

DEAD DOG DISPATCH

TRI-STATE CROTTO OF THE NSS



GOLINPRINAS, MEXICO

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JAN

2008

#1



FAMILY MEMBERSHIP -----\$2.00/FAMILY

(FULL FAMILY-must be NSS)(Voting rights if over 16)
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*** The Picture of the 1200' pit in Golindrinas, Mexico was taken by Nikki Fox.

**** Don't forget, the **JONES QUARRY BOOKLET** is **STILL** available at a reasonable price **\$6.00**. If you don't have it in your library, then YOU MUST GET IT. It is PACKED with info about the QUARRY, the CAVE, the INDIAN BONES, and of course the **MAP!** If you are interested in purchasing the BOOKLET, contact **BOB BENNETT** [304-579-4304(H) or 304-725-3481 ext 491(W)](E-MAIL at gimpycaver@comcast.net or **JUDY FISHER** [304-258-4974(H) or 304-258-1822(W)](E-MAIL at jcf@access.mountain.net)

WE NEED EVERYONE TO KEEP THINKING ABOUT
VOLUNTEERING FOR A COUPLE OF OPEN
POSITIONS. WE STILL NEED PEOPLE FOR THE
FOLLOWING POSITIONS:
PROGRAM CHAIR
CONSERVATION CHAIR
PLEASE GIVE IT SOME THOUGHT. WE NEED YOUR
SUPPORT!



CAVING EVENTS

2008

JAN 1 ----- NEW YEAR'S DAY
JAN 5-6 ----- Pocahontas Co Trip – see Sean & Bernie
JAN 9 ----- Grotto Meeting – 7PM
JAN 21 ----- MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY
JAN 26-27 --- Greenbrier Co Trip – see Sean & Bernie
FEB 2 ----- GROUND HOG DAY
FEB 3 ----- Super Bowl Sunday
FEB 13 ----- Grotto Meeting – 7PM
FEB 14 ----- VALENTINE'S DAY
FEB 18 ----- PRESIDENT'S DAY
FEB 29 ----- LEAP DAY
MAR 9 ----- DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME STARTS
MAR 12 ----- Grotto Meeting – 7PM
MAR 16 ----- PALM SUNDAY
MAR 17 ----- ST PATRICK'S DAY
MAR 20 ----- SPRING EQUINOX
MAR 21 ----- GOOD FRIDAY
MAR 23 ----- EASTER
APR 1 ----- ALL FOOL'S DAY
APR 9 ----- Grotto Meeting 7PM
APR 15 ----- TAX DAY
APR 22 ----- EARTH DAY
APR 25 ----- ARBOR DAY
MAY 5 ----- CINCO de MAYO
MAY 11 ----- MOTHER'S DAY
MAY 14 ----- Grotto Meeting 7PM
MAY 17 ----- ARMED FORCES DAY
MAY 22 ----- DAY of PRAYER
MAY 23-26 – KY SPELEOFEST – Lone Star Preserve
MAY 23-26 – Bubble Weekend
MAY 26 ----- MEMORIAL DAY
JUN 5-8 ----- SERA / VAR – Bristol, TN
JUN 11 ----- Grotto Meeting – 7PM
JUN 14 ----- FLAG DAY
JUN 15 ----- FATHER'S DAY
JUN 20 ----- WV DAY
JUN 20 ----- SUMMER SOLSTICE
JUL 4 ----- INDEPENDENCE DAY
JUL 9 ----- Grotto Meeting – 7PM
JUL 12 ----- GROTTTO PICNIC
JUL 17-20 --- Karst-O-Rama – Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve
JUL 27 ----- PARENT'S DAY
AUG 11-15 – NSS Convention, Lake City, FL
AUG 13 ----- Grotto Meeting – 7PM
AUG 28-31 – OTR
AUG 30 ----- DOO DAH
AUG 30 ----- POLYESTER POWER HOUR
SEP 1 ----- OTR
SEP 1 ----- LABOR DAY
SEP 7 ----- GRANDPARENT'S DAY

SEP 10 ----- Grotto Meeting – 7PM
SEP 19-21 --- FALL VAR – COVINGTON, VA
SEP 11 ----- PATRIOT'S DAY (9/11)
SEP 22 ----- AUTUMN EQUINOX
OCT 8 ----- Grotto Meeting – 7PM
OCT 13 ----- COLUMBUS DAY
OCT 31 ----- ALL HALLOWS EVE
NOV 4 ----- ELECTION DAY
NOV 11 ----- VETERAN'S DAY
NOV 12 ----- Grotto Meeting – 7PM – Elections
NOV 21 ----- THANKSGIVING DAY
NOV 22 ----- BLACK FRIDAY
DEC 10 ----- Wrap gifts for Red Cross – 6PM at Martinsburg Mall
DEC 13 ----- GROTTTO CHRISTMAS PARTY
DEC 14 ----- CAVING
DEC 21 ----- WINTER SOLSTICE
DEC 24 ----- CHRISTMAS EVE
DEC 25 ----- CHRISTMAS DAY
DEC 31 ----- NEW YEAR'S EVE

2009

JUL 19-26 --- NSS Convention, Kerryville, TX

2010

JUL 12-17 ----- NSS Convention, Essex Jcnctn, VT

***** CAVE BUCKS *****

CAVE BUCKS is a voluntary donation for cave purchases. The money is collected at each monthly meeting and sent to the organization of choice. The money SHOULD NEVER be kept past the week it is collected.

