

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

March 2004: Vol 34, No 3

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Cavin' 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.

March 4: **Grotto Meeting** at Southside Library at 7:00 pm.

March 5-7: **Guntersville Getaway!** contact Leigh Dudrow for more information.

March 18: **GROBS** starts at 7:30pm. Ask a Grotto Officer for the current hot spot.

March 13: **Grotto Trip** to Kenna Pit and Brown Pill Pit led by Sharon Faulkner. See page 175 for details.

March 20: **Spring BOG Meeting** in Las Vegas, Nevada hosted by the Southern Nevada Grotto.

April 1: **Grotto Meeting** at Southside Library at 7:00 pm. (no foolin!)

April 15: **GROBS** starts at 7:30pm. Ask a Grotto Officer for the current hot spot.

Today is also the very last day you can pre-register for SERA!

April 18: **ACS Meeting** starts at 10 am. See page 178 for details.

May 6: **Grotto Meeting** at Southside Library at 7:00 pm.

May 20: **GROBS** starts at 7:30pm. Ask a Grotto Officer for the current hot spot.

May 20-23: **SERA Summer Cave Carnival**, Camp Davy Crockett, St Clair, TN

May 28-31: **Kentucky Speleofest** at Camp Carlson, KY.

Jun 3: **Grotto Meeting** at Southside Library at 7:00 pm.

Jun 17: **GROBS** starts at 7:30pm. Ask a Grotto Officer for the current hot spot.

July 1: **Grotto Meeting** at Southside Library at 7:00 pm.

July 15: **GROBS** starts at 7:30pm. Ask a Grotto Officer for the current hot spot.

July 12-16: **NSS Convention** to be held in Marquette, Michigan (Upper Peninsula)

Aug 5: **Grotto Meeting** at Southside Library at 7:00 pm.

Aug 19: **GROBS** starts at 7:30pm. Ask a Grotto Officer for the current hot spot.

Aug 20-22: **DUG Wormfest**, Camp Rivervale, Bedford, Indiana.

Sep 2: **Grotto Meeting** at Southside

Library at 7:00 pm.

Sep 16: **GROBS** starts at 7:30pm. Ask a Grotto Officer for the current hot spot.

Sep 30: **Grotto Meeting** at Southside library at 7:00 pm. (Note: Change of Date!)

Oct 8-10: **TAG Fall Cave In. New location on Lookout Mountain!**

Oct 14: **GROBS** starts at 7:30pm. Ask a Grotto Officer for the current hot spot.

Oct 23: **Grotto Halloween Party** at Alabama Caverns. Camping is permitted.

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: caverjules@aol.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....

Scott Parvin in
House of Happiness Cave
(Scott Fee)



NSS Web Site Award Recipient
July-Sep 2003

Birmingham On-Line!

Check out our (award winning!) web site: www.caves.org/grotto/bag

March 2004, Vol 34, No 3

My First Pit

Jeannie Cates

Sunday, January 18th, I finally got the nerve up and went down into Scottsboro Mountain pit. Sharon Faulkner had led a trip to Diggins pit on Saturday the 17th, but I chickened out on that pit. I really didn't feel ready to do a pit at all, considering I still haven't bought my vertical gear and haven't had much training in rigging myself to the equipment. I felt like I needed more guidance on changeovers before I rappelled Diggins, but when I arrived on the mountain campsite Saturday evening, Sharon, Don Harter and I walked down to the Scottsboro Mountain pit. It didn't look as intimidating as Diggins so I decided what the heck, I'll do the Scottsboro Mountain pit.

Later that day, Chuck, Steve, Howdy and Dirk arrived at the campsite. We all sat around talking and made a nice bonfire. I told them about the events of the day and mentioned I might like to do a pit. It started raining pretty hard and we all huddled under the tarp. We had even discussed going caving that night, but I didn't want to do that since it was raining pretty hard. Since Chuck and Steve were there, I felt I was with experienced cavers so I asked Chuck to help me with my rigging for the mountain pit.

Sunday morning the guys all cooked a hearty breakfast and after sitting by the bonfire a little while, we walked to the pit.

Chuck went down first to ensure that someone would be down there to help me with the changeover. Steve rigged me up for my descent and I went down slowly but touched down smoothly. I really wasn't that scared going down but I should have released another bar on my rack to speed my descent. It started raining again and since there was already a steady drip, Chuck said we needed to get back up pretty fast. I began ascending and stopped about halfway for a rest. I made it to the top but had a little trouble getting over the lip. Mud was caked all in my chest roller and I was pinned tightly against the rock so my ascender wouldn't budge. I was exhausted at this point, so I was close enough for Steve to help pull me up.

