

The Capital Caver

Number One

August, 1993



The CAPITAL CAVER-Published by The Austin Area Committee of the TCMA

For some time, there has been a need for a publication to encourage and document caving and caver thinking in the Austin area. A publication so local that the ideas of every caver are important, every trip is an event, and every new cave a wonderful discovery. A publication that builds a community of cavers in which there is cooperation and encouragement. A publication that records not just science and trip reports, but the philosophy, experiences, excitement and humor of caving.

To these ends, the CAPITAL CAVER has been created. Those who communicate, create. An unrecorded thought, like an unchronicled exploration, cannot inspire others, will not lead to progress, and cannot create the shared reality necessary for a close caver community.

To develop The Austin Area Caving Community into a group in which each person participates, all active TCMA Austin Committee cavers will receive each copy of the Capitol Caver, but otherwise, subscription to the CAPITAL CAVER is by mail. Send in a letter or a post card with your interests in caving and ideas for a publication, and the Capitol Caver will abstract them for the publication. Better yet, send in an actual contribution -art work, comments, letters to the editor, fiction, trip reports, speleophilosophy -anything related to caving. The CAPITAL CAVER will blend the scientific and experiential. There should be such a level of diversity that everyone will feel comfortable writing for the CAPITAL CAVER.

An important function of the CAPITAL CAVER is to encourage serious caving in the Austin area. Central Texas caves are challenging, but probably not for everyone. Sort of an acquired taste -like anchovies -but well worth the effort. Most Texas caves aren't large and spacious, but if we have enough will power to persevere, someday -not far away -there will be a Camp III under Central Texas.

Cover by **Virginie Pointeau**, small drawings by Justin Seligman, both students at St. Stephen's School.

What the critics say about the **CAPITAL CAVER**:

"Represents a treasure trove of information."-**The Progressive Caver** "Challenges traditional speleothought"- **The Speleopolitician**

"Displays a unique gift for cutting through the mythologies, double speak and misinformation so characteristic of the caving community"-**The Independent Caver**.

"Highly erotic and mystical, at once life-affirming and tragic, fraught with contradictions never fully grasped by most cavers." -**The Speleopsychologist**.

"An accelerated course in experiential education, expands your awareness of every area of life to reveal the obvious: caving is why you are on this planet in the first place." -**The New Age Caver**

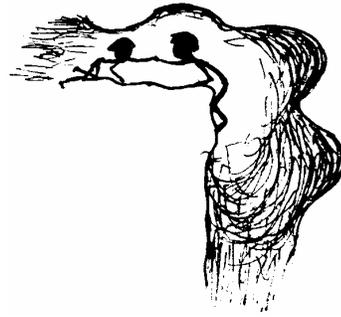
Always read the fine print.

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In today's transnational communications-intensive environment, work can be sent around the world in an instant. The best qualifying bid on data processing for the TCMA-Austin Committee was RDDW GmbH. (Reformiertes Deutsches Demokratisches Waldvolk). This newsletter was typeset in 12 point Times by elves in the state of Mecklenburg, Germany.

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From the Files of the Karst Police: **The Case of the Bashful Boa**



1400 hours, Thursday, 16 July 1992: Received a phone call from Chris Hunnell, who had visited Airman's Cave the proceeding evening to explore upstream and to locate the source of the water flowing through the cave. His group proceeded without incident through the entrance squeeze to the upstream end of the entrance room, only to find the water was still flowing strongly. After repeated attempts to find a passable route through the almost completely water- filled passages beyond the entrance room, they found all leads blocked and succeeded only in losing their car keys in the water. Somewhat depressed both by the high water and the non-availability of the car keys, they started back out toward the entrance squeeze.

Reaching the small sitting-up place just inside the entrance squeeze, they looked ahead and realized something else was slithering toward them. Not just squeezing, like most cavers in the foot-high tube, but really slithering, like a large snake. In fact, it *was* a large snake. Not the normal venomous variety associated with Texas caves, but a boa constrictor, probably an escapee from the yuppie apartments above the cave. Not wanting to meet the large snake in a small place, the cavers backed up, and the snake crawled out of the squeeze and off into a small room on the right side of the passage.

