

Corpus Christi Caving Club 1973–1978

During the early 1970s, only five cavers, Paul Duncan, Roger McMillan, Mike Tibbs, Wayne Russell, and David Lavin, lived in the Corpus Christi area. Though small in number, they were a very active group, usually caving in either Mexico or Central Texas every weekend in conjunction with other grottos. After both Roger and Mike left the state, the remaining cavers decided to recruit new members and form a club. By September 1973, the group had formed the Corpus Christi Caving Club (CCCC), approved a constitution and elected

officers.

Many of the CCCC members were new to caving and early efforts were made to have training trips and vertical practice sessions. Several of the club's first trips were coordinated with the Alamo Area Chapter. During the mid-1970s the CCCC was active in Mexico and Texas caving. Of note were the club's efforts in Cave Without A Name and caves in the Bustamante area. By 1978 the club had disappeared.

Early Officers of the Corpus Christi Caving Club 1973

Matt Farrar	Chairman
Wayne Russell (9873)	Vice-Chairman
Rick Milligan	Secretary-Treasurer

—JA

Corpus Christi Speleological Society [NSS #72] 1956–1959

The Corpus Christi Speleological Society (CCSS) began as a caving club in 1956 under the leadership of Harvey R. "Doc" Jackson. Harvey was stationed at the Corpus Christi Naval Air Station and, together with a group of interested naval personnel, started a local caving club. By October 1956, Harvey had organized the CCSS and submitted a grotto charter to the NSS. The group officially became a NSS Grotto on December 27, 1956.

Harvey was a Hospitalman 1/c in the Navy and was heavily involved in Texas caving and cave rescue coordination in the late 1950s. Despite being a relative newcomer to Texas caving, Harvey served as chairman of the Texas Region in 1958 and was also coordinator of the Texas Region's Safety and Rescue

Team Committee. He coordinated the two Texas Region projects at Longhorn Cavern in 1957 and 1958, and organized a cave rescue program for the Region. By late 1958, the Region had trained active rescue squads in Austin, San Antonio and Corpus Christi. Harvey was an effective organizer and enthusiastically recruited potential cavers at every opportunity.

During its relatively short existence, the CCSS was active in Uvalde, Edwards (mapped Dragool and Wheat Caves), Real, Burnet, Kinney and Bandera Counties. CCSS member Hank Moore amassed a rather large database on the caves of Texas, which later helped initiate the Texas Cave Survey. In 1959, Harvey Jackson moved away and the grotto died shortly thereafter.



This is the only known picture that can be positively tied to the CCSS. *TSS files.*

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Early Members of the Corpus Christi Speleological Society
1956

Harvey R. Jackson
Bob (Hank) Moore

David Utter

1957

Lyda Chapman
Stephen M. Colby
Buddy “Hammock” Frank
Walter Gillette
Paul Hanson
Jerry Harwood
R. B. “Bernie” Hendrix
Darlis Jackson

Harvey R. Jackson
Robert “Bob” V. Money
Bob “Hank” Moore
Roy W. Owen
Carol Ann Parker
Wendy Plum
Jack Sanders

—JA

Coryell County Cavers
1964–1966

The Coryell County Cavers was formed by five Gatesville, Texas high school friends on July 28, 1964. Ronald Fieseler, a member of the Dallas-Ft. Worth Grotto, had interested his cousin, Mike Bales, in caving and had mentored the group by taking them on several trips to Gorman Cave. They subsequently attended several grotto meetings in Dallas and organized a trip to the TSA Project 72 at Powell’s Cave in 1964 where they were accepted as a TSA member group.

The group was primarily active in San Saba, Mills, and Coryell Counties. They made a couple of extended trips to caves

in the Guadalupe Mountains and to McKittrick Hill in New Mexico but perhaps their boldest trip was to Dead Man’s Hole in Burnet County on June 20, 1965. After several weeks of climbing practice on their new three-quarter inch manila rope, they successfully bottomed the cave. It took each member only 7 ½ minutes to rappel the 155-foot drop, but the group spent seven hours climbing out on the wet rope.

Most of the members graduated from high school in 1966. The group drifted apart and eventually evaporated within a few years.

Early Members of the Coryell County Cavers
1964–1965

Mike Bales (7486)	Chairman
Scott Reeve (7554)	Secretary-Treasurer
Stanley Kopec	Equipment Chairman
Ray Barry	Henry Lengefeld
Roger Fieseler (7939)	Ronnie Phillips
Ronald G. Fieseler (7669)	Mark Reeve
Joe Kopec	Bobby Thrasher
Wayne Langford	Reed Williams

—CK & JA

Dallas Speleological Society (Dallas Grotto)
[NSS #76]
1956–1959

Don Widener was taken to Steam Cave by Al Malone. Widener got his grade school buddy, Edgar Bryan, and returned four more times. Don then went to the public library and found a copy of NSS *Bulletin Ten* and, in 1953, he and Bryan founded what would later become the Dallas Grotto. A bit later, in the spring of 1955, Jack Prince and Claude Head were talking about exploring a cave and did some research in the SMU library. Here, they learned about the NSS and a letter to that organization

resulted in a pointer to Bob Hudson, then living in Waco. Their first adventure was Mural Cave near Austin. Soon, Bob put them in touch with the Crisman brothers in Abilene. The Crismans mentored the new group for their first few trips and gave them a lead to Mayfield Cave. On September 24, 1955, Jack Allen, Allen Cain, Pete Cobb, Claude Head, Jack Prince, and Dan Sheffield crossed the now famous ledge in Mayfield Cave (Caverns of Sonora) and discovered what many consider

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to be the most beautiful cave in the world.

