Donating Banners on Mammals and Birds to the primary school of Aldea Cerro Azul

Municipio de Chisec, Departamento de Alta Verapaz, Guatemala

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FLAAR Mesoamérica, June 2018

A friend who lives in Alta Verapaz telephoned FLAAR Mesoamerica to indicate that a village had lost their water source (it had gone dry). They were trying to put a several hundred meters of plastic pipe into a cave spring in the hope of having water in this way. But they had no pump powerful enough to pull the water that distance. Plus there is no electricity in this area whatsoever.

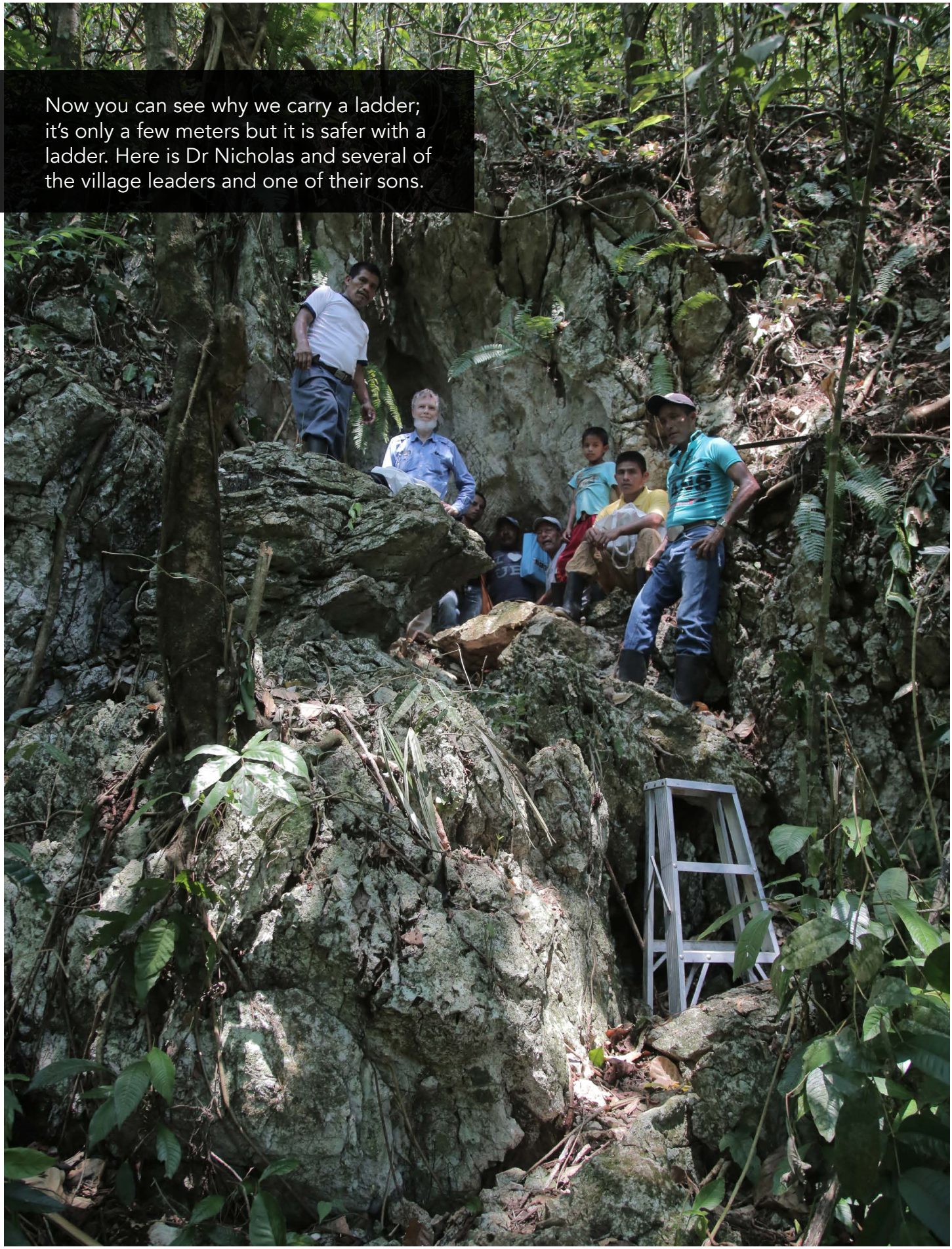
Since I spent much of my childhood exploring caves in the Ozark Mountains with my brothers, I decided to visit the area to see how we could help with ideas. Our family got all our water from a cave in a hill behind our house. So their idea was clever (except their cave is rather far from their village).

In 4WD double-cabin pickup truck we got to the aldea (day and a half drive from our main office).

