

BIRMINGHAM GROTTOS

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2008



VOLUME 38

NUMBER 7

BGN Calendar

JUN 26	DATE CHANGE!! The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Homewood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
JUL 3 JUL 6	Annual Sinking Cove campout.
JUL 17	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
JUL 19	Hiawassee River trip is planned by Judy Ranelli. The river is white water, with 1 and 2 class rapids (many people tube the river). There is no drinking on the river; however, the campground does allow drinking and has a very small selection of beverages in the shop. Anyone interested in the trip should contact Judy.
AUG 7	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Homewood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
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. www.springvalleybeach.com

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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.



Pat Kambesis guiding a lucky few to the fabled Wildcat Extension in Tumbling Rock.
(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.

Birmingham On-Line!
Check out our web site:
www.bhamgrotto.org

On the cover...

Daniel Wood helps daughter Sarah Jane down from the Topless Dome in Tumbling Rock.

(Scott Fee)

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Who IS that handsome devil? Why, it's me!! This was taken in front of Tumbling Rock around 1993. Tumbling Rock was one of the first "real" caves I ever visited and it's always held a special place in my heart, as I'm sure it does with many others. The Southeastern Cave Conservancy recently held their meeting at the newly acquired Tumbling Rock Preserve and it was great to visit the cave again, knowing that it's now being carefully watched after.

With that said, I encourage everyone to become members of the SCCi and help them to continue acquiring and protecting the caves we love so much. The SCCI can only do this with our support!



SERA 2008 - The long Haul?

Scott Fee

With our Arizona trip cancelled, we started to consider traveling to SERA this year. It would be a long trip (turns out we drove just shy of 1,000 miles) and if we went, we would want to take a couple of extra days off. We tossed that idea around, then Scott Parvin e-mailed me that his June guard duty had been postponed and he was interested in attending SERA. Well, that e-mail set the plan in motion.

Scott Parvin picked up Julie and I around 8:30 am, Thursday morning. Yeah, I know, we got off to slow start but all was well. We had Scott's Yukon stuffed to the hilt but could see out the back window thanks to his hitch extender thing that we used for the two full-sized coolers. Getting onto Interstate 59, we traveled through Chattanooga then Knoxville. We arrived in Bristol around 5:00 pm local time.

Our preregistration packets were quickly found and we were soon on our way to find a camping spot. The campground was very large and we drove around for about 10 minutes before deciding on a morning shade spot not too far from the Sauna. With camp initially set up, we headed into town to find the nearest Wal-Mart to get those last minute supplies and get some dinner. As it turns out, we would visit this place daily for one reason or another...

We awoke to a beautiful day on Friday morning. After flipping through the large guidebook, which is augmented by a few pages of color photographs, Scott decided he wanted to try for Worley's (Morrell) Cave. The promise of large passages and closeness to the campground seemed to fit the bill. I talked to one of the local grotto members who described it as the "East Tennessee version of Tumbling Rock." Well by gosh, that settled it!

We drove about 15 minutes and found the landowner's house just as a large van was driving back into their field. We signed the release that was hanging on the door, paid our \$5

per person for the privilege of parking, and drove into the pasture. The pasture became a narrow, graveled road and we quickly emerged into a field loaded with no less than 10 large vans! (Busy day for the cave and this was just Friday.) Only one or two of the vehicles had bat stickers on them, the rest appeared to be youth, church, or tour groups.

After gearing up, we strolled along the trodden path, downhill to the cave entrances. The lower entrance was at the base of a 75 to 100 foot cliff face, had a stream flowing out, and was visibly blowing lots of air. The upper entrance, measuring about 30 feet wide by 15 feet tall, seemed to be main route and was "sucking" the hot air from outside into the large passage. A few hundred feet inside, we encountered an unlocked, bat-friendly, gate. Just on the other side of the gate, Scott noticed a three foot long, black snake. Both Scott and I took multiple pictures until we agreed to leave the poor fella alone to enjoy the twilight zone.



