

# Speleoneews



Nov/Dec 2006

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**On the Cover:** Like a spider weaving a web, a rappeler descends one of the 22 ropes rigged during the 2006 Bridge Day event at the New River Gorge in West Virginia. The 850 foot rappel is only open once a year for groups to rappel and climb by special permit.

Photo by John Hickman.

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#### Speleonews Staff

##### Editor

Alan Hatcher, NSS 56765

jahatcher@gmail.com

(615) 346 - 9221

## Tempus Fugit

### Notes from the Editor

Welcome to the November/December issue of the Speleonews. The November issue ran so late I decided to combine it with the December issue.

This issue features a special article and map by Richard Finch, who previously served as the Chairman of the Nashville Grotto and now resides in Cookeville, TN. We also have two different trip reports from Avis, which everyone looks forward to each month and lots of great pictures and trip reports.

A big thanks to everyone who has contributed articles and pictures this year. I had no idea how big of a job it was to get this thing published every month when I volunteered to take it over. I don't regret doing so, however, and look forward to editing another year of the Speleonews starting in January.

- Hatch



John Hickman, Eric and Kristin McMaster (now living in Minneapolis) and John Henard (now living in Atlanta) on a reunion cave tour in **Horseskull Cave**, Jackson County, Alabama. Photo by John Hickman.

I heard a bird sing  
In the dark of December  
A magical thing  
And sweet to remember.

'We are nearer to Spring  
Than we were in September,'  
I heard a bird sing  
In the dark of December.

- Oliver Herford, *I Heard a Bird Sing*

# December 2006

## Schedule of Events

Dec. 7, Grotto Meeting

Dec. 9, SKTF Cleanup

Dec. 9, Cumberland Caverns  
Christmas Party







Dec. 13, Swirl Canyon Trip

Dec. 16, Fentress County Trip

Dec. 16, Rumbling Falls Trip

Dec. 21, Grotto Christmas Party

Dec. 27, Hardins Trip

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7 	8	9 
10	11	12	13 	14	15	16 
17	18	19	20	21 	22	23
24	25	26	27 	28	29	30
31						

## December Event Details

December 7 - Grotto meeting. Fellowship at 6:30 pm. Meeting at 7:00. Beer and burgers at Brown's Diner afterwards.

December 9 - 46th Annual Cumberland Caverns Christmas Party - See details at the website by visiting

<http://www.cumberlandcaverns.com/Special%20Events.htm>

December 9 - The SKTF will be cleaning up an old sinkhole near Campaign, TN during the day before the Cumberland Caverns Christmas Party. Contact Myrna Attaway for details: [meattaway2@aol.com](mailto:meattaway2@aol.com) 423-837-3739

December 13 - Joey Stuckey will lead a weeknight horizontal trip to **Swirl Canyon Cave** in Davidson County, TN. Meet at the Shoney's at the Bell Road Exit of I-24 in Antioch at 6 PM. Call Joey for more details. 615-429-8617

December 16 - Kristen Bobo and Joe Douglas will be leading a trip to a large horizontal cave in Fentress County. The plan is to go to **Zarathustra Cave**, but if it rains a lot and river levels are high **Buffalo Cave** will be the back-up. The first meeting place is the I-40/Lebanon Shoney's Rest. at 8 AM (exit 238). The second meeting place is the park and ride at the I-40/highway 111 exit in cookeville (exit 288, then left) at 9 AM. It is about an hour drive from Cookeville.

December 16 - Heather Levy will lead a vertical trip to **Rumbling Falls Cave**. Meeting place and details will be announced on the grotto online message boards.

December 21 - Grotto Christmas Party meeting at Hal and Lisa Love's home at 7 PM. Bring a gift for dirty Santa that costs no more than \$10.00. Feel free to bring beverages of your choice as well.

December 27 - Trip to **Hardins Cave** led by Steve Cooper. Meet at Waffle House off White Bridge Road at I-40 at 6:30 or at the cave at 7pm. Contact Steve Cooper for details at 615-584-0387.

For more details about trips and upcoming events, check out our online message boards.

<http://www.nashvillegrotto.org/forums>



## Grotto Obituary - Andrew B. Gardner

Andrew Gardner passed away on November 25, 2006 at the age of 46.

He is survived by his mother Lillie B., wife Freda, sons Andrew Duncan and Alexander Britton, brothers Walter Neal and Jeffery E., and sister Sara Gail.

Andy was a member of the Nashville Grotto and although he was a caver, he was also an avid backpacker. Andy camped and backpacked on many trails in Tennessee as well as the Appalachian Trail. His first love for adventure was backpacking but he also indulged in a variety of caving activities, including wetsuit, vertical, ridge-walking and digging. Andy attended NSS Conventions, Tag Fall Cave Ins, SERAs, and at least one Old Timers Reunion in West Virginia that I was privileged to attend with him .

When Andy got involved with a sport he would go all out and buy up a bunch of equipment. Sometimes he was accused of being a sports equipment collector but he did use what he bought in rotating spells.

Andy will be remembered for his big smile, sharp wit, precise grammar, and total enthusiasm for whatever sport he was actively involved with. Andy was also involved with Boy Scouting while raising his two sons. He was literally a delight to cave and camp with.

The last opportunity I had to camp with Andy was the spring of 2006 in

Blue Spring Cove Tennessee. We were simply enjoying the beautiful cove while digging on a lead I had from 15 years previous. His son Brittan was along and we had a grand time. Andy was also known as a partier and in true fashion he managed to over imbibe and walked off a three foot bank into the nearby creek that night. We were alerted by the sound of the splash but fortunately he landed on his feet and was okay.

I will never forget that last camping trip because it was after a long spell during which he did not go caving. He had spent several years away from caving while raising his two sons. Then he called me out of the blue and said that he had just recovered from lung cancer and was feeling good and wanted to go caving and enjoy the company of his old caving buddy, and I was so glad to oblige. Unfortunately just a short time after that trip his wife called to tell me Andy was back in the hospital. This time he had a brain tumor. Andy had been declared in remission but the cancer had spread. After only three months Andy passed away peacefully at his home.

I miss Andy and will always remember him for the great times we had together. I know his many, many friends and family will miss him too.

