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Association of Mexican Cave Studies newsletter

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**THE ASSOCIATION FOR
MEXICAN CAVE STUDIES**

NEWSLETTER

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Trip Reports

Trip Reports

Persons: Charles W. Fromén, Jim McLane, James Gamel, and Bill Campbell

Date: August 1964; Thanksgiving Day 1964; 14-19 April 1965

Destination: Gruta del Palmito

Reported by: Charles Fromen

Aug. 1964. James, Douglas, and Charles made their first trip to Bustamante and Gruta del Palmito. James and I decided to return and climb Cabeza de Bustamante. We viewed the large mountain from the entrance of Gruta del Palmito.

Thanksgiving Day 1964. James, Bill, Rickey, and I returned to Bustamante. Bill McLane and Bill Campbell went to the Gruta del Palmito. James, Rickey, and I started to climb. We discovered five unexplored caves on the climb. Three were sinks, one of which took 4-7 seconds for a large rock to stop falling. We were unable to enter any of the caves because we lacked rope and only had superficial knowledge of rope work. We decided to return another time to explore these unexplored sinks. We did not believe we could find some of the other caves again because of the thick growth of oak trees. But today James and I made it to the top of the 7,000 foot mountain. There we took pictures of the superb view. Thorns punctured our plastic (chlorox bottle) water jugs. So we had to spend our second night without water. Next day around noon we reached our cars and water. The climb had been longer than we had anticipated, but we made it. The priest in Bustamante said that he had taken twelve hours to make the same climb. This made us feel better. We had camped at 3,000 feet before we went to the top.

Before Apr. 14. We had obtained 450 feet of Goldline and instructions from Harry Miles on how to use the rope. None of us had ever had any experience with rope work. We practiced on Kyle Field at A & M University.

Apr. 14. James Gamel from the University of Houston arrived at A & M. We packed everything in the trailer and started for Mexico at 1 P.M. That night we crossed the border in record time. We camped beside the road just outside of Villaldama.

Apr. 15. We drove to the parking lot at the start of the trail to Gruta del Palmito. We packed our packs with food and water for a five day stay on the mountain. The packs weighed over 60 pounds each. We wore leggings to protect us from the cactus thorns. We started up the mountain at 11 A.M.

Apr. 16. We reached the sinkhole region which we had discovered previously and set up base camp. We set up 300 feet of Goldline over the most promising sink. I made my first drop into a sinkhole—240 feet. The drop was exciting. No one had ever entered

this sink before and it was my first drop not under practice conditions. The drop went like clock work. The many practices and proper equipment paid off. I made my way down stopping on natural bridges and ledges to lower the rope farther down as it had not gone all of the way to the bottom. At about 240 feet down the vertical shaft I reached a point where the flowstone blocked the way down. I threw stones through a small opening which remained open in the flowstone. The rock fell for what seemed another 30 feet. Happy with the technical success of the drop I prusiked out. That afternoon we discovered three more sinks in the area. This made six sinks within 60 yards of our camp.

Apr. 17. We packed light packs and headed for the top ridge all of the time looking for caves. Near the headwall of the canyon where Gruta del Palmito is we saw a great solution amphitheater with numerous cave openings. The place is not visible from the Gruta or the parking lot due to its position on the wall opposite to where we stood near the head wall. Trees grew out of the cave or openings on the mountain.

After looking over the situation carefully, we decided that it would be possible to climb and rappel carefully down the headwall of the canyon to the theater. We picked a route down the cliff. James Gamel stayed on top of the canyon and directed Bill and me down the cliff's face. His directions were perfect. (They had to be.) We rappelled vertically the last 70 feet into the amphitheater. A more spectacular setting was impossible.

The amphitheater was 65 feet wide and 25 feet high. The head wall dropped at least 2,000 feet below. The canyon was at our feet. The amphitheater was cool due to the air rushing out of the many cave entrances which lined the back of the amphitheater. We could see formations back in the small cave entrances. We were unable to enter because of their small size. The caves serve as intermittent springs on the canyon wall. We prusiked up the wall again and were guided up the headwall safely by James. We climbed a high point south of Cabeza de Bustamante and headed to base camp below the Cabeza which we reached that evening.

Apr. 18. We decided to return to the car because we did not have another day's supply of water left. Exhausted we reached the parking lot by noon. A swim in the Rio Sabinas and a case of cokes quickly revived us. We met Bill Russell and party in the canyon of the Rio Sabinas which we explored, finding an interesting opening in the canyon wall.

We continued to the border and Cactus Garden Cafe in Laredo and drove to Palmeto State Park that night.

Apr. 19. We swam in the San Marcos River and then continued back to A & M.

