

The Hole News

A photograph taken from inside a cave, looking out through a large opening. The cave's interior is dark, with silhouettes of rock formations and a tree branch visible in the foreground. The view outside shows a bright blue sky and a rugged landscape with several prominent, pointed rock formations or mountains in the distance.

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Christmas Party 2006

Jacqui Thomas reporting

Our Christmas party at Ess Cave, though lightly attended, was a success on several counts. We had guests: Intrepid President Bill Bentley was accompanied by Debbie Bentley; Kerry Lowery brought Hunter; and Carl Kunath joined us from San Angelo. Donna Hayes couldn't attend but sent representation with Barry Hayes in the form of a huge pot of excellent chili. Other attendees were: Lori Hales and Kel Thomas and I.

Part of the party plan was to get back to our rope going to the upper level, check the bolts, and finish replacing the old rope. Barry, Lori, Kerry, Hunter, Kel and I were on this expedition. Lori ascended to check things out and the bolts were still good and solid so she tied in the new rope with a figure 8 and screw link to each bolt. I climbed up after Lori to be the second pair of eyeballs. Everything looked good so we both changed over and came back down. We've been trying to get that replacement done for a long time so we felt pretty darned good. While we were there, Kerry and Hunter ascended and descended and Hunter was new to some of the rope work so that was fun for all.

Kerry had brought firewood and we got a good campfire going. Bill and Debbie arrived and Carl showed up shortly thereafter with some more firewood. We ate as much chili as we could and told caving stories between bites. Bill told us the pea plasma story, my very favorite tale from before I was PBSS. Sadly, Lori had to leave and she headed out before dark. Carl described Ess Cave from his memory and he also had a map he'd drafted. That Sul Ross trip happened before all the vandalism and trash and I really enjoyed getting a sense of the original beauty of Ess Cave. Carl brought out his three-ring binder proof copy of Fifty Years of Texas Caving and we had a great time looking up the history of PBSS and anything else we could think of to look up while we had the opportunity.

We decided to rig up and go back in before Bill and Debbie had to leave.

Carl brought his cable ladder so we rigged it into the first drop and I had my first in-cave experience with a cable ladder. I guarantee you I would have a much shorter list of vertical caves I have been into if cable ladder were the only way to do it.

Climbing out wasn't any easier for me with the ladder than climbing in had been. I made it, though, and so did everyone else. Hunter was a natural on the ladder. Bill and Debbie left and the rest of us moved in closer to the campfire for more stories and more looks into Carl's book. We finally banked the fire and went to bed, some earlier than I think we would have years past, but we're a long way from being armchair.

Sunday morning Kerry, Hunter, and Carl had to take off. Kel, Barry and I decided that before we left we'd replace the traverse rope at the entrance, which was cut when vandals retaliated for our removal of their entrance rope. I chimneyed from the permanent ladder to the entrance level and Barry and Kel threw the new rope over to me. The bar stock rings are still plenty solid and before long we had our traverse line back and I was able to clip to it and take the short cut back to the entrance. We all finished packing up, locked the gate, and headed home, having enjoyed one more successful Ess trip. May there be many, many more.

Upcoming Events

Feb 10:

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

Feb 16-18

Big Manhole Dig
March

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

April 13-15: TSA
Spring Convention
At Albert, TX PBSS
will do registration

May 12-13

Ess Cave open house.

June 15-17

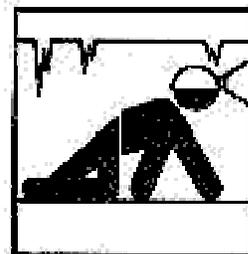
Guad trip

July

NSS convention

Nov.

McKittrick birthday trip.



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Blast From the Past

December 29 & 30- Amazing Maze Cave, Pecos County, Texas From the Jan. 1985 edition of the Spylunk newsletter.
Participants-Bill Bentley and Coyote Coston (Report by Bill).

We left on Friday night, loaded down with gating materials for the entrance. We arrived about 10:00 pm and started chipping and hammering at the constrictions of rock in the existing man-made entrance. Bloody knuckles and busted fingers were the price for six inches more clearance. Blasting would help make it even larger. We left at 3:30 am Saturday morning and drove to Ft. Stockton and camped in Dennis Haynes' front yard. Next morning we woke and discussed the weekend activities with the Haynes brothers; Glenn, Haley, and Dennis. We then filled our water barrel and purchased cement, as well as clay for blasting.