After leaving the cave, they realized others might not be as observant as they were, and would meet the snake in some small constriction, to the discomfort of both the boa and the cavers. So they called to see what could be done. And so the Karst Police rushed into action and returned on Saturday with a makeshift snake stick and a pillow case to move the boa to a more suitable habitat. However, it appeared that the snake was either a real spelunker snake and had left the cave, or was so much of a spelunker snake that he was hiding in one of the numerous karstic crannies. In any case, despite a diligent search, the snake could not be found; better luck was had with the car keys. Sweeping the entrance to the low air space with outstretched hands quickly located the missing item.

The Karst Police called Chris to give him the news, and he was pleased. He suggested that he could pick up the keys on Wednesday when the group was going to make another try upstream. So I met the group, consisting of Chris, Mark Jones and Marks friend Phil, at the cave, and they got meet my assistant, Count Kinsky, the faithful Karst Police Dog. I gave them the keys and decided to quickly squeeze into the cave and read the water level gauge. Thought I would meet the rest of the group going in on my way out, but couldn't see anyone when I looked into the squeeze, so started through to be greeted by Kinsky at the far end. The group informed me that Kinsky the Karst Dog had indeed been diligent in guarding the karst so diligent he would not let them into the cave, snapping in their direction as they attempted to squeeze by. Called Kinsky off to one side, and as they crawled by, I heard one of them say, "If it's not snakes, it's dogs."

That's life in the karst.

PS- the group made it through the first low air space but were stopped by the long low passage just before the first maze area, but did encounter a large surface crayfish apparently at home in the cave.

TCMA Austin Area Committee-First Report

by Bill Russell, Committee Chairman.



The Austin Area Committee of the TCMA is finally organizing after several years of negotiations with the City of Austin. On April 14, 1993, the Austin City Council approved an agreement between the parks department to have the TCMA assist the city in cave management. The agreement does not contain many specifics, and so it is sort of what we make of it. We hope to achieve a close working relationship that benefits both the city and cavers.

Rescue Information

One of the first items on the agenda was to provide a calldown list of cavers to the Austin Fire Department so they could have caver resources available if needed, and this has been done. A special report is also being prepared for the Fire Department with rescue information. It will include a bombproof location map and critical dimensions of entrances, so that if cave assistance is requested, rescue personnel will know what to expect. The Fire Department is already feeling much better about caves after realizing there aren't "hundreds" of caves that will require rescues, but only a small number. They hope to pre-plan rescues to most of these caves, so if there is a problem, they will be ready.

City Cave Inventory

The committee also promised the Park Department a listing of all city-owned caves, and some information has been delivered, but organizing the information has been more difficult than envisioned. I thought we could just print out the cave files on all caves owned by the city, but much information proved to be inadequate. We didn't even have a map of Bullet Cave, but these deficiencies are being remedied, and the city should soon have a complete listing.



Jest John Cave Report

The city also requested information on Jest John Cave on city-owned BCCP land. This land was marginal bird habitat, and they might want to trade it for something else, but they realized that the tract was part of the Jollyville Plateau, and thus Jest John Cave was likely an endangered species cave, so they asked for an investigation. After much walking up and down hills, and searching through thick cedar, guided by numerous phone calls to Mike Warton, Spencer Woods and Pam Oczkowski, we finally located the small inconspicuous entrance to the cave. Jennifer Sigmond and Bill Russell made a biological collection and found a small (about the size of the "s" in small) beetle, initially thought to be *Texamaurops redelli*, an endangered species. We located the cave on an air photo for the city, and they took Bill Elliott to the cave who, along with Mark Sanders from the city, collected *Texella redelli*, another endangered species. Inspired by the competition, Bill Elliott visited Little Bee Creek Cave near Tom Miller Dam and collected *Texella redelli*, giving the City of Austin its third endangered species cave. (Cottrell Cave was the first.) The Austin Area Committee is preparing a report on Jest John Cave for the city.

The Schroeter Park Irregulars

I met Spencer Woods and Pamela Oczkowski at Lost Oasis Cave, and they asked if there were any caves in the north part of town near where they lived. I jokingly told them there was always Schroeter Park, and they took the suggestion seriously and have been working with Dan Oughton and Brandon Kuhn on digging out the entrance to Schroeter Park Cave and checking other locations in the park. This has been a family project, with Spence's and Pam's children playing with the neighbor children, and many of the park's neighbors coming by to observe the project and give advice. Children imitate adults. Sarah Woods (age 7) picked up a crowbar and began her own dig at a promising depression. John Woods (age 10) thought digging looked like fun, so he started his own project a few feet away. He soon enlarged his dig to include Sarah's dig and then announced she could help him if she wanted to. When the work is finished, a report will be prepared for the city.



