Tom Meador, 43, died at 2:00 am on September 29, 1986, at his home in San Angelo. Services were held at Evergreen Cemetery in Ballinger, his mother's hometown.

He was born April 3, 1943, in San Angelo. He was a Schleicher County rancher who lived near Eldorado for many years. Tom was active in both the Texas Speleological Association and the Southwest Region of the National Speleological Society starting in the early 1960’s. He was a life member and Fellow of the NSS, with an NSS number of 5202.

Tom did much of his early caving with the Abilene Grotto. He was involved with surveying caves in West Texas, such as Painted Caves in Val Verde Co., Cueva del Humo and Fallen Stalagmite Cave in Edwards Co., as well as Vanishing River Cave in New Mexico, and many others. Tom was a speleo-historian who dug up old newspaper articles and writings from the 19th Century on Texas caves. He wrote a lot of interesting history reports for *The Texas Caver*. One of his best articles was “A brief history of the Devil's Sinkhole”, which appeared in the October, 1965 *Texas Caver*, pp 70-72, and was reprinted in Texas Speleological Survey 2(5-6), pp. 21-24. This contained colorful stories by cowboys about their first visits to the sinkhole.

He married Pamela Scott on July 9, 1985, in San Angelo, and is survived by her and her children, Noel and Ashley; one sister, Sarah Kate Lipsett of San Angelo; an uncle, Epigmenio Sanchez of Eldorado; and other relatives.

Tom was a big, shambling fellow who loved to drink a whole gallon of milk for breakfast. He invented a combination rappelling and climbing device in the 1960’s, but it never caught on. I remember him demonstrating it at the 1968 TSA Convention in Kerrville. He loved to talk about caves and will be missed by all who knew him. Reminiscences of Tom by cavers will be welcomed by the Texas Speleological Survey and the Texas Caver.

Caver of the Month

Tom Meador became interested in caving in an evolutionary sort of way. First, Tom participated in scouting during most of his school years at Eldorado and Ballinger, Texas. Then this scouting led to just plain interest and adventure in the out-of-doors. Finally, after visiting a few small wild caves in Bandera County with friends, Tom noticed an article in the Texas Almanac on the caves of Texas and wrote its author, James Estes, in Abilene. The letter contained an invitation to visit his ranch near Eldorado and help in removing silt from a filled cave. From then on, caving has been the first word in Tom's many outdoor adventures. (or would you call it indoor?)

Tom is a World Scout, making a trip around the world with a group of other Boy Scouts several years ago. He is also a collector, and this ranges from Indian water flasks to almost anything. Fossils, knives, Guns, rocks, books, you name it. His room resembles a museum.

Tom is perhaps responsible, more than anyone else, in doing speleological work in Schleicher County. He has written an article on sink bottom types of the county, which was reproduced from its original, in The Texas Caver, in the Speleo-Digest. He is a widely travelled caver, making not only trips to Mexico, but to the states of South Dakota, Washington, Oregon, Utah, and Idaho, among others.

Tom is a big fellow, mild mannered, and quite trustworthy on a top end of a safety line. He is interested in mapping and exploring. He is a rancher, loving the country and the work on the ranch. He does most of his caving with friends from San Angelo and Abilene.

Tom Meador fills his tray at the BOG breakfast during the TSA Convention.
J. Tom Meador Award for an Exceptional New Caver, Southwest Region NSS

http://caves.org/region/swr/jtm_award.html

This award is presented to an exceptional new caver, nominated by SWR grottos, at the Fall SWR meeting and selected by committee. Contact Kieffer if you would like to volunteer for the committee. Candidates should have been caving less than 3 years and encourage new cavers to continue as a steward of cave management and safety.

The award will be presented at SWR Winter Tech: 1 yr memberships to SWR and NSS, award certificate, and a gift card for a cave vendor.

Jim Evatt on Tom Meador, 2014

Fond memories of Tom Meador with some of his friends: Lee Skinner, Ronnie Fieseler, Norm Robinson, Jack Burch, Carol and Alan Hill. All views in the Guadalupes, P. Lindsley photos. "Tom was a giant of a man", famous quote of Jim Evatt who wrote the history below.

For his short but extremely active life caving in NM and Texas, no one could or should receive more accolades than Eldorado Texas’s very own Joel “Tom” Meador.

Tom was a giant of a man both in stature and in indomitable spirit. With a slight back problem that reduced him to a “mere” six foot six inches, and a tenacious thirst for cave history, Tom left an indelible mark on spelean history in New Mexico and Texas. Yet it was not his altitude that left an impression on anyone he met, it was his attitude.

He was the personification of Will Rogers in his friendships – Tom “never met a man he didn’t like”, or woman. He was frequently the first to greet a newcomer in any caving group with an infectious smile and a handshake that could crush a limestone block - if he wanted it to. Perhaps he just wanted to leave a lasting impression on his new friend, or possibly he had simply forgotten that he wasn’t wrestling one of his steers to the ground. You always remembered that handshake, and, when he opened his giant paw to release your hand, you counted your fingers to assure yourself that there were still five there.

