

July 1972

## **Association of Mexican Cave Studies Newsletter, Volume 3, No. 5, July 1972**

Association for Mexican Cave Studies

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ASSOCIATION FOR  
MEXICAN CAVE STUDIES

*NEWSLETTER*

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SUMMER CAVING

# ASSOCIATION FOR MEXICAN CAVE STUDIES

## NEWSLETTER

Volume III Number 5

Publication Date: July 1972

The Association for Mexican Cave Studies is a non-profit organization whose goals are the collection and dissemination of information concerning Mexican caves. The AMCS publishes a Newsletter, Bulletin, and Cave Report Series which are available to any sincerely interested, conservation-minded person. The AMCS Newsletter is published six issues per volume as frequently as necessary at a cost of \$3.00 US per volume, which includes both the publication and membership. Prices of other publications are available by writing to the Association for Mexican Cave Studies, P.O. Box 7672, Austin, Texas 78712, USA.

Potential contributors are urged to submit articles for publication. The article may cover any phase of Mexican speleology. Trip reports are requested from all trips.

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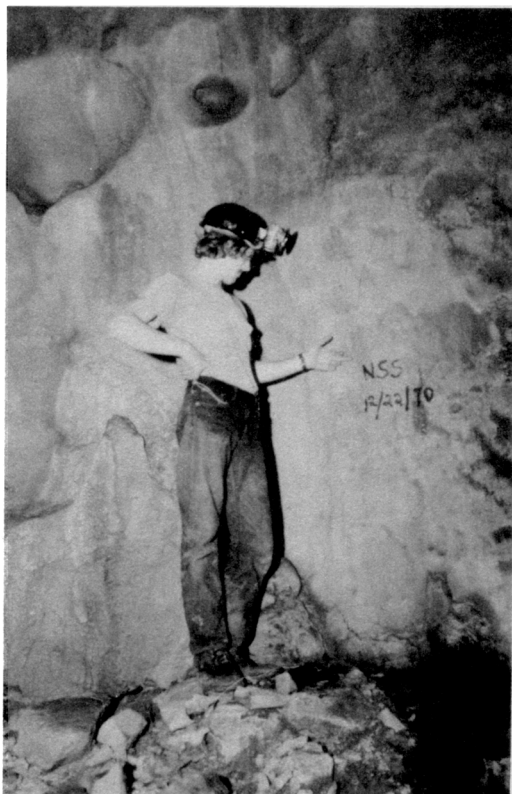
### NEWS AND NOTES

In addition to the persons listed above, several others very actively support the AMCS. Helping with this issue were Roy Jameson, James Jasek, Ann Lucas, and Carol Russell.

Speleological activity so far this summer has been moderate. During June a group reached the terminal siphon at a depth of 1500-1600 ft. in Sótano de El Buque. This system is located in the La Ciénega Area near Jalpan, Qro. In July approximately 10,000 ft. in Sótano de Japonés was surveyed. Anticipated in August is a French expedition led by Claude Chabert of the Spéléo Club de Paris.



## CONSERVATION



The AMCS has been proud of the low level of vandalism which has been maintained by its members. But as the popularity of Mexican caves increases and the influx of extraneous cavers grows, incidents occur. It is difficult to tell who's who. People hear about our group, send in their money for publications, and become supporting members. We trust them. Some are independents, but most are affiliated with organized caving. And of all the groups known to you, which do you expect could be trusted most? We thought the NSS, with its "Take nothing but pictures, ...," but we were wrong.

During Christmas of 1970 Gary Schaecher (NSS 10116) led a group of three on a brief reconnaissance of a pit just to the west of Gómez Farías, Tamps., and of an area to the northwest. On 6 May 1971 he contacted the AMCS by letter, describing the Christmas trip, informing us of a "large caving trip" they were organizing, and requesting information on the area. The AMCS responded with a letter detailing most of the available material concerning the Sierra de Guatemala. As time passed, Gary's group was granted the status of "NSS Expedition, Tamaulipas, Mexico" by the Board of Governors on 19 June 1971. Planned was a four month stay from December 1971 to March 1972. Then, during the fall, AMCS cavers surveying in the Gómez Farías area entered the cave previously visited by Gary's group. Here was discovered the vandalism illustrated in the photograph. Upon returning to Austin, a certified letter was sent to Gary requesting an explanation of their actions. This was on 3 November, six months ago. To date no correspondence has been received. For some reason the "expedition" never materialized, which is probably just as well considering the above information. It is only hoped that the other caves visited during the Christmas trip did not similarly suffer.

What can be done? In this case a wire brush will take care of the cave and perhaps pressure from this article and friends will correct Gary's behavior. But most important is to keep up a protective awareness and strong conservation attitudes toward all caves. Vandalism in Mexico is nil except for a few classical examples such as the engraving feats performed by the Mexican outing clubs in Gruta del Palmito. Let's keep it that way.

# TRIP REPORTS





When first viewed by Logan and Craig, El Sótano was 14 km away rather than 5 km as in this photograph. Using binoculars, they could see that the cliff face was curved and indeed part of an incredibly large pit. Rancho El Barro is located in the midst of the corn fields in the valley below.

**Date:** 17-21 January 1972

**Destination:** Cave hunting near Ahuacatlán

**Location:** SMO; Jalpan

**Persons:** Craig Bittinger and Logan McNatt

**Reported by:** Craig Bittinger

On January 17, 1972, Logan McNatt and Craig Bittinger caught a second class bus out of Ciudad Valles headed toward Ahuacatlán. We had just finished twenty days of Mexican caving in the Ciudad Valles area and we were looking forward to several more weeks of adventure. John Fish and the rest of our caving companions had just left for the U.S., so we felt that we were on our own. Logan had been in on the exploration of Sotanito de Ahuacatlán and knew of several unchecked pits in the Ahuacatlán area, along with rumors of a huge pit twelve hours away over the mountains, so we had decided to return to the area.

The bus slowly worked its way south, stopping innumerable times to pick up every Mexican along the road. Finally, around 3:00 p.m., after 5 hours of twisting mountainous roads, we arrived at Jalpan where we were informed we had a 3 hour layover. We bought a meal at a local restaurant and then sat around the town square waiting for the next bus to arrive. We heard the bus coming two minutes before it burst into view and soon we were under way again. Twenty-five minutes later we arrived in Ahuacatlán and proceeded to hike up the arroyo toward the Sotanito de Ahuacatlán. Our entire day of bus riding had cost us 2 dollars each, and nearly exhausted our energy. We set up camp on a flat spot above the arroyo and were lulled to sleep by the barking of the local dogs.

We woke up around six in the next morning, and after a quick breakfast, hit the trail. After about an hour of hiking, we arrived at a local store and the end of the fairly level part of the trail. Logan bought a can of Mexican sardines which we proceeded to eat in order to stave off our hunger. After two sardines Logan noted something strange in the bottom of the can and proceeded to pull out a large chunk of fish net from in between the remaining sardines. After mumbling a few words about Mexican canning factories we proceeded on up the trail.