Slaughter Creek Park Project

This project has been underway for about two years, mainly by students from St. Stephen's School, encouraged by Troy Lanier, their outing club leader. St. Stephen's students have been active in several areas in the Slaughter Creek District Park, starting around Arrow Cave and Escarpment Sink. It will be several more years before an inventory of this park will be complete, but it is a labor of love.

Cave Access Evaluation

An initial concern by several groups was that the TCMA Austin Committee would recommend that all city-owned caves be gated, and access tightly controlled. Mike Walsh (not the TCMA Austin Committee) recommended to the city that an official newspaper notice be published to the effect that anyone entering a city-owned cave was trespassing. An initial survey was made of caves that appeared to have problems, and two caves: District Park Cave, in the Dick Nichols District Park, and Maple Run Cave, in the Goat Cave Karst Preserve, were recommended for gates. The Dick Nichols Park is currently under development, and soon there will be many more people in the area. The cave has many delicate formations and already is beginning to suffer. The entrance to Maple Run Cave is just behind houses and so has been repeatedly filled in with large rocks, apparently to keep neighborhood children from playing in the cave. Cavers have broken the rocks into small pieces and carried them away from the cave, but to prevent concern by the neighbors, a gate is recommended. Cavers will have access to these caves.



Airman's Cave Project

The Fire Department had concern about rescues from Airman's Cave, and Bill Elliott was worried about the effect of the numerous visitors on the biology of the cave. The cave is the longest in the county, and access should not be restricted without good cause, since the cave is not dangerous; and if access were controlled, just administering the requests for visits would be a time-consuming task. So a study has commenced to determine the extent of visitation, the amount of trash, and the distribution of the fauna. A register has been placed in the cave, just inside the entrance, additional registers are planned for the Walking Passage by the Aggie Art Gallery and for Sherwood Forest, to determine the distribution of visitors. Andy Grubbs has offered to write up his observations on the whereabouts of the cave animals. After a year or so, we will be able to discuss policy.

Other Projects

Inventory of the several large tracts recently acquired by the City of Austin for the BCCP and administered by the Park Department, has barely started. Mark Sanders has attempted to visit all known caves, but even this effort is labor-intensive. After the inventory of known caves in the regular city parks is complete and a report delivered to the Park Department, more effort will be made to assess the cave potential of these areas. These areas will not likely not have large caves (though who knows?), but many of the tracts contain parts of the Jollyville Plateau, and so the caves could be biologically important. Any caver interested in ridge-walking should contact the committee there is much to be done. Mike Warton took Parks Department personnel on a tour of cave gates, so they will understand what they are getting into.

Acknowledgments to:

Lea Stone, who had more to do than was humanly possible even before the duty of City Cave Coordinator was added to her responsibilities, has given generously of her time to help the committee get established. Mark Sanders of the City Parks Preserves is interested in caves and preservation and has given many hours of his own time to discuss not only the problems of caves but also the wonders of the underground. Mike Kalender deserves thanks for steering cavers through the intricacies of the city map room. Thanks also go to Mike von Wupperfield (VW), director of the Parks Department, and to Fire Chief James Ash for encouraging the committee and helping to actualize the benefits of cooperation.



Bat Well Cave: August 11, 1992

Joel Hunter, Bill Russell

Joel Hunter, a UT zoology graduate student, needed amphipods for an ambitious project to determine how the various populations of the common cave amphipod, *Slygonectes russelli*, are related. There was most likely a common surface ancestor which was eliminated by climatic change or other events. Since then, the only animals of this group remaining were the populations of amphipods that inhabited caves. These cave animals have been free to evolve into cave-adapted species, but have not yet had enough time to be established as distinct species. By studying the genetic makeup of the various populations, though, it should be possible to establish which populations are actually independent and which groups are currently interbreeding. Bat Well Cave was the next cave on Hunter's list of amphipod locations, so off we went.

