Dream Lake by Florian Bachmann won an Honorable Mention in the 2020 Photo Salon

Meditation by Florian Bachmann also won an Honorable Mention in the 2020 Photo Salon
Beyond the Sump: Nacimiento Del Río Uluaapan, Mexico

Andreas Klocker and Steve Lambert

Cave Exploration in Colombia

Dan Straley and Becky Dettorre

Looking for Fossils in the Aguas Buenas Cave System (Scab), Puerto Rico

José Luis Gómez Cabrera, Ángel M. Nieves-Rivera, Ph.D., and Efraín Matos Pagan

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ABOUT THE COVER

Front cover:

Gilly Elor on the rope traverse over Victoria Falls in the Río Uluaapan cave in Mexico. This falls greeted divers surfacing after traversing Sump 1.A diver in the sump pool in seen in the distance. Photo by Adam Haydock.

Back cover:

Right: Jesus Fernandez Auderset admires this newly discovered wonder named Cueva de la Suerte (Cave of Luck), in Columbia. Photo by Sofia Oggioni.

Left: Divers beginning a dive through Sump2 in the Río Uluaapan Cave in Mexico. Photo by Adam Haydock.

Bottom: One of the bigger rooms from the very small winding passages of Cenote Don Lucio, south of Tulum. The cenote is hidden in a very small dry cave inhabited by thousands of bats. Photo by SJ Alice Bennett.

USA


INTERNATIONAL

July 23-29, 2021—18th International Congress of Speleology, (Lyon, France), http://uis2021.speleos.fr/
Beyond the Sump: Nacimiento Del Río Uluapan, Mexico
Andreas Klocker & Steve Lambert; otherwise uncredited pix by Adam Haydock

Intro

The Nacimiento del Río Uluapan, or Ndatsè as it is called in the local dialect of Mazatec, is a breathtaking resurgence which remarkably flows out from the face of a steep limestone cliff face. The resurgence is part of the Cerro Rabón, a prominent, heavily karstified massif tucked away in the Sierra Mazateca range in Oaxaca, Mexico. Its impressive waterflow, whose source remains unknown, provides drinking water for towns and cities nearby.

Plagued with political hurdles and the enormous logistical challenges of diving in such an extreme location, the waters of the Uluapan had been untouched since the last attempt was made to explore it in 1995. In that year Bill Farr dived the sump, claiming that it ended with a turbulent pool in a massive dome room under a tumultuous waterfall. 24 years later, in April 2019, our team made the journey to the mysterious sump, with the goal of finding the water source.

History

Known by locals for ages, it wasn’t brought to the attention of cavers until the late 60s or early 70s, when a team of Canadian cavers noted it during a reconnaissance trip in the area (Kambesis, 2003). It was first visited by cavers in 1980 by a group led by Janet Fitzsimmons, and was first dived in 1986 by Bill Stone and Noel Sloan. In an email exchange Stone described their first dive saying: “The water coming out the entrance was frightening. I still remember taking a photo of Noel standing beside it. The water flying out over the travertine falls was deeper than Noel was tall and it arced out a good 20 meters (65 feet) before disappearing in a cloud of impact-induced spray and fog. We seriously considered aborting right then.”

After chopping a trail through the forest up to the mouth of the cave, they made the dives using high pressure lightweight carbon tanks. They discovered a massive passage, but exploration was restricted by the dim dive lights available at that time and limited gas supplies, and they were forced to turn around at 920 feet penetration. Not wanting to spoil one of the best leads in the cave diving world, their findings were kept secret until 1994. In 1995 Jim Brown and Bill Farr dove the cave entrance to the cave above the waterfall

High water conditions encountered on the 1986 Stone/Sloan attempt. Compare to photos above and upper right on page 5.

Noel Sloan in the entrance lake on the 1986 attempt
using similar open circuit equipment, with Farr being the only person to have allegedly cracked the sump.

Following a defeat by our expedition to the Cueva de la Peña Colorada in 2018, where exploration in the final sump was thwarted by an impassable breakdown and 6 team members were dramatically trapped for 69 hours beyond sump 3 by an out of season flooding event, we chose to pursue other leads in the area, and with a smaller team. With extensive help from Mike Frazier, Hugo Rodríguez, Tony Akers, and Alejandra Mendoza, we were able to secure permission to dive in the Río Uluapan resurgence, the first team to do so since 1994, and only the third team ever.

The Drive

A majority of the team departed from the East coast of the United States, with Charlie Roberson and Gilly Elor driving his dive van from Florida, and Zeb Lilly, Andreas Klocker, Teddy Garlock, and Steve Lambert driving Zeb’s F350 Expedition-mobile from Virginia, where a majority of the expedition equipment is stored. Much of the team’s personal dive gear was carried in Charlie’s van, while the team gear was loaded in Zeb’s truck. Thousands of pounds of gear were loaded onto the F350, modified for the expedition with a heavy duty roof rack, camper shell and F450 rear suspension to handle the heavy load. A gasoline-powered air compressor, over 50 scuba tanks, 6 tubs of CO₂ absorbent for rebreathers, 3 scooters, loads of spare parts, cooking, cleaning and sleeping supplies, first aid and emergency medicine supplies, as well as hundreds of feet of static caving rope, bolts, hangars and a full tool set were all tightly packed into the overburdened F350.

The two parties met up in Laredo, Texas, after Joe Heinrichs was picked up from the KISS rebreathers headquarters in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. The border crossing went smoothly, with the only hiccup being an unexpected import tax on the compressor (which had already been taken to Mexico several times prior) and some disagreement on the value of said compressor. After registering the vehicles in Mexico, it was easy going all the way to our destination, San Bartolomé Ayautla, a small village nestled deep in the mountains the Sierra Mazateca range. In the mean time, Adam Haydock made his way via Mexico City, slept in one of those airport pods, got the last seat on the bus, and took a taxi to basecamp...long two days with little sleep.

Setting up

Thanks to Mike Frazier and Tony Akers, we secured a small bungalow at the base of the Uluapan resurgence and only a short hike from the cave entrance. It was luxurious by basecamp standards, with running water, an indoor bathroom, and a gas stove. We stored diving and climbing equipment on the first floor while leaving the second floor for sleeping quarters. Once we had unloaded all of our gear and set up camp, we took a hike up to the cave to see what we would be dealing with. We decided that handlines would be enough to get to the cave entrance, and after some debate on where to store gear we made the decision to hide it on a portaledge that would be inaccessible to all but the most motivated of thieves. Hauling the gear up and down from the ledge significantly increased the setup and cleanup time for each dive, but was the safest option available for gear storage.
Diving

From the beta that we had acquired, we expected to encounter a fairly large waterfall after about 1600 feet of underwater passage in Sump 1. Our initial objectives were to find the waterfall, bolt climb it, and explore any passage heading toward the water source, as well as to continue to explore the underwater passage in Sump 1, looking for any additional leads and making a complete survey of the passage. After setting up handlines to help carry heavy loads of equipment along the mile-long hike to the cave entrance, we began to plan our dives, dividing into teams of two and assigning specific tasks to each team based on their individual strengths.

Teddy and Steve made the first dive into the system, with the goal of finding the alleged "waterfall room". They followed remnants of cave line left by the two previous exploration teams, which they had not expected to be intact after so many flood seasons, diving along the ceiling checking all of the air bells for the waterfall. Making so many ascents and descents caused their oxygen supply to be depleted faster than expected, and they turned back unsuccessful. The second dive was by Zeb and Charlie, whose task was to follow the sump along the floor, looking for other leads and continuing passage. They ended up near Teddy and Steve's line from the previous dive, and discovered that the passage ended in a gigantic room. The next team was Andreas and Joe, who went to further investigate a lead noticed by Charlie and Zeb.

After 3 dives, we were still unsure of where we should be looking for the waterfall. It was impossible to see more than 2 or 3 walls of the cave at any one time, often times we could only blindly guess which direction we should swim off into the blackness to look for the way on. Teddy and Steve made their second dive into the cave with the purpose of getting a better survey of the sump so we could make a map and get a better idea of where the cave might be headed. While working on a survey of the line installed by Charlie and Zeb a few days before, they were able to hear the waterfall, which was directly above the line. They tied in and swam upward to discover the room described by Bill Farr in 1995, an enormous dome roaring with the sound of the waterfall. There were large waves on the surface of the pool caused by the flow as it cascaded down into the pool. At that point Teddy removed his dive gear and was able to free climb the waterfall, which was smaller than had been described, and scramble through around 300 feet of dry cave and locate the entrance to Sump 2. He described it saying "It goes and its big". Later that day Gilly and Jon made a dive in Sump 1 to complete the survey, and to check the unexplored "left side" of the passage for any leads.

After the team heard the news of Sump 2, the first new exploration in the cave since 1995, stoke levels were at an all-time high.
high. We decided that SRT was unnecessary to climb the waterfall and would only complicate logistics, so handlines would be installed to aid in climbing it. Andreas and Joe were assigned the task to carry rope and bolts through the sump in a cave pack, and an electric drill and spare batteries through in a makeshift dry tube made from a DPV body. Unfortunately, upon arrival at the cave entrance, Joe wasn’t feeling well, so Steve took his place.