Month of Nov ----- **\$36.00**

TOTAL TO DATE: --- **\$4104.00**

GROTTTO LINKS

Tri-State Grotto website ----- www.wobey.net/TSG
TSG Events - www.wobey.net/TSG/tristate/events.html
VAR website ----- www.varegion.org
NSS website ----- www.caves.org
NSS Convention 2008 ----- www.nss2008.com/
OTR Website ----- www.otr.org
MAR Website ----- www.caves.org/region/mar/
WVCC ----- www.wvcc.net

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Andy Celmer's Web Site ----www.wobey.net/TSG/Andy/
 Art Jr's Web Site <http://photos.arthanson.net/index.php>
 Bob's Web Site ----- www.wobey.net/TSG/Bob/
 Earl Suitor's Web Site ---- <http://www.ezy.net/~wvcaver/>
 Ehren Gieske's Web Site --- www.wobey.net/TSG/Ehren/
 Jerry's Cave Web Site ----- www.wobey.net/TSG/Jerry/
 Vitas's Web Site ----- www.wobey.net/TSG/Vitas/
 Tina Blaik's Web Site ----- www.kayakdream.com/
 David Hackley's Web Site -----
 ---- <http://s180.photobucket.com/albums/x307/clearsig/>
 Todd Robert's Web Site -----
 -- http://s63.photobucket.com/albums/h143/Todd_05/



MONTH OF DECEMBER!

Priscilla Armer, Jason Cowne, Carrie Cumbo,
 Michael Hayes, Barbara Jefferson, Brad
 Jefferson, Brent Jefferson, Rosie Wisecarver

MONTH OF JANUARY

Eric Armer, Twila Carr, Danny Cumbo,
 Jonathan Dunham, Judy Fisher, Bob Gray,
 Stacey Hajenga, Samantha Hicks, Tim
 McDougale, Van Pell, Bob Quattlebaum, Todd
 Roberts, Johnny Robinson Sr, Bryan Snyder,
 Earl Suitor, Gloria Updyke, Fiord'aliza Vis,
 Trish Walthers

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Tri-State Grotto

Nov 14, 2007

Meeting

Jon Peterson started the meeting at 7:00 pm. 21
 members were present.

Chuck Stanley gave the treasurer's report.

Bob Bennett talked about our Newsletter. We
 exchange newsletters with 25 grottoes. The list
 will be paired down he said.

Jon talked about the next meeting. Instead of the
 meeting we will be wrapping gifts for the
 American Red Cross at the Mall.

Jon and Terry McClanathan talked about Bridge
 Day.

Jerry Bowen talked about his TV experience.

Bob talked about his trip to Scot Hollow Cave.
 He made it to the Christmas Room.

At Paxton's Cave, Bob did find the spar pool that
 he was looking for. Sean and Bernie Wootten
 found the pool. They had nine people on the
 trip.

Todd talked about the sinkhole clean up in
 Highland County.

Several other trips were talked about.

We talked about the Crystal Grottoes Caverns
 Project.

Spring VAR. We will do the 2009 Spring VAR.
 There was a lot of discussion about it.

Tina Blaik moved that we give four patches to
 the channel 5 TV crew. Danny Cumbo second,
 passed.

Trips

January 12, 2008 Dig at Adam Stephen

Danny Cumbo will do a caving trip on Black
 Friday. See him.

Wednesday Night Caving - Nov 28, 2007 at 6:30
 pm. meet in Shippensburg. There will be a trip
 to Cleversburg Sink.

Sharps and My Cave in January.

Cave Bucks

We collected \$36.00. It will be sent to SCCI.

Elections

The Meeting was turned over to Bob Bennett to conduct the elections.

The following were elected:

Treasurer - Chuck Stanley

Secretary - John Di Carlo

Vice-chair - Bob Bennett

Chair - Bernie Wootten

Jon Peterson adjourned the meeting at 8:30 pm.

Submitted by
John P. Di Carlo, Jr.
Secretary
Tri-State Grotto



Cassell Cave



Hoya de las GuaGuas



Cass Cave

TRIP REPORTS

Fourth of July Cave – Scott County, Virginia's Newest Cave.....?

In July of 2007, and my wife and I were spending the week visiting family in our home towns in southwestern Virginia. I had already enjoyed a nice Saturday afternoon with friends in the Mountain Empire Grotto at their picnic, so all the sitting around talking about caving had me ready to get underground. A couple of days later, Todd Roberts made the journey down to our neck of the woods. We spent Tuesday morning with a quick trip to Wildcat Cavern and the afternoon in Hill Cave. The next day, which happened to be July 4th, we headed back down to Scott County to try to get into Spurlock Cave. After several unsuccessful attempts at getting in contact with the landowner, we decided we were just out of luck. So, the backup plan was put in motion. On some land near where he lives, my Uncle always told me there was a cave. I vaguely remembered seeing an entrance near where he was describing years ago, but for whatever reasons, never checked it out. According to him, it's a "big cave that goes all over the place". He says it contains several large rooms and he's never been to the end of it. He also told me about an instance of someone building a house along the valley nearby who was drilling a well when at the 75 foot depth mark, hit a cavity that was twenty feet deep. Realizing this is the typical story one hears when talking to the locals in cave country, I decided to not take his claims at face value, but still check it out, nonetheless. Todd and I geared up and began following a wet weather stream along the ridge. After several switchbacks, the stream disappeared under a huge boulder rock face. Digging didn't look possible. We fanned out a little bit and looked around some more and found that just above the rock face, was another stream bed, this one was empty but showed evidence of flowing from the opposite to direction near the same point. This spot where the water obviously disappeared

