

BIRMINGHAM GROTTOS

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2010



VOLUME 40

NUMBER 4

BGN Calendar

APR 1	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road. No kidding!
APR 10	Russell Cave Watershed Cleanup & Cookout. details inside!
APR 16	NSS BOG Meeting - Cincinnati, OH. Hosted by the Greater Cincinnati Grotto
APR 16	Floyd Collins Fest - American Cave Museum, Horse Cave, KY
APR 17	Earth Day Cleanup and Party. Meet at 10:00am at Logan's Store (I-65 at Hayden Exit). We have a new cave lead nearby and we may dig it open if Dave can get landowner permission. We also have plans for a special treat for the kids. Contact Dave Caudle for more information.
APR 24	AL Cave Survey Meeting - 9:00 am. Scottsboro Library, Scottsboro, AL
APR 25	San Souchi Cave Cleanup - 10:00 am. Decatur, AL
APR 30	BG Road Trip! Fort Stanton, NM. Contact Dave Caudle for details!
MAY 6	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
MAY 15	BG Annual Walls of Jericho Outing. See Dave Howell for details.
MAY 28	39th Annual Speleofest. Lone Star Preserve, Bonnieville, KY. Hosted by the Louisville Grotto.
JUN 3	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
JUN 12	Sewanee Mountain Grotto SERA 2010 Work Weekend
JUN 25	Indiana Cave Capers. Delaney Creek Park, Salem, IN

Thanks to Deirdra Hahn for assistance in maintaining the BGN Calendar.

The Grotto Calendar is being continually updated and is available online at www.bhamgrotto.org. Check it out!



The *Birmingham Grotto Newsletter* is published twelve times a year by the Birmingham Grotto, Inc. of the National Speleological Society, Inc. Other NSS Internal Organizations may reprint material provided credit is given to this publication and the author.

Annual dues are \$15.00 per individual and \$20.00 per family which is payable on October 1st. Dues are prorated for anyone joining during the year. The subscription rate is \$15.00 per year. The Birmingham Grotto will exchange publications with other NSS Grottos. Exchange newsletters should be sent to:

Birmingham Grotto
PO Box 55932
Birmingham, AL 35255-5932

Articles, Trip Reports, Graphics, Poetry, and any other speleo-related material should be sent to the Editor via email at the address noted below. Naturally, the Editor will accept typed text in practically any form; however, electronic submission reduces the risk of typographical errors. Submissions via e-mail should be directed to: editor@bhamgrotto.org. The deadline for publication is the 20th of the month; however, the Newsletter is limited to 12 pages and often fills up quickly.

Disclaimer

Caving trips posted are led by volunteers. No grotto committee reviews any trip leaders' qualifications. New cavers should inquire about the nature of the trip and the experience of the leader in advance. Those participating in the trips should be aware of their limits. On vertical trips all participants are expected to supply their own gear and be knowledgeable about rigging and safe practices.

On the cover...

Magz Sims exiting Kenamer.
(Richard Sims)

Caver's Kitchen
Magz Sims

This is a recipe that you can make ahead of time and throw in the fire when your ready. Once the potatoes are prepared they should be kept chilled.

Ingredients:

Several large potatoes, the bigger the better
butter
sour cream
chives
broccoli, cut the tops into small bits
ham, small chunks or slices
bacon bits
cheese, cheddar or your choice, shredded
salt and pepper
or anything else you like

All of these ingredients can be left out or substituted to your taste.

First bake potatoes wrapped in aluminum foil until tender. Then cut a slit through foil and into the potato. Scoop out the inside of the potato leaving a thin layer of potato next to the outer skin for structural integrity. Next in a large mixing bowl combine all ingredients and mix well saving some cheese to sprinkle on top. Now stuff your hollowed out potatoes with the potato mixture. You'll probably have some left over at the end. Then sprinkle your remaining cheese on top of the prepared potato. Wrap in a double layer of aluminum foil if your cooking on a campfire. Leave them unwrapped if cooking in an oven. Either bake them right away or chill them until your ready to cook. If your cooking on a campfire just place the wrapped potatoes in the coals for about 30-45 minutes. If your cooking in an oven cook at 350 for the same length of time. Take them out and enjoy! You may want extra butter and sour cream to top it off, your call.
Hope you enjoy!

