster. (See article next page.)

Our Agenda:

- Show Cave Videos
- Vertical Training @ Andrews
- Restoration @ CACA

If you need more directions or information call our official contact person, Walter Feaster

@ (915)559-3297, or (915)694-1824 E-Mail: <waltfeast@marshall.com>

Future Cave Trips and Events:

9-11 January--Colorado Bend Project: Contact Terry Holsinger (trhli@sprynet.com)

*** 31, January--PBSS Vertical Training @ Andrews: Contact Kerry Lowery @ (915)394-4230 or more info at the Jan. 13, grotto meeting. (Map of Andrews enclosed in this newsletter.)*****

13-15 February--Colorado Bend Project: Contact: Terry Holsinger (trhli@sprynet.com)

27-29 February--Powell's Cave Project: The entrance pipes are installed and backfilled to the rim, creating Texas' newest pit--28' deep. Bring vertical gear for a fast entry, or a seat harness for safety while climbing the ladder. (Bring a 50' rope in case no one else does.) Still lots of caving to do. Contact: Terry Holsinger (trhli@sprynet.com)

***28, February-- PBSS Rock Hauling @ CACA: Restoration work at Carlsbad Caverns. Contact Kerry Lowery @ (915)394-4230 or sign up at the next meeting.*

7-8 March--GYKAP (SWR, NM) For more info contact Joli or Chris Lee @ (505)585-8406 or <jclee@wazoo.com>.

5-6 April--SWR Regional, McKittrick Hill: For more info contact Dave or Carol Belski @ (505)885-6168 or <belski@caverns.com>.

10-12 April--Colorado Bend Project: Contact: Terry Holsinger (trhli@sprynet.com)

8-10 May--Colorado Bend Project: Contact: Terry Holsinger (trhli@sprynet.com)

August 3-7, NSS Convention: Sewanee, Tennessee. Contact William Shrewsbury, (432)886-3296 or <nss98@caves.org>.

July 12-16, 1999-NSS Convention, Twin Falls County Fairgrounds, Filer, Idaho. Contact: David W. Kesner, PO Box 1334, Boise, ID 83701; (208)939-0979; e-mail <drdave@micron.net>.

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

"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. Items for this newsletter can be sent to the Chief Editor, "The Hole News", c/o Walter Feaster, 4307 Harvard Ave., Midland, Texas 79703-4847. 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 Treasurer /Secretary, c/o Walter Feaster, 4307 Harvard Ave., Midland, Texas 79703-4847. 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 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 Alabama, 35810-4431.

"PBSS Home Page"

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

Web space donated courtesy of Bill Bentley and Apex 2000 ISP.

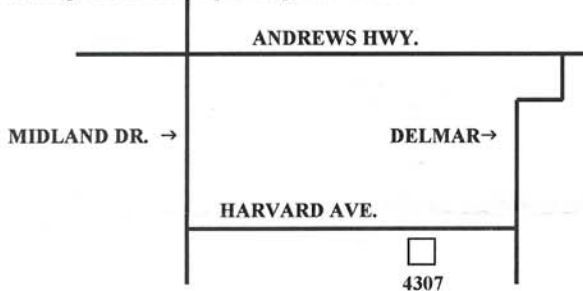


 **ATTENTION: READ THIS** 

If your name is listed below, this will be your last newsletter.
Your "98" grotto dues are due now. Regular membership dues are \$10 and includes one voting right, associate membership is \$5 and includes one voting right, but no newsletter. Please make checks payable to Walter Feaster, because PBSS does not have a bank account.
**Bandy Carlton Carouth Cullen Day Florer Franks
Glasson L. Gray S. Gray Kaler Lee-Kaler ~~Walter Feaster~~**

PBSS Meeting Change

The regular meeting of the PBSS will be held on **Tuesday, January 13, 1998** around 7 PM. at the residence of **Walter Feaster, 4307 Harvard, Midland, Texas.** Why here? Kerry Lowery has rented some cave videos from the NSS and we will be showing them after the meeting. The PBSS will provide pizza. B.Y.O.B.



