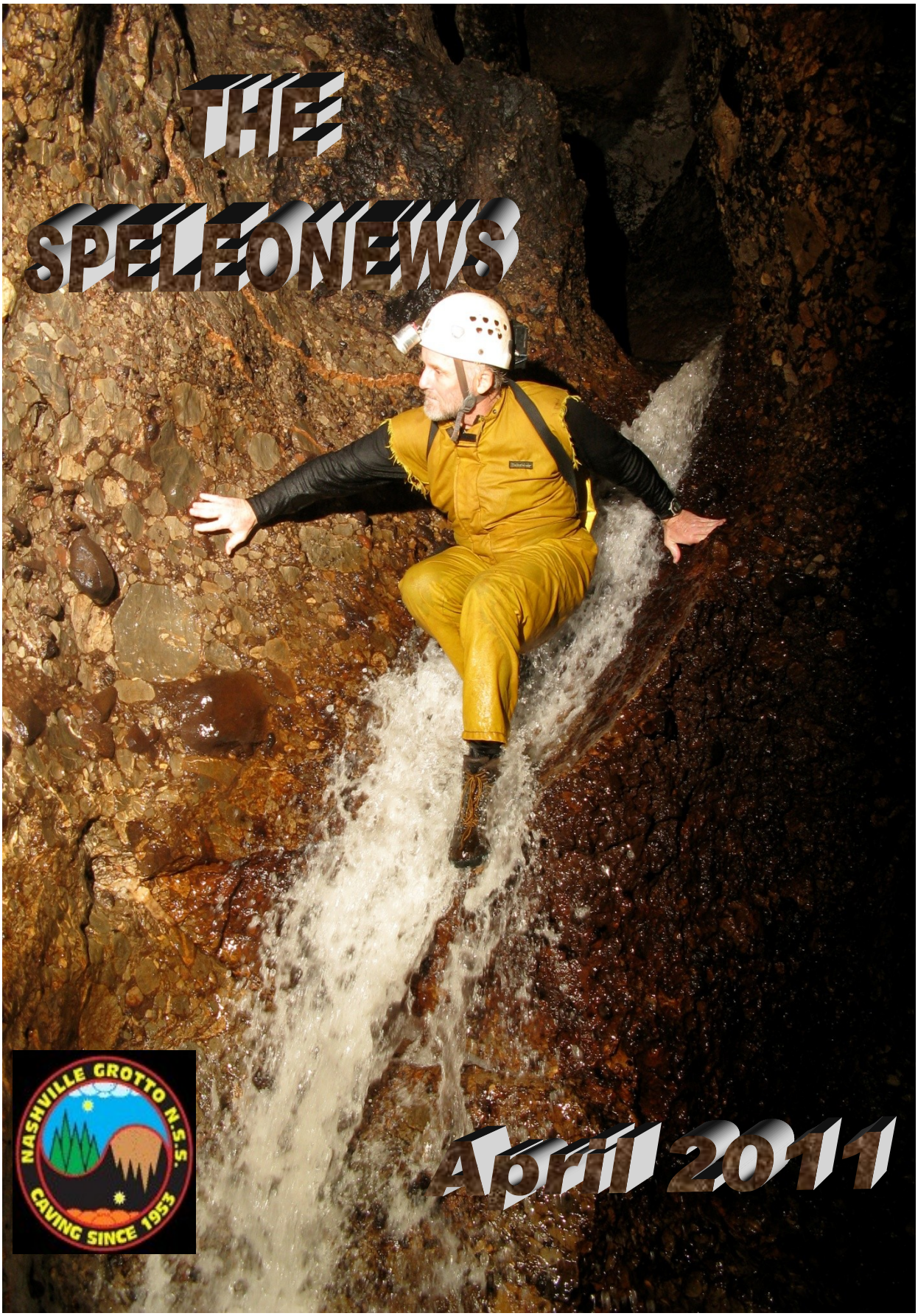

THE
SPELEONEWS
NASHVILLE GROTTO N.S.S.
CAVING SINCE 1953
April 2011

Editor's note

Welcome to the April 2011 edition of *The Speleonews*

The cover features the same picture as last month's edition, but no, it isn't an April Fool's joke.

This edition will feature several of the same pictures as the last edition because there was a snafu in the transfer of files that ended up with the wrong pictures being posted with Chapter Seven of Ric Finch's epic *Caving in Honduras*. The pictures are impressive so I am republishing them with their correct text. Apologies to Ric for the mix-up!
For the correct pictures to last month's story, email Ric: rfinch@tntech.edu (sorry, I don't have them).

If anyone would like to share their experience of the Lost Creek cleanup trip that LaCresha organized, email your trip report to me and I'll print it in the next edition.

Good caving!

Email: news@nashvillegrotto.org/

Cover: Pete Miller descending the waterslide

News

2011 Election Results:

Chairman: David Wascher
Vice Chairman: Ed Yarbrough
Treasurer: Sara Garing
Secretary: Avis Moni

The Cave Management Committee:
2 year term: John Law, John Hickman, LaCresha Kolba
1 year remaining: Jody Bailey, John Hoffelt, Bill Overton, and David Wascher

Other Committee Members:
Conservation Chair: LaCresha Kolba
Safety Chair: John Hickman
Publications: Brett Campbell
Cave Property Management: TBA

Ongoing events:

Nashville Grotto regular meetings are held the 1st Thursday of each month at 7:00 pm at REI, Brentwood. 261 Franklin Rd. Brentwood, TN 37027 (615) 376-4248 These meetings are open to anyone interested in the club. You do not need to be a member to attend.

Nashville Grotto Executive meetings held on the 3rd Thursday of each month, and are open to all members of the grotto. Location is rotated amongst member's houses or other locations. Check the website for details.

You are invited to…

40th Kentucky Speleofest, hosted by The Louisville Grotto

Memorial Day Weekend

on May 26-30, 2011 at The Lone Star Preserve in Bonnieville, KY.

