

NEWSLETTER



BGN Calendar

SEP 3	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
SEP 4 SEP 7	Pupfest, Sewanee Mountain Grotto. Must RSVP. See announcement at right
OCT 1	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road. Annual dues are due at this meeting!!
OCT 8 OCT 11	TAG Fall Cave-In.
OCT 31	Birmingham Grotto Halloween Party.
NOV 5	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.

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



*Kelly French making friends at the rock zoo on the way to Valhalla.
(Jeff Harrod)*

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...

Kids' Trip to Beech Spring Cave.
(Scott Fee)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Pupfest 7!!

Come join the Sewanee Mountain Grotto for Pupfest 7, Labor Day weekend at Maureen Handler's place on the Mountain in Sewanee. Festivities will begin on Friday (or earlier for the hardy caving type). We will be caving all weekend. Saturday evening will feature a band, a short paddle trip to watch the bat flight from Nickajack Cave and a keg bought with the proceeds from the NSS Conservation Section Award. Sunday evening will be the BIG BBQ. We are cooking a pig in the ground and we will have some kegs of Blaine Grindle's famous home brew. Please bring something for the table to help make this an incredible feed. After the BBQ will be the grotto auction. Bring something for the auction, or money to buy something (or better yet, both!!) Remember, all proceeds go to funding our conservation efforts!!

Maureen Handler
Pupfest Chairman
Vice President, Sewanee Mtn Grotto

Speaking of Pup.....

Peter "Mudpuppy" Michaud will be doing a slide presentation on Lechuguilla for the October Grotto Meeting.

October Meeting Reminder

Can you believe it? It is that time of year again! Don't forget that even though elections will be held in December, dues are due now! Time to pay up! Send a check to the treasurer!

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Kids' Caving Trip To Beech Springs Cave Magz Sims (photos by Magz Sims and Scott Fee)

Well, the kids' trip was a huge success. We had 23 people attend. There were 14 adults and 9 children. The youngest child had just turned 4 and the oldest was 16. The kids had a wonderful time! Of course there were moments when a few of them freaked out a little, such as getting a helmet stuck in a tight crawl or were just ready to be out of the cave.



One of the most fun parts of the cave was a clay mud slide into the stream passage with maybe 3 inches of water at the bottom. The kids wanted to do the slide over and over again.

We let them, and spent probably 10 minutes letting them slide and get muddy and wet. Not to mention that the adults had a pretty good time there, too. There was one certain instance with Ryan going head first ending in a great belly flop.

There was certainly a lot of crawling but luckily the stream itself was fairly low giving us more room to walk and duck walk. The kids at this point are looking down on their parents from a standing position with expressions ranging from "why are you down there"



to "would you hurry up already". We made it through the last and worst of the crawls into the last room of the cave. This room was why we went to this cave. Beautiful formations were everywhere. There was also a lot of very sticky mud that the



kids had trouble but fun getting stuck in.

After leaving the formation room everyone quickly headed out of the cave. My child lagged behind not wanting to leave yet. After exiting the cave most people jumped into a spring fed pool to both cool and wash off all that cave mud. Cooled and cleaned off most people headed home. While a few of us went to the bat flight at Sauta Cave and then camped at Goose Pond Colony campground for the night.



All in all everyone had a great time. Most of the kids want to do more caving so they can be real cavers.



24 Hours in Kerrville or An Architect, a Technical Writer, and a College Graduate Walk Into an NSS Convention... Story and photos by Valerie Howell

Those who have attended NSS conventions know what a great opportunity it is to get to meet cavers from all over and how a week is hardly long enough. I hope they will recount their adventures - all I can share is the less than a day we spent there. I got wind of Dave's nomination for NSS fellow several months early. (Many thanks to all who submitted letters endorsing his nomination.) Due to work schedules and finances, and having to keep the event a



secret from Dave, the best I could arrange was to attend the Friday awards banquet. Flying into San Antonio on Thursday, we spent that evening wander-

ing the Riverwalk and trying to see over the walls of the Alamo. Friday morning we drove over to Kerrville and, spotting one business with a sign welcoming cavers, we jokingly wondered how many more had been displayed earlier in the week.

