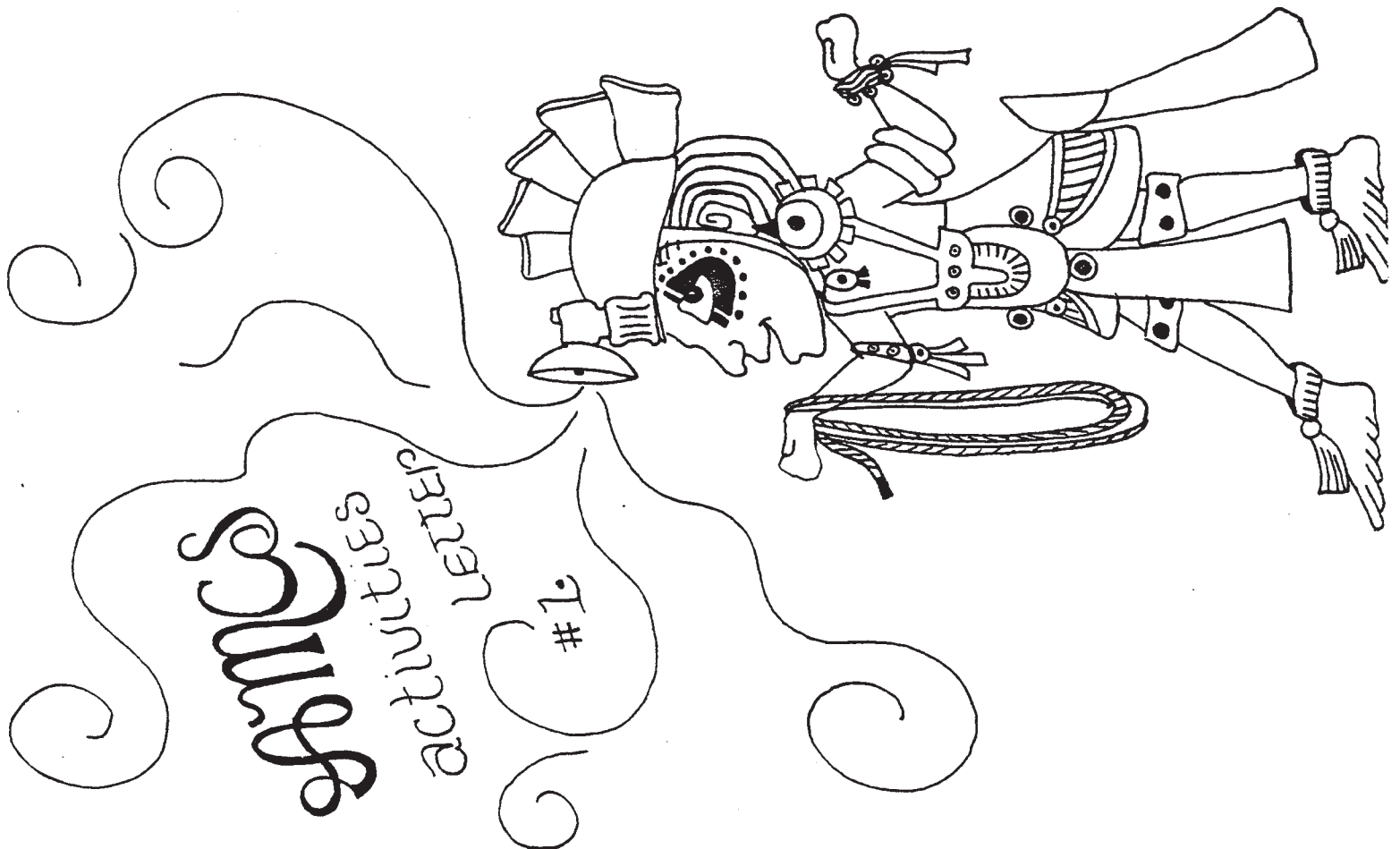


ASSOCIATION FOR MEXICAN CAVE STUDIES
MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE
BOX 7672 UT STATION
AUSTIN TEXAS 78712



Christmas--New Year's Report

Letter No. 1, Jan. 1975

The AMCS Membership Activities Letter is published by the Membership Committee of the AMCS, P.O. Box 7672, UT Station, Austin, Texas 78722. This informal letter is published to inform AMCS members of recent exploration in Mexico and is not intended to replace the AMCS Newsletter. The Activities letter will be published as often as necessary to bring recent developments to those interested in a brief informal report on new accomplishments in Mexican Caves. Send correspondence regarding the AMCS Bulletins and Newsletter to AMCS Newsletter, P.O. Box 7037, Austin, Texas 78712. Requests for information from the AMCS file should be sent to Box 7672.

