Texas Cave Management Association

TCMA PASSAGES

SPRING 2010

VOL 11 NO 1

# Whirlpool Hosts Austin Fire Department Training

*By Heather Tuček*

I have yet to be able to make an NCRC rescue training weekend, as my weekends are usually pretty busy. I know I should, seeing as I am a beginner trip leader for the Underground Texas Grotto in Austin, Texas. I've participated in other rescue training before (first aid, CPR, EFR, and rescue scuba cert.), but I had almost no idea how a cave-related rescue would be handled. So, you can imagine my excitement when I heard that the Austin Fire Department would be training with mock rescues at TCMA's Whirlpool Cave Preserve and would be opening it up to any cavers who may want to attend. I emailed the firefighter in charge of sign-ups and registered to attend on Thursday, March 11. I showed up that day a little early, just to feel out the situation. As time went by, more and more engines showed up. I introduced myself to a few of the firefighters and eventually two more cavers arrived - Nikki Green from the UT Grotto, and Ryan Monjaras from Cowtown Grotto in Fort Worth. At the start of the training, the firefighters were briefed on the communications system and a few volunteered to run the wire and Vietnam War era comm phones. Then, the different teams were formed by engines, and were allowed to go into the cave as far as the Travis County Room, to give the firefighters a feel of what caving is like, and see how each individual person dealt with crawling through the underground (quite a few of them had never been in a cave before).

*See TRAINING* ⟶ *p. 5*

# Arburn New D&P Manager

*By Bill Russell and Joe Mitchell*

The TCMA Board is very pleased to announce that a new manager has been chosen for the 225 acre Punkin and Deep Preserve: Don Arburn, a long-time member of the TCMA Board. He will pick up the work at the preserve from Geary Schindel and continue toward the goal of making the preserve a premiere destination for Texas caving. Schindel served as Preserve Manager since TCMA acquired the property in 2004 and has invested a great deal of time and energy to make the property what it is today. TCMA thanks him for his hard work and years of service.

Arburn has begun the task of planning future work to be done on the property. Regarding his new position, he says, "I have some big shoes to fill and would like to thank Geary Schindel for his work. I have only made a site inspection at this point and have identified a few projects I'd like to complete in the next year including boundary clearing, adding campsites and general clean up. I need to prioritize these ideas and present them to the TCMA Board for their input. I look forward to working with Texas Cavers to move forward the TCMA's Deep & Punkin Nature Preserve."

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# WILLIAM TELLS

*By Bill Russell*

As you probably already know by now, TCMA President Bill Russell --- AKA the William of this "William Tells" column, me -- had a stroke on the evening of February 19, 2010. My faculties are still mostly intact, with a few small holes remaining in my visual field, but I plan to remain active in the TCMA and Texas Speleological Survey. I'm out of the hospital as of St. Patrick's Day, and I hope to keep up my active participation in caving affairs. Many thanks to those many cavers who've supported me in my illness; cavers are truly a caring community.

Now, I'm going to use my illness to guilt trip you all: DO YOUR PART, or William might miss when he shoots the apple off your head. The TCMA is facing new challenges, both financial and operational. On the financial side, we have lost our Camp Bullis contract -- the Army cancelled outside contractors. That's the loss of a considerably reliable revenue stream. On the operation side, we need to learn how to better supervise projects on our preserves for the long term. That so many of you have stepped up and continue to step up proves that you all know that TCMA is essential for the future of Texas caving.

What can you do to avoid being plugged by an annoyed apple-shooter? Although it sometimes looks like TCMA is just another speleopolitics group, focus on the great properties that it is holding in trust for the cavers of Texas, and those that it will acquire. TCMA needs your continued good will, support (in the form of effort, labor, and membership money), and attention to the cave resources of the state. When you renew your membership (and you *are*, a member, aren't you?), consider adding an additional donation. Donations have been an important source of TCMA revenue from the first. Buy a T-Shirt for every member of your extended family (www.tcmacaves.org/store). Come out to a preserve or participate in a cave project near you. Tell all your friends in corporate high places that we are worthy of donations. Buy something at the TCMA auctions.

