

# **Upcoming Events and Announcements of the Nashville Grotto**

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June 18 Nashville Grotto Meeting: On Thursday
June 18th at 7 PM, we will have the monthly
membership meeting of the Nashville Grotto
at the Adventure Science Center. The meeting
typically involves a brief discussion of grotto
business, caving trip reports, and the announcement of upcoming caving trips. This
month's presentation will be an open slideshow from the SERA Cave Carnival, so look
over your pictures and put them on a CD or
other media storage device and bring them to
the meeting. We will also be showing a short
video on White Nose Syndrome.

June 27 SERA Staff Party: Party for those who volunteered for the 58th annual 2009 SERA Cave Carnivale. 4:00 PM. Rau-Wood Conference Center

June 25-28 KARST-O-RAMA 2009: The 2009 KARST-O-RAMA will be held from June 25 to 28 at the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve in Mount Vernon, Kentucky, brought to you by the Greater Cincinnati Grotto. For more details: www.karstorama.com

July 2 Executive Meeting: The July executive meeting will be held on Thursday the 2nd at 7pm at the home of Owen Walker. The Executive Meeting is open to all grotto members and usually involves setting up trips for the upcoming month and other grotto business along with good food and drink. Owen lives at

4820 Briarwood Drive, Nashville. For directions call (615) 574- 5451 or email r\_owen\_walker@yahoo.com

July 11 Snail Shell Mock Rescue: A mock rescue organized by the TBCG will be held at the Snail Shell Cave Preserve on June 11. Contact Bob Biddix for more information at <a href="mailto:brkdwnbob@aol.com">brkdwnbob@aol.com</a>

July 12 Vertical Trip: Gerald Moni will lead trips to Clod Hole, Rhonda Well, and Wil Well. Contact Gerald at (615) 833-6054 or moni7597@comcast.net

July 10-12 Sinking Cove Weekend: Proposed weekend for the Nashville Grotto to camp at the Sinking Cove Cave Preserve. Details TBA.

July 16 Nashville Grotto Meeting: The following meeting of the Nashville Grotto will be on July 16 at 7:00 PM at the Adventure Science Center. Program TBA.

July 19-26 ICS/NSS Convention: The 15th International Congress of Speleology and 2009 NSS Convention will be held July 19th through the 26th in Kerrville, Texas. For more information: www.ics2009.us

Logsdons Cave Work Weekend: John Hoffelt will plan a maintenance weekend at the Logsdons Cave Preserve. Date and details TBA.

#### After immersing herself in Speleoorganizationalvolunteerism, LaCresha finally goes caving.... her report:

Date: June 6, 2009

Cave: Indian Grave Point Trip leader: Dave Wascher

Participants: Troy, Noel, Tara, Mike, Gabriel, Ian,

and LaCresha Kolba

Met off I-40 at exit 239A: 1400
Parked at Cave: 1430
Entered Cave: 1500
Exit Cave: 1900

"Once we entered the cave we encountered a decomposing goats carcass. The cave consisted: good trail, mud, slick rock, mud, rock shambles, small pools of water.

We stopped at the register for lunch. We proceeded onward to the Garden of Eden. At this point Troy took over leading the outing to the end of the Garden of Eden. As we returned we joined Dave and Ian who were at Madonna's Pool. As we proceeded to the cave's exit trash was collected."

-LaCresha Kolba



# Caving in Honduras, Part VI: Return to Catracholandia

Ric Finch, NSS 5560RL

Way back in 1969-70-71, I spent nine months mapping the geology of the San Pedro Zacapa quadrangle in the republic of Honduras...field work for my dissertation. I prided myself on how thoroughly I covered the map area, even keeping a separate map showing that I had physically set foot in almost every one of the approx. 500 square kilometers that comprised the quad. In the process I found some caves, including a noteworthy system—Cueva La Buena Fé, described in CIH Pts. 1, 2 & 2 ½ (Speleonews issues for Feb. & Apr. '82 & Apr. '83). Yes, I fancied I knew where all the caves in "my" quad were. But a square kilometer can hide an entrance easily and I was chagrined when 22 years after my geologic work in the Zacapa quad the "British" dants of the ancient Maya were still exploring this Tea Cavers"--consisting of two Limey volunteers, Tom Hawkins and Dan McKenzie-- reported having discovered two significant caves in "my" quad that had escaped my attention. One, Cueva Siete Quebradas was estimated by them to be 2 - 3 km long and contained a thermal stream with water as hot as 90 Cels! This was major, and I was outraged and humiliated to be one-upped this way.... A return trip to Zacapa was in order....all I needed was to find some cavers to go with me. But this took a while...