Two hours of steep climbing brought us to the vicinity of the Sotanito where we hired 2 Mexican kids to watch our packs in return for a few hand fulls of animal crackers. We hiked over to the Sotanito where we did the 70 ft entrance drop, threw rocks down the 946-foot drop, and then returned to our packs. Thirty minutes later we arrived at the Montoya's house where we were welcomed with open arms and a hearty "Mi casa es su casa." The Montoya family gave us a place to stay, food, and a guide to more virgin pits than we could possibly explore. The Southwest Texas Grotto had done such a good job of public relations on previous trips that their house was like a second home where we were to be honored guests. That afternoon we went to what we thought was a 120-foot pit. Unfortunately after Logan descended to the end of our 150-foot rope he realized that the pit was closer to 300 ft deep, so we decided to wait until the next day to bottom it. While we were coiling the rope, Craig asked our guide if he knew of any deep pits in the area. He proceeded to point at a white spot visible on the side of a mountain in the far distance.



That night the Montoyas gave us more beans and tortillas than we could possibly eat; in return we gave them one of our dehydrated dinners, so it turned out to be an unusual meal for all.

In the morning we were awakened by the sounds of dogs, chickens, burros, pits, and roosters all trying to drown out each other. The Montoyas pointed out the white spot on the side of the mountain again and through our binoculars we could see the curve of the entrance of what we knew must be a huge pit. The entrance intrigued us, so we decided to hike over and have a look at the pit. The Montoyas had never been to the pit but they assured us that no one could possibly throw a rock across the entrance of the pit, and that it was fairly deep. About 10:00 a.m. we left their house carrying only our day packs and about 25 pesos between us. We assured them that we would be back late that night and asked them to watch our equipment. At six o'clock that evening we arrived at the base of the mountain containing the pit. We had been hiking at a steady 2 1/2 to 3 miles an hour pace all day long and we were totally exhausted. The local people told us that we should go to Rancho El Barro to talk to the local judge, who could give us permission to go into the pit. Eventually we arrived at the judge's house, and after explaining who we were and that we would like to see the pit, we were once again welcomed with open arms. The judge, Gregorio Rodriguez, gave us a bed to sleep on, 2 serapes, and a meal of beans and tortillas. We went to bed almost immediately but couldn't fall asleep due to the judge playing his radio over the local loud-speaker system.

We woke up about 6:00 a.m., shivering with cold and eager to get to the pit. After giving the judge one of our canteens to express our gratitude for everything he had done for us, we headed up toward the pit. Unfortunately, there was a dense forest in between us and the pit, and there were no obvious trails. Soon we heard shouts from below telling us that we were lost. Before long the judge's son, Ramón, appeared to guide us to the pit. After 2 1/2 hours of hiking, we arrived at a grassy meadow and five minutes later we burst through the jungle and there in front of us was the largest pit either one of us had ever seen. We quickly picked up a rock and threw it into the pit. After what seemed like an interminable wait, we heard a tremendous noise from below. Neither of us had a watch, so we had to resort to timing the rocks by slowly counting, thousand-one, etc., until we reached thousand-eleven. Ramón was totally mystified as to why these two crazy gringos were jumping up and down, screaming and excitedly shaking hands. We proceeded to jungle crash approximately half of the way around the pit to a cave located on one wall of the pit. The cave was apparently inhabited by javelinas as their tracks and dung almost completely covered the floor of the entrance. Unfortunately, the cave was only a rock-shelter, so we decided to leave the pit and return with rope and a well-equipped caving group. As we hiked back down the mountain we started to consider our situation. The Montoyas were expecting us back any minute, we were virtually out of food and money, and we were totally exhausted.

Luckily, Ramón knew of a closer way to get back to the highway where we could catch a bus back to Ahuacatlán and our equipment. We gave Ramón a pocket knife in payment for his services as a guide, said goodbye, and then set out toward the canyon which he assured us would take us directly to the paved highway. After an hour and a half of jungle crashing, we reached the canyon only to find Ramón sitting patiently at the edge of the stream waiting to guide us out through the canyon.

We followed the small stream for 4 1/2 hours as it wound its way between 1,000-foot tall cliffs. We finally emerged upon an ancient aqueduct which led us directly to the town of Ayutla. The local people informed us that the last bus of the day would be by in a half-hour, so we sat down to enjoy a refresco and rest our weary bodies. Suddenly someone yelled, "Here comes the bus," so we started moving straight uphill toward the road only to see the headlights flash by and vanish in the distance. Fortunately, it was only a car, but the bus appeared 2 minutes later and took us back to Jalpan. We were then informed that no more buses went to Ahuacatlán that night so we would have to spend the night in town. A hotel room would definitely cost more than the 5 pesos we had left; it appeared that we would have to sit in the town square if we could have a ride to Ahuacatlán. He said if we could wait for half an hour he would take us up there. Three hours later we climbed in the back of his truck and watched him accelerate up the mountainous road. The truck continued accelerating as we started down the far side. We both hung on for our lives and watched the truck stay on the wrong side of the road for nearly half the trip. Fifteen minutes later we were in Ahuacatlán marveling that we were still alive.

We lit up our carbide lights and started the 3-hour hike to the Montoyas' house. Two and 1/2 hours later we were totally lost in the pitch black night, virtually on top of a mountain and shivering with cold. We decided to build a fire and wait for morning instead of wandering aimlessly through the night. Five hours, and a lot of wood-gathering later, the sun came up and we discovered the main trail 20 yards away.

The Montoyas were surprised to see us and when we left two hours later there were twenty people waving goodbye and telling us to come back soon. From Ahuacatlán we caught a bus to Valles, and then straight on through to the U.S. Our conversations kept centering on the pit, and how we were going to break the news to the people back in Austin.

**Date:** 17-22 May 1971

**Destination:** Ocampo, Tamps.

**Location:** SMO; Sierra de Guatemala and Sierra de El Abra

**Persons:** Ken Gordon, David Johnson, Kenny Johnson, Mary Ann Kelly, John Mikels, Nick Morales, Mike Padgett, B.B. Russell, J. Carr Strutz, David Waddell

**Reported by:** John Mikels

A man at Ocampo, Tamps., agreed to guide us to a cave. A 5 mi hike got us to the entrance. It is located in a very steep and deep canyon approximately 10 mi SE of Ocampo. The entrance is near the floor of the canyon which apparently conducts great volumes of water at times. We located several large deep lakes in the canyon floor. Our guide said the cave was named La Gruta de la Sierra Tamalabe (this cave is more commonly known as Cueva del Puente). The cave is approximately 1000 ft long and U-shaped. The main entrance is 50 ft by 100 ft and mostly breakdown. The cave enters the canyon wall and curves back to another smaller entrance 200 yards down the canyon. The cave is essentially one big room divided up by flowstone and breakdown. It was quite dry and dusty. The entire cave can be negotiated without ropes, although some difficult free climbing is available. The entrance is or was mined, apparently for phosphates. The only noted life was bats, including vampires.

