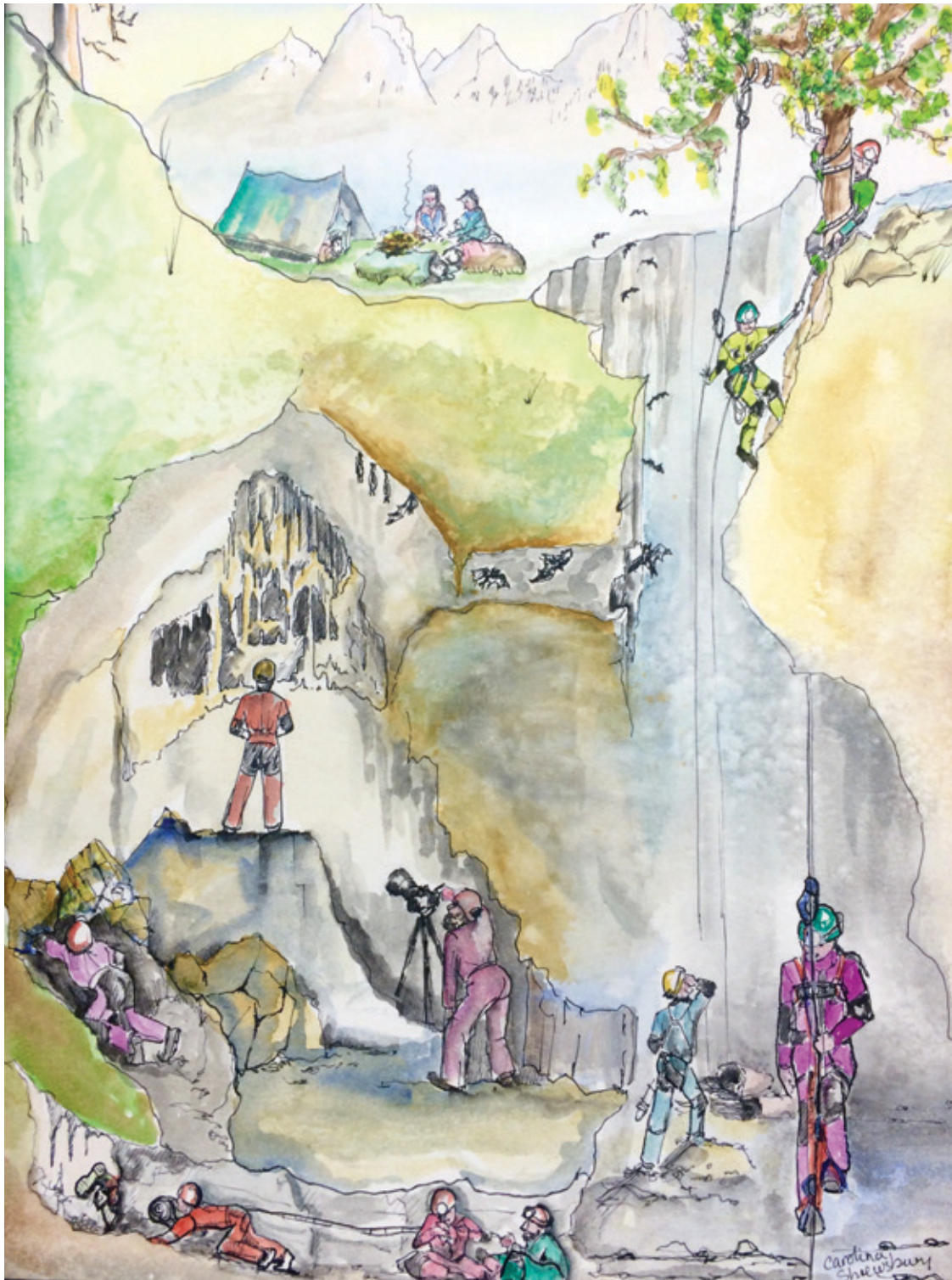


ILLUMINATIONS

Publication of the NSS Arts & Letters Section

Issue No. 25

January, 2017



Illuminations



The Publication of the NSS Arts and Letters Section • Issue No. 25 • January 2017



Land Fill Cave

Charles Loving

Pen and Ink

Cartoon submitted by Bill Steele for the artist.

Front Cover: **Caving in general**

Carolina Shewsbury

Cartoon

Back Cover: **Caving in Chonta Cave**

Charlie Loving

Watercolor

Cartoon submitted by Bill Steele for the artist.



Section Officers

Chairman

Carolina Shewsbury, NSS#46182

carolina2012@hawaiiiflow.com

Vice-Chairman/Editor/

Layout Designer

(Illuminations)

Kenneth Storey, NSS#23320

kennethstorey@charter.net

Secretary

Blake Jordan, NSS#43030

blandevoid@gmail.com

Treasurer

Marc Barker, NSS#13908RE

marc@aeternitasinc.com

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Red Sky at Night

Emily Davis

Quilt

Best of Show at the 2016 NSS Convention Art Salon.

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Carolina Shrewsbury

We have managed, at long last, to get enough material to publish a magazine!

I have to thank all our contributors for sending their inspiration and interesting tales! I hope everyone enjoys the fare we have pulled together this year. Those that sent stuff . . . please enjoy seeing it in print and knowing it is probably being aired all over the world!!

The only way to become famous is to get your hard work known and to have folk be familiar with your name! I can tell you through my own experience that it is an awesome feeling when someone you admire and have looked to for inspiration through the media or read about in books... sees your name or is introduced to you and says excitedly, "Oh I know who you are and I love your work! In fact I have one on my living room wall!" The weirdest feeling is them showing you a photo of it and you cannot remember painting it!

I wish you all the happiest of Christmas, Holidays and New Year. Please get ready for entering and showing your work at the 2017 Convention in New Mexico! If you are looking for inspiration- go caving!

Keep sending in your articles and artwork photos! If you see anything cool browsing the web let me know!

SpeleoArt

Want to become a member?

The Arts & Letters section welcomes new members. It doesn't matter if you create art, write, make music, make movies, teach, or just a fan of the speleoart process.

