

## **Publicity and Caves: Spiraling Ramifications at Peppersauce**

### **By Ray Keeler**

Peppersauce Cave was a pristine underground habitat in Southern Arizona. The cave had large rooms and a mile of passage containing large, white formations, diverse biota, and clear, clean, permanent pools of water. The name Peppersauce is now synonymous with "sacrificial cave"-it has been trashed-massive graffiti, garbage, dirty water, no biota, and hordes of people.

The primary catalyst for the destruction was, and is, media publicity-media coverage leads to more media involvement, public curiosity, untutored visitation, and even vandalism. In February 1948, Desert Magazine published an article titled "Operation Underground" complete with high quality photos, adventure, and exact directions to the cave. The article included an excellent cave map and text about cave science, "Dr. Carpenter, head of the Department of Entomology at Harvard University ... 50 or 60 different insects were taken from the cave." One photo shows the author kneeling next to a large white stalagmite dutifully taking notes.

Then, in 1951, the author of the Desert Magazine article led National Geographic to the cave to publish an article on Peppersauce. The National Geographic article shows their scientist kneeling outside the cave entrance holding a broken formation-the same large white stalagmite that was pictured in the 1948 Desert Magazine article. To confirm the match, we overlaid a transparency made from the photo in one article over the other picture.

Skip forward to November 12, 2000-Arizona Daily Star (the Tucson newspaper)-in an article titled "Cave Divers Plumb for Natural Treasures", the first paragraph ends with this verbiage, "...and to search for pristine Kartchner-like caverns beneath the Catalina Mountains." I have collected other articles about Peppersauce, spanning 50 years of media adventure stories.

Publicity invites visitation and leads to more publicity. In 1995, an informal census conducted in Peppersauce showed more than 23,000 people visiting the cave that year. If wild caves must be publicized, three concerns must be emphasized-conservation, safety considerations, and protection of sensitive underground resources.

We have submitted a proposal to the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) to completely clean Peppersauce Cave. The decision will be made by ADEQ before this article is published. We are asking for financial assistance of more than \$71,000 and we will match it with \$108,000 in volunteer labor over two years. We will spend a major portion of the next two years trying to reverse 50 years of destruction.