1974 UTG NEWS

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Preface

Rumor has it that numerous People have found pictographs In some caves of northern Mex-Ico. Dave Becker is interested in collecting as much data as possible on these, especially anything coming from the Nuevo Leon-Coahuila ara. Persons Having information on picto-graphs of northern Mexico should Call 454-5598.

Please return all publica-Tions (NSS News, TSS files, old newsletters) borrowed from the UTG Library. Return all items to Barbara Vinson in person at meetings, to 407 W. 28 1/2 St., or call her at 472-7584.

"Caver Classified"
LOST: Heavy steel locking biner at vertical session Oct. 7. Please return to Craig Bittinger. Of sentimental and utilitarian value.

TSA SECRETARY Barbara Vinson needs lists of regular members, NSS members and officers from all Texas grottos.

The UTG News

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DIAL-A-TRIP

Ring up Carol or Bill at 472- 7541 weekend caving.

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Binney: Report on Costa Rica

(Editor's note: Former UTG President Frank Binney is presently on a Cave Research Foundation expedition in Costa Rica. The following excerpts are quoted from a recent letter.)

Hello Kirkwood People!

What happened in Mexico? Who went where? What went? And who made it back? I am sitting in a Pension (boarding house) in San Jose trying to get this pen to work worth a damn. Costa Rica is really great! — — Everything but the caves anyway. It's a cool 70 degrees here in San Jose and the sky is beautiful with looming volcanos all around. Out at Barra Honda (the karst area) it was around 72-80 degrees in the day depending on which way the ocean breezes blew. The caves were 74 degrees. At night it got much colder so that the sheet and army blanket I brought didn't keep me warm in the wee hours.

Well, you are probably wondering what the caves were like. In fact, you probably think that for eight people to go 5000 miles to explore caves for 30 days that there must be some really fantastic caves here. You're right! There are eight caves here. Eight pits to be exact. And every single little one of them is over 50 feet deep! And dark too. Yes, 30 days to survey seven caves and explore one more, and not one of them deeper than 350 feet. I don't think that Costa Rica is going to eclipse Mexico or Belize, as the place in Latin America to go caving.

It has been a nice experience, however. The caves, although small, were big rooms rather than shafts and all of them had pretty formations. Barra Honda is a flat—topped, isolated, uninhabited hill that towers over the surrounding countryside. Most of the top is grassy meadow except for an occasional haystack hill covered with big trees full of monkeys. The monkeys establish their macho among the other monkeys (or intruding cavers) by trying to make the most terrifying howls and screams} This process usually started at 4:30 in the morning, so we were assured of early starts.

Several times we climbed to the top of the highest haystack hill at this early hour to try to see the comet. Never had any luck - — I think the whole thing must be a hoax. Did you see it in Mexico? While we never saw the comet, we did have a total solar eclipse. We crossed three Polaroid lenses and were able to look at it directly.

I may make a visit to Panama before traveling up to Belize to visit Macleod and company. Say hello to everybody for me and write me, care of Barb Macleod, about what has been happening.

Mas tarde,
Frank

Aquismon

Date: Dec. 29, 1973-Jan. 5, 1974
Destination: Aquismon area, San Luis Potosi
Persons: Don Broussard, David Hutchings, Cindy Kane, Dino Lowrey, Logan McNatt, Peter Sprouse, Pete Strickland, Steve Zeman
Reported by: Peter Sprouse

Sleeping near Aquismon Friday night (Dec. 28) after four days in the El Abra, our group rendezvoused with a group of seven persons from Austin, including Bob Rhoades and Victor Benalcazar; In Aquismon we found burro prices extremely inflated because of the frequent trips up to Sotano de las Golondrinas. Not wishing to encourage this problem, we elected to carry our rope ourselves. Fortunately, we had relatively short lengths, as our first destination was a multiple drop cave north of Sotano de las Golondrinas, close to the town of San Rafael. We obtained permission and were on the trail by 11 a.m. We arrived at the campground below Golondrinas in time to watch the evening sparrow flight in.

