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Contact the editor @ (915)559-3297 after 8 p.m. Fax line and voice mail @ (915)694-1824, any time. E-mail: <waltfeast@marshall.com>.



Next Meeting: PBSS

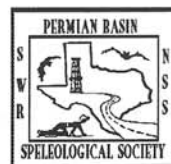
The next official meeting of the Permian Basin Speleological Society will be held on Tuesday, August 12, 1997 at 7:00 PM in the back meeting room of Murry's Delicatessen. Murry's is located at 3211 west Wadley, Midland, Texas.

Our Agenda:

Discuss the Labor Day Trip to Mexico.

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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>.



Caving in Namibia from Bill Mixon

For your entertainment, a couple of things from the expedition report "Otavi95" on caving in Namibia. I've reworded the English translations from the cave descriptions in the report.

Nosib Hole: The cave contains Sicarus spiders. A bite is supposed to kill an adult human within 24 hours by massive necrosis, i.e., gradual rupture of cells throughout the body. There is no known antidote; recommended treatment is amputation of the bitten limb.

Windgat: The cave contains black mambas, which are probably Africa's most poisonous snake. We found snake tracks in the sandy floor of the Mamba Tunnel. The tracks led into a small hole. Stones thrown into the hole fell a long ways. We smoothed the floor before we left, and the next day we found new tracks in the sand. We decided not to dig open the hole.

Future Cave Trips: Also other events from PBSS and other grottos.

- August 14, Carlsbad Caverns N.P. Bat Flight Breakfast: Thursday August 14, from 5 a.m. to 7 a.m. It cost \$5, and call first. Phone # (505)785-2232. Website @ <www.nps.gov/cave/>.
- August 31-September 1, CRF Carlsbad Caverns Labor Day Expedition: Contact Barbe Barker @ (972)594-1183 or <cavers@gte.net>
- August 29-September 1, TSA International Labor Day Project: Gruta del Palmito clean-up and restoration projects on Saturday & Sunday at Bustamante, NL. Caving in Precipicio and other local caves & pits on Sunday & Monday. Make this a 4-day weekend and see some really big caves.
- October 12-18, Lincoln National Forest, Capitan Area Expedition: This is a CRF Project. Contact Dick Venter @ (505)892-7370
- October 17-19, Texas Cavers' Reunion: Location to be announced.
- November 27-29, CRF Carlsbad Caverns Thanksgiving Day Expedition: Contact Barbe Barker (972)594-1183 or <cavers@gte.net>.

The Secret of San Agustin by Mark Minton

The following story appeared in the December issue of "The Texas Caver".

(Continued from last month's "Hole News")

Two days later when the next push was heading in I stayed back at the constriction, known as the Dust Devils, to set a charge to stabilize and improve the access to what was obviously going to become a major route in the cave. My altruism had a selfish motive, however, as I wanted there to be cover for the other blasting I had planned. I grabbed some Kinepak and went back to the maze to blow off a projection blocking another large piece of the hidden object. In spite of careful placement of the charge, the biggest chunk of rock ricocheted off the ceiling and smashed into the center of the exposed metallic area. The rock shattered into fragments, but there wasn't even a scratch on the metal surface. Emboldened by its resilience, I placed another charge against the wall, directly on one corner of the metal. When the smoke cleared there was again no evidence that the metal had been affected in the slightest. This was too weird! What could withstand a direct blast? As I cleared away the debris I made another startling discovery. A clearly machined edge and another curved metallic surface too perfectly formed to be natural. This was giving me the creeps! I closed up the passage again and headed out, thinking of the implications. On the way back through the Dust Devils I gathered up a little cap wire I had apparently missed before. It wasn't until I cleaned my pack out a couple of days later that I realized some of it was a different color than I had used.

That was the last trip I ever made into San Agustin. The Fool's Day Extension went on to reconnect at Tommy's Borehole, a known passage at -615 meters. Although we were a bit disappointed that it didn't go off into totally new territory, the new route cut access time to the bottom of the cave in half, which proved very significant on later expeditions. I wanted to share my secret with the others, but

thought the better of it. I knew this was too important to let any government official or local authority know about. And to what end? Most of them wouldn't believe it, and those few who did would try to cover it up and claim it didn't exist. A great caving area might be closed forever. Worse, the local peasants might be relocated and the whole area declared off limits. We all know how hard it is to get any group of more than two people to keep a secret, so I decided to let this one reside with me alone, even though that meant I had to endure all the psychological ramifications in silence as well.

