

BIRMINGHAM GROTTO

APRIL 2009

NEWSLETTER



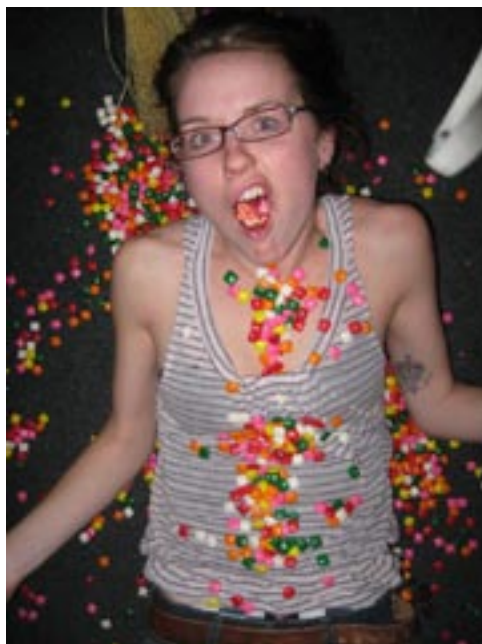
VOLUME 39

NUMBER 4

BGN Calendar

APR 2	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
APR 4	TCS Meeting, Blackman Auditorium, Sewanee, TN.
APR 15	Preregistration ends for SERA.
APR 16	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
APR 18	Earth Day Clean up to Bryant Mountain Cave. Meet near the cave at 9:00 am. Bring good gloves! After the clean up, Dave & Edna Caudle are hosting a pitch-in dinner at their place.
APR 25	Alabama Cave Survey Meeting; 9:00 am, Scottsboro Library
MAY 2	Chris Leggett is marrying Carolyn Foss at 5:00 pm in Huntsville!
MAY 7	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
MAY 9 May 10	Annual Walls of Jericho campout. See Dave Howell for details.
MAY 21	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
MAY 28 MAY 31	SERA Cave Carnival at the TAG on the Mountain site on Lookout Mountain, GA.

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



*Shay Howell caught in the aftermath of a Chiclet frenzy at the Guntersville Getaway .
(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.

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.



On the cover...

Little River Canyon at DeSoto State Park.
(Chris Leggett)

**Birmingham Grotto
Officers**

President:
Scott Parvin, NSS 29279 RL, FE
scott@scottparvin.com
(205) 568-1612

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

Secretary:
Jessica Backes, NSS 59241
jnbackes@gmail.com
(205) 305-5866

Treasurer:
Daniel Wood, NSS 57671 RE
fdw@kullmanlaw.com
(205) 249-4632

Newsletter Staff

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

Publisher and
Membership List:
Valerie Howell, NSS 18128 FR
vdshowell@yahoo.com

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

Archivist:
Dave Caudle, NSS 13995
cavers@bellsouth.net

Conservation:
Deirdra Hahn
conservation@bhamgrotto.org

Webmaster:
Jeff Harrod, NSS 37101
webmaster@bhamgrotto.org



TinY and Nikky at Kilijol during their recent trip to Mexico. Stay tuned next month for a great trip report and wonderful pictures!



Don Koller with daughter Isabella at the Guntersville Getaway. (Scott Fee)

Remarks & Rumors R.U. Sirius

*** Happy April! This month marks the holiday celebrated by the ancient Romans as CONFIDENSUS, a spring rite involving a competition among youths to see who can tell the most outrageous lie that is believed by their intended paramour. The success of these lies was judged by which resulted in the bedding of the maiden receiving it. This holiday enjoyed such runaway popularity with the pagan peoples, after the birth of Christianity the occasion was retained under the aegis of St. Charlotton, patron saint of politicians and elected officials. Although falling into a measure of obscurity during the Middle Ages when the Church renounced the basis of this holiday, its celebration has continued into the modern day, traditionally on the first of the month, heartily endorsed by national governments everywhere.

*** Feel like helping with a Boy Scout trip? JOEL McGUIRE is looking for helpers to take his favorite Scout troop, comprised of boys ages 12-15 and 2 or 3 overweight Scoutmasters, down FANTASTIC PIT. "Enough of these pantywaist trips to Tumbling Rock to gawk up at Topless Dome," Joel said when questioned about the trip. "A taste of rope work will turn the little bastards into real men!" Joel also solicits the loan of helmets, lights, and 20 sets of vertical gear for the trip.