Please join us and bring old pictures, stories, and help us celebrate 40 years of wonderful caving memories with old and new friends. We will have a food vendor, on Rope 1, camping, warm showers, howdy party with DJ, banquet, live band, kayaking, hiking, cave social, orienteering, geocaching, many activities for children, two guest speakers, door prizes, wet-in-wild cavers decon, speleo-slide, burning cave man bon fire, party camp, and a vertical class.

This year we are offering several new caves!

All caving will be based on the most current information from the KY Fish and Wildlife. For more information check out our website: louisville.caves.org

Caving in Honduras, Part Eight

In the previous installment of our continuing saga, we recounted a hard-luck trip in which various mishaps transpired, including Avis breaking her leg in Cueva Siete Quebradas. Having left that cave with only about one third of the survey completed, it was obvious a return trip was in order. Furthermore, the 2008 Caving in Honduras foray included a reconnaissance of a very deep and quite spectacular cave in conglomerate, one that was known to be incompletely explored. Doubly obvious, a return to Honduras was required. And so we come to CIH Part VIII, which was intended to cap this series and be my last caving trip to Honduras. We shall see…

Wrapping up Cueva Siete Quebradas (well, almost):

March 18, 2009: Janie and I drove into Nashville to visit my ailing 94-year-old mother before I took off on another caving trip in Central America, an event that always caused her to worry, but no more than it worried me to leave her in to her fragile state. Janie and I spent a restless night at my brother's house.

March 19: Up at 3:15 AM, out to the airport where I wound up paying $75 extra for an overweight second bag, but at least my carbide lamp and carbide passed through inspection without arousing any suspicions on the part of the TSA personnel. That was good. I said goodbye to Janie and by 6:10 was in the air headed for Houston, where I changed planes and continued south to Tegucigalpa, capital city of Honduras, where I landed just before 2 PM.

Although none of my caving companions were to arrive in Honduras for a couple of days, I had a lot of necessary business to deal with. At the airport I picked up our rental vehicle from National rent-a-car and also began the complicated process of phoning around to find liability insurance for Matt Oliphant, who, along with Nancy Pistole, was to meet us in Honduras in a few days…his Mexico-Guatemala insurance wasn't valid for Honduras! Had supper with old friends, then stayed the night at the Honduras Maya Hotel, a fancy place I would not ordinarily stay in, but a friend in the travel business had gotten me a discount deal here.

March 20: This morning I took a taxi (in Tegus it's best not to fight traffic and look for parking if you can avoid it) to IHAH, the Honduran Institute for Anthropology and History to meet with Dr. Euraque, the Director. IHAH was to be our in-country sponsor for the exploration of Pozo del Portillo, and it is truly important to have some government backing when working in remote parts of Honduras…otherwise suspicious local authorities can block what you want to do. After obtaining the necessary *constancia* (official document showing backing from the central government), I went to IGN, the National Geographic Institute, to buy topos. Next to an insurance agency to start the paperwork for Matt's liability insurance; turned out to be an AIG affiliate, but in spite of the recent brouhaha in the US about AIG, I did business with them…no other choice.

Finally, around 3 PM I headed north to Motel Los Remos, our caving headquarters for Cueva Siete Quebradas and other caves in this area. Nice place overlooking and tranquil beautiful Lake Yojoa. Unfortunately, the trip was not uneventful…. Traffic on the *Carretera del Norte* was simply awful, the pavement in bad shape, and about two hours out of Tegus my rented Nissan Pathfinder lost power! An engine warning light burned in the dash like an ominous red eye staring at me. Crawled up a long mountain grade at about 20 kph, turned in to the town of Siguatepeque and stopped to call National on my new cell phone…bought in Tegus so I could keep in touch with Janie and my mother. Upon restarting, the light disappeared and the car ran normally, so I continued on towards Los Remos while I awaited a return call from Oscar, a National mechanic. It was nearly 7 PM --after dark in this latitude-- before I made it to Los Remos, and driving at night in Honduras is really not what you want to do. To my dismay, Jason Ballensky and his girlfriend Tamara Tatreau, two of our party who were supposed to be here at Los Remos had not arrived, and no word as to their whereabouts. But at least Oscar had called back and assured me they could have a replacement vehicle for me tomorrow if I needed one.

A fine tilapia supper and a double Cuba libre on the motel's cool verandah overlooking the lake did a lot to restore my good humor that the long day had worn thin. And a call from Janie made me feel even better!

March 21: Didn't sleep well last night; truckers unmerciful in using their engines to decelerate on the curve in front of the motel—horrid noise. What's more, I got cold during the night, believe it or not! (Didn't bode well for the camping in the mountains that's coming up in a few days.) After breakfast I drove south a few kilometers to the town of Taulabé where I could e-mail Janie and also send a scan of some insurance papers to Matt in Guatemala. I am so amazed at being able to do this in Taulabé…when I first came here in 1969 an unreliable 19th-century telegraph system was the best communication available.

Next I drove north two hours to the international airport outside San Pedro Sula, arriving there at noon, parked, and as I walked toward the terminal building out walked Pete and Mary…what perfect timing! Mary Gratsch and Pete Miller are familiar figures to Speleonews readers who have followed this CIH series…they were on the 2006 and 2008 trips to Honduras, and have also joined me for caving in Guatemala. Good cavers, good people.

After consulting with Pete about the car (he's a professional mechanic), we decided to keep it…it was running fine. So we signed Pete on officially with National as a second driver and drove in towards San Pedro to look for lunch while we awaited the arrival of another member of our group, Pete Shifflett, a participant in many international caving expeditions.

Pete S., like Matt and Nancy, was in on this for the deep cave we hoped to explore, but he had come down a few of days early to help us finish mapping Cueva Siete Quebradas. I had not seen him since the 2001 trip to the Montañas de Colón karst in eastern-most Honduras (see CIH Pt. IV, Nashville Speleonews Nov./Dec. 2006), which he organized and led. I was pleased to recognize him when he walked in with the other deplaning passengers, in spite of his being a bit greyer.