When we got back to the States I discussed the lead with Bill Russell, discoverer of San Agustin. When he seemed less surprised than I expected, I remembered those bits of evidence that perhaps someone else had been there before us. Finally I asked him point blank, and he admitted that he too had found that lead, and the embedded metal, twenty years before. His reaction had been the same as mine, and his solution had been to blow the lead shut at the Dust Devils, hoping to seal it off forever. But he couldn't stop the air, and that had drawn us back. We shared the same mind-boggling conclusion: that an alien visitor had crashed into a shallow sea back in the Cretaceous Period, 100 million years ago. As limestone formed over the eons it engulfed the ship, preserving it, or parts of it at least, in solid rock. It is there to this day, but some things are best left undisturbed. Bill never went back to Huautla. And neither have I.

Mark Minton

"PBSS Home Page"

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

Web space donated courtesy of Bill Bentley and Apex 2000 IS

Check Out Mr. Bill's "Caver Net"

<http://www.caver.net>

TRIP REPORTS: and other lies and stories



LOCAL HAM REMOVES COAX AT CARLSBAD CAVERNS

By N5POB Bill Bentley

You might ask your self this, why there would even be coax inside Carlsbad Caverns? Trust me when I say to you that there was coax and that there is still a lot more man-made items in this grandest of all show caves located in Southeastern New Mexico.

Since 1986 with the exception of a few years that I missed, I have managed to attend a week long joint cave restoration field camp that is sponsored by the National Park Service, The National Speleological Society, and the Cave Research Foundation. The camp is primarily for the restoration of the cave to a state of near pristine and to try to undo damage by trail and cavern developers from the 1930's. In those days the same emphasis on cave conservation that we have today was simply non-existent. In past years we (being a group of 30 some odd volunteer cavers) have washed flowstone and formations along with a continuing effort to remove elevator debris (rock and clay) from a one time lunchroom. Its hard labor and is not without its thanks. This particular year I was asked to help the park remove some 23 miles (that is 121,140 feet to you and me) of RG-58U coax that was spread through out the cave. I along with Brad Blackburn an electrician at a coal power plant in Missouri, and Tom Bemis WB5CFT, the National Parks Service own electronic guru removed this cable because of the new CD player guides that are controlled by infra-red triggers. This would bring to an end a 17 year era of having hand-held receivers that utilized the coax and loop antennas strung along the 5 or so miles of paved trails in "Carlsbad Caverns".

The old system used a rack of transmitters that was located in the visitor center complex above the caverns and each one had basically 3 frequencies all below 127 kHz and each frequency had a different language consisting of English, Spanish, and French. Each of the 40 transmitters had 3 different loop recordings that were combined and placed on the coax signals and used some extremely long runs of Belden RG-58U. It branched out in two big trees like feeds with one going down to the big room and fanning out through the bigroom and half way up the main corridor and the other following the natural entrance in and meeting the other lines half way. However signal loss did not seem to be a problem. Once the signal reached the area it was amplified and went through a surge suppressor and into a loop of wire that effectively made an induction loop antenna. As long as you stood inside the loop you could pick up the desired signals on the simple battery powered hand-held receivers and outside the loop you did not. It worked remarkably well considering that not one of the BNC connections were soldered, they were twist on connections. Age and a ever higher maintenance as well as new technology called for the removal.

So we 3 started out on Monday June 16th and began at an area called the "Bottomless Pit" and worked our way back toward the "Lunchroom" and elevators and the main feed...

There was a main bundle of coax and each individual station fed off to its respective antenna loop. We coiled and wrapped all of the wires which were tangled with a poly propylene water pipe, a 2,300 Volt electrical primary cable, and secondary electrical light cables. Even GTE had a phone line down there.

There was a lot of damage from having all of this man made material in the cave. Besides the eyesore of it when you get away from what the visitors on the trail can not see, but there is the impact of having transformer oils spilled into pools and water in areas that is not natural due to leaky water lines. Then there is the cement and clay that is placed over the cables to keep them in place...

There is a high price to pay to make accessible a place that was never truly intended by nature to be.

It took us 1.25 days to remove all of the coax from the "Big Room" and it was fairly easy since for the most part the "Big Room" is fairly level. We used wheel barrows to haul up the wire via the elevators to the surface. Our mountain of wire outside the loading dock back of the visitor center grew daily.