*** Cavers take arms! We must gird our loins against the latest threat to the caving community from Fantasyland on the Potomac, otherwise known as Washington, DC: a bill, the LIMBAUGH ACT, named for the recently appointed Chairman of the Republican Party, is making its way through Congress even as we speak. This damnable Act would render recreational caving illegal, ostensibly to protect the health insurance industry from claims for injuries suffered in the persuance of this high risk sport. However, if you read the fine print of the bill,

unlimited access to all caves and subterranean realms is granted to licensed members of the guano mining and speleothem marketing industries under the guise of creating jobs in this depressed economy. This is an outrage! Please, readers, sit down this very night and compose a letter or an email to Senator Richard Shelby protesting this travesty! Encourage him to abandon his support of this bill and concentrate instead on his efforts to have President Obama summarily turned out of office for not being a bona fide US citizen - his birth certificate is not in order, as Shelby so eloquently points out - and to have John McCain declared Chief Executive by default. Or better yet, call Senator Shelby's office and exhort him to enact the above! Do it today, and make sure that the Senator understands how emotionally committed you are to this issue!

*** News reaches me of a fascinating new find in ELEPHANT CAVE in an isolated and inaccessible area of Canada's Northwest Territories. A mapping party from Glacier Grotto of Cold Lake, Alberta, after negotiating the Killer Krawl to rig and descend the notorious Bottomless Pit (measured at an amazing 3,578 feet in 7 stages) discovered at the pit's floor the complete if not exactly intact carcass of a woolly mammoth, which apparently died after blundering through the Krawl and into the pit during the last Ice Age. Retrieved from the icy depths by means of a 9-point Texas system operated by cavers on 5 parallel-rigged ropes, the mammoth carcass is now the subject of research by the science department of Cold Lake University, who are attempting to clone a living mammoth from the long-frozen cells. Stay tuned for further developments.

*** In Grotto news, President SCOTT PARVIN has issued an emergency edict declaring the last Grotto election

null and void for lack of a second, and consolidating the offices of President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer into the new office of GRAND GROTTTO HOOHA. Discussion of this edict at the next Grotto meeting is declared illegal, violators subject to disciplinary action of the Grotto Gestapo, established under a side clause in the edict. All hail the Grand Hooha!

*** Don't miss the April Grotto trip to STEPHENS GAP. Don't bother with that heavy vertical gear, though. In the wake of the great success of the zip line trip, Veep DAVID McRAE has had a stroke of genius, a "parachute the pit" trip! Space on the trip is limited, though: only 10 parachutes could be lined up, so reserve your place early. David suggests that if the group gets done early, the chutes might even be repacked for a foray into nearby PIPESIDE PIT, with an exciting freeclimb out. This trip is the stuff of which Grotto legends are made. Be there. Aloha.

*** Now available is my own recently published magnum opus, THE CAVES OF DELAWARE in 7 volumes. Advance orders for the autographed first edition are only \$100 each. Mail your cash or make your checks out to your favorite BGN columnist. Do it now, it's a limited printing and they will be going fast!



Name Without A Cave Deirdra Hahn

As a recent member to B'ham Grotto, I didn't know what to expect when confronted with the prospect of attending one of their fabled Guntersville Getaway Weekends. I knew that Dave Howell would be leading a ridgewalk and the desire to attend one of those outweighed any question of me not minding my Ps and Qs.

I left work in Montgomery at 4PM for a three-hour cruise, knowing I would get there well before the 9PM Bed Raffle cut-off. Less than one hour into the trip I experienced car trouble. She'd die when you gassed her or let idle and lurched when the transmission attempted to automatically shift. I ended up having to manually shift the Saturn the whole way and traveled at maximum speeds of 60-65MPH. Coming up and down Sand Mountain was an experience. I made it by 8:45 and paid my dues....

A poker game was well underway and other folks were sitting around chatting. Finally 9PM rolls around. The keg is tapped and the party started. I ended up getting second choice for one of six beds. I chose the "quiet" cabin - good choice. I had a few pints and called it a night.

