

Thomas Summers III

1963 – 30 April 2007, 44

30 April 2007

Deadman's Cave, Texas
fatality, drowning, bad air

At 2 PM, **Thomas Summers III (44)**, the manager and partner of Cave Without a Name (a tourist cave) and Brent Holbrook, were on a troubleshooting mission in Deadman's Cave, a flooded cave on Summers' property. Deadman's Cave is the resurgence of Cave Without a Name.

Recent rains had raised the water table, blocking access to the outer reaches of the cave. This is an area where advanced cavers like to explore and Thomas and Brent were attempting to remove any blockage that might be reducing the outflow. About 300 feet into the cave, with Thomas swimming in the lead, the passage ceiling lowered to just a few inches of airspace. They were not wearing helmets. Brent decided to go no further. He then heard “a sputtering sound” and received no response to his shouts. He went for help.

More than 90 searchers arrived to help. Rescue crews used pumps to lower the water level. About 9 PM, cave divers Jean Krejca and Linda Palit were able to retrieve Thomas' body without the need for breathing apparatus.

Jean Krejca, Incident Report, undated

Zeke MacCormack. San Antonio Express-News. “Kendall County cave drowning victim was tourist site's manager.” 2 May 2007

Zeke MacCormack, San Antonio. “Cave Without a Name' closed after fatal accident.” 1 May 2007

Vincent T. Davis, San Antonio Express News. “Tourist cave worker found dead after failing to return from inside.” 1 May 2007

Geary Schindel. personal communication, 23 July 2009

Comments: Thomas was swimming in low airspace. The Coroner's report showed he had died from drowning. Jean Krejca, after talking with Brent, considers bad air may be a complicating factor in the low air-space passage. This possibly caused disorientation. Thomas' labored breathing was followed by sputtering. but was not followed by splashing or a struggle. Others believe that Thomas pushed the low airspace passage and did not stop when there was no air space.

From American Caving Accidents, 2007-2008, NSS News, Feb. 2010, Part 2, p. 13.

Thomas Summers III

Web Posted: Tuesday, 05/01/2007 10:53 AM CDT

'Cave Without a Name' closed after fatal accident

By Zeke MacCormack
San Antonio Express-News Staff Writer

The Cave Without a Name was closed indefinitely Tuesday a day after its general manager, Thomas Summers III, died in a nearby cave [on Monday, 30 April 2007].

Summers entered the neighboring cave – a smaller one called Dead Man's Cave -- to investigate whether an obstruction was slowing the flow of water from Cave Without a Name, a tourist attraction in Kendall County, according to Mike Burrell, its caretaker.

"It's going to be a while" before the commercial cave reopens, Burrell said . "We're kind of upset here."

Justice of the Peace Jerry Collins said Summers, 44, had drowned.

At about 2 p.m. Monday, Summers and Brent Holbert, a tour guide, decided to enter Dead Man's Cave, into which water drains from the larger cave, to see if something was blocking the outflow of water, Burrell said. The smaller cave is located on Summers' property.

They were about 400 yards into the cave when the two separated. They swam into the cave to a point where there was only a few inches of overhead clearance, at which time Summers advanced and Holbert declined to go any further, Burrell said.

Authorities were called after Holbert reported hearing "sputtering" from the direction in which Summers had swum, then no response when he called Summers.

Burrell said regular tours were unaffected by the recent rain- caused rise of water in the Cave Without A Name, but the high water did preclude any "wild tours" into remote reaches of the cave by spelunkers. Summers was the son of the cave's owner, he said.

Summers' body was recovered by a specialist in cave dives who was summoned from Austin after local rescuers decided it was too dangerous to follow Summer's path into the cave. The body was removed about 9:15 p.m. Monday, the Kendall County Sheriff's Department said.

Summers, ex-engineer, show cave manager, dead at 44

Obituary

Salathia Bryant, Copyright 2007 Houston Chronicle, Published 5:30 am CDT, Friday, May 4, 2007

<https://www.chron.com/news/houston-deaths/article/Summers-ex-engineer-show-cave-manager-dead-at-1534338.php>

Thomas A. Summers III, a mechanical engineer for 20 years who moved to the Boerne area to help manage a show cave owned by his family, died Monday [30 April 2007] in a caving accident.

Summers, 44, was remembered by those who knew him as an outdoorsman with a broad, ready smile, especially when he talked about caves.

Family friend Dayna Cartwright said Summers' love for caves came from his father. He left his engineering career to partner with his father to manage Cave Without A Name.

"As soon as he got us down in the cave, he grinned from ear to ear," Cartwright said. "He would point out every single formation. You could tell that it's what he loved doing. He genuinely loved it."

Family members declined to comment about his death.

The accident occurred in a wild undeveloped place called Dead Man's Cave.

Cartwright said Summers and another employee of Cave Without A Name went into Dead Man's Cave to find the source of a water blockage that was affecting the water flow inside Cave Without A Name, located about 30 miles north of San Antonio. The caves are connected through underground tunnels.

According to published reports, Summers swam into a section where the ceiling was just inches above the water.

After hearing "a sputtering sound" from Summers, the other employee got no response from his calls and went for help. Rescue crews used pumps to lower the water level so a cave diver could retrieve Summers' body.

Before the Summers family took over Cave Without A Name it was described as a mom-and-pop operation by National Caves Association President Brad Wuest, whose family owns and operates Natural Bridge Caverns.

Summers is credited with several improvements, including replacing a gravel road with a paved one, expanding the parking lot and remodeling the visitors center. He also had increased marketing efforts.

The cave opened as an attraction in 1939, and a contest was held to name it. They wound up heeding the suggestion of a student who said, "The cave is too pretty to have a name."

Stalactites, stalagmites and soda straws are features of the cave, which is reached by 126 steps plunging down about 90 feet.

Cartwright said Summers was active in the Greater Boerne Chamber of Commerce, graduating from Leadership Boerne in 2005.

Summers is survived by his wife, Joan, and four children, John Joseph, William Matthew, Anne Marie and Renee Kathleen; parents Thomas A. Summers Jr. and Linda Sutherland Summers of Houston; his sister, Laura, and her husband, Todd Knop of Austin; his sister-in-law, Pat Moser of Houston; his brother-in-law, Pete Moser, and his wife, Betty, of Houston.

A rosary will be recited at 7 tonight at Vaughan's Funeral Home in Boerne. A funeral Mass will be celebrated at 10 a.m. Saturday at St. Joseph's at Honeycreek.

The Associated Press and San Antonio Express-News contributed to this report.

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