

AMAZING MAZE CAVE By Rae Nadler-Olenick



Over the February 22-24 2008 weekend, twenty-three cavers from Texas and New Mexico converged on Amazing Maze Cave near Bakersfield for the third in a series of re-survey trips that started after the cave was re-opened in 2006 following a dozen years of closure.

Peter Sprouse, Linda Palit, Jon Cradit, Weston Cradit, Mason Cradit, Laura Rosales, Joe Mitchell, Evelyn Mitchell, Geary Schindel, Mark Gee, Don Arburn, Michael Portman, Rae Nadler-Olenick, Walt Olenick, Joe Datri, Grace Borengasser, George Veni, Wes Schumacher, Ryan Reid, Sandi Calhoun, Rob Bissett, Rick Corbell, and Mike Harris all took part in the latest round of surveying.

A prior survey of Amazing Maze ended in 1993: shortly afterward, the gate was welded shut following an act of vandalism. In 2006, TCMA renegotiated terms of management with the University of Texas Lands System and sent a team to repair the gate. TLS then made the cave once more accessible to TCMA members, who held two survey trips in January and February of 2007. The purpose of the new survey is to replace the earlier map with a more elaborate one including profiles and cross sections, as well as to push new passage.

The group gathered Friday night in the usual spot at a one-time stock pond on UT land just across the Interstate from Ste. Genevieve Vineyards. Amazing Maze, with its myriad of tight-packed passages, is Texas' third-longest cave, (7,500+ meters shown on the old map). It's thick with powdery dirt and contains enough twists, turns, squeezes and crawlways to provide a challenge to surveyors.



Five teams led by Peter Sprouse, George Veni, Laura Rosales, Wes Schumacher and Mark Gee entered the cave between 9:00 and 10:30 and were out by 6:30. By day's end, they had mapped 545 additional meters of passage, bringing the new survey to a total of 2,345 meters; they also uncovered a number of promising leads.

A Survey: Laura's team—Rob, Weston, Jon and Michael Portman—began on the main level at Klimchouk Alley. Their original plan to go straight to the lower level was modified when they found the squeeze too tight for the entire crew to get through. Instead, they devoted themselves to filling in the blanks in the pre-existing map, mainly in the Octopus area. Later, Rob and Weston checked out the lower level, which they reported as different from above, with larger passageways. Much of it had been previously surveyed by Philip Rykwald, and somebody will have the job to continue that work on the next trip. The team mapped a total of 43 meters.

B Survey: Peter's team—Geary, Mason, Walt and Rae—taking off from station C68, surveyed from B17-B48. They mapped some 160 meters of walking, crawling and squeezing passage with lots of tie-ins to prior surveys, closing numerous loops and generating several going leads. While the cave is largely undecorated, it possesses interesting geological features in abundance: ceiling domes, rim vents, deposits of gypsum and endolite clay—all indicative of a corrosive gas origin. Numerous domes and vents were present in this area, much to the delight of geologist Geary.



C Survey: Wes's team—Sandy, Ryan, Grace and Joe Datri—started from the Broken Spoke in the C area, turned right and then proceeded all the way to the edge of the cave, closing a number of loops near the edge in the process. One spot appeared to drop abruptly to the lower level and turned out to be just above where the last lower survey ended: it could be a connection—a very tight one. One unpleasant discovery of the day was...fleas! Joe, assisted by Grace, was doing filmography for a film about Texas caving he's making for ICS 2009; as much of the passage involved stoop-walking in narrow, one to one-and-a-half meter spaces, the logistics of moving equipment around and setting up shots proved tricky at times. The team racked up 83 meters for the day.

E Survey: Mark's team—Evelynn, Mike Harris and Rick—started at Dirt Bike Junction on the upper level, turned Northeast, and, following the passage, quickly found themselves in the lower level where they spent the rest of the day. They took about 35 shots for a total of 116 meters.

F Survey: George's team—Linda, Don and Joe Mitchell—tackled the F part of the maze (just to the "left" of the entrance), where they focused on filling gaps in an area surrounded by surveyed passage. They netted about 143 meters of survey, and met their goal to complete that part of the maze. There are no promising leads left in that area. After they finished, George stayed behind the others briefly to re-sketch an area where surveys had joined but neither survey team had sketched the junction fully. Upon discovering a scale error on a previous sketch which, once corrected, would affect the view of the entire area in a major way, he decided to wait until the next trip when a new plot can be created for that section with a grid to assist in the sketching.



The group left in their wake a collection of colorful new place names, each more creative than the last. Such as:

A Survey: Laura's team were impressed by the fact that she talked to herself while sketching, and named "Pasaje la Loca" in her honor.

B Survey named "The Whinery" for the reaction of team members (one in particular!) confronted with a particularly tight, nasty squeeze.

C Survey bestowed the moniker "Fleaway" on a flea-endowed area, but refrained from exploiting the rich anatomical naming potential occasioned by their presence in the C-section.

E Survey named the "Perfect 10" passage for a shot which, starting at the Petticoat formation, read exactly 10 degrees azimuth and 10 degrees elevation.

F Survey: Stomach growling noises in one area inspired the name **Borborigmy Junction** (it must have been lunchtime).

The next survey trip to Amazing Maze is planned for January 2009.

