

Students explore Aggie catacombs

By LISA JUNOD

My hands gripped the cold steel rungs as I slowly lowered myself down the ladder into the darkened tunnel. Soon my foot touched the ground, and I reluctantly released my death grip on the ladder. I was dressed in an over-sized dark green sweatshirt, a pair of battle-scarred blue jeans and a brown bandana. I was about to embark upon one of the strangest adventures of my life: a trip through the steam tunnels of Texas A&M; a trip through the steam tunnels.

Rumors as widespread and ancient as the underground system of tunnels have prompted my nocturnal mission. My primary task was to search for an underground railroad that many old Aggies claimed ran between Sbisá and Duncan dining halls.

"They used to run food back and forth on underground railroad tracks," one former student reminisced. Another claimed that was not railroad tracks, but trolley tracks that transported the food. One Maggie proudly enrolled at A&M boldly stated that under the campus lay "open tunnels big enough to drive a truck through."

But I found neither railroads nor trucks. I slipped down into the tunnels on that chilly evening; I found instead a unique part of the A&M campus that is seldom seen by present day students, and I discovered an Aggie tradition older than calling all at Silver Taps or kissing after touchdowns on football games: the lost art of tunnel ratting.

The tunnel floor was firm beneath my feet as I backed into the darkness to allow my companion, Will Anderson, to climb down the ladder. The moonlight, still shining brightly through the tunnel entrance, was abruptly extinguished when Will slid the manhole cover back over the hole. A few pebbles clattered down the walls as Will dropped to the floor beside me, and then — near silence, punctuated only by the rhythmic ticking of my watch.

We had entered the tunnels near the dorms on the north end of the campus, so we wanted to head southeast toward Sbisá. I turned my back on the tunnel entrance and took a confident step forward — only to change my foot ankle-deep in mud. Will flicked the switch on his flashlight and a bright beam of light shot down the expanse of tunnel in front of us, illuminating a seemingly endless stretch of muddy earth. He stepped past me and began sloshing down the tunnel, and after screwing up my courage and hitching up my pants, I followed him.

The tunnel was larger than I had expected, nearly six feet high and wide enough to walk through comfortably without bumping into the sides. It seemed to stretch on forever; an uninterrupted passageway of blackness lined on one side with heating pipes and on the other side with dim, dusty light bulbs spaced about every 30 feet.

Although the outside temperatures were

in the lower fifties, the air inside the tunnel was warm and I soon began to perspire under the weight of my sweater. The air was also quite still and a bit steamy, and felt like College Station after a good rain.

The air was still, but not as silent as I had first imagined. The steam tunnels have their own peculiar noises — traveling down the passageways I heard pressure valves hissing gently as they released tiny rivulets of steam into the warm moist air. I could hear the faint sound of generators whirring in the distance and pipes clanging and banging as the loads they carried changed.

I became so engrossed in the tunnel sounds that I nearly ran over Will, who had stopped to stare at some markings on the walls. He aimed his flashlight at a group of them: I could barely make out the words, "Animal Eight — Best Damn Outfit on Campus." As our eyes became accustomed to the darkness we began to notice more markings on the dust-covered concrete walls, most of them names of Corps outfits and students written in paint, felt-tip marker and even dried mud.

In the older tunnels we found, "SDQ 5 '68", "Filthy Fifth", "Salvation of the Corps - D.B.", "Devil D-1" and "Beat the Class '75 Hell outa t.u."

I was staring intently at some initials and a "61" carved in a wooden beam when Will called to me from further down the tunnel. He pointed his flashlight toward a hole in the wall, and exposed a pipe as wide as a coffee can teeming with giant roaches, some of them peering through the eye sockets of a cleanly-picked rat skull. I shuddered and drew back instinctively, but Will simply laughed. He had been through the tunnels before and had already seen the gargantuan roaches and spindly-legged spiders that inhabit the darkened depths.

Nocturnal insects abound in the tunnels, but there is a noted scarcity of rats and snakes. Will suggested most of them are in the Administration Building. That is probably because no such creature could exist for long in such a steamy, hot environment. We grew painfully aware of the intense heat as we trudged on through the tunnels that run underneath the front of the chemistry building and the library. One Aggie wrote on the wall, "Hot in Here," an observation any tunnel rat would agree with.

Once under the biological sciences building, we came to a crossroads in the tunnel, and turned toward an archway adorned with a "Welcome to the Pit" sign. We cautiously crawled through the entrance, and found ourselves staring through a wall of pipes at a small room. Empty except for various valves and pipes, the room opened on one side into a smaller anteroom, and in one corner into a ragged staircase. The anteroom was devoid of furnishings and filled with graffiti from more recent years — "WE STOLE BEVO '6 NOV 72" written in large, bold strokes.