The next morning dawned quietly. I caught a ride up to the Lodge for breakfast (BACON!) and we took off for Jackson County. The Tate Cove road was recently improved along with the parking area. There were a slew of us and sorry if I don't yet know everyone's name. The hike began on trail/logging road. Some folks had an idea of where they wished to go, so we set the voice commands and they took off down into the woods. I decided to stay at my elevation and follow that contour. I had David Caudle above me within sight. Folks below stopped and began milling about. I started to head down-

slope to join them and came across a lovely little gaping maw spewing earth's life fluid. It goes for someone my size, but it's a full-on belly crawl and I decided not to get that wet since I hadn't packed dry clothes. I walked down about 30 feet and called to Dave. He came up, took a look, labeled it a gnirps, and went back down as the bottom group was rigging a drop.

I continued forward at that elevation and next came across a ravine with the sound of running water. I was standing on a bluff, trying to peer below into the corner as it appeared "cavey". David was coming down hill and I told him of my thoughts. He descended and poked into a passage. He called Dave. I started following his trail and while still on the bluff noticed an overhang that had sloughed a portion of its ceiling and that layer was now laying in a concave fashion. I started clearing rocks. It opened and I called Dave. He had been into David's find and noted that it trended to the right. I went into mine and immediately backed out for knee/elbow pads.

Whilst putting on my pads the folks had derigged and were coming up the hill opposite me and above David. They stumbled across a hole that looked like a tree had once been there and started to dig. They had a pit. In addition, Shane Stacey had been with Dave and they had found another lead/cave that filtered them both and needed a small person to drop that. I said I'd be right there after I went back into my find. I climbed through the opening and into a small room about 3x4 feet. There was daylight to the left. A watercourse was coming in from my right and the passage began canyoning. The sinuosity reminded me of Gourdneck except the walls are sharply scalloped. Two water courses joined and fell about three

feet. I avoided that by climbing up onto a ledge and through a key hole. However, that's where my tale ends as around the next bend a third water course joined and there was absolutely no way to go above or under that waterfall without taking the full shower. I backed out and headed over to that other drop. Shane and Jeff Harrod were rigging their find and urged me to get going.



It was a 12 foot climbdown that lead to a canyon squeeze. That's the guy-filter. I made it down through the squeeze and came out on a ledge above a drop. I climbed back up and went for rope. While donning my vertical gear Shane came over and said that he dropped his find and came out mine, but neither met up with David's. I had forgotten my seat harness on the kitchen chair and had to fashion one out of webbing. I noted that my chest plate strap was not functioning correctly and had to hand tightened it. I went back down the squeeze. Shane was above me and handed me a hammer and safety glasses to knock off any sharp edges. I handed them back as the lip was smooth and exposing fresh rock would have been sharper. He asked about elephant trails and I (cont. on p. 27)

Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes March 5, 2009

President Scott Parvin called the meeting to order at 7:06 pm at the Homewood Public Library. We had two visitors: Alan Seifert who announced he is "33 and single" and Andrew Mobley who has been doing vertical work with TinY and NikkY.

Daniel Wood reported that our actual "bank" balance is currently \$7,884.41 less the \$1,000.00 outstanding donation for the NSS. The Guntersville Getaway expenses totaled \$587.00 and we collected \$550.00 in entrance and bed raffle fees. The Auction raised what might have been an all time high of \$1,631.50.

Barring any corrections, amazingly enough, the February Minutes were passed as presented in the newsletter. Score: Secretary = 2, Nitpickers = 0.

Announcements

- 1) ACS meeting will be April 25th at 9:00 am at the Scottsboro Library.
- 2) April 18th will be the annual Earth Day Clean up at Bryant Mountain Cave. Edna and Dave Caudle will host a pitch-in dinner.
- 3) Bryant Mountain Cave had another rescue a couple of weeks ago; this makes three in the last six months.
- 4) We received a thank you and a \$50 donation from the "Florida people" who attended the Tumbling Rock trip.

5) The UA students went all the way to Mount Olympus in Tumbling Rock on a different trip.

"Very" Old Business

- 1) Danger Judy brought some free fossils.
- 2) Milo and Judy are still planning the shark tooth river trip for mid April.

New Business

- 1) Dave Howell is planning to lead his annual Walls of Jericho hike/camp out. It has been tentatively set for the second weekend in May.
- 2) Scott Parvin reported that the White Nose Syndrome (WNS) has spread even farther and has been reported in West Virginia and Virginia.
- 3) NikkY reported that there was landowner change with regard to access to Deep Well. The new landowner has been put in touch with the SCCi.
- 4) The March grotto trip will be announced on the grotto e-group.