Back at Motel Los Remos we all moved into cabin no. 4, a crazy affair with seriously sloping floors….it had been flooded during the disastrous Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and evidently settled irregularly into the wet ground during the weeks and months after the flooding. Somehow I was allowed to have the one bedroom with a private bath…a perk for being the group elder, I suppose!

Still no Jason and Tamara….we know they are touristing around in Honduras, but it is always a bit unsettling to me when people don't show up when I think they are supposed to…especially when overseas.

March 22: Today we took up mapping in Siete Quebradas again. Arrived at the cave around 10 AM, checked a few azimuths in the first part of last year's survey and was gratified to find they were correct…it's simply that the cave is headed west, rather than east as I had expected it to. Because of the thermal stream in the back of the cave, I had thought it would head generally towards a well-known cluster of hot springs three kilometers to the east of the entrance. But the cave was headed where it wanted to, not where my sense of logic said it should. In 2008 we had surveyed about a kilometer of cave, up to the end of the "A" stream and survey line. Today we started where the "B" stream—which is the main stream—joined the A passage.

The B passage starts off inauspiciously as a belly crawl through mud and water, a place that obviously sumps out during times of high water (best not be in here during the rainy season!), but quickly opens up into spacious walking passage. While not heavily decorated like the A passage, the B is a "friendly" passage. This survey line ended at B-27 in a breakdown area that probably relates to a surface sink.

Back at station B-10 we discovered, up above the level of the main passage, a formation room with lovely white draperies, prompting us to name this area the White Curtain Room.

Draperies in the White Curtain Room. Photo by Mary Gratsch.

At B-11 we began surveying the “C” stream, which joins the B stream much like the B joins the A, via a crawl, but this time only a hands and knees crawl for a short distance before it too opens back up into big passage, which features some very nice formation areas and is my favorite part of the cave. We reached the base of a high dome at station C-14, and called it quits for the day at 5 PM.

Exited the cave around 6:20 PM, bathed in the Río Jaitique to wash off the worst mud, then hiked back to the car, another 45 minutes or so away. Of course it was dark now, and darker still by the time we had all changed clothing at the car. So while I was backing up to turn the car around, I failed to see a deep trench excavated right by the edge of the narrow road. A warning yell from Mary came just in the nick of time to keep me from dropping a rear wheel into the hole—we were right on the very edge, and the car wanted to roll on in. 4WD low range, and considerable spinning of tires got us out, but it was a close call! Thank you, Mary!

Next we had a flat tire in Taulabé and no repair service was available at this hour of the night. All we could do was change tires and drive on to Los Remos and pray we didn't have a second flat. Arrived too late for supper at the motel, so went on a couple of klicks down the road to a long line of *comedores* (little eateries) lining the highway by the lakeshore. Had to go to four different places before we could find one that had any chicken, as they all specialize in fish from the lake.

Back at Los Remos at 10 PM. Still no word from Jason and Tamara.

March 23: Stopped for tire repair and found the tire to be in very bad condition; I called National and told Oscar we needed a replacement vehicle, which he promised to send tomorrow. Lost another half hour purchasing more cell phone time in Taulabé, so we didn't get into the cave until 11 AM today. Surveyed and photographed yesterday's formation room discovery, then went on in to continue the C survey, around the base of the big dome, past the junction with the thermal stream, through the muddy-floored "Boot Sucker", and on to its more-or-less terminus at station C-42…where there were several crawl leads yet to be explored.

The mud in the Boot-Sucker (which literally pulled off one of Pete Miller's shoes when he ventured up it for the first time in 2008) and the thick fine mud lining the Thermal Passage both suggest slack-water deposition. It is my belief that these deposits indicate that in the rainy season Cueva Siete Quebradas not only floods and sumps out at various points, but that in this area it probably floods and stays flooded for lengthy periods. The low crawl at the A stream – B stream junction may be the cause.

We were out of the cave a little after 5 PM, all tired, and a bit crabby. Dinner at a Chinese restaurant (normally a good bet in Honduras) turned out to be painfully slow, and served by a waitress who truly had a difficult time showing any initiative or flexibility in attending our wants. Frustrating! But we were entertained by one of the restaurant workers who ran his motorcycle into a telephone pole just outside the front door.

Back at Los Remos aroung 8:30 PM, we were relieved to find Jason and Tamara. They had been visiting the spectacular Classic Mayan site of Copán Ruins

March 24: The replacement vehicle, promised at 7 AM arrived at 7:30, well on time by local standards, nonetheless, the driver apologized for being late and explained he'd gotten into bad traffic…something with which I could certainly sympathize. We took possession of an almost new Hyundai 4X4, very nice, but without as much room as the Nissan Pathfinder…meaning we'd have to carry some luggage on the roof when we pulled out of Los Remos for good.

So, with four of us in the Hyundai and Jason and Tamara following in their little rent-a-car, we returned to Cueva Siete Quebradas for the third day. Goal: finish the map today, and photograph the beautiful Pulhapanzak Room that Pete M. discovered last year.

Having too many people for one survey team, I let Pete M. and Mary break off to do photography while Pete S., Jason and Tamara and I surveyed the "E" passage, a smallish stream passage joining the C stream from the right, between the Thermal Passage and the end of the C passage. I did not expect this passage to go far, but in fact we surveyed 23 stations before reaching its terminal sump. Immediately before the sump we found the Fault Room. Not a big room, but the best exposure of a fault that I have ever seen in a cave. The passage hit the fault, turned parallel to it so that one side of the room or passage is a planar, near- vertical wall of fault breccia and calcite. After following the fault about 20 feet the passage turns 90 degrees and makes a sort of keyhole penetrating directly through about 3 – 4 feet of recrystallized fault material. It then turns right back on itself to parallel the backside of the fault breccia a few tens of feet to the terminal sump. Quite amazing! We renamed the E passage the Fault Passage. Oddly enough we found no orange flagging at the end of this passage…could it be the Brits, who discovered Siete Quebradas in the early '90s, missed this one? Doesn't seem likely, as they were pretty thorough.

