

BIRMINGHAM GROTTO

NEWSLETTER

December 2011



VOLUME 41

NUMBER 12

BGN Calendar

DEC 17	SCCi Fox Mountain Preserve work day. Starts at 9:00 am EST. Details: http://scci.org/News/FoxMtnCleanupDec11.html Directions: http://scci.org/News/FoxMountainAccess.html
JAN 10	Grotto Meeting 7pm, meeting space above Matthew's Bar & Grill at 2209 1st Avenue N. (aka The Fanaei Building).
JAN 17	SERA planning meeting 7pm, above Matthew's Bar & Grill at 2209 1st Avenue N. (aka The Fanaei Building).
JAN 31	Grotto Fun Money Maker event at the Birmingham Ballet (proceeds go into an account for grotto fun events). See David McRae if interested. There may be one more in 2012; details as they are made known.
FEB 14	Grotto Meeting 7pm, meeting space above Matthew's Bar & Grill at 2209 1st Avenue N. (aka The Fanaei Building).
FEB 21	SERA planning meeting 7pm, above Matthew's Bar & Grill at 2209 1st Avenue N. (aka The Fanaei Building).

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



*Slipping and sliding through McKinney Cave #2
(Jeff Harrod)*

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 59607
Birmingham, AL 35259

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 25th of the month; however, the Newsletter is limited to 12 pages and often fills up quickly.



On the cover...
Paint Rock River Cave.
(Jeff Harrod)

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

A Message from the Treasurer

After hours of meticulous investigation, well at least minutes, it has come to my attention that the old PO Box address was inadvertently published inside the front cover of the October and November Newsletters. (The correct one was on the address/stamped section)

If you mailed your dues and you are not sure if you mailed them to the correct address,

Birmingham Grotto
PO Box 59607
Birmingham, AL 35259

Please contact me at the email address or phone number below and I will let you know if your dues have been received.

Because of any confusion or inconvenience this may have caused we are running a special for anyone who has not paid their dues for the October 2011 - September 2012 time period.

For a limited time only, let us say now through December, you can get a 2 Year Single Membership for only \$30.00 or a 2 Year Family Membership for the low low price of only \$40.00, and all late fees will be waived! Where else can you get 2 years of fun and excitement for 30 or 40 bucks? And that's not all! If you act now and pay for your 2 year membership before the end of December, you will also receive, absolutely free, a 2 year subscription to the award winning Birmingham Grotto Newsletter! And just when you thought it couldn't get any better, we will include access to the Birmingham Grotto Website, the amazing Spelunkologists.com website, where you can go caving without leaving the warmth and comfort of your own home, and the Birmingham Grotto egroup, where you can find out about all of the exciting things going on between meetings!

This is a limited time offer, get your checks in the mail!

Oh, and if you need to hang on to a little cash for Christmas, I will give you the same benefits listed above for 1 year for the super low rates of \$15.00 for a Single or \$20.00 for a Family.

One last thing! We still have a half a dozen or so members that have not paid their Getaway Auction Debts. If you pay up before the end of the year, you can scratch "Pay my Auction Bill on Time" off of your New Years Resolution list! Don't make me send out the "Leg Breakers" right before Christmas! Magz can tell you, broken legs are not much fun! And no, I had nothing to do with her broken leg!

Thanks,

Your Illustrious Grotto Treasurer
Dale Douglas

Phone: 205-988-0448
Cell: 205-356-4019
Email: dale.douglas@kellogg.com

Birmingham Grotto Officers

President:

David McRae, NSS 51358
dirtydaves@bellsouth.net
(205) 616-1490

Vice-President:

Jeff Harrod, NSS 37101
webmaster@bhamgrotto.org

Secretary:

The Howells
NSS 13926/18128
vdshowell@yahoo.com
(205)591-5127

Treasurer:

Dale Douglas, NSS 60404
dale.douglas@kellogg.com
(205) 356-4019

Newsletter Staff

Editor:

Toby B. Kemp, NSS 37091
editor@bhamgrotto.org
(205) 903-1211

Publisher and
Membership List:

Valerie Howell, NSS 18128 FR
vdshowell@yahoo.com

Proofreaders:

Julie Fee, NSS 47637
caverjules@bellsouth.net
Scott Fee, NSS 19797 LF
scottfee@bellsouth.net
Valerie Howell, NSS 18128 FR
vdshowell@yahoo.com

Archivist:

Dave Caudle, NSS 13995
cavers@bellsouth.net

Conservation:

currently vacant (see President)
conservation@bhamgrotto.org

Webmaster:

Jeff Harrod, NSS 37101
webmaster@bhamgrotto.org

Stoned Well

Story & Photos by Jeff Harrod



It's a beautiful cold Saturday morning January 2011. Daniel Wood, Randall Donaldson, Alan Cook, Brandon Phillips and I are headed up to Jackson County Alabama. Our goal for the day is to explore ACS# 1578 Stoned Well. It's a 498' multidrop located in Little Coon Valley. We had stopped off at Dave McRae's house around 7am to pick up a rope we needed and he wished us luck. He and Dan had been to the cave a few years prior but only scratched the surface. They had been on a midnight trip and went down the entrance pitch series. They only toured the first formation room but routed. I've kind of got it in my head that this is the trip I'll be on. Something about a tight spot halfway in that might filter me.

We arrive in the valley delighted that the 8" snow from a week ago is still on the ground. Snow is a rare sight for us southerners and the whole area is very beautiful. When we arrive at the parking area we're a little disappointed to see new "No Trespassing" signs up. I start to devise an alternate way in but Dan suggested we talk to the nearest homeowner. Dan and Alan spot the owner of the nearest house who's working on his truck in his yard. They come back with smiles on their faces. Turns out his brother owns the land and the signs are for hunters. He says it's no problem at all to park next to signs and go through the gate. They both welcome cavers on their land. We park



and the landowner shortly drives by us on the road. Alan apparently correctly diagnosed his problem as a thermostat and guessed he was going to town to get it.

We all gear up and slice up the mountain. It's really fun to hike in the snow. Since it never got above freezing that week it's a dry powder which is unusual for Alabama. It's

usually a wet mess. We hike and hike and, well, hike some more. We got to the proper coordinates and find ourselves nowhere near the pit entrance. Dan had only been to the cave at the middle of the night and is having trouble with all the snow cover. We know there is a road near but quickly get separated on 3 different roads going all different directions. After nearly 2 hours I had just resided to myself that I would just ridge walk that day. The opportunity to find steam vents is very appealing.



A half hour later we get a triple "Bo" from Dan. He found the entrance. It was smack dab in a new clear-cut. Exactly the thing we had been avoiding all day. We all gather at the pit. "What, we're actually gonna' do this?" I ask. "Yep" is the response. We make short work of the rigging and everyone in turn heads down. I was last and had instructions to rig the rebelay 70' down once I come to it. I never really heard an "off rope" so I sit in the snow for a long time then eventually rig in.

I get to the rebelay point and spot the bolt on the wall. I'm on the springy Petzl rope and have the darndest time leaning out to rig it. I keep knocking a shower of rocks down the 40' pit at my feet. I eventually decide to hop to the more stable right hand side. Only to have

a nice slice of the wall collapse once I put my weight on it. After a bit of consideration, I finally decide to rig the bolt and just fall over onto the new rig. I detach from the other line and it springs back tight. "Well, that'll be fun to cross coming up" I think but I rappel down (not looking up a bit).



I get to the bottom and climb down a long talus slope and join my fellow cavers. "Where the heck have you been?" was the collective question. Dan had already rigged the second pitch series and headed down. I waited my turn and admired the formation chamber. Very nice pools and large formations abound. Once everyone was gone I head down. The 2 bolts are a

little sketchy one having a freely spinning hanger. I get to the next rebelay but find it rigged slack. It was re-rigged after Dan went down to make it easier to get off rope. I tightened it up since I trusted this single bolt even less. I continue down the 10mm talon rope to a razor lip. It was padded before me but now was off the pad. I pass it and leave one of my wrap pads on the rope for the first person to climb.

