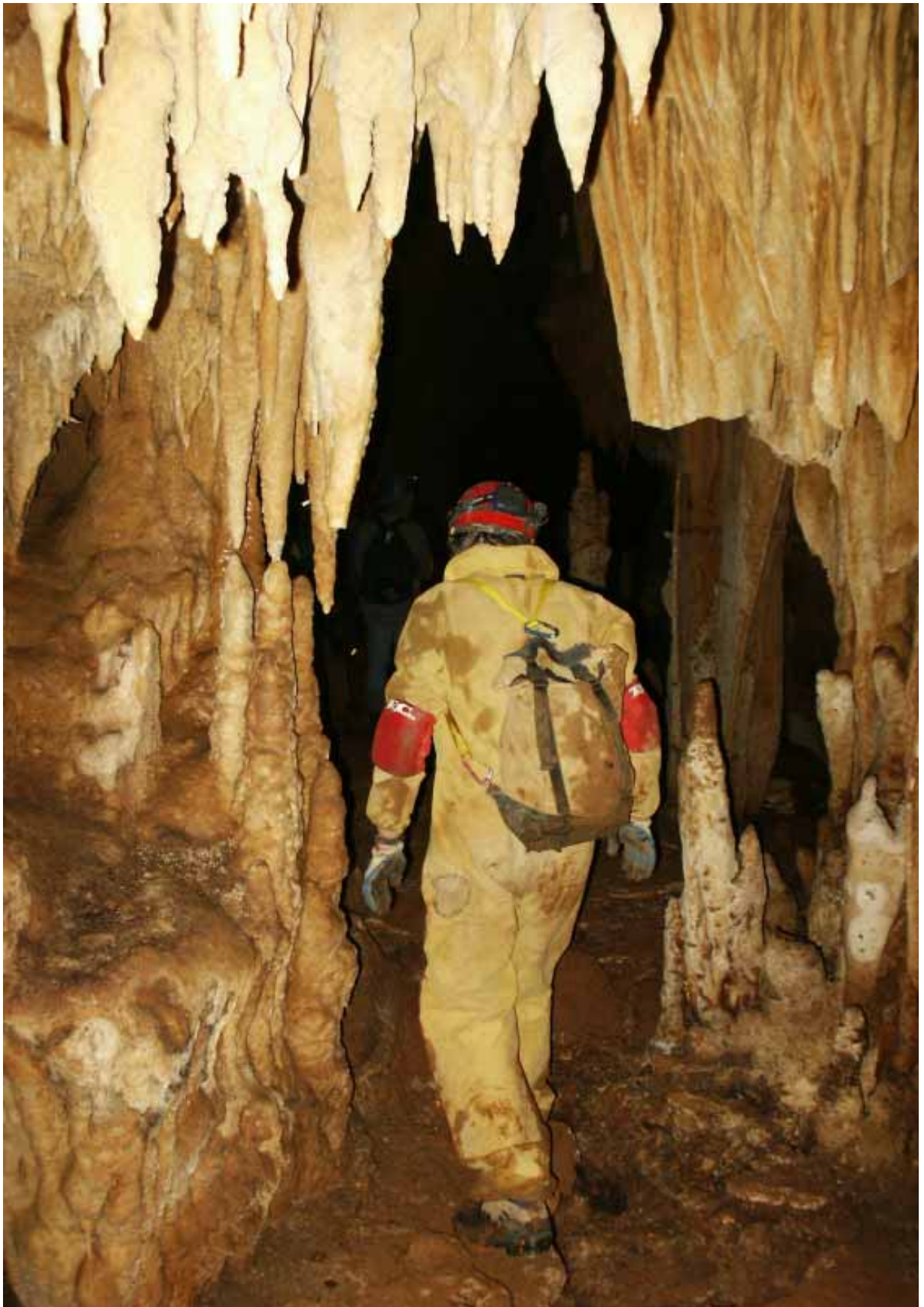


Birmingham Grotto Newsletter



March 2005
Volume 35, Number 3

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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.

Mar 4-6: Florida Cave Cavort.
Information at <http://www.caves.com/fss/cavort.htm>

Mar 5: NSS Spring Board of Governors Meeting in San Antonio, TX. See the NSS Website for more information.

Mar 7: Deadline for submissions for the SERA Guidebook. See Dave Howell for more information.

Mar 17: GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.

Mar 19: SERA Winter Business Meeting in Stevenson, Alabama.

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

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

May 5: Grotto Meeting at South-side Library starts at 7:00 pm.

