

Sierra de Arteaga

Text and photos by Peter Sprouse

Summer in Austin...time to head south where it's cooler: the annual EspeleoCoahuila gathering. The 2006 event was in Saltillo, so we wouldn't be needing jackets like the highland event of the year before, but still it would be a pleasant respite from the heat. We left town Thursday night, August 17, in order to get in some caving on Friday before the event. Our three vehicles met up at our usual late-night camp spot near Casa Blanca, where we caught a few hours sleep before dawn. The roar of semi trucks climbing toward the Coahuila state line roused everyone: Andy Gluesenkamp, Dan Gluesenkamp, David Ochel, Bev Shade, Aimee Beveridge, Geoff Hoese, Nathan Parker, and me. Some truckstop huevos and coffee in Ramos Arizpe put us into gear, albeit slightly off track. Looking for a back road to Arteaga, we found ourselves in Saltillo, but this turned out well as we stumbled upon the INEGI office and did a little map shopping. Soon we were off to the mountains in Carbonera Canyon and found a parking spot at the base of the hill below the Grutas de Arteaga.

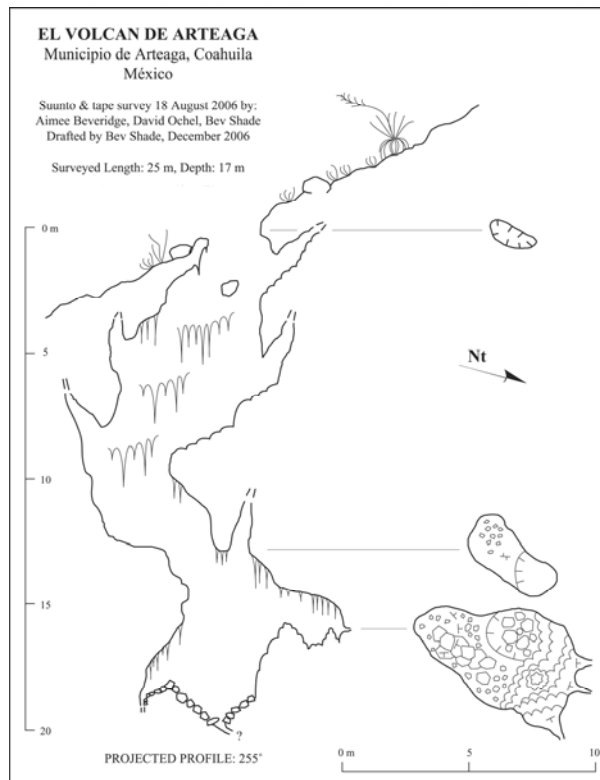


Preparing for the hike up to Grutas de Arteaga, 2/3 of the way up the mountain in background

I had mapped the Grutas de Arteaga back in 1990, and remembered a pit along the trail that we had not explored called el Volcán. This would make a nice project for the day. Looking up from the valley it appeared that we had maybe 300 meters to climb, though it turned out to be twice that. The hike up was quite lovely, along a nice trail through beautiful flowers and cactus. The view grew more spectacular as we climbed toward the pine trees. Soon we came upon the Volcán, just as I remembered it. It was right next to the trail in an area of bare bedrock. The pit dropped at a steep angle toward the east. There were no natural anchors nearby, only sotols, but we had anticipated this and brought the hammer drill. I went in first to rig while Bev, Aimee, and



Aimee takes a GPS reading at Volcán de Arteaga



David followed with the survey. The pit quickly opened up as I rappelled the steep ramp, and a few large bats flitted about. Soon I was on a ledge where the cave continued down a second drop. I rebelayed to a stal and dropped into the next room, which turned out to be the end. The floor was composed of rubble, with a flowstone bank at the north end. Some interesting fauna were present, including cave crickets and ground beetles. Plentiful graffiti on the walls told us we weren't the first ones there.



Bev on the second drop in Volcán de Arteaga

Next we continued up the mountain to the Grutas de Arteaga, which has a large entrance with many stal. A beehive on the far wall gave us pause, but we tiptoed by and into the cave. It slopes down steeply to a depth of 70 meters. On the way out the bees gave us chase, but no one got stung. Then we were off to Saltillo to join up with other EspeleoCoahuila attendees. Saturday's conference was filled with numerous interesting presentations as always. There was brief fracas when certain Texas cavers were reprimanded for drinking beer on government property.



View down the sloping passage in Grutas de Arteaga

Sunday morning some of us opted for another caving trip rather than attend the rescue training session. Driving toward home, we diverted to Ciénega de Flores to visit El Picorete, perhaps the most spectacular pit entrance in Nuevo León. We only had short ropes along so we had to tie two of them together. A large arroyo enters the pit, and there is a promising blowing dig lead at one end of the cave. But this would not be the day to push it, since the rancher had told us we had to be off the ranch in two hours since he would be leaving and locking the gate. In the end only half our group did the drop, then it was time to head north.

Note: This article was adapted from one published in the March 2007 *Texas Caver*. Join the [Texas Speleological Association](#) and support the *Texas Caver*.



Bev begins the rappel in El Picorete while the crew waits in the arroyo above