

BEXARfacts



Monthly Newsletter April 2009

AN URGENT APPEAL REGARDING WNS

Fellow Cavers and National Speleological Society Members,

Never in history of the NSS has any President been confronted with a situation that threatens to change caving as drastically as we used to know it. I'm certain you understand the devastation WNS has caused the bat population in caves in the North Eastern United States. The NSS Leadership has sent a letter requesting U.S. Senate Hearings in an appeal to obtain adequate research funding.

I am now appealing to our NSS Internal Organizations and individual members to get involved and join in the fight against White Nose Syndrome (WNS). Please use **my letter** as a template and change the addressee to your own Senator or Congressperson. The E-mail addresses can be found at <http://www.senate.gov/> or <http://www.house.gov/> to forward your own personalized letter to your Senator or Congressional Representative.

Remember, the sooner we solve WNS, the sooner we can get caving back to normal. The NSS Leadership has also recently released our Policy Statement in an attempt to contain WNS and it can be found here:

<http://www.caves.org/WNS/NSS%20WNS%20Policy%20Stm%20090408.pdf>

Thank you for your participation,

Gordon Birkhimer
President National Speleological Society

For a copy Gordon's sample letter please go to the Bexar Grotto website.

FROM THE SS LIASON FOR WNS

Click on the link below for a moving piece of video showing the devastation of WNS - shot at Vermont's Mt. Aeolus Bat Cave. For those outside the WNS region, this is what it's all about.

http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=4920589n%3fsource=search_video

NSS policy statement on WNS It's the top link under Resources on the NSS WNS website: <http://www.caves.org/WNS/WNS%20Info.htm>

Thank you, Peter Youngbaer, SS Liaison for WNS

SIGNS OF WNS

Bats may lose their fat reserves, which they need to survive hibernation, long before the winter is over. They often leave their hibernacula during the winter and die. As winter progresses, we find increasing numbers of dead bats in the affected locations.

WNS may be associated with some or all of the following unusual bat behavior:

- White fungus, especially on the bat's nose, but also on the wings, ears or tail;
- Bats flying outside during the day in temperatures at or below freezing;
- Bats clustered near the entrance of hibernacula; and
- Dead or dying bats on the ground or on buildings, trees or other structures.

Hibernating bats may have other white fungus not associated with WNS. If a bat with fungus is not in an affected area and has no other signs of WNS, it may not have WNS.

For more information, see http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 1 800/344 WILD, www.fws.gov

WhiteNoseBats@fws.gov

What are the Service and other federal and state agencies doing to find the cause and a cure for WNS?

An extensive network of state and federal agencies is working to investigate the source, spread and cause of bat deaths associated with WNS and to develop management strategies to minimize the impacts of WNS.

The overall WNS investigation has three primary focus areas: research, monitoring/management and outreach. For example, we are conducting winter surveys to document and track affected sites, working with the caving community and local cave owners to target potential sites for surveys and protective measures, and securing funding to identify and fund research on the spread and management of WNS. In addition, the Service has a Web page as a central repository for up-to-date information and links to other relevant Web sites.

Evelynn and Joe's



Joe and Evelynn at the entrance of Midnight Terror Cave



Joe and his jade pendant discovery. The archeologists estimate its age to be about 1300 years old (the archeologists kept it).



Belize Holiday see page 3

Evelynn, Allan Cobb and a couple of the archeology students documenting the pendant find.



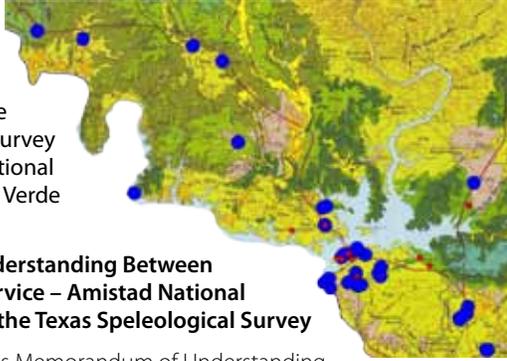
Joe examining a large clay pot.

