

# **NITTANY GROTTO NEWS**



**MEXICO**



**CHINA**

**VOLUME 54  
NUMBER 1  
MARCH 2008**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

---

Nittny Grotto Returns to Mexico .....	4-29
Cueva Pino del Oso #3 .....	24-25
Cueva de Ricky & Cueva de Lucy .....	26-27
Cuevas Pino del Oso #1 .....	28
Cueva de Escaladores .....	29
OTR My Caving Trip Report 9-2-07 .....	30
Rupert Cave Rings Out .....	31
Ruth Cave Twice .....	32
Jim Hixson Remembered .....	33-34
A Wed. Night Trip on a Sun. Afternoon .....	35
The Bat Plucking at Mt. Rock .....	36
Former Nittany Grotto Visits - New Zealand .....	37
Fall MAR 2008 .....	38
Kaza-Doom it is .....	39-41
A Trip to China - Tiankeng .....	42-55
K2 Dig Morphs into BowWow Cave .....	56-61

---

---

## NOTE FROM THE GUEST EDITOR...

This issue is available online where all photographs are in color. Log on to the Nittany Grotto website and follow the links.

Many thanks to those of you who contributed articles and photographs for this issue.

Please send me your articles, photographs, poetry, prose, cartoons, etc. All will be considered for publication.

Guest Editor, *Keith D. Wheeland*

Printed copies of this newsletter include a MAR Fall 2008 registration form.

## THE COVER:

**Top:** Cueva del Tecolote (Owl Cave), Nuevo Leon, Mexico. Photo by Rob Martin.

**Bottom:** Sanqiao Tiankeng as seen through the first of a series of natural bridges. China. Photo by Will White.

Copyright © 2008 by Nittany Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Permission to reprint any material contained herein is freely granted upon request of either the Editor or the specific author(s) of the article concerned.

*Nittany Grotto News* (ISSN 0732-5398) is published on an irregular basis by the

Nittany Grotto  
P.O. Box 676  
State College, PA 16804-0676

POSTMASTERS: Send address changes to Nittany Grotto. Printed in the USA.

# **GROTTO OFFICERS AND POINTS OF CONTACT**

---

*Feel free to contact any of the persons below  
in regard to Grotto or caving business.*

## **CHAIRMAN**

Amanda Morrow  
alm489@psu.edu

## **VICE CHAIRMAN**

unfilled

## **SECRETARY**

Samantha Lloyd

## **TREASURER**

Pat Hensel  
pjhensel@gmail.com

## **FACULTY ADVISOR**

Dr. William B. White  
4538 Miller Rd  
Petersburg, PA 16669-2711  
(814) 667-2709  
wbw2@psu.edu

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Keith D. Wheeland  
2919 Mt. View Ave.  
State College, PA 16801  
(814) 238-2057  
kwheeland@psualum.com

## **NITTANY GROTTO NEWS**

the journal of the Nittany Grotto, both a local chapter of the National Speleological Society and a student organization of the Pennsylvania State University.

*Guest Edited  
by  
Keith D. Wheeland*

### **Membership/Subscriptions**

The Nittany Grotto welcomes all persons, especially those with an interest in caves and caving, to come to the meetings, participate in activities, and become members of the Nittany Grotto. A membership includes a subscription to the *Nittany Grotto News*. The annual fee is \$5.00 for full-time students of the Pennsylvania State University, others \$15.00. Memberships run from September 1 through August 31. Membership inquiries may be directed to Keith D. Wheeland using the contact information on this page.

### **Meetings**

The Nittany Grotto has a General Meeting once every two weeks. This meeting is held every other Wednesday (beginning with the first Wednesday of each semester) at 7:00 p.m. in 29 Intramural (IM) Building. The General Meeting ends with a program, usually on a cave-related subject. Afterwards, an After-Meeting Meeting (AMM), complete with refreshments, is hosted by a grotto member at his or her residence. At this social event, grotto members may discuss and plan future caving trips.

### **Submissions**

The *Nittany Grotto News* encourages and welcomes submissions to this journal. Send your articles, trip reports, editorials, equipment evaluations, artwork, photography, humor, and/or other material to the Editor in care of the Nittany Grotto, P.O. Box 676, State College, PA 16804-0676.

<http://www.clubs.psu.edu/up/NittanyGrotto/>

# THE NITTANY GROTTO RETURNS TO MEXICO

or

Replacement Transmission: \$2000  
Emergency Room visit for kidney stone: \$1200  
Lost cave pack and contents: \$600  
Caving trip to Mexico with friends: PRICELESS

by Keith "Gustavo" Wheeland, with help from Jim "Choque" Kennedy, Bryan "Cuervo" Crowell, Rob "Roberto" Martin, Amanda "Güera" Morrow, and Tone "El Tono" Garot

It all started when Ben Smith sent an email to the grotto asking who was going caving over the Christmas holidays. Earlier Jim Kennedy had asked Bryan Crowell (Crow) if he would be interested in a return trip to Mexico. So when the Ben Smith email came, Jim again suggested a trip to Mexico and sort of appointed Crow as the recruiter for the Pennsylvania contingent. I was reading my email while sitting in a friend's condo on Topsail Beach in early November. Crow asked me if I would be going. When I returned from South Carolina, I checked my passport and found that it had not expired. Good! That meant a "go" as far as I was concerned. After the usual recruiting settled down, there were four Nittany Grotto members from State College who seemed fairly certain of going. Our Nittany Grotto president, Amanda Morrow, Bryan Crowell (Crow), Rob Martin, and me. We had two planning meetings where eating and drinking seemed to be the main activity, but we came away with a plan. It was decided that I would provide my Toyota Sienna AWD minivan and the four of us would share expenses and take turns driving to Austin, Texas. There we would meet another Nittany Grotto member, Jim Kennedy, who was to be our expedition leader. We decided to leave on December 20<sup>th</sup> and drive non-stop to Austin. Jim was hoping to get a few recruits from his area of the country, and maybe even get someone with a 4WD vehicle, to augment his 4WD Isuzu Trooper.

When it was time to leave for Mexico, Jim had recruited only Tone Garot who flew in from Tucson, Arizona. Jim works for Bat Conservation International (BCI). He had ample vacation, so he and Tone decided to go to Mexico several days ahead of us.

But that was not to be! On Monday the 17<sup>th</sup> of December, Jim and Tone were about a half hour south of Austin near San Marcos when the transmission of the Trooper decided to take a vacation. The Trooper was towed to a transmission shop and Jim called a friend, Logan McNatt, who loaned him a small



The Disabled Trooper - Tone Garot

Toyota pickup. Then the search for a transmission began. The second-hand transmission was finally found but wasn't installed until December 26<sup>th</sup>. During the "down" time, Jim found other diversions to keep us busy. But I'm getting ahead of my story. At about 8 a.m. on December 20<sup>th</sup>, Rob and Crow appeared at my door, and we transferred their gear to my van. We finally found Amanda's place despite the ill-conceived addressing scheme found in Toftrees. By 8:20 a.m. we were on the road to Austin. We took turns driving. We stopped only for gas where we also grabbed a bite and performed other

necessary functions. At one such stop, I needed to use the men's restroom. I walked in to see water pouring out of the only two urinals. Fortunately the floor drain was taking all the water. I went into the doorless stall to relieve myself, while two female employees stood there deciding what to do about the water problem. (Their's, not mine!)

We arrived at Jim's door exactly 25 hours after leaving State College, Pa. We weren't sure if Jim would



The Toyota Van - Rob Martin

be at his place, or if he had already left for Mexico. (We were not privy to the details about the transmission at that time.) We were kind of surprised when Jim answered the door. Soon we met Tone. The six of us walked to a nearby restaurant, La Tapatia, for breakfast. It proved to be a popular place for us for two reasons. One - it was inexpensive (three tacos for \$2.35), and two - Amanda has an addiction for any food that is Mexican. Tacos, Tacos, Tacos!

It was then that we heard the details about the transmission problem. So now what do we do? What else? Jim and Tone gave us a tour of cave entrances within the Austin city limits. We visited the entrances to Midnight Cave, Wade Sink, Hideout Cave, Goat Cave, and Maple Run Cave. We also visited Barton Springs. We planned what to do next as Jim prepared a home-cooked meal and frozen margaritas. I had a beer or two.

## Dec. 22

We stranded cavers went to a friend's place to help unload a car and motorcycle from a flatbed trailer. Then, while Jim checked on his transmission, Tone led the rest of us on a four-hour trip into Whirlpool Cave which is managed by the Texas Cave Management Association (TCMA). We met the key holder, Heather Tucek, at the cave which is also within the city limits. A Whirlpool Cave trip consists mostly of crawling. At one point we got to the Birth Canal, known for its tight squeeze. I squeezed and pushed and tore skin off of my shoulder, but I didn't fit - nor did Rob. Fortunately the floor of the tight part was dirt, so I retrieved my fold-up trowel from my pack and Tone and I lowered the floor. After "Team Speleo-engineers" was finished, Rob and I slid through easily. Even after the triumph, Rob decided to rest while we went to the end of the cave. It felt good to come out into the cool air after enduring the unaccustomed heat in the cave. (In addition to the high humidity, Texas caves average around 70 to 72° F.)

I took an afternoon nap while the others went to Gary Franklin's place to practice their Tyrolean rope technique. Again, Jim fed us well as we all pitched in to help. I was in bed early that night.

## Dec 23

Jim had an idea. Christmas was approaching and still no transmission for the Trooper. Why not do some caving in west Texas? We packed up Logan's Toyota pickup truck and the Sienna and drove to the Punkin/Deep Cave Preserve near Carta Valley, Texas. Punkin and Deep caves are owned and managed by the TCMA. There we stayed in the cabin on the preserve. "Cushy" is what I call it. The cabin has heat, hot and cold water, A/C, lights, an electric stovetop, and an electric stove with oven. The only thing missing is a real outhouse. The "facility" is a box with a lid into which a 5-gal bucket is placed. The bucket is doubled lined with plastic bags. This contraption is placed at the end of a winding path among the shrubs. When you have the urge, you start down the path and make your presence known in case the facility is already in use. After you finish, you sprinkle some lime from a bucket, cover the lime with a small sprinkling of

## Mexico

wood shavings, and put on the lid. Paper and hand sanitizing lotion are provided in a handy container. In late afternoon we went to Punkin Cave where we rigged the two vertical entrances for a planned trip the next day. Then we hiked to Deep Cave to look at the entrance. By that time it was time to eat again. Jim brought his laptop on the trip, so in the evening we watched *Airheads* and *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*. They were both tolerable if one had a few brews or a few glasses of Jim's popular margaritas.

### Dec 24

Today after a hearty breakfast we hiked to Punkin Cave from the cabin. I chose the 25-ft entrance drop



Punkin Cave - Keith Wheeland

into the cave. We split into two teams for surveying. Crow, Rob, and I were on one team. Jim, Tone, and Amanda were the other team. Our team started in the entrance room and surveyed down. Jim's team climbed out of the entrance room and surveyed up. I really enjoyed using my Stanley Fat Max laser distance finder for measuring distance and for setting stations. Our survey was dubbed, NBC (Nightmare Before Christmas) and we surveyed 63 meters including a 27 meter shot to tie into one of the permanent stations in the entrance room. Most of the new passage (36 meters) was vertical climb-down. At one spot we rigged webbing because I wasn't sure that I could get back up again without it. While setting our 10<sup>th</sup> station, we heard voices and then saw that the other team was surveying toward us. Our survey team tied into their survey. The other team climbed up the passage that we had just surveyed, and we climbed down to a big room and climbed up another route to the entrance room. On the way Rob spotted a Western big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*). From my vantage point I could only see its long ears sticking out from around a corner. When I tried to get a

better look, it flew away. We did get to see a small cluster of other Cave Myotis bats (*Myotis velifer*).

Jim led a trip into another section of the cave, eventually to Fifty Fathoms, the lowest point (so far) in Punkin Cave. Crow decided to stay in the entrance room. Rob and I soon left the group and route-found our way back to the entrance. The others continued to the deepest part of the cave through what was described as near-vertical crawling. Coming back from the deepest part, Tone got separated from Jim and Amanda. Jim soon located Tone, but Tone's shoulders didn't fit through the squeeze. Through lots of pounding with nearby rocks, Tone managed to produce yet another path in the maze of Punkin. The group with sense enough to not go to the deep part of the cave soon began the climb out of the entrance to the surface. I took the longest time because I'm not very experienced in vertical work. With advice from the Rob and Crow I was able to get out safely



Inside Punkin Cave - Tone Garot  
Rob, Keith, Brian, Jim, Amanda

under my own power. We all left the cave at 4:15 p.m. and were back at the cabin at 4:50 p.m.

We snacked on baby clams, roasted eels, smoked oysters, smoked Sprat, red and green salsa, and chips. Then came more beer and margaritas. We showered with **hot** water. Or was this just a dream? Christmas Eve dinner consisted of baked ham, potatoes, fresh green beans, cornbread stuffing, tossed salad, bread, cranberry sauce, and cherry and pecan pie. I placed

my red glittery “Humbug” sign on the windowsill, and lit the bayberry candles given to me by my sister, Bev. As stated, “A bayberry candle burned to the socket brings health to the home and wealth to the pocket.”

Jim entered the survey data into the laptop. We finished Christmas Eve by watching *Badder Santa*, the unrated version of *Bad Santa*.

### Dec 25

After a breakfast of ham, potatoes, cheese, salsa, and tostadas, we tackled the job of pulling nails from the donated used lumber that is stacked on the property. We worked on the project from 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. putting in 12 person-hours. The clean lumber was stacked separately, then both piles were covered with a tarp.

Once again we hiked to Punkin Cave. Crow, Tone, and Rob entered the cave to take photos. Jim led Amanda on a trip into Deep Cave, and I hiked around taking pictures, and then ended up clearing the Punkin Cave parking lot of loose stones just as the rest of the crew was ready to hike back to the cabin. Here is what Amanda had to say about the trip to Deep Cave.

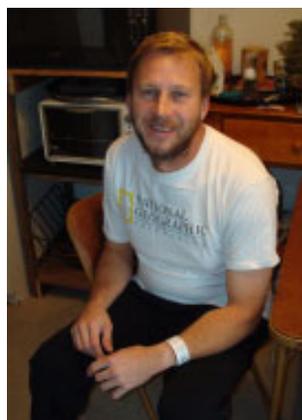
“The trip to Deep Cave was nothing short of spectacular. We only explored one small section of the cave but it was one of the most highly decorated caves I have even seen. This cave is often a haven for scorpions so as we were precariously climbing down (Fig 1) we had to keep a watch out for little black stinging things. After hugging the wall during this climb down we finally entered the Forest of Columns. Many of these features make the largest objects in J-4 look typical. The ceiling was covered in them as far as one could see (Fig 2). The next location we finally found was filled with soda straws (Fig 3), and then we entered a passage of coral, the Helictite Room. These small sections of the cave show just a fraction of the diversity of Deep Cave. This cave is just a 10 minute walk from Punkin Cave and equally as mazy; yet due to the structure of the cave the bats

choose not to come here, so there is no guano, unlike the great mounds in Punkin Cave.”

We thoroughly cleaned the cabin, made our donations to the TCMA, entered the details into the log book, and closed the cabin per instructions. We headed back to Austin at 4:15 p.m. arriving at Jim’s home at 9:45 p.m. stopping for a meal along the way. Jim was not feeling well and thought he was trying to pass a kidney stone. He went to bed early.

### Dec 26

About 1 a.m., Jim couldn’t endure the pain, and asked to be taken to the emergency room. Crow, Amanda, and I slept while Tone and Rob accompanied Jim.



Jim Kennedy Recovering  
Rob Martin

After an MRI and pain medicine were administered at the hospital, the three returned about 4 a.m.

Although still feeling groggy, Jim (along with Tone) went to pick up Jim’s repaired Trooper where it had broken down in San Marcos, TX. The transmission worked which meant we were

now able to get really serious about going to Mexico! Jim did his part to move things along by passing the offending kidney stone sometime during the morning. Mexico here we come!

Jim, Rob, and I drove the Sienna to the local Wal-Mart to pick up Jim’s medication. (Just to set the scene, you need to know that the Pennsylvania license plates on my Sienna say “CAVING”.) While waiting for the prescription to be filled, we looked around and picked up a few extra supplies for the Mexico trip. Jim sat down to rest, so Rob and I decided to look at the bin of DVDs to see if there might be something of interest to watch on the trip back to State College. (The Sienna has a DVD player in the back along with a remote control and wireless headphones.) While looking through the bin, I pulled out a DVD to ask Rob his opinion. A tall young man

## Mexico

offered his opinion. He told us that he had seen the movie and remembered it as being great. He said that he was about 14 at the time and had cried because he didn't want to accompany his parents to see the show. Evidently the parents prevailed. I then told the fellow that I was from Pennsylvania. His next words were, "Oh you're a caver!" I was shocked that he knew that about me. I soon learned the secret to his intuition because in his next breath, he said, "I parked next to your van in the parking lot". He was behind us in the checkout line and I pointed him out to Jim. The two of them had a short conversation about caves of the area.

We packed most of the gear for the upcoming Mexico trip then watched *Touching the Void*, a re-enactment of a skiing expedition. Awesome.

### Dec 27

We had breakfast again at La Tapatia. (It was probably at Amanda's suggestion.) Then we finally began our long overdue trip to Mexico at 9:15 a.m.

We were able to convoy the whole trip. We stopped in Laredo, Texas to purchase auto insurance (for the Sienna, \$118 for 6 days), and exchange some dollars into pesos (about 11 to the dollar). Then we paid our toll (\$3) to cross the International Bridge into Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. Finding the way to the building where one obtains visas and vehicle permits is not a straightforward effort. After crossing the International Bridge the building is on the right, but one must turn left on a small side street, maneuver through parked vehicles, go through two intersections with signals, then cross a wide boulevard and finally make a U-turn onto a two-way street parallel to the boulevard. When I tried it the first time, both lanes of the two-way street were occupied with vehicles coming my way. I took the obvious way on which was the boulevard. Unfortunately this led not to the building, but back across the bridge into the US. Fortunately we were able to shoo some vendors who were blocking an exit and try again. On the third



try, I was able to make it to the building. We got our free visas and I purchased an automobile permit good for six months (40 pesos). Behind the window to which I was assigned, I found a sweet English-speaking female clerk.

The odd thing is this: at no time during the trip were we asked to see our visas, and to our knowledge no one looked at the vehicle permit on the windshield. There is a possibility that the vehicle permit was automatically scanned at an entry station down the road through which all vehicles must pass. (But I doubt it!)

After getting all of our paperwork settled, we stopped at a small mom-and-pop Mexican eatery. Notice I didn't say restaurant. It was in the same building as a small grocery store. The two symbiotic businesses had a small window in the wall that separated them. When the man who was cooking needed something he would yell over to the grocery side. The "restroom" was also in the grocery store. There was a door that didn't close, a commode without a seat, and a small sink. Nonetheless we had good cheap tacos. Oh yes, we had to buy our drinks in the grocery store and carry them to the dining area.

After our short break for lunch we continued on our way, easily passing through the border checkpoint with a green signal light. To be feared here is the dreaded red signal light and the total search of the vehicle. The dread stems not from finding something illegal, but for the time consumed in unpacking and repacking the vehicle.