Steve and Andreas towed the equipment through the first sump with the help of two Silent Submersion scooters, and proceeded to bolt gear lines, handlines, and an etrier to help get divers to Sump 2. After the lines were in place, they were ecstatic to be the first people to have the chance to dive Sump 2. They made the climb wearing their KISS Sidewinder rebreathers, and carried one set of LP50s for bailout. Andreas made the first ever dive in Sump 2, where it was quickly discovered that it was going to be deeper than Sump 1. With such small bailout tanks and only wearing a wetsuit, Andreas turned around once he started reaching mandatory decompression, and surfaced shivering, but extremely happy. Steve made the next dive following Andreas’s line, and followed the ceiling down to 120 feet, then all the way back up to the surface, only to disappointingly discover that it was a false airbell, and a dead end. On the way back through the
Zeb prepares for a dive in Sump 2

At the start of the day, Zeb and Charlie engaged in a series of Tyrolean traverses to move equipment safely and efficiently between sumps. With the need to transport larger bailout tanks on future dives, along with scooters and other heavy equipment, we decided that shuttling gear by hand along the dry section of the cave was too risky. Jon and Gilly made a dive to the dry passage between sumps 1 and 2 and rigged a series of Tyrolean traverses to move equipment safely and efficiently between sumps. This system would both reduce the amount of strenuous work divers would have to do after a dive and also protect the equipment from damage during transport. Unfortunately on this dive the dry tube that Gilly was carrying failed, flooding an almost brand-new DistoX.

With all of the equipment in place to handle more serious dives, it was decided that Zeb and Andreas would make the next exploration dive. Jon and Gilly went with them to assist in moving gear between sumps, help them gear up, and to survey dry passage while waiting for the divers to return. Wearing drysuits, Zeb and Andreas pushed the cave a further 600 feet to a maximum depth of 240 feet, racking up a 2.5 hour decompression time and over 4 hours underwater in Sump 2 alone.

Teddy, who had been bedridden for almost a week, was now back on his feet, and it was decided that he and Zeb would make the next push dive. Once again, Jon and Gilly went to assist, this time accompanied by photographer Adam Haydock, who was documenting the case. On this dive Teddy and Zeb were able to explore and survey nearly 1000 feet more of Sump 2, with a maximum depth of 270 feet then heading upward, with the end of their exploration at a depth of 182 feet. Due to the risk of decompression sickness (DCS), the divers needed to rest for several hours between the sumps before making the final dive out and trips into the cave were becoming quite lengthy, running over 14 hours from start to finish. Jon and Gilly brought food and hot drinks for the divers, to help them warm up and get some energy while resting after the deep exploration dive. By the time they returned, stowed gear, and hiked down the mountain it was after 3 am.

With time running out, we only had a chance for one more push dive. The stress and endless workload was beginning to take its toll on the group, and there were many personal conflicts arising. In the end Teddy and Zeb were chosen to make the last dive of the season. Once again Jon and Gilly went in with them, hauling gear between sumps, taking care of the divers, and surveying dry passage. On this dive Teddy took the lead with Zeb laying the line behind him. There were some extreme changes in depth during this dive, requiring decompression stops during the dive before any planned ascent. From the old tie-off at 182 feet they ascended to 80 feet, hoping that the passage was going up to dry cave. Eventually they found the way on, descending back down to 300 feet, where they tied off. Knowing that it would take a while to survey out, they split up. Zeb began the survey out while Teddy continued to explore a further 200 feet, with a final depth of 333 feet.

Scorpion

On their first dive into the cave, Teddy and Steve came across a scorpion on a sandbank several hundred feet from an exit and around 40 feet deep. Thinking it was dead, they approached for a closer look. Surprisingly, not only was it alive, it reacted to their presence like you would expect a scorpion to, bringing its tail up into an aggressive stance then quickly scurrying away. Unfortunately they were not equipped to capture the specimen for study, but were able to take some video footage. After reviewing the footage, Oscar Francke from the Instituto de Biologia, UNAM in Mexico City was able to identify it, saying: “It is an amazing video!!! Undoubtedly it is Alacran tartarus Francke, 1982, a genus and species I described from Sistema Huautla 37 years ago!!!”
Later in the expedition, there was another sighting of a scorpion underwater, and many sightings in the section of dry cave between sumps one and two. It is still unclear how the scorpions entered the cave, how they survive in complete darkness, and what their source of food is. The only other animal life seen past the light zone of the cave was a tadpole in the entrance pool of Sump 2, which is suspected to have been washed in from an unknown entrance upstream.

Summary
After spending nearly a month on the project, we were able to get the first ever underwater survey of the cave and survey new dry passage between sumps, in total adding 6890 feet of new surveyed passage. When added to the previous exploration and survey done by teams from the United States and Switzerland, the total known length of Sistema Nacimiento del Río Uluapan is 8200 feet, and the total system depth is 557 feet. (+262, -295). Sump 2 is currently 3937 feet long, with a maximum known depth of 330 feet.

Plans for the Future
With the cave continuing big, the team is desperate to head back to the Uluapan and continue exploration. Sadly, cartel activities and Covid-19 crossed our plans two seasons in a row, and we now hope to return in March/April 2022 for an extended expedition. Due to the increasing length and already impressive depth of the passage, we will utilize a dual rebreather setup which will allow us to explore to practically unlimited depths and significantly reduce the number of gas tanks we will need to haul into the cave. We will also bring underwater “habitats” and scrubbers which will allow us to do a majority of our mandatory decompressions stops out of the chilly 60 degree F water and add an extra margin of safety in the case of a drysuit failure. To help with the gargantuan task, the team will likely be several members larger than this year, with Matt Vinzant, Chris Jewell, and Andy Pitkin joining the expedition.

Thank you
The success of this expedition would not have been possible without the help of many, many people. We would like to thank the comuneros of San Bartolomé de Ayautla, Municipal President of Jalapa de Diaz Arturo Garcia, Tatiana Lopez, Martian Jimenez, Mike Fraizer, Hugo Rodriguez, Tony Akers, Fernando Hernandez, and all of the others who paved the way for our team to be able to explore the Uluapan for their assistance, hospitality and for sharing information. We would also like to thank our equipment sponsors for providing extremely robust gear capable of going into some of the most extreme places on earth and be able to be adjusted and repaired in the field. A huge thank you goes out to KISS Rebreathers, Submersion Scooters, Lightmonkey, Shearwaterwater, Otter drysuits, OC Lugo Co. Inc., Xdeep, Fathom Dive Systems, and Nalgene for supporting us. Without such amazing gear projects like this would be logistically impossible. Finally, we would like to thank the National Speleological Society for continually supporting our expeditions with exploration grants.

References

This year’s Beyond the Sump team included: Adam Haydock (USA), Alejandra Mendoza (MEX), Andreas Klocker (AUT/AUS), Charlie Roberson (USA), Gilly Elor (ISR/USA), Joe Heinrichs (USA), Jon Lillestolen (USA), Steve Lambert (USA), Teddy Garlock (USA), and Zeb Lilly (USA).

More on the project’s activities:
www.Beyondthesump.org
facebook.com/cavedive
On the northern tip of the world’s longest mountain range lies a 1400-foot thick layer of limestone known as the Rosablanca Formation. I often compare this formation to the TAG region of the United States because of its similarity in size and large caves. The real major difference between these areas is that one has had several thousand cavers exploring its nooks and crannies while the other has had a mere handful.

Political Colombia

Colombia’s reputation over the past 50 years has been less than attractive to those that cherish law and order and also want to explore. A long war between the government and leftist guerillas has kept the country an environmental time capsule. I first started visiting Colombia 10 years ago and during the early years, I’d wear a hoodie to hide my identity and limit the risk of problems when traveling around cities and natural areas. Urban areas today are about as safe as any major U.S. city and urban Colombians are very welcoming of extranjeros (strangers). In over 80 trips to Colombia, I’ve never had an issue, but that said, I also know the places to avoid—and I speak Spanish. There are still some regions of Colombia that are hot zones and controlled by rebel groups. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People’s Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)) and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)) are the two major groups that strike fear in Colombians. The FARC are currently attempting peace with the government, but the ELN still refuses agreements. The ELN are currently the most dangerous rebel group in the Western Hemisphere. When considering a trip to Colombia, it would serve you well to research current news concerning ELN operations before you go.

History of Caves

The history of Colombian cave exploration spans thousands of years. Many indigenous tribes explored, lived in, and utilized caves for rituals. The Muisca people gave rise to the legend of El Dorado (the man of gold), as they were one of the richest cultures in human history. The Muisca traded salt for gold with surrounding cultures and then created artworks for offerings that were left to appease the spirits of caves, trees, lakes, and so on. Muisca cave paintings are occasionally discovered in central Colombia as they recorded events and culture on cave walls and cliffs. Fast forward to the arrival of the conquistadors and the Muisca went the way of so many cultures that had the same misfortune. In 1799, Alexander von Humboldt arrived on the shores of Venezuela and began documenting plants and animals on his journey towards Bogotá. Humboldt observed and wrote about guácharos (oil birds), which are fascinating hawk-sized birds that echolocate and nest deep in South American caves. Over the past 60 years, there have been several expeditions organized by Polish, French, Swiss, British, and American cavers. These expeditions produced data on over 100 caves discovered. Today’s cave exploration dynamic involves mostly resident cave explorers, many of whom are photographing, surveying, and documenting biological and archaeological discoveries. Swiss explorer Jesus Fernandez Auderset lives in Colombia full time and two other Swiss explorers, Roman Hapka and Jean-Marc Jutzet, organize annual expeditions. Brady Merritt and I work on multiple projects during much shorter expeditions throughout each year. There are also numerous Colombian cavers based in Bogotá and the department of Santander.

