UTG NEWS

UNIVERSITY SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 1977

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Club Meetings

The University Speleological Society has regular meetings on the first and third Wednes—days of each month at 7:30 PM in Experimental Science, Room 223. Special meetings as an—nounced.

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GROTTO NEWS

THE FALL TSA Board of Governors meeting will be held at Cascade Caverns on Sunday, October 2, starting at 10:00 AM, Annual elections will be held at this meeting. On Saturday there will be a safety seminar conducted by Chuck Stuehm at the Caverns. Everyone is invited.

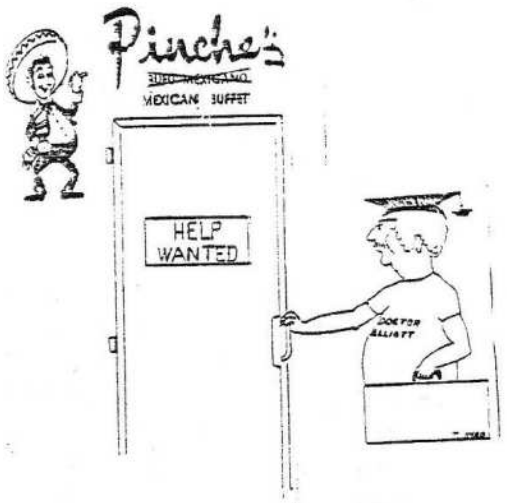
PHILLIP RUSSELL (former UTG president and brother of Bill Russell) has finally published his long awaited book MEXICO IN TRANSITION. It should be of interest to grotto members and Phil might even autograph it for you.

RUMOR. HAS IT that the notorious Diamond Cave explorer and Hlocut Mark Minton will soon be moving to Austin to conduct post—doctoral research at UT.

THE 1978 NSS CONVENTION is going to happen right here in Texas. To find out how you can help contact Ronnie Fieseler- 282-0613; Pam Lynn - 478—6048; or Ernst Kastning 444—2633.

THE U.T. GROTTO is a quarter of a century old in 1977. In celebration of this the grotto will be sponsoring a 25th Anniversary Party. This will most likely be held the 12—13 November if no other events are conflicting. More de—tails will be announced at mee tings.

UTG WELCOMES newest caver - Fontaine Patterson Ralph- born to Pamela Lynn and Ron Ralph on the 3rd of September. She should be ready for use in those tight leads in Airman's Cave within a few months!



BILL ELLIOTT RETURNS.
The U.T. Grotto welcomes the return of Bill Elliott. Once U.T.G. Chairman, Elliott left for Texas Tech where he earned his PhD in Biology. His dissertation was on cave millipedes (Speodesmus) in central Texas. Bill is now residing in Georgetown and looking for a job. Good luck to him on that. . .and we hope he can pay his dues.

SLOWLY BUT SURELY the cost of carbide, the caver's lifeblood, is following the path of gasoline and coffee. The grotto has long provided free carbide to members, but the scourge of inflation has forced the Executive Council to iniciate a charge for carbide beginning this semester to avoid an increase in dues. It will be available to MEMBERS for $1.50 a gallon which is 1/2 of the cost (wholesale) to the Grotto. Thus members will still get a considerable savings.

An Introduction to Caving

Speleology offers a wide range of studies and activities to even the most diverse of interests. Probably what attracts most people is the sheer excitement of exploring an unknown passage or of descending an unplumbed pit. In the populated and well—mapped world we live in few know the vital thrill and pristine beauty of first exploration that spurred our ancestors on to the great discoveries of history. The underworld is a last great frontier easily accessible to the average person, unlike space or deep sea exploration. And there will always be unexplored caves awaiting us.

UT cavers are known for having a worldwide interest in caveing that has recently taken them to such varied places as Guatemala. New Guinea, Canada, Belize, and Venezuela. But they have also spearheaded home territory effort to explore and survey caves in the Austin area and all over Texas.

A most rewarding fringe benefit of caving is the actual travel to and from the caving areas. Karst areas (generic term for cave forming limestone settings) are almost always spectacularly beautiful regions missed by the average tourist and hiker. This is particularly true in Mexico where cave hunting takes one up into high regions, from tropical rain forests full of exotic vegetation and wildlife, up to high ridges of whispering pine forests. In these areas cavers will often encounter isolated Indian groups who speak little or no Spanish, maintaining the traditional tribal tongues.

