

Sierra del Burro Recon

22-26 November 2006

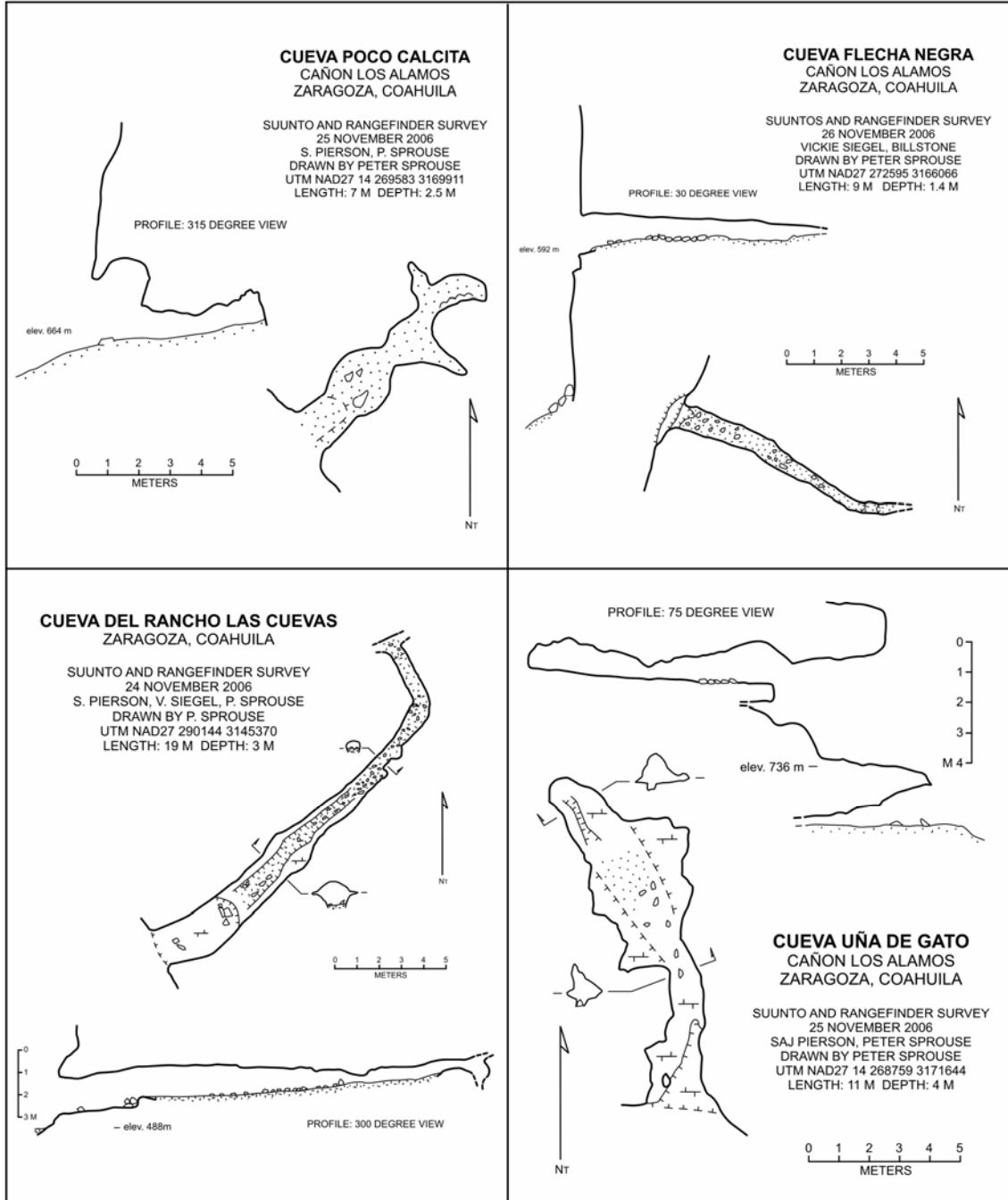
text and photos by Peter Sprouse



Six of us set off from Austin/Buda/San Marcos on a Wednesday night, loaded into two Toyotas. Along for this adventure were Saj Pierson, Patrick Rhoades, Vickie Siegel, Bill Stone, Matt Zapitello, and me. We crossed the border at Piedras Negras without stopping: we weren't the droids they were looking for. Our first destination was the Rancho Veinticuatro, just north of Zaragoza. The ranch owner let us use his hunting lodge, so we slept on comfortable beds after a late game of billiards. The next morning his ranch hand drove down from farther in the ranch to guide us around the 24,000 hectares. This was mostly scrub country, with some wooded areas along drainages. Unfortunately this ranch was entirely in the plains and didn't extend into the hills, there was little karst even though there was plenty of limestone. He showed us two entrances that didn't extend in far enough to be called caves or contain troglobites. There