Association For

Mexican Cave Studies

NEWSLETTER

The Association for Mexican Cave Studies is a non-profit organization whose goals are the collection and dissemination of information concerning Nexican caves. The AMCS publishes a Newsletter, Bulletin, and Cave Report Series which are available to any sincerely interested conservation-minded person. The AMCS Newsletter is published six issues per volume as frequently as necessary at a cost of $5.00 US per volume. Information concerning the other publications is available upon request. Potential contributors are urged to submit articles for publication. The article may cover any phase of Mexican speleology. Trip reports are requested from all trips. All correspondence and orders for publications should be sent to:

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Cover Photograph–

The tenth anniversary of T. R. Evans' initial descent into Sótano de las Golondrinas is now being celebrated by AMCS cavers throughout the world. We thought it appropriate to reproduce this entrance photo from AMCS Bulletin 2 in honor of the occasion. In the ten years since the 1967 exploration we estimate that more than 300 people (mostly cavers) have entered the pit. It is truly a miracle that no one has been killed, considering the competency and equipment employed by some. The hole's measurements are 62, 48, 333 meters. The floor is an incredible 134 by 304 meters and along the west wall a fissure drops to a total depth of 376 meters. Regardless of what future explorations discover, the Golondrinas chapter will remain one of the grandest in the great Book of Speleology. (Photo by Terry Raines)

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ARCHEOLOGICAL NOTES ON CUEVA DE EL ABRA, SIERRA DE EL ABRA, S. L. P.

by John W. Greer

Cueva de El Abra is located in northern San Luis Potosí high on the northwest side of the northern El Abra pass beside the Cd. Mante–Cd. Valles highway. It is well known to most AMCS cavers.

The cave is an extremely large phreatically enlarged fissure with an oval, dome-shaped entrance with much interior flowstone-stalactite formation along cracks. The south-facing entrance is 21 m wide, 18 m high, and slopes gently downward to the large passage back 183 m toward the 20 m pit leading to the lower levels. The passage widens at the base of the entrance slope to about 25 m; the floor here is relatively flat.

Shrine. A shrine is on a high ledge just outside the east side of the entrance and faces south toward the valley bottom. It consists of a wooden cross wrapped with white paper and attached artificial and natural flowers and dried leaves. No other items are present.

Bees. Sticks from honey collectors line the cliff face, walls, ceiling, even the tops of the highest domes in the entrance area. This indicates unbelievable climbs across, around, and up smooth, overhanging limestone walls into dome tops probably 30 m above the floor.

Trails. A trail enters the cave from the valley bottom below, while a second trail goes up the near vertical limestone wall about 15 km east of the entrance and appears easily climbable to the ridge top. Both trails are frequently used.

Pictographs (Fig. 1). Pictographs occur in a small alcove room on the west side of the entrance at the bottom of the entrance slope. The alcove is about 5.5 by 9.0 m, and walls are mainly flowstone formations. A small hole 30 by 30 by 21 cm deep in the center of the floor contains clear water, though presently there is none dripping. At the south end is a small hole in the wall 0.36 m in diameter leading into a small room 3 m long by 0.7 m high with a limestone pebble and cobble floor. No pottery was observed.

The paintings are all 4 to 5 m above the floor on a section of clean, smooth, white limestone wall. To draw them it was necessary to use notched log ladders or to climb flowstone projections and precariously balance oneself. The following figures are present:

1. Two red negative handprints, both an adult right hand, were applied with thin red paint using a spattering technique. They are a medium dark red, approximately the same as at Cueva Pinta farther down the range.
2. The larger man is a light orange liquid paint applied by brush or finger.
3. The smaller man is a darker reddish-orange like the handprints, a liquid paint applied by brush or finger.
4. A zig-zag line is of thick, reddish-orange liquid paint applied by finger. An adjacent, elongated rectangle contains a negative zig-zag line–thick reddish-orange liquid paint applied by brush or finger.

Pottery. Several sherds of modern salt-glaze jars and large bowls were found in the front section of the cave. Only one aboriginal sherd was observed. It is an incised rimsherd from the flat floor at the base of the entrance slope just below the pictograph alcove. It has dark gray paste with limestone sand temper and probably is from a small olla with a short neck, a very slightly turned-out rim, and a rounded lip. The upper neck just below the rim is incised around the vessel with two discontinuous parallel lines. The dark gray surfaces are well smoothed.

