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October, 2006

## Excerpts from the Sept. Big Manhole Dig Trip Report

### From the trip report of Stephen Fleming

...A couple of significant things occurred this weekend. First, we have finally picked up the airflow again at the dig face. We had gone several trips without airflow as we maneuvered around the large boulder above us. This is a very good sign that we continue to progress in the right direction. The second thing of significance is that the character of the dig has entirely changed. Since the beginning of the current dig, we have been cracking out heavily cemented breakdown. When we decided to bypass the large boulder we dug in mostly compacted sediment. This trip we got into large, relatively free blocks of breakdown. At times it was so unconsolidated that it could be dislodged with just a crowbar. That's a first; not needing the demolition hammer... *Continued on page 2*

## Blowhole Dig Report

Trip participants were Barry Hayes, Bill Bentley, Lori Hales and her sister Landa Rodgers, Mike Gray, Jacqui and Kel Thomas.

Good progress was made on what has been known as the "Blowhole" dig. A lot of dirt, rock and fill material was removed. The passage is still rather tight, but after the weekend of work, it is a lot more manageable. The cave measures approx. 45 feet. Since it measures over 5 meters in length it can now be officially considered a cave. It remains un-named at this point; however, the landowner and PBSS are taking the naming task in hand. Much more work will be needed to determine the extent of the cave. Sporadic air flow continues to be encountered.

As far as tangible progress goes, we have gotten to the point where four people, two digging, and two along the passage for bucket brigade, are needed.

As always, we enjoyed great food, great companionship and a great landowner host.

Due to hunting season, the next dig will probably be scheduled for February. Watch for the dates to be announced.

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### Upcoming Events

Nov. 4-5: Carlsbad rock haul. Contact Bill Bentley  
 Nov. 10-12: Big Manhole Dig [swcaver@warpdriveonline.com](mailto:swcaver@warpdriveonline.com)  
 Nov. 14: PBSS monthly meeting. 7:00 p.m. Murray's Deli. 3211 W. Wadley, Midland, TX  
 Dec. 16: PBSS Christmas Party at Ess Cave.

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- PBSS**
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***Big Manhole— continued from page 1***

While no one kept count, I think everyone would agree that at least 300 buckets of fill came out of the hole. A couple of rounds of mucking produced at least 50 buckets each. And, unlike prior digs, we were repeatedly getting very large rocks out that required supplemental breaking to fit them in the buckets. In a switch from everything before, we spent more time cleaning up after each shift than we did digging. The stuff was coming out that fast and the bucket-rope-clipper-upper usually had 4 or 5 buckets waiting to go up. ...we were yanking a bucket out of the main shaft every 40 seconds or so.

The excavation ended with a spacious chamber, wider than our usual work. Part of that was to stay away from the right wall, which is composed of more seemingly un-cemented fill. We surveyed the extension and, if I recall correctly, are now headed roughly at 256 degrees and that points us towards the large void John McLean recorded in the resistivity survey a while back.

Things are looking really good. The next dig is over the Veteran's Day weekend, November 10, 11 and 12. The federal holiday is on Friday, so we will do a 3-day dig with work commencing on Thursday afternoon, the 9th, for those who have Friday off.

One major change will occur for November. The dig is getting so long and logistically difficult that we are now going to require a minimum of 8 confirmed attendees to proceed. At the end of work today, we were down to 6 participants and it was very inefficient not to mention pretty exhausting moving debris through 2 horizontal tunnels and 2 vertical shafts....

*Editorial 2 cents worth- Sounds pretty cool. You never know, the November trip may be the one that breaks through. Jacqui and I are going to be there for this dig, for sure. Come join us!*

## PBSS October Meeting

The October meeting was poorly attended, but there were enough for a quorum. So we voted on the motion to allow PBSS to pay for the officers board meeting in Tahiti for November. Meeting started promptly at 7:03 p.m. with a ritual banging of the sacred Ketchup bottle!.

We discussed stuff. The Meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by

Bill Bentley

2006 PBSS President

P.S. There was also talk of:

\* The upcoming TCR Oct 20-22 2006

\* The CR Dig Project Oct 28 2006 (**contact Barry Hayes**)

\* The Carlsbad Caverns Rock Haul Nov 4th 2006 (**I need to know how many, so far we have 5 confirmed and 1 maybe. Not enough to make a trip**)

\* Big Manhole Dig Project Nov 11 2006

\* PBSS Christmas Party Dec 16 2006 at ESS Cave (**We need firewood**)

And a motion was made by me and was seconded by Barry and passed to allow Kel Thomas to secure advertising for the newsletter. He can set rates, sizes and stuff as he sees fit.

## Reminder

PBSS memberships are renewed in January.  
Look for renewal forms with the next newsletter. .

