

LA GRUTA DE CARRIZAL
ACCIDENT REPORT

Thursday morning, 25 November - Friday morning, 26 November 1971: groups from Dallas, Houston, San Angelo, and Lubbock, Texas arrive in the Bustamante, Nuevo León area of Mexico and make camp in Bustamante Canyon. Much of Thursday is spent in riding motorcycles through the area and it is decided to visit nearby Gruta de Carrizal on Friday.

Friday, 26 November 1971

- 1:30 pm The various groups arrive at the cave. Some enter and go to the Baño Caliente (warm water) siphon (see maps).
- 2:30 pm Jon Everage (Houston---leader of the Houston group) makes several unsuccessful attempts to swim through the siphon. On the third or fourth try, he fails to reappear immediately. Ronnie Fieseler, Bill Elliott, et al, watching the action, become concerned and send for a rope. Everage returns after about 15 minutes. It is noted at this time that the water is up slightly, and thus the siphon is considerably longer than usual. Everage reported that on his final attempt, he had first come up in an air pocket before finally reaching the air filled room on the other side of the siphon.
- 3:00 pm Chris Cleveland enters the water and disappears into the siphon. His intent to enter the siphon was apparently not clear to those watching from the bank.
- 3:05 pm The rope arrives.
- 3:10 pm Bruce Stone ties into the rope with a bowline. Phil, a Houston boy is to belay Bruce. Signals are arranged---1 tug on the rope will indicate trouble, and two tugs will mean that all is well. Apparently, no one comments that the signals are reversed according to common practice. Bruce then enters the siphon.
- 3:15 pm Several tugs are reported felt on the rope as the last of approximately a 50 foot length is paid out. Shortly, the rope goes slack and is pulled back. Thoughts at this time are that all is well.
- 3:20 pm Elliott and Fieseler leave the cave. Remainder of the Houston group keeps watch at the siphon.
- 3:45 pm Everage, concerned at the long absence (no time had been established for the length of any of the stays beyond the siphon) enters the siphon again.
- 4:30 pm Everage returns and reports that there is no evidence that either Chris or Bruce ever made it through the siphon (no tracks on mud floor, etc.). Meanwhile, the remainder of the group not suspecting that anything is amiss leaves the area and returns to camp in Bustamante Canyon.
- 9:00 pm The group camped in Bustamante Canyon becomes concerned and starts to return to the cave only to immediately meet a group of the Houston people coming to get them. The Houston people had been lost 2-3 hours en route. Everage and others had stayed at the siphon with lights hoping to guide the boys back. The group divides, some remaining at camp and others returning to the cave.

10:30 pm The group arrives at the cave and enters. There has still been no sign of the boys. A short conference is held in the cave and continued outside. The decision is made to call for help. At this point, approximately 8 hours have passed since Chris entered the siphon. Two people are left to keep watch at the siphon.

Saturday, 27 November 1971

12:05 am Arrive Bustamante. No people are about. No phone available.
 12:15 am Arrive Villaldama. No people are about. No phone available.
 12:45 am Arrive Sabinas Hidalgo. Find telephone at Bus Station. Calls: American consul, Nuevo Laredo (no answer), American consul, Monterrey (no answer), American Embassy, Mexico City (no answer---the operator explains that although they have a special night phone, "They never answer the night phone."), Luther Bundrant (Texas Speleological Association Rescue Coordinator), San Antonio, Texas (no answer).
 2:30 am Contact Carl Kunath in San Angelo, Texas and partially explain problem. Request that Kunath locate cave divers and try to get them there as soon as possible. Plan is for some to return to the cave, some to be posted at Bustamante-Candela turnoff, and some to remain by the phone in Sabinas Hidalgo.
 2:45 am Kunath calls Bundrant. No answer.
 3:00 am Kunath calls Rane Curl, Ann Arbor Michigan. Curl is current NSS president and past NSS Safety Chairman. Obtain names and addresses of several people and organizations that might help.
 3:15 am Kunath Calls Kenneth Laidlaw, Berkeley, California. Laidlaw is current NSS Safety Chairman. No answer.
 3:25 am Kunath calls Southern Arizona Rescue Association, Tucson, Arizona. Most of their divers are elsewhere, but they will try to locate and will call back.
 3:40 am Kunath calls Bundrant. No answer.
 3:45 am Kunath calls John McLean, Albuquerque, New Mexico. John is not a diver but will call around and return the call.
 4:00 am McLean calls Kunath. Had located only one diver and he did not feel qualified to lead such a rescue.
 4:15 am Kunath calls James Storey, Atlanta, Georgia. No answer. Storey is active in cave diving.
 4:20 am Kunath calls Norman Robinson, Austin, Texas. No answer. Robinson has done some cave diving.
 4:30 am Kunath calls George Yeary, Dallas, Texas. Yeary had done some cave diving, but said that his gear was not in condition. He could not help and didn't know anyone that could. Meanwhile, all but two of the group have returned to Bustamante Canyon from Sabinas Hidalgo. The group divides, some remaining at camp, others camping at the highway intersection leading to the cave, and still others returning to the cave.
 4:35 am Kunath calls Tommy Phillips, Austin, Texas. Reaches wrong Tommy Phillips and can get no other number. Tommy is an experienced cave diver.