TSS - UPCOMING PROJECT

The Friendship Project

Information and photos provided by Ron Ralph & Gerald Atkinson - 2009

TSA's most exciting news for upcoming caving projects this fall came from Ron Ralph Announcing the TSS's Cave and Karst Survey Project at Amistad National Recreation Area, in Val Verde County, Texas:



Memorandum of Understanding Between The National Park Service – Amistad National Recreation Area and the Texas Speleological Survey

Article I. AUTHORITY This Memorandum of Understanding is entered into pursuant to the Act of August 25, 1916, 39 Stat. 535, as amended, and is for the purpose of encouraging participation by members of the Texas Speleological Survey (TSS), (pursuant to the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act of 1988) in the inventory, management, scientific study and protection of caves and cave resources located on lands administered by the National Park Service in the Amistad National Recreation Area.

The Friendship project will be conducted in two phases: Phase I, underway now, is data gathering of existing caves and compiling the data into a database. Phase II will begin after ICS convention and aside from exploration and survey of caves will include collecting cave invertebrates and other cave biologicals. The collection of cave invertebrates will be based on information provided by the TSS in which caves are identified that look promising for biological collection purposes.

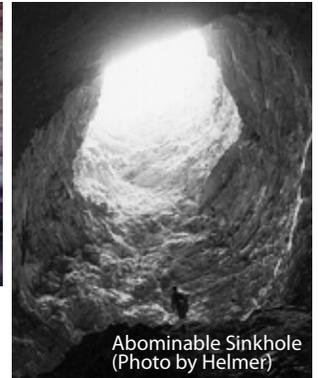
Amistad NRA is the United States portion of International Amistad Reservoir, formed on the Rio Grande along the border of the US and Mexico. Amistad is known for excellent water-based recreation, camping and is surrounded by a landscape rich in prehistoric rock art, a vibrant



Photo by Kunath



Photo by Kunath



Abominable Sinkhole (Photo by Helmer)

Caves in Amistad National Park

border culture, along with a wide variety of plant and animal life. For more information on Amistad Park visit <http://www.nps.gov/amis>

UPCOMING TRIPS

Date	Event	Contact	Additional Information
9-10 May	Honey Creek	Kurt Menking	Work at the spring
23-24 May	Deep/Punkin	Geary Schindel	Welding for the upper lever porch (this is Memorial weekend)
6- 7 Jun	Honey Creek	Kurt Menking	Contact Bill Steele if you want to help haul tanks

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Event	Contact	Additional Information
2 May	Longhorn Caverns State Park Dig	Mark Alman	This is a TSA pre-ICS project! We will be meeting at the visitors center at Longhorn Caverns State Park at 9 AM, Saturday, May 2, and caravan from there to the Crownover entrance. We will be prepping the area for a possible thru trip during ICS, and conducting a possible thru trip.
8-10 May	Colorado Bend State Park	cbsp@maverickgrotto.org	Long running TSA project. A great project for new cavers.
17 May	Bracken Grotto Night	Bob Cowell	
29 May	Bracken Grotto Night	Bob Cowell	
13-20 Jun	NCRC Cave Rescue Seminar	www.ncrc.info.com	Bedford, Indiana

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Date	Event	Contact	Additional Information
3 May	Bamberger Ranch Day	Bob Cowell	15 Volunteers are needed for cooking.

TRIP REPORT - MIDNIGHT TERROR AND BARTON CREEK CAVES

by Joe Mitchell

Around Easter weekend, Evelynn and I went to Belize for a short vacation. We met up with Linda, Allan, Don, and Ann and the team of archeology students under Dr. Jim Brady who have been working down there since mid-March and we were fortunate to be able to go with them for a day to Midnight Terror Cave. In the past they have been able to drive to this cave, but this year it was too wet, so it was a 2.5 mile hike through the jungle.