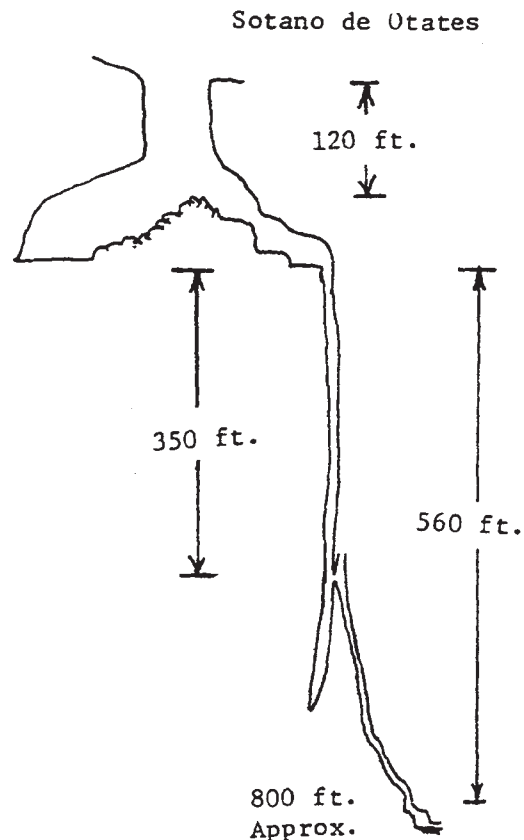
EL SALVADOR, TAMP.: Thanksgiving Day, 1974

A large group of cavers from the UT Grotto visited Sotano de Venadito on a trip led by Craig Bittinger. The trip was mostly a training trip but Charlotte Rogers, Jim Moore, Steve Rudy, Mary Connor discovered several thousand feet of large passage by pushing a pseudo-siphon at the end of the known cave on the 650' level. The passage has a strong air flow and was explored to a short drop.

NACIMIENTO DEL RIO TANTOAN, TAMP.: DEC. 17, 1974 Pat Asnes, Molly Asnes, Dennis Breining, Craig Bittinger, Clark Lillie, Neal Morris, Mike Van Note, and Barbara Vinson.

This group camped at the base of the Sierra de El Abra where the Rio Tantoan emerges from a large spring (Nacimiento). Several caves had been located on the mountain above the Nacimiento from air photos. The group followed an old mining trail up the mountain but could see no caves in the thick jungle. The local people reported that the easiest way to reach the crest was to follow a new road being built to the Otates Mine. This new road leads east from El Salvador (K 49.2) on highway 85 north of Cd. Valles, and crosses eleven miles of jungle-covered karst to reach the crest of the El Abra at the state line. The cavers were amazed at the road. The road crew was very friendly and took the cavers to two caves near the mine. Cueva de Los Indios was mapped and found to have over one thousand feet of large impressive passage broken by a sixty foot drop. Sotano de Otates was partly surveyed. It has a 120 foot entrance drop to a breakdown pile. From here a large decorated passage leads east over two climbdowns to the final drop, a 560 foot blind shaft six to eight feet in diameter. The group then returned to Cd. Valles and left a map of the new area at the Condesa Restaurant. A new caving area was opened up in the El Abra.

Neal Morris Bill Russell



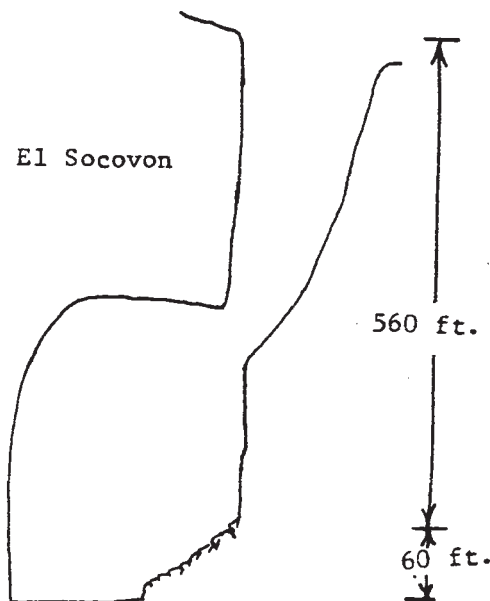
TANCOYOL, QRO.: DEC. 23, 1974, Steve Zeman-Tx., Steve Ward-Pa., Pete Tolcser-N.Y., John Szczesriak-N.Y., Peter Strickland-Tx., Bill Stone-Pa., Art Stone-Ill., Carmen Soileau-Ill., Geoff Parkhurst-N.Y., Larry O'Loane-N.Y., Dave Mack-N.J., Bob Mack-N.Y., Diana Lowrey-Tx., Pete Kicza-Mass., Dave Hutchings-Tx., David Gutter-N.J., Mike Gfroerer-Ohio, Preston Forsythe-Ken., Pat Dillon-Pa., Nelson Corby-N.Y., Alexia Cochrane-Ill., Maureen Cavanaugh-Tx., Don Broussard-Tx.

