Texas Cave Management Association

TCMA PASSAGES

FALL 2015 - VOL. 15, NO. 3

Acquisitions Committee: Behind the scenes ...

by Travis Scott, Committee Chair

Behind the scenes, the Acquisitions Committee of Texas Cave Management Association has been busy seeking new caves to acquire in support of TCMA's mission. Each week, most of Central Texas' real estate market is assessed for new properties. In the last few months, committee activity has increased as key opportunities were sought for TCMA.

Currently, we are researching several potential properties. One or more of these could be successful – or not. Our work involves extensive research. An initial filter process has already eliminated a number of properties, such as small karst features on large ranches – either too expensive for TCMA to buy or falling outside our interests for acquisitions.

Throughout the year, we have found several properties with "caves" either in the descriptions or in the photos. Some were actually small karst features while others turned out to be dead ends. We'll continue checking out new leads since we can't leave any stones unturned!

Since real estate negotiations by their very nature can't be public, we won't mention names until we're close to a "done deal." Also, some caves – famous or not – periodically come back

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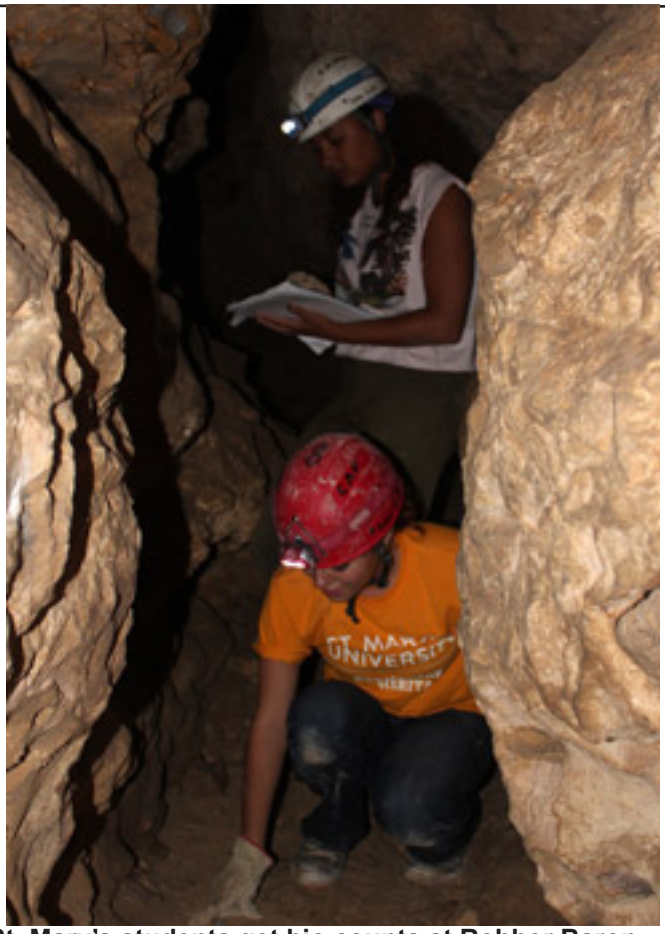

St. Mary's students get bio counts at Robber Baron

Robber Baron: Cool research!

by Joe and Evelynn Mitchell, Preserve Managers

A great deal of research work was accomplished at Robber Baron Cave over the past year, primarily by students and faculty at both St. Mary's University (StMU) and the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). These have included a biological survey, air sampling, soil sampling, testing of an air sampling device and a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey down a couple of passages inside the cave.

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President's Perspective: **Texas caves for Texas cavers!**

By John Brooks, TCMA President

Cavers and non-cavers frequently ask me about the Texas Cave Management Association. They see the stickers on my truck or visit a preserve and wonder what it is all about. The simple answer can be found in the TCMA's Mission Statement:

"TCMA exists to acquire, conserve, and manage caves, and to promote research and education regarding caves and karst while providing responsible access to our preserves."

Net-net: TCMA is many things to many people. A more simple explanation is that the organization creates an opportunity for Texas cavers to acquire, own and manage our own caves. As some cavers explain it, our unofficial motto seems to be" "Texas Caves for Texas Cavers."

The TCMA is defined by an amazing commitment and dedication to our organization: The members, preserve managers, committee chairs and directors are all volunteers. The "work" of our organization is done because of a shared passion for cave conservation.

