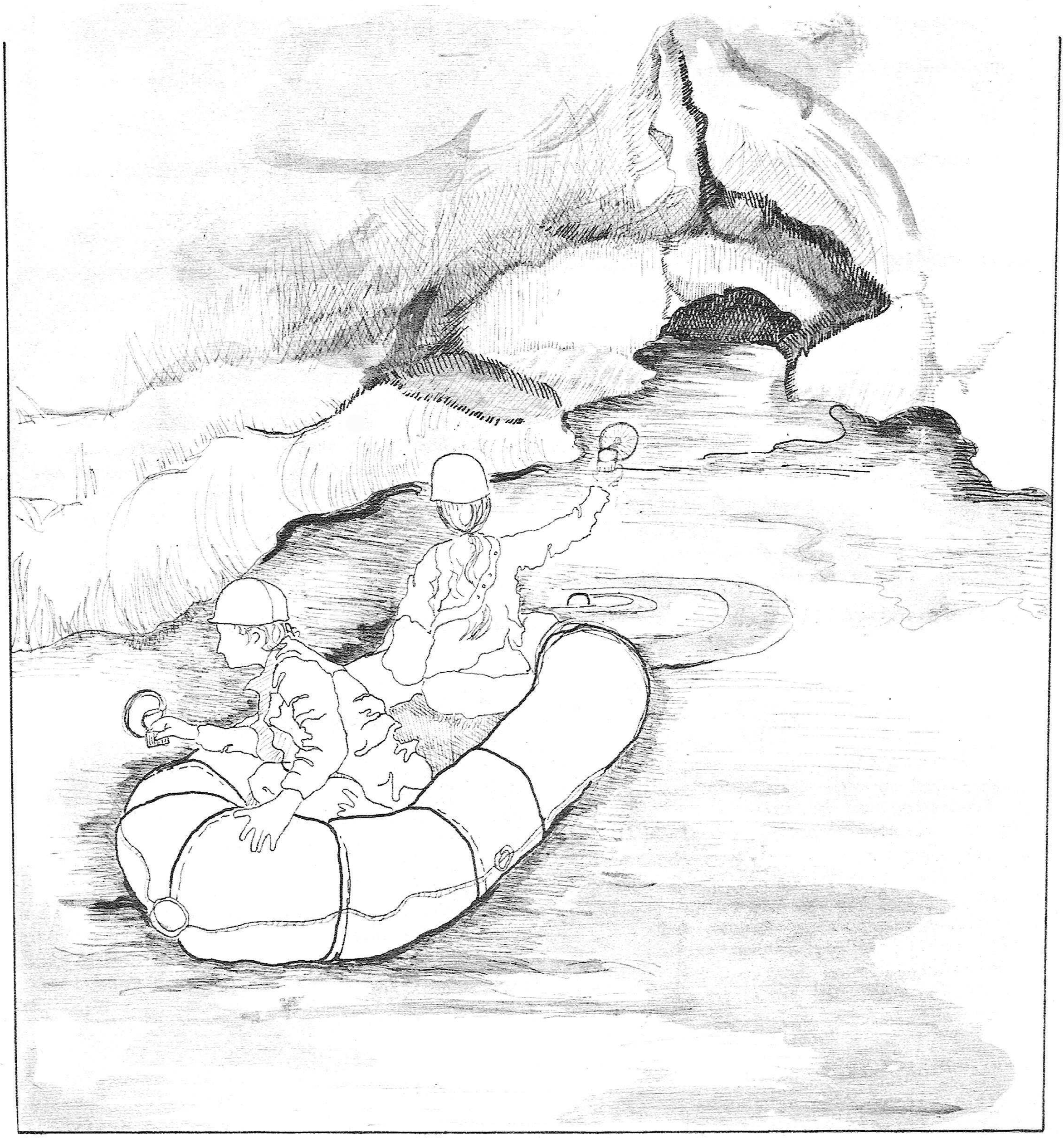
UTG NEWS

VOl.6 NO.3



Inside

A commentary on caves, neophytes and conservation by Bill Russell /page 2

"I'd crawl a mile in Airmen's," says Bill about his favorite cave /page 3

Undaunted by rain, Texas cavers raise hell at A&I Body Roast /page 6

Sick of caving? Buy a backpack and truck to Big Bend Park /page 7

Preface

It's 3 a .m and I'm sitting before my nifty IBM Selectric typewriter wondering, "Why don't I have more trip reports so I can fill up all the white space in this rag?"

