

December 1965

## **Association of Mexican Cave Studies Newsletter, Volume 1, No. 12, December 1965**

Association for Mexican Cave Studies

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THE ASSOCIATION FOR  
MEXICAN CAVE STUDIES

NEWSLETTER

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## Trip Reports

Persons: Ed Alexander, Stanley Everett  
Date: Friday, December 17-Tuesday, December 21, 1965  
Destination: Serranías del Burro  
Reported by: Ed Alexander

After leaving Austin on Friday, and driving until late in the night, we awoke Saturday morning at a roadside park near Del Rio, Texas under a light misting rain which drifted into the shelter and settled on us. Our objective was to drive into the Serranías del Burro and check several rumors of caves in these mountains which were at that time unvisited by the AMCS. The rumors were at best sketchy, mentioning only large depressions sighted by airplane pilots flying over the area. The various maps which we had brought with us were little better, showing only questionable roads at best.

### Saturday, December 18

We were checked through the Mexican Customs at Ciudad Acuña by 10 A.M. and drove on past the railroad station along the new paved road for 20 kms. to the Amistad Dam site. Realizing that we must have missed our turn, we returned to town and found the road to San Miguel just 3 kms. from the railroad. Here we turned left and began what was to be a 300 mile trek through the mountains before we would again find pavement. After two hours, we had covered the 65 kms. to San Miguel, where we talked with Mr. Barksdale who gave us directions to what he called Cueva de Iglesia. Following his instructions, we turned left off the main road and drove for two or three more hours covering another 60 kms. Here we were almost in the center of the mountain range and thinking we had far overshot the simple instructions, we arrived at San Vicente, which was exactly where we wanted to be.

Much to our surprise, we found Mr. Humphries, the owner of several interesting and deep caves near Langtry, Texas, visiting at San Vicente for a weekend of hunting. Since it was late in the day, we accepted his invitation to spend the night there and continue on to the cave the next morning. The evening was passed very profitably, since Mr. Humphries supplied us with much information on the area. Along with several cave leads, he gave us the location of the major ranch headquarters in the range along with some idea of which roads would get us through the mountains. It seems that a large portion of the Sierrinas (about 1.5 million acres) is owned by a Texan, Mr. Myer. The entire area is ranched by Americans, so we found little need of Spanish for several days.

### Sunday, December 19

After an early breakfast at the ranch, we drove on up

the road from the house for several miles and turned right into the first prominent canyon. We followed this road past the second stock tank, and keeping to the right, again entered the small canyon on the right wall. After a couple more kilometers, even the Land Rover could go no further, so we walked the remaining kilometer and found the cave developed in a prominence on the left side of the canyon about 200 feet above the arroyo. Cueva de Iglesia has two entrances: one about eight feet high by twelve feet wide, and the other twenty feet high by thirty feet wide. From these entrances led a passage for about 400 feet which varied in dimensions from eight to fifteen feet wide. The end came suddenly as the cave constricted to thirty feet of crawlway. The cave contained many flies, two ring-tailed cats, and large deposits of very dry bat guano. Near the entrance was also found what was probably bear droppings.

From the entrance could be seen another opening across the canyon, so we decided to investigate. Only a small shelter cave was found, but from there could be seen a much larger opening further up the canyon. There, high on the right side of the canyon we found the shelter which measured ten feet high, 25 feet wide, and 20 feet deep. The ceiling was discolored by smoke stains, the floor covered with very old deposits of ash, and the walls liberally displayed many faded Indian paintings. From this vantage point we could see nothing of obvious importance, so we returned to the car and retraced our path toward San Miguel. At the main road, which we had left the day before, we turned left since we had decided to attempt to completely circle the range and arrive in Muzquiz via Santo Domingo, another ranch headquarters only 30 miles southeast of Big Bend National Park. Dark soon overtook us and after 20 kms., we found it quite impossible to tell which of the many tracks across the desert was the one we desired. We camped there feeling very much as if we were the only people in the world. It was many miles and several hours by car to the nearest Mexican village.

#### Monday, December 20

Early in the morning, we were again driving in the direction of Santo Domingo. One ranch, two trucks, and 70 kilometers later we stopped near the top of the low pass through the range and checked one of the many openings we had been seeing along the base of the rimrock. The cave, which I believe is typical of all that we saw, was developed by weathering of the rock face by surface water draining down cracks just behind the surface. Below the small vertical fissures was a low crawl through the worst combination of powdery dust and cactus thorns which had been left by some inconsiderate animals. We retreated with our punctured bodies and drove 25 more kms. to Rancho de las Norias. There we talked with the mother of the owner, Charles Sellers, who gave us rather incomplete information and no directions to some bat caves somewhere in the area into which rustlers had thrown two ranchers years ago. Since Mr. Sellers was

gone somewhere, we drove on the remaining 50 kms. to Santo Domingo.