- 4:40 am Kunath calls National Cave Diving Association, Miami, Florida. No answer.
- 4:45 am Kunath calls Donna Mroczkowski, St. Louis, Missouri. Reaches wrong party, gets correct number and talks to Mroczkowski who says she knows several cave divers. She will check around and return call.
- 5:00 am Arizona Rescue Association calls Kunath. Says one diver has gone caving in Grand Canyon, another diver is diving near Guaymas, Mexico. They will keep trying and will return call.
- 5:10 am Conway Christensen, Kirkwood, Missouri calls Kunath after having been contacted by Mroczkowski. Christensen says he can get a group of divers together quickly. Kunath tells him he will try to arrange transport for him and will call back.
- 5:15 am Kunath calls Goodfellow Air Force Base, San Angelo, Texas. Talks to duty officer.
- 5:18 am Kunath is switched to Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas. Explains situation again.
- 5:35 am Kunath is patched through to Scott Air Force Base, St. Louis. Explains situation again, emphasises need for quick action, and listens as the buck is passed all the way to Washington, D.C. Many people come on the line to ask questions. Most want to know if help is needed for military personnel. Only the party at Randolph expresses any concern over the situation.
- 6:00 am Kunath is told by official in Washington that Air Force will not provide transport so long as there are commercial flights available.
- 6:10 am Kunath obtains phone numbers of U.S. Senators from Texas.
- 6:20 am Conway Christensen calls Kunath. Says he thinks he can get a National Guard plane to fly them as the National Guard had previously assured him that they would provide this service in case of emergency. Christensen says that they will need official confirmation of the emergency and is given Bill Elliott's name and his location and phone number in Sabinas Hidalgo.
- 6:30 am Mroczkowski calls Kunath wanting to know situation. Is told.
- 8:00 am Christensen calls Kunath. Says National Guard will not provide a flight, but that Eastern Airlines will. Says that the Sheriff of Webb County, Texas will send someone to talk to Elliott in order to confirm the emergency and that they will be in the air soon after the confirmation is received by Eastern Airlines.
- 8:05 am Kunath calls Elliott. Tells him that the Christensen group will be on the way soon and that Elliott should stand by in order to provide information to the local Jefe. At this time Kunath learns that Everage had been through the siphon the second time and had seen no traces of the boys. Elliott and Kunath agree that there is little chance for the boys to be found alive. At this time, over 16 hours have passed since the first boy entered the siphon.
- 8:10 am Chief of Rural Police in Sabinas Hidalgo talks to Elliott who explains and asks for assistance with U.S. Customs for the St. Louis group.