Back out to the C stream and on to Thermal Junction; it was 3 PM already, but the Thermal Passage still had to be surveyed and today was our last shot at it. So in we went. What a miserable survey: Hot, sweating profusely, glasses steaming up so that I could hardly see the book to sketch, boot-sucking mud everywhere making it hard to walk and impossible to keep the book clean. The mud caused me to fall more than once, the second time slicing my hand on a sharp rock, inasmuch as I did not have my gloves on. We threw in the towel after a bit over 900 feet, at a point where the small thermal stream became a crawl. We knew that Matt Kalsch had crawled up this in 2006 and found it to go only a short distance before sumping, and we just wimped at the thought of attempting to survey it.

So we started back out. After getting out of the thermal mud and back into cool water, while trying to clean up I discovered that both my boots were disintegrating. Had to tie my boot soles on using extra shoelaces, a cord and a small rope provided by Pete S. and another cord that Mary had. This jerry-rigged mess had to be re-tied twice on the way out of the cave, but it actually worked well enough to get me back to the vehicle, which we reached around 8 PM.

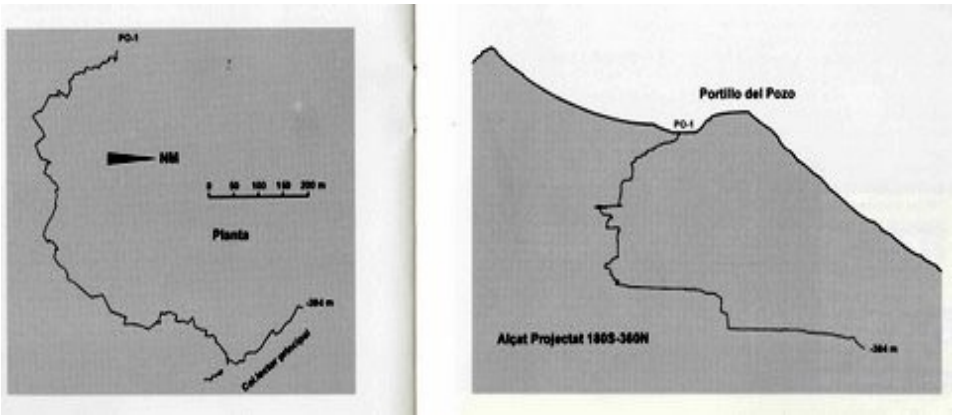
Another chicken supper in a lakeside *comedor*, this time due to a misunderstanding. I asked the proprietress if she had chicken and she said yes. My intention was that those who wanted chicken could order it, and the rest of us could have fish. After a long wait and no one came to take our orders I enquired why…only to be informed that six portions of chicken were being prepared! Oh well, the beers were good and cold. Honduras' best beer, by the by, is *Salva Vida*, i.e., "Life Saver". I'll drink to its life saving qualities; it's saved me at the end of many a blazing hot afternoon. And if being in a cave all day doesn't qualify as blazing hot, well let's not quibble over details.

Back at our cabin around 10 PM. The survey of Siete Quebradas was over. Not complete—there are still several small leads at the end of the C survey, there's the high dome, and some other unpromising leads, but the survey was over. Or so I thought.

March 25: Today Mary, Pete M., Jason and Tamara got a day to piddle around while Pete S. and I drove into the San Pedro Sula airport to pick up Gary Dunkley, a caver friend of Pete's who, along with Pete, Matt and Nancy, had participated in the exploration of the Chiquibul system in Belize, the largest cave in all Central America (see National Geographic, April 2000), We were back at Los Remos in time for lunch, but by ourselves as the others had gone into Taulabé to tour the commercial cave there. Later in the afternoon several of us drove into Taulabé to do e-mail, visit a bank, and for me to buy a new pair of boots to replace my "flappers". When we got back to Los Remos we found Matt and Nancy had arrived, having caved their way south from California through Mexico and Guatemala to get here. Now our group was almost complete…we still expected two Costa Rican cavers to join us in a few days. Tomorrow we would head for Olancho and the deep one….

The 2009 Speleosphere Expedition to Pozo del Portillo:

Speleosphere is an official NSS project, headed up by Matt Oliphant and Nancy Pistole. They undertake explorations all over the world…I am sure I never heard of any other couple that caves so much in so many different countries (Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, China, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Gabon, and I don't know where all!). I talked them into joining us in Honduras to tackle Pozo del Portillo, a spectacular cave developed in limestone conglomerate and partially explored by Catalan cavers back in 1997 and '98 (see Subterranea, 1998, no. 10, Honduras '97-98: La expedición del Centenario). The Catalans had mapped it down to –384 m deep, establishing a new world depth record for caves in conglomerate and coming close to setting a new depth record for Honduras and Central America. Our goal was to finish exploring and mapping this cave and to set some new records.



Line plot and profile of Pozo del Portillo, explored by Catalans 1997 & '98. From Subterranea, 1998.

March 26: We left Los Remos and drove south to Tegus where we split up, two vehicles continuing on to El Rosario, Olancho, while Matt and Nancy and I went on into town to pick up his new insurance policy. It was long after dark by the time we reached the Hotel El Costeño in the dusty little town of El Rosario. We found the others eating supper at what passed for an eatery nearby…there is not a single actual restaurant in this backwoods town; we're damned lucky there is a primitive motel that actually has two cold water showers and two toilets that flush when you pour water into them! Our group of nine occupied all the hotel's rooms but one.*

March 27: Today I visited with the local *alcalde* (mayor) and chief of police to present them our *constancia* and inform them of our plans. I found the police chief to be highly excitable, concerned about our safety, and anxious for us to "collaborate" with him for supplying security. "Collaborate" is a code word in Honduras for putting up some money! I politely but firmly told him we did not have any funds for this.