We cavers who so enjoy the beauty and majesty of the underground world must bear the responsibility of protecting this fragile environment. The beautiful stalactite that took thousands of years to form may be destroyed in an instant by the vandal, so that no one will again appreciate its beauty. Time moves very slowly in caves, and damage takes a millenia to repair. So formations are a sacred thing not to be disturbed, buy to be enjoyed in their natural seaee and left for the future generations of cavers. Animal life in the caves should be left undisturbed except for minimal biological collections, and all trash and spent carbide should be carried out of the cave. Writing on the cave walls is unsightly to others and does not quickly fade away.

EQUIPMENT

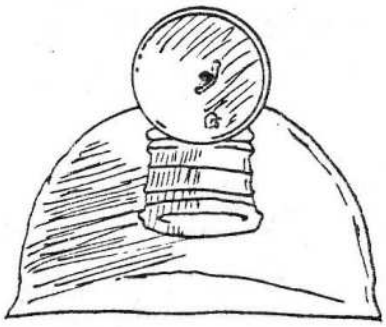
lights

Your light is the most important item you need - without it you cannot function underground. Therefore you should always carry at least two, preferably three, sources of light. Your main source of light will either be a carbide lamp or an electric lamp. Both are good; however, the carbide lamp is most commonly used because it is simple, effective and less expensive.

Which ever light you choose it should be attached to your hard hat so that your hands are free. And you also need to carry spare parts, carbide, water and tip cleaner for a carbide lamp or spare batteries for an electric lamp.

A good second light source is a dependable flashlight with spare bulb. Handy for caving is the "Mallory" type flashlight which is very compact and may be waterproofed by filling it with vaseline. The third source is often candles with waterproof matches; however, cavers often carry lightsticks (an organic chemical light) which is ideal for an emergency situation. They cannot be extinguished and provide usable light for over 30 hours.

Don't forget to carry enough carbide or batteries to last the dura- The third cavers often Cion of your trip underground.(Always take more than you expect to need.) A charge of carbide will last from 2 to 3 hours - water will have to be replenished about twice as often. If you're using batteries be sure to find out how many hours they will last. Your additional light sources should be adequate to get you out of the cave should your main source fail.



Helmets

A helmet is an essential item and should always be worn while caving. It can save your life in the event of rockfall from above or slipping on a tricky climb or chimney. The helmet also prevents injury and annoyance from constantly bumping your head on the irregular cave ceiling. A lamp bracket should be installed on your helmet so as to leave your hands free for climbing and crawling.

Two general types of helmets are available. The first is the construction-type hard hat. These are inexpensive (under $5) plastic or fiberglass items which which most cavers use when they first start caving. If your in caving justifies it, consideration should be given to the second class of helmets; those designed for rock climbing, which are engineered to absorb the shock of a fall and have superior chin strap systems designed to keep the helmet on your head in all circumstances. These helmets generally run $15-20.

cave pack and its contents

You're going to need something to put your extra gear into. It Will have to be large enough to hold your extra sources of light, spare parts, carbide, drinking water, some food and possibly first aid supplies. Don't carry too much or a pack too large — you're going to have to carry It all through the cave and it's got to fit through every passage you squeeze through.

The pack should be durable — canvas is best. It should also have a strap or straps so that it can be worn as a shoulder bag or back pack.

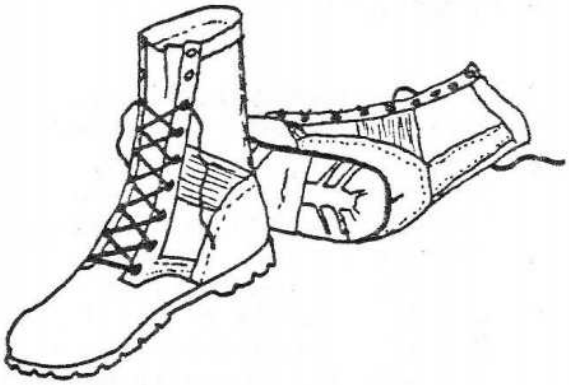
Plastic baby bottles make excellent containers for carrying carbide. Be sure to bring a plastic bag along to put your spare carbide into. You'll need a water canteen for your lamp and drinking. Be sure to pack spare parts for your lamp and your two extra light sources. Always carry some food — candy bars, gorp and canned fruits & are good cave foods. The quantity and types you take will depend on the length of your trip. Not ail cavers carry a first aid kit, but it's not a bad idea.

clothing

If you have a pair of Jeana, a T-shirt, and a light denim or durable cotton shirt, then you already have the clothing you'll need for Texas and Mexico caving. Keep in mind that whatever you choose to wear it never be quite the same after you've climbed over jagged rocks, crawled through mud and waded through water! It's also a good idea to bring a change of clothes for the trip home.