Sunday morning most of us headed up to the cave; Logan was sick so he stayed in camp that day. Peter Strickland had previously explored downfourdrops within the cave, but had run out of rope and caving companions at the top of the fifth drop. So we entered the cave with many short lengths of rope. The locals who gathered around the entrance had no name for the cave. When we suggested Cueva de San Rafael it didn't seem to offend them, so that we named it.

The entrance is in a small sink of vertical rock walls on all but one side. It is about three feet high and four feet wide, and keeps these dimensions for 50 meters, down a dry stream bed with occasional pools. Then a five meter climb down followed by a two meter climb down. Immediately after this are two drops in succession: ten meters and 13 meters into a pool. This is followed by 35 meters of wet tube-like passage one meter high and 0.5 to 1.5 meters wide which opens into the top of a pit 40 meters deep. Passage off the base of this led to a two meter climb down and a seven meter drop. This brought the party to the limit of previous exploration. Only two people were in the group to arrive there first, Don Broussard and myself. While I prepared to descend the virgin pit, Don discovered a side pit off the same room but it did not appear deep or promising so was passed up. I reported the pit to be 14 or 15 meters deep and set off to determine whether more rope was required. Descending a steeply sloping passage, I came upon an estimated 30 meter + drop. So Don rappelled down the 14 meter drop with more rope and I then descended the next drop which turned out to be only 20 meters. Again I pushed on, to report back of a seven meter drop further on.

An order was then sent back for more rope and after a while Pete Strickland came down with three ropes. They rigged the next drop and Pete rappelled down and pushed on 100 meters to where the small stream he was following disappeared through a five—inch wide crack . . .dead end, bottom cave.

The party left the cave and Broussard, Strickland and myself returned to bottom cave and began the survey out. After four hours, Steve and Dino came in to help de—rig. we then found that the pit Don had peered into was of substantial depth after all. Steve rappelled in to report a depth of 45 meters and a low, short passage that got too tight for him to push. As the survey party was already past this point, it was not surveyed for lack of time. The whole crew was back in camp 15 minutes before midnight, new year's, in a sullen rain.

A late start was made the next day for Paxalja, a small town south of La Laja near which Don Broussard had visited, but not descended, two sotanos. A third pit, seen from the air, was also in the area. The group of noncavers with Bob and Victor left with them for Aquismon when we reached Paxalja, and we filled up with water from a spring and continued on to the first pit, Hoya de Quile, where we camped.

The hoya (pit) was of very large diameter, at least 150 meters, and had a parrot colony living in it. we rigged at the lowest point of the lip, so we had only a 50 meter rappel. The bottom was dense Jungle, sloping funnel—like to a small, mainly vertical cave at the bottom. A large shelter cave was found in the opposite wall. The survey took the rest of the day.

The following day we hiked to the next pit, Hoya de Quital. we arrived an hour before dark in time to see an amazing number of parrots fly into the pit, possibly twice as many that live in Golondrinas. Then to our surprise, clouds of swifts gathered overhead and dove into the sotano. This was apparently only the second known pit to have a swift colony, known as swallows by the Mexicans. Not nearly as many were observed though, as at Golondrinas.

The next morning we prepared for the descent. Quital is a very impressive pit, almost as large as Quile and much deeper. A new length of Bluewater III rope was lowered in and Logan descended. It was a free rappel of 90 meters, very close to 300 feet. On the opposite wall was a gaping black crack which reached into the floor. Logan investigated this and found it to be a high chamber where the swifts roosted on or near the ceiling. It was 80 meters long and 25 meters wide in the middle with guano mounds as tall as three meters.

Don and I found another passage off the entrance pit which led to a very large room from which the sound of water could be heard. This required a rope to enter so we returned for rope and help. The others

joined me in exploration while Don went off to climb the huge talus slope on the north side of the pit. The group sent a man down the sloping drop into the room, and the others followed. Shortly, Logan was amazed to find a large piece of Indian pottery close to the base of the crop. How could Indians have descended a 300—foot pit? Mystified, we began the survey. We collected some specimens of troglobitic shrimp and earthworms, and discovered several other potsherds.

Returning to the entrance pit we were further amazed to find that Don had ascended the talus slope, done a climb unbelayed to a skylight entrance! This solved the pottery mystery. Steve returned from further exploration in the swallow crack with a piece of a Matamoros newspaper dated early 1973. Apparently modern—day Mexicans had also visited the pit recently, possibly to kill swifts.

