

BIRMINGHAM GROTTO

# NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2008



VOLUME 38

NUMBER 8

# BGN Calendar

AUG 7	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
AUG 11 AUG 15	<b>NSS Convention</b> in Lake City, Florida . Check out the convention website at <a href="http://www.nss2008.com">http://www.nss2008.com</a> for more details.
AUG 21	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
AUG 24	The Third Annual Birmingham Grotto Splash will again be at Springs Valley Beach (Just North of Blountsville, Alabama). We has reserved Pavilion 1 (The big one, by the field on the far side of the huge pool). The park opens at 10:00 am. All three water slides are open from 12 noon to 6 p.m., which is closing time. Cost is \$14 for three years old up to 48 inches tall. The rest of us have to pay \$19. <a href="http://www.springvalleybeach.com">www.springvalleybeach.com</a>
SEP 4	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
SEP 18	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
OCT 2	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
OCT 9 OCT 12	TAG Fall Cave-In - Held at the TOTM site atop Lookout Mountain, GA and hosted by the Dogwood City Grotto. See the website at <a href="http://www.tagfallcavein.org/homex.html">http://www.tagfallcavein.org/homex.html</a> for more details.

*Thanks to Scott Fee for assistance in maintaining the BGN Calendar.*



*Barry, Ryan, Amy, Jeff, Samantha and Toby outside Sinking Cove.  
(Scott Fee)*

## 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.

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 55102  
Birmingham, AL 35255

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](mailto: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.



## On the cover...

Samantha Acton at Sinking Cove.  
(Scott Fee)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

*From the President...*

Hello Everyone! It was nice to see everyone at Sinking Cove this past month. We had a great turnout and plenty of caving trips. Please remember to support the SCCi so we can continue to enjoy great places such as Sinking Cove.

The month ahead brings us to the National Convention of our mother organization, the NSS. Hundreds of cavers will be descending on Lake City, Florida, to enjoy everything our Convention has to offer. If you've never been to a NSS Convention, I highly encourage you to make plans to attend. In 2009, the NSS Convention will be in Kerrville, Texas, and in 2010, it will be headed North to Essex Junction, Vermont.

I would like to say WELCOME to all of our new members. Over the past several months, we have had some great new members join our Grotto. It's always nice to see new blood flowing into our group, and I'm proud to have you all part of the Birmingham Grotto.

That's it for this month. Be safe and I'll see you underground...

Scott A. Parvin

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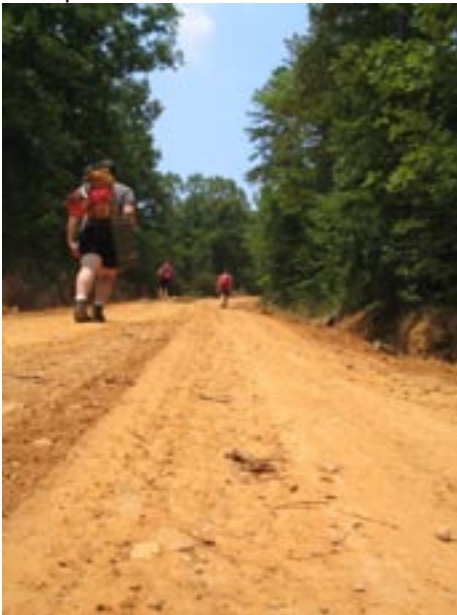


*Kelli French underneath a hanging flowstone shelf in Beach Spring Cave.  
(Scott Fee)*

## Holiday Hole

Jeff Harrod

Saturday July 19th Toby, Alan Cook, Ryan and I all met on Scottsboro Mountain for some caving. I think this was Alan's first official "Pell City" trip. Meeting at noon, then eating lunch and then going caving is actually normal for us, as he found out. After eating at a little Mom and Pop place called "Krystals" we headed off for the Big Coon. When you park at the Coon you have a huge choice of caving possibilities. Today we decided to hit "Holiday Hole" and "67 Dollar Pit". They're 2 pits on the way to "Mandy's" a 161' that we've been to a couple of times.



*The neverending hike to Holiday Hole.  
(Jeff Harrod)*

You can walk up a logging road almost all the way to the pit. It's brutal though - 700' up in less than a half-mile. It seemed easier last time I went up it. That time, Dave McRae's shoelaces froze on the hike down. This time I think the high was 96 so it was a little different. I learned a lot on the hike. I learned that I can eat 6 cheese Krystals, 1 Krystal chic, chili cheese fries, drink 96 ounces of PowerAde and not throw up. Even I would have bet against that.