April Fools Day 2006 (how appropriate!) my three caving companions -- Pete Miller and Mary Gratsch from Ohio and Jef Levin from California-and I crossed the border from Guatemala into Copán Ruins, Honduras. We had just passed a week of excellent caving in Guatemala, including a visit to the fabulous Chiquibul, the largest system in all Central America and a world class cave. But that's a different subject.

### Cueva Masical: A new world record in slow mapping?

We spent the night at Copán and Pete, Mary and Jef visited the spectacular Classic Maya ceremonial center the next morning while I caught up on email. (Yes, I've been to Copán enough times over the years to be getting a bit jaded.) Then after lunch we headed our Avis 4WD Terracan down the road to the departmental capital of Santa Bárbara, where I had lived for a few months in 1973 while working in mining exploration. We were headed to Santa Bárbara to take care of some unfinished business in nearby Cueva Masical, a fine cave and archeological site that Jim Coffroth and I explored in

1979 (see CIH Part I, Speleonews, Feb. 1982) and which Frank Bogle and Pete Deinken, and I mapped to 2025 m in 1981 (see CIH Part 2, Speleonews, Apr. 1982). It's a great cave well worth a visit, but the reason to return was to finish the map.

When we arrived at the entrance around midday April 3rd, it was sadly clear that the cave had received and likely was still receiving much more visitation than a quarter century earlier...names were spray painted all over the entrance, which had been unblemished in '81. String and other debris were scattered along the main passage. The most remarkable artifact was a relatively fresh bundle of pitch pine torches...evidently the modern descencave in the manner of their ancestors! I decided to adopt this system as my "Honduran back-up light."



Ric Finch with torch bundle — Mary Gratsch tense search

1.3 km back into the cave we came to the stream. It was upstream from this junction that remained unmapped due to time constraints imposed on the 1981 mapping team by Deinken's iob at the US Embassy. To my joy a brief but inlocated a still

About

legible 24-year-old survey mark—C-2. Ah, good old carbide survey marks—justifiable vandalism!(?) Back in '81, realizing that we were running out of time, we had just started lines B and C off the main survey in order to be able to indicate on the map the initial direction of these two side passages.

Now the four of us began surveying the ample walking passage, following the C-stream a few shots towards its source. It issued from a too-low crawl on the left, but the passage continued, dry, upwards

and increasing in size. We came to a cliff at a T-intersection with another stream passage. Clambering down to this second stream we came upon the broken remains of a decorated pot. Whether it was Maya or pertaining to another culture we could not say, but we did not doubt its antiquity, as the cave is littered with potsherds, some scattered bone fragments, the occasional obsidian point, and also features some crude stone walls. In the early 70s some local explorers had found a couple of intact pots on a high ledge.

Reaching the stream below the cliff we turned downstream and made a couple of shots bringing us to C-13, 208 m from C-2. Here we had a bit of luck: after setting C-13 (yes, with carbide soot) I spotted just a couple of feet away the faded B-1 point. We had completed a loop and were almost back to the A-survey in the main passage! We celebrated this bit of serendipity with lunch.

After refueling we turned back upstream, initiating a new survey line that we designated G (skipping D, E, and F just in case there were some other lines, unremembered by me). This survey ran 11 stations, 142 m, past a side passage, through some nice formation areas, to a terminal sump.

On the return downstream Pete executed a difficult climb to explore about 50 – 60 m of upper passage that we deemed not worth the effort to survey. Instead, we continued back to the one side lead. Here we initiated the H survey, which only ran nine stations, 84 m, before ending in a fair sized high -ceilinged room.

We were now done and headed back out. Jef exited solo and fast to bathe in the river outside the cave. The rest of us came along slower with Mary taking photos. Pete eventually grew impatient and exited, while I continued with Mary. We reached the entrance around 5 PM and were back in Sta. Bárbara eating a celebratory supper at El Mesón Blanco around 8 PM.

