

March 1965

## **Association of Mexican Cave Studies Newsletter, Volume 1, No. 3, March 1965**

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THE ASSOCIATION FOR  
MEXICAN CAVE STUDIES

NEWSLETTER

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Caves of the Sierra de El Abra  
Part II Los Sabinos, S.L.P.

Volume 1    Number 3

March 1965

Reprint

# Trip Reports

Persons: Ed Alexander, John Fish, Janie Calvert, Jim Dunlap,  
 - Danny Evans, and Terry Raines  
 Date: 20-29 January 1965  
 Destination: Mante Area  
 Reported by: Ed Alexander

The semester break trip to the Mante area in Tamaulipas set out with the primary purpose of locating Sotano de Venadito which was known to be somewhere east of Highway 85 and Rancho de Venadito. Leaving Austin on Wednesday, 20 Jan., I headed for Mante alone to do some preliminary searching until the rest of the group could join me on Saturday. From Laredo I caught the train to Monterrey where, after a short delay, I found the bus station having a bus going to Mante. Arriving in Mante at about dawn on Thursday I boarded the 6:45 second class, local toward Valles. Sixteen stops later I got off at the Venadito sign several miles south of Antigua Morelos and began the nine kilometer hike along the road to the east to Rancho de la Noria. The ranch lies in a small valley at the western base of Sierra de El Abra, and was in the general area where we believed Sotano de Venadito to be located. However, upon arriving at Noria no one knew of the large sotano and furthermore I would have to return to Mante for permission from Senor Edgar Vibina to enter several smaller sotanos on the ranch. After more talking they finally agreed to show me the entrances to some of the closer pits, and in a matter of minutes had led me to the tops of four sotanos and were talking of more. Thinking it may be worth the trouble to check these pits I hiked back to Highway 85 and caught the next bus to Mante and the required permission from the patrone.

The next day, Friday, I was again getting off the bus at Venadito and hiking along the road to Noria, with a written permit in my pack to enter the sotanos. About half way back to the ranch I met a mule with a rider named Antonio who was to become our guide for the next four days. He said he knew of a large sotano about three kilometers away and proceeded to lead me down an arroyo several kilometers south of Rancho de la Noria. After following the arroyo for about one kilometer we were in a canyon about thirty feet deep. Then every thing came to an end and I found myself looking down the entrance of Sotano de Venadito. Since I was to be joined the next day by more cavers from Austin we returned to Antonio's house where I spent the night.

After waiting for about half of Saturday morning for the rest of the group, I told Antonio that I was going back to Rancho de la Noria to check the sotanos I had seen there on Thursday. He immediately dropped his corn husking, got out his mule and came with me. At Noria I entered one of the sotanos and a short shelter cave. On the way to another sotano, the truck arrived from Texas with Terry, Jim, John, and Janie. We decided to make camp and rest up for the trip into Sotano de Venadito the next day.

Sunday morning Antonio and his friend Pancho met us and the now enlarged group of seven headed for the sotano. Terry, John, Janie, and I rappelled in the entrance drop of 150 feet and then

down a second drop of 60 feet. From there we chimneyed down a descending canyon for over 100 feet more until we were stopped by a 50 foot drop. The cave apparently continued on and down with no decrease in size. After checking a connecting pit near the entrance drop we prusiked out and returned to camp.

Monday morning early Antonio and Pancho again dropped by our camp and offered to guide us to several caves they knew of in the sierras. Thinking that perhaps they would lead us to some great new caverns, we accepted the offer and followed them up a jungle covered, thorn infested mountain to finally find two small shelter caves, Cueva de Joya de Aguacate nos. 1 and 2. Back down the two or three kilometers of mountain to the truck, we were then led several miles south along the sierras to Sotano de Don Pedro, a small 120 foot pit inhabited by a single rat. By this time Antonio, who had watched us enter several pits, decided it was time for him to try. We clipped him into a seat sling and watched him disappear over the edge, and then later reappear on Terry's Jumars. Leaving the Venadito area and the newly converted caver we drove to Antigua Morelos where we camped expecting to meet Danny the next morning.

That morning, Tuesday, we didn't see Danny in the town so we drove on north to the turnoff to the town of El Pachon. While we were stopped there asking directions to Cueva del Pachon the second class, local to Valles came by and discharged Danny and his pack beside us. Our full group of six then located the cave just up the hill from the town well and spent several hours mapping, collecting blind fish, and photographing bats. Leaving the cave we drove back to Mante and made camp at El Nacimiento del Rio Mante where we spent the rest of the day reorganizing the truck, catching up on our notes, and swimming in the crystal clear, blue-green water. El Nacimiento is one of the large resurgences along the eastern base of the mountains, indicative of large cave systems somewhere higher up in the sierras. On Wednesday we drove to Cueva de Quintero where we did some mapping and exploring. At the end of the cave we entered several hundred yards of passage, part of which was virgin and the remainder of which had only been entered a few times in the past. That night we again camped at El Nacimiento.