While I was "politicking", part of our group went with Dagoberto Juárez, our local guide and "man Friday", whom we had met in 2008 and who had agreed to work with us again this year. Dago took the group to the resurgence cave we explored last year, to set bugs (activated charcoal dye receptors) in the cave spring. We hoped to determine by a dye trace that this was the resurgence for Pozo del Portillo. They returned convinced that this cave was not the

*What a change from 1982 when Elwin & Debbie Hannah, Frank Bogle and I spent a miserable night in this village in a borrowed room on the square, prevented from sleep by the caterwauling emanating from a revivalist church across the plaza and other plagues. (See CIH Pt. 2 ½ , Speleonews, v. XXVII, n. 2.)

resurgence cave explored in 1997 by the Catalans: it was too short and Pete S. took compass readings showing the cave headed south (towards Pozo del Portillo), not east like the Catalans' Cueva El Resumidero. This left me puzzled because last year Dago had told us this was the resurgence cave the Catalans explored.

Jason and Tamara left us today, so our group strength dropped to just seven, but we were expecting reinforcements from Costa Rica soon.

March 28: We drove out to the village of El Ocotal, where Dago was awaiting us with the six mules and muleteers necessary to take our gear up to Pozo del Portillo. Unfortunately, we were accompanied to El Ocotal by a large police escort, which we neither requested nor wanted. Ostensibly for our protection, the heavily armed contingent seemed mainly to be out for a noisy

A small portion of our unwanted security service. Dago on the right. Photo by Gary Dunkley.

lark. At one point the police chief had said he would send two officers up to the cave with us, “to protect us from bandits”, but to our relief none of the uniformed men actually came with us (far too much work!). It should be noted that while it is necessary to maintain good relationships with local authorities, we had no control over the police actions, but were well aware that being accompanied into a small village by an armed posse is not the best way to inspire confidence with the local people. To make matters worse, the cops arrested one of our muleteers because he was carrying a .22 pistol but wasn’t carrying any permit; I persuaded them to let him go. It is fortunate that we had Dago, a well-known and respected local, working with us. Dago also worked with the Catalan explorers in 1998 and definitively is the man to see to get things done when caving in this area; he knows the area and he is smart and dependable.

Pozo del Portillo (“Pit of the Pass”) is reached by a two hour walk from El Ocotal, starting at an elevation of 800 m at El Ocotal and climbing up to around 1350 m. The cave is located in a sink indicated by closed contours of 1340 and 1320 m in the immediate vicinity of a trail that goes through the pass identified on the map as Portillo del Pozo (“Pass of the Pit”). It is close to the hilariously named Montaña Rompeculo, literally, “Break-Ass Mountain”. As the eldest member of our group, I will aver that hiking up to Pozo del Portillo in the blazing heat of the dry season can indeed be a bust-ass hike!

An excellent campsite is found in the entrance sink, just off the major trail that passes through the *portillo*. While convenient for accessing the cave, this trail, being in frequent use, makes it mandatory that someone remain in camp at all times to prevent pilferage; we rotated the duty of camp guard. The small (in the dry season) stream flowing into the cave is apparently permanent, and is a good source of water for the camp. By the end of the day we were settled in camp and Matt had already rigged the entrance drop and a couple of drops beyond.

While Matt was in the cave rigging drops, Nancy gave the rest of us some rope practice in a tree, the emphasis being on how to pass rebelays and redirects. For most it was actually practice, whereas for me, it was a totally new experience: I had never rapelled on 9 or 10 mm rope before, and never dealt with cowtails, rebelays and redirects. I noted that everyone but I had short racks with hyperbars, and everyone but I was using a frog climbing system. I was sub-par in both skills and equipment.

One hazard explorers in this area must be on the watch out for is venomous snakes. Our group found one pit viper (how appropriate!) in the entrance to Pozo del Portillo, and I almost stepped on a large *barbamarilla* (fer de lance), a real bad news snake. I was walking out the trail at night to a place where I could get cell phone signal to call Janie and tell my worried mother that all was well. She worried about me going into caves…little did she know that by far my most dangerous moment on the trip was walking out to phone and say I was OK! We later saw two other unidentified snakes. The owner of the Pozo property had a child badly injured by a *barbamarilla* in this vicinity.

One guy you don't want to mess with. Image shamelessly snagged off the web.

Entry into Pozo del Portillo cave is through a chaos of very large boulders of limestone conglomerate, and indeed the first drop (climbable, but safer rigged) is in this chaos, prior to actually entering cave in solid bedrock.

Mary in the entrance to Pozo del Portillo. Photo by Ric Finch

Pete M. and Andrés at the bottom of the first drop. Photo by Mary Gratsch.

Once into bedrock, the cave becomes sinuous and very narrow (commonly 0.5 to 1 m wide) as it passes through a section dubbed “the meanders” by the Catalans. Walls of smoothly eroded conglomerate present a fascinating, gorgeous and very photogenic mosaic.

Ric admiring well-rounded limestone cobble conglomerate. Photo by Mary Gratsch.

The bedrock hosting Pozo del Portillo consists of a grey limestone conglomerate. The limestone clasts are generally well-rounded, pebble to cobble-sized (occasionally boulder-sized), tightly cemented in a reddish to dark reddish-brown silty-sandy matrix. It is a clast-supported conglomerate, the clasts comprising the great majority of the rock. Hence the rock is compositionally a limestone, and subject to karst solutional processes just like a normal limestone.

The bedding is not easily seen, but was detected in several places and found to be vertical to sub-vertical, and striking 295 – 305 degrees, an orientation that approximates the linear trends of the strike ridge topography in this area.