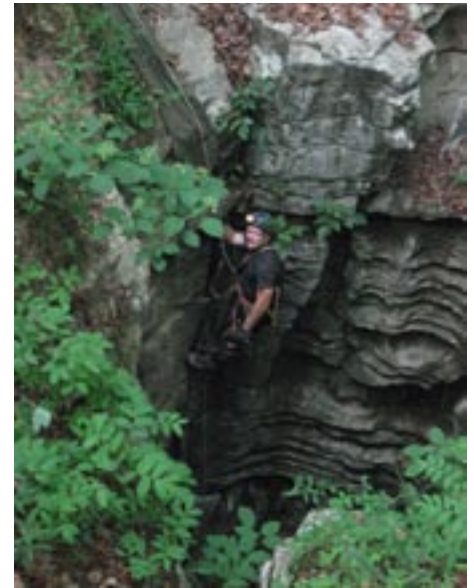
Once we arrived at the pit Ryan and I made quick work of the rigging while Toby and Alan geared up. I had been to the lip of the pit a few years back and already had the rigging in my

head. I also went ahead and brought my 300' rope to make sure that we would actually be able to get to the bottom unlike last weekend's exploits. Toby and Alan made short work of it and were back up. They found a snake at the bottom but couldn't manage to bring him back up. I, then Ryan, headed down next. It's a great pit. It's a nice free ride of 105' with a sizable entrance. I took some pictures of Ryan rapelling then we headed off to the end of the cave. The map shows a 12' climb-down then the classic "tight - dash dash dash".

Ryan went down while I took more pictures looking back at the entrance. I was a little perturbed by the breakdown in the cave. It had a weird look to it like it was stacked by humans. Ryan came back and said there was no "tight," it just kept going. He went back in and I followed. He was crawling in front of me saying how the wind was really flowing strong in the crawl. I looked to my left and noticed a skull and crossbones written in the wall. "Warning! unstable ceiling". After sharing this with Ryan we both backed out to assess the situation. We both started noticing blast marks and evidence of drilling everywhere. Coming back out we looked at the huge pile of rocks we saw on the way in. They all had the same marks



*Alan gearing up for the cave.  
(Jeff Harrod)*



*Jeff Harrod climbing out of Holiday Hole.  
(Toby Kemp)*

and drill holes. Someone's moved about a ton of rock out of the crawl and stacked it in the passage before the chimney. We climbed back in and tried to see if the warning was just a warning of past blasting or a serious danger. We decided to come back after asking around. The wind was very strong hinting that there is much cave well beyond the end of the map. Back on the surface we all de-rigged then went in search of 67 Dollar. We all looked in vain for a good while with no avail. Any cave named after the exploits of E.T. Davis, a case of beer, and jail will likely be hard to find. The hike back down the mountain was actually worse. It was very hard on the knees. After a stop at Piz-za Hut we found Barry on the mountain waiting on us. He had been there a while but his friend Bud L. had kept him company. We all enjoyed Pizza and watched the full moon rise on the horizon. Between the "everything," pepperoni and sausage pizza, we all agreed it was a sausage-fest on Scottsboro Mountain that night.

The next day we all went to Sheldon's Cave. Barry, Alan and Toby had a good time rapelling the 101' of the high side. Alan and I went in the horizontal section and made it to the 80' dome. It was another great weekend.

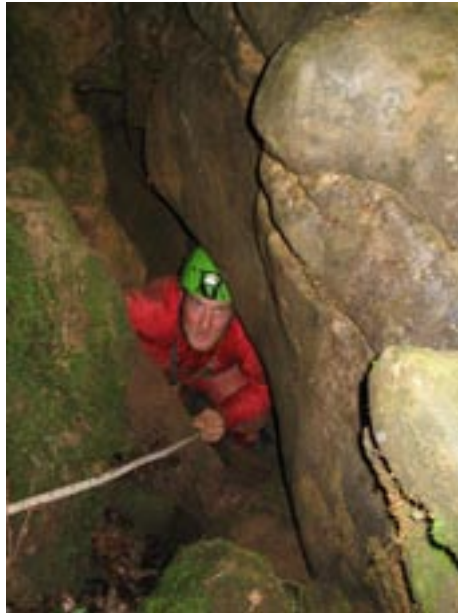
## Crackerjack

article and photos by Jeff Harrod

Sunday July 13th Ryan Strickland and I decided to bounce ACS 2810 Cracker Jack Cave. It's a 120' pit near the town of Grant. It's only about an hour and a half away from Pell City, or \$35 in my truck depending how you look at it. We spent a good bit of time looking for the landowner (or \$3 depending how you look at it) and I was eventually forced to call him. I'd rather meet people face to face but I got to do my trick of talking dispassionately on the phone from the get-go. Once a landowner realizes you're not a bill collector but a caver they're usually more than welcome to let you do some caving. The landowner's wife was such a nice woman I actually was a little disappointed when we hung up.