Next day we hit the Monos road just north of Cd. Valles in search of Montecillos. Too far down the road, we stopped at the trail to Soyate and started down it, but at the time we didn't know Soyate was there and passed it by. On down the trail we stumbled onto an inconspicuous pit with a 3 ft by 5 ft entrance. It proved to be a 180 ft single drop with a ledge halfway down. At the bottom was a live, decorated room 6 ft by 30 ft. Another small room was off to one side about halfway down. We named it Sótano del Lagarto for the lizard we found in the bottom. David Johnson's camera fell 90 ft to its death; luckily it was an Instamatic. Then we came out and some of us took off in search of other caves. About 7 p.m. everyone went to Valles and the Condesa. There, a headcount showed one was missing. Seems that I (John) had been left in the jungle, so after a hot leisurely meal they set off in search of me. Meanwhile, I wandered down the Soyate trail after dark, with no light, for 3 hours until meeting the rescuers. Camped at Los Sabinos.

Next day we successfully found Sotanito de Montecillos and spent about 6 hr within. Later we viewed the entrance of Sótano de Pichijumo. The following day we left for home, making a brief visit to Cueva de El Abra.

**Date:** 1-3 October 1971

**Destination:** Sótano del Anticlino and Cañón de la Huasteca

**Location:** SMO; Cola del Caballo and Cañón de la Huasteca

**Persons:** Craig Bittinger, Steven Bittinger, Donna Atkins, Jan Lewis, Terry Raines, Hugo Victoria

**Reported by:** Terry Raines

Following directions given us by James McLane of Houston, we drove to Cascada Cola del Caballo, arriving late in the night. Continuing on the next morning, we arrived at a point 10.6 miles from Highway 85 and just to the west of the high point reached by the road. Immediately above the road and a culvert, to the north, is the entrance to Sótano del Anticlino. Although it is not visible from the road it is easily located once you start hiking around. The entrance is a climb-down sink about 8 m in diameter which leads into a room 25 m by 8 m with a ceiling height about 5 m. The floor is old guano-covered breakdown. At the far end of the room is a pit 60 m deep. At the top it is 3 m wide but it rapidly opens to about 10 m in diameter. The pit floor is a 46° slope which leads directly to another pit of 28 m. At the bottom is the terminal room, a silt-floored chamber 10 m by 15 m. Total depth is 132 m and length is 37.8 m. After the survey and biological collections were made we continued on to the town of La Ciénega. At this point a rough, gravel road descends into Cañón de La Huasteca. We hesitated because of high water but forged ahead, with water entering the truck cab at times. The night was spent deep within the heart of the canyon.

As we drove down the river canyon the following day, a lookout was kept for persons in the area and consequential cave leads. Just before Grutas de San Bartolo (see map, p. 141, AMCS News, v.II) one gentleman informed us of a cave one hour's hike away and said he could take us there the following day. Time did not permit, so we continued on to Bartolo where we made biological collections before returning home.

**Date:** Thanksgiving, 1971

**Destination:** Southern Sierra de Guatemala, Tres Manantiales, Micos

**Location:** SMO; Sierra de Guatemala; Barrancas

**Persons:** Frank Binney, Steven Bittinger, Bill Deane, Bill Russell, Carol Russell

**Reported by:** Steven Bittinger

Our main objective was to check out the cave at Tres Manantiales which had been previously entered twice by AMCS cavers. James Reddell and Robert Mitchell first entered in 1966 for biological collecting and were stopped by the cold water in the first lake. Later Bill Russell and Bill Elliott visited the cave, crossed the lake, and reported a large passage up to a handline drop. After an uneventful drive from Austin, we found that our first big problem was merely getting to the cave. A recent forest fire had downed many large trees across the crude road, so we spent the first day chain-sawing trees and generally rebuilding the road. Finally we had to admit defeat and decided to pack our gear the remaining two miles to the cave.

The cave is situated at one end of a large valley and serves as the only source of water for several nearby houses. It appears that during flood times the cave takes some surface drainage and a considerable number of vadose features were noted throughout the cave. Of the approximate mile of passage found in the cave, the large majority seems to follow a prominent series of joints.

Just inside the entrance of the cave is a 20-foot handline drop to the edge of a waist-deep lake. Walking size passage continues past this for nearly 1000 ft to a second lake where it is necessary to swim for about 20 ft. Shortly thereafter the passage splits, a large canyon continuing to the left down a 150-foot handline drop soon followed by a 15-foot rappel. The other branch is somewhat inconspicuous, being straight ahead and high up, and after 200 ft it connects with the main passage below the 15-foot rappel. This main passage then continues for several hundred feet to another fork. To the left is over 1000 ft of downstream walking and crawling passage where exploration was finally halted at a siphon in a small crawlway. The right branch continues several hundred feet past a neck-deep lake to an 85-foot drop where a bolt was set. At the bottom of the pit is several hundred feet of walking passage with a few shallow lakes which finally ends in a dome with possible high leads. Directly opposite the top of the 85-foot pit are two small crawlways which were not found to extend for any significant distance. Total depth of the cave is approximately 200 feet.

We re-entered the cave the next day to de-rig our ropes. A small crawlway was entered on the right side of the passage 500 ft after the first lake. In this short crawl and in the main passage nearby we began to notice large numbers of pottery fragments. Frank was fortunate enough to locate a piece with a very distinctive face etched into it. We believe that this would indicate that the cave was also known and used by the preconquest Indians as a source of water. Any future visitors to the cave should be cautioned not to remove or to disturb any such artifacts which may be of archeological importance.

The following day we made an unsuccessful search for some rumored blind fish caves west of Micos but did eventually locate a small cave containing some rare asellid isopods. That evening we met David McKenzie in Cd. Mante. Bill Russell joined him for an additional week of reconnaissance while the rest of us returned to Austin.



**Date:** 18-21 November 1971

**Destination:** Cave hunting west of El Barretal, Tamps.

**Location:** SMO

**Persons:** John Mikels, Nick Morales, David Johnson, Mike Padgett

**Reported by:** John Mikels

18 November. Drove to a small village to the west of El Barretal, Tamps., and near the base of the SMO. Crashed.

19 November. Take 7 hours to drive 26 miles up into the SMO on a narrow, rutted lumber road. We are trying to get to the town of Las Minas and a huge sink nearby (over 800 ft diameter and very black) that was spotted from the air. After these 26 miles we find ourselves in a small lumber mill village. We inquire and find we can't reach Las Minas easily or in the time we have. So we get a local to show us some caves in the area. He guides us to a couple of sótanos within a few hundred yards of a "side side-road." The two pits are about 100 yds apart and both are dead-end 110-foot drops, locally known as Sótanos de Contabanda. With the arrival of dusk the day's explorations were terminated.