was an artesian well that was spewing out quite a bit of water, but we couldn't find any interesting fauna in it. So we drove back to Zaragoza to look for more ranch owners. After some difficulty we got access to the Rancho las Cuevas some 20 km west of town.

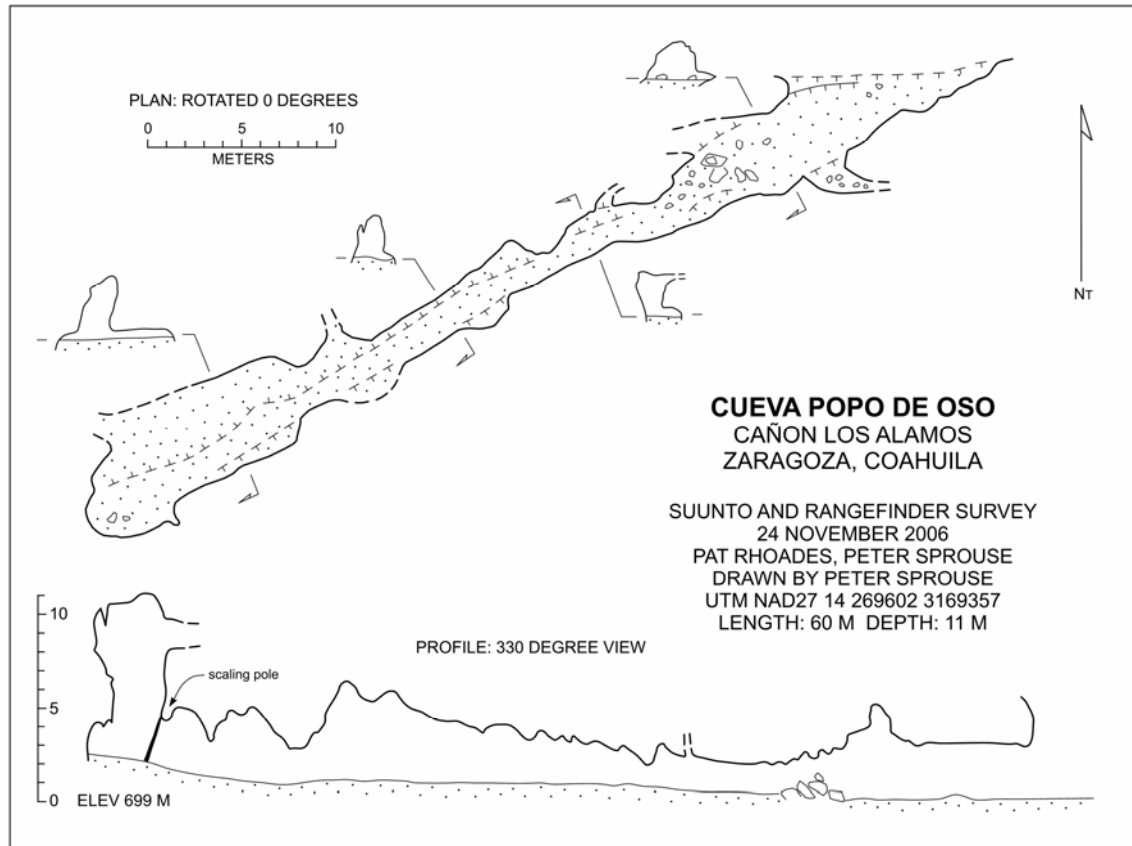
A fellow named Nino guided us to the one cave on the ranch, located behind the ranch house, then went back to town with the owner's brother. The cave was in a small bluff and was about 20 m long, a typical old seep-spring. We collected a lot of spiders in it that evening, then enjoyed a campfire on top of the bluff. The next day we went down to map the cave, which we called Cueva del Rancho las Cuevas for lack of any other name. Matt spotted a scorpion at the back but unfortunately it got away. We did get some tiny pseudoscorpions. After wrapping up there we went back to town to resupply and headed northwest to try to get to Rancho las Presitas, though we had no arrangements to get in. Fortunately the many gates were all unlocked, as there always

