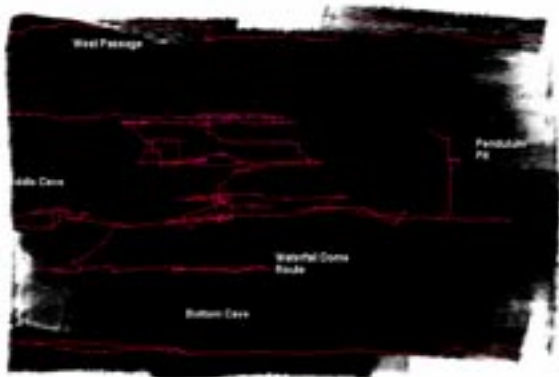


BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER



THE RESURVEY OF FERN CAVE



AUGUST 2005: VOLUME 35, NUMBER 8

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

bgn calendar

Aug 13- Aug 14	This is the work weekend scheduled by Dogwood City Grotto for Site Clearing & Development to the Henson Property on Lookout Mountain. This is the property DCG has leased to hold the TAG Fall Cave-In. All volunteers are welcome.
Aug 18	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
Aug 20	Grotto Trip to Snail Shell Cave led by Scott and Julie Fee. See details on page 71.
Aug 20	This is the work weekend scheduled by Dogwood City Grotto for Site Clearing & Development to the Henson Property on Lookout Mountain. This is the property DCG has leased to hold the TAG Fall Cave-In. All volunteers are welcome.
Aug 27	2005 SCCi Summer Board Meeting will be held August 27 at Ronald McDonald House Community Room, Chattanooga. Meeting begins at 12:00 Noon Eastern. A map and driving directions are available from Yahoo Maps.
Sept 1	Grotto Meeting at Southside Library starts at 7:00 pm.
Sept 1- Sept 5	The 56th Annual Old Timers Reunion (OTR) will start at noon on Thursday, September 1, 2005 and close at noon on Monday, September 5, 2005. Visit the OTR website at http://www.otr.org/ for details
Sept 10- Sept 11	This is the work weekend scheduled by Dogwood City Grotto for Site Clearing & Development to the Henson Property on Lookout Mountain. This is the property DCG has leased to hold the TAG Fall Cave-In. All volunteers are welcome.
Sept 15	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
Sept 30	*****DATE CHANGE***** October Grotto Meeting at Southside Library starts at 7:00 pm.
Oct 6- Oct 9	TAG Fall Cave-In
Oct 29	Annual Halloween Party at Alabama Caverns starting at 7:00 pm. (But you can arrive earlier if you like.) Camping is permitted. Contact Scott Fee with questions - 205-914-7487.
Nov 3	Grotto Meeting at Southside Library starts at 7:00 pm.
Nov 17	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
Dec 1	Grotto Meeting at Southside Library starts at 7:00 pm.
Dec 15	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.

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: scott@scottparvin.com. 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...

*Danny and Donna Cobb participating in the resurvey of Fern Cave along with a profile line-plot.
(Danny Cobb, Donna Cobb,
and Steve Pitts)*

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

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Where Has All the Money Gone?

Scott Fee

At the May Grotto meeting, the thought of divesting ourselves of the conservation funds was discussed. As you may recall these funds are the remaining proceeds from the 1996 SERA Cave Carnival that was hosted by the Birmingham Grotto. Shortly after the event, the grotto decided to create a "Restricted Fund" providing for the money to be used for conservation projects. Over the years, we had spent about \$500 from the fund but the other projects were funded from our Operating Account.

At the June Grotto meeting a motion was made and passed to donate \$4,000 as follows: \$500 to the SERA Region via the SKTF (SERA Karst Task Force), \$1,000 to the NSS for the Great Expectations Nature Preserve Acquisition Fund, and \$2,500 to the Southeastern Cave Conservancy (SCCi).

I am pleased to report that I have closed the conservation fund CD's and have contributed the money as stipulated. The SCCi donation was decided by Myrna Attaway, Julie Fee, and myself. It was as follows:

- \$500 for the "Deep Pool" in Limrock (This is the Deep Pool that you must negotiate to do the circle trip. It can be avoided by taking the dry passage on the left just before the water deepens)
- \$500 for the "Rooms Down Under" in Valhalla (These rooms can be accessed via a small opening in the entrance pit area. It is on the other side of the room from the cascading waterfall.)
- \$500 for the "Fools Pool" in Snail Shell (What a great name!)
- \$250 for the "Guano Room" in Cemetery (Need I say more?)
- \$250 for the "The Junction" in Hurricane (If you have been to Hurricane, you know the Junction)
- \$250 for the "Too Tight" in Horse Skull (This was even too tight for Chrissy Frotten during our mapping trip!)
- \$150 for the Sections 20, 59, 65 in Valhalla (Can you figure it out?)
- \$100 for the 10th Anniversary Rope in Neversink

As you can see, 25% was donated to support Great Expectations Nature Preserve. Great X is located at 8500 feet elevation on a pristine creek in the Big Horn Mountains east of Greybull, Wyoming. The creek sinks into the cave at the entrance and reappears approximately six miles down the canyon near the Lower entrance to the cave, the Great Exit. The Great Exit, near the "Grim Crawl of Death," is on federal land managed by the US Bureau of Land Management. Great X, with a vertical relief of 1,408 feet, is the third deepest limestone cave in the United States and the second deepest in Wyoming. With over five miles of alpine stream passage, Great X is the second longest cave in Wyoming. Great X also contains the Great Hall, which is the largest room in a Wyoming cave. Did you see the 8 foot tall by 20 foot long photographic map at convention? This is one heck of a cave!