*The Worley's Cave Welcoming Committee
(Scott Fee)*

Soon after this we would start meeting a variety of cavers, spelunkers, and even one huge 30 person tour group. The passage was generally huge and my on-camera flash was simply not sufficient to capture the passageway. Scott had his camera along and we took a number of room, passage, and speleothem shots. What impressed me the most was the vari-

ous colors in the speleothems. We saw various shades of red, orange, as well as the typical browns. Some of the speleothems were quite huge and impressive. I would estimate we traveled a few thousand feet before we came across the tour group of 30 sliding down the slope from the "Base Camp" room.

We passed them and at this point entered the stream passage. Again remaining as very comfortable walking passage, we easily travelled another 1,000 to 2500 feet back to a low ceiling, full-of-water crawlway, or perhaps it was the sump. The most noticeable part of this piece of passage was a 30 foot long, 10 to 15 foot tall wall of flowstone. Here the colors "pop" and the wall itself was simply wonderful. After taking more photos, we leisurely strolled back through the cave passages looking at some of the smaller speleothem displays.

In the morning, Scott wanted to work on his Ham Radio "stuff" so Jules and I left camp with the goal of getting her underground in Virginia. We had chosen Wolfe Cave for a few reasons: should be easy to find, don't need to hike a huge distance, and should be large stream passage. The directions worked like a charm and within 45 minutes we were parking atop of the cave entrance. One other caver's car was here, so we would not be alone.

Once we got out of the car, the woods were humming with insect noises. Turns out this was THE 17 year "wake up call" for the cicada's and the "boys were really making the noise." We shot some video to capture the sound but they did not want to upload to You-Tube. The short three minute walk down the forested path led us right into the walk-in entrance. We opted to continue basically straight and soon the passage ceiling height soared to over 30 and 40 feet at times while remaining less than 15 feet wide. We were walking through an obvious fault line within the earth - very cool. It was in this area that we met the vehicle occupants, three cavers from SERA.

We picked up the stream a few hundred feet into the entrance and enjoyed the cool cave water as it weaved its way downstream. The cave passage was heavily scalloped in



Julie Fee inside Wolfe Cave, VA.
(Scott Fee)

the floor area and rather slick in places. After enjoying the various speleothems and tall passageway for maybe 1,000 feet we encountered a rather deep hole. I was able to navigate around it to stay dry, but Jules didn't have the height to pull it off. She told me to go ahead and see the rest of the passage since we knew this was a short cave. After the deep spot, the height of passage dropped somewhat but still remained large and oval.



Julie Fee STILL inside Wolfe Cave, VA.
(Scott Fee)

Once I returned to Jules, we headed back to the entrance and ran into our caving pals again. They had just returned from the other passage and raved about some speleothems. So with camera in tow, we headed in that direction. In a few hundred feet the water got pretty deep so I told Jules to hang on and I would see if it was "worth it." A few minutes later she heard my "hoots" and started into the deep pools. She was not disappointed. Although much smaller than the previous passage, this area was four to eight feet tall by six to ten feet wide and almost "choked" with speleothems. Again, one wall easily stretched some 30 feet and was comprised of an array of speleothems. Albeit mostly flowstone, it had tites, mites, draperies, and some nice bacon. This was a real treat to the eye in such an easy accessible cavern. After shooting more photos, we headed out through the deep pools and back to the bat-mobile.

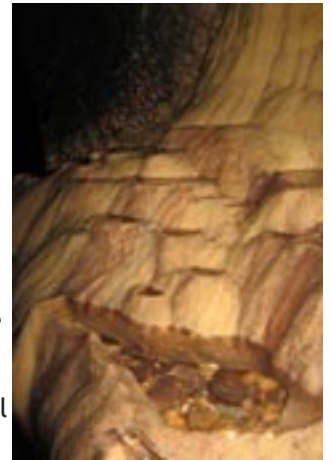
After changing I noticed we were only about three miles, as the bat flies, from Natural Tunnel State Park. We had plenty of time (did not want to miss having our name not called out for door prizes you know) and I had the GPS take us right to it. The park, itself, does not charge an admission fee. The only cost is if you want to use the pool or the chair lift. Chair lift? Yup, sure enough, they had a chair lift for \$3 each way that would take you down or up from the parking area to the 500 foot long boardwalk and tunnel entrance viewing area. We splurged and who should we see underneath us as we cruise overhead... none other than Myrna Attaway! I was surprised how steep the chairlift was toward the end, but it was a novel way to descend into the canyon.