After arriving back at the cave at noon, we chiseled and chipped for another hour, then set the explosives with a three minute fuse. After the blast, a close inspection revealed that the explosives only moved one rock, but loosened the surrounding rock for easy hammering. Altogether, we moved about a hundred pounds of rock and enlarged the entrance about a foot.

Coy and I installed the gate and cemented it in place. Even considering Murphy's Law it looks reasonably nice. It was about 11:30 pm when we went to sleep on Saturday night. Exhausted, we awoke and cleaned up the construction sight and departed at 9:00 am Sunday morning.

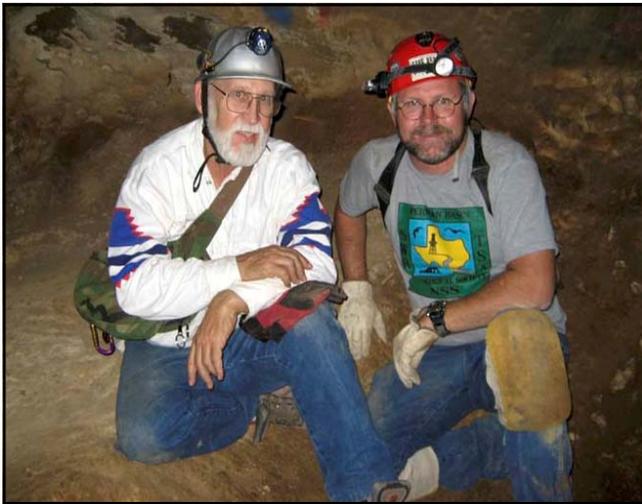
Picture This



Watching the sun set over Irion County after dinner.



Jacqui dropping the entrance to Ess Cave.



Carl Kunath and Bill Bentley in Ess Cave.



Hunter Lowery and his flaming marshmallows.



Lori Hales and Barry Hayes enjoy the afternoon sun.



Entrance guard dog.... Grrrrr!

Big Bend National Park "Mule Ears Trail" Area

1-26-07 to 1-28-07.

Patrick Dearen *Trip Leader*, Richard Galle, Bill Bentley, Steven Shafersman

Report by Bill Bentley;

Planning:

I was ashamed to find dust on the top of my back pack as this was a testament to the fact that it had been over 10 years since I used this pack. I had to end up buying a new camp stove and got one made by Scorpion as there was no longer any places to buy fuel cans for the very small and compact "Hank Roberts Mini Stove and Lantern Combo" I had used a long time ago. I also bought several cans of LP fuel in case the same happens again. I also bought a new back pack cook kit. My meals were to be MRE's and a few cheese and crackers. I took 1.25 gallons of water for the whole trip. A precious bottle of Gatorade. Plenty of spiced cider, hot chocolate (* no weevils) and coffee singles. My crank up emergency SW radio and a good book to read. New Vasque boots were also purchased weeks earlier and they were readily broke in.

The Trip:

Pat picked me up at 8:50 AM on Friday January 26th, 2007 and we headed to Odessa to meet both Steven and Richard. It was chilly out at around 39 degrees. While in route Richard called and said he would meet us there. We found Steven waiting on us and soon had him following us and leaving Odessa around 9:20 AM or so. We drove through Crane Texas and Pat and I stopped and visited one of Pat's old friends and cowboy Paul Patterson at a nursing home. Steven went ahead and we would later meet him at Panther Junction Ranger Station and Visitor's Center. We left Crane and at around 11:30 AM we made it to the Dairy Queen in Ft Stockton, Texas for our last real meal for the next few days. Yeah Hamburgers!

