

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter



June 2005: Volume 35, Number 6

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Grotto Calendar

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.

June 4: The Annual Huntsville Cave Rescue Tyrolean Traverse at Desoto Falls.

June 18-19: TAG Fall Cave-In Site Work Weekend.

June 25-July 2: 2005 Cave Rescue Operations Management Seminar in Somerville, Alabama.

July 2: Fern Cave Quarterly Survey Trip. Contact Kelly Norwood for more information.

July 4-8: NSS Convention - Huntsville, Alabama. Registration and information...contact Jim Hall jimehall2@cs.com (256-772-9829) or CharlesLundquist lundquc@email.uah.edu (256-824-2684) for any questions!

July 9: Fern Cave Quarterly Survey Trip. Contact Kelly Norwood for more information.

July 14 (DATE CHANGE): Grotto Meeting at South-side Library starts at 7:00 pm.

July 21: GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.

Aug4: Grotto Meeting at South-side Library starts at 7:00 pm.

Aug 18: GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.

Sept 1: Grotto Meeting at South-side Library starts at 7:00 pm.

Sept 15: GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.

Sept 29 (DATE CHANGE): Grotto Meeting at South-side Library starts at 7:00 pm.

Oct 6-9: TAG Fall Cave-In

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 or you can give written material to the Staff Typist noted to the left. Submission can also be done via e-mail 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...

*Andrei admiring formations in a Romanian Cave.
(Gheorghe Ponta)*

Birmingham On-Line!

Check out our web site: www.bhamgrotto.org

Fox Trot to Foxhole

Vicki Parker

Timmy Hudson, David McRae, Shane Stacey, Vicki Parker, and three relatively new cavers from Tennessee (Joshua, Brandon and Jonathan) set out for Foxhole Saturday morning during SERA. "Trail Blazing Timmy" led the group of seven who reported no trouble except the occasional inability to keep up. (As any of you who've caved with Timmy know, he does not zig-zag up a mountain - he blazes a NASA lift off pattern — ^STRAIGHT UP^)!

The one hour hike to the cave was hot and ALL uphill but laced with plenty of good company and water. The group gained an estimated 1000 feet in elevation on the hike. If we wanted vertical during SERA, we got it — both hiking to the cave as well as inside the cave! As formidable as the climb was, so were the gnats which seemed to think of fourteen eyes as watering holes. Shane entertained us with tales from the crypt while the sun danced through the trees. (Incidentally, Shane's comedy is better than Saturday Night Live!) Once we reached the entrance, Timmy rigged the first drop into the multi-drop cave and entered. Vicki followed and observed Timmy as he rigged the second bolt. Then Timmy dropped on down to the bottom while each caver made the three drops down and back up again. The first drop was an estimated 30 feet; the second drop was probably 70 feet and the last drop was well over 100 feet. There was a slight trickle of water despite recent rainfall and very little cave to explore, which simply means Foxhole stands true to its name! Nonetheless, she's a beaut and worth the rope haul (cheers to you, Timmy!)

The hike back down to Shane's suburban was met by one sleepy rattler which David discovered and quickly set to the side with the tip of his new trekking pole. No mishaps and the only thing left behind was the skin off the back of Vicki's right heel and her trekking pole (breaking in a new pair of boots on this hike is not recommended; use of cane trekking pole as a baseball bat is highly recommended!)

If you're going to do the fox trot to Foxhole, consider taking the zig-zag trail instead of the NASA lift-off

trail and pack light other than water and power bars. You'll need a peak energy level as there is little-to-no down time on this trip. A micro rack will work fine since the largest drop is just over 100 feet. And be sure to

take a camera. The dirt road out sometimes shares its secret — several Clydesdales which live in the pasture to the north. It's not a perfect ending though — you have to supply your own Budweiser!

HEY!

Are you one of those people I saw leaving SERA Summer Cave Carnival with aluminum cans in your trash that I couldn't chase down?

Well, here's your chance to redeem yourself. Even if you didn't go to SERA and are coming to Convention, Sewanee Mountain Geezer Grotto will be recycling at the 2005 NSS Convention in Huntsville.

We will be accepting ALUMINUM CANS.....and.....PLASTIC BOTTLES! (Please, no half eaten hogies or used birth protection devices)

Plan on recycling NOW! Aluminum cans will go in the metal containers and plastic bottles will go in plastic containers. Hope this aint to technical for some of you. There will be a recycling station near your camp, near campground events, one on leaving the campground, and stations set up at Grissom High School.