Trip Reports

Dave Caudle and Jerry Saulsberry went to Anderson Cave before the bat closure to collect Bat Guano and store it in Edna's refrigerator. Not to be outdone by David, Deirdra Hahn went down south to Sanders Cave (Concehuh County) and collected her own Bat Guano for her fridge. Andy Zerbe, Danger Judy, Kathy King, Eric Bradford, and "Amy" went to

Waterfall Cave near Old Blowing Cave and did not collect any Bat Guano; however, it was reported to be a "great cave with a scenic entrance." TinY and NikkY went to South Pittsburgh Pit after an aborted attempt to visit Deep Well. Dave McRae led a 22-person grotto trip to Mikes Wolf Cave and Wolf Cave in Newsome Sinks area; some saw more of the cave than others. Deirdra went to Rumbling Falls Cave with some Tennessee cavers and Huntsville Grotto members. (The audience "ooohed" at the mention of this.) Deirdra, TinY, NikkY, Bruce, and Jayne visited various pits in Monte Sano State Park. Dave Howell reported on the Getaway ridge walk; unfortunately, most of this was classified information and cannot be reported here. In addition, ten cavers reportedly enjoyed Roaring River during the Getaway.

The meeting adjourned at 7:44 pm after which Andrew Mobley gave a presentation on "Introduction to Cave Biology."

Respectfully submitted,
Scott Fee, Secretary at Large



Further Shenanigans at the Guntersville Getaway



Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

(cont. from p. 25)



was pretty sure that I was seeing mud marks on the walls. I called for the rope and it was fed. I rigged and dropped about 25 feet and walked about 20 feet to another drop. Sweet! My first multi-drop! I called for more rope and made the second 20 foot drop. This put me in a dripping-dome with a crawl that had been enlarged by the sediment being scooped aside. I shucked my chest/foot gear and took off. I went about 15 feet and came up into another dripping-dome. Another 20 foot crawl brought me onto a two-foot wide flowstone ledge that down-angled into another 25 foot canyon. I couldn't crawl the ledge forward as it narrowed and couldn't down climb as the canyon was too wide. Foiled again! There is one three inch high by two inch diameter knob on which to rig. Not a good idea plus I was out of rope. I retraced my route back to the second drop.

I retied my seat harness, donned my Mitchell, tied my rack onto the end of the rope and set about climbing. Half-way up I noted that my chest harness was not tight and found that the plate-strap had pulled all the way through and was only holding by the sewn end abutting the knurled roller. Not good. I finished the climb, fixed my chest harness, and pulled rope. I climbed up the first drop, helped

pull rope and exited. Folks were wet and cold from the day's activities and started heading back. Dave, David, Don Harter, and I continued on for about another half-hour. Dave had a couple more pits to show us. I opted not to drop and we headed back too. I saw that the group had placed a couple of cairns as markers on the trail and I just had to

add an extra stone - like the Fourth Stooge!

I made it back in time for the Annual Action! Oh what good stuff to be had for the beginner caver. One choice item was the 255' pit rope. I really wanted that as it is the perfect length for Stupendous Pit - no one wants to tote more rope than they need into Rumbling Falls! I ended up scoring a Kelty Dart1, MSR water purifier with both charcoal and ceramic filter, extra helmet and TAG-type light, rope-walker chest harness, and various other sundry items for the one-time low price of \$117.

During the auction the wine flowed, the beer spilled, and the din reached a fever pitch. One fine pint of 8-year-old Wild Irish Rose was up for bid. The bidding was fierce, but Grotto member Ryan Strickland made that final bid! He was standing there looking

at it - I think he was actually trying to focus and possibly wondering why he had just paid good money for Wild Irish Rose!!! The imp in me out and convincingly vocalized one word - CHUG! Again, CHUG! The crowd joined in. CHUG! CHUG! CHUG! CHUG!.....

That dude downed it. Remembering Wild Irish Rose (circa 1973) I personally don't care if I ever taste of it or smell it again. I thought for sure he'd puke - since he'd been drinking beer and Patron, however I have the utmost respect for him.

Later, it came to me. The new cave(s) should be named Wild Irish Chug - for me and Shane - two fine Irish names - and for Ryan as his feat was one of the highlights of my first Guntersville Getaway. Alas, it's not meant to be - the caves we had so much fun finding are part of the Spring Hollow Cave System, discovered in 1984 by Jim Smith.