Most of all, say thanks to those who have already donated so much, and pat yourself on the back if you're one of them. And come back soon with more help. Cave softly.


## TCMA Officers and Board - 2010

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# Robber Baron Preserve: From Overgrown Urban Lot to Native Plant Sanctuary

*By Cheryl Hamilton*

Photo by Cheryl Hamilton

Red Yucca and Sage plants at Robber Baron Preserve.

For many years, the Robber Baron Preserve property was typical of many abandoned, overgrown, urban lots. Although some common native trees such as Netleaf Hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*), Honey Mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*), Texas Mountain Laurel (*Sophora secundiflora*) and Texas Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana var. fusiformis*) existed on the site, the majority of the property was overgrown with non-native invasive plants such as Johnsongrass (*Sorghum halepense*), English Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*), and Japanese privet (*Ligustrum japonicum*).

In 1995, the property was transferred to TCMA. After several years of construction around the cave entrance and sinkhole, it was time to focus attention on the landscape. Volunteers began the transformation in the fall of 2007 by manually pulling English Ivy and Johnsongrass. They removed the invasive trees with chainsaws and loppers and added topsoil to the rocky site.

Clearing the brush revealed several native plants hiding among the invasives, including Texas Persimmon (*Diospyros texana*), Gum Bumelia (*Sideroxylon lanuginosum*), Cedar Elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*), Greenbriar (*Smilax bona-nox L.*), Chili Pequin (*Capsicum annuum*), Threadleaf Yucca (*Yucca constricta*), Pigeonberry (*Rivina humilis*), Carolina Snailseed (*Cocculus carolinus*), Yellow Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis stricta*), False day flower (*Commelinantia anomala*) and Spineless Prickly Pear (*Opuntia ellisiana*). Mexicana anemia (*Anemia Mexicana* Klotzsch) was also found on the site. This fern is particularly exciting, as it is endemic to lightly shaded limestone outcrops of the Edwards Plateau and it is unusual to find it in an urban setting.

The next step involved drafting a landscape plan. Goals for the site included erosion control around the sinkhole and screening from the streets and alley to create a quiet sanctuary and park. Other goals included restoration with mostly native plants that would attract insect pollinators and local and migratory birds. A number of factors were considered in the plant selection, including whether the plants were deciduous or evergreen and shade-tolerant or sun-loving. Plants were selected for their value and attractiveness to wildlife and for their tolerance to drought conditions. Overall aesthetics and seasonal color and variation were also important considerations.

In the spring of 2008, volunteers planted over eighty new trees and shrubs, including Texas Red Oak (*Quercus texana*), Yellow Colombine (*Aquilegia chrysantha*), Crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*), American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa Americana*), Mountain Sage (*Salvia regla*), Scarlet Sage (*Salvia coccinea*), Barbados Cherry (*Malpighia glabra*), Cenizo (*Leucophyllum frutescens*), Mexican Bush Sage (*Salvia leucantha*), Red Yucca (*Hesperaloe parviflora*) and Pride of Barbados (*Caesalpinia*

See NATIVE PLANTS ⟹ p. 4

## NATIVE PLANTS (from p. 3)

*pulcherrima*) among others. Spring rains that year helped greatly in the establishment of the initial plantings.

In the fall of 2008, Robber Baron saw its largest work day ever, with fifty-three volunteers. On that day, over one hundred plants of various sizes were added to the preserve. The Anacacho Orchid Tree (*Bauhina lunarioides*), Twist Leaf Yucca (*Yucca rupicola*), Devil's Shoestring (*Nolina lindheimeriana*), Evergreen Sumac (*Rhus virens*), Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), Turk's Cap (*Malvaviscus drummondii*), Yellow Bells (Tecoma stans), Rock Rose of Pavonia (*Pavonia lasiopetala*), Gregg's Mistflower (*Conoclinium greggii*), White Boneset (*Eupatorium serotinum*) and Inland Sea Oats (*Chasmanthium latifolilum*) were among the plantings. Unfortunately, that fall also saw the beginning of several months of unusually dry and hot weather. Volunteers hand-watered the new plants for nearly a year to help them get established.