Staff photo by Kevin Venner

The writings indicated that the secret room must have been deserted for years, but what was it doing there in the first place? Was it the hidden lair of some long-forgotten maniacal biologist, a madman who performed sex change experiments on frogs? Or did he concoct secret potions, perform Frankensteinian experiments or hold captive a lovely damsel in distress???

Whatever its cause for existence, the room reeked of the past and I shivered as I tiptoed toward the staircase, a structure that rose ten or twelve feet in the air, then ended abruptly. A staircase leading nowhere, that at one time must have step-

ped up into some mad professor's office or into some secret storeroom.

Slowly I left the stairs and climbed back over the pipes and into the tunnel. Will tried to jiggle the staircase door loose, but it was wedged tightly into the cement and soon he gave up and followed me.

After leaving the room, we reversed direction and headed across campus toward the Corps dorms, to find some of the older writings and see if we could find any traces of the rumored Sbisá-Duncan railroad. By this time my legs were aching and my shoulders permanently stooped from bending over to fit through the low passageway.

The older steam tunnels have much lower ceilings than the new ones, sometimes only about five feet high. This particular tunnel was flooded, and I found myself sloshing through long stretches of the black muck on the tunnel floor.

But all the slime and clammy mud left my thoughts when Will turned his flashlight to the wall, and we came face-to-face with a historical marker: an Aggie centennial ring imprinted on the tunnel wall in sealing wax. One tunnel rat had written on the wall, "PIG CAN GO ... ME," proof that Aggies are caught even in steam tunnels.

Steam tunnels had many uses

By LISA JUNOD

(Note: Entrance into the university's steam tunnels is strictly prohibited by paragraph 48, part b of the University Rules and Regulations which warns against "the willful and illegal entry of any University property, including dormitory basements, utility tunnels and utility chambers between floors and in walls." Offenders may be punished by expulsion, dismissal, suspension or other disciplinary action.)

The steam tunnels, reputed home of the legendary Gigags, are narrow underground passageways designed to allow maintenance workers easy access to the university's heating pipes. These tunnels now house pipes that carry hot and cold running water, steam heat, telephone lines, and power and television cables.

The tunnels are reinforced concrete structures buried about ten feet underground. Three main tunnels radiate out from the university power plant and, aided by nearly a dozen smaller branches, reach into the basements of nearly every heated building on campus.

Despite their utilitarian purposes, in past years the tunnels have served as a rather unusual recreational area for students at A&M. One Old-Army Ag claims that during the 1950s on any given Saturday night the tunnels were a beehive of activity, so busy that they could have used a traffic cop down there. There were guys wandering all over.

In those days when Corps membership was compulsory and no women lived on campus dorm rivalries were stronger, and many Aggies used the steam tunnels to gain access to other dorms. Sometimes the invaders would climb up inside the dorms and awaken their sleeping enemies with buckets of cold water; other times they would paper their rooms or try to flood the halls. Often the attackers simply turned the pressure valves in the steam tunnels, cutting off the heat leading into the dorm and freezing students out of the building.

University records don't show how old the steam tunnels are, but they date back to at least the 1920's when cadets lived in tent city (now the site of Law and Puryear Halls) and sought refuge from the chilling College Station winters in the steamy tunnels. The main tunnel system now in use has been here since 1939, when branches extended down Military Walk and to the north dorm area, the systems building and the biological sciences building.

Modern-day tunnel rats can find remnants of past Aggie civilizations etched on the walls; students' names, classes and sometimes even phone numbers. The earliest date found in the tunnels, "1920", was scratched in the concrete wall of a tunnel beneath the biological sciences building. Above the date a "Welcome to the Pit" sign enticed brave Aggies to enter the steamy lair.

Bookmart will be open from Monday May 10 — Friday May 14 from 9-5 daily, and will be located in room 137 of the MSC. Due to limited funds we are able to buy only the books listed here. We are selling quite a variety, however. We will open again for the first two weeks of fall semester to sell and will buy for the last two weeks of the fall semester.

Hopefully at that time we will be able to buy all books which will be used in the spring of '77. We're sorry we can't buy more books at this time, but we hope this will help us to better serve you in the future. Any questions, please call the Student Government Office at 845-3051.

Building Construction	253 Schmidt 335 McGinness 336 Egan 427 Crowley AISC 427A MFPATS 428 Ferguson ACI 453 Clough 470 Labor Relations Re 489E Walker 617 Dagosino Auntington	Construction Principles 3ed. Mech and Elec Equipment 5th ed. Concepts in Thermal Comfort Steel Building Design Manual Steel Construction Manual Wood Construction Data 1-6 Reinforced Fundamentals 3ed. Building Code rev. Reinforced Construction Construction Contracting Primer for Labor Relations Building Estimates Reference Book Methods and Materials of Comm. Const. Building Construction	Economics	203 McConnel Bingham	Economics Study Guide to Accompany Economics (McConnel)	Mechanical Engineering	101 Beakley 112 Hibbeler 213 222 Van Vlack	Engineering Engineering Mechanics Elements of Materials
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