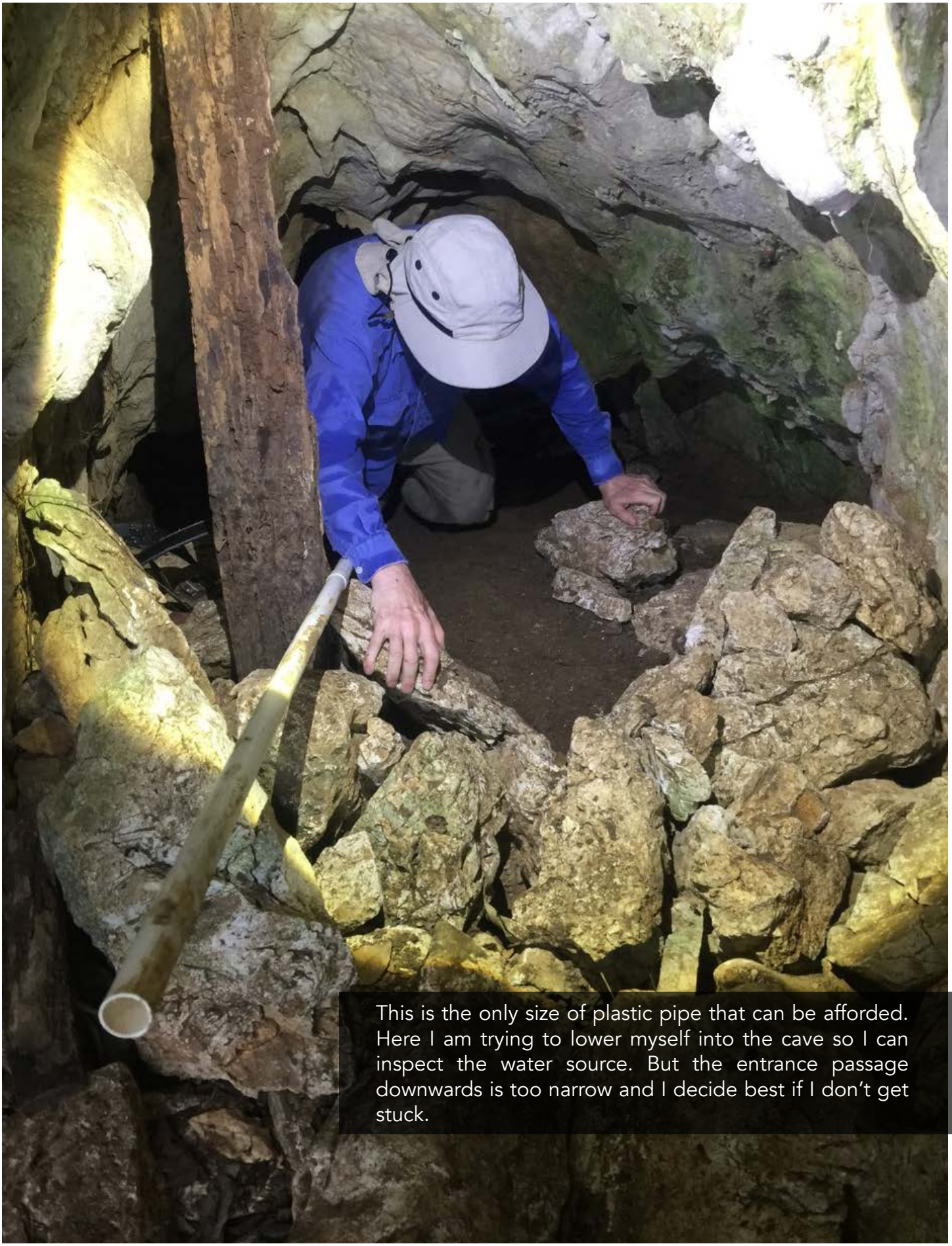
Then we hiked several kilometers through the milpas, towards the uncut forest. The cave spring entrance was into the forest.