You can find a membership form, submission guidelines, and samples of our newsletter Illuminations on our web site at:

www.caves.org/section/arts_and_letters/

For information on the many different Speleoart salons, workshops, and speleo- news you can go to:
www.hawaiiiflow.com/SpeleoArt/.



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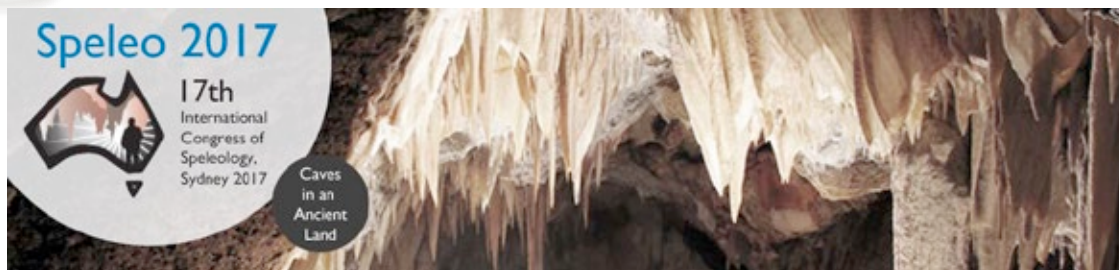
**THE SALAMANDER MUSES ABOUT WHAT HE
HAS SEEN****STEVE BELEU**

No other creature tramps recklessly as they do,
Neither raccoon nor skunk, porcupine, nor even mouse
That all move with stealth, and they think invisibility
Because our home here is cave darker than night.
But we salamanders hear and feel their every step
Sensing air pressure change whenever they move
As they hunt through our cave for they hope
An easy meal. We wait until they pass and know
They'll give up trying to catch and eat us soon
Because we're prepared and know precisely
Where they are and the next steps they'll take.

But these clumsy-footed ones
That grunt and yelp at each other don't seem to care
If they trudge along or not, stomping so loudly
They must be here not to hunt and must instead
Graze on grass like cows that live in herds
That follow each other single file to drink at ponds
And lay down together for the night.

Why do they come to our cave? None of us know,
Not even our Elders renowned for their knowledge of
Not only our world but the world outside beneath the sun
And night and moon we prefer. These two-legged creatures
Are unknowable and beyond all salamander reason
And may not even come from this world, our Great Mother
That we're born from and return to...

Monsters, they're monsters
From the moon or some other moon we can't see!
Reason has enlightened me with the wisdom of fear.
Hide from them, get under a stone, don't let them see
Or sense you're here!



B14.AC

Arts and Caves

Tasmania

This excursion is being organised in association with the Arts and Letters Commission of the International Union of Speleology.

The group will gather in Hobart, Tasmania and spend a day at MONA, the world-acclaimed Museum of Old and New Art, with its extensive collection of antiquities and modern art.

We then travel to Hastings Caves and spend two days working on in-cave art projects.

This excursion is not just for artists, anyone interested in joining the excursion is very welcome.



Summary:

| Starting place, date and time. | End place, date and approximate time. | Number of participants. | Sleeping bags required. | Camping gear (tents) required. | Included meals. | SRT required. | Cost A\$ (Incl. GST) |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Hobart, Tasmania 18 July midday | Hobart 22 July 11 a.m. | Min: 6 Max: 11 | No. | No. | Four breakfasts, one dinner included. | No. | \$510 |

Detail:

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Name of excursion. | B14.AC Arts and Caves—MONA and Hastings Caves, Tasmania |
| Contact person. | Cathie Plowman: lueena@bigpond.com |
| Overview of excursion. | <p>This excursion has been planned to provide an opportunity for participants of the 17th ICS to see MONA, and especially for members of the Arts and Letters Commission to see MONA as a group, and then have two days at Hastings Caves (about a 90 minute drive south of Hobart) to work on in-cave art projects.</p> <p>It is not necessary to be an artist to join the group. Anyone who is interested is welcome.</p> <p>Participants will gather in Hobart on Tuesday 18 July. We are organising for the group to meet some Tasmanian artists on the Tuesday afternoon. On Wednesday 19 July, we will have a full day at MONA, travelling via ferry at 9.20 a.m. to enter MONA as it opens for the day at 10.00 a.m. Our return ferry departs at 5.00 p.m.</p> <p>On Thursday 20 July, we will travel by small bus to Hastings Caves where we will work on an art projects at the cave, being organised by Ian Ellis Chandler. The caves are set in cool-temperate rainforest, and options for art can be explored both in the cave and the forest surrounding it.</p> <p>Overnight we will stay at a small bed and breakfast house, Jetty House, where our hosts will provide nutritious breakfasts and a home-cooked evening meal on one night. Our group will be the only</p> |