We all stopped in Monterrey to buy groceries for our stay in Mexico. Monterrey is the capital city of the northeastern Mexican state of Nuevo León and is probably most US-like of the large cities of Mexico. Rather than stop at the Super Wal-Mart which was our original intent, we stopped at a US grocery chain called H.E.B. made popular in Texas. It was a very large supermarket with all the things you would find in a well stocked US supermarket. Our total bill came to about 1500 pesos, roughly \$140.

Our next stop was to buy gas before driving up into the mountains. It's somehow refreshing to walk into a gas station to find bins of beer on ice being sold by the can. We refrained from the temptation. Next we stopped at a woman's home near Santiago to pick up the key for the cabin in which we would be staying. Our stay would be free which suited our pocketbooks quite nicely. The woman conversed with Jim who knows enough Spanish to get by, but she was telling him something he couldn't quite understand. So she sent for one of her sons while we all crowded into her living room and tried to make conversation. When her son arrived, he finally unraveled the mystery after making a phone call of his own. It appeared that the gate on the driveway to the cabin would be locked and that we would have to park at the bottom of the hill and carry all of our gear up the quarter-mile steep road to the cabin. We weren't exactly thrilled at the prospect of hauling two vehicles worth of heavy gear up the hill, but we would do it.

Our next stop was to buy beer at the local grocery store where Jim has stopped in the past. Our last stop was the cabin near the town of Laguna de Sanchez. By this time it was dark so the trip into the mountains meant that we couldn't see the scenery as we followed a twisting road up and over mountains, past giant boulders, and between towering limestone cliffs. It was 9:45 p.m. when we reached the gate leading to the cabin. We were so relieved to find that the gate was unlocked and that we could drive right up to the cabin. Oztotl was good to us. (Fun loving cavers have come to accept Oztotl as the cave god. Oztotl is the Aztec word for cave.)

We unlocked the cabin and were greeted with a sink full of dishes, mouse droppings, two dead mice (and one live one) in the bathroom, and musty bedrooms. Jim moved into the "master" bedroom, I chose a single bed in the other 3-bed bedroom, and some climbed the skinny, precarious ladder to situate them-

selves in the loft. To counteract the mustiness, we opened the bedroom window to air it out. Room switching between the downstairs bedroom and the loft took place so that by the end of our stay, all three beds in the downstairs bedroom were occupied.

After unloading and getting settled, I enjoyed an Indios beer before bathing in the cold water provided by an overflow next to the cistern, then crawled into my cold sleeping bag.

### Dec 28

We set up a table outside on which to cook and prepare meals. Jim brought a small 2-burner propane camp stove on which he prepared delicious feasts. This morning Jim cooked eggs and bacon served with tortillas and salsa. I discovered the secret of the water system and hooked up the water so that we had running cold water in the kitchen and bathroom – yes, we had a real bathroom complete with shower. Crow and I attempted to start the outside hot water

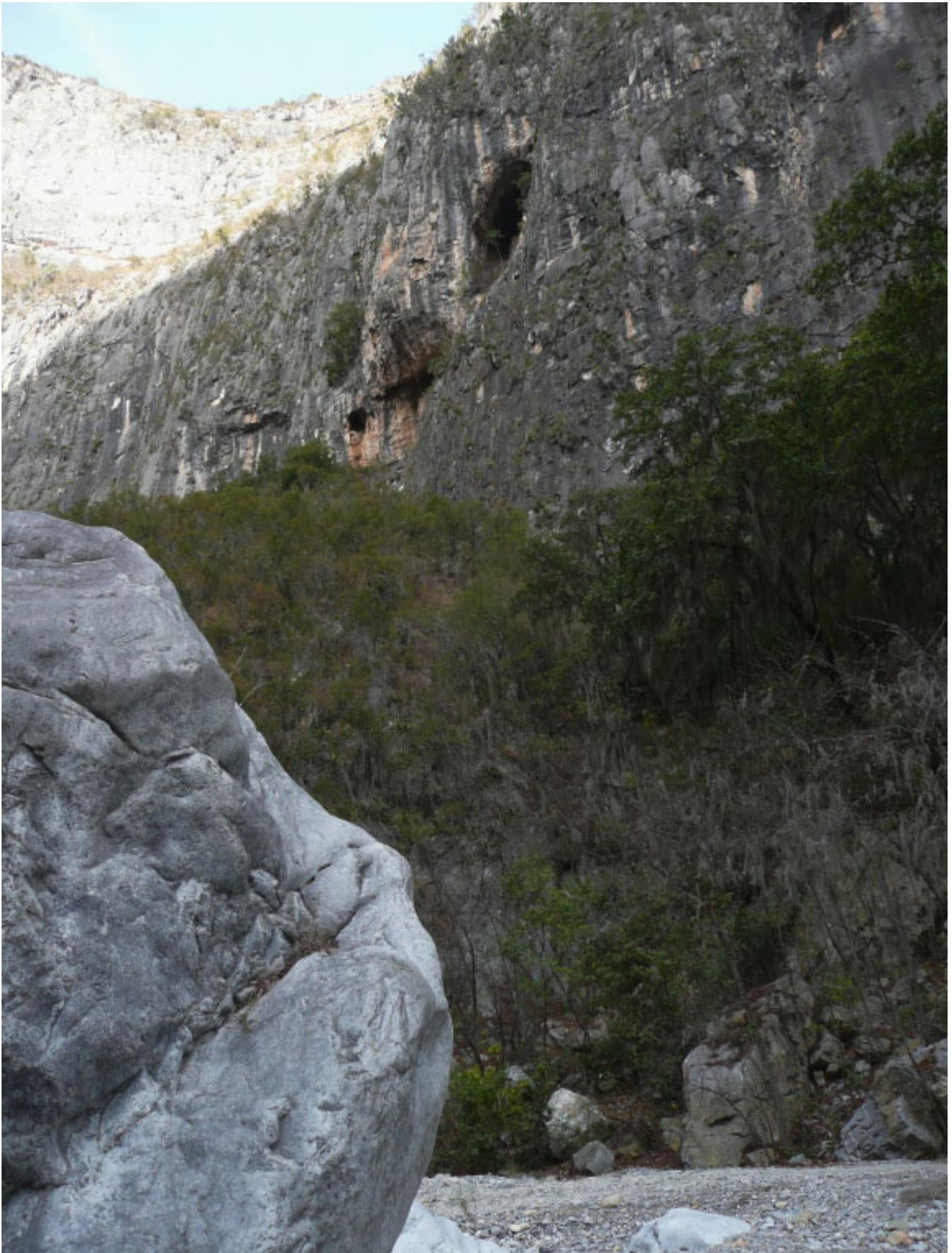
heater for hot showers but were thwarted when we realized that the water heater is gas powered and that the cabin's propane tank was empty. Bummer! The gas stove in the kitchen was of no use either.



Our home in Mexico - Keith Wheeland

This day we all piled into the

Trooper and drove to the upper part of the Huasteca Canyon to an area called El Salto. Before we got there we stopped to admire the wonderful scenery, ooh and aah, and take lots of pictures. Getting to the canyon requires a 4WD vehicle so the Trooper was put to the test. Part of the road is actually up a dry stream bed filled with rocks. As we got closer to our destination, we were greeted with many rock climbers taking advantage of the sheer cliffs and the beautiful (but chilly) day.



Our goal, the upper cave. - *Keith Wheeland*

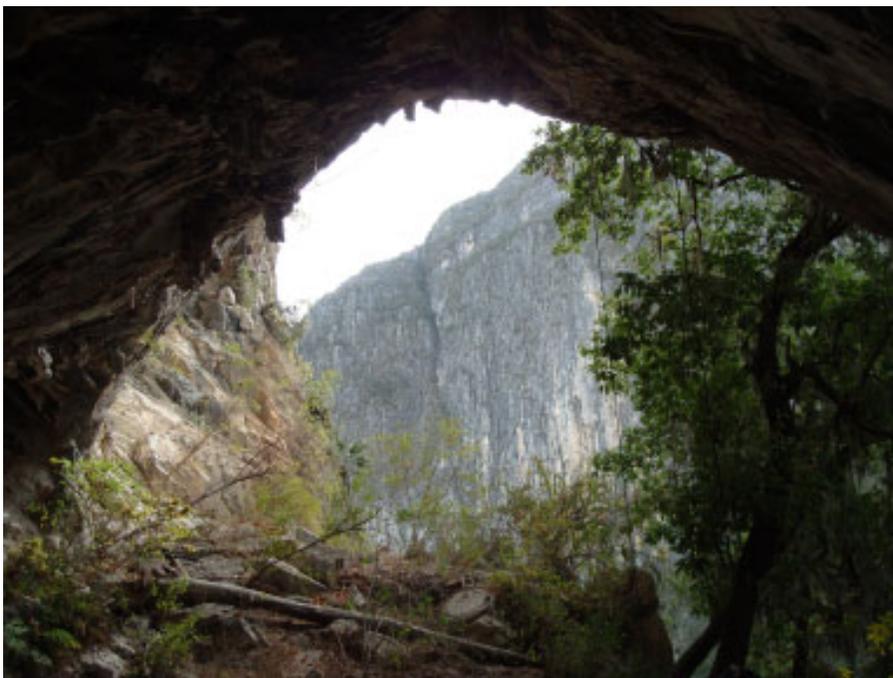
Our goal was to survey a cave high up on the cliff that we could see from the bottom of the canyon. Jim had seen the cave on a previous trip and used the picture of this large opening with a palm tree in front as an enticement for the Mexico trip. At the base of the opening there is an old slump that has grown up with trees and brush. We started up, most attacking the hill from its front. I took a minute to determine the route I would take.

I had only climbed about twenty feet when I discovered a trail that appeared to be winding up to the top. I called out to Jim who was skeptical. I kept repeating that I was on a trail. And I was making much faster progress than the others. Jim finally made it up to the trail and joined me. At times I thought I heard voices coming from the cave. But since there were no vehicles parked nearby I figured it was just the wind. As we got closer to the top we realized that this place was a favorite spot for rock climbers, for there, in the lower cave entrance, we encountered six climbers. Some were climbing beside the cave, some partially inside, and still others offering encouragement. Dozens of bolts and hangers had been placed at various routes, even inside the caves.

Jim walked along the cliff face and found another cave that we decided to survey. Since according to the climbers it didn't have a name, Jim named it Cueva de Escaladores (Climbers Cave) (*map page 29*). Jim and I began to survey this one-room cave that didn't extend into darkness. Then Tone joined us to collect insects and spiders.

Crow, Amanda, and Rob (our expedition rock climber) surveyed the cave at which the climbers were located. It already had a name, Cueva del Tecolote (Owl Cave) (*map page 29*). While their group was finishing Owl Cave we tried to reach the large opening (with the palm tree) that we could see from

the canyon floor. It will require special climbing gear, and possibly bolts, since it is above the slump and up a sheer cliff. The El Salto area is well known to rock climbers and has about 45 bolted routes. A few years ago an article appeared in the magazine *Rock and Ice* describing the cave and its surroundings. See also <http://ranchopotrerochico.com/salto.htm> for a few pictures.



Cueva del Tecolote (Owl Cave) - Rob Martin

While searching for a route to the upper cave, Jim and Tone looked across the canyon to the opposite wall and spotted two dark spots through the vegetation. By examining the spots with my binoculars, we determined that they sure looked like caves and should be investigated.

While the other group was finishing up their survey, Jim, Tone, and I went to look at the two places of interest across the canyon. A short hike through vegetation and over rocks brought us to the lower place of interest. It certainly was a cave! We surveyed it and named it Cueva de Ricky (Ricky Cave). (*Page 27*) We started up toward the upper place of interest which was 70–80 feet higher up the cliff. I tried one route to a dead-end, and had to retreat. I then tried to climb up a clump of trees growing near the cliff, but

## Mexico

again I was turned back. Jim and Tone got way ahead of me, so I decided to do some “ridge walking” along the cliff face. I found nothing of interest. After much effort, Jim and Tone made it up to the higher place of interest and found a cave, surveyed it, and named it Cueva de Lucy (Lucy Cave). (Page 26)

Meantime the other survey team had climbed back down to the canyon floor and decided to hike down the canyon. Jim and Tone made their tricky descent down from Cueva de Lucy and told me they were hiking back to the Trooper. I decided to wait for Crow, Rob, and Amanda to return. Shortly they came back except for Amanda. We waited a bit then Rob and Crow decided to hike back down the canyon to find Amanda.

When Rob and Crow returned with Amanda in tow, here is what she reported.

“I had continued down the canyon in search of more caves, and was intrigued with a large broken-down solutional area and then another ‘cave’ under some boulders that housed a lot of flies and spiders. The buzz from the flies in this area was so loud that it almost felt like it was inside my head. I guess they need a cool place to live too. I saw another cave up on the cliff face, but a climb up to it seemed difficult. Further down the canyon was a 4WD driving club taking a day trip from Monterrey along this ‘road’. Eight of the cars passed a particularly bad section, but one got stuck and the rest couldn’t get around it. I spoke to the occupants of one of the Jeeps who told me that there are many more caves further (but very far) down the canyon.”

The four of us then joined Jim and Tone who were already situated in the Trooper. We drove back through the gorgeous gorges toward our cabin.

But instead of driving up to the cabin, we continued past the gate and up into the little town of Laguna de Sanchez. There Jim gave us a quick tour of town, and we stopped at the grocery store for some squash and other perishables. Our most memorable stop was at the wine store. A delightful colorful woman, named Eualalia, makes and sells wine made from apples and quinces grown in the orchards in the dry lagoon. We visited her shop which consists of a card-



Eualalia - Jim Kennedy

table sized table on her front patio. A number of times we were invited into her kitchen where she has a collection of cups and saucers. In addition to her electric range, she has a traditional Mexican fireplace where she still prefers to prepare her tortillas. On our first visit to her “store”, we bought a mere \$40 worth of alcohol. She was so happy and willing to sell us anything else, probably even the blouse off her back. We made a trip to her store almost every day for more of her amazing products and another helping of her exuberant character. One cold morning she spotted us in another part of town and invited us to her home for coffee. We were on a mission and declined her gracious offer.

During the day, it occurred to me that Tone was the only non Nittany Grotto member on this trip. While enjoying the campfire and having a few drinks before dinner, we formally made Tone an Honorary Nittany Grotto member for the duration of the expe-



Rough road.- Amanda Morrow

dition. Amanda tried to get him to jump naked into the reservoir which some called a cistern, and to shame him into paying Grotto dues. Tone was firm and did neither. When we got to Mexico, we tried to use Spanish words for things that we knew. While Rob was trying to get Tone to dunk himself, he used the word *cisterna*. Tone's response was, "You can't just add a f...ing "A" to a word and make it Spanish." We all had a laugh. Later we had a laugh at Tone after we looked up the word in Jim's Spanish/English dictionary and found it to be correct. After that we often reminded Tone of his remark. (All in good fun, of course.)

This evening we built up a few concrete blocks on the back patio to serve as a place to build a campfire. Rob collected firewood. Crow had taken old caving clothes to use on this expedition with the intent of leaving them in Mexico. This night he started a trend by burning his old clothes as a sacrifice to Oztotl. During the week we each made our own sacrifice of old cave clothes. I guess that if we were to do it right we should have sacrificed new cave clothes. But that's not what cavers do!

This night Jim prepared fried fish, rice, squash, and margaritas for supper. Others made freshly prepared guacamole which was served with chips. Cold beer rounded out the beverages.

### Dec 29

Last evening we decided to go up to the La Camotera plateau where Jim had explored on previous expeditions. It is the site of El Infierno de la Camotera, a deep pit cave with a colony of nectar eating bats (*Leptonycteris nivalis*). The bats are important because of their assistance in the pollination process of agaves which are an important source of income in the region. Over the years, the entrance to El Infierno has become overgrown making it difficult for the bats to come and go. Bat Conservation International was interested in clearing away the vegetation to aid the bats in their flights.

On the days that we had taken only the Trooper, one of us had to try to get comfortable in the back since there is seating only for five. In a conversation with

Jim, I learned that he and others have taken their 2WD vehicles to the plateau. So on this day I drove my 4WD Sienna, and Jim drove his Trooper.

We split up the group and off we went. Our first stop was a break at the pass (*Puerto Tejocote*) that also served as a photo op. We photographed the entrance to Cueva Linda Vista, a large cave (previously surveyed) that we could see up the cliff. We took pictures of cacti and other growth as we crawled on the rocks. After our refreshing break, we then continued on the switch-back road to arrive safely on the plateau about 1.5 hours after we started. The Sienna did well except for its low clearance which meant a few scrapes on the bottom as we drove over boulders and through streams – at a very slow speed. The road we followed is an actual surveyed road, but the uninitiated would not consider it a road.



Gerado - Rob Martin

Our second stop was to meet the 36-year old farmer, Gerado, who lives on the plateau with his wife and six children. He and his family are the only residents on the plateau. Gerado is a kind of caretaker, who earns money by tending his herds of cattle and goats. In addition, he collects Spanish moss for the market. He was proud to show off his old Chevrolet pickup truck that he recently acquired. I mention his truck, because it becomes the focus of another part of our adventure.

One of Gerado's sons took us down to see El Infierno, and we all got pictures of the overgrown entrance. We retraced our steps, and then moved our vehicles to a better parking spot. It was time to get to work clearing brush around El Infierno.

Jim cleared out some brush at the preferred rigging site and rigged it with a long rope and a single redi-



Jim Kennedy

El Infierno de la Camotera. **Above:** During clearing. **Below:** After clearing.



Keith Wheeland

rect. My job, all day long, was to haul up the vegetation that was cut by others, and stack it on the surface away from the entrance. I also lowered gear and was a general “step and go fetch it”. While we worked on the entry side, the others were busy rigging ropes for rappel and hauling lines on the side we were preparing to clear. Everyone, except me, took a turn on the ropes using saws, machetes, and pruning shears to clear the vegetation which included shrubs, greenbrier, and some small trees. The person on rope would first tie the vegetation to be cut using one of the haul ropes. This was to prevent vegetation from falling into the pit. They would then cut the vegetation and notify whoever was at the top to “haul away”. The hauled-up vegetation was untied and stacked away from the entrance. And the process was repeated. At one point, Rob took a timeout to recover from hyperthermia. By the time 4:30 p.m. arrived, most of the slope had been cleared. But we weren’t quite finished! We left the entrance drop rigged, and one haul line ready for the next day.

For supper Jim prepared chicken *mole* with rice and beans. We also indulged in our fresh-made guacamole, chips, wine, and beer.

### Dec 30

Today after breakfast, we drove back to La Camotera in the Trooper. I had decided that the road and the Sienna were not compatible. As we approached Gerado’s house we couldn’t proceed because his pickup truck was blocking the main road.