- John Hutchison NSS 11906 RE



**Andy Gardner**

NSS 30819 RE



**Looking for more information about our upcoming events?**

**Open your browser to <http://www.nashvillegrotto.org>**

**Then click on the "Forums" link at the bottom of the page.**

## Moni Adventures (September and October) - by Avis Moni

On Sunday, September 24, we went on the grotto trip to **Buggy-top Cave** in Franklin County. This was both a vertical and horizontal trip. It was led by Becky Dettorre and Joe Douglas and there were a total of 12 participants. It turned out to be a beautiful day in spite of the previous day's monsoon that caused us to wimp out on our planned caving for Saturday. We got sprinkled on a little but that passed and the rest of Sunday was a lovely day for caving and hiking. Several of us did the drop to the cave and I climbed right back up to go with Gerald to the Peter entrance. We went upstream for a ways and then turned back and went downstream past the Peter entrance and on to the main entrance. One of the "highlights" of this trip was the 2 mile hike to the cave and then the 2 mile hike back to the vehicles.

For the next Saturday, the 30<sup>th</sup>, we went to Cookeville to attend the Tennessee Cave Survey meeting. After the meeting and filling ourselves with Mexican food I went with Kristen Bobo, Jason and Chrissie Richards, Becky Dettorre, and Heather Levy to **Pharis Pit** in Putman County. When we got there we found Jack Thomison at the top of the pit with Gary Chambers in the pit. We rigged a second rope and within a short while we had all done the pit at least once, with some of the others doing it a second time. Gerald joined us during this activity, having gone to check on a couple contacts for future projects.

The next day, October 1, we went back to Putnam County. The first cave was **Weiser Hollow Cave** which was a 125 feet easy crawl. We then went to **Crawl and Crawl Cave** which should have been named Crawl and Crawl and Crawl Cave. The first part was a belly crawl, followed by a hands and knees crawl followed by more belly crawl. None of the crawls were very long because the whole cave was only 50 feet long. We then went to **Rockwell Cave** which had about 600 feet of passage. It was a mazy cave, and was mostly crawling.

We then looked for **Rock Cave** which we could not find but we did find **Summertime Cave** in the middle of a rather high end new subdivision. We looked at the insurgence and then went on to the spring entrance. And guess who got to go in this rather small passage. It was a 150 foot crawl following a small stream. The passage was strewn with debris and other trash but I managed to find my way to the insurgence and out through the logs and branches piled up and into the daylight.

On the way home we stopped at an abandoned quarry in Wilson County to look for cave entrances in the quarry walls but did not find anything.

Then, of course, there was the TAG weekend. On Saturday we went to **Bee Rock Cave** in Walker County, Georgia near Chattanooga. The cave has three levels and there was a lot of climbing and chimneying involved, and so of course it was lots of fun.

On Sunday we stopped at **Sauta Cave** west of Scottsboro in Alabama. Gerald had not been to the back room and wanted to see that and I assured him that I knew right where it was since I had been there numerous times. But no, we wandered around for a long time with a bunch of other cavers before we found the ski slope which was the way to that room. So we did eventually get there and so much for my memory.

Saturday, the 14<sup>th</sup> found us on the side of the mountain in the Rocky River area in Van Buren County. The first cave was aptly named **Popcorn Crawl Cave** and thankfully only 50 feet long. Then we did **New Zealand Cave**, another crawling experience, and 75 feet of that. We then found **No Account Cave** which was 200 feet long with 3 entrances. This cave was not entirely crawling, there was some actual stoop walking. The last cave of the day was **Sandstone Castle Cave** and 100 feet long with 4 entrances. This was the most fun cave of the day.

Sunday, the 22<sup>nd</sup>, we went to Putman County and visited three caves. The first was **Gnat Cave**, which was just long enough at 50 feet to qualify as belonging to cavedom. It was of course all crawling and mostly belly crawling. The second cave for the day was **Quinlan Lake Creek Cave**. It had two entrances, both of which I crawled into and since doing a through trip would have involved belly crawling in water with very limited (if even existent at all) air space neither of us chose to do that.

We then went to **Anderson Spring Cave**. It had a very small entrance but not too small for Gerald so we finally got to go caving together. Once inside we were at a hands and knees crawl in a stream which lasted for about 800 feet. If crawling can ever be called pleasant this qualified even though we were crawling on gravel. This was soft gravel (and this is not an oxymoron) The gravel was made up of small rounded pebbles in water so that it gave with pressure and did not grind knees. We could generally stay out of the stream so all we got wet were our hands and knees and feet. This was one time that Gerald went farther than I. He continued on and came to a breakdown room and went partway through that standing upright.

And our invitation still holds—we really wouldn't mind having company. Feel free to invite yourself any time.

## Buggytop Cave Trip Report - by Eve Proper

Becky Dettorre offered to lead a trip to **Buggy Top Cave**, in the Carter State Natural Area near Sewanee, on Sunday, Sept. 24. Twelve people, including Becky, showed up for the trip: Kristen Bobo, Joe Douglas, Gerald and Avis Moni, Sherri Person, Eve Proper, Joe Stewart and daughter Kylie, Dave Wascher, Andrew Wascher, and Trent Westfall, Dave's brother-in-law. This was Trent's first caving experience.

As usual we met at Shoney's before driving down. We stopped to pick up Kristen, and then again to see the Natural Bridge before continuing on to the parking area. From the parking lot it is a 2-mile hike down to the cave. The net elevation loss is 620 feet, but the cumulative has to be higher than that because the first .7 miles are actually uphill. The hike is pretty, although the oppressive humidity dampened our enjoyment somewhat.

Once we reached the top of the cliff, our group split up. The cave is pretty straightforward, although it has three entrances. Joe Douglas, Kristen, Sherri, and Becky elected to rappel over the edge of the cliff into the first entrance. The rest of us headed down the trail to the second entrance. There was a lot of group shuffling on this trip, with people choosing different routes.

The group I was with went in the second entrance and looked at the rimstone pools, where we spotted a salamander. We then explored a side passage that doesn't really go anywhere. There was, however, one spot at the back of it where there were these lovely little formations. There was a niche in the wall, about a foot high, right at floor level. When you got down on a level with it, it looked like a tiny cave diorama, with miniature columns and crystals. From there you can climb up a little bit before the passage gets choked with breakdown.

We went back to the pools and looked in them for a while longer, but the salamander we had seen on the way in had skedaddled. He was probably sick of people shining lights on him!

The main cave passage went the opposite way, past the third entrance. While you can't always see which way is best to go, you can't really get lost either. The passage follows a stream with breakdown on one side of it. Scrambling was fun for a while. Many of the rocks are interestingly fluted and scalloped from the water. Also, there isn't much crawling, and not even a whole lot of mud. We weren't sure how far the passage went; we knew it just ended at some point. At this point I was with Gerald, Avis, Dave, Trent, and Andrew.