## Texas Cavers Reunion Wrap-up

The 2006 edition of TCR, held over the weekend of Oct.20-22, brought out over 360 hardy cavers. TCR featured not only the usual craziness and good times, this year there was actual caving. Honey Creek Cave, the longest cave in Texas, was front and center, making for a welcomed diversion. Honey Creek is unique in the fact that most of the cave is actually a subterranean river. There are at least two entrances; one being an artificial shaft descending 144', in which you descend by means of a cable system powered by a tractor. The other is the natural entrance, a walk-in that becomes very wet, very soon. **See trip report.**

PBSS members making the trip were Bill Bentley, Walter Feaster, Jacqui and Kel Thomas. It was great to see Walter and spend great times around the campfire with a legendary caver such as Walter.

By all reports, this year's TCR was another success. TCMA, TSA, and the TCR committee reported profitable fund-raising activities. Vendors such as Bob and Bob, GGG, Inner Realm Books and the rest enjoyed brisk business.

The weather was decent most of the time, people were friendly and the bon fire huge. What more could you ask for?

## *Honey Creek Cave Trip Report*

*Submitted by Jacqui Thomas*

On Saturday morning of TCR, droves of cavers headed to Honey Creek Cave. Some folks went to the shaft entrance to be lowered for a through trip, a little over 2 miles. This distance is traveled mostly by swimming, and the water is 68-70 degrees, so the through trip requires wetsuit, flippers, some kind of floatie, and a water-proof way to carry snacks, spare batteries, and other stuff. The shaft entrance is not far from where we were camped, but entering this way is an immediate dunk. Lots of cavers passed wetsuits around camp, but the one someone brought for Kel didn't work out so Kel and I decided to go into one of the natural entrances, as a sort of a reconnaissance mission for a future through trip. We would gear up as best we could and go in as far as we could before fears of hypothermia or drowning turned us back.

Kel is a strong swimmer but didn't wear any special water gear and was wearing real boots. I am not particularly fond of swimming but I wore a Farmer John shorty with polypro long johns and top, fleece booties under Teva water sandals, and rubber gloves. I therefore had the edge warmth-wise. I had added my kneepads, both for additional warmth and because I had no idea what I would be bumping into.

There are two natural entrances within yards of one another, both about two miles from camp. Barbe Barker, Joel Williams, and Kevin, another caver from Cloudcroft, NM, headed out at the same time; we planned to stick together as long as our warmth held out. We all opted for the entrance you get to by climbing over some boulders, as the other one required wading into the spring through a pool of water, then ducking under. I don't think I was the only chicken on that one.

We walked in: It was walking—soon wading—passage, about 12 feet wide, rocky, shelved walls with crusties of calcite. There is a twilight area but we turned on our lights soon after entering. At about the same narrowing bend in the passage where we ran into a videotaping group from San Diego, the wade suddenly and unexpectedly became a swim. After we dropped off, saying several surprised types of things, the folks taping said, “oh, there's a drop off.” Seems like they were stifling laughter...

Geary Schindel had told Kel that after about a thousand feet there was a passage up to the right that wasn't water passage, and we thought with Kel's outfit that might be a good target. We were on our way.

The walls with slight ledges were slippery muddy, too slippery to use as holds. We didn't swim for very far before the passage widened and sturdy stalactites, almost touching the water, made perfect handholds. I think this is the first cave I've been in where it's okay to grab the formations. In some places the formations were reminiscent of jail bars and we had to pick the openings wide enough for our helmets. The first time we did this, the passage made a “Y” and we weren't sure which arm to take. This was the first time of many that I asked if we were to Geary's passage yet. The answer was “No.”

We first bobbed to the right, and it didn't look like that went anywhere. To the left, the widest space between stalactites required a ducking maneuver. I watched Barbe and Joel and Kevin pass through, then tipped my head back as much as I could without dunking my old Petzl Zoom's maybe-not-waterproof-anymore battery pack and scooted through. Kel seemed to hesitate about like I did.

So we had all met the first face-wetting challenge. We Tarzanned from stalactite to stalactite for several yards. As hand-holds thinned out the walls became more user-friendly; less muddy slimy. The walls were hugely undercut in places. There was another stretch of swimming, during which my kneepads became a real annoyance. They seemed to have stretched from being wet, and I kept kicking them down to my ankles where they acted as sail anchors. I was starting to notice that I wasn't dressed appropriately and checked with Kel, who was noticing the same thing about his outfit. About here is where I thought we should take off to the right because surely we had gone a thousand feet by now...

“No.”

We were lagging behind the Cloudcroft gang, and we were both thinking that as amazing as this was, we didn't want to wait until we were uncomfortably cold to turn around. After some “Do you want to turn around? “I don't know, do you?” “I'll turn around whenever you're ready. Are you ready?” back and forth, we hollered ahead that we were turning back. Not sure that we heard a response we asked a passing caver if he would let the group ahead know that we were turning around.

It seemed to take no time at all to get back to the videotaping crew. We emerged from the depths and dripped our way back to the rock where we had left some clothing. We left a note on the Cloudcroft vehicle in case they didn't get our message and we warmed up by walking up the hill to the car.

