

A. Richard “Dick” Smith

22 September 1939 – 4 July 2001, 61, NSS 3708 FE

All photos by Carl Kunath



A. Richard was an important Texas caver and geologist who was the rock of the Texas Speleological Survey for many years. The following tribute is from three close friends of his.

It is with heavy heart that we announce the passing of our dear friend and esteemed colleague, A. Richard (Dick) Smith. Dick was the victim of an apparent robbery turned homicide as he went to his automobile parked in front of his home the evening of 4 July 2001. Loud voices were followed by gunshots and his wife, Ann, discovered him dying on the front porch. At this time, the police have no suspects and the crime appears without motive.

Dick was born in Odessa, Texas, September 22, 1939 and became a member of the NSS while still in high school. Initially, he attended Rice University as a math major. Consuming interests in speleology compelled a transfer to the University of Texas at Austin where he met and married Elizabeth Kelley, fathered two sons, Geren and Preston, and eventually received a degree in geology. He continued at UT in the Doctoral program but the press of family obligations left the Ph.D. unfinished. While at UT, Dick quickly became extremely active in many facets of the caving world, but is perhaps best noted for his contributions to the Texas Speleological Survey. Through the years, Dick served TSS as Editor, Geologist, Cartographer and Publisher. Among the 26 publications in the TSS's first four-volume series, Dick is credited as editor or coeditor for 5, geologist for 7, cartographer for 14, and was on the publication staff for all 26 of those issues and for nearly all subsequent TSS publications. He compiled, drafted and authored hundreds of cave maps and descriptions during his caving career and contributed countless hours and funds to supporting Texas speleology through the TSS. Dick also held offices in the UT grotto and served as chairman of the Texas Speleological Association. He is the

author of numerous articles in the caving media and was highly regarded as a Karst and groundwater geologist by all his peers. Besides Texas, his caving activities included trips to New Mexico, Mexico, and Guatemala.

Dick is especially well-remembered by many defenseless writers for his meticulous editorial skills. He could turn a confused, semi-literate manuscript into a clever, articulate masterpiece.

In September 1997, Dick was awarded the Texas Speleological Survey's Outstanding Service Award at a dinner in his honor in Austin, Texas. The Outstanding Service Award is the highest honor offered by the TSS and is given to individuals that have made extraordinary long-term contributions in support of the TSS and Texas speleology. Dick was the first recipient of the award.

Although recognized for his enduring body of scholarly works, Dick's intelligence and fellowship have left an even larger impression on his long-time friends and colleagues. Carl Kunath tells the following story:

"I knew ABOUT Dick Smith long before I actually met him. On a trip to Indian Creek Cave early in my caving career, I was visiting with the owner, Fred Mason. Fred asked me if I knew some of the UT cavers such as Bill Russell, James Reddell, and Dick Smith. I replied that while I knew most of the active cavers I had not yet come face-to-face with Dick. Fred looked thoughtful for a moment, smiled and said, 'That guy's got a mind like a steel trap! He is the brains behind that UT group. You have a real treat in store for you!' Fred was right all three times."

We cannot overstate the loss of a gentleman, a brilliant intellectual mind, a sharp wit, a great caver and, above all, an exceptional friend in the fullest sense of that term.

We are diminished.

Carl Kunath (former NSS 6230F)

Gerald Atkinson (NSS 22368)

James Reddell (NSS 4897F)



A. Richard (Dick) Smith, recipient of the first TSS Outstanding Service Award in 1997.

A.R. Smith

Alvarado, Texas [SW of Fort Worth]

A.R. "Dick Smith", 61, a geologist, died Wednesday, July 4, 2001, at his residence.

Memorial services were held July 8, 2001, at First Jefferson Unitarian Universalist Church in Fort Worth. Following private committal services, Dick was laid to rest at Greenwood Memorial Park.

Honorary pallbearers were his sons, Geren and Preston Smith, brother-in-law, Al Schultz, Hardy Childress, Ginger Courtney, Lori Greathouse, Carl Kunath, Howard McMahan, James Reddell, Peggy Schneider, Barbara Turner and Dale York.

Those desiring, please make memorial contributions to the Dick Smith Memorial Music Fund, Westside U.U. Church, 6901 McCart St., Suite 125, Fort Worth, Texas, 76133. Anyone wishing to contact his wife, Ann M. Smith, may do so at P.O. Box 1876, Alvarado, Texas, 76009.

A native of Odessa, Audas Richard Smith was born Sept. 22, 1939, the son of Audas Richardson and Annie Louise Watkins Smith. He attended Rice University for two years before receiving a degree in geology from the University of Texas at Austin.

He was revered by his co-workers, whom he loved to encourage and share his knowledge with them, delivered along with his wonderfully corny sense of humor. He was considered an expert in karst geology and hydrogeology.

In his early years, he was a cave explorer and is responsible for mapping many of the caves in Texas. He was the recipient of the first Texas Speleological Survey Outstanding Service Award, given in appreciation of 37 years of extraordinary contributions which have been instrumental for the TSS in attaining its goals of documenting, researching and conserving the caves and karst of Texas. Dick was also a member of the National Speleological Society.

His hobbies included steam trains, building models of his beloved T&P railroad and researching railroad history. He was an officer and an active member in the Missouri Pacific Historical Society. Dick was a beloved leader in his church, serving in many capacities. One of his loves included music, both classical, especially opera, and hymns. Playing hymns from his childhood served as a form of relaxation for him.

Dick was honorable, fair and principled with all. The universe has lost a beautiful soul. He was a sweet man, a gentle man and a gentleman. Loved by all who knew him, he abhorred violence of any kind. He was a voracious reader and an eloquent writer. He was an animal lover, especially of their precious pets.

Dick was adored by his wife and was the most loving husband. More than life, he loved his Ann.

Survivors: Wife of 11 years, Ann Marie Harding Smith of Alvarado; sons, Geren David Smith of Phoenix, Ariz., and Preston Smith of Holden, Mo., and their mother Elizabeth Kelley Smith; daughter-in-law, Sarah; grandchildren, Griffin Gynn and Rigel Smith; brothers, David Smith and Donald Smith and wife Diana; mother-in-law, Avis Wirth; brother-in-law, Alex Schultz and wife Jeneane; and several nieces and nephews.

*Ector Co. TX - Obits from the Odessa American Online 18 Aug 2001
Submitted by Charlene Beatty Beauchamp cbodessa@classicnet.net
Thanks to the Odessa American Online <http://www.oaoa.com/>
OA Online Obituaries. August 18, 2001. Permian Basin Obituaries*

Opposite page: Dick Smith admiring curtains in Harrison Cave, 1976.

William R. Elliott, compiler, updated 2 February 2020.

