

BIRMINGHAM GROTTO

NEWSLETTER

September 2011



VOLUME 41

NUMBER 9

BGN Calendar

OCT 6 OCT 9	34th Annual TAG Fall Cave-In on Lookout Mountain, GA. More details available at www.tagfallcavein.org .
OCT 11	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Homewood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
NOV 8	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Homewood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.

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

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about 100' because the pools were so deep that swimming would be required. Suddenly, we all heard the sound of falling water! Were we close to Mark's Pit? Anticipation grew and we all wanted to move faster to discover the nature of the sound. Right when the stemming ran out and we would have no choice but to swim, the canyon offered a climb up, which we took and popped out at the top of the waterfall in Mark's Pit! Lo and behold, there was an 80' rope sitting on a ledge as described in a verbal account of the cave by Andy! It is necessary to have this rope to rig Mark's Pit because the only safe rig point is to sling a formation bridge about 60-80' back up the canyon passage.

We tied our 100'-9 mm rope to the end of the existing rope, put a section of it over a nub as a re-direct, and rappelled into the waterfall. 35' later, we were all at the bottom and the way on was obvious. Very shortly, we were thrilled see regular river fish in the pools of water! It seemed like a sculpin to me, but I wasn't sure. The small fish, so unaware of our presence, inspired us to continue despite fatigue. After another 10-15 minutes of regular caving, we reached the 60' breakdown, terminal room of the cave! At the lowest point, the water disappears in a ribbon under the floor to re-surge somehow in the blue hole. Past the lowest point in the cave, the room continues up a steep talus slope for around 75' and terminates. We let out a group whoop and didn't even care that the trip was only half done. To us it was over!

We put some environmentally safe green dye into the water to see if we could turn Blue Hole into Green Hole, snapped a group photo, and headed back toward the exhausting 600' climb-out.

Seven hours after we left it, we arrived back at the bottom of Fantastic not really looking forward to the ascent with heavy wet cave packs, rope, etc. Daniel rope walked and Randall and I tandem frogged out. Everyone was at the top about an hour and 10 minutes later and we pulled and stuffed the rope. The rest of the trip was the standard Ellison's exit trip. We got out after dark (around 10 PM) and hiked down the mountain, lighting the way with the afterglow of our successful trip!

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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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...

Daniel Wood in Blunder Hole.

(Dave McRae)

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

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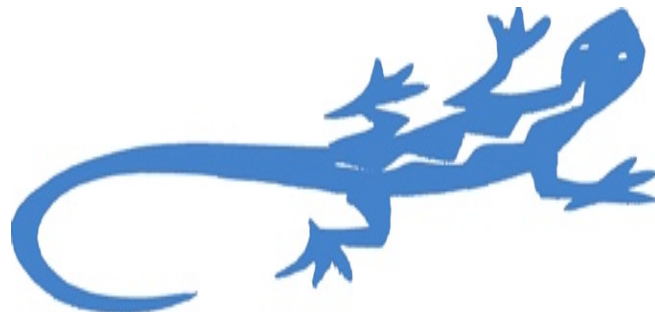
transmission of WNS and disregard bat to bat transmission completely. There is no mention of translocation of bats although the initial site is less than 40 miles from a deep water port and a published scientific report of the threat of bats introducing infection agents. Mixing of bats in summer roosting sites is totally ignored when describing likely distances for bat to bat transfer over the year. An opinion paper is described as a scientific study and absurd values for bats impact on pesticide are use to influence public opinion. Data from Texas which has a cave with 20 million bats was used to calculate the bats influence in Montana where the largest bat cave has less than 2,000 bats. This data was presented as fact to the public by the USFS region 1 in a request for public comments on banning recreational cave exploration.

Some of the actions taken by federal agencies clearly have not been thought out and are detrimental to caves and bats. The USFWS termination of caver management of Fern Cave and Anderson Cave will greatly reduced the monitoring of those caves. Already there are reports of meth labs being set up near Fern Cave. The blanket closure of all caves in the Rocky Mountain Region of the USFS has resulted in western cavers no longer sharing information with the USFS. The Mark Twain National Forest is using emergency procedures to avoid public comments on a 5 year blanket cave closure plan will that surely erode public support for the action.

