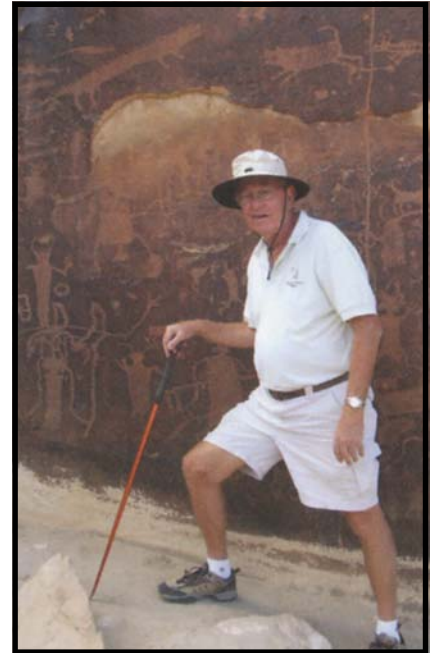


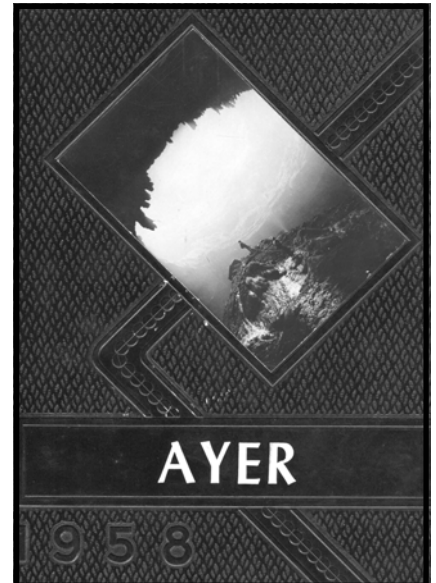
Royce is an excellent example of a serious Texas caver who had an important place in events of the day. Royce's time was 1957-1962 and then his active days were over and he moved on but maintained an interest for the rest of his life.

Royce was fortunate to have spent most of his undergraduate years in the Ozona public schools, a progressive system that boasted some of the better instructors, and a supportive community. This was Royce's environment. Royce's first caving experience was a Boy Scout adventure that included a visit to Blackstone Cave. In Ozona there wasn't much to do outside of school-based activities so it was natural to seek and find adventure beyond the academic activities. Ozona, Texas is in Crockett County, the area of Texas known as Edwards Plateau and although there are quite a few caves, they are not as numerous as areas in the Balcones Fault zone where most student groups began and flourished in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. However, the available caves tended to be exceptional. This group visited Felton Cave, Caverns of Sonora, Montgomery Gypsum Cave, Abyss Sinkhole, and O-9 Well, to mention only a few.

Enough young people were seeking adventure to form The Ozona Speleological Society. Most members were from the class of 1958-1959. Royce was in the class of 1960. In Ozona, with such a small student body (~100), everyone did everything whether it was football, band, or caving. The community was involved to the extent that the 1958 school yearbook, *Ayer*, selected exploring as the theme of the yearbook and the activities of the local boys was prominently featured. The yearbook featured seven pages of pictures. They are not credited but many were by Mills Tandy with additional contributions I recognize as by Scotty Moore and Royce Ballinger.



Later in life Royce began substituting archeology for zoology and was especially interested in the American SW. Here, he is pictured at one of the Mimbres



