

International Exploration Session

Session Chair: Cyndie Walck

Wednesday, June 15, 2022 9:00am – 4:30pm

Location: Soule Center

The International Exploration Session features presentations on explorations, mapping, expedition reports and updates and the study of caves outside of the U.S. Many of the presenters have been recipients of the NSS International Grants Program. Featured locations include Vietnam, Mexico, Canada, Belize, Montenegro and Lebanon.

Session Schedule:

Time	Speaker	Presentation
9:00-9:30am	Dean Wiseman	Phon Na Kebong, Vietnam
9:30-10:am	Bill Steele	PESH 2022 Expedition Proyecto Espeleologico Sistema Huautla
10:00-10:20am	Jim "Crash" Kennedy	Laguna de Sánchez, Nuevo León, Mexico --- The caves keep popping up!
1020-1030	BREAK	
10:30-11:00am	Bev Shade and Reilly Blackwell	USDCT 2021 and 2022 Cheve Expeditions
11:00-11:30am	Bryce Smith	The Desert Pits of Muzquiz, Coahuila, Mexico
1130-Noon	Ron Delano	Proyecto Cerro Verde, Mexico
12:00-12:10	Norm Thompson	3D Slide show – Proyecto Cerro Verde, Mexico
11:50-2:15pm	Lunch Break	
2:15-2:35pm	Philip Schuchardt	Exploration of Kučka Korita, Montenegro
2:35-3:05pm	Katie Graham	White Rabbit- A Canadian cave found during a Caribou survey
3:05-3:25pm	Zeb Lilly	Huautla Resurgence
3:25-3:35pm	BREAK	
3:35-4:05pm	Carol Vesely	Panti Pit, Belize: Drops, Boreholes, Mud and Bad Air
4:05-4:30pm	Issam Bou Jaoude	An Introduction to the Caves of Lebanon

Abstracts for International Exploration Session

(in alphabetical order of presenter)

Proyecto Cerro Verde, Mexico

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The Proyecto Cerro Verde was established in 2012 by Herb Laeger, Edd Keudell and Ron DeLano with the mission of studying the caves, karst and hydrology of the Cerro Verde massif in the Mexican State of Oaxaca. Located in the storied Rio Domingo Valley, Cerro Verde has received scant attention by cavers in comparison to its famous neighbors: Huautla, Cheve and Cerro

Rabon. Over the last ten years, this small project has had success in locating more than seventy-five caves not previously known to the caving community. While all limestone caves, these caves are interesting and varied. The project has encountered caves with very large passage over 40 meters wide, pits up to 165 meters deep and caves that are quite hydrologically active. Many caves are well decorated, have important archeological resources and have interesting cave adapted creatures including fish, insects and crayfish. This presentation will emphasize discoveries made from 2019 to 2021. These include the newly discovered Cueva de Octavio Salinas which boasts spectacular formation areas and archeological resources. A 200-meter swim in Paco's Ranch Cave led to continuing passage and large, decorated chambers. Exploration in Roadside Cave continued with an uphill extension to a diveable sump and a lower extension that includes a lovely rimstone dam area called Fabio's Grotto. A new cave called "Resumidero Seco" was found to have large canyon passage and lovely formations. The project visited a remote cave deep in the jungle, Cuarto Enorme, that had impressive formations and many human bones. A fluorescein dye trace experiment proved a hydrological link between Cueva Cemeterio and Rio Cave more than a kilometer downslope. Future prospects for the project will be discussed. The project is thankful for the NSS exploration grant that supported these activities and for the excellent photographic documentation by Norm Thompson.

White Rabbit- A Canadian cave found during a Caribou survey

Katie Graham k8mgraham@gmail.com

White Rabbit is a magnificent marble cave laced with rubies and garnets and has the potential to be the deepest in Canada, yet it does not require an SRT kit. Current discoveries and plans for this project along with a couple other gems of the north will be presented.

Laguna de Sánchez, Nuevo León, Mexico --- The caves keep popping up!