MONA Photographer: Remi Chauvin



Photo: Richard Bennett

| | | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | <p>guests and we can continue to discuss art and caves sitting beside cosy fires and around the dining table.</p> <p>We will return to Hobart on the Saturday morning, where participants can return to MONA to see more (own expense), enjoy the vibrant Salamanca Market, spend an additional night in Hobart (at own expense) or fly on to Sydney where the Congress commences on the Sunday afternoon.</p> | | | |
| Starting place, date and time. | Hobart, Tasmania, Tuesday 18 July, midday | | | |
| Finishing place, date and time. | Hobart, Saturday 22 July, 11.00 a.m. | | | |
| Min and max no of participants. | Minimum: 6 People Maximum: 11 People | | | |
| Cost of excursion and what is included. | A\$510 per person, includes: Ferry transport to MONA and return from Hobart city, admission to MONA including a hosted introduction, two nights accommodation and breakfast at the Astor Hotel in central Hobart, mini-bus transport to Hastings Caves, two nights at Jetty House, Southport, including two breakfasts and one dinner and return transport to Hobart. | | | |
| Transport. | Ferry to MONA, hired mini-bus to Hastings Caves and return. | | | |
| Accommodation type. | <p>Astor Hotel, Macquarie Street Hobart, twin rooms (two single beds) or double rooms (one double bed) with share bathrooms. There are single rooms (share bathrooms) and some queen-bed rooms (with own en suite) available at an extra rate.</p> <p>Jetty House, Southport. There are a variety of rooms: queens, twins and singles. Ten beds available to sleep a maximum of 12 people. We will arrange rooms to best suit the group. Shared bathrooms.</p> | | | |
| Bedding requirements. | Everything supplied at our accommodation. | | | |
| What meals are included? | Four breakfasts and one dinner. | | | |
| Arrangements for meals not covered and anticipated costs. | <p>Lunches and refreshments are available at MONA and Hastings Caves and participants can separately purchase these as they require.</p> <p>The group might eat together on the Tuesday and Wednesday nights in Hobart and can decide on the day. Pay individually. On one of the nights we are at Southport, the group will eat at the local tavern and pay individually.</p> | | | |
| Is SRT required? | No. | | | |
| Clothing requirements. | Clothes to suit a variety of winter weather conditions. Warm, layered clothing suitable for cool temperatures and possible wind and rain. Sturdy walking shoes or light-weight boots for Hastings Caves. The temperature inside the cave is 9° C, so warm and comfortable clothes to work on the art projects. | | | |
| Average weather details for July. | Min temp Hobart 4.6° C Hastings 2.6° C | Max temp 12° C 11° C | Rainfall 53 mm 145 mm | Daylight hours 9.5 hrs 9.5 hrs |

| | |
|--|---|
| Travel considerations: remote area, phone coverage, medical access, money access, local quarantine issues. | <p>Full phone and internet services available in Hobart. These are also available at Jetty House but may not be as reliable.</p> <p>For quarantine requirements for entering Tasmania check: www.quarantinedomestic.gov.au</p> |
| Other special requirements. | We ask that all caving gear be clean prior to being used in Australia, especially if you have come from a White Nose Syndrome infected area. |



Image of Chillagoe by Alan Pryke



17th
International
Congress of
Speleology,
Sydney 2017

Speleo 2017

Sydney | 23-29 July

A once in a lifetime opportunity to experience a world-class Speleology Congress in one of our planet's most ancient lands - Australia. Discover our wonderfully unique caves and karst during pre and post Congress field excursions. Meet with cavers from around the world, keen to share knowledge and experiences, at what promises to be a most memorable International Speleological event.



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ERGOR REPORTS ON EAR BATS

Ergor Rubreck

Previously I reported on vegetable bats in Guatemala -- eaters of turnips, parsnips, and rutabagas. As an internationally known and admired authority on cave bats, I'd like to correct some misapprehensions about bats and reveal some new information. Many people think fruit bats are the largest members of the bat community because of their reputation for carrying off whole watermelons and bananas. However, fruit bats do not tangle in your hair, as some women fear. Louisville Slugger bats are not flesh and blood bats. Bats live in caves but not in doors -- unless they live in hollow core doors.

While leading a caving expedition in Bhutan I discovered ear bats, which are undoubtedly the smallest of bats. Most are solitary bats, although some are colonial bats. How can bats live in human ears, you may ask? Bhutan is a high country, not to be confused with Bessarabia (formerly), and the altitude is unfriendly to most species. Diminutive species survive best because of their low energy requirement. The average adult ear bat measures 0.015 mm, so many can live at once in the average ear, particularly at such high altitudes.

Ear bats exhibit a reverse cycle. Whereas most bats forage at night for insects, ear bats reverse this cycle, sleeping at night and venturing on feeding excursions in daytime. That is why they have never been detected before my discovery of them. How many doctors look in people's ears with an otoscope at night? In the daytime, when ENT medical exams take place, ear bats are absent.

For many years ear bats were suspected to exist, but never proven. "She has bats in her belfry," goes the anecdotal phrase. Or, "He is acting batty." The excreta of ear bats is termed "ear wax." Bats in many parts of the world exhibit white nose syndrome. Ear bats experience runny nose syndrome. If you have suffered from runny nose at any time, rest assured, your ear bats are suffering worse!

Our expedition entomologist, Dr. Seymore Avians, Ph.D. first called the creature to my attention. "Dr. Rubreck!" he exclaimed one day at the dial of his audiometer, "I detect a high pitch sound at 72,500 Hz.

and 0.0013 dB." I left my dowsing station in Bishop's Cave, and hurried to his post in Level 5. Could it be the sound of a mite peeing on a washcloth? The source of the sound was too small to be seen in my microscope, so I switched to the binocular microscope and there it was -- a precocious juvenile male ear bat emitting his first mating call to attract females.

Since then I have discovered ear bats in practically every cave and caver. In North America *histoplasmosis* immunity has been found in most inhabitants of the American Midwest. Their initial introduction to histo was probably dismissed as 24-hour flu. Ear bat victims have just assumed they had a runny nose, never suspecting their ear bat infestation. When they blew their nose they obliterated whole colonies of ear bats without realizing they were bringing an entire colony of ear bats to the knife edge of extinction.

Fortunately, ear bats have no deleterious effect on humans beyond the benign symptoms of nose drip and ear wax. A possible exception: Did the impressionist painter Vincent Van Gogh slice off his ear as a result of fluttering ear bats? Unlike their larger brethren, ear bats do not eat insects, cross-pollinate crops, or carry fruit and blood from place to place. They may have no use.

Acarologists have told me that their study of mites has revealed untold millions of hitherto unclassified varieties, such that one might earn a PhD before lunch investigating but one new species. Mites are as small as ear bats, so it is no wonder they have not been exhaustively investigated. An exhaustive investigation of ear bats might poison them with carbon monoxide. Probably not a good idea because of the well-known scientific principle of serendipitous co-prosperity spheres of living.

Since I have not yet submitted my paper, *Ear Bats of Bhutan's Bishop Cave*, to a peer-reviewed journal, I can relate here some particulars of our expedition. The caves of Bhutan are little known and not well studied. Local folk wisdom holds that Bhutan's caves are cursed and that both of them doom their explorers to death. The history of

Bhutan, as found in a monastery library, confirms that in 1811 two teams of explorers entered Bishop Cave and Knight Cave. By 1911, when the history was written, all the members of both teams were dead. Undaunted and bereft of superstition, I applied for and received an UNESCO grant for 235,300 Euros to mount the subject expedition.