Therefore, 75% of the fund was donated directly to support the caves and cave organizations of the Southeastern Region.

Furthermore, at the July grotto meeting, we passed a motion to donate \$250 of the 2005 SERA proceeds to the Indiana Karst Conservancy for the recent purchase of Robinson Ladder Cave in Southern Indiana. The IKC acquired 40-acre tract of property containing the entrance and virtually all of the land overlying Robinson Ladder Cave. Robinson Ladder is a Priority III Bat Hibernaculum for the federally endangered Indiana Bat.

The Birmingham Grotto should be proud of our accomplishments.

SERA 2005: A Weekend of Firsts

A Combined Eric Schoonover & Donna Cobb Adventure in Fern Cave

It was going to turn out to be a significant weekend for Eric: his first organized caving event, his first trip into Fern Cave, and his first time surveying! Quite the weekend of firsts! Eric had no idea what to expect other than going caving and because he doesn't live close to any grottos (LaGrange, Georgia), there are no monthly meetings to attend, and he didn't even have a clue about the people he'd be hanging around with for the next 72 hours! Eric, it sounds like LaGrange Grotto needs to be in the works, buddy!

Eric and John arrived at Camp Comer around 9:00 p.m. on Thursday night. They knew quite a few names from reading and chatting on the NSS discussion board and couldn't wait to put some faces and handshakes to the names. The first person Eric met was none other than Scott Fee himself who was working hard making the registration process go smoothly and easily.

They left the registration tent to go in search of somewhere to sleep and to get ready for what they hoped would be a full day of caving. If they had only known what was coming at them in just ten short hours, we don't know if they would have slept at all that night.

They woke at 7:00 am on the Friday of SERA and started some coffee brewing, took in the morning air and surveyed their camp in the daylight. The first people they met were John Lovass and Dawn Ryan and after the normal, "where are you from?," Q & A time, Dawn says that they were gearing up for a survey trip to Fern Cave. Now Eric didn't know much of anything about the cave other than it has the longest known drop in Alabama, Surprise Pit, and that access to the system was very limited. Hmmm. What is a caver to do when someone asks if you want to cave in Fern and join a survey trip? They jumped at the chance!

The surveying teams were meeting at the registration tent at 8:00 am so at 7:40 am, John and Eric drop everything and take off to meet them. Of course this means skipping breakfast too, a decision that would come back to haunt Eric later. They caught up with the group, pick up a few passengers to car pool with and they were off to the fabulous Fern Cave!

Something that bears mentioning is the fact that John and Eric have no surveying experience. Surveying and exploring a cave system is something they'd talked about at length and have enthusiasm for, but needed a survey mentor or two. Imagine their surprise at

the willingness of the survey team to teach them everything they needed to know about how to do a precision cave survey! If they really wanted to learn cave surveying they were in the right place at the right time and with the right folks for the job.

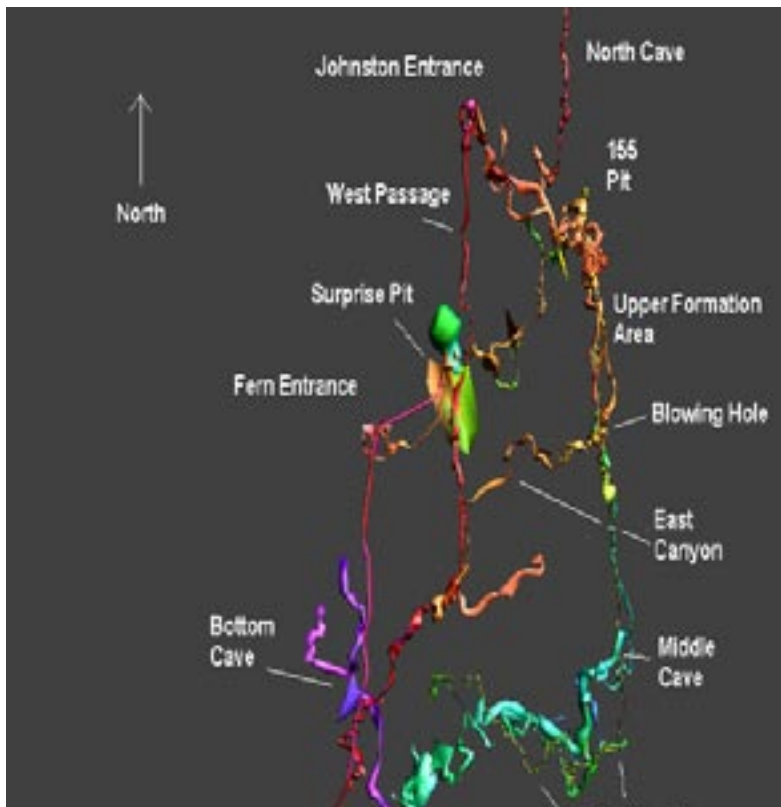
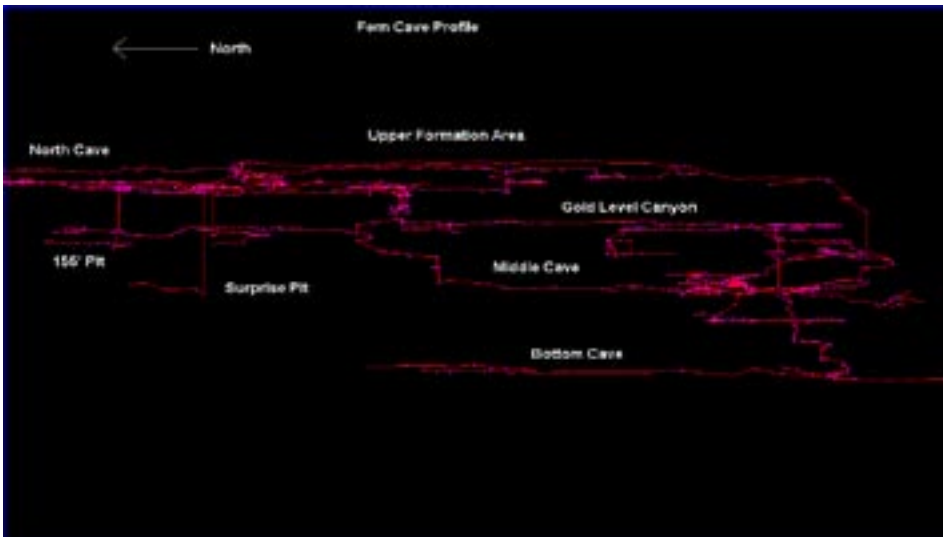
Kelly Norwood (DCG) is sort of the acting survey team organizer and works closely with Steve Pitts, the Cave Access Coordinator for Fern Cave. Although the old map of Fern Cave is excellent, many new areas and routes have been discovered and the new Fern Survey Teams are working hard to produce an updated map of the entire cave system. So, although we all awakened to a blisteringly hot morning with humidity nearing 100% and dreaded the long hike up Nat Mountain, something Eric and John were unaware of ☺, we were all excited to be a part of this amazing re-survey project.