According the web site, "Natural Tunnel, called the "Eighth Wonder of the World" by William Jennings Bryan, has been attracting sightseers to the mountains of southwestern Virginia for more than 100 years...The creation of Natural Tunnel began more than a million years ago in the early glacial period when groundwater bearing

carbonic acid percolated through crevices and slowly dissolved surrounding limestone and dolomite bedrock. Then, what is now Stock Creek was probably diverted underground to continue carving the tunnel slowly over many centuries. The walls of the tunnel show evidence of prehistoric life, and many fossils can be found in the creek bed and on tunnel walls."

The bottom line is that the chair lift dumps you off at a boardwalk that winds upstream into an impressive canyon

headwall towering a good 100 feet high. Unfortunately you are not allowed off the boardwalk to explore the cave (the railroad route is still active according to the signage and as many as 8 trains a day pass through the immense cavern).



Wolfe Cave, VA. (no Julie)
(Scott Fee)

We returned back to camp with plenty of time to grab Parvin, get dinner, and return for door prizes. The lead band that was playing in the oppressive heat wrapped up at 9:00 pm. SERA provided three complimentary kegs of cold beverages that lasted an hour or so. The door prizes dragged on a bit and I was surprised that no rope was offered to the waiting crowd. Next up was band for the night. We were a bit taken back when they put out a "two step" sign. Yup, this group is not going to rock our world. Oh well, back to camp to enjoy some brew and do a walk about. In the morning we packed up camp and headed home after a great weekend in the far edge of TAG.

Grotto Trip to Guffey, 1994

Jim Flem Sims

12-10-94: Andy Zerbe, David Allsup, Frank Case, Mike Dikeman, Jeff Harrod, Clay Holland, Tim Richey, Timothy Richey, Jim Flem Sims (reporter).

At the December grotto meeting, Andy volunteered to lead the trip. We left from Betty's Restaurant in Pinson with a second rendezvous at Pardue's Texaco Restaurant south of Blountsville. It was a perfect day to go caving. The rain was coming down in buckets (see footnote 1). Gary Barnes, Milo Washington, and Tom Chamblee met the group for a quick breakfast visit on their way to Roy Davis' annual Christmas Party at Cumberland Caverns. If Gary had possessed any extra xmas party tickets that morning, we might have had a few mutineers defect to go with him instead. After meeting up with the Richeys at Pardue's, we sped up Highway 79 following Gary to a cave near Grant that Milo had seen from the road and Tom had been in once. Nobody really felt like doing the wet entrance crawl so we made a note of it for another day. Neither xmas banquets nor caves by the road could deter us from Guffey! Besides, any cave by the side of the road just HAS to be on the survey already, right?

In Grant we piled into 2 vehicles to save space at the cave parking area (and to save some of the \$5/car parking fee now charged by the trailer occupants). Everybody chipped in on the 10 bucks for just the 2 vehicles. I guess, if you wanted to, you could say that we almost parked Scott Free with that Fee. Anyway, we upheld a sacred grotto tradition and entered the cave BEFORE 12 noon at 11:45AM. The normally dry big entrance room had drops from the ceiling falling on stalagmites in places. After descending the old aluminum ladder, sometimes calling out "on ladder" and "off ladder" as we went, we were soon in the spaciousness of the Grand Central room at the junction. The group took off for a quick look at the Pizza room passage while Jimmy and Frank stayed behind to take pictures in Grand Central. We had already seen the Pizza passage on previous trips separately. When the group came back the photographers made everyone stand still at different places for a mutiple flash exposure.

