

The Maverick Bull



**Nico Escamilla rappels the 145 foot entrance
shaft of Honey Creek Cave.**

Maverick Grotto Information

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The Maverick Bull is the monthly newsletter of The Maverick Grotto, an internal organization of The National Speleological Society (NSS G-322). The editor invites all individuals and other grottos to submit articles, news, maps, cartoons, art and photographs. If the material is to be returned, a self-addressed stamped envelope should accompany it.

Reprinting Articles: Internal organizations of The National Speleological Society may reprint any item (unless copyrights belong to the author as stated in the byline) first appearing in *The Maverick Bull* if proper credit is given and a complete copy of the publication is delivered to the editor at the time of publication. Other organizations should contact the editor of *The Maverick Bull* at the address herein.

Exchanges: The Maverick Grotto will exchange newsletters with other grottos. Contact the editor.

Complementary Newsletters: The Maverick Grotto will provide complementary newsletters to persons or organizations that provide cave access (i.e. landowners) or otherwise provide assistance to cavers. The Maverick Grotto will provide one free issue to persons interested in becoming members.

Subscription Rates: Subscription rates are \$15.00 per year for non-members and free for members.

Membership Policy: Any individual with interests, beliefs and actions consistent with the purposes of The Maverick Grotto and The National Speleological Society is eligible for membership. Acceptance of new members is based on payment of dues and a mandatory three trip requirement with at least three different grotto members. These three members shall act as sponsors. At least one sponsor must attend the meeting at which the membership vote is taken. A two-thirds majority vote of the members present will be required for acceptance.

Meetings: Meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. The location will be announced prior to each meeting.

Library: Support your Grotto Library. Dennis Welch will be accepting books and magazines on cave-related topics, copies of homemade cave videos, etc. for our library. Bill and Diana will be temporarily bringing and setting up the grotto library on Dennis' behalf.

Photos & Map Credits

Cover Photo: Nico Escamilla of Sabinas Hidalgo, Mexico at his first TCR taken by Bill Steele. see article on page 5

Page 6: A ride to the entrance of Honey Creek cave taken by Bill Steele.

Page 7: Nico Escamilla at the shaft entrance by Bill Steele

Page 8 and 9: TCR photos by Butch Fralia

Page 10: TCR photo by David Ochel

Visit Our NSS Award-Winning Web Site! Butch has done an excellent job at constructing the grotto web site and keeping it up-to-date. You'll find information about getting into caving, trip photos and the PDF version of this newsletter (with color photos!):

[Http://www.maverickgrotto.org](http://www.maverickgrotto.org)

Cave Rescue: Call collect: (512) 686-0234

Cave Emergency:

FOR A LIFE THREATENING EMERGENCY IN TEXAS DIAL 911. FOR CAVE ASSISTANCE START BY CALLING THE CLOSEST NUMBER:

BEXAR: 210-326-1576 **COLLIN:** 214-202-6611

HAYS: 512-393-9054 **KENDALL:** 830-537-6111

SUTTON: 315-387-3424 **TRAVIS:** 512-663-2287

PARKER: 817 657-5780

Next meeting: November 14th , 2006 7:00 pm

Buck N' Loons 3517 South Cooper Street
Arlington, TX 76015-3410.

Program: Come and find out. I'm sure Diana will have a great program.

It is time to elect officers for 2007. See the chairman's corner for a list of candidates. Come and cast your vote.

Chair

Butch Fralia
3412 Walton Ave.
Fort Worth, TX 76133
(817) 346-2039
cavedba@charter.net

Secretary

Scott Boyd
509 E Glendale St.
Crowley, TX 76036
(817) 297-4427
sdboyd56@yahoo.com

Newsletter Editor

Tammy Cox
237 Gwen St.
Azle, TX 76020
(817) 444-0186
tammy.cox@charter.net

Vice-Chair

Diana Tomchick
500 Kingston Dr.
Irving, TX 75227
(214) 418-5827
Dianatomchick@utsouthwestern.edu

Treasurer

Sharon Mastbrook
3412 Walton Ave.
Fort Worth, TX 76133
(817) 346-2039
cavedba@charter.net

Webmaster

Butch Fralia
3412 Walton Ave.
Fort Worth, TX 76133
(817) 346-2039
cavedba@charter.net

Caving Calendar

Nov 10-12 Colorado Bend State Park - TSA Volunteer Project. Something for everyone from beginners to the most experienced cavers. 380 Caves and Karst features identified with more found nearly every project weekend. Contact: Rafal Kedzierski cbsp@maverickgrotto.org