We arrived at the Persimmon Gap Ranger Station and Park entry point around 1:30 PM or so and the person there could not give us and park permits or passes. So we drove on to Panther Junction Ranger Station and got our park entry passes and met Steven who informed us that Richard has our back country camping permit and was about 30 minutes ahead of us. At around 2:45 PM we finally made it to the Mule Ears trail head and seeing Richard's truck parked there we knew he was at the very least... on the trail. I had all of my gear together and started down the trail. Steven was soon behind me and followed me almost the entire way to our camp site. Pat was about 30 minutes behind us and by around 5 PM we all had made it to our desert camp ground area. Steven, Pat and myself were all camped with 100' of each other while Richard camped closer to the mule ears base some 300 yards away. The trail on the way in was shorter than I had remembered from my 4 previous trips there. One being a hot July solo trip. All in all about 4 miles and the trail had several ups and downs that were not too bad until just before the end where the trail takes a 300' or more drop into the lower desert area that makes Mule Ears at 3,881' above sea level seem to stand so tall. Each got his own tent up before dark and soon the stoves were going in full force heating up good hot trail foods. I had a MRE Beans and wieners without the beans, a MRE fruit cup in a soft can and hot spiced apple cider. We made a makeshift candle campfire near a bluff in the sandy creek bed. It gave off a lot of light during the night but very little heat. The candle fire discussions from both Friday and Saturday night are best left untold, I will elaborate on some a little later on and besides you should have been there if you really want to know the fine details. Steven called it quits first at around 9:00 PM and I soon followed and crawled into my sleeping bag around 9:30 PM. I found that my 4 compartment sleeping pad had been stuck by a cactus and 2 of the compartments would not hold air. I made a make shift pillow out of my heavy and light jackets. I had my crank to charge emergency radio and enjoyed listening to some far off AM stations till I drifted of to sleep. I slept in 1 to 2 hour increments tossing and turning from one side to the other.

Saturday morning came with not so cold weather and I would guess it to be in maybe the high 40's and soon the sun was drifting down the ears of the mule and it was getting warm quickly. After hot coffee and yummy hot oatmeal, then we all 4 were on our way to the box canyon and the famed waterfall hidden in the treacherous mountainous terrain of rocks and cactus. The canyon is about 2 to 3 miles cross country and about 11:30 we were near the edge and you could hear water dripping and making a strange but welcomed noise for the desert. Once down the sides of the outer regions about 35' down we were soon following along a small stream which was only 2' wide but was moving rapidly. The previous trips here it was not flowing except at the cave which lay ahead. We did the same mistake that has been made on each and every trip to this canyon, we came to where the sides became too steep to boulder scramble. Thinking back Pat and I seemed to remember up and over to the right side of the canyon. This was very scary and what there was of the trail was nothing more than a scree slope of loose rocks and dirt that would with one small slip send a person tumbling down about 100' and then a free fall drop about 30' to your death or want of death from the misery. Pat and I negotiated the way and soon Richard and Steven followed. There it lay before us a cave which is about 100' wide and about 60' inside the canyon wall and to the right side a 100' waterfall which was cascading down in sheets and a spray into a small pool and from there the water back flowed into the cave and out the other side. The cave was a true shelter in every sense of the word but it had a huge rock in the middle making an entrance on each side. Water went in one entrance and out the other and on down the canyon, flowing over rocks and through the gravel to at least 2 other 20' to 30' water falls to where it made its way maybe 3/4 of mile out of the canyon where the sides get shallower and the desert comes to meet the edge. It stopped abruptly and disappeared into the gravel stream bed.

Continued on page 7. *A picture of the mule ears grace this month's cover.*

THE SAGA OF BRAD AND JANET PT.4 *submitted by Karsten D. Pohl*

[Last time; The cave goes, Beaner is still gone, and Janet's mom approaches]

The Barely Underground Transvestites and Transsexuals (B.U.T.T.) grotto members were loading gear into their power wagon. The driver and most of the occupants did have jobs. Doug assured Janet, fascinated by a sport for which she didn't need SPF 60, that he was only a hundred miles away and he would come back and help them to explore the cave. This week, Janet had two responsibilities: She needed to find and talk to the owner of the property, and she would coax Brad into helping.

Men and women and men who looked like women hugged Janet, tried to hug Brad, apologized for not finding the dog, and handed Janet slips of paper with email addresses and cell phone numbers. Now that she'd caved-yes, she had caved!-with Ralph, she found it hard to believe that she'd thought he was a girl. Well, maybe from the back, in that sari, but.

The power wagon had barely turned the corner when a white Dodge pickup turned into the trailer park and a middle-aged brass-blonde woman in tight jeans and a crop top, well-muscled and the kind of top-heavy that brings to mind pixilated before- and after- photos, jumped from the passenger side and wrapped her tattooed arms around Janet. She looked over Janet's shoulder at Brad (he was sure her look was accusing), and used a chirpy voice to call Beaner. Mrs. Esserherff's look was accusing as Janet explained Beaner's disappearance, even though Janet insisted that Beaner's escape was her fault, not Brad's.