Logan, Pete and I began the survey around the bottom of the sotano. We closed a loop around the walls and the base of the talus slope. As dusk fell, I prusiked out and Logan and Pete climbed the talus slope out. On their way out they encountered a cave passage going off that had been reported by others earlier, about 35 meters below the lip. Many bats were exiting.

The next morning it was decided to split into three groups: one to continue surveying, one to explore the bat cave, and one to look for the third pit seen from the air. This pit has two openings which appear to go into the same pit. Don and Logan went off to hire a guide to look for it while Steve, Cindy and David explored the bat cave. Dino, Pete and I surveyed down the slope and then into the swallow hole.

Don and Logan returned after a few hours in which time a guide took then back to the same pit (Quital), then had to leave. No other guide could be found so they returned to the pit and descended into the pottery chamber to get drinking water. Pete Strickland accompanied them to photograph the pottery.

The bat cave team emerged and the survey team went up to survey it. They reported four drops, the last into a big room 30 by TO meters. Pete, Steve and I surveyed in, and on the way out pushed a side lead which opened into big passage to a 25 meter drop into a room beyond. This was not descended or mapped.

Our food running out, the next day we headed back to civilization. By hiking back east over the mountain instead of north to La Laja, we made it down to the Inter—American Highway by early afternoon.

Gorman Falls

Date: Oct. 28, 1973
Destination: Gorman Falls
Persons: Jon Everage, Laura Walter , Will Vinson, Neal Morris, Barbara Vinson
Reported by: Barbara Vinson

Finally locating Gorman, we arrived on a really pretty day. Pulling up to the office, we ran into a blue Toyota Land Cruiser with a SPELE0 license plate belonging to Kelly King. Cavers Jay Jorden, Peter Sprouse, John Steele, Frank Sadek, Noel Sloan and Mimi Laurens were present, representing Austin, Waco and Temple. One group went to a small cave elsewhere, with most going to Gorman Falls Cave. We arrived and were surprised to find mud up to our knees leading into the cave entrance. We divided three charges of carbide between the five of us and merrily entered the cave. It was very wet and muddy. After a while James Jasek and others came up from behind and passed us by. I located some cave ice which I showed Laura and Will.

The bad air was still present but was not as bad as usual, and we were able to go all the way back to the first siphon. Jon and Neal were pushing a water crawl when Jon pulled out a huge wad of white parachute cord and a ball of gross looking, green cotton webbing. We emptied Neal's side pack and stuffed half the cord in the pack and headed out. James had finished taking pictures and we soon ran into all the other — people also heading out. Around the last bend, Neal blew out his light to look at the light from the entrance. Laura and I watched our lights go out, and Neal tried to relight his light to no avail. Just as we got to the entrance, Neal's light filled the cave, and this left us muttering about his abilities as we exited to the river. After a semi-dunking to wash our clothes, we headed back to the car, stopping to look at the waterfall which was quite beautiful. We then noticed the newest formation at the falls, a Chevrolet which two guys had inadvertently driven over the edge.

We spent from 9 a.m. Monday to 3 p.m. unrolling and untangling 1500 feet of parachute cord.

Bustamante

Date: Nov. 21-25, 1973
Destination: Bustamante Canyon
Persons: David Backer, Peter Sprouse, Greg Walker
Reported by: Peter Sprouse

Wednesday night a long line of turistas was encountered at the border, many of whom were scruffy, dirty types who we suspected were fellow cavers. Thus it was 4 a.m. Thursday before we were on the road again, heading for Sabinas Hidalgo, which was to be a meeting place with the

other half of our group going to the highlands east of Saltillo. Arriving at the rendezvous point, we discovered the other truckload of cavers had left 15 minutes ahead of us. Off to Saltillo, where we again failed to make contact. After a three-hour wait in the town square, we elected to head north to the Bustamante Canyon area.

We arrived in Bustamante about 1 p.m. and drove on through the canyon to the desert west of it. We then drove south through the desert looking for a good section of the mountain to look for caves. Aiming for what looked like a possible huge sinkhole on the summit, eight miles south of the canyon gap, we only got five miles south of the gap before our road ended near the base of the mountain at a small rancho. Here lived an old man, known only to us as "the senor," who told us of a cave in one of the valleys cut into the mountainside near his home. He also told us of some more caves he knew of farther away which we didn't search for due to lack of time.

