

UTG NEWS

The Official Newsletter of the Underground Texas Grotto



January 2025
Volume 65 No. 1

The Revival Edition

STAY IN TOUCH WITH THE UTG

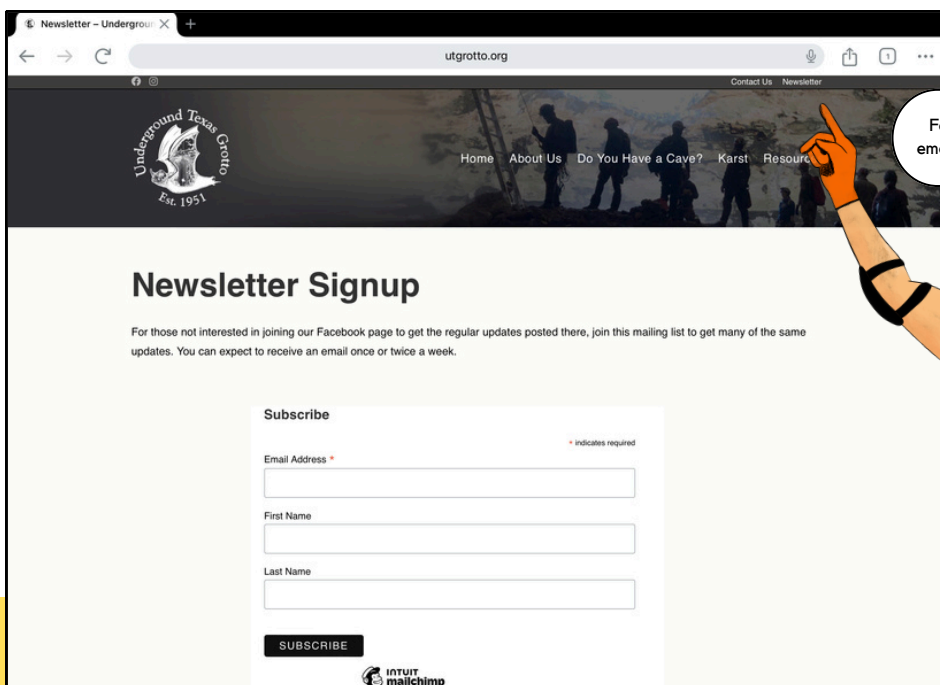
MEET YOUR OFFICERS

 <p>Have I been impeached yet?</p>	 <p>Sign up to present at a meeting!</p>	 <p>Send me your dues!</p>	 <p>Submit photos for the website!</p>	 <p>I'm glad Kevin Pride isn't lurking behind me with murder in his eyes.</p>
PRESIDENT Ethan Perrine	VICE PRESIDENT London Darce	SECRETARY TREASURER Holly Klein	WEBMASTER Joel Haus	MEDIA MANAGER Enzo Monfre

MEETING INFORMATION

The Underground Texas Grotto (UTG; UT Grotto) is an Austin-based nonprofit focused on cave exploration, education, and conservation throughout Texas and beyond, established in 1951. Members range from beginners to lifelong explorers, professionals, and international expedition leaders. We meet on 1st, 3rd, and 5th Wednesdays in the Austin area. For up to date information on meeting times and locations, please visit the UTGrotto.org website or look us up on social media for updates.

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THE REVIVAL EDITION

The UT Grotto's newsletter has been out of print for approximately 40 of the 65 years since it was first published. The largest gaps were between 1978 and 1993 and the 25-year drought that this issue marks the end of. With this being the first issue in a quarter of a century, it's safe to say that there's no shortage of things to talk about. Future issues will include reminiscences on trips, events, and memories from the period of time since the last issue, but to build a strong foundation for moving forward, this issue is focused on the events of 2024. Speaking of the past, throughout this newsletter I have paired the word "approximately" to most mentions of *UT Grotto News* history. This is due to previous editors intentionally assigning volume and issue numbers at random. To account for this, I consulted several Texas caving historians and reviewed what existing copies I could get my hands on, and determined that *UT Grotto News: Volume 50, No. 4* from April 2000 is likely the most recent publication. Since the knowledge of which volume and issue the "fiftieth volume" is actuality, I designated *Revival Issue* as *Volume 65*, seeing as how the only concrete date I have is the first publication. Probably. The unorthodox nature of this newsletter is befitting of the group that created it, and alleviates any concern for violating previous standards and practices, on account of there not being any. After determining what to name it, I was left with one outstanding question. How long is the *UT Grotto News* supposed to be?

We pre-sold this issue for \$7.00 at the grotto birthday party fundraiser in September. That was *before* I dusted off the back catalogue and discovered that the average length of past newsletters was three pages. That would mean charging \$2.33 per page to a group of people who aren't known for happily parting with their cash, who have no shortage of holes in the ground where an editor could disappear. I weighed my options carefully. What could I write, short of the next divine revelation, that would justify the cost? To make matters worse, I had about two weeks to write this if I was going to include the end of the year and publish by January. It took Moses forty days to crank out the *Ten Commandments* and he didn't have a day job. In a bind, I decided that value through volume was a safer bet than trying my hand at penning the divine word. Please enjoy a lengthy issue of the *UTC News*, AKA the *UT Grotto News*, *University Grotto Newsletter*, and occasionally the *Yew Tee Gee Noooz*, but always the official publication of the Underground Texas Grotto.

Your rabbinical scribe, Ethan Perrine



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Front cover: Homage to old UTG News covers
Ethan Perrine

Back cover: Assorted photos from 2024
Ethan Perrine

Have something you'd like to submit? editor@utgrotto.org

THE YEAR IN REVIEW



January: UTG members attended the NCRC cave rescue seminar to take levels 1, 2, Small Party Assisted Rescue, and to teach (pictured; p. 08). UTG cavers participated in the Honey Creek survey project.