That means there are a lot of people to thank for our successes. The contribution of each of these individuals is why the TCMA is such a great organization.

John Brooks in TCMA board meeting at Cave Without a Name

Sure, the TCMA has a few challenges to overcome; that is to be expected of an all-volunteer organization. But our ability to manage cave preserves - and raise funds to acquire new preserves - would not be possible without the dedication of volunteers who do the work required to keep this organization on track.

A few of our accomplishments this year:

- We raised over $6,000 during our TSA Spring Convention auction.
- We put a new roof on the field house at the Deep & Punkin Cave Preserve.
- Our Acquisitions Committee has looked at several properties with caves. Although none met our criteria for acquisition, we continue to seek out new potential new preserves.
- We have active exploration and mapping projects in several of our caves, and new passage is being found on a regular basis.
- Our board has grown to represent the entire state with directors coming from across the length and breadth of Texas.
- The TCMA was awarded a LIP Grant to install a new bat-friendly gate on Ezell's Cave. The grant will cover 50 percent of the cost, and the remainder will be funded by donations and a TCMA fund-raising effort. So what's next?
- The board of directors, our committee chairs and preserve managers are working to streamline our workings and governance.
- We'e working through the process of becoming an accredited land trust by adopting Land Trust Alliance policies and procedures.
- The board, committee chairs and preserve managers are meeting in early September to revisit our strategic plan that was created several years ago. We will evaluate our progress in meeting the goals we set for this organization several years ago.
- Our acquisition committee is active and is continually looking for our next preserve.

The efforts of our many members and volunteers have allowed us to accomplish great things this year... and will ensure that we fulfill on our mission of protecting and preserving "Texas Caves for Texas Cavers."

If you would like to be involved, the TCMA would welcome your efforts.... just ask and we will find a way for you to contribute to the best cave conservancy in Texas.

TCMA elections: **Candidate statements for director**

Elections for TCMA's Board wrap up in November. Paper ballots will be mailed on Oct. 21 and counted on Nov. 10. For more info, visit the TCMA website at http://www.tcma-caves.org/ ... Here are profiles of director candidates:

Barry Adelman: I've been caving Texas caves since 2007. I'm a member of TSA and the UT Grotto and have been a part of large survey projects in the TX Hill Country. My caving experience includes supporting project managers, scientists and divers including many tank hauls at honey Creek. At the heart of my desire to cave is exploration and comradery. If elected I will use all of my strengths in relationship building, policy improvement, marketing and negotiations skills for the betterment of TCMA.

Barry Adelman

Lee Jay Graves: I have been a TSA member for 28 years; I have worked with the TCMA since shortly after its inception, and was elected Director in 1991. I am a Life Member of the NSS, (30591RL) and recently I earned a 25-year pin.

Lee Jay Graves

I began performing cave and karst research professionally in 1990, and have been involved in the continuing research into the threatened caves and karst of central Texas, as a working caver, conducting karst terrain surveys, excavating sinkholes, and exploring and mapping the caves we find, as well as collecting cave invertebrates, my specialty. Three years ago, I began working for the City of Austin Watershead Protection department, as a cave specialist. I have devoted my life to caving, I love caving in Texas, and cherish the fellowship of my caving friends.
I have no specific agenda, if I am asked to serve I intend to attend every meeting possible, I'm most interested in our preserves, and adding to our cave inventory. Let's build our organization; we could add a new cave to Punkin and Deep property if we could open the cave in front of the cabin!

Jay Jorden: I am writing to seek your support for re-election as a TCMA director. I have been a TCMA member since 1987 and began serving in volunteer roles soon afterward, editing the first TCMA newsletter and working behind the scenes on the team that acquired Whirlpool and Lost Oasis, among the first caves TCMA purchased. Through the years, I have continued to volunteer for preserve work and was greatly excited to see TCMA acquire the Deep and Punkin property – because Punkin Pit was my first cave as a newbie UT Grotto member in 1971!
As an NSS life member (NSS 143356LF), I have represented TCMA as an officer of the NSS Conservation Committee and Cave Management Section – and helped organize and host the national cave and karst symposium that TCMA sponsored in New Braunfels for cave conservancies and government agencies nationwide in 1988. Through the years, I have remained a passionate supporter of the work we are doing in preserving caves for future generations and educating the public at large and kids in particular about the value of our underground world and the creatures that live there.