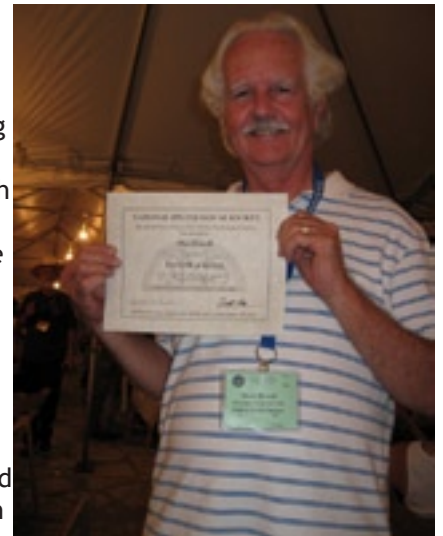
The college was easy to find and the destination confirmed by the signs of a caver infestation - tents, bat stickered vehicles and clothes-lines full of drying gear. We almost immediately spotted Scott Fee and, with his help, located registration. Had a nice conversation with the folks manning it - still surprisingly upbeat for late in the week. Our t-shirt and guidebooks were easily found, a testament to the dedication and organization that went into the event. Found Georghe Ponta and the Caudles as we looked around the cafeteria. In lieu of any real caving, we checked out the vendors, taking the stairs for exercise and purchasing cave-scented soap for effect. That was followed by a tour of the building that housed cartography, newsletter



covers and caver-created artwork, as well as an extensive collection of rappelling devices. While visiting the poster presentations, we chatted with the gentleman manning the booth for the 2012 ICS and sampled the local wines on our way out. When we heard about the location change for the banquet and the timetable, we realized there was just enough time to return to our room and freshen up for the evening.

The ranch was most impressive, with longhorn greeters at the gate and chandeliers in the trees. We had a chance to make some new friends and locate our B'ham contingent. The food lines moved smoothly and we were honored to share a table with the Drs. Parvin & family and Dr. Barnes, who ensured our table was fully provisioned with wine. Several people at the table ended up with pink fingernails (thanks to Shay's polish) and a new game involving wine corks was born. As darkness arrived, the weather cooled, the program heated up and Dave got to make the walk to the front to accept his certificate and congratulations (for the record, barefoot).

Heading out of town the next morning, we carried many pleasant memories along with our cave-scented soap, ICS wine and other souvenirs of the day.



Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes
August 13, 2009

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 pm by President Scott Parvin.

Visitors

The following guests were recognized: Sarah Bettinger, Ben Gallagher, Gary Nichols, Ewell Gene Ingram.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Daniel Wood reported that there is currently \$6,938 in the Grotto's checking account, not including \$154 taken in at the Sinking Cove Campout and \$80 taken in at the Grotto Splash. He also stated that several members still owe for their purchases at the Grotto auction last February.

Previous Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of July 2, 2009 were approved as read (in the absence of the printed minutes in the Newsletter, not here this evening due to the Secretary's temporary infirmity).

Announcements

The TAG Fall Cave-In will be held October 8-11 at the regular spot on Lookout Mountain, Georgia. Preregistration cost is \$28 per person, obtainable until September 1. After this date the per-person cost will be approximately \$10 more.

The Birmingham Grotto won several awards at the recent NSS National Convention in Kerrville, Texas. Among these are a blue ribbon for the *Birmingham Grotto Newsletter* cover entitled "Gary Barnes and the Cave of the Crystal Skull," and an Honorable Mention for another *BGN* cover, exact issue unspecified at the Grotto meeting. It was pointed out that 8 *BGN* covers were chosen to be shown, this in itself an honor, as not all newsletter covers submitted for the salon are displayed. Also, Birmingham Grotto member Dave Howell received an NSS Fellowship Award.

A seminar on cave rescue will be present next weekend (the weekend of August 22) by the Huntsville Cave Rescue Squad. Brochures with applications to attend were available at the front table during and after the meeting.

Old Timers' Reunion (OTR) will be held September 4-7.

There will be a Grotto kids' trip to Beech Spring Cave on Saturday, August 29, followed by a trip to see the Sauta Cave bat flight and a campout at Goose Pond Colony.