"Let's see this dog eatin' hole in the ground!" Janet followed her mother to the driver's side of the pickup, where she was introduced to Tex while she tried to explain to her mother about helmets and lights and not going into caves alone. "Tex, I'm takin' your bullridin' helmet," and she slapped a compact hardhat onto her head, lifted the faceguard, rummaged in the truck bed toolbox, pulled out a flashlight and said, "Go."

Janet found out that her mother carried a derringer when her mom's back pocket hung itself up on the ceiling just past the entrance and Janet heard the distinctive sound of cocking hammer. "Somabch, I'm stuck." "Mom.

Ple-heeze don't move." Gingerly, Janet unhooked the pocket and lowered the gun's hammer to the accompaniment of Mrs. Esserherff's curses. Yapping interrupted the string of curses, which turned to little kissy noises and baby talk. Janet wasn't in the cave yet and Beaner was snuggling into Mrs. Esserherff's cleavage. "Dang, girl, why couldn't you do that?"

Janet's tongue hung up on several different responses before she said, "What do you think, Mama?" "I think that boy's lucky. This time." "No, the cave." They were standing by the hole and Janet's mom stopped kissing Beaner long enough to ask Janet to tell her about it. By the time they were back at the trailer, Mrs. Esserherff showed she understood Janet's bug by offering whatever money she might need to further her dream, which was to own the cave.

Next time: Janet gets her cave.

Other News, Views and General GIGO

Amazing Maze:

Over the weekend of Jan. 27th, approximately 15 cavers from all over the state descended upon Amazing Maze cave.

The TCMA event led by Peter Sprouse, was the re-scheduled trip from the week before following the ice and snow storm that left west Texas stranded.

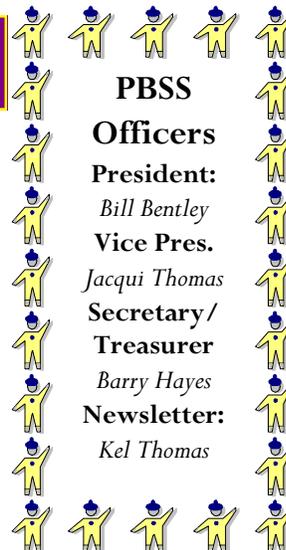
Kerry and Hunter Lowery, as well as Jacqui and Kel Thomas joined in on the survey trip. Five teams of 3 spread throughout the cave's capillary system in order to re-survey and more concisely map the complicated cave. Other trips are planned in the near future.

TSA Spring Convention:

As you might know, our own Jacqui Thomas has been elected to the illustrious office of Vice-Grand Poobah for the TSA. This year, the convention will take place in Albert, TX, Apr. 13-15. Albert is located 6 miles south of Stonewall, which is between Fredericksburg and Johnson City on Hwy. 290. PBSS has been asked to provide help with registration. Let's all give her our support and encouragement in this important event.

Ft. Stanton Cave: The Domenici bill creates a Fort Stanton-Snowy River National Cave Conservation Area to protect, secure and conserve the natural and unique features of the Snowy River Passage and the Fort Stanton Cave in Lincoln County. S.260 authorizes the Bureau of Land Management to develop a map and legal description of Fort Stanton Cave, and to develop a comprehensive, long-term management plan for the cave area. *The complete story will appear in next month's Hole News.*

Thanks to Carl Kunath and Bill Bentley for the pictures appearing this month.



“Mule Ears Trail” from pg.5

After an our or so and a snack lunch of fruit bars and water we got some neat waterfall group pictures and Steven and me left with Richard and Pat following about an hour and a half behind us. At the point where the water stopped I left the canyon and went cross country and with dead reckoning made my way straight to the Mule Ears trail and back to camp. Steven followed the dry creek bed and actually made it back to the trail before me. Cactus dodging and a nature call slowed me down.