Thursday was to be our last day in Mexico, so we repacked the truck and drove south to the pass through the sierras for a short visit to Cueva de El Abra. Much impressed by the large entrance and enormous sky light we climbed back into the truck and began the long trek back to Texas. We passed through Laredo customs at about midnight and arrived back in Austin at 4:00 a.m.

Persons: -Bud Frank, Orion Knox, David McKenzie, and John Porter  
 Date: 19-25 January 1965  
 Destination: La Joya de Salas  
 Reported by: David McKenzie

(Ed. note: The unusually detailed descriptions in this trip report are given in order to familiarize the reader with the Gomez Farias area. It is believed that with further exploration this area will become as important as some of the other pit areas such as Tequilla, Ver. and Xilitla, S.L.P.)

19 Jan. At 6:30 a.m. we left Austin in John's pickup. We arrived in Reynosa at 2:40 p.m. and spent one hour crossing the border. At 8:00, after a 194 mile drive, we reached Victoria and, with some difficulty, found the Juamave road. We camped beside it in the foothills west of town.

20 Jan. We left early and began climbing the scenic range that separates Victoria and the Juamave valley. It is the northern extension of the Sierra de Guatemala which, in the Gomez Farias area, contained caves we hoped to visit -- mainly a large rumore sotano at La Joya de Salas. It was our faint hope to find a route on the less precipitous side of the range,--as several recent attempts at Encino failed due to deep, non-traversable ruts in the road. The elevation of Juamave is 750 meters as compared to the 120 m. of Encino, where a steep and narrow lumber road climbs to 2000 m. and then down to 1550 m. at La Joya.

The 38 km. road to Juamave is very impressive; but as it is only partially finished, it would punish a car with low clearance. Two of us rode the pickup's tailgate to see more of the scenery. At the halfway point, where the road reaches its highest elevation, we stopped at a store-dwelling for "refrescos". We were told of a sotano and several caves in the arroyo just south of there, probably easily approached by the "old road" which goes to a nearby ranch.

We continued west, dropping to the valley floor, and then moved south over extremely dusty roads to the small desert town of Juamave. The vast cactus-treed landscape is remarkable in its contrast to the tropical scenery one encounters near Encino. To the east we could see the tremendous and remote canyon of the Guayalejo River which cuts its way through the anticlinal range. At a general store in town we asked if there was a road from there to La Joya, about 35 km. away. But far from it, there was only a rough, seldom-used trail, where one could "get lost and die of thirst without a guide". We weren't inclined to doubt this and, as we were anticipating a deep cave, we intended trying every possibility of getting our heavy gear to the entrance.

More anxious than ever to reach the cool mountain cloud forest, we drove back to Victoria, bought a few forgotten necessities, and went 48 miles south to Encino. We then drove west, crossed the scenic Rio Sabinas, and continued through spectacular tropical forest to a difficult stretch of road requiring a laborious breaking down of its high center. A noisy flock of parrots and a great variety of butterflies contributed to the new atmosphere. At 4.8 miles from Encino we beat the Juamave dust out of our sleeping gear and camped for the night.

21 Jan. While struggling with the road, we let two lumber trucks pass carrying water to the first lumber camp, Julilo, at about 1300 m. The passage of the second truck along this stretch was slow and precarious, and after helping it across we were offered a ride to Julilo. Reluctantly we accepted, having hardly started our climb of the range. An emergency-brake failure, which nearly wrenched off the right door of the pickup had further discouraged us. We hurriedly condensed our equipment to four heavy packs and a 1300 ft. collection of rope which included the veteran "600 ft." length.

The 4000' climb to Julilo was truly exciting. Thick jungle usually limited vision to within a few feet of the road, but higher up there appeared impressive views of the plain. When a conspicuous pit entrance 15' from the road came into view, we stopped and dropped in a few rocks. Sotano de Maria, as it is called, is an unentered shaft dropping 90' to a slope or ledge. Other attractions along the road were a recently killed fer-de-lance hung on display and a "murderous" tropical stinging nettle called "mala mujer". A brush with this plant, whose stalk is often over ten feet tall, is like a wasp sting. After the immediate pain, an itching sore will develop and may last for more than a week.

Julilo consists of about six family dwellings and a sawmill whose main product is slats for fruit crates. It is surrounded by a cool pine and hardwood cloud forest, which for eight months of the year, experiences daily rainfall. When we arrived we were shown to a tin-roofed shack where we could stay and store our gear. After eating, we learned that trucks rarely go to La Joya, an agricultural community no longer operating as a lumber camp. Sadly, we would have to hike the rugged 10 km. to La Joya, leaving most of our heavy rope behind.