seemed a little more promising as there was a bigger opening about six to eight inches tall by about four feet wide mostly choked with dirt and moss. After digging away the packed earth, we found a large rock wedged in this entrance. Not anticipating a full-fledged dig, we had no shovels or pry bars. It was time to make a decision; trudge on further in search of the cave we were originally looking for in the July heat, or see what's under this rock. We opted for the latter. The rock was wedged in a way that one wrong move and it could fall further down the passage and potentially plug it completely. It was in a position where either one of us could get a grip on it and try to lift it out, but not so that both of us easily could. So, thinking on our feet, we took the webbing straps off of my caving pack and rigged them around the rock and created a cradle around it. We were then able to both pull the rock out of the passage. Now that the rock was out of the way, we had an opening about twelve inches high. We tossed in a small stone and what came echoing back was just what we wanted to hear, the sound of the stone clacking off the walls into the void. I took one of my headlamps and attached it to the shoulder straps from my pack and lowered it down, trying to get a better look at what was below. This allowed us to locate a ledge about 6 feet down. Unfortunately, as I was raising it out, the headlamp became dislodged and fell into the void! I was glad it was at least my cheap-o Wally World light! By this time, Todd had the bug for bigger discovery and decided he wanted to see what was down there. He lowered himself down onto the ledge and found that the passage sloped below that and allowed him to step off and safely climb on down. He made his way down about forty feet and encountered a sump. I lowered down to him his bag containing his camera equipment and he photographed it and did a quick sketch of the passage. Upon climbing out, Todd presented me with my lost headlamp. I ventured no further than the ledge six feet down to take a look at things. The rest I decided I would take Todd's word for and save for another trip if the sump ever goes down. With a newly discovered cave under our belts, we spent the rest of the afternoon driving through Rye Cove checking out some sinkholes and shelter caves on the way

back to my in-law's home in East Stone Gap. There, Todd put on a fireworks display that had the whole neighborhood either in awe or taking cover.

This past December, my wife and I were back in East Stone Gap for the weekend to celebrate Christmas with family. While down that way, I decided to go back and log GPS coordinates for our find. The walk down the stream bed was a wetter one this time, which indicates the sump in the cave probably does not go down much at all. We arrived at the entrance to 4th of July Cave and found the dig just as Todd and I had left it; covered up with a piece of plywood that must have washed down in the gulley during a heavy rain. I tossed a stone in and my suspicions were confirmed when I heard the clacking of the rock abruptly end with a splash. It sounded like the sump was definitely higher now than in July. I went ahead and logged a GPS waypoint on the entrance. From there, Carrie and I walked along the base of the ridge and about 350 feet southwest of the dig site, we found another cave entrance. My Uncle confirmed later that this is the one he was always talking about. I logged the coordinates of this cave as well, but was ill-equipped to explore it.

Upon this initial discovery in July, I was able to confirm with the VSS that these are, in fact, undocumented caves. My hope is to get back to these caves sometime in early 2008, either during the VAR/SERA in June or sooner. While I can't promise that this is big cave that goes anywhere, I just consider that this cave is situated less than 10 miles south of the Omega System and right on the edge of the Rye Cove karst area. That puts this cave right in the middle of many significant caves in that region. That alone tells me the potential is there.

Danny Cumbo

Return to the Omega System

The lure of deep pits has always been a strong magnet for me. This would explain why a cave such as the Omega System, in the extreme southwest corner of Virginia, would attract my

attention. The cave is the deepest in the east at nearly 1300', and there are at least five pits in excess of 100' deep. Two of these exceed the 200 foot mark. I had been in the lower Blowing Entrance Sept. '06 on my first trip there. I didn't think that entrance was particularly difficult, and it included two of the hundred footers, plus a chance to look up a high dome which extended to a height of 200+ feet. This had not been rigged yet at that time. When an invitation by Ben Swartz and Mike Ficco to join teams that would be working on leads accessed by the upper Lori-Cori Entrance appeared on my e-mail late this past summer, how could I possibly refuse? Knowing something of the super-hardcore nature of Swartz, Ficco, and some of the other team members, I did venture a question regarding the nature of a trip in this entrance. The only reply I received was, "Well, it's different." (from the Blowing Entrance).

And so after 7.5 hours on the highway, followed by six miles up a narrow road which had more hairpin turns than any road I've ever seen in both the Virginias, then four miles back a gravel fire-tower road, I found myself at the designated camping area for all trips to the upper end of the system. It was 9AM, Saturday, Sept. 15, '07. There were, I think, 16 cavers milling around in various stages of preparation. I knew some of them. Ben and Mike were the primary organizers. Tommy Shifflet was there. Jack Thomison, a TAG caving friend I've known for many years, was present. I'm pretty sure Jack is a bit older than me, so he would have been the oldest participant. Bob Alderson, from Roanoke area, I knew from survey trips together in Germany Valley caves. This would be his first trip in Omega. The others I had never met before and I do not remember most of their names. I will say, though, that they collectively appeared to be the meanest, leanest, caving machines I may have ever laid eyes upon. I didn't know there were that many really tough cavers in the entire country, let alone gathered in one place at the same time. This was actually the last weekend of a nine day work effort in and around the system. Some of those present had been caving all week. Lines had been strung between trees, and these were full of drying cave apparel coated

with generous quantities of caked mud. All the cavers were wearing big smiles with no hint of weariness to be seen. There was little doubt in my mind who the weakest link in this group was going to be. Once again, I queried, "What is this end of the cave like?" The answer, "Well, it's different."

As is often the case, there were a few no-shows (maybe they were the smart ones). This meant a reshuffling of assignments. Jack was on a team that was off to complete a dig in nearby Hairy Hole, and then survey whatever lay beyond. Three teams consisting of four cavers each would enter the Lori-Cori entrance to Omega. I think I got put on the team with the easiest assignment (at least our objectives were closest to the entrance). I wasn't going to complain. I was getting just a bit concerned looking at all those wiry, muscular bodies, totally lacking in even an ounce of excess body tissue. Mike Ficco was my team leader. I wondered if Ben's secret instructions to Mike might have been something like "keep a close eye on McClanathan". Besides Mike and me, Kelly Mathes and Jon Lillestolen made up the rest of our team. Tommy and Ben each lead fast teams of four which would go deeper into the cave. Our objectives were to survey any existing leads already marked on the map, plus check for new leads and survey those we found.