- 8:25 am Bill Elliott and Ronnie Fieseler go to the Sabinas Hidalgo Police station and call the American consul who tells them to call the American consul in Nuevo Laredo. The American consul in Nuevo Laredo, Lee Cotterman, says he will try to assist at the border.
- 9:00 am Elliott and Fieseler return to the Bus Station.
- 9:30 am Chief Deputy Sheriff of Webb County, Texas(Laredo, Texas) calls Elliott and says that he has a local rescue team lined up. He says "They been in all them caves." Elliott questions the prudence of this since he has never heard of the group, but can do nothing to stop their coming.
- 9:45 am Elliott calls Kunath and passes on the news of the Laredo group. Kunath has no knowledge of the group and shares Elliott's feelings about them. Both agree that the St. Louis group is still needed.
- 9:50 am Kunath calls Christensen and tells him of the Laredo group. Kunath says that the St. Louis group is still needed and says that no one has yet been by to get confirmation from Elliott. (It is uncertain if either the Webb County Deputy Sheriff or the Sabinas Hidalgo Policeman was doing this.)
- 10:30 am Jerry Lindsey, leader of the Laredo group calls Elliott. Elliott is somewhat reassured after this conversation. Lindsey says that they will be on the way in 20 minutes.(The Laredo group had some trouble obtaining air, eventually putting out a call on the local radio station and leaving with only three bottles.)
- 10:55 am Elliott returns to the Police Station to arrange for transport of the bodies in the event this is necessary.
- 11:00 am Fieseler takes the bus to Laredo, hoping to meet the St. Louis group at the border and guide them to the cave.
- 11:25 am Elliott returns to the Bus Station.
- 11:30 am Arizona Rescue calls Kunath. They have located one man and are continuing the search for others. Will continue checking in.
- 12:05 pm Fieseler's bus breaks down near the 20 K checkpoint (Aduana). Fieseler walks to checkpoint. His papers show that he has taken a vehicle into Mexico and the Officials will not let him through the checkpoint without it. Fieseler finally talks them into calling Cotterman. No answer. Next, they call the assistant consul in Nuevo Laredo, a Mr. Gardner. Gardner had not even heard of the accident and said he would call back.
- 1:00 pm David Keeper, father of one of the Houston boys, calls Elliott requesting details of the situation. Elliott tells him most of the story. (It is not known at this time how Mr. Keeper was able to obtain Elliott's location, or even how he heard of the accident.)
- 1:10 pm Elliott leaves for the cave. Stops in Bustamante and sends others to stand by the phone in Sabinas Hidalgo.
- 1:30 pm Fieseler is permitted to pass through the checkpoint after Gardner calls and talks to the officials. Fieseler hitches ride to Laredo.
- 2:00 pm Christensen calls Kunath. Says that Eastern Airlines flight has been confirmed. St. Louis group will leave at 4:30 pm and fly to Corpus Christi, Texas. A helicopter will take them directly to the cave the following morning.

- 2:10 pm Kunath calls Bus Station in Sabinas Hidalgo, but Elliott has left. Meanwhile, Fieseler has reached the Laredo/Nuevo Laredo border and met the Laredo group. Fieseler gives them the complete story and they leave. Fieseler calls Cotterman and tells him the latest. Cotterman says we may not need the St. Louis group now and requests that Fieseler call them and discuss the situation. Fieseler calls Christensen but the line is busy. Fieseler calls Kunath and explains the situation. Both Fieseler and Kunath agree that the St. Louis group should still come as the Laredo group is not known to be competent and even so, they may need assistance.
- 3:00 pm Fieseler calls Cotterman again and learns that Cotterman has just been talking to St. Louis group (thus the busy phone when Fieseler called), and has cancelled them (cancelled their flight through Eastern Airlines). Cotterman maintains that the Laredo people can handle it and still doesn't seem to understand exactly what is involved in a situation such as this. Meanwhile Louise Power (Houston) has just heard a small news spot about a caving accident in Mexico involving Houston boys and calls Kunath to see what he knows. She is told the full story.
- 3:10 pm Elliott arrives at the cave with the news that two rescue teams are on the way.
- 3:15 pm Christensen calls Kunath with the news that Cotterman has just cancelled their flight. Both are thoroughly disgusted with Cotterman's actions, and fear that a worse emergency may be in the making.
- 4:10 pm Power calls Kunath requesting news. Nothing new.
- 5:00 pm Laredo team arrives at the cave.
- 5:15 pm Laredo team enters the cave and establishes a line through the siphon. No sign of the missing boys. At this time, 26 hours have passed since the first boy entered the siphon.
- 5:50 pm Blair Pittman (Houston Chronicle photographer and caver) calls requesting news. Is told bare facts. Names of missing boys are withheld.
- 6:25 pm Fieseler leaves on train for Candela, Coahuila (a few miles from the cave).
- 6:45 pm Power calls Kunath requesting news. Nothing new.
- 7:00 pm Laredo team ends diving for the day, having made a second dive searching deep and to the left. One of the boys' flashlights was found but the water became too murky (visibility less than 1 foot) to continue diving. At this point, the divers were short of air and expressed doubts as to their ability to carry on with the rescue.
- 8:40 pm Houston Chronicle calls Kunath for news. Is given nothing.
- 8:45 pm Laredo divers go to Bustamante to eat. They are looking forward to the arrival of a second team.
- 9:00 pm Fieseler arrives Candela with the news that the St. Louis group is not coming. Morale reaches all time low at this point.
- 10:15 pm Houston Post calls Kunath (It is not known how they obtained his number and the caller refused to give any information as to his sources). Post had correct names of the boys and wanted confirmation which was not given.

