

Permian Basin Speological Society

NOVEMBER MEETING NOTICE

We are meeting on the second Tuesday of November instead of the regularly scheduled third Tuesday in order to be able to plan our club trip.

DATE: Tuesday, November 14

LOCATION: St. Paul Methodist Church, 4501 Thomason

TIME: 6:00 P.M.

OCTOBER MEETING REPORT

There was a large, friendly crowd at Jerry's home for our October meeting. It was a time to meet some new people and to visit with old friends over a pot-luck dinner. Jerry demonstrated vertical gear on a rope attached to a large tree in his back yard, and several people tried their hand at using it. We made plans for the October trip, and then looked at slides of past trips.

OCTOBER TRIP REPORT

We had a good turnout for our first club trip last month, and everybody seemed to have a great time. Suzy Noldan, Jim Siegmann, and Jerry Atkinson were at Pointer Rocks near Fort Davis bright and early to meet Chuck Anderle, Will and Debbie Brinson, Don Carlton, and David Diffie. We learned about knots, ropes, hardware, and all the things that go into safe vertical caving. Then we had some real fun - going up and down the rock faces there at the park. I'll have to say that it is a lot more fun to go down than to go up. Later Kathy Schwehr and her amazing rock-climbing dog joined us for the fun. Anyone know where to buy a seat and chest harness for a german shepherd?

We spent the night at Balmorhea State Park where several people went scuba diving. Chuck demonstrated how to catch catfish with your bare hands, and if we hadn't been in a park we could have had fish for supper.

Sunday morning we traveled on to S Cave near Iraan in Pecos County. J.D. and Melissa Fincher and family along with Tom Hill and family met us at the cave at about 11:00 A.M. The cave is really a mess, but it gave the new people a chance to learn some caving techniques and find out if tight places bother them. After approximately an hour and a half we returned to the surface - dirty, wet, and happy.

NOVEMBER TRIP

November 18-19 -- Black and Cottonwood Caves on Saturday
Hidden Cave on Sunday - Hidden has an entrance drop of approximately 50 feet and a second drop of 20 feet.

These caves are in a beautiful part of the Guadalupe Mountains of New Mexico, and it is always fun to camp and hike in this remote area. It should be great camping weather this time of the year.

DECEMBER TRIP

December 9-10 -- Permits have been secured for all the caves on Mckittrick Hill northwest of Carlsbad, N.M. for Saturday. One cave, Algerita, is a newly discovered cave with limited access, and Dave Belski will be the tour guide through it.

Permits for Spider and Christmas Tree Caves in Carlsbad Caverns National Park have been secured for Sunday. There is a \$5.00 fee for touring Spider Cave. Christmas Tree has small entrance drop and some climbing is involved.

RAPPELLING DEMO

Explorer Post 85 here in Midland sends thanks to Bill Bentley for a demonstration of rappelling and prusiking in September. Bill showed his stuff while suspended from the band tower on the Midland High practice field.

NSS MEMBERSHIP

With the addition of Tom Hill to our roster we have the minimum of five NSS members required for our club to be affiliated with the NSS. Now we will have exposure to the world of caving in areas other than the Permian Basin. For example, the Southwestern Region of NSS is having its winter meeting in Carlsbad in December - more about that later. Every one of our members is encouraged to belong to the NSS in order to have an organization that looks after the interests of cavers around the world.

FINANCIAL REPORT

PBSS TREASURY RECORD - 1989

DATE	RECEIPTS	EXPENSES	BALANCE
9/89	\$33.00 Contributions		\$33.00
9/89	Meeting Room	\$15.00	\$18.00
9/89	Postage	\$5.00	\$13.00
10/89	\$55.00 Dues		\$68.00
10/89	Postage	\$5.00	\$63.00

Last Name	First Name	W Phone	H Phone	NSS #
Anderle	Chuck & Jan	685-3119	685-3119	Application Made
Atkinson	Jerry	688-6160	697-3807	22368
Bentley	Bill	694-7721	697-3079	21977
Brinson	Will & Debbie	699-4081	683-1991	Application Made
Carlton	Don	683-4701	687-4352	30417
Diffie	David	688-7851	699-0919	31097
Fincher	J.D. & Melissa		694-4381	
Hill	Tom			27888
Noldan	Suzy	687-8476	689-0586	Application Made
Schwehr	Kathy		684-0048	28847
Showalter	Ernie	563-1663	682-1700	
Siegmann	Jim	683-0128	689-0586	Application Made

TRIP REPORT - POWELL'S CAVE - Will & Debbie Brinson

Powell's cave is an experience for both the novice and experienced spelunker alike! The cave is easily accessible (with land owners permission) and only a short 7.5 mile drive from Menard, Texas. At Jerry's invitation, my wife Debbie, daughter Deanna, and myself joined the Austin Grotto and several other spelunkers from across the state on a survey expedition of the cave. Not being familiar with the cave, I was surprised to find out that the cave is believed to be the second longest cave in Texas. At the current time, approximately 13 miles of the cave have been mapped and the remaining area is either unexplored or in some cases, previous survey's have been lost. We were assigned to a team whose primary responsibility was to re-survey the areas close to the entrance and to remove trash that had been brought into and left in the cave over the past 40 to 50 years.