Soon, the Widener and Prince groups united but because of their isolation in north Texas and the general lack of communication between caving groups at the time, the Dallas cavers were slow getting started. Prior to 1956, they were known simply as the Dallas Group. In April 1956, Don Widener and others decided to form a NSS grotto and call it the Dallas Speleological Society. It took almost a year for the group to formalize their efforts and they became a NSS Grotto on April 8, 1957. Founding members were Don Widener, Wally Martin, Ed Bryan, Al Malone, and Charles and Yvonne Groening but soon they had ten or 12 members. They changed their name to the Dallas Grotto of the NSS in the spring of 1958 because Oscar Hawksley, VP for Organization of the NSS, suggested that the use of the word “society” in the name of groups affiliated with the NSS was “undesirable.”

Widener had an article titled “Underground Mountaineering” published in the September 1956 issue of *Summit* magazine and, more importantly, he also founded the Texas Cave Survey in 1957. This was the first successful attempt to unite the cave files of all the individual Texas groups into a single archive and was remarkably successful. In a two year span, 11 issues were published (see TSS chapter).

By January 1959 there were 25 names on the membership list. Quantity did not insure success however, as Widener wrote to Dudley Roberts on July 16, 1959: “DSS is practically non-existent.” When Widener entered military service in November 1959, it appears that the spark went out of the group as they soon ceased all activity. There was a gap of perhaps a year before a new group arose almost spontaneously with but a single member, Bob Littlefield (NSS 3854), carried over to the new group (see Dallas-Ft. Worth Grotto).

Early Members of The Dallas Speleological Society 1956–1957

Don L. Widener (3224)	Chairman
Al L. Malone (3775)	Secretary-Treasurer
Jack Allen	Yvonne Groening
Nancy Austin	Claude Head
Ed C. Bryan, Jr. (3786)	Dave Ince
Ben Davis	Wally Martin
Charles Groening	Dan Sheffield (3451)

—CK

Dallas-Ft. Worth Grotto

[NSS #76]
1960–Present

The present Dallas-Ft. Worth Grotto was organized in June 1960 to take the place of the recently defunct Dallas Grotto and was able to retain the original NSS grotto charter from 1957 (see Dallas Speleological Society). The only member carried over from the old grotto was Bob Littlefield. In a 1986 *Caver* interview, Bob Littlefield said that the resurrection of the grotto was almost an accident:

During the NSS convention in Carlsbad [1960] was when a bunch of us got together. What happened was we ran into each other at the convention at Carlsbad Caverns. There were two or three of us and when we got ready to vote, we were voting individually as representatives of the Dallas area. And then we discovered that we had been independent of each other

and we got together and formed a grotto when we got back to Dallas.

The other cavers that Bob referenced were Bill Janetsky and Charles “Chuck” Larsen. Back in the Metroplex after the convention, they held their first organizational meeting at George Yeary’s home in Garland, elected officers, and soon applied for a grotto charter from the NSS. The group’s first project was the mapping of Gorman Cave; Bob Littlefield is said to have filmed the project from start to finish.

Initially, the new grotto’s membership came from the immediate Dallas area. Besides those already mentioned, Jack J. Burch, David Ince, Bert Olsen, Blair Pittman, and Fred Tart were early, active members. The cavers in Fort Worth were considering starting their own grotto but instead chose to merge

In 1969 Don and I had just moved into an apartment in Irving. Don was still at work one evening when there was a knock on the door. Looking through the peephole, I saw a young man sporting a bushy red beard and wearing a bowler hat. I was a bit nervous as I inquired who he was and what he wanted. With an exuberant grin he said he was Ronnie Fieseler; a caver. I flung open the door and welcomed him in. Don returned home to find me feeding dinner to a stranger. Ronnie told us that A. Richard Smith kept track of cavers moving into areas with grottos and had alerted him to our presence. We were very pleased about our warm welcome to Texas caving and to the Dallas-Ft. Worth Grotto.

—Sid Formanek

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with the Dallas Grotto in late 1960 to form the Dallas-Ft. Worth Grotto. Through the years, the membership has been active in Arkansas, Mexico, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and many Texas caving projects. The grotto was quite active in the 1960s and had important roles in the TSA Projects of 1962 and 1964 at Powell's Cave, the 1963 Project in San Saba County, the 1965 Project at Deep Cave, and the 1966 and 1970 Projects at McKittrick Hill.

