

# OBITUARIES



## Lee Jay Graves

NSS 30591RL

Lee Jay Graves, the youngest child of long-time Ozona residents Lee and Jocelyn Graves, died in Austin on November 24, 2018. He was born in Fort Stockton, Texas, October 29, 1959. Lee Jay lived in Austin, Texas, where he was a prominent figure in cave research and exploration in Texas and Mexico. He travelled widely in pursuit of his interests.

He is survived by his siblings, Jackie Graves and George Crone of Southaven, Mississippi, Buddy Graves of Austin, Texas, Laura Graves and David Etheridge of Levelland, Texas and Joyce Graves and Jeff Purkeypile of Lubbock, Texas, and many nieces and nephews.

I met Lee Jay when I began college at Southwest Texas State University (SWT, Now Texas State University) in San Marcos, Texas. I moved there in 1983 and began to frequent a bar called Showdown. Lee Jay was a bartender there and a student of Anthropology at the University. It was there that I learned about this “grotto” thing. It turns out the SWT grotto was huge and has produced some very significant cavers over the years, including Dale Pate. Lee Jay was a couple years older than me and was already active in the grotto.

We began caving together recreationally at this time and, of course, doing the social activities included with caving like TSA conventions and travelling farther around the state and into Mexico. We both had a variety of interests that we shared including anthropology and archaeology, biology, hydrology, geology and more. Caving was such a perfect activity to explore all these subjects

In 1997, I started working with George Veni and Associates. I don't remember if Lee Jay started working with Dr. Veni before I did, but from then until 2006 when Dr. Veni became the Executive Director of NCKRI and for a couple years more, I spent

more hours underground with Lee Jay than I have with anyone else. The karst consulting business would frequently have us spending 40-50 hours a week underground, engaged in surveying, excavating, biology and more.

Lee Jay was an excellent biologist and has a cave-adapted mold beetle, *Batrisodes gravesii*, named in his honor. We would tease him when he brought out his whisk broom during cave excavations but Dr. Veni loved it. There are probably hundreds of caves or parts of caves that Lee Jay was partially responsible for discovering.

He moved on to Austin, where he worked with the city doing much of the same and I didn't see him much after that. He served on the Board of Directors for the Texas Cave Management Association for several years. I've also learned how many young cavers he mentored with his knowledge, experience, passion and kindness. I'm glad I got to see you shortly before you passed but wished we would have had that one more cave trip. You are missed.

**Chris Thibodaux**

29482RL

(with contributions from Gil Ediger,  
James Reddell and Justin Shaw)



## Don Broussard

NSS 9514-FE

August 17, 1948 – May 16, 2019

Don Broussard, famous caver from the Austin, Texas area, passed away apparently on Thursday, May 16. His close friend, David Honea, had visited Don May 6-10, and they usually spoke on the phone on Sundays, but David could not reach Don on May 19. Nancy Weaver and Terry Raines found him deceased in his home between Wimberley and Driftwood, Texas. Don was diabetic, and he was in good health lately, but he was stricken with an unexpected heart attack. We

all miss our dear friend, Don!

Don was an active caver who went on many hard caving trips from 1967 through the 2000s. He continued to be part of the support crew for major expeditions to Huautla and other destinations until recently. Don was always cheerful and helpful. His trademark was to walk up and say “Good morning!” even if it was late at night. Everyone noticed how unassuming, modest, and quiet he was. His good friend, John Fish, said, “Don was a faithful helper, a faithful friend.”

Don and David Honea were good friends in Houston schools from 1st through 12th grade. They shared an interest in telescopes, rockets, and ham radio. They built a home-made diving helmet air-supplied by a converted bicycle pump. As teenagers they went to their first cave near Lake Travis.

Don went to the University of Arkansas for two years, then to the University of Texas, where he got a BS in EE and joined the UT Grotto. David Honea also moved to UT. The two friends visited Gruta del Palmito (Bustamante) in Mexico, and explored/mapped a nearby pit. Don, David, and Bill Elliott were caver pals and UT roommates in 1968-1969. In the summer of 1969 Don worked with Bill Elliott and Jim McIntire in the Sierra de El Abra, mapping and making cavefish collections in many caves for Robert W. Mitchell's cavefish research. After that he worked for John Fish from 1971-1973 in the El Abra as part of John's dissertation work on hydrogeology. Most of Don's work in the El Abra is documented in AMCS Bulletin 14 by John Fish, *Karst Hydrology of the Sierra de El Abra, Mexico* (2004) and AMCS Bulletin 26 by Bill Elliott, *The Astyanax Caves of Mexico* (2018). Don was declared the “King of the El Abra” because he went in more caves for science and mapping than anyone else. Friends presented him with a free copy of the cavefish bulletin in 2018 and had a lunch in his honor.