Jim "Crash" Kennedy, NSS 26791 FE, LIFE cavercrash@gmail.com

What started as a weekend trip to help a fellow bat biologist in 1997 (with only three known caves in the area) has since ballooned into 19 additional cave survey expeditions, the most recent three during the COVID pandemic. We now have documented over 230 caves in the area, and find more each trip. None of these will make Bob Gulden's Long and Deep cave lists, but the sheer number, variety, and ease of access makes this a great first Mexico trip for many cavers (124 total so far!). Plus, the place is simply gorgeous. During this talk we'll update listeners on the most recent trips and discoveries.

USDCT 2021 and 2022 Cheve Expeditions

Sean Lewis (sealewis@gmail.com), Bev Shade, Bill Stone

US Deep Caving Team (USDCT)

In 2021, the 4-month US Deep Caving Team expedition to Sistema Cheve in 2021 was a great success, truly a triumph of execution and testament to the dedication of 69 cavers from 9 countries involved. The expedition mapped more than 20 km, most of which was at the new bottom of the cave, with the limit of exploration an extraordinary 4 days of loaded travel from

the nearest entrance. The northernmost extent of the cave was pushed past the previous boundary of Sump 2, the first significant northward extension since the discovery of Sump 1 in 1991. This was a monumental effort, a total of 3,156 person days on site were required 1,531 person days spent in 8 underground campsites and ~1000 person days spent hauling. National Geographic filmed a 1-hour documentary called "The Deepest Cave", which airs in early June this year on Disney+. In 2022, a smaller expedition returned to Cheve and San Miguel Santa Flor with two objectives: to push leads in the upper reaches of Cheve via the Peña Negra entrance and search the middle karst for a new route to Cheve's northern frontier. With about 500 person days in the field, Cheve 2022 still managed to map 5.5 km in the upper sections of Cheve. We did extensive ridge walking in the middle karst over the current end of Cheve, and pushed Cueva Agua Pajarito 120 m deeper to a total depth of 370 m. We mapped nearly 700 m in new caves near San Miguel Santa Flor and other caves of the area. A shorter route into downstream Cheve remains elusive, but there are several possible options. Sistema Cheve is now 80.9 km long and 1,530 m deep.

Exploration of Kučka Korita, Montenegro

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In 2017, a small multi-national group of cavers began the exploration of a karst area in east-central Montenegro, located on the border with Albania. This area consists of a relatively flat carbonate plateau which, on the southeast drops into a steep, approximately 1,200 meters deep Cijevna Canyon. The plateau is comprised of a thick sequence of limestones dipping northwestward at 15 to 30 degrees. Following a brief 2017 reconnaissance, annual summer expeditions of 3-week duration have been fielded to the area. In total, more than 100 new caves have been documented. Two caves (C95 and Vrijema za Pivo) are currently continuing with great promise. C95 was discovered in 2018 and is currently 1.07km in length and 267 meters deep, with a large windy canyon passage continuing at the limits of exploration. Vrijema za Pivo was discovered near the end of the 2019 expedition and was quickly pushed down to 134 m deep and 251 m in length. Exploration was suspended in 2019 at the top of a large 50 m shaft and a continuing tall canyon, with strong airflow in both leads. A return to the area is planned for July 2022

The Desert Pits of Muzquiz, Coahuila, Mexico

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In the arid Sierra del Burro mountain range of Northern Coahuila, lies an indisputable paradise for vertical cavers. Amongst all the unfriendly vegetation, there are hundreds of blind pits, some explored, some virgin. For decades, cavers based out of Texas (accompanied by friends from other states and Mexican nationals) have been combing the desert mesas for deep pits. Most are gunbarrel-like shafts that drop less than 100 meters, while others plunge 300+ meters down into the limestone. Caves like these have kept cavers busy surveying, rigging, and exploring for years...

Until a cave was found that changed the game...

In 2018, Kraig Fenton, an Austin caver found what is now known as Cueva Arroyo Duermiente, one hot afternoon. What makes this cave special amongst so many huge pits is the sump. No other cave in the area has reached a water table, but Duermiente had further secrets to reveal. Within the sumped passage, the Mexican Blind Catfish was found to be thriving. This discovery expanded the range of this mysterious species and made us all wonder what else this marvel in the desert has to offer.