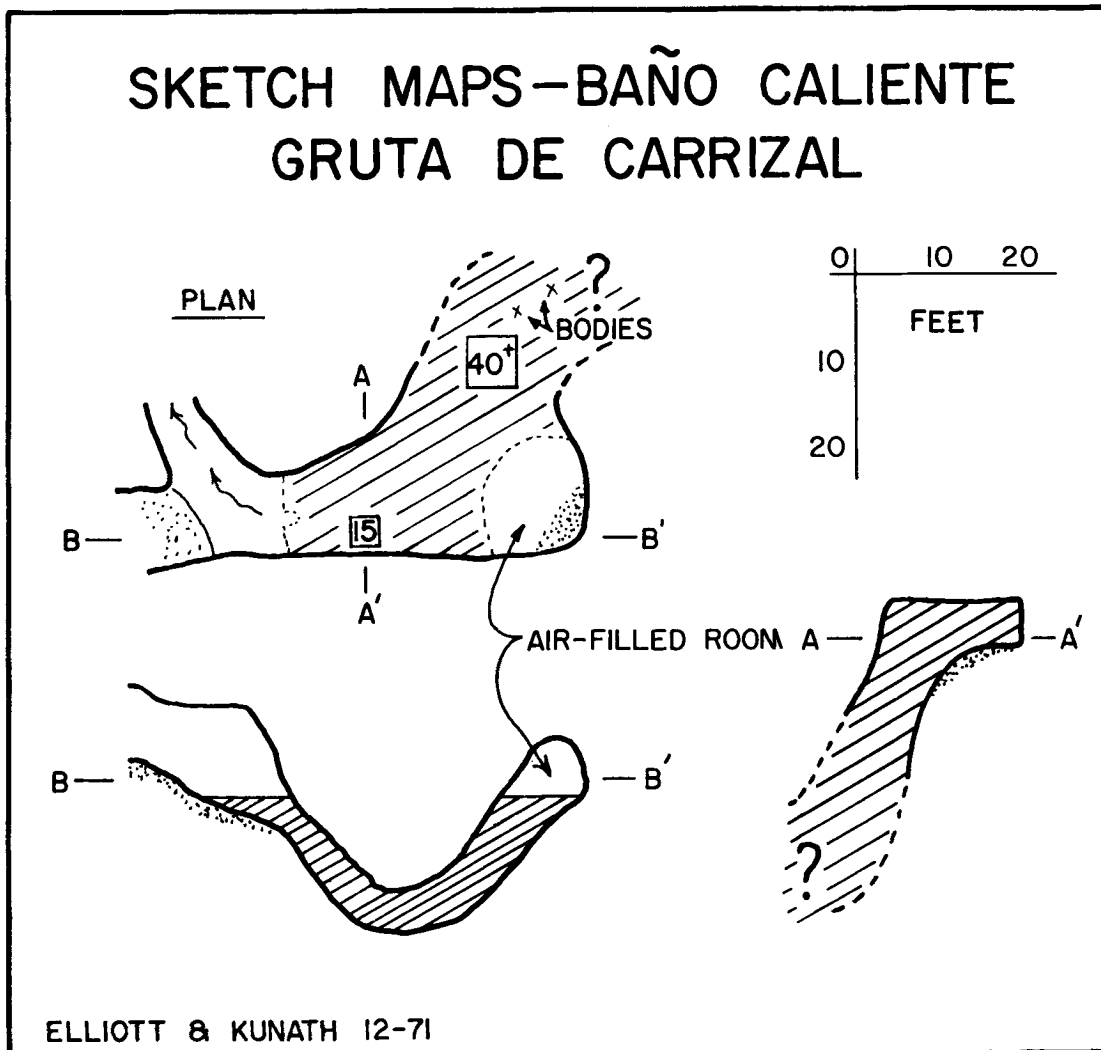
- 11:15 pm Houston Chronicle calls Kunath for news. Is given nothing new.
- 11:20 pm Power Calls Kunath requesting news. Nothing is new.
- 11:30 pm Divers return to camp at the cave and all retire for the night.

