

BIRMINGHAM GROTTO

NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2010



VOLUME 40

NUMBER 1

BGN Calendar

JAN 7	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
FEB 4	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
FEB 19 FEB 21	The Guntersville Getaway will be held this weekend at Guntersville State Park. See Scott Fee for details.
MAR 4	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
MAR 26 APR 4	Group trip to the Guadalupe Mountains. See David Caudle for more info or to sign up for what promises to be an amazing trip!

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



*Presenting Samantha Acton McRae.
(Scott Fee)*

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. 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...

Jeff Harrod dropping into Iliad
Odyssey.
(Dave McRae)

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*Alan Cook giving Moses' Tomb his seal of approval.
(Jeff Harrod)*

Dancing Ferns Tom Chamblee

Across fields of soybeans, the hot afternoon sun bears upon us, sweating like waterfalls in nature's steambath. Looking up at a sharp green pinnacle looming 1500' above the cove floor. Into the shadowy woods we go, cold air engulf us cooling our overheated personage. Fern thickets are dancing in the cold caverns' blow. We are approaching a limestone bluff adorned by grapevines and English Ivy; a beautiful scene of natural art. Once inside, we traverse a sandy bottomed pool, up to our chins in crystal pure water. Over round boulder piles into a clean sculptured passage with an incised canyon in the middle. A series of lovely cataracts thunders into a series of pools as clear as an aquatic magnifying glass. Up the falls into a room like a vault of fine crystalline jewelry. Masses of flowstones and stalagmites are covered in calcite sparkle, the flat faces of coarse calcite crystals. They reflect our lights like starbursts in a Fourth of July fireworks display. Scenes only seen in a speleo netherworld, a paradise of unique beauty.

Caver's Kitchen Deirdra Hahn



I've had this idea kicking around since about April; a feature called Caver's Kitchen! I originally got the idea when I admired my full dish-drainer of biners, rack, ascenders, helmet, etc; curtains billowing in the spring breeze and thought, "that would be a great picture - a true caver's kitchen!" Then I started hearing the stories about Jason Wall's cooking feats - like the flat-rock fajitas he made out west, again when he and Moe went into another dimension talking about what had become of the Halloween leftovers (you guys made my mouth water!), and then I had Gary Barnes smoked salmon.

Format: one picture, one recipe, and an anecdote.

The picture is your choice of how to represent. Recipe should be relatively reproducible by the better than average cook. Story can be linked or unlinked to picture and/or recipe.

RECIPES of the GROTTO Dave Howell (this month)

It seems that our new Secretary Deirdra Hahn and my lovely wife Valerie have been conspiring of late to institute a recurrent feature for the Newsletter, a kind of recipe of the month article in which Grotto members recount memorable in-camp meals and related incidents, along with recipes. I am honored to have been invited to write the first article in this series. Be thinking about your favorite camp meals and recipes, readers, for future installments!

To speak about "hobo meals" in the context of a "recipe of the month" article might seem to some cavers like a statement of the obvious, kind of like "Hey, didja know you need a good, reliable light for caving?" But until a couple of years ago, I had never heard of a hobo meal. Moreover, when Shay called a few nights ago - from Grant's Pass, Oregon - to ask for suggestions for camp food that could be cooked on an open fire, to my surprise she had never heard of hobo meals. They're really easy to prepare beforehand, and extremely easy to cook: you just throw them in the fire! Here's the recipe I used on my Walls of Jericho hike last May:

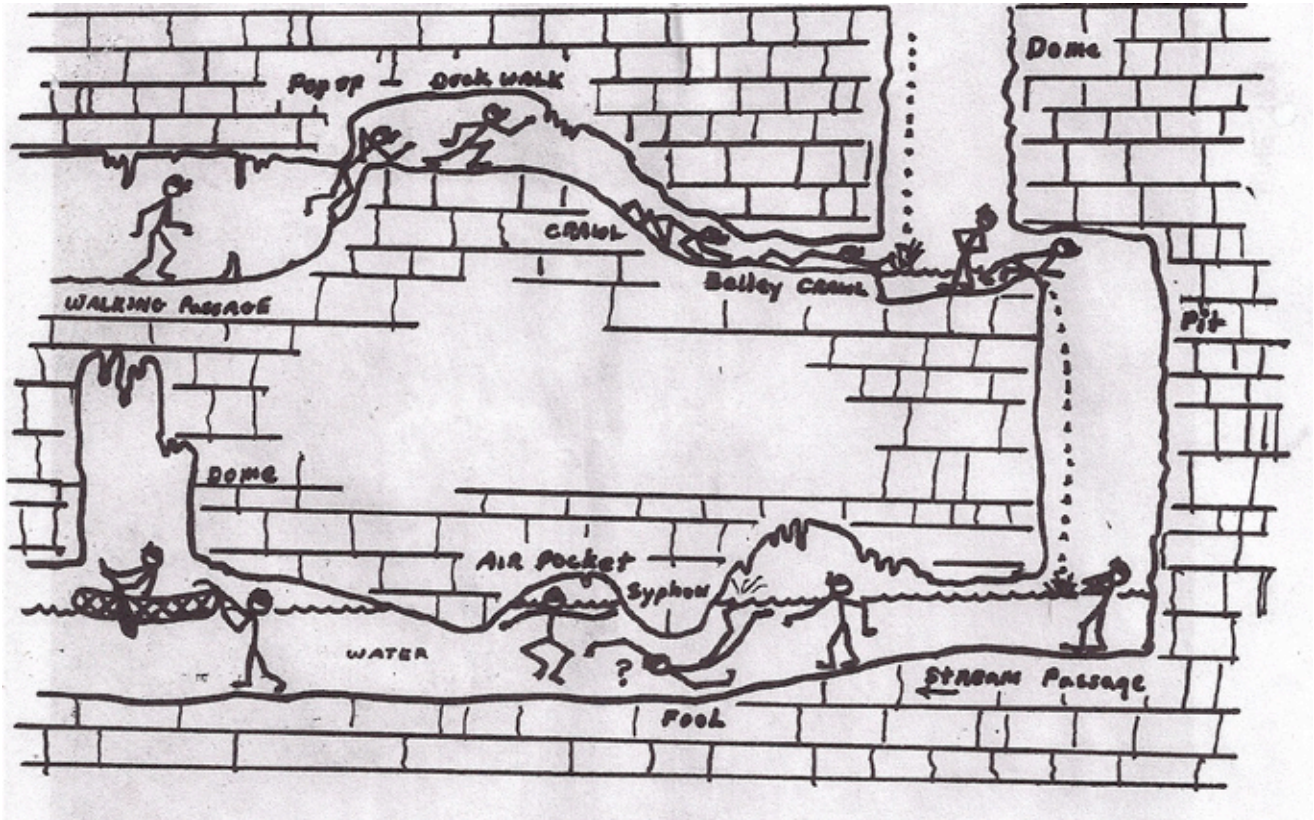
Hobo Meal:

1 or 2 boneless chicken breasts
1 or more potatoes, cut into bite size pieces
squash, sliced
mushrooms, sliced if they're large
onions, thickly sliced
carrots, cut into 1" sections

Season or spice the chicken to taste, arrange it with the veggies over/under/around and wrap it securely in a **double layer** of aluminum foil. When ready to cook, simply place the foil-wrapped parcel in the coals of your campfire. Cook for 20-30 minutes, depending on the size and heat of the fire, and where it's placed in relation to the thermal center. Turn a couple of times during cooking. Unwrap and eat.

The beauty of this is that you can use most any meats or other ingredients, get the package ready a day or two in advance, then carry it in one of the pockets of your pack. The double layer of foil is important, as this keeps the contents from burning, unless you get careless and leave it in the fire too long. Refrigeration is not necessary if you're going to be cooking it within 24 hours of when you take it from your refrigerator at home. I've gotten quite hooked on these as an easy way to have a good and nutritious camp meal without carrying a lot of heavy cookware and utensils. Enjoy! (Oh, and uh... I recommend a *Zeller Schwarze Katz* with the above recipe. Chill it in the creek before opening.)





An incredibly detailed cave map by Laurence Breeland, circa 1974.



Barry Skelton in the Iliad/Odyssey trip.
(Jeff Harrod)



Shay Howell and Willie at Dave & Sam's wedding.
(Jeff Harrod)



Who has two thumbs and loves a good party? THIS GUY!!!!



Dave, Toby and Jeff offering Robot Ninja dance lessons.
(Chris Leggett)

Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes
December 3, 2009

President Scott Parvin called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM. He announced he was not running for re-election and thanked the Grotto and all volunteers who had made his job so much easier during the previous years. You're welcome Scott, but we thank YOU!