In the fall of 2009, twenty-five volunteers added nearly three hundred more plants to the preserve. During this planting, the emphasis was on erosion control around the sinkhole. Deep-rooted grasses such as Lindheimer Muhly (*Muhlenbergia lindheimeri*), Nimblewill (*Muhlenbergia schreberi*), Rice Cut Grass (*Leersia oryzoides*) and Seep Muhly (*Muhlenbergia reverchonii*) were planted inside and outside the perimeter fence. Additional trees included Little Walnut (*Juglans microcarpa*), Mexican Buckeye (*Ungnadia speciosa*) and Vasey Oak (*Quercus vaseyana*). New shrubs included Big Red Sage (*Salvia penstemonoides*) and Coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*). That evening, five inches of rain provided a deep soaking for the new plantings. Significant rainfall persisted for approximately six months, giving the newer and the older plantings additional support. A colder winter in 2009-10 resulted in typical die-back of many of the plants. However, they are showing new growth as warmer weather arrives in March 2010.

Photo by Cheryl Hamilton

**Pride of Barbados.**

Photo by Cheryl Hamilton

**Monarch Butterfly on Gregg's Mistflower.**

Almost every day, families with small children, neighbors and passerbys visit the preserve to peer into the sinkhole, read about the cave on the educational kiosk, stroll along the paths, examine the labeled plants, have lunch on the picnic table or find a bit of solace in this restored habitat. If you haven't stopped by lately, please do. You will be greeted by birds singing, butterflies sipping nectar from native plants, and the quiet of a shady sanctuary in the midst of a busy urban environment.

## TRAINING (from p. 1)

The cavers went in with the first group, which included members of Engines 11 and 13. After a short break in the TC Room, and a couple of us talking about common caving practices, we exited the cave.

A fire chief for AFD worked with some of the other high-ranking officers, to decide on what the rescue scenarios would be. They came up with 3 "patients" who were played by rookie firefighters, and had them go into the cave and hide in specific places, that only the people in charge knew. Nikki volunteered to be the first caver to "show up on-scene" and went in with the first group, Engine 20. They were instructed to locate and retrieve patient #1. The rest of us waited for our assignments. Ryan got placed on the haul team at the top, whose job it was to pull up the rope as soon as the rescue sked was attached. I was teamed up with the Rescue 211 team from the Pflugerville Fire Department. This engine was the last to go in. It consisted of me, the caver, the Lieutenant in charge, and 3 other firefighters. We were instructed to locate the third patient, who was said to be somewhere in the East Passage. We were to check in with topside within the hour. The Lieutenant asked me to lead them in, since I was the only one on their team who knew the cave. What an honour! We booked it to the Travis County Room with a brief pause to catch our breath and check up on the other engine that was in that room. Their patient was stable and they were waiting for the sked and OSS (Oregon Spine Splint) to arrive so they could take the patient out of the cave. We were told that some rescuers had gone down to check the East Passage, but didn't know if they had gotten back yet. The Lieutenant in charge of Rescue 211 decided that we should continue anyway and see what we could do to help. It was our patient, after all.

Halfway to the end of the East Passage, the crawl-way gets shallower and shallower. Three of the firefighters in my group didn't feel comfortable or safe squeezing through any further. The Lieutenant and I continued on, giving the rest of the team orders to find us if we were gone more than 20 minutes. We searched every nook and crannie, but couldn't find the patient, or the other rescuers. We returned exhausted to the other members of our group, and crawled back to the Travis County Room. We sat there for a few minutes, discussing what to do about our missing patient. Nikki commented that she might have gone down the South Passage, toward the Surprise Room. Could she have read the map wrong and taken the other turn? The Lieutenant made the call that we would head down the South Passage. As we were preparing to leave, one of the communications personnel informed us that Patient #3 (our patient) had been found in the sump passage. Rescue 211 assisted with securing Patient #2, and helped to transport him closer to the entrance.