Sunday, 28 November 1971

- 2:30 am Members of group stationed in Sabinas Hidalgo return to the cave.
- 7:30 am Laredo divers re-enter the cave and enter the siphon again.
- 8:30 am Bodies of the two boys are located near the ceiling about 40-50 feet from the entrance to the siphon. (41 hours have passed.)
- 9:00 am Word is passed to those waiting outside the cave and they enter to assist in removing the bodies.
- 10:00 am All bodies and equipment out of the cave.
- 11:00 am Some take bodies to Candela to complete necessary paper work while others return to Bustamante Canyon to organize remainder of Houston group and prepare to leave.
- 12:30 pm Group arriving in Bustamante Canyon finds group there in mass confusion and seemingly unconcerned about recent events. Their vehicle has a broken axle and must be abandoned.
- 12:40 pm Power calls Kunath with the news that both Houston papers have printed the names of the boys in some rather inaccurate stories. She has been in contact with the parents of both boys.
- 12:55 pm Power calls Kunath with the news that both boys are dead. She was informed by the parents of one of the boys who had just been notified.
- 1:00 pm Entire group leaves Bustamante area. Kunath calls Christensen and cancels with thanks. Kunath calls Arizona Rescue. No Answer.
- 2:00 pm Group stops in Sabinas Hidalgo to pack the bodies in ice.
- 2:10 pm Kunath calls Arizona Rescue. No answer.
- 2:15 pm Elliott calls Cotterman. No answer. Calls Gardner (Assistant consul, Nuevo Laredo) and requests police escort to border and assistance in clearing US Customs. Gardner is still uninformed and is noncommittal and unconcerned about the whole affair. After several lengthy pauses on Gardner's part, Elliott hangs up in disgust.
- 2:25 pm Group leaves for Laredo.
- 2:30 pm Houston Post calls Kunath for details. Are told they can have the complete and accurate story as soon as he knows it.
- 4:30 pm Group reaches the border. No escort has been provided and Gardner has not so much as called to tell U.S. Customs the group was on the way.
- 5:00 pm Group clears Customs.
- 5:30 pm Ambulance arrives to take bodies to local funeral home.
- 7:10 pm Kunath calls Arizona Rescue and cancels with thanks. Total elapsed time between group entering the cave and clearing U.S. Customs: 52 hours.

COMMENT

Siphon diving in itself is dangerous. The Carrizal siphon is especially treacherous in that it is not a simple tube that one can follow blindly. To reach the air-filled room one must stay to the right. At low water stages, it is about 10-15 feet horizontal distance to the other side. When the water is only a little higher, the length of the siphon is greatly increased. At the time of this incident, the water was up perhaps a foot, but the siphon was about 25 feet long. To reach the other side, one must dive at least 10 feet deep and follow the ceiling. The water on the right side is about 15 feet deep. To the left, the floor drops off to at least 40 feet deep and there are several small air pockets in the ceiling. The bodies were found to the left, 40-50 feet from the entrance to the siphon. Stone's body was floating against the ceiling. Cleveland's body was within 15 feet of Stone's and was neutral in the water. See maps below.



ERRORS DIRECTLY CONTRIBUTING TO THE ACCIDENT

- 1) The group from Houston was large and inadequately supervised. Everage was responsible for 14 people. They were also ill-equipped and inexperienced and were entirely too casual about going to Mexico, more so about caving in Mexico.
- 2) Everage, group leader of the Houston group, set a poor example in diving the siphon without taking the slightest safety precautions.
- 3) Cleveland, a near novice caver, attempted the same feat as Everage. Everage said that he did not know Cleveland was in the water or of his intentions and that at the time he was dressing on the bank with his back turned.
- 4) Stone, a complete novice on his first caving trip, was allowed to enter the siphon, his intentions perfectly clear. A rope was used, but was entrusted to a completely inexperienced belayman, and the signals which were arranged were backward. Again, no time limit was discussed for their proposed venture.
- 5) So far as can be determined, at no time was either of the boys instructed as to the physical nature of the siphon, nor did they inquire.

PROBLEMS COMPLICATING THE RESCUE EFFORT

- 1) Few cavers go to Mexico with adequate contingency plans in case of an emergency. After the incident, the Houston group was helpless and could have done little to organize a rescue. Luckily, some of the non-Houston group spoke Spanish and knew what to do.
- 2) Communication problems.
 - a) The accident was in Mexico, but Americans were needed to help.
 - b) This was a major holiday weekend for Americans. Many of the people who might have been able to help were unavailable, being involved in various holiday trips themselves (this was only the second time in 8 years that Kunath had been home during Thanksgiving).
 - c) A lack of information about who might be qualified to help, and the absence of any back-up numbers for some key people (Laidlaw, Florida Rescue, Bundrant, etc) who might have been able to help.
- 3) The help received from the American Government was worse than useless. The American Embassy in Mexico City has an emergency phone, but no one would answer it. After wasting an hour of Kunath's time, the Air Force refused to fly the St. Louis divers, even to Laredo, so long as any commercial transport was available. The American consul in Nuevo Laredo (Lee Cotterman) cancelled the St. Louis diver's flight when the Laredo divers were contacted---this could have been a serious mistake should help have been needed. Once the bodies were recovered, the assistant consul in Nuevo Laredo (Gardner) was contacted and asked to provide a police escort to Nuevo Laredo and through the heavy holiday traffic. He was also requested to assist the group in clearing U.S. Customs. He did

nothing. The man appears to have been either stupid or drunk---he asked ridiculous questions, repeated himself many times, and lapsed into lengthy silences. In short, the Air Force is unsympathetic and the American officials in Mexico are inept political fixtures. It is obvious that we need to find someone in the government with responsibility and the initiative to help in situations like this one.