There we found Mr. Bridges, the ranch foreman (?), Mr. Myers, the owner who had flown in (we were only an hour from Del Rio by air), and Mr. Morris (?), an overseer of some kind who seemed to know the area very well. However, he knew of no notable caves, although he did remember a large depression near El Burro, a prominent peak we had passed earlier in the day. This possibly is the feature which has been sighted by airline pilots. After a pleasant supper with the Bridges, we learned that it would be possible to drive on to Muzquiz in only a few hours, so we decided to continue on our way (we had half-way expected to have to return over the long route we had just completed). Expecting a speedy return to civilization, we started on our way, only to be overtaken in ten miles by a flat tire and nightfall. The next 30 kms. were over the worst road that Humble has ever put on a map. Then, quite abruptly, we arrived at the main truck road into Muzquiz. Expecting smooth traveling for the rest of the trip, we settled back for the drive only to have the generator die in about ten minutes. The remaining 130 kms. to town and paved road consumed about two hours and one heavy-duty Land Rover battery. We camped at Muzquiz.

### Tuesday, December 21

The entire day was spent waiting while a shade-tree Mexican mechanic rewound the generator armature by hand. However, the day was not entirely lost, since it seems the area around Muzquiz has many more caves than the Serranías del Burro. By the time we left town at about 6 P.M., we had acquired several promising leads to nearby caves. We returned to Texas through Piedras Negras and drove on to Austin, arriving at about 3 A.M. the following morning.

Persons: Dan Evans, T. R. Evans, Richard Smith  
 Date: 20-25 December 1965  
 Destination: Rancho del Cielo  
 Reported by: T. R. Evans

Taking a few days leave in December for Christmas and Mexican caving, I arrived in Austin on 19 December. Few people were around who were available for a trip, and I had almost given up in despair when a crew from Alabama arrived: Bill Cuddington, Bill Tozer (who had come from Indiana), Dan Hale, and John Cole. After discussing possible areas to visit, we decided that the Rancho del Cielo area provided some of the best possibilities for deep pits. During June, 1964 James Reddell and David McKenzie had visited the area and were shown several pits near Rancho del Cielo by the owner Mr. Frank Harrison, a Canadian. Richard Smith agreed to go, and Dan provided transportation to the border for the three of us that

went from Texas. The Alabama group left ahead of us and by a different route, having agreed to meet us at El Encino the following day. Dan, Richard, and I left the morning of the 20th and arrived at the border in time to get an 8:30 PM bus south. We arrived at El Encino the next morning at 10, but after checking with a shop owner who speaks English, we found that the Alabama group had not arrived. Thinking they might have had car trouble, we got the first lumber truck heading up into the Sierra de Guatemala. Its destination was Julilo, a sawmill high up in the mountains, 4 1/2 miles from the ranch. The ride on the back of the truck up the jungle-covered mountains over the rock road was as fantastic as all Mexican truck rides have a habit of being. The trip up required over six hours. We got to Julilo around 3:30 PM and after buying a supply of tortillas, hiked the 4 1/2 miles to the ranch. Checking for caves along the way, we found nothing. We arrived at the ranch at dusk and were glad to find Mr. Harrison there, who welcomed us and let us sleep in his cabin. We explained that we were from the University of Texas and were friends of James and David who had been there looking for caves some months before. We told him we expected the others the following day and hoped to visit the pits he had shown the other cavers before.

The next morning, Mr. Harrison insisted on cooking for us (as he did from then on: a botanical expedition had left the day before we arrived and left a supply of meat) and then agreed to show us the pit area, located about a mile from the cabins. We found the pits and checked one — Dan went down and found it to be blind: depth 240 feet. The other was much deeper, more like what we had anticipated, so we returned to the ranch to wait for the others to arrive. When we got back, the other group had arrived and were anxious to get in some pit caving. That afternoon, we looked for caves and pits in a valley located near the ranch. A few small caves were found, nothing spectacular. We then made plans to hit the big pit the following morning. Places were provided for all by Mr. Harrison in the cabins he has on his property.