Vertical bedding, parallel to the red pocket knife. Photo by Mary Gratsch.

Due to its tightly cemented nature, the limestone conglomerate is very solid and takes bolts well, with little tendency for individual clasts to pull out. This is fortunate, inasmuch as the smooth nature of the water-solutioned walls makes natural anchors scarce.

The meanders section drops rapidly through a series of small nuisance drops, some of which are climbable, and some of which must be rigged. We noted that where we found remnants of the Catalan rigging (a shoot-out in El Rosario, which some of the Catalans witnessed, caused them to abandon their explorations precipitously, leaving the cave fully rigged), it was placed higher than our rigging, apparently indicating the greater water flow they encountered in their September explorations.

Andrés downclimbing one of the nuisance drops. Photo by Matt Oliphant.

March 29: On the first full day working in the cave, at a depth of about 85-90 m, the first major pitch, the Catalan's 41 m drop designated "P-41" (for "pozo 41 m") was reached and descended. Here the cave stream forms a waterfall tumbling down into the pit, which bells out to perhaps 10 m in diameter. Matt rigged this drop with a rebelay and a re-direct, to keep the rope away from abrasion points, but part of the rappel was in the waterfall. This caused Pete M. to regret having drilled a series of ventilation holes in his hardhat, for he got a head and face full of water!

A short distance beyond the P-41 the ceiling abruptly lowers as the Catalan's "semi-siphon" is reached. Apparently it was a genuine siphon, length unknown, when first explored by the Catalans—we marveled at their audacity at pushing through it….which of them had the *cojones* to make the first attempt? When our group arrived at this spot it was fully sumped, and even though we knew it to be only about 2 m long, it still required some nerve to force through. Pete S. was the first, and once on the other side he managed to trench through the gravel enough to lower the water a few centimeters to create a little air space (but not enough to breath—you still had to push through face down in the water). Our first day of exploration and rigging ended here.

Pete S. emerging from the short siphon. Photo by Mary Gratsch.

Today I remained in camp all day as camp guard, and therefore was on hand to greet Andrés Ulloa, the first –and last-- of our Costa Rican contingent, who was escorted up to Pozo by Dago, bringing our group strength up to eight cavers. Unfortunately, the other Tico caver had to cancel his trip, so our group never grew past eight—a rather small team to attempt such a cave a Pozo del Portillo.

March 30: While Mary remained in camp as camp guard (along with Andrés, who was trying to get over a cold) the rest of our group entered Pozo. Unfortunately, upon reaching the top of P-41 Gary had to turn back, having accidentally left his pack higher up in the cave. Matt, not satisfied with yesterday's rigging, re-rigged the P-41, adding a second redirect to get the rope out of the waterfall. Once past this drop, our group of five spent a second hour trenching beyond the "semi-siphon" and managed to lower the water until it was merely an ear-dipper.

A short distance further in we came to the largest room in the cave, the "Sala Catalunya", measured by the Catalans at 55 X 65 m, with a ceiling height reported as 25 m. The cave stream disappears amid the various large blocks in this room, and the way on was not immediately obvious. At this point I felt obligated to turn back. I had found that my long rack and other rather aged vertical gear were not really appropriate for passing rebelays and redirects; I managed, but with enough difficulty that I was worried about possibly causing an accident. To be completely honest, my experience level was pretty minimal for what we were doing. Pete M. accompanied me back to the surface, while Matt, Nancy and Pete Shifflett continued on in. Before heading out, I gave them the can containing about a kilogram of fluorescein dye, to inject into the cave stream before they started back up. They found the way on, reached the second major drop, the "P-48", descended about half way down this broken pitch, and dropped the dye in the stream here at 5:20 PM, then headed back to camp, which they reached around 7:30 PM.

March 31: Matt and Nancy hiked back to El Ocotal and on in to El Rosario to recharge Matt's drill batteries and drive to the next town to check e-mail, returning to camp just before dark. During their absence Pete M., Mary, and I did photography in the upper part of the cave. And

Gary took Andrés into Pozo and watched him drop the P-41. Inasmuch as Andrés was at that time a stranger to us, it seemed prudent to "check him out"…he passed with flying colors, being young, strong, and adept. As I later told Matt, "he's a keeper". Pete S. remained topside as camp guard.

April 1: Today our cave team was reduced to just six: Gary declined to continue into the cave due to some muscle or joint pains, and I had concluded that my equipment and experience level were not adequate to continue in without possibly risking an accident, something to be avoided here at all costs. Mary -- who had experienced difficulties with some of long-legged Matt's riggings-- also had some misgivings about going back in, but she was game to do it. Even the two Petes admitted to feeling beat up by this tough cave. As Pete M. put it jocularly, "I feel sorry for Matt and Nancy, they're surrounded by has-beens and never-was-es."

The six cavers going in split into two teams, with Pete M., Mary and Andrés entering at 8:45 AM and the second team consisting of Matt, Nancy and Pete S. going under around 9 AM. The plan was for the second team to bypass the first and continue finding the way in and rigging it, while the first team came along mapping. Gary was assigned camp guard duties, while I went to look for the entrance to the Catalans' Cueva del Resumidero, using a GPS unit and map coordinates I had gotten from Josep Guarro, one of the Catalans.

My eight hour hike took me by the entrance to the presumed resurgence for the Pozo del Portillo cave stream, where we had left the bugs, and wow did we have a positive dye trace! The water was a bright green. No need for lab analyses of any charcoal receptor! But a potential

A very positive dye trace indeed. Photo by Ric Finch.

undesirable consequence of this wildly colored water was what effect it might have on any locals who saw it…a matter that would soon be made abundantly clear.

I followed the resurgence stream to where it joined the "main" streambed shown on the map, but this was bone dry upstream from the resurgence stream. Following this dry stream west, upstream towards the Catalans' Cueva del Resumidero, a little before 2 PM I was standing in a corn field where my GPS unit matched the Catalans' coordinates for El Resumidero. No cave here! I found a possible wet weather resurgence near the base of the mountain flank near by, but no obvious candidate for Cueva del Resumidero. A mystery remained, but the hour dictated that I start the climb back up to camp.