Jay Jorden

My other activities outside cave conservation have included serving as chair of the Cave Vandalism Deterrence and Reward Commission of the NSS, Texas coordinator of the National Cave Rescue Commission and editor of the Texas Caver as well as chair and vice-chair of the Dallas-Fort Worth Grotto. I would like to continue and help drive the work the TCMA board has started to aggressively grow our preserves and enhance the benefits they provide the Texas caving community – as well as those who come after us.
I am very impressed with the dedication and enthusiasm of our TCMA board and officers and **would appreciate your vote,** enabling me to continue serving with them.

Denise Prendergast: Hello, cavers! I have been a caver since 1998 and love this community of ours. I admire TCMA's mission to preserve karst and caves and would love to serve as a director in such a great organization. Conservation of natural resources is one of the most important things we can do in these times of rampant development. Thanks for your support!

Denise Prendergast

Joe Ranzau: I am asking for your vote to allow me to serve a term on the Texas Cave Management Association Board of Directors. My goal for this term on the Board is to run and serve again as Treasurer of the organization. The current Treasurer, Michael Chicherski and I have collaborated together for many years on TCMA finances. Michael is ready for a well-deserved rest.

Joe Ranzau

As a former Treasurer of TCMA, I am well versed in skills and commitment needed to manage TCMA's half million dollars in liquid assets. I see no reason to deviate from the solid foundation Michael has put in place. It will be my priority to cultivate a new generation of Texas Caver to help

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TCMA elections: **Candidate statements**

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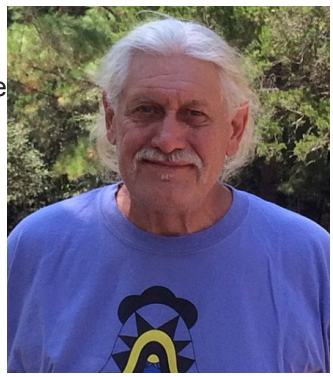
step in to managing the finances of this organization. In addition to serving previous terms as a director and officer of TCMA, I have also been an officer of the TSA and the Bexar Grotto.

My caving life started 19 years ago as a tour guide at Cave Without a Name. Some strange people from the Bexar Grotto would come out to go play in the stream passage. It looked like fun and they did not appear too crazy, I wanted to know what was around the corner, so I joined in! From there I quickly joined in the fun around the state at various projects like Kickapoo Caverns and at Colorado Bend. Pat Copeland and other cavers lit a passion in me for cave conservation and restoration. This passion has taken me caving in many special places around the US, Mexico, and Belize.

The TCMA stewards places like Ezell's Cave, a portal into the Edwards Aquifer or Deep and Punkin Preserve, a place that not only provides great recreational caving opportunities but also allows us to protect an important bat colony. Giving back to something that gives us so much joy is important. Vote for Joe!



John Schneider

John Schneider: I started caving in fall 1967. On my second trip a friend and I discovered the major portion of a now 29 mile long cave and the excitement of that find has kept me caving for 48 years. With that start, I caved in southern Missouri for 13 years with 4 different grottos and was president of Chouteau Grotto in 1978. After graduating college in 1980, I moved to Houston and for the next 28 years I was a member of GHG exploring caves in the hill country and northern Mexico. When I retired in 2008 I moved to Red Rock, Texas and have been caving with the UT Grotto since then.

I would like to use my many years of experience of exploring the good, the bad and the ugly (trashed and graffiti covered) caves in different areas of the country to help the TCMA to identify, acquire and properly maintain unique and endangered caves and karst areas in Texas.

Drew Thompson: I have been a member of the TCMA for over a decade and an active member in the UT Grotto in Austin, Texas. With the Grotto, I have caved throughout the US and Mexico. I organize a weekly volunteer dig night with permission to excavate caves on city owned properties. I have set up and participated in many other volunteer work trips throughout Texas. I am currently employed as the Team leader of the City of Austin Cave Team. A city hired team of cave specialists working under the Watershed Protection Department of the City of Austin. Along with the Cave team I perform environmental studies and cave excavations for educational and recharge purposes. I have successfully completed the first level of NCRC and am looking forward to completing the rest.

My mission is to expose and recruit new cavers into the community, helping to direct them onto new projects and trips. My goal is to "Welcome, Educate, and Guide."