seemed to be more ranches up the road. The ranch hands at Las Presitas didn't know of any caves, so we headed into the hills to see for ourselves. We stopped at the first arroyo crossing to hike around a bit. I went upstream and found some pictographs in a small shelter with two entrances. As we drove farther into the ranch we checked other entrances out, but none went anywhere. A steel tank on top of a hill provided us with a needed swimming spot.



Beyond that the road continued west down into the Cañon los Alamos, where tall limestone cliffs looked quite interesting. We stopped to camp under a cliff with some entrances perched above us. Patrick and I climbed up to check these out as it got dark. We climbed up to the first one, about 40 m above the canyon floor, three quarters of the way up the cliff. This entrance looked

rather good, it was about 10m wide and headed into the cliff at an oblique angle to the right. What appeared to be old bear dung was scattered about the entrance. Cueva Popo de Oso went straight back along a fracture with a convoluted bedrock ceiling, usually walking height with low bedding plane areas off to the sides. After about 50 m it ended at a dome climb where someone had left a scaling pole, too short to get up the required 6 m. We collected some large spiders and some eyed pseudoscorpions. Then we climbed up to the next entrance just below the top of the cliff. This was just a shelter, so we climbed back down to camp.

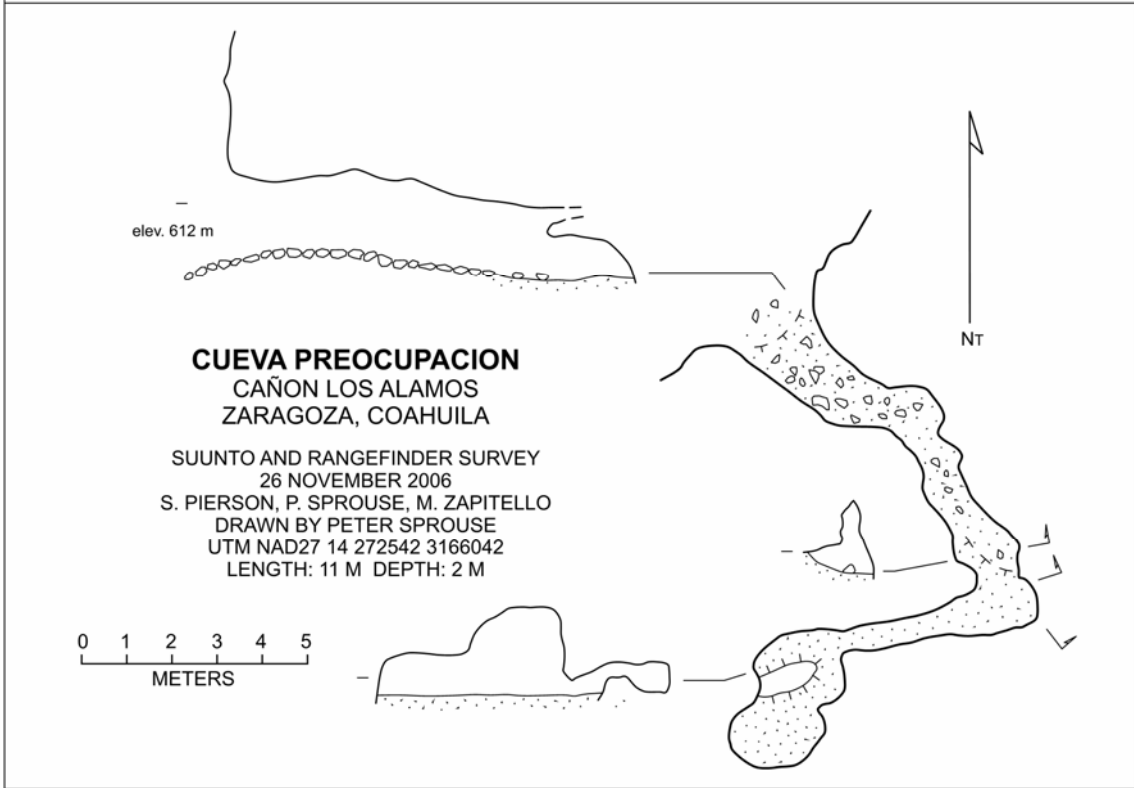
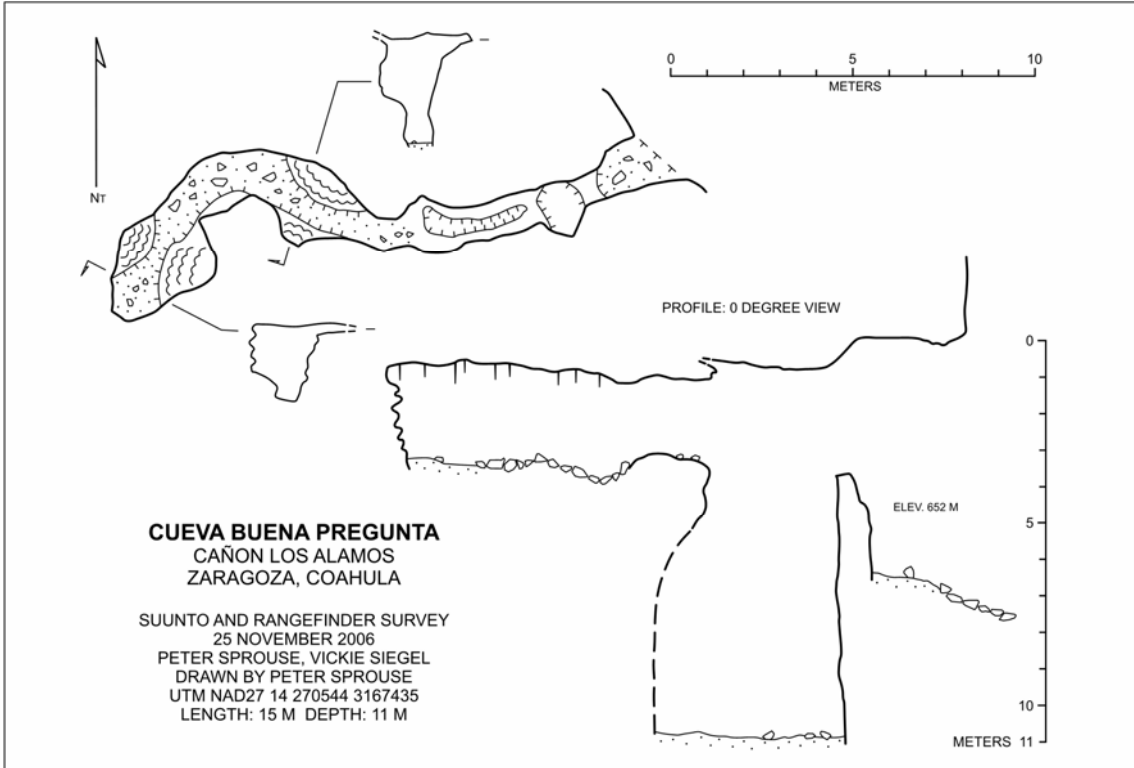