By the end of the 1960s, most of the earlier cavers were inactive and the grotto was sparked back to life by Ronnie Fieseler, Bob Lloyd, Mike Moody, and a few others who were extremely active in New Mexico and at Carta Valley. Nothing lasts forever and by 1980 the grotto was again in the doldrums. Joe Giddens and Jay Jorden resurrected the grotto in 1982 by publishing a monthly newsletter and generating interest among the young cavers of the area. From 1983 to 1984, the grotto roster grew from 13 to 42. Members were actively exploring and mapping caves in south east Oklahoma and the Guadalupe, and attended mapping projects at Inner Space Cavern and Fitton Cave (Arkansas). The grotto was also active with the Southern Plains Region (SPR) of the NSS and hosted the 1986 SPR Regional at the Chickasaw National Recreation Area in southeast Oklahoma. Perhaps their most notable accomplishment was the discovery and survey of dozens of caves in the Arbuckle Mountains of southeast Oklahoma. John Brooks, Greg Mooty, and Woodrow Thomas led the exploration and survey of Mystic Cave, Blue Hole, Wild Woman Cave, and Bitter Enders Cave. The exploration of Blue Hole entailed over 4,500 feet of underwater survey using SCUBA gear.

In 1986 a splinter group formed in the Ft. Worth area and started the Maverick Grotto more as a geographic convenience than from dissatisfaction with the D-FW Grotto (see Maverick Grotto).

In 1988, the Grotto celebrated its 34th anniversary by holding an OTJ (Older than Jesus) party on the banks of the Brazos River. [This iteration of the grotto is properly rooted in 1960, making it a 28th anniversary but, hey, any excuse for a party, right?]

A number of important cavers have come from the Dallas-Ft. Worth Grotto. John Brooks, Ronnie Fieseler, Jim Goodbar, Katherine Goodbar, Terry Holsinger, Jay Jorden, Chuck Larsen, Pete Lindsley, Mike Moody, Greg Mooty, Norman Robinson, George Yeary, and many others have made significant contributions to Texas caving. Of these, perhaps the most important is Pete Lindsley (NSS 5566). Pete joined the grotto in 1961 and soon became an important figure in the Texas caving scene, serving as Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the TSA, and as editor of the *Texas Caver*. Pete's attention soon shifted to New Mexico and he became the central figure in the renewed interest in New Mexico caving that occurred during the 1960s (see

New Mexico chapter). In *The Oztotl Caver* for January 1995, Pete recalls his first Grotto meeting:

I had been caving perhaps 6-8 months before I heard of the NSS and the local Grotto. The only lead I had was that one of the leaders, Chuck Larsen, worked at Texas Instruments in Dallas. There were about four TI sites in Dallas, and none of them had a "Chuck." I finally located a number for a Charles V. Larsen and made the first contact with the Grotto. The first meeting was wild. All I wanted to do was to find out where some good caves were located. At the meeting, there were 4-6 small groups of people all talking at once about caves, but they didn't have much time to talk to me. They were very obscure about cave locations. The meeting was freestyle and I didn't understand much about some of the cave details that were discussed. (It hasn't changed much 34 years later, I guess.)

With its several iterations, the Dallas-Ft. Worth grotto is the second longest-lived caving organization in Texas, following the University of Texas Grotto. The grotto has published two monthly newsletters: *Habla la Abuela del Oztotl* (1983–1989) and *The Oztotl Caver* (1989–present). The DFWG newsletter is one of the most consistent grotto publications of its kind in the state, regularly comprising at least ten pages of grotto and state caving news, with a strong emphasis on conservation topics from across the country. Several issues were adorned with cover art provided by such notable artists as Kenny McGee, Wallace Hughes, and John Brooks.

D-FW Grotto members have often been strongly involved in caving politics. As noted before, Pete Lindsley served as TSA vice-chairman in 1964, TSA chairman in 1965, and editor of the *Texas Caver* from 1965–1966. Chuck Larsen served a partial term as TSA chairman in 1963. Katherine Goodbar served three consecutive terms as Secretary-Treasurer of the TSA from 1963–1965. Jay Jorden co-edited the *Texas Caver* from 1984 to 1989 and was editor and vice-chairman of the Conservation and Management Section of the NSS during mid-1980s. Brian Burton served as TSA vice-chairman in 1986 and chairman in 1987. Terry Holsinger served as TSA vice-chairman in 1987 and was active in the South Plains Region of the NSS in the mid-1980s. He later moved to Austin and subsequently served as TSA vice-chairman from 1999–2000, and TSA chairman in 2001 and 2003. More recently, John Brooks took the office of TSA Chairman for 2006.

In the 1990s the grotto became less prominent with the ascendancy of the Maverick Grotto and the loss of some key members but has shown more activity since 2000.

Early members of the Dallas-Ft. Worth Grotto 1960–1961

Jack J. Burch (5019)	Chairman
Denny Hamric	Vice-Chairman
Chuck Larsen (4970)	Secretary-Treasurer
Bob Littlefield (3854)	Safety and Training
Jim Eagan (5270)	Al Richmond (5427)
James Fitzpatrick	Cedric Snyder (5277)
Bob Gough (5250)	Fred Tart
Bill Janetsky (4918)	Larry Wyatt (5293)
Craig Rabb (5288)	George Yeary (5010)