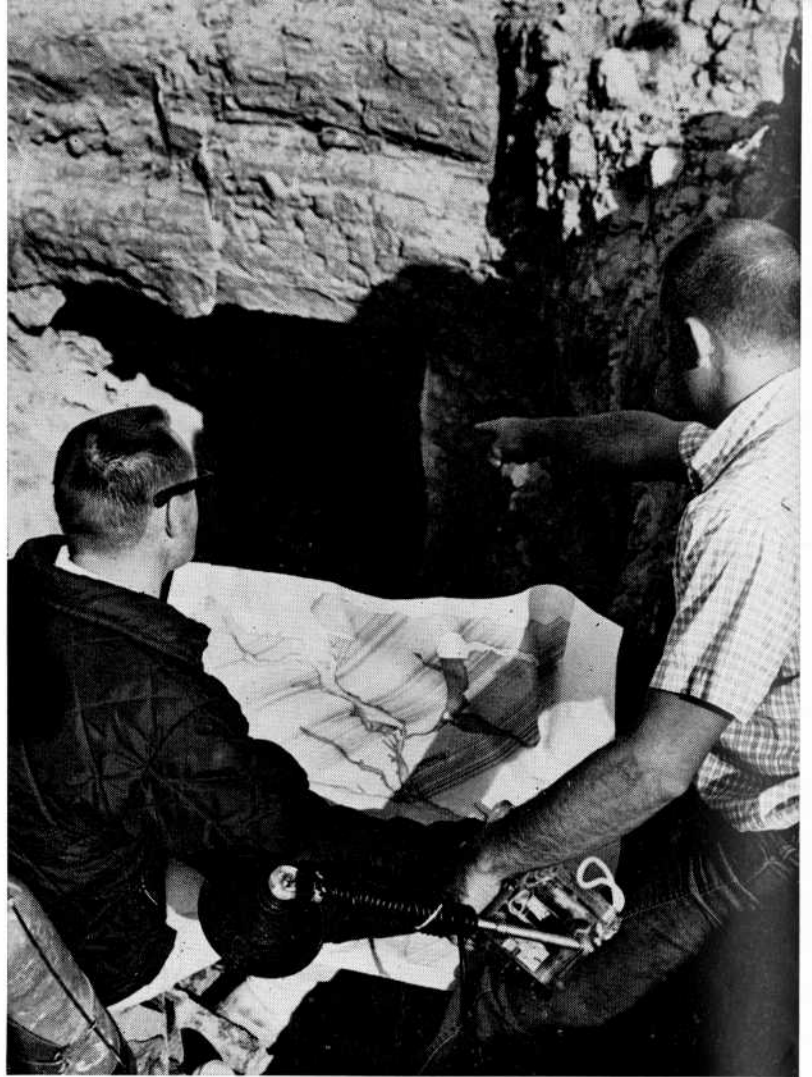


Fruit of the expedition is the scale map of Devil's Hole held here at the cave opening by Dobry (*left*) and Houtz.