The next day (Friday) we went in search of the cave the senor told us of. After fighting cacti up the valley's steep sides all morning, the senor's goatherder showed us the way to the cave. The entrance, ten by eight meters, was hidden by palm trees at the base of a cliff. Thusly it earned the name Cueva Escondida. Just inside the entrance, under a magnificent 30-50 meter ceiling, were the diggings of Mexican miners, presumably saltpetre works. On the walls, mixed with recent graffitti, were many Indian pictographs. These were copied by David for further study. Also found were several potsherds, but these looked to be of fairly recent origin.

The huge passage beyond unfortunately ended after 75 meters. Exploration of side passages and lower level crawls produced another 75 meters.

While cooking breakfast the next morning (Saturday) in the desert, we spotted an entrance about 1.5 miles north of the canyon. We hiked through the desert to find that the entrance,15 meters by eight meters, was basically a shelter cave with only 10 meters of passage.

That afternoon we felt a desire to spend an extended period underground, so we visited Gruta del Palmito, which was quite an experience, as none of us had been there before.

There are still a lot of discoveries to be made in the Bustamante mountain range. More emphasis should be put on looking for new caves there than on repeated trips into Palmito.

Saltillo

Date: Nov. 21-25, 1973
Destination: mountains east of Saltillo, Huasteca Canyon
Persons: Neal Morris, Barb Vinson, Terry and Nancy Sayther, Pat Asnes, Craig Bittinger
Reported by: Craig Bittinger

We left Austin at 6 p.m. Wednesday and arrived in Sabinas Hidalgo at 1 a.m. The border took about two hours but involved no hassles. We proceeded to sleep at the Ancira Restaurant while we waited for the other car of cavers, including David Backer, Peter Sprouse and Greg Walker. We awoke at 5 a.m., left a note on the door of the restaurant and proceeded to leave while wondering what had happened to the other car. By 9 a.m. we were at the parking spot in the mountains east of Saltillo.

Donning our packs, we followed Neal up the trail. Two hours of strenuous hiking brought us to the steep mountains we were to climb. We would hike 50 feet, rest, and then repeat the process up the mountain. Sitting to rest could be dangerous because of the slope's steepness. During one rest break I slid five feet back. Finally, at 4 p.m. we made it to the top at 11,500 feet. we had gained 5,000 feet in elevation after a sleepless night on the road and we felt it. Spirits were high around the campfire in the pines as we supped on Lipton's best, popcorn and chocolate pudding. The next morning the sun came out and we set out to find new caves.

We located four caves and mapped one about 300 feet long and 100 feet deep. Unfortunately, these weren't the caves Neal had seen previously. We all enjoyed the fantastic view down into the valleys on both sides of us. The hike down lasted until dark. When we arrived at the truck, we fixed supper and went to sleep while 20 Mexican children watched. They admitted that it was better than the circus.

The next morning we drove through the canyons to Monterrey. Huasteca Canyon was in flood and four-wheel drive was necessary to traverse the road. A Mexican foot-soldier raced us through the canyon and held his own for about eight miles until he met his buddies. They were busy pointing machine-guns at us and pumping water up from the depths and into the creek bed so it wouldn't dry up. We were sad to arrive in Monterrey because of the smog.

Proceeding to Bustamante, we ate and met Fred Paschal at the canyon entrance. We followed him to the canyon near El Alamo and met the owner of the canyon on a one-lane road, getting the Mexican standoff. After a night's rest, we journeyed up to the springs where the canyon water emerges. Our guide enchanted us with tales of finding buried money and local Spanish ruins. Crossing the border was easy but getting to it took two hours.

Yucatan

Date: Dec. 18, 1973-Jan. 2, 1974
Destination: Yucatan
Persons: Ron Ralph, Pamela Lynn, Terry Sayther, Chuck Kennedy, John Davies
Reported by: Pamela Lynn

Caving on this trip involved visiting three caves in Yucatan — - Grutas de Balankanche (a quickie trip), Spukil (very confusing), and Loltun (very impressive.)