February: Rigging practice with TCSAR at Midnight Cave, planting natives at TCMA's Dahlstrom Cave preserve, and pushing leads at Powell's Cave to continue survey for the historic cave project (pictured; p. 21).



March: The first Tuesday Night Dig (pictured; p. 10, 11), renovation of TCMA's Whirlpool Cave gate (p. 07), Eleonore's Godwin Ranch Mothing Night, cave presentations at Bowie High School.



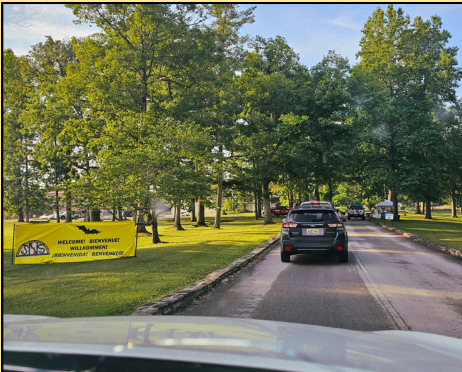
April: Midnight Cave (pictured), digs at TCMA's Dahlstrom Cave and Lost Oasis Cave (p. 10, 11), visit to a cave dwelling (p. 05), Quigg Sink (p. 21), and digs begin at William Russell Karst Preserve (p. 10, 11).



May: TSA Spring Convention, a visit to Bowie Highschool Cave, O9 Well (p. 09), and a new dig in Williamson County (p. 10, 11).



June: Tabling at Nature Nights (pictured), assembling new Disto XBLEs, pond cleaning at Stricklandia, greenbelt cliff night, and Canyon Lake reveals a cave.



July: The NSS National Convention (pictured; p. 12, 13), a reporter visits Whirlpool Cave and digs at Sinky Dinky (p. 10, 11), and a workday at TCMA's Wilcox Cave Preserve.



August: Squeeze box construction, meeting at UT paleontology lab (pictured; p. 05), caving in west Texas, two Goat Cave trips, digging in a Wil Co cave (p. 10, 11).



September: Digs at Wilcox (p. 10, 11), repairs at the TSC (p. 20), and the grotto celebrates its 73rd anniversary with a fundraiser birthday party at Jef and Liz's (pictured; p. 14).



October: Hydro Geo (p. 15), TCR (p. 16, 17), tabling at BSU, meeting at Inner Space Cavern (pictured; p. 05), digging in Menard, and Halloween party (p. 22).



November: Drew leads a dig on a private ranch (p. 11), trips to Goat Cave, meeting at Save Our Springs HQ, and Thanksgiving trips to Mexico (pictured; p. 21)



December: NCRC OCR (p. 18, 19), the TSA Holiday fundraiser (p. 22), and the grotto New Years party (pictured; p. 22) closed out our year!

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS



2024 was a year of fortunate and diverse venues. We continue to be without a permanent meeting location, but we were fortunate to meet at the Hill Country Conservancy office for several months thanks to Rachael Lindsey. The pictured meeting was especially well attended and featured an excellent presentation by Jef Frank and Liz Frank about caving in Florida, as well as exploratory cave diving in west Texas.



In April, Rachael Lindsey and London Darce organized an on-location meeting at an eccentric house that was built inside of a cave. The dwelling was one of a kind and made for a very memorable meeting venue.



In August, we were invited to meet on location at the UT vertebrate paleontology lab by paleontologist and grotto member John Moretti. The only thing cooler would have been a trip to the *invertebrate* lab, but I'm biased.



We look forward to the Halloween meeting at Inner Space Cavern all year. Thanks to ISC, we meet on the Wednesday closest to Halloween, dress in costumes, listen to tales of the cave's discovery in the 60s, and take our group photo. This year we were treated to talks from Terry Raines, MD Turner, and Bill Steele, who was visiting in town. In exchange, we volunteer our labor to ISC to help keep clean lampenflora from around light fixtures.



November's meeting was true to form for the UTG: projected onto the side of a mobile home, outside, headlamps, audio technical challenges, and a great presentation from UTG's own Bill Stone, detailing the recent expedition and upcoming plans.



Ben Hutchins presented on his far flung expedition to the Cook Islands at this October meeting in Don Arburn's backyard. The talk was as engaging as it was hard on Ben's knees since I found the presentation remote too late and instead of interrupting, I just watched him kneel through 50+ slides.



NEW MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

"We started caving as a family labor day weekend of 2023. After tons of research, that lead us to The Posse with our 11 year old son in tow, we met up with the grotto at a social meeting. Being a part of the UT Grotto over the past year has been quite the adventure! Not only have we been included on many amazing trips but we have learned SO MUCH thanks to the time and dedication of some pretty amazing people!



From rope nights at Joel and Eleanor's to the karst project at Colorado Bend the learning never ends! Having a young caver son, safety is of the utmost importance and the grotto always pulls through with not only classes but personal 1 on 1 tips and tricks. It's always so heartwarming to witness different members take our little dude under their wing and fine tune his skills! It doesn't stop with Bradyn either, everyone is always so willing to help and we cannot be more grateful.



We've had the complete pleasure of joining in on the fun of TCR, OCR, and Tony has been blessed to attend NCRC Level 1 in January. TCR was such a blast! Not only was it informative with the ropes and survey course, but to truly be able to trust our son to run around camp and have a good time is where it's at. To know that we have joined a safe community means EVERYTHING!!! It's not often in life we can free range our children and it's so comforting to know that caver gatherings are a space to do that.



Orientation to Cave Rescue is another example of our incredible little community. Being able to take Bradyn with us and know that he is well taken care of when we are busy learning was a pleasant surprise. The way everyone not only looked after him but INCLUDED him meant more than we can even express. It's things like that that will keep him interested and excited to cave. We all learned so much valuable information that weekend that it sparked a further interest in cave safety in all of us.