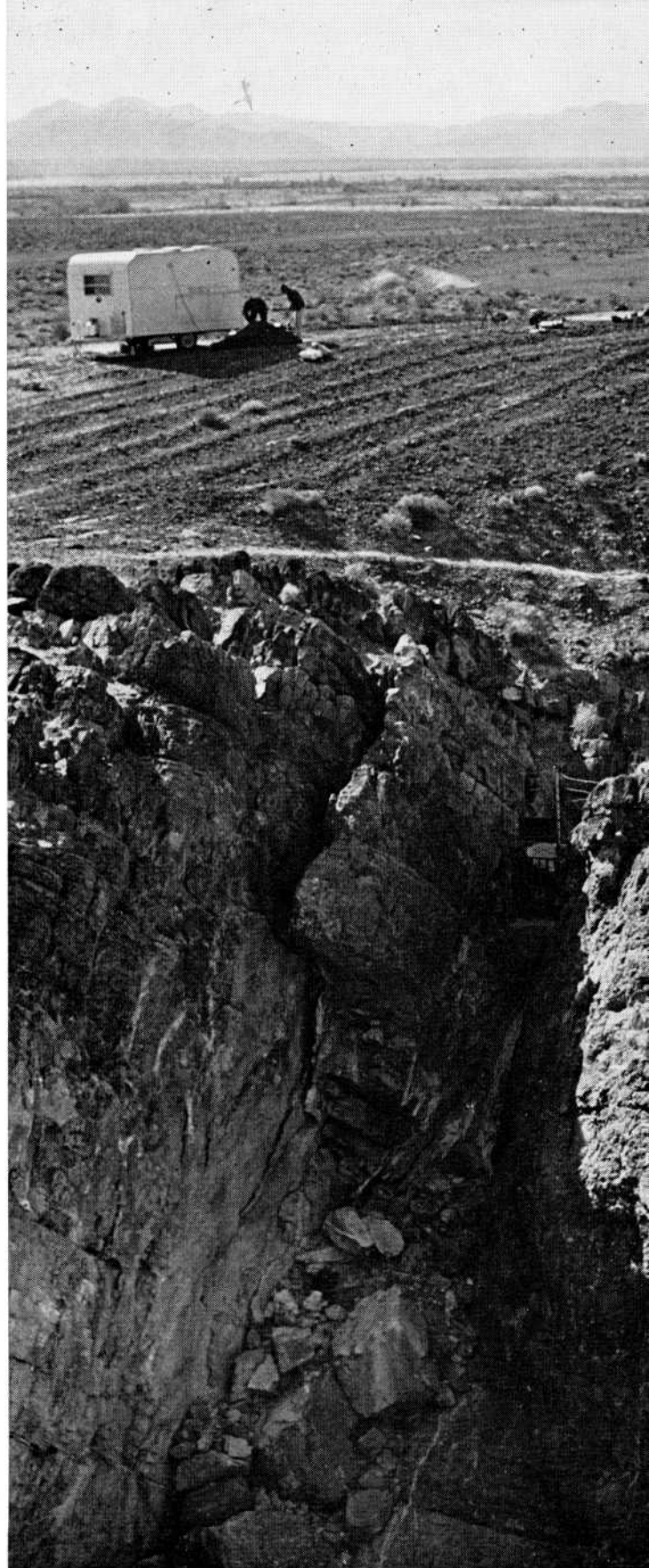
# *Deep Dive in Death Valley*

By MERLIN DOBRY  
Photos by Dobry and other members  
of the Brooks Institute of Photography,  
Santa Barbara, California



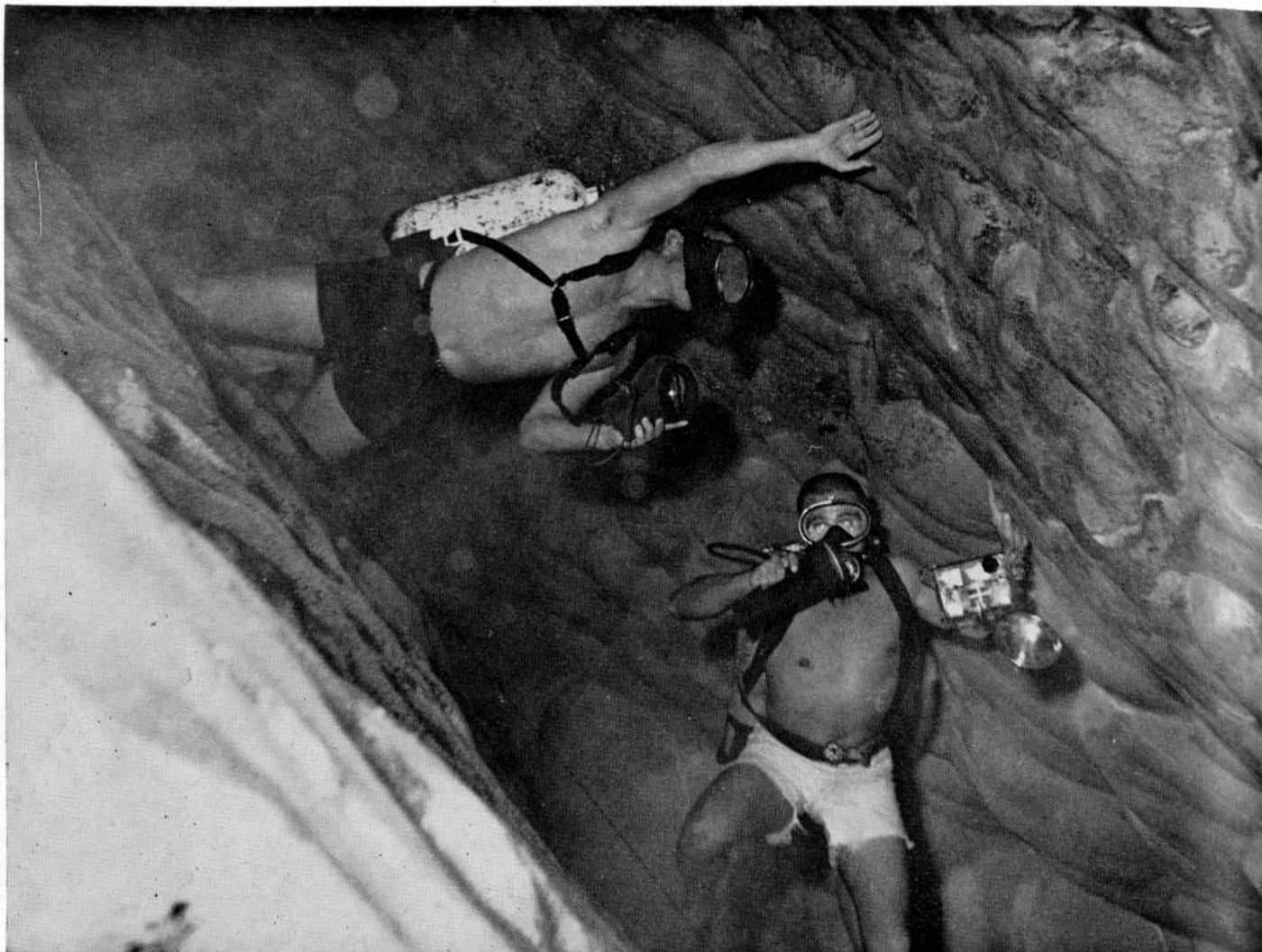
Loaded with Scuba equipment and photographic gear, Brooks and Dobry begin their exploration of the underground labyrinth.

