

TRIP REPORT FORM

AGGIE SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

DATE: 01/21/2023

CAVE: Honey Creek Cave

SPECIFIC AREA: Leads off drilled entrance chamber.

TEAM LEADER: Jenna Crabtree, Jakob Denton

TEAM MEMBERS: Caleb Crubaugh, Josie Shaw, Evan Bowen, Josh Zawislak

TIME ENTERED: 11 AM

EXIT TIME: 5:30 PM

PURPOSE OF THE TRIP

Surveying and pushing leads off the drilled entrance chamber to Honey Creek Cave.

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE YOUR TRIP AND ANY SPECIAL OBSERVATION

We departed College Station around 5:30 PM on January 20th after a bit of last-minute gear hunting and headed towards the ranch that would house as our base of operations for the weekend. Jakob and Jenna joined me for the expedition, and after our traditional pre-cave trauma dump, we all felt refreshed and extremely excited for the learning opportunities and unknown passage that lay ahead. We made a brief stop to refuel at a Whataburger in Bandera and headed into the final 30 minutes of the trip out to the property, where we were welcomed with the tell-tale sign of flagging tape on the gate. We arrived a little after 9 PM and began to unload. While the boys set up camp, Jenna and I set off to greet our fellow cavers, finding many huddled around a flickering lamp emulating a campfire and conversing. We joined the group and for the next couple hours discussed the day that lay ahead. A map of the cave had been set up not far from the group, and I wandered over with Caleb to check it out. Many were huddled around the table, pointing out different leads and making game plans. I recognized an old ASS member, Megan Necessary, and inquired to what leads her team would be pushing. She pointed them out on the map, and after chatting invited me to join her group as us young ASS had been unassigned. I gladly accepted and introduced myself to my fellow team members consisting of GHG's Bethany Carter, Ryan Monjaras, and Steven Fondriest. We soon all turned in for the night, and Jenna and I were grateful for the warm shelter my 4Runner provided as the temps dropped into the twenties.

We stirred around 7:30 the next morning and began to prepare for the day. As Caleb and Evan made breakfast, I meandered to the GHG's group to check in for the morning. Bethany and

Megan were up and moving but had yet to start gearing up, so I let them know I would be back once I had suited up. I went back to our base, ate breakfast, and started gathering my things. We were informed that there was a safety meeting, so we all quickly made our way over to the shaft. We were introduced to our fearless shaft masters, Kurt and Naomi, and the faithful tractor operator, Aaron, and were briefed on the plans of the day. We did not have a call-out time until 7 AM the next morning, so I knew immediately the day ahead was to be full of adventure. We broke ranks and began to gear up.

Once I had shimmied into my wetsuit and packed as many cave snacks as possible into Jenna's Swaygo, I headed back to the shaft to meet with my team. We waited for a short period and watched as cavers were lowered into the hole in groups of three. I asked Megan and Bethany what our day would actually consist of, causing both to giggle and explain to me a little on how surveying worked and that they would show me more once we were inside. Once it was our turn, I joined the girls at the entrance to the shaft and had Megan double check my gear before being clipped on to the bottom loop. We were raised high into the air, and once the bags dangled below us, we began our descent.

This was my first wet cave, and I had little idea what that would look like until my feet hit the floor at the end of the shaft. After moving the bags out of the way and unclipping myself from the rope, I immediately began exploring the little room we were dropped into. I was enamored with the glistening flowstone and endlessly flowing water. Once our team had all made it to the bottom, we began our journey down a shaft to the right of the entrance. We were joined by members of the DFW grotto and Evan as their leads were in the same direction. It took some time to orient ourselves, as the information we were following was from the 1980's. After plenty of investigation and backing out of quite a few holes, we located the survey tape for our first lead. What appeared to be just a slit in the wall to our left led to a steep, muddy slope and then a room above the breakdown above our heads. After discussing the best routes to reach the room, the girls set up shop with the brick while Ryan and Steve made their way up the slope. Megan demonstrated how the brick worked while Ryan went to set up a rope to help us reach the room, and for the next hour or so we sat in the mud marking points, sketching the entrance, and avoiding the rocks tumbling down from the guys moving around overhead. Once we had surveyed from the original marker to the back wall of the entrance, we took a break and ate snacks while discussing how to move forward. We attempted to all make our way into the next room, but I was unable to pass the top of the slope due to the mud and had to turn back. Bethany attempted to move past this point and was unsuccessful as well. Unfortunately, we were unable to continue pushing the lead as the slope became too treacherous to ascend even with the rope. We all decided to keep moving forward and search for the next lead on our list but to inform those on top that it was possible to make it to the room above.

For the next three or so hours we moved our way deeper into the cave, swimming through the passages and crawling along the mud when the water's height became too shallow. We saw many beautiful speleothems, from draping flowstone to multitier rimstone dams. We

even saw evaporated calcite that had formed into little bubbles. Ryan demonstrated how to perform a duck-under and welcomed us to try it. I was nervous at first but took a few deep breaths, followed his instruction, and emerged victoriously on the other side. We continued to search for our other leads, stopping to take photos of the occasional salamander or strange little creature that looked like a translucent roly-poly. As the evening drew closer, the girls decided we would start heading back so we could emerge while there was still daylight. We encountered another team on our way out, with Jenna being their Aggie. We were both excited to share our experience and see the other had another wonderful time underground. We eventually made it back to the shaft entrance, and while waiting for the others to ascend Megan took me down the main passage to listen to the water knocking against the walls. What a sound! It was a deep rumbling that bounced back and forth across the passage with every wave we made, drowning out our voices. We made it to a deeper area and I splashed around for a bit until it was time to head back to head up. Back at the entrance, we all harnessed up and began our ascent, soon greeted with the sharp cold of the early evening sun. I longed for the warmth of the cave as we were slowly lowered one by one back to the ground.

After exiting the cave I went of back to my car to strip and clean up. Jenna and I caught up with Bill Steele shortly after and discussed how much we enjoyed the cave. Once Evan had made it back, the three of us decided to head into town to grab pizza and drinks for our group while we waited for the rest to emerge. When we got back to the ranch, a circle had formed around the shaft waiting for the final few teams to make their way back. We ate dinner, laughed, and shared stories while waiting for the rope to whip around. Evan was a bearer of great gifts for those of our group coming up the shaft, wielding a handle of vodka in one hand and a pizza in the other. After catching up with Jakob and Josh, I was happily exhausted and accidentally passed out after bundling up in my blankets for a moment in the back of my car. Jenna later came to find me and alerted me that the rest of the teams had made it out safe, and we all conked out for the night.

Jenna and I rose early the next morning as we had promised to attend an all-female rigging workshop in Austin that morning. We packed as much gear as we were able into the back of my car and said our goodbyes. After spending a couple hours at the workshop, we headed home and were back in College Station by 2:30.

This trip was full of firsts for me. My first time in a wet cave, first time surveying, first time caving without my ASS and fully amongst other grottos to name a few. It was a wonderful and extremely educational experience, and I cannot wait to continue to apply the knowledge I gained from this weekend. I am very thankful for my team for showing me the ropes of surveying and wet caving that day, and deeply grateful to the wider caving community as a whole for giving ASS opportunities like this. I look forward to assisting in surveying trips more in the future.



(From front to back) Bethany, Megan and I pose for a photo. Photo by Steven Fondriest



Drapery reflected by the still water behind the dam. Photo by Steven Fondriest