

The Hole News

A photograph of a large, circular cave opening. The interior of the cave is rocky and textured, with a bright light source at the top, possibly an opening to the surface. The cave walls are covered in various rock formations, including stalactites and stalagmites. The lighting is dramatic, with the top of the cave being very bright and the bottom being in shadow. The overall scene is one of a deep, natural underground space.

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VOLUME 21 NUMBER 10

Chartered in 1984 as the 300th Grotto of the NSS

December, 2006

Tragedy in the Caverns of Sonora



Broken Butterfly—Broken Heart Texas Loses a National Natural Treasure

From a submission by the owners and management at the Caverns of Sonora

The Caverns of Sonora's signature butterfly formation was vandalized and damaged when two-thirds of the butterfly's right wing was broken off shortly before Thanksgiving.

People are known by their hearts. The Caverns of Sonora is known by "The Butterfly." It is the heart of this beautiful cave and someone intentionally broke its right wing and took it with them.

Back in the 1800's, a small dog stuck its nose in a 10" hole and the wonders of the cave were discovered. The private owners have worked diligently to preserve and protect this cave. Its monocrystalline formations, normally rare, are effusive and it is impossible for the human brain to grasp its splendor in just one tour. People of all ages and from around the world come back time after time to see the splendors of the Caverns of Sonora. At almost the end of the tour, there has always been the anticipation of seeing the butterfly, one of God's precious gifts to humanity. Indeed, the butterfly was an iconic American National Natural Treasure pictured in hundreds of books around the world. *Continued on pg.3*

Upcoming Events

Jan. 12-14:

**TSA Winter Convention— Colorado Bend
2007 dates**

Jan 20: Amazing Maze Cave.... There will be some surveying going on. You must be a member of TCMA before the trip. Contact Bill Bentley for details.

Feb 10th or 24th:

Bradford Cave gate and survey and/or Blow-hole dig.

April: TSA Spring Convention

May: Ess Cave open house.

Big Manhole 2007

Projected dates:

Jan 13-15 May 5-6

Feb. 17-19 June 9-10

Mar. 17-18 Aug. 18-19

Apr. 14-16 Sept. 15-16
or

Apr. 21-22 Oct. 6-8

Keep watching for firm dates and progress reports in The Hole News.

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Tragedy in the Caverns of Sonora continues.

In a child's eye, all things in nature are wondrous and sometimes inspiring. Scientists try to explain how and why things happen, but to children, it's just there.

A nine year old writes:

"I was four years when I first saw the butterfly crystal. The butterfly was like the story about the golden apple in the world. When my mom took a tour into the cave, I looked forward to going with her because I knew I was going to see the Butterfly. But now someone has broken it. I hope the person responsible feels as much pain as that person has made me feel." -Katy

Our prayer is for the person who took the butterfly wing to send it back.

This unique formation developed and grew in total darkness for hundreds of thousands of years. The very first light to touch it came from the beam of an explorer's carbide head lamp in late 1955. If you send us the wing, we can repair it. Quick recovery of this broken fragment is critical. The longer this kind of crystal is out of its natural environment, the harder it will be to restore the butterfly, the *only* known formation of it's kind in the world. It will never be the same. It will now be known as "The Broken Butterfly", but if it can be repaired, perhaps in a hundred thousand *more* years, the scar of the broken butterfly will be covered over and the Heart of the Caverns of Sonora will be restored.

All cannot be lost. Someone out there, please help us. We beg for its return. We just want the wing of the butterfly, the heart of Caverns of Sonora returned. A fund for information leading to the recovery of this broken fragment has been established. Our mailing address is: Caverns of Sonora, PO Box 1196, Sonora, TX 76950. Information can also be e-mailed to cavernsofsonora@cavernsofsonora.com. Or phone Caverns of Sonora at: (325)387-3105

Lidar Project in the Devil's Sinkhole Trip Report

By Jacqui Thomas

Kel and I spent the weekend of December 2nd at the Devil's Sinkhole as part of the second of the series of LiDAR mapping weekends. LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) mapping is a sophisticated interface of laser and computer programming that produces three dimensional scans. The Bureau of Economic Geology is providing the equipment and the people who know how to use it, Texas Parks and Wildlife is providing camping and cave access, and TCMA provides volunteers like Kel & me who are willing to do everything from cook to make sure everyone's safe to hauling equipment to exploring. [For more LiDAR information, TCMA website has a link to the project].