Kroll was there to greet me with a warm lick in the face. I think Kroll knew I was a little scared and wanted to reassure me that I was welcomed back to safety. He is such a sweet caver dog and seemed to know that I was happy I made it back up. I never intended on going down 84 feet my first time, but I felt good that it went smooth and I was back on top with no complications. Thanks to Chuck and Steve for helping me accomplish my first pit.



Jeannie Cates on Rope
(both by Sharon Faulkner)

Scottsboro

Mountain

Pit

SERA Conservation Task Force Rocky River Clean Up

Martha Mills

Saturday, February 8 had been spent at the SERA Winter Business Meeting in McMinnville, Tennessee. It had been a very cold, snowy day and all of us were hoping for better weather for the clean-up. The weather gods were with us and during the night the snow stopped and the wind diminished.

When Glenn and I left the motel there were big patches of blue sky appearing. We arrived at the sinkhole to find rigging of the haul line in progress. Athens Speleological Society (ASS) was setting up a portable food stand with Danish rolls, hot chocolate and coffee for the workers. They also announced that they would be cooking chilidogs for lunch.

My first job was to carry some buckets down into the sink to load with small trash. The main haul line was almost rigged and a couple of guys were on another slope trying to remove a couple of large appliances from there. The main haul line was fifty to sixty feet from the slope down into the cave. However, the second hauling crew was very close to the entrance slope. I quickly decided I wanted a helmet to work in the entrance area (which was to be my assigned job). I climbed back out of the sink and retrieved my helmet.

When I returned I checked out the sink and went to see the cave entrance. The actual entrance is not visible for all the trash. I'm told the cave can be entered if you want to climb through the metal debris that is wedged in the entrance. I would not want to do it.

We quickly learned that we had to scramble for cover when the haul team closest to the entrance began to move their load, as rubble would tumble down the slope and bounce into the entrance area. The main haul line was far enough away it didn't create any problems. The main problem was we had to wrestle our trash 50 or so feet across the rocky sink bottom to the haul team. We were hauling out refrigerators, stoves,

washers, chairs, beds, sofas, lawnmowers, bicycles, tires and other assorted items. There was even a pickup truck bed in the heap.

Once the secondary haul crew had moved the big stuff another group started scouring the ledges. This is when it really got fun. The haul crew had warned us when they were moving something. The "pick up" crew kept accidentally knocking rocks and debris loose. After a few of the rocks almost took out a couple of the crew below, we asked them to cease activity on the ledges.

Toward the end of the day the slope into the entrance area was becoming treacherous. As we had moved appliances and furniture we were exposing another layer of decomposing trash. This layer was somewhat unstable in places. Also, the melting icicles were making the area quite muddy and slippery. The crew hauling items out of the cave was glad when the haul team told us to stop bringing big items because they wanted to clear out the sink visible from the road before we left for the day. We then concentrated on trying to pick up smaller stuff that would fit into the buckets.

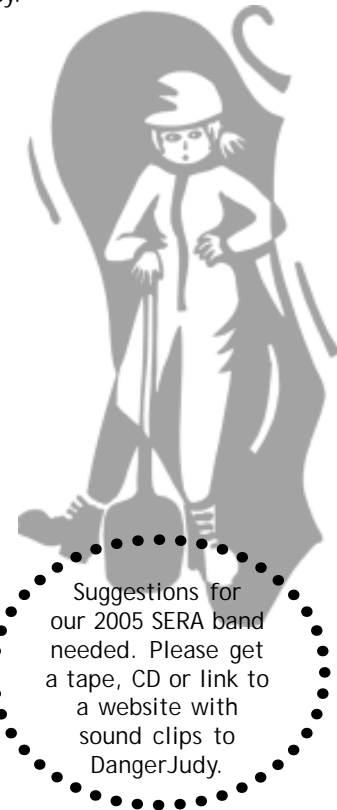
By the end of the day we had one dumpster totally full of scrap metal, about 50 tires, and another dumpster half full of assorted trash. For future cleanups there is talk about rigging the haul closer to the entrance. If that is done, for the first few hauls the entrance area will probably need to be cleared until the loose rocks are knocked from the ledges and it is determined where the actual rock fall zone is going to be.