Nov 10-12 Manhole Dig (Carlsbad region, NM): Cavediggers welcome, come see if this will be the next big one. Steve Fleming told me at TCR that this weekend could be the big breakthrough. If you plan to come, contact Steve as they need a minimum of eight people now to run the dig. Located on BLM land not far from Lechuguilla Cave. **Contact:** Stephen Fleming swcaver@warpedriveonline.com

Nov 12 Government Canyon State Natural Area Project: 20 miles northwest of San Antonio, Sunday only this month. Activities include survey, exploration, ridge walking, and digging. Participants must enter by 9 am, contact in advance if you want directions. **Contacts:** Marvin and Lisa Miller (830) 885-5631 mlmiller@gvtc.com

Nov 18-19 High Guads Restoration Project (Carlsbad, NM) On-going work amid spectacular scenery in beautiful caves of the Lincoln National Forest. Last weekend of the month, permits often include Three Fingers, Virgin, Pink Dragon, Pink Panther, Hidden, Wonderland, and Black Cave. Activities vary from month to month. **Contacts:** Susan Herpin or Jennifer Foote highguads@yahoo.com

Nov 18-26 Proyecto Espeleológico Sierra Oxmolon (San Luis Potosí, México): Annual Thanksgiving caving/surveying/tourist trip to the Sierra Madre Oriental, west of Aquismón. Trip suited for beginners and veterans alike. **Contact:** Jerry Fant (512) 970-0456 Jerry.Fant@esotericvision.com
Info: www.pesoproject.esotericvision.com

Dec 2 Metroplex Grottos Holiday Party (Irving): Annual holiday party includes good food, good fun and the ever-popular White Elephant Gift Exchange. Baked turkey, ham and potatoes will be provided by the hosts, bring a side dish and your favorite beverages. Party starts at 7 p.m., dinner will be served at 8 p.m.; space is available inside or outside for sleeping if you wish to stay overnight. **Contacts:** Bill Steele speleosteel@comcast.net Diana Tomchick (214) 418-5827 diana.tomchick@utsouthwestern.edu **Address:** 500 Kingston Drive, Irving, TX 75061

Dec 2-3 Southwest Region Winter Technical Meeting (Socorro, NM): Similar to the TSA Spring Convention, the SWR Technical Meeting is devoted to caving talks on Saturday, and an evening banquet. Subjects of talks include exploration, science and cave management. Takes place on the campus of the New Mexico Tech at Socorro. **Contact:** Kenny Stabinsky nmbatty@zianet.com

Dec 3 Government Canyon Karst Project : Government Canyon State Natural Area Project:

Dec 9 Bracken Karst Survey Project Bat Conservation International will be conducting a resource & karst survey at the Bracken Bat Cave property. The project will involve a grid search of designated areas to identify natural resources such as Old Oak & Cedar groves, sinkholes and caves. Survey will begin at 8:30 am and search until 2 pm. Training will be provided on site. Contact: Fran Hudgins 512-848-9404 fhutchins@Satx.rr.com <fhutchins@Satx.rr.com>

Dec 22-Jan 1 Purificación Caving Trip (Tamaulipas & Nuevo León, México): Annual end-of-year trip to the mountains of Old Mexico, dates are approximate. The search to go deep continues. **Contacts:** Bill Steele (speleosteel@comcast.net) Diana Tomchick (214) 418-5827 diana.tomchick@utsouthwestern.edu

Jan 12-14 Colorado Bend State Park Rafal Kedzierski cbsp@maverickgrotto.org

Jan 27-28 High Guads Restoration Project (Carlsbad, NM) Contacts: Susan Herpin or Jennifer Foote highguads@yahoo.com

Feb 9-11 Colorado Bend State Park -Rafal Kedzierski cbsp@maverickgrotto.org

Feb 24-25 High Guads Restoration Project (Carlsbad, NM) Contacts: Susan Herpin or Jennifer Foote highguads@yahoo.com

March 9-11 Colorado Bend State Park - Rafal Kedzierski cbsp@maverickgrotto.org

October 2006 Meeting Minutes

By :Scott Boyd

The Maverick Grotto met October 10th at Buck N' Loons, on S. Cooper St. in Arlington. There were 11 members present and no visitors.

Program: The program this month was two cave-related videos. The first was "The Troll's Demise" and the second video was "Into the Darkness".

Reports from Officers: Vice-chair: There is no November program yet. See Diana if you have anything for a program.

Treasurer: The grotto has the same amount of funds as last month.

Newsletter Editor: Tammy reports that she needs articles for the next newsletter.