Permission granted to post this wherever you please.....hopefully other caving egroups!

Glenn Mills
Sewanee Mountain Geezer Grotto Prez.....

Mom needs your help!

A Call To All Birmingham Grotto Members!!!

The July Birmingham Grotto Newsletter will feature articles, art, photographs, and recollections of SERA 2005. Please take some time and put your memories into words for this special edition. Send any submissions to the editor at scott@scottparvin.com.

Graffiti in Caves

Jim Wilbanks

Webster defines graffiti as: "A drawing or inscription made on a wall or other surface, usually so as to be seen by the public. A rude decoration inscribed on rocks or walls."

Rude is a very good word to describe the graffiti we see today.

We have all seen graffiti in caves. These graphic expressions come in many forms and styles. We all hate the spray painted attempts at personal recognition of daring spelunking feats and especially the colorful expressions of lust left in the dark for our lights to discover. There are caves barely marred by graffiti while other caves have become huge palettes painted time and again with multiple layers of the stuff.

Many of us have also seen cave graffiti in a different way. Such graffiti often is an important historical record. Those of us lucky enough to tour Big Bone Cave with Marion Smith or other knowledgeable historian / cavers have witnessed such important records. Marion knows the history behind nearly every name on those walls. These carefully inscribed names and dates from earlier times are invaluable for researching the history of a cave and the region. Such cave treasures are valued and protected by all cavers.

There are ancient renderings on some cave walls that do not make use of the written word. Most of us have not seen archaeological cave graffiti, which is much harder to find and to authenticate. I recall ten years ago a noted anthropologist reported that there were only a few examples of it in the Southeast. Since then, much more has been found using side lighting techniques to highlight the faintly drawn symbols important to ancient cultures. Some of these indeed lie beneath more modern graffiti.

Just about every caver I know doesn't like modern graffiti and wants it removed. There seems to be a visceral, deeply felt hatred of the stuff. Volunteers will gleefully spend hours trying to remove even small patches of it. Grottos have been known to devote years of weekends to scrubbing graffiti from cave walls.

Historians argue that graffiti is a historical record. Some even argue that spray paint should never be

removed because important historical or archaeological graffiti might be under it. Most cavers do not have the training or experience to determine if sensitive ancient cultural materials lie beneath modern graffiti. There are historians and archaeologists that can spot such hidden treasures. It is wise to consult such experts before planning a graffiti removal project in any cave. The generally accepted point of historical antiquity is fifty years before present but there are always exceptions.

Others are concerned about further damaging the microbial balance in the wall. All exposed rock is undergoing a weathering process. Exposed rock on the surface must be cracked open to identify it, because of the effects of weathering on the rock. Rock in caves is weathering because of several processes. Rock in water filled conduits is being worn away by the passage of water. These conduits are called phreatic formations whether they are active or not. Rock in active caves is undergoing weathering from surface drainage, which forms pits, formations and other vadose formations. Even bone dry cave passages are being actively eroded.

Most agree that microbial action is a part of this weathering. Microbes are tiny life forms, which are actively eating away at the rock and in turn being eaten by other microbes. These microbes are fed by the surface drainage, the air in the cave and the minerals in the rock. Cavers who are lucky enough to encounter virgin cave usually find the walls to be very crumbly. The top surface of the rock has been weathering for eons and is easily brushed away. This microbial life zone is actively feeding the life in the soil of the cave, especially at the base of walls and is an integral part of the ecology of the cave. When our graffiti removal leaves behind bare un-weathered rock, these microbes move back in and return the rock surface to a weathered state in time.

Spray painting is toxic to this microbial action. It delivers a huge slug of toxins in the paint and the propellants. When we encounter graffiti, the damage is already done. All that is left are simple pigments.

Anything volatile or toxic has evaporated.

Urban areas are constantly being targeted by "taggers". These people derive pleasure from painting their signature on buildings and railroad cars. One local cave has been defaced from one end to the other by religious graffiti. Municipalities who have aggressively removed this form of graffiti have noticed a decline in the practice. The former enforcement ranger for Pigeon Mountain headed up multiple projects to remove graffiti from Pettijohn's Cave. He attributes constant removal of graffiti for a measurable decline in new graffiti. Many believe there is simply less of it showing up in general. Of course there is always an exception like the recent defacing of Neversink. The ranger and most municipal leaders believe prompt removal of graffiti inhibits new graffiti.