4) The simple fact that cave divers were needed. It is hard enough to find people who are qualified to make the "standard" cave rescue (ie. search a horizontal cave for a lost or injured person and evacuate if necessary), let alone try to find people qualified to perform a "pit" rescue, but when you need cave qualified divers, you narrow the list to a precious few. Local Sheriffs, Jefes, etc. are apt to think that anyone with an aqualung can do the job, while this is very seldom true. It was extremely fortunate that the Laredo group was available and able to help---no one knew they existed. When we were told that "They been in all them caves", we cringed. What if they had been incompetent? The tragedy could easily have grown larger. As it was the situation was none too secure. However, the Laredo divers were very competent, cautious, and they did a good job. They were: Jerry Lindsey, Dennis DeKneff, Manuel de la Fuente, Dario Gutierrez, Bill Ashe, and Dave Worthington (the last two did the actual diving).

Some may ask why Fieseler and Elliott, supposedly competent cavers, sat on the bank of the siphon and watched the whole thing without stopping them. Elliott says:

I have only a weak excuse to make. From almost the very moment we arrived in Bustamante Canyon on Thursday, we noticed how irresponsible many of the Houston group were. Some of them took a shovel from Vinson's truck and after using it, left it lying some distance away. I gave the ones who did this a verbal lashing, but it seemed to just bounce off. On the way to Carrizal the following day, most of us rode our motorcycles and put our ice chests in Fieseler's truck, which he allowed the Houston kids to drive to the cave. They passed us on the road at high speed, tossing out empty beer cans, some of them hanging on top or out the back. When we arrived at the cave, we discovered that nearly all of two six-packs had been consumed by members of the group. Again, I gave them a tongue lashing, with the result that a few of them shrugged their shoulders and one of them returned two beers. I was already convinced that any warning to most of this group was futile. When I got to the siphon, Everage was already trying to dive the siphon. What could be said to him the supposed leader of the group?

I have learned my lesson. Speaking for myself, if I ever become entangled with a group like this again, I will try to leave before something happens. From now on, when someone I am with does something stupid in a cave, I will physically restrain them if necessary, no matter who they are or what I think about them. I went through hell for two days because of someone else's stupidity, and I got what I deserved for remaining silent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Cavers should stay out of the Bustamante-Carrizal area for some time to come. Some will disagree, but we feel it is best to avoid any possible friction with the local people in the immediate future.
- 2) Any group that goes caving in Mexico should have some members who are fluent in Spanish and who have some idea of Mexican politics and customs.
- 3) If you are ever in a situation such as this, try to handle things as much through private channels as possible. You will of course have to notify local Mexican officials. You will risk being thrown in jail if you do or if you don't. Don't expect the Mexicans to be too much help, but they can help by cutting "red tape." We were lucky that this happened in Coahuila and Nuevo Leon. The Police Chief in Sabinas Hidalgo and the Presidente in Candela were very cooperative---it would probably have been a different story in a state such as Oaxaca where there has been considerable friction with the local people.
- 4) The AMCS should now begin collecting telephone numbers of all it's members and of all the competent cave divers and rescue teams who could help with future accidents. We had best assume that there will be future accidents. For many years, AMCS cavers have been saying that a serious caving accident in Mexico was inevitable, but most thought it would be a pit accident. A pit accident would have probably been an easier situation than this one. Everyone is urged to send the names and phone numbers of competent rescuers so that a list may be compiled and distributed to all concerned persons. This list should be up-dated as often as possible and should be carried on all caving trips, whether to Mexico or not.

CONCLUSION

Both boys were probably dead within minutes of entering the siphon though other unlikely possibilities exist. Having no knowledge of the physical characteristics of the siphon, they continued straight or to the left rather than keeping to the right along the ceiling. Thus, they found no air-filled room---only water. Prompt action, even to the extent of having diving equipment immediately at hand, would have been to no avail. Nevertheless, it is chilling to realize that in a situation where prompt action might save a life, that life would be jeopardized by apathy, ineptness, and bureaucratic "red tape" on the part of the American Government and certain of it's representatives in Mexico.