First we tried to jump start his truck. This didn’t work because the starter wasn’t engaging. After conversing with Gerado, we decided to push his truck further down the hill to a wide spot in the road near one of his sheds so that we could drive the Trooper around it. This we did. Now that the road was clear, Jim could maneuver the Trooper in front of the pickup. We tied the pickup to the Trooper and tried to pull it up the hill. This didn’t work because the hill was steep and the rocks smooth. Just to explain it further, this steep hill was the only place on the whole trip where my Sienna had a problem slipping.) About that time another driver in a Mazda 4x4 pickup truck appeared on the scene from the opposite direc-

tion followed by two fellows on ATVs. Now we had a party! In the Dominican Republic we called this the “milling around phase”. Spanish and English began to be heard with the usual hand and arm motions. Then the Mazda driver said that his tires were better than Jims, so he would try towing. Well, he apparently never engaged his hubs, so he too slipped on the hill. Then it was decided that while Mr. Mazda was pulling, the Trooper would push. But in order to do this, we had to push Gerado’s pickup back to the wide spot again. Still with me? The Mazda got in front towing Gerado’s pickup and Jim was in the rear



Jim’s Third Woe - *Jim Kennedy*

pushing with his Trooper. This arrangement seemed to be working until the back of Gerado’s truck slipped up over the Trooper’s front bumper. Not good. The Trooper’s grill was pushed in, the right headlight smashed, and the parking light knocked out. I called it Jim’s Third Woe. Fortunately the Trooper’s radiator was not damaged. So once again, we cavers pushed Gerado’s truck back to the wide spot in the road so we could drive past. The Mazda man drove off and the ATV fellows went buzzing away. And for us it was time to get to work - caving.

While Tone, Rob, Amanda, and Crow finished clearing vegetation from the pit, Gerado led Jim and I up the mountain to some caves that he had found since Jim’s last trip there

After we had gained about 500 feet in elevation, we reached a cave entrance. He showed us another one about 15 ft higher up. The upper cave was not free-

## Mexico

climbable, but Jim was able to climb down to a ledge in the lower cave. He decided that in order to continue down, he would need ropes. These would have to wait for another day. Jim asked Gerado whether the caves had a name. “No”, he said, but he would offer a name. He named the holes, Cueva Pino del Oso #1 and #2. (Bear Pine Caves). In order to explain the name, he took us downslope to a dead pine tree lying on the ground. He told us of bear scratches he had seen on the tree. We understood. As we made our way back down, Jim saw another hole that would need digging. He logged it into his GPS and hung up flagging tape. We did that for a few other likely spots that we encountered.

We made our way back to Gerado’s house, but he wasn’t finished. He told Jim that Cesar, his son, would show us yet another entrance. We would need

to drive. So Jim, Cesar, and I got into the Trooper and off we went. This time we traveled on a road on the upper side of the plateau. As we passed likely spots for caves we would get out and take a look. If there were an opening, Jim would GPS the site and hang up flagging tape. This continued until we got to the cave that Cesar knew about. The cave takes a stream in wet weather and looks really promising. I got a picture of Cesar and Jim near the entrance. Gerado called it Cueva de Rancho Tio Ticho (Uncle Ticho’s Ranch Cave), because his great-uncle once owned the parcel of land on which the cave is located. Cesar was ready to turn around, but Jim persisted in following the road. At one point there were sinkholes on each side of the road. Jim stopped. “You check that side. I’ll check this side” Off we went leaving Cesar in the truck. Soon I heard Jim say, “I have a cave!” My reply was, “I have a cave!” And so



Jim Kennedy and Cesar at Cueva de Rancho Tio Ticho (Uncle Ticho’s Ranch Cave) - *Keith Wheeland*

it went, we identified about seven openings before we turned the Trooper around and started home – much to Cesar’s satisfaction.

After we dropped Cesar off at his house, Jim and I returned to El Infierno just as the climbers were hauling up the climbing rope after their trip into the cave. Tone, Amanda, and Rob had dropped the pit while Crow stayed on the surface to enjoy the sunny day. Amanda explains her experience this way.

“The drop into El Infierno was pretty straightforward aside from the re-direct at the beginning, which caused me a little trouble since I had never tried one or had seen anyone else do one before. After Tone explained and coached me how to do it, I had no problem other than my slowness. The free drop is about 55 meters to a breakdown slope. There is one small room with pretties off to the right as you descend, but other than that the cave is just a big hole. Although we had been careful in clearing the brush from the entrance, many small pieces dropped to the bottom. Luckily they were hardly noticeable compared to the vastness of the chamber.”

We took pictures of the now fully cleared entrance. Jim and I dug in a likely spot nearby while Amanda and Rob surveyed a small cave called Cueva de Chivo Muerto (Dead Goat Cave). Tone and Crow hung out at the Trooper.

We all assembled at the Trooper and Jim took us on a riding tour to see other entrances on the lower side of the plateau. We stopped at Cueva Martiniano and some of us went in for a quick look at this highly decorated cave. At another stop, the others hiked to the entrance of Cueva de Tres Luces. Since I had seen the entrance the day before, I went the other direction and started a dig at a small hole that sure looks like a cave. It will have to wait. We found and GPSed a couple more caves not seen on previous trips. The Trooper made weird groaning noises at times, prompting the nickname “Chewie Blanco” after Chewbacca in the movie *Star Wars*. (Did I mention that the Trooper is white?)

We gathered lots of wood to take back to the cabin for our nightly campfire. The wood was placed on the roof rack along with the gear. This added additional weight to our load making the Trooper a little top heavy. While heading back up the mountain, the transmission burped and it slipped out of gear causing the Trooper to go backward. Jim quickly turned the wheel so we wouldn’t hurdle down the side of the steep bank on our right. In doing so it caused the left back wheel to go up a slope which meant that the Trooper was now in danger of tipping over. Someone yelled “Everyone out!” I looked out the window to my right and saw only the road surface. Tone was already out trying to keep the Trooper from tipping over and from drifting backward at the same time. Crow was sitting on the uphill side of the Trooper. He was able to open his door and distribute his weight on that side. Amanda was the last out because she had been riding behind the back seat. There was a short bit of panic when Tone yelled that there was liquid running off the back bumper. My first thought was brake fluid. But wait. The liquid was coming from the back window washer. We worked together – some pushing on the top – some pushing on the rear – and Jim working the controls inside. We finally got the Trooper stabilized. Then Jim was able to get the Trooper in gear and drove it up the road to the next fairly level spot. Relieved, we hiked up and got in Chewie Blanco to continue our journey. It was time to “take the edge off”, so we passed around a bottle of apple wine. Aah.

Supper was steak, French fries, and sautéed cabbage and onions, plus freshly made guacamole with chips, beer, and wine. Jim set up his MP3 player using some tiny speakers he had. From time to time, songs from the band “Boston” were played. Tone made it perfectly clear that he detested the group. So naturally, every time a Boston song would play, someone or everyone would yell out “Team Boston!!!” We had survived another day, and Tone would be forever haunted by our good-natured ribbing. Party on!

### **Dec 31 (New Years Eve)**

After breakfast, Jim announced that his cave pack was missing. It held his helmet, Sten light, survey gear, kneepads, and other gear (well over \$600

## Mexico

worth). We looked. We searched the sides of the road as we drove back to La Camotera. We retraced our driving of the day before. Jim checked with Gerado's wife. The pack stayed missing. But that didn't stop Jim from his priority – caving!

We all hiked up to the Pino del Oso caves that I mentioned previously. Rob, Amanda, and Crow went into Pino del Oso Cave #1 (*map page 28*) to survey out. They rigged the first rope and Rob descended. He called for the second rope. The cave was going deep! Jim and I went to a likely cave nearby that we had seen yesterday. After some digging by both of us, I was able to slide down into the vertical entrance while Jim remained on the surface. I could see a floor below. I had accidentally left my helmet at the bottom of the hill, so as Jim said, I was going “soft shell”. Not only that, I only had a small flashlight with a



Rob Martin Entering Pino del Oso #1.  
*Jim Kennedy*



Rob Martin and Bryan Crowell Setting Up to Survey Pino del Oso #1. Keith Wheeland with his back to the camera - just milling around.

*Jim Kennedy*

small cloth loop. I slipped the loop over my ear and wore the flashlight like a dangling earring – which worked well for lighting my climb down about 20 feet. I described the cave from inside, estimating distances and calling them out to Jim who recorded the data in my notebook. The climb back out was a little trickier since my light was shining down, and I needed it to shine up, but I made it. Jim got a picture of me at the entrance. (*map pages 24-25*).

Jim and I hiked around a little more and I once again looked into Pino del Oso #2. While doing this I looked along the nearly invisible outcrop and noticed a depression about 30 feet away. I clambered over to take a look. It was an 8-foot deep leaf-filled steep slope heading into the hill. I started pulling out leaves and noticed some deteriorating formations at the left hand side. The bottom of the slope looked like an entrance. Jim came over, and I started handing rocks out. As I cleared the leaves, I could see down into darkness. “It goes”, I told him. I came to larger and larger rocks. Jim was giving me suggestions. I tried once to squeeze in, but my chest wouldn't allow it. Out came the webbing. We hauled out one large rock and moved another to the side. But the moved rock was still in the way. Bummer! It too had to go. Jim wanted a try at the rock, so I began to climb out. Nearing the top I grabbed hold of the formation that I'd seen earlier. I pulled. Instead of my coming out, the formation came in! When it

broke, two large pieces of rotten formation above it dislodged. One just missed my “soft shell” head, and the other slammed into my wrist raising an ugly welt. I brushed the pieces out of my hair, and pronounced myself OK. Then Jim and I traded places.

Jim crawled to the bottom and lassoed the rock and we push-pulled it out. After some more rock pulling, we had enlarged the opening to an enterable size. Jim crawled back to the surface and accorded me the honor of being first to enter. This time I was able to slide in. I was being careful since I was going feet first down slope, and I couldn't see ahead. After a short squeeze, I was able to sit down inside and take a look. There was a small hole in the floor. Since we were fairly close to the vertical cave that the others were still surveying, I was being careful as I tried to enlarge the hole. Then a fist-sized rock accidentally fell down the hole. It rattled on and on, bouncing – silence – another bounce – silence – bounce as the sound became dimmer. I listened to see if maybe the caves were connected and I would hear swearing. I heard nothing. This time I pulled out a larger rock and deliberately left it fall. Awesome! Still I heard no response. This was fun. Then I told Jim to come in. I slid to the side so that he could enter. What he saw impressed him so he began to enlarge the hole even more.

By the time he was finished the hole was humanly passable and we had estimated it to be 200 feet deep. We decided to see if maybe the upper cave (Pino del Oso #2) was connected to this one. Jim crawled out and went over to Pino del Oso #2 and I stayed inside by the drop. When he yelled for me to drop another rock, I could hear his voice through the cave – and he heard mine. I dropped another rock and he could hear it from where he was. The two entrances connected! It was getting late and our work was done here so we walked back to Pino del Oso #1, and heard the cavers surveying out.

The surveyors had their own tales to tell. They had got to the bottom of Pino del Oso #1. It appears as if the cave is a rift, wider at the top and slightly narrowing as it got deeper. Pino del Oso #2 probably has the same structure. At no time did they see a

connection between the two caves. They could hear the rocks that we tossed, but there was a wall between them and the rocks. Strange! Or maybe not so strange if the caves are actually separate rifts.

While surveying up, Amanda noticed a small snake on the ledge where the first rope ended. Amanda's motherly instincts took over and she concerned herself with the welfare of the snake. To provide a suitable carrying case for the snake, Crow transferred the items from his survey pack into his regular pack.



Black-tailed Rattlesnake in Pino del Oso #1  
*Amanda Morrow*

Amanda coaxed the snake into the survey pack and brought it safely out of the cave. Jim said that he usually didn't rescue animals that fall into the caves since they become part of the natural food chain. But, none of surveyors had heard of that premise, so they were forgiven – especially by the snake! Jim identified the snake as a Black-tailed Rattlesnake, and proceeded to photograph it before allowing it to go free. Now when someone asks, “Don't you see snakes in caves?” there will have to an asterisk next to my answer!

Jim and I found yet another cave on the climb down the mountain, and logged it for another day. On our way back to the cabin we picked up more firewood for camp, and stopped in Laguna de Sanchez for more beer and food.

Jim prepared pork fajitas, beans, and rice and we provided fresh made guacamole with chips (are you

## Mexico

detecting a pattern here?). We had our usual wine and beer.

It is traditional in Mexico to herald the new year with fireworks. And Jim was prepared to be part of that tradition. And just to add the caver's touch, we fashioned carbide bombs using every soda bottle available. Although I went to bed early, I awoke in time to usher in the New Year. I added my own unique (but careless) touch to the festivities. I found some tongs in the kitchen and retrieved a few of the unexploded carbide bombs. With urging from the celebrants, I threw them on the fire. What a grand explosion or two or three! One time I didn't get away quick enough and the Fire God touched the back of my right hand (Rob got a picture), and burned three small perfectly-round holes in my fleece jacket. I just consider it my extra sacrifice to Oztotl! Stupid of me – but fun, nevertheless!

### Jan 1

This was a day of relaxation – sure! The sky was gray and overcast, the clouds were low and it was cold. Our motto is to leave things better than the way we found them, so this morning our focus was the cabin. After breakfast we all pitched in to clean, clean, and clean. To treat ourselves for a job well done, we drove to Laguna de Sanchez and took a walking tour of the town. We visited a few inactive mescal distilleries, and walked by the unique water company building. Painted on the side of the building are the customer names and units. The person who lived in Unit 3 was known only as “Gringo!” We had lunch at a local restaurant named El Mirador. Today the fare being served was gorditas, corn bread pockets filled with some interesting meat or cheese/bean filling. They were so good that some of us ordered seconds. We continued on our way by driving up to Mesa Colorado to look at entrances of caves that had been



Dangerous game of placing unexploded carbide bombs on a fire, and the consequences.

*Rob Martin*

found and surveyed. On a previous trip, Jim made sure that all the known entrances were tied into a surface survey. Our mission today was to GPS a few entrances in order to accurately locate each entrance on the total plot. The road was extra steep in some places. At one spot we all disembarked and Jim drove up to a less steep area where we all piled in again. I was badly in need of dental floss because of our recent lunch so I cut off the tip of an Agave and used the fiber. Ah relief! I knew of the fiber because I had earlier cut off a needle-like tip to coax an invasive splinter out of my finger. As Tone says, “Mother Nature working for us!” We hiked around taking pictures of the ice on the trees and whatever interesting flora, fauna, and minerals we happened upon. Because this area has been finished cave-wise, of course Amanda had to find a new cave. You project cavers know all about that.

We stopped again in town to see the wine lady, Eualalia. It was our custom to return the empties so that she could reuse them for her next batch of wine – true recycling! This time Eualalia was frying sweet bread and sprinkling them with sugar. She didn’t have to twist our arms. We bought six of the breads hot out of the oil, yum! And, of course, another few bottles of wine were purchased. But you already guessed that if you’re paying attention!

Jim made delicious cheese quesadillas despite the sticky skillet while he simmered the chicken-rice corn soup to perfection (lots of garlic). And guess what? We had freshly made guacamole and chips plus wine and beer.

This night we watched *Galaxy Quest* on Jim’s laptop, on the patio, bundled up in front of the campfire. The power came from an electrical outlet nailed to a tree. How rugged can you get!

## Jan 2

We woke up cold again. The temperature at 7:30 a.m. was 29.8° F according to my digital thermometer. After our unorganized breakfast (including beer!), we did some final cleaning, packed the vehicles, and closed the cabin. Let me explain about the beer. We bought beer in returnable bottles and this morning

there were still two full bottles left. Rather than wasting them, we shared the two bottles. I thought it was the right thing to do! I told Tone that in Pennsylvania we sing, “In Heaven there is no beer, that’s why we drink it here!”

We four Sienna riders began our journey to Austin about 10 a.m. with Jim and Tone trailing us a little. They stopped at the grocery store to return our last empties and stopped in Santiago to drop off the cabin key.

We were back in Laredo when we got a call from Jim. They were about an hour behind us. They had run into grass fires along the road south of Monterrey which had slowed their progress even more than the two scheduled stops.

Our drive through Monterrey was interrupted when I got off the route a little, but by driving through a parking lot and making a U-turn that the semi driver behind me didn’t like (his horn was loud up close!), I was able to get back onto the preferred route through the city.

We stopped at the building in Nuevo Laredo to cancel the vehicle permit. The cancellation process is handled out in the parking lot where tables and computers are set up. We just happened to get in a lane whose attendant was the very same sweet English-speaking gal from whom I had purchased the permit. Well, I thought it was unusual

I got us off track in Austin which cost us about 15 minutes of unnecessary time, but we arrived at Jim’s about 9 p.m. Jim and Tone showed up about an hour later. I was shaved, showered, and in bed by 10:30 p.m..

## Jan 3

According to plan, we arose at 7:15 a.m. thanks to Amanda. We had breakfast at La Tapatia (except for Jim who was packing for a flight to Lexington). Tone took off from breakfast early to drive Jim to the airport, so we said our farewells to him then. We left the restaurant at 8:15 a.m. and drove straight through except for the necessary stops.

## Mexico

### Jan 4

We arrived at Amanda's place at 9:15 a.m. exactly 24 hours after we left Austin. We then drove to Rob's to drop him off. Crow's truck was at my place so that was my last stop.

It is 1557 miles from my place to Jim's in Austin  
It is 420 miles from Jim's place to the cabin near Laguna de Sanchez. Total miles put on the Sienna: 4,514

**Postscript:** Jim is making plans to return to La Camotera the last week in June and the first week in

July to map Pino del Oso #2 and the 8 or so caves he and Keith saw on their December 30 drive. Cuervo and El Tono have already expressed interest, as have 7 or 8 other cavers from around the country. They will be camping for both weeks, not staying in the cabin. There is room for additional experienced vertical cave mappers, so contact Choque if interested at [jkennedy@batcon.org](mailto:jkennedy@batcon.org).

---

## GUACAMOLE ANYONE?

### Amanda's Guacamole Recipe

Five ripe avocados, chopped or mashed  
5 cloves of garlic, diced  
1 onion (2-inch diameter), chopped  
3 Serrano peppers (including seeds), chopped  
Juice of 1–2 limes or 3–4 Key limes  
1 large Roma tomato, chopped  
A dash of tequila  
Salt to taste  
A sprig of cilantro is optional  
Mix together and allow Jim to taste test, then adjust accordingly

### Jim's Guacamole Recipe

Take 4 ripe avocados, slice in half, remove seed, and scoop from skin. Mash with fork.  
Take one onion, peel, and dice fine. Mix with avocado.  
Add a couple of heaping spoonfuls of minced (not chopped) garlic.  
Add 1–2 finely minced (not chopped) serranos.  
Squirt with juice of a lime or two. Add salt to taste.  
Add finely chopped tomato and cilantro if desired.  
No tequila!

Amanda making  
Guacamole



Jim Kennedy



Keith Wheeland

I loved the Humbug sign  
decorated in Christmas glitter.

*Rob “Roberto” Martin*



*Amanda “Güera” Morrow*



*Bryan “Cuervo” Crowell*



*Jim “Choque” Kennedy*



*Tone “El Tono” Garot*



*Keith “Gustavo” Wheeland*

## **CUEVA PINO DEL OSO #3**

### **KEITH D. WHEELAND**

This cave is located up on the slope above the La Camotera Plateau near the town of Laguna de Sanchez, in Nuevo Leon, Mexico. Jim Kennedy and I dug into the cave on December 31, 2007. The previous day, Gerardo, the farmer who lives nearby, had shown us two other cave entrances further up the slope from this one. While the rest of the group were surveying one of the other caves, Cueva Pino del Oso #1, Jim and I were ridgewalking when he found this dig.