The hike down to the entrance was less than a mile but very steep. It would be "fun" coming back up. The Lori-Cori entrance had been gated following the unfortunate death of Dick Graham in 2003.

Past the entrance, the passage consisted of a series of short crawls, climb-downs, and narrow canyons. After about 500 feet the first pit was encountered. This was a nice 90 foot free drop. Shortly past this pit, the nature of the cave began to change. A narrow canyon cuts into the floor as you progress forward. It is necessary to stay high in this canyon for many hundreds of feet, while the floor below you keeps dropping. The walls are slippery and in many places footholds are dubious. There are also several short sections where footholds are non-existent. Friction

traverses and tricky maneuvers seemed to be the only manner of traverse. At one point in the canyon it was necessary to rappel about 30' to a lower level.

The section between the 30' drop and the top of the big pit, called Gollum's Abyss, was the hardest to traverse. The canyon continued as before, except it was deeper, more slippery, and with even fewer good holds. There were several places where we passed packs along to make the traverse less cumbersome, and less dangerous. I know that if these traverses were in, for instance, say Hellhole, there would have been safety lines to clip into. As was pointed out to me by Mike and Ben, if that were done in Omega, there would have to be a thousand feet of extra rope just for the traverses. This was definitely a gymnastic cave. As I thought about climbing back through this canyon after a hard cave trip, my anxiety level increased. I would certainly have to be extra cautious. After about another 500 feet of this "exhilarating" canyon, we came to Gollum's Abyss. This was the pit where Dick fell. I could only cringe, thinking about the ordeal and mental state of the rescuers who were involved with getting his body out of the cave.

Gollum's Abyss starts out with a 20' drop to a rebelay ledge. From here it opens into a vast blackness. The thing was huge! It started out at about fifty feet in diameter and then got bigger! From the rebelay point, the drop was 213' free. About a third of the way down, the walls on one side were covered in a white cascading flowstone which might have been as much as a hundred feet long. Coming off the ends of the flowstone were draperies whose ends tapered to a myriad of twisting helectites. It might be a long, slow climb back up this pit, but at least it would be scenic. Once on the floor, we climbed up a large pile of breakdown from which we could watch other cavers descend. The pit was truly awesome. I got the feeling that those more familiar with the cave, having lived through the tragedy of Dick's fall to his death in this pit, have, understandably, a bad feeling for the place. But on its own merits, I think Gollum's Abyss is probably the most spectacular pit in the two Virginia's.

At the far side of the breakdown pile at the bottom of Gollum's Abyss is a small hole blowing generous amounts of air which leads to the rest of the cave. Mike informed me that considerable modification was needed here before the original explorers could get through. We down-climbed through the constriction for about fifteen feet to a tight crawl. While the top part of the cave (before Gollum's Abyss) was difficult, this crawl was the only genuinely nasty, gnarly part of the cave I would see on this trip. Fortunately it wasn't much over fifty feet long, and opened up into a fairly easy canyon. At one point we took a bypass which led to a welcome strolling passage lasting for about 500 feet. Mike said originally the canyon could only be followed at a lower level they referred to as Razor Alley which was pretty bad. I didn't need to be convinced, and was glad the easy alternate route had been found. Not much past the easy stroll we came to a rigged up climb of 35 feet. This took us up into the beginning of the Gael Force section of the cave, which was where we were to start mapping and checking for leads.

We looked at a few high leads which were nothing more than upper levels of the same passage we were already in, but then I found a nice virgin section that was heading in a direction away from our canyon. The survey was on. There were four of us so we did a pretty good job of dividing up the work load. Mike assumed the hardest job as sketcher. The passage was complex, consisting of basically three intertwined levels. All of it was virgin. Portions of the middle and bottom levels were nicely decorated with colorful flowstones topped by small snake-dancer heligmites. There were also lots of delicate straws and the usual stalactite/stalagmite displays. Even though the survey was tedious, it sure was pretty.

We got 410 feet of new survey, and then our passage popped out into a large room. I was doing point and setting stations. At first I thought we had hit something really sweet, and my adrenaline starting going. Then I spied footprints and a survey station. How could this room have been surveyed, but not the passage we had just come through? Mike checked his notes to try and

determine where we were (remember, The Omega System is 20+ miles long). The survey station in the room was a high number, indicating it might have been the end of a long previous survey trip, and even though the leads from the passage we had just surveyed were pretty obvious, this room may have seemed like a good point to terminate a long trip. We eventually found other stations and were able to determine that the room had been entered from a completely opposite direction. Mystery solved, we quickly tied in to the station in the room and went off to look for other leads.

We checked several back out in the main passage, and even started surveying into one of the more promising, but they all looped back around into the main canyon, and therefore Mike disqualified them as new survey. We continued further into the cave, but found nothing which wasn't just an upper level of our present trending passage. Our trek took us about 3000 feet further along what was now a stream passage, mostly of walking dimensions, interrupted by two short water crawls.. At one point there was a precarious up climb of about forty feet which seemed to be heading about 90 degrees away from the stream passage. Mike got up the first part of the climb, and while he thought he could probably climb the top part, he decided not to try it. A wise move, I thought. Deep in a cave like the Omega System, is not the place to risk injury. The lead was noted and would be tackled with proper aid on another trip. We proceeded as far as a rigged waterfall up climb, but found no more promising leads along the way.