Gerald and Avis headed back, while Andrew and I wanted to follow the passage to the end. We continued scrambling, with the route getting muddier and more challenging, all the way to where the stream burst in through the cave wall. The water pushed in through a boulder choke. Just before the waterfall, there were two

flowstone draperies on the right wall. The waterfall and formations made a nice end to the passage, making me feel as if it was worthwhile to push that far.

There may be more passage up in the breakdown, but it was steep and very muddy there. I was reaching the "stick a fork in me" point, and Dave and Trent were waiting for us. We headed back along the passage, running into Becky just before the third entrance. She suggested that we make it a through trip by exiting the third entrance, hiking a bit, going back in the second entrance, and exiting the first. We took her advice, except for Andrew who was convinced it would be shorter just to hike. Andrew did beat us back to the car, but we stopped and chatted with the Avis and Gerald along the way.



Avis Moni outside Buggytop Cave - Photo by Kristen Bobo



Looking out from Buggytop Cave - Photo by Joe Douglas



## Lechuguilla Trip Report - by Bob Biddix

It was a rainy day at Carlsbad Caverns National Park as Jonathan Griffith - 29 from Tennessee, Doug Warner - 38 from Montana, and Bob Biddix - 38 from Tennessee hiked the two mile desert journey to Lechuguilla Cave. A rainy day was not typical of New Mexico and this was no typical cave expedition for us as we gained elevation to the entrance pit. This trip was a long awaited journey as both Jonathan and I were approved a trip by the Park in November, 2005 but were notified that our permit had been pulled one month prior to that expedition. It was disappointing but I really felt bad for Jonathan as this was to be his first time into the cave. Since that day in November, we had been working to get back on board proposal for a future trip. We had known we were going this time for almost a year and prepared ourselves as such. Lechuguilla has been known to take TAG cavers on a wild ride due to the extreme temperature of 68 degrees combined with high humidity levels makes the cave even more challenging. This was Doug's ninth trip in the cave and my fifth. Knowing what to expect I let Jonathan go ahead as I brought up the rear. There are a total of six team members on this trip all headed to the Near East camp of Rusticles. The other three, Elvis Andrich, age 50 Missouri, Joe Sikorski, age 30 Missouri, and Bruce White, age 31 California, were about an hour behind. The group was staggered as not to bottleneck down the

drops.

Lechuguilla is dominantly a vertical cave. It was discovered in the mid 80's and during that time many people contributed to the survey of this great cave. Back then it was usually day trips consisting of 24 or 36 hour jaunts into the cave and a great deal was surveyed. Today most trips are 6+ days making base camp in one of only four places allowed within the cave. Everything you need is on your back and packs weighed anywhere from 42lbs to 65lbs. Just when you think your pack couldn't get any heavier group gear has to be distributed and loaded into your pack.

Things like survey gear, group water container, fuel, stove, flagging tape, etc. All of this is essential for the group to accomplish their goals and maintain energy levels for an extended stay within the cave. We had several objectives for this mission ; flip the fifth rope leading to Boulder Falls as it had a bad spot in the rope, the base camp needed a push rope which is used during exploration, two of the ropes leading up to Giant Chiclets, survey, resurvey and exploration.

After a mandatory but brief orientation of the do's and don't of Lechuguilla cave presented by Park Cave Specialist Stan Allison (like don't knock over the 4ft aragonite bush or play marbles with cave pearls, that kinda thing) we were free to make our way to the cave. Unfortunately, a prior expedition just before ours a careless misstep from a caver knocked over an eight foot soda straw in Nirvana. I was fortunate enough to get a picture of that

straw in 2003 before its demise.

After this we headed to the Rusticles base camp in the Near East. It's kind of funny as I never fathomed I would get so tired going down as we continued our descent through the hot cave finally stopping at or near minus 1,000ft. Everyone agreed Apricot Pit really sucked due to the burden of carrying a heavy pack while the pits 80 degree angle is only compounded by the ceiling getting closer. This causes one to rappel on their side at times in order to keep the descent. From the bottom of Apricot, it is 45 minutes through Nirvana then to camp. Our base camp space is small as there is a six person limit in the Rusticles Camp. Ceiling height is not that great there either and sitting up is about the extent of it. Other camps like Ghost Town in the Near East or Big Sky in the South West enjoy 100 ft ceilings. Here you just need to keep in mind not to stand up without your helmet on!

Throughout the rest of the week we surveyed and resurveyed many passages along with checking multiple leads. Having been instructed by the park not to cross any pools, one of our leads stopped at a 15ft deep pool 6ft wide and 17ft across. The passage remained 25ft high. Virgin passage could be seen on the other side but Park regulations prohibit crossing over or into any pool for fear of contamination. So, that gets saved for some other caver. Jonathan found some good leads that headed off the map. Most were tight but they had good air flow and eventually led to bigger rooms. After

surveying the leads they ended up in too small to continue or we left them open for future trips. Still, this is a good indication of bigger virgin passage to be found in the Near East. We stopped by Lake of the Blue Giants which is absolutely incredible. This lake, some has several 30ft high underwater stalagmites that can be seen with high power lights in the deep blue-green water. Jonathan and his group performed a resurvey at the Orange Bowl where I understand Alan Cressler, Marion Smith, and Gerald Moni discovered in the late 80's. So Gerald, all your points were wrong! (kidding) If it weren't for blunders such as this we wouldn't have a trip. We took many pictures especially in the beginning but as time goes by the numerous aragonite bushes just become commonplace. Besides, it is so hot and you are so tired that you will be happily contented to do absolutely nothing for hours. I was off surveying in a really pretty Paleo room with many small side pools, calcite rafts, lily pads, and pool fingers. It was aqua socks most of the way as we worked for 14.5 hours that day. Our schedule was reversed by the end of the week as our days turned into nights and 30 hour days instead of 24. We slept for longer and longer periods and we remained awake longer as well. The trip out was uneventful and tiring. We divided into groups of three and headed towards the surface. If

## Lechuguilla (continued)

you split the journey out into three segments it is more bearable than the whole. The first segment would be making it to the top of Apricot Pit which is a giant slog in itself. Yes your pack is somewhat lighter on the way out but not by much as you still have to carry your spent food. The Rift can be a problem for some people and I suppose could be considered the second segment. It is not particularly difficult but it is time consuming doing all of the traverses.