I recruited Dr. Avians, entomologist; Ms Klima deRope, Vertical Specialist; Sr Pablo Escobar, Pharmaceutical Investigator, and Ms Shrill Scream, Media Relations – internationally famous and wonderful cave exploration experts to accompany the ***Ergor Rubreck Expedition to Bhutan***. We left New York on February 28, 2004, landed at Thimpu

Municipal Airport, and returned the following November 31. We surveyed and mapped both caves and made several notable discoveries. This first report on ear bats is one of those. The second was the existence of light water on Level 5 of Bishop Cave (subject of a forthcoming report of water in the form of cotton candy), and crystallized skulls of cave bears.

Those wishing to join my next cave expedition are invited to download an application form from www.WTFexpeditions.com (World Traveler Fame Expeditions) and include a PayPal fee of \$85 US for h&s.

The passing of A&L member Glenn Mills

One of our artists died recently. So next time you hang your artwork on the Fine Arts Salon Stands at Convention, please give a small thought for Glenn Mills who built them. Glenn never thought his artwork was good enough for the FAS, so never entered; actually not an unusual excuse I get from several cavers, and why we are not getting to see much of the amazing talent we have amongst our caver family. I loved Glenn's work so much I bought one his works through the SCCI only a year ago!

His wife, Martha took me to their lovely log cabin in the woods of Sewanee TN, to see his studio and feel the spaces Glenn had sat in to play his guitar, and the place where he would work on his painting. Glenn has left a massive legacy; the amount of work he produced was enormous. I am quite sure one day in the future we will get to see his beautiful work and know he will always be with us . . . in the stands at Convention, and looking at us through his brightly painted underground landscapes.

Here are two of my most favorite works by him.

Carolina Shrewsbury
Chair for Fine Arts Salon
Chair for Arts and Letters Section
12/5/2016



Eurospeleo Art Salon

Ian Chandler

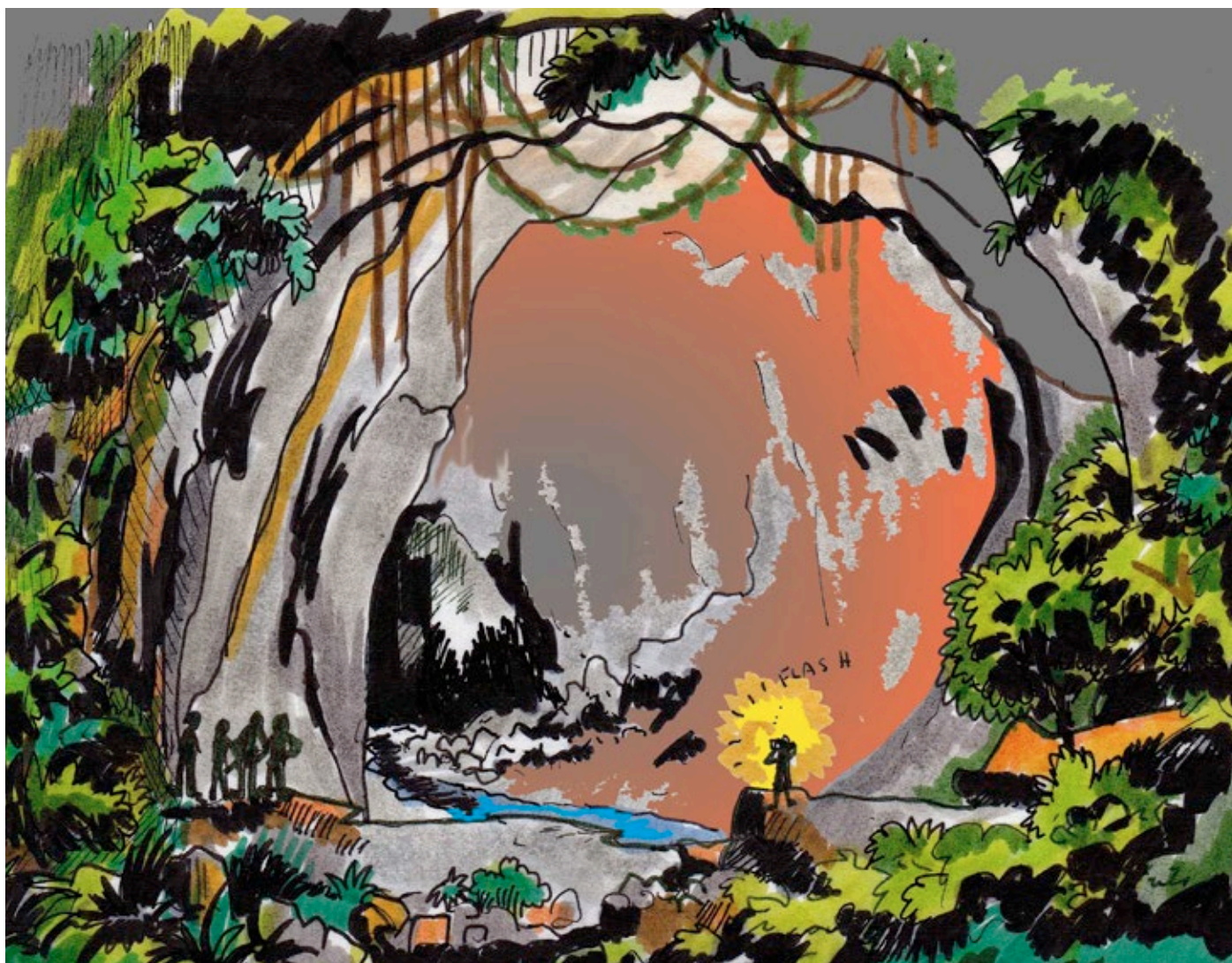
Yorkshire Dales, August 2016.