Removal of graffiti has to be done carefully. After determining that a site does not contain archaeological or important historic materials the SERA Karst Task Force uses a graduated process for removal. First, we brush the area with a soft brush. If the paint is on undisturbed, weathered rock, it comes off easily. If it is on mud, then water from a pump up sprayer is added. Next we try a wire brush. This gets most of the graffiti. Wire brushes can be manual or electric. In both cases, eye protection is important. If the paint persists then more aggressive means are needed. These more aggressive means are the point where opinions begin to differ regarding impact on the cave and safety for the cleaner.

One method, which is certainly effective, utilizes acid. Stonemasons use Hydrochloric acid to clean rock. Diluted to about 20% with water, this substance literally eats the surface of the rock away along with anything on it. This acid mixture is very toxic and can burn any tissue it touches. Fumes from the process are acrid and probably toxic. Acid might be a good choice on an outside surface well away from water sources where power is not available. It is not advisable for groups or in cave use.

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

The SKTF has been using a new product for a few years called Graff-Off. This product is manufactured from coconut oil and is reputed to be biodegradable and non-toxic. While we have used it, several volunteers have reported allergy like symptoms as well as nausea. The committee has been unable to get complete ingredient lists from the manufacturer. We are currently awaiting a chemical analysis from an environmental lab. In the mean time, we are not using the product in caves and recommend others not to use it until it can be determined that it is safe for use in caves.

Pressure washers can remove a great deal of paint especially in crevices and cracks. The operator has to be prepared to get wet and wear eye protection. Power and water has to be supplied. One Tennessee caver has a self-powered unit, which will siphon its' own water which was demonstrated to good effect removing spray paint graffiti.

Most pressure washers need a pressurized water source and run on gasoline. Caution has to be exercised in dealing with exhaust fumes and Carbon Monoxide. Unless the cave is large with good airflow and no hibernating bats, a gasoline engine does not belong in a cave.

Sandblasting is very effective in graffiti removal. Air tools do not loose effectiveness over distance, so you can clean away as long as the hose reaches. A sandblaster using glass beads can be effectively used on flowstone as the power of the tool can be adjusted.

Glass beads are a very expensive blast media, but they are used because they are inert and do not seem to affect the cave's ecosystem. Recovery of spent media is important both economically and in order to lessen any unknown impact on the cave.

During the summer of 2005 the SKTF will be hosting a Graffiti removal trailer first fabricated by Ray Keeler of the Central Arizona Grotto. This trailer is intended for off road use and contains a complete assortment of graffiti removal tools. Everything is powered by a generator/air compressor, which is mounted on the trailer. Fifteen hundred feet of air hose and electric lines end at three stations fifty feet apart. Each station is equipped with: sandblaster, angle grinder with wire brush, tarps,

shopvac, and personal protection devices. Recovery, screening and reuse of the glass bead blast media are integral steps in the process. During a full weekend's work, up to 10, 5-gallon tubs of media will be used. Greater than 50% of the blast media is recovered and reused. The tubs are about \$40 each. We need help designing a better recovery system. Those of you who are engineers, try and think of a way to use the shopvac to help increase the recovery. We need your help.

If you or your caving club has a graffiti covered cave that we can get within fifteen feet of, we want to come help you clean it up. We will show up with the trailer and the expertise to run it. You or your group needs to supply the cavers to operate the equipment and provide support such as hauling, feeding, housing or camping, and supply. According to the folks who have used this rig, an entire weekend will go through about \$400 worth of blast media, plus gas. They describe the system as being able to remove a large amount of graffiti quickly. We interpret that as a big cave with lots of graffiti. Your target cave may be smaller and may be near another grotto's target cave. As the summer progresses, we will have much more clear idea of how much running this machine will cost to operate. Below are some web links which describe the equipment and its use:

<http://caves.org/grotto/cag2/pcleanup.html>

<http://www.thespectrum.com/news/stories/20050206/localnews/1961225.html>

<http://members.cox.net/neonspyke3/graffiti2.html>

<http://members.cox.net/webmastercaverjim/pccpsummary.html>

This summer at the NSS Convention the trailer will be in use in a graffiti removal workshop. The SKTF is sponsoring three workshops at the convention. Formation repair will be taught one day. We will demonstrate our trash hauling system in a pit nearby on Friday of convention. The graffiti removal workshop will show different methods side by

side. We will measure Nitrogen content as a basic measure of the life in the soil at the base of the wall and repeat the measurement in an effort to assess the impact of graffiti removal on microbial life.

This will be a pivotal year for the SKTF. We will be busier than ever and we are reaching high in our expectations. None of this can happen unless you help. None of the projects we have worked on would have been possible without your help. Your strong backs, and determined spirit make what we do with the SKTF a pleasure. We can never say THANK YOU enough.