Let me back track a bit to talk about the main haul line. The top of the haul was a huge tripod with a pulley. The main haul line was tied to a tree at the bottom of the sink. Another pulley was rigged to the main line. A huge net was loaded with trash and attached to the line and pulled up. Then the pulley was sent back down and an appliance was sent up.

This was to make use of the time while the "top side" crew unloaded the net. The system worked well. The force for pulling was supplied by a truck driving down the road pulling the rope. Gail Wilbanks was the designated driver. Jim Wilbanks gave the haul commands. Glenn was on the unloading crew topside.

By 3 pm the de-rigging was in progress. By 4 pm Glenn and I were headed for home, tired but feeling good that we had done our small part to help. This was the third clean-up at this site and it will need at least three or four more, maybe more than that, before it is completed. Since we have seen the site we plan to return for future efforts here if we can make the dates that are set.

Since Myrna is on the SERA Karst Conservancy Task Force, I'm sure she will keep us posted on the dates of future clean ups. Members from Birmingham in addition to Glenn and myself were Myrna Attaway, Tamara Hughes, Michael Greene, and Shane Stacy.



Suggestions for our 2005 SERA band needed. Please get a tape, CD or link to a website with sound clips to DangerJudy.

Society Volunteer Opportunities

Sharon Faulkner

On January 2, 2004 Mike Hood, Chairman of the Executive Search Committee posted the following to the NSS Discussion Board:

Have you ever considered being a vice president of the NSS? The Society will be saying goodbye to our three current VP's, Don Paquette-Executive Vice President, Thomas Lera-Administrative Vice President, and Colin Gatland-Operations Vice President. We will need three good, energetic, dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers to take on these important jobs. The vice presidents will be elected at the 2004 NSS Convention.'

INTERESTED IN RUNNING?

The officers are elected by the Directorate, and serve a one-year term from the time the officer takes his or her seat on the Board of Governors. Incumbents may run for reelection each year, and serve at the pleasure of the Directorate. NSS officers are tasked with the day-to-day operation of the Society, and accomplish this by delegating many of the duties to the various committees in his or her department.

Those elected to an officer position can expect to devote several hours each week to the job, incur out of pocket expenses, travel to various caving events and activities, attend three Board of Governors meetings, and two to three Executive Committee meetings each year. Those interested are also strongly encouraged to review the Board of Governors Manual for more information on how the NSS operates.

Office of Executive Vice President

The Executive Vice President (EVP) is elected during the closed session of the Directorate at the Monday Board of Governors meeting at the NSS convention. The member elected takes his or her seat on the Board immediately. The Executive Vice President (EVP) serves as a member of the Society's Executive Committee and

is primarily responsible for the NSS periodical publications, research, science, exploration and special publications branches of the Society. The EVP works with the Secretary-Treasurer (S-T) to develop and manage the department's budget to ensure fiscal responsibility for the publications and committees within the EVP department. The EVP is also responsible for managing committees assigned to the EVP department by the Board of Governors. The EVP carries out other duties as may be delegated by the Board of Governors.

Office of Administrative Vice President

The Administrative Vice President (AVP) is elected during the closed session of the Directorate at the Monday Board of Governors meeting at the NSS convention. The member elected takes his or her seat on the Board immediately. The AVP of the NSS is a member of the Executive Committee. The AVP has responsibility for managing the Society's cave management, conservation, and education activities. At any one time, the AVP is overseeing the activities of committees, commissions (the National Cave Rescue Commission, and the Vandalism Deterrence Reward Commission), and upcoming NSS Conventions. The AVP has responsibility for working with Federal agencies having cave management responsibilities; e.g., the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service, in matters dealing with cave management, cooperative endeavors, and cave conservation. The AVP is also responsible for oversight of the NSS' Cave Preserves and its Conservation Task Forces. The AVP works with the staffs of NSS Conventions to ensure that NSS policies are followed and that the Conventions are properly planned, managed, and financed. The AVP also works with the National Coordinator of the NCRC to coordinate NCRC and NSS activities and to provide support to the NCRC as needed. Finally, the AVP works with other members of the Executive Committee to manage the

NSS, coordinate responsibilities of the NSS officers, and to prepare the annual NSS budget.