The next morning after breakfast (which Mr. Harrison cooked), we struck out for the pit. Mr. Harrison had work to do around the ranch and said he would be up a little later. The Alabama group came well prepared with several lengths of rope including a fantastic piece of 1/2 inch braided nylon, 869 feet long, a wonderful chunk of rope. The equipment was divided, and we went along with little difficulty. We succeeded in getting lost on the way and were rescued by Mr. Harrison who guided us the rest of the way. The pit was rigged with no trouble and entered by Bill Cuddington, Bill Tozer, Dan Evans, Dan Hale, and John Cole. Vertical Bill was the first down. Different people used different methods of descent and ascent, all quite successfully. Knots were tied in the rope to mark the depth, and the pit turned out to be 400 feet deep and blind. It was dark by the time we had de-rigged the pit and packed the gear, but we somehow made it back to the ranch without getting hopelessly lost. Mr. Harrison had a most welcome supper waiting.

The following day (Friday, 24 December 1965), we three from Texas left the ranch, while Mr. Harrison showed the other group a pit a mile or so below his house. In order to get back to the Inter-American Highway, we walked down to Gomez Farías from the ranch, a distance of 8 1/2 miles, then got a truck from there to the Highway. Mr. Harrison walked a mile or so with us, showing us several small caves he knew of. We got to Gomez Farías late in the afternoon and were soon being guided to a pit near there. It was most impressive, a 250 foot deep oval pit about 15 feet by 30 feet to a one foot deep pool. I went down and found the pit kept on going as a fissure passage then came on out. We thought the pit was virgin, but Terry Raines later informed us that it had been entered by him and was called "Sótano de El Molino". About 5:30 PM we got a truck to the Highway and succeeded in catching a bus to Victoria, change to Monterrey, change to Nuevo Laredo - arriving at 8 AM Christmas Day. The Alabama group planned to leave the ranch on Saturday and get their car which was left at El Encino (on the Inter-American Highway) and head further south for the Xilitla area.

The area around the Rancho del Cielo is all karst, but from what we saw, there has been a lot of floding and fracturing of the rock, thus not an abundance of pits or caves. Better areas are known to exist in other regions of the Sierra de Guatemala and further investigation will undoubtedly reveal more finds such as Sótano de la Joya de Salas. Barium and flouride mines also exist in the area.

Persons: John Cole, Bill Cuddington, Dan Hale, Bill Tozer  
 Date: 18-28 December 1965  
 Destination: Rancho del Cielo and the Xilitla area  
 Reported by: John Cole

At noon, December 18, John Cole, Dan Hale, Bill Cuddington, and Bill Tozer left Huntsville, Alabama and arrived in Austin, Texas at 2:30 PM December 19. Plans were made in Austin to rendezvous with T. R. and Dan Evans and Richard Smith at Rancho del Cielo where a man by the name of Frank Harrison would show us to some deep pits.

We drove down to El Encino, left the car with Carlos Gonzalez, and caught a lumber truck to Julilo where we spent the night of the 21st. Three burros carried our equipment to Harrison's place by noon the next day. That afternoon Dan Hale and I went with Harrison to a small cave about 200 yards from his cabin. It had one large room, 40 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 25 feet high filled with intricate speleothems, cave frogs, spiders, and millipedes. Meanwhile, everyone else searched for more pits in the area and found a pit and a cave. T. R. explored the cave and found some pottery, probably 30 to 50 years old. The pit was not explored because it needed equipment and did not look promising.

The next day we went to another deep pit (Dan Evans had explored one the previous day and found it to be 240 feet deep) which turned out to be a single drop of 400 feet against the wall and that ended in a circular, level floor 25 feet in diameter and covered with breakdown.

The following day, the 24th, the Texas crew left for Gomez Farias, while the rest of us went to explore another pit which turned out to be a deadend at 110 feet deep. Dan Hale and I then went to a cave near a Barium mine on a ridge across from Harrison's place. This was a medium size cave with several large rooms each filled with long speleothems including helictites. We spent several hours photographing. The next day we returned to El Encino by way of Gomez Farías. On the way to Gomez Farías the Mexican with the burros showed us two sótanos. The first one was ten feet from the road about 200 yards toward San Jose from where the road from Julillo intersects the road from Gomez Farías to San Jose. The pit was estimated to be 150 feet deep. We did not rig it but went on to another pit just outside Gomez Farías. Bill Cuddington explored it and later we found out that the Texas crew had visited it and its name was Sótano de El Molino. From here we headed on south to the Xilitla area.