If you are unfamiliar with Fern, the Johnston Entrance is the main access for cavers on their way to areas like gorgeous Helectite Heaven, a popular trip requiring only horizontal skills and a very small drop to satisfy any on rope craving. If seeing lots of bats is your goal or you want a short cut to areas less traveled in Fern, you can also rappel into the majestic Morgue Entrance, the seasonal home of Fern's Gray Bat population. If your passion is big pits the Surprise Pit entrance into Fern can't be beaten for its sheer beauty, but watch out for the evil, stinging nettles or your adventure will include above ground pain and lots of scratching! If you've not visited the top of the pit, Surprise is filled also with an array of finely crafted clay sculptures by folks from all over the country and maybe even some from foreign cavers too. Exploring the variety of contemporary cave art gives you something fun to do as you wait to get on rope or while waiting for your buddies to ascend back up the deep pit. Surprise also offers the aspiring geologist something to look at too so, if you are



*Eric at the bottom of Burrito Pit
(Danny and Donna Cobb)*

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*Working plots of the ongoing Fern Cave resurvey project.
(Steve Pitts)*

feeling courageous during your ascent, take a minute to study the bottom side of the flowstone slope we all sit on- if you know anything about physics or geology, your hair will stand on end! Yikes!

Once at the parking area for Fern, we all enjoy a quick orientation speech from Steve Pitts and the teams were assigned. Since John and Eric had

nothing to offer to any of the teams, but their caving and vertical experience, they were just hoping that someone, anyone would be willing to take them under their wing! Lucky for them someone volunteered to teach us how to survey and that someone was Kelly Norwood. Let me tell you, this is one geologist that should be a full time teacher. She is patient, un-

derstanding, and gave very thorough explanations. Their team was filled out with two other members that the team couldn't have done anything without, Danny and Donna Cobb, our survey sketchers de jour.

Fern is the quintessential "caver's cave," but does require your group request a permit in advance from Steve Pitts, Fern Cave Manager. If you need advice on where to go or what to see while in Fern, Steve is the man to ask and is always generous with his knowledge of the cave system. Fern offers a bit of every kind of caving imaginable from deep canyons, huge breakdown, archaeology, ice age animal bone deposits, deep pits galore, formation areas and booming passages to stroll. Our task for this particular trip was to map the passage from the Johnston Entrance to the 115'. After all the teams readied their caving and survey gear, we hit the first stop for Fern surveyors at the instrument calibration site. Eric got his first instructions on how to use the survey instruments. Kelly took time to explain how to read them, why we had to first shoot one way then shoot the back-sight for precision. We can certainly give her credit for thoroughness for during the survey we realized that she'd covered everything we needed to know and more. Once all of the survey equipment was calibrated, it was time to hike to Fern. For some reason Eric thought that the calibration stations were close to the entrance. Boy was he wrong!!

Eric is not a marathon runner but he's no slacker either! Trying to hike with Steve Pitts to the Johnston Entrance of Fern Cave is something to be proud of (if you survive it without heat stroke!). He walked up Nat Mountain like he had Hummers for boots. Three quarters of the way up the mountain Eric's lungs were burning and his legs were giving out, but this is the adventure of hiking Nat Mountain and at least he doesn't smoke like some of us goobers do. At the point when we could all feel our pulse in our eyeballs, Eric had to let Steve go on without him while he sat down to take a well-needed break. This is the first time that

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the decision to start a strenuous day without breakfast would come back to haunt Eric (grumble, grumble).

After sitting for a few minutes, Jennifer Pinkley and her team came up the path. Of course, Eric told Jennifer that Steve asked him to hang back to make sure that her team didn't need any help and if they would please pick up the pace- HA! Eric finished the hike with her team at a gratefully slower pace than Steve "Hummer-Feet" Pitts. By the time we made it to the entrance, Steve's team was already in and heading to their section. Since John and Eric were the first two from Kelly's team to reach the entrance, Steve took them in to show them the section of the cave that our team would be surveying today and showed John where the bolt is that would serve as the first point of our survey.