Grutas de Balankanche is near the site of Chichen Itza and costs three pesos. The main interest is not the cave itself but the beautiful pottery excavated there.

Spukil is near the town of Muna and has recently been explored and photographed by David MacKenzie. The cave is a huge maze with broken pottery and metates scattered throughout. We didn't have a map and ended up going in circles for several hours without ever finding the main passage.

Loltun is near the town of Oxkutzcab (Loltun means Stone Flower in Maya). The cave has several huge skylights, pictographs, petroglyphs, a couple of rough altars carved from natural rock, a stalagmite that has grown like a water fountain with cold sweet water, a ceremonial bath with carved steps, and many fine formations. Without our guide, who was very knowledgeable and also spoke some English, we would have missed many of these features, so the $5.00 (U.S.) he charged was definitely worth it.

The rest of the trip was spent visiting lots of Maya ceremonial sites (Palenque, Labna, Tulum, etc.)

Gruta del Palmito

Date: Dec. 27-31, 1973
Destination: Gruta del Palmito, Grutas de Villa de Garcia,Huasteca Canyon and Cueva de la Boca
Persons: Paul Bonner, Joe Everton, David Foster, James Jasek, Mimi Laurens, Jane Laurens, Frances McCauley, Gary Parsons, Frank Sadek, Alicia Wisener
Reported by: Jane Laurens

The Temple group left Temple at about noon and picked me up in Austin on their way down. We ate at an A&W somewhere along the way that night and continued on to the border. We had no trouble getting across and arrived at Bustamante about midnight and crashed. The next morning we met some South Dakota and Illinois cavers who had done Precipicio and another cave. They were planning on doing Palmito that day.

We started out early, and after discovering the right road to the cave we proceeded. Many hours were spent in the cave which put the group out after nightfall. Our group met up with the South Dakota and Illinois cavers and did Palmito with them. After everyone got down, we went to Ojo de Agua and cleaned our dirty bodies in the relatively warm water. We ate and then crashed.

The next morning, Jim, Mimi and Joe met us at our camp; we ate and hit the road, traveling to Grutas de Villa de Garcia, a commercial cave which is northwest of Monterrey. Getting up to the cave involves riding a cable car which goes up an extremely steep trail of 800 feet. The cave is in Cretaceous limestone and is fairly large with many interesting rooms and formations. We left at 4:30 p.m. and went through Monterrey and Villa de Santiago to Cienega. We drove on up the mountain road to camp just off the road by Huasteca Canyon. We woke up with much frost on our bags and had to get up and brave the frigid weather. Fortunately it warmed up a lot when the sun came up. We walked into the canyon down to the waterfall. The South Dakota people then went further into the canyon with their super truck.

After much picture taking of the incredible scenery, we headed back to camp and took off again. Our next destination was Cueva de la Boca which is on the south side of Canon Garrapatas, 1.4 miles east of Presa de la Boca. Even though we arrived after nightfall, we did the cave after eating a fantastic pitch-in dinner. The cave entrance is reached by climbing and crawling up a steep slope. The entrance is about 100 feet square and the cave is in Cupido limestone. This cave is really just one very large room with numerous mining pits for phosphates. La Boca has some but not many formations, and there are some very large bats which inhabit the cave.

We started the long drive back the next day. We stopped for a little sight—seeing and souvenir buying. After spending two hours trying to get out of Nuevo Laredo, we finally got to the border and across in about five minutes. We stopped in Laredo to eat and were "royally shafted" by a cafeteria there. Getting some gas in San Antonio, we arrived in Austin about 9:30 p.m. I was left there and the rest arrived in Temple about 11:30 p.m. The gas in Mexico was fairly cheap and not at all scarce. We hit one expensive station in our travels.

Sierra de El Abra

Date: Christmas, 1973
Destination: Sierra de El Abra
Reported by: Bill Russell

Cavers from four nations camped at the Los Sabinas campground during the 1973 Christmas season. Among the notables was Paul Courbon from France, author of Atlas des Grands Gouffres du Monde, an atlas of maps and descriptions of the deep caves of the world. He planned to visit Sotano de las Golondrinas to see personally if it was the world's greatest pit. Also present was Peter Lord, an English caver touring the caves of North

America, and Edwardo Castro, the second Mexican to do Sotano de las Golondrinas. Edwardo hopes to form a national organization similar to the National Speleological Society to include all the various groups interested in Mexican caving.