The hour was getting late and a decision was made to start out of the cave. I was a bit tired and I knew I would be slow in some parts of the cave. My greatest concern was the deep canyon traverse between Gollum's Abyss and the 90' pit. To avoid a backup at the tight crawl before Gollum's Abyss (going out) and at the big pit itself, we split up, with Jon and Kelly heading out first. When it was our turn, Mike climbed first. As his light illuminated the walls of the shaft, I once again admired the vastness of the pit. My turn to climb. I rested several times and admired the twisting draperies with their

helectite tassels. When I reached the top I think Mike was taking a nap. It probably took me about twenty minutes to climb those 213 feet, and truthfully I was glad it wasn't any deeper. I hadn't reached exhaustion yet, but I was definitely getting tired. I'm not even sure if Mike had worked up a sweat. We ascended the 20' drop and started traversing the deep canyon. It wasn't any easier on the way out. All of my moves were slow and deliberate. Once again, at some of the trickier spots, Mike helped me with my pack and gave me some pointers on the safest way to proceed. We eventually made it to and up the 90 footer, which seemed like it was well over a hundred feet to me. More traversing, and by sometime around 3AM we were back at the entrance culvert. The trip had only been fourteen hours, but I was easily as tired as I would have been after a 20+ hour trip to Silent Stream in Hellhole. My concluding thoughts were that this part of the Omega System was certainly "different" from the Blowing Hole side.

Once out of the cave, Mike and I hiked (at least Mike probably was hiking, I was trudging) up the steep mountainside to the vehicles, where we were greeted by a roaring campfire. We sat around, shot the bull, ate a bite, and waited for the other two Omega teams. They hadn't shown up by 4:30. I pitched my tent and slept pretty soundly for a few hours. I was awakened by voices at about 8:30. Ben and Tommy's teams had just returned from their "routine" 20 hour trips, garnering over 1000' of new survey each. I didn't even think they looked winded. I'd like to return to see more of this end of the cave someday, but I'll have to get myself psyched up for it. I'm not sure in this case if knowing what to expect will be an advantage. Mike tried to console me by saying that many cavers got pretty tired on their first trips into the Lori-Cori entrance to the system. He said it got easier with repetition. I'm not certain that will be true for me. Maybe part of it is an age thing. I guess I'll just have to wait and see.

Terry McClanathan (12103)

Thanksgiving 2007: Four Mexican Caves

Plans were made starting back in the winter 2006 between Kurt Waldron, who had been Mexican caving a couple of times before, and Nikki Fox (that's me), who was relatively new in the vertical arts, for a Mexico vertical caving trip. People were invited, people were trained and people made plans. As it turned out, three cavers were going: Kurt Waldron, Chris Coates (my man, boytoy, etc.) and I.

On the morning of November 17th, the three, along with Kurt's girlfriend Kathy Frazier, embarked on the adventure. The goal — to visit the deep pits of central Mexico without driving a vehicle of our own. You must understand that the roads leading to these caves we wanted to visit are very bad. Imagine an old forest jeep road made entirely of basketball-sized rocks. Imagine all pot holes filled in with a bigger rock that protrudes a foot above the rest of the road. Imagine driving for an hour to go 15 miles up a mountain.

Ensuing were airport mishaps of planes delayed, different flights flown and prayers of all gear making the flights filled the day. At the end, all equipment and people made it to our final destination: Corpus Christi, Texas.

The plan was simple — drive a rental car to the border town of Brownsville and meet up with Texas and Mexico caving legend Mike Walsh. He would transport all our gear, Kurt and Kathy across the border and drive all the way to his Mexican home in Aquismon. Chris and I had to cross the border on foot and pay the 65-cent entrance fee. Of course this provided to be a lengthy process due to the fact that Mike had no cell phone, he was hauling home building materials and he needed to get into a relative's office to acquire a window to add in his Mexican home.

More adventures ensued.

The border was crossed, legally.

Nine hours of buses and taxis were ridden to our destination of Aquismon in the state of San Luis Potosí.

After two days of travel and some rest, we headed out to our first Mexican warm-up pit on Monday: Sótano de las Huasteca, which is a pretty 420-foot open air pit. Having no vehicle, Mike let us borrow his truck for transportation to and from the cave for the day. The mood was good, the weather was sunny and the walk to the entrance was short, which makes for smiles all around.



Two hired guías (Spanish for guides) showed the way to the cave and carried some of our gear. Kathy stayed atop the pit, while Kurt and Chris bounced the pit several times. I was quite happy dropping the pit once and spent most of my time at the bottom taking photos of the other two. We all started a friendly competition to see who could ascend and rappel the 420 feet the fastest.

The records are as follows:

- Nikki with a 48-second rappel.
- Chris and Kurt with a 13:45 tandem climb.
- Chris with a 9:50 solo ascension.

Huasteca actually had a knee to thigh-high jungle growing in the bottom. I guess enough sun reached the floor to support this little ecosystem. There was no cave of length beyond the pit to explore, but it was still a nice way to start our Mexico trip.

Tuesday, we opted to go check out a much less frequented vertical cave called El Socavón. Jerry Fant, a Texas caver who regularly visits Mexico in search of new caves, told us about an easier access road that was built within the past year near Socavón. After a late start due to parades celebrating the 1910 Mexican Revolution (equivalent to our Fourth of July) in the morning, we started the 30-mile trek to the cave.

We hired a local mountain taxi driver to cart us there and back. Francisco, or Pancho as he wanted to be called, was a 50-something man who owned a 1970s extended crew cab Ford pickup truck. The bed had bars around the edges, like a cattle rack for people and a couple of old bench car seats. The truck had no power steering, a makeshift steering wheel, no working dash board, an exhaust leak in the cab, a broken windshield and windows that couldn't be easily rolled up or down. The truck was well worn, but made the four and a half hour trip there without too many problems. We did loose the gas cap along the bumpy ride but made due with a plastic soda bottle and a rag. We almost got stuck in some sloppy mud on the way, but we all crawled in the back to provide extra weight for traction. And Chris lost his hat when tree branches hit his head.