We parked at the usual spot (I guess) and headed up the mountain. Ryan forgot his GPS. I thought this was going to really suck but there was an old paved road that goes right to the sink entrance. I guess it's the old road that used to climb the mountain up to Grant way back when. It's probably the best trail to a cave I've been on, albeit a little creepy. We found the waterfall and sink and started gearing up. I'd read that if the waterfall was flowing expect to get wet. Geared up, harnesses on and carrying 2 ropes, we dove into the blackness. Dead end. Oh god where are we? Is this the sink?



We spent the next 30 minutes in full gear just burning up. We eventually find the right chimney entrance. It's a 37' climb-down so I went ahead and rigged a 100' rope to aid us. It's a real help since we both ended up rappelling a 10' section. After a good bit of twisting in and sliding down (carefully passing dozens of salamanders) we came to the 120' pit. It had a loose scree slope lip that was



pretty hairy. Ryan looked in vain for some bolts. The description of the cave was from an old SERA book that was printed when the "Simpsons" was only in its 2nd season so I guess things had changed. We found a badly set Petzl self-drive with no bolt or hanger and next to it was just a hole where a bolt used to be. Everything else around was a loose mess so we were talking about routing. We then decide to just try and rig to something and then make a decision. It's good rigging practice to see what you can come up with. I eventually found a large rock flake above the pit and Ryan brought the handline rope all the way down to the lip. Combining the two made a pretty bombproof rig and Ryan clipped in and went over. Unfortunately because of the costly rigging he was about 10' short. He switched over and came back up. The drop was only drippy so he was burning up on the climb. Finding no real way to add some rope to the bottom we both finally did route. The hand line was a necessity for me coming out. It was storming fiercely when I climbed out but the rain felt pretty good.

On the way back walking down the grown up road I pretended we were in the future and apes had taken control of the human race. Fun day and it was a cool pit. I guess I'll be back.



## Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes June 26, 2008

President Scott A. Parvin opened the meeting at 7:10 pm. Once again our Secretary has abandoned our group for some kind of extended “jaunt” out west, east, or perhaps even north of our beloved homeland; therefore, the other Scott was pressured into taking the minutes!

William Thompson “met some people rummaging through his backyard” and was drawn to our crew. Former member Van Cain accompanied William to attend our meeting. Before the night was over, both William & Van, in addition to June visitor Kelly French joined our illustrious gang of underground dwellers.

Daniel Woods, rumored to be working a big case off the Florida beaches, emailed his report indicating that we had \$10,275 in the treasury; however, the mysterious 50th Anniversary T-Shirt invoice has yet to be received.

The minutes were approved once we noted that NikkY LaBranche was also a featured knot tier during the evening’s educational program. (You might want to ask TinY about how good she is!)

In the announcement venue, the following items were discussed:

- 1) Sinking Cove campout will be over the extended July 4th weekend
- 2) Dangerous Judy’s river trip, a Class II river that can be tubed, is set for the weekend of July 19th
- 3) NSS Convention is from August 11-15
- 4) Third annual Grotto Splash will be on Sunday, August 24th

Under “Old Business,” Edna Caudle reported that the 50th Anniversary Extravaganza has netted the grotto a tidy profit, yes profit, of \$116.82. Scott Fee has sold six guidebooks to date, and still has about 15 remaining at \$10 each.

Larry Money then reported that he incurred about \$200 in expenses for the Guffey Movie production and raised \$90 in additional sales. Not seeking reimbursement, Larry provided the Movie DVD Revenue to the grotto and received a well deserved round of applause for his in-kind donation.

Starting off “New Business,” Julie Fee had printed two large 11 x 17 laminated prints of the 50th Group Photo as well as a Photoshop image whereas attendees could be numbered and identified for posterity. The Caudles will review the image and seek out help for the mysterious faces.

A motion was presented and subsequently passed for the Grotto Library to procure a copy of the recent book titled “50 Years of Texas Caving.”

Van Cain reminded us that the SCCi is in the process of purchasing Steward Springs Cave near Fort Payne, a fine cavern by all accounts. According to Bill Putnam via e-mail, “The purchase is pending, and not yet complete. The cave is gated and access is only available by making arrangements with the owner, Kenneth Rupil. We expect the purchase to be completed this summer, and will make a formal public announcement when that happens.”