It’s an incredible experience to attend expeditions with Roman, Jean-Marc, and Jesus. These guys are cave exploring machines who find and survey about one cave per day on average. Jean-Marc crunches data on his laptop and has 3D maps of the day’s explorations for everyone to view by the time dessert is on the dinner table. The data presentation is usually accom-
panied by Roman’s funny stories from other expeditions. I’m still giggling about the time a young Stan Allison mistook foot cream for toothpaste at an underground base camp in Mexico. In case you don’t know who Stan Allison is, he’s an amazing and well-respected caver in the Western U.S.

**The Rosablanca Formation**

Located about a five-hour drive from Bogotá is the small town of El Peñon. El Peñon sits at between 8,000 to 9,000 feet of altitude and is surrounded by beautiful cloud forests. The climate is moist and cold yet orchids and bromeliads jut out from every crevice and crown every rock spire; even the steeples in town are crowned with orchids. The name El Peñon translates to “big rock” and that’s exactly what you’ll see there. Close to town is a rock dome mountain that has a massive 100 foot high cave entrance in its bright white cliff face. Tropical plants dangle their roots off the 200 foot high cliff in some form of a natural hydroponic garden. It’s on par to being one of the most beautiful rock outcroppings that any caver has ever seen. Did I mention this amazing sight greets you everyday when you wake up and sip your coffee? In 2011, Roman, Jean-Marc, and Jesus managed to strike a lease for the 30 acres of land including the house directly in front of the cliff. They converted the house into a base camp for expeditions and named it Camp Espeleo-Colombia. The house can sleep about 15 people indoors with beds, hot shower, gear cleaning station, and a kitchen. Jesus has maintained the house as a year-round resident for the past 10 years. His dedication and hard work to build relationships with local people, police, and military are the sole reason that extended cave exploration is possible in the area. The field house has been the base for many science expeditions and new cave species are being discovered in the area on a regular basis. Jesus’s work with the scientific powerhouse Humboldt Institute has led to a first edition book currently at the printers, written by scientist Carlos A. Lasso about the caves and species of the Rosablanca Formation.

The Rosablanca is much like our own region of TAG. There are no large rivers and only very small creeks cross the landscape, all of which dump into cave systems. Cave systems often have massive entrances with passages sometimes extending 600 feet wide or more that eventually narrow into sumps. It’s not exactly known where the water goes, but at lower altitudes, there are many large caves, some with rivers.

Jesus Fernandez Auderset has been covering the Rosablanca on foot for most of his years spent in the mountainous landscape. He has located hoards of caves and has a very impressive survey of his work. He does this unappreciated work mostly by himself or with his girlfriend, the renowned Colombian cinematographer, Sofia Oggioni. Though one particular cave always at Jesus’s side is his best bud, Poker. Poker is an extremely intelligent dog that understands Jesus’s quest for caves and so he also looks for caves. Poker is likely the greatest cave discoverer in Colombian history or at least he seems to think so. Poker climbs cliffs and goes amazingly deep into caves on his own; it’s really something to witness first hand. Even if you spot a cave by some chance before Poker, he still scoops the light zone before you can reach the entrance. He won’t scoop beyond the light zone because he actually thinks he found the cave and calls out the location with barks and whimpers until you arrive.

On his long walks through the countryside, Jesus finds caves—lots and lots of caves—and cows I guess, also rock forests and the occasional “hola” from locals who traverse a large network of trails on their way to town. These trails often pass caves and one trail in particular has a 150-foot pit right on the edge, literally a foot away. The terrain is extreme and difficult with marked changes in elevation over the ancient, eroded landscape. In the past few years, technology has come to El Peñon in the form of a DJI Phantom 4 drone. Using the drone, I’ve
scanned the landscape for caves in hard to reach areas. These scans have resulted in several large cave discoveries, one of which we aptly named Cueva del Phantom partly for the drone and partly because it eluded Jesus in an area he frequents. I can’t forget his face the moment this cave showed up on the live view screen and he exclaimed, “Por eso no puedo dormir” (For this reason I can’t sleep), knowing we now have to go home and reflect all night on this discovery. Since that day, I’ve been on three expeditions to Phantom and the cave just gets bigger and bigger. Camping in the cave has become necessary to have time to push and survey the inner passages and it appears that it will soon connect to large caves nearby. Phantom is the most amazing cave I’ve ever been a part of discovering with indigenous drawings, tombs, and blue stalactites, worthy of an article in the NSS News, surely coming soon.

There’s another particularly amazing cave out there in the mountains that has a perfectly heart-shaped pit. It’s one of the coolest things I’ve ever seen and this heart pit is 300 feet deep. Cueva de la Tronera has a large walk-in entrance and large borehole passage; some areas are near 1,000 feet wide, all leading down to a river system. The cave had a full skeleton of a giant sloth which was recently removed for museum display and preservation by the National Geological Department of Colombia; its removal is the only reason I can speak about its existence. Treasure hunting and looting of caves is extremely common in Colombia. Most Colombians know the history of the aforementioned Muiscas and think that all caves have treasures, which is not the case. Cave tourism is another issue as its in the startup phase in El Peñon. This tourism by untrained guides has caused caves like Cueva Caracos to suffer extended damage to formations. I stopped by the cave earlier this year and noticed that the 50 feet long and 25 feet high, snowy white, calcite waterfall has been heavily damaged by dirty boots where a group scaled up the middle section. This type of behavior ruins the very cave that these guides need to earn their living, and so they look for other caves suitable for tourism.

Though I’ve been working in Colombia for many years, I publish only photos on social media and never the actual area where the caves are located. This is my first article about Colombian cave exploration, though it’s been discussed among resident cavers as something to possibly help the situation and deter others from claiming years of work as their own—sadly, it happens. As more U.S. cavers become aware of Colombia and decide to see for themselves, it’s good that they know there is a place for cavers to stay and highly experienced cavers in the area, like Jesus, who already has the lay of the land and a survey brimming with data.

**Maintaining Paradise**

Most of us dream to have the life of Jesus Fernandez Auderset, living in a caver’s paradise. The reality is that it’s actually really difficult to live in the area full time. There’s no gainful employment for Jesus in the area, and so how to maintain the cost of the lease? Jesus has no other option but to work in other parts of Colombia and shift his time between Espeleo-Colombia and earning a living. Brady Merritt and I stop in to help every couple of months while we work on our projects. I’ve been introducing other cavers to Jesus and asking everyone to trade 30 bucks a day for food, bed, and to employ the neighbor Delfina, who comes over and cooks dinner, packs lunches, and keeps warm coffee in everyone’s cup. It’s an excellent deal and it’s starting to help the situation and giving Jesus more time to scout virgin areas for future expeditions. We’re in the manual and on social media; look us up and join us on a future expedition and search Sofia Oggioni on Vimeo for great caving documentaries. In the meantime, be safe on your own explorations and as they say in Colombia, “Cuidate, un abrazo” (Take care of yourself, a hug)!
A lone caver stands in the large borehole passage of Cueva de la Puerta.

Brady Merritt stands under the 300 foot heart shaped pit in Cueva de la Tronera.
Aguas Buenas Cave System (Scab), Puerto Rico
José Luis Gómez Cabrera, Ángel M. Nieves-Rivera, Ph.D., and Efraín Matos Pagán

The hard, old, greyish limestone that is millions of years old but now filled with exuberant subtropical vegetation is what you see now and what became the foundation of the Aguas Buenas Cave System (in Spanish “Sistema de Cuevas de Aguas Buenas” or SCAB), in what is today a natural reserve. In this reserve so far 42 cave entrances of the system and of nearby caves have been found, all located in the municipality of the same name. SCAB limestones began to form in the Early Cretaceous during the Albian (113-100.5 million years ago). The dominant geology includes volcanic material deposited under an environment predominantly marine during the Early-Late Cretaceous, with plutonic intrusions or late intrusive (volcanic rocks of slow cooling under the soil surface) and recent landslides. This entire surface is highly weathered or altered for the pluvial precipitation of the area. The whole system consists of several kilometers of galleries and passageways. The Río Caquitás is a tributary stream of the Río Grande de Loíza and has its origin in this cave system.

In SCAB about 52 species of animals have been identified, 50% of them endemic. Among the examples are the extinct web-footed coqui (Eleutherodactylus karschmidtii) and the bronze coqui (E. richmondii), and the non-endemic white-lipped froglet (Leptodactylus albilarbis). Recent explorations to SCAB by members of the Gruta Troglodita Norman Veve (GTNV) and Cuban-American scientists such as Luis F. de Armas and Antonio R. Perez Asso resulted in the description of a novel species of arachnid: Rowlandius chinoi, sp. nov., which was named after the nickname (Chino) of the first author of this report.

In recent collaboration with the Programa de Conservación de Murciélagos de Puerto Rico (Bat Conservation Program of Puerto Rico), SCAB was added as a Bat Conservation Area, a category granted by the Red Latinoamericana para la Conservación de Murciélagos, importance given to the habituation of these mammals, as pollinators, and plague control. This category was granted to this terrain inhabited by a large number of bat colonies, having the greatest concentration in this region. Bat species include the Antillean ghost-faced bat (Mormoops bl净利润lilii), Parnell’s mustached bat (Pteronotus parrnellii), Jamaican fruit bat (Artibeus jamicensis), big brown bat (Erophylla sezekorni), Antillean fruit-eating bat (Brachyphylla cavernarum), buffy flower bat (Erophylla sezekorni) and the sooty mustached bat (Pteronotus quadridens).