Local caver, Caio, the tourism director for the town of Aquismon, and his oldest daughter came with us. We arrived late in the afternoon, found the cave and searched for a good place to rig. The machete was used and people got stung by the nasty "mala mujer" (which means bad woman). It's an evil barbed plant that feels like stinging nettle, but 10 times more painful.

The cave was described to us as an hour-glass shape. It came down to a pinch and then opened back up into a huge underground room.

Just before dusk, Kurt descended the funnel-shaped pit. We were all concerned that our radios would not work past the pinch. But we could talk if you were hanging the radio over the lip.



Once Kurt was down, I rappelled in the twilight. I wish I could have seen the upper part of the funnel better. There was a free-hang drop along the wall for several hundred feet before you hit the steep slope in the funnel. From this point a forest accompanied you to the pinch. After the pinch I stopped on rope to take the only photos of this cave. The bright light in the photo is Chris at the lip looking down the pit.

Still on rope, I made my way down a huge flowstone-covered wall with a small waterfall trickling on me. Looking up to the ceiling of the bell-shaped room, I could see huge stalactites ranging from 10 to 30 feet long. They were beautiful and caught my eye for minutes. Eventually I landed on a ledge about 125 feet from the floor, joining Kurt. We decided not to continue the rappel to the bottom due to time restraints and the fact that the flowstone, which covered the wall, from this point wasn't as smooth as flowstone would imply. It was more like tiny rimstone pools on the flowstone with sharp edges everywhere. It wasn't to rope friendly and we didn't have enough rope pads.

Kurt started up the rope to the pinch as I tried to find a creative way to pack away my digital SLR to keep it dry on the way up. Unfortunately, I got it soaked on the rappel into the cave and was unsure if it would even work at that point. I just

didn't want to make it worse than it already was. After I disassembled my camera, repacked and ate some food I, climbed up the rope to meet him for our tandem climb out.

Chris rappelled and climbed solo after we reached the top. It is still unknown how deep the drop really was. Jerry said Socavón was around 600 feet from the high side of the pit, where we rigged. But factoring in the amount of rope we used, we feel it was a little over 700 feet.

Once we all bounced the cave, we packed up and headed out. There was a small village at the bottom of the mountain where we devoured our dinner around 11 p.m.



Cold, wet and filled to the gills by this point, we all loaded in the truck for our 4-hour trip home. On the way back we came upon another driver who was stuck in the muddy road. Once we stopped, we were stuck. And I mean really stuck, as in sideways in the sloppy, soupy roadway. This created a bottleneck of drunk locals (remember it's a national holiday) behind us, who also got stuck. But everyone worked together to get out of the situation. Finally we reached Casa de Welsh back in Aquismon around 4 a.m. We crashed and slept in the next day.

We decided to take Wednesday off to do touristy stuff like visit Las Posas, which was constructed by Scottish eccentric Edward James. He invested more than 25 years and millions of dollars in making concrete buildings and sculptures in the middle of a forest, creek and waterfalls. The

buildings have creative names like The Temple of the Ducks and The House Destined to be a Cinema. I would suggest this place to anyone who is a Salvador Dali fan.

Thursday we arose early to have Mike drop us off to rappel Hoya de las GuaGuas. Dark clouds hung low in the sky threatening to rain on us at any time. Kathy decided not to accompany us to the cave and opted to go shopping with Mike, who is eternally working and fixing up his Mexican property.



Again, we hired two guías to carry our rope for us at the price of \$80 pesos (which equals about \$8) per person. The 45-minute hike was all paved with rocks and steps down a mountain and then up another one with the cave on top. There are two rigging points available at this massive pit. One on the low side, which is a 498-foot rappel and the other, which is the high side, is a 668-foot rappel. Both sides had their own killer bee hives. Upon walking up to the lower side, we looked out over the pit, which I guess could fit over two football fields inside the circumference, and you could hear the humming of the killer bees.

Oh joy!

We proceeded to rig the high side and were interrupted by an entire colony of ants. Kurt must have disturbed them looking for a back-up rig point in the rocks because they decided to uproot and march to a different locality. There is nothing you can do when millions of ants take over the ground. They went right over our

unfinished rigging and the lip where we wanted to rappel. We even found a black scorpion, who when thrown on top of the moving ants, wanted nothing to do with them and promptly ran off of the ants. During our hour wait for the ants, I was stung by a rogue killer bee.

Did I mention that I'm mildly allergic to bees?

Did I mention that I didn't bring an epinephrine?

Did I mention that if you crush a worker bee that a scent is released and provokes the hive to attack the intruder?

Did I mention that these are KILLER BEES?

I was so freaked out by the fact that I could die from millions of bee stings that I forgot about my reaction. Kurt told our guías about my allergy and they found a local plant to rub on my sting. It worked great. I didn't swell at all, when the last time I was stung, my face swelled up for two days.

Anyway, once the ants were gone, we were able to finish the rigging and got on rope. As we rappelled on the rope we were all surprised by snapping, sizzling and popping of it going thru our racks. Apparently, the dirt lip of Socavón made the rope very dirty and moist. All of our faces were covered in little tiny bits of fried dirt. And again, as in Huasteca, we had friendly competitions. I need not brag (eh-em) but I did get the fastest rappel time with 2:05.

GuaGuas has a lot more cave once you're in the main pit. The drop into the second, lower room is a little over 500 feet. We did not attempt this drop due to the unstable rock slope you must rappel over. Rocks may start to roll and possibly avalanche over you while still on rope.

We had a good day with lots of different critters. We watched the white-collared swifts return to the cave at the end of the day. The rain hit when we started to derig. By the time we reached the end of our hike back to the truck it was dark. Mike and Kathy were waiting to pick us up in the rain storm. We tipped each of our helpful

guías an extra \$40 pecos due to the weather. Maybe the rain washed the rope a little for us, but it got all of our gear wet for our grand finale: Sótano de la Golondrinas.

