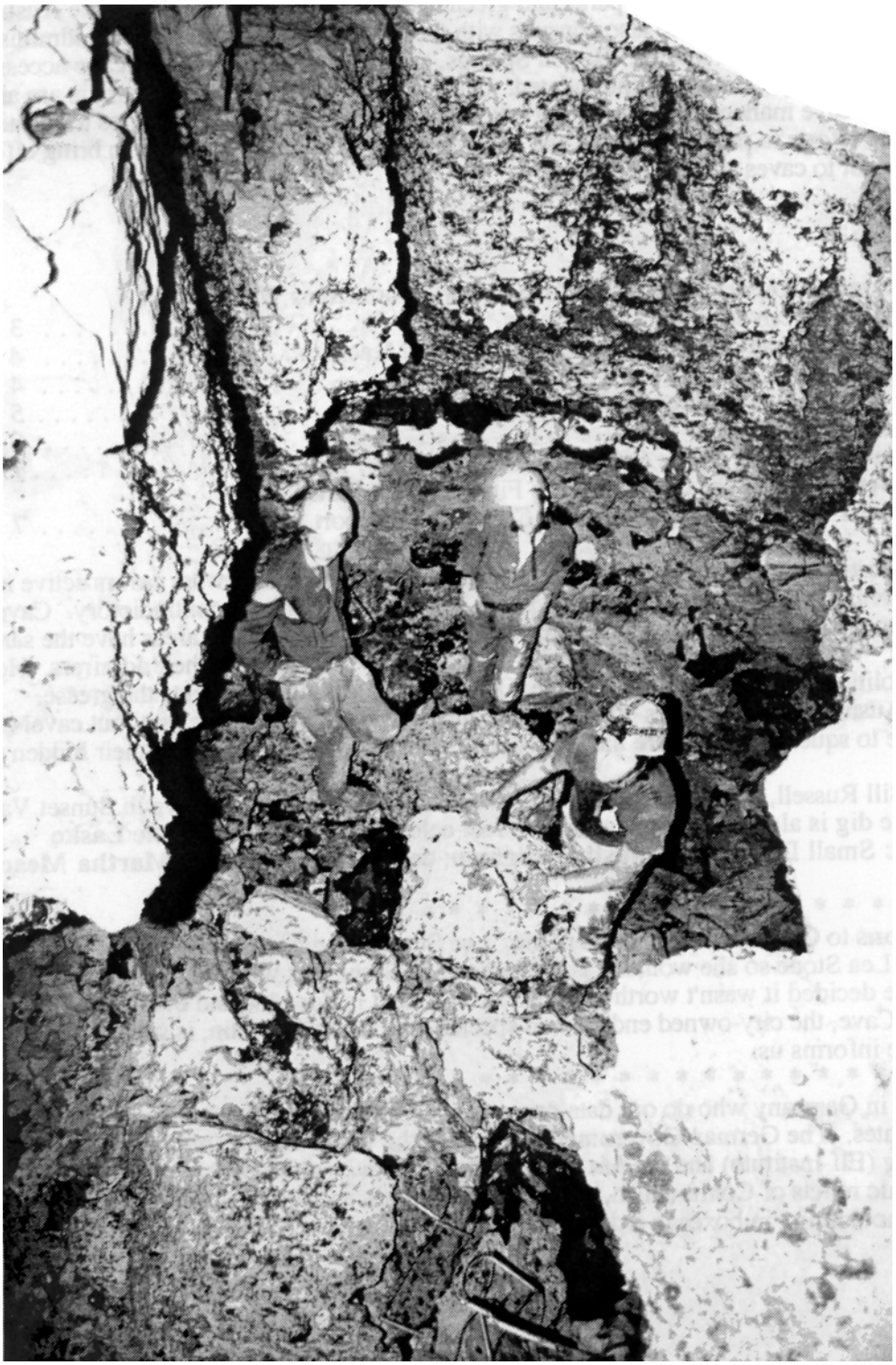
The Capital Caver

Number Two
October, 1993



The TCMA Austin

ILLUMINATING

the

UNDERGROUND

The Capital Caver

The Capital Caver is published by the Texas Cave Management Association -Austin Committee, to keep committee members informed and enthusiastic. TCMA-Austin was established by the Texas Cave Management Association to work with the City of Austin on cave-related problems. A primary objective of the TCMA-Austin is to complete an inventory of city-owned karst features, starting with city parks and greenbelts, and eventually including the Austin-owned BCCP tracts. The committee also consults with the city on policies affecting the administration of caves and cave-related features. Barton Springs, cave preserves, cave gates, cave access, liability, and endangered species are all interrelated. Other cities, agencies, and landowners are also involved in cave management and preservation of the karst. TCMA-Austin tries to influence and coordinate efforts to protect the karst and to develop a constituency of cavers to bring effective management to caves and the karst.