Kao Chimi

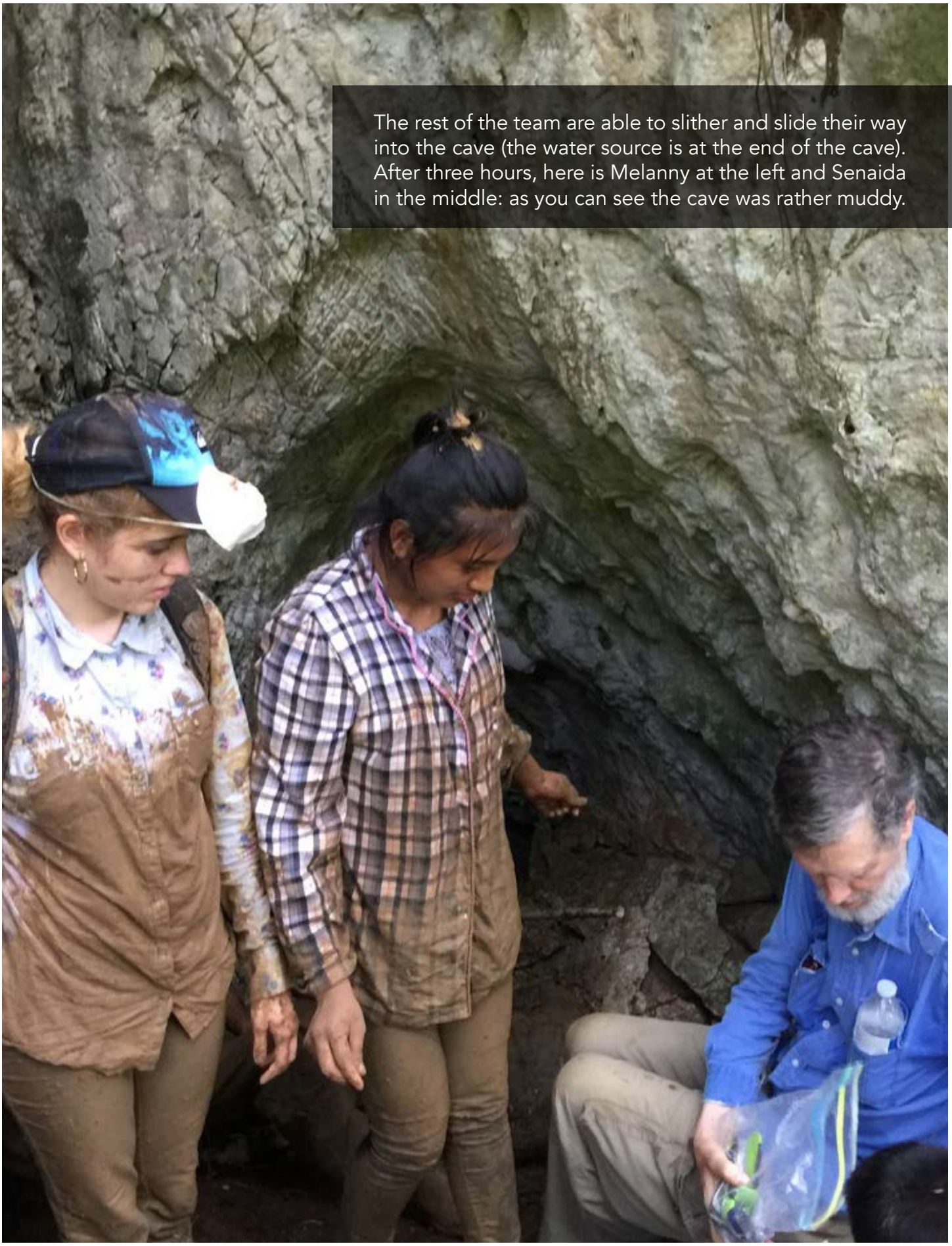
Here the milpa fields end and we begin the descent down to the mouth of the cave.



Now you can see why we carry a ladder; it's only a few meters but it is safer with a ladder. Here is Dr Nicholas and several of the village leaders and one of their sons.



This is the only size of plastic pipe that can be afforded. Here I am trying to lower myself into the cave so I can inspect the water source. But the entrance passage downwards is too narrow and I decide best if I don't get stuck.



The rest of the team are able to slither and slide their way into the cave (the water source is at the end of the cave). After three hours, here is Melanny at the left and Senaida in the middle: as you can see the cave was rather muddy.

What are needed are solar panels

A solar panel system is needed for the village school, and so somewhere can keep food and medicine in a refrigerator.

Solar energy would also help the village elders and village leaders so they can charge computers and charge their cell phones.

Most important are solar panels so a water pump can be powered. It would help if an entity in this kind of solar energy technology could work with the Aldea Cerro Azul village leaders to assist them.

We also suggested that because the pond at the end of the cave has cave fish and cave crabs, that the end of the pipe must be protected. If a fish gets into the pipe, it will block the flow of the water. Same with leaves, cave insects, and other materials. The end of the pipe needs a clever method to allow water to enter but not fish, crabs, leaves, giant cave arachnids or dead bats. This sieve will need to be checked and cleaned once a month or at least often enough to allow the water not to be blocked.

Since our main expertise is preparing material for local schools and doing research on plants and animals, the needs for electricity and water pump was new for us. But visiting this remote settlement helps us understand what is helpful for rural areas.

We will network with other groups to find another company or NGO or group who can help the Q'eqchi' Mayan people of this aldea.