The art salon attracted a wide variety of entries, ranging from drawings to sculpture to acrylics. In addition the week long event allowed for a number of workshops. The three above ground focussed on still life, the figure and 'fantasy cave art'. The underground workshop was in Gaping Gill Main Chamber. This was facilitated by getting to the bottom of the 100 metre shaft via a winch seat. This facility is a regular event two times in the year for the general public. In all over twenty people enjoyed the workshops.

The overall winner in the art salon, for both judged and popular vote was Taraneh Khaleghi's, 'black' diptych seen to the left in the photograph. An impressive work which captured the moment before a carbide light lightens the darkness. Other photographs show the underground workshop with the winch in the background and a general view of other art in the salon.

Photograph credits: Taraneh Khaleghi.





Entrance to Chonta

Charlie Loving

Watercolor

Cartoon submitted by Bill Steele for the artist.

Cheryl's Cave

For Cheryl Selman, July 20, 1945 - April 11, 2000

Steve Beleu

Moderato
Quarter note = 80

Oboe

mf

Piano

Ob.

Pno.

Ob.

Pno.

mp

mp

2 Cheryl's Cave

Ob. *mf* Crescendo little by little

Pno.

Ob. *f* *mf*

Pno.

Ob. *rubato* *a tempo* *mf*

Pno. *Morendo for 2 measures*

Cheryl's Cave

3

Ob. 22 *rit.* *f* *p*

Pno. 22

Reo. * Reo. * Reo. *

INTO THE CAVE WE CRAWL**STEVE BELEU**

Into the cave we crawl, contorting ourselves
 As we push our feet, pulling with our forearms
 Until we emerge—everywhere gypsum clouds—
 And enter—everywhere gypsum crystals—
 The wonders between these walls. Wordlessly
 We touch both walls at once, our way is narrow
 And we hear bats—before seeing them, smelling them.
 Some flap their wings, a few fly away
 But most don't move, so we estimate their mats
 Count small groups, guess how many scattered.

This is our good life, our life beneath the earth
 None of us will give up, not until we must.

Above us in the night sky, bats are soaring
 Like the grace of love.

Murder Hole Movie Premiere Packs the House

Marian McConnell NSS 37358

Murder Hole, the movie, premiered at the Grandin Theatre in Roanoke, VA on September 21, 2016 to a packed house! The movie was shown twice that evening and was open and free to the public. About 475 people turned out to see the film, and had the opportunity to ask questions about cave, bats, and sinkholes in between and after the film. The first 100 guests received a souvenir - bat pencils from Speleobooks. Free information was displayed and available about caves and caving, as well as copies of the movie DVD and Murder Hole books for sale. (One dollar of every DVD purchase goes to the West Virginia Cave Conservancy.)

Murder Hole won an honorable mention at the 2016 NSS Convention in Ely, Nevada. Videographer David Socky, and landowner Marian McConnell produced the 28-minute documentary to share history, interviews, and a trip into the depths of this infamous cave in Catawba, Virginia. Scenes include spectacular drone footage of the cave's huge entrance pit by Nathan Williams and Sabrina Simon, as well as photographs as far back as the 1900-1920's by early explorer George von Kromer. Ivan Sexton, Jr., a local, provided rare 1988 footage of going into the cave with his buddy "Porky" sliding into the daylight cave portion with no gear. Thor Bahrman, caver and professional radio announcer, did a brilliant job of narrating. Many more contributed, which can be seen in the credits.

Many cavers and cave-lovers came from far and wide to watch the movie... some wearing their caving gear and/or t-shirts. The film was cheered enthusiastically and the event also gave the Blue Ridge Grotto members a chance to engage with the public about cave safety and conservation!

The Murder Hole movie also showed on October 17 at the Salem History Museum in Salem, VA, for free, to a standing room only crowd of 120; and again on October 22 at the Buchanan Theatre in Buchanan, VA to an enthusiastic crowd of 35.



Ergor Finds Fossils in Cave Deposits

Ergor Rubreck

Index fossils provide telltale clues to the age of rocks they are found in. For example, *platicrinus penicillis* is an index fossil to the Ste. Genevieve limestone, a Mississippian formation found in the lower part of Mammoth Cave. It resembles a cross-section of a Ticonderoga #2 lead pencil, but without the yellow exterior skin. It is the proof fossil for the formation.

My acquaintance with cave fossils is limited, but extraordinary. In the abandoned bed of the ancient Root Canal near Sassafras, WI I found a 1.7 lb piece of mystery metal, later identified as amalgam. I believe it was a early filling of a mastodon molar from the Pleistocene era, and a precursor of veterinary dentistry. Unfortunately the molar was missing, not at all unusual since amalgam fillings are far more durable than the enamel and dentine themselves. Since it was not a cave deposit per se, I failed to report it to the Wisconsin Molar Society.

In a Nulabar cave in Australia I identified a one-meter fossil femur of an Emu, thus making an enemy of the expedition leader who claimed it was an Emu leg bone. He went so far as to suggest that I knew nothing about paleontology, the study of fossil pollen. He was so angry he omitted my name from the expedition roster, which is why some speleologists still say I never caved in Australia. Believe me, politics is alive and well in some parts of speleology today!

I once found a fossil Model T Ford axel in a cave in The Highland Rim of Tennessee. The carbon steel molecules had been replace by calcium carbonate molecules thus preserving the original grain structure of the metal part with crystalline limestone. Radiocarbon dating set its origin at 1923 plus or minus 6 years. I offered it to the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, MI but alas, they explained they had a plethora of fossil Model T parts.

Ferns are closely related to hosta plants. Some fern fossils are preserved in Pennsylvanian (Carboniferous) formations. I discovered a beautiful, fully formed hosta leaf on one of my many trips to Mexico. The mouth of the cave in which it occurred overlooked a shining cenote, so I suggested my discovery be named *hosta la vista*. Sorry to say, the name was already taken.

Everyone knows fossil poop is called (or are called) *coprolites*. Salts Cave in Mammoth Cave National Park has many poop deposits – not fossilized – from which archaeologists recovered and reconstructed the diet record of Eastern prehistoric Indians. Preserved in their poop are fragments of digested cultigens and undigested detritus. This suite of seeds and fibers show exactly what was hunted and gathered, and what was grown or bought at Indian supermarkets. Most recent studies have revealed that the poop has male origins – female poop has not been found! One conclusion is that the cave was used for male coming-of-age rituals, such as practiced in primitive tribes today. “Here, eat this magic white powder . . . ha ha ha . . . it will make a man out of you. Now, pull my finger...” I can see it now.

