

Frank Mason Estes, Jr.

3 October 1965 – 10 August 2000, 34

Compiled by Mark Minton, Lee Perry, Bill Steele, Jim Smith,
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Mason Estes was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and grew up in Houston, Texas. He attended Texas A&M University, where he graduated in 1989. He was an avid caver, beginning his adventures with the Texas Aggie Speleological Society. He was working toward a Master's degree in Geology at Idaho State University at the time of his death.

Mason passed away after an unfortunate accident in Cripple Creek, Colorado. He was a geologist with a passion for collecting crystal and mineral specimens. His collection was well-known in those circles, and he would go to great and risky lengths to collect specimens. A memorial service was held in Divide, Colorado.

According to the obituary in the *Austin American-Statesman*, 23 August 2000, he was survived by his parents, Frank and Carolyn Estes of Austin; Juanita and Tom Parker of Madris, New Mexico; and his sister, Sally Aitken and husband, Tom, and three nieces and nephews, of Cedar Park, Texas.

Below are photos of Mason and his Huautla caving friends, and some caving trips we found in the AMCS Activities Newsletter and the Texas Caver.



Left to right: Mason Estes, Lee Perry, Allan Cobb, Don Coons, Mike Futrell, Jay Arnold, Bob Runser, Jim Smith, Keith Goggin at Huautla de Jiménez, Oaxaca. Keith Goggin, 1988.



Mason Estes in The Gorge, Sótano de San Agustín, Huautla, Oaxaca. Ed Holladay, 1988



Huautla Expedition, 1988. Back row, left to right: Bill Storage, Andy Grubbs, Tina Shirk, Matt Oliphant, Nancy Pistole, Mason Estes (yellow shirt), Janet Steele, Bill Steele, John Ganter, Jim Smith. Front row: Carla Powell, Doug Powell, Audrey Steele (red jacket), Lee Perry, Jay Arnold, David Doyle, Brian Steele, Elizabeth Steele.



Mason Estes and pals in Sistema Huautla. Jim Smith, 1988.

Mason with injured knee in camp. Jim Smith, 1988.



AMCS Activities Newsletter 17, 1988, pp. 32, 33, 37, 42, 43, 47, 49, 65, report by Jim Smith.

Mason Estes participated in two expeditions to Huautla and Sistema Cheve in 1988 and 1989. The first would have been when Bill Steele said they took a semester off for expedition caving.

Mason was part of the camping team and support team for a film in Huautla by Jim Smith and Jay Arnold. They continued the exploration of Nita Ka in late February. Lee Perry and Mason Estes were green when they started the expedition. After almost half a dozen 500-meter-deep adventures, they had proven that they could endure the hardships of deep caving. Mason instigated the exploration of Nita Ka, soloing into the cave.

Mason (along with Don Coons, Ed Holladay and Lee Perry) went to Sistema Cheve in 1988 after leaving Huautla. Mason was hit by a rock on the knee while climbing up 40-m-deep Flat Rock Well. His injury was a contusion and inflammation. Even though he could barely walk, he managed to freeclimb unassisted up climbs that were later rigged with ropes. The journey to the surface involved climbing 15 shafts up 500 vertical meters. It's hard to keep a good man down, and he was caving a week later. Nita Ka was placed on a back burner until mid-April. Mason's name is with many others on Jim Smith's 1989 map of Nita Ka, 1813 m long and 760 m deep, the 24th deepest cave in Mexico. See *Explorers Journal*, March 1990, p. 20. *AMCS Activities Newsletter 42*, 2019, p. 17. *Deep Caves of Mexico*. Rank 24.

Texas Caver, August 1989, vol. 34, no. 4. pp. 78, 79.

Mason was on trips to Cottonwood Cave and Three Fingers Cave, New Mexico.

AMCS Activities Newsletter 23, 1999, p. 51.

Mason's name is with many others on the map of Sistema Cheve, second deepest cave in Mexico.

2 November 2020