In 1976, the National Speleological Society (NSS) and the Sociedad Espeleológica de Puerto Rico, Inc. (SEPRI), published a geological, hydrological and biological report on SCAB that was compiled by several specialists, including one of the mentors of the second author of this report, Nicaraguan Prof. Juan R. Carvajal Zamora. Prof. Carvajal Zamora was a limnologist and mycologist who undertook the first scientific studies relating to the existence and ecology of the ascomycete microfungus Histoplasma capsulatum, which causes the disease known as histoplasmosis. SCAB elicits an ancestral fear to speleologists of the old guard because it brings ungrateful reminders of histoplasmosis and its consequences. Unfortunately, histoplasmosis has become like the leprosy of Biblical times, and many curious modern speleologists have surpassed its risks and fears. Nonetheless, we must not underestimate the etiological capability of the fungus and its danger; particularly if a person is ill and irresponsibly visits caves, we assure you that it could be lethal (at least in a 14% of the cases), but not all persons who explore SCAB or other caves in P.R. develop symptomatology. But in this regard, the second author will treat cave histoplasmosis in P.R. in another report.

Through the years there have been explorations of SCAB by different speleological groups (grottos) such as SEPRI, FIERP, SELEABINC, and GTNV; however, GTNV thus far have recorded 20 known entrances, increasing the knowledge to 42 entrances of the caves, which are related to a net of caverns interconnected by their hydrology or physically, a set extended by several kilometers. Although scientific explorations of SCAB began at the turn of the XIX century,
Speleological group GTNV. Among the discoverers are the authors of this report, JLGC and EMP, both members of this group, who presented their discoveries in the 80th Anniversary of the Speleological Society of Cuba, in the city of Calarién, Cuba, this past February. As a result of this study, an effort continues to obtain more data and information about this rock art, lost for centuries, to comprehend the uses of SCAB by Amerindians. Also, it developed a new net of collaboration between local and international scientists. The next study that GTNV will carry out is the phase of photogrammetry of the recently inventoried petroglyphs and a comparison with others previously documented in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

SCAB brings additional data regarding the Quaternary fossils in the north of Puerto Rico. Although the majority of the fauna found in the SCAB deposits have also been collected in other localities, we document an unusual large bone of a Peltophryne sp., and perhaps the size of this fossil itself might have paleoenvironmental implications. The age of the deposit is Pleistocene, based on the set of fossils found in this locality.

The study of SCAB and the initial collection of fossils was carried out in four localities within the system with particular characteristics, which were visited during: Site 01 (9 September 2010, 4 January 2011), Site 02 (16 April 2017), Site 03 (6 August 2016) and Site 04 (19 October 2016). The fossils were recovered from the sediments from top soil or by sieving, but it was not found in a particular layer horizon per se. This suggested possible internal collapses, runoffs or landslides inside the cave. Mammal fauna was represented by E. obliquus, an unidentified rodent, an unidentified bat, and A. odontrigonus. Unidentified does not mean new species, simply that these bones lack the anatomical elements for their taxonomical identification.

The mammal fauna found in this cave can be used to establish a minimum age of 33,670 ± 370 years before the present (Pleistocene) according to the latest data reported by the mammologist Donald McFarlane (Claremont College) in 1999 for A. odontrigonus. Regarding the bird remains, according to paleornithologist Storrs L. Olson (Smithsonian Institution), the fossils included a carpometacarpal bone and six ulnae probably of crow (Corvus sp.), bones of Audubon’s shearwater (P. lherminieri), and the Antillean cave rail (N. debooyi).

The fossil herpetofauna collected in SCAB is represented by an unidentified crocodilian and a land iguana (Cyclura sp.). In 2011, herpetologist Gregory K. Pregill commented that he identified the lower jaw of a large anole (Anolis cuvieri) from SCAB fossil material. It is the correct size and displays the heavy sculpture on the side. In 1996, archaeologist José Muñoz Vázquez also recovered the lower jaw of a fossilized A. cuvieri during an exploration of Cueva
Information relating to the distribution of Quaternary fossils in northern Puerto Rico. Although most of the fauna found in this deposit have already been collected from many other localities in the region, the unusual size of the encrusted bones of the anuran *Peltophryne* sp. might have paleoenvironmental implications relating to the appearance of some of the fossils in this cave. The age of this deposit is Pleistocene, based on the fossil set found in this locality.

Matos, near Cueva Ventana in the municipality of Arecibo, similar to the one recovered from SCAB. Also in SCAB, the fossilized vertebrae of a frog was unearthed, possibly an *Eleutherodactylus* or *Leptodactylus*. Additionally, a bone from an anuran tibia fibula was found, although the species could not be established. Similar findings were identified by Dr. Olson of the Smithsonian Institute, who told us that many other bones clearly showed bats, other mammals and a great anuran. However, Olson found curious this anuran because the bones are well embedded in the substrate, so he suspects that it must have been of a native species. He also considered that this anuran might be a toad like *Peltophryne* sp., but he did not know that they grew so large. The appearance of *Peltophryne* sp. in SCAB it could be used as a paleoenvironmental indicator for drier and arid conditions in the area.

This study deals with other studies and discoveries at SCAB, which are still under evaluation, such as the 3.5 years of continuous climatic data, recording temperature, humidity, and the surrounding air mass throughout the entire cave system, for which 16 permanent stations are used (approximately half a million data points). These were taken in normal conditions, hurricane season, and seismic events, possibly the largest data of this type recorded in a cave in Puerto Rico by a private group other than well-documented USGS field stations.

In summary, SCAB provides new information relating to the distribution of Quaternary fossils in northern Puerto Rico. Although most of the fauna found in this deposit have already been collected from many other localities in the region, the unusual size of the encrusted bones of the anuran *Peltophryne* sp. might have paleoenvironmental implications relating to the appearance of some of the fossils in this cave. The age of this deposit is Pleistocene, based on the fossil set found in this locality.

The explorations carried out by GTNV in SCAB were planned to follow cave exploration regulations and protocols, given the complexity of this cave system which has very dynamic characteristics throughout its galleries, pit caves, sinkholes, collapse blocks, river course, and waterfalls. These conditions could lead to accidents if one does not have the necessary training and equipment.

![ADA cave diagram](image)

Left: Antillean cave rail (*Nesotrochis debooyi*); Above, Audubon’s shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*), SCAB.

Lower jaw of a giant anole (*Anolis cuvieri*) above; right, a crow (*Corvus* sp.), SCAB.
In February 2018 our team of eight French cavers conducted a speleological expedition in Haiti. We got logistic support by the local Haitian development association ADA/Dondon and its many volunteers, as well as equipment provided by a French association from Grenoble, “Homme des cavernes”.

We warmly thank these two associations and the numerous villagers who formed the support team when we were underground.

The explorations took place in the North Department, in the area of Dondon, about 30 kilometers south of Cap Haïtien.

During the two weeks spent there, 28 caves were identified and explored. In parallel of exploration a lot of mapping work was done, resulting in 18 cave surveys. Those caves are both known cavities and new ones discovered by the team with the help of the locals.

Two major discoveries must be highlighted:

The first one is the ADA cave, a spacious cave containing a lot of cave formations, but most importantly, with rock paintings.

Nine areas have been identified in the ADA cave containing either abstract or figurative paintings. These paintings seem to have been made with charcoal.

An archeological study is underway to determine the origin of those representations, which may be remnants of the Taino civilization (pre-colombian civilization).

There are some inscriptions in the first part of the cave that are dated from 1961, however in the second part, after the narrow passage leading to the Dog Room, only paintings were found.

GPS coordinates of the ADA cave have been voluntarily erased from the cave survey for obvious scientific reasons. The access to the cave is granted only for scientists.

Unfortunately, we cannot publish all the pictures of the cave paintings in this article but we made a representative selection in order to provide a good overview to the reader.

The second important discovery is the Boukman “zing-hole”, named in honor of Dutty Boukman, a revolutionary Haïtian hero from the end of the seventeenth century.

This pit-cave is a 100-meter shaft with a hall at the end.

The deepest known pit in Haiti is 127 meters deep, the Séjourné Chasm, but according to reliable sources a 100-meter rope would be enough to reach its bottom.

A precise topographical checking would be necessary to compare and determine the deeper of the two.

Other minor discoveries have been made and cave surveys of known caves have also been produced, following the request of the ADA/Dondon association.

A complete assessment of the expedition will be soon available in the report given to the CREI.

Haïti 2018 Expedition members

Jérôme LOIRE, Quentin and Françoise MARTINON, Joffrey LORNAGE, Céline DISPAGNE, Jérôme JOURET, Yannick LESSARD and Franck TELLIER
More of the award winners from the 2020 NSS Photo Salon
MA=Merit Award; HM=Honorable Mention

Inner Sanctum with Pink Perspective Nunley Mountain Cave-MA by Sam Moore

Lee White, HM, by Tiffany Nardico

Classic Hellhole-MA by Ryan Maurer

Water-Light, Cantabria (Spain)-MA by Georg Taffet
SJ Alice Bennett

It’s not unusual for NSS Photo Salon entrants to hail from foreign countries, or for them necessarily to even be NSS members.

What matters to salon judges is the end result beauty of a photograph, often determined by how well a frame depicts humanity’s emotional connection with nature. Award-winning entries transcend the mechanics of simply pressing the shutter release. They demonstrate, in themselves, artistic ability, a spirit of adventure, and the lengths a photographer will go to get ‘the shot.’

SJ Alice Bennett is an underwater cave photographer who embodies all those qualities.

Q. How did your sense of adventure develop?

A. I think I got that from my parents. When I was a kid, my family went for camping weekends to a lot of atypical destinations. I always loved being out in nature, especially in the water. In a way, seeking adventure was always something normal to me.