for your feet

Rubber soled boots with some ankle support are preferable for caving, Make sure the soles give you some traction as you want to walk and climb through caves — not slide. "Jungle boots" are very popular because they are inexpensive, comfortable, cool, constructed so that they allow water to escape and are indestructable. If you do not own boots, tennis shoes will suffice for your first caving trips until you are ready to make the investment.



gloves

They protect your hands when doing rope work and scrambling over rough surfaces. Inexpensive cotton or leather will do.

vertical equipment

The myriad techniques and kinds of equipment involved in climbing and vertical work comprise an art in themselves, and certainly the best place to learn is through the guidance of experienced teachers and prac—ice on cliffs, not by written instruction. Borrowed equipment is avail—able for use at practice sessions, which allows one to evaluate the dif—ferent kind of climbing gear and techniques prior to making an investment. Hardware and slings will usually run from $20 to $50 depending on which method of climbing is desired,

Austin

Whole Earth Provision Co. 24th & San Antonio
General camping gear, some climbing hardware and slings.
Climbing helmets and chemical lights.

Wilderness Whitewater Supply 30th & Lamar
camping gear, climbing gear, slings and helmets,
plus used equipment.

Academy Surplus four Austin locations
80urce for cave packs and jungle boots. Good prices
on Goldline climbing rope.

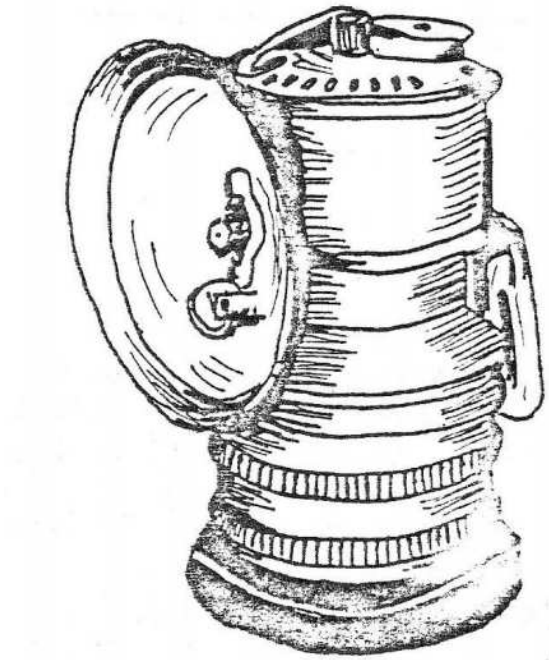
Radio Shack many Austin branches
Radio Shack carries the compact "Mallory" type flashlights
which run about $1.00 a piece.

Mail Order

Bob & Bob Bob Liebman, P.O. 1187, Alhambra, CA 91802
Best source for spare brass lamp parts. Bob carries a good line
of vertical gear with a low price on jumars. Other caving supplies
including Premier lamps.

The Speleoshoppe Box 8044 Louisville, KY 40208
Phone Orders 1—502—367—6292
Premier carbide lights and rechargeable electric lights.
Surveying compasses, vertical gear and good prices on chemical
lights.

The Carbide Light



The carbide light is a compact, simple, and wonderfully reliable source of light. Most often constructed Of brass, the carbide lamp has an upper chamber filled with water which drips down into a lower chamber containing calcium carbide. Contact of the water with the carbide produces acetylene gas creating a bright flame out of the hole in front.

Calcium carbide resembles dark pebbles and is available in sizes from that of a marble down to smaller than a grain of rice - most cavers preferring the ¼″ to ¼″ size. The bottom of the lamp should be filled no more than two thirds full, and this charge will last about three hours. When the charge is spent, the lamp bottom will be full of white powder, which should always be carried from the cave and disposed of properly. Spent carbide left in the cave is unsightly and will pollute cave streams.

The burner tip where the gas exits has a tendency to fall out periodically, so spare tips, and also gaskets for the carbide bottom, are good to bring along. Also necessary is a tip reamer, a small wire brush used to clean the burner tip when it becomes clogged.

Brass lamps are the sturdiest and most desirable for caving. A new "improved" lamp of plastic is on the American market which has a tendency to melt and burn. Probably the best available lamp is the British made Premier lamp at about $10.00.

Take Nothing But Pictures. . .