Office of Operations Vice President

The Operations Vice President (OVP) is elected during the closed session of the Directorate at the Monday Board of Governors meeting at the NSS convention. The member elected takes his or her seat on the Board immediately. The OVP serves as a member of the Society's Executive Committee and is primarily responsible for the NSS Office in Huntsville, Alabama, and oversees its operations. The OVP delegates the day-to-day operation of the office to the Operations Manager and staff. The OVP is responsible for the NSS Bookstore and establishes policies and procedures for marketing, merchandising, sales, advertising, and promotions. The OVP works with the Secretary-Treasurer (S-T) to develop and manage the department's budget to ensure fiscal responsibility for the NSS Office and committees within the OVP department. The OVP is also responsible the managing committees assigned to the OVP department by the Board of Governors. The OVP carries out other duties as may be delegated by the Board of Governors.

For more information about running, and the responsibilities of the offices, contact Mike Hood, Executive Search Committee Chair at mhood@caves.org

Sources:

- Mike Hood, Executive Search Committee Chair
- National Speleological Society Website
- NSS Discussion Board

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

Grotto Trip to Diggins Pit

Sharon Faulkner

On January 17, 2004 I met Jeannie Cates and Don Harter in Scottsboro for the Grotto Trip to Diggins Pit. The weather was somewhat dreary with misting and drizzling rain most of the day. We parked and Don and I got all our gear ready for the trip. I grabbed my rope from the back of the truck and we followed the four-wheeler road to the pit. There is a No Hunting sign posted in front of the pit, but we were not hunting, and the

go back to the car to get his rope, and we'd use it. A somewhat lengthy discussion ensued regarding rope issues covered in the caving classic *On Rope*. My solution was to tie a knot on the suspect end of the rope, where it would lay harmlessly on the floor of the pit, after it was rigged. I began rigging the rope to the tree, wrapping it a

as an extra safety precaution. Jeannie was our photographer for the day, and took photos as I dropped over the lip of the pit. I hit bottom and climbed back up to the second ledge, and called off rope. Out of the rockfall zone, I watched as Don came over the lip and did a fine job rappelling his first 'hundred footer'. He wanted to tour some of the cave at the bottom, but I explained to him we shouldn't since we had not told Jeannie we would be doing that, and she was also waiting on top in the misting rain. I told him I would wait for him while he had a quick look.

When Don came back, he climbed up to the second ledge and found a place out of the rockfall zone, while I climbed out. The mist had turned into a mild drizzle by this time, but Jeannie got a few shots of me coming over the lip. I called off rope and listened for Don's on rope. I got my



Sharon Faulkner
(Jeannie Cates)

last known access for this area has been that cavers could go to Diggins Pit, but no further back on the property. I had also checked with Andy Zellner (keeper of the closed cave list) before planning this trip.

Once at the pit, I started uncoiling the rope. Don examined my rope and found a fuzzed place near one end, and decided he didn't know if it was safe or not. Since I actually want to live I examined the rope, but did not see anything that made me feel the rope offered a danger to me. I told Don that if he didn't feel comfortable rappelling on my rope that he could

few times, and then used a double figure eight knot with a biner. Don added an additional biner beneath mine

gear off and put on a fleece shirt; it was much warmer in the pit than it was at the top. I ate while we waited



Don Harter
(Sharon Faulkner)

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

for Don to climb. Don did very well climbing with his new modified Mitchell System, and we got a few photos of him coming over the lip. While Don took his gear off, I undid the rigging and pulled, and coiled the rope. All in all, I really enjoyed the trip to this pit again. It was nice to be out bouncing a pit after doing a great deal of horizontal caving, but painfully few pits this past year.

When we returned to the vehicles, we found a note without a name asking us to call and let the person know who we were and why we were here, with a phone number. We considered the idea that it could possibly be a joke, but I tried to call the number from a pay-phone, and the number wouldn't go through. So I tried calling on Jeannie's cell phone, and got an answering machine, but

the message was garbled. I left a message with my name and home number. Don wanted to report the cave as closed, but I asked him to wait until we had a chance to talk with the person. I told him that cavers had been trying to find correct access information to the Diggins area for a few years, and that I'd like to talk to this person.

We basically spent the rest of the day touring various cave entrances and popular areas in and around Scottsboro. I led Jeannie and Don to the parking spot for Sauta Cave, and we walked to the scenic lower entrance, which was impressive even in the rain. We took a few photos, and then drove up to Scottsboro Mountain. Jeannie had never been

there before, so the three of us made the short walk to show her Scottsboro Mt. Pit. As Jeannie and I were going back down the mountain, she and I stopped on the way down so that I could show her Dr. Sheppard's Crack. It was an enjoyable outing in TAG, even with the mist and drizzling rain most of the day.