When the data were reduced and survey overlap removed, I found we had added a mere 352 m to the 1981 survey, bringing the total up to 2377 m (moving Cueva Masical from fifth to fourth longest cave in Honduras). Not a big deal in terms of distance surveyed, but the important point was that the cave survey was finally finished after 25 years! Dividing the total distance by the number of years needed to finish the survey, I get an average survey rate of 95 m/yr! I proudly submit this as a likely candidate for the world's record for slow surveying!

Editor's note: Please see the accompanying file "Speleonews June 2009 - Masical Map.pdf" for the map of Cueva Masical.

# Cueva Siete Quebradas: Getting into hot water underground

April 4th found us headed east out of Santa Bárbara, passing through the San Pedro Zacapa quad, and on to Motel Los Remos at the south end of beautiful Lake Yojoa. En route we stopped so Pete, Mary and Jef could see the entrance to La Buena Fé cave, a short walk off the road. Recent erosional changes at the entrance, which is in a limestone fault breccia, were obvious and impressive. The family at the nearby home where we left our car told us that during Hurricane Mitch (1998) the valley had become a lake, with the waters reaching close to their house on a hillock at least 10 m higher than the entrance.

At Los Remos we found my Honduran caver friend Gustavo Ustariz awaiting us. After getting a cabin and eating a tilapia lunch at Los Remos, we headed out to find Cueva Siete Quebradas. I had pretty specific instructions from Hawkins and McKenzie, and at the point where we left our two vehicles we acquired a local guide who claimed to know where the cave lay. A thirty minute hike brought us to the cave our guide knew: Cueva La Teta, as the locals dubbed it, due to its mammiform stalactites. The Brits had called it Cueva de los Vampiros, and this low, nasty bat-infested crawl was not what we were looking for.

In spite of the guide's insistence that there was no other cave on this side of the Río Jaitique, we pushed on down the river to where the entrance to Cueva Siete Quebradas should be just above a spring. The spring was there on the left bank, just as the Brits had said. But we try as we might, we could find no cave entrance. We clambered in and out of boulders and limestone overhangs; beneath one boulder we found a small hole that didn't appear to go, and Pete couldn't have gotten through if it did. Discouraged, and running out of afternoon, we took a second look at Las Tetas, but that definitely had nothing in common with the description of Siete Quebradas. We gave it up, returned to our cars and Los Remos.

At Los Remos our team was augmented further by Matt Kalsch, a young Florida caver with some previous experience in Central America, and lots of enthusiasm. Now we were six.

For supper we went to a small comedor that Gustavo knew and recommended. To my astonishment the owner asked me right off if I wasn't "Richard who had once lived at La Buena Fé", the Mormon mission across the lake where indeed I had lived during the summer of 1969. He was

Gaspar Pacheco and his father had sold us fish at the had headed out to find Pete. mission and once rowed me across the lake to the highway. Gaspar had been just a little boy, yet he recognized me immediately—and was even kind enough ignore my bald head to say I still looked "just the same". Amazing, especially to someone like me who has a touch of face blindness and often can't recognize people I met an hour before.

The next day we returned to the spring on the Jaitique and the supposed cave entrance. Once again we combed the crannies in the boulders and overhangs. But today we had skinny Matt with us and rather than believe that the tiny hole Jef had looked at yesterday did not go, he dropped in to see fork, saw some more cave and came to another juncfor himself and bingo...Matt had found the cave! The hole led to a small inter-boulder chamber below which running water could be heard....Jef had gotten this far, but had missed seeing an even smaller hole that Matt squeezed through to find the cave opening up. With some mashing all of us except wide-shouldered Pete were able to get into the cave. We left Pete digging and went on in.

The name "Siete Quebradas" means "Seven Streams"; the Brits had found a total of seven streams flowing in different branches of the cave. We headed upstream, past huge roots in the ceiling that looked like anacondas. The cave is mostly walking passage, with the ceiling lowering to a duck difference between this little stream and the other walk or crawl in places, mostly in the first quarter or half kilometer. There are lots of stalactites, all undamaged. In fact the cave is nearly pristine—no grafitti, and no evidence of any visitation whatsoever, except for some red-orange flagging hanging at stream junctions (placed there, we were confident by the Brits). There is, however, some scattered trash, mostly plastic, washed in, along with a lot of organic debris, from unseen sinkholes somewhere above us.

Having no idea where we were going, we took a left at the first stream junction, merely because the left-hand passage was walking; we disregarded the fact that the stream coming in from the right looked to have the greater flow. We now had stream number two.