Q. Please tell us about your background.

A. My full name is Sarah-Jane Alice Bennett. My older brother started calling me SJ when I was a little kid and it just stuck. I was born in Cornwall in the UK in 1985, but was still a baby. My mom is German, my dad is South African, and a lot of our family is in the UK. Hence, we travelled a lot but that was part of my parents’ sense of adventure. My dad is a psychotherapist, a yoga teacher and semi-famous Techno DJ on weekends. He goes by the name ‘Rob Bennett,’ if you want to look him up. My mom also was a psychotherapist and a biodynamic massage teacher but she now runs a guest house in the Berlin countryside.

Q. What is your education?

A. I have a 3-year diploma in Communication and Graphic Design from Berliner Technische Kunsthochschule, which is now a campus of the University of Applied Sciences Europe. I returned there later and went on to earn my Bachelor of Arts in Visual and Motion Design.

Q. In what countries have you ever lived or caved?

A. In addition to the UK and Germany, I also lived in New Zealand as a teenager. Then I was back in the UK, then Thailand for two and a half years, and then to the U.S. I now live in Mexico. I was brought up bilingual, so I speak German and English pretty well. I now also speak very broken Spanish, which I’m trying to improve day by day. I have traveled to quite a few other countries, and have enjoyed the caves in Mexico, Thailand, Cuba, Belize, South Africa, the U.S., and a few places dotted around Europe. When it comes to dry caving, however, I’ve mainly been to the more tourist-accessible places.

Q. Where do you currently work?

A. My career as a graphic designer has allowed me to work remotely, which is why I’ve been able to travel and live in several different countries. Right now I live in Tulum, Mexico, and work as a freelance graphic designer as well as an underwater cave photographer. I also still do surface shoots when I get the chance.

Q. Was it a difficult decision to move to Mexico, and was it the caves that primarily lured you there?

A. I definitely came for the caves. I didn’t know much about the area apart from that the cave diving was supposed to be ‘world class.’ I moved to Mexico for 10 months in the summer of 2015, which is when I tried cave photography for the first time. I then had to return to Berlin for a bit, but made the decision very quickly to move back to Mexico as soon as I could. Was it hard to leave? Yes and no. I miss my home in Berlin, but it does not have caves or any particularly good diving. It’s important to follow your passion in life, I think, and that’s what I’m doing.

Q. How did you learn to be a photographer?

A. My mom trained to be a photographer when she was younger. When I was a kid, I used to play with her SLR, usually without it being loaded with film. But when I was about 10, and after a lot of begging, my parents gave me a little analog point-and-shoot Olympus camera for my birthday. It became a passion, and I usually carried a camera around with me all through my teenage years. I did quite a bit of street photography or just documenting life wherever I saw it. Then, when I went to school in New Zealand, I learned about shooting techniques as well as how to properly develop and print black and white photos. In my early 20s, I started working as an event photographer from time to time, which is still one of my favorite photo jobs.

Q. How and when did you become interested in scuba diving?

A. I’ve always been a ‘water child’ and very interested in the life in and around water. I owned loads of books about the ocean, with quite a few of them being beautiful photography collections. For as long as I remember, I wanted to dive. So when I turned 12 (which was the minimum age you could start back then in Germany), I convinced my parents to let me take an instructional course. This was in the mid 1990s, and learning to dive was a bit different from how it is now. I practiced all kinds of procedures and scenarios once or twice a week at the pool, but then my dive instructor abruptly left town just before I was to do my final open water test. I then went on a trip to Thailand, finally got certified, and decided I would move there. Since then, diving has been a huge part of my life, and I’m very happy about that.

Q. How and when did your interest in underwater photography begin?

A. I began bringing a camera with me underwater as soon as I felt comfortable enough to do so. As I mentioned earlier, I barely ever went anywhere without a camera so bringing it underwater was a natural. After moving to Thailand in 2012 and during my dive master training I got interested in technical diving fairly quickly. I remember a friend showing me an amazing magazine photo, Emergence du Russel, which is a large impressive cave in the bed of a river in southern France. I was mesmerized and just gazed at it for ages. It became very clear to me at that moment that this was how I wanted to continue my diving adventures. I later found out that the photographer, JP Bresser, won the 2012 Global Underwater Explorers (GUE) Photo of the Year with that picture. That photo is still on my fridge as
a reminder of where it started for me and where I wanted to go. Cool thing is, my photo of the Blue Abyss (in Mexico’s Yucatan peninsula) won GUE’s Photo of the Year in 2020, and it now also hangs on my fridge (see NSS News October 2020, page 15).

Q. What is it that draws you to caves?
A. I had an early interest in caves when I was a kid, although I can’t exactly tell you why. Probably just because they are beautiful and mysterious environments. And I absolutely loved bats—and still do. In my young mind, all caves had bats living in them so that’s where I wanted to go.

Q. Between photography, cave diving, and graphic design, is one or the other more important in your life or does one ‘drive’ the other?
A. I really love doing all of it. And, of course, when I get to combine everything together it’s a very cool feeling. Like doing an underwater shoot for a company or business and then using those photos in designs for their materials is really fun and very rewarding.

I think the only downside about doing design work is that I spend many hours in front of the computer in my home office, so I’m unable to leave the house for days sometimes. I’m quite an outdoors-y person and I go through phases where I work very intensively on design projects, so the balance of indoor and outdoor time gets thrown out of whack sometimes, which can be hard. But I’m very grateful for the job, as it has enabled me to be really flexible with where and how I wanted to live in many different places on the planet.

Q. What’s been your coolest or most rewarding design gig?
A. One of the biggest projects that I have done was redesigning the visual identity guidelines for the financial services company Ernst & Young. That was a pretty cool job. I’ve designed a calendar for UNICEF Sierra Leone for the past two years, which has been fun. And I’m also really enjoying my current project work for the World Health Organization. I’ve designed a lot of their reports about Covid-19, which can be found on their web page, as well as a new logo for their Partners Platform and a redesign of their web site, although it’s not live yet.

Q. Are you primarily a recreational cave diver or do you do original exploration and mapping?
A. Right now I’m primarily a recreational cave diver. I’ve never really seen myself as an explorer and mapper because I’m much more interested in documenting the process with my camera and photographing new findings of other people around me.

Q. When underwater on a shoot, what techniques do you use to communicate with your assistants and models?
A. Ha-ha, that either doesn’t or barely happens at all. Communication underwater can be difficult and is often more confusing than helpful, especially in a low-light environment. I try to keep communication to an absolute minimum and shoot in a very dynamic way, which means we basically just execute a cave dive and I document it. I rarely ‘stage’ a shot. I have a few good friends who act as assistants, I’ve trained them to work with the lighting in certain ways, and they’ve learned to know what I’m looking for. I often work with models who have never done a photo dive. They re divers on holiday who want nice photos for their walls at home or to show their friends and families what it’s like in the underground. In those cases, we always do a thorough briefing before the dive. The most important communication, apart from safety of course, is always “don’t shine your light at my camera and we’ll be good.”

Q. How do you sync your underwater flashes?
A. I don’t use strobes at all when shooting underwater caves. Optical slaves are not necessarily very reliable, although using them in caves you have a better chance of the strobes ‘seeing each other’ in the very dark environment. I opt to use video lights, as they provide a more natural feel and also lend it more to the way I shoot. During a photo dive, my assistant will turn on the video light and create different scenes that the model will swim through, and that I will then capture. I also really love the teamwork aspect of this technique.

Q. What specialized training or certifications have you completed?
A. I am a certified decompression cave diver and also for the DPV (diver propulsion vehicle, which looks like a torpedo that pulls you through the water). I’m a Tec 1 diver with the GUE, which is one of the only dive training agencies that is nonprofit, very highly regarded. Tec 1 is their first level of technical dive training, which teaches you to safely execute decompression dives to 51 meters on Trimix, which is a mix of helium, oxygen, and Nitrogen. I’m also working towards being certified for CCR, or closed circuit rebreather, which is a machine that recycles your exhalate gas and gives you an ideal breathing mix for the depth you are at. The result is you can stay longer underwater with less of a time obligation for decompression. I have basic first aid training but have unfortunately not done any vertical training yet. It is on the list though.

Q. Please share with us your outside interests and some things we might be surprised to find out about you, like you are a sport rock climber or you have a pet turtle named ‘Sumpy.’
A. Ha –now I kind of wish I had a pet turtle named Sumpy! Actually, I love creating things, which goes hand in hand with design and photography. That can range from building furniture to making crafty things for decorating the house to working on silly photo or video projects with friends. I also really enjoy cooking and ‘creating’ a nice meal for friends and family. I love making Indian food and have become pretty good at it. I always have often multiple projects or recipes that I’m working on the side.

I really dig the electronic music scene, which relates to growing up in Berlin and my dad being a weekend Techno DJ. To me, music, like photos, is something that connects people and elicits emotional responses. I’ve spent many weekends at festivals sharing beautiful experiences with friends, dancing the night away. It’s always been an outlet where people come together to celebrate the beautiful life we have and for a moment to forget about all the differences we constantly fight about. As for music artists, I love Kraftwerk, as they were true pioneers of electronic music. Mostly, I listen to house and techno but it’s a very broad spectrum of music and I stick to mostly underground stuff. I like some of the old school greats like Franki Knuckles, Jeff Mills, and Derek May. Last spring, my boyfriend and I adopted two cats that were just left on the side of the road in a box. So now ‘Iggy Pop’ and ‘Stevie Nicks’ live with us and have a

Cenote Chan Hol has some of the weirdest formations I’ve seen that seems like they don’t abide by the laws of gravity.

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become pretty spoiled, considering they used to be street kittens.