Librarian: (not an official officer) Bill Steele announced that the grotto library is here and he wants everyone to check out stuff.

Non-trip announcements: Cynthia Hall announced that her husband Jerry is turning 50. She invited everyone not going to TCR to a party at their house on Saturday Oct. 21.

Old Business: Butch says we need another location for meetings. Francie Tucker says that Bodacious BBQ is available on the 4th Thursday. We discussed various options for future meetings.

New Business: Nominations of officers for 2007:

Chair: Lex Cox and Diana Tomchick - Vice-Chair: Bill Steele

Newsletter Editor: Butch Fralia - Secretary: Butch Fralia (he will recombine Secretary & Editor positions) - Treasurer: Sharon Mastbrook

Trip reports and trip announcements: The caver project at Colorado Bend State Park is this coming weekend - Oct. 14 -15.

TCR is the weekend after that - Oct. 20 - 22. The Metroplex cavers area is already marked off.

Bill Steele announced that there will probably be a swim-thru of Honey Creek Cave on Sunday, the weekend of TCR.

Francie Tucker went caving last weekend.. (It was in San Saba Co. on a private ranch.)

Cynthia Hall and Tammy Cox went to Airman's Cave in Austin. The detailed trip report is in the October newsletter.

Diana Tomchick went to Lava Beds National Monument in northern California last weekend and went through some lava tubes. The Cave Research Foundation was meeting there.

IN THE BEGINNING

The Maverick Grotto
by Butch Fralia

In the beginning there was only DFW, an old Grotto of great renown, and it was in Dallas. Upon a dark night, some who professed to be speleos (children of the underground) gathered high upon a hill in a County called King, on a Ranch called Bateman, near a cave called Styx. Many a liter of fine lager (the nectar of Oztotl) were consumed and spirits ran high! A warm fire lit the night and the hearts of the speleos who gathered there. A voice spoke from the dark saying; "let there be more and let it be in Fort Worth!" That night the thought was not well received but the suggestion took root and later other voices sprang forth saying "let there be more and let it be in Fort Worth!" Thus in the summer of 1986 were the beginnings of The Maverick Grotto.

The early speleos, those called the founders, gathered at a later time to discuss their thoughts. There was Donna Anderson, Corky Corcoran, Dale Ellison, Butch Fralia, Joe Giddens and Danny Sherrod. The ancient speleo, Joe Giddens, wise in the lore of the old time speleos, spoke on that which must be accomplished to become acknowledged by the most illustrious of speleo organizations, The NSS. There must first be a gathering of those of similar mind. A drafting of a constitutional document complementary to the society of caving. A statement of intent on the part of other speleos willing to say "let there be more and let it be in Fort Worth!" These were the words of the ancient speleo, Joe Giddens, wise in the ways of the ancient art.

It came to pass in November of 1986 a gathering of some twenty speleos willing to say; "let there be more and let it be in Fort Worth!" In the minds of most, gathered on that long passed night was remedy to a monthly drive on a work night to the far away county of Dallas. There was willingness to expand the ranks of speleos unable to make the trek to far away county Dallas.

And so it came to pass in those days, the formation of the Grotto of Mavericks. Those known as Mavericks were numbered twenty and became known as the charters. They chose leadership to guide them through the rocky passages of the early days. These were named as Chairman: Corky Corcoran, Vice-Chairman: Donna Anderson, Treasurer: Joe Giddens, and Secretary-Editor Butch Fralia. This leadership remained mostly in place for the passing of a single year.

Mighty Joe Giddens was called away to a far place called Arkansas and there today remains. Upon the beginning of the second year the coffers of the Grotto called Maverick were managed by Dale Ellison.

In the second year, the finances of Corky Corcoran, the first of Chairmen, heeded the call of night shift. Editor Butch Fralia produced twenty-eight issues of "Bull" then moved on to other demands of life. Donna Anderson served two years in the role of Vice Chairman until she returned to the ranks of Speleos where she is still a strong and respected influence. Speleos Dale Ellison and Danny Sherrod are still among us. Through the years have they held high office and left us with the legacy of their contributions.

During the passing of eight years, the grotto of Maverick has seen many fine cavers enter it's chambers. Those such as the one known as Dave "Cave" McClung well known in the hearts of all. Among us has walked the well known David Finrock until called from our midst by prime time television. Many have come and abide still while others have come and gone.

Thus is the story of the Grotto of Maverick in it's beginnings. Long may it live in the county Tarrant and forever shall it dwell in the hearts of those who have known it's times, it's trials and it's tribulations.