Russell Cave Watershed Restoration Project

The SERA Karst Task Force and the Sewanee Mountain Grotto (SKTF/SMG) will be working on the Russell Cave Watershed restoration project again. For the past 4 years they have worked their way down the watershed and have removed over 50 tons of debris. They still have 3/4 mile of roadway to clean, are within a mile of the town of Orme, TN and soon will be cleaning right up to the gate of Russell Cave National Monument. A February 13, 2010 cleanup netted 3 more tons of debris on 1/4 mile of the roadway with 13 volunteers, but there are still lots of tires as well as trash-debris to be removed from that bottom 3/4 mile of Orme Mountain Road. Some materials that have been removed are a significant danger to the watershed and cave, for instance, the last clean up netted a full gallon can of lead based paint, but all debris impact the watershed.

The next phase of the cleanup will be this Saturday, April 10th, 10:00 a.m. CDT. The meeting point is 3 miles down Orme Mountain Road from TN State Route 156, South Pittsburg, TN; but coming from the south, they will meet 1 mile up Orme Mountain Road from the town of Orme (US 72 N; [L] Jackson CR 75; [R] CR 98). The SKTF/SMG provide all clean up supplies, but please wear sturdy shoes and bring gloves. After the clean up, there will be a cookout at Maureen Handler's campground on Jump Off Mountain, hosted by the Sewanee Mountain Grotto. They will have hamburgers and brats and if you can bring something for the table that would be great too. Come join and see the impact made on this watershed. The spring wildflowers should be in bloom and the watershed will be a wonderful place to visit on a spring day!!

For additional information contact Maureen at tnsnotgunATearthlinkDOTnet or 423-605-5569

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Illiad/Odyssey Pt. 2 Jeff Harrod

It's 4:05 on January 16 2010. I'm slightly awake on Scottsboro Mountain hoping I'm the only one up. I suddenly hear some giggling followed by a loud *BAM!* on the side of my Van. More giggling follows. "Get up b*****s!" yells Dave McRae. *Bam!* We're off on our second trip to Illiad/Odyssey cave. The 10 pitch 492' deep multidrop in the Big Coon Valley.

Our first foray to the cave was 2 weeks prior. It was a great trip but we only made it halfway. Where the streams meet from the two upper entrances the cave pinches off into the 'Nozzle' - a tight wet flowstone constriction which caused a cascading mass route on the first trip.

Now six of the original eight are back. Alan Cook, Dave Mcrae, Mark Grace, Shane Stacy, Dan Wood and I intend to "Nearly Bottom" the cave. We're all quite concerned about the expected rain showers in the forecast.

Not wanting to be stuck on the other side of the Nozzle we kept moving the trip time earlier and earlier. In a powerful display of one-upmanship Mcrae yells "4 AM!" the night before. Everyone is in their tent by 9:30pm. Hours later I climb out of my Van in the dark and we're all off.

I'm not sure if "flirting with the Huddle House Girls" was included in the original time-frame but we all seemed to have plenty of time and were in no rush eating breakfast. At dawn we're in the Big Coon.

The nice thing about Illiad is you get to 4x4 almost all the way to 1300' elevation and hike sideways. The road is very steep and there is much discussion on how well Alan's truck will do coming back down the mountain in the rain. It was still frozen going up. I reassure everyone it'll be fine.

We hiked past the Odyssey since it's supposedly more crawly and arrive at the Illiad entrance. It's in a little ravine with a natural bridge. Dave spots a rope we left on a rock from the other trip - Doh! We gear up and all dive in.

The first few hundred feet is a hands/knees to belly crawl. After a bit you encounter a 20' pit. You can either rig to the natural bridge or an older bolt located on the floor. This drops into a room with canyon passage. After negotiating some up and down canyon climbing you make it to the second pit of 63'. You rig to two bolts on the wall and squeeze through. It's tight at the top.

From the bottom you can go a couple of ways. Climb up 8' and look for a squeeze on the left. This will pop down into a room but instead climb back up into a crawl on the other side. After some more hands/knees you come to the third pit of 15'. It's in a breakdown room and the rig is a large block at the edge of the pit. From the bottom you intersect the passage from the Odyssey entrance. Climb over and down breakdown and look for a deep channel where both cave streams meet. Chimney down 20' and do a sideways squeeze for a bit in clean washed passage. Eventually you get to the beginning of the "Nozzle."