The walk to the Socavon area leaves from the town of Tancoyol, Queretaro, located twenty-two kilometers north of the Xilitla-Jalpan highway. For 25 pesos per burro, per burro driver, per day, we rented three burros, a mule, and a local farmer to transport 1300 meters of rope and food for twenty-three people to the village called Rancho Carrizal, two days north-east of Tancoyol. On the third day the motly crew set up camp in an area called Ojo de Agua, three minutes walk from the closed valley which contained El Sotano de Socavon. The next day almost everyone entered the pit at intervals to survey, photograph, and make a biological collection in the large room at the bottom of the entrance drop.

The entrance to Socavon is in the end of a quarter-kilometer-long dolina. The top of the entrance is fifty by one hundred meters, with the high side being slightly undercut for a free rappel down eighty meters until you reach the neck of a funnel. Here it is only ten meters in diameter. The low side slopes to the neck and is covered in ferns, lichens, shrubs, and large-leaved plants. After twenty meters through the neck, one finishes the rappel, bouncing off a flowstone covered wall in the side of an enormous room, for a 180 meter drop to the apex of a talus slope. This boulder pile slides away from the wall of the chamber for seventy more meters to the damp dirt floor, 200 meters below the entrance.

The chamber itself is two hundred meters long, one hundred meters wide, and seventy-five meters high. There are several huge formations near the wall opposite the entrance drop, and a couple of pancake-sized fried eggs in the northeast end. Water has stood as much as one meter deep over some parts of the flat silt floor, indicating that there is no rapid run-off once the rain trickles in. No side passages exist in this immense room unless they are hidden below the silt floor, in which case they would be full of silt anyway. A small population of parrots use the room as home.

In the next few days, seven other caves and sotanos were found and sketched or mapped. Most were only thirty to seventy meters deep in two or three short drops close together, ending in dirt plugs. However, a 200+ meter system with several drops was found close by; but it also stopped at about the same elevation as Sotano de Socavon, ending in a dirt plug.



continued

So the large-entranced sotano which AMCS cavers had been hearing about since 1967 and which Bill Stone and Steve Ward had partially entered in August of 1974 was finally mapped. It did not turn out to be the record-breaking deep system we were prepared for. But Victor Benalcazar and Mike Schulte walked in from Azuismon, via Rancho Parada where they had been checking trails and rumors of more caves. There are still caves in the Xilitla plateau to be found. Maybe the next one will go.

Don Broussard

LOS SABINOS, S.L.P.: DEC. 24, 1974, Steve Barbee, Steve Beckman, Ken Dewire, Steve Joffe, Mark Minton, Paulette Minton, and Richard Minton.

The above people had just arrived in Los Sabinos campground and awaited the coming of Harold Goldstein, Karen Jacobson, Joe Maskasky, Tom Ramsey. This group arrived in Los Sabinos with several objectives--among them to film a Golondrinas trip and map Cueva del Aire and Cueva del Brujo. They connected Aire and Brujo last year but exploration is not complete. Mapping these caves is difficult not only because the cave is used as a shrine by

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Despite their previous plans, when the group heard of the new road in the El Abra they decided to go there. First they checked Sotano de Locut, a one hundred foot pit by the road. Then they explored Sotano de Otates, checked north of the road and south along the face of the range. Several of the group pushed Cueva de Diamante to about the four hundred foot level; the cave still goes. Others filmed the trail chopping, did Sendero (the new 712' pit by the trail), took movies in Sotano de la Cuesta at the end of a three hundred foot rope, and then checked Sotano del Arbol since they had brought their rope. This pit had a 177' entrance drop to a room with a four second pit on one end. The group then returned to Los Sabinos, happy but tired, to see how much of their original schedule they could salvage.