Chairman's Corner

I'm a little tipsy as I write this so forgive me if I slur my words. That's a little haarrdd to do when you're typing but if anyone can do it I can. The Dallas Stars won tonight, that itself is cause to celebrate but this is the real anniversary of The Maverick Grotto. OK, some of us started meeting a few months earlier in my living room working on a constitution and planning/plotting out a grotto. In November, we had the first public meeting of the grotto. It was held the same night as the DFW meeting so people would have to make a decision and a commitment if they wanted to be part of the new grotto. I think it was 20 people who showed up to become the charter members of the grotto.

That was an interesting time because there were articles in the NSS news about why grotto's don't survive. Joe Giddens had the idea they didn't survive because there wasn't a committed effort to produce a newsletter. He was probably right about that. Considering in 1986, there wasn't the Internet and e-mail and all that stuff we enjoy today. The primary medium of communications was the printed word. We were lucky in that we started producing a newsletter when those few grotto's who were able to produce one, did it on a type writer and

a mimeograph machine. Heck, even today people still like newsletters. The TSA activities newsletter is one of the most looked at pages on the TSA website. Old newsletters make up the majority of pages looked at on The Maverick website. People still like newsletters!

There's a lot of things happened in the last 20 years and the grotto is still here because of the commitment of a few members who wouldn't let it die. Hell, 20 years ago I wasn't sure I'd live to see 60 but will be going on to 61 in a few months, about the time this newsletter goes from the member/subscriber area to the public of The Maverick Grotto website.

Over the years, I've preached that things don't happen without people making them happen. R.D. Milhollin helped start The Cowtown Grotto mentioned that he'd heard me say things like that over the years (The Maverick Grotto was about 6 months old when he came along). He'd never fully appreciated it until he started a new grotto and was trying to inspire people to get things done. Just remember that applies to almost anything, your business, your extracurricular interest like a grotto or even supporting your favorite sports team.

TCR was cool, literally until Saturday when it went to hot! Sharon and I arrived at the Metroplex Cavers Camping area (marked off by Bill and Diana) shortly before dark on Wednesday. We had just enough daylight to debate where to put our old trailer. That debate was settled by consensus, the trailer was disconnected and leveling jacks in place about dark. We decided all the fancy stuff; the sun tent, outside cooking gear and other stuff could wait until morning. It was hot and humid and too hot to sit in the trailer so we did pull out the lawn chairs to sit and look at the stars for a while. That didn't last long, a front came through and we got a really good rain and the weather cooled down significantly by Thursday Morning.

I've been sending e-mail back and forth with Nico Escamilla down in Nuevo Leon for a couple of years now. He came to TCR and I finally got to meet him as did Bill Steele, 58 year old world renown caver who wore Nico down to a nub going through Honey Creek Cave. Look for an article by Nico elsewhere in the newsletter. By Thursday night, there were more people in our camping area than I ever remember in 20 or so years of TCR. Friday it began to get downright crowded and Saturday everyone disappeared until the door prizes, bon fire and Terminal Siphons began to play.

For many years, The Maverick Grotto donated a door prize to the drawings. Andy Grubbs in his infinite wisdom decided all Metroplex Grottos were the same. He'd give our door prize away as another generous gift from The DFW Grotto. Don't take it that I have a problem with The DFW Grotto, but they couldn't afford to give away as many door prizes as they were credited for. Last year we decided to try it one more time and carefully marked the door prize as from The Maverick Grotto. Joe Ranzau took special care to make sure it was from us. We tried it again this year and got proper credit so I'd recommend to future officers of the grotto, to keep contributing door prizes to TCR if they keep recognizing our participation. If I have enough energy left, I may try to write a short article on TCR, if not be sure and read Nico's article.

It's November meaning it's time to elect officers for 2007. So far the candidates are Diana Tomchick – Chair, Bill Steele – Vice Chair, Sharon Mastbrook Treasurer, and Butch Fralia – Secretary/Newsletter Editor. That's right, after two years, Tammy has decided to retire from newsletter editing for a more full time caving position. I hope that everyone will thank Tammy for the fine job she's done over the last two years. Tammy is a case of someone stepping forward to make sure things happen.

I've enjoyed another year as Maverick Grotto Chairman. However my heart hasn't always been in it as I was laid off November 1, 2004 and have been working starting my own business since that time. While I just didn't have it in my heart to get back in the middle of corporate America, my business is starting to take off. There may be situations where I can't come to meetings because someone thinks I'm needed to save their behind for another day. I should be able to get a newsletter out in my "spare" time however.

It's time for new ideas and new blood to start making their mark on the grotto. I don't know of anyone who works harder in that arena than Diana. She has my full support.