We arrived Friday evening and it was cold. We helped to lower some equipment into the cave so Saturday would start more efficiently. It became colder. Randy, the Texas Parks employee in charge of the Sinkhole, brought bundles of wood and found us a safe place to build a fire ring, so we soon had a place to circle the fold-up chairs for an evening of visiting and waiting for the food people.

A novel part of the project was the expedition quality of the weekend. People had assigned roles and meals were made for us, including brown bag lunches lowered into the cave. Of course, we're cavers so we crossed over occasionally as needed, but the experience was very different for me.

There were about twenty people there. Several folks were "support," acting as everything from food preparers to sherpas. My first day I was assigned to "exploration" with Aspen Schindel and David Calcote. I had no idea what that entailed but it was in the cave so I geared up, packed snacks, water, and some "oops" stuff (webbing, screwlinks, and chemical hand heater packets), and headed to the viewing platform, which was rigged with two ropes. On my way, I asked Linda Palit about exploration; she explained that many years ago, someone supposedly found a room under the breakdown that is not one of the familiar Lake Rooms. Our job was to look for that room, which has yet to be re-found. I said something like, "That's a job?" The hardest part of that morning was waiting for all the LiDAR equipment and people to get into the cave, as they have priority. It was still cold.

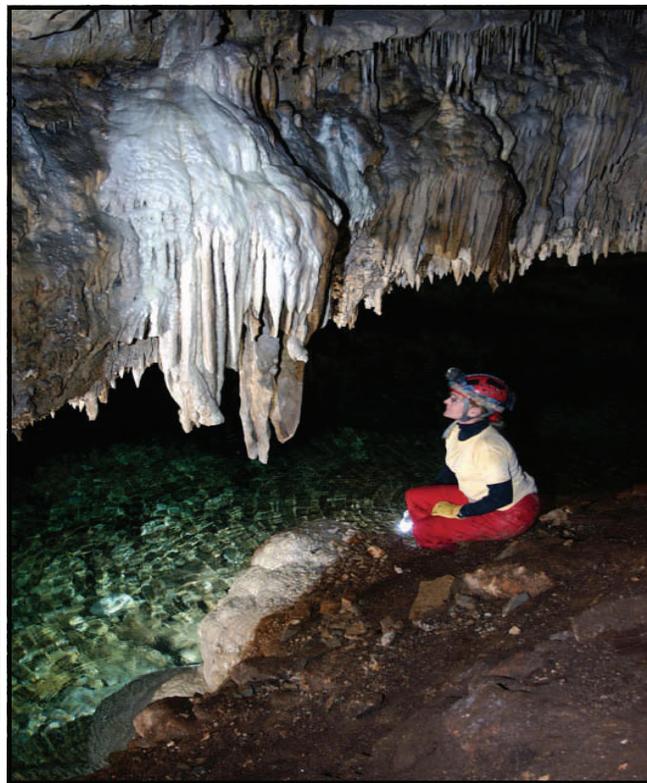
We started the same place as the exploration team of the first project only we went clockwise. We followed the solid cave wall as best we could, crawling through breakdown and searching for holes to places no one has been to for a while. We thoroughly investigated the Southeast Lake and the South Lake. In the South Lake we found some small white critters with lots of legs, long antennae, and a spatulate tail kind of like on a crayfish. First thought to be isopods, Randy identified them to us as amphipods. (I think). We also found a somewhat water- and mud-stained laminated sign from the NSS Brackettville convention telling people, "No Swimming in the Spring."