Kelly, Danny, and Donna arrived shortly after they exited and needed a rest too - whew! Danny was soaked to the bone from wearing polypro and a tee shirt up the mountain, but Donna had more sense and wore shorts and a sports bra! When everybody had recovered from the hike, we decided that it was time to go to go caving and Kelly did an excellent job of putting John and Eric to work on the survey. The team completed a number of shots and found ourselves in a position to start the survey shots that would let us run a tape down a 115' pit. John and Eric rigged the 115' and with a little advice from Danny, we soon created a nearly bombproof rig that we were all comfortable with.

We tied a Maglight and a foot-loop at the end of the rope and started lowering it into the pit. After all the rope was in the pit, Eric rigged his rack and started to the edge. He took a look down to see how the rope lay and if there were any ledges and what did he see?? The flashlight on the end of his 200' PMI is swaying in space!! Oops! It looks like we have used more rope than we thought trying to make our anchor point "bomb-proof"! We removed one of the two wraps from the BFR and Eric went to check the light again. This time it was on the ground

so, Eric was the "chosen one" to hang on the edge of the pit and hold the tape for the shot to the edge. After John marked the distance to the edge of the pit, Eric held on to the "dummy" end and headed down to the bottom. Danny and Donna worked on sketching the passage around and above the drop and to fill in details since surveyors tend to go much faster than the sketchers and the sketchers, for the most part, slow the instrument folks down.

There is eight feet or so of rappelling to do after the lip then it's a free drop for the rest of the way down the pit. What a beautiful sight!!! The pit has a huge bell shape and an echo that just would not stop. After a smooth rappel, Eric stood on the bottom of the pit and gave a shout to the rest of the group, "Off Rope!!" Amazed at the echoes as he stood at the bottom of the drop, he started looking for a spot to place the survey point. Eric chose a volleyball-sized rock right next to where the rope was hanging. He held the end of the survey tape on it and gave a shout to the top that he was ready on tape and as John pulled the slack out of the tape, he gave a shout that the pit is 116.4 feet deep. Eric let the tape go, John reeled it back up the pit and Eric marked the survey point with some blue flagging tape.

Steve's plan for us was to do a couple of shots at the bottom of the pit so that the next survey teams could take up where we left off. At the top of the pit, the plan was to have Eric go down first with the tape, then John and Danny were coming down to put down a couple of survey points and then we would call it a day. Eric watched the end of the tape go up and out of sight, so he moved away from the rope and took off his ascending gear to get comfortable while he waited for the other two to join him at the bottom. Surprise! Eric was thirsty and called up to John to bring some water down with him and started exploring a little. Suddenly he hears John calling to climb up!! What?? Hoping that John and Danny and so much more importantly, some food and water would be

on the way to join him, it was not to be. Oh well. This is the second time that skipping breakfast would come back to visit Eric as we could all hear his stomach grumbling from 116.4' below- *just teasing, Eric!*

Since he was by himself now, all alone in the bowels of Fern, Eric double and triple checked his gear and started the ascent a bit confused as to why nobody else was on rope coming down. About halfway up Eric's feeling the effect of not having breakfast again, but there is something almost spiritual about ascending a pit. It feels like you're climbing through time-geologic time. This one felt special to Eric and he looked on at all of the layers of fossilized shells and long ago laid strata of stone going by as he worked his way up the rope. As he watched the bottom of the pit fade away he turned his attention to the seemingly small 15' opening that is the entrance to this wonderful experience and adventure. And, as he reached the lip and worked his way over and out of the pit, he took one more look down just to fix the memory of his first surveyed drop in his memory.

For Eric, it was good to see the rest of us waiting patiently for him as he worked my back up to the main passage. The survey crew began to busily work on de-rigging the pit while he recovered from the climb. After the pit was put back to normal, we shot a few more marks to leave the survey in a good position to be continued by the next group. After that we all agreed that we completed the objective given to us by Steve so, we got our gear packed up and headed out.

The hike back down the mountain was uneventful and is nowhere near as exhausting as the hike up. When we reached the vehicles, we found that we were the only team there. John and Eric had members of one of the other survey teams' ride with them from SERA. Eric didn't want to leave anybody stranded, so he decided to wait with John and Brian for them to show before heading back to the SERA campsite. Kelly, Donna, and Danny

Continued on Page 85...

Snail Shell Cave Trip in August

Scott & Julie Fee

The Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. owns Snail Shell Cave and 88 acres of surrounding karst land and cedar glade near Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Snail Shell Cave is one of the most biologically significant cave sites in the Southeastern United States. In 1999, the cave was named one of the Top Ten Most Endangered Karst Communities by the Karst Waters Institute following its nomination by The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee. Primary threats to the cave include trespassing and vandalism, logging, and factors related to the encroaching sprawl and development from the nearby city of Murfreesboro.

Snail Shell is the longest continuous cave in the Tennessee Central Basin region, with more than 9 miles of surveyed passages. It is part of a system of caves comprising more than 13 miles of known passages. The main entrance, which is located on the SCCi property, is a huge sink about 100 feet wide and 200 feet long. The sink is a microhabitat containing an extraordinary number of rare and endangered plant and animal species.

Snail Shell Cave is an important natural resource. It is the intention of the SCCi that it be available to responsible and qualified individuals for exploration, recreation, education, and scientific study, and that SCCi and NSS members, area residents, and members of the caving and scientific communities interact and work together within the larger community of speleology to preserve, enjoy, study, and protect the cave and its ecosystem.