*An airplane winged its way across the rugged Panamint Range, which separates Death Valley from the rest of California, and landed on a desert strip 11 miles from Death Valley Junction. On board were four professional diving cameramen, one a University alumnus of 1958, Merlin Dobry, who once took pictures for Sooner Magazine and is now an instructor at the Brooks Institute of Photography. Other members of the team were Ernest H. Brooks, president of the institute; Ernest H. Brooks II, and Jim Houtz, expedition leader. And why were these men unloading diving gear, underwater cameras, and lights in the middle of the dry, sun-bleached desert? The answer is related to a series of events which took place 250,000 years ago. The earth's crust in this area quaked and faulted. Then a mountain erupted, belching forth lava and ash. When the lava cooled and contracted, a large fissure was left inside the valley. Aeons passed until only a subterranean gash and the eroded surface of the old volcano was left. The fissure is now filled with 4,625 billion gallons of water, a volume of fresh water so large it registers a tidal rise and fall and is as large as one of the Great Lakes. The exposed surface to the underground lake is only seven feet wide and 35 feet long with a water surface temperature of 92 degrees, which increases one degree for every 94 feet of descent. Add an air pocket in the mountain's heart, some prehistoric fish (Cypripinadon Diablos), and you have a setting for adventure. Under Houtz's direction, the team was to make a photographic survey of the area for the 1964 International Underwater Film Festival. The four members made many descents into the liquid blackness of the cave and completed a scale map to a depth of 284 feet. Special oxygen helium blends will be used by Houtz in attempts to reach 400 feet. Nylon safety lines were strung from the surface down the twisting main shaft and out into the many openings branching off it. The lines guided the divers on their dark exploration. On one occasion two of the underwater lights imploded under the water pressure and team members traced their way to safety by following the life line hand over hand through the blackness to the cave opening.*



Above the steep plunge to the opening of Devil's Hole is the expedition camp site. The mobile van shown above houses a complete photographic laboratory.

*Continued*



## DEEP DIVE IN DEATH VALLEY



At 140 feet below the surface Brooks' underwater camera catches Dobry and Houtz (*above*) as they make their way through an arm of the cave. Light from camera flash is reflected (*left*) by silt from limestone. Cave's limestone formations look deceptively smooth, resemble clouds (*below*). At right, divers squeeze through a small passage running off cave's main artery, soon found an air pocket sealed in the heart of the mountain.

