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Next Meeting of the PBSS

The next meeting of the Permian Basin Speleological Society will be held 3-9-04 at Murray's Deli located at 3211 W. Wadley in Midland at 7:00 PM.

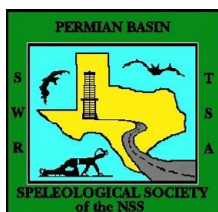
Our Agenda:

Meeting

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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 made out to and sent to: Michael Anderson. 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>.

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



President:
Barry Hayes
Vice-President:
Lori Hales
Secretary/Treasurer:
Michael Anderson



On Going Projects:

CRF Carlsbad Caverns: Expeditions usually occur on holiday weekends. Contact Barbe Barker <cloudcaver@pvtnetworks.net> or 505-687-4270. Or the CRF website www.cave-research.org

High Guads Restoration Project (HGRP): Upcoming events usually take place the last weekend of each month. For more information contact Susan Herpin <sherpin@caverns.com> or 505-785-2423.

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

Future Cave Trips, Events, and Projects:

*****March 13- CACA Rock Haul:** If interested contact Walter Feaster <wdfaster@cox.net> or 432-559-3297.

*****Denotes a PBSS Grotto Trip*****
*****Due to permit restrictions or other limitations Grotto members have priority*****

Trip Report

Schleicher County Ranch 02/14-02/15 2004

Jacqui Bills (trip leader), Bill Bentley, Michael Anderson,
all of PBSS

Jacqui was invited by a rancher she knows to look at “a low spot in a pasture that drains the whole area.”

Jacqui’s contact arranged for his father to meet the group on the ranch on Feb.14th. The day was blue sky and cold, in the 40s, with a steady wind. Much worse weather north & west did not allow the Midland contingent to travel. Jacqui met the rancher and they drove to the pasture with the hole Jacqui’s contact had described. The hole looks more like a long, rock-filled slot than a hole. They moved some rocks and found a lot more rocks. The crack looks promising, although the wind made it impossible to tell if there was air movement. They then drove on to another area the rancher thought might have something and he kindly flagged both places. The group was okayed to try again Sunday.

Sunday February 15th was a much warmer day and there was very little wind. Bill & Michael met Jacqui near the ranch headquarters entrance. Gear was moved into Michael’s vehicle, which is newer than Jacqui’s and needs more mesquite branch scratches. A release was left at ranch headquarters. After a stop to look at the crack, the group started toward the second area. Another sunken area that looked like a similar crack was seen on the other side of the road. These rocks have small green things growing between them, indicating both warm air and moisture, so this crack was put on the “explore further” list.

The group continued to the 2nd area, which contains a most unique stretch of thick limestone layer broken into large blocks. This is a sort of a ledge lining a draw, with one side being blocky and one not. The limestone block area is not long and according to the rancher is the only part of the ranch with such features. The rock is a very thick layer of exposed limestone that has cracked into large, somewhat square blocks separated by very deep cracks as much as 3-4 inches wide. The group also looked at an overhang in the other bank of the draw which sheltered a small hole going back under the rock.

The decision about this area is that it is not likely to have caves. The hole under the ledge, if it does lead to something besides a porcupine or a raccoon, would require a lot digging. The best theory of what caused the cracked block area is that water running in the draw eventually undercut a thick layer of limestone that dropped when it lost its support and cracked when it fell.

The group returned to the 2nd crack. It, like the 1st crack, is a slot tapering in as it deepens, and is filled with rock and some soil. Careful rock removal uncovered a large and fortunately very sluggish rattlesnake. There is a crack in the bedrock at the bottom but it was impossible to tell how deep it goes and at that point it is too narrow to allow person entry. This area was refilled.

The 1st crack looks quite hopeful. It is by far the largest, longest section of a line of sunken, rock-filled places on a NW-SE line. It yielded lot of rock and nice soil. After getting down 3-1/2 to 4’ deep there is a crack in the rock that offers glimpses of holes, the depth of which was hard to gauge. There was some air detected at the southerly end of this crack. Rocks were placed over the crack to protect livestock, but the hole is not completely filled so it is still a low spot.

The next plan is to ask the rancher if PBSS can come back as a club and move lots’o’rock, perhaps camping overnight and working for 2 days. Jacqui Bills



Coffee Cave/ Robinson's Cave

By

Rebecca Lee

Since moving from the Texas and Carlsbad Caverns areas many years ago, Tom Kaler and I have been off and on cavers. It seemed like wherever we lived either had a few caves nearby or none at all. We would try to go caving more often but it never worked out. However, we managed to find a cave or two in the areas we lived to provide us with just enough scratch for a caving itch.