While we're not exactly sure what the future holds Melissa does hope to fuse her love of caving with her love of mindfulness practices such as yoga, breathwork, and meditation. What makes you more mindful than making your way through Horseshoe Crevice having to ease your mind every inch of the way?!? All we can say is caving has brought us closer together as a family and we hope for many many MANY more adventures with you amazing people! TAG is definitely on the radar now that we're vertical! We hear great things about New Mexico too. So just remember the Kinney's when you're looking to fill spots on your upcoming trips!"

- Tony and Melissa Kinney



CONSERVATION HIGHLIGHTS

Wurzbach Bat Cave Graffiti Abatement Workshop By Eleonore Le Corvaisier

"On Saturday morning, [we] attended a PowerPoint tutorial by NSS cave restoration maven Val Hildreth-Werker held at a nearby library. There, [we] learned about the importance of proper techniques and documentation, and how to discriminate between precious historical graffiti and revolting modern ones. The team then drove to the cave for lunch, except for the DFW grotto participants, who failed to rejoin the group and were presumed dead. A minor scuffle erupted upon their belated arrival, when they realized no food had been left. How they could have been lost for an hour, despite the proximity and GPS pin, made little sense and the rest of the team silently suspected an encounter with skin-walkers. However, there was no time to mourn this irreversible body theft.



After an in-cave demonstration by Mrs. Hildreth-Werker, groups of two and three descended upon their chosen graffiti equipped with rags and brushes of varying coarseness. The before and after pictures show the effectiveness of the techniques. I was not terribly hopeful when we started, given the ancient age and thickness of some of the paints used by the vandals, but we saw results very quickly with most panels. In the course of six hours (across two days) my team was able to successfully remove most of the paint off three panels. In total, at least a dozen graffiti disappeared or faded considerably. With enough people, we might only need another couple abatement weekends to restore the cave to a more dignified state. It was very encouraging to see how much got done without even having to scrub that hard."

Whirlpool Gate Renovation By Ethan Perrine

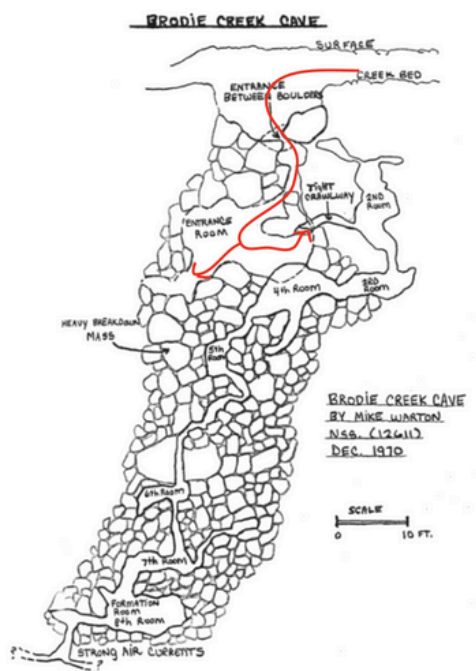


The TCMA's most urban preserve, located under the MOPAC highway bridge over Latta Drive, sees a lot of visitors throughout the year. The current gate got a facelift to make it even harder to infiltrate, and easier to fit a rescue litter into in case a visitor ever has a health event and needs to get out with assistance. The UTG relies on Whirlpool Cave for bimonthly beginner trips and we appreciate the work that Lydia Hernandez with design input from UTG member and Cave Gators head honcho, Jim Kennedy, did to make TCMA's urban preserves safer for welcome visitors and harder to access for unwelcome Ne'er-do-wells.



Brodie Sink Cave Restoration By Dane Smith

"When I came upon the cave, the upstream section of the perimeter fencing was laid over ninety degrees by past floodwaters. The black vinyl chain link between the round posts had been stretched down into bowl shaped baskets filled with leaves and woody debris. The resident racoon had availed themselves of the baskets high above the sinkhole as a perfect toilet-with-a-view as shown by the impressive mounds of scat. Past the downed fence about 10 feet lower in the sinkhole sat a very impressive cave grate that was about half covered with trash and woody debris. It was apparent that this was an important karst feature due to the large amount of effort that had gone into making these protective structures. However, the overall condition of the structure suggested that it had been a long time since anyone had done any maintenance to the structure or feature. I was able to contact the owner and offered to help them repair the fence. They were happy for the help, and we have developed a good relationship for future maintenance of the fencing and karst feature.



The cave consists of a series of rooms formed within the breakdown debris of the sinkhole. After entering the cave gate you head back upstream stoop-walking 25 feet under the grating until you can drop down a sloped passage between breakdown into the large entrance room. This room is about 8 ft wide and 25 feet long with multiple leads heading off in different directions. The north side of this room, which is the left side as you enter, is in-situ bedrock that is structurally stable and a good exposure for future stratigraphic study. The extent of the recent exploration is shown below as the red arrows on the map that was made by Mike Wharton in 1970. Future trips should focus on clearing drains and removing small or loose breakdown to prevent future choking of drains while also improving safety."

NCRC

JANUARY 19th-27th

BEND, TEXAS
SOUTH CENTRAL REGION
NATIONAL CAVE RESCUE COMMISSION

The NCRC South Central Regional is an eight day cave rescue seminar, but considering the practice ahead of time, it's really an entire season of preparation.



Since NCRC is held in January, it's a season full of shivering. There are few trees indoors, so students huddle in backyards, rope courses, cliff faces, and anywhere else they can string a rope to get ready for the big week which begins with the skills check off pictured below.