7 December 1971

ck: Carl Kunath, Bill Elliott, Ronnie Fieseler, Jon Vinson

The following stories appeared on the UPI teletype Saturday:

SABINAS HIDALGO, MEXICO-- A SEARCH IS UNDERWAY IN MEXICO ABOUT 70 MILES SOUTH OF THE TEXAS BORDER FOR TWO HOUSTON YOUTHS WHO ENTERED A CAVE YESTERDAY AND FAILED TO REAPPEAR. THE UNIDENTIFIED YOUTHS DISAPPEARED IN A CAVE NEAR SABINAS HIDALGO, MEXICO--WHICH IS 70 MILES SOUTH OF LAREDO, TEXAS. THE YOUTHS ARE BELIEVED TO BE AN 18 YEAR OLD HIGH SCHOOL BOY AND A 20 YEAR OLD RICE UNIVERSITY STUDENT.

TWO HOUSTON AREA YOUTHS..MISSING (FEARED DEAD) IN SABINAS HIDALGO MEXICO...
 AUTHORITIES NEAR THE BORDER REPORT THE PAIR ENTERED A CAVE AND FAILED TO REAPPEAR.. THE CAVE ABOUT 70 MILES SOUTH OF LAREDO, TEXAS.
 THE UNIDENTIFIED YOUTHS DESCRIBED BY AUTHORITIES ONLY AS AN 18 YEAR OLD HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH AND A 20 YEAR OLD RICE UNIVERSITY STUDENT.

The source for both of these stories appears to have been the American consul in Nuevo Laredo and/or the Sheriff's office of Webb County, Texas.

Blair Pittman edited the article at the right. This is the best of any that either of the Houston papers printed.

★★★★ HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Sunday, November 28, 1971

2 Houston Youths Disappear Into Cave in Mexico

Two Houston youths disappeared into a cave in northern Mexico Saturday, and a search party was attempting to rescue them.

The youths were identified as Chris Cleveland, 18, a freshman at Rice University and the son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Cleveland of 5839 Ettrick, and Bruce Stone, 18, whose local address was not determined.

The elder Cleveland said his son went to Mexico Wednesday on a cave-exploring expedition.

On Saturday, the sheriff's office in Laredo was notified that two youths had entered a cave about 80 miles south of Laredo near the village of Bustamante in Nuevo Leon

state about 60 miles west of the city of Sabinas Hidalgo.

The cave, in the base of a mountain, has been explored and mapped by Texas cave buffs. It has two siphons, or areas where the ceiling of the cave lowers below water.

A man identified as William Elliott telephoned the sheriff's office in Laredo from Sabinas Hidalgo to notify them of the disappearance of the youths.

The sheriff's office dispatched a team of rescuers from Laredo. They were expected to arrive at the cave Saturday night, but a word had been received of their progress early today.

Cleveland is a graduate of Westbury High School.

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THE HOUSTON POST
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 1971

Houston teens lost in cave

By BILL FURLOW
Post Reporter

Rescue efforts continued Saturday night for two Houston boys lost Friday while exploring a cave in Mexico.

The boys were identified by the American Consul in Nuevo Laredo as Bruce Stone and Chris Cleveland, both in their late teens. They were with a group of young spelun-

kers from Houston who were spending the Thanksgiving holidays roaming caves near Sabinas Hidalgo about 80 miles south of Laredo.

A member of the party told relatives this story:

While exploring a cave that has different levels, one of the boys dived into some water, hoping to surface in another room of the cave.

When the boy did not return, the second boy tied a rope around his waist and dived in also. The group thought the second diver signaled to them with his rope that he had reached the other side. He apparently untied the rope, and it was pulled back.

Another man then swam through to the next room but found no trace of the boys.

There was reportedly a

large number of Americans exploring caves in the area, and they joined in the search for the missing boys, whose addresses were not immediately available.

A Webb County sheriff's deputy in Laredo said a rescue team from St. Louis and several skin divers and spelunkers from Laredo were called in to help with the search.

THE HOUSTON POST
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1971

Bodies of 2 Houston boys

By SUSAN KENT CAUDILL
Post Reporter

The bodies of two Houston boys, victims of a Mexican cave exploring mishap, were found by searchers about 9 a.m. Sunday in a cave south

of Laredo in the state of Nuevo Leon.

Bruce Stone, 17, a Bellaire High School student, son of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Stone of 2811 Conway, and Chris O. Cleveland, son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Cleveland of

5839 Ettrick, apparently drowned in a water-filled tunnel inside the cave.

A party of about 20 Houston spelunkers started out for the range of Mexican caves near Candela and Sabinas Hidalgo late Wednesday.

The expedition and the rescue team crossed the border into Laredo late Sunday bringing the two bodies.

The rescuers, largely members of the Laredo Speleological Society, pieced the story

found in Mexico cave

of the other Houston cavers together this way.