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TCMA-Austin is creating a group of environmentally and politically aware cavers active in the Austin Area. Cavers have a unique viewpoint, sometimes seemingly contradictory. Caves are both "environmentally sensitive" and suitable for spelunking. Many natural areas have the same problems. Yellowstone and Yosemite might well be destroyed by their admirers. However, in today's politically confrontational climate, ONLY the squeaking wheel gets the grease. TCMA-Austin thus encourages efforts to maximize cave access, because, without cavers, there will be no one to squeak. Cavers are the karst police, keeping a loving watch on their hidden realm.

Cover: Bill Russell, Julie Jenkins, and Jim Wolff are about to check the dig in Sunset Valley Cave. The dig is along a fracture about ten feet below Julie. Photo by **Susie Lasko**
Artwork: Small Drawings by Justin Seligman; decorative Oztotols by **Martha Meacham**.

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Corrections to Capital Caver Number One: Lee Stone, the city cave coordinator is LEE Stone. She tried Lea Stone so she wouldn't get letters to Mr. Stone, but when people asked for "Leah" Stone, she decided it wasn't worthwhile, so Lee Stone it is, for now and ever more. Cotterell Cave, the city-owned endangered species cave in north Austin, is spelled Cotterell Cave, Lee Stone informs us.

* *

The elves in Germany who do our data processing and typesetting would like pen pals in the United States. The German Government has closed the *Waldvolksinstitut fur unterirdische Forschung* (Elf Institute) and the *Max-Planck-Instituit, Zweigstelle Brocken,* as obsolete, uneconomic relicts of Communism, and so the collections and archives that took years to develop are now moldering in boxes in a damp cellar. Send letters to DDVW Elves, *c/o Capital Caver.*

TCMA Austin Second Report

Jest John Cave Report

The TCMA Austin report on Jest John Cave, located in the city-owned Forest Ridge BCCP Tract, has been delivered to the City of Austin. This is a general report, intended to familiarize the Parks Department with the cave and to discuss conservation and management strategies.

Jest John Cave has an unusual geographic setting: it is located on the end of a long, narrow ridge of limestone extending southeast from the Jollyville Plateau. The report emphasizes that serious collecting in the cave has just begun, and that many more trips to the cave will be required to adequately survey the biology. The few collections made so far indicate an interesting fauna. The endangered harvestman, *Texella reddelli,* has been tentatively identified from the cave. What was originally thought to be the endangered beetle *Texamaurops reddelli* (because it was the most likely blind beetle) turned out on closer examination to be a new species of the genus *Batrisodes.* Its nearest, but quite different, relative lives in caves in Williamson County several miles to the north. Several *Cicurina* spiders were also collected, but have not been identified as to species. Jest John Cave, like Jester Estates Cave, has no *Rhadine* beetles, but this might be due to the limited collecting. Another possibility is that there has been a recent climatic change. When visited in July of 1993 at the end of a long wet spring, the soil deposits near the entrance contained large mud cracks, with some local rehydration under drips. It is likely that opening the entrance of the cave to provide access has increased the airflow and thus decreased the moisture in the cave. The report recommended that a rock be placed over the 1.3 by 1.0 foot entrance to limit airflow.

TCMA/TSS involved in the **"Hazardous Materials Water Contamination Risk Study"**

This an SOS-mandated study to determine the risk of hazardous material storage and transportation in all parts of Austin. The TCMA and TSS identified sinkholes and sensitive karst areas for inclusion in the study. The entire Edwards Limestone Outcrop, along with the Georgetown Formation and Glen Rose Formations within the Balcones Fault Zone, have the highest geologic risk factor, which gives some protection to the entire karst. However, in the methodology used in the study, the geologic risk comprises 30% of the transportation risk, but only 10% of the total storage risk. The TCMA-Austin thinks this maximum geologic risk factor is justified, but to consider it only 10% of the total risk for storage is inappropriate.