From the Big Fall room we went upstream for a look at The Barrier to see how high the water was. When it got to 2' of ceiling in a stream crawl, we decided the water was up here today and made a hasty retreat back to the Big Fall room and on to a snack lunch at the Spires of Guffey. Despite the heavy traffic the Spires have been spared any deliberate vandalism and are still a beautiful sight. After some of us signed the register there, Andy led the group on to Little India except for David and Frank who stayed behind to help me flash more photos. We caught up with them coming out of a side passage on

the left just before Little India. Andy Zerbe, Tim Richey, & Timothy Richey -side leads? Yes, the world down here made sense: those three checking side passages along the way. Jeff and Mike had been to the cave before but I'll bet hadn't seen that passage either.

After the short 3' crawl we were in the 15' high Little India passage admiring the formation area. We carefully stayed on the trail along the edge of the flowstone and columns for 300' until we came to another short 3' crawl and the walking passage under the Unnatural Bridge room. The room was full of cave mud vandalism figures including a dragon, lizzard, dog, car, skull, people, and flowers. If Dave Howell had been there instead of working, he probably could have identified the year, make, and model of the car for us. The artwork was quite good but it was still vandalism. But it was the only vandalism we had seen yet except for the usual arrows painted on the wall at junctions and a little trash, which we took out with us. Amazingly, the speleothems are unscathed with little breakage or touching, but the floor is almost completely gone due to the hoards of people failing to stay on the trail. I couldn't help thinking about what these rooms must have looked like to the first visitors. The beauty must have been overwhelming.

The cave here ended for us at a crawl dig that even the Richeys couldn't squeeze through. It was still going getting lower when Timothy backed out feet first, only one bodylength farther than we had been able to squeeze. The crawl is digable with small spades but there was no air pushing or pulling us tighter and tighter onward. The map showed it heading in the direction of another tight crawl 300' away in another part of the north cave at Whirlpool Lagoon sump. From there the water goes 800' to Woodall Spring Cave AL 1885. -NOT a thru trip I will be making anytime soon (see footnote 2).

Anyway, to make a long story short (see footnote 3), at this point we turned around toward the entrance and at Little India the group split up again. Andy, Clay, Jeff, Mike, and the two Tims left to do the 25' climbdown at the edge of the Big Fall room to the stream level while the photographers again stayed behind to push Kodak's December '94 cash flow to a new ceiling. We agreed to meet up again in 30 minutes at Grand Central. They reported high canyon stream passage with lots of water -better left for a dry day when it's not probably still raining outside. Along the way we checked the Zerbe/Richey side passage to the end at a 10' plugged hole in a 15' high room. The photographers beat the explorers back to the junction so out of the pack came the camera one mo time.

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

Soon we saw lights coming in the distance but it was a group of Georgia Tech students from Atlanta. After talking for a while they headed on out. Soon we saw lights coming again but it was the 2nd half of the Georgia Tech group. Their leader was a Tech professor who had charged \$25 each for the trip of 9 students. He said he also led trips to Tumbling Rock and even Stephens Gap. We told him that Stephens Gap had recently been closed and I told him that his cars would be towed from the parking area. After talking for a while they headed on out. Soon we saw lights coming and this time it was our trip leader. No wonder they call it Grand Central Station on a Saturday afternoon...

After the on ladder, off ladder routine we were out by 6:15PM to a cold windy night but the rain had stopped. The weather front had moved on and the small main upper entrance was blowing like hell (heaven). The thick

cloud plume was blowing 10'-15' out from the bottom of the sink. Back at the cars we decided on Reed's Restaurant in Guntersville for our dining experience that evening. As we were getting into our vehicles, another car (party of 2) pulls in and, finding no one at home now in the trailer, asks US how to pay for parking. "Put \$5 on your license plate" we say leaving the Grand Central parking lot. "Or you can just pay me" Frank quips.