Note: Anyone who wants information on exact locations of the yet unexplored sink holes we found write me: Charles Fromén
814 La Monte Lane
Houston, Texas 77018

Persons: Chip Carney, Jonathan Davis, Phil Schiffert, and Jim Blakemore
 Date: Easter, 1965
 Destination: Ciudad Valles
 Reported by: Jonathan Davis

We left Austin the evening of the Wednesday preceding Easter and drove straight through to Valles via Nuevo Laredo. We arrived in Valles at 2 p.m. Thursday, and by 5 p.m., using broken Spanish, and with the help of a policeman, a cabbie, and the female curator of a local "museum", located the rancher upon whose land Sotano de la Tinaja is located, Sr. Luis Martinez (his house is on the highway, in Valles, on the east side) who gave us permission to enter his land the key to the gate.

We spent the night in an abandoned stick house on the highway north of Valles and spent Friday in locating the cave and packing our gear down to camp, 100 yards inside the entrance. We tried building a fire at this location and discovered that the cave is not as well ventilated as we had hoped. To escape the smoke we went in and rigged the first unclimbable drop (see AMCS Newsletter, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 29) and then returned to camp and retired for the night.

Saturday morning we ate breakfast outside the entrance and sallied forth into the cave. We investigated the unexplored drop (see AMCS Newsletter, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 30; vol. 1, no. 1, p. 2) by throwing rocks into it, as the bottom is not visible, and decided that the bottom is from 100 to 150 feet down and is dry. The nearest conceivable tie-off is 80 feet back from the edge and, as we had only 176 feet of rope, we decided to leave it alone. Expansion bolts would probably be best here.

We followed the Northwest Passage (see AMCS Newsletter, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 29) to the "main" intersection and from there took the northwest or upstream passage. We followed the passage straight to the natural bridge. We found the passage as McKenzie described it except that the lake he called "mostly waist-deep" was mostly eyeball-deep.

We had brought flotation gear so we rappelled into the deep water at the end of McKenzie's exploration, which we found to be about 8 feet deep immediately under the drop and 4 to 6 feet deep elsewhere. This lake is 50 feet long, with a sand bar in the middle. The passage opens 4 feet above the water, 3 feet wide, and 8 feet high, and widens gradually until at 100 feet from the lake it is again a sandy-floored passage 50 feet wide and 25 feet high. It continues with these dimensions for about 500 feet, into another lake.

This lake is 500 feet long, with a sandbar about halfway across. The section before the sandbar is waist to chest deep, while the last section is neck deep with one part which must be swam. We followed the left wall and held on to projections through the deep part. At the end of the lake is a monster sandpile in a round room with two large stalactite formations 75 feet in diameter and 50 feet from water level to ceiling. The passage appears to continue from an opening 15 feet up on the wall, which we couldn't get into, as the rock is friable and every handhold broke off.

The passage is 10 by 10 feet and can be seen into for about 50 feet, to where it seems to bend to the left. We spent 45 minutes trying to get up to the passage, photographed it, and headed back to camp. Scaling ladders may be required to reach the opening, but they will be hard to snake in. There is also a possible siphon in this room, behind one of the formations. In all, we went about 1/4 mile beyond McKenzie's natural bridge. No mapping was done, as we had no Brunton or tape. According to the populace, it rained very hard on Saturday night, while we were in the cave, but we didn't notice any rise in water levels at all, and the arroyo didn't seem to have flooded. Evidently it takes a lot to fill it up, which is a happy thought.

We slept all day Sunday, hauled the gear out Sunday evening, and spent the night in a wide place by the side of the road a few hundred yards from Cueva de El Abra.

Monday we went through Abra, photographing. We then drove for Austin, arriving Tuesday night, delayed only slightly by golfball-sized hail in Mante.

Persons: Ken Evans, Danny Evans, Ted Peters, and Richard Smith
 Date: 14-18 April 1965
 Destination: Grutas Xoxafi
 Reported by: Danny Evans

On the evening of April 14 we left for Mexico to investigate a lead a hundred kilometers north of Mexico City. Loaded in the trunk was an excess of 1,000 feet of nylon in anticipation of a record breaking pit called Grutas Xoxafi (in the PEMEX BULLETIN and in a report written by Charles Mohr).

Driving through the night, we awoke on the out-skirts of Victoria in Mexico. We blasted on towards our goal, noting many impressive dolinas and pits along the way. Shortly past the turnoff to Xilitla at Y Griega we began the fantastic ascent over the towering limestone mountains towards Grutas Xoxafi. About 6:00 p.m. we arrived at the town of Lagunillas at 127 km. post where we asked directions to the cave. Described by Pemex, the location of the cave was easily found and we sacked out at the entrance.