When the left-hand passage degenerated to a really nasty stream crawl, we returned to the junction and went into a wide, low stream crawl. Mary opted out here, not wishing to take her camera through this crawl, and, no doubt, wondering if Pete was going to make it in and try to catch up with us. So Jef, Matt, Gustavo and I went through the crawl, which soon opened up into big, gravel-floored easy walking passage. I went back to holler at Mary to come on through, but she either couldn't hear me or

We traveled rapidly along this passage, admiring some nice flowstone, including an unusual mustard-colored deposit. We eventually reached another junction, where we found another strip of red-orange survey tape. Stream number three!

Once again, we took the left-hand branch, and followed it until it ended, apparently skirting around a breakdown pile feeding in from a sink above. The breakdown included cobbles of mudstone and sandstone from the stratigraphic unit overlying the limestone.

Back to the junction, we started up the right tion: stream number four! And this was the thermal stream! It was a rivulet, really not much more than a trickle, but distinctly warm! And I was carrying a thermometer for the precise purpose of determining how warm. It was only 86F, but that was 12 degrees above the normal cave stream temperature of 74F. Actually, that the water was only warm was both a disappointment and something of a relief, mostly the latter: the report by Hawkins and McKenzie gave the water temperature as 90 Cels, and I had had visions of trying to explore a cave passage in which a slip into a pool would result in a fatal parboiling.

Aside from temperature, another noteworthy cave streams is that it carried absolutely no trash. While the normal streams were fed from surface sinks and brought in debris, this thermal stream undoubtedly came from great depth. About three kilometers east of Cueva Siete Quebradas is a wellknown thermal field with several dozen hot springs, with water in excess of boiling temperature. These springs issue through a fault zone which I had mapped and defined as the Zacapa normal fault. Not far from the fault are exposures of a fine-grained diorite pluton. Though this intrusion has never been radiometrically dated, its proximity to the thermal springs suggests that it may be young enough to still be hot at depth and provide the heat for the springs and the thermal stream in the cave...which, fortunately, was far enough removed from its heat source to be merely warm.

While Matt and Gustavo continued up the left hand branch, Jef and I proceeded up this little warm stream cautiously...the Brits had reported feeling shortness of breath here, and I knew that sulfurous gases accompanied the waters issuing from the hot spring cluster to the east. We could smell nothing, but we were sweating heavily, and the appearance of a dead bat floating in the stream, followed by a second, did not add to our liking of the exploration. Plus, this passage, unlike the others, had a lot of deep, boot-sucking mud in it. In fact a few foot-prints still were visible in spots—the Brits, we assumed.

A few bats were flying around, and this gave us confidence that the air was good, but forward progress was still problematical due to the mud and my steamed-up glasses that I could not see through. When the already small passage dropped to a stream crawl, we turned back to find Matt and Gustavo.

After waiting for a considerable while at the junction, we left them a note and an arrow in the mud (lined with TP for visibility!) and headed out, arriving back at the entrance at 3:20 PM, where we found Pete and Mary bathing in the Río Jaitique. Pete had never made it into Cueva Siete Quebradas, but had had his own adventure when a couple of Honduran campesinos took him to yet another cave, Cueva Nacimiento de Jute.

Around 4:30 PM Matt and Gustavo emerged, having pushed every lead, including the thermal stream crawl—which he found to go just a short distance before sumping.

I failed to ask Matt if he and Gustavo found three more junctions and streams 5, 6, & 7, but I assume that the Brits can count well enough. What we established on this recon is the following:

- 1. Cueva Siete Quebradas is completely unknown to the locals; we were probably just the second party to ever enter the cave.
- 2. Except for trash washed in from sinkholes, it is pristine.
- 3. The 2 3 kilometer length estimate by the Brits is probably a fair estimate.
- 4. The 90 Cels water temperature reported by the Brits is way off (maybe it's a typo in their report, that should be 90F?).
- 5. The cave needs to be mapped, and this would be a multiday effort. We didn't have the requisite time. Besides which, Pete couldn't get in, and it would not have been fair to him leave him twiddling his thumbs for days while we mapped.

### Cueva de la Quebrada Susmay: The longest known cave in Honduras

Thursday, April 6, we headed for the Catacamas area in eastern Honduras. Now we were five, all crammed into the little Terracan, as Gustavo had had to return to work, taking his vehicle with him.