Footnotes:

1 Andy Zerbe, Birmingham Grotto Newsletter, Nov 93, Trip Report, p. 5, 1st paragraph.

2 Scott Fee, Birmingham Grotto Newsletter, Dec 94, Scott's Scoop, p. 118, 2nd paragraph.

3 Mike Gross, Birmingham Grotto Monthly Meeting, Jan 94, 30 minutes, Trip Reports:

Christmas Caving in Mexico, 1096'.

A Trio of Trips

Daniel Wood

Jerry couldn't come so Bros. Wood borrowed his 300' rope. On the way out the door, little Martha said she wanted to go. I was a little surprised by this and told her, "next time, for sure." There were some folks already at the camp site, so we introduced ourselves and offered our fire wood. The group included another Jerry, Jim, Stan, and Lynn, all of Atlanta, one dog, Luna (who is no Quinn, but is a fine dog), and three children around five years old. Shame on me, I should have brought Martha!

While they rode into Rising Fawn to Dine at the Depot, James and I walked back to Moses Tomb and bounced the pit. James looked like he was about to have a heart attack after climbing out on his frog system. Tough to tell it in the dark, but that's a deep pit! The fire was roaring by the time we got back to camp and another Jim was there. We sat up under a clear sky 'til around midnight.

Next morning Jerry and Jim showed us Mystic Well and a couple other caves around it. Then James and I drove to Sue's and walked to Cemetery Pit where we toured the passage marked on the map as "broken soda straw."

In addition to the good company, a highpoint of the weekend was the critters we saw: at the bottom of Moses Tomb two large purple-ly/orange-ish sallies held each other fast in a death grip, or love lock (they reminded me of the M.C. Escher image of the hand with pencil drawing the hand with pencil); we also saw an interesting two inch spiked caterpillar-typed-creature down there - surely he fell in; on the wall of Mystic Well, about ten feet down, was a perfectly constructed little bird's nest with five bright white eggs; on the floor of Mystic three soft turtle eggs lay beside a shell and skeletal remains; and in Cemetery we saw a pipistrelle hanging from the end of a soda straw!

25 Years Ago - from July 1983 BGN

The Birmingham Grotto Newsletter is published approximately twelve times a year by the Birmingham Grotto of the National Speleological Society.

Subscription and Membership fees are now due. Annual subscription rates are included in the \$4 membership fee. Outside of the Birmingham area, the subscription rate is only \$2. ALL are prorated from October.

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The Officers for the 1982-83 year:

- President - Mike McEachern
- Vice Pres. - Jay Clark
- Secretary - Nancy Boice
- Treasurer - Edna Caudle

The grotto meets the first Monday of each month at 7:30 pm at the Avondale Library.

The meeting after the meeting is at Burly Earl's around 9:00.

ALL GROTTTO AND ACS MAIL SHOULD BE SENT TO OUR NEW P.O. BOX 55102

Aug. 5-7 SERA CAVE CARNIVAL. Contact Jeanne Pridmore at 205-852-9549 or the NSS Office at 205-852-1300.

Minutes of June 6, 1983

The meeting was called to order by Jay Clark. No visitors were present, but approximately 40 grotto members were there.

Old Business:

Edna reported that the 25th Anniversary party lost about \$200. 00 which will be refunded to those who fronted the money. Hopefully, t-shirt sales will defray some of this cost.

Jay reported that the 25th publication is being printed and will be sent out this month.

New Business:

A motion was passed to donate \$200.00 from the grotto savings to the NSS office fund. The money will be reimbursed in sales of t-shirts or whatever later in the year.

Trip Reports:

Myrna Jordon went to Sinking Cove Cave in Tennessee.

The grotto trip was to Pipeside well.

Announcements:

Dave and Edna Caudle will host a party with banquet leftovers on June 25 at 2:00. We will meet at their house and go to Bryant Mountain Cave for a cleanup trip, then have dinner at their house. Everyone should bring a dish of food and beverages of their choice. Edna will furnish bar-b-que & bur

The July meeting will be held July 11, the second Monday of the month due to July 4th holiday, at the Avondale Library.

