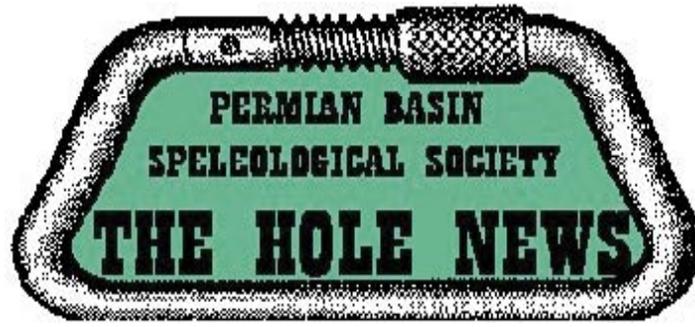


The Hole News

June, 2009

Volume 24 Number 6





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Chartered in 1984 as the 300th Grotto of the NSS

Volume 24 Number 6

Caving Community Loses Another Pioneer

Submitted by Jerry Atkinson

The caving world has lost one of its grand old gentlemen. Jack C. Burch (NSS #2175) passed away on Monday from complications due to Alzheimer's Disease. Services will be held on either Thursday or Friday of this week.

Jack's contributions to caving are legion and I'm not the person that should put them to paper as others were much more familiar with him and his accomplishments. I'm sure a more detailed accounting of his life will be forthcoming in the NSS News and Texas Caver. Until then, here are a few remembrances :

Jack started his caving career in Oklahoma as a young man in the 1950s. He is regarded by many as the Father of Oklahoma Caving and founded the Arbuckle Mountain Grotto, the first NSS grotto in Oklahoma, in the 1950s. Jack received the April 1956 NSS News and saw an article written by Bart Crisman describing a "Secret Cave" in west Texas with extraordinary speleothems. He was immediately interested and soon paid a visit to Crisman to find out more about the cave. The cave was Mayfield Cave (Caverns of Sonora) and Jack made his first visit there on June 15, 1957. After a few more visits to the cave, Jack decided that "conser-

vation by commercialization" was the only way to save the cave from future degradation. He and James Papadakis (NSS #3630) formed a partnership and negotiated a lease from the landowner, Stanley Mayfield. After conducting a transit survey of the main portion of the cave in 1959, construction of the commercial trail began in 1960. Visitors to the cave still marvel at the masterful engineering and meticulous attention to detail which was taken to construct the trail with as little damage as possible to the fragile speleothems. The cave was open for tours on July 16, 1960, less than 6 months since trail building began.

Jack's career as a professional commercial cave consultant and trail builder was not over. He built several more extensions to the trail in Caverns of Sonora, and was hired to commercialize Natural Bridge Caverns in 1963. Trail building began in NBC on March 7, 1963 and was completed to the Hall of the Mountain Kings by June of the following year, just in time for the first public viewing of the cave by attendees of the 1964 NSS Convention in New Braunfels, Texas. Jack assisted in the commercialization plans for the

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Scheduled Upcoming Events

June 27-July 6
Ft. Stanton Cave Project
Ft. Stanton NM
Contact John Corcoran at john_j_corcoran_III@msn.com

July 14
PBSS Monthly Meeting
7:00 p.m. Murray's Deli,
Midland, TX

July 19-26:
ICS/NSS conventions,
Kerrville, TX

Sept. 5-7
SWR Labor Day Regional
Pinon Cave

October 16-18:
Texas Cavers Reunion,
Paradise Canyon,
Medina River

Nov. 7:
Carlsbad Caverns
Rock Haul

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Rio Camuy Cave in Puerto Rico in the mid-1960s. In 1967, Jack served as the chairman of the Texas Speleological Association. He was made a Fellow of the NSS in 1969. He was subsequently honored as a pioneer of Oklahoma caving in 1986 by the newly formed Southern Plains Region of the NSS.

He will be missed.

Addendum by George Veni

Jack is also widely acknowledged

as the father of modern show cave development. As a caver, he understood that a cave is not best appreciated if the wires, bulbs, and other constructed features are exposed. He pioneered hiding the infrastructure, designing trails that are not obtrusive and minimize the need for railings, and he would not use colored light so a cave's natural beauty could shine through.

Funeral services will be at the

grave site in the town of Sonora's cemetery at 2 p.m. Saturday June 20, 2009.

Editors note: The passing of Jack Burch falls on the heels of the loss of another Caverns of Sonora discovery team member, Bart Crisman, who passed on March 7, 2009. A full obituary can be found in the June issue of the NSS News.