20 November. At the lumber village we located a Señor Gremaldo, an elderly man, who agreed to show us some more caves. First, a rather short hike, but with fantastic scenery (elevation was 6000 ft or more), brought us to another pit just like those of the day before. They were about 100 ft and dead-end. Next he took us to a horizontal cave about 100 ft off a small side road. It was approximately 500 ft long and well decorated and active. About half of the floor was white flowstone with numerous rimstone pools. We took some pictures and mapped it. Locals call it Cueva de la Cojada. We left and talked more with Sr. Gremaldo. He told us of numerous caves and pits, "muy grandes y bonitos," further up in the mountains, but they would involve long hikes and backpacking. He was most hospitable and gave us some fruit as we talked about the area. We promised to return in the near future. Our friendly attitudes did pay off on a future trip to the same area when he helped some sick cavers get over Moctezuma's revenge. After bidding goodbye on the afternoon of the 20th we began the long drive back to the highway. There we went to Cd. Victoria and Peregrina Canyon to join the PAU Geology Club field trip.

**Date:** 25 November 1971

**Destination:** Lead west of Bustamante now known as "Lote la Gruta"

**Location:** NBR

**Persons:** Ronnie Fieseler, Jon Everage, David Temple, Billie Fieseler

**Reported by:** Ronnie Fieseler

We left Cañon de Bustamante to check a cave lead of Charles Fromén, et al. In the Sierra de Enmedio 12-15 miles west of the Cañon and about in the middle of the range, is a prominent series of switchbacks which reportedly leads to a cave or a mine. They are easily visible from a long distance.

Leaving the Cañon we passaged through 2-3 gates, riding on our motorcycles. We had not gone far before encountering a huge swamp. We were barely able to get ourselves and our bikes out of the bog, which was a couple of miles across. We asked directions at a Tequila factory and rode closer to the range. Soon we could see the switchbacks despite the

haze. At a small village a man told us that they led to a big cave and the only way there was by road from the big ranch. Fromén and crew had been refused access to this road on another trip so we asked the Mexican if it might be possible to ride bikes across country to the cave. He thought we could.

Soon we were crashing through a piece of desert covered with almost solid growths of agave, lechiguilla, etc. It was so bad we almost gave up. One bike had a flat when we finally reached what passes for the road. It took about 3 hours to cover the 3-4 miles of desert. Misery.

All but Billie started up the switchbacks. They lead into a high canyon and stop. A foot trail leads further up into the canyon. After about a half mile hike the cave was found by Ronnie almost at the end of the canyon. He took some pictures and entered the cave. Exploration did not take long as it consists of a single tube-like passage with no obvious side passages. Measured by paces, it was found to be about 900-1000 ft long. The first 2/3 of the cave averages 20-40 ft wide and 20-30 ft high. The last part contains some stoop-ways and more walking passage. The cave ends in a face where an ore deposit is being mined. The cave contains some medium-sized formations which, though not spectacular, are pretty.

The entrance is an inverted V arch with a large rock in the middle of it. A passage just to the left inside the entrance is seemingly man-made and leads to a vertical shaft, also man-made. It was not explored. A marking stone stands just outside the entrance and reads:

ML  
LOTE LA GRUTA  
SUP. 4 H's  
EXP. 1844  
AG. MONTERRYE  
N.L.

There is also what looks like a survey or datum point in concrete at the entrance with the initials "P.P." in the concrete.

David joined Ronnie for another quick look inside before leaving the cave and rejoining Jon back at the bikes. They were sad that it was late in the day and they had no time to check out two very promising leads across the canyon. One is a giant arch-shaped depression with trees and brush growing in it and a big dark hole in the back. The other is a very nice looking hole on a cliff face—very promising but very hard to get to except for the chance that another smaller hole in the same bedding plane and accessible might connect.

We made our way slowly back to the Cañon due to the bike with the flat and arrived a little after dark. This is a very rough trip across the desert by bike but it is the only way unless the rancher will allow use of his road. He might even own the cave and the canyon. But the Mexican we talked to seemed to think it would be alright for us to go there, and he worked at the ranch. But it would still be best and safest to try to get permission at the ranch, which is on the north-east side of the mountains.

The cave has been mined for something—probably phosphates. Yet the amount of work seen does not rate the road of switchbacks (which could easily accomodate trucks). The shaft may lead to more extensive workings or there may be another mine in the canyon that we missed. The road certainly indicates a larger operation and was doubtless built for

vehicular use. It has not been used recently though and was in a moderately bad state of repair. It would be very interesting to find out more information on this canyon and it's associated activities, maybe from the rancher, if he would talk. There's bound to be a good story about it if it could just be found.

**Date:** 17-26 April 1972

**Destination:** Ayutla, Qto.

**Location:** SMO; Jalpan

**Persons:** Craig Bittinger, John Greer, Clark Lillie

**Reported by:** John Greer                      Austin, Texas  
                         Craig Bittinger                      Kingsville and Austin

17-19 April. Left Kingsville Monday night, crossed at Reynosa, rode buses to Ayutla. Walked part way up canyon south toward Rancho El Barro from Ayutla and spent Tuesday night in a haunted rockshelter next to river (nacimiento). Wednesday we continued on up to El Barro and found Ramón -- Craig's previous guide and good friend (Ramón Gonzales, Santa Maria de los Cocos, Ayutla, Querétaro, México). That afternoon we hiked on up to El Sótano (entrance drop 1345 ft) just to look at the huge pit. Leaves covered the trail and we ended up jungle crashing through thorns about half the way. Spent the night in El Barro.

20 April. Thursday morning we left at 8:00 for La Florida, "3 hours walk" west of El Barro (faster to come straight in off the highway from west of Ayutla). Checked several 25-35 foot pits in a large sink area on the way (between La Huasteca west of El Barro and the Puerto Cudisia east of La Florida). In the pass before dropping down to La Florida we checked the Sótano del Puerto Cudisia -- 4.9 sec. initial freefall, bounces to 11 sec., then we just couldn't hear the rocks anymore (estimated over 600 ft deep). We got into La Florida at 3:00 p.m. exhausted. Heard of many more pits. Checked one pit (ca. 120 ft) about half-way up the hill south of town (15 minute run from the church). About 70 yards NE of the church are two pits: ca. 150 ft, ca. 120 ft, both apparently drop to a dirt floor. Reported is a huge cavern north down the valley toward the highway, contains a stream or lake; should be checked for sure. Also reported was a deep pit north of Lagunillas toward Rancho Carrizal, possibly at Rancho Carrizal (our informant had seen the pit -- said it was huge, over 500 m deep, and well known). Another very deep pit reported on Cerro del Pajaro south of town. We were the first norteamericanos in La Florida and were well accepted. We fixed the electrical generator for the church (except for the tornillos to connect the motor with the generator in place of a clutch). Spent the night at the church after an exceptionally fine meal with the padre (Javier Ferros Moya, La Florida, Municipio de Arroyo, Seco, Querétaro, México).