A recent medical discovery is that fresh poop contains exotic biota and flora that can beneficially ward off diseases and restore a person to health. As a result, pharmacologists are now selling donor poop pills from healthy donors at unbelievably high prices to patients who have been prescribed such remedies. My interest is this:

Since nobody has examined the fossil flora and microfauna of cave coprolites, I have applied for a multi-million dollar grant to study cave coprolites scientifically for a medical breakthrough. Think of the many benefits for mankind that I may unearth! People nowadays live 70 or 80 years. With ancient donated fossil poop life spans of two or three times the present could become routine. I would not only become famous – like Salk, Pasteur, Heimlich, and Lister – but unbelievably rich. Think of all the good I could accomplish with the **Ergor Rubreck Poop Prize and Fossil Fecal Scholarship Grant Program.**

I guess the first task is crowdfunding an electron microscope, and second finding a cave containing lots of coprolites. I'd probably conduct a round the world lecture tour to describe the anticipated health benefits. (I will skip Australia because I was underappreciated there.)

There is no reason on earth why the world's greatest and most wonderful cave explorer could not be simultaneously the greatest and most wonderful medical researcher of all time . . . is there?

How I came to make cave art.

Linda Neely

This is my story about how I came to make cave art. It begins with a simple assignment in a beginning drawing class, a common assignment that every teacher utilizes to teach value in drawing, or the “darkness” of a mark. The project involved completely covering a piece of paper with charcoal and then creating the imagery using erasers, a kind of backwards way of making art. In my classroom that day we did a still-life of paint brushes in a paint can. I fell in love.

Flash forward about fifteen years. I am in a university graduate program. I am experimenting with the classic surrealist idea of “automatic drawing” in which I “scribble” around with my erasers in charcoal without an end result in mind. I explore these lines with some more erasing and sometimes brush away the charcoal with paint brushes. I explore the random lines finding textures, noticing shapes, developing forms and follow where the process leads. I made about fifteen large scale pieces this way. One day I hung all of my favorites up to study. I was looking for what they might have in common other than the way they were created. I stared and studied and wrote a lot. It finally occurred to me that most of them were related to caves. They were drawings of the interiors of caves, the view from inside a cave looking out or some life-form that could be living inside a cave. I was pretty surprised to make this discovery. Although I had no actual experience with caves, the imagery kept appearing in what was meant to be random and intuitive pieces. I wondered why. What I did know was how these pieces made me feel. In the making of them as well as the finished work they felt mysterious, wondrous, safe, comforting and beautiful.

A couple weeks later came the defining moment. I used a small unused studio to create an exhibit of my newly discovered cave pieces. The pieces were large, the space small and closed-in. I wanted to create the feeling of walking into a cave. I wanted viewers to be awed at the mysterious beauty they encountered within. It was “crit day,” my chance to have a group of fellow graduate students and professors come in and give me feedback on my work. Here’s how it went:

Students and faculty alike stood around quietly. Not overwhelmed with the magic they were

surrounded by, just quiet. They shuffled around the little cubical, getting out of each other’s way, checking out each piece. Finally some questions, little ones like What kind of paper is this? Do you think this is the best way to display this work? Then the big one. How do these pieces feel to you? Excitedly, I told them. I described the wonder at making them, the uncovering of imagery, the discovering. The comfort in the curving lines, soft charcoal, enchanting places. Then the group came alive. In a now lively discussion they told me how the work made them feel fearful, claustrophobic, foreboding, danger. I was so disappointed. How could we feel so differently? How could they not see and love these places like I did?

Then from a young woman came the most important question of my career. “Have you ever been in a cave?”

After a day or so of wrestling around with that question, feeling defensive, feeling this woman had missed the point, it became crystal clear that I needed to do just that. Whether it resulted in the same creepy, claustrophobic feeling most everyone else seemed to share or a moment of glorious enlightenment, I needed to go have a cave experience of my own, a real one.

So I packed up all my questions like how would I feel in a cave and why in the world were these things appearing in my work and began my research. If I had ever been anywhere near a cave before it was likely when I was a young angsty pre-teen, sitting in the back of a station wagon with my nose buried in a book. I was starting from scratch.

I decided that although the myriad opportunities to tour caves with a guide might be interesting, it would not give me the information that I needed. So I planned little road trip to Shasta Caverns and then Lava Beds National Monument, both within a day’s drive from me in California.

The visit to Shasta Caverns was fantastic. It answered one of my questions: Is the imagery I’m making too bizarre? Are there such formations inside a real cave? Yes, caves are that extraordinary and more! Being inside one was like a fantasy. I no longer worried that I might create something that was too far-fetched. The tour guide also hit on something I was not expecting.



She talked about earthquakes and how being inside the cave was so much safer, that a quake that would be devastating on the surface of the earth may not even be noticeable inside. She pointed out a thirty-thousand year old stalactite and I imagined it in its delicate infancy and how it survived longer than I can actually wrap my brain around. Through earthquakes, wars, catastrophes, this dazzling limestone formation has been and continues to be slowly, silently growing. My feeling of safety inside a cave felt real. I learned so much about caves on this little tour but it was my next stop that I knew would really tell me what I needed to know.

My goal at the Lava Beds was to find a place deep enough inside one of those tubes to be in utter darkness. I wandered through several getting the feel of the lava, feeling like a little kid at Disneyland with all the magnificent formations and unbelievably delicate tiny ones. It was in Skull Cave that I found my spot. It was a good dark place, deep inside. I found a good sitting place and turned off my head-light. I sat there. At first it was all about me. All I could hear was my own breathing, the rustling of my nylon jacket. I took it off. I could smell my lotion. When I could finally push myself out of my thoughts I felt no fear, just cool, comforting, smooth silence. The most utter silence. I sat and let my breathing be silent also. I felt welcome and at home. I could almost hear my surroundings reassure me that I was right, this was my place. I don't know how long I sat there in that cool rugged silence. It could have been an hour or ten minutes. Eventually I turned on my light, found my journal and wrote. Here I was, home.