Update on the Pay for Caves in the National Forest

The Price War continues over a US Forest Service proposed cave permit fee demonstration program in Arizona and New Mexico. An NSS ad hoc committee, chaired by another NSS BOG member, Ray Keeler of Phoenix, was established to maintain a dialogue with the Forest Service on the fee plan. The ad hoc committee generally opposes any fee proposal, opting for a "no fees, use volunteer services and materials to attain cave conservation goals" approach. When this response was sent to the Forest Service, they (rightfully, at the time) responded that it only represented the ad hoc committee members and not the NSS as a whole. At the Board Of Governor's meeting at the 1997 NSS Convention, Ray presented a motion that would define the NSS stand on the demonstration fee program. The wording on the final motion was:

The NSS opposes the use of the federal managed undeveloped caves as the focus of fee demonstration projects. The NSS supports a more constructive alternate to cave entry fees: utilizing existing caver volunteers to assist in the management of cave resources as stated in our MOUs.

Only one word of the presented draft motion was changed by the Board during discussion; when the vote came, the motion passed unanimously.

(Above reprinted from the SWR web page)

Trip Report:

Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge September 1997

On another one of our frequent trips to the great wilderness of the Wichita Mountains, Tom and I found a unique mine tunnel. The Pennington Mine Tunnel is a straight, horizontal shaft going back about 170 feet. Nestled behind a screen of trees on the side of a mountain, the handpicked tunnel is approximately six feet high and four feet wide. Hopes of a great gold cache were quickly shattered by the Pennington brothers in the early 1900's when the tunnel failed to produce much gold or platinum. Now, visitors don flashlights while splashing their way through the tunnel and disturbing the few bats that rest there. In short an underground experience but an underground one no less.

As promised in an earlier trip report we finally made it to Bat Cave (Wind Cave). Carting vertical gear and a rope, we were quickly surprised to see that a rope knotted with loops had been newly put in place at the cave's entrance on the side of Bat Cave Mountain. I swiftly tossed our rope aside and watched as Tom scrambled up the rope following him soon after. We both cussed at the large distance between each foot loop. A giant must have tied these loops. Nonetheless, it got us to our destination which was a cave 36 feet deep, 8 to 11 feet high, and 15 feet wide. Calm your oos and ahs, it is still a cave. There are some reports of countless bats, a few bats, and no bats inhabiting this cave area but for those who see it, it's hard to imagine any bats ever living there. Inside the cave is the usual spray painted graffiti and trash but a different kind of trash caught my disgusted eye. Some one had decided that Bat Cave would make an excellent toilet. Enough said.

The view from the cave however is spectacular. The Refuge and the land that follows it are green and wavy in all their glory and the eye is full just to hold the sight. A small town here, a bump on a log there, and all that nature owns is there for the viewing. Indians have referred the cave to be a ghost house but the only ghosts Tom and I felt that day were the ghosts of history roaming the Wichita Mountains. Friendly ghosts I'm know because I can't imagine a place so beautiful harboring anything else.

Submitted by Rebecca Lee-Kaler NSS# 42075



TRIP REPORTS: and other lies and stories

Comanche Springs

Date: November 27-30, 1997

By :Dale Ellison & Butch Fralia

Attendees: Mike Anderson, Dale Ellison, Butch Fralia, Arlene Heintz, Benjamin Heuss, Christopher Heuss, Keith Heuss, Brad Newton, Brittany Newton, Mark Porter, David Williams

After driving four hundred miles, you'll come to Fort Stockton, Texas. The gateway to Big Bend country. It's a small town with about 8,500 people and apparently a tourist town for the most part. There are many hotels, restaurants and gift shops. For cavers, the most significant things are caves in the area. In particular, Comanche Springs Cave located at the city swimming pool. In other words, there is something for everyone.