What happens to "The Chairman's Corner?" That's up to Diana, I guess there will be a revival of "The Editor Speaks" or some such that started in the beginning and followed through until Chad Fenner quit doing the newsletter.

Happy November, happy caving and support your TSA projects. There's a lot of stuff going on if you aren't into sitting up your own trips.

My First TCR by Nico Escamilla, Sabinas Hidalgo, N.L, Mexico

Thursday

After getting last minute driving directions, I headed north towards Nuevo Laredo to then take the road to the Colombia international bridge to avoid lines and the rudeness from the customs officers at the Laredo bridge who once denied an entry permit to me in the past. I got to the Colombia crossing and was asked "a donde va señor"? I told him the usual Austin, Texas to see a friend, and he asked me if I had a permit to which I responded I needed to buy one, so he pointed me where I should go. I went in, answered a few questions, they took my picture

and registered my fingerprints with a scanner. I paid 6 bucks and then continued on my merry way. Customs officer didn't even open my trunk full of gear.

Having left Sabinas Hidalgo at about 3:00 p.m., I got to the Guadalupe River State Park office at about 9:30 and realized I had gone too far. There was payphone there so I called Bill Steele but got forwarded to his voice mail and was charged a whopping 75 cents for that call. I was walking around reading signs till I heard a car driving through and stopped to ask for directions to Honey Creek Ranch, it was Roy "Puppy" Lewis so I got in my car and we both went to look for the TCR entrance.

We found it and it was now time to look for the D/FW cavers and after a little driving around we got to the Maverick's camp, and there we met Butch Fralia, Bruce Anderson and others. Then Bob Liebmann from Bob and Bob showed up and was talking about the world in general with Butch. A few minutes later a white Toyota Tundra blinded us with its lights and seemed they were in a hurry because they were flying down the road. That was Bill Steele and Diana Tomchick who I met a few minutes later to talk about our trip to the sumps in Honey Creek Cave the next day (Friday) we talked, drank a little whiskey, joked about the cowbell Bill brought to clang with Thinking Thing, a regular at texascaving.com. Don Arburn showed up too and we started talking about engines and whatnot till 1:00 a.m. when I went to crash.

Friday

I woke up shivering because it was pretty cold inside my car (I didn't want to set up my tent the night before) and Puppy who camped next to me was already setting up for breakfast and invited me to join him with a cup of hot chocolate and some bread that helped me stop the shivering. Then we both went to

greet our camp neighbors and get ready to go caving. My friend Gordon May from Austin showed up to join us on the cave trip and after gearing up Allan Cobb showed up too in the little ATV/pickup thingie and offered to take us to the cave shaft entrance. Bill and RD started rigging the rope to rappel down the shaft because the tractor wasn't there yet to lower us. Jim Brown went down first but took a lo-o-o-ng time to get to the bottom cause his new rappel device was giving too much friction. Then RD went down, then me. Right after me was Puppy's turn, Gordon came next, and Bill was last. We all took our vertical gear off and left it there, and then headed up-

stream towards the sump. It was all good the crawling, the swimming, the low air spaces, but I got pretty tired on the way in and on top of that I hit my knee pretty bad when I stepped off a dam, but again it was all good till we got to the mud. Bill wasn't kidding when he said it was thigh-deep and boot-sucking. We arrived at the Shower Stall and I mentioned that I was pretty tired and I should wait there to keep my energy for the way back. "No way," said Bill, "you're going to get cold, so let's keep moving." After an hour of stoop-walking we got to the sump, but Bill thought that was not it so we kept on going till we reached another sump. Everyone went to check it out

while Gordon and I waited, sitting in the water. Then Gordon said he should start walking back toward the entrance and he did. Puppy and I followed, while Bill, James and RD were checking an old dive line in the sump. The bad air was giving us a very hard time and both Puppy and Gordon were hauling butt while I struggled to keep up with them, then during a break the rest of the party caught up with us. When we got out of the bad air I felt a whole lot better, but that didn't last long because my muscles were already worn out and I was miserable till we got to the shaft and Bill started climbing the rope to fire up the tractor to get us out. We'd been in the cave for 11 hours. After we all got out we had to walk about half a mile to camp only to realize that I had left my car keys at the cave entrance. So Bill drove me there and I picked them up and went back to camp to get changed and have dinner.