We all meet up again and discuss our next move. I still think I'm going to be filtered shortly so I'm a little disinterested. Everyone is sounding like Charlie Brown's teacher. We come to a breakdown climb up then a slide down with a squeeze in the breakdown below it. Dan, Alan, and then Brandon negotiated it. I hear Brandon say he doesn't know if I'll fit. I start heading in and get to the tight part. I'm through!



Oh heck, now I'm suddenly on a real caving trip...

It's difficult to describe the change in mentality. Most trips require some kind of mental challenge. I now realize we're all going to bottom this cave today. I move up to the front with Dan and I'm suddenly more interested.

We negotiate climb downs, squeezes and water crawls for the next few hours.

I had thought the cave would be fairly easy since it didn't have that many pitches past the first 5. I soon realized it's actually going to be much harder as we have to scramble down small drops one after the other. We used every bit of extra rope, webbing and slings to do it. It's very tiring to reach the depth. Finally I rig the last pit and Dan gives me the option to go down first. I turn him down and give him the honors of testing the old bolts. He gives me a "why you s.o.b" look and heads down. The pit was wet. After we all reach the bottom Dan says some very memorable words at -498'.

We all start trudging out. Shoving rope in tight water filled crawls, exposed climb-ups and scary rigging for the next few hours. We finally get to the bottom of the entrance talus slope and wait our turn. It takes everyone a long time to exit. The tightness of the rebelay at the entrance proves to be very difficult. I'm last out and really get chilled negotiating it and derigging. Luckily most of the loose rocks were gone now. My hands are frozen stiff as I get near the 80' entrance pit. Cold night and stars greet me. Alan and Randall are waiting and the rest have already headed down the mountain. We start down ourselves in the snow and eventually get back to the trucks around 10pm. We quickly change and head home.

Dave, who hadn't heard from us in 15 hours had already loaded the truck and was driving north. We assure him we're ok and thank him for his efforts. We all stop at waffle house late at night and enjoy the completion of another adventure in Alabama.

What were Dan's memorable words deep under the mountain? "The best thing about bottoming this cave? I don't ever have to come back"



Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes
November 8, 2011

Pres. McRae called the meeting to order at 7pm at the meeting space above Matthew's Bar & Grill at 2209 1st Avenue N. (aka M Lounge and The Fanaei Building).

Visitors

Desmond Villalba, invited by Kyle Crider, and Angela Bagwell were recognized.

Minutes

October meeting minutes were accepted as posted to the egroup and printed in the newsletter.

Treasurer's Report

The following accounting was presented by Treasurer Dale Douglas:

\$3,108.73 Starting balance
-250.99 Total Expenses
 Newsletter printing and postage (235.16)
 BBQ sauce for TAG (15.63)
+1,205.00 Total Income
 Dues (\$295)
 GG Auction Payments (\$80)
 TAG Meal (\$62)
 2012 SERA Pre-Registration (\$768)
\$4,062.94 Ending Balance

NOTE: 2011 Auction Balance Owed - \$191.50, under \$200 to go!

Announcements

Grotto Halloween Party was a success. Thanks to all who helped set up/clean up (at the risk of missing someone, they included Jeff, Amy, Ryan, Randy, and Brett).

Nov 15: SERA 2012 planning meeting, 7pm, meeting space above Matthew's Bar & Grill at 2209 1st Avenue N. (aka The Fanaei Building).

Nov 19-20: Grotto trip, Weekend in Florence; Sat. Colbert County tour. Sun. McKinney #2 (wet suit/polypro recommended; bring flotation that you don't mind trashing) Leaving McDonald's in Moulton at 9am. More info? Jeff Harrod

Dec. 2-4: Howdy Puff Fest (5th annual) Moses Tomb campout

Dec 13: Grotto Meeting and Elections, 7pm, Homewood Library room 101.