The first objective for most Austin cavers was the high part of the Sierra de El Abra north of Cd. Valles, S.L.P. Many of the caves in this area had only recently been discovered. The largest, Sotano de la Cuesta, a 570-foot drop into a large room, had only been entered last Christmas. The advance group of Neal Morris and Barbara Vinson had arrived in Valles Dec. 20. Neal and Barbara then walked up to the base Camp at Cueva de Tanchipa and surveyed 60 stations on the map of that cave, and then returned to the highway clearing and marked the trail. Jim Moor, Craig Bittinger, and Bill Russell arrived in Jim's VW on the evening of Dec. 22 and waited in Valles for Ronnie Fieseler, Susan Fieseler and Jim Goodbar to arrive on the bus. When they arrived, we rode out to Los Sabinas with our packs and rested. The next afternoon, Peter Strickland arrived in his truck with Peter Sprouse, Cindy Kane, Steve Zeman, Dino Lowery, Larry Wigginton, Logan McNatt, Ivy Abbington and Dave Hutchings. Peter's people went into town to eat and the rest loaded into Jim Rodemaker's and Marion Smith's four—wheel-drive pickups for the ride to the base of the mountain. Toward the end, the road was rough and everyone walked, but at least they didn't have to carry their packs until the end of the road. Peter Strickland's alternator ceased to function on the way to the base of the mountain, so those in his truck didn't arrive at Cueva de Tanchipa until the evening of Dec. 24, after walking from the highway with full packs. The two gallons of water each person needed to carry didn't make the packs lighter. Everyone spent Christmas eve in the jungle—shrouded shelter-like entrance to Cueva de Tanchipa.

Christmas day some cavers explored in Cueva de Tanchipa where Ron Fieseler and crew had blasted through a small hole the day before. Others followed a trail chopped through the jungle to Sotano de la Cuesta and Sotano de la Estrella, three kilometers to the north. Sotano de la Cuesta is the main attraction of the area, a 570-foot drop into the top of a large room a thousand feet long and 300 feet wide with a ceiling over 500 feet high, one of the largest rooms in a North American cave. The shaft of sunlight entering the room makes a spectacular sight even in December when it does not reach the floor. A summer picture of a person in the beam of light shining 500 feet from floor to ceiling would sweep any photo salon. There is light enough that a flash is not needed - - only a tripod. It is possible that there is another deep pit in the area, as Sotano de la Cuesta is not exactly where it was supposed to be ... a "black hole" in the jungle was seen from the air on the ridge between the "star-shaped sink" and the west slope of the range, and while looking for this pit Sotano de la Cuesta was found about 300 feet south of this ridge. It is possible that they are the same pit but it seems unlikely that their apparent positions from the air would be so different. A letter has been sent to John Fish for him to search his air photos of the region for a black hole about 1000 feet south of Cuesta. If there is another pit, it might be even more spectacular than

Cuesta, as we flew over the pit in July at noon on a bright, sunny day and could only see blackness from the air. Over a thousand man-hours were spent chopping trails into the "star-shaped sink" and it would be especially nice if another sink could be found with only a few hundred feet of chopping.