To give guidance to future decisions regarding the location of hazardous material storage areas, we outlined **High Risk Areas** (along creeks, in "karst areas," and within sinkhole drainages), **Moderate Risk Areas** (adjacent to a known karst feature), and **Low Risk Areas** (everywhere else). Four high risk karst areas were designated: the **Kretschmarr Ranch Karst Area, the Beck Ranch Karst Area,** the **Brodie Lane Karst Area,** and the **Slaughter Creek Karst Area.** We hope this study doesn't influence others to believe that all of the karst isn't sensitive. All of the karst is more sensitive than most non-karst, but all of the karst isn't equally sensitive.

Cave Gates-Gates are still planned "soon" for District Park, and Maple Run Caves, and, yes, the Goat Cave Gate is still somewhere near the appropriation/construction phase.

Caver Comments on Draft Recovery Plan for Endangered Karst Species

The TCMA-Austin Committee did not comment officially, since caver concerns were expressed in comments by others. The main points developed in comments by Bill Russell, Mike Warton, and the UT Grotto are that the plan:

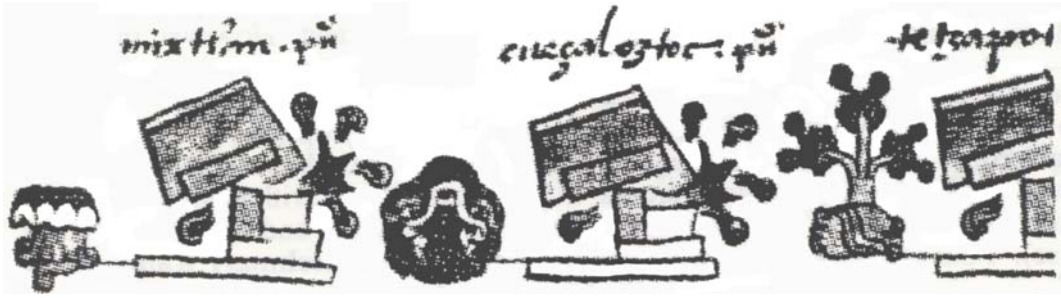
*Needs a provision to include cavers in its operation
*Needs to protect the entire karst system, to include other animals
*Needs to set specific guidelines for establishment of preserves
*Needs to deemphasize the interstitial fauna.

Oztotol: the cavers' secret symbol

The observant new caver will soon notice in the clutter surrounding old cavers many examples of a strange symbol, and if they ask, they will be told it's an "oztotol," and the sign of a real caver. Many cavers use the oztotol in place of the more conventional bat, hardhat or crawling caver to represent all cavers and caving in general. The symbol appears on cars, hardhats, patches, and even inner tubes to identify them as caver-owned. The oztotol was brought back from Mexico by the early Texas cavers, starting in the 1960s, and was widely popularized by the Association for Mexican Cave Studies (AMCS). Lately, the commercially-distributed bumper stickers with newer symbols have reduced the use of the oztotol, but many old cavers regard it as the real symbol of caving.

The oztotol, derived from the Aztec glyph or sign for cave and named for the Aztec cave god, has been heavily ornamented by cavers. An actual oztotol from the Codex Mendoza is shown below (a hand has been added to form the name of a town), followed by an ornamental Oztotol by Martha Meacham, and then followed by a caver Oztotol, usually appearing somewhat as portrayed in the center of the Oztotol Appreciation Society Logo.

An actual line of Aztec text from the Codex Mendoza:



Several other artistic oztotols by Martha Meacham are included elsewhere in this issue. The "MM" bat initials are a nice touch.

Hideout Cave Converted to Animal Den

Lee Stone and Mark Sanders have found evidence of bobcat (?) habitation and have reports of fox sightings in the Karst Preserve. So, after checking with Bill Russell, Mike Kalender and Mark Sanders spent a day cementing rocks in the cave entrance so that only animals could enter Hideout Cave. This will give any animals living in the preserve a safe, secure place away from children and cavers.

The TCMA-Austin Committee thought cavers would not mind sharing part of the karst preserve with the animals. So tell the new cavers, when they walk through the Karst Preserve, that even though Hideout Cave has airflow and is in a promising area, the cave has been thoroughly checked, and it would take a serious effort go further. For the meantime, the cave is for our four-footed caver friends.