We arrived in Xilitla Sunday morning, December 26, and found a student who seemed to know the area pretty well and who could show us some sótanos. The first cave he showed us was Cueva del Salitre. It has a very large entrance easily visible from the road between Xilitla and the Inter-American Highway. Sardino Treho said that it was over 100 meters deep and that he and his friends had climbed to the bottom without the need of a rope. We didn't climb down. Then he showed us the Sótano de San Antonio which we also didn't rig. We drove the station wagon on toward Ahuacatlan and Sardino quizzed the local people along the way about sótanos. We found one about 200 yards up a mountain from a culvert under the road. We rigged the 30 foot by 40 foot entrance and found the pit to be about 75 feet deep and about 50 feet by 70 feet across the 30 degree sloping floor. There were two caves at the bottom; one about 50 feet long and the other about 300 feet long, both draining into the pit. Neither had any formations or signs of life. We drove on to Ahuacatlan and inquired about sótanos. The local people reported two sótanos just the other side of town (Sótano de las Hoyas and Sótano del Pozo), both about 200 meters deep, but informed us that we had passed the biggest and deepest one about five miles back and just up the mountain from El Balcon. It was late so we returned to Xilitla for the night. Since we had only one more day left to do caving we decided to try the big one. The next day we found a local resident of El Balcon who said he knew where the big sotano was and would show it to us. The man from El Balcon said that the sótano was about one and a half or two hours up, but after four hours we were still climbing up the cow trail. At this point I asked one of the local people how far we had to go to get to the big, deep sótano. He informed me that it was still many hours up the mountain and pointed up the arroyo we had been following which we could see disappear into the clouds. Our route to this



looked very promising. Every 300 to 400 yards along the arroyo was a sink, no pit, but it did indicate a fantastic amount of internal drainage. After another ten minutes the man from El Balcon turned away from the arroyo and after another twenty minutes we arrived at a place called Rancho Buena Vista which had two disappointing sótanos. The first one was very narrow with many steep ledges down to 210 feet to a bat guano covered bottom. The other one was about twenty feet across and forty feet deep with a cow skeleton at the bottom. We returned to Xilitla for the night and began the trip to Huntsville the next day.

Persons: Ed Alexander, Dr. and Mrs. K. Alexander  
 Date: 25-30 December 1965  
 Destination: Santiago, Galeana, and Chamal  
 Reported by: Ed Alexander

Since the various caves and other locations of speleological interest visited on this trip were only part of a longer vacation, I will skip from place to place omitting the longer details of how we got there and back. The lack of continuity is intentional.

#### Gruta de Santiago (Cueva de la Boca)

We arrived at Santiago, just 35 kms. south of Monterrey, on Sunday, 26 December, and following the directions of a hotel clerk in Monterrey, we turned east off the highway onto the road to La Boca which circles the north side of the lake at Santiago. Continuing past the dam for two kilometers the rumored cave suddenly appeared on our right about 350 feet above the road. The entrance is quite impressive, being almost square and 100 feet on a side. From local residents we learned that the cave is presently being mined for phosphates and that we were fortunate in having arrived on a Sunday. The mine is normally in operation 24 hours a day, Monday through Saturday. Since ore is thrown down from the upper levels, the only time when the cave may be entered is Sundays. We were also told that the main passage was about 300 meters long to where upper levels could be entered which led to another entrance 300 meters higher on the mountain. Although we did manage to verify the length, the claimed depth (height ?) is still open to question.

Entering the cave, we found that the internal dimensions were just as impressive as those of the entrance. The ceiling lowered at one point to about 30 feet and then zoomed upward into two domes which may be as high as 200 feet. The second of these contained the access to the upper levels. The miners have constructed a wooden scaffolding which is four feet square and 45 meters high. After inspecting the construction of the tower, I decided that I didn't really have time to explore the upper levels anyway, so I settled on drawing a pace and compass sketch of the lower level on our way out of the cave. This section was found to be about 1200 feet long and 70 to 100 feet wide through much of its length.

Rayones to Galeana: La Puente de Dios

Monday morning, 27 December, found us in the small town of Rayones about 47 kms. west of Montemorelos. Our immediate destination was Galeana, located just off Mexico Highway 60. We were told that from Rayones the road was next to impassable, even with the Land Rover. The first half of the 35 km., four hour, trip was through the bottom of a dry canyon. Upon emerging at the head of the arroyo we soon came upon a Mexican who promised to lead us to a nearby cave. Since the area is rich in barium, it seems that we had not made our intentions clear enough, so after an hour hike we finally arrived at the Palacio mines. Interesting, but hardly worth the trouble.