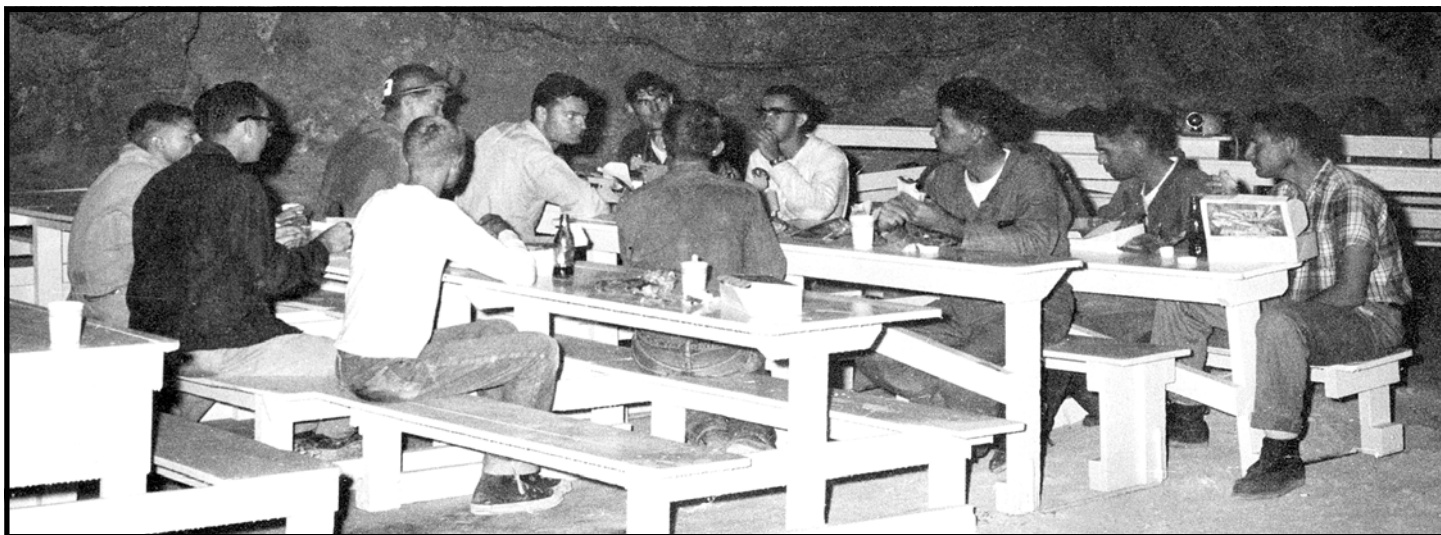
The 1958 Ozona Yearbook.



Here are some of the stalwarts of the OSS. From left: Scotty Moore, Royce Ballinger, Mills Tandy, Jon Burton.

In 1957, it became known that a pipeline would be constructed near Mayfield cave and that considerable blasting would be required to bury the pipe. August 6, 1957, Royce, along with Mills Tandy and Scotty Moore made a long visit to photo document the cave. No one knew what effect nearby blasting might have on the fragile decorations at what would become Caverns Of Sonora. As it turned out, there was no effect but it was certainly cause for concern.

On a notable trip in September 1957 Royce, Mills Tandy, and Scotty Moore were part of a group with cavers from Abilene and Dallas that accompanied author William Halliday to Carlsbad and a couple of other caves in that area of New Mexico.

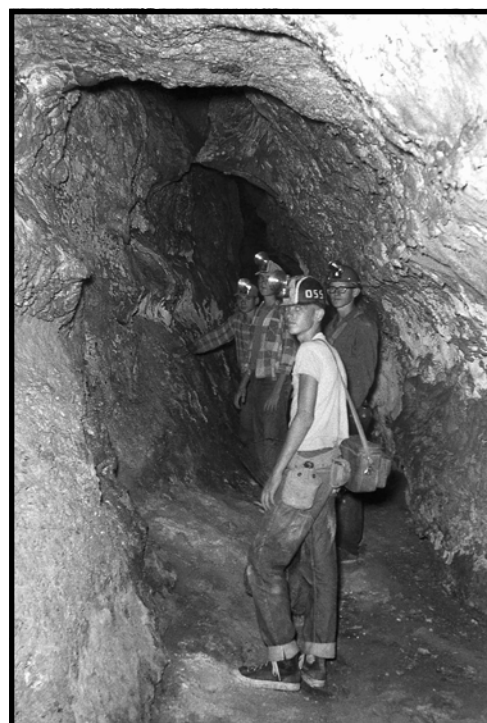


Royce is pictured in white shirt with back to the camera. This is a group of important cavers at that time that included Jimmy Walker, James Papadakis, Bob and Bart Crisman, and Bill Halliday (second from right).