The NSS has a legal fund and has been involved in court cases to defend cave owners. Should the NSS take legal action to protect cave owners from poorly conceived Federal or state regulations aimed at controlling the spread of WNS? Should the NSS take legal action to preserve the right of individual recreational use of caves on federal land without oppressive permitting requirements? The NSS has stressed working cooperatively with Federal agencies and believes such an approach will result in the best outcome. In recent meetings the NSS board has decided not to use litigation as a strategy to defend recreational caving. The NSS seems more concerned about where in the East to build a new headquarters, than how closing caves on public lands in the West effectively outlaws caving for an entire region of the country.

Since the NSS seems unwilling to utilize the full range of conservation tactics to preventing caving from been outlawed in the West, perhaps a new group willing to use less cooperative tactics is needed. Would cavers support a group devoted to litigation and political activism? Are there any cave lawyers that would be willing to step forward with legal advice pro bono publico?

It remains to be seen if cavers are willing to vigorously fight to preserve public caving in the West or will they simply settle in to being outlaws in a modern version of the wild west with their new motto "Cave Quietly".



Friends of the Cave?

Michael McEachern

Over the years various organizations have been formed to help appreciate and preserve elements of our natural resources. In some cases an organization appeals to government agencies to prevent the destruction of resources, in other cases, the goals of the organization may be to prevent government from destroying the resources.

Litigation, civil disobedience, and cooperation are all tactics that can be used to achieve resource management goals. All of these tactics have been used by cavers with various degrees of success to preserve caves and the karst landscape. The application of these strategies in the past at Mammoth Cave, Oregon Caves, and the Stanislaus River karst have all produced useful outcomes. These three cases will be examined and discussed as to their usefulness in the current WNS crisis in the the western US.

Mammoth Cave

Sarah G. Bishop provided a description of the CRF law suit with Mammoth Cave. "In June 1979, The Washington Committee on Mammoth Cave, consisting of representatives from the Cave Research Foundation, National Parks Conservation Association, The Wilderness Society, and other national conservation associations, filed suit in U.S. District Court in Washington, DC claiming that the Department of the Interior had acted arbitrarily and capriciously in allowing the continued pollution of Mammoth Cave from a sewage lagoon at the Great Onyx Job Corps Center, located in Mammoth Cave National Park. William P. Bishop, a former Board Member of CRF, was an additional plaintiff. After three years of negotiation between the plaintiffs and the defendant, and numerous depositions from several CRF joint venturers concerning the unsuitability of a karst plateau for the location of a sewage lagoon, the judge ordered the Job Corps Center closed and the site returned to its natural state. The Center was closed in November 1982 and site restoration begun at that time. The Job Corps Center was subsequently moved to the far northeastern part of Mammoth Cave National Park in a location that would not impact the cave."

Oregon Cave

Steve Knutson passed on the following personal account of dealing with the park service.

" I worked for the NPS at Oregon Caves for many seasons in the 90's and observed heavy work going on in the cave, tour reconstruction, and no EIS, no supervision, and the workers were finding bones--paleontological material. I asked the super why no EIS, and he said they didn't have to honor NEPA, and if they issued anything, it would be a categorical exclusion (a nepa doc, as it turns out, which doesn't apply if there is any dissenting voice). This was a lie, but I didn't know. Later, around 2000, I heard via the grapevine that they were going to do a spelunker tour

right past the animal claw marks in the mud, in the back part of the cave, a very rare feature and one that clearly wouldn't survive such use. I called and complained, and was given a runaround. I called the EPA in Portland and was assured that the NPS indeed had to comply with NEPA, and I informed Oregon Caves. They issued a Categorical Exclusion. I was pissed. I found a caver lawyer and got pro bono advice. Yes, he could file an injunction, not really expensive, but thought an environmental lawyer might do better. I contacted the Sierra Club and they said they were interested but too busy, and suggested the Cascade Resources Advocacy group. They took the case on half price. I got the NSS to at least tentatively agree to foot the bill (there is an NSS legal fund). I might have to pay but I was pissed. The NPS, however, faced with a court confrontation they would clearly lose (they were in violation of NEPA, no question), caved in and went thru an EA and finally agreed to leave the animal marks alone."