5-Mouth Cave Bites Back



Bill Bentley, Kerry Lowrey and Tony Abernathy make plans to begin a new dig in 5-Mouth

On Saturday June 13, Tony Abernathy, Bill Bentley, Kerry Lowrey, Jacqui and Kel Thomas braved record high 100+ degree temperatures for a scheduled trip to 5-Mouth Cave south of Sonora.

It was very quickly determined by all present that not enough cavers were in attendance to form a bucket brigade. This prevented further digging in the south part of the cave. For that to be accomplished efficiently, a total of ten or more cavers were needed.

However, a promising area in the northern extreme of the cave fell victim to the intrepid dirt slinging quintuplet.

The plan was to excavate a trench following the downsloping ceiling. Initially, the digging was fairly easy with the removal of loose sediment, but as the trench progressed, the sediment compacted and became laced with imbedded individual rocks, ranging from half dollar size to bowling ball size. The dig team continued for a total of



What was accomplished

approximately fifteen feet.

It should be mentioned that 5-Mouth Cave is approximately ten feet below the surface with five entrances located very close to one another. There is very little air circulation and not deep enough for cooler temperatures. Given these considerations, the decision was reached to return to 5-Mouth in the fall when the weather is cooler and ASU is back in session, thus providing more diggers.



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NSS Bat Experts to Testify at Congressional Hearing on Lethal Disease

Members of the National Speleological Society (NSS), the nation's largest cave exploration and conservation organization, will testify June 4 before two congressional subcommittees investigating White Nose Syndrome (WNS), a mysterious, deadly disease threatening millions of bats across North America.

Peter Youngbaer of Plainfield, Vt., the NSS WNS liaison, will address the U.S. House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands and Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife. The joint oversight hearing requested by lawmakers is scheduled at 10 a.m. Thursday in Room 1324 of the Longworth House Office Building in Washington, D.C.

The NSS and its members have been at the forefront of efforts to stop the spread of WNS and find a cure. At stake is the viability of the world's second largest order of mammals. Youngbaer is working with biologists, researchers and others on a coordinated response and fund-raising activities to fight WNS, which has killed an estimated one million bats in three years.

"As cave scientists, managers, explorers and conservationists, NSS members have been very proactive in researching this disease and attempting to halt its spread," Youngbaer said, adding that the NSS owns several caves where the disease was initially identified. "However, sufficient feder-

al funding of a comprehensive national research program is urgently needed to thoroughly examine the underlying WNS mechanisms and develop sound management solutions," he said.

Since its discovery in hibernating bats at a New York cave in winter 2006, WNS has caused the most precipitous decline of North American wildlife in the past century. Named for a white fungus found on affected bats' faces and skin, WNS has spread to nine other states in the northeastern and southern U.S., infecting six species of insect-eating bats. Infected bats' hibernations are disrupted, and they become emaciated after burning through fat reserves.

The NSS has raised more than \$55,000 from members for a rapid response fund for five critical research projects. Boston University biologists were awarded funds to study why many infected bats starve and whether their immune systems are compromised.

A third study focuses on hibernation arousal patterns. A 30-state sediment sampling project will investigate the suspect fungus. Another study covers decontamination techniques for caving and research gear.

Scientists believe more WNS deaths may lead to extinctions of entire species and more than quadruple those federally listed as endangered.

Agriculture could also suffer since most bat species feed on night-flying

insects – including crop, garden and forest pests – and pollinate beneficial plants and crops.

Previous NSS conservation efforts have included protecting bat hibernacula and helping pass the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act and other laws to preserve nonrenewable resources.

Youngbaer, president of the Vermont Cavers' Association, will testify on the NSS response to WNS and urge federal action and funding for the crisis. Another NSS member, Merlin Tuttle, will also testify before the House Natural Resources Committee subpanels. Tuttle is founder and executive director of Austin, Texas-based Bat Conservation International.

The Huntsville, AL based NSS, with approximately 12,000 members, was founded in 1941. The nonprofit corporation is affiliated with the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the International Union of Speleology. The NSS advances cave conservation, scientific study and safe exploration through training and education programs.

For more information, please contact:

- Peter Youngbaer – (802) 272-3802, wnsliasion@caves.org
- Gordon Birkhimer – (703) 573-4653, president@caves.org
- Jay Jordan – (214) 202-6611, media@caves.org

A Blast from the Past

From the archives

PBSS SPYLUNK MARCH - APRIL 1987

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January 24, 1987 Whiteface Cave, San Saba Co., Texas

Jack Carroll, Tom Carroll, David Laughlin, Pixie Clark, and Pat Copeland.