Nozzle entrance.
(Alan Cook)

At your feet is a little flowstone hole with water pouring in. You squeeze in head first and crouch into a little room with water rushing all around you. You then spin around and slide down an even tighter spot on your back. You squeeze and slide for a few feet and then drop off into a little 5' pit in the waterfall. The whole experience with the water rushing around you and having to put your head halfway in the water is very freaky. Plugging the water with your body in such a small area also makes you uneasy.



Nozzle exit.
(Dave McRae)

While I'm working my body though this I hear Shane yell he found another rope on the other side from the other trip. "What was wrong with us!" he yells. I eventually pop through. I had to remove all my gear to do it though. Everyone heads on to keep rigging. I notice the rope we left up on a ledge but I keep going.

At this point the cave has totally changed. We've hit a stunningly gorgeous formation area. We thought that Shane and Mark were teasing us with their description from the other trip. However, everything they said was true.

We make it to the next pit. A 7' next to a waterfall that was rigged to a natural bridge. The formations continue all the way to the top of the 5th pit. You rig to the large column,

carefully negotiate around the pretties and descend 35'. A few feet from the bottom you chimney out over the 6th pit of 54'. Only a single bolt is available and I recommend using one rope for the 5th and 6th. At the bottom of this narrow canyon we finally got wet. Just the last 10' feet. After a little bit you come to an 8' wet cascade.

We didn't need to rig it but it was awkward and very tight at the top. A short distance past that is the 21'. At this point we all met up for the first time in a few hours. The lip had a pretty good break-over so we padded it.

It was a nice rappel next to the waterfall. At the bottom the cave starts to have a different feel. The ceilings start to get very tall and the passage gets big. After some climbing and squeezing we come to the 9th pit of 40'. There was some discussion of where the rope is. No one seems to have it. Remember the rope I saw and left after the Nozzle?

Yep.

Shane had just found a short rope from earlier and taken it with them. I left the last rope for the 9th pit. "Never leave a rope!" I heard that a lot the rest of the day. Dave offered to climb back and get it but Shane pulls out his extra 9mm 90'. We manage to get it rigged and Mark, Shane and Dan head down. In the meantime Dave is trying to make use of the short extra rope we have.

Eventually we find another way further along and rig to a large chert knob at the very edge of the pit. Quite sketchy getting on rope but it works. The fatter rope makes it down 30' to an offset then after that it's 5' short. Well, good enough. We're all down and the 10th pit of 18' is last. But that's not where we're going.

Before the last pit we look for a flowstone climbup. It goes to the Illiad borehole. We climb the flowstone a few hundred feet and come into a large room with some big haystacks. Inky blackness seems to be everywhere we look. We climb up 60' or so to a large breakdown room.

There's a very nice formation gallery on one side. We explore for a while but it seems like there is no time. You could spend hours looking around. When we climb back down we notice huge trunk passage going both ways. Ceilings weren't discernible with Sten lights. Some of the largest passage I've seen in Alabama.



*Illiad borehole.
(Dave McRae)*

We all begrudgingly head out. (an odd feeling in a multidrop) The thought of the Nozzle and the rain expected is a great motivator though. After some time I make it back to the Nozzle. It seems like the water's slightly higher but not bad. It was a great relief to get it behind me though.

Eventually I start to get tired and Dan grabs one of my coils and passes me. Even with the lighter load the 63' seems like 200'. Eventually I see the light from outside 9 hours later. We're all out not too long after that. We all try and stay as warm as we can and make it back to the truck.

It's been raining for a while and we

need to get the truck back down the mountain before it gets worse. Alan gets his truck out of the woods but the road has taken on a consistency of wet peanut butter.

Alan starts down with Dan and I in the cab and others walking behind. The truck breaks loose. There's a sick feeling in my stomach and we just start sliding. Alan expertly eases it to the bumpy shoulder to slow it down and bring us to a stop. We stop on the brink of one of the steepest sections. We have no choice but to leave it.

We load all our wet backpacks on and start trudging down the mountain in the rain. At the beginning Alan mentions he needs to get his house keys out of the truck but I tell him we'll be back tomorrow to try again. Dave mentions his car keys are in there as well.