When it seemed things were under control, we went back to Patient #3 to see how we could help the rescuers who had found her. They seemed to have things under control, so we helped them transport her once she was out of the sump. I (along with my Lieutenant) assisted in moving both Patients #2 and #3 through the dip under the Natural Bridge by getting on our hands and knees and using our backs to create a bridge for the skeds to slide along. Once we had found them, the entire process of getting the patients out of the cave went rather smoothly. During the debriefing, each patient said that their ride out was relatively comfortable.

As for me, I learned a great deal about how the fire department handles rescue operations and even though some of the politics get in the way at times, the actual rescues are very well organized and relatively efficient. I greatly enjoyed being a part of the Rescue 211 team and feel as if they adopted me as one of their own. I learned a lot, had a blast, made some new friends, and feel safer than ever in a cave rescue situation. Even though the guys would tease each other mercilessly, they'd still call each other "sir". It was a good balance of respect and camaraderie. I know that if I ever need a rescue squad to come get me, I know that the Engines I witnessed training in Whirlpool Cave last week have been well trained, are more than capable, and have my complete trust, especially the guys from Rescue 211 in Pflugerville. I can't wait for an opportunity to work with those guys again (in a non-emergency situation of course...)!

# Punkin Cave Survey Trip #12, 5-7 Feb 2010

*By Jim "Crash" Kennedy*

We started with 22 cavers signing up for this trip, 15 veterans ("Punkinheads") and 7 folks who have never surveyed in Punkin before ("Punkin Sprouts"). By the time we got there, we lost two due to disabilities and last-minute job assignments. We lost another Saturday morning due to illness, and one of the Sprouts was a non-caver and did not intend to go in the cave. So we had 18 folks ready to go, divided into 4 teams, most of which attacked the relatively poorly explored Western Maze.

The first team, TEAM ORGY, led by sketcher Allan Cobb, started on some new holes in the floor near the Western Parallel. "So many holes to check out!" they lamented. Assisted by team members Arron Wertheim, Jill Orr, and Lydia Hernandez (who was later traded for Sean Vincent), they made one vertical loop and ended up back in the entrance room before popping down another hole and eventually connecting to the Hellmouth section. They made 23 shots and surveyed 96.26m (315.8 feet), for an average of 4.18m (13.7 feet) per shot. There are other holes in the area still to be checked out in another orgy of exploration.

The second team, TEAM TOP, started the "ZZ" survey in yet another hole on the west side of the entrance room. Sketcher Geary Schindel led Don Arburn, Ann Scott, Matt Turner, and Sean Vincent (later traded for Lydia) to map a bunch of shallow loops in the western maze, tying in to previous surveys from Lee Jay Graves and crew, and also to surveys from the other two teams in the area at the same time. They closed several loops during their 25 shots, surveying 68.80m (225.7 feet), for an average of 2.8m (9.0 feet) per shot.

The third team, TEAM FURTHER DOWN, started out improving sketches from previous western maze surveys, aided by a line plot provided in advance. This team consisted of sketcher John Brooks, assisted by Chris Vreeland, Bonnie Longley, and Josh Rubinstein, all three of whom have been on previous surveys in this part of the cave. They began new survey at station WM24, and put in 13 additional shots, gaining another 10m of depth and leaving many leads for future surveys. Since some of their time was spent resketching old survey, they only got 50.45m (165.5 feet) of new survey, for an average of 3.9m (12.7 feet) per shot.

The last team, TEAM PANCAKE REVISITED, began cleaning up more leads in the Medusa Maze. Visiting NCKRI cavers George Veni (sketcher), Dianne Gillespie, Lewis Land, and sprout Matt Zaldivar were guided to this complex area by an injured Jim Kennedy. They began with one of two loops Jim remembered from the November survey, but soon got into more passage and didn't complete the loops. They ended up tying into both the previous Medusa Maze (MMM survey), and the Upper Medusa (UM) survey. They found another room with Pissicles and strange chalky white minerals, probably also biogenic. After the seemingly endless breakdown mazes, they started the survey of the Dungeon, the huge lift tube discovered in November. However, George and Dianne were a centimeter too big for the top of the slot. After some fruitless rock pounding, Matt, Louis, and Jim shot a line into the Dungeon room, but didn't sketch it due to the approaching "out of the cave" deadline. There are good leads there going down in this important part of the cave, and we still have to sketch that section, as well as complete the loops off the Pumpkin Pancake Room. This team set 32 shots totaling 93.58m (307.0 feet), averaging 2.9m (9.6 feet) per shot.