One of the boys, Cleveland, dived into a water-filled tunnel or siphon without a rope or a light shortly after an adult leader had successfully done the same thing, also

without a rope or scuba gear late Friday night.

When Cleveland did not return Stone went in after him with a rope tied around his waist. The rope went slack and was pulled back empty.

The first boy plunged in

fully clothed in Vietnam combat boots, a rescuer said.

The boys apparently missed the turn of the tunnel ending in an air-filled chamber, rescuers said.

Both bodies were found on the tunnel floor about 50 feet

from the entrance to the siphon.

Jerry Lindsey, a member of the rescue team, said no experienced spelunker would go into the siphon without a

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Crews find bodies of 2 drowned boys in Mexican cave

Continued from page 1

rope, light and preferably scuba gear.

Cleveland, a member of the Rice University Speleological Society, had several months caving experience. Miss Louise Power, a society officer, said. "He had a cool head and was learning very rapidly," she said.

Stone, an Explorer Boy Scout, had no caving experience, his father said in Houston Sunday.

The expedition apparently had no sponsor although several members of the Rice club went on the trip.

Stone said his son went on the expedition as part of a spelunking program associated with Explorer Post 43 and the Central Presbyterian Church.

"This was Bruce's first trip. He's always been interested in things like this. We didn't realize it was quite such an expedition," Stone said.

Stone said his son was an Eagle Scout and in excellent physical condition.

About 9 members of the Explorer Troop and its leader went on the Mexico expedition, Stone said.

Dennis De Kneef, a member of the Laredo Speleological Society who helped coordi-

nate the rescue attempt, said the bodies were found in a cave called "El Carrizal."

Lindsey, who was with the rescue team at the cave, said Airman 1st Class Dave Worthington and Sgt. Bill Ashe, both from the Laredo Air Force Base, recovered the bodies with scuba gear. The men were also members of the Laredo caving society.

Lindsey said the siphon can be treacherous if the caver does not keep to the right following the wall into the open cavity.

A wrong turn means an almost endless water-filled tunnel, he said, which has never been charted.

"If you are going to go in, you should have somebody on a lifeline outside the water," Lindsey said.

Veteran spelunker De Kneef said the cave where the boys drowned "is a fairly easy cave to go in.

"But there are water traps all over the place. Still, it's not especially dangerous. No one has ever been killed in that cave that I know of.

"If you don't know where the siphon goes, you wander around under water until you can't breathe anymore," De Kneef explained.

The bodies were taken to the Jackson Funeral Home in Laredo.

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Bodies of Two Cave Victims Are Returned

A plane today returned from Laredo the bodies of speleologists Chris Cleveland, 18, and Bruce Stone, 17, who drowned in a northern Mexico cave while exploring.

Cleveland, son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Cleveland, 5839 Ettrick, disappeared Friday when he dived into water encountered in El Carrizal

cave near Sabinas Hidalgo in Nuevo Laredo state.

Young Stone plunged in to try to find Cleveland and failed to come up.

Eight cave explorers recovered the bodies Sunday.

Cleveland was a freshman at Bellaire High School and an Explorer Scout.

They were with a party of 15 cave explorers who left Houston last Wednesday to explore the cave, located between Laredo and Monterrey, Mexico.

The cave, at the base of a mountain, had been explored before.

The explorers found a new spring in the cave where the ceiling dips below the water. It was to investigate this find that Cleveland plunged into the water, friends said.

The following story was released to the San Angelo Standard Times Monday afternoon 29 November 1971 by Kunath, Elliott, and Vinson, but was never printed.

Friday 26 November 1971, about 4:00 pm, Chris Cleveland 18, and Bruce Stone 17, both of Houston, Texas and both inexperienced cavers drowned while attempting to swim through an underwater passage about 25 feet long in order to reach another room in a cave about 80 miles South of Laredo, Texas.

A rescue attempt was begun within an hour when both boys failed to return and it was decided that experienced cave divers would be required to reach them. The party reached a phone about midnight Friday, and after several attempts to reach the American consuls in Nuevo Laredo, Monterrey and Mexico City met with no success, they (Elliott, et al) telephoned a caver in Texas (Kunath) and asked him to contact some cave divers. Finally, a team of divers from Laredo, Texas, led by Jerry Lindsey, was located and arrived at the scene by car about 5:00 pm Saturday. Two initial dives were unsuccessful due to murky water. The rescue attempts resumed Sunday morning and the bodies were recovered about 9:00 am Sunday.

Both boys were members of a larger group of cavers from Houston, Dallas, San Angelo, and Lubbock who were in the area for the Thanksgiving holidays.