The rain just keeps getting worse when we reach the bottom. By then it's decided that there's no use to even try to get the truck tomorrow. Now someone has to go back to the truck and get the keys.

Dave's legs are cramping so much he can't do it. So I make a formal announcement - "If I do this no one can mention how I left the rope for the last pit again." I head back up the mountain. I was pretty delirious so it was quite fun.

Much later I'm back in my van on Scottsboro Mountain by myself. Everyone is headed home. I cranked up my buddy heater and finally got some sleep after 17 hours. Best trip ever.

Addendum:

(Alan did rescue his truck 2 days later. Unfortunately I regularly get text messages from Shane - "Where's the rope?")

Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes
March 4, 2010

President Dave McRae called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

Visitor: Lori Scott became a member and this is her first meeting. Welcome Lori!

The January meeting minutes were passed, with the correction of Jason Wall's name (he's an impassable vertical plane and not of the Wahl's clothing dynasty).

Treasurer Dale Douglas: *See attached table following minutes.*

Announcements:

- 1) Jeff's mom has been moved to Lakeshore and can now receive younger members of the family as visitors.
- 2) Annual Earth Day Celebration is scheduled for April 17, 2010. Pot luck at the Caudle's. Continuation of the Bryant Mountain Cave Clean-up. Potential dig. This is the KIDS TRIP! DAY.
- 3) Speleofest. May 28th - 30th. Memorial Day Weekend.
- 4) SERA 2010 Summer Cave Carnival. June 17th - 20th. Pre-registration forms available at Grotto meetings and online at the Sewanee Mountain Grotto website. Save \$5.00 until May 1st postmark.
- 5) Dave Howell: Walls of Jericho trip scheduled for the May 15, 2010.
- 6) Amy Strickland: Reserved 8 cabins at Lake Guntersville State Park for next year's Getaway Weekend (Feb. 19-20, 2011). See her if you'd like one.
- 7) Grotto Trip: Kennamer Cave. Sunday March 14, 2010. Meet at the Guntersville Sonic / Slot #23 / 8 AM (time change!).
- 8) Dave Caudle: If you want to go to Fort Stanton, NM. Let him know now.
- 9) Meeting After the Meeting: Upper Deck on W. Valley Ave.
- 10) Bruce White: There is an RC Convention at the Bessemer Airport

Old Business:

- 1) Survey from NSS Safety and Techniques Committee. Dave McRae completed. Please come forward if

you're interested in heading up this type of Grotto training.

- 2) Stephen's Gap trip. April 3rd or 10th, 2010.
- 3) Fee: "Isn't Samantha's hair gorgeous?" Vote: Unanimous!
- 4) Harrod: "Scott's hair is OK." (mild applause)

Visitor: Kim Waits. Milo extends the greeting "What kind of person are you?"

- 5) Daniel Woods: Grotto received a note of appreciation from Mike Venarsky for our sherpa services in getting the corn stover to his research area.
- 6) SERA WBM attended by Hahn.
 - a. Treasurers Report - 1/1/2010 - \$1207.27
 - b. 2009 SERA SCC - Jody Baily - Nashville Grotto. Insurance = Cave-In Site. 554 attend. 76 vendors. +/- 42.50\$. High cost Toilets/Water Haul. 9 minute presentation of pics. Parade/Wt in Beer (330#). Host again. Fun Fellowship work for Grotto. Grotto taking on other projects. Fellow with Moonshine was the unfortunate incident. Security \$1200.
 - c. SERA Survey Results. Nathan Gatlin - CAG. 86 respondents/-500 SERA population. 10% population - OK results.
 - i. SCC held same weekend - 60% NO
 - ii. SCC preferred season - 44% Late-April
 - iii. You/Grotto like permanent site in your state - 70% NO
 - iv. You/Grotto like SCC Advisory Committee to help Grotto put a SCC together - 57% YES
 - v. Should the GOAL of SERA be to help it IOs financially through Grants/Loans (this is the reason for wanting to increase attendance at SCC) - 58% YES
 - vi. Factors for choosing to Attend
 1. site location
 2. date
 3. cave quantity
 4. cost
 5. cave quality
 6. hosting grotto
 7. other
 - vii. Amenities of Importance
 1. Fixed bathrooms/showers (non-

portables)