I followed up on our mystery note, which turned out to be from the leaseholder of the property surrounding Diggins. Anyone planning

to visit the pit needs to call Mr. Byrum, the leaseholder in advance of visitation. Contact information can be found on the closed cave list at <http://www.dcg-nss.org/>



Don Harter and Jeannie Cates
(Sharon Faulkner)

March 13 - Sharon Faulkner will lead a vertical grotto trip to **Kenna Pit** and **Brown Pill Pit**. Kenna Pit or 120' deep pit with an easy lip and a few nice speleothems, and Brown Pill Pit is a short open air pit of 53' deep. Both pits require ascending gear to climb out, and will require hiking of around ¼ mile to reach. Camping is planned for Saturday night on Scottsboro Mt. Friday night (March 12) camping is also available on Scottsboro Mt. We will meet at the Liberty Restaurant in Scottsboro at 9:00 a.m. (or earlier) to eat, 9:30 a.m. ready to leave.

Contact Sharon at (256)739-9957 for directions to Liberty Restaurant or Scottsboro Mt directions.

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter

Who Said That? - Raw Mountain Humor/Valentines Day 2004

Jeannie Cates



Sharon makes a good fire.
I drug those big logs all by myself.
I helped too.
I didn't drag logs; I was putting my tent up.
Happy Valentine's Day!
Look! Dirk has chocolates.
Yeah, and they're Turtles.
I like Turtles.
Do you want a chocolate?
Incoming, incoming....it's Chuck.
Har...Har...Har
Somebody is missing.
Where's Steve this weekend?
Steve is doing the Valentine's camping thing in his bus.
Where is Glenn Riley?
He had to go home and do the Valentine's thing too.
I got a water hose for Valentine's Day.
Man, you racked up
I never bought a man a Valentine's gift, but if I did I guess it would be heart boxer shorts.
That's cheap. I always buy my man a Valentine's gift.
I guess it's a feminist thing.
Too much testosterone here.
Look! Kroll is giving Eskie her Valentine's gift.
Kroll has a girlfriend.
I need a croll.
I need a caving rod.
Scott Fee got a nice bright yellow caving rod.
You should be able to spot Scott now.
His bat sticker will look good on there.
Where's Frank been hiding?
Jason and Frank still live in Cleveland I think.
Jason is a good cook.
Yeah, he would make someone a good husband.
Jason makes good margaritas too.

Flash is so cute.
I need to bring my foo foo dogs.
Here's a raspberry Schnopps for you.
Mmmm...it tastes like juice.
Yeah, it's real sweet.
Just guzzle it down.
Happy Valentine's.
Don't say nobody didn't give you a Valentine.
I got it in Mexico.
It looks like water and it came in a neat little water bottle.
Pass that water bottle this way.
It's stout.
I'm going on the Romania trip.
I'm going on the Caver cruise.
I woke up after the Guntersville Getaway's auction and had bought a dancing hula pig for my dashboard.
It was the Tequila that made me do it.
Speaking of Tequila, wonder where Myrna is?
We need more beer at the Getaway.
Steve is getting 3 kegs this time.
I need to get on a tree.
Bang! What was that? It must have been from the Mexican food.
Open up and say ah!
You have a big uvula.
A what?
It's that thing that hangs down in your throat.
Dr. Tamara is giving tonsil checks.
I don't have tonsils.
I have tonsils but I want to yank them out. They swell up all the time.
Let me see your tonsils.



Grotto Girls (Scott Becker)

No, you can't look in my mouth.
Yes, they are pierced.
I wouldn't pierce them...no way!
I kind of like belly rings.
What's the purpose of a belly ring?
It looks sexy on your belly button.
I want a tattoo.
How did mudpuppy get that name?
Did you see Sling Blade?
mmm...uh-huh I took that there sling blade and cracked his skull...mmm...uh-huh (laughing, laughing, laughing and more laughing)
Who is the first man down?
Leigh is missing.
Get all the Grotto women to sit there and let's take a picture.
Grotto women...yeah!
But Leigh is missing.
Leigh went down early.
I'll get Leigh.
First man down is back up.
Now get the guys together for a picture.
Oops the bench broke.
Let's burn the evidence.
Scott, lie down and do something funny.
You look like the elephant man in that picture.
This is the best mountain party ever. Now, no kissing. I'm jealous. I don't have a Valentine.
Are you sweetielessness?
It's raining.
Let's all go down.
Is everyone going down now?
Guess I'll go down too.