I spent the rest of the day in those lava tubes. I became much more comfortable underground. Coming to the surface with all its harsh bright hot light and noises felt assaulting. I loved it down there. I was

mesmerized by the different shapes and patterns, the delightful places where spots of light broke through and greenery sprouted up, the occasional drops of water creating sweet, friendly signs of life. I learned what helmets were for and belly crawled through some tight places wishing for knee pads. But it was my first day and I was patient with myself and just reveled in this new world I discovered.

Later when I returned home I recalled this excerpt by writer and psychiatrist Ian McCallum. It had intrigued me before but now I could understand it completely:

"It is that place where land and psyche meet, where one feels real, authentic, elemental. It is that place, that spiritual and geographical space where one feels one has come home, where one can gather one's self. It is that inner place, a moveable feast from which one's strength of character is drawn. It is neither a passive nor a prescriptive place and neither do you stumble upon it. You have to find it outwardly and inwardly for yourself. . . consciously. And you must protect it."

Since that day at the lava beds I have spent a lot more time in caves. A lot of them have been in California, including more trips to the lava beds. I have also visited Padirac and Grand Roc caves in France and a sea cave and an inland water cave in Kauai. I have terrified myself by rappelling into a cave. Twice. And I am currently preparing for a trip to Iceland, to visit an ice cave while it's still there.

I have learned is that I can't create in my mind and my artwork anything more dramatic and magical than what is actually found inside a cave. My art still includes some "fantasy" pieces but I think the most spectacular are those that derive from what I actually see (and sometimes hit my head on).

Three Scary Incidents While Caving in Mexico

Bill Steele

This is not fiction. I've caved in Mexico for 46 years. Besides being trapped 500 meters deep in a cave for four days in 1977, and being in the back of a truck when it went off the road into midair and rolling down a mountain three years later, my scariest incidents have occurred in the past decade: 2007, 2014 and 2015.

April 2007 - Jim Smith, Diana Tomchick, and I were doing a 36-hour, non-stop drive from Huautla de Jimenez, Mexico to Irving, Texas (adjacent to Dallas). We were driving Diana's Toyota Tundra, double cab, 4WD truck with camper up the coastal road along the Gulf of Mexico. It was 2:00 a.m. Jim Smith was taking a turn driving. I was in the passenger seat, awake, doing buddy duty. We were on an elevated highway, cruising through Tampico. Then came a confusing branching of the road and we took the wrong one, came down off the elevated highway, and were in a business section of the city with a wide street and closed retail businesses on both sides. It was well lighted, there were no other moving vehicles, and all we needed to do was find a way to get back up on the elevated highway.

We had only gone a couple blocks when we were pulled over by a police car. The officer slowly approached the driver's window. Jim asked in Spanish what was wrong. The policeman looked stern, angry, and told Jim to get out. Diana and I watched as best we could while Jim spoke with him and was led out of sight behind the truck. Not good. I felt my pulse quicken.

Jim came back to the cab with the cop following him. "He said we made an illegal turn and wants 1,000 pesos for the fine." That was about \$100 USD. I said, "Here's a 500, see if that'll do." Jim talked to him. No, he wants 1,000. So, we came up with it.

The cop then said to follow him and he would show us how to get back onto the elevated highway. After two blocks his turn signal came on and he turned left into a narrow, dark street. Diana said, "No way! Don't follow him. Keep going straight!" So, we did, but we still didn't know how to get back on the elevated highway.



The Elevated Highway
By Clariano Sewursbrhy

We only got a few blocks and were waiting for a red light to change when the cop pulled up beside us. He looked angry. "Sigueme!" he shouted, "Follow me!" He pulled in front of us, went a couple blocks, and did it again. He turned left into a dark, narrow street. "No way," Diana and I said, "Keep going." Jim picked up the

speed and forward we went. Soon we saw the elevated highway and a way onto it. We had escaped.

What do we think he was up to? No good. He surely had a radio. We think he was in cahoots with others, others down those dark, narrow streets, to rob us, steal the truck, and maybe even do us in.

April 2014 – It was the first PESH (Proyecto Espeleologico Sistema Huautla) expedition to Huautla. We say we're going to conduct full-fledged, month-long caving expeditions ten years in a row.

Once there, we started the expedition by driving a fairly new road into an area that had an entrance, La Grieta, and a major section of Sistema Huautla, but the area had not been looked at closely for other entrances. At a little store in the village of Plan Carlota we asked about caves and the storekeeper said yes, there were some close by, and mentioned one across the valley that was a deep pit. He said that on hot days families gather in the shade trees around the entrance and enjoy the cool air rising out of the pit. He said he'd show us the entrance.

The road around the side of the valley to the pit was rocky and rough and ended near the pit at a closed and vandalized schoolhouse. Few kids these days, the man said. The pit looked good, sounded around 200 feet deep, and we decided to return the next day with ropes and a team to explore it.

As we dropped the store owner off at his store, he said that we should keep someone at the van when people are in the pit because a bad man lives up on the hillside above it. We heeded this advice and two others and I stayed with the van all day as cavers rigged, descended, explored and mapped the pit and cave off the bottom.

By the time the last caver climbed out of the pit, the rope was derigged, and everyone was ready to load into the van for the hour-long drive back to our fieldhouse in the village of San Agustin Zaragoza, it was night. Two of us were in the front of the van, eight in the back. I was driving. I turned on my iPod and played Bruce Springsteen. A couple hundred meters up the rough, rocky road I saw something across the road.

It was a log, perpendicular to the road, so it had not rolled there on its own. I yelled, "Ambush! Move the log off the road!" "Helmets on!" All eight cavers behind me in the van unloaded, LED lights at full brightness, eight burly men and women with a mission. Seven of them went to the log and began to rock it back and forth. The eighth caver, who had served in the army in Afghanistan, crouched in a sentry's stance and scanned the bushes above the road with his bright headlamp. I heard him shout, "Target!"; and though my heart was racing about what might happen any second, I was slightly amused. Our only weapons were bright lights.