Grotto Trip:

The trip will be to Wolf Cave led by Les Buryn. Meet at the Krystal in Tarrent, 7:30 Sunday June 12. This is a salt peter, horizontal cave.

The program was slides on California & Mexican burial caves by Mike McEachern.

Nancy Boice

Jess Elliot Cave
March 19, 1983
Tom Chamblee

After several years of hearing enticing reports concerning the Jess Elliot system, I decided to see for myself. The cavern is situated at the base of Tetson Point near the juncture of Dever's and Tates Cove in the head of Big Coon Valley at an elevation of approx 760'MSL. The entrance is situated in a ravine on the west side of Tates Cove just beyond the crossing of Bear Hollow Creek (or at least creek bed due to its oft dry condition). The walk up Big Coon Valley, enhanced by the towering Cumberland Plateau, is worth the trip alone! On the right, approx. 3/8mi from the entrance, is what appears to be a discharge from the Jess Elliot system; a gorgeous pool 60'across, 15'deep bluish emerald green in color. This seems to be the major input for Big Coon Creek and what a swimming hole it is! One follows a foot path through a small grass flat through cedars and up the ravine to Jess Elliot Cave. Just into the ravine, one passes the large entrance to Tate's Cave on the right. A short ascent up beautiful water worn boulders leads one to the mouth of Jess Elliot Cave, a 115'wide x25'tall opening with a slender, solid rock beam roof parapet above. On the right is a limestone, pyramidal hill covered with bright green carpet-like moss. The entrance passageway is clean, smooth, scalloped limestone with an entrenchment down the middle of the floor. The woods, rockscape, and entrance are probably one of the most beautiful I have ever seen! I could sit at the entrance for 8 hrs. and be totally engrossed by the area's mystical magnetism. Immediately within, one climbs across a massive, "rice patty" adorned flowstone. If you bear 90 degrees to the left, you will descend down the flowstone through a very wide, smooth elliptical hall to its terminus 120 yds. away. If one follows the main corridor, you will travel an arching hallway from 60' to 100' wide and from 12' to 35' high. There are numerous, massive speleothems of all description including a nice lake impounded by the development of rimstone dam deposition. I followed the main corridor a considerable distance to a point where crawling over clean alluvials was necessary. This re-opened into an 8'high x 5'wide section possessing a very deep lake; a point at which one would have to swim or raft across. The passage appears to continue beyond and possesses a steady flow of outgoing, cold air. Approx. 500' from the entrance is a very extensive railroad tunnel passage containing much clay and alluvial fill. This is a very attractive, "white chalk" surface corridor that appears to continue on for a considerable distance. A nice, candle smoked picture of old "Cade", and the date 1872 appear on the ceiling of this corridor. Apparently back after the Civil War, this was a mecca for farm kids in Big Coon Valley. Since that time, visitation has diminished to an almost zero at present.

This is a fine cave system and along with the scenery and the almost unbelievably impressive entrance area, making it a very enjoyable journey indeed!

NOTE: Having walked all over the mountainsides surrounding Big Coon Creek, I have noted many notable spring discharges, sinks-and-solutional development areas worthy of speleological investigation. There are also many spectacular views to be seen for those who will ascend the precipitous bluffs of the mighty plateau.

Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes June 5, 2008

The June 2008 meeting of the Birmingham Grotto took place at the Homewood Library on June 5 and was called to order by Vice Chair David McRae at 7:04 p.m.

Our fair Chair was away at SERA. Our Secretary, fairer still, was away way out west. Minutes were recorded by the Treasurer, not fair at all. Attendance was low, but quality was high.

Visitors

Visitors included late-arriving Carolyn Foss. It was obviously not her fault, she arrived with Chris Leggett. Tommy and Becky Wooten from the Cullman Grotto attended with Richard, also a member of the Gadsden Grotto. So impressed were they, dues were paid.