Soil sample. A soil sample was collected from just beside the phosphate test pit at the back of the entrance room. The appearance–color, texture, grain size, weathered calcite sand inclu-

sions, etc.--looks identical to the paste of crushed calcite tempered sherds from such Sierra de El Abra caves as Pinta, Higuerón, Cerámica, and las Manos.

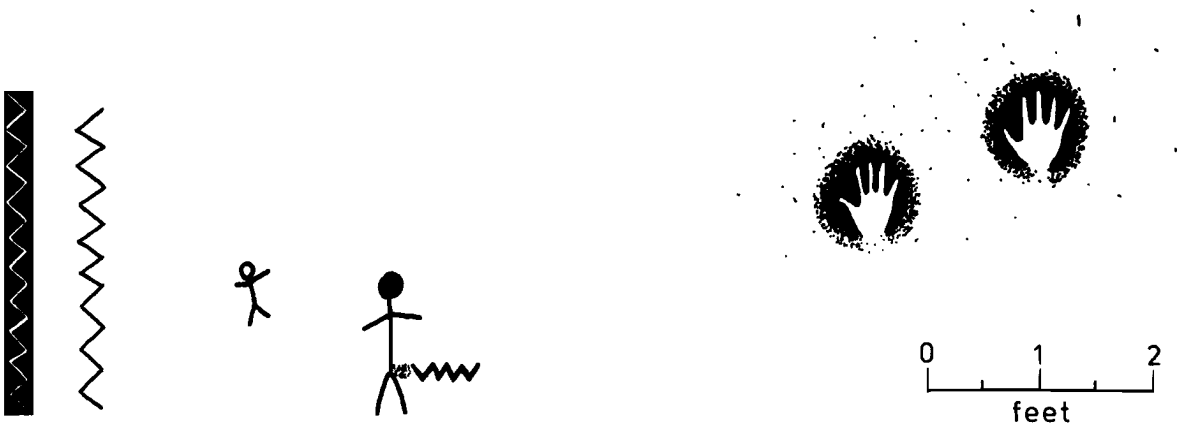

Fig. 1. Aboriginal pictographs in Cueva de El Abra.

A SPELEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE OF THE LOWER CANYONS OF THE RIO GRANDE, STATE OF COAHUILA, MEXICO

by Ronald G. Fieseler

As it follows its long path to the Gulf of Mexico, the Rio Grande is primarily a lazy, sluggish river with occasional stretches of turbulent, roaring whitewater. Most of these are located in the canyons of the Big Bend Region, where they add another hazard to an already harsh environment. However, with skill and common sense, most canoeists and kayakers can safely negotiate the various canyons and enjoy a wilderness experience difficult to rival.

One of the least-traveled stretches is the area known as the "Lower Canyons." No more hazardous than the other canyons, the Lower Canyons' difficulty lies in the distance involved (about 90-100 miles) and the time required (5-10 days). The logistics of such a trip can be a problem, not to mention the long, always-hated car ferry from put-in point to take-out point and back again. This is not your average weekend outing.

In late March, 1976, I was fortunate enough to be part of a large expedition through the Lower Canyons. The trip was sponsored by the Texas Natural Areas Survey and was scientific in nature. Along on the trip were botanists, geologists, archeologists, zoologists, photographers, and a speleologist--namely, me. My job was to assess the speleological resources of the Lower Canyons, both on the Texas and Mexican sides of the river.

From the beginning, it was painfully obvious that I would only be able to scratch the surface. The vastness of that country is staggering. Once in the canyons, the sense of futility grows day by day as canyon follows canyon, entrance follows entrance, and the terrain restricts access to all but the most determined. It was difficult enough to muster the desire and energy to check out the easily accessible and largest entrances, let alone the small or hard to get to entrance. Imagine a 2 meter in diameter entrance, 300 meters above the river and 1-3 kilometers by foot through a waterless, scalding, thorn-covered, snake-infested desert, and all this after paddling for hours, beaching the boat, dragging it high on shore to insure against possible