May 13-15 2005 SERA Summer Cave Carnival hosted by the Birmingham Grotto.

May 19: GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.

June 2: Grotto Meeting at South-side Library starts at 7:00 pm.

June 16: GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.

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!

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...

Mike McEachern in Topolnita Cave in Romania.
(Dave Caudle)

Birmingham On-Line!

Check out our web site: www.bhamgrotto.org

Arranging Cave Trips With a Little Caving on the Side

Sharon Faulkner

In contrast to last weekend's messy, winter mix, the weather forecast for the weekend of February 5-6, 2005, called for sunny days and a high in the 60's. Far too good an opportunity to spend cooped up indoors, so Casey and I drove up to Scottsboro late Friday night to meet Tamara Hughes and Michael Greene. We found several others had decided to get out and enjoy the nice weather. Chuck Constable and a large crew of seven or eight, that planned to do Elmo's Canyon on Saturday, had a campfire going on one side of the campground. After saying howdy to that lively bunch, I drove over to the other campfire and found Tamara, Michael, Lisa, and Hazard. Page Ashwell, who was planning to meet Andy Zellner's Tumbling Rock crew the next morning, later joined us. After catching up with the latest happenings, and tentatively making arrangements for a future grotto ridgewalk, everyone turned in for the night.

Several of us had breakfast at the

Huddle House Saturday morning before going our separate ways for the day. Casey and I went to Unclaimed Baggage hoping to find her a pair of caving boots after I ruined hers last weekend while drying them near the fire. We didn't find boots here, but they had a large assortment and various sizes of wetsuits in stock. We ended up doing the dreaded Wal-mart triathlon, dodging cars in the parking lot, maneuvering through the crowd to reach the shoe department, and navigating our way back to the front of the store to check out, all for a tiny pair of boots. After successfully completing this obstacle for the day, we set out for hurdle number two. We drove to Princeton to make arrangements for another cave trip, with the thoughts of perhaps a short visit to the huge entrance room of this cave to piddle away the afternoon. Staying within the pattern of the day, the person I needed to speak with wasn't available. However, I did get a phone number so that the drive won't be

necessary to plan future trips.

On the way back to Scottsboro, we stopped by Limrock Cave for a quick visit, so Casey could break-in her new boots in a cave. As we drove up I saw five vehicles parked on the side of road (where we used to park) and wondered why they did not use the SCCi parking area. Turns out, there was a herd (12-15) of UAH students visiting the cave and apparently did not know to use the parking area.

Saturday night found the same group, minus Chuck and crew, with the addition of several others camping on the mountain. Casey and I were the first ones to arrive and had already gathered wood and built a fire as others returned from various trips. They gathered more wood to keep the fire burning well into the night for a nice evening of campfire chatter. This weekend the weather was as beautiful as anyone could ask for during the month of February. I hope we have more of the same good weather through the rest of the month, or at least on the weekends.



*Casey in Limrock Cave
(Sharon Faulkner)*

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

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

MORE RIDGEWALKING NEWS

Dave Howell

We had an amazing ridgewalking trip the other day.

It starts out as a lead check - a small pit I had observed on a solo trip a while ago - with a ridgewalk in whatever time remains after we do the pit. Word of this trip had gotten around to a certain extent, so it is one of these trips when I don't know who will be there until they show or not. Tom Hagood meets me at my place at 8:00 am, we load gear into Toyota and head for cave country, stopping at Pardue's for breakfast, where we pick up Frank Case. Heading north, we see Hazard Bryant's truck at the Walls of Jericho parking place on our way to Bear Den Point Road, the closest parking place to the pit that is our objective.

Partway to the parking place at the road's end (where we park beside a white pickup truck with a camper shell) we encounter two cavers walking along; it is Hazard and Lisa Andrews, on their way to check a small pit he found a few weeks ago. Story short, it turns out we were returning to the same pit!

We find the pit easily, Hazard (who, we ascertain, was the original finder) rigs the entrance and descends. The entrance drop measures 28 feet, and there are two secondary drops, 14 feet and 10 feet for an overall depth of 52 feet with some horizontal leads, which Hazard reports are not too attractive. In view of the fact that both Hazard and I found this pit fair and square, but Hazard found it first, we decide that I will report the find under Hazard's NSS number, but I get to name it. Thus this pit becomes Hallucination Hole. Check the 2005 ACS Data Update for full info.