That afternoon, craving exercise, we hiked toward La Perra a lumber camp 7 km. from Julilo and approx. 1900 m. high. We rode a truck for half the distance. Tall karst pinnacles provide a weird setting for this larger camp. The water source is Agua Linda, where a stream issues from a small cave and sinks within a few hundred yards. Hiking south about 2 Km. we came upon a spectacular panorama at the mountain's eastern drop-off. The edge of the large sink or "dolina" where we stood was in late afternoon shadow, but the plains steeply below us were covered with brightly lit clouds.

We walked back to Julilo, reaching our house at nightfall. We planned to hike to La Joya the next morning, carrying our packs and 400' of rope.

22 Jan. We made an enthusiastic early start. When we had climbed about 1000', our morning burst of energy nearly gone, we met two men who convinced us we had taken the wrong road from Julilo. While this logging road ended within 200 meters, the correct route looped far to the north. They said, however, that La Joya was a mostly downhill walk from La Perra, for which the logs they were loading were destined.

We rode the truck to La Perra, balanced carefully on the huge, shifting logs. On arriving, we bought some Pepsi, candy and crackers at a store counter. We then started northwest through thick pine forest, threading our way through tall limestone spires ornamented with large agaves. Occasionally we checked large sinks for caves but found none, as the thick humus and topsoil allowed little chance for an entrance. Finally we made the top of the range, and the man we had met just previously said we were still six km. from La Joya. We encountered a sotano about 30 ft. from the and hoping to at least collect some cave invertebrates, I quickly checked it. The 70' pit entrance leads to a steep passage dropping an additional 80' to a high, circular dome-room 40' in diameter. We named it 2000 Meter Cave. The fauna was interesting, but scarce due to the dryness.

As the road gradually descended, we noticed the change to a vegetation supported by less rainfall: stout oaks and far less undergrowth among the pines. There was little of the jagged karren which characterizes the eastern slopes of the range at nearly all elevations. After passing the site of an old sawmill, we came to what we thought was a huge sink; but Orion checked and found a narrow canyon continuing down. He also discovered bear tracks near a small pool.

Soon we were standing at the brink of the broad valley of La Joya de Salas. The view was magnificent; we could see the blue gleam of a lake perched behind a remote ridge, but nowhere was there sign of inhabitation. While searching for good camera viewpoints, John came upon an even greater spectacle. Orion's canyon was now an awesome slot, our rocks floating free for seven seconds before crashing on the distant floor! We were later told that the canyon runs south to eventually enter the Rio Boquilla near Ocampo, about 25 miles distant.

The road ended and we began descending the switchbacks of a crude trail. It was late afternoon and, suspecting we had missed the right route, we started hiking cross-country to the lake. The karst of the valley floor was strangely different from anything we had seen. The level ground was covered by a smooth carpet of grass, now yellowed and dry. And beneath the canopy of pines were scattered innumerable sinks, each denoted by a jumble of exposed rocks. We wandered west for at least a mile, then crossed the ridge separating the northern extension of the valley, which contained the lake and surrounding village. When we told a villager of our plans, he eyed our ropes and said the sotano was "muy profundo" — much too deep. He knew of no other caves in the area and was sympathetic that we made such a long futile hike.

We decided to camp in the long, treeless pasture just beyond the lake, where a group of boulders blocked the wind. The sotano, just 300 yards farther, we would face in the morning.

23 Jan. When we sorely crawled out of our frost-covered sleeping bags, we realized how effectively the cloud blanket at Julilo — at about the same elevation — protects it from such a sharp drop in temperature at nightfall. While eating breakfast, we watched the numerous and active teal on the lake.

We truly admired the idyllic setting of La Joya; the small thatched houses did little to alter the area's natural appearance. The only water source for some 300 inhabitants and their livestock is the shallow lake, which drains the long valley meandering north. When it occasionally dries, water is trucked 25 km. from the Rio Sabinas, which resurges at the base of the range northwest of Encino. Our inquiry supported what Frank Harrison had told James Reddell and myself during a summer visit to the cloud forest at Rancho del Cielo. He said the lake was artificially created when a "resumidero", or sinkhole, was somehow plugged. Harrison also remembers when an unusually long heavy rain rose the lake and caused a violent and spectacular whirl-pool at the entrance of the larger sotano!

We found it situated only two hundred feet in front of the village schoolhouse. It is indeed an imposing shaft; the maximum top dimensions are 40' by 115' with its smooth walls dropping sheer for nearly three hundred feet. At the narrow west end,

however, we could see a ledge about 85 feet down, and from there we could tie our longest rope. There was virtually nothing but smooth rock ledges around the entrance so we used an expansion bolt for a tie-off. While about forty amazed spectators watched we all rappelled to the ledge, where another bolt was necessary. I then began a brake-bar rappel to the bottom, somewhat doubting the adequacy of the 200' rope. I reached the rock covered floor with six feet to spare.