Camping on the property is permitted for SCCi or NSS members and their guests. Campers must request permission when contacting the property managers for access. Campers must carry identification and proof of membership in case of inquiry by property managers or law enforcement personnel. Camping is not permitted inside the cave or in the entrance sink. Campfires are allowed in existing fire rings at

the designated camping area only, and are never permitted inside the cave, in or near the entrance sink, or within 100 yards of any sinkhole or cave entrance on the property. Bring your own firewood - do not collect or cut firewood on the property. Human waste should be buried in a shallow hole at least 100 yards from the camp area, the entrance sink, cave entrances, or water sources. Do not bury toilet paper or leave it lying on the ground as it will be dug up and scattered by animals. Pack it out for proper disposal off-site.

Specifics:

Cave: Snail Shell Cave, Tennessee

Date: Saturday, August 20, 2005

Time: Enter the cave at 10:00 am

Gear: Wet-suit and a Personal Flotation Device (PSD) are suggested; however, much of the cave can be done with layers of poly pro and a cave suit.

Optional Gear: Kayaks or Canoes for a 2,000 foot long passage that leaves from the entrance sinkhole.

Questions: Call Scott or Julie at 205-856-9177



*Passage in Snail Shell Cave.
(Bob Biddix)*

Hilti Hole #1 (AJK 4194)

Terry Ragon

Hilti Hole #1 is a small but well-decorated pit located mid-way up the eastern slope of Nat Mountain, in Jackson County, Alabama. It is formed in the Bangor limestone and at the same elevation as the well-known Stephens Gap Cave, as well as some lesser-known pits our gang of diggers opened up last year (Arrow Shaft Well, Jeffs 100-foot Pit, and Bloody Finger Horror Hole to name a few).

The entrance was originally a 5 inch diameter hole first noticed by Glenn Ledbetter during one of his numer-

ous hunting excursions this past winter, but the usual conflicts in personal schedules kept us from digging on the hole until spring of this year.

On April 12, Glenn and I met for our first day of ridgewalking for 2005. We parked on his property on Nat Mountain and walked for about two miles in a light rain as we poked our heads into several holes here and there. We saw one hole which was too wet to probe, several which would need a larger hammer than we could carry that day, and one that sounded nearly deep enough to qualify.

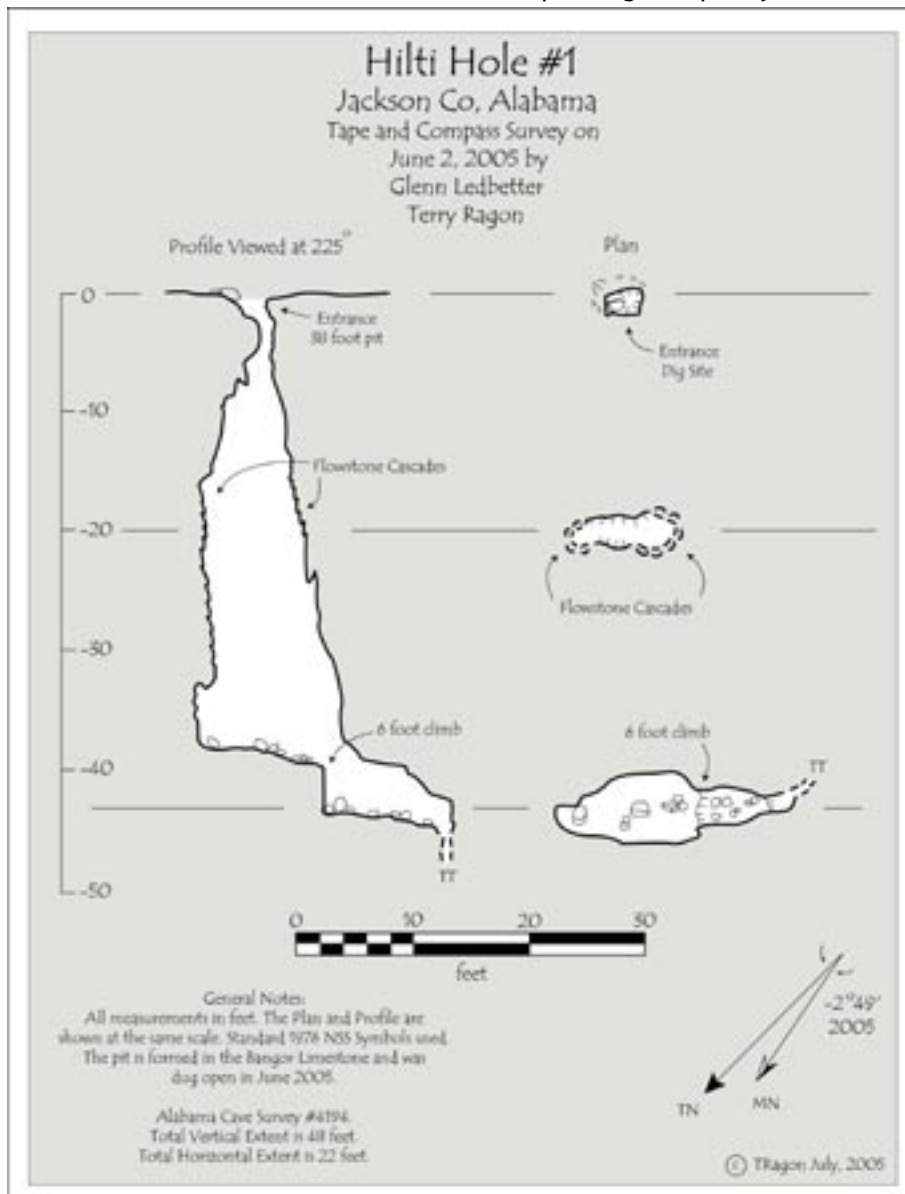
We dug on this latter hole for over an hour, and eventually had an opening large enough to accommodate a caver wearing his seat harness. Rock-fall made this pit sound almost 30 feet deep and we had hopes the drop would connect to other obvious sinks very close by. Glenn was awarded the honors of visiting the pit first, so rappelled down and taped the drop at 25 feet. Unfortunately, no amount of digging was going to connect this blind drop with the other nearby sinks.