Lastly, Boulder Falls is the final hurdle and once on top you are in the entrance series and basically out. Boulder Falls is a 150ft semi free drop that departs from Windy City and Glacier Bay. When you are tired from a weeks worth of caving and not eating properly this last hurdle has stopped a few with exhaustion. A short rest is needed at Packs Peak where some have left valuable luxuries such as Hershey Bars, Cokes, and power bars on their way in. We all three managed to get to

the top within 1.5 hours.

Many don't realize having never been to Lechuguilla but from here there are still five more ropes to get out of the cave. It was wonderful exiting the cave to the grand smell of the desert and seeing the night sky. There were several shooting stars that night as I later learned the Hale Bopp Comet's tail was passing through. It was a really neat show and a fitting end to another great expedition into Lechuguilla Cave.

This aragonite bush is in a small no named room and is close to Lake of the Blue Giants.



Self Portrait by Bob Biddix



## Caving On and On - by Avis Moni

On October 29 we went to Overton County to join a vertical trip led by Joe Douglas and Kristen Bobo. Other participants were Ken Oeser, Jay Green and four-legged friend Noodle, Don Harter, Brian Taylor, Robert and Lauren Van Fleet, and Kristen's four-legged friend Zip.

Most of us did the 3 pits although obviously all of us didn't. Gerald, of course, did the hard part and the four-legged ones also stayed topside. The pits were **Rocky Mount Pit 1** (95 feet), **Rocky Mount Pit 2** (73 feet), and **Standing Stone Pit** (33 feet). The entrance into **Rocky Mount Pit 2** was tight and I had a hard time getting out. It would have been easier with a frog but I did make it with my rope walker. Several people looked for **Standing Stone Pit** and couldn't find it but Gerald looked for it where the point said it should be and found it but he had to dig it open.

November 4<sup>th</sup> we spent in Marion County and went to looking for **Pig Sty Cave**, **Hog Sty Cave**, and **Lost Wallet Cave**.

According to their descriptions they should have been easy to find but find them we didn't. Gerald assured me that we were in the right cove but eventually decided that we were not. So we gave up and looked for and found **Cold Spring Cave**. This is a mazy cave with 350 feet of passage. Gerald got really carried away in this cave and went down a stream crawl farther than I did.

Then that evening we attended the Chattanooga Grotto's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary party. On entering you put your name on a list if you wanted to make comments or tell stories, et cetera. This was done after dinner and it turned out to be a Gerald roast with all speakers going into some detail about adventures (some fun and some not so fun) with Gerald. Also the videos and slides shown featured Gerald prominently and some were when he had black hair. A lot can change in 50 years, or is it thirty?

The next day, November 5<sup>th</sup>, we went back looking for the three caves we didn't find the day before, this time in the right cove and they were easy to find. We didn't

go in **Pig Sty Cave** because the land owner got his water from the cave and didn't want us to go in. This cave is 150 feet long with 2 entrances. **Hog Sty Cave** was longer, having 240 feet of passage some of which were actually walking and had some nice flowstone. Also one cave crayfish and one cave salamander were sighted. And then we toured **Lost Wallet Cave** which was 100 feet long and in which two cave crayfish were seen.

While talking to the landowner of these caves he told us about a man who years before had been seen by the locals wandering those back roads. He described this person as looking like a bum, that he had a straggly red beard and straggly red hair and that he claimed to be looking for caves and that he had a common name—Smith or Jones or something. He went on to say that his speech revealed a certain amount of intelligence that his appearance belied.

That wraps it up for this time so happy caving one and all.



Formations in Cedar Ridge Cave - Photo by Joey Stuckey



Aimee Roosenberg, John Hoffelt, and Don Harter at TAG

Photo by Joey Stuckey

# Caving in Honduras, Part IV : Montañas de Colón Redux 2001 – by Richard Finch NSS 5560 RL

As unlikely as it may seem, the Nashville *Speleonews* was once the primo source of information on caves and caving in Honduras. Nowadays the Italians are publishing the best stuff, but nonetheless, I'd like to continue the tradition of reporting on Honduras.

Super-long-time readers of the *Speleonews* (i.e., geriatric cavers) will remember that the *Speleonews* has sporadically reported on caving in Honduras since 1969. Caving in Honduras Pt. 1 (Feb. 82 issue) described a caving recon trip by Jim Coffroth, Ric Finch & Buddy Lane; CiH Pt. 2 (Apr. 82) detailed the mapping of *Cueva Masical* by Frank Bogle, Pete Deinken and Finch, and the partial exploration of the *Cueva La Buena Fé* by Bogle & Finch; CiH Pt. 2 ½ (Apr. 83) regaled cavers with the completion of *La Buena Fé* to – 525 ft and some more recon by Bogle, Finch, Debbie & Elwin Hannah; CiH Pt. 3 (Apr. 91 and June 91) satirically presented the results of the first caving team – Trent Carr, Larry Cohen, Finch, D. & E. Hannah, and Ed Yarbrough-- to reach the remote and spectacular karst of the *Montañas de Colón*, and reported the successful plumbing of *Cueva Guatemala* to -1080 ft by this same group minus Cohen. And now comes Caving in Honduras Part IV.

Some time in Jan. 2001 Pete Shifflett, a veteran of numerous international caving expeditions, e-mailed me about the Montañas de Colón (MdeC) in Honduras. These remote and rugged limestone mountains comprise one of the largest and most dramatic areas of karst in Central America, and may justly still be said to be largely unexplored speleologically. Pete had somehow learned that I had led a group of Tennessee cavers to the MdeC way back in 1984, in spite of the fact that our expedition had never been written up and published except as a satirical piece suggesting that our group of stalwarts-- Trent Carr, Larry Cohen, Elwin and Debbie Hannah, Ed Yarbrough, and yours truly—were CIA agents somehow involved in the Contra War (*Speleonews*, v. XXXV, n. 2, p. 14-17). This satire was merely a cover-up for the fact that our expedition had been a failure in terms of speleological results: we found no caves worth writing about in the MdeC (we did better in western Honduras, where we explored and mapped *Cueva Guatemala* to a depth of -330 m!). Nonetheless, big systems simply *have to exist* in the spectacular MdeC karst. All you have to do is look at the 1:50,000 quads of the area to be convinced of this. And since Pete was now planning an assault on the MdeC, he was hoping I could provide some information more useful than a silly satire.