In 2024, the week of NCRC was seasonably cold, which meant any instruction time indoors was a respite from the drizzling, frosty winter outside of the lodge. In the above photo, Holly Klein splints another student's leg, held down by fellow rescuers.



Speaking of splinting, here Joe Datri gets his leg splinted by teammates during medical scenarios early in the week. A lot of duct tape was used in the pursuit of saving lives.

UTG had several students in Level 1, and a handful in Level 2. During a counterweight exercise underground, former UTG member Philip Rykwalder gets rescued by a teammate. I like Philip so I even looked up how to spell his name. That's more work than I did at the time though, since I was apparently standing around taking pictures.



The seminar culminated in the big mock rescue on Friday. Except, this year the turnout was affected by Covid. The remaining healthy students, fueled by sour patch kids and adrenaline, persevered, rescuing patients and earning certificates.

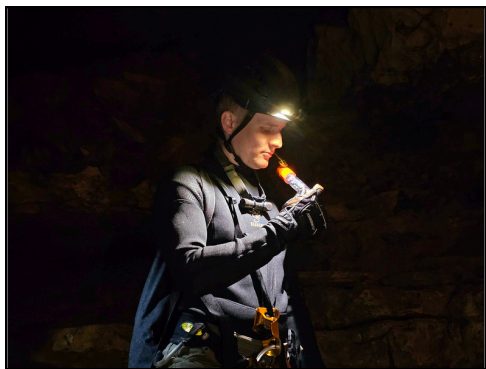


MAY 25th

09 WELL

RIGGING PRACTICE
AIR CHEMISTRY DATA
BIOLOGICAL MONITORING

Thanks to the Texas Cave Management Association, a group from UT Grotto visited 09 Well, a classic Texas water cave managed by the TCMA. The crew included Holly Klein, London Darce, Enzo Monfre, Joel Haus, Scott Bauer, Greg Sullivan, Randolph Colby, and Ethan Perrine. The purpose of the trip was to gather air chemistry data, take photos, and monitor the cave's fauna.

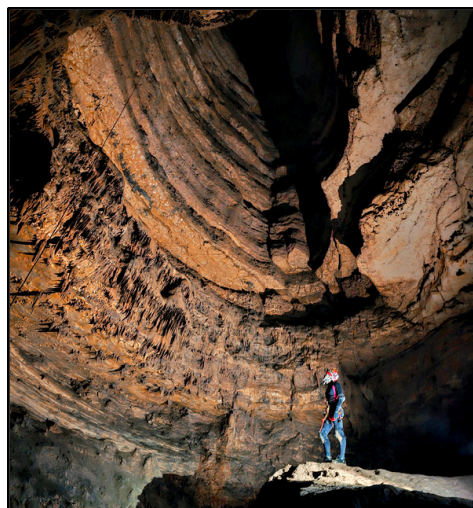


Greg checks a CO2 monitor to record a reading of the gas's concentration.

One of the main purposes of the trip was to collect carbon dioxide concentration data throughout the cave. The percentage of CO2 in the air fluctuates seasonally, intensifying in the summer due to the role surface temperature and pressure play in affecting a cave's microclimate. While Greg checked CO2, I looked for critters and the rest of our crew took photos and explored.



We were able to progress to the final, lowest known room in the cave, recording data at different elevations as we went. Our goal was to provide the TCMA with data to better understand how the carbon dioxide level changes through the year.



Enzo stands at the peak of a steep mud slope, peering up into the impressive dome above him.



London rappels the second waterfall drop, moving deeper into the cave while Greg watches from above.

London rigged the cave so I could take pictures and critique their rigging while I otherwise did nothing. Truly commendable, I'm glad it wasn't me. This photo is made better by the pop of color from London's wetsuit. This is your reminder to wear bright colors if you want your picture taken.

TUESDAY NIGHT DIGS



Enzo Monfre standing in the newly opened entrance to a cave that started out as a grapefruit sized hole in a residential backyard.

A YEAR IN REVIEW

- DIG NIGHTS: 35
- BUCKETS: 3,430
- GALLONS: 6,860
- POUNDS: 68,600
- METRIC TONS: 31
- PARTICIPANTS: 150

PERSON HOURS: 15,750

These stats are based on conservative estimates averaging dirt buckets with rocks and do not factor in non-Tuesday night digs. Considering that we started in March of 2024, these stats should be even more impressive with a full year of digging in 2025.



Lizzie Lind hauls buckets in the freshly opened cave passage within the entrance pictured above. Williamson County.

The UTG Tuesday Night Digs are open to all. You don't need to know the right people, score a secret invite, or have your own tools. If you're new to cave excavation, come learn how to become a skilled digger. Watch for dig announcements on our email list and social media, send that week's dig leader a message for information and come help us restore caves. See you next Tuesday!

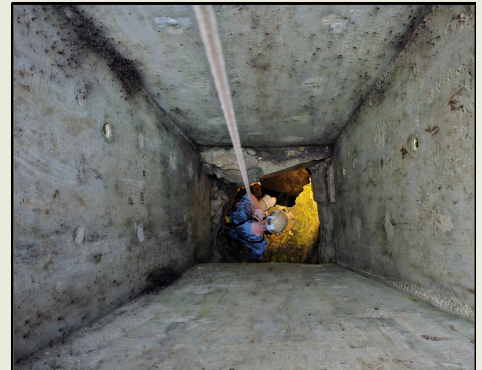
NEWS FROM THE DIG FRONT



Enzo Monfre stands in a soil filled depression, assessing the merits of excavation, Williamson County.



Near Lampasas, Jef Frank and Will Quast wrestle coils of barbed wire from a fracture cave, just before discovering an entire windmill was crammed inside.



