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March 10, 2001: Expedition to survey life in newly opened Texas cave

On March 10th, Tom Iliffe of Texas A&M University, Galveston will lead an expedition to investigate the little-known fauna of an undisclosed cave, near Boerne, 30 miles North-west of San Antonio, Texas. This cave has a stream running through it and at 2.8 km long is the tenth longest cave in the state. The cave is privately owned and entry has been prohibited for the last 20 years. The expedition is taking place in winter because a large bat colony resides in the cave in the summer.

Scientists expect to find many previously unknown species in this cave; unusual creatures uniquely adapted to this extreme habitat and relicts of ancient lineages. Collections from other similar caves in the area have yielded previously unknown marine and Tethyan relict species such as thermosbaenaceans and copepods.

Cataloging the life in this cave is an urgent task, since groundwater ecosystems and fauna are often threatened by pollution and development. It is important to know what life exists in these groundwaters, the ecological roles they play (for example in purifying water) and whether they are threatened.

The stream cave expedition is part of a survey of fauna of flooded caves around the world, as part of the International Biodiversity Observation Year (IBOY) taking place in 2001 and 2002. The IBOY is a grass-roots initiative in which scientists around the world are collaborating to increase communication of important new findings about biodiversity and its role in our livelihoods.

There are opportunities for a member of the media to take part in and this expedition and obtain a first hand account of its discoveries. This is a water cave and involves wading in waist to chest deep water. Water temperature will probably be about 60-65 degrees or so and scientists will be in the water for several hours so a wet suit is essential. Please contact Gina Adams (970 491 1984) or Tom Iliffe (409 740 4454) for more information.