The Ozona Speleological Society, was chartered in July 1958 as NSS grotto #86 and was strong enough to host the Texas Region Convention in 1958. In the next few years, the group explored at least 20 caves in the nearby areas of Terrell and Crockett County. They also benefited from the proximity of the newly discovered portions of Mayfield Cave (later called Caverns of Sonora) and were frequent visitors and explorers. Royce was often the designated "ledge crosser" in the days before a fixed rope was installed across the Pit Room ledge.

In January 1958, part way through Ozona high school, Royce moved with his family to Andrews, Texas. This was a critical event because it brought him together with A. Richard Smith, NSS #3708, who was somewhat isolated in Odessa.

They became interested in Ft. Stanton Cave and began a study/mapping program. The *Texas Caver*, January-February 1959 pages 5 and 16 detail a Ft. Stanton trip in July 1958 by Royce, Charles Carrara, Bill Fritz, and Jim Thompson. They were exploring and began with a trip through a long crawlway known as Hell Hole. Fifty yards out of Hell Hole, the passage became larger but was seemingly blocked by a huge mountain of breakdown—the limit of known cave. Probing the breakdown, they reached a drop of 40 feet that required equipment.



Royce at the rear of a group of OSS cavers in Dondole Cave.

Improvising, they formed a human chain and lowered Jim Thompson (the smallest and lightest member of the group) about 10 feet to a point that became climbable. All descended and shortly, they were in a passage 50 feet wide and 60-70 feet high with lots of velvet flowstone. The passage was obviously virgin and was well decorated. Their time expired and they exited the cave after a ten hour trip.

In 1959 Ballinger and Smith published *Preliminary Report of Investigations of Ft. Stanton Cave*, Their report included a map of about two miles of passage and data about history, geology, meteorology, and biology. Not bad for a couple of high school students.

While at Andrews, Royce was fundamental in the organization and activities of the Permian Basin Grotto (Andrews/Monahans) but struggled to maintain group activity. In 1960 Royce entered school at San Angelo College. By 1961 he had organized San Angelo College Speleological Society and spurred the group to a study program at Arden Cave and continued exploration at Longhorn Cavern. Royce and others were major assistants for the November 10-11, 1962 Texas Caving Convention hosted at the college with Bud Frank as chairman.



Mills Tandy in Abyss Sinkhole. [Ballinger]

After student days at SAC, Royce went on to earn a Masters degree and later returned to SAC as a zoology teaching assistant. While there he was instrumental in forming the San Angelo College Speleological Society. Their special project was a study of Arden Cave that was published in the *Texas Caver*.

Royce had all the academic credentials you could ask for and a list of his publications requires several pages. That material is well documented in a detailed 2022 autobiography (372 pages) he compiled a few years before his death. Here, I will only mention a few things related to his involvement with caves and cavers except to note his educational accomplishments.

Besides the co-authored article on Ft. Stanton Cave, Royce also wrote:

- O-9 Well*: 1958 *NSS News*, page 70
- Cave Conservation*: 1962 *Texas Caver*, page 44
- Longhorn Caverns*: 1962 *Texas Caver*, page 46
- Arden Cave (Project Arden)*: 1962 *Texas Caver*, page 4

- Royce's academic degrees:
- 1962, BA from University of Texas at Austin
- 1962, Masters from Texas Tech (a study of the lizard genus *uta*)
- 1971, Ph.D. from Texas A & M (comparative ecology of two viviparous lizards)

Royce was generally recognized as an authority for certain "lizards" and authored at least 150 technical/research publications. He completed his academic career as Professor Emeritus at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Although Royce's active years in caving were relatively short, his contributions were significant and he remained interested in speleology. His memory remained sharp and he was always a patient and helpful consultant on matters of early Texas caving. His passing after a long struggle with cancer is a significant loss. He was my friend and I shall miss him.

===Carl Kunath, 12/2023