Q. Please tell the story of your first cave trip.
A. The first time that I can more or less remember was in the Sudwala Caves in Nelspruit, South Africa, when I was about 5 or 6 years old. Of course, these are very touristy caves with colorful lights everywhere, but as a child I loved it and it left a mark on me.

My first proper wild caving trip was in 2013 during cave diving training in Thailand’s Khao Sok National Park. The park has a huge lake that was made when they built a dam and flooded a valley in 1982. It has limestone caves that formed before the flood, and it’s an awesome and beautiful place. We loaded everything into a longtail boat and they drive you to small floating huts situated in between steep cliffs. We stayed there for 10 days, venturing out every day by boat to the different dive sites. It was so much fun and so amazing to see these places that had once been dry. Compared to the endless underground rivers that run though Mexico, the caves in Khao Sok are tiny and not nearly as decorated but it was still an amazing and unforgettable experience all around.

Q. What’s the coolest underwater cave or cavern you’ve ever explored, whether or not you photographed it?
A. That’s pretty impossible to answer. There are so many! Especially here in Mexico where we have so many different cenotes connecting huge cave systems. It’s really a question of what you’re in the mood for on a particular day. There are super dark caves where all the formations are covered with what looks like black velvet, huge deep blue phreatic cave passages filled with saltwater, pretty and very decorated white caves with mind-bending haloclines, as well as very small windy yellow passages that you have to be incredibly careful in to not damage the delicate environment. I go through phases where I like this and that more but then it can easily swing back around to something else.

Q. What’s the coolest non-underwater cave you’ve ever visited?
A. That would be Sudwala in South Africa, which was my first, where I was very impressed as a kid. I’d really love to go back and see how it looks to me now.

Q. What professional, work-related, or NSS awards have you earned?
A. I’ve placed second place in 2019 and also 2020 in the NSS Photo Salon. My picture of the Blue Abyss was the GUE Photo of the Year 2020 and also highly commended in the exploration category of the Ocean Photographer of the Year Awards.

Q. Please list significant accomplishments, and of which you are proudest?
A. I’m quite proud of some of the photos I’ve taken but can’t really say I’m proud of any of the dives I’ve done. I think cave diving should be done without an ego involved. It gets dangerous quickly when you try and achieve things and set goals.

Q. What is it, in your mind and in your heart, that drives you to explore and photograph underwater caves and caverns?
A. I love documenting life with my camera and always have since I was a teenager. Explorational feats would not be known like they are if it wasn’t for the people who document accomplishments in pictures, moving or still, showing that humans have been to the South Pole or Everest, for example. Pictures are what we can connect with on an emotional level as humans and what makes it real. And also I love that it shows a time in human history so future generations can look back and be proud of the footsteps they are following—and also, of course, laugh about the old-timey gear and outfits that were used. I think it’s a very human thing to want to record history and preserve it for future generations to learn from. It’s how we process and evolve.

Q. What are your thoughts regarding women in the field of cave diving, and do you think they are due more recognition?
A. The diving industry, especially when you consider technical and cave diving, is still a very male-dominated activity and I’ve experienced a lot of macho attitudes over the years. It’s not very welcoming and I think it turns many women away from the activity even in their spare time. Ask a skilled diver what her most memorable dives are and they’ll often reply, “That dive with a lady today.” But I’m hopeful for the day to come when that will not be a special thing anymore and we won’t even notice, as it will just be ‘normal.’

Q. Likewise, please share your thoughts regarding women in the field of photography.
A. Photography also is a very male-dominated area, in my experience. So it has happened that I find out that the judging panel for a photo competition consists of only male photographers, and I end up not even bothering to submit my photos. That might seem counter-productive but, again, I think these things must be taken into account by the organizers to create a more diverse platform where all individuals, regardless of gender or orientation, can feel welcome and be taken seriously. I was very happy to see that the judging panel for the 2020 NSS Photo Salon consisted of an equal ratio of women and men.

Q. What advice would you give young cavers, photographer, or divers?
A. Go do it! But remember, especially if you want to get into cave diving, that it’s mostly a profit-driven industry and you should choose your instructors wisely. Don’t let yourself be ‘pushed though the mill’ just because a dive shop or instructor only sees dollar signs. They should be people who love doing it just for fun and still actively pursue the activity even in their spare time. Ask a lot of questions and train not only with one instructor, and especially not if a person claims to ‘do it best’ or ‘knows it all.’ Cave diving can be very ego-driven, so I suggest to stay away from those big egos. It’s about the caves, not the people.

Q. What effect has the Covid pandemic had on your caving activities?
A. Unfortunately all my projects and trips for 2020 were canceled. On top of that, I contracted Covid myself last August and I’m still suffering from long-term effects. It’s been pretty sucky, to be honest. The initial infection was not so bad and I barely had any symptoms apart from being extremely fatigued. But I’ve not been able to work out since then as every time I try I feel like my...
body can’t handle it and I feel miserable afterwards. So I’ve stopped trying to let my body properly recover. Physical fitness is an important factor in cave diving especially, as we lug around a lot of heavy gear. So diving and also shooting in the caves has become much more difficult for me. My breathing rate has gone up by nearly 60-percent and usually it will take me a day or two to feel normal afterwards. As of December, I have not been in the water for about four weeks, as I just couldn’t sustain it anymore. I’m feeling much better now, though, and I’m hoping to continue improving to 100-percent. I’m going diving for the first time this weekend on my birthday so we will see how that goes. Fingers crossed!

Q. What are your remaining goals in caving, and plans for the future?

A. I’m hoping to shoot more expeditions and do more exploration, but I’m very careful about making any proper plans in these uncertain times. I also really want to do more dry caving and hopefully I’ll be able to get to Mammoth Cave in the spring, as that was one of the trips that had to be canceled.

SJ’s underwater photo gear, detailed in the sidebar on the left, first 7 items. Additional items shown are floats for the camera or lights, and a device to pull air out of the underwater housing.

Peacock Springs, located in the Wes Skiles Peacock Springs State Park in northern Florida is one of the only caves in the area with virtually no flow. The limestone passages that now stretch over 7.2 miles were first explored around 60 years ago.

The huge halls you find when entering Cenote Nariz, which is located deep in the jungle north of Tulum, Mexico.
Majestic formations of Cenote Chan Hol part of Sistema Toh Ha. At different locations in the cave human remains have been found and are believed to be about 10,000 years old.

Among many animal bones that can be found in Chan Hol are also intact fire pits and pottery.
Cenote Chan Hol was connected to Cenote Toh Ha in 2007 and spans over 105,000 feet.

Entering from Cenote Jailhouse, this is the deeper saltwater Swiss Siphon section of Sistema Ox Bel Ha south of Tulum, Mexico.
**Introduction**

In the last few months, the NSS has accomplished a lot. We’ve made a lot of progress at the Headquarters. I want to thank those folks that have made contributions in retiring our mortgage. At the beginning of March 2021, we will owe approximately $70,098.37 and will have 15 payments left.

**Membership data**

Membership increased slightly in December as we reached the end of the year. This is probably an end of year effect. Much of this is believed to be an impact from the pandemic. Most grottos are not physically meeting and our ability to recruit members has been limited. As of December 31st, we had 7,203 members and the highest NSS number in the file was 70,741. Please consider renewing your membership in the NSS.

**NSS Memorial Brick Patio**

[Ed. For several years the NSS has had a BUY A BRICK! program to raise funds. For each $100 donation, you can have your message laser engraved on a brick for all to see on a patio area, walkway, or other ornamental feature at the NSS HQ. The first 702 bricks prepared are the topic below, and 800 more are still available.]

There is some exciting news at the end of the year: Maureen Handler, NSS OVP, assembled a great team of volunteers that meet to work on the NSS Headquarters. They spent three days in late December to lay the bricks for the memorial brick patio. A total of 702 bricks were laid with additional room for about another 500 bricks. Julie Schenck-Brown has invested huge amounts of time organizing and proofing all the narratives for the bricks (and also bought 15 bricks). Maureen Handler coordinated the work of the many volunteers and donated the use of her tractor for the project. I want to thank Joe Horton, Ethan Horton, Josh German, Preston Forsythe, Shari Forsythe, Scott Fee, Dirk Siron, Mark Medlen, and Maureen Handler for a great job. Moral support was provided by Ed Strausser, Scott Shaw, Bob Roth, and Bill Torode who were working on other projects inside the headquarters.

Preston reported that Joe and Josh have professional patio brick-laying experience and led the installation. Preston said it was a professional, well-done job, with at least 3 grades of tamped and machine-compacted limestone, elevated, with drainage below, joint compound between the brick and very nice large sandstone and limestone rocks weighing hundreds of pounds were placed around the patio.

The patio was installed around the flagpole that fronts Pulaski Pike with our fairly new fence paid for with insurance money from the person who ripped out at least 100 feet of the old fence in a vehicle accident. No one was seriously hurt. In December, cavers from the Atlanta Dogwood City Grotto installed black slats in the fence for more privacy.

You can still purchase bricks for the next brick laying event by contacting the NSS Office. Or request yours using the PDF form on the NSS website: [https://caves.org/donate/HQ_Donation_Form.pdf](https://caves.org/donate/HQ_Donation_Form.pdf)

**Photo Archives**

Dave Hughes, Scott Shaw, and Ed Strausser have made great progress in organizing the photo archives room in the headquarters. They now have plenty of room and the equipment to scan old photographs.

**Keep those cards and letters coming**

Bill Torode, Christi Starr, and Michelle Vaughn love to receive photos and post cards so please feel free to drop them a note at NSS, 6001 Pulaski Pike, Huntsville, Al 35810-1122. FYI, Bill has worked on the NSS Library since 1975.