There were several ways to go; the most obvious was a bone dry passage leading, as we would have hoped, to another long drop—probably exceeding a hundred and fifty feet. The passage was so thoroughly scoured that a rock for gauging the drop could be found only at the bottom of a deep pothole. The cause of the extreme dryness was fully realized when the acetylene flame fluttered strongly as I walked back toward the entrance. The cool air pouring in the cave was, of course, a fascinating sign.

The other passages were minor. The longest contained a small pool at the end, where aquatic isopods were collected. One alcove near the entrance contained scores of leopard frogs. The most exciting find was a number of totally blind, white crickets.

Using Jumars, I ascended to the ledge. We then prusiked to the top and discussed our discoveries with the spectators. They were particularly interested in the water.

To say a Mexican cave is "promising" certainly needs to be clarified. As we had jokingly predicted when we left most of our equipment at Julilo, our 400 feet of rope was "wiped out" before we could even escape the twilight zone. Furthermore, the massive lower cretaceous limestone in the Gomez Farias region supposedly is of unlimiting thickness. But where is the drainage of this system at La Joya destined? Most likely for one of two large resurgences: the Rio Frio and the Rio Sabinas the latter being the least distant and a good 4500 feet below!

We spent the afternoon seeing more of the surrounding area. Crickets were collected in a dry ninety foot crawlway named Cueva de la Escuela. The "maestro", with whom we discussed our plan to return to La Joya, offered us the fenced-in school yard for our campsite.

24 Jan. Early morning was devoted to photography and preparing for our hike to Julilo. John and I would try the 10 km. road; while Orion and Bud would go through La Perra, hoping to find a misplaced hardhat and logbook.

Our route took us through still another type of terrain. We followed a narrow, winding valley containing large oaks draped with Spanish moss. Fortunately we met no problem intersections, and it was about noon when we could relax on the cabin floor. Soon after, Bud and Orion staggered in, having walked about 15 km.

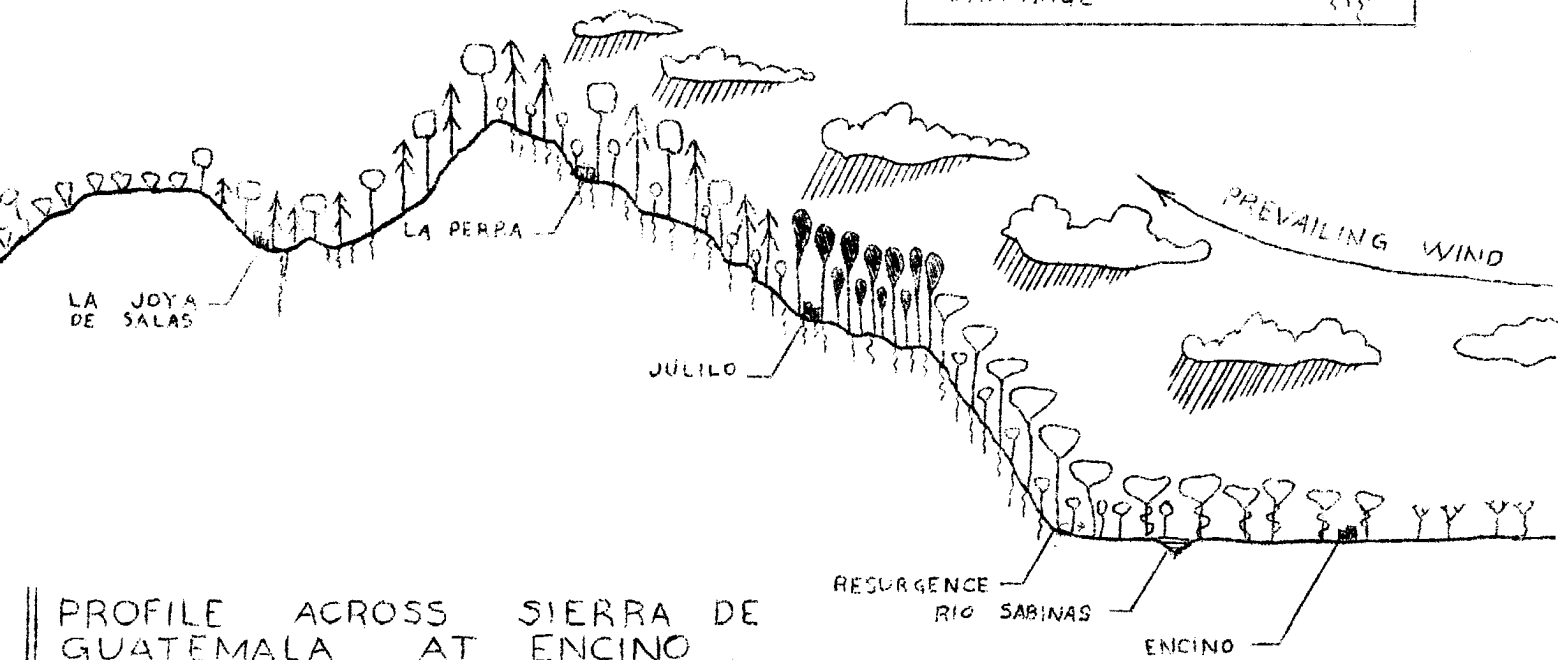
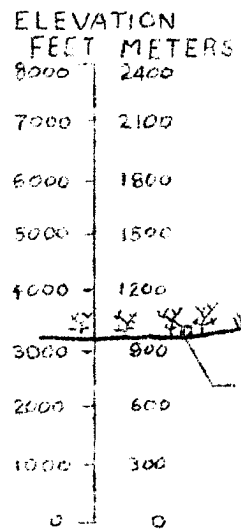
At nearly nightfall we caught a truck loaded with fresh-cut railroad ties destined for Encino. The wild ride to our pickup took about 2 hours. We reached Encino with little delay, our luck with the weather having been remarkable. We drove to Victoria, bought some "pan dulce", and went 30 miles north to camp.