We had dug open our first virgin dud of the year!

On May 23 Glenn returned with Jeff Lynn to have a look at the most promising of the leads we had seen while walking, however I was unable to join the group for this trip. They used ATV's to carry the usual assortment of hammer drills, pry bars, trenching shovels, rock hammers, picks, axes, webbing, ropes, etc for over three miles to a small hole which sounded 50 feet deep. Together they dug, blasted, and moved many rocks, but eventually ran out of battery power, so were unable to enter the new pit. [1] A return trip had to be planned ASAP!

Glenn and I returned to the area ten days later with our full complement of digging gear, although Jeff couldn't make this trip. We parked our trucks on his property and used the ATV's to follow the paved road for a mile to a spot where the power line would gain us access to the mountainside. From here we enjoyed a HAIR-RAISING 1.5 mile off-road adventure over slick and muddy terrain as we transported nearly 200 pounds of digging gear within a 5-minute hike of the dig site.

I noted an impressive 4 foot tall rock cairn now marking the dig site and Glenn assured me that Jeff had contributed the most to the rock pile I could see. Jeff is certainly skilled at moving rock; I was just sorry he wasn't with us since Glenn and I were pretty sure we could get in the new pit today.



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After setting off a handful of soda straws we had fractured the nasty rock blocking our access to the pit, then attacked it with a rock hammer until we had another opening large enough to explore. Once again Glenn was awarded the first-down honors since he had found the hole, so I began to rig our rope to a nearby tree.

Our new pit was still sorta tight and awkward at the top, so Glenn had quite a job rappelling down while keeping the tape measure untangled at the same time. But his efforts were rewarded when he reached the bottom and we discovered we had a qualifier this time; plus there was lots of pristine flowstone to enjoy on the way down! I was excited to here the good news and quickly began digging the verti-gear out of my pack while I searched for sketch paper.

After Glenn's initial bounce, I went down with paper and pencil in hand, and spent as much time as I could in the cool underground. Our new pit had no continuation at the bottom, and no air-flow to warrant further digging, but was a qualifier none the less. The pit's name comes from the brand of hammer drill we used to open it up, and hopefully will be the first of many we dig open this summer.

[1] Ledbetter, Glenn. Email communication, July 20, 2005.



*Chrissy Frotten at the entrance to Hilti Hole #1
(Terry Ragon)*

*Adeventures in Fern Cave
Continued from Page 82...*

drove on back to SERA so that Kelly could start cooking dinner for everybody working on the survey- a promise she had a mind to keep no matter how many times Donna and Danny asked to stop for a quick snack. She finally did break down though and we all enjoyed a wonderfully creamy ice cream at a local shop on the way back to camp.

Now this is where Eric has to fully take over on the article for I wasn't there:

John, Brian, and I ended up waiting just a little over two hours for the other "medium trip" group to show up. It was 10:00 p.m. or so by the time we started the drive back to Camp Men-

tone and SERA. When we arrived Kelly had to put some more burgers on the grill and she did a great job having everything set out for us. I guess it was 12:30 am Sunday morning and there I am, finally getting Saturday mornings' breakfast! Just a warning for the next trip: make sure you get up early and have a big breakfast before a survey trip! It could literally be days before you eat again or at least it might feel like it!

Tired, but feeling very satisfied with the work we did, we learned a lot about being part of a survey team. I also learned a lot about the people I was caving with. The people making up this survey team are an outstand-

ing group of people to cave with and I am proud to know them all. We all laughed until we thought our sides would split, had a great time together and did a good job surveying our wee section of the cave that day.

Eric went back to Fern to survey again during the Saturday after convention and we are sure that not only did he have a great time, but that anyone on his team enjoyed his good natured, good caver company as much as we all did at SERA!

Convention 2005: Sweet Home Alabama

Sharon Faulkner

“Big wheels keep on turning, Carry me home to see my kin, Singing songs about the Southland, I miss Alabama once again, And I think it’s a sin, yes”

“Well I heard mister Young sing about her, Well, I heard ole Neil put her down, Well, I hope Neil Young will remember, A Southern man don’t need him around anyhow”

“Sweet home Alabama, Where the skies are so blue, Sweet Home Alabama, Lord, I’m coming home to you”

I don’t even know where to start, Convention was a week filled with great fun, old friends, new friends, good food, fantastic sessions, and photos. Casey and I actually began our Convention travels early on June 29 at Marion Smith’s pre-convention caving camp in Spencer, Tennessee, but I’ll save our cave trip reports for a future newsletter article and touch upon a few highlights of Convention week. We arrived at the campground on July 2, and set up our tarps so we could get to the registration building to help receive arriving Convention goers, stopping around 6:00 p.m. to go out to dinner with some friends from Colorado. I, along with Larry and Margaret Money, Edna Caudle, and a slew of other folks, worked registration off and on thru late Sunday afternoon. We had a steady stream of arrivals and a few busy bursts of registrants, but basically an easy indoor job in the blissfully cool, air-conditioned building.