Then, creeping into my mind with the encroaching dawn, an insiduous voice whispers, " Perhaps it's because cavers don't like to write those dis- tasteful things, eh?"

But writing is fun, just as caving can be. And the hardest thing about writing a trip report is actually sitting down and doing it.

The heading form, with date, des- tination, personnel and the reporter's name is standard in Texas caving news, but the content doesn't have to be the same "We went to Sleazy Hole and then to the Dairy Queen for cheeseburgers."

For instance, most trip reports are written in chronological order, but needn't be. Put the best thing that happened on the trip first, and the rest falls into place.

—Ed.

U T G News

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DIAL-A-TRIP

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Russell Questions 'Conservationists'

Within the last few years it has become fashionable to denounce all publicity about caves and caving as recruitment but now this philosophy has been carried a step further. It has been decided by some that training new cavers is an inducement to go caving, and that as a conservation measure there should be no grotto training program. This would be unfortunate enough if it were adopted only by magazine editors to increase circulation, but unfortunatelv it seems to have siven some grotto leaders a philosophical excuse for their lack of interest in new cavers.

It is clear that active recruiting or publicity campaigns are not desireable; but, this does not mean that there should be no publicity. Every grotto has an obligation to let the world at large know of its existence. This obligation exists for several reasons. The first is that unorganized groups who are caving should fairly early in their career realize that there is an organization of persons with similar interests and secondly so that persons interested in obtaining accurate information about caves be they land owner with a cave , a contractor building in a sinkhole, an engineer, a hydrologist or an urban planner they will realize there is a source of information available to them. This minimum amount of publicity will attract interested persons from the local community. These persons will be for the most part either already caving or highly interested in caves and caving, It is important that the grotto welcome these people , not only for the grotto's continued existence, but also for reasons of conservation and safety.

The greatest hazard to a cave is the new caver with no idea of conservation , He dumps his carbide, writes his name on the wall, and takes home a nice souvenir all of which is done without realizing its cumulative effect. A kind word to this new caver would make him a strong advocate of conservation and as most of these new cavers will be in a cave whether or not the grotto trains them, training new cavers is a necessary part of any conservation program .

Another responsibilityto the new caver is to see him safely through the cave. this again benefits both the caver and the grotto. A tragic accident like the fatal fall in Fischer's Pit can close caves over several counties as ranchers decide that caves are dangerous and they don't want anyone killed on their place. Training on both caving techniques and conservation is an essential part of the program of every grotto. New cavers should not be discouraged by the grotto. The proper kind of publicity will bring highly motivated, desirable people to the grotto for education. Publicity should emphisize what the grotto does--not as an adventure, but for its own sake. Perhaps there is a place in caving for the caver whose only interests are running down virgin tunnels and exploring mile-deep systems in Mexico, but these people cannot consider therselves conservationists because they don't train new cavers

Bill Russell

Airman's: Austin's Flint Ridge

The Flint Ridge of Kentucky overlies Floyd Collins' Crystal Cave and contain probably over one hundred miles of passage beneath its relatively flat surface. Just southwest of Austin is a plain extending from near Oak Hill south into Hayes County. The plain is crossed by the shallow valleys of several creeks most of which run only after heavy rains. The water rapidly becomes lost in cracks and fissures in the limestone. Between the creeks are well developed sinkholes, but with all this obvious solutional activity only a few small caves are known. The Flint ridge in Kentucky is capped with sandstone and entrance to the caves is only through deep sinks or from the valley sides where the limestone is accessible.
The situation is somewhat similar near Oak Hill where the uppermost Edwards Limes is impure and contains few caves, while 50 or so feet into the Edwards is a very soluble layer described by geologists as "a thin solution-collapse zone". The overlying impure limestones cap the cave zone and prevent most caves from reachin the surface.

The northeast corner of the Edwards Limestone Plain is crossed by Barton's Creek. In February of 1971 two airmen from Bergstrom noticed a strong current of air flowing from a 2 x 6 inch crack in a cliff on the south bank of the creek. After a month of digging they were able to squeeze through into Airman's Cave. Cavers have now followed the generally small passage southwest for an airline distance of 0 .5 mile. The average passage cross-section is about 12 feet squared, so breakdown blocks frequently have to be removed. The total mapped length of the cave is now 82U8 feet, with almost all explored cave having been mapped. Progress is now temporarily stopped by several large (two by two by four feet) rocks. Exploration is advancing at the rate of .25 mile per year, but there are several signs that there is a large amount of passage beyond.

