

POZO CHUZO

The Black Hole of Coahuila

by Jubal Grubb

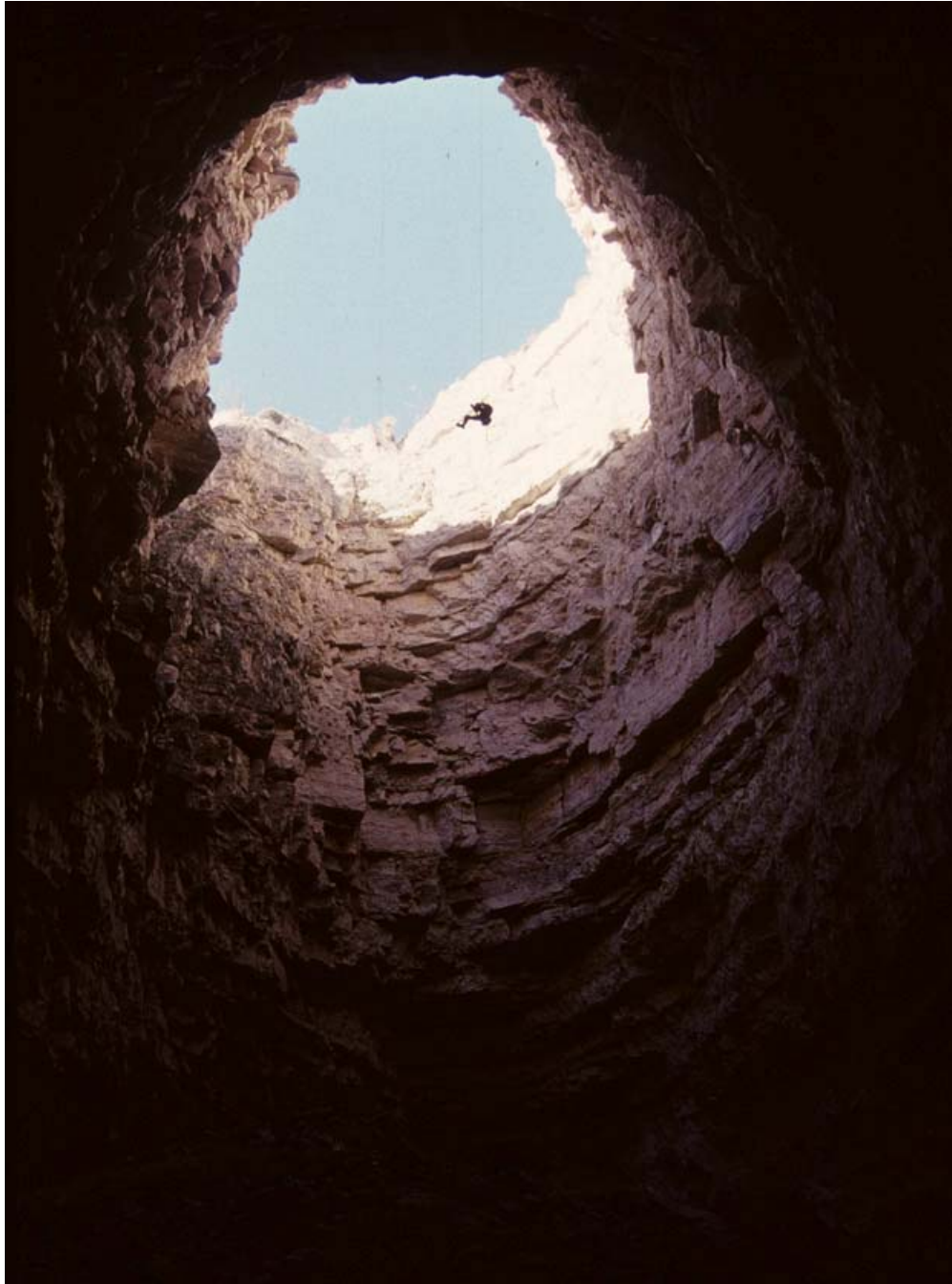
The Pozo Chuzo trip started two years ago on a fateful day 1000 feet over the Coahuila desert in the summer of 1999. Earlier that year, while diligently studying maps, Peter Sprouse had identified a couple of sinkhole features west of Cuatro Ciénegas on a topo map while planning a reconnaissance flying trip to this area. The sinks looked fairly big and promising, and since we were going to have an airplane it would be a cinch to take a look. During the first part of the trip we based operations out of Cd. Victoria in Tamaulipas to see the Purificación area. In the latter part of the week we all headed north to Coahuila to do the reconnaissance west of Cuatro Ciénegas. The crew on the '99 trip included our pilot Leonard Pruitt from Dallas, Bryan McMillin also from Dallas, Peter Sprouse, Beverly Shade, Cathy Winfrey, Laura Rosales (Mexico City), Aldo Guevara, Xóchitl de la Rosa, and Paco García de León (all from Cd. Victoria). We took a trip west of Cuatro Ciénegas to investigate sinkhole features and, lo and behold, we found a gaping hole on the top of a hill in the Sierra de Australia. It was quite impressive from the air; a big black hole in the desert that we could not see the bottom of. So, with such an enticing lead to go on it was only natural that we would return to see what mysterious wonders awaited.