Jack and Tom arrived at my house near 8:00 along with Pixie and David. Gear was loaded and we headed for cave country. We arrived at the forman's house to let him know we were going to the cave. The weather was a little windy but it was nice and warm.

After securing the rope we checked for any varmints near the entrance. All the rains we have had was noticeable but not too bad. We made it down the incredible slope one by one for safety because of the loose breakdown and all the slick bat guano. After everyone was down the slope we all grouped together and headed to find the stream. This was only my second time to the stream, but we found it but the water had risen so high that I could hardly recognize where I had been before. We checked the stream out and rested for awhile. David and Tom checked out several leads but none appeared to really go anywhere.

Jack wanted to check out an area that he had taken pictures of over 20 years ago to see how it had changed. We found several rooms not on the map while looking. The cave had some breakdown since Jack was here before. The cave was really dripping and all the water has washed off bat guano from some really nice rimstone dams and beautiful formations. Small streams were running down the dams and running down a crack below. I saw parts of this cave that I had not seen in four visits before.

We slipped down a crack and crawled for a few feet and it opened up to a room eight feet wide and 20 five feet long and the floor was covered with cave coral. At the end of this room we climbed up over a three foot ledge and crawled up into a small room with some pretty formations. From there we crawled on down the crack but after a few feet we were looking down a small fracture that went down a long ways but this looked like a recent fracture with lots of small sharp rocks that could start falling so we elected to forget this one. This cave needs to be checked out more but David had to be back at 4:00 and Jack and Tom had a Scout Dinner at 6:00 and I had a dinner party at 7:30. This cave needs to be checked out more but David had to be back at 4:00 and Jack and Tom had a Scout Dinner at 6:00 and I had a dinner party at 7:30. There were several mounds of guano in this room. We saw several real good leads but we were running out of time so we started back up Pixie's favorite slope. Tom went up first followed by Pixie and David. Jack was putting some trash that someone had thrown down the hole in a small out of sight hole and covering it with some rocks. Sure hope people will learn not to put trash in caves. After Pixie and David reached the top, Jack and I made our way up and out.

We washed up the best we could and put on clean clothes for the drive home. Tom found a armadillo checking the trees and brushes around the entrance for his meal. Pixie and David headed for Brownwood while Jack wanted to check on his water tank at his ranch between Richland

PBSS June Meeting Minutes

Murray's Deli in Midland provided the usual backdrop of good food and drink for the PBSS June meeting.

President Jacqui was again MIA providing leadership in teaching young Boy Scouts how to jump off a rappelling tower and how to climb a climbing wall. That said, Bill Bentley ably presided over the meeting, which was brought to order at 7:03 p.m.

In attendance were: Tony Abernathy, Bill Bentley, Walter Feaster and Kel Thomas.

Bill presented the treasurer's report and as a result, PBSS has a grand total of \$726.44.

Old business included an Ess Cave recap.

New business included: A 5-Mouth recon by Kel reporting Jacqui and he visited 5-Mouth to determine if the flooding reported in April had indeed subsided and that the cave floor was dry enough to dig. Also Kel distributed the book "The Hidden World of Caves" by Ronal Kerbo. The book is a children's guide to the underground and will be distributed to schools, libraries and nature centers around the west Texas area.

The meeting was brought to a close at 7:20 with the glorious thud of the sacred ketchup bottle gavel.

Submitted by stand-in secretary,
Kel Thomas

Literary Corner

A wonderful new book, "Visions Underground - Carlsbad Caverns Through the Artist's Eye," by Lois Manno, is now available through Inner Realm Books.

"Visions Underground" traces the history of artists and photographers who have explored the awe-inspiring forms and colors found in Carlsbad Cavern.

The book includes images from the first caver/artist to capture the cave's mysteries in oil on canvas, Will Shuster in 1924, to contemporary, surrealistic photographs of cave pearls, soda straws, and pristine pools of blue-green water. With over 140 images and 177 pages, "Visions Underground" tells the story of how Carlsbad Cavern has inspired artists since the early days of the twentieth century.

It also documents the history of cave exploration at the park, and the evolution of cave photography. Some previously unpublished photographs of the cave by Ansel Adams are included!

In stock and ready for immediate shipment, "Visions Underground" can be ordered for \$18.50 per copy (New Mexico residents please add \$1.35 tax), and \$3.00 shipping for one or more copies. Payment can be made by check, Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or PayPal. Order your copy today!

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Photo Credits

COVER PHOTO: Lewis & Clark Cavern, Montana.
Photo by Kel Thomas

PAGE 3: 5-Mouth Cave.
Photos by Kel Thomas



PBSS Home Page
<http://www.caver.net/pbss/pbss.html>
Built and maintained by Bill Bentley