Awakening next morning, we were slightly depressed in surveying the topography of the area. The land was almost desert-like and much of the surface was covered with igneous material associated with volcanic activity in ages past. The limestone that could be observed was very unstable and received little surface water. The entrance itself was even more depressing. Located at the top of a hill, it drained absolutely no water and resembled the collapsed roof of a one-time passage. Leaving the rope in the car, we decided to check out the most promising of a series of passages which branched out from the entrance. Our progress down a dry, grody passage was quickly halted by breakdown at the bottom of a 20' pit negotiable. No passages could be located which led to anything which came close to suggesting a record, so we returned to the entrance in hopes of discovering another lead. Our effort was useless, however, so we packed and made it to the nearest

cantina where we found relief in bottles of spirits. Deciding then to return over the mountains to Xilitla, we drove merrily on—perhaps our caving trip could be salvaged yet.

Driving through the evening, we made it to Xilitla without incident and sacked out in the second class hotel.

Awakening to the predominant peak of La Silleta, we decided to proceed up the road toward Ahuacatlan and check out some of the numerous pits along the way. Lacking time, we checked out two sotanos which led nowhere then proceeded back down the road towards the ferry at La Y Griega. Stopping at an impressive dolina along the way, we hoped to enjoy another good bit of ropework by entering a pit which Richard thought to be 300 to 400 feet deep. Hauling out the 550 foot length of nylon, we rigged the entrance drop and descended within. Our trip seemed well worth while, as we were greeted by a drop spiraling down to a 350 foot depth. After checking out a small passage leading from a small stream at the bottom, we quickly returned to the surface and left.

Our caving fun over we drove to the resurgence (Nacimiento) near Mante where se swam and talked with the local Mexicans. Later that night another group of our caving friends rolled in from their trip to La Joya de Salas. Much talk. Return not significant except wreck with train.

Persons: Bob Burnett, Jim Duke, John Fish, David McKenzie, and
James Reddell

Date: 14-19 April 1965

Destination: West of Antiguo Morelos

Reported by: James Reddell

After much preparation and several delays we left Austin late Wednesday night and drove to McAllen where we had a late supper at Jim Duke's home. From here we drove to Encino where we hoped to obtain a lumber truck to take us to La Perra, from which we would hike to La Joya de Salas to explore the deep sotano there. Unfortunately no lumber trucks were running during the Easter vacation so we were forced to abandon our plans. We decided that the best thing to do would be to go west of Antiguo Morelos to cave hunt in the mountains there. By early afternoon we were driving into the mountains between Antiguo Morelos and Ciudad del Maiz. As we climbed into the oak forest we began to notice many sinks and promising karst areas near the road. Those easily reached were checked and, although many were small caves, found to be of only slight interest.

Late that afternoon we located the William Blagg Ranch. The owner is an American who has lived in the area for many years and is quite familiar with the country. David had met him quite some time ago and he had told him of many caves, both on his property and in the surrounding countryside. He was very hospitable and told us of a cave in the creek behind his house into which much flood water ran. This was so intriguing that we

decided to go ahead and see what was there. Mr. Blagg found a man to go with us and loaned us a jeep. In a few minutes we found the cave. The entrance is an easy climb down through breakdown for about 30 feet. Here a room about 40 feet wide, 20 feet high, and 100 feet long is encountered. At the end of this room a passage leads down below the floor to a deep lake, but no passages led out. Back underneath the entrance a passage led to a point where a stream could be heard. Since it was late and we had only two flashlights for the six of us we decided to wait until after supper to finish the exploration. Our guide then drove us on down the valley where we located several pits up to 100 feet deep, most of which remained unexplored.

After supper we returned to the cave, which we named Cueva de La Lagunita, and continued exploration. After soon searching and a little rock and trash moving we were able to drop about 40 feet down into the stream which ran from breakdown through a room about 50 feet high, 100 feet long, and 25 feet wide before becoming very deep and entering a passage with only a few inches of air space. Not wishing to enter this unpromising passage we spent the rest of our time making biological collections and hunting for other leads, which were not found. Of some interest was the discovery of an additional record for the aquatic isopod, Speocirolana pelaezi, which is also known from caves in the El Abra range.