*Jim Kennedy scoping out the North Lake Room
in the Devils Sinkhole.*



*Geary and Eric rigging Devil's Sinkhole with an interested
(perhaps apprehensive) observer.*



Jacqui in the North Lake Room of Devil's Sinkhole.

Devil's Sinkhole LiDAR continues from pg.3

We didn't find any area that looked like it had been "lost" but we did find names carved into walls, several solitary pipistrelle bats tucked into tiny solution holes or hanging on the edges of breakdown, and were subjected to two Mexican Freetail fly-byes. Solid breakdown forced us up into the main cave and when we ducked under again, it was through the hole that leads to the Lake Room. Backtracking toward the other side of where we were stopped we found a long, narrow room, mostly squatting or crawling, with lovely dripping formations. In this room we found a slot in the floor through which we could see a drop off about eight feet below us. David found another way to that lower level, moved aside a few rocks, and found himself on the edge of a tube.

We "rigged" a safety of webbing so David would have something to pull against coming back out of the tube. David squeezed down an angled chute that became a narrow chimney with a ledge on which he could stand. He saw water, and a beach. Fortunately he had the presence of mind to drop a pebble onto the beach before he dropped himself onto it, because the beach was water about five feet deep. David had gotten his nice new camo overalls dirty; we were really glad that he didn't wash them right then.

According to the map, this chute was back above the northern arm of the lake. Everyone was leaving the cave, so we had to stop exploring shortly thereafter. We left what seemed to be a solidly cemented breakdown stretch of about 100 feet between where we had to come up and where we were stopped in our backtrack ducking back down by the Lake Room. The next exploration team will probably be starting at the Lake Room and working east.

When we climbed out the (according to Allan Cobb's disto) 148.04 feet to the platform, it was still cold. Kel was waiting to log us out. We had an excellent dinner of two different kinds of thick soup and cornbread, and another campfire.

Sunday, Aspen had homework and David had to leave so I became part of the LiDAR-schlepping team. What a totally fascinating piece of equipment! And so very heavy, too. Jerry Bellian, the LiDAR person, left after Saturday's session, so Rick Corbell and I worked with Steve Bryant, a geology student working with Jerry. Steve was great to work with, as he was very good at explaining what we were doing, including how the PDA and the LiDAR "camera" interfaced. I even got to poke that little PDA wand at set-up commands and make things happen. While we waited for the display on the LiDAR box to build a 3-D image of the cave walls we had time to ask questions and tell stories and rest up before the next equipment haul over guano-slick rocks and around wire, wood, and metal debris.

I was again with the last folks out of the cave before the safety team. The climb out was still 148.04 feet, and on the surface it was still cold. Kel was waiting for us, as he was again doing topside check-ins.

A View From the Top of Devil's Sinkhole

By Kel Thomas

Having been assigned duty as a camp manager, my first thoughts were of cracking the whip on the cooks, making sure everyone observed the rules and regulations of the TPWD and basically sitting around drinking hot chocolate. Boy was I wrong. As I soon realized, the "camp manager" keeps track of everything and everyone dropping the pit, maintains strict control of access to the platform, acts as part-time safety person, milks the cows and slops the hogs. It was great.

The weather Saturday was warm and sunny. Different song, different verse on Sunday. Cold, windy, cold, cloudy. Did I mention cold. Those descending the pit remarked after only 15 feet below the platform how much warmer it was. Gloating and very happy to underground were these fortunate souls.

Seriously though, the work being done is a ground-breaking endeavor. High technology meeting the timeless wonders of caves. The results of projects such as these has unimaginable potential. Allowing cavers and non-cavers to more fully appreciate caves and cave systems as living entities deserving protection and scientific research.

Am I glad to have participated? Absolutely, and look forward to the next trip sometime in January. It was a lot of work, but worth every second. There is always room for a few more.

A huge thanks to Allan Cobb for graciously granting permission to use his wonderful photos of the Devil's Sinkhole in this issue of The Hole News.