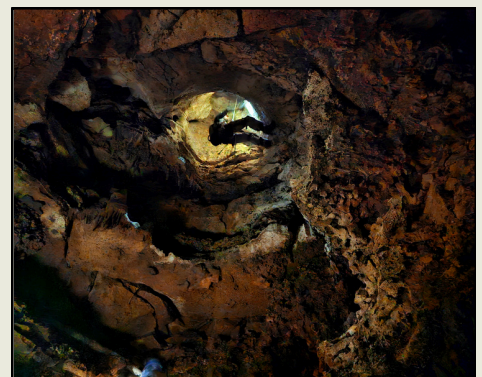
In Travis County, work resumed at the William Russell Karst Preserve, led by Peter Sprouse. This photo shows the entrance shaft of Sinky Dinky, one of the digs at William Russell Karst Preserve.



Four dig nights and two meters of soil later, the cave entrance was revealed. Open cave is just a few digs away.



In Menard County, an entrance opened up on private property during the installation of a porch, leading to an air blowing hypogene cave that still needs to be mapped.



Sinky Dinky from below, showing the route that material is hauled up each night by a team of five or six.



Eleonore Le Corvaisier hauls mud bags with her teeth through a passage that is 1.1 Eleonores in diameter. Travis County.



Lost Oasis, a TCMA preserve has been in the dig night rotation, with a howling lead that produces trailers of fill.



Diggers Dane smith and Jordan Ogletree load buckets in the entrance air blasting entrance of Lost Oasis.



50 feet later, Eleonore is rewarded by a passage at least 1.5 Eleonores tall. No end in sight, be that passage or mud.



An hour from Austin on a private ranch near the Pedernales, a horde of diggers from UTG, AG, and BG dig on a complex of karst features that are likely connected.



What excellent foreshadowing. Those disparate features all connect and after another round of digging, will likely break out into something good!



JULY 1st - 5th

NSS CONVENTION



The annual national convention of the NSS was held on the campus of the St. Andrew's Sewanee School in Sewanee, Tennessee. Nine hundred cavers registered for the event, and among them, nearly twenty UT Grotto members made the drive to the Cumberland Plateau. Eight of whom had never been to an NSS Convention before.



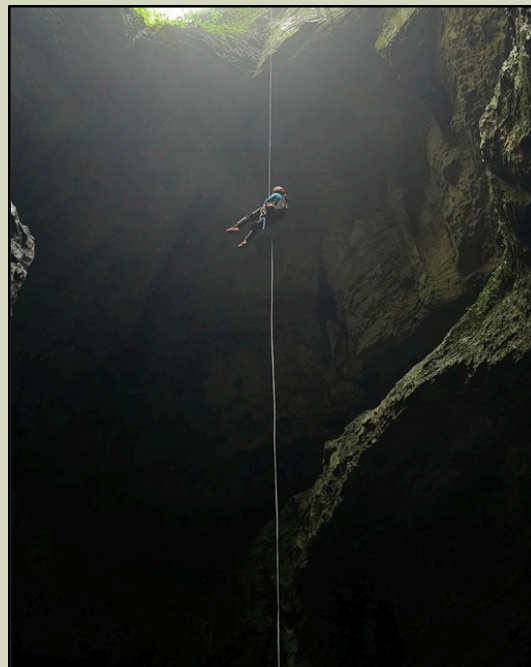
Our first trip of convention was to Montague Cave. The first cave of trip out of Texas is important for acclimating to the local caves. For Texas cavers, that means getting used to being able to stand up. This 43 meter dome was a pitstop on our tour led by Ryan and Liz Hoffman.



On campus, a row of outdoor attractions was arranged along the main drag that led from camp to the buildings where vendors and presentations were located. Along the way, a cave trip kiosk supplied visiting cavers with guided and unguided caving opportunities throughout TAG.



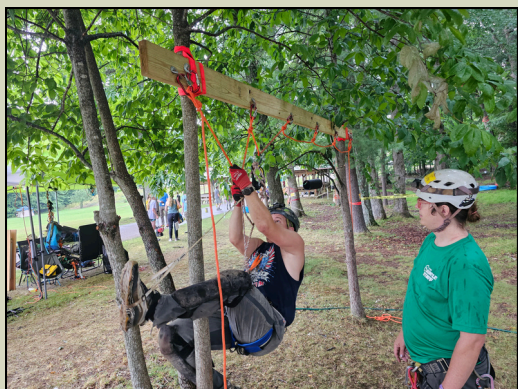
Despite having a large group of UTG cavers intent on caving together every day, we didn't have any trouble finding caves that could fit us all and since ten of us managed to drive five vehicles Convention, we had plenty of carpooling options.



Izzy Newman rappelling Balcony Sink's 42 meter entrance drop, an SCCI preserve that Joel, Enzo, Chelsea Dau (GHG), London, Holly, Eleonore, Izzy, and I visited on Thursday.



A Red Salamander (*Pseudotriton ruber*) spotted under a log on the floor of Balcony Sink.



Over 200 people subjected themselves to the Gauntlet ropes course over the week including many Texas cavers, like Jef Frank.



UTG has performed pretty well on the national circuit as of late with members giving talks, presentations, submitting artwork, filling section roles, and placing in competitions. Speaking of stepping up, Joel Haus not only helped organize and present the fine arts salon, he also won it and had to the award to himself.



As avid shoppers, Terry Raines and I ran into each other daily at vendors' row, the collection of caving gear store fronts set up in the entrance hall rooms. Of the shops to visit, Terry frequented the NSS consignment store to track down the next batch of cards, magnets, and stickers to selflessly distribute at the next grotto meeting.