Don moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1977 to resume his studies in computer science and continue caving. He eventually bought property near Driftwood, Texas, and worked at IBM to pay for it and go caving. David Honea says that Don had the indomitable spirit of a true explorer.

Peter Sprouse said, “The passing of the first generation of AMCS cavers, those who were active in the 1960s, continues with the loss of Don Broussard. Don was very involved in the exploration of the Sierra de El Abra and Aquismón in San Luis Potosí in his early caving years. In the 1980s Don led efforts to explore and survey the

Crevice in the deepest part of Sótano de las Golondrinas. He was also active in explorations in the Huautla area of Oaxaca and the Purificación karst of Tamaulipas. ¡Vaya con Oztotl, Don!”

John Fish remembers the time when he and Don returned to Ciudad Valles after a crawlway trip in Sótano de la Tinaja. They emerged covered in mud. When they returned to their rented room Don walked straight to the concrete shower stall and proceeded to wash down his muddy clothes before stripping and scrubbing himself down to the skin. In this practical way he got all the mud off in one session.

Don participated in mapping at least 63 Mexican caves from 1968 to 2009 in Nuevo León, Coahuila, Oaxaca, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, and Tamaulipas. Don was involved with mapping Sótano del Venadito, Tamaulipas, from 1969 to 1998. He led the re-survey of the cave from 1989-1998, the longest project in the Sierra de El Abra.

Bill Steele said, “Don and I did a lot of caving together. It wasn’t just caving, either. Don was an active member of The Explorers Club. He joined in 1984 and was made a fellow upon joining. That’s a great honor. It says that you have made a lasting contribution to some realm of exploration. He already had, 35 years ago. Don had the greatest tenure in caving at Sistema Huautla. He first went there in 1969 and the last time was in 2018. He was on some epic trips. He was there when we started the climb up to Anthodite Hall. He was there when we discovered the Lower Gorge of Sótano de San Agustín. He was trapped underground 500 meters deep with us in that same cave for four days in 1977, and had run out of insulin. He was there in 1987 when we connected Nita Nanta to Sistema Huautla, making it the world’s second deepest cave at the time. Maybe “he was there” sums it up. More often than not, Don was there. In Texas Don was a mainstay in the exploration of our longest cave, Honey Creek Cave. And at our third longest cave Don camped on the surface last month while cave divers camped underground, far from the entrance, knowing Don was in support on the surface. He was always to be counted on. And he did so calmly with a smile.”

Mark Minton recalls that “Don was a frequent caving companion of mine for about 20 years in the 1980s and ‘90s. For most of those years we were also neighbors in Driftwood, Texas. Don was active, even legendary, in Mexican caving, including long stints in both the Sierra de El Abra and in Huautla, the latter as recently as 2018. Don was one of the principal explorers of the Crevice at the bottom of Sótano de las Golondrinas, which extends the famous pit to over 500 m deep. One particularly

memorable trip with Don in Huautla comes to mind. In 1987, while coming out of Camp IV in Sótano de San Agustín after the historic connection with Nita Nanta, Don injured his back and needed to bivouac near the entrance. Bill Steele stayed with him. The following day Doug Powell and I went in to help carry his gear. While we waited for Don to climb out, the three of us investigated a high ledge just inside the cave. We probed breakdown following the air, and eventually found an obscure way through the collapse into a totally independent deep route, unknown and unsuspected for over 20 years. That passage, the Fool’s Day Extension, reconnected about 500 meters lower, but provided a much improved route to the bottom that played a pivotal role in future expeditions. So while Don didn’t discover that passage himself, we wouldn’t have found it without him. Don had several close calls while caving and became legendary for those as well. He survived free diving into a pocket of bad air and passing out in the Sierra de El Abra, a plane crash in the Sierra de Guatemala, and getting short-rope in Sótano de San Agustín, causing him to

nearly run out of insulin (Don was diabetic), to name a few. We began to talk about the nine lives of Don Broussard because he survived so many potentially fatal scenarios. Don was a diminutive man who lived a simple life, but made a big impact on caving. He will be missed.”

Don’s family originally was from the Houston area and Louisiana. He is survived by his mother, Madeline Skinner of Brenham, Texas; sister, Linda Broussard, Los Angeles, CA; nephew, Morgan Broussard, Houston area; and cousin, Wendell Broussard, Smithville, TX. A memorial gathering will be held on August 10, 2019, at the Texas Speleology Center in honor of Don Broussard and Bill Mixon. Full obituaries with more details will be posted later and in the next AMCS Activities Newsletter. Many friends will be writing tributes. Don’s ashes will be scattered in several areas that he loved.

**Contributors: William R. Elliott, John Fish, David Honea, Logan McNatt, Mark Minton, Peter Sprouse, Nancy Weaver**



**This image by Georg Taffet was shown in the 2019 Photo Salon. (Ed. note: This version is cropped in on the sharpest portion of the image, which I typically wouldn’t do with a ribbon winner but feel this shot benefited from).**