News & Notes

Dave Howell

*** Happy April! The vanguard of the fourth month was the VERNAL EQUINOX on Friday, March 20. The first day of spring has always been associated with rebirth, as has the underworld. Although early Christians named the nether regions for the goddess Hel and envisioned it as a realm of eternal torture, the ancients viewed the underworld not as a place of punishment, but as dark, mysterious, and awesome. Souls of the dead dwelled there, but were not subjected to torment other than a flesh-and-bloodless yearning for the rebirth that vernal equinox symbolized to the living. However, it was Johann Weyer's *Pseudomonarchia Daemonum*, published in the 16th century, that contended that hell was populated by demons - 7,405,926 of them, to be exact. Intended as a satiric caricature of earthly hierarchies, this volume was taken at face value by the ecumenical powers that were at the time, in the form of the Inquisition. (Those inquisitors never did have much of a sense of humor!) The underworld: symbolic of rebirth, or of eternal death? You decide. In the meantime, I'm going caving.

*** The annual meeting of the ALABAMA CAVE SURVEY will take place this month, on Saturday the 25th at 9:00 am at the Scottsboro Public Library. This meeting is a "must attend" for all who enjoy ridgewalking and adding their finds to the list of known caves in our state. Or consider attending if you're simply interested in keeping abreast of new finds, whether new caves or new discoveries in already known caves. Or if you have a free Saturday and want to seize an opportunity to hang out with cavers from all over TAG then go caving

with them - the ACS meeting is almost always followed by some sort of in-cave trip. I will see you there!

*** When spring is in the air, that means the annual WALLS of JERICHO CAMPOUT will soon be upon us. In fact, it is coming up the 2nd weekend in May (May 9 & 10). If you're not familiar with the Walls, it is a spectacular limestone gorge astride the Alabama-Tennessee state line just off of Alabama State Road 79. There is a cave in the Walls - Jericho Cave - and beaucoup karst features in the area. Logistics: Meet at the hikers' parking area (as opposed to the equestrians' parking area, which you come to first going north on 79) at 11:00 am on Saturday the 9th; we will start down the trail around 11:30. The trail is about 3 miles to the camping area (beside Clark Cemetery), then another mile or so to the Walls. We will as usual plan on camping Saturday night, but if you can't stay the night with us, this can easily be done as a day hike. Y'all come - spring is when the Walls are at their most beautiful. Oh, and uh... you probably need to know there's a 1200' elevation change along the trail from the parking area to the campground, down going in, up coming out. The effort is well worthwhile. See you there!

*** Did you happen to notice any familiar faces in the February *NSS News*? There was an article (an obituary, actually) about GRANDMA GAINOUS, owner of GLORY HOLE, with several pictures of Grandma posing with cavers. Among her companions are our own JASON WALL and FRANK CASE! As I've said before, it's always nice to see our people in the media, as long as it

isn't on a sheet in the Post Office.

*** Remember Papa Doc Duvalier, ruler of Haiti from 1958 to 1971? Ever wonder why the Haitian people put up with such an iron-handed dictator all those years? Well, there's an interesting story about his ascent to power. Amid the voodoo and mysticism of Haiti, Duvalier realized he needed powerful spirits on his side if he were to gain complete mastery over the Haitian people. The oak- and mahogany-forested mountains that rise from the aqua blue Caribbean between Port-au-Prince and the Artibonite Valley are home to many caves, including a vast one called TROU FOBAN. Since times of slavery Trou Foban has been known by the Haitian people to be home to evil spirits of great supernatural power. On an afternoon in March, 1958 Papa Doc, along with a voodoo priest and his acolytes, set out on the long, difficult climb to Trou Foban, arriving at the cave at dusk. After elaborate preparations and rituals, the shamans called upon the spirits to leave their cave home and follow Duvalier to Port-au-Prince, where he would offer them a new home in a special mystic room of the National Palace. The incantations were successful, and the spirits accepted Duvalier's invitation. The story goes that these spirits remained with him until he died, and because of their presence and favor to his regime in return for their comfortable new quarters, no living human could overthrow him. Next month: How George W. Bush managed to win not one but two elections. (Condensed and paraphrased from *Haiti: The Duvaliers and Their Legacy* by Elizabeth Abbott, © 1988.)

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P.O. Box 55102
Birmingham, AL 35255-5102

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