And so Friday started, as a cold, overcast drizzly day at 4 a.m. We mustered ourselves out of bed and got ready for our departure. Our new friend Pancho returned to take us up the mountain to the famous Golondrinas in his trusty truck. We arrived and paid our \$10 pecos entrance fee to watch the swifts, which are called golondrinas, exit the cave at dawn. Several other tourists arrived throughout the cold, dreary morning to also watch the birds. We waited hours and watched very few birds fly out. We were worried since the cave owner said we couldn't rappel if most of the birds were still inside. The day brightened slightly, a few more birds left and we were given the go-ahead to rig and rappel.



We were met with a change in rigging plans when we saw the high point of the entrance. The huge tree, which is the main anchor, was gone! It must have died or something because it wasn't there anymore. We found another, much smaller tree to use as a main anchor and used another tree of the same size as a backup. We also used a re-direct off of a branch of a tree hanging over the pit so we would not have to negotiate the lip. We all rappelled into the pit, leaving Kathy at the top to watch the birds. I had a nice rappel, going second. So did speed-demon Chris (with a time of 4:20) going third down the rope. We all convened and signed the register at the bottom. We were the only entry in the book during the past several months to be written in English.

Kurt climbed the rope solo as Chris & I entertained ourselves for the next hour taking photos and exploring this huge birdcage. We found huge piles of bird pooh that were as tall as a person. I found a bird that was missing its torso. I guess the wild green conures, which are the green parrots commonly found in pet stores, only eat the belly of the swifts and leave the rest to fall to the 6-acre floor below.

When it was our time to tandem climb out, we were ready to go. I got on rope first and Chris took the bottom. We climbed and climbed. And after 20 minutes or so we were only making a small dent in the 1,150-foot drop. It looked like we only climbed about 3-400 feet. But it's really hard to gauge distance when hanging in the middle of a huge pit on a piece of dental floss with birds circling you. An hour later when we were near the top and looking down, we realized there was about 1,000 feet of rope below us. I had been planning on passing my camera to Chris while on rope, but chose not to at this point.

We exited the cave 30 minutes after we had planned. We derigged and Santos, the usual Golondrinas guía who has been helping rappellers for years, helped tie Kurt's rope and carry it back to the road. We stayed and watch the few birds gather in the sky, swirl in a circle like a tornado and dive bomb into the cave trying to avoid being eaten by the conures. The sight was neat, I just wish it would have been millions of birds instead of thousands. I think the overcast day prompted the birds to stay safe down in the cave.

We obviously all made it back to the States and we each have stories to tell of our grand adventures in Mexico. Looking back, I wish I knew Spanish better. I wanted to speak Portuguese to the locals, since it was always the first language to enter my head. It was frustrating for them and me because so many words are familiar but not the same.

All in all, it was a wonderful experience and I look forward to more Mexico caving trips in my future.



Jul 3 - **WILDCAT CAVERN, Scott Co, VA** --
Todd Roberts & Danny Cumbo

----- **HILL CAVE, Scott Co, VA** -----
Todd & Danny

Jul 4 -- **4th OF JULY CAVE, Scott Co, VA** ---
Todd & Danny – Dug & removed rock blocking passage

Sep 1 ----- **MY CAVE, Poca Co, WV** -----
Twila Neeld, Pete Bracken, & others – Wanted to get underground during OTR – Huge dunes
Sep 26 --- **'P' CAVES, Franklin Co, PA** -----
Todd Roberts, Danny Cumbo, Jeff Noe, & Jon Peterson – Photo trip

Sep 29 -- **CLEVERSBURG SINK, Ship, PA** --
Kerry Speelman, & Jon Peterson – After officially signing the lease & management plan we went into cave to check water – Water was down

Oct 5 ---- **FARGO PIT, Jackson Co, AL** -----
Nikki Fox & Chris Coates – 219' pit
-- **WILLS WELSH WELL, Jackson Co, AL** --
Nikki & Chris – Pits of 28', 148' 12' & 50'

Oct 6 --- **BYERS CAVE, Dade Co, GA** -----
Nikki, Chris, & another couple from VA – Fox Mt Cave Preserve - Great horizontal cave with lots of canyons, chimneying, & huge formations – 5.5 hr

Oct 6 --- **FANTASY CAVE PROJECT** -----
Jon Peterson, Todd Roberts, Ken Tayman, Istvan Urcuyo, & Ken Jones - Survey

Oct 7 -- **CAGELS CHASM, Marion Co, TN** --
Nikki & Chris – 218' pit – A TAG classic

Oct 27 -- **SCOTT HOLLOW, Mon Co, WV** ---
Jeff Hajenga, Billy Gibberson, Jerry Bowen, & Bob Bennett – Trip to the Root Canal & Christmas Tree Room – 6 hr

Nov 1-2 ----- **GREENBRIER CO, WV** -----

----- **BUCKEYE CREEK CAVE** -----

----- **BABER PIT #2** -----

----- **SUNNYDAY PIT** -----

----- **RACEWAY PIT** -----

----- **MC PIT** -----

----- **INSPIRED PIT** -----

----- **SALAMANDER SUICIDE PIT** -----

----- **PIGNUT PIT** -----

DEAD DOG DISPATCH. #23

----- **POST HOLE PIT** -----

Jeff Hajenga, Katie Schneider, & various people – Final invertebrate inventory & removal of cover boxes for PhD project

Nov 5 --- **BENDERS CAVE, Berk Co, WV** ---
Jerry Bowen, Bob Bennett, Holly Morris, & 5 TV crew – “Good Golly Where’s Holly”