Jan 10, 2012 Grotto Meeting 7pm, meeting space above Matthew's Bar & Grill at 2209 1st Avenue N. (aka The Fanaei Building)

Jan 31 2012: Grotto Fun Money Maker event at the Birmingham Ballet (proceeds go into an account for grotto fun events). See David McRae if interested. There may be one more in 2012; details as they are made known.

Feb 14, 2012: Grotto Meeting 7pm, meeting space, 2209 1st Avenue N.

Mar 13, 2012: Grotto Meeting 7pm, meeting space, 2209 1st Avenue N.

Apr 10, 2012: Grotto Meeting 7pm, meeting space, 2209 1st Avenue N.

May 4-6, 2012: SERA, hosted by the Birmingham Grotto, Paint Rock Valley, Estill Fork, AL

May 8, 2012: Grotto Meeting 7pm, meeting space, 2209 1st Avenue N.

** Grotto Elections are next month (Dec 13) at the Homewood Library, room 101. **

Old Business

SERA 2012: Next planning meeting is next Tuesday 11/15/11, at this same time (7pm) and location.

Guntersville Getaway: Given the uncertainty of the cabin availability at Guntersville State Park, an alternative was proposed. The SERA Site, Paint Rock Valley Resort, is available and the weekend could be used as a combination Getaway and opportunity to get familiar with the site and do some SERA-related tasks. Details on available spaces and costs to camp vs. a room will be brought to the next meeting.

Meeting location 2012: After discussing pros and cons of the two current options (Homewood Library room 101 and Matthew's upstairs meeting space), the majority of those present voted to move the grotto meetings for 2012 to the meeting space above Matthew's Bar & Grill at 2209 1st Avenue N. (aka The Fanaei Building). The December 2011 meeting (and grotto elections) will be held at Homewood Library.

New Business

Grotto Web costs: Jeff Harrod's costs are doubling to \$120/year. A motion was made and carried to pay \$60/year toward his expenses for each year that he hosts the grotto website. There were also wide expressions of appreciation for all his efforts as webmaster to date.

Music Plugs: Robert Randolph and the Family Band will be performing at WorkPlay next Tuesday (11/15).

The Florence band Pine Hill Haints - under consideration for SERA - will be performing at Bottletree on 11/12 at 8pm.

Grotto Trip: 11/19-20, Florence area. Shane Stacey has arranged permission to go to McKinney #2, described as a "wet, plunge pool, otter slide mud fest" - wet suits/poly pros highly recommended, ditto flotation/life jackets you don't mind getting trashed. Plan (changed since the meeting) is to see some of the sites in Colbert County (hot waterfall, sanitarium site) on Sat., camp Sat. night and visit the cave on

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

Sunday, ending the day at the Rattlesnake Saloon, a cool spot located under a large rock shelter. Original plan to leave the McDonald's in Moulton at 9am on Sat. may change. Contact Jeff Harrod, who will post more info on the egroup.

Trip Reports

(Want more details? Encourage reporters to send in trip reports to the newsletter!)

- Jonathan Hobbs: Horse Cave (both entrances) and took his father (James) to Tumbling Rock; Made it to the Elephant's Feet
- David Caudle: St. Clair unnamed cave is surveyed to 2500', close but still not connecting as expected.
- Howdy: a macramé rappel of Whiteside at TAG with Darien Dopp
- Alan Cook: Lava River Cave in Flagstaff, Arizona
- Dave Howell: Forest's First Find with Reid and Forest Hilton, and Danger Judy. He's very interested in contacting "Steve

Davis, NSS 20524" for a couple of reasons.

- Daniel Wood: Paint Rock River Cave with Chris Garrison, Jeff Harrod, David McRae, Alan Cook, Sonya Erickson, Randy Donaldson, Shane Stacey.

Program

Due to meeting date confusion, there was no program.

Meeting adjourned at 8:05 pm to the downstairs for the meeting after the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by The Howells, Secretary

****IMPORTANT NOTE****

The December Grotto meeting and elections will be at 7pm on Dec. 13 at Homewood Library, room 101
Pay up and show up to vote!