SEWANEE, TENNESSEE



The banquet that capped off the Convention week was held outside under vast canopy tents strung with twinkle lights. Among the announcements, awards, and acknowledgements made, the TCMA was honored with an award for being rad, Don Arburn was awarded a presidential certificate of appreciation for his contributions to the Cave Animal of the Year artworks (and informally twenty years of other contributions), and both Joel and Walt Olenick won the rope climbing competition, smoking their collective categories.



UT GROTTO BIRTHDAY PARTY

April 27, 2024 marked the 73rd anniversary of the UT Grotto! In order to uphold the grotto's longstanding irreverence for rules, we chose to celebrate five months late in September. In truth, we needed all the time we could get to finalize our ambitious party plans.



The party was hosted by Jef and Liz Frank, who welcomed the grotto into their home, letting us temporarily renovate their living space into grotto party central. By "us" I mean Jef, who did much of the work himself. Thanks Jef and Liz!



Months before the party, during the planning stage, the officers learned that nobody in the grotto owned a squeeze box. Each of us had to face this disappointment in our own way, but before I could find a tin can to kick forlornly down the road, Jef had already rendered a 3D squeeze box schematic and was driving to a Home Depot. In the coming weeks, a team of volunteers, led by Jef's exacting standards, produced a squeeze box without equal, as elegant as it was durable. The cherry on top? As a cave diver recently turned dry caver, Jef didn't know what the purpose, or perhaps, the appeal, of a squeeze box was. He crafted this strange, medieval torture device on faith alone, because we said it would make the party better. Thanks Jef Frank, Liz Frank, London Darce, Ryan Hoffman, Liz Hoffman, Joel Haus, and Holly Klein, who also donated the lumber!

UT GROTTO EST. 1951

UTG TURNS **73**

Sunday, September 22, 4-8 PM

Includes fundraising activities, like:

Dunk Tank	Grilled Weenies and Burgers
Squeeze Box	Caver Cocktails
Raffle	Tshirts and Merch
Corn Hole	Baked Goods
Wafer Balloons	Face Painting

RSVP on Facebook or contact officers@utgrotto.org for location



Thanks to Team squeeze box's hard work, the weaponized claustrophobia machine was debuted as promised just in time for new member Lizzie Lind to set the day's record at 6 and 1/16 inches! Thanks to Ryan and Liz, we also had a dunk tank, Drew and Patty painted faces and twisted balloon animals, London ran the raffle, several talented bakers supplied the gourmet bake sale ran by Carrey (who never left her post), Liz ran the weenie and burger stand, grilling up hot meals for anyone not satisfied by the potluck, Holly and Randolph served up beverages at the caver cocktail bar, and I took photos of people working hard, my favorite job. Here's a photo of Joel working very hard.



Once everything was setup and the clock struck 4:00 PM, grotto members from all over town showed up to celebrate and see what we had in store for them. For starters, we had a literal store, complete with touchless payment that worked 80% of the time, new t-shirts, stickers, 3D cave animal toys, magnets, chip clips, movies, calendars, raffle tickets, dunk tank tickets, weenie tickets, and my hand in marriage. No takers. Next door to the store, the grotto's resident fine artist, Joel Haus, painted tirelessly at the custom t-shirt booth. For a drink while you watch Joel paint, Holly and Randolph served beverages at the Rock Bar, the highest class, caver-themed establishment you've never heard of. For the record, this was a mocktail bar. Holly ain't got a liquor license. Anyway, I'm running out of column, but not out of volunteers who helped make this party happen. Thank you, UTG volunteers for making it happen, and to everyone for coming and supporting your grotto.



The night wound down with London's raffle drawing and by 9:00 PM, the crowds cleared out leaving the volunteers to count the proceeds. Thanks to our fellow members, we raised \$2,000 to keep the lights on for the following year. Happy birthday UTG!



HYDROGEO WORKSHOP

OCTOBER 4th-6th



The 9th annual Hydro-Geo Workshop, a weekend educational development event, was held at Cave Without A Name in Boerne, TX.



While "hydro-geo" is in the name, a shadowy faction of biologists are slowly diversifying the course offerings. Here, a group practices surveying for fauna in a water cave near CWAN.



To maintain relations between grottos, former UTG president Galen Falgout ceremonially mends the shoe of Bexar Grotto member Tom Florer.



Whether you're a student, instructor, professional, or just sci-curious, the modules taught at Hydro-Geo are led by leading experts and practitioners in their respective fields. It's a great place to learn, not to mention mingle with folks in fields that you're interested in. This water quality monitoring module on the TCEQ's Clean Rivers Program was taught by the Bandera County River Authority. Students wore helmets to enter the nearby cave to learn about the relationship between ground water and above ground streams.



No matter what your modules are focused on, if you sign up for stream gauging, seismic surveys, paleoclimatology, changing a tire, or karst biology (like the students in the above photo), you have hands-on learning to look forward to. Saturday has a catered group dinner, lightning talks, offsite field trips, a keynote speech, caving trips, and most importantly, a hog calling contest. Bird sounds, along with most other noises are accepted in place of, or in addition to, a hog call.

TEXAS CAVERS REUNION

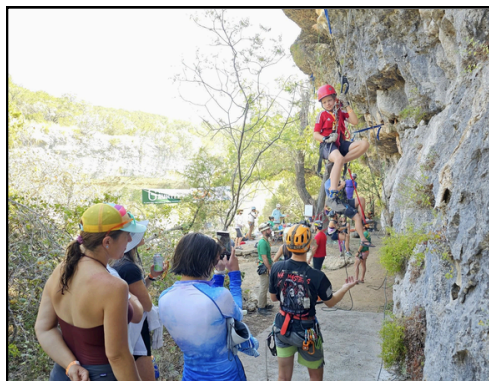
OCTOBER 10th-13th



Joel Haus attempts to knock his wife Eleonore Le Courvaisier into the dunk tank to temporarily quiet her vicious heckling, but the crooked machine doth not budge.