After photographing in Cuesta and Estrella, surveying between the entrances and clearing a shortcut trail, the cavers returned to the Los Sabinas campground, the center of caving in the Valles area. The next day we spent recovering and relaxing by visiting the local movie (6 pesos) and swimming in the nacimiento. For the next two days, we talked to the various groups stopping by the campground and tried to find guides to some local caves. We talked to a woodcutter we had met at Cueva de Los Monos two years ago about taking us to a "deep" pit he had told us about, but he had to go to a funeral. Returning to camp, we found Don Shofstall of convention fame and his group returning from caving in the Gomez Farias area. Bob Addis of Bob and Bob fame stopped by. Kyle Isenhard, Bill Bauman, John Wingert, Bill Combes, Gerald Hale and Peter Lord returned from doing the 1345—foot drop in El Sotano. A group mostly from Indiana consisting of Mike Van Note, Barb Ransom, Peter Syrusik, John Valainis, Joe Lieberz and Edwardo Castro went with Paul Courbon to Sotano de las Golondrinas. Paul then pronounced Golondrinas "the best shaft in the world," thus making it official. (Provatina is too cold anyway.) Two Indiana cavers, Eric Valainis and Tim Davis, climbed to the Window on the wall of Golondrinas after traversing narrow guano-covered ledges only to find it ended in a steep guano slope to the ceiling. They wanted something else to do, so we sent them to Sotano de San Antonio just off the highway to San Luis Potosi. A 360—foot drop into a deep pool was explored by John Fish several years ago but he did not swim to the shore, and when the pit was finally checked, it was found there was a short passage leading to another drop. Valainis and Davis descended this drop another 340 feet into a deep pool and the next drop was 120 feet into a deep pool. By that time the cold water (since the cave is high in the mountains) had taken its toll, so they returned to the surface. They didn't have wet suits so they called Valles for reinforcements. Alas, the only group equipped for wet caving (Pete Strickland's group) had already left for the mountains above Aquismon and a large group of cavers from the Rensselaer grotto in New York did not feel they were equipped for cold water either.(They knew what cold water was all about.)

Finally, it was time to return to Austin. Steve arranged for a guide to take him to some new caves found by woodcutters east of Los Sabinos and the various other groups departed to visit areas of interest.

Gruta del Palmito

Date:Jan. 18-21, 1974
Destination: Gruta del Palmito: Bustamante, Nuevo Leon, Mexico; Gruta del Carrizal: N.L., Mex.
Persons: Roy Brooks, Susan German, Jay Jorden, Preston Forsythe, Ron T. Kopel, Mary Conner, Neal Morris, Pete Strickland, John Steele, Rene Shields, Barbara Vinson, Willie Vinson
Reported by: Neal Morris

It was a dark and threatening evening as twelve cavers of the UTG met at the Kirkwood house. As the first drops of rain began falling, they loaded into Pete's Speleo-Power Wagon and Preston's Speleo—Honky Car and swerved onto Interstate 35. Into hail and blinding rain they drove while other vehicles were forced over to the side of the road. The rain gave way to strobe lightning and finally the sky was clear - - stars.

At Mexican Customs, our group all received visas easily, except for Ron. Although he had gotten his visa at the Mexican Consulate in Austin, he was refused several times. The customs official said that there was no way he could let a long-haired undesirable hippie like that into the Republic of Mexico. After explaining that Ron was part of our group and would only be in Mexico for two days, the official disgustedly stamped the visa with the admonishment, "Don't ever come back to Mexico without getting your hair cut, because there is no way you will get in!" Ron, who was on the verge of pulling his hair out, wandered from the building in bewilderment.

At the checkpoint 15 miles into Mexico, the guards told Peter to park the truck and get everybody out. We were led across the road to see the Jefe. "Why are you in Mexico?" he asked. "We are only a group of students from the University of Texas on our way to visit the caves of Bustamante," we replied. No problem . . . back on the road again, we reached Bustamante Canyon at 3 a.m. and camped.

The next morning in camp Peter said, "Get all your things ready for the cave now. When we get to the parking lot, we're not going to take an hour to unload the truck getting gear together . . . The truck will be open for five minutes. Then I'm locking it and hiking up the trail to the cave!" A few minutes later found Peter frantically searching for his good pants with the billfold in them. In a fruitless search the truck was completely unloaded. Finally, a systematic search of personal belongings found the missing pants in Rene's bedroll.

At the police station in Bustamante, the group ticket for the cave cost 5 pesos a person. The guide was at the entrance with the key and would turn on the lights for one hour. We were soon on the trail knee—high in cabrito. As we entered the cave, the guide said he would be gone before dark and that

we should lock the gate upon exiting. We took a leisurely tour of the cave, rigging the Birthday Passage and visiting the New Room. Unfortunately, Willie lost his billfold (visa, etc.) in the cave. We retraced his steps in vain, finding only three black combs, a shovel handle, a rotten glove and a buckle. We were out of the cave and down to the parking lot at 12:30 a.m. where we camped.