I immediately went to work on the website we would use (<http://www.rutahsa.com/mdec.html>) to provide photos and information on our 1984 effort, as a means of giving the 2001 team an idea of what they were getting into. There are real logistical problems involved in reaching the MdeC, and real problems finding enterable caves once there. Pete's team included six other

well-known cavers—Matt Oliphant, Nancy Pistole, Herb Laeger, Taco van Ieperen, Jean Krejca, and Vivian Loftin, a group with tons of experience in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, Peru, Madagascar, Borneo, and elsewhere. Definitely a capable and hard core group with many experiences beyond the levels of my caving skills and nerve. Nonetheless, they were headed for Honduras, “my” turf. By the time I had the website up and running my lust to return to the MdeC had been rekindled. Even if out-classed in caving skills I could still offer Spanish language abilities, government contacts in Tegucigalpa, and first hand knowledge of how to get to the target. And so I signed on as the eighth member of the expedition.

Most of us flew into “Tegus” (as the capital of Honduras is called by virtually all foreigners) on April 22. Matt and Nancy, who drive down to Central America almost every year, caving in Mexico en route, were awaiting us and we all went to the Hotel Boston, a cheap lodging suitable for cavers. The following day was spent acquiring a letter of introduction/permit from the Director of the Instituto Geográfico Nacional (to aid us in dealing with local authorities when we got into the field), unsuccessfully trying to acquire antivenin to use in case of snakebite, and successfully reserving tickets on the Wednesday morning SOSA flight to Ahuás. Unfortunately, the flight was not from Tegus, but from La Ceiba on the north coast, so that meant a trip across the country by bus was necessary for all but Matt and Nancy. At least it wasn't a “chicken bus”; Honduras now has some fine “executive class” buses, complete with air conditioning, a served snack, and a movie. We saw “The Green Mile”...but inasmuch as they waited too late to start the film we missed the last five minutes...which, naturally, are key to understanding the movie!

The next day we flew a 19-passenger high-wing aircraft out to Ahuás, the main town on the Río Patuca, and the jumping off point for a trip up-river to the MdeC. Here, at the local mission hospital we managed to acquire the antivenin we wanted. “*Barbamarillas*”, the local name for a species of fer-de-lance, are native to this area, and a bite can easily be fatal, so we were happy the mission doctor would loan us this valuable safety precaution. (When we returned it unused at the end of the MdeC trip, we made a nice cash donation to the hospital.)

Next, to find transport upstream. In 1984 we had arrived at Ahuás carrying our own 5-horse outboard, had quickly rented a 41-foot long *pipante* (a type of dugout boat) and headed upstream. In 2001 we had no outboard and wound up in lengthy negotiations with various boat owners all wanting to over-charge us by three times, asking Lps. 13,000 - 15,000 for a trip that should not cost over Lps. 4000 - 5000. We finally hired a boatman for Lps. 6000, after rejecting several more outrageous bandits. By 3:25 PM we

## Honduras, Part IV (continued)

were headed upstream, with José at the motor and Morgan as bowman watching for snags. We did not get far before approaching darkness forced us ashore—too many snags to run the river at night. So we tied up, hastily set up a camp, ate a freeze-dried meal, and spent a pretty uncomfortable night—it was surprisingly chilly!

The next day we were up at 4:22 AM, broke camp, and by 5:13 were again headed upstream in hopes of reaching Wampusirpi that day. The air was pleasantly cool until the sun got up over the trees. We saw lots of water birds, including beautiful roseate spoonbills—the first I had ever seen in the wild. Just before 7 AM we went ashore at Wawina landing to buy some breakfast. Here we picked up a woman with a little boy with a broken arm. They had been to the hospital in Ahuás and were trying to get back home to Kurpa, an hour upstream from Wampusirpi. They had been en route a week she said!

In the afternoon we were caught in a heavy rain for an hour. Herb got soaked, having lost his umbrella earlier. In fact, most of us got pretty wet in spite of rain gear, all except Pete, who had been lying on top of a pile of backpacks and who simply got under the tarp that was covering the gear and went to sleep with the pattering rain on the canvas just above his ear.

By 4 PM we could see the northernmost ridges of the Montañas de Colón in the distance. And a bit after 5 PM we pulled in to the landing at Wampusirpi, unloaded the boat and selected a campsite. I walked in to the village to find Doña Silvina's house, remembering from 1984 that this was a good place to eat. She was surprised and pleased that I remembered her cooking from 17 years earlier! We ate in shifts, so that we could leave someone guarding the camp at all time, to prevent pilferage.

It was here in Wampusirpi that we suffered the first two of numerous set-backs on this trip. We chanced into Kendra McSweeney, a recent PhD geographer who had spent two years doing her research in Krautara (a Tawahka Indian village a few miles upstream) and who was back on a visit. Kendra gave us the astonishing news that in 1995 a large group of Italian cavers had spent three weeks exploring the very area we were headed to. They supposedly had found a three km long cave.<sup>1</sup> We had come several thousand miles at great expense just to learn we had been scooped! This was depressing news, but we obviously were committed to our enterprise now, and would continue on in the morning.

The second mishap occurred during the night. We were robbed! Two members of our crew unwisely left a bag of gear outside their tent, and as a result lost a Nikonos camera, dried food, a pair of boots, and a set of contact lenses. And Nancy had a pair of boots stolen from inside her tent vestibule while she slept. Even our

boatman had his flashlight taken! The Nikonos was the most expensive item, but the boots were the most essential items. Jean was able to replace her boots by buying a pair from a young gringo artist who also happened to be passing through Wampusirpi (on a float trip down the river). And Nancy managed to buy a cheap pair of boots in a local store.

The upshot of all this was that we lost an entire day visiting local authorities, reporting the robbery, filling out forms, waiting to see if they would be able to track down the culprits, getting a police report for Jean's insurance company, and generally piddling away the day. To make matters worse, Morgan, our bowman, got drunk and unpleasant. And we had to pay an additional Lps. 800 to José for the day added to the trip. Such is the price of carelessness.

The next morning we made a final useless visit to the Wampusirpi police, then finally headed upriver again towards our goal—the Sutawala Valley, which transects the MdeC and where we would set up our base camp—normally a four-hour boat ride up from Wampusirpi. Unfortunately... first José needed to stop to deliver a message; next we stopped at Kurpa to let the boy with the broken arm and his mother get off. Around 2 PM we reached the Tawahka town of Krausirpi where we stopped to try to find some of the locals who had guided for the Italians. We were successful in finding one Dionisio Cruz who gave us a second version of the Italian expedition: there had been 18 cavers, they spent three *months* here and only found one cave. Dionisio also named several places the Italians had checked out...all places we had intended to visit. More depressing news, but we were uncertain how to evaluate it; one thing for sure, we doubted the Italians had been here as long as three months.