POWELL'S CAVE - continued

The cave's entrance is located at the bottom of a sink-hole that is approximately 30 ft. deep. The sink-hole consisted of loose dirt and rock that continually breaks loose and falls into the entrance so that from time to time, the entrance is completely blocked. During the past 7 to 8 years, access to the cave had been denied and only last year was permission given for continued exploration. The years of being closed have reduced the existing opening to about the size of a basketball. To gain entrance into the cave it was necessary to climb down into the sink hole using ropes and a metal cable ladder and then lie on your back and slide through the small opening. This procedure gains the spelunker access to a small outer room about the size of a small bedroom but only about 3 feet in height. From this room it is again necessary to lie on your back and slide through an even smaller crawlway that is approximately 6 feet in length. After this, your inside the actual cave and approximately 45 to 50 feet underground. The ceiling here is about 3 feet in height. The next landmark encountered is a huge triangular shaped rock that is only about 10 yards from the opening. The rock is perfectly flat on top and fell from the ceiling creating a room that is tall enough to stand up inside. This is the real jumping off point of the cave and from triangle rock passages lead off in various directions. To the right is a low, crawl passageway that leads through 75 or 100 yards of bat droppings to a passageway called the crevice. The ceiling of this passage is carved like a gigantic honeycomb that is fragile and can be easily broken. Broken fragments of the ceiling lie scattered on the floor and cave markers indicate directions into and out of the depths that lie below. Once reaching the crevice, the spelunker can climb down approximately 10 to 12 feet to the floor of the crevice and can continue in either direction for miles. Here, the ceiling can be 30 to 40 feet in height with upper level passages and side tunnels every few feet.

Traffic in the crevice was brisk by cave standards, with various teams passing by to descend into and to survey the portion of the cave to which they had been assigned. At some places, rocks had fallen into the crevice so that more crawling was required to proceed. However, after each crawl space was conquered the crevice seemed to grow larger and more extensive.

After having explored the crevice for some distance and after some insistence from my daughter, we returned to triangle rock, had lunch and began to explore the area that was the opposite direction from the crevice. This area is a maze with passages leading off in every direction. The area is reminiscent of "S" Cave except that it is much, much larger. We explored this area for probably an hour and again at the insistence of my daughter started back for triangle rock with her leading the way. Markers in this area of the cave are fewer and further between and consist mainly of arrows drawn on walls pointing to the exit. Some graffiti has been etched onto the passage way walls and the overall effect is that most passageways look identical. After

a few wrong turns, I was compelled to tell my daughter that " I don't think we came this way" and the ensuing response was that of complete and total panic and a resounding "WE'RE LOST." This in itself would not have been that disastrous because I felt that we were only a short distance from triangle rock. However, at this exact moment, the carbide lamp that had served so faithfully during the first 4 hours of exploration, decided to burn out. Time to refill the carbide I thought. No Problem. Wrong! This was the first time I had re-filled a carbide light and needless to say I was in a hurry as my daughter rapidly explained to me the fact that we had NO FOOD, NO WATER and were probably going to die in the cave and it was all my fault for not having turned back sooner. This was despite the fact that we did have food and two full canteens of water.

POWELL'S CAVE - continued

I rapidly emptied the expended carbide into a plastic bag, re-filled the lamp, assembled the lamp and like a pro, struck the flint to re-light the flame. "BOOM." In my haste to assemble the lamp, I had forgotten to check and see that the rubber seal was in place. It wasn't and the lamp had flames coming out in every direction. This did nothing to calm my daughter who by this time had given up all hope that we would ever see sunlight again. Quickly I blew out the flames, corrected the error and in only four or five minutes were had found the correct passage and were standing beside triangle rock. SAVED!!!

At this point my storey of adventure in Powell's Cave has reached an anti-climax because, after taking my daughter to the surface to again breath fresh air, all that remained was to contribute our part to the clean-up and removal of trash that had been brought into the cave. To accomplish the task we were issued several standard trash bags which Debbie and I quickly filled with old tin cans, ancient flash light batteries and other rubble from previous expeditions.

Unfortunately, the cave opening was too small to permit the filled sacks to be easily removed and both were soon torn to shreds. After only a short hour or so, I managed to get (almost) all of the contents to the bottom of the sink hole where we both agreed that it would be no problem for the remaining members of the expedition to remove from there.

All in all, the experience has taught me several things.

1. Always take knee pads as it has been six days since the trip and my knees are just now beginning to return to normal color.
2. Never use plastic trash sacks for the removal of trash left in a cave with a small opening.
3. Always check carbide lamps carefully before lighting.
4. Never take my daughter in a cave again, ever!

Powell's cave is an interesting experience with something to offer for anyone interested in the exploration of caves. Access to the cave is available through the Austin Grotto with trips twice a year. I recommend it and if I have the chance I'll go again.