

Bennett F. Martin, (Benny)

21 December 1941 - 6 July 2009, 67

From Ed Alexander, July 7, 2009 <https://www.cavetexas.org/rmiller/Martin.html>

Benny Martin died Monday [6 July 2009] in his cabin on the Llano River where he has been living for a number of years. Benny participated in some of the early explorations in the Xilitla area in the 60's, including the trip to Sotano de la Tlamaya that broke the North American depth record. An account of that trip is in the AMCS Newsletter, Vol. 1, Num. 1:

1964 Trip Reports, pp. 3-11.

20 Nov. After several hours of hasty preparation Bill Bell, Terry Raines, Bob Burnett, and **Benny Martin** left Austin at 7 PM in Terry's pickup truck. The trip to Cd. Valles took 14 hours with only stops made at gas stations and the Mexican Customs.

21 Nov. While in Valles they ate, bought a few things that been forgotten, and exchanged money. From here they headed on to the cave area near Xilitla and the ranch of Sr. Modesto Gómez. With the weather as usual, rain and fog, it was decided to spend the few remaining hours of the day preparing the equipment for the descent the following day.

22 Nov. By 7:30 everyone was up and eating breakfast. From here it was only a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile drive to the edge of the small village of Tlamaya and the entrance of **Sótano de Tlamaya**. They entered at 9 AM and remained in the cave for the next 26 hours.

23 Nov. Upon arriving back at the entrance they decided to leave the ropes in place for a return trip the next day, so from here a quick trip back to the ranch was made. Sr. Gómez was interested in what had been found and after telling him all that had happened they ate and sacked out.

24 Nov. Early the next morning Bob and Terry returned to the entrance of the cave and found, much to their surprise, that the rope was gone. It could not have been removed from the cave since it was tied off 290 feet below, so they figured that someone in need of rope had pulled up as much as he could, then cut it. This later proved to be true but for the present it meant that they would have to drive to Xilitla to buy more rope and therefore lose a day. In Xilitla they went to several stores, then decided to buy 300 feet of sisal rope. After doing this and several other errands a collecting trip was made [to] several small caves near Ahuacatlán, the first town west of Xilitla. On the 15 mile trip back a stop was also made at Cueva de la Selva to map the main passage and collect more insects. By 8 PM they were back at Gómez's patio and

ready to sack out.

25 Nov. The morning was spent readying the equipment and eating. Just before noon everything was loaded in the truck and drive made down to Tlamaya and the cave. The weather was good and they entered the cave at noon.

26 Nov. After spending 31 hours in the cave they returned to the surface just at sundown. It still required nearly an hour to raise the ropes up the last drop, but after doing this no time was lost in returning to the ranch. They learned that a party made up of Jim Moran, Frank Wiseman, Ken Myrick, and Bob Thomas were that time exploring a **cave that later proved to connect with Sótano de Tlamaya.**

27 Nov. Around 3 AM the group of explorers returned from the cave and went straight to bed. The next morning experiences were exchanged and then after thanking Sr. Gómez for his hospitality everyone went into Xilitla where Frank had left his car. Here they ate and passed several hours, then each group went their separate way. Benny, Bob, Terry, and Bill headed to Valles and the El Abra Range to meet several groups who were coming down from Austin. Everyone met at Los Sabinos about dark and from there went into Valles to eat and find out what each other had been doing.

28 Nov. The day was spent in **Sótano de la Tinaja** where insects and blind fish were collected and pictures were taken. That night everyone went north to Mante and **Grutas de Quintero** where several hours were spent in partially mapping the cave.

29 Nov. Everyone left for Austin [in] one group that now consisted of Benny, Bob, Terry, and A. Richard Smith. They spent the morning in Mante restocking their food supplies and then that afternoon they went to “El Nacimiento” just outside of town where clothes were washed and the truck cleaned out.

30 Nov. They headed north from Mante some 20 to 30 miles to Encino [Tamps.], a small village on the highway. From there a very bad lumber truck road was taken to the west into the mountains Good progress was made for 5.6 miles until it started to rain. This turned the unbelievably steep road into a mass of slippery mud and rocks that made passing almost impossible even with tire chains. It was decided to turn back and go south then west to Ocampo. Also located in the mountains but on a much better road. They arrived just after dark.