Grotto Election:

Nominations:

President: Dave McRae
Vice-President: Jeff Harrod, Judy Ranelli
Secretary: Deirdra Hahn
Treasurer: Scott Fee, Dale Douglas (Scott Fee declined nomination)

Results:

President: Dave McRae (Samantha McRae - First Lady)
Vice-President: Jeff Harrod
Secretary: Deirdra Hahn
Treasurer: Dale Douglas

Daniel Wood reported that the treasury stands at \$6,814.88.

The November meeting minutes were passed. Final 2009 Score: Secretary Scott Fee = 8 and Secretary sit-in = 1, Nitpickers who don't read the minutes on the e-group = 2.

Announcements:

1) Birthday Best Wishes to Valerie Howell! 39 again!

2) Dues are past due; cannot vote tonight if you haven't paid your dues. See Daniel Wood.

3) The trip to the Guadalupe Mountains is set for March 26th through April 3rd 2010. Sign-up with Dave Caudle. (Plenty of caves, dry and decorated - Scott Fee)

4) Grotto Newsletter in full color! Grotto received a one-time gift from

Vineyard Brands through Julie Fee for the use of its color copier. Thanks Vineyard Brands! Drink their wine while you read our print!

5) Guntersville Getaway - February 19/20. Jason Wall - Beverage Man! Bed Raffle - 9:00 PM Friday.

6) Scott Fee announced that the Central Alabama Grotto (CAG) is hosting a survey on their website concerning the SERA Summer Cave Carnival. The survey has nine questions.

7) Deirdra Hahn announced that the SERA Karst Task Force (SKTF) is looking for clean-up ideas. Now is the time to get a local project going. (Lady/Weaver Cave needs a clean-up - Scott Fee)

8) Valerie Howell announced that Wild South is looking for volunteers to survey canyons in the Bankhead National Forest. The Grotto used to have an informal Bankhead Survey group who found several caves.

9) Jimmy Sims recognized Toby Kemp as the editor and Valerie Howell as publisher of our Grotto Newsletter. Thank you Toby and Valerie!!!!

10) Scott Parvin recognized Dave Howell as a recipient of an NSS Fellow award! Congratulations Dave!

11) Dale Douglas made a generous donation of boxes of Christmas tins - free to a good home! Thanks Dale!

12) Donna Cobb's father passed away recently. (Donna and Danny, our heart-felt condolences).

New Business:

1) Howdy Puff Fest at Moses Tomb. Friday after 4:00 PM. Contact

Jeff Harrod for directions and combination.

2) December Grotto Trip is Moses Tomb. Ridgewalking and other local favorites. Jeff is leading a beginners vertical trip to Rusty's on Sunday.

3) January Program: "My Light is Better than Your Light". Bring your head lights/lamps and be ready to defend your choice!

Old Business:

1) Scott Fee reported on the thank yous received from the NSS Board of Governors (BOG). Several had been posted to the e-group and he received verbal thank yous concerning the choice of the Facility - Birmingham Zoo; hosting by CAG and the Birmingham Grotto; and the Friday Howdy Party at Gary Barnes house. (Well Done Folks!)

2) Monies set aside for the Howdy Party and light beverages at Saturdays BOG meeting were well utilized. Left-overs will be available at the Guntersville Getaway.

3) Meeting After the Meeting still not resolved. Club South, Nanafunks, and Still Water Pub (Burley Earl) named as possibles. Need an ad hoc committee to investigate and report.

Trip Reports:

1) Dave Caudle reported that 2600' feet of Ward's Cave has been surveyed. They have one loop closure at 20'. Another survey trip is scheduled for this Saturday and they will be out by 3:00 PM!

2) Deirdra went on a trip lead by Shane Stacey and Dave McRae to McKinney Pit #2. Otter slides and mud ball fights. Great fun was had!

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

3) Johnny Shaneyfelt took fellow employees of Mountain High Outfitters to Morrison's Cave. High water and mud fun!

4) Scott Fee asked about Saint Jefferson Cave, reportedly has 100's feet of passage and a through cave.

5) DangerJudy took two newbies to Tumbling Rock. Deirdra and her friend Michelle came out to help. Deirdra lead Kim out at the Wild Cat Rock pile. Judy, Karen and Michelle went back to the Christmas Tree, detoured into the Little Hall of Mysteries, and were relieved to run into Bill Torode and Dave Hughes at the Elephant's Feet! (Karen is a natural caver!)