Paint Rock River Cave



News & Notes

Dave Howell

*** December is here, bringing with it the holiday season. No matter which holiday you're partial to, be it Christmas, Hanukkah, the Winter Solstice, Kwanzaa, *Dies Natalis Solis Invictus* (Birthday of the Unconquered Sun), or whatever, it is a wonderful season, a celebration of lights amid the gelid winter darkness, a time to honor family and friends - and not a bad time to ridgework (on non-gun days). So as you cut a pine from the Sacred Grove of the Great Mother, as Odin gallops over the housetops granting boons to his worshippers below, as the mistletoe is cut from the sacred oak and the ritual drunken sex orgy ensues... ahem. Well, perhaps not. Whatever your holiday season tradition, may it be merry/holy/spiritual. *Froehliche Weihnachten*.

*** By popular vote of members attending the November Grotto meeting, the location of our monthly meeting is changing. Starting in January, Grotto meeting will be held at M Lounge (2209 1st Avenue North) on the 2nd floor of Matthew's (2208 Morris Avenue), familiar from recent meetings after the meeting. (Meeting date and time will remain the same, the 2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm.) The 2nd floor is accessible either from 1st Avenue North or from Morris Avenue through Matthew's and up the stairs. Parking is available on either street, too. An advantage of this new location is it's "one stop does it all:" you can come early for dinner, attend the meeting, then stay for the meeting after the meeting. Come check it out, if you haven't already. And if you're not

excited about this new meeting venue - not everybody voted for it - then suggest an alternative. This change came about because several members indicated they would cease attending if meetings continued to be held at the Homewood Library, which has become inhospitable in certain ways. As was said when the vote was taken, if you can come up with a better location for Grotto meetings, by all means let's hear it. This one is not set in stone.

*** Congratulations to KYLE CRIDER on winning the World Environment News's Letter to the Editor competition with his submission, "Conspiracy: The Communists' Plot to Destroy the Earth for Their Own Personal Gain." Not really - the actual title of his letter/essay is "The First Rule of Intelligent Tinkering." Kyle's prize? A good one: his essay was published in the *World Environment News*, plus a \$500 donation was made in his name to Friends of the Earth. Congrats again, Kyle! By the way, check out Kyle's blog posts on the Green Register.

*** Did you catch coverage of the 2011 NSS CONVENTION in Glenwood Springs, Colorado in the November issue of *NSS News*? A casual glance discovers good photos - in full color, no less - of former Birmingham Grotto caver PETER MICHAUD (aka Mudpuppy) at the banquet, our TAG colleagues ANGELA MORGAN at Flowstone River, Breezeway; BILL CUDDINGTON at the vertical competition; and MARION SMITH in Anvil Points Cave. Also,

several photos are credited to our colleague ALAN CRESSLER, as well as a Merit Award in photography to Marion for his and KELLY SMALLWOOD's photo cover of *TAG Caver*, and several other awards to Kelly for nonphotographic and computer-enhanced *Georgia Underground* covers, and for entries in the Photo Salon. Looking further, I see that BENJY Von CRAMON was awarded NSS Fellowship, and also was recognized for the December 2010 *NSS News* cover photo of Fantastic Pit, Ellison's Cave, which he and WILLIE HUNT produced. Congrats to all the above!

*** Thanks and a tip of the Grotto helmet to the Boy Scout leader in Monroeville, Alabama who was nice enough to forward our former President CHARLES SNIDER's caving-related books and papers, many of them specific to the Birmingham Grotto, which had been donated to the Troop by Charles' survivors. We don't know your name, Mr. Scoutmaster, but your thoughtfulness has enriched our archives, and our knowledge of our own Grotto's history. Thanks again!

*** Once again the Great Wheel turns, and another year draws to a close. New Years is always a time to look back over the past year and what it brought, and to look forward over the coming year and what it might bring. Whatever your wish for 2012 might be, whether for deep pits, mapping projects measured in miles, virgin walking passage, or that cool Aston Martin (in blue, please), may it come your way. Peace.

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter
P.O. Box 59607
Birmingham, AL 35259

Forwarding & Address Correction Requested