We continued up the Patuca, reaching the mouth of the Sutawala—a much smaller stream, but a karst stream with bluish water-- around 4:30 PM. Several kilometers up this stream is a great campsite that I had used in 1984 and which we hoped to use in 2001. But shortly after starting up the Sutawala we found our way blocked by a fallen tree. We all got out and tried to pull the big *pipante* over a spot where the massive trunk just barely ducked under the water. But we could not manage the weight.

It was here that José proved his stuff as a boatman. He has three of us get in the stern with him, everyone else out, so the bow rode high in the water. He then backed off downstream a bit, revved up the motor, and charged-- The bow rose up out of the water, went over the low spot on the trunk, and the boat's momentum ran enough of the *pipante* up over the log into the air that the weight then pulled the stern and the four of us up into the air and we slid down into the water on the opposite side of the deadfall. A spectacular bit of boatmanship!



## Honduras, Part IV (continued)

Unfortunately we quickly ran into a second mass of fallen trees, and this time there was no way through or over. So we had to turn back. On the return downstream José outdid himself—he jumped the fallen log with all of us aboard—with six in the stern, and Morgan, Matt and Nancy and me in the bow, and no one amidships. Again he charged the low spot, the bow slid up and over the log, perhaps not as far as before, but the weight of the four of us helped the weight of the boat pivot on the log and bring the stern up again...and we slipped off on the downstream side. Really fine handling by José, and a fun ride, too!

We camped that night on a gravel bar by the Patuca and prayed it didn't rain upstream (April is the dry season, otherwise this campsite would have been rather foolish). That night we decided that in spite of whatever the Italians might or might not have done, we would spend at least three days exploring the Sutawala Valley to see what we could find. While in Krausirpi we had arranged for Dionisio's brother Isidoro—who, like Dionisio, had guided for the Italians—to come up river and guide for us. Perhaps with Isidoro's help we could avoid duplicating the Italians' work and find something new.

The next morning Isidoro and his son Samuel arrived in a tiny *pipante* around 8 AM, having started out from Krausirpi poling and paddling at 4 AM. Isidoro told us there had only been 11 Italians, and they stayed only three weeks. So yet another version of the Italian expedition.

Now it was essential to find a suitable base camp, but to move camp we would need Isidoro to return to Krausirpi and come back with a *pipante* that was bigger than what he and Samuel had arrived in, but not so big as that of José. But first, Matt and I had Dionisio and Samuel take us up the Sutawala river beyond where José had been forced to turn back—their little craft could be pushed through the fallen tree branches—to finally reach Sutawala landing. From here we hiked on up to the 1984 base camp, finding it had been used by other parties and much improved with rude tables, etc. We then scouted the main Sutawala trail a few clicks further into the valley, and finally returned to the Patuca, missing a right hand fork and coming out well upstream of our gravel-bar camp. It took some nasty bushwacking in the wretched midday heat to get back to camp around 2:30 PM, having hiked about 10 clicks total.

While Matt and I were scouting for our base camp, Taco had gone upriver with José, who evidently had some business of his own upstream, before he and Morgan headed back down the Patuca, leaving us more or less on our own to get back to Ahuás. While upstream with José, Taco saw a really big alligator, much bigger than the 4 or 5 footers we had seen thus far. Later Isidoro told us there were sharks in the river. I know there are fresh-water sharks

in Lake Nicaragua, but this was the first time I had heard of them in Honduran rivers. Alligators and sharks...it gave us something to think about as we bathed in the Patuca.

To our surprise and pleasure, Isidoro and son made it back from Krausirpi this same afternoon, with a medium-sized *pipante*, but with a different story about the Italians. He evidently talked with his brother Dionisio, for now he was saying three months! Oh well, whatever.

The next day, April 30, we moved from "Patuca Beach" to Sutawala Base Camp. We had to do this in two shifts, so as not to leave gear at either camp unguarded. It took me two trips to move my personal gear from Sutawala landing to Base Camp, and though only a 20 minute hike, the combination of the weight and the tropical heat wore me out, even with Samuel carrying my big duffel part of the way. I didn't have the stamina that Herb—just two years younger than I—had for backpacking heavy loads! So when everyone had their tents up, the camp was organized, and a latrine site chosen, I promptly volunteered to act as camp guard while the rest went out searching for holes in the ground. Taco, Jean and Vivian set out to walk up some dry creeks to look for resurgences and overflows along the south wall of the Sutawala Valley. Pete and Nancy went with Isidoro and Samuel to begin to machete open a trail up into the high country towards "Helicopter Sink" (a gigantic 200 m deep sinkhole I had helicoptered into once while doing some work for Amoco). Herb and Matt explored a trail leading toward the north side of the Sutawala Valley.

That night the group spirits were up a bit. Several resurgences had been located, a small cave apparently visited by the Italians (it had a spray-painted code number on it) had been seen, and progress had been made in the direction of "Helicopter Sink", which Isidoro told us the Italians did not reach.

Well, to avoid further day-by-day, blow-by-blow descriptions of our adventures and mis-adventures, let me sum up by saying we spent the next three days checking out some small caves, a big resurgence, and slowly and painfully hacking a trail up and up — some 600 m of relief—into the high country where we hoped entrances might be found in some of the myriad sinks. Matt had a close encounter with a *barbamarilla*, but fortunately it did not strike, but merely brushed his boot as it raced away, then turned and raised its head facing Matt as if to challenge him...."come on, I'm ready for you" it seemed to hiss. We took turns going with the Tawahkas to cut the trail toward the top. During my turn I took a fall and bunged one knee pretty badly. After this I volunteered to be camp guard again. Jean and Vivian made a tough push, bivouacking in the jungle with Samuel two nights on their turn. The two women reached the top of the mountain and explored sinks there, but none of us ever made it to "Helicopter Sink". And just

## Honduras, Part IV (continued)

as in 1984, we found no caves of any significance. The main difference between 2001 and the first trip is we were unsuccessful much more efficiently in 1984!

On May 4 we decided it was time to give it up. We spent most of the day helping Isidoro construct a balsa raft, which, it was hoped would be sufficient along with his *pipante* to get all of us and all our gear back downstream to Krausirpi. Nine balsa logs were cut, stripped, and hauled up to a gravel bar. Here Isidoro—with obvious practice—arranged the logs, big ends at the stern, small ends together to point the bow, notched and lashed them together, finishing the job in just about an hour.