Bill Russell

Overheard while trailbuilding in the El Abra: "only one more chopping day until Christmas."

SAN CRISTOBAL, CHIAPAS: DEC. 29, 1974, Brian Larson (Calgary, Alberta), John Donovan (Blackpool, Lancashire), Blake Harrison (Austin, Texas), Mike Boon (Calgary, Alberta)

The group took burros from Tenejapa about six miles to Sumidero Yochib. They went downstream in this large river cave for five hundred meters. Here exploration was stopped two years before by large breakdown blocks that channel the flow of the river (132 cubic feet/sec) into impassable rapids. The group managed to pass the breakdown by crossing the river and bolting across a deep gut between the blocks thirty meters further downstream. There exploration was stopped at a rapids where the river--a meter deep and ten meters wide--went swiftly down a slight grade. They decided the only way to attempt the rapids was with a rope and jumars. Returning to a point nearer the entrance, they explored a fifteen by fifteen meter side passage about six hundred meters to a depth of about 210 meters. They thought this passage would bypass the rapids and return to the river, but it ended in a mud choke.

From Tenejapa they went to Huixtan near San Cristobal to climb a waterfall about three hundred meters back in the resurgence of one of the headwaters of the Rio Huixtan. They climbed the ten meter waterfall and found 120 meters of passage which ended in a sump. A low passage below the waterfall was not checked. Next, joined by Mark Stock and Bob Ranney, they visited Chen-Ven-Sil-Mut, a 120 meter long, fifty meter wide, 126 meter deep pit with a river crossing the bottom. The pit had been checked before and the river found to sump both upstream and downstream. This trip discovered a way up to a pit partly blocked by driftwood that connected to an upstream canyon twenty meters high and ten meters wide. Just as a new cave was found near the resurgence, the rains began to fall, forcing a return to San Cristobal. Mark and Bob planned to return, and Mike Boon wants to return in April when the river in Yochib will hopefully have less water.

Mike Boon as told to Bill Russell

EDITORIAL: A problem has arisen in Mexico that can only be solved by cooperation. Several groups of cavers have walked up to Golondrinas traveling light. These groups carry no rope, but plan to wait at the pit until someone with rope arrives. Then when the pit is rigged they expect to use the rope carried up by others. Most cavers so far have not realized the implications of letting other cavers use their rope. With a rappel time of thirty minutes and an ascent time of two hours, each caver adds two and one-half hours to the rope time. One group of cavers realized this too late, and as they had only one day at the pit, there wasn't time for all of the group who carried the rope to use their own rope.

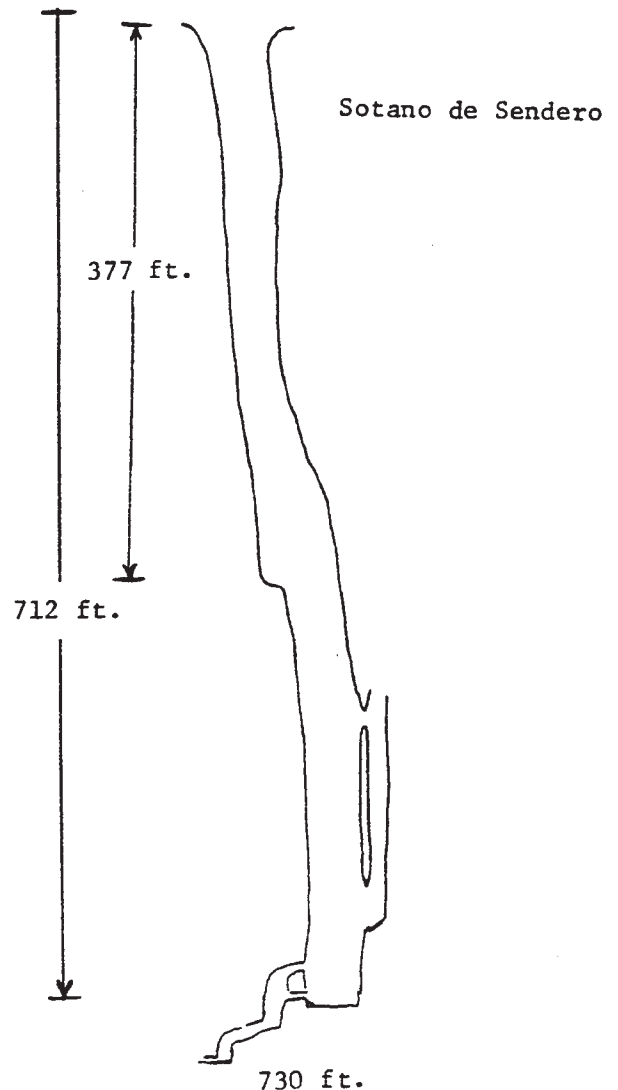
Several cavers that were waiting at the pit had rappelled in before they realized that it would take all the time left for everyone to climb out. We heard reports of a trip to Ellison's Cave where several cavers learned there was a rope in the cave and rushed to the pit. The cavers who rigged the pit had to wait in line for hours to use their own rope. We don't want this to be a problem in Mexico. There have been two solutions suggested. Most effective is to rig Golondrinas with a 600' rope and have all the interlopers go off the end. Less drastic is to have cooperation and have cavers plan their Mexico trips in advance. This solves many problems. Everyone has a ride, cars are full so gas costs are less, you know the people you ride with--an important factor in a crowded car on a long trip.