I had accidentally left my helmet in the truck at the bottom of the steep hill, 500 vertical feet below. After we dug open the cave, Jim allowed me the honor of being first. I squeezed in with my small flashlight. Jim pointed out that, "I was going soft-shell". I crawled down the slope feet first on my belly and reached a stable breakdown pile about a meter below where I was able to stand. I was at the top of a canyon that appeared to be about 7 meters deep. The walls were covered with flowstone.

Below me, I could see a dirt floor embedded with small rounded limestone rocks which contrasted nicely with the black dirt. It appeared that I could free-climb to the floor, if only I had a head lamp. Fortunately my small flashlight had a loop strap - just big enough to slip over my ear. I selected a narrow place in the canyon that provided plenty of hand

and foot holds, and lighting my way with my dangling light, I safely reached the floor below.

All along I was letting Jim know what I had found. When I got to the bottom, I told Jim that I would describe the cave and provide him with estimated distances. He recorded them in my notebook as he sat on the surface.

It appears that most caves on the side of the hill above the plateau are solutionally modified tectonic features. This cave was of that type. At floor level I could look back along the canyon to where it pinched out. The ceiling reached almost to ground level. At one place I could look out a spot where the ceiling reached the surface. (A small second entrance that we had seen earlier.)

There is another small slot which drops down about 1.4 meters from the flat floor. It was too small for me to enter and appeared to pinch out.

My climb out was a little more tricky than my climb down, since my light was pointing down, and I needed to see up. Jim took my photo at the body-sized entrance, complete with my earring flashlight.

It's interesting to think that somewhere in Mexico is a cave that I am the only person to have entered.



Keith Wheeland exiting Pino del Oso #3  
*Jim Kennedy*

# Cueva Pino del Oso #3

La Camotera Plateau

Nuevo Leon, Mexico

NAD27 Mexico Datum Zone 14R

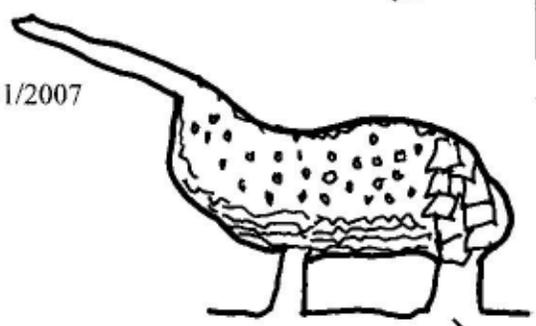
0378368e

2801014n

5686' msl

Sketch map 12/31/2007

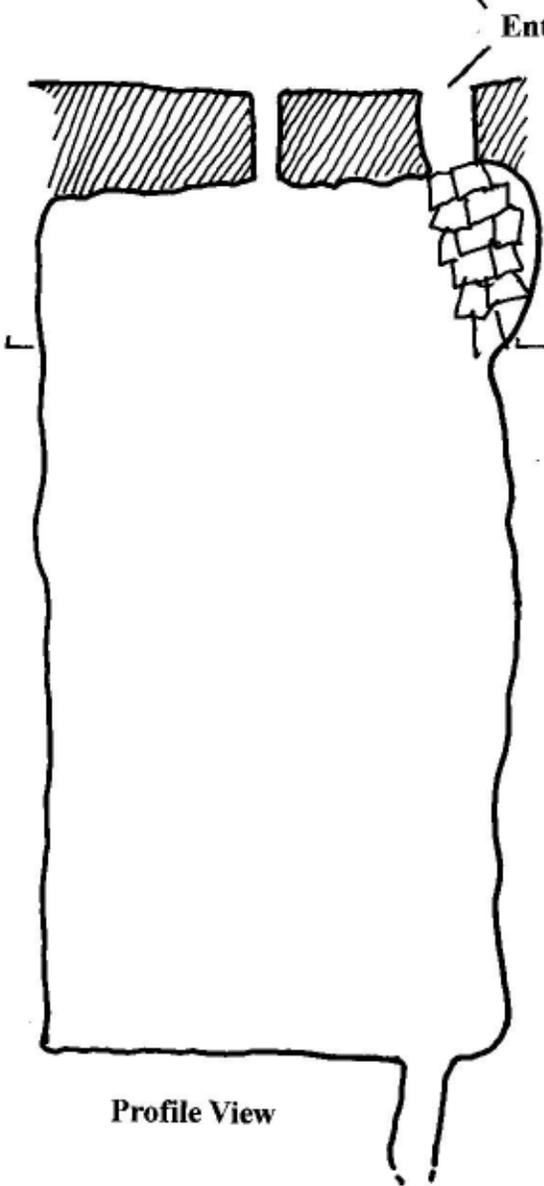
Jim Kennedy and Keith Wheeland dug into the cave on 12/31/2007. Jim remained on the surface. Keith entered the cave and called out the description and estimated distances to Jim who recorded the data. Keith drew the map.



Plan View

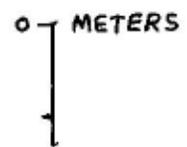


Profile View 90°

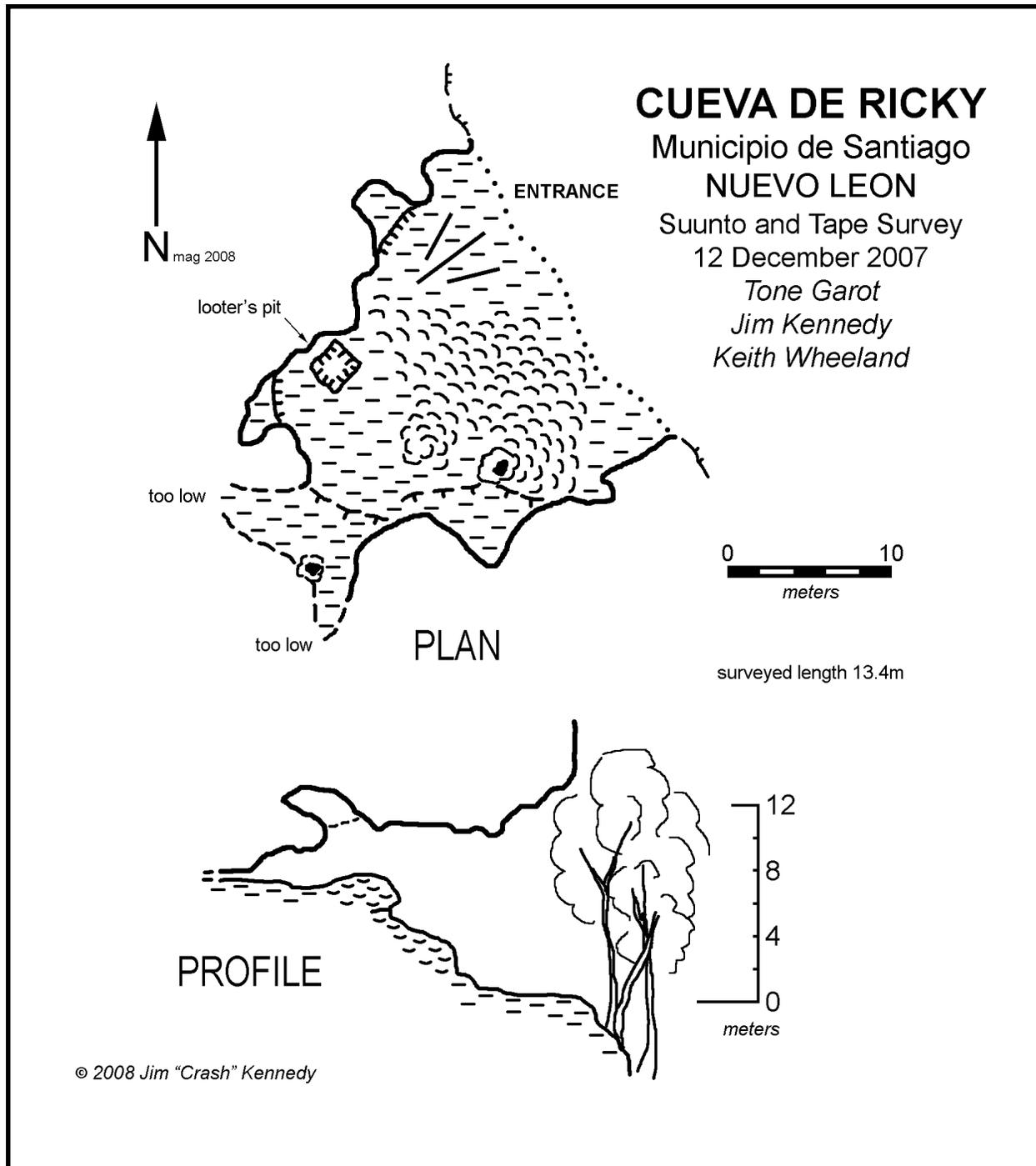


Profile View

Entrance







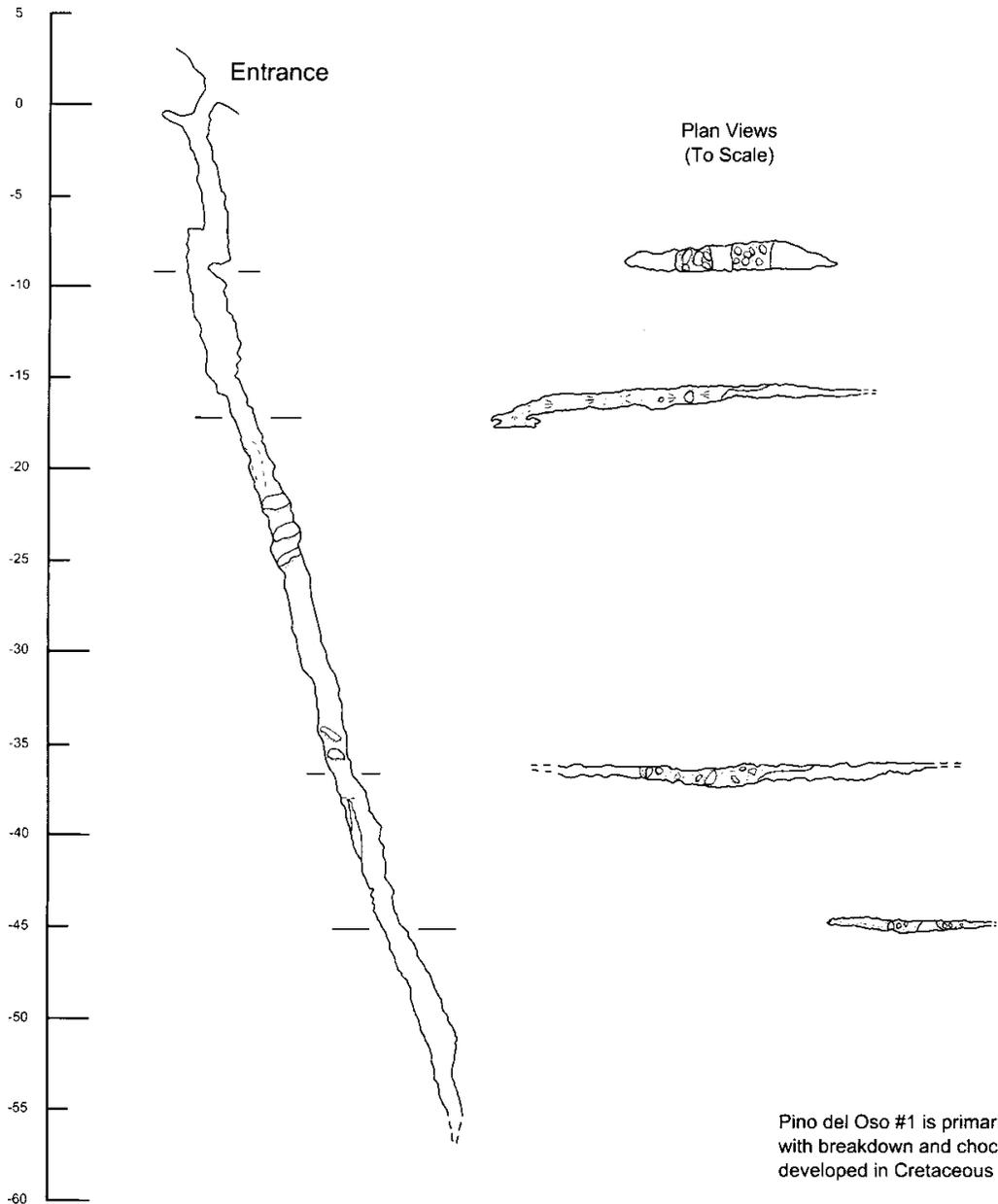
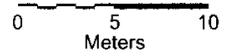
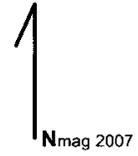
# Cueva Pino del Oso #1

Municipio de Santiago  
Nuevo Leon

Suunto and Tape Survey  
December 31, 2007

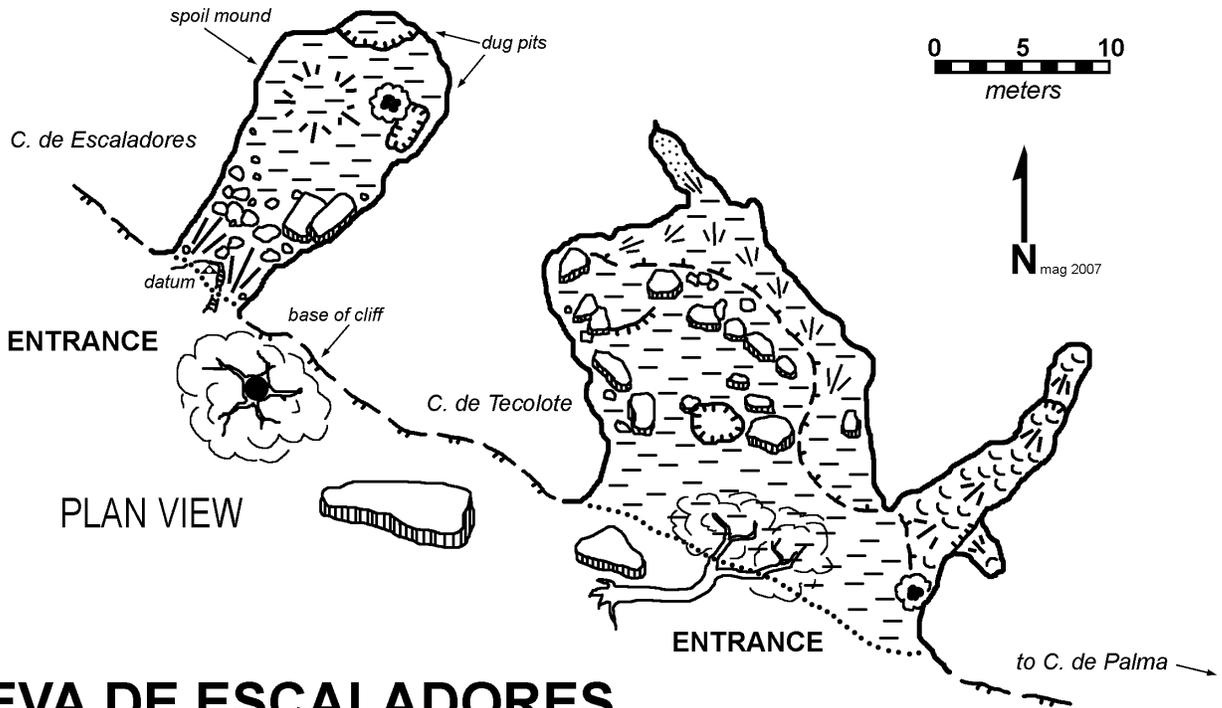
Bryan Crowell, Rob Martin, and Amanda Morrow

Surveyed Length = 98 meters  
Surveyed Depth = 53 meters



Pino del Oso #1 is primarily a fissure passage with breakdown and chockstone false floors developed in Cretaceous age limestones

© 2008 Bryan Crowell



# CUEVA DE ESCALADORES and CUEVA DE TECOLOTE

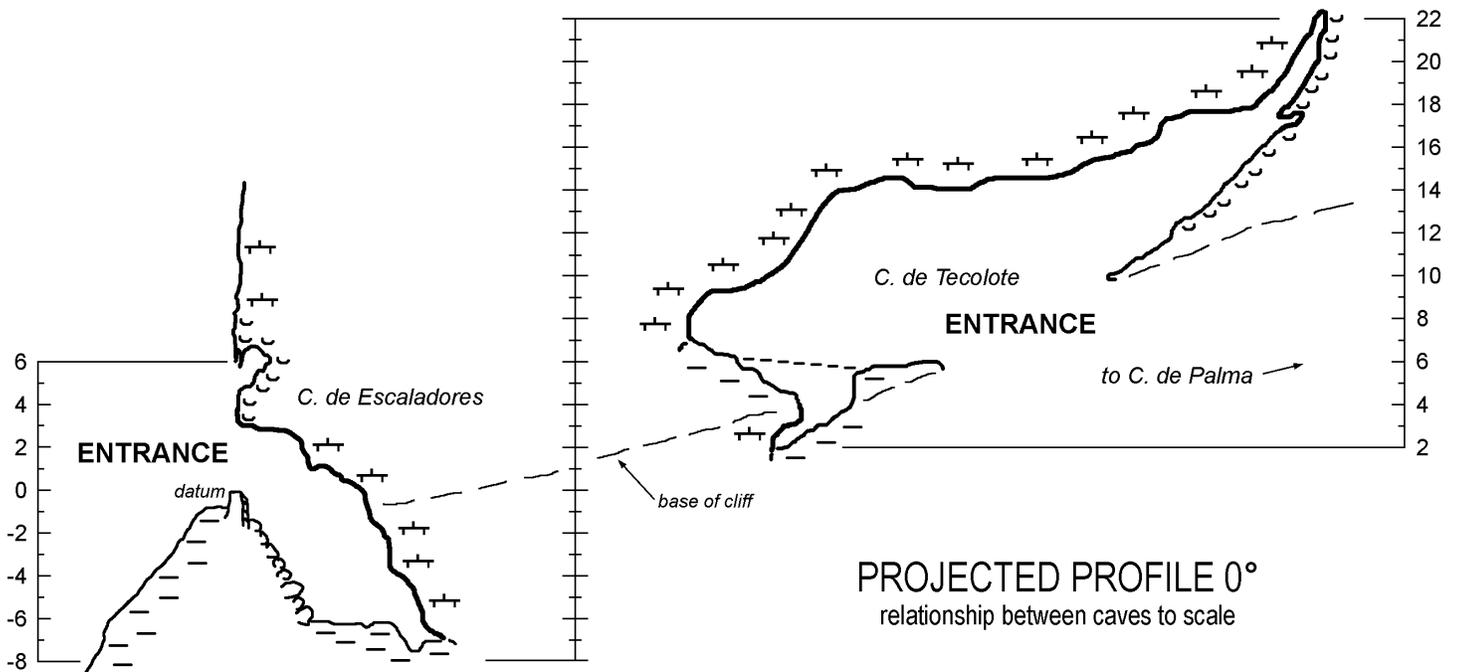
Municipio de Santiago  
NUEVO LEON

*C. de Escaladores surveyed length: 20.3m*  
*C. de Tecolote surveyed length: 52.2m*

**Suunto and Tape survey 28 December 2007**

by Bryan Crowell, Tone Garot, Jim Kennedy,  
Rob Martin, Amanda Morrow, and Keith Wheeland

*Map 26 March 2008 by Jim "Crash" Kennedy*



# OLD TIMERS REUNION MY CAVING TRIP REPORT 9-2-07

BY BRYAN CROWELL

We arrived at the OTR site on Friday night around 10:30 or 11. After several beers and talking with old friends, everybody eventually made their way to bed. Saturday morning came, and we were getting ready to go caving. After an hour or so, we were still getting ready to go caving. Another hour passed, and we decided to really get ready to go caving. Then we gave up and decided that OTR was about the "R" in the name.