THE SAGA OF BRAD AND JANET PT.3 *submitted by Karsten D. Pohl*

[Last time: B.U.T.T. members come to Beaner's rescue. They open passage and get Janet into a cave.]

Janet, dry-mouth scared, was as close behind Ralph as she dared. Ralph was squishing himself through a shoebox-sized black spot on the wall. His feet disappeared and a muffled voice told Janet, "You're small, you'll fit."

Brad was caught in a knot of B.U.T.T. members, some of whom were wearing sarongs. Brad wished he'd had the nerve to crawl in, but figured with his luck he'd be behind the guy in the kilt, and he really didn't want an in-person answer to the question, "what's under those?"

An electronic "You Light Up My Life" broke into overlapping conversations.

"Janet, your phone!" The break in Brad's voice was caused by the caller ID, an exploding red heart with "Mom" on it. A low-voiced "Rats," preceded, "Hi, Mom, how's Nevada?" "You're not?" "Abilene?" Brad tried to keep the panic out of his voice. "Well, she can't come to the phone right now, I'll tell her. Tomorrow, huh?" "If Abilene's fun, we can wait." "Tomorrow. Yeah. I'll tell Janet." "Bye."

"Ja---net!"

"She can't hear you, dude, she's way in there. You look really white, yes you do."

"My mother-in-law-it's her dog, the lost dog, and she's coming here tomorrow, she's supposed to be on an old people bus headed back from Laughlin and she's in Abilene with a cowboy she found and they're coming here tomorrow oh, crap, what are we gonna do?"

"Janet's mom must be hot." "A cowboy, huh?"

"She's not hot, she's rich. Some idiot drove her 18 wheeler off the road and it rolled and she sued him 'til next Sunday and then she went to Laughlin and about tripled her settlement and she still looks like a truck driver but now she has boyfriends."

"Oh, wow, Ralph," was all Janet could say. Ralph said to the person behind Janet, "Doug, come up here."

Doug excused himself as he pushed past Janet and squeezed in next to Ralph, who was looking down. Way, way down. His Stenlight created black shadows between large rocks at the bottom. "A hundred feet, you think?" Doug responded with, "Janet, can you back out?"

"We're leaving?" Ralph laughed at the obvious disappointment in Janet's voice. "We'll be back," Ralph assured her, "we need gear."

Janet barely heard Brad's tale of impending Mom-attack as she watched people pull things out of the Power Wagon. The only thing she recognized was rope.

As soon as Brad stopped talking, Janet said, "Brad, don't worry. Come in with us-you'll love it!" But there were no spare helmets, now-everybody wanted in on the adventure.

Janet tried to follow what they were doing with rope; she'd already decided these people knew what they were doing but it all looked so dangerous. Doug was down the rope before Janet could see how he attached the thing they called a rack. Doug yelled back, "It goes and there's big air!"

