

## Amazing Stories

### Reddell and Russell make the first land crossing of Culberson County

In the summer of 1963, James Reddell and Bill Russell went to far west Texas in a 1955 Plymouth station wagon that we would now consider unsuitable for a trip across town. As they traveled, James wrote letters to Dick Smith (in Austin) telling him of their adventures. Those letters have survived the years and provide a wonderful window into the caving activities of that era.

#### Marathon, Texas, 16 June 1963:

Was in the Glass Mountains yesterday afternoon. Was greeted with harassment and permission. Very strange. Owner told us he used to be a salesman and believed a person had to know what he was selling. He asked us a million leading questions. Harassed us about not knowing where north was to the nearest degree (just about) and etc. But when he had decided we knew enough, he asked for a release and told us we could go look for a cave marked on P.B. King's map near the split tank, but he had never seen it and his Mexican hand (15 years there) didn't know it. "This is going to be a fruitless search, but get in the Jeep and let's go." So we struck out. Went over miserable roads, cross-country miserably, and finally over wicked ledges, through thorns, and over trees. He would stop and ask sneeringly where we were on the map—we had to tell him where to go and then off again. We said stop. (We were on a ridge he hadn't been on.) We walked down the hill and to the cave. I presume we sold our product.

#### Kent, Texas, 18 June 1963:

Today we went north of Kent to a cave on Goatshed Mountain (in Apache Mountains) that was in a geology thesis. Spent hours looking where thesis had it marked, abandoned hope when the owner showed up and told us to look elsewhere ("It's somewhere back up in there."). The thesis said, "On east flanks of Goatshed Mountain, a prominent cavern." It is a 10-foot diameter vertical sink on the slopes of the north flank of the mountain,



The trusty Plymouth station wagon. *James Reddell.*

7 (instead of 3 1/2) miles north of Kent. Had little trouble finding it but was sheerest ingenuity. The rancher pointed west but I found pieces of calcite; so knowing it was a calcite mine, I followed the trail of broken crystals around a bluff to the south and to an obscure canyon and walked right to the cave which couldn't be seen 100 feet away.

#### Kent, Texas, 19 June 1963, early morning:

Drove to town and are waiting for flat #2 to be fixed. This one had eight thorns in it. #1 only had four. . . .

Bill talking to rancher about sinks. Halfway between Toyah and Kent and probably not enough gas to reach either. We have three maps: P.B. King (circa 1900), theses (circa 1940) and county map (circa 1960). None agree vaguely and none are right. Ranch owners all different and only four people live in



"Warning Keep Out" sign in the absolute middle of nowhere. *James Reddell.*



Hope! Flats repaired somewhere ahead. *James Reddell.*