***Please Mark
Your
Calendars!!!***

***The July Birmingham
Grotto Meeting has
been moved to July
14th to avoid
confliction with the
NSS Convention being
held in Huntsville!***



Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes
May 5, 2005

A Motion passed to approve the May Minutes as written.

VISITORS:
None.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Gary Barnes announced that we have \$7,471.65 in our checking account and \$3,976.87 in CD's totaling \$11,448.52 to date. He will inform us next month of the total of the SERA expenses.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Jimmy Sims announced that Tom Champion has been moved to Summerford Nursing Home, Room 12-B, P.O. Box 4087, Highway 31 SW, Falkville, Alabama 35622. The phone number there is (256) 784-5275. Tom has been exercising and is doing a little better.

Leigh announced that Terri Constable is coming to Birmingham from California the week after SERA and she would love for everyone to come to Grobs for a get-together, Thursday, May 19th.

OLD BUSINESS:

Joel announced that the TAG gates would open Friday morning and camping is allowed over the weekend. Everyone should meet a Camp Comer around 8:00 a.m. to begin the work weekend. Plans are to get the hot tub and sauna set up, cut wood and to sweep the chalets. 11 vendors are scheduled to attend SERA.

Leigh is asking for people to sign up for registration shifts. Kitty also has a sign-up sheet for various volunteered duties. The grass is supposed to be cut for us but various tools would be handy for whatever needs to be done.

Steve presented the staff shirts, which are dirt colored. They are \$10.00 if you show up and work. Lunch will be provided and Jason Wall is preparing a bar-be-que for Saturday night at the TAG site.

Leigh stated that we have sold 272 pre-registered entries into SERA.

Scott Parvin donated a Welcome SERA sign for SERA.

NEW BUSINESS:

Sharon stated the cut off to receive a \$25.00 discount to register for the NSS Convention is May 31. Sharon presented photos of the campground that the convention will be held at. She discussed that buses would be available to take people to and from the grounds and she discussed all the events that would be going on at the convention.

Jimmy Sims wanted to thank Milo and Andy Zerbe and Metro Warehouse by providing a truck at SERA to haul the garbage off.

TRIP REPORTS:

Sharon Faulkner and Casey Faulkner-Porter went to Hans Kennermer's, Tumbling Rock, Jess Elliott and Tate Cave.

Scott and Julie Fee, Sharon Faulkner, Alan Cressler, Tom Dubois, Brian Killenbeck, Tamara Hughes, Michael Greene and Doug Strait went to the Iron Hoop entrance to Jess Elliott.

Steve Sills and Tim Hudson went to Jess Elliott.

Judy Ranelli went to Blue Springs with Martha Mills and Kelly Norwood.

Judy Ranelli, Martha and Glenn Mills and two others went to Sherwood Mountain Pot. Judy saved a garter

snake in the pit and brought it out.

John Roberts, Jeff Harrod and Ryan Strickland went to Starline pit near the Walls of Jericho parking area.

Scott Fee and Scott Parvin attended the Tennessee Cave Survey meeting in Sewanee, Tennessee.

Dave Caudle suggested we donate at least \$1000 to SCCI and maybe \$500 to Great X. It was agreed to discuss and vote on at a later meeting.

Scott Fee said the last conservation fund was established in 1996. The NSS owes over \$80,000 for Great X and The SCCI is still fundraising for possibly Valhalla and Snail Shell. He anticipates doing well at SERA and we might want to think about a large donation. This will be discussed at a later meeting.

Sharon Faulkner made a Motion that everyone think of donation ideas.

Dues are due for SCCI in May.

PROGRAM:
No program.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeannie Cates, Secretary

Notice!!!

The October Birmingham Grotto Meeting has been rescheduled for September 29, 2005, because of the TAG Fall Cave-In.

News and Notes

Dave Howell

*** May - and the 2005 SERA SUMMER CAVE CARNIVAL - are past, and the event was a great success! We had hoped to turn around the trend in recent years of dwindling attendance at SERA, and with 558 cavers registered, it seems we did just that. Each and every Grotto member who participated in and contributed their time and efforts to this event deserve thanks, but space does not permit the enumeration of all their names here. There were several, however, who should be recognized for their extra efforts, for going the extra mile to help SERA be the success that it was. JOEL is the foremost of these, who, as SERA Chairman, faithfully oversaw all planning and operations, making sure everything was planned and taken care of, coordinating the various committees, jobs, events, and the myriad details of this complex event. Thanks, Joel! Your excellent and painstaking work paid off in the quality of the event.