The black hole as seen from Leonard's plane. Peter Sprouse photo

After nearly two agonizing years of waiting and planning, Sprouse set up the trip. We assembled a ragtag group consisting of Peter Sprouse, Grace Borengasser, Victorio Calvo, Andy Gluesenkamp, Fofó González, Laura Rosales, Leonard the pilot, Vivian Loftin, James Lopez, Brian McMillan, Terri Whitfield, and a bunch of other Monterrey cavers. The trip into the area was beautiful in itself. We stopped for a look-see and swim at a small spring on the side of the road where we observed mating habits of fellow

cavers and endemic fish species, marveled at the unique desert scenery, and took in a quick lunch.



Descent into the unknown. Peter Sprouse photo

Equipped with GPS coordinates from two years ago, Peter led us directly into the arroyo that was closest to the cave. We made camp just before dark and proceeded to cook and hydrate ourselves. It was a long entertaining night of listening to Gluesenkamp and Vivian talk dirty to each other, so we all lubricated our brains, took in some good spirits, and celebrated long into the morning hours. Awaiting us in the morning were multiple hangovers and a 2 kilometer hike up an arroyo. Along the way someone spotted a

shelter cave that had some neat archeological remnants: little twisted bits of rope, worked flint chips, a metate, and some faint pictographs. After a short hike we arrived at the pit.

Grace, Vivian, and James measured the entrance while everybody else set up little shady spots under various spiny cacti and slept and/or ate food. The entrance is polygon-shaped, something like 45 meters long by 27 meters wide. Peter scouted for a suitable place to rig and cleaned the drop of debris. He rigged the main anchor, a deviation, and one rebelay for a smooth freefall into a ever-widening shaft, a total of 65 meters. Once the first group of folks got in the cave the survey began. James Lopez, Vivian, and I started on one side of the cave, and Laura, Terri and others started from the other. Peter and Fofu noticed some cool air blowing out of a small space in the breakdown near one far wall of the pit and decided to check it out. The air had condensed enough to let some green algae grow on the surrounding rocks, so the smaller folk went slithering in to see where it went. After much squirming and squoozing Terri and Laura followed the air to a rubble pile. They hammered but to no avail. Grace and I went in to cheer them on, give a little backup and moral support, but the lead wasn't going anywhere. Some people unfortunately did not go into the pit, apparently it was taking a long time for people to get set up, a couple of others decided there should be someone at the top to keep watch of the rope. So they made a campfire and had a good time up above.



James, Vivian, and Fofu surveying the bottom of the pit. Peter Sprouse photo

I have to say that overall, the most necessary thing for this trip was vertical proficiency. There were a few folks that came all this way to see the cave, and either learned about rebelay while on rope, or valiantly opted out of the experience in the interest of time and for the benefit of the group. We exited the cave sometime in the middle of the night and

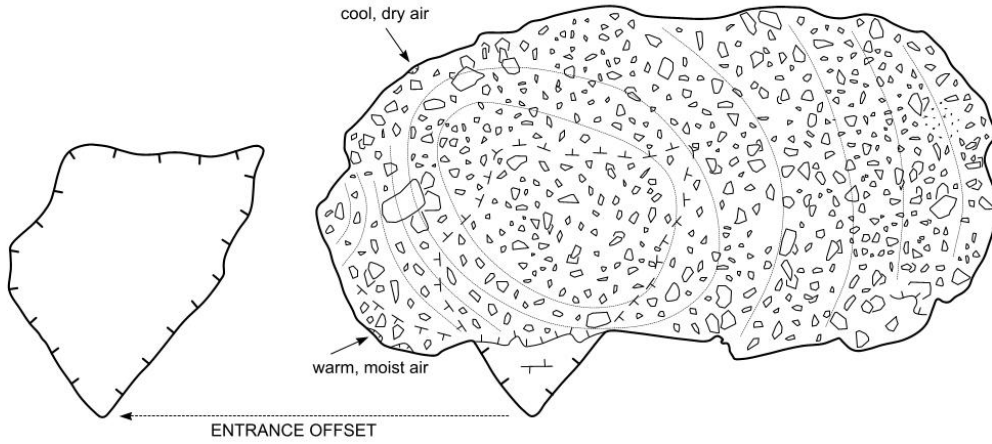
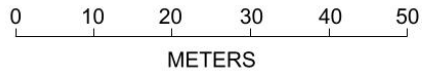
began stumbling our way back to camp with musical accompaniment by the Monterrey folks. Great trip! Special thanks to Leonard Pruitt, the pilot, for being the aero-stud man that he is and flying us over the area two years ago, Peter Sprouse for the discovery of the lead and getting us to the cave, and to the illustrious Laura Rosales for traveling all the way from Mexico City to go caving with us. It was good to have the Monterrey cavers along too because they are such a friendly bunch. They don't seem to mind sharing their caves with us, and they have a fierce determination to sing all the way back to camp.



Pilot and navigator. Jubal Grubb photo



This engine was running yesterday! Peter Sprouse photo



POZO CHUZO
EL MESQUITE, COAHUILA

SUUNTOS AND TAPE SURVEY
20 JANUARY 2001
GRACE BORENGASSER, FOFO GONZALEZ,
JUBAL GRUBB, VIVIAN LOFTIN,
JAIME LOPEZ, LAURA ROSALES, PETER SPROUSE
DRAWN BY PETER SPROUSE
LENGTH: 170 M DEPTH 87 M

