

Bartley Wayne Crisman (NSS 2781)

Photo by Carl Kunath.
Obituary by James Estes, Carl
Kunath, and Bryant Lilly.

It is with great sadness and a heavy heart that we convey to you the news of Bart Crisman's passing. Bart was born September 27, 1932 and lost his battle with pancreatic cancer on March 7, 2009 at home and surrounded by his family. Bart was 76 and had been a cave enthusiast for most of his life.

In June 1958, Bart was injured at Ogle Cave when a cable ladder failed. One of the Carlsbad hospital staff was a gal named Jaylene. They were soon married and remained so for nearly 50 years. Bart is survived by Jaylene, sons Kyle and Kern, and a daughter, Keri.

For many younger cavers in Texas it is especially unfortunate that they had never met or had the opportunity to go caving with the man we knew simply as Bart. He was always in a good mood, got along well with everyone, and understood much more about the caves of Texas than many. During the memorial service, a surprising number of references were made to Bart's involvement with caves and cavers. The minister remarked, "He was the only cave man I've ever known."

Bryant Lilly recalls: "Bart never saw a cave or a caver he didn't like. He would enjoy a small San Saba County crevice as much as a larger cave." James Estes remembers his first meeting with Bart: "I was in the Abilene Public Library seeking information about caves. They had a few copies of the *NSS NEWS* and one of them contained a short article about Bart's accident at Ogle Cave. I saw that Bart lived in Abilene so I looked up his address and went straight to his front door. It took a little time for someone to answer, and when the door opened, I was greeted by a tall black-headed fellow, grinning and using crutches. In spite of that, I wasn't going to leave until Bart signed me up for the grotto."

Bart and his brother, Bob, began caving in the mid-1950s when they stumbled across a copy of *NSS Bulletin Ten - The Caves Of Texas*. As Bart once said, "We noted that Devil's Sink-hole was the deepest cave in the State and therefore we felt obligated to pay a visit." They descended the 140-foot drop using an old wire ladder with rotting wooden rungs and no belay line. The two were avid cavers and contributed much to the camaraderie of Texas caving. Perhaps the most remembered caving experience was the original exploration of the Caverns of Sonora, then known as Secret Cave or Mayfield Cave. It was Bart who named the "Butterfly."

Stories of these adventures brought friends into the Abilene NSS Grotto, and included Ray Archibald, Dwayne Dickey, Jim Estes, George Gray, Robert Hale, and John Lanier. For some of these new troglodytes their first spelunking trip was Mayfield Cave—and the memorable crossing of "The Ledge."

Through Bart's efforts the grotto grew but was purposely



**Bart Crisman at Caverns of Sonora, August 1964.
Carl Kunath photo**

kept to a maximum of less than ten members at any given time. This was for important reasons: landowner relations, cave safety, and conservation of the caves. The grotto lasted many years, and was one of the foremost Texas cave organizations during the 1960s. The Abilene cavers checked out many cave leads and surveyed caves in San Saba County, Sutton County, and several gypsum caves in Northwest Texas, as well as making several visits to the Guadalupe Mountains of New Mexico.

In 1964, the grotto, along with the other members of the Texas Speleological Association, sponsored the first NSS convention in Texas (New Braunfels), and were rewarded with the largest attendance of any NSS Convention up until that time.

Bart had knee problems later in life that curtailed his active caving but he remained interested and particularly enjoyed several visits to Caverns of Sonora with Jack Burch, James Estes, Carl Kunath, and Bryant Lilly when they were able to stroll leisurely through the cave on their own private tour.

Bart was among the earliest of Texas cave photographers and some of his photographs of Caverns of Sonora and Harrison Cave remain among the best ever done.

We have lost a great friend, a fine gentleman, and an important figure in Texas caving.

We are diminished.

James Estes (NSS #4168F)

Carl Kunath (NSS #6230F)

Bryant Lilly (NSS #6724)