Everyone in the village was hospitable

They provided us with several 3-liter bottles of liquid so we would not be dehydrated hiking back and forth. A local pickup truck driver kindly donated his services to drive the approximately six people of the village to the end of the road (to where we had to start to go on foot to the cave entrance).

Then another driver also donated his services to drive all the people back to the village.
Now that we noticed how appreciative the people were when we showed them the banners we had of birds and animals, we wish to print even more and return to the village and donate lots more educational material to them.

The purpose of the overall original field trip was to find wild vanilla orchid plants in this remote part of Alta Verapaz. And to do close-up photography of the rarely blooming Vanilla insignis orchid vines in the orchid research garden of botanist Fredy Archila in Coban. So we were not carrying copies of our other printed material for primary schools. We came to the mountains of Chisec because the vanilla flowers did not open on the day expected in Coban, so to fill two days of waiting, we came to this village.

Printing Books is helpful

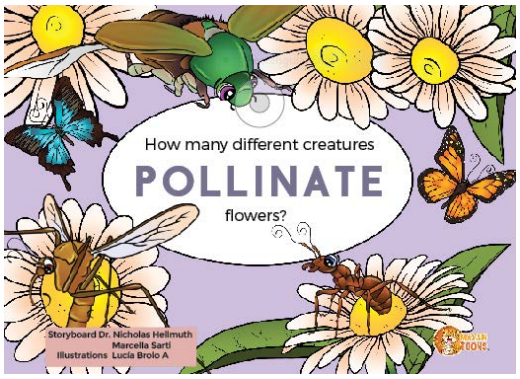
Friends and colleagues in the printing industry in EU, USA, and China donate 5-meter, 3.2m, and 1.8m banners. What really would help is a printing company which could print enough books to help the Q'eqchi' Mayan villages that we know:

There must be at least ten schools between the main highway and the hotel on the other side of Parque Lachua (the only hotel in this area, since Chisec is too far away, as is Playa Grande).

We would also like to donate books to the schools around the Candelaria cave area. Must be at least six village schools around Mucbilha and Candelaria and along the road between these two locations.

We also work in the schools of Senahu, between Senahu and Cahabon, and between Cahabon and Lanquin (total of a dozen schools of which we have visited about six). We would also like to donate books to all the Q'eqchi' Mayan schools of Balamte' and all the areas near Cahabon and Senahu.

Here are front covers of the books that need to be printed for the vilages



Dr Nicholas writes the storyboards for the books. We have the capability to put them into Spanish, Q'eqchi' Mayan, and Spanish (the school teachers specifically ask that all the books be in three languages, since they say the only books available to them are either in Mayan-Spanish or Spanish-English: there is nothing in all three languages.

MayanToons is a project concept of FLAAR Mesoamerica. FLAAR Mesoamerica is a Guatemalan entity initiated by FLAAR in the USA.

www.maya-ethnobotany.org
www.maya-ethnozoology.org
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To donate for our projects please contact FrontDesk@FLAAR.org. This reaches both FLAAR and FLAAR Mesoamerica and MayanToons.

Part II

The helpful local Q'eqchi' Mayan people of Cerro Azul told us there were oropendola nests a few kilometers deeper into the Neotropical seasonal rain forest. So after we returned from the cave we drove deeper into the mountains and WOW.

The tallest palo de jiote that I have seen during my over 54 years in Guatemala. Never, ever have I seen this species of Bursera even 33% this height (potentially *Bursera simaruba*). Across the top were Montezuma Oropendola nests with the birds occasionally flying back and forth. We will issue a separate FLAAR photo essay on these birds and their remarkable meter-high woven nests.

The next day we found native Guatemalan bamboo: yes, not bamboo of China, Taiwan, Vietnam: but bamboo native to Guatemala, available to the Mayan people for thousands of years.

We also found palm trees with edible nuts.

So we will have additional FLAAR photo essays showing the palm groves and the bamboo groves (just a few meters from each other).

It's amazing what you can find in Guatemala in general and in Alta Verapaz in particular. I spent all my younger years in Peten, but since we have several Q'eqchi' Mayan people working in our main office, we visit their home areas which are all in Alta Verapaz. WOW, what a great place to learn about plants, animals, and friendly insects.

We saw zompopos harvesting flowers; we found other ants in a mutualistic relationship with a rare *Costus* species of flower. And we found wild vanilla orchid vines in this previously unrecorded location.

Very successful field trip, the first week of June 2018.

The banners are printed at 5'meter widths since that is the most economical (easiest way to transport them to remot e locations). Once we donate the banners, it is easy for the school teachers to cut them into individual posters or cut them into shorter series (to hang on the walls of the classrooms).