In September of 2003, a few months after moving to our PERMANENT home in High Rolls, NM between Cloudcroft and Alamogordo, Tom obtained permits for Coffee Cave and Robinson's Cave in the Gila National Forest. Ah... to return to the smell of cave mud. It was a fun return to caving and even provided us with a hint of adventure.

Tom and I invited NTSS member Kevin Lillie to be our third and early one cool morning armed with a step log and photocopied topographic map we eagerly began our search for Coffee Cave. At least, I thought we had the step log. Turns out we didn't and thus began a search for a needle in a haystack. Only the area of the cave was circled on the faint map.

The trail to the cave began as a road and led us in to the forest for some distance before petering to no trail at all. But being optimistic cavers that we are, we assumed many times that a goat track here and a trampled spot there must be the trail. So, we kept going toward the area circled on the map. We passed a beautiful waterfall and several mines as we wandered in and out of the creek.

"It must be here. We're not too far," the guys insisted. But to me, it seemed we hiked too far. The more we climbed and the more we searched, the more obvious it was that we were looking in the wrong place. With late afternoon approaching, we decided to abandon our search defeated and disappointed. We still had the permit for Robinson's and we hoped we could find it. Though our instructions for the location of Robinson's were more vague than Coffee, a plain, clear trail led us right to it. We found Robinson's in no time.

The entrance to Robinson's is well hidden perched in a limestone bluff. It's a maze cave and threatens confusion around every corner. In fact, we placed temporary flagging tape to assure our safe return to the surface. There are few formations but a lot of mud, which inspired someone to start a mud city. There are the usual familiar characters and animals and things we couldn't identify but something that caught everyone's attention was a sculpture of the Twin Towers with a plane crashing in to it. It was sick but we resisted the urge to remove it lest it be someone's memorial.

Another sculpture we found was an enormous head. It was probably 3 feet tall and 5 feet diameter. Someone either spent a lot of time accumulating the mud or as we feared, built it over a stalagmite.

After exploring Robinson's, we discussed our options and agreed to ask the group who had the permit for Coffee the next day if we could join them. They agreed and one even took Kevin on an ATV to the entrance so he would know where to take Tom and me the next morning to meet them. Come to find out, they actually knew where the cave is having never been inside. Come to find out even more, we had hiked as suspected too far. The entrance to the cave is just off the road and our topographic map provided by the Gila was ridiculously wrong. And, the step log (had we carried it) would have only kept us from hiking so far. Why is it so difficult for Federal agencies to provide adequate maps and step logs?

Interestingly enough, the group we explored Coffee with was made up of German Air Force members stationed at Holloman AFB and their wives led by an American who worked on base for them. All were novices and as they arrived at the cave on their ATV's we were surprised to see that only two Germans wore bicycle helmets and the rest carried one flashlight with little else. Kevin, Tom, and I looked at each other in our caving attire. They looked under prepared. We looked over prepared but no one knew what to expect. Kevin opened the gate and the group with Tom and me in the tail climbed through the small entrance.

The cave's mostly horizontal and muddy but there are a few exposed climbs that everyone learned would have been less dangerous if only we had a handline. In fact, one man climbed in to a muddy pit and was challenged for some time to escape. He had a look of panic on his face but managed to stay calm. I think we miraculously avoided injuries that day only by the grace of teamwork. Each person to climb these slippery walls was aided by a cradle of hands.

After climbing a steep wall, the passages shrunk to crawling and most of the group was scared off. That was enough caving for them (a whole hour's worth). While they exited the cave, Kevin, Tom, one adventurous, 6'2", German named Oliver, and I continued on and found some of the most beautiful cave rooms I've ever seen. Coffee offers a good time for those willing to keep going. We found elaborate draperies, giant walls of flowstone, stalactites, stalagmites, columns, and more. We even found a small pool of water.

It was totally worth the effort and we spent hours enjoying the cave. Long after the others returned to camp, we were giddy as children on Christmas morning as we slid around the muddy passages looking for more presents. Oliver snapped photo after digital photo in every nook of the cave. He was obviously hooked on caving from that moment. He stuck with us, struggled to squeeze his huge body through tiny passages, and reaped the magical rewards of caving.

We exited the cave only to find a thunderstorm brewing. Oliver proceeded to ferry us to our vehicles one by one on his ATV. Then, he disappeared in the rain.

I think what I learned on the trip is this: don't trust Federal maps, be prepared for anything, and never underestimate the power of a cave to lure even the most unlikely candidates. Go to Coffee Cave when you can because like the high you get from a hot cup of Joe, this kind of Coffee will take you even higher.