Stanislaus River

The construction of the New Melones Dam on the Stanislaus River in California by the Corp of Engineers resulted in the inundation of significant karst resources, including a major cave, along with a favorite white water rafting run. Friends of the River (FOR) was formed to generate public opposition to the plan. FOR started as a signature gathering group seeking to preserve the river by ballot initiative. FOR tactics changed when Mother Lode Grotto caver and river runner, Mark Debois took charge of the organization. FOR became membership and donation based with civil disobedience accepted as a valid preservation tool. In 1979 Mark Debois chained himself below the pool level of rising water of the dam forcing the governor of California to temporarily halt the filling of the reservoir. While FOR failed in saving the Stanislaus River, the organization has succeed in protecting other rivers.

Other cavers under the direction of Ralph Squire formed the New Melones Task Force to deal with the impact of the dam on the Stanislaus River Karst. Their approach was to work with the Corp of Engineers to preserve the remaining karst which would not be inundated. The Corp had a history of working with special interest groups like boaters that supported their projects. In the case of cavers the Corp agreed to mitigate the lost of the inundated karst by expanding the take area to include additional privately held karst areas above the pool level. As a result of this a number of caves in the area are now under federal protection.

The length that cavers will go to protect and perserve cave resources is best illustrated by the passage of the Federal Cave Protection Act of 1988. FCPA took years of effort by cavers working with their Congressmen to get it passed. Cavers were disappointed that only significant caves would be protected , and not all caves. Today cavers monitor eBay and protest sales of cave formations.

From these examples it can be seen that cavers are willing to use extreme civil disobedience, litigation, and cooperation to preserve caves and caving. Since we want to save bats it seems like we should all be able to get along.

A yellow sticker with three bats on it is the symbol that cavers use to identify themselves. The yellow bat symbols are the most popular items sold by the NSS and part of every sale goes to the Bat Research and Preservation Fund. Cavers feel a deep connection with bats which is reflected in their purchase of bat caves specifically to save the bats.

Since wildlife preservationist, managers, bureaucrats, academic and student scientists, as well as cavers, all have a stake in protecting bats why are we fighting among ourselves? The simple answer is we come from different backgrounds and have different world views. Many of the agency personnel who have been assigned to deal with the WNS crisis have little or no experience in caves or with bats.

It is worth while to look at some of the different view points to illuminate where conflicts can arise.

Manager - We must do something. The easiest way is to close all caves. If we do it with an emergency order we don't even have to get public comments. There aren't many cavers anyway.

Bureaucrat - We will need a national coordinator, assistant coordinator, press person, and at least seven regional WNS coordinators. We can have meetings, make a plan (but make sure there is nothing in it to hold us responsible or measure results). We have over 10 millions we can spend but we should probably throw a couple of million to research to KOA.

Wildlife preservationist - we must save all life forms. We must stop natural selection. We failed stopping the amphibian disease chytridiomycosis and might have been able to slow it if we had closed all streams and lakes for the decade it took us to learn about the disease. By closing all caves, it will help set a legal precedent for wide-spread blanket closure of natural resources. We must be sure to mention chytridiomycosis in the general principles of the National Cave Plan.

Academic/Student - If I switch my subject from moths to bats I will have a better chance of getting grant money.

Caver - Caves are my church. It is where I go to recharge my batteries and find meaning in life. I will do what ever I can to save them and the life in them.

Many agency personnel are college educated including many with advance degrees and research experience.

Most recognize the value of research and good maps and will support limited caving under a permit system for the benefit of science. Some feel that the only caving allowed should be directly related to bat research and monitoring. Clearly some caves will remain open to an elite group of caver scientists and biologists.

Where the greatest conflict exists between non-caver preservationist and caver preservationists is in recreational caving. Recreational caving is devalued by some as a sport which could simply be replaced by climbing, running or some other activity. The FCPA specifically lists recreation as one of the values of caves in addition to the scientific values. Why do people go into caves and what is their real value?

Many people feel a great sense of wonder when visiting a cave or when spending time with nature. Groups like the Sierra Club and Friends of the River believe only through being in nature can you appreciate it and learn the importance of preserving wilderness. That is why recreation is an important part of their programs. John Muir was captivated by the underground experience and its importance in understanding our place in the universe. On emerging from a tour of Cave City Cave he writes "When we emerged into the bright landscapes of the sun everything looked brighter, and we felt our faith in Nature's beauty strengthened, and saw more clearly that beauty is universal and immortal, above, beneath, on land and sea, mountain and plain, in heat and cold, light and darkness."