(continued)



# KEY TO SYMBOLS

THORN FOREST	Y Y Y Y
TROPICAL DECIDUOUS FOREST	Y Y Y Y
TROPICAL SEMI- EVERGREEN FOREST	Y Y Y Y
CLOUD FOREST	Y Y Y Y
HUMID PINE - OAK FOREST	Y Y Y Y
DRY OAK - PINE FOREST	Y Y Y Y
CHAPARRAL	Y Y Y Y
THORN DESERT	Y Y Y Y
SUBTERRANEAN DRAINAGE	Y Y Y Y



PROFILE ACROSS SIERRA DE  
GUATEMALA AT ENCINO

25 Jan. We enjoyed the morning drive to Monterrey. Encountering few problems, we crossed at Laredo and finally arrived in Austin at 11:00 p.m.

We had used surprisingly little carbide during the trip, but we were now assured that the sotano at La Joya de Salas is well worth the concentrated effort needed to reach it.

## Caves of the Sierra de El Abra

### Part II Los Sabinos, S.L.P.

The village of Los Sabinos, located about 8 miles north of Valles, is the center of a small area containing more cave passage than all the rest of the El Abra range. Within 5 km. of this village are located six of the largest caves in the range. At present exploration of this area has barely begun. Of the six large caves, mapping of all large passages is almost complete in two, two others have had incomplete but extensive exploration, and two have had only their entrance sections visited. Topographically the area consists of rolling, brush and jungle covered hills. The area is drained by normally dry arroyos that lead into the caves. Elevations in the area range from about 200 to 250 meters. The nearest resurgence is the Nacimiento near the Hotel Taninul 10 km. to the southeast at an elevation of about 90 meters. It is likely that several of these caves will eventually be connected. At present not enough mapping has been done in the area to make it possible to speculate on the detailed speleogenesis. The limits of this area are not known and it is entirely possible that more large caves may be discovered.

#### Sotano del Arroyo

B. Russell

The entrance to this large cave is located about three miles east of the Cd. Valles-Cd. Mante highway, and about three miles SE of the village of Los Sabinos. The cave can be reached by traveling east from Los Sabinos for about one mile and following the normally dry arroyo to the cave. Near Los Sabinos the arroyo has low dirt banks, but near the cave it goes over several climbable falls before dropping fifty feet into the cave. This entrance is a rectangular slot, almost 200 feet deep except on the north end where the arroyo enters. Several passages lead from this entrance. Thirty feet above the floor and below the arroyo a passage averaging about eight feet in diameter goes for about 800 feet to where it is almost blocked by flowstone. Even though this passage is thirty feet above the floor of the sink, water appears to enter it during floods. Several other passages leaving the entrance sink at the same level have not been explored. The main passage of the cave leaves the south end of the sink and continues for about 1000 feet to a 50 foot drop. This section of the cave averages about twenty feet wide and thirty feet high, and shows signs of violent flooding. There are several pools from three to five feet in depth that must be crossed in this passage, though after the longer dry periods some of them are dry. About 500 feet from the entrance a right branch

The Water Passage, leads from the base of a small drop behind a curtain of formations. This passage extends for about 200 feet to a right turn through a small hole into a deep lake. This lake is about 200 feet long with about three to four feet of clearance. At the end of the deep water the passage goes over a series of travertine dams and drops into a larger passage that extends for about 1500 feet to where it reduces to a crawlway.

The first drop in the main passage, about 45 feet, leads over polished limestone into a larger section of the cave. From the base of this drop a passage about thirty feet wide and six feet high extends to a room. This room is triangular in plan and about 200 feet on a side. From where the main passage enters the room slopes steeply upward to the right, and downward over a steep breakdown to a lake. Across this lake is a low section of passage with only a few feet of clearance. This passage then enlarges and leads to a drop of about 30 feet to water. It is not known if a traversable passage extends from the base of this drop.