Before cavers could reunite, several days worth of volunteer labor went into preparing the venue. Bryce Smith tackled one such task, setting up the mud wrestling pit for Saturday night. A thankless job that benefits anyone who is both a caver and a fan of blood sport, a nearly circular Venn diagram in the UT Grotto.



We were fortunate to host the Gauntlet vertical rope course and workshop for the second year in a row, teaching single rope technique to cavers young and old. Their volunteer staff arrived days in advance to set up, bivouacking on the riverside like 18th century fur trappers.



The UTG climbing competition was hard fought and competitive, with some surprising upsets.



The TCMA convened under the tents at vendor row with an impressive turn out to discuss the state of affairs.



For their part, the Aggies spent hours marching cups, pales, and buckets up the hill from the river to fill the TCMA dunk tank.



Vico Jones, along with his several helpers cooked up an exceptional dinner for Saturday night's dinner.



While people ate, awards were announced including the top prizes for the climbing competition, hand-crafted by Tony Kinney, which were bestowed upon Joel and Eleonore for their impressive times!



Jim Kennedy, head honcho of TCR, announces awards at the Saturday night ceremony held at Flat Creek.

TCR NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

CHUCK STUEHM AND PHIL WINSBOROUGH AWARD WINNERS

My resolution for 2025 will be to take more photos of TCR award winners. Thankfully, Peter Sprouse took a photo of Mowgli Swartz with his 2024 Phil Winsborough award (for his outstanding commitment to exploration). For the Chuck Stuehm Award, bestowed upon new cavers who display exceptional enthusiasm, our winner, Bradyn Kinney, was among the youngest to ever win. You only need to meet Bradyn once to learn why.

PHIL WINSBOROUGH

Award and grant given to encourage and support exploration. Generously funded by Terry Sayther and Debbie Stuart.



Cheve veteran Mowgli poses with his actual award. PC: Peter Sprouse

CHUCK STUEHM

Awarded to one new caver each year who shows exceptional potential and enthusiasm.



Bradyn Kinney, in awed silence of his space-time defying award.

2024

2023

2022

2021



Talented cartographer Kara Posso, pictured with what is definitely her real award, not a bachelorette party.



I have as many reasons to boast about Enzo Monfre (left) as he has surplus military jackets. Cruz, the square crop cut you out, sorry. - MGMT



Prolific cave digger Drew Thompson surprised by his award in a field in South Dakota.



Yours truly, pictured eating a sandwich with a copy of my actual award taken two years later.



London was the silver lining of the pandemic, joining the grotto at a very challenging time and emerging as our current vice president.



Badass project caver and videographer, Bryce Smith poses with his real Phil Winsborough Award. PC: David Ochel



Cave surveying extraordinaire Ben Hutchens, pictured disrespectfully marking a station on his award in this undoctored profile picture.



Eleonore is an exceptional digger, caver, and preserve manager, not to mention an all-time great grotto VP and the current TSA president.



DECEMBER 6th-8th

ORIENTATION TO CAVE RESCUE



An unofficial advertisement that failed to illustrate what actually OCR is. Students signed up despite this.

The weekend of December 6th, the South Central Region of the NCRC put on an Orientation to Cave Rescue (OCR) where 12 instructors taught a class of 19 students at the TCMA's Deep & Punkin Cave Preserve. The crash course weekend culminated in a mock rescue for students to apply the new skills they learned.



After breaking open eggs all night, Hunter volunteered to break his leg for Carrey to splint. What a good sport.

Carrey Bull, the lead instructor for this weekend, kicked off the 12+ hours of classwork on Saturday morning with a demonstration of improvised splinting using commonly available materials.



Bad students were put in the Palmer furnace of shame while good students got to light the candle.

NCRC was developed to marry skills from caving with techniques from agency first responders to better address the unique spatial and environmental challenges that exist underground. NCRC courses like OCR show ways that cavers can cave with rescue in mind, minimizing the chance for accidents. One method for avoiding hypothermia is the Palmer Furnace, a heat tent fashioned from a trash bag and a candle.



Hunter (a constant presence in these images so far) and **Casey** demonstrate how to use wired field phones to communicate.

Inside the Deep & Punkin cabin, students practiced a rotation of skills, including tying knots, learning emergency medical considerations, patient packaging, and communications like is pictured above. By this point, structured learning had concluded and students were allowed to spend time at whichever stations they wanted more time with.



See, I didn't just follow Hunter around. Here, Holly Klein and Jeff Walters teach students to tie the essential knots for cave rescue.

Knots are critical in caving as well as cave rescue, so the knot tying station was busy most of the evening. OCR doesn't require students to tie many knots, but later courses utilize them heavily.



Hunter Klein helping meal prep after arriving at midnight from Carlsbad, New Mexico.

Keeping 31 people fed for the weekend required a team of helpers which included helping hands from instructors and students who were too generous and insistent to take no for an answer.

OCR 2024



The graduating class of South Central OCR 2024, UTG, GHG, BG, agency, and St Stephen's Episcopal School members were in attendance.

Students hiked to Deep Cave on Saturday afternoon for hands on training at Jeff and Bryce's patient movement exercise near the cave's entrance.



Savvy rescuers stand out during patient packing. Volunteering as the patient means you get a blanket, snacks, and no responsibilities while your classmates dote on you.



While students were focused on rescue, instructors watched in case the patient or the cave formations needed rescuing for real. With a live patient, the stakes are high.

After their team safety and patient's wellbeing, preserving the fragile cave environment was the most important concern that students focused on.



Once the students were sufficiently tired for the day and slunk off to their tents to rest, the instructors convened in the cabin to plan the mock rescue scenario that the students would be met with in the morning. Each instructor was assigned roles and took notes on when they would need to disappear the following day to get to their positions.