Sunday came and we got ready to go to My Cave.

Trip participants were Rob Martin, Melissa Woortman, Ezra Schwartzberg, Drew Northrup from SUOC, and me, Bryan Crowell. Audrey went to Sharps Cave. This time we made it out of the camp and traveled about one hour to the Elk River Valley and

My Cave. The ~2 mile long My Cave is connected to the ~6 mile long Simmons-Mingo Cave via several sumps that were explored and surveyed in 1977 and 1978.

We geared up at the parking area and headed towards the cave. Rob led us along the abandoned railroad tracks for 15 or 20 minutes, cut off of the railroad, crossed the dry bed of the Elk River, and climbed up to the Elk River Entrance of My Cave without a problem. We hopped into the cave and worked our way to the Outhouse Drop, with a short miscue that involved us going down the Northwest Passage before we realized the mistake.

After Ezra rigged the drop, everybody rappelled the 77' drop. Nobody went to Taggard Falls to see Crayfish Pool and the underground Elk River. We gradually caved along the trunk passage to the Dune Room,

where Ezra almost made it to the top without touching the ground with his hands (almost = losing the bet = the rest of us don't have to give Ezra beer and wine that night). The rest of us didn't even try to make it to the top without using our hands for balance.

We took a breather at the top of the Dune Room, where we talked about pizza, racks, and other topics, and then went down the Northeast Passage, past the Razor Pit, and out to the Dry Branch Entrance?

Oops, the Dry Branch Entrance isn't at the end of the Northeast Passage! We backtracked to the Dune Room and proceeded down The Lair, where we ran into two different groups of cavers that said we were on the right path to the Dry Branch Entrance.

Oops, the Dry Branch Entrance isn't at the end of the Northeast Passage!

After traversing some stream passage, a short climb, and a cobble strewn crawl we corkscrewed up through breakdown and out the Dry Branch Entrance.

After a short walk past the path to Just and Justrite Caves, we were back at the cars, where Ezra and I decided to go de-rig the drop. Rob, Drew, and Melissa went to the gas station/convenience store by Snowshoe to order pizza for everybody.

On the walk back from derigging the cave, several flyfisherman offered Ezra and I beer, which, of course, we couldn't politely refuse. Several minutes were spent with the fisherman talking about caves and fish while we gulped the beer. Ezra and I then drove to Snowshoe to eat pizza with the rest of the crew. After eating, we went back to the OTR site, where beer and a trip to the hot tub soothed the muscles from a day of caving.

# RUPERT CAVE RINGS OUT

JOE TURCHICK

Rupert Cave, Mifflin County, PA - June 22, 2007 - 7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Karen Bange, Gary Dunmire, Joe Turchick, and 20 Mennonite youth

What a long, (OK, not so long) strange trip it's been. Apologies to the Grateful Dead, but I couldn't resist the musical reference.

George and Karen Bange asked for some help guiding a trip into the historic section of Rupert Cave. A neighbor of the cave property, a Mennonite farmer, had asked them if his children and some of their friends could visit the cave.

None of us had ever seen a Mennonite female in any clothing except a dress, so we were quite curious to see what this group might be like.

At 7 p.m. that evening, we found out. The young people, ages about 16 to 20 years, arrived in a car, a pick-up truck, and on foot. The men were dressed in short-sleeved summer-weight shirts, the females in long dresses and their head caps. Some of the men had hardhats and flashlights. All had good-traction footwear.

After getting everyone outfitted with hardhats and headlamps, we took a quick look at the map, then onward into the Earth (inward?). George was nursing an arm injury from dog-wrestling, so he waited outside. Gary led, with me in the middle, and Karen bringing up the rear. I observed a dress hem getting caught now and then; otherwise everyone traversed the cave without a problem.

Soon we had all gathered in the canyon passage at the base of the climb up to the Four Guardsmen. One of the young men at the front of the queue asked if it

were time for a song. In seconds, the passage rang out with the sweet sound of music, a hymn in perfect two-part harmony. It was quite unexpected and somewhat overwhelming. The acoustics were brilliant and the vocals were flawless.

When it was over, Gary burst into spontaneous applause, Karen bubbled with praise, and I stood there blinking back tears, a lump in my throat, and covered in goose bumps. We requested an encore, and were treated to a second chorus.

Karen then accompanied about half the group out of the cave. I suspect they were getting a little chilly. Karen stopped to let them experience total darkness.

They treated her to another song which they called "Midnight". Karen expected "After Midnight", the Eric Clapton cover of the great J.J. Cale song. Not quite!

The remainder of us toured the rest of the cave then joined the others on

the surface. The young people left and we proceeded to gush to poor George about what he had missed. One of the young women had promised Karen a CD (?), and sure enough, 15 or 20 minutes later she showed up riding a golf cart, a sort of surrey with a fringe on top, with a little girl in the passenger seat, and handed over a CD.

It turns out that the group is a touring choir and this is not the first time that they had performed in a cave. I guess that we had been kind of "had" in a most wonderful way.

Delightful, one of my caving "golden days".

In seconds, the passage rang out with the sweet sound of music...

# **RUTH CAVE TWICE**

**JOE TURCHICK**

## **GOING ONCE!**

**Ruth Cave**, Huntingdon County, PA - July 14, 2007, 2:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Jesse Chronister, Dan Donahue, Trevor Kupstas, Jeff Morrissey, Bill Herr, Karen “Bawl-baby, Pissy-pants” Bange, Joe Turchick

After two years of pestering, I finally convinced the “bawl-baby” to return to the “dreadful” Ruth Cave. Neither Karen nor I are overly fond of the climbs and exposure, and it had been 13 years since Karen dared Ruth Cave. Dan and Trevor were seeing it for the first time, and in a whole new light. (Dan brought a 10 million candle-power “flashlight”). Bill’s last trip into Ruth Cave was about 15 to 17 years ago.

Bill and I partied at Jesse’s until 3 a.m. Friday night where Bill impressed us with his beer-pong laser shot. We were in bed by 4 a.m. and back at Jesse’s at 12:30 p.m. where Karen chastised us for not acting our age.

At the climb, things did not go exactly as planned. Everyone was up except Karen, Bill, and myself. Karen started up, asking for someone to climb with

her. I wanted Bill to spot footholds for me, so guess who was elected?! Karen and I became this kind of 11-foot tall climbing machine. She did her own hand-holds, I did my own foot-holds, and I’m not sure exactly what happened in the middle, but we got up neatly and in short order, with less help from Bill than usual.

An almost standard tourist trip ensued, almost, because of that white-dwarf-in-a-case. Sunglasses might have been in order. Unfortunately, the battery lasted only 15 minutes, so we couldn’t lase a hole to the surface in the upper trunk. Still we could see lots of delicate white pretties.

Jesse provided human elevator surface on the climb back down. (Might have to name him Otis.)

Post caving at the Spruce Creek Tavern, where we dug into piles of fries. After Jeff left for home, we went back to Jesse’s to party some more.

## **GOING TWICE!**

**Ruth Cave**, Huntingdon County, PA - August 5, 2007, 2:45 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Andy McKinnon, Melissa Woortman, Stephanie Ronin, Brooke Osborne, Bill Herr, Sara Fitzsimmons Joe Turchick

Standard tourist trip. Steph, Brooke, and Sarah were Ruth rookies. Good time had by all. Post caving at the Main Street Grill in Alexandria. Blue Moon. In

case nobody noticed, I like Ruth Cave a lot and try to get as many new people in there as I can during the summer. So if you’re around next summer and you enjoy tight spots and climbing, talk to me.

Post script: I recently asked Karen when she wanted to go back to Ruth Cave, to which she cheerfully replied, “NEVER!”. I’ll give her another two years. George?

## **JIM HIXSON REMEMBERED**

*Editors note: This obituary originally appeared in the NSS News, October 2007, p.30.*

### **George Paul “Jim” Hixson, Jr.**

#### **Obituary**

*NSS 4340*

Jim Hixson was a past member of the Nittany and Greenbrier Grottos and the Monroe County Cavers, and was a Fellow and Life Member of the National Speleological Society. He joined the Nittany Grotto in 1959, and he was a member of the NSS Board from 1969 to 1975, the chairman of the 1983 Elkins NSS Convention, and had been presented with the Virginia Region Outstanding Service Award. Nittany Grotto still uses Jim’s old P.O. Box as their address to this day.

Jim was a strong proponent of the “survey as you cave” credo, and he is famous for his mapping of the caves in the Acme Quarry area of Greenbrier County, West Virginia, the caves of which include: Windy Mouth (18.0 miles, where he made 63 trips into the cave), Acme #5 (7.1), Hunt (6.0), Doodle (3.3), and Jewel (1.25). The short story, when it came to Jim Hixson and caving, was that Jim just loved to go caving. But Jim was most famously known as “a character.” Who else could you go caving with, dropping off broken lawnmowers on the way, fixing his vehicle en route, and resting your feet on the large, spare transmission in front of the passenger seat?

He surveyed with a Brunton for azimuths and a Suunto for inclinations, and he taped the cave in meters and estimated the passage dimensions in feet. He disconnected the automatic directional lights on all his vehicles because he felt they were “unnecessary.”

He caved for years with a white dog named Linda, and then “buried” her, when she died, in Jimmy Lynn’s spare freezer. He won the OTR Chili Contest, and when he—as a requirement—had to tell the judges the ingredients, they became much less enthused about what they had eaten when they discovered that Jim’s recipe included canned dog food.

Jim was a member of the Nittany Grotto at a time when

only a few members owned cars. Jim owned three, none of which could be depended upon for any kind of long trip. On one occasion, Jim stenciled the words “Nittany Grotto of the National Speleological Society” on the car doors and took off with two or three companions for a western NSS Convention. They stopped in the Rocky Mountain passes to take pictures of the scenery, and other people stopped to take pictures of Jim’s car, not believing it actually had made it to the top. Jim and Sandy van Luik crossed Loveland Pass on a later Convention trip. This is a favorite summer ski area in Colorado, and motorists routinely stop and haul the skiers back to the top of the pass. Now imagine Jim, Sandy, their luggage, Jim’s dog of the moment, and several skiers and their wet dogs all jammed into some kind of four-wheel-drive vehicle. Surely a memory to cherish!

Jim took two vehicles to another California Convention. The linkage on his pickup came apart on the way, but Jim crawled under the vehicle and fixed it (and don’t think this was the only time he did this!). A rock then flew up out of the dual wheels of the truck in front and cracked the window of the following vehicle. Jim drove north during the Convention to Oregon to have the window replaced at the only Toyota dealer he could find. When the group left the Convention to drive south, they first had to return to Oregon and the Toyota dealer. Jim had forgotten his wallet on the day he had had the window replaced. He had talked the dealer into replacing the window with the promise he would return after Convention and pay him. Such was Jim!

They had four-wheel drive contests at Conventions back then, and the Convention Staff picked Jim to design the course (what were they thinking?). A Hixson-designed course included going through the thing backwards, or going through it as slowly as you could without shifting gears. Everyone had light, jeep-like vehicles, while Jim had a heavy, dual-wheeled truck. Want to guess who won? And he had time to step out of the vehicle and go for a beer while the truck completed the course on its own—a perfectly acceptable strategy in Jim’s mind, no doubt.

And Jim’s four-wheel drive vehicles had, shall we say, personality. One, named Henry, was once actually new. Jim drove it up and down a stream at a caving function,

but that only made it a dirty new vehicle. His solution was to have cavers whack at the truck with a sledgehammer for a dollar. That gave it the look Jim wanted, and the proceeds went to some kind of caving fund. Later in life, parts of Henry were auctioned off at another caving function for yet another caving fund.

There was a rescue in Organ Cave in January 1975, when several teenagers attempted to explore the cave, leaving pennies to find their way back to daylight. This did not work (imagine that!), and Jim was one of many called on the rescue. He and Debbie Kyle were selected to search the long breakdown passage “behind the Rock Organ,” and—once in the cave—Debbie lamented she had forgotten her cave pack. Jim told her not to worry—he had plenty of carbide and water.

They were well past the Rock Organ when Debbie’s lamp started to go out. Jim reached for his carbide, which he carried in a pocket, and his search rapidly became a fast pat-down of his body. He had no spare carbide, and the two had no spare lights whatsoever. They turned and raced for the commercial tour.

They almost made it. They then had to grope their way over the breakdown to the end of the tour, only to find the lights were not on. They ended up crawling downstream along the commercial tour, with Jim in the

front on all fours and Debbie hanging onto his belt. The path goes downhill and crosses a deep ravine on a high bridge. Jim’s theory, which he expressed to Debbie, was: “You get in front. You’re lighter and it won’t hurt you as much when you fall off the bridge.” That was a plan that didn’t work either. But the good news was—from Jim’s point of view—he didn’t fall off the bridge, going first.

Jim was born on April 21st, 1939 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was the son of the late Mr. and Mrs. George P. Hixson, Sr. He graduated from Penn State in 1961 with a degree in mining engineering, and one of the many jobs he had was at the Acme Limestone Company at Fort Spring. He had lived in Greenbrier County (which he loved) for about 30 years, and he died on July 28th, 2007, after a long illness, at the Brier Nursing Home and Rehabilitation Center in Ronceverte.

Jim was buried in the Mount Vernon Cemetery in Fort Springs, just a quarter mile from the Acme Mine. There was a long parade of cavers’ vehicles at Jim’s funeral, and his coffin, when it was placed in the ground, contained several bat stickers. Jim would have liked it that way, because he was a kind-hearted individual and a caver at heart. And he was a man with many, many friends. (*George Dasher, with help from Bob Liebman, Ed Loud, Keith Wheeland, Jim Denton, and Bill Mixon*)

### ***SOME NOTES BY THE EDITOR:***

Jim Hixson was Nittany Grotto Treasurer in 1960, and President for the years 1961-1963.

During his first year as president, the Nittany Grotto voted to rent a post office box. Jim was already renting box number 676, so he suggested that the grotto use his box number. When Jim moved out of town after graduation, the grotto took over the box and has been using it ever since.

In 1972, Chuck Landis, another Nittany Grotto member, removed a sample of purple flowstone from Spirit Mountain Cave in Wyoming. Jim analyzed the

sample by X-Ray diffraction and found it to be pure fluorite. This was the first definite report of such an occurrence.

In an article in *Nittany Grotto News*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, Nov. 1959, Jim described how to use a three carabiner rig for rappelling. It was common in those days for frugal cavers to use the “hot seat” for rappelling. The carabiner rappel was an improvement.

Jim attended the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Nittany Grotto in 1998.

# A WEDNESDAY NIGHT TRIP ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON

**KAREN BANGE**

Gary Dunmire, the coordinator of Wednesday night trips, organized a Nittany Grotto cave trip into Rupert Cave on Sunday, October 7, 2007. With a Sunday cave trip on the books, Joe Turchick arranged for a small group of student grotto members to go to the back of the cave. In general, cavers plan on at least a four hour trip to the back of the cave; hence a trip to the Jewel Room is not feasible for a Wednesday night trip.

The group going to the back of the cave, consisting of Anthony Dente, Brooke Osborne, Stephanie Ronin, Jesse Chronister, Dan Donohue and Karen Bange, met at the cave around 11 a.m. for a late morning entry into the cave. The group ventured through the Keyhole to gain access into the “new section” of the cave, a section discovered in 1987 by Nittany Grotto member Jim “Crash” Kennedy. Everyone seemed to enjoy all the pretty formations in the 5,200 feet of passage in spite of having to work hard to get through the crawlways.

Meanwhile a larger group of Nittany Grotto members arrived early in the afternoon for a tour of the “old section” of the cave. George Bange, Jeff Morrissey and Gary Dunmire led three groups and encouraged everyone to push all the nooks and crannies. Brittany Harris, Amanda Morrow, Jonathon Belinski, Madman Mory, Jason Hoffman, Simon Vandefor, Lillie Matyskiela, Mat Mills and Holly Heckard made up the groups going through the old section.

Cavers started to come out of the cave late in the afternoon to discover terrific fall weather on the surface. The first group of cavers out of the cave were the morning group. These tired cavers relaxed on the surface waiting for the rest of the group to emerge. Once everyone was out of the cave, the group headed over to Nittany Grotto members Carrie Shafer and Steven Shawver’s home. A potluck dinner, complete with burger and dogs on the grill, was enjoyed by all.



Photos on this page and the next by the author.

# **THE BAT PLUCKING AT MT ROCK CAVE**

## **KAREN BANGE**

DeeAnn Reeder, a bat biologist at Bucknell University, contacted me and my husband, George, in November asking if she could have access into Mt Rock Cave in Mifflin County. This cave is gated to protect the bat population that hibernates in the cave and George and I have the winter key into the cave.

DeeAnn is doing research on the relationship between hormones and arousal during hibernation. She has permits through the Pennsylvania Game Commission to collect big brown bats to study in the lab. Information on her research can be found at: <http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/dreeder>

DeeAnn's request was presented at a Nittany Grotto meeting. After some discussion the grotto approved a trip into the cave. It was agreed that a bat count would occur as we went into the cave. Based on the number of bats counted, DeeAnn would collect a percentage of the female big browns for her research.

DeeAnn and five of her college students/assistants met us at Mt Rock on a cold Saturday morning in mid December. Her group first checked out the small tunnel found in the far side of the quarry. They only counted 5 or so big browns in the tunnel. In Mt Rock Cave we counted about 30 big browns, 50 little browns, many pipistrelles and Northern Long Eared, and two small footed bats. On the way out DeeAnn's group sexed the big browns. This was done by removing the bats from the wall (in some cases using forceps) and inspecting the bats. There were only two female big brown bats, the rest were juvenile males. DeeAnn took both the females out of the cave to take back to the lab.

The Bucknell group went into the tunnel to sex the big brown bats in there. After securing the cave, George and I left the group and did not accompany them into the tunnel.

Stay tuned for further details on DeeAnn's research.



# FORMER NITTANY GROTTO MEMBER VISITS FROM NEW ZEALAND

## WILL AND BET WHITE

Chuck Landis, who was an active Nittany Grotto member from the late 1950s through the early 1960s returned to central Pennsylvania July 13-14, 2007. Chuck and his wife Carolyn (Allison) explored many caves not only here in Central Pennsylvania but some of the infamous caves such as Devils Sinkhole, Mystic Cave, and Overholt Blowing Cave, in West Virginia. A side note – Both Will and Chuck were guides at Lincoln Caverns (in Huntingdon County). Will was a guide from 1951 through 1953; Chuck was a guide late 1950s.

