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CELEBRATING A TEXAS TREASURE
Natural Bridge Caverns 50th Anniversary of Discovery

NATURAL BRIDGE CAVERNS, TEXAS (March 10, 2010) – Ask a caver why they explore caves and they'll answer, "to discover the unknown." That's the very essence of caving: exploring dark and mysterious passages, crawling, climbing and squeezing, to see where they go. Fifty years ago, on March 27, four adventurous college students from St. Mary's University in San Antonio did just that, and what they found was nothing less than the mother lode of majesty and wonder: Natural Bridge Caverns, the largest cavern in Texas.

Led to the site after hearing of an amazing 60-foot limestone bridge which would become the caverns' namesake, the students obtained permission from the Wuest family to investigate what laid beneath their ranch. What the students found initially was enough to keep them interested, and on their fourth expedition they uncovered a long, narrow crawlspace that ultimately opened up into two miles of virgin caverns.

"We are so excited about this anniversary because it puts the spotlight on the spirit of discovery, which is why fifty years later people still come to Natural Bridge Caverns -- to satisfy their curiosity and sense of discovery," explains Brad Wuest, president and chief executive officer of Natural Bridge Caverns.

To commemorate the anniversary, this summer Natural Bridge Caverns will offer Discovery Days on select weekends, with special pricing and activities for guests of all ages. "We want everyone to know this is the perfect time to visit Natural Bridge Caverns and celebrate with us," says Wuest.

A third-generation family-owned and operated attraction, Natural Bridge Caverns was developed by the Wuest family, along with Jack Burch, a noted cave developer, and Orion Knox, one of the four student discoverers. Natural Bridge Caverns opened to the public nearly four years later, in 1964, and millions have visited since. Brothers Brad and Travis grew up working at the caverns and today manage the business along with their mother, Joye. "You could say it's in our blood," says Wuest. The family is actively involved in promoting Texas tourism as well as show caves internationally.

Two daily tours are available – the *Discovery Tour* and the *Illuminations Tour* – each quite different and offering its own unique charms. "We've taken great care to preserve the cavern environment and develop for our guests two unforgettable cavern experiences, each with its own personality," explains Wuest. "We believe we are giving people an experience they haven't seen anywhere else in Texas." Natural Bridge Caverns is recognized as a National Natural Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior and one of the world's premier show caverns.

Both tours are led by trained guides down to a depth of 180 feet below the surface, through passages and rooms of glistening cave formations revealed in succession, beautifully unfolding long-held secrets of the caverns. Many of the formations actually sparkle from the light reflecting off calcite crystals that adorn them. First-time cavern visitors may be surprised by the colors of some formations, sometimes subtle, sometimes deeper, depending upon the mineral content.

Cavern tours feature vast rooms and winding passages of geologic treasures, from gigantic, towering

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stone monuments in Sherwood Forest and the Castle of the White Giants, to delicate and rare formations of soda straws and cave ribbon. The formations are plentiful and beautiful, even breathtaking, and nearly all of them are still growing.

The *Discovery Tour* lasts approximately 75 minutes and boasts the largest rooms of the two tours, one the size of a football field. The *Illuminations Tour* lasts approximately 70 minutes and features a total darkness experience.

A family-oriented attraction, Natural Bridge Caverns offers a variety of activities for all ages. Two unique *Adventure Tours* allow the more daring an opportunity to don rappelling gear, helmets and headlamps for a guided cave excursion that gives participants a chance to get dirty and appreciate the experience of exploring the unknown. These three- to four-hour *Adventure Tours* are by reservation only and are not for the faint of heart.

Natural Bridge Mining Company is an authentic mining sluice where guests can pan for gems, minerals and fossils, just like miners once did in their search for gold. Sparkling quartz, sapphire, ruby, topaz, emerald, amethyst and many other gems and minerals, as well as arrowheads and fossils are among the treasures that can be discovered at this attraction. The more adventurous might want to try the *Watchtower Challenge*, season and weather permitting, and test their climbing skills on one of the largest outdoor climbing and zip line towers in Texas.

Natural Bridge Caverns is open daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., with extended hours for spring and summer. The year-round temperature in the caverns is 70 degrees with high humidity. Guests should wear lightweight clothing and comfortable walking shoes which provide good traction on steep, wet surfaces. Strollers are not recommended for the *Discovery Tour*, and not permitted on the *Illuminations Tour*. The caverns are located 30 miles north of downtown San Antonio and eight miles west of IH-35 at exit 175/Natural Bridge Caverns Road. For additional information, visit www.naturalbridgecaverns.com or phone 210-651-6101.

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