This is the trip that for a while seemed like it wouldn't be. One health disaster or another befell one then another of the cavers who planned to attend. First, Ernie Parker's father-in-law was diagnosed with bone cancer. Jim and Patty Kennedy had to cancel because Patty came down with pneumonia. Bill Bentley's father had emergency surgery then followed it up with a stroke. Bruce and Donna Anderson had to cancel when Bruce came down with the flu. Joe Ivy and Becky Jones did not get back from playing Guanzo Guano at TAG in time to recover for the trip. There for a while, it looked like there would be three survey teams to turn loose in the cave. It boiled down to a possible two when everyone arrived, and ended up being one, when all was said and done.

Those who made the trip, arrived in Fort Stockton on Thursday evening or night. There were a few small problems, like meeting David Williams at the swimming pool. David (from Houston) was planning on camping at the swimming pool. Butch and Sharon had the keys to the pool and before checking in at the motel, visited the pool to see if David was there. Not seeing anyone who looked like they were looking for a place to camp, they drove to the Comfort Inn and checked in. They found that Dale, Arlene, Keith and his boys were already there. After taking possession of their room, they located the others. They decided the first plan of action would be to find someplace where they could all get supper after checking the pool one more time.

They drove to the pool and checked once more for someone who looked like they needed a place to camp. No luck this time either. After a while, they began to wonder if David was going to come, then finally gave up and drove to the Alpine Lodge, across from the Comfort Inn.

The Alpine Lodge restaurant had the distinction of being the only one in town open on Thanksgiving. It seemed to be a great deal of trouble to put two tables together so the group could eat together. The task was finally accomplished after a lot of oh dears and dirty looks. The food was great, making up for the trouble we seemed to cause. There was a Thanksgiving buffet that would satisfy most anyone's appetite. We finally figured out the problem was the small amount of people available in the restaurant because of the holiday.

Mike Anderson and Mark Porter arrived at the Comfort Inn about 11:00 p.m. They let us know they were there and asked what time to be at the cave. They then went to wind down from the long

boring drive.

Saturday morning, everyone, including David Williams, arrived at the Comanche Springs Swimming Pool at 9:00 am. David had arrived in town about the time that Butch and Sharon left the pool to check in at the motel. He parked his truck under a street lamp hoping someone would notice him. Unfortunately that was not the case, though he spotted us checking the pool to see if he had arrived. He didn't realize we were the ones he was looking for. As it turned out, Butch and David had attended a cave mapping workshop in Austin together but couldn't put the names and faces together.

Brad Newton and his brother Brittany arrived. Brad is the Pecos River Land Commissioner that he explained is an appointed position that actually pays a salary. It was through his efforts that Bill Tucker was able to get permission for us and his team of divers to re-explore and re-survey the cave. Brad was on the original 1984 survey with the Haynes brothers and Bill Bentley from Midland, Texas. Brad explained that he was not a caver but an electrician. The original surveyors needed help with the wiring for a five horse power submersible pump they wanted to use to pump a passage dry. Brad volunteered his time to help them and ended up working on the survey with them.

After getting everyone acquainted with each other, the cavers reconnoitered the area. Comanche Springs is a large Olympic sized pool. It was originally fed from the spring but now relies on city water for its source. Irrigation pumping west of town lowered the water table and stopped the spring from flowing. The facility is large and nice; Restrooms with showers, a concession stand (closed for our visit), a large bleacher area and the two cave entrances. The original entrance to Comanche Springs is a caged in area, 10.1' x 10.1'. A manhole cover on the deck between the pool and pool house can be lifted to provide access under the pool. The pool was built on stilts and at one time, it was necessary to crawl under the pool to enter the cave. The entrance the cavers entered is called the 'well hell' entrance. Brad said that whenever they started working on the entrance, something else would go wrong and everyone said 'well hell!' The name stuck. This entrance is a piece of 12' casing 3' in diameter. There is a ladder welded to the casing to climb down on.