If you have a special interest in any city cave (or any other cave, for that manner), try to keep TCMA-Austin informed so that your project won't be adversely affected by someone else.

**Received a call on October 4th that someone had removed the rocks carefully cemented in both entrances. There are a lot of very energetic children in the karst preserve - perhaps organized cavers can contact them and channel their enthusiasm in more productive directions.

Arkansas Caves: Cold, Cold, Cold.
by Justin Seligman

I just got my first edition of the *Capital Caver*, and was very excited to see this long-awaited publication. Briefly about myself: I am a St. Stephen's senior, and have been caving with the St. Stephen's Outdoors Club for only about a year. When I was about 13, I went to a local cave with a friend with one rechargeable flashlight. About 15 feet in, there was a crawlway, where we had to go on our chests. Needless to say, the flashlight died at the back of the cave (another 10 feet later). There was no light. Then we discovered fire ants.

Clearly, I was never particularly inclined to head back to a cave. But I did, and I sort of liked it. Last Spring Break (1992), the St. Stephens Outdoors Club took a river (and cave!) trip to northern Arkansas. The first cave we entered was probably 125 feet long and 1 inch deep. The highlight was a spectacular 20 foot or so waterfall in the back of the cave. I took two pictures; you have to put them together to see the whole thing.

The next cave we entered was known as a "water cave." Little did we know that the cave was actually a "Recently Melted Glacier Water Cave." Our lead woman was Jen Sigmund, "Siggy" for short, and believe me, she is short. Siggy, class of '95, is an interesting 3 foot 2 inch midget (maybe she's *5* foot, but let's be dramatic). My brave companions and I desperately tried to dodge the frigid stream that ran down the center of this 5 foot diameter tube cave. We thought of turning back until Siggy told us, "Hey, guys! You can stand up here!" Little did we realize that Jen is shorter in height than Rush Limbaugh is on compassion.

It was a cold trip - -cold cold cold; but an experience I wouldn't have missed for a "Quick Dip with Piranhas!" The final cave was known as "Friday the 13th Cave" or "Mud Cave." Picture this: a mouth entrance, 20 feet wide, a steep WIDE OPEN path down (it was like a mountain, the walls were 75 feet apart), and then... You are standing at the bottom of a room the size of two gymnasiums (the kind with the indoor tracks). There are twenty foot hills everywhere, and everything is covered with 10 feet thick mud. Much mud surfing and mud fights ensued. Not only was it cheaper than Six Flags, but I got a free mud bath as well. My mother was delighted when I brought home *those* clothes. Cap Brooks, pottery teacher at St. Stephen's, commented on how good the mud (or clay) was. That evening he pit-fired a small pot in the coals of the fire. Had it not gotten down to 15 degrees the next morning, and had there not been frost on the inside of the tent, the pot might not have cracked in half. *Finis.*

Austin Area News

Fire Blackens Whirlpool Preserve

August 19, 1993: After a wet spring and over 50 days of no rain, the lush growth of spring was dry. A fire, thought to have been deliberately set, probably by children, started along the creek to the south of the preserve. The south winds fanned the fire through the dense brush, destroying much of the cedar woods just SE of the preserve and burning through the preserve almost to the MOPAC bridge. Most of the grass burned, and many of the trees along the creek are brown and may not survive.

Mike Walsh organized an after-the-fire-cleanup to remove old barbed wire once hidden in the brush and rebuild the now accessible wall. Helping out were: Mike Walsh, Bill Russell, Jim Wolff, Linnett DeCarli, Robert Wexier, Dale Bernard, Candace Stephens, Lisa Stephens, Brandon Coon and his friend Robert who is into Ground-Penetrating Radar (a technology of the past that never quite worked out, but that Robert thinks still has promise).

Despite the fire, the cave still receives many visitors. On the weekend of September 11, several groups visited the cave, including 32 cavers on the UT Grotto's new caver trip, 35 cavers from A&M, and 10 from Chris Thibodeaux's caver class. The Whirlpool Cave campground was the base for trips to several nearby caves as well, including Maple Run, Goat, and District Park Caves. Without the TCMA, there would likely be no Whirlpool Cave Preserve. Support your local preserve.