The brush-covered walk-in entrance to the Bat Well is in the side of a small gully just upstream from Brushy Creek, a few miles north of Georgetown in Williamson County. After storms, the gully carries drainage into the cave, though the floor of the gully downstream from the cave is only a foot higher than the cave entrance, so much of the larger floods is able to bypass the cave and flow on down into Brushy Creek.

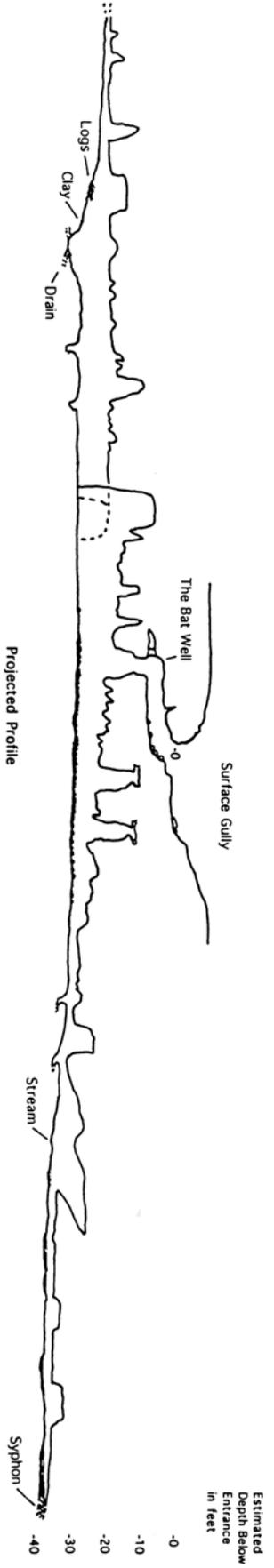
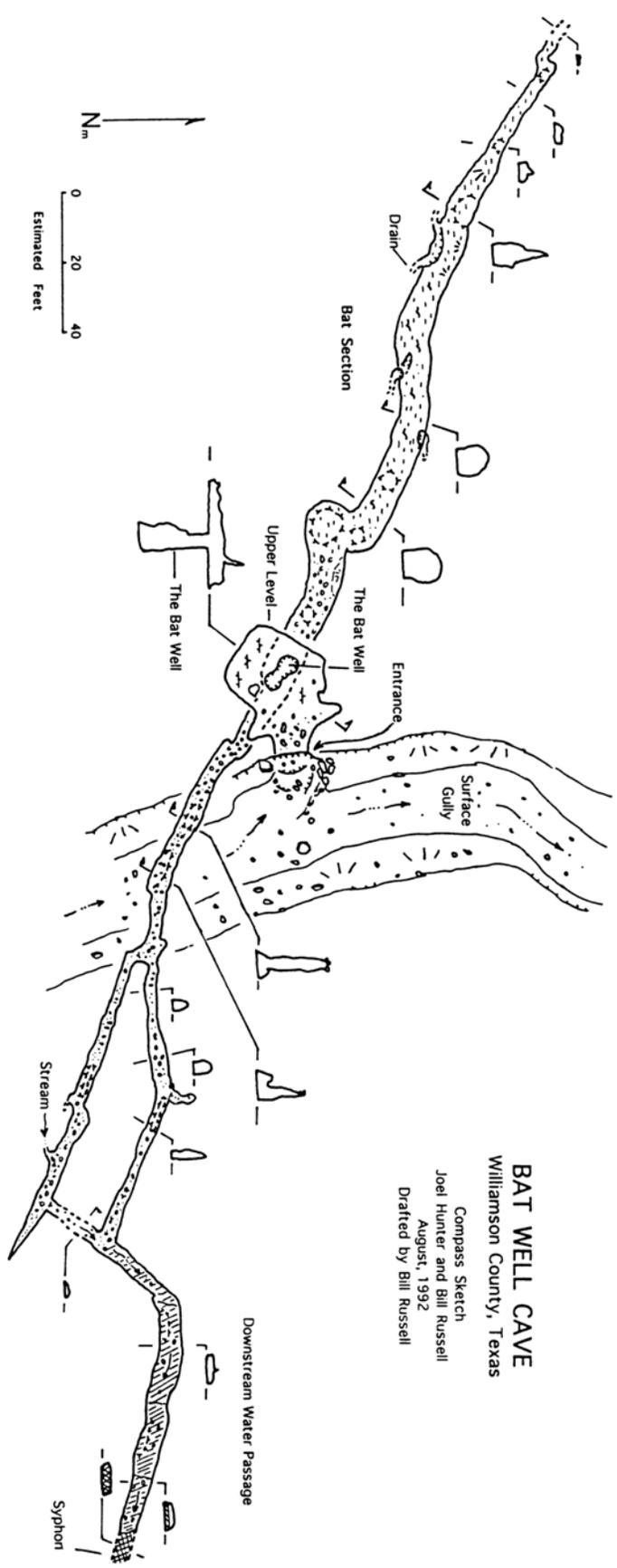
We arrived about 6:30 Wednesday afternoon, following a brief heavy thunderstorm about a half-hour earlier, and walked to the edge of the Bat Well, a 20-foot drop just inside the entrance. The cave from the entrance to the Bat Well was scoured clean, no dirt or guano. We rigged a cable ladder through a convenient solution hole and climbed down to the main cave level. First, we followed the largest passage away from the entrance into the Bat Section. This passage is 6 to 10 feet wide and 10 to 20 feet high with numerous domes. The cobble floor soon changes to slippery mud banks with channels and holes leading down 3 to 5 feet that make walking tricky. Several hundred bats were roosting at the end of the bat section, about 300 feet from the entrance. At this time of year there are usually many more bats, and an almost unbreathable ammonia-rich atmosphere, but on this trip the air was fresh, with only a hint of ammonia. There were many flying insects, but no guano, fresh or otherwise. The walls, up to at least 6 or 7 feet above the floor, were covered with sticks and leaves. It appears that the flooding of the spring and summer had forced the bats elsewhere and they were only now returning.