2. Other [?]
3. Non-caving recreation opportunities
4. Established Campground
5. Electric/Water Hook-ups
6. Waterfront/Pool
 - d. SERA/Gadsden Grotto/SKTF Lady/Weaver Cave Clean-up. 22 volunteers, ~20 bags of trash, Volunteer Leaders of the day were Scott Fee and Jim Loftin. 110 man hours and 1200 miles traveled.
- 7) USFWS Bat Wing Punch Training. Cathedral Caverns. Feb. 26th. Hahn attended. Gates stated that B'ham Grotto was contacted for AL Bat Working Group meeting and email bounced.
- 8) Hahn: CBD letter not started. Understand 90 days for response from guvmunt. That's -04-20-10. Hopefully have B'ham done by next Grotto meeting.

New Business:

- 1) SCCi has revised the Cave Visitation Policy for ALL SCCi caves (02-27-10).
 - If you want to visit any SCCi cave, anywhere, the SCCi wants you to decon your gear first. This is not just for WNS, but to reduce the likelihood of cross-contamination among cave ecosystems.
 - If your gear has been in a WNS-affected cave, don't bring it into a non-WNS affected cave.
 - If you already need an SCCi permit to visit the cave, then you also need to fill out the WNS form.
 - Return the form with your permit request to the manager, however they want to receive it (electronically, snail-mail, email attachment, etc.).
 - The SCCi Cave Visitation Policy, Containment/Decontamination Procedures, and WNS Permit Questionnaire and Compliance Statement form will be added to the Grotto's Yahoo! Group site under [Files].
- 2) NSS Congress of Grottos has placed a call for Issues to be submitted by June 15, 2010.
- 3) Graves Cave Grotto Workday

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postponed until the part comes in.
 4) Sinking Cove July 4th Weekend. Will ask for permit for July 1-5, 2010.

Trip Reports:

- DangerJudy and Milo went to Cherokee Cemetery.
- DangerJudy, Milo and Kim Waits went to No Pole Cave. 2 rooms with litter and graffiti. Needs a clean-up and a survey
- DangerJudy, Milo, and Kim Waits went to Arachnophobia Cave (Marty named it!). They did not go in.
- Danger Judy, Howdy, and Lori (non-visitor) went to Stephen's Gap after the Getaway. It was DJ's first time.
- Dave Caudle and Jerry Saulsberry have been ridgewalking near Dave's house. Dave's lived there 35 years and hadn't noticed a few karst features (and they're on the topo). One is a dig - call Dave if interested.
- Bruce White went to War Eagle with the Cullman Grotto.
- Dave Howell went ridgewalking and

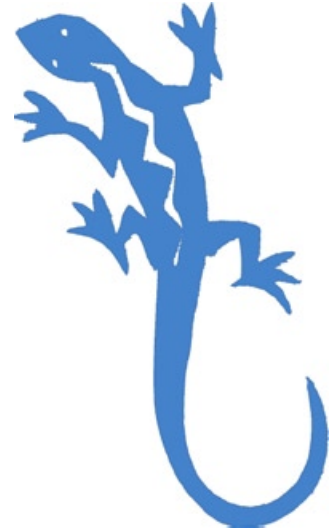
walked a contour distortion. He has a pit lead with a dig (there was an echo) and another lead that is not as deep.

- Jeff Harrod, Mark Grace, Shane Stacy, Daniel Wood, David McRae & Deirdra Hahn went to Microwave Cave. Made 3 of the 6 drops. Must go back.
- Daniel Wood and Alan Bullen went to Byers and did the Razor Back; Byers was pumping water.
- Dave McRae took researchers to Secret Society & Ingram Caves to look for spiders. On the way in, Dave performed his Jesus Trick whilst wearing his puffy jacket, slipped and got soaked. He performed the same Trick on the way out and slipped again on the same rock. He has made the observation that a Wal-Mart light is just as good or better than a Sten Light.

President McRae adjourned the meeting at 8:13PM.

Program: "Great Pits" is postponed.