Grotto Guys (Jeannie Cates)

Cave Survey Update

Sharon Faulkner

On Sunday December 21, 2003 Terry Ragon, Chrissy Frotten and I met in Scottsboro for the second survey trip into House of Happiness Cave. We picked up in the large borehole passage where Terry and Scott had stopped on December 13. We finished surveying the borehole passage and surveyed over breakdown to a muddy eight-foot high passage that quickly descended into hands and knees crawling passage. We surveyed this crawl until we again reached standing up passage before stopping for the day. At this point the passage goes into all out bellycrawl for at least the next one hundred feet.

This passage seems to be an in feeder. We gathered up survey gear and begin to exit, picking up our packs in various places we had left them in the crawlway. Back in the borehole passage we took a food break before heading out of the cave for the day. The cave was sucking in an enormous amount of air today making it cold on the way out. It felt great to reach the fifty-degree weather outside. We

set 11 stations for a total of 351.7 feet. We have now surpassed the footage surveyed on the original 1968 map. New total survey length is 1585 feet. Based on passages that have been visited in the cave, that we have yet to survey, I expect we will at least double the total footage that is currently surveyed.

On the third survey trip, Saturday January 10, 2004 Terry Ragon and Scott Fee picked up near where we stopped on December 21. This passage consists of crawlway interspersed with standing passage. Upon reaching the 'Y' junction, and setting a station in a dry, upper crawl that appears to be the continuation of the main trunk passage, Terry and Scott began surveying in the side canyon passage to the left. They ended the survey past the second rimstone dam, for those of you who have visited this cavern. There were 17 stations set for about 945 feet. Total passage is now ~2530 feet, with a vertical extent of 24 feet. The vertical extent should begin to increase as this side canyon has several climbups, some significant from this point onward.



Chrissy Frotten in
House of Happiness Cave
(Sharon Faulkner)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dear Neighbors:

As you may know, the Huntsville Grotto will be submitting a bid proposal to host the 2005 NSS Convention. We have finally drafted the proposal, which we will be submitting next week, and we expect it to be accepted at the Spring BOG meeting.

Running a Convention is a massive undertaking that has become much too large for any single grotto to undertake, and its success will depend heavily upon individual cavers and grottos in the TAG area.

We need your help. Could you please forward this information on to the members of your grotto and anyone else you think might be interested.

We are actively seeking volunteers to assist with every aspect of this Convention, and would greatly appreciate any assistance you can offer. If your grotto would like to take charge of a task, or if you would like to help out, even if just for a few hours, please contact me at hopenwasser@acm.org. In particular, there is a lot of pre-convention activity for which we have an immediate need for help (registration, geology, cave guides, etc.). Please feel free to directly contact one or more of the Chairs listed below if you or your grotto would like to help out in any way.

Convention Chair: Jim Hall (jimehall2005@yahoo.com)
Executive Chair: Chuck Lundquist (lundquc@email.uah.edu)
Facilities Chair: Bruce Wallace (bruce.k.wallace@nasa.gov)
Publications Chair: Julie Schenck (jeschenck@hotmail.com)
Publicity Chair: Eric Johnson (ejohnso4@yahoo.com)

If you can make it, please come to our planning meetings. We are currently holding regular meetings every Monday night at 6:00 PM at the NSS Headquarters here in Huntsville. Probably the best way to stay current on the Convention plans is to join the Yahoo! Group we have created for this purpose. To join, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NSSConvention2005> and click the "Join" button.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.
Sincerely,
Lance Hopenwasser (hopenwasser@acm.org)
Chair, Huntsville Grotto
Executive Secretary, NSS Convention 2005 Committee

Jim Hall and I got together and came up with an Alabama Cave Survey (ACS) meeting. It will be at 10:00 AM Sunday morning April 18, 2004 at Papa Lovettis at 4710 University Drive. This is an all you can eat Italian Buffet. We ate there at lunch today and it was \$6.00 plus drink. Drinks will be free for our group, they have a very big selection, it was very nice. They also have beer, for the Birmingham cavers.

Keep Kaving, Bill Torode



Alley Parvin

Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes

February 5, 2004

The meeting was called to order and the Minutes were approved as written in the February newsletter. The visitors included Chad and Valerie Dempsey in addition to Felicia Prince. Gary Barnes stated that we currently have \$2,350.00 in checking with \$35.00 in dues to be deposited.

Announcements

Myrna announced that February 28th and 29th is the Anderson Cave Cleanup. Steve Sills announced the Guntersville Getaway would be held March 5th and 6th. Steve Sills also reported the Kentucky Speleofest will be held Memorial weekend at Camp Carlson, Kentucky. Spring MVOR will be held April 30th, May 1st and 2nd. It will be a big party.