We then returned back through the bottom of the Bat Well and followed the narrow passage back under the entrance in search of the elusive amphipod. This passage, about 6 to 10 feet high and 3 feet wide with a cobble floor, appears to take most of the water. After about 100 feet the passage divides. A crawlway leads right under a low arch, and a fissure 4 to 10 feet high extends ahead to a small room with an old shovel stuck in a mud bank. Two small passages to the left ended in 19w mud-filled leads. The main floodwater continued ahead through a fissure to the right. The passage soon lowered to a crawl, then enlarged somewhat and encountered a shallow pool. This was not the stream I remembered from my earlier trip, so while Joel checked the pool for amphipods, I returned to the lower right crawlway. This passage enlarged into a fissure up to 12 feet high, went around a jog, and eureka! there was a small stream flowing from under the wall on the right side of the passage.

I returned for Joel and told him the stream was found. He was pleased, since the pool was destitute of amphipods. On reaching the stream, he soon found an amphipod, so I left him happily collecting and went on the down the passage past the first pool. The passage lowered to a crawlway about 4 feet wide and 3 feet high, very clean with evidence of much water flow. This passage soon intersected a stream passage about the same size, extending both left and right. Water was flowing from right to left a strange mixture of hot surface water and cool cave water. This flow is likely a downstream continuation of the other stream, mixed with storm runoff from the sun-warmed surface. The air was fresh, and the passage definitely passable in both directions, but it was time to return and check on Joel. He was finding collecting slow going, the amphipods relatively small and not numerous. While searching for amphipods, he also found several asellid isopods, which I could not remember being reported from the cave. (Later checked with Bill Elliott, who reported that an undescribed species of the genus *Caecidtea* has indeed been reported from the

BAT WELL CAVE
Williamson County, Texas

Compass Sketch
Joel Hunter and Bill Russell
August, 1992
Drafted by Bill Russell



Estimated Length 1080 feet
Estimated Depth 38 feet

cave.) It is possible that the flooding dispersed the amphipods throughout the cave, and that they are just now being reestablished in the stream, which accounts for the relatively few and small individuals located this trip. Joel finally had what he hoped would be enough amphipods, and so we returned to the surface.

PS: We didn't get enough amphipods, and on a return trip we noticed that ants, which looked like fire ants, were building a mud tube up the west wall of the Bat Well, and had completed it to within a few feet of the top. These insects looked like ants, not termites, but whatever they were, why haven't these structures been observed before? Hopefully, fire ants haven't found a new behavior to invade the underground. We also explored the downstream passage to a syphon, and collected an eyed, pigmented spring-type *Eurycea* salamander on the way.



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