Calendar

Voting deadline - TCMA elections	Nov. 10
Ezell's Cave Preserve work day	Dec. 12

For more calendar items, visit:
http://www.tcmacaves.org/

Ezell's Cave Preserve update: gating project

By Ron Ralph, Preserve Manager

Thanks to the hundreds of volunteers who have participated in building the new gate at the Texas Cave Management Association's Ezell's Cave Preserve in San Marcos.

We will convene again on **Saturday, December 12,** beginning around 9 a.m. to put the finishing touches on the gate. This will involve first removing thick brush, briar, and small trees inside the main compound and then cutting and welding the sliding gate so that it will function smoothly. We will continue work to remove the many invasive tree species living on the lower slopes of the property.

A major project will involve eradicating bamboo, which continues to invade the southeast corner of the preserve. This effort will involve both cutting and chipping the stalks and grubbing out the roots. Hopefully we can enlist the aid of some heavy machinery to assist in this work. Trash removal and brush clearing along Brown Street is an ongoing project. Once cleared, additional mulch will be spread in this area to slow erosion and provide protection for recovering native grasses and shrubs. After the work session the cave will be open to visitation by the hard working volunteers.

So bring your tools and caving gear for the annual maintenance day at Ezell's Cave Preserve. If you have questions or need directions, please give a call. The TCMA cannot manage our properties without the on-going assistance of Volunteers in Preserves (VIPs). I hope those who have labored here have enjoyed the TCMA preserve and our unique window into the aquifer.

FYI, you can reach me at (512) 797-3817. Thanks!

Robber Baron Cave: **Recent (cool!) research**

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Dr. Evelynn Mitchell at StMU primarily coordinated these efforts, especially involving StMU students. The first is a biological survey effort, where students performed monthly counts of different types of cave fauna observed along transects starting at both entrances. The purpose was to determine how the populations of fauna changed in the cave over time and to identify any seasonal trends. This survey project is now in its second year of data collection, and future students will be analyzing data from both years to determine any correlations between populations of fauna with temperature, humidity, and recent precipitation.

A second StMU project was a student soil sampling effort. In this project, many locations within the cave were selected to determine if there was a chemical difference between soils located near the entrances of the cave and soils from passages further back in the cave. Sampling was performed last spring in the cave, and the analysis is still continuing.

At UTSA, a master's student - Reece Thompson (also involved in caving and a TCMA member) - has performed monthly air sampling at several locations within the cave as part of his thesis project. Reece has monitored carbon isotope ratios within the air samples and has taken drip water samples in an effort to understand the mechanism that produces CO2 in the cave.

Also at UTSA, another student project out of the Mechanical Engineering Department (not related to Reece's project) involved developing a device to collect periodic air samples in the cave. The objective was to construct a system - compact, durable and battery-powered - to collect and store multiple samples and be left in the cave for an extended time. After the samples are collected, they can be analyzed in a laboratory setting. This would allow more frequent sampling in a cave environment without multiple trips into the cave and would also remove effects of human breath in air samples.

Finally, Dr. Mitchell and a *Ben Hur-esque* cast of cavers also carried out a GPR survey of the Entrance and Lighted Passages of the cave. Both of these passages were filled in during development of the cave in the 1920s to make a nice level trail. We were hoping to determine the depth of the fill and whether there might potentially be any filled pits visible. Also, although GPR has been commonly used on surface surveys to look for voids, it has only rarely been used within caves. There were some challenges with the survey since the passages are relatively narrow and the GPR did not fit in certain areas. Some sections of passage had mud or standing water at the time which made for additional challenges in taking and interpreting the data. Scans taken with a shorter range wavelength tended to bounce off the side walls, but scans taken with a longer range wavelength appeared to show that most portions of the passage had strong reflection about 6-7 feet down. However, in one area under and east of the Devil's Kitchen there was a different signature with no reflection down to 12-15 feet. A pit about 12 feet deep was dug in the 1980s by George Veni and Randy Waters in this section and they did not reach a rock floor. This appears to at least partially corroborate the GPR data.

Acquisitions Committee

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up on the market, so we can't close the door - but publicizing these would jeopardize a deal.