Myrna announced that Ruffner Mountain is having a fundraiser event March 12th at the Botanical Gardens. The fee is \$50.00 for dinner and dancing. The cash bar will begin at 6:30 p.m. and the dinner begins at 7:30 p.m. Kathy Freeland is the director at Ruffner Mountain.

Don Harter is leading a trip to Rusty's Cave Saturday, February 7th. Sharon Faulkner is leading a trip to Stephen's Gap and Pipeside Pit Saturday, February 14th. Myrna announced the Sera Winter Business Meeting and cleanup of Rocky Mountain Cave will be held Saturday and Sunday, February 7th and 8th.

Birmingham Grotto will host the Sera Winter Business Meeting for 2005. Myrna announced that Peter Michaud is planning to run for Vice President for SERA. Sharon Faulkner made a Motion that our Grotto support Peter's bid for Vice President, if he does accept the nomination. The Motion passed to support Peter.

Sharon reported that Diggins pit has a change of access. You can find the change of information on the special access section of the closed cave list or if you don't have a copy, you can check with Andy Zellner. Don Harter announced that the winner of the "What Cave Am I?" photo contest was Jimmy Sims, who correctly guessed *Guess Creek Cave*.

Dave Caudle reported that the Grotto's library has two new books, *Alpine Caving Techniques* and *Caving*

Basics. Jimmy Sims gave Don Harter some money for helping him during his recent move and Don purchased the two books and donated them to the library. Dave Howell reported that the January scout trip to Ledbetter Cave was cancelled.

The meeting date for the October 2004 meeting has been changed to September 30th, which means there will be two meetings in the month of September. A friendly Kentucky State Trooper who was also a caver stopped Glenn and Martha Mills on Christmas Eve - not because they did anything wrong but because they had a bat sticker and he wanted to say "Merry Christmas." Mike McEarchern brought some reels to view of the *Caverns of Sonora*.

Sharon announced that Dave Howell would present a carbide lamp program for the meeting and Myrna Attaway brought door prizes.

Old Business

Glenn Mills resigned as SERA chair and Joel McGuire was nominated to take his place. A Motion passed to name Joel as the new SERA chair. Scott Fee will help Joel co-chair.

The location of SERA has not been decided at this time, however, there are several sites being considered. Steve Sills went to Camp Comer near Mentone to check it out as a possible SERA site. Tamara Hughes mentioned that she had heard that some of the locals around Mentone don't really like cavers. Steve described Camp Comer as having a flat, level, grassy field with camping around the property, mini barns, bunk beds, bathhouses and maybe 2 - 4 port-a-johns there.

Another site being considered is Charlie Smith's farm. Charlie's site has no water to accommodate SERA and the wiring expense will be approximately \$1,000. A rough estimate to hold SERA at Charlie's would be about \$4000. Glenn Mills said there might be a conflict to hold SERA at Charlie's in case something happened to Charlie and it would be left up to Charlie's children to take over the event. In a worst case scenario, they could possibly deny the event being held there. It was discussed that Camp

Jackson or Camp Comer would be a better place to hold SERA but Joel McGuire needs to check into issues with police on the roadblocks.

Tamara Hughes also suggested the KOA site. We need to make the decision of where to host the function by the next meeting after considering cost and comparison issues.

New Business

Myrna Attaway brought up a plan to clean up caves by taking graffiti and swastika symbols off. There is a solution you can buy that removes the painting that the task force uses and it comes in spray bottles. One gallon should clean off a wall. A Motion passed to donate \$50.00 to buy the clean-up solution.

A Motion passed to buy 3 kegs of beer for the Guntersville Getaway March 5th and 6th. Steve Sills will arrange the pick up of the 3 kegs and the brand of beer will be announced at a later time. A Motion also passed to buy soft drinks for those that do not drink.

Trip Reports

Jason, Bobby and Eric went to the Sipsey River and camped beside a cave. The cave does not have a name at this time. Jeannie Cates bounced Scottsboro pit. Sharon Faulkner led a trip to Diggins Pit. Don Harter came along and bounced the pit and Jeannie Cates took photos.

Hazard and several others bounced Cemetery Pit, Deep well, Not So Deep Well, Cagle's and Jeepside in Stevenson.

Mike McEarchern went with Terry Ragon and David Caudle on a survey trip to McClendon's cave.

Program

Dave Howell gave a presentation on using Carbide Lamps for caving.

Door Prizes

Myrna Attaway brought many bat door prizes and names were drawn for the prizes.