Not far south of Lake Yojoa, I stopped the car where limestone slabs were for sale, a cottage industry that was just starting up in the early 70s, and

now supplied flagstones for patios and walls and walkways all over Honduras. The flagstone quarriers occasionally found fossil fish nicely exposed on the bedding planes, and they had learned that these were salable, too. And that was my reason for stopping—I had long wanted one of these fish, having seen one during my dissertation field work, but being unable to persuade its owner to part with it. Since then the fish had gone commercial, and this day I walked away with a nice specimen for just a couple of bucks.

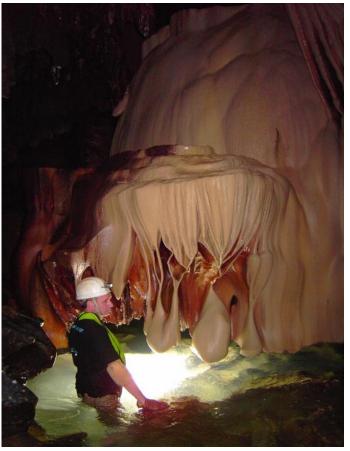
We arrived at Catacamas in the afternoon, and, with considerable and surprising difficulty, found a hotel that had room for us. Jorge Yanes, one of the discoverers of the famous pre-columbian ossuary widely known as the "Cave of the Glowing Skulls" and now the manager of the Talgua Cave National Park, came by around 8 PM to talk with us and set up a special visit for us to the archeological site on Saturday. In the meantime, we would visit Cueva de la Quebrada Susmay.

The British Tea Cavers, Tom and Andy, had, among their other accomplishments, been the first cavers to find the Quebrada Susmay cave, which they explored for an estimated three kilometers. The good-sized stream issuing from this cave flows into a huge sink or small karst valley (something over 1 sq. km. in area), to resurge -probably—at a really big spring at the base of the north flank of the mountain. This lower cave, which Tom gave me a tour of in 1995, they estimated to be just over a kilometer long. The Brits were explorers and thorough catalogers of caves and karst features, but they weren't mappers. Since there were only two of them, it's easy to understand why they were reluctant to map big caves. In recent years Italian cavers have explored beyond the Brits' penetration of Quebrada Susmay to map 6690 m of cave, making Susmay the longest known cave in Honduras. And they have linked it hydrologically to other caves, defining a major system in the Susmay area. The Italians are currently doing the best speleological work in Honduras.

Friday we arrived at the tiny village of Susmay around 9 AM, noting new homes on higher ground than originally—Hurricane Mitch had created a small inland sea of the karst valley, in places over 20 m deep and submerging much of the village for 15 days! We parked our vehicle at what turned out to be the house used by the Italians as their project headquarters. From here we were guided by Omar for a kilometer to the house where the landowners of the Susmay cave live. After obtaining permission to visit the cave we trekked on with Omar another

klick to the entrance, which lies in a jumble of boulders about 10 m above the spring formed by the cave stream.

Cueva Quebrada Susmay exceeded our wildest expectations-- What a great cave! Walls of beautifully polished blue-grey limestone shot through with snow-white calcite veins, clean as a whistle, being occasionally washed by floods. Enough water to require swimming in several places and swift enough to be sporting here and there. Size ranging from really big gravel-floored galleries to near-siphons. In one spot a flowstone mass nearly filled the formerly large passage; to proceed on into



Pete Miller stands in crystalline water flowing out from under a beautiful flowstone — Mary Gratsch.)

the cave you had to fight the current through an eardipper under the flowstone. This is pristine with no signs of vandalism decorated with gobs of stunning flowstone formations of varied colors—white, cream, yellow, chocolate. This was a real speleological treat.

We explored upstream perhaps two kilometers, maybe more, until we reached a long crawl nearly siphoned out, and which clearly is submerged frequently. More than half the cave lies beyond this point, but we had seen a lot and the photographers in our group—Mary and Matt—wanted to shoot their way out, so this seemed like a good turn



Pete Miller and magnificent flowstone — Mary Gratsch

a seven hour trip.

We drove down out of the mountains, back to our hotel in Catacamas, witnessing a spectacularly lurid sunset en route. It was getting late; I was at the wheel and pushing things a little on the winding gravel road, but I felt comfortable with it, even if some of my riders were perhaps not as placid as I was.