Finally the survey started. Ben, Chris, Dale, David and Keith would make up the first team surveying their way into the cave from the entrance. David had never sketched before but thought he could do it and wanted to try. He'd even brought a fancy surveyor's book he'd found in Houston. The team started into the cave while the others waited for them to clear the entrance.

When the entrance cleared, Butch entered the cave and began to have breathing difficulties in the tight entrance passage. He climbed out of the cave and decided there were other activities he could keep himself busy with. Unfortunately, this left Mark and Mike without a third on their survey team. They went in anyway.

A good amount of dirt was dug from the entrance belly crawl. Brad headed up that project so, "he wouldn't get in our way surveying," as he put it. Brittany went into the cave to toss buckets to Brad while Butch stayed on the surface as hauler.

More Trip Reports:

Brad kept the buckets full and moving to the surface such that Butch found himself very busy.

At 1:00 p.m. the surveyors came out of the cave. Arlene and Sharon delivered lunch. The meat burritos from the Burrito Express were hot and spicy. The spice had a wonderful flavor but would stop just short of etching the flesh from inside your mouth. Fabulous! While they ate, Butch added up the survey length and looked at the data. The one team had surveyed 230' before lunch. Descriptions of the passage made this sound like a heroic feat.

After Keith broke out his cave radio gear. A brief conference identified three features in the cave that would be interesting to correlate to the surface. Butch set the radio at Glen's dome while Keith remained on the surface and located the spot. On the original map, this spot shows to be out in the middle of the street. It turned out to be on the edge of the wall toward Springs Drive. Mark and Mike joined by David, moved the radio to another survey station A8, a dome a little further down passage. This spot was located on the original map as across the street, about 1/3 the way in the middle of the block. Oops, that one turned out to be across the street at the base of the street and another rock wall heading underneath the ruins of old Ft. Stockton. The third location is where the first pool of water is located was found under an old restored building that houses the Historical Society. Dale went under the house and set off the alarm trying to find the cave radios' tone. Dale thought it was interesting to see the underside of a historic building. He saw a dead black cat under there, too. And yes, the Ft. Stockton city police showed up. Then the head of the Historic Commission showed up so the alarm could be reset. Fortunately Brad was there to take care of the other officials.

While this was going on, David, Mark, and Mike were in the cave surveying. They added another 130' to the days survey bringing it up to 335.8 feet for the day.

That ended the day with Brad heading for home after suggesting that we try out Sarah's Restaurant that evening. When everyone had cleaned up and recovered from the day's activities, they headed for Sarah's. Ah ha! Talk about different atmosphere! Were they bothered finding a place where nine cavers could eat together? No! Just a moment folks, these people are almost finished and we'll put those tables together. When the tables were joined, everyone sat down and ordered. And then the food came. Ohhhhhhh, was it ever good, not just good it was great. Sarah's is still family owned since 1929. These people in Fort Stockton know how to eat and the restaurants know how to feed them. A fantastic meal.

Imagine what the people at Sarah's Cafe looked like when this bunch walked in the door. Hungry cavers wanting to eat better than great Mexican food, and drink beer!

After supper, Butch and David went to Butch and Sharon's room to enter the survey data in the notebook computer. They worked on it for awhile but couldn't see any errors. The survey was deemed acceptable and David went on for the night.

Saturday morning was similar to Friday. After enjoying a continental breakfast at the Comfort Inn (today there was butter and jelly for the biscuits), everyone met at the pool at 9:00 a.m. Everyone seemed to be moving a lot slower than they were on Saturday. David was hot to survey and Dale agreed to join him. Everyone else was to sore. What's with these guys, they deserve a medal and an investigation to see what they are eating to allow them to go on for a second day. David had in mind an area where a

loop could be closed to check the accuracy of the survey data.

While Dale and David were in the cave, Ben, Butch, Chris, Keith, Mark and Mike worked at some overland survey to get features information together for a future map. They surveyed from the 'Well Hell' entrance to the pool, the perimeter of the pool and over to the original entrance. The data was entered into the computer and several discrepancies noted in the loop closure. It wasn't much but still created a lot of questions in such a short survey.