Born on April 3, 1943, Tom grew up in the West Texas ranch country near the town of Eldorado, south of San Angelo. How Tom began his caving career is open to conjecture; it wasn’t due to fabulous cave finds on his ranch, since no caves of major significance were found there despite a wealth of limestone. In the early 1960’s, Tom became known in the caving circles of West Texas, where he was informed that the really terrific caves were in the Guadalupe Mountains of southeast New Mexico. So Tom packed his Jeep CJ-6 and took the first of countless dozens of treks to that hollow mountain range.

Tom rapidly became close friends with the grand “old” man of caving in the area, Andy Komensky of Carlsbad. Tom’s third home, after the ranch house and his parent’s home in San Angelo, was the living room floor of Andy’s for many a Friday night.

For several years beginning sometime in 1963, Tom probably spent as many weekends in southeastern New Mexico as at his home. He made as many caving trips as his ranch work schedule would allow, mostly to New Mexico caves. Tom rapidly became as recognizable an in-cave fixture as the bats and spelothems that he visited.

Like his caving omnipresence, he was insatiable in appetite. A number of all-you-can-eat restaurants that he visited were forced to change their policy, or price, after Tom tried, usually unsuccessfully, to fill his “bottomless pit”. He proudly explained to friends that he probably kept several dairies in NM and Texas in business – singlehandedly; his daily consumption of milk was almost as legendary as his speleological exploits.

Tom and three other cavers spent nine consecutive days in the Guadalupes in the summers of 1964 and 1965, scouring ridge after ridge for new caves and making the first Jeep trek in many years from Queen of the Guadalupes Mine to Camp Wilderness Ridge. On that ridge one morning, Tom taught the others how to eat, leading the way in a pancake-eating fest that saw the four consume 64 pancakes cooked on a Coleman camp stove atop Camp Wilderness Ridge.

Tom’s hunger was even more evident in his quest for cave knowledge. He rapidly became the leading cave historian on Guadalupe caves, amassing an awe-inspiring collection of archives and memorabilia. He knew more about the history of Carlsbad Cavern and the other caves on the National Park than many of the interpreters did, and periodically was called upon by them to answer questions that they had been unable to answer when asked by visitors to the park.

He spent a great deal of time at the NPS library at Carlsbad Caverns, sponging and donating as much historical information as he could. The copy facilities were very limited at the Visitor Center, so Tom took copious notes. Some that may still require deciphering. He eventually amassed a collection of Carlsbad Caverns history that dwarfed the little library there.
As the living legend of Tom Meador grew to match his physical presence, and the history of caves in NM and Texas expanded exponentially, so too did the cave conservation movement in those two states. Tom participated in many cave surveys and in frequent cleanup trips. It was not uncommon to see Tom lugging two or more large filled trash sacks out of caves, returning the well-deserved wilderness look to many a cave.

He constantly made generous donations to caving organizations, and was rarely out-bid on art objects or regional historical objects at the regional or NSS convention auctions. His collection of cave art items, too, was voluminous.

The Jeep dealership in San Angelo was always happy to see Tom drive in; he was constantly returning a tired 1-year old Jeep to trade for another brand-new one. Between his ranch roads and the 4WD roads of the Guadalupe, his Jeeps were constantly subjected to punishment that might be considered cruel and unusual. The ranch business paid for the new one each year.

When others within Tom’s enormous circle of friends achieved a major accomplishment in caving, Tom was quick to congratulate their effort. But he rarely talked of his own successes. He preferred to sit back and listen to the tales of others, to commit their triumphs to memory to further his database of cave history with information that was soon to be an integral part of the overall historical perspective of New Mexico – Texas caving.

He wrote copious communications with other cavers, as well as articles on cave history that gained notoriety in Texas and New Mexico, particularly Carlsbad Caverns National Park. He was a member of the Lion’s Club and attended meetings both in his home area and in Carlsbad when he was there, sometimes being called upon to talk about the caves of the area.
A bachelor nearly all his life, Tom married during the summer of 1986 at the age of 43. He was a Life Member of the National Speleological Society. Among his awards were Fellow of NSS (1969) and Honorary Member of Southwestern Region of the NSS (1983). He was a Caver of the Month for the Texas Speleological Association in 1965, and Vice-Chairman of the TSA in 1968. He was on the staff of the Texas Speleological Survey in 1967 and 1968.

Sadly, Tom passed away at home September 29, 1986 in San Angelo, Texas after a year-long illness. His widow still resides in San Angelo.

Tales told by Tom, and tales told about Tom, will flourish around caving campfires for generations to come. The true stories are often as bizarre as the embellished ones. But Tom’s positive impact on caving in New Mexico and in Texas, will serve as exemplary leadership as long as the sun rises in Texas before it does in New Mexico.