Bill Russell

MINA OTATES, TAMP.: DEC. 25, 1974, Andy Grubbs, Robert Hemperly, Logan McNatt, Bill Russell, Nancy Sayther, Terry Sayther, Barbara Wolf.

This group arrived in Cd. Valles after two days checking cave leads near Papagayos, east of Cd. Maiz. They found the map of the Otates Mine area in the Condesa, checked in at Los Sabinos, and drove to the mine. There it was decided to chop a trail south from the mine road on compass bearings from Neal Morris's map. To connect the mine area with the trail north from Cueva de Tanchipa required three and a half days of chopping. Assisted by Tom Ramsey and Joe Maskasky, the group cleared a trail through the karst for five kilometers south to Sotano de la Cuesta at the end of the Tanchipa trail. The new trail went by several pits, including a one hundred foot (unchecked), Sotano de Sendero (712 feet), Sotano de Arbol (177' to a room with a four second drop), and several smaller pits. The chopping went rapidly as we had a large group and the lead choppers cut only enough to get through and stay on bearing, while the people following enlarged the trail. Just north of the mine road a cave in the bottom of a large sink was explored and named Cueva de Diamante (Diamond) after the quartz crystals found in the sink. The first part of the cave is an old phreatic tube five feet in diameter that now takes drainage from the sink. Almost blocked by flowstone in places, the cave was climbable to about the 150' level. Then we returned to Los Sabinos and enlarged (with ten sticks of Kinopak) a passage that bypassed the Acupuncture Crawl in Cueva de Tinaja.

Bill Russell



NEWS NOTE: Aquismon, S.L.P.; Word is that a road is to be built to Tamapatz, a one and one-half hour (level) walk from Sotano de las Golondrinas. The road will start at Pimienta on the highway south of Aquismon, and follow the trail to Tampachal (one-half hour from Guaguas), then north to Tamapatz. Will a road to Tamapatz increase Golondrinas traffic? Will cavers still have to ask permission in Aquismon? What ever happens, things should be different. Construction is scheduled to start soon and should take about a year.

MINA OTATES, TAMP.: JAN. 4, 5, & 6, Pete Strickland, Bill Stone, Art Stone, Carmen Soileau, Alexia Cochrane, Brian Clarke, Maureen Cavanaugh, and Don Broussard.

From the due south trail connecting the mine and the Tanchipa trail, a two day due east chop toward a pit seen from the air by Bill Russell located the pit itself and another sotano about two hundred meters north. The pit, Hoya de Hojas Grandes, is twenty-five by fifty meters by fifty meters deep. No rope is required; it was just a very steep chop to the bottom, which is covered in huge banana-tree-shaped leaves. A short passage near the upper edge connects with the surface forty meters away.

The other pit, Sotano de Arbol Sangre, is a fissure five meters wide and thirty meters long. The entrance drop is about thirty meters, and after two other drops, a total depth of roughly 150 meters is reached.

Glenn Darilek, Ed Geldstone, Steve Gutting, Bill King, Greg Passmore, and Chuck Stuehm visited Cueva de Nacimiento del Rio Frio, Grutas de Quintero (you can drive through the cave with four wheel drive), Cueva de El Abra, Cueva de Salitre, Puente de Dios (by Jalpan), and Cueva de Taninul #4.

NEWS NOTE: Neal Morris is editing a book on the speleological exploration of the Sierra de El Abra that should be available soon. Plans are to publish the book under the auspices of Gill Ediger's International Speleological Foundation, so that the foundation can show prospective donors the kind of work it will sponsor. As soon as this book is available we will notify all AMCS members.