Chuck and Carolyn left Penn State in 1962 and moved to New Zealand – Chuck was a graduate student at the University of Otago, on the south island of New Zealand. He later became a professor in their Geology Department. He spent his entire professional career at the University of Otago in New Zealand.

The purpose of Chuck’s visit was primarily to document some of the early caving that he and Carolyn

did in their early caving days. Carolyn passed away on October 15, 2006. Chuck is writing a Memorial Book to honor Carolyn. Chuck came to visit Will and Bet White to rummage through their copies of the old Nittany Grotto Newsletters to document some of their early caving trips.

Carol Hayes (Carol Russell, in the late 1950s and early 1960s) and Bobbi Nagy (Nittany Grotto member late 1960s) came to Will and Bet’s Weathertop Home to reminisce with Chuck over the “old” times at Nittany Grotto

Chuck’s visit to United States included a trip to Colorado visiting with other former Nittany Grotto members, Peg Fowler, Pat (Purdy), Tom Turner, Bill Glosser, Hank Hoover, and Mike Thomsen. Tom, Hank, Mike, and Bill with their wives went to New Zealand in October 2007 for Carolyn’s Memorial “Celebration of Life”.



Carol Hayes, Bobbi Nagy, Will White, Chuck Landis, Bet White

# Fall MAR

## 2008

October 10-12<sup>th</sup>

Woodward, PA

Hosted by:

The Nittany Grotto  
60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



### Registration Fee Includes:

- Bonfire Saturday night
- Dinner Saturday night provided by Clem's BBQ (A vegetarian meal is available).
- Beverages to include beer Saturday evening and coffee in the morning.
- Program Saturday night by Jim Kennedy of Bat Conservation International
- Nittany Grotto 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Guidebook.
- Guided Cave Trips
- Door prizes.

There may be a vendor on site – Stay tuned

### Registration Information:

- Register before September 10<sup>th</sup> and get a discount
- Make checks payable to MAR and mail to:

2008 Fall MAR  
c/o Jeff Morrissey  
RR#3 Box 468G  
Tyrone, PA 16686

### **Directions:**

Please visit the Woodward Cave web site or see below: <http://www.woodwardcave.com/232386.html>

Woodward Cave and Campground is located along Route 45 in eastern Centre County, PA, about midway between State College and Lewisburg.

From the State College area, go east on Rt 45, through Millheim and Aaronsburg. Several miles past Aaronsburg, turn right at Quarry Rd. Go 1.5 miles to the end of Quarry Rd, then left at Pine Creek Rd. If you miss Quarry Rd, continue to Woodward, and turn right at the Woodward Inn onto Pine Creek Rd. The Cave is two miles down the road.

# KAZA-DOOM IT IS

## GARY DUNMIRE

During a grotto meeting in late April of 2007, Will White mentioned that he was contacted by a local scoutmaster to see if the Nittany Grotto knew of a cave in the Spring Mills area. Will described the area where the cave was found. And none of us knew of any cave in that area. I was given the scoutmaster's information and contacted him the very next day. Andrew Sicree, the scout master, told me that he was fossil hunting with the scouts when a couple of them found a hole going straight down. Andrew was concerned that one of the scouts might fall in and get hurt. I asked him to describe how to find the cave, and that evening I drove to Spring Mills right after work to take a look for myself. I saw a small hole in the face of a road cut. I looked down in to the hole, which is pretty tight, and could not see any bottom or any back wall. Being alone and not having any cave gear I decided I would contact a couple of friends and plan another trip to see where this hole led.

In the beginning of May I got together with George Bange and Joe Turchick to see what was down this dark virgin passage. Showing up with some cave gear we climbed the road-cut so they could see the entrance. I put body in the hole and guess what, I didn't fit! The entrance was too tight but it looked like if we removed just a little bit of the wall I just might be able to make my way in. We had no real digging tools with us so I got my lug wrench out of my jeep and we managed to break off some loose rock off the walls of the entrance. I tried one more time and still felt a little tight so we enlarged the entrance a bit more, and this time I fit. I slid down what felt like a couple of body lengths and boom, I found a bottom. It was not a very big room and I was wondering if we should even call it a cave? But it had quite a few small formations so I think we could call it a cave? George passed down his camera, and I had mine. I took a lot of pictures for such a small cave. This was only the second time that I had been a virgin cave passage but the first time to be possibly the first person ever in a cave. I found out it was a lot harder to get out than it was getting in, since the cave

entrance was in the ceiling. The wall at the bottom did provide a few small footholds to help get up near the entrance, but being so tight I had to go up into it with my hands and arms over my head. When you're a couple of feet from the entrance it is so tight you can't bend your legs anymore and you have to depend on all upper body strength to get out of the cave. George, Joe and I went back to the Bange residence to celebrate and show Karen the pictures we just took of the cave.

A couple of days later I contacted Andrew Sicree to inform him that it was indeed a cave. I informed him that if any of the boys were to fall in, I didn't think they would get hurt very badly. I suggested it would be perfectly safe to fossil hunt on that road cut. I told Andrew that since the boys had found the cave, I would appreciate it if they could come up with a name. They must not have had a scout meeting for a while because it was a week or more before he got back to me about a name for the cave. Here was his reply; "My son Thomas Sicree - one of the first to find the cave - wants to call it "Kaza-Doom Cave". This is a play on Khazad-Dum or Moria, the dwarf's cave in *The Lord of the Rings* - a very large cave name for a very small cave." This is how legends start!

My summer got pretty busy and it was September 18 before I could make it back to the cave to survey. I have never surveyed before and was hoping to get a quick lesson before tackling the job, but it never worked out. I read a mapping manual available with the Nittany Grotto survey equipment and realized that there are angles and dimensions not on normal maps that needed to be included. I managed to convince Joe, who had never surveyed before, to go over to the cave with me and give it a try. We both knew that since it was such a small cave there should be less to screw up.

We got to the cave around 6:30pm on Sept.18 and wasted no time getting our cave gear on. Joe couldn't find his boots and wound up using his work sneak-

## Kaza-Doom

ers. The side of the road-cut is pretty steep, and getting up to the cave without sliding back down is hard. Doing it with your hands full of survey equipment is even harder! I set up the GPS and looked around to see where to set up my first station. I gave Joe the camera to take some pictures for posterity while I took some measurements.

The entrance is a 16 x 12-inch hole heading down at a 70' angle to the NW. After reading the compass, I dropped in to the cave. I set up the second station and we stretched the tape and found out the cave is 9' ft. 10 " deep. The short reading bummed me out a little. I was hoping it would have been deeper than that, after all the trouble we had getting in and out the first time. Joe dropped in the cave with me to take the rest of the measurements. I think he was happy to get into a cave he'd never seen before. We took the last few measurements, took a few more pictures, and sketched the shape of the room and that was that. So we thought. I sent Joe up the entrance first. You have to enter the opening in a Superman position with your arms over your head just to fit. You lose use of our arms to help yourself out. I

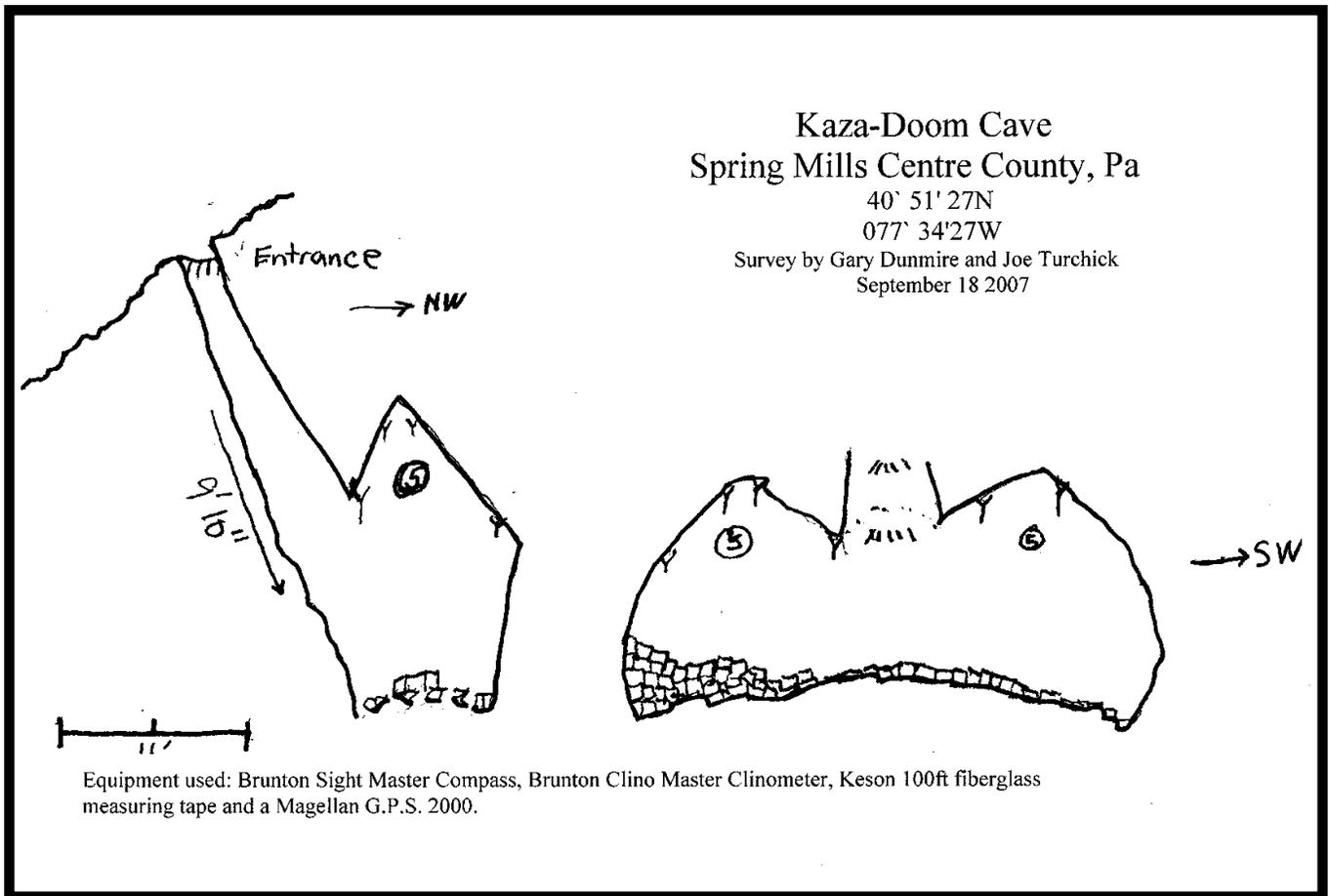
watched Joe struggle for awhile and realized that the entrance is so tight it doesn't allow you to lift your leg to push yourself up and out. I suggested that I go out first and see if I could help from the top. I started to struggle and for a couple of moments I couldn't find a way to move up. I was having problems getting to the opening. The thought of how funny it would be to find two guys stuck in this little cave yelling for help. Using all upper arm strength I managed to get myself to the top. It wound up being a little bit more of a struggle for Joe, but we eventually got him out of the cave. Joe mentioned that the cave was starting to look a lot like a coffin. It was already dark which made carrying all the gear down the road-cut even scarier.

It had taken us about two hours to survey the tiny cave. We got cleaned up fairly quickly and drove over to the Bange residence for a beer to celebrate. We let George know that the cave didn't survey to any great lengths. While we were there I showed Karen of a new type of flying fox bat they discovered near Manila somewhere. All in all it was a good self-taught survey. I hope I do a good job on the map.



Gary Dunmire

Joe Turchick and Gary Dunmire in Kaza-Doom Cave



Travel east on PA Rte. 45 to Spring Mills, Pa. Just after the bridge over Penn's Creek is a road-cut on the north side of the highway. One hundred fifty feet east of Penn's Cave Road and 30 feet up the side of the road-cut is the entrance to Kaza-Doom Cave. The entrance is a 12-inch by 9-inch football shaped opening dropping almost straight down. The tight entrance drops 9 feet into a small room. The only room in the cave is 10 feet long by 3.5 feet wide having a 5-foot ceiling. There are quite a few formations for such a small cave. The back wall has calcite covering a lot of the wall. The cave is definitely water formed but the entrance exists because of the removal of the hillside. Sliding down in the entrance and just as you clear the ceiling of the room you scrape small ribbon type cave formation just to get in. The floor of the cave is loose rubble from the construction hammering back the hillside. The cave is in a mud filled fault in the limestone. If you look at the road-cut the entrance is in a mud seam that slopes downward to the southwest. If you follow the mud seam and view

it crossing Rte. 45 towards the western edge of Spring Mills there is a sinkhole in line with the mud seam. I feel there is a possibility of the cave being deeper with all the loose rubble on the floor and it being in the fault of the limestone.



Gary Dummirre

Formations in Kaza-Doom Cave

# **A TRIP TO CHINA**

## **OR**

# **WHAT IS A TIANKENG ANYWAY?**

### **WILL AND BET WHITE**

E-mail is a frustrating thing. Ninety five percent of it is offers for Viagra, fake Rolex watches, return mail University degrees, and ten million dollars for helping with a money laundering scam in Nigeria. But from the remaining five percent comes an occasional gem. Out of the blue sky in the Spring of 2005 came a message from UK caver Tony Waltham. Would we be interested in a free trip to China? Well, not exactly free because it was necessary to get to China at our own expense. But once there, we would be transported, housed, and fed by various County governments. It seems that the local governments are promoting geo-tourism with the central attractions being the incredible holes in the ground that the Chinese call tiankeng. What was needed was a visiting delegation of world experts on karst who would certify that these features were indeed as unique and spectacular as the Chinese claimed they were. Maybe they would even qualify as World Heritage Sites. It was the sort of offer that one does not casually turn down.

October in Happy Valley is the time for early morning ground fogs that make a shambles of airline connections. So we left in the evening on Friday, October 14 on a short hop to Washington, Dulles to overnight there. Saturday morning, October 15, we flew to Chicago where we teamed up with Art and Peggy Palmer who had come in from Albany. Then at noon, the four of us headed up and over arriving in Hong Kong at 5:10 in the afternoon, 16+ hours in the air plus another 12 hours on the clock. For us, it was half way around the planet. We didn't have to change our watches, only noon and midnight were interchanged. We had a full day in Hong Kong to tour around before taking Dragon Air to Chongqing. We were met at the airport by our host, Dr. Zhu Xuewen, from the Karst Institute in Guilin, taken to the 5-star Golden Resources Hotel, and told the banquet would begin at 7:00 p.m.

The team of international experts was a cross-section of world caving. In addition to Will and Bet and Art and Peggy from the U.S., there was Tony and Jan Waltham, Andy and Lillian Eavis, and John Gunn from the UK, Julia James from Australia, Alexander Klimchouk from the Ukraine, and Andrej and Maija Kranjc from Slovenia. Our hosts were Dr. Zhu, Dr. Chen Weihai, and Dr. Liu Zhihua, all from the Karst Institute. In addition, there were always a group of local officials depending on which county we were in and some other Chinese who may have been assistants, tour guides, or handlers. We were never quite sure.

What follows is a log book account of two weeks being toured through some of China's most spectacular karst country. Everywhere we went, there were the local officials asking: "Do you think our Geo-Park's are up to world standards?" It's rather as if Leonardo had held up the *Mona Lisa* and said: "I rather like this painting. Do you think it's OK?"

#### **Wednesday, October 19**

In the morning we boarded a minibus and headed south up the Wulong Gorge. The Wujiang (Wu River) is a tributary of the Yangtze which it joins at Fuling east of Chongqing. (Fig. 1, 2). At Jiangkou, there is a tributary, also in a deep gorge, the Furongjiang, which extends into the cave country.

Late in the morning we arrived at the Furong Cave. Furong is a show cave high on the wall of a tributary gorge with a tricky, winding road leading up to it. The cave tour is fairly long, maybe a mile and a half. The cave is spectacularly decorated (Figs. 3 and 4). It would be a beautiful cave under any circumstances but then the Chinese have this thing about colored lights. As can be seen in the figures, two fairly typical views in the cave, the color is more due to the

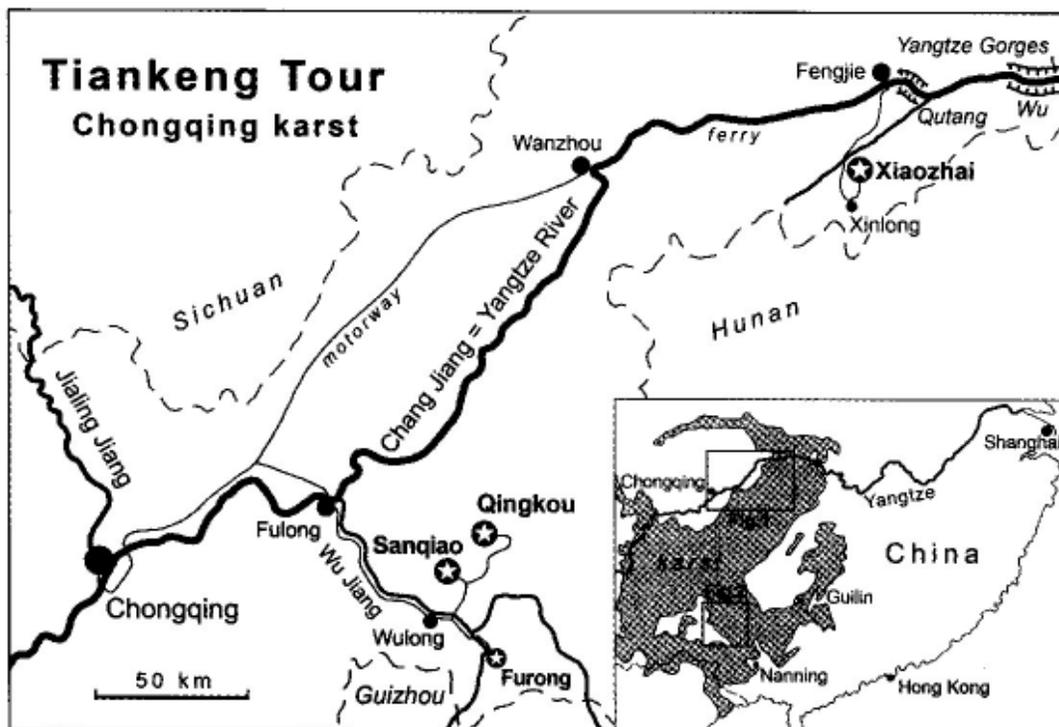


Fig. 1. Map of the Chongqing region. Stars denote the visited tiankeng or caves. The map is from Tony Waltham's description of the trip published in *Cave and Karst Science*, volume 32, pages 51-54 (2005).

lighting than the speleothems. There are many other caves in this area, some quite large. Descriptions and maps of some of them have been published in *Caves of China*, Series 2, Volume 1, Tianxing 2001-2003.

After the cave trip, we drove back down the gorge to Jiangkou Town at the junction of two rivers for lunch at the Yuelai Hotel. After lunch, it was back up on the plateau for a visit to the Sanqiao (Three Bridges) Tiankeng. There is a nice parking area right on the paved highway and a paved trail leading off into the woods. A short walk through the pine forest brought us to the edge of the tiankeng, a vertical cliff dropping hundreds of feet to the bottom of the pit. And there, completely incongruous, in the forest at the edge of the cliff was a shiny stainless steel door. There was a push-button with a down-arrow on it – an elevator. The elevator opened onto a platform on the talus pile at the base of the cliff from which a well made trail and steps descended more hundreds of feet, through the first of the natural bridges, to the flat floor of the tiankeng (Fig. 5).