Respectfully submitted, Deirdra Hahn,
 Secretary



Birmingham Grotto Treasurer's Report March 4, 2010			
Starting Balance - February 4, 2010			6,701.54
	Expenses		
	Printing & Postage	136.37	
	SKTF Donation	200.00	
	Getaway Keg *	300.00	
	Getaway Cabins	<u>447.52</u>	
	Total Expenses	-1,083.89	-1,083.89
	Income		
	Getaway Cover	540.00	
	Getaway Auction**	<u>601.75</u>	
	Total Getaway to Date	1,141.75	
	Dues	225.00	
	Interest	<u>0.44</u>	
	Total Income	1,367.19	1,367.19
Ending Balance - March 4, 2010			6,984.84

*Will be receiving deposit and change back for keg

**Total Getaway Auction Sales \$994.00 (balance owed is \$392.25)

News & Notes

Dave Howell

*** April, a delightful month in which the Alabama woods come alive, first with the most restrained sprinkling of snowdrops, then with the golds and greens and crimsons of new buds, finally with a joyful explosion of new leaves and blooms. But this extravaganza is not limited to flora. The fauna emerge from dens, nests and burrows to revel in the new season, which to them means *food*. And among the fauna that emerge to seek a meal are SNAKES. Yes, friends, once again we must renew our caution in the woods lest we run afoul of our reptilian friends: Watch where you're putting your hands and feet. Step on logs, not over them. When entering a cave, use a stick to make sure no one awaits you in the twilight zone, or in that pile of loose, blown-in leaves. If the entrance area is rocky, pay attention to the recesses you're stepping over and in, and give a wide berth to any rocks or ledges with spaces underneath. When you're in any wooded area be sure you know the location of the nearest hospital. (A good practice any time - humankind is unfortunately heir to all manner of sprains, breaks, cuts, concussions, and on and on. Good to be ready for them, even if they occur only rarely.) Be careful out there - a snakebite can ruin your whole day. And please, leave the snakes unharmed. They are an important part of the food chain, and we are on their turf, not the other way around.

*** Besides the bloom of spring, April brings us the annual meeting of the

ALABAMA CAVE SURVEY. This year ACS is scheduled for Saturday, April 24 at 9:00 am at the Scottsboro Public Library. Make plans to attend, to keep abreast of new finds and discoveries, as well as the latest news of already-known caves, including (but not limited to) ongoing mapping projects and current surveyed lengths, changes in access status (which are not always bad, sometimes closed caves and caving areas reopen), and of course the current count of known caves in Alabama. It's always an interesting meeting attended by interesting folks. Don't miss it! I will see you there!

*** And while you've got those calendars out, mark the weekend of May 15 for the WALLS of JERICHO hike and campout. This is another annual event, to celebrate the beauty and magnificence of the Walls when they are at their most gorgeous - in springtime! Never been there before? Then you definitely need to go, the Walls are a not-well-known scenic wonder of Alabama and Tennessee (they sit astride the state line). Can't spare the time to camp out? Come for Saturday only, this can easily be done as a day hike. For your info, the trail is only 3-4 miles from the public parking area to the Walls (about a mile less to the campground at Clark Cemetery), with a 1200' elevation change, down going in and up going out. (It's not as bad as it sounds, the trail goes out of its way to avoid being very steep.) Be there. Aloha.

*** A quick correction: It was reported

that the Guntersville Getaway auction netted about \$1,200 for the Grotto. This was incorrect. The correct figure is about \$1,000. Still an impressive figure, in view of the national economic situation and the lower than previous years Getaway attendance. (I rely on various covert intelligence sources for the information printed in this column. The agent who reported the incorrect figure has been dealt with... harshly.)

*** An amazing news story has crossed my desk concerning Kentucky's SLOANS VALLEY CAVE system. It seems that the Sloans Valley area is the site of a UFO crash debris field in which a number of alien artifacts have been found. In addition, a mysterious shaft called the Elevator of Doom, down which no human has ever been, connects to the Sloans Valley cave system, and an "alien reptoid" has been observed - and photographed! - lurking in the area, usually concealed by a cloaking device rendering it invisible. Read this astounding report yourself at ztech.com/secret/ufo.htm, or just Google Sloans Valley alien. There are some obvious transparencies in all this, though: because of the hostile alien presence the crash site and debris field are (conveniently) closed to the public - for our own safety, of course - and some of the debris has (again, conveniently) disappeared. Also, if no human has ever been down the Elevator of Doom, how do they know it connects to the cave? And the alien reptoid is obviously just GARY BARNES on one of his annual visits to the area. See? Mystery solved.

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Forwarding & Address Correction Requested