Saturday

Saturday morning was not as cold as Friday and I got up all sore from the death march into Honey Creek. I had breakfast with Bill and Diana then headed towards the shaft again with RD to lower "a few" people that were doing the through-trip

and take some pictures. That few people turned out to be at least 30 or 40 people who took turns to go down the shaft, including a girl from Monterey who was roommates with a friend of mine - "What the heck are you doing here?" is what she said after I said hello to her. -"Duh, I'm a caver," was my response, and we kept talking about how I never came back to visit my friend in Monterey because I moved back to Sabinas and whatnot.



Gordon May, Roy "Puppy" Lewis, James Brown (in cab), Diana Tomchick, Allan Cobb, Nico Escamilla. The Isuzu miniature truck belongs to Don Arburn.

Once everyone was lowered into the cave RD and I went to the registration booth where I met Mark Alman. We're

both moderators of the TSA discussion board. RD signed up and I told them that Allan Cobb had told me registration would be free for me. They found my name on a list and they gave me my wristband, and then while wandering around vendors row I met Mike Walsh from the TCC and he asked about the lighting system along Hwy. 85 in my hometown of Sabinas, and we kept on talking about Sabinas, Bustamante and Mexico in general.

I spent pretty much all day wandering around (I found out that if I stopped for a few minutes the muscle pain came back so I

I decided to walk or stand as long as possible) and meeting people. Felicia Vreeland was one of the first people I met and she made comments about how illegals crossing the border aren't very good-looking, but how she would help them get across the Rio Grande if they were handsome - complimenting my looks. Thanks Felicia!

Then I went to take a look at Charley Saavas' bus and got introduced to Peter Sprouse. We talked about Monterrey and of course Power Wagons. I went back to camp where I met Alan Montemayor, the guy the cave at Minas Viejas was named after, and he told me how exploration there started, how the cavers met my grandfather and became friends because cavers told him the windmill pipe was out of the water and needed to be lowered so the windmill could pump water, etc. Then RD and I went to register, and met Mark Alman, my co-moderator at the TSA online discussion forum. I told him Allan Cobb had told me registration was free for me so they looked up my name on a list and gave my wristband and asked me to sign the waiver like everyone else (by the way, thank you Allan)

After that I went to see the vertical competition for a while and saw some familiar faces. Mica and Justin Tell were there. I had met them at Bustamante during the Presidents' Day restoration trip. I also met Bill Russell, aka the legend among the people at texascaving.com

Dinner time was getting close and RD talked me into serving. I said yes and went to look for the guy who was keeping the list of servers. When I signed up Jim Kennedy introduced himself, but we didn't talk much because he was busy.

I kept walking around the place and went back to the buses camp where I was treated to some grilled chicken Charly had cooked because according to him dinner would take forever to be ready, I hung in there for a while till the servers were called a little after five o'clock and we were briefed on how to do it.. We were there serving and oh boy! the line seemed endless, when I saw the last person in the distance I thought -great only

a few more, but since the line on the other row was longer a few people switched over to our side because we were a little faster.

After dinner the band started playing and I was there enjoying the music I saw Puppy and asked him to start his fire spinning. So he went and got his fire toys and told me how I was supposed to put him out if he caught on fire. The fire show started but someone told us he had to stop cause the sheriff was there, so we did, and I headed to the ramen noodle pit and had a great time watching the people wrestling, especially when the sheriff showed up with handcuffs and said he was going to arrest the topless ladies, but that ended up being a prank.

Puppy and I headed to the hot tub to hang out there and someone convinced him to do his fire show there. After asking Mr. Hot Tub, Pete Strickland, for permission, Puppy went back to camp to get his fire toys and came back to start spinning for a while. He said he didn't have much more muscle-strength after caving the day before and participating in the vertical contest. We hung there for a while till it was time to sleep.

Sunday

Next morning we went to the fundraising taco breakfast where I met Bill Stone and I was all excited about meeting the man I had read about in National Geographic. He invited me to do the through trip in Honey Creek with him and other guys, but after giving it some thought I decided to decline because I was already pretty tired and I still had to drive six hours back home by

myself. We went back to the shaft to lower Bill Stone's party with the tractor and he asked if we could drive his truck to the cave resurgence so they didn't have to walk back to camp. I drove the truck there and went back to camp with Mr. Steele and Diana to start packing my stuff. After packing I said goodbye to everyone and spent a few minutes talking to Butch, then I was on my way back home to Mexico.

After a little over six hours I got home. I only had to stop once because I was falling asleep while driving.

I had a great time and look forward to attend next year! That's all I have to say about my first TCR.



Nico Escamilla getting ready to rappel the shaft entrance of Honey Creek Cave.