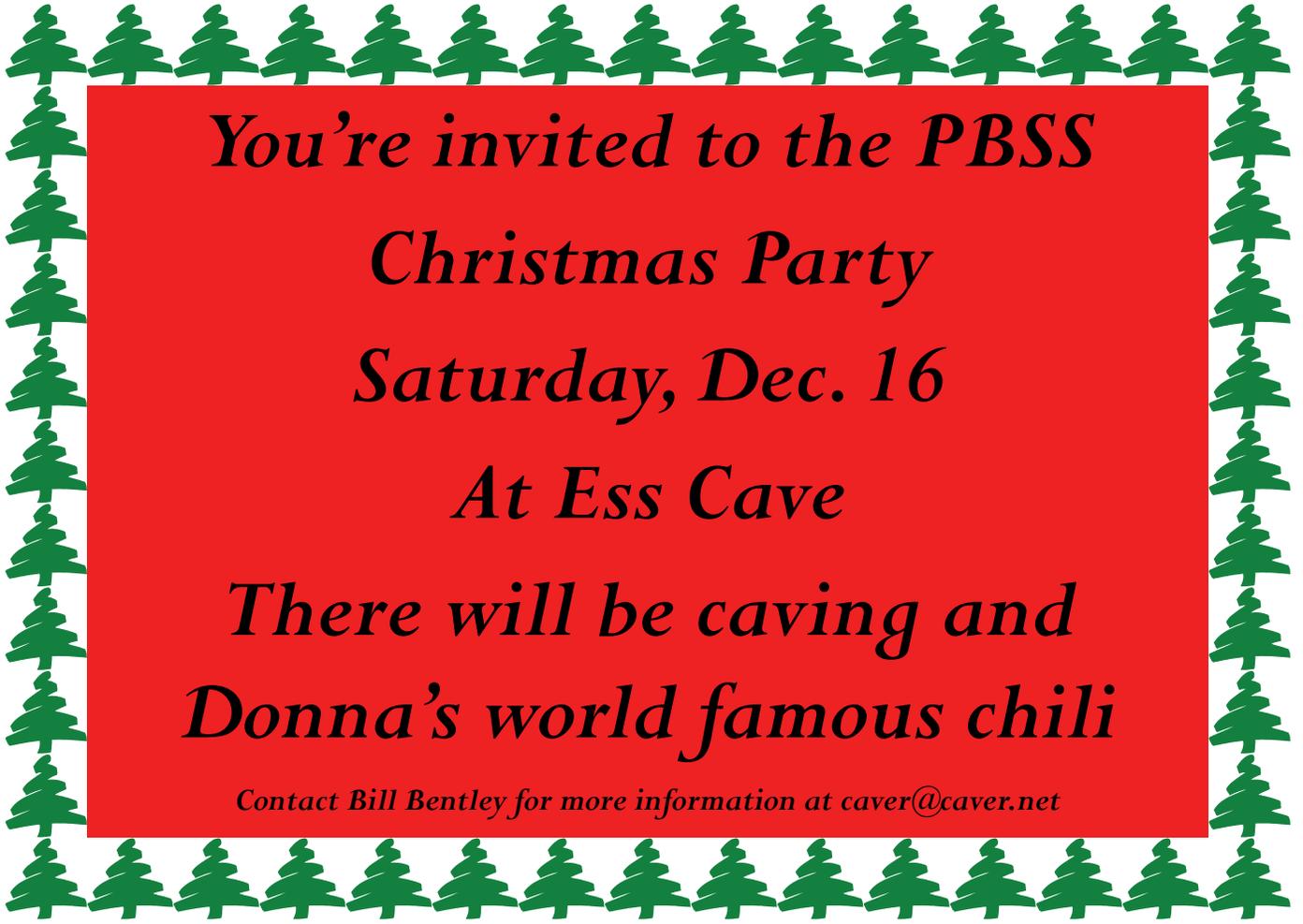
Again they were out. At first, Janet wondered why they stopped. Surveying she didn't understand, but finding the answer to the question, "who owns this?" before somebody was prosecuted or-this being West Texas-shot for trespassing was important. Janet swallowed her disappointment and listened as Doug describe to the group a squeeze through breakdown leading into a narrow passage that sounded similar to the one she had wiggled through.

Janet's eyes shone as she listened to Doug describe a room ten feet tall and about as wide, with waist-high ledges along both walls. The space between the tops of the ledges and the ceiling was filled with dripping soda straws, stalagmites, stalactites, and columns. Sparkling white and gold and pinkish curtains sprang from cracks in the ceiling and flowed down walls. A cough interrupted Doug's narrative and all turned to Brad, a frown between his eyebrows, who asked, "Where's the dog?"

Next time: If Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.

Remember, PBSS renewals are due in January

Cave Softly, Cave Often



*You're invited to the PBSS
 Christmas Party
 Saturday, Dec. 16
 At Ess Cave
 There will be caving and
 Donna's world famous chili*

Contact Bill Bentley for more information at caver@caver.net



Barry Hayes exiting the Blowhole.

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Yes Jacqui, there is a Santa Claus.



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