Hydrologically, Airman's was a conduit for water that sank in the Williamson, Slaughter and Bear Creek drainages. After heavy rains, great amounts of water would enter the subsurface through thousands of small cracks and sinks. While most of this water probably resurged along the Colorado River near the present Barton's Spring, the lowest point of the Edwards outcrop, it had to cross several faults, and, at first, the conduits leading to Barton Spring were not well developed. As all the water couldn't f'low to the spring, the water table rose and some water followed the easily soluable solutionHcolH lapse zone north to Barton Creek. This flow of water formed Airman's Cave, but finally the water flowing to the much lower Barton Spring enlarged the lower conduits so they could carry the full load, and Airman's was abandoned. Thus it is likely that further advances into the cave will reach the point where Airman's Cave joins the much larger Barton Spring conduits. Strong currents of air flow through Airman's, generally blowing out in the day- time and in at night, powered by temperature changes in the outside atmosphere. By day the sun heats the air and the pressure drops; in response to this pressure drop the air flows from the cave. At night the air cools and becomes denser, the pressure rises and the air is forced in again. This pressure change is small (about 1$) and as the change in volume

is proportional to change in pressure, air flow gives an indication of minimum volume of the cave. Air flows out a fourHfoot square opening at about 2 ft./sec. for 10 hours; thus 3 x 105 ft3 of air leaves the cave, giving a minimum volume of 3 x 107 cubic feet, or 1,000,000 feet of the 12 ft.2 crossHsection passage, equalling an average passage 100 miles long.

Thus the cave is not just one long passage, as the air at the end could not reach the entrance in ten hours. So somewhere there must be a large volume of cave, either a room or a complex of smaller passages. Several sinks southwest of Airman's are actively being dug out by cavers, and if the "solution-collapse" zone can be reached, they well might connect with Airman's, at an airline distance of four miles away, doubtless much more as the caver crawls. The Flint Ridge of Texas may lie at Austin's doorstep.

Bill Russell

U T G Journeys

Joya de Salas

Date: Sept. 9-20 [1973]
Destination: Sotano de la Joya de Salas; Tamaulipas, Mexico
Persons: John Donavan, Peter Lord, Mike Boon, Joan Becket, Peter Strickland, Blake Harrison

Reported by: Blake Harrison

This trip was pretty much an international affair. Peter and John were from England. Michael Boon and Joan Becket were from Canada, and their lost guides, Peter Strickland and I, from Austin. Within a day and a half, the six of use were on our way for two weeks of Mexican caving. Peter offered to take his Speleo Power Wagon. We knew we would be doing quite a lot of four-wheel driving due to the road conditions and time.It ws close to the end of the rainy season there. Well, the road WAS rough.

We had no difficulty crossing the border and drove on into the night towards Encino, our first destination. After a wrong turn at Victoria or somewhere and a flat tire that lasted approximately 200 yards after being fixed by a "friendly" local, were were ready to see Encino.

We arrived at Encino ready to go, with a full tank of gas and prepared for the four- to six-hour ride to Joya de Salas. Party way up the road we met a road crew, which meant that from there on we were the first vehicle up the road since the rainy season had started. The road was untraveled but not impassable. Near the middle of the afternoon, we were at a place that a couple of us recognized, but we weren't sure whether or not it was the right road. There were logging roads everywhere. The next morning, John and I left camp on foot (due to the fuel supply) hoping to find Joya de Salas and the right road from where we were. Three hours later, he and I were at the pit. It was taking quite a bit of water. This lowered our hopes of a successful caving trip. We started back to the truck and arrived five hours later, extremely tired.

The next morning we drove on into the town of Joya. We were greeted by many of the locals and a note at the entrance saying that we needed permission from Sr. Carlos Hernandez who lived in Cd. Mante. Well, we weren't about to drive back to Mante to ask, so we efchecke with several of the locals and acquired suitable permission.