The Hardest Caving Trip in Texas

by Bill Steele

Or at least that's how I advertised it on TexasCaving.com. But I didn't mean the trip that was scheduled to happen on the Friday of TCR weekend. I meant the trip sometime soon when a strong caving team will do a "tank haul," meaning supporting a cave dive five hours travel time from the closest entrance in the longest cave in Texas, Honey Creek Cave.

I was fishing for cavers wanting to push themselves and see what "hardest caving trip" meant. With over 200 cavers on the TexasCaving.com listserv, and more than double that on TexasCavers.com, I thought I'd catch some fish. And I did, I caught four: RD Millhollin of the Cowtown Grotto, Nico Escamilla from Mexico, his friend Gordon May from Austin, and Roy "Puppy" Lewis from Galveston. I told them that this trip would be a shakedown trip, a trip to a section of Honey Creek Cave few people had ever been to, and no one had been to in 16 years. What's so hard about it? Well, I described it to Puppy as follows: We'll go down the shaft, wade in shin to waist deep water for an hour, walk on mud banks and then sidewalk-like bedrock for an hour, crawl on gravel in water for an hour, slog thorough "thigh-sucking" mud for an hour, and then stoop over in "back-breaker," less than five feet high passage, for another hour. I wasn't far off.

The lead back there is enticing and made all the more so since one of the top cave divers in the U.S.A. recently moved to the D/FW Metroplex. James Brown had done a lot of cave diving. If you've read the caving book Beyond the Deep, you've read about James. He's willing and able to dive the upstream sump at the back of Honey Creek Cave, and I am looking to put together the team to get his gear back there. Our shakedown trip was to familiarize ourselves with the route and look at the sumps, and to inventory how much lead weight was left back there in 1990 (there was only 8 pounds, and James wants to have 38 pounds).

The upstream sump was pushed and surveyed by John Schweyan in 1990. At least three tank hauls to the area took place between 1988 and 1990. I was on at least two of them, and I did a short cave dive back there. However, the sump James Brown wants to do is anything but short. Schweyan laid over 1,000 feet of dive line in spacious, clear, shallow underwater passage, until he ran out of not air, but dive line instead. It's a great lead, and hopefully we'll put together a team to do a tank haul sometime this winter.

Any volunteers?

TCR 2006

By Butch Fralia

Sharon and I arrived at TCR just before dark, Wednesday October 18. At Spring Branch, just before the turnoff on Highway 46, I decided to stop and fill up with diesel. It was \$2.54/gallon vs. \$2.39/gallon in Fort Worth. It was the first time however I'd seen the 15PPM sulphur diesel mandated for 2007 diesel engines.

It was hot and sticky (humid) when we arrived and there was just about enough daylight to pick out the best spot for our old trailer. We set it up, leveled it and all that stuff. Bob Cowell from San Antonio came over and visited and our dogs. He has several Labrador Retrievers and has always liked Bear (the 13 year old retriever). He and Carl Ponebshek had come down early to get some work done prior to the big event.

We decided we'd set everything else up the next morning. We dug out our lawn chairs and proceeded to just relax and enjoy life away from telephones and computers. It had rained earlier in the day and there were still rain drops settled on tree leaves. A gust of wind would come up and blow drops off the tree leaves. Shortly there was

thunder and we realized that all the drops we felt weren't residual from the tree leaves. It was starting to rain again and the temperature was dropping quickly.

That's what trailers are good for, protecting you from rain and cold. Old trailers (1968 Mobile Scout) are well insulated and provide a dry refuge during unpleasant weather situations. We retired to the trailer and got the first good night's sleep in a good while.

Thursday morning it was cool but warm clothes prevailed and we were out in the middle of it. We set up our 12x12 sun tent along with outdoor cooking equipment and we're ready for the weekend. I'd brought my new camera that I'd recently bought with a 1GB memory card intending to take as many pictures to document TCR as I possibly could. I took some pictures of our barren campsite then moved on up to where others would be later in the

weekend and took pictures there before the hoards arrived..

The previous good camera I had was an HP-845 which was damaged at CBSP when I fell into a sloping cave entrance. Fortunately Keith Heuss was there to break my fall but that didn't save the camera. I was in the mood for a fancy 35MM



Butch and Sharon were the first to arrive at the Maverick camping area.

framed Canon or Nikon digital camera but on a trip to Sam's, they had a clearance on the Kodak 850, 5MP camera. I've received pictures from Dennis Welch taken with the same camera and for which I couldn't find fault. I bought the Kodak with a 1GB memory card for under \$300.00. They had a clearance sale making room for the new 8MP Kodak 880. I decided that since most of my pictures end up in newsletters or on websites, 5MP was good enough and I'd buy the more expensive one later. I got some neat pictures of what the TCR camping area looked like before people arrived.