The survey was redone with similar results. There was too much re-bar in the concrete to completely close the loop but it was close enough for an illustrative map of the area.

As this activity was completed, Dale and David came out of the cave with 128.1' of survey data to add to the figures in the computer. This checked out ok and brought the survey for the weekend up to 464.9'. The original idea was to put three or four teams in the cave and complete the survey in a weekend. The first problem would be having room for three or four teams at the same time. The second problem is that some of the passage is water filled. A close look at some of the names thought up by the original survey team should have eliminated some of the illusions about a one weekend survey. Names like Born Again, Suicide Crawl and Mary's Misery tell a tale all their own.

The weather was stable, not a cloud in the sky, Dale noticed there were two places in the cave, that was flowing a 8" wide stream of water on Saturday that he didn't think was flowing on Friday. He thought that was interesting and made a mental note to watch these areas.

Brad had made a good landowner contact for us. We were privileged to meet a local businessman. He took us to his older brother's ranch. He showed us several sink holes one spring and four real caves. Our host and Brad rode in a silver Ford pickup followed by Dales van and Mike Anderson's Suburban. We drove all over a ranch called "Vista Grande". Abe would get out of his truck, carrying a cold Coors light in one of those coolers with his white hair blowing in the wind,...he would lead a pack of hungry, ecstatic cavers to different sinks on his property and tell us about what he know about the caves.

One of the caves we visited had been closed since about 1954. He had explored the cave about that time then the local Lone Star Beer warehouse caught fire and burned to the ground. His father hauled all the beer out and dumped it in the cave then covered the entrance. About three years ago heavy rain caused the entrance to collapse and it reopened. There are broken, and unbroken Lone Star Beer bottles in the wall of the cave. We were assured that no other cavers had visited the cave. The entrance was vertical so Mike Anderson rigged up and dropped the cave, broken beer bottles and all. One bottle was found dated 1947. Another was found dated 1957. We decided to name this cave, Lone Star Cave. Another cave was entered by the Hayne's brothers back in the 80's. They blasted the cave to make it more accessible and there may be a reasonable amount of passage there. There was feces in the cave that suggested a large cat could have used it as a nest and "very" recently. In a small crack to the side of the passage a large snake resided.

Butch used his GPS to determine locations for all the caves visited. That data has already found itself overlain on a topographic map.

(Continue page 5)

Before we left, a "Thank You" card was purchased for our new friend. Every one out there Saturday signed the card which was mailed before we left town Sunday morning.

Saturday night we tried to find an establishment called Mi Casita that Abe's daughter owned or where she worked. It couldn't be found on the street or in the phone book. "The Steakhouse" on East Dickinson was chosen to provide the nights provender. Alas, the food was good but the service!

Unless you are limited for eating places on Thanksgiving like we were, try to avoid the Alpine Lodge across the street from the Comfort Inn and "The Steakhouse" east of there on East Dickinson. The food was great at both locations but the service was less than equal.

Brad gave us all a new State map as his office joins State Senator Madla's office and they have a good supply there in the County Courthouse at the town square.

Dale may have accidentally promised to draw the final maps of Comanche Springs Cave while speaking to Butch about it Sunday morning. It was over a nice Continental breakfast at the Comfort Inn. If drawing the map is compatible with Dale's lifestyle he will even draw the map of the data that the divers gather. He just wants to make certain that Brad gets a map of the cave as he has been promised. He said, "The only way I can insure that will happen,...I'll do it himself."

We all had a great time there in Ft. Stockton. We had a great trip surveying. One and a half days of surveying will dispel the size of Comanche Springs Cave. I think it will be smaller. We still need to survey "Gonzales Pass" and the passage takes off to the left just after you enter the cave. A couple of other areas need to be surveyed but are best left to Donna Anderson. People that were not able to attend this trip really missed a wonderful weekend of hard caving and great friends.

Andrews Texas