The Three Bridges Tiankeng is clearly a collapsed system of very large cave passages. The bottom is nearly flat with well-prepared walking trails. On all sides are the towering walls of the cliffs which surround the depression and contain occasional cave entrances and waterfalls. The remnants of the cave system are the gigantic natural bridges under which the trails pass. (Fig.6)

As we hiked along the trail looking up at the bridges and the cliffs, I was wondering how we were supposed to get out since there was no evidence that the trail was curving back toward the elevator. Not to worry. At the end of the trail, there was a cable car rising up into the clouds and mist that had settled in. It was almost dark by the time everyone had reassembled at the bus. We drove to Fairy Maiden Mountain and the Huabang Hotel. The usual banquet was followed by a forum during which we gave our impressions to the local officials.

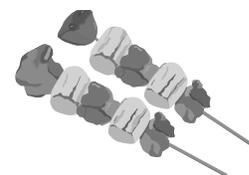


Fig. 2. The Wulong Gorge. There is a railroad on the left bank and the highway is on the right bank. Both are largely in tunnels cut through spurs of the ridge or hacked into the side of the steep gorge. The relief here is nearly 3000 feet and it's all limestone.



#### Thursday, October 20

Today was to be the Qingkou Tiankeng. The road to it was too much for the minibus so we were loaded into SUV's and, accompanied by a police escort, we headed out over a narrow one-lane road. Yesterday's dull overcast turned into real rain and the road became a muddy track. Eventually, we reached the town of Houping and beyond it to the Qingkou Tiankeng. The local folks had built a nice overlook of planks and bamboo but the fog was so thick that we were just staring off into a cloud. This may have been just as well because the rickety bamboo platform was jutting out over a 600 – 800 foot drop. We returned to Houping for lunch.

After lunch, we returned but took a narrower, muddier track that led down to a tiny village plastered against the side of a hill. The SUVs and the police were stuck in the mud to varying degrees so we walked the last few hundred yards. We were greeted with a tremendous series of explosions – a great string of fireworks being the Chinese welcome as everyone in the village lined up to see us (Fig. 7)

The walk-in entrance to Erwan Dong is on the hillside immediately behind the building shown in fig-

ure 7. After 500 feet or so, the large entrance passage ends in breakdown through which there is a scramble-down to an intermediate level series of passages. The intermediate level is a walking height passage with a dry sandy floor. There are some speleothems but nothing really exceptional. After about 2500 feet there is a short ladder drop to the stream level. Upstream about 1500 feet brought us into the daylight at the base of the Qingkou Tiankeng. The platform we had stood on this morning was somewhere above us in the clouds.

We were guided through Erwan Dong by Erin Lynch, a US caver who has been living in China for some years. Although we saw about a mile of the cave, Erwan Dong contains about 6 miles of passage with other miles in nearby Sanwang Dong and there is clearly much more to be discovered.

Emerging from the cave late in the afternoon, we found that our drivers had by some miracle turned the vehicles around. We also found that several of the police officers had accompanied us through the cave and emerged without a smudge on their neatly-pressed uniforms. There was a long drive over the muddy track to Wulong for dinner and overnight at the Champs Lysees Hotel.



Figs. 3, 4. Speleothems in the Furong Cave. The flowstone cascade is about 30 feet high; the stalagmites are 10 – 15 feet high. The bright halo on the tallest stalagmite is a lamp, not a cave entrance.

### Friday, October 21

Today we rode the minibus from Wulong to Fulong and then down a very nice new motorway to Wanzhou. At Wanzhou the motorway ends. After lunch we were driven down to the dock where we boarded a fast boat for a several hour trip down the Chang Jiang (Yangtze) (Fig. 8) to Fengjie. We reached Fengjie a little before dusk and found another minibus waiting for us. There was a long trek over the mountains on a one-lane dirt road made more interesting by meeting a coal truck in the rain and the dark. After about an hour of careful nudging and creeping, we passed the truck with maybe an inch to spare before rolling into a ravine. In due course we arrived at Xinglong for dinner and overnight.

### Saturday, October 22

Our primary objective for the day was the Xiaozhai Tiankeng. Xiaozhai is one of the largest known tiankeng. It is an immense collapse structure in the form of a double pit. The upper pit is about 2000 feet in diameter and difficult to photograph from the rim (Fig. 9) The inner pit (Fig. 10) drops away from a ledge about halfway down. The overall depth is about 2000 feet depending from where on the rim the measurement is made. At the bottom is a huge cave passage with an underground river. Xiaozhai,

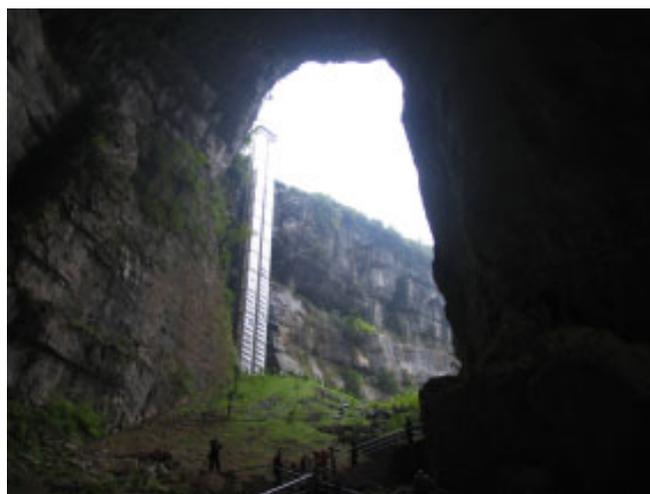


Fig. 5 The elevator providing access to the Sanqiao Tiankeng as seen through the first of a series of natural bridges.

better than most, demonstrates of the origin of the tiankeng. They are gigantic collapse structures formed in thick-bedded limestones with extensive vertical fractures (Fig. 11). The pre-existing cave collapses. Blocks fall into the river where they are dissolved and carried away. The tiankeng are much younger than the overlying cone and tower karst because the pits slice neatly through the hills. To allow tourists access to the cave and river, the Chinese have build stone steps the entire way to the bottom. In the

## China

best tourist tradition, there is a restaurant perched on the ledge between the inner and outer pits.

After lunch in Xinglong, we drove along Tianjingxia, the giant earth crack. This is a narrow, vertical walled karst gorge pretty clearly an unroofed cave passage. The river seen at the bottom of the Xiaozhai Tiankeng flows along the bottom of the crack. Again, to make access for tourists, stone steps have been built to the bottom. The stairs reach the river just as it flows into a cave entrance, inside which there is a 300 foot drop.

It was then necessary to retrace our route over the mountain. Fortunately, there was no coal truck this time because we were in a hurry. The ferry across the Yangtze closed at dusk and we were on the wrong

side of the river from our hotel. Dinner and overnight was at the Zhong Guo Jin He Hotel in Fengjie. Fengjie is a bustling town – it is just upriver from the Three Gorges where a huge power dam is being built.

### Sunday, October 23

In the morning it was back on the fast boat up the Yangtze to Wanzhou. Then by bus to Chongqing. This trek takes all day so we are put up at the 5-star J.W. Marriott Hotel and treated to a banquet hosted by the mayor of Chongqing. Again there is a brisk report session. This time there is much to say. Geoparks are a great idea but if the Chinese want World Heritage status for these parks, they will have to be careful not to build hotels and restaurants right



Fig. 6. One of the natural bridges in the Sanqiao Tiankeng.



Fig. 7. The welcoming committee at Erwan Dong. The white cloud in the upper left is the smoke from the fireworks display that went off just a little earlier.

Fig. 8. The high speed river boat used for traffic on the Yangtze. The river banks have been cleared in anticipation of flooding by the Three Gorges Dam now under construction.



Fig. 9. A portion of the cliff surrounding the upper pit of the Xiaozhai Tiankeng. The base of the cliff is the ledge surrounding the inner pit.

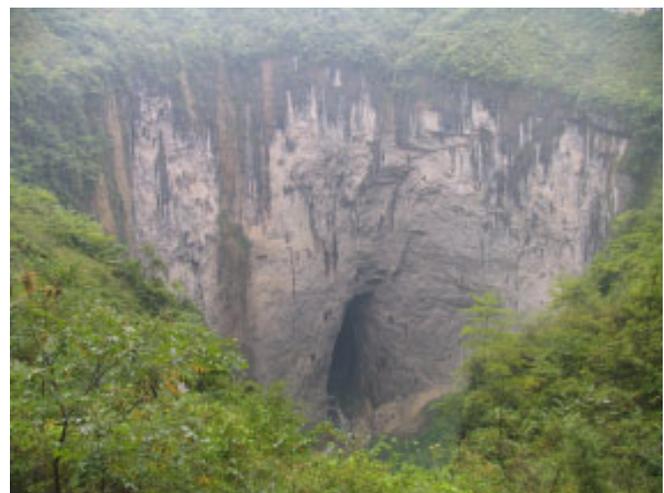


Fig. 10. The inner pit with a view of the cave entrance at the bottom. As a matter of scale, the entrance is about 300 feet high.

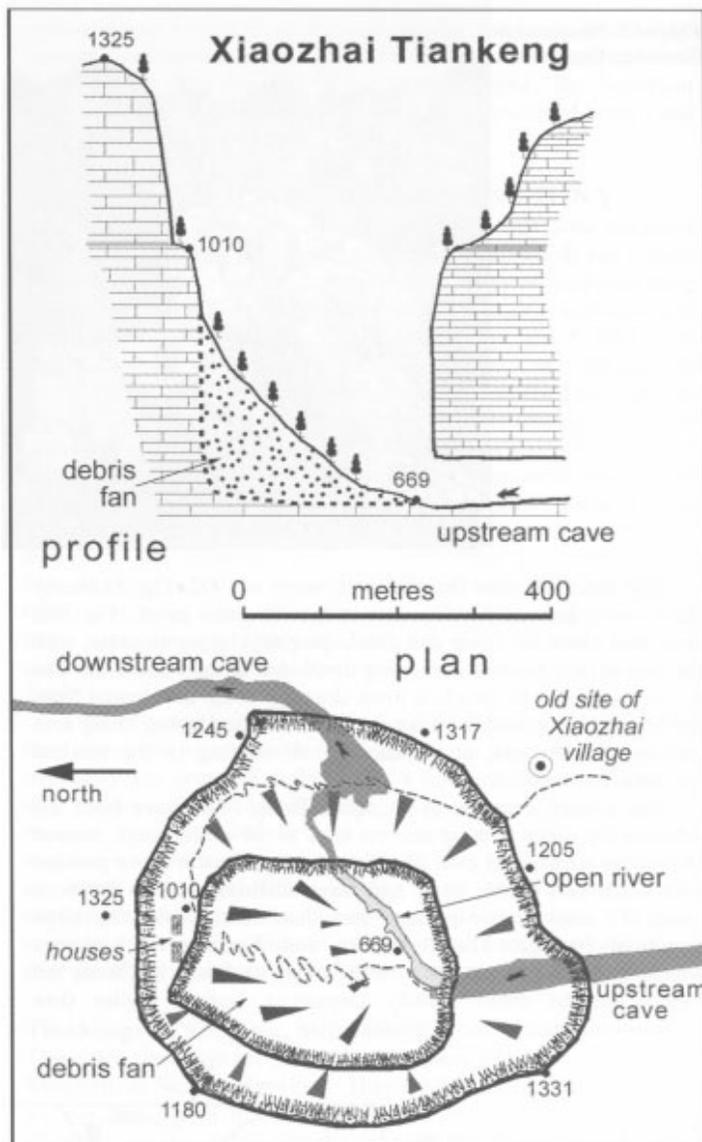


Fig. 11. Plan and profile of the Xiaozhai Tiankeng. From the article Tiankengs in the Karst of China by Zhu Xuewen and Chen Weihai, *Cave and Karst Science*, volume 32, pages 55-66 (2005)

up to the edge of the pits. The word “buffer zone” was spoken very often.

**Monday, October 24**

From Chongqing, we fly to Nanning on China Southern Flight 7581, leaving at 10:10 a.m. and arriving in Nanning a couple of hours later. There were some problems and we were late taking off. Then, when we arrived some of the luggage was missing and another hour was spent trying to sort it out. It was a long drive over some very crowded highways to Leye where we had dinner and were put up in the Jinyuan International Hotel. The downside of the travel screw-ups was that darkness fell just as we reached the beginning of the cone karst. We were now in

Guangxi Province and in the midst of some of the world’s most spectacular karst (Fig. 12)

**Tuesday, October 25**

Our first stop was the Baise-Leye Karst Museum on the outskirts of Leye. Many of the exhibits had been prepared by the Karst Institute in Guilin. Our British colleagues, Andy Eavis and Tony Waltham had been exploring caves in this area for years and their photographs are now prominently displayed in the Museum.

There are several entrances in the cliff along the valley where the Museum is located (Fig. 13). Some of these are down at water level (Fig. 14) and one is the

Fig. 12. Map showing the points of visitation in the Leye – Bama karst region. Map from Waltham as above.



Luo Mei Lotus show cave (Fig. 15). The cave extends completely through the ridge. The exit is in a narrow valley and across the valley is an entrance which is clearly the extension of Luo Mei Lotus Cave. The cave name arises because of the flat, circular pool deposits know as lotus flowers in Chinese show caves.

Exiting the cave from the back entrance where the bus was waiting, we drove deeper into the hills past a number of huge cave entrances, to Chuandong Tiankeng. The Chuandong Tiankeng has the usual vertical cliffs and the cave at the bottom with an underground river. What was unusual about Chuandong Tiankeng was the access. Up on the side of the hill above the road was a building of the sort that show caves have at their entrances. Walk up a trail and some steps to the building and step into a large conduit with a paved trail (Fig. 16). A few hundred yards and the cave opened into the side of the tiankeng. A trail has been built that circumnavigates the tiankeng some distance about the bottom. This tiankeng has lush vegetation and only in a few places can one see down to the cave en-



Fig. 13. The Leye Valley with cave entrances.

trance below. Completing the circuit around the tiankeng, we came across another large cave parallel to Chuandong. This one houses a botanical museum which would have told us much about the local plants if the labels hadn't been written only in Chinese.

After the Chuandong Tiankeng, we returned to Leye for lunch. Then it was back into the hills to the



Fig. 14. The entrance to a water cave against the base of the hill. This is one of the principal insurgences to the Bailong underground river system which has been traced for something like 20 miles to its resurgence on the Hongshui He.



Fig. 15. The entrance to Luo Mei Lotus show cave. All show caves should have an entrance like this.



Fig. 16 The entrance to Chuandong. Ahead is the entrance building and the road in the valley. Behind the camera, the passage eventually opens into the side of the tiankeng.



Fig. 17. A new road constructed on the side of a karst tower. Since most of these roads lack guiderails, sitting on the outside of the bus as it goes barreling down the mountain can be an un-nerving experience.



Fig. 18. Dashiwei Tiankeng seen from the top of one of the surrounding karst cones. Note trail system on the far hill, upper right. The deep point in the tiankeng is out of sight on the lower left. The overall depth varies from 1670 to 2000 feet depending on the point of measurement.

Dashiwei Tiankeng. There have been some remarkable changes in this area in the years since Andy Eavis and Tony Waltham began cave exploring in the 1980s. Much of the area deep in the karst was accessible only by footpaths. In the interests of their thriving new tourist industry, the provincial and county governments have build paved roads many of which are literally hacked out of the sides of the karst hills (Fig. 17). It may be noted that the concern is not with western tourists; it is the newly wealthy Chinese from Beijing and Shanghai that are being lured to South China to enjoy the geoparks.

There are trails built around Dashiwei Tiankeng so that tourists can hike to many vantage points (Fig. 18). We hiked up one set of trails to an overlook and then down the other side where the bus picked us up. The cave at the bottom of this tiankeng has been partially blocked with talus peeling from the walls so that only the downstream river cave is accessible. There are two short caves high on the walls of the cliff; the entrances are shown in Fig. 18. One of the more unusual features is a massive cable strung between two of the high peaks. As we were hiking down the trail, still near the top of the peak, we heard

the sound of a motorcycle. We looked up and saw two fellows, one on the motorcycle and one hanging beneath it, riding out on the cable. They were well out over the top of the pit when suddenly the engine died. We thought we were going to see two people fall to their deaths right in front of us. But not so. They just hung out there on the cable while two young ladies rode out on a unicycle. Then the unicycle riders turned and went back and the other two, how I don't know, turned their motorcycle around, started the engine and slowly rode back along the cable. We learned later that this mind-boggling performance was for our benefit. Then we had the awkward task of explaining that such performances, spectacular as they are, are not in keeping with an World Heritage site.

In the woods, just above the road, is a hole about 8 feet is diameter opening into blackness. A misstep here would be a serious mistake because this is a skylight in a large chamber in Baidong (Bubbling Cave). The chamber is bell-shaped and the free drop to the rubble on the cave floor is 900 feet. Baidong can be accessed more directly by descending a long flight of steps and walking along a trail at the bot-

## China

tom of a large closed depression. Beyond the cave entrance, the trail leads to the side of the Baidong Tiankeng.

Because we had to recover the lost luggage, we returned to Leye to the same hotel for dinner and overnight. As a small miracle, the luggage was waiting for us at the hotel to the great relief of Julia, Andrej and Maija.

### Wednesday, October 26

In the morning, we packed out of Leye and drove to the National Forest Geopark and the Huangjing Tiankeng. The development at Huangjing has progressed farther than most of the others. There is a paved trail with multitudinous stone steps around the rim of the tiankeng and several observation towers giving a great view into the pit (Fig. 19). There is a sinkhole back in the woods near the observation tower closest to the parking lot. Steps lead down through the foliage to a cave entrance. The cave is lighted and steep steps down through the cave allow access to the bottom of the tiankeng



Fig. 19. The Huangjing Tiankeng taken from an observation tower. Another observation tower is visible on the far rim.

Lunch was at a lodge called the Forest House. The original plan would have had us spending last night there if the luggage hadn't been delayed. A trio of guys with horns and a drum gave us a musical send-off. We drove back to Leye, picked up the luggage from the hotel, and drove to Beise to overnight at a hotel that seems to be part of a government compound. There was the usual banquet and meeting with local officials.

### Thursday, October 27

The objective for the day was simply to drive to Guilin, a distance of about 400 miles but there were some unexpected stops. The first was a tiankeng near Bama. It is entered by boat through a series of caves and intermediate lakes (Fig. 20 and 21). Sanmenhai Dong is a show cave. Visitors are poled through the cave on flat-bottomed rafts. It is possible to order lunch which is served on a table set up in the middle of the raft.

We stopped at the hotel in Fengshan for lunch. There was the usual red banner welcoming us (Fig. 22). After lunch we headed over the mountains to the east planning to reach the motorway that would take us

to Guilin. However, as we were going up the mountain east of Fengshan, we parked the bus along the road and hiked down a steep hill on stone steps to the entrance of Yuanyang Dong (Fig. 23). Yuanyang Dong is also a show cave. It has very high ceilings some of which leave one wonder how much rock is between the cave and the highway up on the mountain. The high ceilings mean that water drips with a considerable splat creating stalagmites like stacks of pancakes.