21 April. We left Friday morning with two guides and checked out two pits on top of the hill NE of La Florida. Sótano de la Mora, 3.6 sec. entrance drop to dirt floor. Sótano Conrado, 6.5 sec. drop to dirt floor. Area is apparently all internal drainage with some really large sink areas. Headed back toward El Barro again, stopping by Sótano del Puerto Cudisia. Clark fixed another radio. Stopped by another pit (ca. 110 ft) in the sink area on the way back down the hill between Puerto Cudisia and La Huasteca. Back at El Barro we were temporarily harassed by drunks, who then began fighting among themselves with

knives. Ramón went over and broke it up. Then the army happened by and hassled, interrogated, and arrested us and put us under strict armed guard with machine guns for the night. Trying to urinate with armed escorts turned out to be quite a new experience.

22 April. Saturday morning, following orders from Querétaro headquarters, the commander released us (after 18 exciting hours); we took pictures of everyone, had a few laughs, etc., before leaving. Since the day was shot, we just lay around, except for a short walk to the river (3 miles) to take a bath.

23 April. We left at 5:30 a.m. with Ramón for La Cienega, across the river up past Naranjo SE from El Barro. We were also the first norteamericanos in Naranjo and La Ciénega. While we were waiting for some beans and tortillas to be heated for us, we visited two pits: ca. 90 ft and ca. 250 ft. Informants said the whole hill is covered with pits. We ate and left with our guide Luis Arriega of La Ciénega. Later Elias Sanchez (who lives up on the hill west of La Ciénega) joined us. We climbed the hill west of La Ciénega and checked several excellent pits in the upper regions of the hill. Of particular interest was a drainage terminal which we called Cueva del Perro Muerto for obvious reasons – probably an extensive system begins here; there is a large drainage pattern and no resurgence activity on the hill at all. This is not far above the store and below the house of Elias Sanchez. Hoya de Callejón is quite a way above Sanchez's house and at the edge of an upper field. Entrance drop probably well in excess of 600 ft. Huge rocks drop for 14 seconds before they just go out of hearing range. This and most other pit entrances on the hill around generally about 3 x 4 m, mas o menos. Near the top of the hill is Sótano del Bernal (at this point we were above and just west or WNW of the rock finger which is easily visible, but small, from La Ciénega), which is said to be the deepest in the area, apparently because a man went down 60 m without reaching the bottom. The pit opened up 30 years ago when a man was walking home from his corn field – the ground opened and swallowed him up. The whole hill is hollow and walking across some fields, one can actually hear echoes down probably 200 ft. Apparently the hill has a hollow mantle and may contain an extensive system. These pit entrances are probably easily 3000 ft above the entrance to Sótano de la Paila (to be mentioned later), which leads to some interesting possibilities. Our guide also mentioned that other pits were present on the hill higher than Bernal; certainly the karst continues higher (there is also a house about 300 yards or so up to the NNE where presumably one could acquire another guide). The possibilities here are staggering. From Sótano de Bernal we continued on around the hill and started down, always checking insignificant pits of about 25 to 150 ft deep. We stopped by a cavern entrance where people today get water. Old flowstone covered footholds indicate that the cave has been used for a considerable period. The bottom of a 100-foot pit in the entrance room should be checked for artifacts which might indicate how long the cave has been used. We continued down to the bottom of the hill and visited Las Tranto, a cave into which a whole valley runs. It should be checked for sure, and might easily be found to connect with the huge Sótano de la Paila which lies about one-half mile to the northeast. Sótano de la Paila is an extremely large pit with a mouth about 300 x 200 ft; the shaft narrows about 200-250 ft deep to about 65 x 20 ft. We dropped rocks from about 100-150 ft below the rim (one can climb down somewhat on the north side). The following times were recorded (running times are for individual bounces with elapsed times in freefall): (a) 3.4 sec. initial, bounce to 5.0, 5.0-9.0 freefall,



11.0 total; (b) 3.4, 6.8, 9.0, 11.5, 20.0; (c) 3.6, 5.5, 7.0, 8.5, 12.0 (thought we heard a later one but not certain); (d) untimed rock with a distinct, very faint bounce very deep after about 10 sec. freefall following the usual several seconds of entrance bounces; (e) 3.4 initial, bounce to 12.0, 12.0-16.0 sec. freefall, no more sound. We hopefully estimate the pit at around 1500 ft. After this excitement, we returned to La Ciénega and back to El Barro (arrived 9:30 p.m.) – a 16 hour trip.

24 April. Left El Barro and went back to Ayutla, then to Valles, and out to Los Sabinos for the night. A welcome sight.

25-26 April. Came back into Valles. Messed around, rented a house for summer headquarters, and headed back for Kingsville.

### TRIP SUMMARY

Craig Bittinger, John Greer, Clark Lillie

17-26 April 1972

Notes: No pits were entered. Times are from stop watch for falling fist-size limestone rocks.

Depths are estimated. Most entrances are in general about 3 x 4 m.

#### EL BARRO

Visited – El Sótano (previously explored and mapped by AMCS, January 1972)

#### Trail, LA HUASTECA to LA FLORIDA

Visited –

1. Pit, 25 ft (est.)
2. Pit, 30 ft (est.)
3. Pit, 35 ft (est.)
4. Pit, 110 ft (est.)

#### LA FLORIDA

Visited –

1. Sótano del Puerto Cudisia, over 600 ft (est.) – 4.9 sec. to first bounce, 11 sec. total drop before going out of hearing range. In main saddle east of town.
2. Pit, 120 ft (est.) to dirt floor. Hill SE of town.
3. Pit, 120 ft (est.) to dirt floor. NW of church.
4. Pit, 150 ft (est.) to dirt floor. NW of church.
5. Sótano de la Mora, 3.6 sec. to dirt floor. Top of hill NE of town.
6. Sótano Conrado, 6.5 sec. to dirt floor. Top of hill NE of town.

Reported –

- Many pits (some deep) all around La Florida and in the surrounding hills; good leads for the area around Cerro del Pajaro SE of town.
- Very deep pit reported on top of Cerro del Pajaro.
- Cave with good yellow calcite crystals just WNW of town; also nearby elephant bones (portion of exceptionally well preserved mastodon molar was examined).
- Very large, long cavern containing a river or lake, north up the canyon toward the highway from town.
- Deep pit (over 500 m) between Lagunilla (on the highway NW of Ayutla) and Rancho Carrizal. Very large and well known.