The United States Senate voted \$200,000 in funding for research into the White Nose Syndrome currently affecting

bats in certain regions of the US. Funding requested was \$10 million.

The Grotto's Vice-President David McRae is presently in Las Vegas with his sweetie, Samantha Acton; Sam called to announce her and David's engagement. Best wishes to the uxorious couple.

Old Business

Jokester Jimmy Sims asked Larry Money about the Guffey movie, and was told that this was a done deal.

New Business

David Caudle displayed his cool Staff T-shirt from the NSS National Convention, and stated that there are now a 3-volume set of Proceedings (i.e. speleology-related abstracts), plus Convention guidebooks, available to be added to the Grotto library upon remittance of \$80 to him for the cost of these volumes. Failing remittance, they will go into his personal library instead. The difference between these 2 libraries is what floor of his house they're on.

The following disbursements of funds from the Grotto treasury were approved by popular vote of the members present:

- * \$80 to reimburse David Caudle for the aforementioned volumes to be added to the Grotto library;
- * \$250 to reimburse David McRae for the meat that he procured for recent Grotto events;
- * \$25 to reimburse Scott Fee for pavilion rental for the Grotto Splash.

Joel McGuire reported that repairs to the fence enclosing the entrance to Anderson Cave, recently damaged by a falling tree, were effected with the generous contribution of time and effort by various Grotto members.

The August Grotto trip will be the kids' trip to Beech Spring Cave on the 29th, announced earlier in the meeting. In the event of rain, there will be a Plan B. (Beech Spring floods big time.)

Trip Reports

Scott Parvin and David Caudle each reported on trips to Cave Without a Name and Caverns of Sonora, both in conjunction with the NSS National Convention in Texas. Additionally, David reported on Natural Bridge Cave

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north of San Antonio, which he and Edna visited on their way home from Convention.

NikkY LaBranche-Manke reported on the Saturday road rally sponsored by the Southeastern Cave Conservancy at the NSS Convention, which did a whirlwind tour of 9 central Texas caves. Most of these were entrance observations only, in deference to current voluntary restrictions related to White Nose Syndrome. She could not recall the caves' names.

Gary Barnes reported on trips to Kickapoo Cave; a small cave on a ranch near Kerrville, which featured a dam-impounded pond offering good swimming possibilities in the heat of the Texas summer; and Robber Baron Cave, which he described as a maze similar to Alabama's own Anvil Cave

Daniel Wood reported on the Sinking Cove Campout, which among other things included David McRae's record-setting through trip via the Pulldown Route, timed at 43 to 46 minutes (depending who you ask), campfire to campfire.

Dale Douglas reported on trips to Natural Well, Three Caves Quarry, and Bangor Cave.

Dave Howell reported on the August 8 Grotto trip to

Falling Spring Cave, in which 18 cavers went several hundred feet beyond where the low stream passage and the dry walking passage split, only to encounter a breakdown plug blocking the way. Efforts to find an acceptable way around this were unsuccessful, although a number of side leads were pushed. Whether the plug was a forgotten feature of the cave, or something that happened in recent years is uncertain. A good time was had by all.

Program

A video record of the Grotto's recent outing to the ziplines at Banning Mills, Georgia, was presented by Bruce White. Reactions by those who were not on the trip and seeing the course for the first time ranged from "Wow, cool!" to "I would *never* do that!" to "Gaw-dayum!" (this latter upon viewing the last zipline, beginning at 100 feet in height, some 2,400 feet in length, and typically traversed at a speed approaching 65 mph).

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm to Matthew's on Morris Avenue.

Respectfully submitted by
Dave Howell,
Acting Secretary



Scott & Julie Fee celebrate conquering the "Zorb."