Several months ago, it came to the committee's attention that a ranch with a well-known cave was comng up for sale. This large ranch would have been expensive to acquire and, even though we knew the owners, the property could not be subdivided and getting a loan was not feasible. Even so, the property is transitioning and so cavers will maintain contact.

This summer, a cave came on the market near San Antonio. The cave was explored for TCMA and negotiations are ongoing for this property.

In the last few months, two properties have also received special attention from the committee. One, in a residential area southwest of Austin, contains a significant recharge feature. The committee has worked closely with the board and president to contact a realtor and negotiate with the owner. This potential acquisition is still pending – with more news possibly to come on this as well as another opportunity in the Austin metro area.

Other opportunities have come up or are actively in the works. For TCMA to be successful in gaining more properties, we need help from the entire caving community. Please keep your eyes and ears open for potential opportunities, and send us any tips. This is OUR organization; let's work together to continually improve it!

23rd Punkin Cave Survey Expedition

By Jim Kennedy, Preserves Coordinator

Summary: For the expedition on June 26-27, we had 24 people sign up, but three people dropped out at the last minute (Friday). Out of the remaining 21, three were not planning to enter the cave. This left us 18 surveyors to divide into five teams. We surveyed 115.05 meters that weekend, bringing the total length of the cave to 4747.58 m.

Don Arburn arrived at the cabin early on Friday, and had things opened up and turned on for the rest of us. Jake Kirk showed up from San Antonio a few minutes before I did. I brought Yaz Avila (who decided to join us at the last minute), Chris Vreeland, and Tone Garot with me. We quickly settled in, prepped the breakfast casserole for the next morning, and decided to take a little hike down the East Trail while waiting for the other arrivals. Pretty soon we had Matt and Saj Zappitello, Matt Zaldivar, Matt Turner, Galen and Ellie Falgout (who brought Dale Barnard), Allison "Chains" White, Walter Potter, Kathryn Huchton, Ryan Monjaras, Gregg Williams and Graham Schindel all hanging at the cabin. We watched Interstellar on the big screen on the back porch, and some people stayed up way too late.

The next morning I was up around 7:00 AM putting the hash brown casserole back in the oven, cooking five pounds of bacon, and setting out the yogurt, fruit, coffee, tea, and orange juice. Everyone ate their fill, and started getting their personal gear together. While folks were washing the dishes, I started organizing teams and passing out copies of the old survey notes, digging tools, and survey pouches. We then drove to the Punkin parking lot and walked to the cave to rig the three bolted drops.

I took my team (Tone and newbies Walter and Allison) back to hanging leads in the AF survey. We were able to make 10 shots for a total of 24.92 additional meters, averaging 2.49 m per shot. We got sidetracked a bit when I dropped our heavy hammer down a lead, and tried to retrieve it with no luck. We eventually got through another restriction into big passage, where we tied in to Saj's survey at AF42. There are still 3 or 4 leads left back in my old AF survey, and a whole bunch of stuff around AF41 and AF42, so I guess I'll have to go back there at least one more time.

Saj and Matt Zapp intended to take Gregg and Dale back to leads left in the old Superstition surveys, but were apparently so thorough on their earlier surveys that the only leads left in the notes were marked "for really small people." But Dale knew of some stuff in the AF area that he had left in a previous trip, so they found the notes to that and went searching. They mopped up one lead and found some more passage, but couldn't fit through (Matt got stuck for about 10 minutes, then hammered on it for about an hour). They then heard my team hammering and I pointed Dale to a couple of unsurveyed leads we hadn't gotten to yet. But their notes indicated another lead as a quick little loop closure, but it ended up having quite a bit of unsurveyed passage. They surveyed as much of it as they had time for, tying into my team's survey at the end. They win the prize for the most survey of the day, making 13 shots for a total of 35.98 m (an average of 3.00 m per shot). Our two teams then decided to try to find a shorter way out of the cave instead of following either of the two routes we followed in. An hour and a half or so later we finally made it back to familiar landmarks.

[To be continued ...]

Texas Cave Management Association - a 501(c)3 nonprofit since 1986

Visit us online! http://www.tcmacaves.org/

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Membership information

Membership Fees:

Regular - $15.00
Associate (Students under 21) - $10.00
Institutional (Non-profit) - $50.00
Corporate - $100.00
Life (Regular Rate) - $500.00

Joining is easy! Go online at www.tcmacaves.org - or send a check to:
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