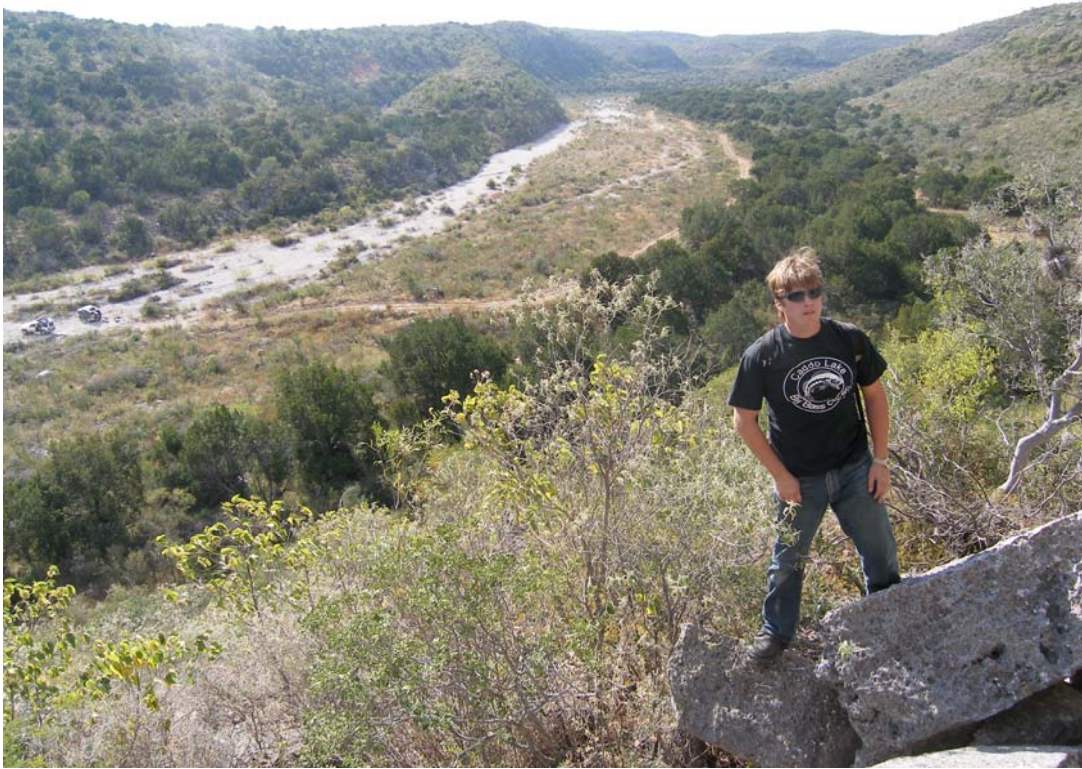
Saturday morning we checked some more entrances in a cliff face upstream. Cueva de Poca Calcita went in about 7 m and had a little flowstone in it. Bill went around to the top of the cliff and rigged a rope to get into another entrance, but it didn't go either. So we continued up the Cañon los Alamos to Rancho el Trebol and started to take a road that looked like it would lead over into the Cañon San Dabe, where El Abra (longest cave in Coahuila) is located, but we soon turned around and continued up the main canyon. Finally we were stopped by a locked gate at the Pedernales Ranch, said to be owned by Americans. Retreating down the canyon, we returned to the point where we had first joined the Cañon los Alamos. We followed a road that went downstream in this canyon. The very next cliff on the right had an interesting looking entrance in it so we parked the Toyotas and Bill began to cut a steep trail through thick brush up to the base of the cliff. After awhile he called down that the cave went, so the rest of us came up with survey gear. Pat, Saj and I arrived at the entrance to find Matt just inside, dropping an 8 m blind pit. The main level continued over this as a floorless canyon for a few meters, which someone had bridged with some sticks. The cave (Cueva Buena Pregunta) went another 10 m to end in flowstone. By the time we were done there it was dark, so we drove down to the next cobble beach and set up camp. We had another fine desert campfire that night under the Coahuila stars.