It then took us 2.75 days to remove all of the coax from the main entry corridor. We finally resorted to using NPS provided expedition style North Face packs to haul the wire out since the trails were too steep for wheel barrows. This is where we were doing some old fashioned style caving which consisted of crawling and climbing up and ail over the place...I truly have seen more of "Carlsbad Caverns" on this trip than on any other. So the next time you are out that way and you decide to take the in-laws to "Carlsbad Caverns" take an extra look around and think about the work that has goes on and the things that are hidden just out of sight of the trail.

Submitted by Bill Bentley,
N5POB

Bill Bentley maintains an Internet site that is dedicated to caving <http://www.caver.net>

More Trip Reports:

Jemez Mountains Trip, June 1997

While on our way to the Jemez Mountains in Northern New Mexico for our long awaited honeymoon, Tom Kaler and I found ourselves in the Sandia Mountains after avoiding a traffic jam in Albuquerque. We soon realized we were on the road to Sandia Man Cave. Of course we had to stop and explore the cave (with a host of other passers-by). The maintained trail from the parking lot leads directly to a spiral staircase and platform fashioned against the cliff where the cave waits. Along the trail we heard words from people leaving the cave like, "Wish I would have had a flashlight," and "They're smart, they've got lights." I guess the idea of caves being dark places hasn't quite hit some people.

We climbed the stairs to the cave's entrance which is basically semi-circular in shape. The passage quickly led to a rock wall with a people sized hole gauged through it. We crawled through and were met by a fog of dust which previous spelunkers (not cavers) had kicked up. The floor of this cave is coated in a thick layer of dust. Inching our way deeper in to the cave, the only things we found were cans, bottles, a little breakdown, and more dust. We did see some fossils in the low ceiling but no formations to speak of. The entire 600 foot length of the passage is absent of any side passages to explore. No one can get lost or confused in this cave. At the cave's end, Tom snapped some pictures of us actually in this historic cave before we made our way out.

As we visited this cave we had an overwhelming sense of the anthropological significance of Sandia Man Cave. With artifacts as old as 10,000 years being excavated there, it's not a hard sense to have. There we were in a cave known to have sheltered so many ancient peoples before us and now we were briefly using that same shelter from increasing rain drops. The parallel of human needs was eerie but not surprising.

When the rain stopped, we searched the area for other rumored caves and actually found one that was little more than an alcove. It is a vertical slit leading to a fair sized, soot stained room (party cave!). Three passages stray from the room with only one being accessible. We crawled through to a dead end. That was it so we hiked back to the truck to continue our journey that had already taken a fascinating turn.

Walking through a man made, railroad tunnel in granite is hardly exploration but our stroll through Gillman Tunnels at the Guadalupe Box in the Jemez Mountains was an underground experience just worth mentioning. The two tunnels are large enough to fit logging trucks and are impressive among the cliffs and river that surround them.

From there we went in search of the new Spanish Queen Copper Mine near Jemez Springs. Marked on the topographic map as being on public land, we soon found that we needed to cross private land to get there. So, we opted to search for the old Spanish Queen Mine. Later a forester told us that the new mine collapsed and entrance was limited to 8 feet. We expected difficulty in finding the old mine and were surprised to just about walk right to it. The entrance was filled to a level where a crawl was inevitable. Once inside, we could stand and we carefully walked down the tunnel. We came upon two drifts heading in opposite directions only to quickly dead end. Farther back, the main tunnel ended at a length of 200 feet. Outside the mine, we found some interesting green and blue fossilized minerals in the tailings pile. We once again found ourselves in a place of great history albeit more danger when we visited this mine.

Cruising from one underground adventure to another, our next conquest was a small cave formed under the Soda Dam in the Jemez River Valley. The Soda Dam is a formation built of calcium carbonate from a spring. The dam is 300 feet long, 50 feet high, and 50 feet wide. It naturally blocks the Jemez River flow to a point that only a violent waterfall rushes through the remaining opening. Carved in the dam is a shallow cave dissolved from wind and rain. Inside the cave is one of the prettiest sights I've ever seen. A flowstone covered in tiny rimstone dams shines in a round, green algae coated room. The water flowing over the flowstone shimmers against the walls creating a reflection that looks metallic. It is very hot and humid in this cave and its small size doesn't keep a caver inside for long. This cave was a nice surprise but it was time to move on.