### Trip Reports:

Edna Caudle went caving! Yes, indeed, truth be told, David Caudle risked Edna’s and granddaughter Becca’s life by venturing into one the 17 or so entrances of the Parks Ranch Cave System near Carlsbad, New Mexico. Happily, no rain took place during their foray into this rapidly flooding gypsum cave. They had previously toured Carlsbad Caverns (NM) and the Caverns of Senora (TX).

TinY and NikkY were at SERA; however, they were too occupied with winning climbing contests to venture underground. (TinY took 1st in the 300 foot mechanical whilst NikkY won 1st place in the overall category.) On similar venue, these two “kids” each managed to win a team spot for Bridge Day.

Andy Zerbe saw Worley Cavern (TN) during SERA and commented that he thought this was “one of the best SERA’s he had ever attended!”

Van Cain and three others explored the various passages of Kennamer Cave.

Tumbling Rock was a busy place during

the members meeting weekend with Toby Kemp, Jeff Harrod, Scott Fee, Julie Fee, Dale Douglas, Jonathan Gladden, Daniel Wood, and Sarah Jane Wood.

Back to SERA, Scott Parvin, Scott Fee, and Julie Fee enjoyed taking photos in Worley (aka Morrell) Cave. Scott and Julie Fee also explored Wolfe Cave and the Natural Tunnel State Park, both located in Virginia.

New member William Thompson reported on the various cave extending activities on his property, most notably by TinY. Technically, the crew still needs to extend the tape a bit more to get that qualifier on record!

At 7:53 we adjourned for a short break followed by Scott Parvin’s photographic record of his trip to Worley (Morrell) Cave, TN with the Fees.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Scott Fee



Spotted in Beech Spring Cave  
(Scott Fee)

## Fortuna Smiling

Daniel Wood

I served my time, or at least most of it, and finally joined the Alabama Cave Survey this Spring. But I missed the first eligible meeting because of unavoidable work, which became extremely disappointing to me with the announcement that a cleanup and special trip into the hallowed Clemmons / Nature Conservancy, Sharp / Bingham Mountains, Cox / Keel / Calloway Sinks wonderland would follow the meeting. I was really quite bummed to miss a unique opportunity like that.

But shortly fortune smiled with a big grin. In a gracious gesture, The Nature Conservancy offered the ACS a "thank you" event which included camping accommodations, a catered dinner, cave locations and access to the property which includes dozens of known caves. Now you realize that I realize that TNC had nothing to thank me for, personally, but hey, now I owe them one and karma works that way, after all.

So I'm just a wide-eyed and big-eared green horn in the presence of some of the biggest big-named TAG cavers listening to talk of good leads, unchecked coves, possible dome climbs, and plenty of first-hand stories, including the classic one about the initial rappel of Dental Floss Well.

Come Saturday morning I was handed a color topo map with caves marked, given some good descriptions of different caves, and convoyed along with maybe 20 others onto the premises.

Jimmy Romines, Brad Philips, and I headed straight for Engle Double. We followed a group from the Cullman Grotto up Stairstep Road, taking some skin off the bottom of Brad's truck in the process. We only bounced the spectacular 237' entrance pit and did not see any more of the cave, but

we did enjoy an incredible light show in the pit as the sun moved far overhead, a quickly changing beam evidencing the Earth's true speed. Next we drove through Keel Sink and back to the massive, massive Calloway Sink, which is totally encircled by mountain and fed by numerous draws.

Somewhat randomly we picked Sisk Cave and located it amid a threatening thunderstorm. It has a waterfall slot pit entrance with about a 60' drop, but having no rope, I made the 30' climb down from E2 and looked around briefly before bolting back to the car.

Finally, we took a quick look into the twin sinks entrances into Tony Sinks Cave which someone thought would be clever to split by the dirt valley road.

Brother James arrived late Saturday night, after an active week. Wednes-



*Twin sink entrances of Tony Sinks  
(Daniel Wood)*

day, he managed to lock himself into Swirl Canyon Cave and Saturday he bounced Surprise Pit, all stories for another day I guess. But Sunday he slummed with me and we returned to the Keel twin sinks to see some cave.

As my humble pictures suggest, the twin sink entrances are quite scenic. After the 40' roadside rappel, the pas-

sage is instantly awesome with thick layers of white quartz complimenting the limestone. After a short slog through a mucky stagnant pool, we found the crawly bypass around



*Another view of the Tony Sinks entrance  
(Daniel Wood)*

the swim (thanks Lin Guy!), and thereafter we followed the strong air to the main trunk where we turned upstream, toward the Frenchmans' connection (downstream leads to the Cox entrance). Wow, wow and WOW!