## LA CIENEGA

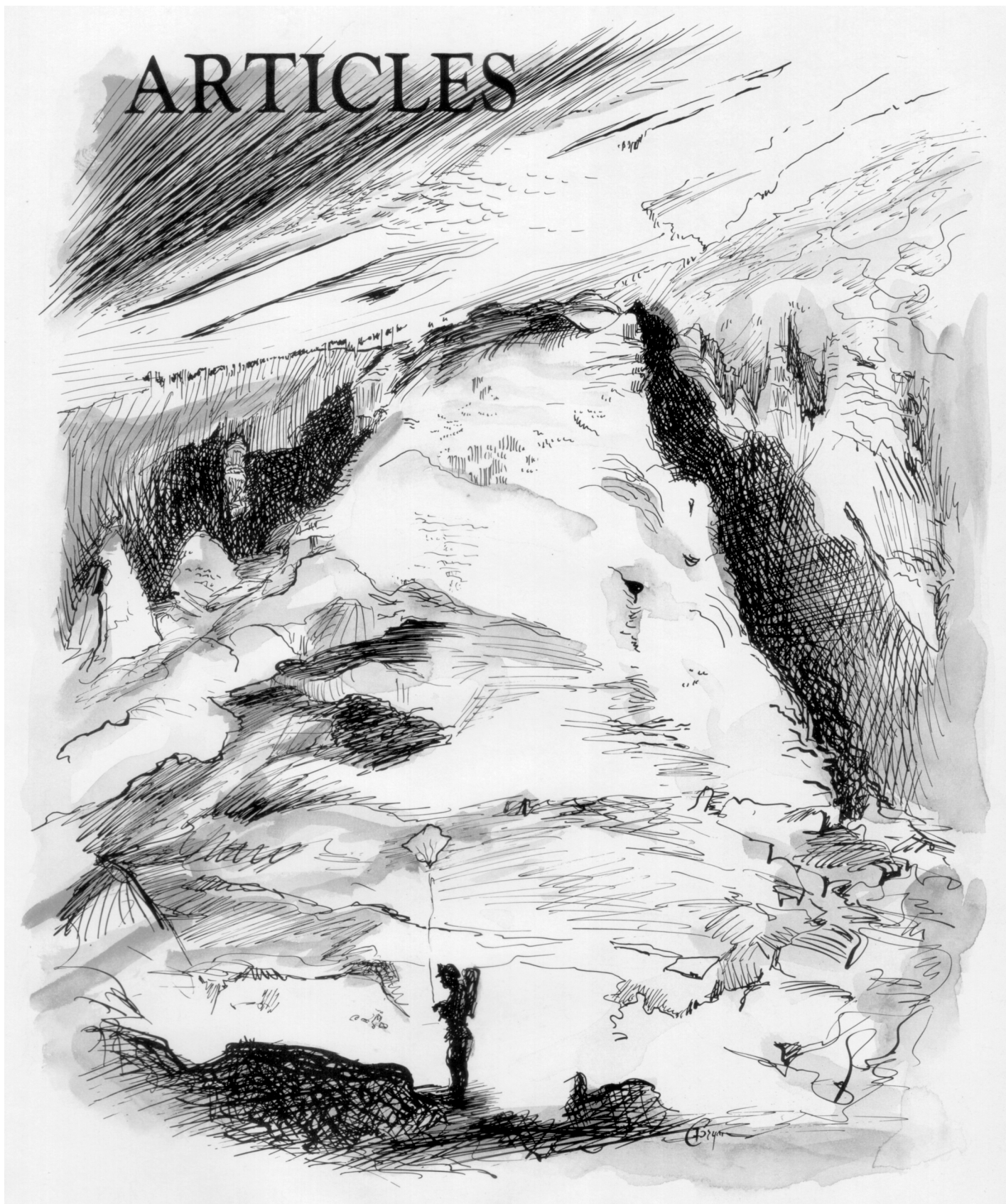
## Visited --

1. Pit, 90 ft (est.). South side of town.
2. Pit, 200-250 ft (est.). South side of town.
3. Cueva del Perro Muerto (our name). Cavern on opposite hillside just west of town. 20 ft climbable drop to horizontal passage. Drains a very large area. Should be a very deep system.
4. Pit, 100 ft (est.) to breakdown slope. Just above house of Elias Sanchez on opposite hill west of town.
5. Hoya de Callejón, over 600 ft (est.) -- 3 sec. freefall, 2 sec. bounce, 2 sec. freefall, fast bounces at least 6 more seconds (out of hearing range).
6. Pit, 40 ft (est.)
7. Pit, 120 ft (est.) -- 3.0 sec.
8. Pit, 30 ft (est.) to breakdown room.
9. Pit, over 200 ft (est.) -- (a) 2.8 sec. freefall, fast double bounce, 5.0 sec. total; (b) 2.8 sec. freefall, several bounces, 7.5 sec. total.
10. Pit, 50 ft (est.)
11. Sótano del Bernal, over 500 ft (est.) probably into an extensive system in the hollow mountain -- 11 sec. bouncing before rock goes out of hearing range. Near top of the hill.
12. Pit, 80 ft (est.) -- 2 sec. to dirt floor.
13. Pit, 30-35 ft (est.).
14. Pit, 30 ft (est.).
15. Cavern entrance with some formations into a small room; on right side of room a pit drops about 100 ft (est.). Ancient footholds to allow water collection are partially covered with flowstone.
16. Las Tranto. Long horizontal passage draining an extensive area. In bottom of valley about 2 miles south of town. Very likely connects with Sótano de Paila in an extensive system.
17. Sótano de la Paila, probably over 1500 ft (est.), bounce times up to 20 sec. before rock goes out of hearing range. Example of running times for bounces with intervening freefalls: 3.4, 6.8, 9.0, 11.5, 20.0 sec. (rocks dropped from 100-150 ft below the entrance lip). Very large entrance; drains an extensive area.

## Reported --

- Numerous pits all around and practically in La Ciénega. Apparently hill is covered with pits.
- Upper portions of hill opposite La Ciénega to west, where we checked our pits, is covered with sinks and pits. Only a few were checked.
- Large pit less than an hour walk up the valley (south) from the cave Las Tranto.

# ARTICLES





Logan      Tom   David   Terry   Peter   Frank   Craig S.   Craig B.   Donna  
Blake   Blake   John   Roy   Steven



## PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE INITIAL EXPLORATION OF EL SOTANO

by Terry W. Raines

Although the existence of a large pit in the Jalpan Region was a known fact, none of the earlier cavers visiting the area had the persistence to continue on to the entrance until Logan and Craig's hike in January of this year (see Trip Report, p. 93). Once news of a definite sighting reached Austin, 2 days elapsed before an "expedition" of 14 members headed south. Equipped with over 4000 ft of rope, backpacks, and provisions for up to a week, the group traveled in three vehicles to a rendezvous in Ayutla, Qro. From this small town a mountain trail climbs to Cerro de la Tinaja, descends to Río de la Atrejea, then climbs again to the entrance of El Sótano. The activities of this five day adventure are recorded below.