Nov 17 -- **SCOTT HOLLOW, Mon Co, WV** --
Billy Gibberson, Ben Doan, Ehren Gieske, & Todd Roberts – Went upstream to Kansas & then dropped down to Mystic & took Mothes

Borehole to Camp – Took some great pics of Ambers Garden & the Glacier Room – 7.5 hr

Nov 19 - **SOTANA de las HUASTECA, Mex** --
Kurt Waldrun, Chris Coates, & Nikki Fox – Pretty 420' open air pit – Nikki did a 48 sec rappel – Chris did a 9:50 solo climb – Knee-high jungle at the bottom

Nov 20 ----- **EL SOLCAVON, Mexico** -----
Nikki, Chris, & Kurt – Funnel shaped pit – Between 600 & 700 feet

Nov 21 ----- **LAS POSAS, Mexico** -----
Nikki, Chris, & Kurt – Millions of dollars spent on concrete buildings & sculptures with a creek & many waterfalls

Nov 22 - **HOYA de las GUAGUAS, Mexico** --
Nikki, Chris, & Kurt – 668' high-side rappel – Had nests of killer bees on both sides of pit – Nikki was stung by a killer bee – Had to wait an hour for a nest of ants to decide to move

Nov 23 ----- **GOLINDRINAS, Mexico** -----
Nikki, Chris, & Kurt – 1200' rappel

Nov 23 --- **NEW TROUT, Pend Co, WV** -----
Eric Berge & 7 others – 6 hours – Made it past the dusty crawls & explored the mazy area – After the trip & passing truck's mirror hit one of the scouts as he was standing along the road

DEC --- **4th OF JULY CAVE, Scott Co, VA** ---
Danny & Carrie Cumbo – GPS

----- **UNKNOWN CAVE, Scott Co, VA** -----
Danny & Carrie - GPS

Dec 1 ---- **PAXTONS, Allegheny Co, VA** -----
Twila Neeld, Pete Bracken & 4 others – Getting to know the cave – The dog-tooth spar pools are always a treat

DEC 8 ---- **FRG CHRISTMAS SOCIAL** -----
Bob & Paulette Bennett, Janet & Rex Tinkham, Lauren Rexford, Greg McCoy, Nikki Fox, Chris Coates, Marie Everhart, & may others

DEC 12 - **WRAP PRESENTS for RED CROSS** -

I. #1 JAN 2008 15

Carl & Sandy Amundson, Eric & Priscilla Armer, Bob & Paulette Bennett, Jerry Bowen, Danny Cumbo, Ben Doan, Rosie Wisecarver, John DiCarlo, JC Fisher, Ellie Florance, Lauren Rexford, Greg McCoy, Linda Kling, Jon Peterson, Ken Tayman, Chuck Stanley, Bernie & Sean Wootten

DEC 15 -- GROTTO CHRISTMAS PARTY ----

Tracey Miller, James & Jesse Bennett, Madison Brantley, DJ, Derek, Connie, Justan, & Karlie Bennett, Bernie & Sean Wootten, Erek & Sid Bennett, Bob & Paulette Bennett, Jeff & Carrie Marcum, Jobeth Wisecarver, Ben Doan, Sonny Floyd, Lynn & John DiCarlo, Steve Rexford, Lauren Rexford, Greg McCoy, John Roche, Ken Tayman, Jon Peterson, Eric & Priscilla Armer, Maria & Stephen Ford, Carl ____, Brenda Byers, Brent Jefferson, & Todd Roberts – 38 people – Not bad considering the freezing rain!

Dec 16 --- **McMAHONS MILL #2, Wash Co, MD** -----

Sean & Bernie Wootten, Bob Bennett, & Jonathan Dunham – Water in pool was cold!

Dec 21 ---- CRYSTAL GROTTOS FIRE -----

John DiCarlo, Sean, Bernie, Christopher, Tyler, Jonathan, & Abigail Wootten, Jerry & Cassie Downs, & local farmer – Cleaned up mess

Dec 22 ---- CRYSTAL GROTTOS FIRE -----

John, Farmer, Jerry, Sean, Bernie, Chris, Tyler, Jonathan, Abigail, Jeff Noe, & friends of Jerry – Cleaned up mess

Dec 23 ---- CRYSTAL GROTTOS FIRE -----

John, Jerry, Sean, Bernie, Chris, Tyler, Jonathan, Abigail, Tina Blaik, Samantha Hicks, & Jerry Bowen



Harpers Pit



Paxtons



Harpers Pit



SAVIN CALENDAR

JANUARY 6TH - FEBRUARY 16TH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Jan 6 Pocahontas Co Trip	Jan 7	Jan 8	Jan 9  Grotto meeting 7pm	Jan 10	Jan 11	Jan 12
Jan 13	Jan 14	Jan 15	Jan 16	Jan 17	Jan 18	Jan 19
Jan 20	Jan 21 MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY	Jan 22	Jan 23	Jan 24	Jan 25	Jan 26 Greenbrier Co Tri- see Sean & Bernie
Jan 27 Greenbrier Co Tri- - see Sean & Bernie	Jan 28	Jan 29	Jan 30	Jan 31	Feb 1	Feb 2 GROUND HOG DAY
Feb 3 Super Bowl	Feb 4	Feb 5	Feb 6	Feb 7	Feb 8	Feb 9
Feb 10	Feb 11	Feb 12	Feb 13  Grotto Meeting 7pm	Feb 14  VALENTINE'S DAY	Feb 15	Feb 16

DEAD DOG DISPATCH



SALAMANDER IN CALDWELL CAVE

- 1- RETURN TO THE OMEGA SYSTEM
- 2- CRYSTAL GROTTOS FIRE
- 3- BOUNCING PITS IN MEXICO

DEAD DOG DISPATCH

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