The passage size certainly befits the main drain for a sizable sinking valley, but bonuses are paid with copious nice decorations, fantastic chocolate sculpted chert layers, and huge shoals of cobbles with big sand banks. We strolled unobstructed maybe 3000-4000' with our mouths agape. Where there was breakdown, it too was of monumental scale. I have commented that, to my aesthetic, Sinking Cove is one of the finest caves I have seen, and what I saw of Tony Sinks was reminiscent of its finer points, only magnified.

We routed out the way we came in. But still having some of the day left, I took James back up to Engle Double and he bounced 220' of it, which was the longest rope we had. Many, many thanks to TNC, Jim Godwin, and others. It was a great weekend.

## News & Notes

### Dave Howell

\*\*\*

*July '08 is done, that month  
We ne'er shall see it more  
It brought some good times and some bad  
We'll boot it out the door*

*August now is coming 'round  
We're going to give it hell  
The summer's end, the start of fall  
We mark with doggerel*

\*\*\* July '08 is indeed done, as is this year's SINKING COVE CAMPOUT. The lucky ones arrived Thursday; the masses arrived Friday; the Johnnies-come-lately (such as VALERIE and myself) arrived Saturday. Water levels were very low, allowing just about any vehicle to make it all the way to the campground, and the rain Saturday night made not one iota of difference. (Good! Have you ever tried to explain to your boss that you missed a deadline because of the water levels in Sinking Cove Creek?) Everyone who wished to get underground did, either on the "traditional" Waterfall to Spring Entrance through trip, or on the pull-down trip (now a true pull-down, since fixed ropes in the cave are no longer allowed), or to nearby CUSTARD HOLLOW CAVE. Well, almost everyone - I understand GARY and JERRY had a very pleasant walk in the woods. But no matter - all travails were forgotten as JASON served the beef, pork, turkey, and Cornish game hen he'd been smoking all day (where'd you get rolling papers that big, anyway?) and the potluck buffet was opened to all comers who happened to have a \$5 bill handy. Some mighty fine eating was followed by a megacampfire, compliments of

firebuilder extraordinaire BOWEEVIL. Unfortunately (or maybe it was fortunate) the evening's festivities were cut somewhat short by the rain, which started (I think) around 11:00 and lasted pretty much the rest of the night. Sunday morning, however, dawned dry, the precipitation evidently having soaked right into the dry ground. (I could tell they haven't gotten much rain up there this season because the blackberries were tiny and mostly not ripe yet.) There was vague talk Sunday of more caving, but don't know that any of it ever came to fruition. Nevertheless, the record group (48 in attendance Saturday night) drifted away with no one disappointed in the weekend. That's the fascinating thing about the Campout: it's always the same, but each one has its own unique personality, too.

\*\*\* As fall approaches, so does the annual ritual of renewal of our MEETING ROOM at Homewood Public Library - or this year, maybe not. It seems there is a debate on about changing the meeting place. Matthew's, the Morris Avenue watering hole where we've been having the meeting after the meeting of late, has offered us an upstairs room for our use, free of charge. Tempting. Ah, but those who have been in the Grotto long enough to remember the meetings at 48 Lanes Bowling Alley at Eastwood Mall will also remember the consequences of having beer available before the meeting. (Where are the minutes from that period, anyway? -Just kidding.) As always, we must measure advantages against, well, other considerations in choosing our meeting place. The debate continues. Stay tuned.

\*\*\* Haven't heard much from BUBBA and LORA GEYER lately, but I hear they're doing well. Bubba sold his aircraft service company and is now working for Alabama Power, and he and Lora are both working on raising their precious crop, ROSE and ZEB. Greetings, Geyers! Hope to see you sometime, if not underground then on the river!

\*\*\* I remember some talk last spring about a fall BUFFALO RIVER trip. Might that actually happen, JOEL? Sure seems like fall would be a good time for the Buffalo: fewer people on the river (it was really crowded last May, and from what I hear, summer is even worse), moderate temperatures, and lovely fall colors in addition to the usual riverside beauty. And if we do this, here's another idea: Friday night at Buffalo Bud's Camp, and Saturday night along the river, as a certain contingent wanted to do last spring. Food for thought, yes?

\*\*\* The Grotto's condolences to SCOTT FEE on the loss of his mother on July 21. Anyone who has been through this knows how much it hurts. We're thinking about you, Scott.

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**Birmingham Grotto Newsletter**  
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**Birmingham, AL 35255-5102**

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