### 27 January - Hike to Rancho El Barro from Ayutla

Two vehicles arrived late the previous evening containing Logan McNatt, Terry Raines, John Fish, Jan Lewis, Craig Bittinger, Frank Binney, Blake Harrison, Craig Sainsott, and Peter Strickland. At that time arrangements were made for 3 burros to carry 6 duffel bags to the pit at a cost of 12 pesos/burro/day. These arrangements fell through the following morning and we had to seek out another driver-guide. By 9:40 a.m. another truck had arrived with Donna Atkins, Steve Bittinger, David Honea, Roy Jameson, and Tom Wright and the hike was begun. Leaving the upper edge of town, the trail follows a small arroyo for a short distance then cuts up onto a river terrace. The crossing of the gently sloping terrace required one hour after which the trail began climbing steeply up the east flank of the Cerro de la Tinaja. This particular cerro is the first of a series of linear ranges which characterize the region. It is approximately 20 km long and 5-6 km wide and the trail between Ayutla and El Limón crosses at a point 3160 ft above Ayutla (see photograph, which shows almost the entire length of Cerro de la Tinaja). From the pass we hiked down to El Limón, located on a low plateau formed by a rock formation change. Another hour's hike brought us to the Río de la Atrejea, only 612 ft above our beginning point at Ayutla. This is the primary drainage course in the area. As is frequently true throughout Mexico, its name changes from area to area. Below Limón it is the Atrejea while only a few kilometers away the river is named Río Ayutla, below the town of the same name. The last leg of the day's hike took us back up again to Rancho El Barro, located on a small plateau area corresponding to that of El Limón. The elevation here (above Ayutla) was 1557 ft and arrival time was 6:30 p.m. The people living at the ranch were very friendly and generous and allowed our group to spend the night in the school house.

### 28 January - Hike to El Sótano and descent

Arrangements were made with Ramón, son of a local official, for burros to carry the equipment to the pit entrance. The population of El Barro was on hand to watch us reload our packs and wander off in groups of 2 and 3. From the ranch, located on the lower east flank of the second range, it is a continuous hike upward to the entrance. This mountain has been referred to by local sources as Cerro de la Mesa and Cerro del Charcos. It would require 2 hr and 45 min over a network of muddy paths to reach the cave. Fortunately, Craig



original was foldout

and Logan had been guided to the pit earlier and were now able to mark the way accurately for the stragglers. About 1000 ft above the ranch the trail angles toward the south but we still could not see the entrance or had any idea where it was located. In fact, it would be hidden until the last moment. The Mexicans continually advised us as to the pit's proximity. The last stretch led up a linear valley carved by Arroyo del Ojo de Agua. At a nondescript point the stream bed was crossed and a short hike led us to La Joya de Los Nogales. Here a depression has been filled to form a level, grassy surface, perfect for camping. And from here, only 7 minutes away, is El Sótano. Hastily abandoning our packs, we climbed the low ridge above the joya and suddenly found ourselves on the edge of a true precipice. We could not contain our excitement. People were carefully running from one vantage point to another, exclaiming at the voluminous, wonderful pit but not really comprehending the immensity... not at first anyway. Organize and drop rocks was foremost. The watch was ready, the rock was ready, and when the first 13 sec free-fall resounded previous excitement seemed minor.

One hour later it was noon, a bright, sunny day, temperature 57°F, and the burros still hadn't arrived. We were anxious to get on with the rigging but also grateful for the rest. Shortly, Ramón did appear with burros and equipment and activity resumed. Each person organized personal gear and made general preparations. Then the main lines, still in the duffel bags, were carried to the pit edge. Two points would be rigged, which would allow Logan and Craig Bittinger to make an initial, simultaneous rappel. On the north wall an area protrudes inward providing the only practical rigging points around the whole perimeter. Here work was begun clearing vegetation and dislodging loose rocks. Handlines were rigged for safety. When all was ready, rope pads in place, the lowering process was begun. To the west descended a continuous length of 11 mm braided nylon, while to the east three lengths of Bluewater, 600 ft, 600 ft, and 300 ft were rigged. By this time it was 3:00 p.m. and Logan and Craig were eager to descend.

As they dropped over the edge, everyone waited with anticipation. For the first 60 ft the ropes hung against the wall and were on either side of a buldge. Then, the drop became completely free with the ropes mutually visible and 65 ft apart. Logan rappelled 1181 ft and Craig 1239 ft. The difference was due to their landing points on the bottom. Logan arrived at the very top, western-most end of a talus slope while Craig landed in a tree downslope. We were in contact via walkie-talkie throughout most of the rappel.

What had appeared to be a smooth, even covering of vegetation from above turned out to be a rugged topography of rocks, ferns, and trees. From the landing point at the far western end of the pit, the explorers saw a steeply dipping floor descending to a linear trench and then climbing up again to approximately the same level, 700 ft away. The width was 350 ft. Further exploration produced a cave on the south wall that was 150 ft long. There were no other leads showing any promise.

The radio gave us the details and go ahead for more of the group to enter. Frank, Roy, Stephen, Tom, and Donna descended and further checked the bottom but found no continuations. As most of the bottom group carried sleeping bags, they spent the night on the flat floor of the 150 ft cave. Meanwhile, back on top, John, David, Terry, Jan, Blake, and Craig Sainsott surveyed about 2/3 of the north half of the entrance before dark.

### 29 January - Survey of pit floor completed

Very early in the morning all prusiked out except Logan and Craig B., who remained to survey the north edge of the bottom. This survey was completed as Blake reached bottom. He was the first to rappel in on the second day of exploration and was followed by Peter, Terry, David, Craig S., and John. Terry and David photographed the pit as the others entered and upon John's arrival surveying began. Proceeding east along the south wall, only a few hours elapsed before closure was made to Logan's and Craig's earlier survey. With information gathering activities completed, the cavers, who had not already exited, did so in turn.

While this was going on, other members topside were lowering a calibrated wire to record the pit's depth. Readings were taken at two points, one at the eastern rigging and the second on farther to the east. Results were 1239 ft and 1345 ft respectively. This latter point is located where the lip is still at the top of a sheer drop and immediately before it recedes from the pit. It is here that a plumb line intersects the talus floor furthest down-slope. All other approaches to the pit, except the rigging area, are characterized by densely overgrown slopes of increasing magnitude. For this reason, it is only practical to rig the pit in that one area.

### 30 January - Survey of entrance completed and hike to El Barro

On the morning of the 30th the only task remaining was the completion of the entrance survey. Frank, Steve, Roy, Donna, and Tom had left the previous day for Austin which left 9 cavers at El Sótano to finish this last part of the survey. Beginning at the last station, the remaining 1/3 of the north half was completed and triangulation stations established. It was then possible to survey the heavily overgrown south half of the entrance perimeter by sighting on persons perched above the pit at closely spaced intervals. All was completed by noon, camp broken, and that afternoon everyone arrived in Rancho El Barro where the night was spent again in the school house.

### 31 January - Hike to Ayutla

At 9:00 a.m. hiking began; down to Río de la Atrejea, up to Cerro de la Tinaja, and down to Ayutla, with arrival at 4:40 p.m. A quick return to Austin was made.

### Pit Statistics

To reach the entrance from Ayutla would require a nearly continuous hike of 9 hours, assuming a pack of 20-30 pounds was carried. This hike would involve changes in elevation totaling 9021 ft. Elevations measured by altimeter:

Ayutla	2699 ft
Trail pass	5859 ft
Río de la Atrejea	3311 ft
Upper edge of El Sótano	6624 ft

The entrance perimeter measures 700 ft by 1400 ft, while the pit floor measures 300 ft by 700 ft. The longest drop is 1345 ft. No other pit in the world is presently known to be deeper.