1 Dec. From Ocampo they intended to go to Tula, the only trouble being that everyone they asked didn't know exactly the road was. Finally after nearly an hour of driving around an old man directed them to a slippery mud road that headed out across the large farming valley of Ocampo towards the mountains [Sierra de Guatemala]. After passing through several ejidos, taking the wrong roads, and fording two

streams, they came to Rancho de Corrales, Ejido P.E.G., Municipio de Ocampo. Here again directions were asked but instead of just pointing a man told them that the road to Tula was impassable and they should stay at the ranch where they could collect insects and explore caves. Everyone was very friendly and that afternoon Robert García took them on a collecting tour of the ranch. The time was spent turning over logs, wading through a swamp called “La Laguna”, and wandering around the valley. That night was spent at Roberto’s house.

2 Dec. Ejido P.E.G. or Rancho de Corrales occupies a large N-S valley that is separated from the larger Ocampo valley by a range of low limestone hills on the east. To the west some 7 or 8 miles away is a range of much higher mountains also composed of limestone that mark the western boundary of the valley. Looking to the south a low, rugged hill is seen in the center of the valley and is called “Cierro Partido” by the local inhabitants [actually Cerro Partido]. From all indications this is the cone of an extinct volcano that during its active period covered the valley floor with volcanic debris. From the peak the land slopes gently away in all directions.

From Roberto’s house, located near the eastern hills, they headed out in the truck for the mountains to the west. It seems the ejido was in the process of building a new road in order to get corn to the market. As it turned out they spent the whole day driving through corn fields, fording streams, taking down fences, and even chopping a way through the undergrowth. Everyone arrived at the house of Guadalupe Portales around 8 PM after spending eight hours and going 4.4 miles.

3 Dec. From Guadalupe’s house, located part way up the side of the eastern mountains, a good view could be had of the valley below and the hills to the east. The morning was spent touring his land and about 11 AM they went down to the truck for the caving gear. Guadalupe told them of several large and beautiful caves in the Cerro Partido, but considering how late it was, that it was a 6 to 8 mile walk, and we had to return to Mante that day, it was decided to go to a smaller cave about 1 km above the house. After reaching the area he found that it had grown up so much that he couldn’t find the entrance. They returned to the truck and began the journey back to Mante. All the roads were dry which made driving much easier, especially through the construction between Ocampo and Highway 85. The night was spent at El Nacimiento near Mante.

4 Dec. The morning was spent cleaning out the truck and getting the equipment in order. At 11 AM they began what was to be a driving tour that would take them through some extremely beautiful country and good possible caving areas. From Antigua Morelos they turned west, winding their way up through the heavily vegetated limestone mountains to the much drier Central Plateau near Cd. del Maíz. From here on through Tula to Cd. Victoria the mountains were of a completely different nature than those of the more tropical areas like Gómez Farías or

Xilitla. In an area of so little rainfall the mountains were nearly completely bar of vegetation as was everything else. With access to them very limited and not many people living in the area, one might have difficulty in locating the large solution type cave that are most assuredly there.

The afternoon was spent driving along the unbelievably dusty detours around the new highway under construction between Huizache and Cd. Victoria. Near dark they stopped beside the road just outside Palmillas and camped.

5 Dec. From Palmillas they drove on, passing through one of the beautiful mountain areas in Mexico and arriving in Cd. Victoria around noon. Here they ate lunch then headed south to Gómez Farías [Tamps.], arriving at **Sótano de Gómez Farías** that afternoon. They went into the cave shortly afterwards and mapped the upper levels, leaving **four pits** to be explored the next day.

6 Dec. They returned to the cave and found many more interconnecting pits in the lower levels than they had thought were there. It took most of the day to map them and find that all connected to one horizontal passage that ended in mud and a small hole where water disappeared. Late that afternoon they left the cave and drove on up the road as far as they could before dark, then camped.

7 Dec. It seems the place they camped was the beginning of the very steep part of the mountain road and that without four wheel drive it would be hopeless to try. It was then decided to return to Austin, stopping on the way to tour the commercial **Grutas de Villa de García** near Monterrey [Nuevo León].

From William C. Stone and Terry Raines, A history of Mexican Speleology to 1992. 1997. AMCS Activities Newsletter Number 22:25-48.

“...AMCS cavers were shown the entrance to Tlamaya, across the ridge from Huitzmolotitla, that had been previously recorded by Mitchell. On the third trip back to this cave, in November 1964, Benny Martin, Robert Burnett, Bill Bell, and Terry Raines surveyed to a depth of 391 meters, making Tlamaya the deepest cave in the Americas.”