**Personalized Plate Drive for the NSS Museum**

The NSS Headquarters would like to design a display of personalized caver-oriented license plates as part of our museum. We want to show how widely our membership is spread throughout the country and would love to get plates from all 50 states. Foreign plates are welcome too. We can display multiple plates from the same state. The display will include a list of names of the plate owners. If you have a plate to donate, please mail it to Albert Ogden, 6478 Jones Lane, Murfreesboro, TN 37127 or email Albert with any questions at aogden@mtsu.edu. There are lots of cool plates out there that will be fun for folks to stroll by and view when visiting the Headquarters.

**Announcements from Adam Weaver, NSS AVP**

The Environmental Education Committee Chair is now Dr. Sharon Weaver (sharonweaver@caves.org) and the Safety and Techniques Committee Chair is now Dr. Hazel Barton. The Show Caves Coordinator is Nicole Ridlen. Nicole, over the next six months, will be producing a narrative on selected show caves for the NSS News (see the first in this issue). Dan Austin is the NSS Convention chair for the Black Hills 2022 Convention hillscaver@gmail.com.

**Conservation:** We have a new NSS Task Force, the DARK Karst Conservation Task Force. This group is working to do conservation education in the mid-west and to create a karst hiking/driving interpretive trail in Minnesota/Wisconsin/Iowa/Illinois.

**Education:** The NCRC has established a new international rescue instructor exchange program. This program will exchange two of our instructors with two from nations around the world each year going forward. This is a great opportunity to spread our knowledge and to learn new techniques. For more program info email mark@bestweb.net

**Speleoguest:** Also hosted on learnmore.caves.org, this new public speaking pairing program has already paired its first 21 caver speakers with school groups around the country and cavers have already given a number of talks to classes virtually.

**New material:** Work has continued on new curriculum pieces, a cave exploration education booklet, and a kids’ activity book.

**Cave Management**

The Cave Preservation Network has started to receive donations from the round-up program with our commercial cave partners. learnmore.caves.org has added additional downloadable education material for visitors. The opportunity for partnerships in other aspects, like interpretive sign production, has also picked up at some of these locations. Nicole Ridlen has stepped up to take a larger role in the day to day activities of this program.

Steel has been purchased/donated to build new cave gates at two NSS Preserves: Warren and Secret Caves. Dave Springhetti has volunteered to build the gates in the spring, hopefully, depending on the pandemic.

**Safety**

While the Covid 19 vaccinations have been released, it will be months before it is sufficiently available to everyone that wants...
Jewel Cave 200th Mile Artifacts Donated to the NSS Museum

On December 16, 2018, Jewel Cave was surveyed past the 200-mile barrier. While graciously acknowledging the work performed by several generations of previous explorers, the team that crossed this “finish line” consisted of Stan Allison, Dan Austin, Garrett Jorgenson, Rene Ohms, Chris Pelczarski, and Adam Weaver.

In an effort to preserve artifacts from their historic undertaking, and to pay tribute to his exceptional teammates, expedition leader Adam Weaver has donated to the National Speleological Society Museum certain of the items that he used on the trip that surveyed the 200th mile in Jewel Cave. Pictured (clockwise from upper left) are Adam’s “Gonzo Guano Gear” camp pack, “Rite in the Rain” loose-leaf survey sheets binder, data-recording pencil, two survey station “point” lights, removable cap from collapsible canteen, and “Cave Compass” plotting tool. Also shown is a packet of M&M candies that were custom made to commemorate the event—and to surprise and honor the record-breaking team upon their exit.

Following Adam’s generous example, other Society cavers are gently reminded that the NSS Museum is eager to obtain artifacts and mementos from important and history-making explorations. Such items can be offered to the Museum according to guidelines explained in the “Policy for NSS Museum Donations.” Copies of this Policy may be obtained from the NSS Headquarters in Huntsville. It is available on the NSS Web site at https://caves.org/Museum%20Donation%20Questionnaire.pdf

Dave Hughes, with Adam Weaver

Some of the bricks in the patio

Master bricklayers Joe Horton (green shirt) and Josh German (with shovel) at work while Joe’s son Ethan looks on.

Scott Fee with two bricks

Two more images of the construction
Tom had a problem at Rush Mountain Adventure Park—the banks could not give him the coins he needed to give his visitors change. After visiting another attraction that was asking visitors to round up their purchase and donate the change as a novel way to deal with the coin shortage he came up with an idea for his park. The round-up program went to protect a local cave preserve founded by the Paha Sapa Grotto that Tom & Rushmore Cave had a working relationship with. Rushmore Cave, the foundation of Rush Mountain Adventure Park, was actually discovered by those in search of coin as well. Well, sort of: gold miners, actually.

Miners accidentally discovered a cave in 1876 in South Dakota when a log flume that supplied water to their operation sprung a leak and started to flow into a small hole. They explored and when it was determined to be a limestone cave they abandoned it, as they knew there would be no gold to be found in the limestone. Over the years many locals found themselves entertained deep within the Pahasapa limestone, many carving their names into the cave walls. Over time the Ferguson family finally decided to open the cave to tourists and in 1927 opened it as Hermosa Crystal Cave. The cave was purchased by Si & Ruth Pullen in 1952, at which point they renamed the cave to its current name, Rushmore Cave, to attract visitors from the new-and-popular attraction, Mount Rushmore. In 2008 Tom Hagan and his partners purchased the cave as a business venture.

When Tom first got the cave in April 2008 they did not have a lot of employees as they had to keep costs down for the business to make ends meet. That meant Tom, as owner, was also a tour guide. He gave tours of the cave everyday but had never stepped foot off the tour path; then he went to a grotto meeting. The Paha Sapa Grotto members were talking about these amazing parts of Rushmore Cave that Tom had never seen and they offered to come up and show Tom the rest of his cave. They loaned him some caving gear and showed him his cave. He had so much fun he joined the grotto. Tom became an active caver until his hip replacement slowed him down in 2013. Rush Mountain Adventure Park Natural Attractions Manager Kevin Chase is an active grotto member and the editor of their newsletter, The Carbide Flash. Kevin actually worked at Rushmore Cave for the Pullens, left, and then returned as a manager a few years ago.

There are actually two caves on the property, Rushmore and Mystic. Mystic is surveyed to just over a mile long and is within a few feet of connecting with Rushmore. In fact, you can talk to someone in Mystic Cave while in the far reaches of Rushmore Cave. Tom says he has no plans to develop Mystic Cave, but it is a good cave for grotto members to explore (and probably only a cave a true caver would enjoy it anyway). Tom jokes that the survey of Mystic is actually what pumped Rushmore Cave out of the top-ten longest in South Dakota. There are plans to resurvey Rushmore Cave next year and hopefully an official connection will be made.

As cavers you may wonder, why the adventure park? Well, with two large caves run by the NPS in the vicinity that were selling tickets for a price that would not support operations, Tom and his partners had to do something to attract more visitors to Rushmore Cave. It started out with one ride simply to attract more cave visitors. The line was into the parking lot, a 1.5 hour wait for a one-minute long ride! Of course, this means more people visited the cave and discovered the amazing subterranean world. Over time they added more rides and Rushmore Cave became the central nucleus to Rush Mountain Adventure Park. In other words, the adventure park is what saved the cave. If you have ever been in a show cave that had to shut down you know the damage that can be done. Everyone knows the cave is there and no amount of gates, cameras and monitoring stop the vandalism and trespassing. I’ve seen it firsthand. Keeping a show cave open? This not only ensures the cave is protected, but it also educates the world about caves. South Dakota has two of the longest known caves in the world. Only around 450 caves are documented so far but there are thousands of leads and the cave count will likely grow many times over.

Show caves like Rushmore Cave are important to our mission as cavers. The public learns about caves at show caves and many fall in love with caves at a local show cave and later become cavers. Kevin estimates that 2-3 cave guides end up joining the local grotto each year, and while many aren’t long-term cavers a select few do make it a lifelong hobby. As cavers we know many people appreciate caves, but it takes a special kind of person to be a caver. Now not only do show caves bring relevance to the public about what we accomplish as cavers, but through the round-up program of the CPN they directly help the NSS protect caves. The Cave Preservation Network is more than just a round-up program to fund cave preserve purchases—it is a way to build the relationship between show caves and the NSS. The NSS has the scientists and skilled cavers to help the NCA-member show caves in public outreach, survey, training and more. The NCA show caves have the platform to reach more than just cavers—they can reach the entire world. If someone is a member of the NSS they already have a vested interest in caves, but many who visit a show cave have never been in a cave before. It may be the first or only interaction with a cave they have. They are crucial to the public’s understanding of cave & karst features.

Rushmore Cave will certainly be a feature of the 2022 NSS convention you won’t want to miss. Caves are so full of history, at times leading to entire cities being built, and they are as relevant today as they were back in the golden years of cave tourism. Support your local show caves and let’s make the International Year of Caves and Karst the year that everyone understands why caves are worth protecting.
Historical photo of cave co-owner Ruth Pullen showing the cave off, sometime in the 1950s.

Modern and historical images of Rushmore Cave.

**WCC Conservation Grants**

*Western Cave Conservancy*

Conservation Grants are intended to be used to maintain and conserve cave and/or karst features in the western USA, or to provide support for related scientific research efforts related to cave conservation in the western USA. Please spread the word to any deserving projects. Visit [https://www.westerncaves.org/conservation-grants/](https://www.westerncaves.org/conservation-grants/) to learn more and apply! Questions: grants@westerncaves.org

**Updates to Decon Policies by USFWS**

USFWS has updated their decontamination policy, which is available online at: [https://www.whitenosesyndrome.org/static-page/decontamination-information](https://www.whitenosesyndrome.org/static-page/decontamination-information)

Quick summary: They updated the map of management areas. They updated the approved decontamination products, including that hot (131 F) water submersion is now only required for 5 minutes.  