Financial Report

Very little information was provided by the Treasurer. All expenses for the Grotto 50th Celebration are in except the T-shirts, and a late report indicated that this too may have been submitted; however, we cannot complete the final tally until the Caudles return from their trip way out west.

Announcements: Sinking Cove is the weekend of July 4th. It is believed that our permit starts July 3. Please remember the sanitation policy of the SCCi. Food was discussed, Jason will bring the trailer and smoker, financial remuneration for food cost was discussed but left unresolved. The permit and SCCi policies will be posted soon on the e-group.

Danger Judy's trip to the Hiawasee River will be moved to the weekend of July 19 with the hope that she will be mended enough after her recent fall to paddle something, or at least somebody. Some will drive up on Friday night.

Old Business

There was no old business.

New Business

Donna Cobb volunteered to revive the "Who am I" section of prior Newsletters. The idea was well-received.

Mid-meeting, attendance suddenly improved, although the quality suffered, with a horde of late arrivals who mercilessly hijacked the meeting, noisily scrambling for Newsletters and generally ignoring the Vice Chairman's pleas for "order." In a deft move, time was taken to review the minutes.

Order being finally restored (relatively speaking), the Minutes from the May 2008 meeting were approved.

Trip Reports

David Howell's annual trip to Walls of Jericho turned out to be two separate trips and never the twain did meet. Reid Hilton and David Howell sought to set out from Tennessee but found many rules and no people. So they parked in Alabama, walked in, made camp, went to the Walls, and next day had a nice hike out in the rain. Nikky and Tiny, following an official but mysterious map, went to the Tennessee side, then back to Alabama, but finding no bat stickers returned to Tennessee and walked in. They found another camp and both groups were convinced they had the valley to themselves.

Alan Cook, Howdy, Chuck, Dirk, Joe, Danielle and possibly others spent a weekend at Sinking Cove.

For the Grotto 50th Celebration, there was a special trip to Newsome Sinks arranged by David McRae through Jack Fisher and Jeff Burns (many thanks to them!). 28 cavers attended. The destination was Wolf Cave which offered something for everyone: a spectacular waterfall sink entrance, big bore hole passage, climbs, and the ever-popular bath tub swim. There was much interest expressed for a return trip soon to see Mike's Wolf Cave in the same sink.

Jimmy Sims and Donna Atchison went with a three year old grandchild to Rickwood Caverns. NSS cards are worth no discounts there.

Karl Weber, the Fees, and Samantha Acton went to Beech Spring and Cave Mountain Caves. Julie took a lot of pictures. Karl also went to Firelighters and Cedar Grove River courtesy of Mr. Caudle.

Dave McRae, Jonathan Gladden, Tyler, Dale Douglas, and the Fees made a trip through Kenamer.

Daniel Wood made his second trip to Dan Morton yet has still not been in the cave. But he, Jerry, and Dale and Evan Douglas did see Fruit Cellar, Coye Springs and French's Salt Peter.

Judy reported on her trip.

Dave and others floated on the Cahaba and considered the lilies.

Richard noted that the cover picture on the current issue of the NSS News is from Bear Creek or Deep Cave in an area they visited recently.

Following the meeting, Dave McRae and TinY Manke presented a program on tying and using the double figure 8 knot. Always the silent subversive, Jeff Harrod repeatedly tied the double bowline.

- Daniel Wood





*Dirty Dave amid the Cahaba Lillies
(Scott Fee)*



*Entrance to Wolf Cave
(Daniel Wood)*



*Wet passage in Kenamer Cave
(Dave McRae)*



*Dale Douglas showing his
game face at Tumbling Rock
(Scott Fee)*



*Martha Wood adding her name to
the list at Wolf Cave
(Daniel Wood)*



*Group shot inside Kenamer Cave
(Dave McRae)*



*Sarah Jane Wood pointing out the Hold Harmless Clause
at Tumbling Rock
(Jeff Harrod)*

News & Notes

Dave Howell

*** Hope you marked the SUMMER SOLSTICE this past month with a trip into the nether regions, the world of eternal darkness, Xibalba. What better time for a caving trip as a metaphor for the death-birth cycle, as was the custom of the Ancients?

