

November 2001

OBITUARY

Thomas E. Harding

by Carl Kunath (KunathCE@aol.com)

It is with deep regret that I announce the passing of Dr. Thomas E. Harding, 71, of Carta Valley, Texas. Tom was taken by cancer after a fight of little more than a year. On 22 February, the end came quite suddenly and mercifully after a final illness of only two or three days. Private services were held at the ranch and his ashes scattered on the hills that he so loved. Tom is survived by his wife of 28 years, Lolly, and three children.

To some of you, the name may not be familiar but to many of us it is a tragic loss and something of a milestone. Once in a very great while, we are blessed with an exceptional host for our caving activities. Tom was such a person and his kindness and consideration will surely be missed in the years to come. Tom's family owned 20,000 acres of typical Carta Valley ranchland but Tom had spent the previous years in the veterinary business in San Antonio and had only recently returned to Edwards County to take over the ranch. In 1968, we followed a lead and made his acquaintance. Tom was not your typical Carta Valley rancher!

He showed us to Midnight Cave and watched with great interest as we vanished into the entrance pit. Later that day, after initial exploration, we returned to his home to report and found a wonderful meal waiting for us. In we went, perspiration, mud, guano, and all. On later visits, we had slide shows and once I took him on a complete tour of the cave via the newly opened lower entrance. Tom did quite well as a novice caver, and negotiated the Corkscrew with little difficulty. He was very interested in his cave and asked many questions.

As time passed, Tom remained an interested and protective owner. He readily granted permission to install a gate on the lower entrance and he understood that visitors should be reviewed.

The saga of the Michel Siffre "Beyond Time" adventure is far too long for this occasion, but the resulting publicity caused an enormous increase in visitation and I'm sure requests must have been something of a burden for Tom and Lolly. Nonetheless, requests were seldom refused and Midnight Cave became a mainstay of Texas cavers.

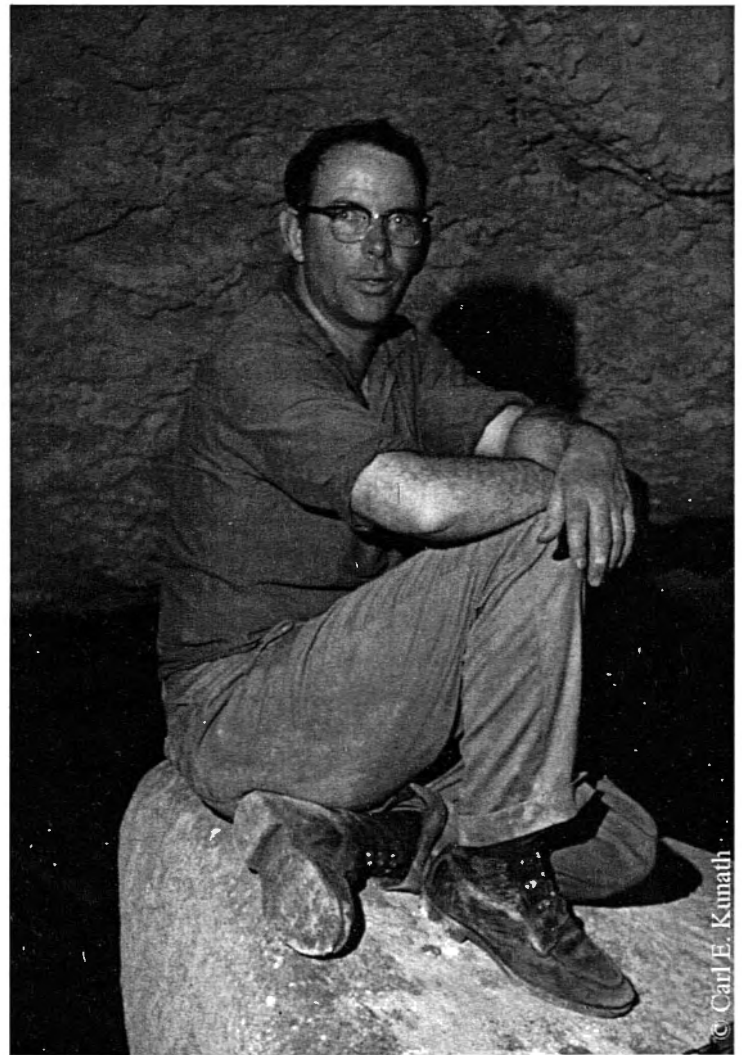
Unfortunately, Tom was not a great correspondent and years might pass without contact. Yet, the thread was easily picked up when we did meet. I last saw Tom in 1994 when I stopped by his ranch to visit with him about some details as

The Caves of Carta Valley was nearing publication. We sat in the back yard under sunny skies and talked of music, guns, caves, politics, cockatiels, women and hunting – not necessarily in that order. It was a fun afternoon for friends of 26 years.

Regrettably, the caver world was slow in receiving the news of his passing but Lolly remains at the ranch and it's not too late to send a card or friendly thought to:

Mrs. T. E. (Lolly) Harding
P.O. Box 420126
Del Rio, TX 78842

One day soon, I'm going to Midnight Cave—back to Harding's Hall. I'll sit down, turn off my light and have a big shot of mescal in his memory! Tom thought it made good window cleaner



Dr. Thomas E. Harding in Midnight Cave in 1968

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