*Shay makes a new friend on the Kids' Cave Trip.
(Scott Fee)*

News & Notes, August 2009

Dave Howell

*** Autumn is upon us! Where did the summer go? September means the beginning of fall, and fall means the beginning of HUNTING SEASON. Because hunting season coincides with RIDGEWALKING SEASON, and because most cavers don't wish to get shot, here are the dates for the 2009-10 season:

General Season throughout Alabama:

Deer: guns November 21-January 31; archery October 15-January 31
Turkey (daylight-1:00 pm only):
March 15-April 30

Gun Days in the Coon ("the Coon" = James D. Martin-Skyline Wildlife Management Area):

Deer: November 14, 21, 27-29; December 4-5, 10-13, 18-19, 30-31; January 1-2, 8-10, 22-24
Archery & Turkey: Same as "General Season" above

And now, my annual litany of cautions: *Always wear hunters' orange*, even on non-gun days. This makes you more visible not only to hunters, but to your caving buddies as well. *Don't wear white*, as hunters can mistake you for a whitetail deer. (No joke, this really can happen.) *Don't hunt by this schedule*. The actual hunting schedule is a good bit more complicated, with youth hunts, primitive weapons days, etc. The above is simply to let cavers know when people are likely to be shooting in the woods. If you're hunting game rather than caves, consult the 2009-2010 Alabama Hunting Schedule on the Internet or available in printed form (along with wildlife management area maps) from hunting supply stores statewide. (By the way, Skyline WMA gates are open October 1-April 30, and

Area maps are available at the kiosk at the Walls of Jericho parking area - the WMA boundaries change slightly each year.) *If you're caving in a WMA other than Skyline*, consult the hunting schedule for that Area, gun days differ in each WMA. *Also, if you're caving in Tennessee or Georgia*, consult the hunting schedules and rules for those states; the above applies to Alabama and the Coon only. Notice that nobody is (legally) hunting in February; therefore February = prime ridgewalking season. Good hunting (caves)! And don't forget to report your finds to the Alabama Cave Survey.

*** The Grotto bids a fond farewell to KELLY FRENCH, who left around mid-August for grad school in Portland, Oregon. Good luck out there, Kelly, and enjoy the sea caves and lava tubes of the west coast. A good-bye party for Kelly was thrown by SHAY HOWELL, and I guess it must have been a really hilarious affair, it left Shay in stitches!

*** Our wishes for good luck also go to RYAN MORGAN, who, visiting Texas for the NSS Convention, liked it so much he decided to stay. Ryan will be hanging out in Austin, home of both the State capital and the University of Texas, as well as the venue in which the movie *Dazed and Confused* was filmed, and a really cool town. Enjoy it, Ryan! We'll see you underground when we figure out that connection from the Lake Purdy Caves to a manhole in downtown Austin.

*** Did you hear about the ultimate ridgewalking find, CAVES UNDER THE PYRAMIDS? Though it sounds like fiction, it's true: the incredible story starts in 1817, when British Consul General to Egypt HENRY SALT, along with

Italian explorer GIOVANNI CAVIGLIA, investigated a previously unknown tomb west of the Great Pyramid on the Giza Plateau near Cairo. Through a crack in the tomb they discovered a vast system of natural caverns, about which Salt wrote in his memoirs. However, these memoirs were not published until 2007, which is when British explorer and writer of science and history ANDREW COLLINS read them and undertook to recreate Salt's exploration. Locating the still unrecorded tomb by Salt's directions, Collins found and entered the caves, perhaps the Lost Underworld of the Pharaohs. A brief description of their finds can be found on line, but Collins is publishing the full story of the discovery in his book, *Beneath the Pyramids*, to be published later this month. It is interesting to note that ZAHY HAWASS, Secretary General of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, dismissed the find, saying, "There are no new discoveries to be made at Giza." Oh, really? It is true that many prominent Egyptologists are fiercely dismissive of any newly discovered evidence or theories about the ancient world that contradict or even call into question accepted beliefs, and it seems that Mr. Hawass plays into their hands. How about a little openmindedness here, guys? Evidence should give birth to theory, not be dismissed or distorted to support preconceived mindsets. We're talking about an actual find here, not wild conclusions of ancient visitation by space aliens. (Although...!)

*** Don't forget about this year's TAG FALL CAVE-IN at the regular TAG site on Lookout Mountain, Georgia the weekend of October 8-11. Deadline for preregistration was September 1, but if you missed that you can still pay at the door. Be there. Aloha.

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