LEIGH is to be commended for her hard work at the registration tables. Thanks to her continuous presence there Wednesday afternoon through Saturday night (no, I don't think she slept during that time), and to her careful attention to pre-event details, registration went smoothly and without major incident. Good to see Mr. JONES of the Jackson County Sheriff's Department again, providing gate security.

Thanks to JULIE FEE for the many hours of layout time she spent on the guidebook, as well as to those others who contributed time, effort, articles, and photos. Thanks to SCOTT P. for the signage and banner that he generously donated.

The guided trips also went out smoothly - thanks, HAZARD. The Cave Information Booth did a rushing business both days it was open, apparently this alternative to publishing cave locations or directions to entrances was successful. Thanks to MUDPUPPY (Peter Michaud) for your help with info about non-Alabama caves, to JIMMY S. for the display maps, and to DONNA A. for your accurate, street-by-street directions to Manitou

Cave, one of the more popular destinations of the weekend.

A special, and unanticipated, attraction of Camp Comer was the WAR CANOES, two 27' long crafts each weighing several hundred pounds and seating 12 paddlers each. (It took 12 folks to just lift them into the water!) Check out the pictures of them, I expect some of these will be appearing in the BGN and/or on the Grotto e-groups.

The Saturday evening banquet, first meal to accompany SERA in many years, also went smoothly with just short of 200 diners, although I think our caterer underestimated somewhat how much cavers eat. Thanks to KITTY for arranging the catering. Nevertheless, no one went hungry, and MIKE McEACHERN's 3D slide show afterwards was fine. Several of our own won door prizes, including MISTY and CHRIS TOMASELLO, VALERIE HOWELL, and GLENN MILLS, whose name was drawn after MARTHA, as Vendor Committee Chairman, declined a door prize due to concerns about conflict of interest - it was karma that the Millses win something! The band, featuring our own TONY TOMASELLO, was also great. Dudes, I hope you know you *did* have an attentive and appreciative audience, just not there in front of you like you're used to.

MARTY put on a super fireworks show Saturday night - thanks, dude! - with apparently several grand finales, just when folks thought the show was at an end, there was more! In fact, the local Gestapo liked the show too: "Ve haf come to arrest ze perpetrator of ze fireworks. You vill give him to us now." But Marty is a professional and had all the necessary permits in hand, which enabled BRIAN, the Camp Ranger, to turn them away empty handed.

Thanks also to JASON for the various delights of the palate including the fried bream and tilapia, chicken legs and other treats. Sorry about that little incident in the campsite parking area, Jason, but we did manage to pull the survivors from the twisted wreckage that was once a Jeep Cherokee.

Thanks also accrue to JIMMY S, our Trash Master, who contributed not only his efforts in planning, but also in the physical removal of the mountain of waste that SERA produced, an odious but necessary job.

There are so many other people I'd like to thank - LARRY MONEY for the electrical setup at the vendors' area and the new Grotto tarp, MYRNA and JOHN for the Mule, LARRY MULLINS for his work with the hot tub and sauna, MARGARET, EDNA and DAVID for their help with the banquet decorations, and everybody else who worked to make this SERA the success that it was. Thanks to you all, and my apologies to the many folks who contributed but whose name is not listed here. Good job, y'all! I think we all deserve a tip of the Grotto helmet.

*** Part of the human condition is change, and a couple of changes loom on the horizon for some of our number. Later this year MIKE McEACHERN and NANCY BOICE plan to move to Hamilton, Montana, where other members of Mike's family already reside; the schedule for this is changeable, but right now late August is the target date for the move. Another Grotto couple is also planning a move to the Golden West: LARRY MULLINS and KITTY WOOLDRIDGE will relocate to St. George, Utah in another year or so, again the schedule for the move is inexact and subject to many variables. Those of us who remain in Birmingham should not look on this as the loss of Grotto members; rather, it is the inception of the Utah and Montana colonies of the Birmingham Grotto, an event to be hailed and celebrated, yes? Good luck to Mike and Nancy and to Larry and Kitty in their colonization initiatives!

*** Some good and bad news of restaurants in Scottsboro, for your après-cave dining decisions: the bad news is that Old Mexico is apparently out of business. The good news is that Geno's Pizza has moved into the former Old Mexico space (in the shopping center just southeast of the Veterans Drive overpass on US 72).

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P.O. Box 55102

Birmingham, AL 35255-5102

Forwarding & Address Correction Requested