Another passage heads east from the base of the drop leading to the triangular room. This passage first leads up a steep slope to the level of the entrance passage. It then makes a right turn and continues for about 200 feet averaging 15 feet wide and 10 feet high. By making a right turn and climbing through formations it is possible to reach a room about 10 feet high and 20 feet leads for about 300 feet to a lake that forms the end of this passage.

This is the best known of the large caves of the El Abra range, with over a mile of mapped passage. If there are no further discoveries, the map may be completed in a few trips. The entire cave appears to flood about every other year after heavy rains.

Sotano de la Tinaja

D. McKenzie

Though none of the large "resumideros" in the El Abra range are fully explored, Sotano de la Tinaja promises to exceed all in size and complexity. At present, about 9000 feet of voluminous passage has been traversed and, aside from many leads, the major drainage channels appear to continue undiminished on size.

The cave is approached by following a canyon-like arroyo to its end, where the surrounding walls are nearly 200 feet high. The drops in the arroyo previous to the cave entrance are climbable. A descending passage extends east from the entrance and averages 30 feet by 15 feet high. Beyond 500 feet it abruptly enlarges and attains widths and heights exceeding 75 feet. The floor consists of large, smooth boulders often covered with slippery vampire bat guano. Soon after one traverses alongside a deep lake, an unclimbable 25 foot drop is encountered. The cave has been mapped to this point by zoologists from the American Museum of Natural History who, in 1947, made a study of the blind fish of the area.

Beyond the drop, which is approximately 1200 feet from the entrance, a 25 by 50 foot high passage leads acutely to the northwest; while the east-trending passage, becoming high and narrow, appears to be blocked by formations about 350 feet further. Recently, however, a narrow side passage was discovered above a short climb on flowstone. This quickly leads to a drop of about 60 feet into a large room or passage—as yet unentered.

The northwest passage continues a few hundred feet to the

"main intersection". Previous to this is the stoopway entrance to a 500 foot long linkage passage, some parts of which are attractively decorated. At the intersection, a large passage directed NW SE is encountered. To the right it is narrow, passing through formations, and soon reaches a room to which the linkage connects. The main passage continues east several hundred feet to a 30 foot drop. The muddy, debris-covered floor indicates it is a major course for the arroyo's water. To avoid the lake below the drop, a ledge can be traversed for about 70 feet to a better tie-off point. The passage descends rapidly beyond. It is very high and usually less than ten feet wide at the lowest level. Exploration is tedious because handlines are frequently necessary and pools must be traversed. Finally one reaches a 60 foot drop into a large room apparently denoting a "T" intersection. Its approximate dimensions are 150 feet long, 100 feet wide, and over 100 feet high. A deep lake requiring floatation gear has limited further exploration.

The passage extending NW of the main intersection is, so far, the most impressive part of the cave. The broad meandering gallery, commonly 50 feet wide and 25 feet high has been followed for about 5000 feet. The floor is a stream-bed, usually dry, with many sand and gravel bars forming undulations. Organic debris is almost entirely lacking. Large columns, stalagmites, and flowstone deposits are numerous and often very colorful. About 3000 feet from the intersection is a narrow section of passage with deep travertine pools which contain the best water yet found in the cave. At this point a side passage has been explored which, by way of a series of rooms and crawls, intersects a large solution room perhaps 600 feet long. With respect to drainage, it seems unrelated to the rest of the cave.

At about 1500 feet beyond the pools a large lake is encountered. (a shallow one just previous is easily passed.) It is about 200 feet long and averaging 40 feet wide, with the ceiling varying from 6 feet to 40 feet above the water. Mostly waist deep, the lake can be crossed by holding to formations. Just beyond, a clay-floored side passage to the left leads to a formation block and crawlway not fully explored.

The main passage continues to another lake where progress is halted by a broad natural bridge. Because it siphons beneath, one must pass through the wide crawlway above which leads to a 20 foot sheer drop into deep water. The passage apparently continues with large dimensions, but floatation gear will likely be necessary for further exploration. A connection with S. del Arroyo may well be suspected since this is an "upstream" passage and it appears to trend northwest. Several side passages along its sinuous length remain unchecked.

Another lead worth mentioning is an obscure passage extending northwest at a point just 150 feet from the cave entrance. Its approach is through a 100 foot long "slot" with a drop-down through large boulders at its end. A 40 foot wide passage extends from here, its low ceiling necessitating a crawl over smooth rocks. It contains an air current and obviously takes much of the arroyo's water.

The fauna of the cave, which is quite extensive, will be covered in a future report dealing with the Los Sabinos area. Of primary interest is the blind fish Anoptichthys, common in

every pool of any size. Peculiar objects deposited throughout the cave are the large two-pronged thorns of the Bull-horn Acacia, a bush common in the Valles Area.