Arriving finally at the pit, we were greeted with the pleasure of seeing no water entering the pit's recesses. It took us several hours to prepare ourselves for the drop andget it properly rigged and padded. We had our nine bags that had to be lowered into the pit. Our plan was to spend around five days in cave or until it was pushed to the end. Quite a task, or so we thought, since the area around Joya has close to 3000 feet of lime-stone for the water to drain. The job of getting all the bags into the cave and down to base camp took nearly 12 hours. We camped about 850 feet underground, at the bottom of the last major pitch in the cave, a 230H foot drop. We were surprised to find water at the entrance to the passage we were to be using for the next several (not much) but passable. Luckily for us, the water had receded we were still prepared for some swimming. All had wet suits to amount of water passage involved.

Our first day of caving was filled with mapping about 700 meters of walking passage and exploring several other side passages. Our tired crew returned and slept for ten hours. It's nice to wak up in totally pitchCdarkness; if you want, you can just go back to bed.

Our second day in the cave was filled checking out some more leads, none of which went. One crew had planned to "blast out a small rimstone dam that was blocking passage beyond, but the water was just too high to blast safely, so that attempt failed. The lead that Pete Lord and I checked didn't go. Again tired, we returned to camp to get some rest the and leave the cave the next day.

Our third day from noon until midnight was spent with the grueling task of hauling up all the gear we had brought with us. We were really tired that night. We didn't even get all of the bags up, so we finished the next morning. By noon we were ready to leave Joya. The local, as always, were there giving us farewells and asking us for our spare water jugs. We gave them some and left the town by noon. May hours later, after getting stuck once, we were in Encino. It sure was good to see the pavement again, especially since we were about to have another flat.

The next day I took the bus from Monterrey back to Astin since I was supposed to have been at work two days earlier. The rest of the crew spent the remaining few days touristing and visiting Gruta del Palmito.

Precipicio

Date: Oct. 20-21 [1973]
Destination: La Gruta del Precipicio
Persons: Blake Harrison, Peter Sprouse
Reported by: Peter Sprouse

After being unable to find a third caving partner in Austin Friday night, we decided nevertheless to leave for Bustamante Canyon about 9 p.m. Arriving in the early hours, we slept at Ojo de Agua. Arising late, we didn't start the long hike until 1 p.m. Saturday. There was another truck from Texas in the parking area so we expected company in the cave.

Our objective was to gather additional data for the big room sketch at the rear of the cave in order to complete the map. Gruta del Precipico is high up on the side of Bustamante Canyon and requires a steep rocky hike of over two thousand feet in elevation change.

After two hours and 45 minutes of hiking and scrambling, we arrived at the cave entrance We left our backpack just inside the mouth, removed our ropes from it and started into the cave . We had only gone about 100 feet into the cave when Blake who was leading, slipped while negotiating a five-foot high sloping climb down. He had his arm behind him on a handhold and when he slipped, his arm twisted behind him and apparently pulled his upper arm bone out of its socket at the shoulder. While we were analyzing his injury, the other group returned from the back of the cave. It consisted of two cavers from Laredo, Tom Addison and David. Together we returned to the entrance, where we attempted to massage the bone back into place, with no success. Not knowing whether the bone might be broken or if any internal bleeding was occuring, we decided to start down the mountain immediately.

Blake was in considerable pain and was forced to keep his arm in one certain position for the pain to be bearable. This made the steep descent a difficult task, which even under normal conditions is rather tricky. The Laredo cavers helped by carrying down Blake's vertical gear and machete. Leaving the entrance at 4:30 p.m., we were slowed by several climbs down which normally are no problem. On one I had to give Blake a top tension belay and lower down my pack containing rope, water and caving gear.

The sun set about three quarters of the way down the mountain, and we reached our vehicle after three hours of hiking. The Laredo cavers, who had gotten down fifteen minutes ahead of us, left for home. After a short rest, we prepared to head for the border also.

I gave Blake two Darvon (pain killers) to ease his pain.

We stopped at a restaurant in the town of Bustamante for a refresco and talked with some Mexicans who had a map of La Gruta del Palmito. We then hauled ass for Laredo and the hospital there. Speeding through Customs, we got to the hospital at 1 a.m. Sunday. After an hour and 15 minutes of waiting and red tape examinations, we found out they couldn't do anything until morning because the X-ray room was closed and the right doctor wasn't there. So we decided to drive on to Austin and a decent hospital, despite the difficulty in staying awake to drive. We got to Austin just as dawn was breaking. After 15 hours, Blake's arm finally got proper medical attention. They administered muscle-relaxing drugs and pulled the bone back into the socket. We left the hospital shortly after 9 a.m.