6) Scott and Julie Fee, Jeff Harrod, Dave McRae, Ryan Strickland, Alan Cook, Dale Douglas, and Magz and Richard Sims attended the Lady/Weaver Cave Clean-up hosted by the Gadsden Grotto. The cavers filled half a dumpster. They removed some very large items like 5 fifty-five gallon steel drums, a steel door, tables, and 25 bags of trash. There is still more in there!

7) Jerry Saulsberry, Jennifer Pinkley, and Daniel Wood visited Iron Hoop Cave.

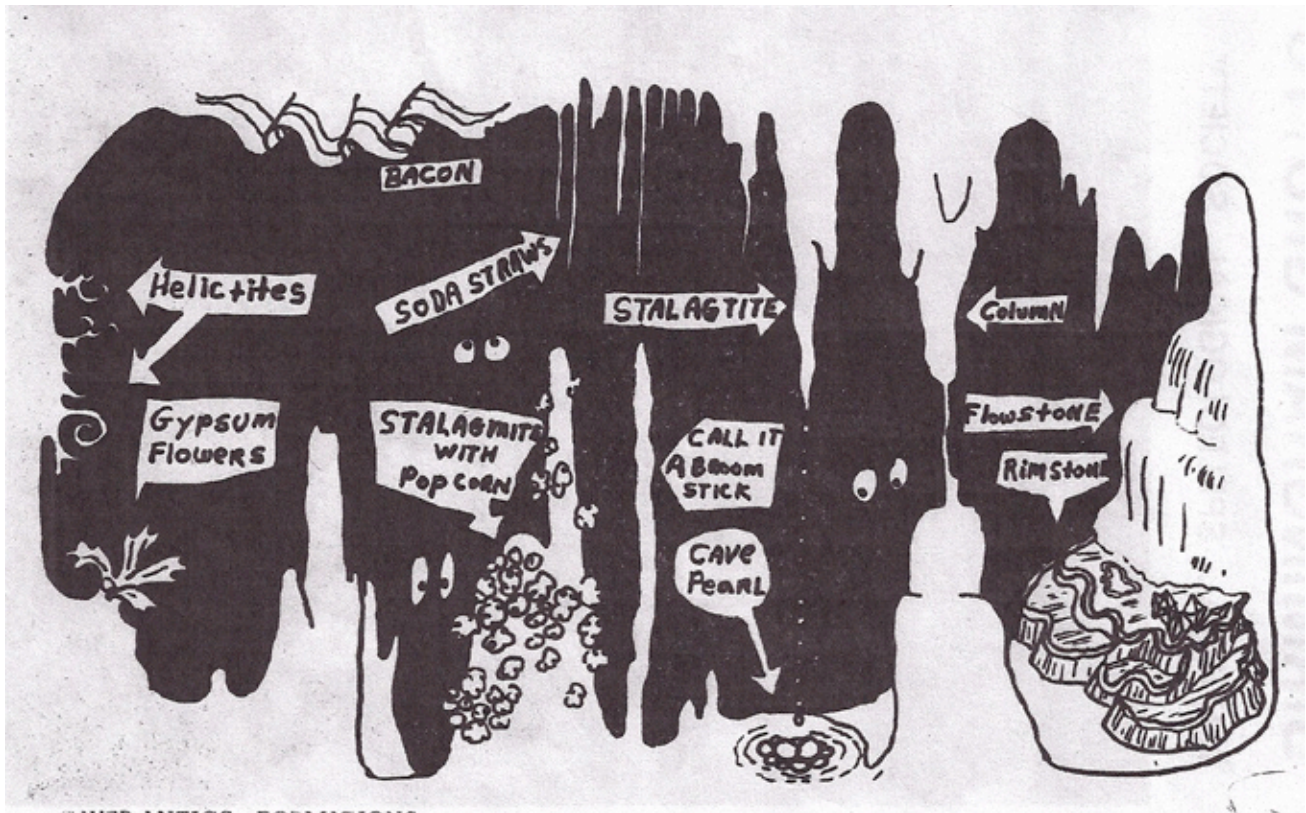
8) Bruce White and Josh Versailles did Rickles Cave. The drop was 50', but the rest of the cave is of various

sizes, lengths, and contains a space-time warp that erases all elephant tracks! It must be experienced!