En route back up the mountain, I met the owner of the Pozo area who was rather worried about the green water coming out of his spring and what effects it would have on his cattle. Fortunately, he was a reasonable man and accepted my explanation that the dye was harmless and would soon disappear. A donation for his child's hospital bills also helped smooth his upset. In the meantime, back at camp, Gary, who speaks only a little Spanish, was having a harder time calming down a large group of angry and armed *campesinos* who had come up to camp to demand our immediate departure from the area. By the time I arrived at camp Gary had done a good job of making friends and entertaining them, but it had taken several tense hours to do so. Nonetheless, I had to go through all the explanations about the dye, its purpose and harmlessness, again for this group, which finally returned to El Ocotal. A lesson to be learned here: try not to use too much dye, and let the locals know what is being done beforehand…just in case!

To top off an event-filled day and a somewhat negative one at that, while Gary and I were eating supper in camp, Pete M., Mary and Andrés unexpectedly returned to the surface with the news that Matt, after conferring with Nancy and Pete S., had called off the exploration effort and had begun derigging. It seems Pozo becomes more difficult below the P-48 drop and safety had become a real concern: our group was too small to safely field two working groups, and in the event of an accident, rescue would be extremely difficult….practically impossible. Matt, Nancy and Pete S. derigged up to the top of the P-41 before exiting.

Thus ended our effort to push beyond the explorations of the 1998 Catalan group and to finish the mapping. However, all agreed that safety trumped exploration.

April 2: Gary and Pete S. went in to finish derigging, while Matt and Nancy took photos using Andrés as a model. I took guard duty in camp again, and later in the day walked out to a point where cell phone reception could be had, to call Dago and tell him seven mules would be needed for packing out camp the next day.

April 3: Our reliable friend Dago arrived early in the morning, having left his house in El Ocotal at 5 AM, worried that some of the locals upset about the green water might be causing us problems. And the mules arrived shortly after he did. By mid-morning everyone and all the gear was not only back down the mountain to El Ocotal by mule, but moved from there by car back to the Hotel El Costeño in El Rosario, a minor miracle of transportation logistics, but a good thing, because I had to drive Pete M. and Mary into the airport in San Pedro Sula—five hours of hard driving—this very same day.

April 4: Today, Nancy, Matt, Pete S., Andrés, and Gary mapped the resurgence cave, which we decided to name Cueva Resumidero del Pozo, in order to distinguish it from the Cueva del Resumidero of the Catalans. The cave mapped out at 374 m long, gaining 23 m elevation, to end at a terminal sump. The average direction is almost due south, headed right for Pozo del Portillo.

While much shorter than Cueva del Resumidero, Resumidero del Pozo is likewise a sub-horizontal active stream cave developed in conglomerate, and very beautiful.

Map of Cueva Resumidero del Pozo, drafted by Nancy Pistole.

Nancy in a big pothole in the conglomerate. Photo by Matt Oliphant.

After mapping Resumidero del Pozo, our group went in search of the Cueva del Resumidero, but they had no more luck finding it than I had had. A dark fissure, a possible wet-weather resurgence was located, but no obvious cave. And so the puzzle remains: where is the Catalans resurgence cave? Is it strictly a wet-weather resurgence? It would appear so inasmuch as the main streambed in the valley is dry upstream from the stream issuing from Resumidero del Pozo. And what feeds Cueva del Resumidero, does it have a high entrance, the equivalent to another Pozo?

Pozo del Portillo, Resumidero del Pozo and Cueva del Resumidero overlaid on topography.

Another mystery is how the Catalans missed finding Cueva Resumidero del Pozo, inasmuch as it is the best known resurgence in the area, and is permanent, not seasonal. It is possible that in the wet season the volume of water issuing from it might make it impossible to enter the cave. But that is insufficient as explanation because the Catalans state in their 1998 article that they had not located any likely resurgences for Pozo. I hypothesize that they followed the main streambed, which is labeled on the map "Quebrada El Resumidero" and which was flowing in the wet season. By sticking to the main stream they would have by-passed the smaller side stream coming from Resumidero del Pozo, and arrived at a seasonal resurgence that we did not locate in the dry season.

What is very clear is that much remains to be explored and discovered in this area. **Someone needs to finish off Pozo del Portillo and explore some of the many other caves in this area.** The Catalans located a total of 31 caves in this zone, including one with a 70 m entrance drop to going cave they did not have time to explore.

April 5: We left the area with some regrets about the failure to bottom Pozo del Portillo. We had originally hoped to finish the map started by the Catalans, push the world's depth record for caves in conglomerate past the 400 m mark, and perhaps even establish a new depth record for caves in Honduras and Central America. Nonetheless, we were pleased to had the privilege of seeing part of a magnificent cave in conglomerate, to have proven where Pozo resurges, and to have mapped a new cave. And we certainly had no regrets about leaving the dusty, unpleasant little town of El Rosario behind. Matt, Nancy and Andrés headed for Guatemala for more caving, Gary to the Bay Islands for some fun in the sun, and Pete S. and I returned to Tegucigalpa to turn in our rental vehicle and book new flights home.

And so the 2009 Pozo del Portillo effort ended. But as later events would have it, in spite of my intentions, this was not to be my last caving trip to Honduras.

The End

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THE SOUTHEAST REGION

NATIONAL CAVE RESCUE COMMISSION

2011 Regional Level 1 - Cave Rescue Operations and Management Seminar

June 10,11,12
July 8,9,10
July 29,30,31
August 6

To be conducted in Chattanooga, TN
With the cooperation and support from:
The Chattanooga - Hamilton County Rescue Service, Inc.