It was getting late in the afternoon by the time we finally restarted our long trek across the mountains on some very twisty roads. The karst scenery went from spectacular to more spectacular, resulting in loud requests to stop the bus so we could take pictures. It was dark



Fig. 20. How to explore a cave. The raft trip through Sanmenhai Dong.



Fig. 21. The Sanmenhai Tiankeng seen through the final exit (or entrance) of the cave.



Fig. 22. The hotel at Fengshan. It is typical of the mid-range hotels – not 5-star grandeur but a long way from being a dump. Note the banner. These or something similar were displayed at many of our stops.



Fig. 23. The entrance to Yuanyang Dong. The cave entrance is essentially a ledge on the mountain side that holds the ticket office and provides a staging area for visitors. The person on the right is Dr. Zhu Xuewen, the organizer of the expedition.

by the time we reached the motorway. We reached Liuzhou about 8:00 p.m. where a banquet and the usual assortment of local officials awaited us. Then it was a long slog northeast to Guilin in the dark and the fog. We arrived at our hotel in Guilin sometime after midnight.

### **Friday, October 28**

Today was a tour of the karst around Guilin. We drove south along the main highway to Yangshao. There are many isolated towers, what the Chinese call fenglin – peak forest (Fig. 24). We had lunch in Yangshao and the drove back along the Li Jiang (Li River) which is now clogged with tourist boats. Xingping is a total mass of stalls selling just about anything to the tourists. We continued north to Caoping and then took a big loop through the karst hills to the east.

Although the area around Guilin is China's classic karst, our photographs were generally lousy. There is a big-time air pollution problem with so much haze and smoke that objects at a distance are lost. In the Chongqing karst we could blame the bad seeing on rain and fog. At Guilin it was definitely air quality. We were in China in 1988 and toured much the same area. The photographs were great. In 1988 most Chinese were riding bicycles. Now there are many cars and motorcycles, many of them out-of-tune and belching black smoke. The most common workhorse device, of which there are hundreds on the streets, is

shown in Figure 25. It appears to be the illicit offspring of a union between a cart and a motorcycle. The rural Chinese use these for everything. The day we saw two pigs being taken to market on a bicycle is long gone

We returned to Guilin for a banquet at the Karst Institute hosted by the Director.

### **Saturday, October 29**

This was the day of the formal presentations. All participants had prepared papers giving their views of tiankeng, even before they had ever seen one. All agreed that tiankeng are special landforms and that the decision to use them as showpieces in geoparks is well taken. Some, indeed, are of World Heritage quality. These papers were collected, edited, and appear as a special issue of *Cave and Karst Science*, volume 32, numbers 2/3 (2005). The all-day seminar was followed by lavish banquet at the hotel up the street from the Institute. After dinner, we were treated to a boat ride through “Two Rivers and Four Lakes”. The lighting of parklands along the lakes would have made Walt Disney proud. Our Chinese friends have come a long way from the days of almost continuous power blackouts.

### **Sunday, October 30**

Fly from Guilin to Guangzhou at 9:30 a.m. on South China flight 333. At 2:00 p.m. fly to Hong Kong on

South China flight 307. When we arrived at 2:50, Hong Kong had two young ladies stationed in the corridor between the plane and passport check. They had these little guns for remote temperature measurement and they were measuring everyone's fore-

head. It's the bird flu epidemic. We think about the muddy farmyards and are glad we aren't running a fever today. We overnight in Hong Kong. The next day it is a long flight over the Pacific to San Francisco, then on to Dulles, and on to State College.

Fig. 24 Karst tower near Yangshao. Note the haze obscuring the landforms in the background.



Fig. 25. The present-day workhorse of the rural Chinese. These take on a great variety of detail but the basic design is the same – a motorcycle engine and front end; an open bedded cart as a back end.

# **K2 DIG MORPHS INTO BOWWOW CAVE**

## **KEITH D. WHEELAND**

This is an account of how a dig in Highland County, Virginia became a real cave. Since I was keeping a log of this dig and reporting via email back to my digging buddies, I've decided to present the log as I wrote it. I've made a few minor changes for clarity. I'm the old geezer Keith, so I refer to Keith Christenson as The Younger.

2/17/2008

During President's Day weekend, Keith Christenson, Scott Olson, Tony Canike, and I stayed at the Roost (my place in Virginia). Our objective was to dig into a cave on Tower Hill Mountain. We did, but that's another story.

On Sunday, after Scott and Tony left for home, The Younger wanted to see the entrance to Better Forgotten Cave. We drove down the road and parked by my neighbor's gate since it is easier walking up their lane than it is hiking cross country. We hiked to the cave and took a few pictures. Having done that, we decided to ridgewalk since I have the neighbor's permission. The Younger found a small sinkhole that he thought was interesting. I concurred. We decided to pull out some leaves, but there was dirt and small stones in the way – and I didn't have gloves. The Younger went back to his vehicle to get a bar, gloves, and shovel, while I continued to remove leaves and dirt with my bare hands. He got back in a few minutes and we started to dig in earnest. It was 2:51 p.m. At 3:08 p.m. his shovel went into a void (he was hinting earlier that it felt interesting). It wasn't long until we were both looking down a hole that was moving warm air. From the surface the hole does not go straight down. There is an offset. Unfortunately you can not see past the offset, but we knew it continued because the dirt that went that direction just disappeared. We worked at enlarging the sides of the hole until we decided that a bucket would really be helpful so that more of the dirt could be prevented from falling in. And it started to rain a little harder. So we left it for another day. But we

ridgewalked some more and tried to see if we could find any openings lower down that may account for the warm air coming out of the hole. We found none.

2/18/2008

Today I walked back to do a little documenting so I took along a carpenter's roll-up metal measuring tape. The dig itself is about 17" square. It is 5' from where we started digging down to the floor of the offset. But what I did next was more interesting. I thought, "I wonder if I can stick the tape past the lip of the offset and push it down any farther." So I put my plan in motion. I have decided that when we come to dig the next time we better have a rope. I pushed the rule to its length of 25 feet without touching bottom. That means that the hole past the lip is at



Keith D. Wheeland

The K2 Dig after the first session.

least 20' feet deep. We will have to dig some more to determine whether the hole into which I stuck the tape is body-sized. You can imagine how excited I was to email this news to the other diggers. And it's only a short walk from the Roost.

The location of the hole indicates that it may lay over the lower part of Better Forgotten. We are hoping that this entrance will bypass the nasty Vertical Crawl that gave Better Forgotten its name. Of course, only more work will tell us whether we get our wish!

Keith the Younger wants to call the dig, the K2 Dig. That's OK with me.

3/9/2008

Today Scott, Maggie (Scott's dog), and Phil Lucas came up and we went down to the K2 Dig. We dug about 2.5 hours. The hole is wider and a bit deeper. Before we started I demonstrated where the hole is that we want to follow by sticking a dead sapling down the hole. In the process I dislodged a small stone that went tumbling (we all heard it). When Scott went down in the hole the first time, the floor

settled some. After that we used a belay rope while we dug. When Phil got in the hole to take his turn, he decided it was stable so he took off the rope. Right now we don't have an indication of the hole going down. We covered it with dirt. But we now have a wider space in which to work. We missed the magic quitting hour of 5 p.m. and worked until 6 p.m. since I hadn't adjusted my watch for daylight savings time. Fire the boss!

3/12/2008

I was feeling guilty because I lounged around yesterday and read until 5 a.m. this morning. So after 4 hours of sleep and a leisurely breakfast I grabbed my digging gear and headed for K2, and started digging at 10:33 a.m.. By 11:30 (after 4 buckets) I had found our "hole" again and there was a lot of air pumping out of it. By 12:30 p.m. I had pulled out 11 full buckets. By then it was easier to push the loose dirt down the hole. There were some rocks that needed to come out that were over the hole, so I squished the bucket down into the top of the hole to keep the rocks from jamming the hole. Then I loosened a big rock and pulled it out over top of the bucket. It is just too big for me to wrestle alone today. So there it sits on top of the bucket. To the left of the rock in the photo you can see the bucket and its webbing handle peeping out. That little dark spot to the left of the bucket is cave. We need some more speleoengineering in order to get into the cave because the slot is too narrow, at least for me to enter. I packed up my tools at about 1:12 p.m. and went back to the Roost.

3/13/2008

Today Phil Lucas, the straw boss, came over with his portable equipment and we got to work sometime around 11:00 a.m. The "big" rock sitting on the bucket was easily man-



Keith D. Wheeland

Phil Lucas in the hole, Scott Olson bucket handler.

Keith D. Wheeland



The K2 Dig after my 11 buckets.

handled by Phil after he got his hands around it. He didn't have to open his special equipment, he just handed the rock up to me. It was my turn to get in the hole. I began shoving dirt down the crevice and enlarged our dig quite a bit. My plan was to dig along the top of the crevice toward Chestnut Ridge. It appeared that the crevice was getting slightly wider that direction. It was - but only by a little. Then Phil got his chance. By working back toward Chestnut Ridge, he uncovered a cross joint. Good, it might be wider here. My 5' bar was the first to go cave exploring - it jumped right out of Phil's hands. After a few comments about lost tools, he got to work again. He uncovered some ledges along the right (facing the road) at the cross joint. Since up to that time he hadn't needed any help from his portable equipment, he was itching to make a big difference in a short amount of time. He was leery that his first attempt would work after he hit a void while drilling - but he had to try. He was right, not much happened. So he destroyed that layer of rock with a bar and hammer. The ledge below it was more cooperative. We were treated to a satisfying sound. When he crawled back into the hole, large chunks of rock yielded to his hammer and bar. Then it was back to digging in the floor again. Now his shovel went through the dirt closest to my vantage point at the top of the hole. The floor was being held up by a large chockstone. He got the chockstone to move down a little. You can see it in the photo. The top of the chockstone is about 16.5' from the surface. It is another 6' down to the sloping floor. The crevice slopes toward the paved road then slopes



Keith D. Wheeland

The K2 Dig after 3/13.

off to the right, That's as much as we can see from our vantage point lying on the chockstone. Phil was able to retrieve the digging bar by lying on the chockstone and reaching down. The bar didn't get to scoop very much since it was standing vertically just where it had jumped down into the crevice.

The crevice is narrow. It will take some hammering of limestone fins to widen the passage so that one can slip off of the chockstone and wiggle down to the floor. One may have to walk sideways in the crevice. But it certainly looks doable. Being the good guys that we are, we didn't go any farther than the sneaky bar had gone.

So there it sits. If this cave goes, it will definitely need a 10' section of 36" plastic pipe at the entrance. If it doesn't go, then we have another problem of how to cover it. In either case there is more work ahead after it is surveyed.

Phil and I finished at about 3:45 p.m.

3/15/2008 (Pancake Weekend)

During Pancake breakfast at the Williamsville Community Center, I made arrangements with a crew to bring a 11' x 3' plastic culvert pipe (from the BCCS stash) to install in the entrance of the dig. A group of us went to the K2 dig to enlarge the dig to accept the pipe. Diggers were, myself, Tony Canike, Brad Cooper, Eric Davis, Phil Davis, Mike Fernandez, and



Mike Fernandez

Tony Canike in K2 Dig. Almost ready to insert the pipe.

Scott Olson. During the day we had a steady stream of spectators. Tony set up a haul system so we could haul spoils by the bucket-load out of the entrance. When we got down about 8 feet, we left the spoils drop into the hole, rather than haul them up. By measuring the diameter of the dig, and by eyeing the edges from above we were able to make the hole the correct size to accept the pipe. Today, Tony was the straw boss. He had to use his authority twice.

A group of men rolled the pipe up the hill from the paved road while Kathy Haverly snapped pictures. It was about 4:45 p.m. and raining slightly when the culvert was placed into the hole. Jeff Uhl directed the placement. It was a perfect fit thanks to all the care we had taken. We cleaned up our gear and got out of there about 5 p.m. as the rains came. Throughout all of the activities so far, no one had ventured into the cave. I was hearing rumors that there was a lot of discussion about my having installed a culvert even before I knew there was cave. The last advice that I got this evening was "Don't backfill the pipe until you know there is cave. We can always pull the culvert." I didn't backfill.

3/16/2008

After breakfast at the Marks', we put together a survey team. Phil Davis, Scott Olson, Brad Cooper, and myself. We chose the team from the diggers that weren't already engaged in another project or were heading home. We got into the cave about 10:50 a.m. and exited at 2 p.m.

The vertical entrance drops into a steeply dipping crevice which trends about 315 degrees. Near the entrance the floor is covered with mud and the ceiling of the crevice with formations. At about 60 feet horizontal, a cross bed is enlarged to form a room which is 15 ft high at its apex. There is standing water, probably from the many dripping formations. The formations are to be expected since the ceiling is near the surface. The cross bed to the left of the room has been enlarged into a passage which narrows down about 20 ft. from the room. There is standing water on the floor. After Scott didn't fit, Phil tried the passage for size. He was able to squeeze through a little farther than Scott, but had to back out when it became too tight to follow. Both of them felt air movement in the passage.



Mike Fernandez

The Survey team. Phil Davis in white, Scott Olson on pipe, Keith Wheeland with book. Brad Cooper is behind Keith. Spectators: Tony Canike is behind Phil, and Amanda Morrow is behind Scott.

Scott began to leave the cave, Phil checked out some higher areas, but nothing held promise of further extension. Brad and I dug up near the entrance where earlier, Phil had seen a passage extension that is blocked by rocks, that can be seen past. We moved a lot of mud, but couldn't get up far enough to investigate further. At times we thought we could feel air movement, but it could have come from the entrance. A flat stone in the floor has to be removed in order for someone my size to continue. We surveyed about 95 feet of passage. The cave is about 60 ft. deep.

We plan to go back and try to dig at both the small passage off the room, and the dig near the entrance.

Why the cave name, BowWow? 1) The owner is a veterinarian, 2) When we saw the formations inside, we said "Wow!". and 3) Once again we have to bow

down to Mother Chestnut Ridge before she will give up her precious cave passage.

### Postscript.

After this trip, both Phil and I had to discard our caving boots because the soles came off. I've replaced mine with a good pair from Goodwill. Earlier in the day Nevin W. Davis examined my cable ladder and pronounced that it was constructed the same way as a ladder that had failed them in Hawaii. Well, guess what? As Scott was climbing out, a rung slipped past it's detent. Was it the Nevin Curse or was it because my ladder is 35 years old? Whatever the cause, I now have a new cable ladder. I looked on the web and found one on sale for \$965. All high tech with plastic rungs and special plastic cable constructed for use by the Navy Seals. I considered it (briefly), but opted for a \$160 ladder from Karst Sports.

# BowWow Cave

Highland Co., Virginia  
Suunto and Stanley Fat Max

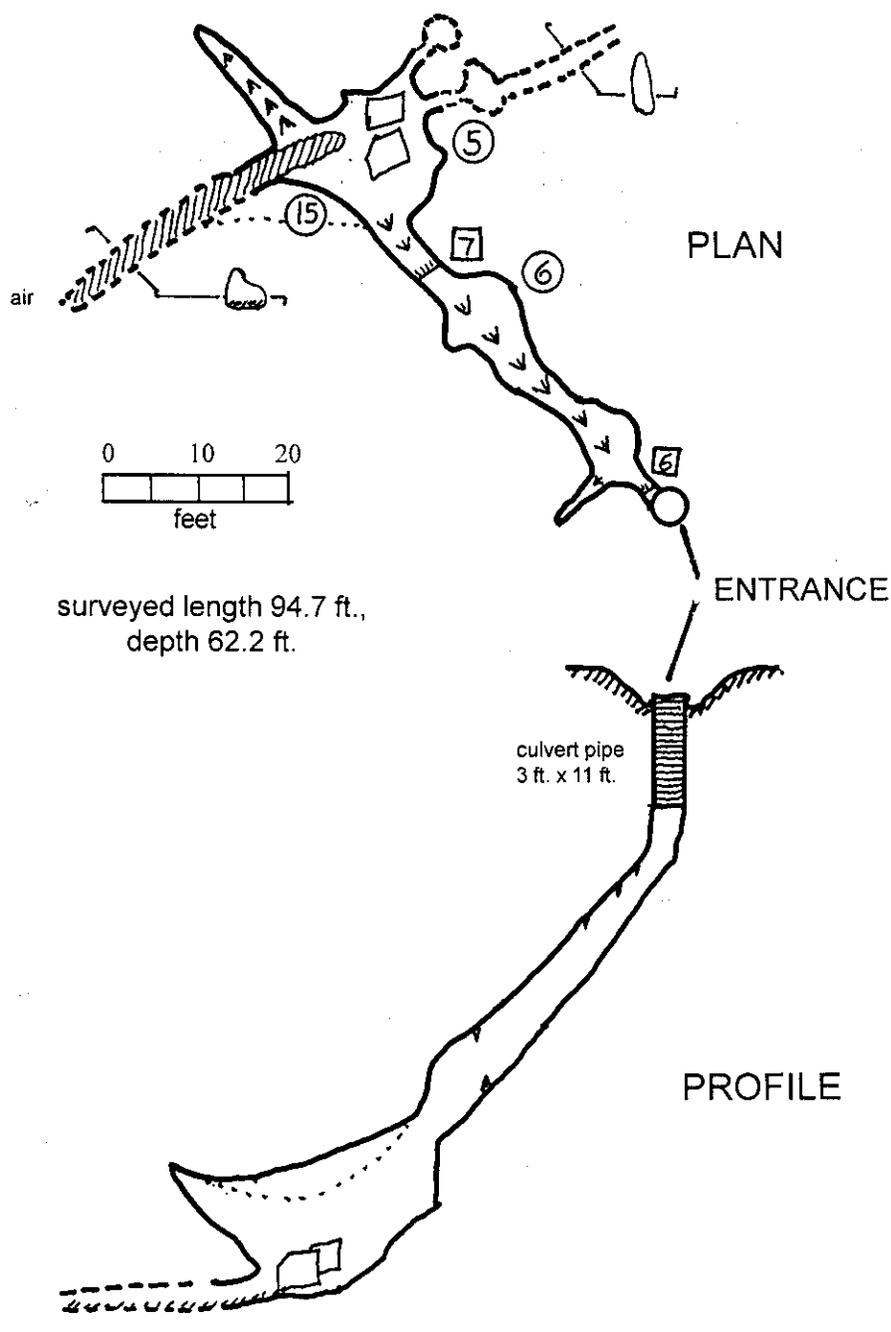
March 16, 2008

*Phil Davis - instruments*

*Scott Olson - stations*

*Keith Wheeland - book*

*Brad Cooper - observer*



**Nittany Grotto (Caving club)**  
[www.clubs.psu.edu/up/NittanyGrotto/](http://www.clubs.psu.edu/up/NittanyGrotto/)

**Mid Appalachian Region NSS**  
[www.caves.org/region/mar](http://www.caves.org/region/mar)

**Pennsylvania Cave Conservancy**  
[www.caves.org/conservancy/pcc](http://www.caves.org/conservancy/pcc)

---

**NITTANY GROTTTO NEWS**  
P.O. Box 676  
State College, PA 16804-0676  
USA