Jemez Cave sits 100 feet up in the side of a mountain directly across from the Soda Dam. The early occupancy of this cave dates back to 2500 B.C. and many ancient artifacts have been recovered. Even a mummified baby wrapped in a turkey feather blanket was found. It's a steep but short climb to this cave which is really a very large shelter. Soot covers the ceiling and the best thing about this cave is the view from it. We didn't linger long. We climbed around the mountain side to check out some dark holes and found one just big enough to sit in and drink a beer had we had it.

Racing down Highway 44 to our next cave, Tom noticed a couple of springs oozing from the ground just off the road. He's a kid in a candy store when it comes to these things so we had to stop and look. Sure enough not far from the springs was an opening in the side of a hill. We climbed to it, peered in, and decided we would come back later to check it out. We never did. Could've been another Lechuguilla.

On a caving roll, we finally made it to a cave that would be the biggest one we would see on this trip. Alabaster Cave is a true, gypsum cave. Close to San Ysidro, this cave was worn by a stream. Breakdown and a sandy floor are the facets of this cave. We did find another entrance and black arrows pointing out (we hoped) littered the walls. But other than seeming to never end, we

found little of interest. We were warned by John Lyles that when we came to the water passage to take the upper passage because the water is too deep but we never found the water. If we would have spent more time inside, we may have managed to find the water and also get ourselves lost. At dusk we were on the trail back to the truck.

The Tent Rocks near Cochiti Pueblo are tent shaped Fillers formed by wind and water. The volcanic tuff and pumice wore away around caprocks creating these unusual forms. In this area is a cave of prehistoric origin that is carved in the base of the tuff wall. It's a six foot climb up to this round entrance. Sitting inside feels like sitting inside an egg. Allegedly some of the many Petroglyphs etched on the walls are authentic but only an archaeologist would know (of course we knew the pornographic ones were probably not real). Nonetheless, the etchings are impressive and artistic. Soot covers the ceiling here as well. The view from this cave is spectacular and I thought it was a cool place to be.

Here's a little mention of the mines we found in the Bland Mining District. We found three obvious prospects to the side of the road. They went no where. Then we found a mine that went back 250 feet and had several short drifts. At the end of the tunnel we discovered the walls looked fuzzy. Further inspection revealed tiny crystal hairs growing from the mine's walls. It was an intriguing sight and totally unexpected. We found formations in a mine but few in the caves. Weird.

After exploring this mine, we were headed back to the truck when we noticed a faint road leading around the bend. Naturally we had to follow it. It took us to yet another mine. This mine had an old log frame partially collapsed around its entrance. Tom peeked inside before deciding to go in a short distance to determine the mine's safety. It really had the look of doom. He came to a pile of debris that left just enough room for a person to squeeze through but Tom being the smart guy that he is resisted the urge (I knew I didn't marry a fool). I'd never been in a mine before this trip and now I'm a veteran.

Later that night, we relaxed in the McCauley Hot Spring (it was really a warm spring). Just up the hill from it, two shelters fooled us into thinking they were caves. Turns out, the soot covered walls made the entrance look dark and deep. They didn't keep us from the spring long.

In the faint light of a fleeting sun, I was staring at distant plane going overhead when suddenly a familiar shape fluttered over. "That's a bat!" I screamed and probably gave the poor thing a heart attack. It was a creature of the night. We watched as the bat skimmed the spring catching insects and buzzed Tom's head a couple of times. Soon there was more than one and all we could do was sense them swirling around us in the darkness.

We visited Jemez Falls the following morning and basked in the beauty of nature. Guess what? Yep. Another shelter. Nothing to comment on except that the floor was water surging from the falls among huge boulders.

The last cave we saw is carved in the base of Tea Kettle Rock in Jarosa Canyon. This sandstone rock throws a narrow arch which strongly resembles the spout of a tea kettle. The cave is just a hole beneath the rock. A duck walk in one entrance had us crawling out the other. Footprints and trash told us we weren't the first ones to see inside. We snapped some photos of this unique rock and with that were done with our caving.

This trip was truly the honeymoon of two cavers. We sought underground experiences in an area not known for its underground beauty. Most people just see the surface of the Jemez Mountains but Tom and I went much deeper and came up with some unique memories.