The Caver from Muldoon

The sierra loomed black beneath a million stars in the rain-washed summer night, and the damp pines scented the breeze. Far below the stars and the storms, deep within the mountain, it was late evening in Camp III, 800 meters below the cave entrance. Late evening -- caver time, because, after a day of rest, it was almost time for the last sleep, to rest for the long trip back to the surface. Beneath the vaulted roof of the chamber lights glimmered, and in one corner of the camp, a stove hissed softly, as cavers packed for the trip out, or spent their last hours writing their final thoughts, trying to capture the cave in words. Everyone was quiet, the thought of leaving this immense and wonderful cave cast a sad spell over the group. So much cave, so little time. This trip had been an unqualified success, mapping over 6 kilometers of passage, and breaking out of the complex area that had stalled progress for two years. No one wanted to leave, but the trip was over; jobs, friends and family demanded attention.

Yesterday had been the most perfect day a caver could imagine. We had started surveying a fissure trending east from Bocly's Boulder, discovered by Marisol Bocly the year before, and the passage was immediately joined by several other passages to form a roughly tubular passage 8 to 10 meters in diameter, trending downdip to the northeast at a constant 10 to 15 degrees. The passage appeared to have been scoured by ancient floods, and only a few smooth cobbles were left on the scalloped bedrock floor. After 1800 meters of surveying, our adrenalin was almost exhausted, so we ran ahead for a bit to see if there was any immediate obstacle. After 100 meters, we came to a small, probably climbable, 5-meter drop, where a prominent fracture crossed the passage at right angles. Ahead, the passage appeared to narrow and change to a more steeply sloping canyon, but it was past time to return. We named it the Corrales Corridor, as it was trending roughly in the direction of the Arroyo Corrales, ten kilometers away, and 1500 meters lower.

As I was thinking of all this, I looked over to see what Bev, one of my companions of the day before, was doing. She was staring off into space, and I knew she was thinking of the same thing I was, and as I turned away I heard her say in a soft voice, "I want to go back down our passage. I haven't wanted to go anywhere so bad since I was a little girl in Muldoon, and my family was going to my aunt's house for Christmas, and you know how much little girls look forward to Christmas."

"Muldoon, that's the town you grew up in?"

"You couldn't really call it a town, more of a community."

"Sounds like an odd name for a town, where did the name come from?

"It was named after Father Muldoon, a priest who helped Stephen F. Austin escape from a jail cell in Mexico City, when he was arrested by the authorities while trying to help Texans. The town was actually named by one of my relatives, and there is a family story that, after the town was named, Father Muldoon appeared in a dream and, in return for being remembered, promised to help any resident of Muldoon escape if they were ever trapped, but only once -- after that they were on their own."

"How do you qualify for this assistance, just stay in the Muldoon Motel?"

"No, Muldoon doesn't have a Motel, or even a store any more, but everyone in Muldoon knows who lives in Muldoon."

At this point everything that could be packed was stored away, and it was time to rest for the long trip out. Everyone went to sleep thinking of the next trip back **to** the cave, and resolving to arrange their life to make it possible.

"Morning" arrived, and after a breakfast of the last of the freeze-dried, we started the long 3 kilometer hike back to the base of the entrance series. Five hours later, making good time with our now lighter camp duffels and cave-hardened muscles, we entered the chamber at the base of the series of short drops that led up to the entrance drop. The first change we noticed was that there was a pool below the drop where, on the way in, there were only bare rocks. The second change was more alarming. Looking up the 30 meter drop, our lights could just make out the frayed end

of a rope dangling 20 meters in the air. There had apparently been a lot of water coming down the drop. We stood on the edge of the pool looking up into the darkness with an uneasy feeling. We had maybe a day's food with us, and it would be several days before we would even be missed. Then it was a long trip to Mexico, and worst of all, just about everybody who really knew the way to the entrance was in the cave. Then I heard Bev's voice say, faintly but distinctly, "Oh, Father Muldoon." Then, after a short pause, she grabbed my arm and exclaimed, "I see a light, it's a candle!" Looking around I asked, "What light?" "Over there," and she lead the way across the chamber towards the far wall. "It went behind that boulder." "I didn't see any light," I objected. "You weren't looking," she replied, as we slid into the narrow slot between the boulder and the wall. Bev inched forward, squeezed around a corner, and exclaimed, "Look!" A passage two meters high and a meter wide angled steeply upward over a series of ledges. Things were looking up. We called for the others.