Driving on, the road now followed another canyon floor for about 6 kms. This one however contained a permanent stream with which we shared the right-of-way. Finally the trail left the stream bed and angled up what was, by that time, the 200 foot high wall of the canyon. A left turn at the top put us directly over the canyon on the largest natural bridge which I have ever encountered. We of course stopped to investigate what the local people called La Puente de Dios (The Bridge of God), and parking the Rover at the top, we followed the trail leading down. The opening under the bridge is at least 130 feet high and 70 to 100 feet wide. Approximately 70 more feet of rock overlies the 200 foot long tunnel. Under the bridge and about 70 feet above the stream we found a shelter about 40 feet deep and across from us was another opening which we did not have time to check. The road from La Puente to Galeana is in fair condition, making this a worth while side trip for anyone in the area. The distance from Galeana is 9 kms.

This entire area has excellent potential as an important caving location. We picked up many reports of large caves and sótanos developed in the gypsum country around Galeana.

Chamal: Bee Cave

On Tuesday, 28 December, we again turned west off Highway 85 just north of Cd. Mante and drove through Chamal and on to Bee Cave which I had visited several months before. (See AMCS Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 6, p. 52.) Parking the Rover about 100 yards from the large vertical entrance, I was prepared this time to descend to the bottom on a 275 foot length of Goldline. At the end of the rope I found that I was still nearly 50 feet from the sloping, breakdown mountain below me. However, by traversing along a ledge I was able to reach the top of the mountain and thus climb on down to the bottom of the cave. It appears now that the cave is at least 300 feet deep, somewhat over my previous estimate. At the bottom I saw ahead of me a large passage, 50 feet high, leading off into the darkness. With visions of another long cave similar to those near Cd. Valles I rushed ahead only to find the end 400 feet beyond. Returning to the top, we repacked the car and departed.

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# NOTICE

Do you want to continue receiving all the latest speleological news from Mexico? Then don't forget to renew your membership in the Association for Mexican Cave Studies. Memberships at \$5.00 for the calendar year of 1966 are now being accepted.

## AMCS Plans for 1966

With this, the last issue of the AMCS Newsletter for 1965, it again becomes time to plan ahead and decide on a policy for 1966. Up to this time we have published what we believe is a very informative and useful Newsletter that will be an aid to Mexican speleology for many years to come. But, there are problems. If we were to continue on the same schedule of publication, in ten years we would be approximately three years and four months or forty issues behind! Obviously this can not continue, so after much talking, arguing, and what-have-you we have decided to begin publishing a Newsletter once every two months. In this way we can cut the time needed for addressing in half, minimize on postage expenses, provide more consistent news, but most important we can get the Newsletter out on time with the latest news.

The other decision we have made is to publish a bulletin once a year. Tentatively, the 1965 volume will be published during May, before the NSS Convention in California. This first bulletin will be a speleological road log between Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas and Tamazunchale, San Luis Potosi, and contain locations and descriptions of all large caves along the Inter-American Highway, maps of as many of these caves as possible, geologic descriptions of the different areas, locations of good camping spots along the Highway, and anything else that might be of interest to the caver as he heads south.

By now you should have noticed some great improvements in the Newsletter. More maps are being published along with better trip reports and a larger amount of useful information. But perhaps the greatest improvement has been the offset lithography which has been made available to the AMCS within the last couple of months at no additional cost. This enables us to put out a very neat-looking, easy to read Newsletter complete with photographs and illustrations. We hope that the AMCS can continue to make this kind of progress during the coming year and thus offer more benefits to its members.

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The AMCS Newsletter is published monthly by the Association for Mexican Cave Studies, P.O. Box 7672 Univ. Station, Austin, Texas 78712. Membership in the AMCS is \$5.00 for the calendar year, with memberships starting at the first of each year. Persons joining after the first of the year will receive all back publications for that year.

Members are urged to submit articles for publication. Maps submitted for publication should be of a type suitable for copying onto a standard or legal size master or for printing. Longer articles with detailed maps are invited for publication in a bulletin. Trip reports are requested from all trips.

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|-----------------------|--|
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Note: An index for Volume I of the Newsletter is now prepared and will be ready soon. For those of you planning to have your issues bound, wait until you receive this index so you can include it in the volume.