About the Seminar

This seminar consists of extensive classroom and fieldwork in all phases of cave rescue including underground environment, vertical rescue, hauling systems, extrication techniques, medical management, communication systems, and the organization and management of cave rescue operations. Basic and advanced course material is presented for students who typically include cavers, emergency services personnel, and emergency managers.

The seminar provides approximately 100 hours of instruction over eight days. Its classes are physically strenuous and participants must be in good physical health. Students should be prepared to work in difficult situations, both above and below ground.

NCRC requires participants in its seminars to possess certain skills as prerequisites.

Each student must demonstrate his or her ability to ascend (on rope), change over, rappel part way down, tie off their descender, then rappel safely to the ground as part of initial check-in skills. Students must also demonstrate proficiency with the basic knots and hitches used in cave rescue. Information on specific prerequisites will be provided upon registration, or may be found on the NCRC website.
Participants must review and sign a liability waiver at check-in registration. (Persons under the age of 18 may be permitted to participate in the course but must contact the registrar prior to registration concerning specific rules and restrictions.)

Course Overview

LEVEL 1 teaches current cave rescue and emergency management techniques, and provides instruction in cave environment, medical considerations, basic rope work, litter rigging and transport, and incident command systems.
It is specifically designed to meet the various needs of agency personnel with little or no cave-related experience, and cavers with little or no rescue or medical experience. Level 1 prepares students to function as cave rescue task force members.

Personal Equipment Requirements

CLIMBING HELMET

UIAA or CE approved mountaineering style helmet with a three or four point suspension, and a non-elastic chinstrap

THREE SOURCES OF LIGHT
All must be capable of allowing you to exit the cave. At least two should be electric and two should be helmet-mountable.

BOOTS
Sturdy, rubber soled

RUGGED CLOTHING (see clothing note below

SIX LOCKING CARABINERS
These must be independent of your ascending or descending systems

DESCENT DEVICE
Any of the following four devices are acceptable:
1. A standard rack
2. A three-bar Micro rack with a hyper-bar (4 bars total)
3. A bobbin-type descender with off-set or safety carabiner
4. A “Rescue Eight” with ears

MANFACTURED SEWN SEAT HARNESS

ASCENDING SYSTEM
Must be a complete working system with at least two points of gripping attachment connected to the user’s seat harness
1. An additional mechanical ascender or prusik must be available for crossing knots, etc.
2. One of the system’s mechanical ascenders must be functional as a Quick Attachment Safety (QAS)

WATER BOTTLES
Two quarts recommended

SMALL, PERSONAL FIRST AID KIT
Optional, but recommended

SMALL, HEAVY-DUTY PACK
Used to carry personal gear around underground

2 – 20 FT PIECES OF 1-INCH TUBULAR WEBBING

All personal equipment must be in safe, usable condition and marked to identify the owner. Equipment deemed unsafe or unacceptable during check-in must be replaced prior to the student’s continued participation in the course.
Students must arrive prior to the start of the each weekend at 6:00 p.m. EST (local Chattanooga time) on each Friday.
All students must either be current members of the National Speleological Society, or pay the Non-NSS fee in addition to their registration fees.

Site Accommodations
CHCRS Headquarters; classroom and training area - Eagle's Nest; field work and rope area - Raccoon Mountain; campground area for camping and training and cave used for in cave exercises

Meal Plan
Each student will be responsible for their own meals. Meals are not included in the Seminar fee to keep cost low. There will be ample time given each day for meals. Local eating establishments will be near the Seminar sites. Students may choose to pack their own filed lunch. More information will be provided in the registration packet.

Lodging
Camping will be at Raccoon Mountain Caverns, Chattanooga TN. The cost is $5.00

per night / per person. Camping for accompanying non-students is available at the same fee. Bathrooms and showers will be available. Persons who prefer a motel must make their
own arrangements. A list of nearby motels (1-5 miles) will be provided in the registration packet.

Environment/Area/Caves/Clothing

Daily high temperatures in Tennessee can be expected to average 80 to 90º F. Relative humidity will be 60 to 80 percent. The elevation for the area is 1100 feet above sea level. Be prepared to hike to caves through heavily vegetated areas with poison ivy, ticks, and mosquitoes. Long pants, short sleeve shirts, hats, sunscreen, sturdy boots, and plenty of water are recommended for comfort and
safety during outdoor activities. Area caves average 55 degrees in temperature and are frequently wet and muddy. Rugged clothing (caving coveralls or caving pants), kneepads, sturdy boots, and leather gloves are recommended.

If you have questions about the seminar or need more information please contact:

Patty Springer - Registrar Course Lead Instructor - Brian Krebs
Phone: 423-619-2041 Phone: 615-566-5129
e-mail: pitpatty@att.net e-mail: briankrebs@earthlink.net

Membership Info

Memberships *(expires 12/31 of current year)***:**

Regular Member: $15 /yr must be NSS member, all publications **(***NSS Dues are separate and must be paid to the NSS directly**)**

*Associate Member: $15 /yr, all publications, limit 1 yr

*Family Member: $1 /yr no publications except emailed newsletter

*Accompanying Member: $5 /yr, Speleonews and emailed newsletter, must be member of another grotto

*Honorary Member: no dues, all publications for life, selected for members who have significantly contributed to the Nashville Grotto over their lifetimes.

If you would like information on becoming a member of the Nashville Grotto, write to:

Nashville Grotto
P.O. Box 23114
Nashville, TN 37202

or email: chair@nashvillegrotto.org

Members in the Nashville Grotto receive the following:

*Monthly Speleonews publication
*Access to the Nashville Grotto's Listserv
*Member Directory
*Information on regional/national/international events
*Opportunity to participate in training and/or training exercises
*Voting rights
*Education on safe, conservation minded caving
*Knowledge that you are helping to protect Tennessee caves

The Grotto is an ALL VOLUNTEER organization. Although we are always in need of funds, we also need people to help with our various projects.