

BIRMINGHAM GROTTO

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2011



VOLUME 41

NUMBER 2

BGN Calendar

FEB 8	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
FEB 18 FEB 20	Annual Guntersville Getaway At Lake Guntersville State Park.
MAR 8	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.

Slogging Through Woods On A Snowy Ridgewalk Valerie Howell (with apologies to Robert Frost)

Where am I now? I think I know.
Dave hikes above me, Judy low;
They will not catch me stopping here
For I trek on, albeit slow.

My slip-on boots, far from good gear
Despite the tread, feet slip I fear
On snowy slopes above the lake
My muttered curses just I hear.

The game trails tempt me and I take
One into briars, a mistake.
O'er fallen tree limbs I try to leap;
A graceful landing I don't make.

The woods are snowy, cold and steep.
All caves but one their secrets keep,
But we'll check that one out next week.
Or look for others, all next week

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...
Inside Cagle's Chasm.
(Dave McRae)

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	447.52		
	Total Expenses	-1,083.89	-1,083.89	
Income				
	Getaway Cover	540.00		
	Getaway Auction**	601.75		
	Total Getaway to Date	1,141.75		
	Dues	225.00		
	Interest	0.44		
	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)				

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.

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There Are Rocks Under The Snow - But You Can't See Them

Notes On My First Ridgewalk In A While

Valerie Howell

Before I met Dave he belonged to an elite group called the Dülfer Demons, college friends who sought adventures in rock climbing and caving. "There are rocks under the leaves but you can't see them" became a catchphrase after a fall hike led to an unusual number of stumbles and falls. On this recent day I quickly learned how a layer of snow on top of the rocks and the leaves magnifies that effect.

I've been away from regular ridgewalking for years and during that time Dave's ridgewalks have evolved into more challenging treks (some have called them death marches). The promise of this one being less challenging and in territory I've hiked before convinced me to give it a try. I hadn't factored in the 6-8 inches of snow the area got during the week, which was reduced to maybe 4 inches by the time we arrived. The most hazardous part of the hike was getting from the car to the trailhead and back again on the slick and slushy road.

We agreed on the spread: Dave took the highest elevation, Judy the lowest and I attempted to stay the middle course. I'll note here that Judy picked the magic elevation, making the only find of the day. I focused on ways to keep on track without falling on my face and assessed my preparedness.

Gear: I had prepared for the cold with layers and thermals. I forgot my gloves, but found an old pair of Shay's fingerless knit gloves, which were just barely better than nothing. I hadn't thought through the boot situation and was left to choose between my open weave low cut hiking shoes or a pair of fleece/suede zip up snow boots Shay had also left behind on her way through town from NY to CA. I opted for the latter, thinking enclosed and higher sides would be better. I brought along one walking pole to use as a hiking staff, a security blanket of sorts.

Lessons learned:

Boots: What slips on can also slip off. While the tread grips the surface, your foot slides around inside the slip-on kind. Especially when traversing steep hillsides.

Walking stick: A good thing. With proper placement it can substitute for saplings when none are handy to grab, push the briars out of your face, and help locate those rocks and potholes before mis-stepping.

Game trails: Seemed like a good idea at the time. Then it dawned on me: deer have 4 (smaller) feet to my 2, much better balance and, after a few attempts to follow their trails, I'm convinced they have a wicked sense of humor.

Pace: I tend to set a slow steady speed, which avoids rest stops but guarantees being left behind. As a result I've learned not to take Dave's offer to carry my water and light. Helpful hint: If you can arrange for Dave to set down his map case or other important article and leave it behind, you'll have a chance to catch up while he's backtracking.

News & Notes

Dave Howell

*** February, considered by some to be an uneventful month, actually hosts many festivals. There's Valentines Day of course, that's been discussed in this column in previous years; besides that, February 1 is Imbolc, also known as St. Brigid's Day, an Irish festival marking the beginning of spring. (Guess they have an early spring in Ireland!) Imbolc, originally a pagan festival of the goddess Brigid, later Christianized as St. Brigid, is referred to in Irish mythology as one of four cross-quarter days, the others being Beltane, Lughnasadh, and Samhain. But wait, there's more! February 3, which is the birthday of SHAY HOWELL and CHASE TRAMMEL, is Chinese New Year, beginning the Year of the Rabbit. Of course we all know bunnies are great partiers, look at their lavish celebrations of Easter, so we can expect rowdy festivities this month in the Sunroom of the Mad March Hare. Carrots, anyone?

*** As I write these words it is the last gun day in the Coon (i.e. the James D. Martin-Skyline Wildlife Management Area), so you can be sure the woods are full of hunters and their bullets. But the situation is soon to change: the 2010-11 hunting season ends statewide on January 31, and during the entire month of February nobody is (legally) hunting anything in Alabama. You know what this means: February is prime RIDGEWALKING SEASON. Get out there and find those new ones that have thus far escaped notice, and don't forget to

report qualifiers to the Alabama Cave Survey. (If you don't know how to do this, call me, I'll help.) Also, we sure would like to read your ridgewalking and caving reports in this august publication. (The word "august" is the adjective, not the proper noun; don't wait 6 months to write about your adventures!)

*** Of course February brings not only prime ridgewalking season, but also the GUNTERSVILLE GETAWAY, this year the weekend of the 18th-20th, lakeside cabins in Guntersville State Park. Dynamite party Friday night, with a lottery at 9:00 pm for beds in the 2 Grotto cabins. (Watch out for the Vegas-style gaming table; if not, bring your money!) Cave trips, usually both horizontal and vertical, and the annual GROTTA RIDGEWALK (led by your favorite BGN columnist) on Saturday. Another great, if slightly more subdued, party Saturday night, featuring the GROTTA AUCTION, our primary fundraiser (not counting the SERA Summer Cave Carnivals we host from time to time). Bring your unwanted goods to donate for auction, they don't have to be caving-related. This is one of the Grotto's premier annual events, don't miss it. Valerie and I will see you there!

*** As of this writing MAGZ SIMS is still in the hospital recovering from complications from her recent knee surgery. (Her original doctor assigned

his staph to her case.) That's the bad news, the good news is that it's expected she will be out by the time you read this. Hope the remainder of your convalescence is uneventful and easy, Magz (unlike the earlier portions).

*** Magz's infirmity has, it seems, not slowed her down. When Valerie and I visited her she showed us a list she'd put together of possible locations for the 2012 SERA SUMMER CAVE CARNIVAL. Won't upstage her by printing the list here, but I will say that Thunder Canyon Campground was on it, a location we considered for the 1976 SERA, for gosh sake! We liked the place, but didn't use it because the price was way high. Interesting that it's again being considered, 36 years later. (The '76 event was held at Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park Campground north of Guntersville, which no longer exists in its earlier form, and is, to my knowledge, no longer open to the public.) Things don't change much in Jack Daniel's hollow...

*** Remember the news item last month about the land GENE LAMBERT has for sale? The agent called to tell me the price has been reduced, it's now \$79,500 for each of two 40 acre tracts. Interested?

*** The Grotto's sympathy and thoughts go to JONATHAN GLADDEN on the recent loss of his grandmother. Very sorry to hear it, Jonathan.

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Forwarding & Address Correction Requested