In summary, four survey teams in Punkin Cave put in another 93 shots of survey and added another 309.09m (1014.12 feet) of passage to the length of the cave, the best in the last five expeditions. The average shot length of 3.32m reflects the slow nature of the surveys. The new length of the cave is now 2822.2m. It just moved from the #19 spot on the Texas Long Cave list to #13, displacing Spring Creek Cave, Prassell Ranch Cave, Phantom Springs Cave, Rocket River Cave System, River Styx Cave, and nearby Deep Cave. It only needs another 532m to hit #12 and displace Natural Bridge Caverns, and another 553 to pass Caverns of Sonora, and 622 meters to knock off Airmans Cave and enter the Top 10. The depth of Punkin has not changed in several trips, remaining at #28 on the Texas Deep Cave list, but the Dungeon area holds great promise for something deeper. The next trip will likely be in early June, and as usual, Punkin survey veterans will receive first notice before it is posted to CaveTex.

# Regarding the D&P Porch...

*By Bill Russell*

In the name of the TCMA Board, I would like to address what I know has been the subject of much recent discussion in some quarters: the decision to remove the second story of the porch structure at the Deep and Punkin Preserve.

The Board deliberated long and hard on this decision, given that it undoes some work generously donated by some of Texas caving's most enthusiastic supporters. As TCMA Vice-President Arron Wertheim has expressed in an email: "The decision to remove the second floor portion of the porch was not taken lightly, and it was voted on with heavy hearts and much concern for everyone who has so generously donated their time, money, materials, and sweat to get it to its current station." That I would like to underscore and reiterate.

This unfortunate but necessary result points to some growing pains within TCMA, as we learn long-term planning and management strategies for our assets. We are slowly learning to deal with ongoing financial challenges and to work with preserve managers to guarantee that precious volunteer hours and donations do not go to waste.

The basic issue for the D&P porch is that the Board felt that the project design did not meet engineering safety standards that would answer to liability concerns. When the issues first came to light, it was felt that ensuring the safety of the structure was only a matter of a few work days and some more materials. After more time passed and in light of further information gathered, that doesn't seem to be the case and so the Board voted to stop any expenditures in that direction and to guarantee safety to the degree possible.

The Board reluctantly agreed that it would be a poor use of resources to fix this ambitious structure—though at the same time, we realized that it might cost us good will. Nonetheless, we felt we had no other choice. As Wertheim summarized:

"Unfortunately, the TCMA, in analyzing the structure's potential costs and our available resources, determined that we are not in a position to fund further modifications. Simply, the structure requires A LOT more heavy steel and different building methods, and there is still no guarantee it will be stable.

"We have solicited bids from several engineering firms to evaluate the structure . . . [It would cost] $1000 each time the engineer went to see the structure, $2500 for plans and drawings that correct any problems. This $3500 is just for an professional engineer to look at our issues - once. The amounts required to modify and correct any building errors are in addition and would easily run many, many more thousands of dollars, even if cavers did most of the work."

The Board's decision was to leave the ground floor in place along with the second story floor (and removing access to the second level), while removing the upright supports and roof above the second level as an immediate safety solution. We will then reevaluate the stability of the structure as part of a permanent solution that may include converting the second story floor to a porch roof. The existing, unfinished structure is indeed attractive in its inspiration, but the Board felt that this was the only way to avoid potential injury or damage—one lawsuit could threaten the preserve's whole existence.

To all who have contributed their time, expertise, and money to this project: we apologize sincerely if our failure has caused you to feel that your contributions were diminished. Such generous efforts on the part of Texas cavers are rare assets that we do not want to squander. We need your continuing participation, excitement, talent, and support, if the D&P Preserve is to continue being the resource for Texas caving that it has been under Geary Schindel's exemplary management.