The greatest threat to caving comes from individuals and groups that see caves as useful analogs for other environmental battles. Since caves are unique environments, like oceans, deserts, forests and mountains the ability to successfully close all caves to the public could become a power example to justify the closure of entire regions to protect wildlife. Using "shock doctrine" principles, the devastating effect of WNS on some species of bats in one environmental region of the country is being projected to all bats and all regions of the country without the scientific evidence to support the claim. Dire predictions are being used to spread fear backed by simple statements of "we just don't know" and "we can't take any chances".

This shock doctrine approach is working because cavers as a group are just a small part of the population and majority of people do not feel like they will be personally effected. The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and, unfortunately some federal agencies, are successfully molding public opinion through slanted press releases, to forward their own agendas. Few people take the time to examine the evidence or realize the heavy price they might have to some day pay for supporting blanket cave closures. How will they feel when they aren't allowed to visit the ocean or the mountains or the forest?

There are many examples of the gross distortion of data, on national and regional levels, to get public support for cave closure. Some early documents only mentioned human

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Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes
August 9, 2011

Pres. McRae called the meeting to order at 7pm at Homewood Library.

Visitors

Previous visitor Kim Waites and former member Jonathan Uptain were recognized.

Minutes

July meeting minutes were read aloud by Scott Fee and accepted with a correction to the SERA 2012 t-shirt design deadline (moved to September or later, depending on when the location is finalized).

Treasurer's Report

The following accounting was presented by Treasurer Dale Douglas:

Starting balance 6/14/11	\$3,440.42
Expenses	
Gas for boat used at The Grotto Splash	-50.00
Income	
Dues	+3.75
Getaway Auction	+28.25
Ending Balance 7/12/11	\$3,422.42
2011 Auction Balance Owed	- \$271.25

Announcements

- September 1: Deadline for TAG pre-registration
 - September 1-5: OTR
 - September 13: Grotto Meeting (last meeting before dues are due)
 - October 6-9: TAG Fall Cave in. Glen & Martha Mills are TAG chairpersons.
- NOTE 1:* If you want a long-sleeved T-shirt, you must pre-order (by 9/1/11)
- NOTE 2:* If you pre-register online; \$.95 sales tax=PayPal service charge; bring form and PayPal receipt

Congratulations to Howdy (Chris Davis) and Damon Moats, newly certified members of the National Cave Rescue C (NCRC)!

Graves Cave and tornado damage: David McRae reported that clean up of fallen trees has brought workers and vehicles within 25 feet of the entrance, opening the road and creating a parking site. He spoke with Tommy Graves who told him that the clearing crew was supposed to gate the road. The grotto may be needed to address the access issue before it becomes a problem.

Old Business

SERA 2012: Scott Fee reported that the location for the event is close to being finalized. President McRae is anxious to have some artwork (including but not limited to t-shirt, window decal and/or web page) ready to go on the web page as soon as the location is settled, and asked for designs to be submitted for the September meeting. Jonathan Uptain

noted that he has a band that would be interested in playing at SERA.

There are plenty of tasks that will need your help, so be ready to volunteer!

Meeting location: After discussing pros and cons of alternatives, it was decided that the grotto meetings will remain at the Homewood Library room 101 through the end of 2011. If you have another suggestion for next year, please bring/relay them for discussion at the September meeting.

Guntersville Getaway: Larry Money reported that on a recent visit to Guntersville State Park he learned that 5 of the lakeside cabins were totaled and the rest damaged in the April 27 tornadoes. Plans are to replace the 5 cabins and the sites are being cleared. No campgrounds are open but all 17 of the chalets are open. Larry Money spoke with a ranger who said they could accommodate us in February with the chalets if cabins are not available. Some alternatives to the cabins include the chalets, Lookout Mountain Resort, a very large house in the area, and other state parks. Further discussion was tabled until the October meeting.

New Business

Grotto Splash: The Parvins were thanked for hosting this event.

Avondale Park: A resident contact David McRae, concerned that the caves on the park property might be closed for good during the renovations currently underway. Dave Howell is looking into determining the status.

Grotto Trip: David McRae will be leading this month's trip, to Gourneck Cave on August 20. See the grotto egroup or contact him for more information. On August 28, Howdy and Damon will be leading a vertical trip on Monte Sano.

Trip Reports

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

Scott Fee and Leigh Dudrow reported on a trip to Limrock Blowing Cave.