PESH 2022 Expedition Proyecto Espeleologico Sistema Huautla

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In 2013 Tommy Shifflett and Bill Steele organized PESH with a goal to conduct annual expeditions for a decade (2014-2023 now due to the Covid pandemic and skipping 2020 and 2021 extended to 2025) to continue exploring and studying Sistema Huautla, Huautla de Jimenez, Oaxaca, Mexico and other non-integrated caves in the Huautla drainage basin. The 2021 expedition was the seventh of these. PESH's goals include conducting all speleological studies: cartography, geology, hydrology, biology, paleontology, archaeology, anthropology (studying the local Mazatec Indians' beliefs in cave spirits) and also gear development and testing. PESH has an ongoing public relations program to educate local people about the caves beneath their homeland. Mexican cave scientists are invited to participate and are supported. Huautla cavers have a 50 year-plus record of published findings. PESH is an official project of both the NSS and the U.S. Deep Caving Team. Expeditions carry the flag of The Explorers Club. The presentation will include the results of the 2022 expedition and discuss international speleological project management. Prior to this year's expedition Sistema Huautla stood as the deepest cave in the Americas, tied as 9th deepest cave in the world, 89 km long (55 miles) and 1560m deep (5,118 feet). Sistema Huautla is often referred to by speleologists who have visited it as one of the world's most magnificent caves.

Panti Pit, Belize: Drops, Boreholes, Mud and Bad Air

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On the last day of the 2009 XMET expedition to Belize, team members gave a ride to a local farmer who told them about a small hole in his front yard that formed a water geyser during Hurricane Mitch. Digging open the hole revealed a short crawl leading to a pit, blowing air. Over the next couple of years Panti Pit was explored down a series of eight wet, muddy drops. After reaching a vertical depth of approximately 360 feet, the cave opened into horizontal borehole going both ways. In 2012, the XMET leaders made it clear that they were not interested in continuing explorations in Panti Pit. Five years later, Doug Billings and Brian Pease founded the Boundary Fault Cave Project to continue the exploration and survey of this promising discovery. Since then, team members have surveyed over six kilometers of mostly linear borehole cave during five expeditions. Extremely nasty mud, bad air, a low air space crawl and other nuisance

obstacles complicate exploration. The water in Panti Pit has been dye traced to multi-kilometer-long Barton Creek Cave. About 75 meters of breakdown separate the two caves at their closest points. Heading in the opposite direction, a huge room with a stream at the bottom was discovered on the last day of the last pre-COVID expedition. This year's trip promises more exciting discoveries in this intriguing and challenging cave.

Update on exploration and survey of caves in or near the Tiger Cave System, Phong Nha-Kẻ Bàng National Park, Vietnam

Dean A. Wiseman (jazzpilot@mohodisco.com), Steven W. Frye, Uy Jang Jong, Le Luu Dung

Exploration of the karst and cave resources in Phong Nha-Kẻ Bàng National Park, Vietnam, has been a decades-long multinational effort and has yielded some extraordinary cave discoveries. Importantly, these discoveries have opened the door to a new source of sustainable economic development in an area that has traditionally relied on primarily on resource extraction and subsistence farming. In the Spring of 2019, we were invited to explore, survey, and generally assist local outfitters in the Tiger System. This included the Kong Doline and Great Saudi Cave segments, which had originally been identified by British cavers of the British Caving Research Association (BCRA). In addition, we took an inventory of incompletely explored, or newly discovered areas of Over and Pygmy Caves, two major caves in the Tiger System, also originally surveyed in the early 1990's by the BRCA. To date we have initiated survey and karst inventory of the southern edge of the Kong Doline, including discovery of a new significant cave, named Python Cave. In addition, we successfully established a pull-down route through a cave, where one entrance comprises a ~600-foot-high vertical solution feature, nicknamed the "Eye of Kong." We have also identified several areas which will add significant additional length to Over cave and significant discovery opportunities in Pygmy Cave, and our long-term goal is to update and extend the mapped areas of these caves. Following a COVID-19 induced hiatus, we are again returning the region in 2022, and this presentation will include additional exploration updates to the Tiger Cave System and another nearby Tra Ang doline. We will attempt to convey the extraordinary potential for new and significant cave discoveries that await this magnificent karst resource.