May 5, *Cinco de Mayo*, and my 58<sup>th</sup> birthday! Surely I never spent a more exotic birthday: floating and paddling down the Patuca River on a raft, with the beautiful—yet sinister—tropical jungle gliding by, and cliffs of limestone soaring up in the background, taunting us with their still hidden caves. Taco, Nancy, Herb and I, along with Samuel rode the raft. Pete, Matt, Jean and Vivian accompanied Isidoro in the *pipante* along with most of the gear where it would be drier than on the raft.

We spent the night in Krausirpi, enjoying the hospitality of three Cuban doctors stationed there for social service work. The Cubans do a lot of valuable medical mission work in Latin America.

The next day we said goodbye to Isidoro and Samuel, paying them for their services, and hired a large *pipante* to carry us back down to Wampusirpi. En route we struck something and sprang a leak, but this was remedied—more or less—by using my Swiss Army knife to jam rags into the cracks in the bottom of the boat. In Wampusirpi we switched to a more sea-worthy craft and headed towards Ahuás at 3 PM. But even going with the flow, it wasn't possible to make it before dark, so we were forced to camp on a beach again.

We arose at 3:30 AM to break camp and head out at the very first light of day...we were trying to make Ahuás in time to catch the morning flight out. Saw more roseate spoonbills, and a whopper gator—estimates ran from 6 to 12 feet (such a wide range, and this from people supposed to be skilled in estimating ceiling heights!). We pulled into Ahuás landing at 7:20 PM and while the rest of us unloaded the gear, Matt hot footed it to the air strip (several kilometers away from the river) to try to catch and hold the plane. Once the boat was unloaded I headed in to try to find transportation for the gear. I managed to hire a truck, and by 8:30 AM we all were at the airstrip, tickets in hand, awaiting the plane.

Oops. The agent informed us that although he had sold us eight tickets, there were only six spaces on the morning flight. Two would have to await the midday flight. A bit later we learned there would be no mid-day flight today. And when the morning

flight arrived the pilot looked at all our gear and said he could only take five of us. So Pete and Jean and Vivian wound up camping another night at Ahuás, while Matt and Nancy, Herb, Taco and I flew back to La Ceiba. This was one time I didn't volunteer to stay in camp!

Having ended our attempts to find caves in the MdeC did not mean our Honduran caving efforts were over and done. Nor, unfortunately, did it mean our bad luck was behind us. After Pete and Jean and Vivian caught up with us, we rented a vehicle and, with Matt and Nancy in their pick-up, headed out in a two-vehicle caravan to check out some very fine looking sinks we had spotted on a topo sheet. Sinks complete with the notation “*Drenaje subterráneo*” (subterranean drainage). An especially likely looking sink was located at Portillo de la Peña, a few kilometers up into the mountains from the town of Mangulile. But would you believe it...after we found a rough 4WD road that got us there, we learned that we had been scooped here, too...those damned Italians again! The entrance sink is magnificent, and the Italians had done a through trip, mapping the cave (1615 m long, -84 m deep), back in 1997.<sup>2</sup>

We wound up visiting two other sinks noted as “*Drenaje subterráneo*,” finding a small cave in limestone conglomerate. But the conglomerate did not seem likely to host major caves, or such was my opinion as a professional geologist.<sup>3</sup>

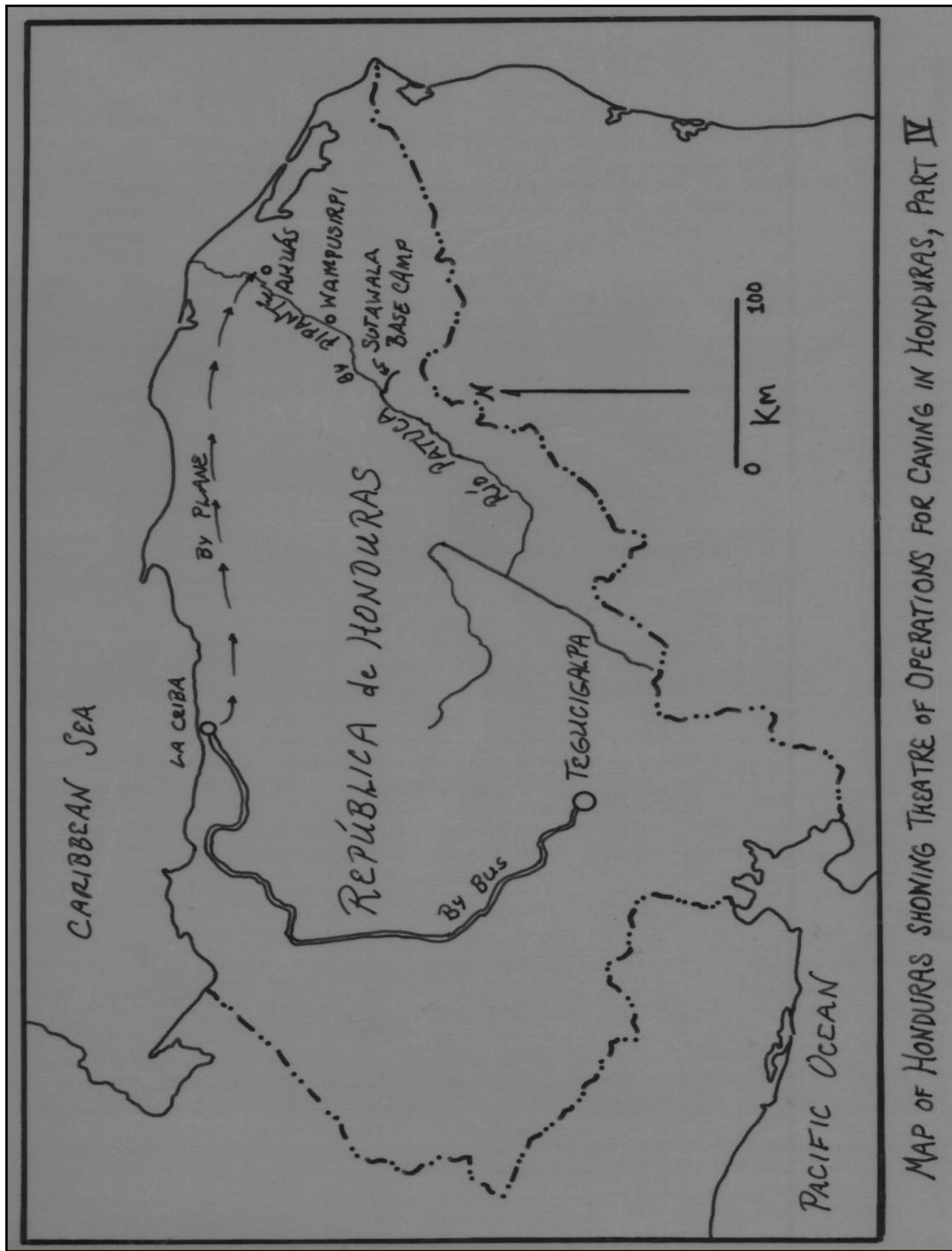
Next we moved camp to another locality where we began mapping a going stream cave, when the final spate of bad luck befell us. Vivian fell seriously ill. After a day of vomiting and diarrhea she was getting dehydrated, and it was time to get her to some medical help. So we aborted the exploration of our only decent find for the trip and headed for Juticalpa, the nearest city with good doctors. And this effectively put an end to the 2001 Honduras caving trip. We had a good adventure (with a few too many misadventures). But we didn't have much in the way of caves to show for it. *Así es la vida, a veces...*