Gary Barnes, the Caudles and Andy Zerbe brought tales from the NSS Convention.

Dale Douglas and Bruce White discussed their trip to Ellison's with others.

David McRae described his trip to Blunder Hole.

Program

Gheorghe Ponta presented a fascinating program on his caving/karst geology adventures in Laos.

Meeting adjourned at 8:44pm.

Respectfully submitted by The Howells, Secretary

Ellison's After Sonya Erickson

Few people on the Earth have ventured to the bottom of the deepest freefall pit in the lower 48 States. Of the people that have, a small percentage has completed the through trip from Fantastic Pit to Incredible under Pigeon Mountain. Then there are the handful that have actually been to the bitter bottom and effective end of the Ellison's cave. The last known successful trip of this sort was led by Andy Zellner, with 3 other participants in 2008. Since '08, the flood of 2010 brought into question whether or not the trip was repeatable. As cavers know, anything can happen to underground systems closely connected to groundwater. In flood conditions, breakdown rocks can shift and block passage; sediment and silt can wash in and make already narrow passage too small, low airspace can become no airspace. Caving near the groundwater table after a flood can be tantamount to a journey into virgin territory, as all signs of human passage may have been washed away. Since the flood of 2010, nobody knew if it would ever be possible to push past the Glubs, drop Mark's pit, and cave to the end. After all, the entrance of the cave had collapsed several times and been dug out over and over. A rescue/recovery had just occurred near the Warm-Up pit. Ellison's just kept on being a cave, unaware of all the human drama that took place in its arms, and unaware of the epic trip being mounted to explore its bowels to re-discover its secrets.

Daniel Wood, Randall Donaldson and Sonya Erickson woke up early on August 27th at Blue Hole campground to the dying night sounds of faint music and crickets in the background. We all had the same mission in mind, to see if bottoming was still a viable option after the 2010 flood and document any notable changes. I had been to the Glubs 3 times, each time my progress was checked because the opening was sumped shut. This time, a long dry spell and low groundwater table gave hope for safe passage. A feeling of excitement and pre-determined success was felt by the group while eating breakfast and drinking hot coffee. I could feel an energy that told me we were going to make it this time. We started up the mountain at 7:30 AM. Gear was problematically heavy because we each had vert. gear, wetsuits, food, first aid, and emergency stuff, plus 1,000 feet of rope to divide amongst three people. It was almost 9 AM by the time we actually entered the cave, already wet from the sweaty hike up 1,000' elevation gain.

The first part of the cave went dry, quick, and according to plan. Fantastic was Randall's first big pit and he rappelled in like he had done it a 100 times before- fast and in control. At the bottom, we all did a costume change into wetsuits. I had a full wetsuit, Daniel had a Farmer John, and young Randy had a shorty with thick poly pro. A quick descent down the hand line in TAG Hall, followed by a little passage led us to the stream junction where we turned east to follow the passage downstream to the Glubs. Tension mounted as we

looked into the ominous Glubs. There were so many unknowns at this point. How far was it, how deep was it, would we have to go underwater? The water was turbid enough that it was impossible to determine the depth. Could we touch the floor, or would we have to swim with our noses against the roof? The water nearly touched the ceiling with the exception of a small triangle of air that could only be seen once you were neck deep in the water. Helmets off was essential for any sort of passage attempt. This was the critical moment, who would go it first? If nobody volunteered, the trip would end there yet again.

Daniel donned his baklava and disappeared silently into the water. Then we heard, "Made it, but had to hold my breath! It's up to my eyes." I went next with a camera, so I could take a picture of Randy coming through after me.

Photo opportunities would be scarce past the glubs because of time, cold factor, fog, and route finding, plus I'm not so patient with a camera anyway. On the downstream side of the glubs the cave changed character as many times as Eddie Murphy in "The Nutty Professor". The passage starts out switching between breakdown route finding and wading waist to shoulder deep in stream passage, but always following the water flow further and further down into the earth. Just when we came to a bathtub section of stream passage that was made impassable by a rock, Daniel noticed some old orange flagging tied around some shifty, narrow, contorted breakdown rocks! It seemed like that would be the only way to go on. Being the smallest, I went delicately through first, very careful to not dislodge and rocks that could fall and block us in! Daniel and Randall preferred the no air space, but finally followed me. We passed gear and everyone made it through the contortionistic restriction and back into the stream passage for a little while. Then the cave transitioned into borehole and we only had to barely get our feet wet walking in a small ribbon of water. Horn coral and fossils dotted the passage, reminding us of the stuff of which caves are made. Scattered coral became concentrated black, fossilized coral and shale lining the passage. In my mind, I was diving in the reef, as it looked millions of years ago. The recoded of geologic time was written in rock, a much more permanent record, than our transient human language.