*** We marked the transition from May to June with this year's WALLS of JERICHO campout. It came off well, if a tad disconnectedly. REED HILTON and I showed up at the parking area on the Tennessee side at the appointed meeting time, but nobody and no cars were there. We waited 30 minutes and nobody ever showed, so we assumed we were the trip this year. We were a little apprehensive about leaving the car there with absolutely no one else around, and were a bit intimidated by the long list of rules for use of the area, several of which are ambiguous or contradictory, so decided to park at the Alabama trail head, hike in the usual way and hike *out* via the Tennessee trail. The hike down was pleasant, with not a great many other people on the trail. We set up camp beside Clark Cemetery, rested a while, then hiked the additional mile to the Walls. The cave entrance was issuing water as usual, but there was no waterfall into the big swallow hole above, and the bottom of the hole was almost completely dry. The stream below the cave was running, however, and Reed had a swim in the (cold!) pool. I walked the streambed below to immerse myself in the beauty, if not the water. As the Walls' shadows grew long we returned to camp, hung out, built a fire, hung out, cooked dinner, hung out, saw a group of Boy Scouts start on the trail out, hung out, watched evening become night (one

of my favorite things to do in Jackson County). The stars were magnificent, so we spread a tarp in the field and watched the sky for a while. The night was so beautiful I did not bother to rig my rain fly, and you know what that means: I was awakened by rolls of thunder and flashes of lightning. You can bet I was quick to roll out the rain fly, although it didn't actually rain until first light, continuing until about midmorning. Reed's patience and perseverance gave us a morning fire, so we were able to have a better morning beverage than cold rainwater coffee. The rain slacked off as we were breaking camp, and the sun came out when we were about halfway up the trail to the parking place. (We scrapped the idea of hiking out through Tennessee in deference to the weather.) An excellent trip, even with the rain.

BUT! The above is only half the story. The true turn of events, about which I found out later, were stranger than fiction. It seems that TinY MANKE and NIKKY LaBRANCHE showed up at the Tennessee *hikers'* parking area - Reed and I went to the horseback riders' parking area - thought *they* were the only attendees, so hiked on down. They set up camp in the open field with fire rings just north after the first footbridge - I didn't know a 2nd campground existed - then hiked to the Walls, apparently traversing the trail just as I was traversing the streambed below. Because Reed and I had pitched our tents at the *second* fire ring instead of the first for greater privacy, they missed seeing our camp. It even turned out that the Boy Scouts we thought were leaving were actually camped in the same field with TinY and Nikky. Such a string of near misses

I would not have thought possible, and yet they happened. T&N reported an excellent campout as well, even though they and we were only a few hundred yards apart and utterly unaware of each other's presence. Every trip a new adventure, yes?

*** Congratulations to the Grotto's 2 recent graduates, REED HILTON from UAB with a degree in Civil Engineering (his 2nd college degree after a 1st one some years ago in Landscape Architecture), and SHAY HOWELL from Bard College with a Bachelor of Arts in the French language and African Studies. To our commencing scholars: excelsior! (Although excelsior seems like a weird graduation gift. I mean, unless you're planning on shipping something...)

*** The Grotto's wishes for a speedy recovery go to JUDY RANELLI following her unsuccessful attempt at a death-defying leap across a chasm last month. (Actually what Judy did was not quite as daredevilish as I make it sound. What *really* happened was she was testing out the wrist-mounted Spiderman web generator she's been developing; obviously the device still needs a little work.) We hope the broken arm heals quickly, Judy, and that you're back caving and paddling again soon. Hey, I know! When you get your cast off, let's do a celebratory trip to Graves!

*** Don't forget about the SINKING COVE CAMPOUT this 4th of July weekend! This is one of the Grotto's prime annual events, and is always a not-to-be-missed affair. Come prepared for both caving *and* partying. I will see you there!

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

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