Once back at camp around 3:00 PM, I settled in for some reading of my book about Charles Goodnight and soon was overtaken by a well deserved nap. I awoke and snacked on a cheese and crackers and water as mid afternoon snack. After Richard and Pat returned I discovered that Pat had of all things went for a solo walk. Pat enjoys walking and hiking always makes him restless so he has to walk to calm down. Steven borrowed my book and read at the wash and high bluff area. Richard was walking the hills at the base of the Mule Ears and I joined him in a philosophical talk about people and places we have known or know in the last 25 years or so. Yep!, youth is defiantly wasted on the young! Late afternoon in January in the high desert of the Chihuahua is sure one neat place to be. I can't think of a better place to be in the so called dead of winter.

Saturday evening we each gathered by my tent to cook and have our meals. I had my corned beef hash and Steven had his snacks of fruit and hot tea, Pat had his oatmeal in a baggie while Richard had summer sausage and cheese with crackers. Richard showed us the soon destined to be an Olympic challenge of cheese block hurling. As twilight crept in we each made use of the setting sun with cameras snapping away to get pictures of the sun and all of it's glory and magnificent of reds, oranges, pinks, and pastels painted on the far mountains to the South and West of us. The Mule Ears shadows were casting the outlines longer and longer as the sun set. Before long it was dark and the clear cold sky revealed the stars one by one. The moon high overhead, it was so high overhead that Pat could not see it and made the unforgettable statement "Where is the moon?" uh look up Pat! Sorry could not let that one go by. The conversation went from jokes to theories, UFO's were explained. The DNA and existence of all living things. Time-travel, science fiction, cattle drives, and mankind and his ultimate purpose. You can learn a lot sitting in a stream bed in the desert on a Saturday night in January with good friends and a single candle to bond the memories and friendships. I for one was glad I had come on this trip.

With the night seeming to be warmer than the one before or maybe we were just getting used to it, so at around 10:30 PM I went off to crawl into my sleeping bag and commence the endless tossing and turning that I will call sleep and wait for first light and dread the trip up and out. It's cold and as I stretch up I feel ice inside the tent...Condensate from my breath had froze on the inside of my tent. It had to be 30 degrees or somewhere below freezing. 5:30 AM I covered up and drifted off to sleep again...

Sunday morning when the light was good enough to see by I clamored together my cold clothes and mustered energy to get dressed and go out and start my camp stove. Warmth was on my mind and a hot cup of coffee would really hit the spot. After a bit I had it brewed, drank and my hot oatmeal consumed. Pat soon joined me, followed by Steven. Just as we were all finishing our breakfast and welcoming the rising sunlight and its great warmth, Richard showed up fully packed and ready to hit the trail early as if it would be too hot too quick which was not to be the case on this day as a cold front had moved in during the night.

He visited for a minute or two and started up and out the trail back to the place we left only 2 days before but it seemed somehow much longer. I packed my sleeping bag, tents and other stuff into my pack and soon was on my way followed by Steven and 30 minutes behind him was Pat. I stopped many times on the way out. Admiring nature, the desert, the wonder, and the beauty of it all. It maybe desert but certainly was not a desolate place and was not devoid of life. So I made it way past Mule Ears Spring and all the 4 miles of the way back to the car at the parking lot at 12:20 PM Sunday afternoon. Richard had already gone.

I nibbled on cheese crackers and cold Gatorade I had waiting for me at the car. I rested in the seat of the car and welcomed the soft seat to my aching back. A few people drove in and looked out the vehicle windows and drove away and down the road at the trail head parking area. I knew I had seen far more than they would, at least of this place. Steven soon showed up followed by Pat and at 1:00 PM we all drove away. We made a final stop at the Ranger station to turn in back country permits and use the facilities. From there it was on to a waiting cheeseburger at the Dairy Queen in Ft. Stockton. Would it really taste that good? I think so and it did to me. I got home at 5:00 PM ... I can't wait to go back.....

Post Mortem: Lessons learned; If it is not a back pack tent, then it is going be heavier. I also believe that going up hill is easier than down hill. Never pass up the opportunity to stop and rest, take in the surroundings and take a few pictures. A chair to sit and rest with a firm back on it would have been very nice. Smaller lights and ones with working batteries are a good thing. [Politics and religious discussions don't belong on the trail!](#)

* I mentioned to Pat many years ago that weevils would infest his hot chocolate and make holes in the paper wrappers. He had never noticed this until I told him about it.... Its a longer story best left for another campfire, but it is known they are a good source of protein.

The End



“PBSS Home Page”
<http://www.caver.net/pbss/pbss.htm>
 Built and Maintained by *Bill Bentley*