After some more route-finding through easy breakdown, a few rooms, and a little more wetness, the water became instantly, completely crystal clear standing in deep mirrored pools impounded by clean, awe striking narrow, black, chert, scalloped canyon passage. I hardly wanted to enter this serene world, so undisturbed for so long. The first touch of my toe into the water to stem the passage dropped mud off my boot and clouded the water, never again to be the way it was a moment ago. We all stemmed the canyon passage for

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News & Notes

Dave Howell

*** The big news has at last broken loose: the 2012 SERA SUMMER CAVE CARNIVAL will be held May 3-6 at the Paint Rock Valley Lodge and Resort in Estill Fork, Alabama. The Lodge and facilities are done on an Old West theme, so considering SERA Saturday will be Cinco de Mayo, we'll hang a few sombreros here and there, and adopt the Western theme for our event. (The Mayan calendar-end of the world theme seems to have been pre-empted by the 2012 NSS Convention.) There's still time to submit T-shirt designs, so think Old West, sketch 'em up and send 'em in. (Almost seems like the *Bonanza* theme ought to be playing, doesn't it?) The first SERA Committee meeting will be announced soon, if not at this very Grotto meeting, so don't miss it. I will see you there!

*** The Grotto is growing! OWEN WADE LEGGETT was born to CHRIS and CAROLYN on August 17, 7 pounds 14 ounces. Congratulations, Chris & Carolyn! His spirit creature will be the wise and patient owl. We can't wait to meet our newest member, and as I tell all new Grotto parents, be sure and let us know when he starts crawling - we have several too-tight crawls we'd like to push. (Oh, don't worry, we'll tie a length of webbing around his ankle - do you think we're uncaring?)

*** A big Thank You! to GHEORGHE PONTA for his excellent program at the

August Grotto meeting, a slide show of caves of Laos, the photo record of a recent Romanian-French expedition there. Laotian caves certainly are impressive for the size of their entrances and passage. One wonders what lies undiscovered in the Laotian interior, considering Gheorghe's report that if a cave is less than a kilometer long, it's not of local (Laotian) interest. By the way, my best guess about the in-cave viper Gheorghe photographed is that it was a Malayan Pit Viper, a distant relative of our water moccasin.

*** During the past month FRANK CASE was in the hospital for a few days - no, not from the bite of a Malayan Pit Viper. (It was actually a Southeast Asian Death Viper.) However, he's out now and back to stable, if not quite yet ready-to-go-caving condition - in fact, he may be reading these words at Grotto meeting. Glad to have you back in approaching-normal condition, Frank. (Whatever "normal" means among cavers.) We're looking forward to seeing you on a few ridgewalks, or even underground, this fall. (By the way, I was just kidding about the Southeast Asian Death Viper. One did bite Frank one time, but the viper quickly died.)

*** Also in the hospital, I hear, is our Montgomery Grotto colleague JOHN PARKS, who recently broke his hip in a noncaving-related incident. Sorry to hear it, John. Hope the healing

process is a rapid one, and we see you underground again soon.

*** As I write this, Valerie and I have just returned from this year's SIDEWALK FILM FESTIVAL, an annual event held in and around the renowned Alabama Theater. Not a caving event, but one that I recommend highly, we always see some dynamite films there that never make it to commercial theaters. The Film Festival is also a good place to run into old acquaintances, and this year it was former Grotto members SLADE PRISOC and JEFF BECKER (until recently known as Scott - darn those pesky wanted posters!). Both are doing well, if not caving, but both expressed an interest in getting underground again sometime. Good to see you again, Slade & Jeff. We'd be delighted to see you at Grotto meeting any time. But wait, there's more! One of the local shorts, *A GASP for Clean Air*, featured an interview with former Grotto President KATHY FREELAND, and even featured several views of her son FENN... at about 4 years of age. Congratulations on your film debut, Kathy! All the caving pictures I've taken of you through the years... does that make me a paparazzo?



Birmingham Grotto Newsletter
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