#### Cueva de los Sabinos

B. Russell

The entrance to Cueva de los Sabinos is located about 4 km. east of the village of Los Sabinos, at an elevation of 560 feet. The cave has not been visited by AMCS members, the information in this report coming from a excellent map and report published by the American Museum of Natural History. The entrance to this cave is about 100 feet high and 50 feet wide and leads into a room 200 feet long, and up to 100 feet wide. From this room a large passage extends north and east for about 200 feet. Southwest from the entrance room a 20 by 20 foot passage leads for 200 feet to a 110 foot drop at the bottom of which is a passage of the same size and direction. After 100 feet this passage enlarges to form a series of rooms that extend for 500 feet to where the passage appears to end in a pool. Two hundred feet from the drop there is another large passage leading to the SE, that soon turns and leads back almost under the entrance. This passage is about 20 feet wide and high, with much of the floor being covered by deep pe. From near the entrance this passage turns south and after 500 feet drops 50 feet into a room. The passage leading from this room is at an elevation of 235 feet, which is 325 feet below the entrance and very near the level of the resurgence at Taninul. The passage at this level is very nearly filled with water and the total length of the passages mapped by the Museum was about 3000 feet. The purpose of the Museum's visit to the cave was to investigate the biology, especially the blind fish.

#### Sotano de Montecillos

D. McKenzie

Typical of the other large caves in the area, the impressive entrance is situated at the end of a large, deep arroyo. A 50 foot drop must be equipped to enter the cave; a 20 foot drop in the arroyo just previous must be climbed. The cave consists of two parts. The water of the arroyo enters a 20 by 50 foot high passage leading east to what is known locally as "el sotano". Directly opposite this is "la Cueva", a 30 by 30 foot passage extending underneath the arroyo.

The sotano is encountered about 150 feet within the east passage. A flowstone slope prevents getting close to the pit which is apparently over 100 feet deep and beneath a very high dome. There is water at the bottom — most likely a plunge pool. Local people say that the president of Valles once encouraged an exploration of the pit with the intention of installing a water pump if feasible. A platform has been built atop the 150 foot cliff at the entrance.

The west passage enlarges beyond the entrance and contains several massive formations. It continues large for about 200 feet where it lowers to a clay floored stoopway and goes several hundred feet to become a water passage. From the large section two major side tunnels lead south; water is encountered in each after a few hundred feet. Flotation gear will probably be required.

The fauna included animals common to other caves in the area. Spiders, phalangids, silverfish, aquatic and terrestrial isopods.

and crickets. Blind fish were numerous in all three passages of the west section. Bats were heard in the dome above the pit.

#### Sotanito de Montecillos

D. McKenzie

The entrance, situated in the floor of the arroyo leading to the previous cave, is a vertical well approx. 110 feet deep. The 8 by 5 foot opening is partially covered by a thick limestone slab. From the bottom of the bell-shaped shaft a high, irregular passage averaging 15 feet wide and dropping occasionally leads south. After about 300 feet a cross-passage is reached. To the right, it extends to an unexplored watercrawl. Southeast past a large flowstone curtain, is the passage through which the flood water is directed. It is a large meandering stream channel averaging 20 feet by 20 feet with several high domes. The cross sections are often interesting; one is sometimes winding his way through a deep, narrow slot cut in the floor. The passage meanders so greatly that, at one point, a "cut-off" has formed. One can bypass a loop by climbing through an opening in the thin passage wall. It was explored for about 2000 feet to a lake where flotation gear is necessary. The passage is still large at this point.

Back near the intersection a steep climb on flowstone leads to a small side passage directed north. This shortly opens into a large irregular gallery containing numerous formations. It descends fairly rapidly reaching a depth well below the level of the water channel. After 500 feet a 30 foot drop has stopped exploration. An 18 foot drop just previous to this must also be equipped.

Further exploration of this cave will almost surely prove a connection with the other sotano. A survey of the two should be an enjoyable and interesting project.

Numerous pools in the water channel contain blind fish. Several dormant bats were seen on the ceiling of one small side passage.