Here's a little of my personal TCR history. The last time I took a two week vacation was in 1991 when Mark Porter and I took an interesting trip to New Mexico and a little bit of Arizona. After that, due to hostile takeovers and even though I had four weeks vacation on the books, I couldn't take long vacations. I could manage about a week then the rest of my vacation was taking a long weekend here and there. I finally got fed up and gave an ultimatum that I was going to be gone for six working days starting the third Monday in October. In other words, TCR became my vacation. Sharon and I started getting on site as early as the owners would allow.

Thursday morning, it was COLD. I took advantage of warm sleeping bags as long as I could. It did warm up later in the day, only to cool down that night.

Later on Thursday, people really started to arrive. Mike Anderson arrived from W. Fort Worth, Bruce and Donna Anderson arrived from McAllen, TX. Then George and Kay Crosby from Lake Charles, LA, Dale Ellison, Mike Swinson and John Bennett arrived from the metroplex. Lot's of other people came in, more than I could keep track of came in afterward. I went go into all the people who were there, but the metroplex caver camping area was quite large and filled to the brim by Friday evening. On Thursday night, it's was the most people I recall seeing at TCR on Thursday evening ever. Bill and Diana from the Metroplex along with James Brown with Washington State tags were included in the mix. Nico Escamilla who I'd corresponded with via e-mail for two years arrived from Nuevo Leon, Mexico and Puppy Lewis arrived from Houston. Plenty of Cowtown, DFW and Maverick grotto people made their presence felt. . That doesn't include all the other people from other places, camping in other areas. Bill



A relaxing time at TCR

Bentley from Midland arrived and the Permian Basin had good representation. Keith Heuss, arrived from Austin, a Maverick Grotto member almost since it's inception though not quite a charter member.

Late Thursday evening, Bob Liebman arrived and took a wrong turn. There's a road to one of the family members residences right beside where the Metroplex Cavers camped. I heard a vehicle on that road then a voice yelling asking where TCR was. I gave directions and a short while later Bob arrived at our camp. After discussing all things caving, we helped him get to the vendor area where he would set up his wares on Friday. I don't recall as many people at TCR on a Thursday night as there was this year.

Friday morning it was still cool, Bill, Gordan(?), James Brown, Nico, Puppy, RD Milhollin, and others headed off to Honey Creek Cave for a trip that would last 13/14 hours. I walked to the vendor area and discovered that Jim Kennedy had already arrived and set up both the TSA and TSS tents. I mentioned to Jim that I'd been available but he'd forgotten that I'd sent an e-mail saying I'd be there on Wednesday.

Friday night, the traditional Bexar Fish Fry was held, with everyone getting a taste of the various fishy treats they offered. Many of the people camping in our area returned for a wine tasting party. Others just enjoyed other libations.

Saturday turned out to be HOT! I manned the TSS/TSA sales area for most of the day and was glad of the shade. Sales were slow both on books and caving gear were slow because most people who would be buying new stuff were at the cave. Both the natural and shaft entrance were well attended. It was about 2-1/2 miles from the vendor area to the natural entrance. It was a common site to see young folks carrying wetsuits and other paraphernalia on their way to the cave.

Late Saturday afternoon, the cooks finished cooking and the best feast in Texas was served. I went go into all the menu selections but there was plenty. Bill Bell's Fredericksburg Sausage is still one of my favorite dishes served. Nico, who'd been like Santa Claus during TCR (he's everywhere) was serving the food line. I think before the weekend was over, he had every experience that could be had at TCR.

Saturday evening, the awards and door prizes were handed out. The Maverick Grotto donated a nice cave pack (cost just under \$50.00) to the door prizes. Joe Ranzau made sure proper credit was given for the donation. Terry Holsinger was the lucky recipient of that particular door prize.



Terry Holsinger with his door prize

Sunday morning, the TCMA held it's breakfast for those who could wake up that early. We overslept this year but last year it was really great! Well worth the small donation they ask for stuffing you. The TCMA and TSA held their meetings, TSA/TSS vendor tents were taken down and stowed. Camps were broken and people headed back to their respective home.

If you've never been to TCR, you should really plan to go to the next one. It's a great event for camaraderie with your friends. It's a great place to make new friends. Who knows, if you make the right impression, you could fill your caving calendar out for the next few years.

If you made it this year, glad to have seen you there. If you didn't make it this year, hope to see you next year.



**Maverick Grotto
c/o Tammy Cox
237 Gwen St.
Azle, TX 76020**