Leave Nothing But Footprints

Caving Organizations

the University Speleological Society

In April 1951 an article in the Daily Texan announced that John Riggs and Carroll Sleymaker were planning a trip to Dead Man's Hole. The response was tremendous, some 50 people answered their request for interested people. From these humble beginnings a group of people formed a club and were chartered as an N.S.S. Grotto in 1952. In the twenty—five years since the U.T.G. has seen many changes and significant discoveries.

The University Speleological Society (as it is officially known) has regular meetings the first and third Wednesdays of every month in Experimental Science 223, For membership information inquire at the meetings.

Texas Speleological Association

The Texas Speleological Association is composed of all the various grottos throughout the state and serves to bring together the varied cavers in Texas. Through the TSA's official publication, the TEXAS CAVER, cavers can read about statewide activities and contribute their views. Once a year the TSA holds a two day convention where cavers enjoy caving talks and campfire camaraderie with their own kind. The TSA is a regional organization of the NSS,

National Speleological Society

The NSS is the backbone of American caving. Most serious cavers are NSS members, aud from this gain a keen insight on speleology and cavers themselves, The monthly NSS News provides highlights of national (and international) caving and techniques. Perhaps most valuable of all is the annual week—long NSS Convention, the high1ight of the speleological year when up to 1,000 cavers gather from all over North America. Activities include caving trips, scientific sessions, rope climbing contests, rescue and scuba training, four wheel drive races, legislative decision—making, caving techniques workshops, and nightly round the bonfire beer boogies. Also on hand are specialized caving equipment stores and a well stocked speleological publications room, Membership applications will be on hand at the UTG meetings.

Association for Mexican Cave Studies

This loose knit, Austin—based organization is dedicated to the advancement and distribution of knowledge of Mexican caves. Many trips leave Austin for south of the border each year, some for only a weekend, some for months at a time. Large and exciting caves are constantly being discovered from the northern deserts of Coahuila to the thick jungles of Yucatan. AMCS cavers have discovered many new species of cave life over the years and have contributed knowledge in archeological and geologic fields. Recent trips and activities are written up in the AMCS Activities Newsletter, available from William Russell at UTG meetings.

JOURNEYS

BEAVER BAT CAVE

On the weekend of September 17—18, 1977 Jerry Atkinson, Tom Byrd, John Chelf, Bill Elliott, Robert Hemperly, Dale Pate, Lisa Wilkes and Maureen Cavanaugh visited this Burnet County cave. We arrived at the cave at 8:30 as the bat flight continued to be quite thick, Fearing the multitudes of bats inside the cave, we decided to wait for the bat flight to dissipate. Bats continued to fly out in heavy numbers as late as 10 o'clock, so we decided to enter the cave regardless of the bats.

We split into 2 survey teams: Hemperly, Atkins, Chelf and Pate surveyed the west end of the cave, while Elliott, Cavanaugh, Wilkes and Byrd surveyed the east passage,

The east passage crew surveyed a large room over 150 feet wide continued to the sumits of "Ammonia Mountain." The west passage crew finished fast and proceeded to map the extreme east part of the cave to connect with the Ammonia Mountain Room.

After photographing, collecting and surveying the two crews left the cave at 4:00 AM.

Tom Byrd

PURIFICACIÓN AREA, MEXICO

Over the UTG members reteurned to continue the exploration two large caves near Cd, Victoria in the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico, in the Río Purificación watershed. During the week of the 14—22 of May, Sheila Balsdon, Gil Ediger, Preston Forsythe, Margaret Hart, Shari Larason, Thomas Moore, Diane Perwein, Peter Sprouse and Terri Treacy camped near Cueva del Brinco at 1900 meters elevation In the Sierra Madre Oriental. Several surveying erips were made into the cave and a total of two kilometers added to the known extent of the cave (length now 5.2km). Most of this was in large stream passage containing numerous deep lakes and gravel bars.

At the beginning of August, six cavers from Austin retuned to the area: Shella Balsdon, Tom Byrd, Maureen Cavanaugh, Jeff Horowitz, Terry Sayther and Peter Sprouse, This time the objective was Cueva de Infiernillo, which is considerably lower on the mountain but may eventually connect with Cueva del Brinco. Access to Infiernillo Is only by dropping steeply down into a canyon, then climbing a 40 meter cliff to get into the entrance, so the group set up camp inside the cave for 5 days. From the base camp 500 meters inside surveys were taken into new passages heading southward and upward towards Brinco. Three and one half kilometers were mapped, bringing the length up to 4.1 km. Only a little more than a kilometer now separates the two caves, Another trip back to the area is planned over the Thanksgiving Holidays. (See AMCS Publications for more detailed exploration descriptions.)

Peter Sprouse