

## What's In A Name?

Texas caving is rich with interesting names. The names given to caves and to features within them are varied almost beyond belief.

In early days, the caves tended to be named after the current owner: Mayfield Cave, Powell's Cave, Fisher's Fissure—or some prominent physical feature on the surface: Indian Creek Cave, O-9 Well, Austin Caverns—or something within the cave: Fern Cave, Frio Bat Cave, Dead Deer Cave, Fallen Stalagmite Cave, Histoplasmosis Cave (no histoplasmosis is known from this cave although conditions for it seem ideal)—or sometimes a combination of these things: Montgomery's Gypsum Cave (Terrell County), Magill's Crystal Sinkhole (Brewster County), or Hitzfelder Bone Cave and Kappleman Salamander Cave (both in Comal County). Speaking of combinations, Valdina Farms Sinkhole is quite near the border of Medina and Uvalde Counties and its name results from using portions of both names.

Later, cavers became more imaginative and names were taken from classical literature or whatever was popular currently. Natural Bridge Caverns is a wonderful example of two of these styles. Its name comes from the natural stone bridge spanning the main entrance. It is also perhaps the best-known example of a "theme" cave with many of its main features having names taken from Beowulf: Pluto's Anteroom, Lucifer's Entrails, and Dante's Descent. More recently, names such as Poltergeist Pit, Demon Drop, and Sirion River are found in Sorcerer's Cave, itself renamed from the original, more humble, Adams' Cave. The mythical theme was carried forward in MFP (Mighty Fine Pit) with names that were taken from J.R.R. Tolkien's Ring Trilogy then enjoying a period of popularity: Citadel of Gondor, Mirkwood Forest, and Sword of Anduril.

Most commercial caves name important places in their caves with romantic or fanciful names: Queens Chamber, Lake of the Moon, Valley of Ice, Bottomless Pit, Sherwood Forest.

Natural Bridge Caverns was a mouthful to repeat in casual conversation so it was commonly referred to simply as NBC. It wasn't the first acronym cave name but it spawned a few others: HBC for Highway Bridge Caverns (Inner Space Cavern), MFP for Mighty Fine Pit and BMC for Big Mutha' Caverns. The prime example of this is likely to be OMMBC for the incredibly awkward Oriente Milestone Molasses Bat Cave. Also known as Doke Ranch Cave, this name resulted from a "contest" to label a cave with a longer name than Langtry Trail Canyon Shelter Cave. The original acronym cave in Texas is almost certainly CWAN for Cave Without A Name.

Other themes are less elegant as in the Dallas-Ft. Worth Grotto penchant for naming a room in a newly explored cave the "Dallas Palace." We now have Dallas Palaces sprinkled over several states.

Some names are elegant in their simplicity: Ulk! Cave in Culberson County, Arrid Cave in Kimble County (it's extra dry), Deep Cave in Edwards County, Gyp Joint in Culberson County, Con Cave in Presidio County, and Cave X in Travis County. Before Cave X had a name, a novice caver was inspecting a topographic map marked with new cave locations and asked, "What about Cave X?" When told there was no such cave, he pointed to the "X" on the map; the name stuck.

There are some really strange names: Nigger Navel as an alternate name for Rambie's Cave in Uvalde County—the entrance looks a little like an umbilicus; Punkin Cave, in Edwards County—for the shape of its main chamber, Pregnant Cricket

Cave in Burnet County, and Phalangid Filled Fissure in Lampassas County.

Earlier names tended to be literal: Helictite Room, Soda Straw Room, Mud Crawl, etc., but after those names became blasé, cavers dug a little deeper and we got Fuzzy Walls, Sherwood Forest, and Meat Tenderizer.

Alliteration and rhyming are common tools: Crumbly Crack in Bandera County, Cedar Creek Crack Cave in Bell County, and Rinky Dink Sink in Comal County are good examples.

Only rarely have cavers named caves after themselves: Smith Cave in Pecos County (A. Richard Smith), Opal's Cave in Pecos County (Opal Hail), Gardner's Fall Pit in Val Verde County (Will Gardner). There are, however, countless features within the caves named after a person: Babcock's Lost Passage in Felton Cave (Dr. O. G. Babcock), Berner's Precarious Precipice in Caverns of Sonora (Fred Berner), and many in Indian Creek Cave: Evans' Heavens (T. R. Evans), Alice's Wonderland (Alice Hirsch), Patti's Pretty Passage (Patti Tarver), Bill Russell's Long Crawl (William H. Russell).

Some names are utterly without inspiration: Nelson Ranch Cave numbers 1-11 in Kerr County (Clearly, you would have to do some renaming if one of them actually did something impressive!). Or worse: Caves S-1 and S-2 in San Saba County, Dead Tree Cave in Randall County, and Dry Pasture Cave in Kerr County. Sometimes, the imagination fails and there are innumerable Goat, Bat, Indian, Porcupine, and Rattlesnake caves. And the desperate: Unnamed Cave #5 in Gillispie County and Unnamed Cave By El Max Front Gate in Kendall County.

Some caves have names for which only a few will find the full meaning. Clifford's Qal Cave in Brewster County is named for one of the original explorers and for the Quaternary alluvium in which it is formed. Gay Nineties Cave is named for the ranch on which it occurs in Comal County. Four Mile Cave lacks a lot being four miles long but is four miles from the center of Del Rio.

Some you wonder about: Toad Frog Falling Floor Fissure in San Saba County, Peardon's Sweat Box in San Saba County, Left In A Lurch Cave in Sutton County, \*\*\*\*\* Cave in Lubbock County, 200-Ft. Long Four Mile Cave in Kerr County, and Tarbutton's Showerbath Cave in Hays County. We also have the enigmatic Andy's Conveniently Ignored Cave and Cave of the Mad Machete, both in Bexar County.

And then there are the names of features and places within the cave. Some are logical and obvious: Butterfly Junction, The Crevice Passage, and The Corkscrew, while others are without a clue. For example, Egyptian Junction was named for a nearby pyramid-shaped rock. Sunflower Pit in Indian Creek Cave occurs in an area so muddy and nasty that sun and flowers are but distant memories. It gets its name from the fact that climbing out requires holds so fragile they were likened to pulling the petals from sunflowers [Elizabeth Smith to Carl Kunath: "Do you know why Sunflower Pit was named that? We were actually at the bottom of the pit. Somebody—Benfer, Bill, James—tried to climb it but said that the handholds were like picking sunflowers!"]. One of the most bizarre names to date is, unfortunately, not in a Texas cave but I can't resist mentioning it: Squirting Tuna Passage (Tuna can bludgeoned with a rock hammer). Airman's Cave has a couple of place names almost guaranteed to make you go somewhere else: Crucifixion Rock and The Emasculator.

50 Years of Texas Caving — Lighter Side

Inevitably, the influence of the Spanish language makes its appearance but not nearly as often as you might expect. We have Sótano Lodoso (San Saba County—[Literally “Muddy Basement,” but Sótano is used for “pit.”; so it’s Muddy Pit], Grutas de los Mojados—[Wetback’s Caverns] and Cueva Proxima Encino Grande—[Cave Near The Big Oak] but nothing quite so marvelous as the better Mexican names such as Sótano de Puerto de los Lobos.

Some caves have names so repulsive that you really don’t want to go there: Coon Crap Cave, Putrefaction Cave, and Poison Ivy Pit in Bexar County, The Shredder in Kendall County, and Putrid Pit in Val Verde County.

With more than 4,000 actual caves in the Texas data base, I suppose it’s amazing that more names aren’t duplicated and that Texas cavers keep coming up with wonderful names for their discoveries.