#### Cueva de Leon

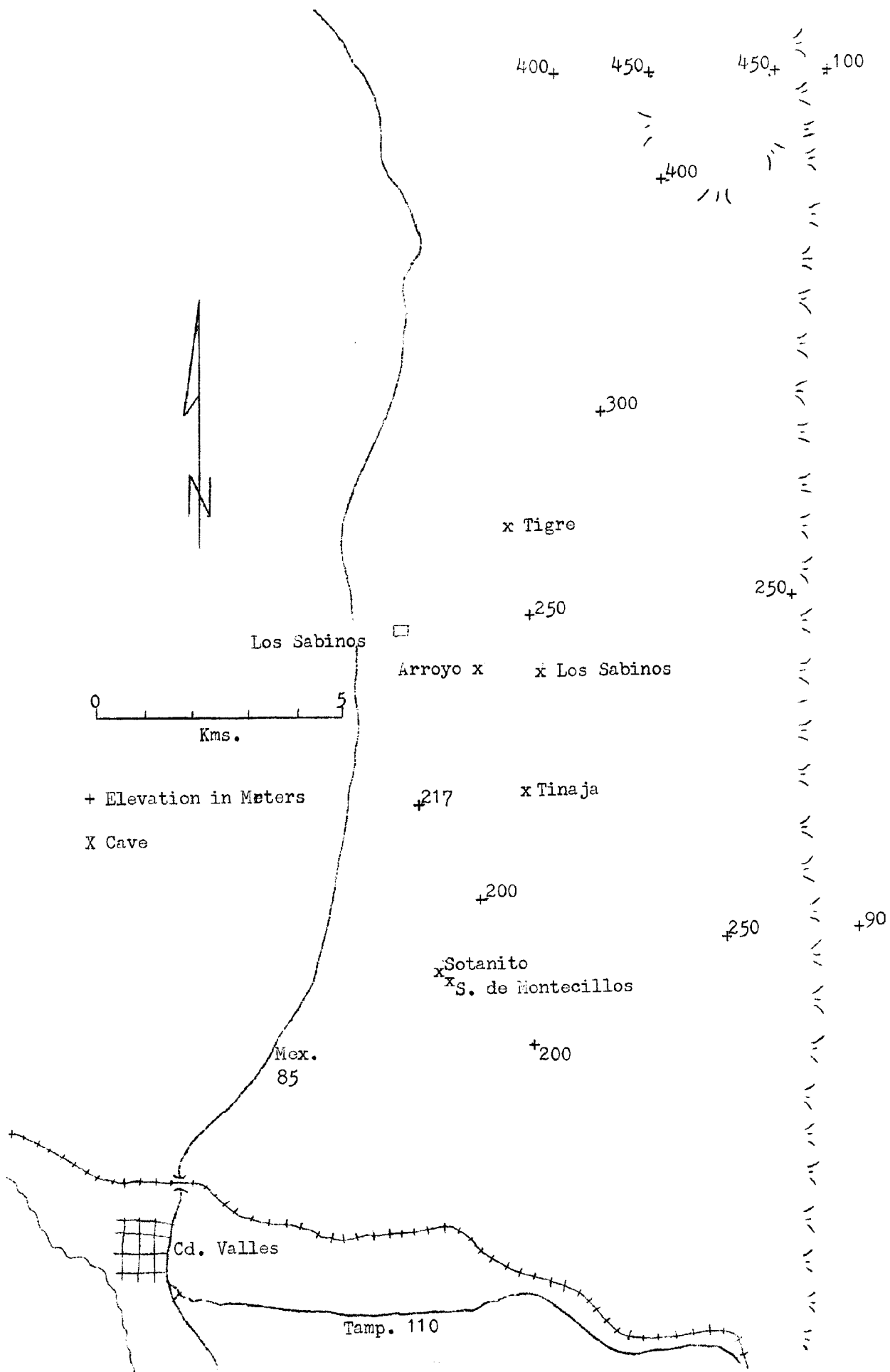
D. McKenzie

The entrance of this small cave is in the north wall of the arroyo, about 100 yards down from Sotanito de Montecillos and about 300 yards down from the large sotano. Though only about 75 feet long, the cave is attractive and contains several domes, one almost 30 feet high. It served as an excellent campsite when the nearby sotanos were visited.

#### Sotano del Tigre

D. McKenzie

This sotano is the northernmost of the chain of "resumideros" and can be reached by a 4 km. road and trail from Los Sabinos. It has been entered only once by AMCS members. The only previous investigation was by the president of Valles who reportedly found it unsuitable as a source of water. The vertical entrance is at the end of a canyon not as large as those characterizing the other sotanos. But the ivy-covered floor and walls provide for a impressive approach. The drop is sheer, with dimensions averaging 50 by 25 feet, and drops 190 feet to a plunge pool. A short offset leads to a 110 foot drop into a high gallery trending perpendicular to the arroyo. Just opposite the drop, a scoured, tube-like passage averaging only 5 feet high extends about 200 feet to



an unentered dome-pit perhaps 60 feet deep. The main gallery leads north from below the entrance. At about 300 feet an 80 foot drop into a large dome-room is encountered. About 30 is climbable. Progress was stopped for lack of equipment. A side passage, partially log-jammed was also found to continue.

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Members are urged to submit articles for publication. Material submitted for publication should be of a type suitable for copy onto a standard or legal size Mameograph master. Longer articles with more detailed maps are invited for publication as a bulletin. Trip reports are requested from all trips.

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