Most accident reports need a moral. We broke one of the primary rules of caving by going with only two people. Fortunately, there were other cavers on the spot, but things could have easily been different. The fall could have been in the rear of the cave instead of the front , and the injury could have as easily been an incapacitating spinal break. In such a circumstance, I would have had to leave him alone, ascend the two drops, climb down the mountain and find the nearest long-distance phone to call the Waco cave rescue number. What had been 15 hours until treatment could have been 48.

Also evident to us was our obvious lack of first aid knowledge. We didn't know which direction we should pull the arm to get back into the right place. The whole ordeal pointed to the usefullness of the Texas Speleological Association first aid and rescue practice sessions.

A&I Body Roast

Date: Oct. 13-14 [1973]
Destination: Texas A&I Grotto first annual Ear Bust and Body Roast; Malaquita Beach, Padre Island National Seashore
Persons: Denis Breining, Scot Lillie, Neal Morris, Barbara Vinson, Phil Shaw, Craig Bittinger. Pat Asnes, Blake Harrison, Peter Sprouse, T.C. Ferret, Brian Clark and others
Reported by: T.C. Ferret

After a week of rain in Austin and San Marcos, the above people headed for the coast in expectations of a sunny weekend on the beach. Arriving at the National Seashore late that night , there was much pouring rain and flooded countryside The beach was undrivable, so the A&I, Corpus Christi and Houston Cavers had driven their vehicles under the giant park pavilion-walkway and were proceeding to have a good time despite the weather.

Saturday morning the weather looked to be clearing, so everyone packed up and headed down the beach. A freshwater river was soon encountered flowing out of the dunes across the beach to the Gulf of Mexico. It had carved out a small gorge which somewhat blocked our passage. Camp was established. People waded through the waterlogged dunes, went swimming and set up a tarp and a bar-b-que pit, but it was all in vain. Warm, air from the south was rising over our heads with deep black purple clouds while cold air from the north was surging past our trucks down the beach. After enduring the cold, steady rain for several hours, we retreated to the pavilion.

The Texas A&I Grotto had 62 pounds of chicken which Fred Paschal barHbHqued on a portable Bi shopHtype pit. He cooked chickens all day and all night and there was lots of chicken and beans for all.

The weather was so bad that only the cavers could stick it out on the beach, so we had the park pavilion to ourselves and most everyone had a good time. The waves were big and the water was warm. Jim Clements brought a generator which provided a slide show that night. The rangers were very helpful and cooperative considering that we had taken over the park pavilion . They even hauled away a Topeka State Mental Hospital escapee who crashed our party.

It was still raining Sunday morning when we all headed for home, but it was a very different and successful beach party. A big "thank you" to Fred Paschal, Tom Wright, Max ine Miller and all the other members of the Texas A&I Grotto for a great weekend.

Big Bend

Date: Oct. 18-20 [1973]
Destination: Big Bend National Park
Persons: Ronnie Fieseler, Susan Fieseler, Tom Byrd, Barbara Vinson, Neal Morris, Carl Kunath
Reported by: Neal Morris

Reaching Big Bend National Park late Friday night, our group camped near Yucca Flats for a few hours of sleep. Saturday morning, we drove to the Mule Ear Peaks Overlook and joined the San Angelo Sierra Club for an overnight backpacking trip. The only thing made the trip was our expert guide Jay, who had hiked the area extensively. He led us to a canyon with a 60Hfoot waterfall, and we soon discovered that a person familiar with the locations of certain desert springs could hike for weeks in Big Bend without carrying water. Saturday night our group of 21 people camped on the desert flats near the canyon of which the spring water was drinkable and delicious. Sunday morning the group split into smaller parties which chose their own routes back to the highway. Barb, Tom and I climbed the Mule Ear. The weather was excellent and so was the trip.

Airman's

Date: Sept. 27 [1973]
Destination: Airman's Cave
Persons: Robert Hemperly, Barbara Vinson, Neal Morris, William Russell and others
Reported by: Neal Morris

It was a beautiful sunny Saturday afternoon and our hearts were filled with the urge to be outdoors -- so into the bowels of Airman's Cave we went. Airman's is a treacherous, crawly cave and our group of seven soon became lost in a 20-foot section of belly-tube. Shortly thereafter we exited the cave.