The large entrance opens to the top of a ledge with a 30-50 foot drop into the cave. The students had various sites they were working at in the cave., they had rigged a couple of ladders for access since the students did not normally do rope work. Ann was working on a site just below the entrance while Don was doing a drawing of the entrance area, and Allan was nice enough to give us the grand tour of the cave. (Linda did not come along that day).

Most of the cave is basically a single large room with very large formations and breakdown blocks that separate it into rooms. Allan lead us to various places showing us modifications that had been made to the cave by the Mayans such as cutting trails, adding steps, building altars, and so forth. Along the way were many pottery fragments but little was intact since the cave had been heavily looted in the past.

Eventually we worked our way down to a lower room with a sloped floor and what resembled benches cut in the rock in what resembled an amphitheater seating arrangement. At the bottom of this slope was another room known as Bone Soup. This is a low muddy area with filled with numerous human bones and a couple of skulls - likely Mayan sacrifice victims. He then took us to a spot with a short but tight tube with airflow that Linda previously had briefly squeezed through and found passage beyond.

Since it was very tight, I was the only one able (or willing) to go through and found virgin borehole passage (likely an occasion stream passage) on the other side going in both directions. I went upstream a ways and eventually came to a T-intersection. To the right, it ended quickly in ended in a flowstone wall, but the left continued on as far as I went. I then went downstream which became interesting as the passage became increasingly muddy but maintained its large size. The mud started to have an odd hollow sound and at each step the floor would give a bit. I realized that a large collapse in the floor that I had passed a ways back that was about 10 feet in diameter and 8 feet deep might mean that this whole area might have voids underneath covered with a thin veneer of flowstone and mud. After noting that the passage continued as far as I could see, I beat a hasty, but gentle retreat back to the squeeze.



Later, Evelynn and I were sitting around in the amphitheater area when I noticed a green glint behind her. I went over and cleared a little dirt away and found a flat oval piece of jade carved with a head! I didn't know if it was important or not so called Allan and the students over and they quickly became very interested. The face on the pendant was wearing a headpiece that looked like a helmet, what appeared to be so sort of ear-loops and did not look very happy having an upside down U shaped mouth. It was a little more than an inch high and about 1/4 inch thick. It had a small hole drilled through the width of it, so may have been used as a pendant. Apparently this was one of the nicer artifacts that had been found during the expedition and was likely at least 1100 years old. *Very cool!*

After spending a while admiring the pendant, the archeology students documented it and bagged it for removal. Allan then took us back up to the main level of the cave and I went with Don to another higher area with another area of bones to collect a data logger. Meanwhile Evelynn was sitting at one spot when one of the students noticed a burn pit behind her with some bones that had not been documented previously. So, we started saying that she just needed to stop and sit down and have someone look behind her to make new discoveries. Eventually it was time to head out and another 2.5 mile hike though the now 95+ degree jungle.

A couple of days later, we went to another cave called Barton Creek Cave. This is a water cave but semi-touristy (though undeveloped inside) and you can rent canoes and paddle upstream about a half mile or so. It was reasonably well decorated with a large amount of flowstone coming down the walls in various places. The ceiling became very high, up to 150 feet at one point. There were a couple of Mayan pots visible on high ledges along with a skull. Getting to the cave was interesting; driving on a road that was incredibly rough for a few miles (probably not recommended for pregnant women) and then down a very steep road into the valley with the cave with several switchback sections.



We did several other things while we were there including going to Tikal in Guatemala (very spectacular), visiting Xunantunich and Cahal Pech which are a couple of smaller ruins near San Ignacio, going to the Belize zoo, and even having an afternoon to hang out with Allan, Linda, Don, and Ann by the pool and drink Pina Coladas and then going to the carnival down the hill to ride the *scare-us* wheel (which we also found out after getting on it probably should not be ridden by pregnant women since it has a high-speed rotation mode!) It was a short but very fun trip to Belize!

