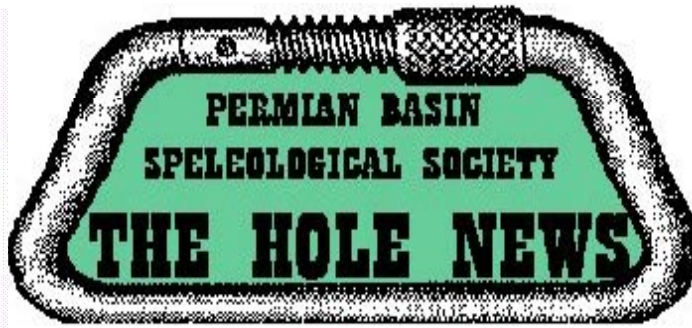


The Hole News

February, 2008

Volume 23 Number 2





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McKittrick Hill Caves Need Help

By Jacqui Thomas

According to an announcement at the Southwest Region's Winter Technical meeting in Las Cruces in December, McKittrick, Sand and Endless caves are in need of extensive restoration. The initial discussion—the horror—revolved around shutting them all down indefinitely. Jim Goodbar's announcement poked us out of the status quo on a few levels. There has been vandalism on the Hill, with it being especially severe in the Lily Pad Room in Sand, and repairs need to be planned and effected. There have been groups that received permission to go into McKittrick Hill Caves because they agreed to do clean-up work, and these groups used a few squirts of water then played the rest of the day/weekend. To be fair, some groups may not have understood exactly what was being asked of them in the way of restoration. Either way, the expected restoration and subsequent report to the BLM didn't happen.

For a long time these caves have been visited by people with helmets and lights and a sense of adventure, as long as they applied for and received permits, and some of these folks do not have exposure to the conservation information that so many of us carry

with us when caving. Traffic from groups, regardless of their knowledge and level of care, have worn on Endless, Sand and McKittrick caves. After adding together the impacts of vandalism, deception, ignorance and general long-term wear and tear, the threat of total closure became less a cause of shock and more a logical conclusion based on reality and frustration.

The original possibility of total closure has so far evolved into less shocking plan. For the near future, there will be no trips into Sand or Endless unless they are part of a restoration expedition. The details of how those will go are still being worked out by the Southwest Region, the BLM, and other interested and concerned parties. It so far looks like permits will still be available for McKittrick Cave, though. For PBSS these changes mean two things: a change in the nature of the Barry's Birthday McKittrick Hill trips, and an opportunity to learn sound restoration techniques and pitch in to help "our" caves.

The next meeting of the Southwest Region will be April 5th at McKittrick Hill and will include restoration planning and trips for restoration purposes. Cavers who don't know anything about restoration will receive training.

Upcoming Events

Feb. 12: PBSS monthly meeting at Murray's Deli. 7 p.m.

Feb. 23: Bradford Cave survey and Blowhole dig.

Feb. 16-18: Manhole dig and CRF at Carlsbad Caverns N.P.

Mar. 1: Lake cave. Contact Karen if interested.

Mar. 2: Mirror Cave resto. Both in Slaughter Canyon, NM. Contact Karen if interested

Mar. 15-16: Orientation to Cave Rescue at Colorado Bend.

Apr 5-6: SWR Spring Conference and restoration. McKittrick Hill

Apr. 4-6- TSA Spring Convention, Kerrville.

Apr. 12- Honey Creek tower repair.

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McKittrick Again

By Jacqui Thomas

The very nearly annual Barry's Birthday McKittrick trip, although lightly attended, was a huge success. The trip was held the weekend of November 17th, in part to add the Leonid meteor shower, supposed to peak that weekend, to the planned caving activities. We were joined by a new caver, Dustin Gashette, a student at Angelo State who works weekends at the Caverns of Sonora.

Barry and Donna Hayes and their camper arrived Friday afternoon, not too far ahead of me. I met Dustin in San Angelo and he followed me up the hill. We camped at the lower area, before the gate. The weather was unseasonably warm, with very little wind. Since the enormous rocks of the fire ring were surrounded by thick dried grass, it seemed smart to leave a fire for some other time. We spent the evening visiting and watching for meteors. Except for some tiny ones, the meteor shower didn't look like it was going to meet expectations.

The weather did not meet expectations, as we expected it to be cold and windy. The day started warm and the wind that had come up briefly during the night was gone. Donna had camp projects; Barry, Dustin and I didn't head to Endless until about 10:15. We were greeted by the official Endless Diamond-backed Rattler, who was not in his regular hangout behind the big rock inside the cave, but was about two feet to the left of the lock, outside the gate. Barry encouraged him to unwind and all five feet of him found another place to hang out. I had both hands on the lock, and both eyes on the rattler.

Dustin spent his Endless time exploring every place he could fit into, and

found some new ways to get to where we were going. We found a wonderful pit that was like a giant ant lion cone, easy to slide into but tricky to climb out. Fortunately, there was a skinny crawl into lower cave, which we explored extensively. We did not look for the newly discovered lower part that's accessed by the "P Trap."

We took our time, and popped through the keyhole to get out just in time to run into Karen Perry and David Bunnell, Karen's friend from Odessa, who were also leaving. We all went back to camp and Dustin was all kinds of fired up to get into another cave. Karen and David thought McKittrick sounded good and they had a handy dandy pre-tied handline for the upper entrance so we didn't have to brave the brush (and potential snakes) in the sinkhole entrance. They waited while Dustin and I heated and ate enough food to hold through the next round, and we headed to McKittrick. Barry and Donna stayed at camp, to make sure the meteor shower didn't go without an audience.

A quick trip into McKittrick Cave turned into a lot of wandering and inspecting and picture taking and by the time we were headed out we were well beyond our target time. Barry and Donna were tucked into bed and the rest of us did the same. Of course, first Karen and David had the long trip down the hill and back to Carlsbad, but they also had hot running water. Dustin gave up on his bivvy tent—something to do with insufficient padding on sharp rocks—and slept in his Jeep. Sunday morning he seemed surprisingly awake (and upright) for all that, and we were ready to go by the time the rest of our party arrived from the

Did you know?

The Permian Basin Speleological Society is a grotto member of the Southwest Region, and some PBSS cavers are individual members. Individual membership to the Region is \$10.00 per year and includes a subscription to the Southwestern Caver. Dues are \$1.00 for each additional family member (eg. \$11.00 per couple per year; \$12.00 per family of 3 per year and so on). Payment can be made for multiple years.

Send dues payment and information (name, address, phone number, e-mail address, NSS number, grotto affiliation) to:

Patty Daw, Treasurer
P.O. Box 1952
Carlsbad, NM 88221

Checks should be made out to the Southwestern Region of the NSS or SWR.

comforts of Carlsbad.

Our morning ended up being a lot more about ridgewalking on a beautiful sunny Sunday morning and a lot less about exploring Sand Cave. We left the Hill without ever finding either entrance to Sand, which caused Karen and me no little embarrassment, and I am still wondering why everyone let that go with so little teasing. Possibly because Dustin is a new caver he doesn't know how wide-open to hammering we were. David caves, but doesn't consider himself to be a caver, more of a photographer who takes pictures in caves, so perhaps the same went for him. Or perhaps they were just biting their tongues...

Anyway, we had another terrific Barry Birthday Trip to McKittrick Hill, may there be many more, and may they be well attended.

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Picture This



Bradford Cave rimstone ponds.



Jacqui and Sharon going through the guano.



Above ground splendor of Crested Butte, CO