9) Bruce White and Josh Versailles dropped Elison's! (Way to Go Guys!)

Vice-President Jeff Harrod adjourned the meeting at XX:XX PM. The December Program was postponed since there was a logistical glitch... someone forgot the flashlight and the sheet.

Respectfully submitted,
Deirdra Hahn, Secretary



An informative cartoon originally submitted by Laurence Breeland in the '70s.

News & Notes

Dave Howell

*** Welcome to 2010! The Great Wheel turns bringing us another new year, full of possibility and promise. What are your plans for this new revolution of our planet around the sun? Myself, I'm planning on finding the deepest pit in Alabama, yeah, deeper than Surprise Pit in Fern. OK, I may have to settle for something a little less grand - such as anything over 100 feet deep - or a horizontal find longer than Fern would be an acceptable substitute. But we'll see, the year is young. As a wise man once said, life is like a box of chocolates, you never can tell whether that one's made with almond flavoring or cyanide. (I might not have gotten that quote exactly right, but you get the idea.) Good luck! And let's be careful out there. (Recognize *that* quote?)

*** The carbide flame of love burns as brightly as ever in the Grotto, evidenced by the union of DAVID McRAE and SAMANTHA ACTON the last Sunday of November. Held at the recently renovated lodge at Guntersville State Park, the wedding was quite beautiful, featuring music by TOBY KEMP (guitar) and JAMES WOOD, our outgoing Treasurer's brother and colleague from the Nashville Grotto (cello), as well as a violinist. A reception replete with food and (very entertaining) slides followed in an adjacent room affording panoramic views of the lake and surrounding cave country, then the happy couple booked off on a honeymoon to the Dominican Republic. It was a lovely day. Congratulations, y'all!

*** Couldn't help noticing that one of the wedding guests arrived on 2 wheels rather than 4. Check it out. Cool ride, TPH!

*** Congratulations to the Grotto's new slate of officers elected at the December meeting! Your new leadership is as follows:

President - David McRae
Vice-President - Jeff Harrod
Secretary - Deirdra Hahn
Treasurer - Dale Douglas

It was an especially good month for all of you new officers: David got elected Grotto President and married to a wonderful woman, all in the space of a week! And Jeff got to chair his first meeting right from the get-go, in our new President's absence. (Honeymoon, you know.) Deirdra will never again get her name misspelled in the minutes, and Dale is holding his first Grotto office - be sure to send us a card from Rio! (Just kidding. Given the size of the Grotto treasury, a more likely destination to which to abscond would be Pell City.) Thanks and a tip of the Grotto helmet to our outgoing officers for a job well done. And now, the victory parade of black Mercedes convertible sedans through the Brandenburg Gate, the goose-stepping troops marching in review, the red, white and black banners snapping in the breeze... the cheering crowds, their arms raised in - oh. Sorry. Wrong place and time.

*** This is January, which means next month is February, which means the GUNTERSVILLE GETAWAY draws nigh.

Mark your calendars for the weekend of February 19-21, the Getaway is one of the Grotto's not-to-be-missed annual events. The accommodations: we always rent 2 lakeside cabins at Lake Guntersville State Park, bed space raffled off or you can spread your bag on the floor of either the party cabin or the quiet cabin; some folks rent their very own cabins, you're on your own for that. The agenda: Friday night, dynamite party with kegs provided and 9:00 pm bed raffle. Saturday, horizontal and vertical cave trips plus the annual Grotto ridgewalk. Saturday night, 2nd party and Grotto auction. Sunday morning, clear the debris, check out by 11:00 am, there are usually several cave trips afterward, ask around. Also, start setting aside any unwanted items to donate to the auction. Look around your garage, storage room or attic - auction items do not have to be cave-related, anything is welcome (and that's what shows up at the auction sooner or later, anything). All donations are tax deductible, ask our Treasurer about this. Cost of the Getaway is variable depending on how long you're there, where you stay, etc. - pay at the door. Don't miss it. I will see you there!

*** The Grotto's sympathy and condolences go to DONNA COBB, whose father passed away last month after an extended illness. No matter the circumstances of one's passing, losing a parent is a devastating event. Our thoughts are with you, Donna, as are our hopes that your recovery from the inevitable period of grief and mourning will be a quick one.

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