The next morning we arose late and, after some discussion, decided to visit a cave at the Ejido Los Avaes, a hike of several kilometers. Mr. Blagg had a guide take us in the jeep to the area, but since the jeep was needed it was returned. Cueva de Los Avaes proved to have a sloping entrance dropping into a room with many dead formations. Holes in the formations led into a room about 30 feet high and 40 feet in diameter with many formations, most of which were dead. Some time was spent checking a number of dead-end passages and small side rooms and in making biological collections. When we came out of the cave our guide told us of another cave higher on the mountain side. We were then led up several hundred feet to a small shelter-type slope-in entrance with many dead formations along the back wall. This cave we named Cueva Seca de Los Avaes because of the dust in the cave. Two small holes in the formation block led into small rooms, but with no additional passage. The return from the two caves was made by foot and with no trouble. Upon returning to the ranch and after drinking much water we decided to check a cave David had previously reported and only partially explored. This cave, Sumidero de Piedra Paloma, is located several miles west of the Blagg Ranch in a large sinkhole in a cleared field on the right side of the highway to Ciudad del Maiz. A walk-in entrance leads back a short distance to a pit dropping 60 feet to a low sloppy crawl. Bob dropped in and not knowing any better crawled through the muddy hole only to find a second pit, this time about 100 feet deep. After everyone descended the first pit and our rope, ascenders, and other equipment was dragged through the liquid mud we rigged the drop and proceeded to explore it. It proved to end in a siphon. Cursing people who can't tell

"Mexican cave ends" (namely muddy crawlways) we slopped our way out of the cave and broke-in new ascenders on slimy rope.

The morning of April 17th Mr. Blagg showed us several sinkhole areas, but no new caves were found; he also told us of large sinks he had seen from the air and of caves south of El Naranjo on his brother's ranch. We then drove east to the valley of the Rio Naranjo where we turned south to the Dallas Blagg Ranch. Although we were greeted with considerable hospitality no guide was available to take us to caves on this ranch, so we were directed to a cave near the small town of Micos on the Valles-San Luis Potosi railroad. Here we found a guide to take us to the best known cave in the area, Cueva de Puente Morita, located above the bridge of that name. This is really two caves located within a few feet of each other. The left-hand cave is a large walk-in shelter which served as a home for the local inhabitants during the hurricane which struck Tampico several years ago. At the back of this shelter a steep slope leads down for a total of about 60 feet before ending in breakdown and dust fill. Much mining for rumored treasure has been done in the cave and this pit is partly artificial. Another pit is located along the left side of the entrance room, but it also dead-ends. The main cave, however, is located to the right of the large shelter entrance and is entered by a small hole at the base of a large tree. From the bottom of this hole a passage leads a few feet to a nearly vertical drop. Large tree roots supply hand holds for the descent of about 30 feet. The cave is essentially one long fissure-type passage running perpendicular to the entrance and separated into small rooms and drops by flowstone and formations. The total length of the cave is about 300 feet while the total depth is about 100 feet. The principal item of interest was the discovery of the jawbone of an extinct giant rodent whose modern counterpart lives no farther north than Panama.

After leaving the cave we returned our guide to Micos and returned to El Naranjo just ahead of a thunderstorm which would have stranded us on the bad road to Micos had the cave been any larger. From here we drove to the Nacimiento de Rio Mante where we tried to sleep among the starving mosquitoes. We awoke the next morning to find that Richard Smith and crew were there already. After eating breakfast we set off cave hunting in the Quintero areas, but had no luck. We decided by noon that a good place to go would be the headwaters of the Rio Frio where we could combine cave hunting and swimming. We located the downstream of two large springs with no difficulty and after wading the chest deep river arrived at the spring to find that it did not arise from a cave but rather from a series of small holes along the river bed. Determined to find a cave we began hiking around above the river. It was not long before John yelled for someone to bring a flashlight. We all gathered at a hole dropping down over breakdown for about 30 feet. With two flashlights we were able to make only a hasty reconnaissance. We then returned to the car and after obtaining carbide lights, rope, and mapping equipment, we returned to the cave. From the

bottom of the entrance drop the main passage led about 200 feet back as a 20 foot wide, 40 foot high passage. The walls were covered with moist flowstone and the floor with attractive rimstone dams. At the end of the main passage we encountered a tremendous dome-pit about 50 feet in diameter. The ceiling above the pit was about 50 feet high while the pit dropped about 150 feet into a bottomless lake of crystal clear water. Unfortunately no passages led from this pit. While John was exploring the pit, David and I began acting like Texas cavers and started digging out a small hole about 60 feet from the edge of the pit. After a little work we had the hole opened up enough to allow us to squeeze through. After a short crawlway we came to a 15 foot drop which in turn led to a second 15 foot drop. At the bottom of the second drop a passage sloped steeply down for about 60 feet where it ended in a shallow siphon. Several narrow fissures were checked with the result that I came out of the cave practically naked. By the time everyone had come out of their respective passages it was late so we quickly finished our map, made intensive biological collections, and hiked back to the car. From here we drove back to McAllen where we ate breakfast, slept a few hours, and Monday afternoon returned to Austin.

The AMCS Newsletter is published monthly by the Association for Mexican Cave Studies, P.O. Box 7672 UT 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 Ditto Master. Longer articles with more detailed maps are invited for publication in a bulletin. Trip reports are requested from all trips.

Editor.....Terry Raines

Staff.....James Reddell