### Footnotes

1. As reported in *Speleologia*, March 1996, 13 Italians spent several weeks in the Montañas de Colón, working out of six different base camps, and explored and mapped 10 or 12 caves, for a grand total of 629 m length. So in terms of worthwhile caves, they came up empty handed too. But they certainly did the most thorough exploration done in this area thus far.

2. As reported in *Speleologia*, Sept. 1998.

3. Boy howdy, was I wrong! In 1997 a group of Spanish cavers explored two caves in conglomerate, one Cueva El Resumidero being 960 m long, and the other, Cueva Portillo del Pozo with 1400 m mapped thus far, setting a world's depth record for caves in conglomerate at -384 m. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> deepest known cave in Honduras, and it was still going when they turned back. See *Subterránea*, Oct. 1998



MAP OF HONDURAS SHOWING THEATRE OF OPERATIONS FOR CAVING IN HONDURAS, PART IV



## The Speleolog - October and November 2006

October 7: Joey Stuckey, Eve Proper, and Aimee Roosenberg visited **Hurricane Cave**.

October 7: Ken Oeser, Robert Van Fleet, and Alan Hatcher visited **Gamble Cave** near Sparta, TN.

October 8: Joey Stuckey, Eve Proper, Aimee Roosenberg and others visited **Cedar Ridge Cave** in Marion County, TN.

October 11: Joe Douglas led a weeknight grotto trip to **Sinking Ridge Cave** in Robertson County, TN.

October 13: John Hickman led former grotto members Eric and Kristin McMaster, of Minneapolis, and John Henard, of Atlanta, to **Horseskull Cave**, Jackson County, Alabama.

October 18: Ken Oeser, Heather Levy, and Robert Van Fleet went to **Escue Cave** for the ongoing survey.

October 20: Jason and Chrissy Richards, and John Hickman attended the 2006 Bridge Day rappel at the New River Gorge Bridge, Fayetteville, West Virginia. The bridge had an approximate 850' rappel.

October 21: Ken Oeser, Robert Van Fleet, and Gerald Moni were caving in Smith County, looking for caves along the Cumberland River, by boat. A small cave (about 80 feet) was located and surveyed that may be the **Buzzard Cave** described by Bailey, and a new cave was located at Boulton Bend on the Caney Fork. It surveyed to 126 feet.

October 22: Ken Oeser and Robert Van Fleet went to **Escue Cave** to continue the ongoing survey.

October 28: Alan Hatcher, Joey Stuckey, and Aimee Roosenberg joined Gary Barnes and others from the Birmingham Grotto on a trip to the **Sloans Valley Cave System** near Pulaski, KY during the Time Change Cave-in. The group entered through the Minton Hollow entrance, and later entered through the junkyard entrance, sans Hatch who napped in the truck.

October 29: Joe Douglas, Kristen Bobo, Don Harter, Ken Oeser, Robert Van Fleet, Lauren Van Fleet, Jay Greene, Brian Taylor, Gerald Moni and Avis Moni visited several pits in Standing Stones State Forest, including **Rocky Mount Pit #1** and **Standing Stone Pit**.

November 8: Steve Cooper, Joe Stewart, and Kylie Stewart visited **Hardins Cave** in Davidson County, TN.

November 11: Don Harter, John Hutchison, and Rosemarie MacDonell visited **Blue Spring Cave** to continue a dig Don has recently been working on.

## Petzl Announces Recall

### October 18, 2006

Release #07-010

Firm's Recall Hotline: (877) 807-3805

CPSC Recall Hotline: (800) 638-2772

CPSC Media Contact: (301) 504-7908

Petzl America Recalls Climbing Equipment Due to Fall Hazard

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, in cooperation with the firm named below, today announced a voluntary recall of the following consumer product. Consumers should stop using recalled products immediately unless otherwise instructed.

Name of Product: Carabiners used for climbing

Units: About 8,000

Importer/Distributor: Petzl America, of Clearfield, Utah

Hazard: These carabiners have a green button that acts as a safety mechanism to prevent unlocking. The recalled carabiners can unlock unexpectedly without pressing the green button, posing a fall hazard.

Incidents/Injuries: None reported.

Description: The recall involves the M34 BL Am'D Ball-Lock and M36 BL William Ball Lock carabiners with metal locking sleeves. Carabiners with batch number between 06076 and 06178 are included in the recall. The batch number is engraved on the spine of the carabiner. The recall does not include Ball Lock carabiners having a plastic locking sleeve.

Sold at: Petzl dealers nationwide from March 2006 through July 2006 for about \$13 for the Am'D model and about \$17 for the William model.

Manufactured in: United States

Remedy: Consumers should stop using the recalled carabiners immediately, and contact Petzl America to have their carabiners inspected and to receive a free replacement, if necessary.

Consumer Contact: For more information, consumers can contact Petzl America at (877) 807-3805 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. MT Monday through Friday, or log on to the firm's Web site at [www.petzl.com](http://www.petzl.com)

To see this recall on CPSC's web site, including pictures of the recalled products, please go to:

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerel/prhtml07/07010.html>

## The Nashville Grotto

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## A Note from Dr. Thomas Barr

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***Elimia*** sp. This troglobitic species of the widespread genus ***Elimia*** (= "***Goniobasis***," the black spiral-shell snails you see so often in cave stream and spring outlets) is still undescribed.

It is the only known obligate cave species of the genus, and its presence has thus far been confirmed only for the **Snail Shell Cave** system.

This is one of the rarest species of the rich **Snail Shell Cave** fauna.