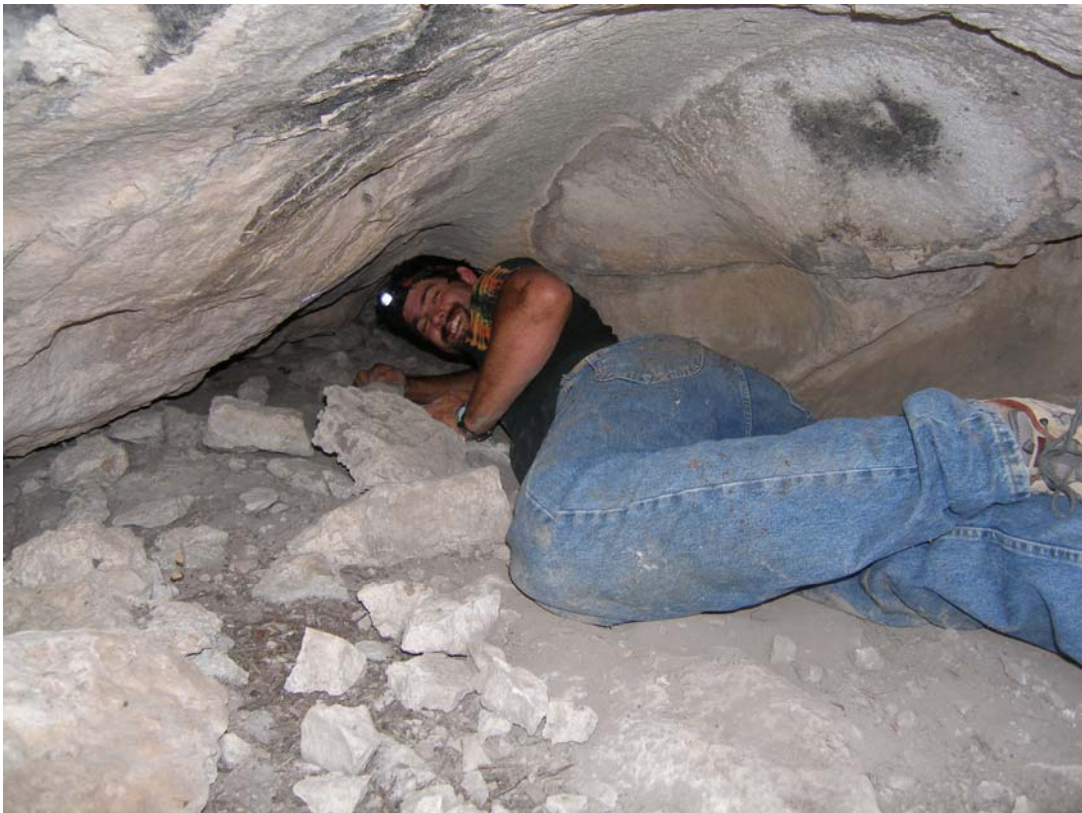
Saj at the entrance to Cueva Poca Calcita

On Sunday we had to start heading home, but we did have time to check a few entrances on our way down the Cañon los Alamos, which our topo map indicated would take us back to the Rancho las Presitas. It wasn't long before we spotted an array of cliffside entrances on the right side of the canyon. Matt, Saj and I walked up to one of them, which went about 15 m. Matt, who is a big guy, pushed through a tight spot that he was rather worried about getting back out of. This inspired the named Cueva Preocupación. Although short, I did find a blind pseudoscorpion in this cave. Meanwhile Bill and Vickie tackled another cave, Flecha Negra, which required a bit of a climb to get into. Typical, it only went in 9 m. Driving on down the canyon, we were startled to see a large slot-like entrance on the left wall of the canyon heavily adorned with poison ivy, as if well-watered. It was about 15 m tall by 10 m wide, with a spring drizzling water from high on the back wall over a tufa spout. On the right side of the shelter was a small statue of the virgin, her head exploded. To get up to the source of the water would require an overhung aid climb through poison ivy. Oh well, time to leave anyhow. Our trip on the ranch roads back to Zaragoza and our favorite "Cocina Economica" was quick, which was not the case crossing the border back into Texas amid holiday traffic.





Pat hiking up to Cueva Uña de Gato



Matt forcing himself into Cueva Uña de Gato



Saj starts the survey of Cueva Preocupación