Early Sunday morning, students were alerted to a series of increasingly unfortunate cavers who need to be rescued nearby. They packed their lunches, hiked over, and performed admirably. I pushed my luck requiring rescue not once, but twice. Can't take me anywhere.



LOOKING AFTER THE

TEXAS SPELEOLOGY CENTER

Immediately after joining the grotto, Tony and Melissa Kinney began volunteering; pictured here tackling the dirty jobs at the TSC.



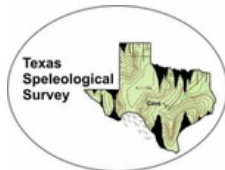
Did you know that we have a speleology center? Did you know how much work it takes to run? Do you have a strong back?



The TSC is located south of Austin, in Hays County, and houses the TSS, TSA, TCMA, AMCS, and RUMIX; the five acronyms that keep Texas caving.



Vico Jones whips up lumber for repairs needed by crews working on different projects.



TSS president Joe Mitchell, RUMIX president David Ochel, and president of my heart, Enzo Monfre move a shelf to store the extensive book collection housed at the TSC.



David Ochel assesses the repairs made to the AC duct in the attic. Strangely, the electricity bill dropped since then.



Ayana Monreal installed new blinds to cover the windows in the upstairs meeting area and library.



Oscar Berrones and Geoff Hoese demonstrate building Techniques beyond my comprehension.

Cavers warm up in the lodge before Powell's, Saturday morning.



Powell's Cave

Doubling the county's population, a dozen caver vehicles line up to caravan to Powell's Cave for a weekend of survey before the TSA winter meeting.



FEATURED PROJECTS



Holly enjoys a spacious dome while killing crawly leads.



Cait McCann Teran and Holly Klein weave through intersecting passages during some mop up survey in Powell's, while other teams pushed leads throughout the cave system.

Quigg Sink



Cavers wait for the rope to be free at the historic cave's entrance.



Carrey Bull rappels into the entrance to join her team in Quigg, first visited in the 1950s.



Waiting at a ledge, Holly watches Joel rebelay navigate the entrance rebelay.



After Saturday's trip, trip leader Bryce Smith looks for cliff caves, guided by drone.

Muzquiz



Over Thanksgiving, a group of cavers searching for new caves in the mountains of Coahuila, Mexico.



Project leader Ron Rutherford comes to the rescue for a mechanical issue.



Eleonore and Holly practice rigging pits with Peter Sprecher-Anderson & Bryce.



After feasting, cavers share what they're thankful for around a much needed campfire.



Daylight shines into one of the deepest pits in the area, taken at an entrance rebelay.



One cave in the area extends down to water, where blind catfish have been observed, most recently during a visit to the sump in 2024.



On the way home after a week of caving, Naomi Orndorff poses with the Tres Picos mountains.

PARTY SEASON

OCTOBER - DECEMBER

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Attendance: 25 Hosted By: Don Arburn

NO CAPTIONS, NO CONTEXT. NOT EVEN FOR THE PHOTO OF LONDON, CORNERED IN A GARAGE, WEARING A CRAB SUIT. IF YOU WANT TO KNOW, YOU GOTTA GO.



TSA HOLIDAY CONCERT

CELEBRATING ALL YOUR FAVORITE HOLIDAYS

YULE
KWANZAA
SHOGATSU
CHRISTMAS
BODHI DAY
HANUKKAH
SIMBANG GABI
WINTERSCHLUSSVERKAUF
GURU GOBIND SINGH JAYANTI

Attendance: 50+
Hosted By: Joel & Eleonore

THE
NEW
YEAR'S
PARTY



Attendance: 65+ Hosted By: Bill Stone and Gilly Elor



LESSONS LEARNED

Tips From Your Fellow Cavers

Most Texas caves can be comfortably explored wearing the Texas caver uniform of tights or blue jeans and a t-shirt, but that is not the case for water caves. The water temperature in a typical Texas water cave averages 60 to 70°F (16-21 °C) which is warm compared to other caving regions, but is still cold enough to cause hypothermia without appropriate clothes. Wetsuits are the modern standard and while you can get away with cave suits or doubled up base layers, some wardrobe choices can be dangerous, like waders. When the sediment in a stream or pool is disturbed, the rocks, ledges, and potholes beneath the water can no longer be seen, so one wrong step can cause a caver to lose balance and flood their waders. The weight of flooded waders and the panicked struggle to escape them has drowned fishermen and shore workers more than once. With exception to carefully crossing a discreet obstacle, waders are typically inappropriate for water caves. Borrow wetsuits to learn what length and thickness you need to stay warm in the cave that you plan to visit, and leave the waders at home. If you invite an inexperienced caver on a water cave trip, you should adequately prepare them for what to expect and how to prepare. If you're attending a project with multiple teams, look around for new cavers who seem unprepared and intervene if something dangerously stupid is about to occur.

Wetsuit buying Tips

- The best wetsuits are free; ask around for spares. High quality suits can be found for cheap on eBay, Facebook, or Geartrade.
- Dive shops like Tom's Dive & Swim have clearance sales periodically where you can score name brands like O'Neill.
- Affordable wetsuits are available on Amazon though sizing can be unintuitive.
- Try on your suit with enough time to exchange for the right size before your trip.
- Suits are more restrictive when dry, so expect stiffness. A loose suit may not effectively insulate you.
- Most cavers opt for a 3/2mm, full length wet suit. If you run cold, a neoprene jacket over a 3/2 or a 5mm may suit you better.
- Protect your wetsuit with over shorts and pads. I wear light pants and a shirt, but you run the risk of not looking as cool.



A new caver wearing flooded waders during a beginner trip to a Comal County water cave.

Have a tip you want to share?

editor@utgrotto.org