In Hoya de Guaguas, a skull was found which was keyed out by Mike McEachern to be Eira barbara senex. This diurnal mammal inhabits tropical forests and climbs, runs, and swims well. It feeds on many species of small mammals and birds, as well as on fruit. Body length is roughly a half meter, excluding the tail. It is commonly known as a tayra.

Taken from Mammals of North America by Hall and Kelson.

A canal was continued in the second level in Cueva de Los Sabinos. In an attempt to lower the water level in the siphon lake just north of Sotano de Arroyo, water was channeled to a lower level of the cave. A third canal needs to be dug about half a meter deep and twenty meters long to lower the water in the siphon lake 0.6 meters. Eleven cavers worked two hours in the second canal which was thirty meters long and 0.4 meters deep.

Don Broussard

LA CAPILLA, S.L.P.: DEC. 15, 1974, Steve Hudson, Ann Knox, Buddy Lane, Marion Smith, Bill Steel, Doug Strait, Ed Yarbrough, et. al.

This group went up the chapel trail to visit and photograph in Sotano de la Cuesta and Sotano de la Estrella. On the way they checked Coatituesday and found it to be about 147 meters deep--somewhat narrow towards the bottom. Some of the group also visited and photographed in Hoya de Guaguas.

We heard a group on the way to Golondrinas rolled their Blazer south of Cd. Valles. No one was injured and they did the pit anyway.

During a three month stay in Merida this group mapped and made biological collections in the Yucatan Peninsula. On the way down they mapped the commercial cave Grutas de Cocana near Teapa, Tabasco. Much time was spent mapping in the incredible maze, Cueva de Kaua, east of Chichen-Itza. About six hundred meters were mapped per trip; the cave is now over six thousand meters and still much more to survey. The group finished the map of Xtacumbilxunam (the Cave of the Nine Wells), a famous cave near Bolonchen in Northern Campeche. The cave is developed on several levels, totals over sixteen hundred meters in length, and reaches a depth of 102 meters. They also finished the map of Las Grutas de Tzab-nah south of Campeche, about nine hundred meters long, and Actun Chen-Mul in the ruins of Mayapan. Four caves were located in the Sierra de Ticul. The largest, Gruta de Chukum, was important biologically. Two new caves near the ruins of Xul were explored, one intersected by an eighty meter hand-dug well. The most notable new discovery was Grutas de San Antonio in remote northern Campeche. This cave has eleven hundred meters of large passage and reaches a depth of 113 meters. A hand-dug well intersects a fifteen meter high passage in the lower level of the cave and continues until it reaches water at the 113 meter level. A blind tarantula was collected in this cave.

Several caves near Santa Elena were visited. Pozo Nohcacab in the center of town was being dug out by local labor. Pozo Okbinchen was a series of drops to a large room. Actun Xcoch, in the same area, was first reported in John L. Stevens book Incidents of Travel in the Yucatan, published about 1840. The cave had been sealed for forty years, but was dug open and explored for over three hundred meters. Another Stevens' cave, Gruta de Chac, about six hundred meters long and sixty-four meters deep, was mapped. Important biological collections were made in the Sierra de Ticul near Otzkuab in Actun Tzitz, a large inclined room. Also visited were Actun Sabach, a large multiple skylight cave near Tekax, and Cueva de Monte Bravo in southern Campeche, over five hundred meters long. Many other caves were visited and the group felt that if they had stayed three more months, as much more could have been accomplished.

David McKenzie as told to B. Russell

Warren Netherton, Roger Skaggs, Devi Ukrain, and Dave Whitacre arrived on foot in Los Sabinos after their car crossed Texas, but not the border, with no license plates. They were visiting caves in the Los Sabinos area.

Diana Emerson and Walt Jaskinerny of the Windy City Grotto arrived in Los Sabinos after five days of having their car worked on in Dallas, Texas. Grim...

Bill Edison, Nancy Edison, Ron Gariepy, Karen Hoskin, and Dave Kelley couldn't find Soyate, did Golondrinas, and planned to do Guaguas.

The Left-Hand Water Passage in Cueva de Tinaja ends in a room five meters by six meters long, with less than 0.3 of air above water of unknown depth. This is one of the few places in the Left-Hand Water Passage where a caver's body can be vertical. But you may be within only fifteen meters of another lake in Sotano del Arroyo. Explored by Mark Stock and Don Broussard.