The next morning, a group of Laredo cavers drove up carrying the cave guide and his bicycle. They had been checking leads near Candela with some miners for guides. They also informed us that the building under construction in the parking lot was only a restaurant and not a sky ride to the cave as we had hoped. Going down the road into Bustamante, Preston's new muffler got torn from the belly—side of the Speleo—Honky Car.

Soon we were swimming in the sun-warmed pool outside the entrance of La Gruta del Carrizal. Some went in the cave; others did not. It was afternoon when we got hack to the pavement from Carrizal. We decided to split up and meet later at the Whataburger in Laredo. Preston would go back the normal route through Sabinas Hidalgo, and Peter would take the back-country route to Laredo for a scenic change of pace. Also, we decided, we couldn't hand in two Roy Brooks visas at one checkpoint. Preston roared off. Then Barbara noticed a red puddle where the Speleo Honky-Car had been. Peter slammed all the doors and gave chase in the Powerwagon at speeds up to 75 miles per hour and finally ran Preston off the road - — he never saw us coming up behind. There were two holes in the automatic transmission fluid pan suffered when Preston drove the Speleo-Honky Car on the rough road to Carrizal. The highway was red. Preston was towed to Sabinas Hidalgo. It was 6 p.m. Sunday afternoon and all the mechanic shops were closed tight. It was rumored that all the mechanics were drunk or asleep. Peter and Preston removed and cleaned the pan and soldered the holes with a Svea stove. Then Preston got out the Speleo-Honky Car manual to find out how many quarts of auto-transmission fluid to pour into the beast; his cries shattered the lazy Mexican Sunday evening: "Eleven quarts! Eleven quarts!" He was stunned and so was his pocketbook.

We were almost ready to leave when a fuse went out in the Powerwagon. The second one on the trip. Peter said the contacts were rusted and heating up the fuses until they melted out; he needed a file to clean them with. Preston went over to the filling station attendant to ask for a file. "Afilar, afilar?" Preston queried in a southern drawl while making the appropriate hand motions. The attendant led Preston into the bathroom. Everyone in the Powerwagon chortled, and Peter worked on the contacts with a screwdriver.

At the checkpoint, Pete handed the official seven visas. The official asked how many people. Peter said eight. The official started looking into the truck and counting people. I asked him where the bathroom was and Jay asked for his multiple-entry visa in order to create diversions. The official continued looking over the people and visas. The other official grabbed the car papers. Finally they said to go ahead. Willie was through without a visa.

At U.S. Customs, a lady official was too grossed out to look through

our stuff or even look at our dead turtle. It was a quick crossing.

We filled up our gas tanks and cans in Nuevo Laredo and were greeted in Laredo Sunday night by an open self-serve - - gasoline 20 cents cheaper than in Mexico. However, it was the only open station we saw in the U.S. all night.

Except for being pulled over by the Border Patrol and having to use a couple of cans of gas to get further than San Antonio, we drove in tandem averaging 55 miles per hour and arrived in Austin at 5:30 a.m. Monday. Rene skipped her morning class, Willie didn't understand his computer science lecture, etc. . . another successful caving trip.

NOTICE to anyone going to Bustamante, especially the Birthday Passage: one wallet containing many important cards and identification has been lost. If found, please mail to Willie Vinson, Box 8415/UT station, Austin 78712.

Gorman Falls

Date: Jan. 13, 1974
Destination: Gorman Falls, Tx.
Persons: Paul Bonner, Debbie Flanagan, James Jasek, Tommy Jo, Mimi Laurens Jane Laurens, Frances McCauley, Gary Parsons, Frank Sodek, Alicia Wisener
Reported by: Jane Laurens

The Temple Caving Association made one last trip together before school began. We went to Gorman Falls despite the foul and gross weather. Because it was chilly, we decided to do just Lone Bat Cave and any other hole we could crawl into up the hill. In Lone Bat, there were, surprisingly enough, three hibernating bats. We roamed all over that hill and discovered many possible chimney crevices, but because it was getting late, we finally decided to leave. The Austin-bound people arrived home Sunday at about 7 p.m. After gourging at a local fantastic Mexican Restaurant, we went to our respective dorms.

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