*Respectfully submitted,
Jeannie Cates, Secretary*

News & Notes

by Dave Howell

*** This month, March, will see the 22nd anniversary of the death of science fiction writer PHILIP K. DICK, a most interesting and enigmatic man. One of the most neurotic writers - some might even say paranoid schizophrenic - Dick's work was Kafkaesque, morbid, and obsessed with the idea that human beings are trapped in a web of unreality. Witness his 1957 novel *Eye in the Sky*, in which a group of people find themselves in a reality in which individuals' personal beliefs become reality for the group; a religious group imposes its own beliefs on everyone's minds, but then find that they themselves are trapped in the insane delusion of one of their own members. Think about this concept, and you will begin to understand how Dick experimented with different concepts of the nature of reality, questioning even whether there is indeed a single "reality," or if there is instead as many "realities" as there are living creatures. On March 2, 1974 Dick experienced the first in a series of episodes which convinced him he had been possessed by a being - God? An extraterrestrial? An angel? Of this Dick himself wrote, "It seized me entirely, lifting me from the limitations of the space-time matrix; it mastered me as, at the same instant, I knew that the world around me was cardboard, a fake." The ramblings of a psychotic, or a drug-altered mind? They do sound that way, except that this "intelligence" revealed to Dick that his (Dick's) 4-year-old son Christopher was suffering from an undiagnosed inguinal hernia, a potentially fatal condition. A medical exam confirmed that indeed the boy *was* afflicted with this condition, which was subsequently remedied by surgery. What was the "reality" of this episode? Dick called his possessor "Valis"

for Vast Active Living Intelligence System, and later wrote a novel by that same name. But this was not the only incident in Dick's life which suggested that his experiences might not so easily be dismissed as hallucination. Indeed, Dick's own life seemed to challenge conventional notions of the nature of reality. Fascinating. Want to know more? In addition to reading his fiction, much of which is still in print and even more of which is available at the public library, try Dick's biography, *Divine Invasions* by Lawrence Sutin (1991). Most cavers I know prize most highly the exploration aspect of what we do. Is Philip K. Dick's experimentation with the nature of reality not simply another dimension of exploration? Or is caving our way of expanding the bounds of reality?

*** The 2004 GUNTERSVILLE GETAWAY, yes. I always write a followup to that event in this column, so here it is. The Getaway did not happen last month (February), and a good time was not had by all. No cave trips or ridgewalks went out that Saturday, and the auction that did not happen Saturday night did not raise a tidy sum for the Grotto. Just kidding, folks. The Getaway has not happened yet, you haven't missed it. (All those negatives really mess with your mind, don't they? What is reality?) As you read these words - if you're reading this at the March Grotto meeting, that is - the Getaway begins tomorrow, Friday, March 5. Party Friday night. Cave trips and ridgewalking Saturday. Party and Grotto auction Saturday night. Sunday morning... well, never mind. Be there, the Getaway is a not-to-be-missed annual event. And don't forget to bring those goods, caving related or not, to donate for

auction. Followup in the next News & Notes, even though it will no doubt compete with the flood of reports which will inundate our Newsletter Editor after the event - right? I will see you there!

*** It seems that the recent moving of the TAG Fall Cave-In from its longtime home at Sequoyah Caverns Campground is not the only change related to this event. Last month the caving community lost an old friend in the death of CLARK BYERS of Trenton, Georgia, former owner of Sequoyah Caverns. Mr. Byers, 89, passed away on February 19 after having been in ill health for several years. Prior to his ownership of Sequoyah, beginning in 1936 Mr. Byers and 2 helpers painted those "See Rock City" signs on barns throughout the South, hired by an advertising agency in Chattanooga to do that. The Grotto's thoughts and sympathy go to his daughter NANCY NEWGARD, as well as to the rest of his family.

As an aside I must relate how I became aware of this particular news item. The weekend of February 20-22 Valerie, Shay and I traveled by way of Chicago to Beloit, Wisconsin for Shay to visit Beloit College. We noticed Mr. Byers' obituary in the Sunday, February 22 edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. Life is full of coincidences, isn't it?

*** March means that spring is almost upon us, and with it the ALABAMA CAVE SURVEY annual meeting. Logistics: 10:00 am Sunday, April 18 at Papa Lovetti's, 4710 University Drive in Huntsville. If you are a ridgewalker, or if you simply want to keep up to date with the latest cave finds and locations, attend this meeting! I plan to. (But come anyway.)

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