The cavers piled back in the van and on we went, but not far. Around a curve to the right the real obstacles came into view. Large rocks had been rolled



Driving on lonely roads at night
By Clariano Sewursbrhy

down the hill onto the road. There were several of them. The cavers piled out and moved them, too. No one came out to rob us. We drove off.

We returned to this pit several times more, but always left before nightfall. Nothing else happened.

When in this life do you get to yell, "Ambush!"? I've heard it in westerns, but now I've experienced it. I was scared, it happened fast and was over, but I got a life-long story out of it.

May 2015 - At the end of the first PESH expedition we decided to award two awards each expedition: Rookie of the Year award and the PITA Award (pain in the ass). On our second expedition, the likely PITA Award winner seemed evident from the get-go. His name shall remain unsaid, but he aggravated me as expedition leader 40 days in a row. He irritated the cooks. He went in to a deep camp and abandoned greener cavers he was leading 700 meters deep. They floundered and took a long time finding the camp. Poetic justice was that they had the PITA Award contestant's sleeping bag.

Finally, the expedition was over and we started the three day-drive with two vehicles north to the USA. We had walkie-talkie radios in each vehicle for communication. I had a cell phone too, but the PITA guy, even though priding himself on being a master of gadgets, had a cell phone that only worked when on Wi-Fi. In other words, no cell phone.

We were arcing around Mexico City to the northeast of it on the Arco Norte, the fairly new toll road highway out in the countryside. I was in the lead. I looked in the rear view mirror and didn't see the PITA guy's truck back there. We tried the radio and got nothing. We pulled over and waited. They didn't come. So, we went back. We went back 80 km before seeing them on the other side of the road with their hood up. Breakdown.

It was the water pump. The truck is a big Dodge Power wagon diesel. The owner, the PITA guy, said that he would only allow it to be fixed by a Dodge dealer or an authorized Cummins diesel shop.

When we had turned around to go back and look for the other vehicle, I dropped my son, Brian, and daughter, Audrey, who had joined the expedition for the last week of it to cook, in Tula to see the Toltec ruins. I noticed as I drove them to the ticket office at the ruins that there were many auto repair shops along the way, including a couple that advertised diesel mechanics. I called Brian and Audrey and got them looking for a tow truck and shop that could replace a diesel water pump.

The PITA guy didn't want to pay for a wrecker. We looked at his insurance and it included towing. We had to climb up on a nearby hill to make cell phone calls. We couldn't succeed in getting the insurance company involved to send a wrecker. My son and daughter called and said they found a garage who could fix it and would send a wrecker. The PITA guy said no. He insisted on either a Dodge dealer or an authorized Cummins diesel shop, plus he didn't want to pay for towing.

So, began a 48-hour hassle. We finally learned that there was a Dodge dealer in Pachuca, a large city about 40 km up the highway, and that the Arco Norte provides free towing to get you off the side of the highway. We learned the latter when a tow truck came along and offered to tow the broke down truck. The PITA guy had walked to a nearby toll booth to use their phone and again call his insurance company. We passed on the free tow since he wasn't there to agree.

When we finally had a plan that seemed like it was going to work, a tow truck loaded the heavy truck, fully loaded with a full bed and camper with dive and caving gear. It was 2:00 a.m. and I was to follow the wrecker to Pachuca and to the Dodge dealer. The wrecker would drop it off there and we would stay in a cheap hotel nearby. In the morning, we'd get it fixed. Good plan, finally.

Except it didn't go as planned. The plan was for Ernie Garza, our best Spanish speaker, to ride in the wrecker. Pita guy and one other would ride with me in the van. The wrecker would go about 30 km to the exit for Pachuca, drive to the Dodge dealer, drop off the truck, and we would go to a nearby hotel.

We got to the exit off the Arco Norte and the wrecker passed it. There are few exits and ramps on to this divided toll road highway. It would a long way to the next one. I fretted. Maybe there is another exit for Pachuca, a large city. So, I followed the wrecker and stayed in my own thoughts.

Another exit came and he passed it, too. This is not good. It's 3:00 a.m. and we are following a wrecker to lord knows what end. I told my two passengers that we had a problem. They were unaware. I repeated the plan, which was not being followed. The wrecker driver had Ernie and the truck. We had to follow him no matter what. I had to do something. I had to act.

One of my passengers said, "You're worrying too much. What are the chances that he's leading us into trouble?" My reply was, "50/50, it either happens or it doesn't."

I came up with a plan and said it. "The next long hill I'm going to pass him at the top and pull over. Hopefully he'll also pull over and I'll walk back and talk to Ernie to find out what's going on."

At the top of a long hill I did that. The wrecker pulled over like I had. I walked back and Ernie rolled down the window of the passenger's side. "What's going on, Ernie?" I asked. "I don't know," he said, "he's been on his cell phone yacking away, talking so fast I can't follow what he's saying."

"Ask him why he didn't get off the highway like we'd agreed, please," and Ernie did. The answer was that he had called a mechanic friend who said he would meet us in the morning and replace the water pump. He said he would take the next exit, lower the truck in a parking lot next to the toll booth, and in the morning his friends would meet us there to fix the truck. He said there was a hotel at the exit.

I said to Ernie, "Ok. we have no other choice, but please get out and ride with us. If he doesn't do as he said I don't want to keep following him." Ernie refused. He chose to trust the guy. I saw no reason to trust him.

At the exit, he took it, backed the wrecker in the parking lot, and left. Just like he'd said. We went to the hotel and it was cheap but sleazy. They had rooms by the hour. Ernie stayed there and the rest of us slept in the van and the broke down truck.

In the morning two shade tree mechanics showed up, ran off to get parts, and fixed the truck beneath a shade tree. I got a great photo of them standing on the front bumper, and unlike plumber butt, got a shot of mechanic's butt with the PITA guy advising them how to do their jobs and irritating them.



The PITA guys car breaks down
By Clariano Sewursbrhy