Five hours later, I unclipped from the long climb up the entrance drop and collapsed down beside Bev, exhausted but happy. I was very glad Bev had been with us and remarked, "It certainly was a good thing you found the bypass, or we'd still be down there. It was an obscure passage; even the mappers missed it." After a short pause Bev replied," We've got to be more careful in the future--Father Muldoon only comes once."

Buttercup Creek Cave: August 16, 1993
Mark Minton, Nancy Weaver, Bill Russell, Julie Jenkins

After work on Monday, Day 50 of no rain, appeared like a good day to score major local booty and connect Ilex and Buttercup Creek Caves. These caves, just north of Austin, are separated by about 150 feet of low air space, and we had persuaded Mark "don't-make-waves" Minton, veteran Honey Creek Cave low air space caver, to lead the trip; so we headed off into the 5 o'clock traffic.

Sliding into the cave entrance, Bill Russell squashed most of the fire ants into oblivion. The group pushed on through the White Jaws of Death, down Dollar Pit, and arrived at the Upstream Junction to find water gurgling merrily along the passage. This was disturbing: the passage was dry when last visited, and we had hoped water levels would be unusually low due to the drought, a major impetus for the trip.

The cause of the water flow was discovered when we arrived at the first Bathtub. The Bathtub drain had plugged. Two years ago, we had dug out a tube only a few inches in diameter. Opening this tube lowered the water level and allowed access to the upstream end of the cave. This tube did not reenter the cave for about 300 feet, and recent floods (probably the same ones that destabilized the entrance to Ilex Cave) had plugged the tube with leaves and mud.

While we mulled over the problem, Bill Russell attempted to catch a salamander in the Bathtub. Biologists at UT hoped to describe the Buttercup Creek Salamander as a new species, and could use a few more for the type series. This particular salamander was unusually active, and some of the cavers present cheered for the collector and some for the collectee. The collectee won, swimming out of sight for an instant and vanishing.

We then attempted to unclog the drain by sticking a crowbar into the mud as far as we could reach, but no luck. We then decided to dig out a by-pass passage blocked by old formations, and made good progress, but realized we couldn't finish in the time available. On the way back we noticed that the water in the Bathtub section was actually impounded by a mound of white clay on the floor. We fell to work trenching and drained the Bathtub in a rush of water. Alas, too late to explore ahead.

Reaching the entrance, we found the fire ants had regrouped. They were able to inflict major damage on Julie, the first out, who had developed strategic rips in her clothing. However, Julie was an excellent ant blotter, and the rest had no problems. Arriving back at the trucks, Mark and Nancy poured water over their mud-encrusted bodies, slipped into more formal attire, and were off for a night on the town.

District Park Cave: Stonehenge of the West

A person wandering through the woods to District Park Cave would think they had found remains left by a primitive, but mechanically adept, earth cult. Even though cavers might fit that description, the new look of the area wasn't created by cavers. District Park Cave will be in the flood plane after a regional detention pond is built downstream from the cave, so the city has placed rock gabions around the cave to filter any flood water that may enter the cave. These gabions (wire cages filled with rocks) are three feet high, three feet wide and six feet long, and are joined end to end to form a circle 52 feet in diameter around the cave entrance.

When District Park Cave was named, the cave was in the woods, far from civilization, and no one even knew the name of the park. Now there are several District Parks in south Austin, and so the cave is more and more frequently referred to as "Dick Nichols Park Cave." The name of the cave will probably have to soon be officially changed.

"Goat Cave Preserve" is no more

At some time in the recent past, the name of the Goat Cave Preserve was changed to the "Karst Preserve." The new name emphasizes its potential as an interpretative area. Hope the title of this paragraph didn't alarm you too much.

Buttercup Creek Karst Report

The Buttercup Creek Karst-Geology, Hydrology, Land Development, a report by Bill Russell prepared for the UT Grotto, has been released. The report urges development controls in the upper Buttercup Creek Valley (about 320 acres) to help preserve a unique karst area containing the as yet undescribed Buttercup Creek Salamander, as well as an endangered cave-adapted beetle. The salamander, now under study by Paul Chippendale and others at the University of Texas, inhabits an extensive, still mostly unknown, cave system.

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