## A LETTER FROM RICK RIGG

Just finished reading the excellent Carrizal accident report in the last AMCS newsletter, and the suggestions and discussion at the end got me thinking about cave rescue for the first time in a while. That accident had almost all the elements one could imagine for a stateside rescue, plus the additional complications of an international border. I was particularly impressed by the relatively small portion of the total hassle that was caused by the border problem. I'd like to debate some of the conclusions that were drawn from the incident, however.

I'm willing to concede that accidents are probably inevitable, especially in Mexico, and that the number will increase as more and more cavers of less and less competence go there. The situation probably is the same here in the U.S. But I'm still not convinced about the practicality of outside rescue. Consider:

1. There aren't going to be enough rescue situations to keep a "special Mexican cave rescue team" together and operating, unless they go into the practice rescue business full time like typical other U.S. rescue organizations. Even the mountain rescue people, who get a lot more business, spend most of their time practicing and having meetings just to maintain the "critical mass" of population and interest.
2. There is almost never enough time to bring in outside help for saving a life if an injury is involved. Certainly not enough time in a diving situation. Even the above accident took more than 24 hours to get outside help, and it was only about 120 miles from the rescue group. Injured people don't survive in a cave environment that long except under very special circumstances. Rescuers have more time if they're just looking for lost people, but maybe we don't need to worry about that.
3. The only people who are willing to take the time to set up and organize, or even find out about a rescue organization are those who are least likely to need outside help in the event of an emergency. The Carrizal incident with competent cavers around when an incompetent group got into trouble, was the exception rather than the rule.
4. Setting up and maintaining a rescue group is a lot of hassle and bother, and requires the full-time efforts of a lot of people. Who's going to do it?
5. Is it worth it?

The above is all negative, and may appear to lead to the conclusion in the accident report; i.e., make up a list of people who might be able to help and carry it with you. That approach has a lot going for it, but I don't think it's the answer.

### **positive**

1. It's simple. Everybody fills in a questionnaire and somebody compiles the results and publishes it in the Newsletter. A more complex system takes more time to set up and operate, and may have lower reliability.
2. It puts the people at the site in direct contact with cavers who can help out (if it works).

### **negative**

1. How do you decide who's qualified to be on the list? The number of people who could ad-lib a rescue organization as well as Kunath did is probably pretty small. You're looking for an awful lot of attributes (vertical caver, diver, rescuer, organizer) in one person.

2. This accident shows that you can't get in touch with most individual cavers on a big weekend, when the accident probability is highest.
3. It requires a lot of calls to be made out of Mexico. I've never tried, so I don't know how hard it is.
4. Somebody has to keep the list updated and republished, and the people on the list have to be responsible enough to keep sending in changes of address and phone numbers. Good luck!
5. Without being "official," you'll never get government cooperation (Mexico or U.S.).
6. Most people aren't ready to leave on a rescue even if they are home.

Conclusion: Maybe it's the thing to do for the time being, but I don't think it's a good long-term solution.

What is a good long-term solution? It's awful difficult to move people and equipment around in a hurry (especially across borders) unless there is some sort of "official" sanction. This can only dependably be secured for an "official" group with all the hassle and effort and time that that implies. I don't see any way around having such a group in a reasonable long-term solution.

#### **advantages**

1. "Officialness"
2. Twenty-four hour phone, especially if it is associated with a sheriff's office somewhere, as most western rescue groups are.
3. Personnel experienced at working together.

#### **disadvantages**

1. May not have any caving competence, unless it's a bunch of cavers to start with. Most rescue groups have some vertical competence.
2. May not be reliable.
3. May not have any real interest in cave work.

Where is such a group going to come from? Maybe an existing group, like the Laredo rescue group if they have any interest. Maybe it's time to get the NSS rescue operations more organized, and then use that. Maybe Christensen in Missouri or Jim Storey in Atlanta. I don't think the AMCS or any small caving area could keep a reasonable group going; historically lots have started but few survived. The important thing isn't so much which group as a group that has become committed to the idea of rescuing people in Mexican caves. There may be even some Mexican rescue group that could be used, though I find it difficult to believe that one could operate interstate down there. Ken Laidlaw has been in the "official" rescue scene for quite a while and may have some ideas.

#### **Suggestions**

If you go with the "list" approach, you might separate the "organizer" and "rescuer" function. Print a list of nice, competent, stable, stay-at-home cavers who know Mexico and could organize a rescue if they had to (or a long list of such cavers who normally don't stay home), and then give them the necessary information to get the particular technical expertise required. There's probably enough vertical competence in Texas to keep the call list "local," but you might have to go further for divers. I recently put out a 'Caver Information Series' blurb on cave diving, and Dave Jagnow suggested in reviewing it that we put



divers phone numbers in for rescue purposes. I didn't, but maybe I should have. The nearest divers I can think of are Jagnow in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the Hondo group (Christensen) in Missouri, but there must be some in Texas. Going further afield there's Jim Story and group in Atlanta, or Jack Hess and myself in western Pennsylvania, or Ken Laidlaw in Berkeley. I really think you need to get some sort of official group involved to make it work. Would like to hear if anything develops out of all this.

Following the accident at Carrizal, many concerned cavers met in Texas to discuss the event and to formulate future rescue plans. Below are the results.



#### CAVE RESCUE PROCEDURE

When it is necessary for a cave rescue, do the following:

1. Make a collect call to the Cave Rescue number in Waco, Texas. This number is 817-772-0110 and is the phone number of Air-Page Answering Service. The operator will answer the phone by stating the number 772-0110.
2. Tell the operator that you need a cave rescue. She will accept the collect call.
3. Give her your *name* and *phone number*. She will then call the rescue co-ordinators and have them contact you. Stay by the phone until you receive the call.
4. In the case of a very "light" rescue you may call the operator to find out the names of the co-ordinators on the call down list. Please do this at your own expense, unless it is absolutely necessary to do otherwise. Air-Page Answering Service will provide us with a no-charge number until it is used. Then the TSA will be charged for the collect calls plus \$10.00 service charge. So let's not use the service unless it is absolutely necessary.

## WARNING TO NAME DROPPERS

Once I was talking with a Mexican anthropologist friend of mine who told me about this experience in the highlands of Chiapas:

“One time when I was walking along a trail with an Indian we passed a large cave on the side of the trail. I stopped and looked into the mouth and then asked the Indian what the name of the cave was.

“The Indian just shrugged and looked impatient, so I forgot about the whole thing and continued down the trail.

“About a kilometer down the trail the Indian asked me if I still wanted to know the name of the cave. I said I did and the Indian gave me the name which was in the local Mayan language. Then I asked him why he hadn’t told me the name when we were at the entrance. Then he replied that the cave was named for the spirit which lived in it and that the spirit would get mad if you spoke its name within hearing range of the cave. So he waited until he was well out of the spirit’s hearing range to avoid the consequences of getting the spirit mad.”

Felipe