#### Cueva Talgua, the "Cave of the Glowing Skulls"

Saturday morning we went out to Cueva de Talgua, a Honduran National Park. As described in CIH Pt. V, this cave is famous internationally as the "Cave of the Glowing Skulls", a moniker given by the press after the spectacular discovery in 1994 of an upper passage of calcite-encrusted human skulls that seemed to glow in cavers' headlamps. The remains were in fact reburials: ritually stacked clean bones from skeletons that had been previously buried outside. Unfortunately for most paying visitors, the archeologically interesting section is off limits to the public. But thanks to our acquaintance with Jorge Yanes and the fact that the First Congress of Central American Speleology was about to be held here, we were given the special treat of ascending the ladders, removing our caving boots and passing sock-footed through the normally locked gates to visit the ossuary.

As it turns out, the site was somewhat of a disappointment. Most of the calcite covered skulls and stacked femurs have been removed for safekeeping and study. What is left is minimal and mostly unremovable due to the amount of calcite encasement. which also renders the remains less photogenic. around point. We exited the cave around 5 PM, after Still, it isn't every day you get to see piles of skulls 7



Calcite covered bones in Cueva Talgua

and femurs in a cave, and it was undeniably a privilege to see the site in person.

We were very grateful to Jorge for making this visit possible.

After lunch back in Catacamas, we packed up, I deposited most of my luggage in the Hotel Juan Carlos, and then I drove us back to the capital city, Tegucigalpa ("Tegus" as all the gringos call it).

Sunday, April 9, Appomattox Day. After we said goodbye to Jef, who was leaving later in the day, I drove Pete and Mary out to Toncontín, the international airport, where they got their Continental flight back to the US. I settled the bill with the Avis at their airport office, then took a cab to the Discovery bus station and hopped the first bus back to Catacamas.

What should have been a simple four hour trip turned into a mess. Thirty-five minutes out of Tegus we were broken down on the side of the highway in a blistering heat. Ten minutes later the driver attempted to move on down the road with some engine alarm beeping loudly. Another ten minutes and we were stopped again, fortunately this time near a roadside refreshment stand. The driver put some water in the vehicle and again tried to head on down the road, but another ten minutes further on we had to stop again, this time at a filling station, where the driver gave up and called for a replacement vehicle, which arrived an hour and a half later. The replacement bus was bigger and more comfortable, but that proved to be a liability, as we had to stop in the town of Juticalpa to switch to a smaller bus...it seems the big bus could not fit

through the gate to the terminal at Catacamas! We finally arrived at that latter city at 5:35 PM, I caught a cab to the Hotel Juan Carlos and was in my room sipping a much needed Cuba libre by six o'clock.

# El Primer Congreso Centroamericano de Espeleología

Attending, supporting, and making a presentation at the First Central American Congress of Speleology was how I wound up this essay into caving in Honduras. The Congress was held at the Hotel Juan Carlos in Catacamas, with camping and rope training sessions at Cueva Talgua just outside of town. The Congress was organized by Costa Rican cavers and a few Honduran cavers such as Jorge Yanes. It was a

small affair, with only about 30 participants from eight different countries, but it was a good start and it was fun.

Perhaps because I was clearly the oldest caver in attendance they asked me to lead off the presentations. Or maybe it was because I was the only speaker old-fashioned enough to need a 35 mm slide projector and they wanted to get my Model T out of the way of their Power Point equipment. In any case, I gave a talk, illustrated by slides and map displays, on the history of caving by North Americans in Honduras, 1857 through 2005. I gave the talk in Spanish, which, despite being less than grammatically perfect, was understood by all, and well received. Most of the Central American cavers have not had the opportunity to participate in undertakings such as the exploration of major river caves like the the Subterráneo del Río Atima (Steve Knutson, NSS News, Aug. 1988), or the propping of deep multidrop caves such as Cueva Guatemalía (Ric Finch, Speleonews, June 1991). So hearing about and seeing photos from such enterprises on their home territory was an eye-opener to them.

The congress included vertical training, technical talks, round table discussions of the future of caving and speleology in Central America, and post-congress caving trips. But I skipped the latter and by Wednesday I was on my way back to Tegus again, and Thursday morning, April 13, I was winging my way back to Tennessee after three very funfilled weeks of caving in Guatemala and Honduras.









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Carnivale photography in the
June 2009 Speleonews
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