As we were driving back we ran into Bill Bentley and the New Mexico contingent. They had understood that it was a half-mile walk to the spring and were on the third or fourth “just a couple of football fields more” when we told them it was less than a half-mile to go. “Just a couple of football fields more” didn't cut it with Carol Belski's granddaughters, who rode back to camp with us. We later found out that we were less than one football field from the breakdown climb-over that is just before “that passage.” The first stick-your-nose-on-the-ceiling maneuver comes right before the breakdown, so I have no regrets about turning around when we did. As a recon, it was the perfect adventure, and we look forward to a through trip when the opportunity arises.

## THE SAGA OF BRAD AND JANET submitted by Karsten D. Pohl

Brad and Janet were bored: They decided a dog walk after supper would be slightly less boring than staring at the interior of the minimally equipped trailer provided by Brad's new employer, a propane supplier in Southwest Texas. They would not be in Southwest Texas in a no-cable-TV-nothing-to-do-after-supper-except-play-cards-on-the-cracked-formica-dinette-table eight by twenty-four foot tin can on wheels if it hadn't been for Katrina.

The good news: They left New Orleans ahead of the panicked mob of refugees and did not end up in a substandard apartment in East Houston. The bad news: They had been dog-sitting Janet's mother's aging Chihuahua while Mrs. Esserherff was on some senior citizen gambling junket to Laughlin, Nevada when Katrina headed inland, and they were forced to bring Beaner with them.

Beaner's digestion and marking habit required at least three dog walks a day. Janet, of such fair complexion and pale red hair as to require a slathering of sunscreen just to take out the trash, always took Beaner on his final walk, after dark. Brad's whining about their "lousy tray-ler" forced him to take her up on her offer to join them, and Janet was glad, because following a Chihuahua around alone after dark creeped her out.

They booked it to the edge of town, past the last streetlight, where lawns ended and trees, rocks and cacti took over. They were near a grove of live oak and hackberry trees when they heard a scratching that seemed to come from every direction. Beaner's leash flew from Janet's pale, soft grip. Fearing for their lives, each imagined the worst: Brad, a rabid chupacabra; Janet, a poacher's 50,000 candlepower spotlight. These fears vanished when they saw Beaner chomp down on the tail of a large armadillo. Dirt clods and small rocks flew as the armadillo frantically clawed into the base of the grove.

The armadillo disappeared. Beaner disappeared. Brad's arm disappeared up to his shoulder and still he could not feel Beaner. Brad pulled back his arm. "What the...?" he said to the stream of cool air that followed his hand.

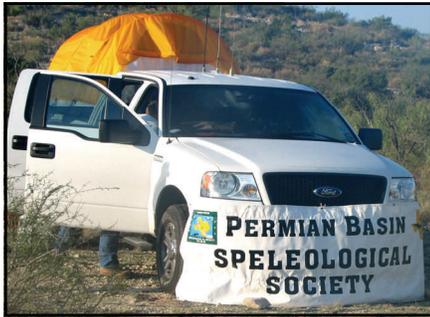
*Next time: Beaner finds a cave...*



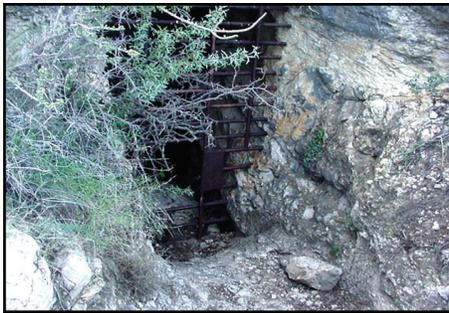
*This is how close the quarters were for digging, but we have gone from 3' to 35', at a slight slope downward...*



*Bill, Jacqui, Kel, Landa and Lori with the ever increasing pile. Missing are Mike, back at camp marinating steaks, and Barry, taking the picture.*



The new '06 Speleo-Ford.



The hole, and nothing but the hole...To Ess Cave.



Look!! One hand rigging.



Texas in the fall... A beautiful part of the country anytime... This is the mule provided us to get around...sure beats walking.



The rabbit comes out of the hole, and then back, and the snake.....



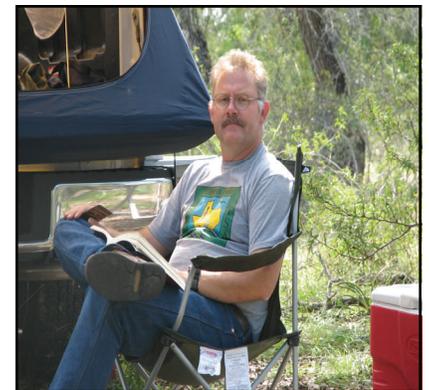
Ruel, are you sure this rigging is bomb-proof?



Jacqui and Don discuss the philosophical impact of the new book "Zen and the Art of Rack Maintenance."



\*The reason we go\*



Our fearless leader and good friend.

No animals, cavers, ceilings, or formations were harmed in the creation of this page.



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