The grotto tarp faired well in Monday’s gusty thunderstorm, though at one point grotto members were holding the poles down to keep it upright. My tarps blew down in spite of me trying to hold on to them during the storm. I believe someone took a few photos of what I am sure must have been a comical sight as everyone was laughing their butts off. Later in the week, someone obviously took pity on me and when I returned from the school, my tarps had been totally redone. At least they stayed up the rest of the week. In my defense, we had

several windy storms, the Windy City Grotto’s tarp was flipped upside down, and the NSS Bookstore tent suffered a broken ridgepole, along with several other folks’ tents, some of which I believe were found laying next to the dumpsters around mid-week.

The rain did assist with keep the daytime temperatures to a reasonable level, but that didn’t stop Danny and Donna from building Cobb’O San Lucas, complete with pool and “no diving sign” in our campsite. I think they gave some other groups ideas, as I saw a couple more pools show up later in the week. For the most part, nighttime temps were relatively mild for July. We had a number of fun gatherings spent socializing around campsites during the evening hours. I’m glad our Brooklyn friends Lisa and Sal made it down to Convention. Especially Miss Lisa, it was so great to see and visit with you again! I miss youse two guys [sic].

The Space & Rocket Center tour was fun, even though I’ve been there before. I managed to walk out the wrong door when it was over, trapping Casey and I inside a fenced area with locked gates. Well, rather than walk back thru the Space Center we did what any caver would do, and found about a seven inch gap under one gate and crawled underneath. Unfortunately, this happened directly in front of a busload of Convention attendees. Timing could have been a bit better on that. This was probably caught on a camera somewhere, but since guards didn’t come running out with guns, Casey and I just casually strolled away. Following our escape, we arrived back at the campground for the campground party, which we (staff) had relocated into the registration building earlier in the day, due to fifty percent chance of rain being forecast. This was an excellent party with the Terminal Syphons playing and many folks dancing.

Although I missed most of the U.S. Exploration sessions, I was able to attend many of the International Ex-

ploration sessions. All impressive, but several stand out for either the number of caves, the sheer beauty of the photographs, or the very entertaining style of the presenter. The sessions on China, Puerto Rico, Saudi Arabia, Panama, and New Zealand particularly come to mind as completely top-notch. The Map Salon and Photo Salons were as always, terrific. Rather humbling to see such talented pieces of work on display, including the fine map of “House of Happiness Cave,” (for show only) by Terry Ragon.

In addition, I attended both Monday and Friday’s Board of Governors Meetings, the Congress of Grotto Meeting, a panel discussion regarding cave locations on the internet, and a few other meetings of interest to me. Other stand out items include the Howdy Party, with two bands to entertain, followed by fireworks, Thursday night’s slide salon program, the food at the Friday night banquet was delicious, and a few small gatherings spent kicking back with friends.

The weeklong event ended much too soon, but left behind lasting memories. It was easy to get used to waking up surrounded by, and spending all day visiting with, over 1200 cavers. Lets just hope we don’t have to wait 38 years for the next Alabama Convention.

“In Birmingham they love the governor, Now we all did what we could do, Now Watergate does not bother me, Does your conscience bother you? Tell the truth”

“Sweet home Alabama, Where the skies are so blue, Sweet Home Alabama, Lord, I’m coming home to you, Here I come Alabama”

*Lyrics by Lynyrd Skynyrd

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes June 30, 2005

A Motion passed to approve the June Minutes as written.

VISITORS: None

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Gary Barnes gave a report of \$8,758.61 in checking, zero dollars in conservation CD'S and outstanding auction debts of \$87.00.

ANNOUCEMENTS:

Scott Fee reported on progress regarding the June Motion to spend \$4000 from the 1996 SERA funds. Out of \$3,994.64, \$1000 was donated to Great X and \$500 for the SKTF. In addition, \$2500 will go to the SCCi at the NSS convention for Valhalla, Limrock and Snail Shell caves.

Steve Sills announced the annual July 4th Sinking Cove camp out is this weekend.

Myrna announced some repair work dates during the convention as being Monday - graffiti removal workshop at Hughes Cave, Wednesday - formation repair workshop and a visit to Crossings Cave, a project cave. Friday - a high angle haul of large trash near Natural Bridge Cave in Gunterville.

Scott Fee announced that there is a convention stuffing party for those who are interested in attending. The Moneys said they would attend. Directions will be sent over the E groups.

Myrna announced that John Attaway retired today from Brasfield and Gorrie. A nice portrait of John was shown at the meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

David Caudle discussed that the Indiana Karst Conservation made a major purchase recently of a bat hibernation cave called Robinson Ladder Cave. They have raised money and it was suggested that we donate \$250 out of

our SERA profits to contribute. Dave made a Motion and it was seconded. The Motion passed and Dave will get with Gary Barnes to send a check.

Myrna did some graffiti removal at Alabama Caverns and she proposes that we have a graffiti removal trip soon. She will announce a weekend at a later date.

Scott Parvin is working on Marion Smith's project on an Alabama Salt-peter cave. He has the original handwritten pages that need to be typed into a book form. He passed out the pages at the meeting for those than can help with the typing.

TRIP REPORTS:

Toby Kemp, John Roberts, Jeff Harold and Ryan Strickland went with David McRae and Shane Stacy to Bluff River Cave.