The TCMA Board wishes to express its deepest gratitude to the many people who have devoted so much time to the porch project under the direction of Jon Cradit over the last couple of years, and especially to the Fort Worth-Dallas area cavers who provided the building materials and talent, to the cavers from Austin, San Antonio and beyond who provided labor, and especially to Geary Schindel and to all of the Texas grottos who have made this whole endeavor possible.

Rest assured Texas Cavers, TCMA will honor your contributions by seeing the structure's materials find other uses on the property, and that we do a better job as we learn to function as a mature karst conservancy—only so little time after Texas pulled off the miracle of burning the D&P mortgage. We are learning what responsibilities must be upheld and what types of communication are necessary between the Board, the membership, Texas Cavers, and our Preserve Managers; we ask for your tolerance and continued support as we grow.

## TCMA Preserve Managers

| | |
|---|---|
| Deep & Punkin: | Don Arburn |
| Ezell's: | Jon Cradit |
| Godwin Ranch: | Aimee Beveridge |
| Lost Oasis: | Julie Jenkins |
| Robber Baron: | Joe Mitchell |
| Rolling Oaks: | Evelynn Mitchell |
| Whirlpool: | Julie Jenkins |
| UT Lands: | Peter Sprouse |

## TCMA Committee Chairs

| | |
|---|---|
| Bookkeeper: | Susan Souby |
| Database Manager: | Ron Ralph |
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| Acquisitions: | Bill Russell |
| By-Laws: | Bill Russell |
| Budget: | Ron Ralph |
| Communications: | Kevin McGowan |
| Fundraising: | |
| Insurance: | Jon Cradit |
| Nominations: | |
| Membership: | Don Arburn |
| Finance: | Linda Palit |
| Preserve Management: | Jim Kennedy |

## TCMA SEEKING CHAIR FOR FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE

TCMA is seeking a Fundraising Chairman to supervise and coordinate our important fundraising efforts.

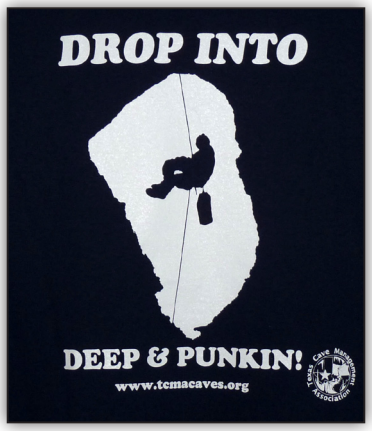
With the completion of the fire ant contract that helped finance the TCMA activities, we need to evaluate and work on new and varied fundraising activities. A chairman of the committee is desperately needed as fundraising is now essential to the continued activities of TCMA. A person with enthusiasm, ideas, ability to coordinate different activities, and the desire to begin new activities and work on coordination of those is essential. Please consider taking on this role, or suggesting any person you think might be qualified. Contact William Russell whrussell@gmail.com or any board member to volunteer or make suggestions.

## Support TCMA! Get a T-Shirt!

**TCMA now accepts new memberships, renewals, or donations online with Paypal!**
**www.tcmacaves.org/financial**

### DEEP & PUNKIN SHIRT

Colors: Navy, Grey, and Red

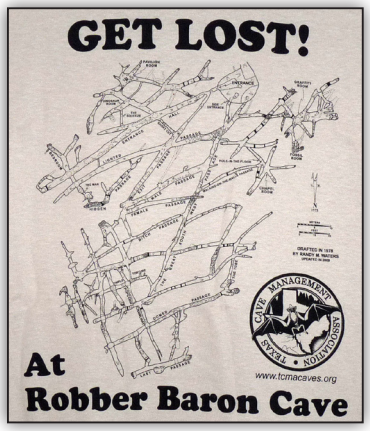



### TCMA SHIRT

Colors: Grey and Tan

### ROBBER BARON SHIRT

Colors: Green, Blue, and Tan

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**Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL** **Price: $15 + $2.50 shipping**

For information or to order contact: Joe Mitchell at joe.mitchell@tcmacaves.org