Jennifer Foote

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**NSS News, February 2021**  

**NEWS & NOTES**

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**National Speleological Society 2021 Annual Convention**

June 28 - July 2, 2021 ~ Weed, California

Cave science, live music, fine art, cave trips, social events, and a 14-thousand-foot volcano? What could possibly go wrong?

For more information, please visit us online at [nss2021.caves.org](http://nss2021.caves.org)
H. Dwight Weaver

H. Dwight Weaver (NSS 3753FE) was born May 29th, 1938 in Centralia, Illinois. Dwight discovered his love for caves early in life, when the family moved to Hannibal, MO. He was nine when he and his father got permission to explore passages not on the Mark Twain Cave commercial tour, using flashlights and a Coleman lantern. More exposure to wild caves came when his family moved to Ashland, Missouri when he was eleven. Dwight and his friends made their own lights with 6-volt batteries and sealed beams.

At the age of thirteen, Dwight mapped 600 feet of Hunters Cave, Boone County. He went back in 1959 and mapped it for real. One of the first big caves that Dwight explored was Devil’s Icebox. Since they didn’t have a boat, Dwight got a bunch of empty paint cans from a house painter. He burned them out and soldered the lids back on. He made a wooden frame with partitions and secured the cans under it. The homemade raft weighed 100 pounds with door handles on each end to carry it. Dwight and his Dad went about 1 ½ miles back into the cave. On the way out, they started losing cans which showed up later on other trips. Dwight wrote a total of thirteen books including these cave-related books: Onondaga – The Mammoth Cave of Missouri; Meramec Caverns in Legend & History; Missouri – The Cave State; Wilderness Underground, Caves of the Ozark Plateau; Missouri Caves in History & Legend. Other books include A Pictorial Guide to HahaTonka State Park and books on history in the Lake of the Ozarks area.

Over a period of nineteen years, Dwight worked for six different show cave operations: Ozark Caverns, Stark Caverns (which was renamed Enchanted Caverns, then Fantasy World Caverns, and now back to Stark Caverns), Meramec Caverns, Mark Twain Cave, and Bridal Cave.

In 1985, Dwight joined the NSS. He was a charter member of the American Speleological Survey. In 2015, he was presented the Lester Liaison Editor of NSS NewS, February 2021. Other books include A Pictorial Guide to HahaTonka State Park and books on history in the Lake of the Ozarks area.

Dean (Dino) Sylvester

NSS# 25629.
1953-2020

Dean was an avid Indiana caver for many years. He enjoyed both vertical and horizontal. He was a graduate of the first NCRC level one training class. He was a great friend to me and several other cavers. Dean loved the caves of the garrison chapel valley. Dean was also a very accomplished Bass player playing with several bands over the years around Bloomington Indiana. Dean was also a very accomplished amateur astronomer publishing a paper on an unstudied star cluster. Dean passed away on November 7 at his home.

Dean will be missed by the caving and musician community in and around Bloomington Indiana. Rest in peace my brother.

Richard Hawkins. Aka Hawk

from the Missouri Humanities Council. He served on the Missouri Board of Geographic Names as a governor appointee representing Lake of the Ozarks. He was a member of the Missouri Writer’s Guild and the Ozarks Writer’s Guild. He was a member of the Camden County Historical Society, the Miller County Historical Society and a columnist for Lake of the Ozarks Business Journal. He was a contributing member of the Ozark Mountain Pepsi Collectors Club. Diet Pepsi was his beverage of choice!

Dwight touched the lives of so many people. He was a wealth of knowledge on caves and had many great stories to tell. He will be truly missed.

Dwight passed away on November 27th, 2020 while he was home recuperating from triple bypass surgery. He leaves behind his loving wife of 61 years, Rosie (NSS 4925) and daughter, Karen.

Alberta Zumwalt
NSS 12881FE
Bradley Jones has been working hard to acquire its 11th preserve after taking control of the Salamander Cave property in Kingston, New York. Donated by Valerie and Dennis Connors, the preserve encompasses 8.2-acres of steep hillsides and cliffs perched above Rondout Creek.

Thom Engel surveyed two short sea caves in the cliffs of Herring Cove located in New Brunswick’s Bay of Fundy. Access to the caves can be difficult as the tidal range of the bay is one of the largest on earth, changing up to 50 feet daily. Toms Head Sea Cave and Herring Cove Sea Cave are both short, single chamber caves. Several other caves formed in sandstone slippage zones of the bay exhibit depths of over 50 feet. Lacking a rope, Thom was unable to explore and map these latter caves.

Determined to see what laid atop the terminal alcove in Vermont’s Tallow Cave, Alex Fischer recruited friends from the UMass Outing Club to help him aid climb the 30-foot route. Despite bad rock, Alex was able to summit the pitch, only to find the alcove pinched off with no possibility of digging.

John Dunham has taken advantage of the pandemic to visit old digging leads. Rechecking a sink in a Vermont streambed that has continued to open and close over the years, Dunham found it to be stable enough to enter. After pushing the unstable and gravel-filled tube for a short distance, a nice-sized room was discovered. With a surface survey in hand, Dunham and the B.A.D. Ass. cave digging crew created a more stable entrance to what they hope will be Vermont’s first 400-foot-deep system. Further in-cave digging yielded two short pits of 27 and 26 feet. Unfortunately, the cave takes on a lot of water and is very flood prone during the wet season. At a depth of approximately 100 feet, cavers have been stopped by a dig which is no longer accessible due to water conditions. With the resurgence stream of Holy Grail Cave 401 feet below its entrance, cavers are anxious for the return of the drier summer season.

The Northeastern Caver Northeast Regional Organization-NSS December 2020, Vol. 51, Number 4

The Northeastern Cave Conservancy acquired its 11th preserve after taking control of the Salamander Cave property in Kingston, New York. Donated by Valerie and Dennis Connors, the preserve encompasses 8.2-acres of steep hillsides and cliffs perched above Rondout Creek.

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Birmingham Grotto Newsletter
Birmingham Grotto
December 2020, Vol. 50, Number 12

A proposed quarry in Alabama’s Jefferson County is threatening to destroy over 100 smaller caves located on the slopes of Butler, Foster and Praytor Mountains. Bradley Jones has been working hard to identify and quantify the flora and fauna of the caves and surrounding area in a bid to ward off future quarrying activity. Jefferson County’s first cave-adapted flatworm has been found in the threatened caves, as have three other species that have yet to be identified and may be new to science.

Huntsville Grotto Newsletter
Huntsville Grotto
December 2020, Vol. 62, Number 2

Discovered while ridgewalking past LiDAR leads, Hokie Well is a short Alabama pit-cave. Dave Hughes and Tom Whitehurst helped discoverer Lin Guy map the 52-foot deep multi-pitch system.

The Region Record
Virginia Region of the NSS
Winter 2020, Vol. 33, Number 4

Cavers believed they had found a new system after digging open the supposedly virgin Blitz Cave. However, cavers were confused when they found abundant signs of visitation in their new discovery. After further research and data collection, it was discovered that Blitz Cave and BVideo Pit are one and the same, the latter of which was explored and mapped in the 1980s and then subsequently lost to time.

Eric Landgraf, Paul Walko and Jason Delafield spearheaded the charge over the last year to connect Buddy Penleys and Newberry-Banes into one large system. Initial efforts from the Newberry-Banes side have been hindered the past year by a pesky sump. As such, Eric and his crew decided to push old leads in the Buddy Penleys system in areas near the theorized connection point. After struggling through muddy crawls, unstable breakdown, and a temporary rock-pinned event, the trio successfully connected the two caves in September 2020. The combined system is now 10.2 miles long, however, several leads in the connection area still need to be explored and mapped.

Sag Rag
Southwestern Region of the NSS
Nov.-December 2020, Vol. 58, Number 16

Two marathon trips into Fort Stanton Cave in early Fall yielded almost 11,000 feet of new survey, with most of the passage being around and above the Snowy River. The surprise discovery of Black Rock Bypass, which avoids some of the worst sections of Snowy River, will make future trips up the Snowy River easier. With the new data on the books, Fort Stanton Cave is now over 42 miles long.

SPELEOBKOKS.COM

GREAT GIFT IDEA! Rare, hardcover set: Caves of Tennessee (Barr, 1961) and Descriptions of Tennessee Caves (Matthews, 1971). Copies are gently used but in excellent condition. Three sets available, $300 per set. Will email photos.

A Great Gift Idea: The Unexpected by Donal Myrick is a two volume sci-fi novel providing the reader with over 900 pages of exciting adventure spanning two continents from Venezuela to the far reaches of Nunavut. Available from Amazon in paperback and Kindle. https://www.amazon.com/dp/B089Y6N3NB. 2

West Virginia Cave Books
www.WVASS.org

If your Grotto or Region is looking for new caves to explore in the Virginia area, RASS can offer your group a place to camp in Bath County, VA. There are more than 100 caves within an hour drive. We support cave conservation and education. Contact Jason Hart at JHARTCAVESA@gmail.com.

Applications reviewed quarterly.                      12

Rann-Grants-Committee@googlegroups.com. If you are interested in a grant request application please email us at

The Richmond Area Speleological Society (RASS) supports cave conservation, education and research by offering grants to assist projects aligned with these goals. To receive a grant request application please email us at rass-grants-committee@googlegroups.com. Applications reviewed quarterly. 12

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