Myrna Attaway, John Attaway, Peter Michaud, David Buckner, David Adams and stepson David went to a virgin cave

and it connected to Mayapple Cave. John found two other virgin caves on his property.

Hazard Bryant went out west and did Black Canyon then Hazard Bryant, Dirk Siron, Tim Hudson, Steve Sills, Chuck Constable, Ben Holley, Kim Hunter and Donny and Kenny from Atlanta went to El Cap in California.

MONTHLY GROTTO TRIP:

There will be no grotto trip for the month because of the annual Sinking Cove trip and the NSS Convention

PROGRAM:

Dave Caudle showed slides from Romania caves and Howdy "Chris" Davis showed slides from the El Cap trip.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeannie Cates, Secretary



Sharon enjoying the 2005 NSS Convention Festivities at the Space and Rocket Center

News & Notes

Dave Howell

*** Have you ever thought about the possibility of caves on other worlds? And, if by chance there happened to be a sentient culture on 1 or 2 of those worlds, surely the locals would have used those caves in some way at some point in their history. Extraterrestrial Speleology... sounds like the title of an article in *The Journal of Caves and Karst Studies*, doesn't it? There is much talk these days of the possible existence of not only water, but dramatically different climate in the distant geologic past of Mars. If there actually was an earthlike environment on Mars at one time, wouldn't that imply the existence of limestone as the result of deceased sea creatures sinking to form sediments? And wouldn't that, in turn, imply... CAVES? And if the caves were used by a prehistoric sentient culture, might that not imply artifacts, architecture, ruins? The trail leads us to another University of the Future discipline, Extraterrestrial Archaeology 101. Study the features in the Martian surface area of Cydonia, home of the famous Face on Mars. Sure, NASA circulated a photo of the Face in a certain light, implying random natural contours are at work here, rather than artifice. I'm not so sure. Examine the geometry and interrelationships of certain anomalies on the Martian surface in the Cydonia area. Geologic coincidences? Or intelligent design? The question gets almost religious, doesn't it?

*** For those not attending the Sinking Cove Campout, the first week of July brought the NSS NATIONAL CONVENTION in Huntsville, but since I didn't attend I can't very well hold forth about the event. No matter - I'm sure the BGN will be rich with first-hand narratives by those who did go - right? (Hint, hint!) There is one aspect of Convention that I do want to hold forth on, however: Congratulations to SCOTT PARVIN on his ascent to Fellow of the NSS! This honor is

well deserved, and I must say it's about time we saw the name of one of our own on the list of new Fellows. Way to go, Scott!

*** Those of you who did go to Convention, did you notice the billboard advertising the Huntsville newspaper? It's a sign of the Times. (haw!)

*** For those not attending Convention, the 4th of July weekend offered the SINKING COVE CAMPOUT. It was its usual cool, laid-back event, and the weather was better than last year, isolated showers rather than steady downpours. Interesting, though, that the creek responded so quickly this year, coming up a full foot from 5:30 to 7:30 Sunday evening following a heavy shower around midafternoon. In any case, there were no tents floating down the creek, nor any mass exodus through the roaring torrent early Monday morning. When I arrived Sunday evening JASON was already busy, with 3 different kinds of meat in his smoker, and STEVE contributing some excellent mashed potatoes. That evening saw the arrival of MIHAI BACIU, one of our cave guides extraordinaire in Romania last year, accompanied by GHEORGHE and GARY, catching a bit of the Campout before heading to Huntsville. The campfire was cool. Mihai commented on the noisy night, and seemed a bit surprised that all the racket is caused by frogs, but I reminded him that we don't have cuckoos in America, as they do in the Romanian woods. (Well, not the kind that sit in trees and sing.) (Well, not the birds.) Monday morning, the 4th, was a leisurely affair, with nobody in a hurry, and coffee and breakfast around the remains of the campfire. I was going with Mihai and Gary on the "classic" through trip from the Waterfall Entrance to the Spring Entrance right above the campground, but as we were suiting up 3 guys arrived in a vehicle with Texas tags. This was

Ted (a Scoutmaster from San Antonio), Nick, and Kevin (Scouts, 16 and 15 respectively) looking for a preConvention trip. Of course we invited them on ours, and after a quick consideration of a pulldown trip, they signed on with us. In spite of heat in the 80s, the hike to the Waterfall Entrance was only a moderate deathmarch. The steep trail into the sink, almost a technical climb at the best of times, was very wet and slippery, but Mihai was kind enough to rig a handline for us. Interestingly, water levels in the cave were about normal, knee deep in the entrance passage a couple of hundred feet in. This notwithstanding, we went through via the upper level crawl, with a side trip to the Overlook above the Big Room. Exit passage water levels also normal, about waist deep. It felt good to get in the cave, now it felt good to get out into the hot July day. After a rest and lunch break, we all went our ways, to Huntsville and Convention, or Birmingham for the evening's fireworks, or to Rico, Georgia, or wherever home happened to be. A fond *bune călătorie* (have a good trip) to Mihai, who, after Convention and a quick trip with MIKE and DAVID out to the Grand Canyon and the desert Southwest, was on his way back home to Bucharest. Hope you enjoyed your first visit to the US as much as we enjoyed our first visit to your country, Mihai. We'll see you again underground, there or here! (JOHN, did you get your car fixed, or did you put it out of its misery?)

*** The past month has been a difficult one for TOM CHAMPION. He was in a nursing home up in Falkville waiting for a new heart, but then developed some problems and had to go back into the hospital in a medically induced coma. As of this writing he is improved, out of the coma and awake. Hang in there, Tom! We are all rooting for you.

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter
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