

OBITUARIES



Steve Davis

Lee Harrison White

April 17, 1988 – September 15, 2019

Lee Harrison White, 31, NSS# 65425, of Evans, GA, and Chattanooga, TN, died September 15, 2019, when he was struck and killed in an automobile accident on I-40 in Alamance County, NC. He was a 2007 graduate of Lakeside High School in Evans where he was president of the senior class and a member of the school system's wrestling teams since seventh grade. He learned survival skills and became a ranger at Camp Deep Woods in Brevard, NC.

Lee studied physics at the United States Military Academy at West Point and the University of Colorado at Boulder and enjoyed a lifelong passion for science and technology. He was an accomplished cave explorer who supported his calling by working as a rope access specialist with Industrial Access, Inc., of Cumming, GA, on jobs all over the South requiring work in high places.

Lee's innovative approach, unique techniques, and well-developed climbing skills along with his creative use of available equipment combined to change cave dome climbing forever. His impact on the caving community will be felt for decades to come.

Lee became an active project caver in 2013, as part of the TAG caving community, explorers who support science and survey new caves in the unique geological region where the states of Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia meet. The region is where many of the techniques and traditions of modern caving developed. Lee became a respected practitioner of vertical caving, an expert in both American and Alpine styles of rigging. In 2014, he rappelled and climbed the deepest pit in the United States, 586 feet, Fantastic Pit in Ellison's Cave, Georgia. In 2016 and 2017, he was involved in three cave rescues.

Among his most recent achievements was setting a rope at the top of the 120-foot Dome Pit, in Natural Bridge Cavern near San Antonio, TX, the state's largest and most spectacular show cavern. The rope allowed explorers to reach a tantalizing passageway that was once considered inaccessible because of its height, giving the first access in 60 years to a new part of the cave. Lee climbed the wall, setting bolts and ropes, in an hour and a half.

Lee successfully ascended dozens of previously unclimbed domes in TAG. He made the first ascent of the second tallest dome, 267 feet, which he named the Very Hungry Caterpillar Dome after his favorite book, in a cave named Savor It Well in Madison County, AL. He rigged at least 20 domes permanently in the TAG region and worked with the Southeastern Cave Conservancy to assure safe rigging at caves managed by the conservancy.

In the past three years, Lee's skills led him to join international caving teams bringing experts in geology, paleontology, archeology, biology, and cave surveying to study and map extensive cave systems in Mexico.

In 2017, he joined the Proyecto Espeleológico Sistema Huautla (PESH), an official project of the National Speleological Society and the United States Deep Caving Team. This is a ten-year expedition conducted annually in April since 2013 into the deepest cave system in the Western Hemisphere, Sistema Huautla in the State of Oaxaca, Mexico. He continued as a member of the team in 2018 and 2019, in 2018 leading the small team of cave riggers that enabled confirmation of a major connection from Sistema Huautla to another well-known cave, Sotano de Agua de Carrizo. This connection added a confirmed length of 9.2 kilometers to the system, as well as five new entrances, "making one of the longest, deepest caves in the world even longer and more complex," stated the National Geographic Society in its report on the new connection, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/06/sistema-huautla-cave-mexico-culture/>.

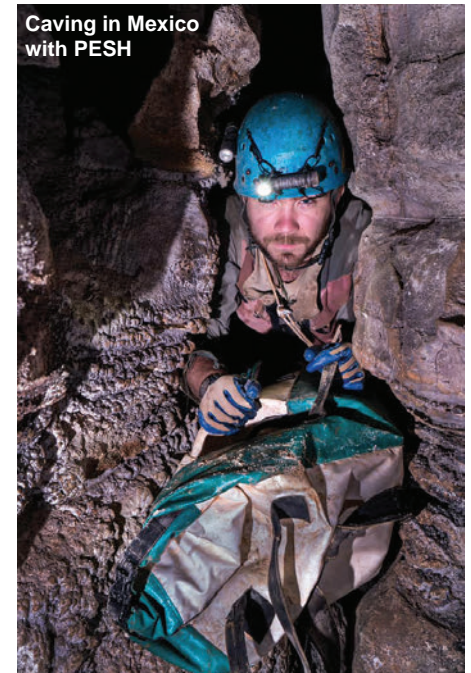
In 2018, Lee also joined the US Deep Caving Team to support a scientific expedition of 40 team members from six countries in Cueva Chevé in Oaxaca's Sierra de Juárez region. Currently documented at 1,520 meters, Chevé is thought possibly to rival the world's deepest, Vervovkina Cave in the Republic of Georgia, which has a maximum explored depth of 2,204 meters. Lee himself has caved to a depth of 1,200 meters in Mexico.

The expedition leader of PESH, Bill Steele, recalls, "In late April of 2019 Lee White led another small team to go 600 meters deep in the La Grieta section of Sistema Huautla to look for a lead Lee had a hunch they would find. And they did. It was a major trunk passage they named after Lee: Blowhard Boulevard. They ended their exploration at the bottom of a waterfall to be climbed next year. Once it is climbed and mapped, we plan to name it Lee White Falls."

Lee is survived by his father, Marco White, his mother, Rebecca Watson White, and his brother, Graham White, and a loving family of aunts, uncles, cousins, and cavers. A memorial service celebrating Lee's life will be held on October 5, 4 pm Central, by the TAG community at Caver's Paradise, 482 Wild Heart Lane, Sewanee, TN.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that friends donate to the organizations Lee's work supported: PESH, <http://www.peshcaving.org/donate>; Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc., <https://saveyourcaves.org/give.html>, PO Box 250, Signal Mountain, TN 37377, info@sccl.org (indicate "Lee White Fund"); and the National Speleological Society, <https://caves.org/donate/index.shtml>, 6001 Pulaski Pike, Huntsville, AL 35810-1122, nss@caves.org.

To see drone footage of Lee climbing in Natural Bridge Cavern on May 20, 2019, shot by Greg Passmore and posted by Rachel Saker at the Facebook event page <Celebration of The Lee White>, go here: <https://tinyurl.com/yxwo4rht>.



Tiffany Nardico

Lee White

1988 – 15 September 2019, 31



Lee White at Huautla, by Bill Steele

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<https://www.statesman.com/news/20190515/cave-explorers-discover-new-600-foot-passage-in-natural-bridge-caverns>

<https://www.statesman.com/news/20190812/cave-expeditions-yield-new-discoveries-at-natural-bridge-caverns>

<https://www.statesman.com/photogallery/TX/20190813/NEWS/812009996/PH/1>

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Bill Steele, 9 October 2019, on TexasCavers
speleosteele@aol.com

Over the weekend I attended a Celebration of a Life in Tennessee for a good caver friend of mine, Lee White. Lee made Texas caving history in May of this year when he successfully climbed the 100 ft. sheer wall of the remote Dome Pit way off trail in Natural Bridge Caverns, which has led to the best discovery of virgin cave in the state of Texas this year. The Dome Pit was first reached in 1960 and for 59 years was considered to be perhaps unclimbable due to soft limestone. Lee climbed it in 1 1/2 hours. Here is Lee's obituary followed by some links to newspaper articles about the discoveries in Natural Bridge Caverns.