We walk on, setting as our goal the circumnavigation of Pruitt Ridge. The next find is a small sink containing a climbdown to a small room above a 40' drop. Tom climbs down to look in, but nobody goes down; the top of the pit is el tigho and may need some minor adjustment. Spreading out along the west flank of the ridge, we continue the walk.

A bit later a find is made that is unique in the experience of any of us: a small pit (about 10 feet deep)

with an 8-point buck in it, alive and apparently unharmed, but unable to get out. There is nothing we can do to get him out, and no one is willing to climb down there with him. Tomorrow morning I will report this find and its location to Jim Schrenkel, the ranger.

Not far away another interesting find is made: the wreckage of a single engine Piper aircraft that crashed in the woods high on the southern end of Pruitt Ridge. Even though this is obviously nothing recent, you can see exactly how he came in. Approaching from downslope, you find the right wing first, with a bash mark on the leading edge where it hit the tree that tore it off, then upslope a bit the left wing, then the fuselage, badly deformed and surrounded by a litter of smaller parts. The engine and instruments are long gone. The plane's number of N5552F; I will research what happened here, and when.

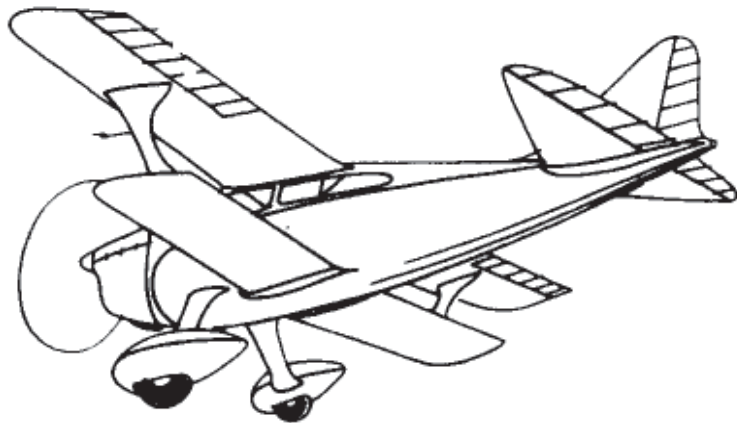
Rejoining the group, I lead with a GOTO route on my GPS back to Toyota, finding on the way a beautiful little 50' pit with a cairn beside it - we are not the first ones to find this pit, but when was the cairn built? Last month? Twenty-five years ago?

The afternoon sun is sinking past the plateau rim, so we ascend toward the parking place. As Tom and I approach the wall of the sandstone cap I find a hole under a huge boulder

collapsed from above. Tom waits above while I investigate the hole; it goes into a small cave, all sandstone, with a second entrance at the other end of the boulder. It is a qualifier, totally unexpected at this elevation.

We make the parking place just before dark. The white truck we parked next to is gone, but I find a card on my windshield: it is from Jim Smith of the DCG. We relax a while, then I shuttle everybody to the Walls of Jericho parking place, and we agree to meet for dinner at the No. 1 China Buffet in Scottsboro. In fact, only Tom and I end up eating there, but we have an excellent dinner. This is a very good buffet, I recommend it.

Postscript: The next morning I call Jim Schrenkel, to find out he is no longer working as Skyline Wildlife Management Area Biologist, he's in Decatur now and the new Skyline biologist is Frank Allen. Nevertheless, I tell Jim about the deer in the pit, and he says he will let Frank A. know about it. He also tells me a bit about the plane crash, and later I learn still more about it by Googling the plane's registration number, which brings me an NTSB report on the accident. I find the cold, officialese report against the fact of seeing the actual remains lying there on a lovely karst hillside quite moving, and try to express this in a poem, which can be found elsewhere in this Newsletter.



THE LAST FLIGHT OF N5552F

Dave Howell

The night is dark and evil
The fog's a pearly shroud
Ceiling's low
Gauges glow
The engine drone is loud

But in the Piper's cockpit
It's snug and safe and warm
Gauges' light
Defies the night
Won't come to any harm

Crackling in the headset
A voice that's full of dread
The weather's bad
Turn back, my lad
It's IFR ahead

Chattanooga's socked right in
Conditions getting worse
You can't land there
You wouldn't dare
The runway is immersed

Go back to where you came from
Or land that plane right now
You can't go on
Daylight's gone
In dark you won't know how

The pilot is a brash young man
He handles Piper well
He's flown his plane
Through fog and rain
Can fly through pure hell

No, I'm going to fly on
Penetrate the night
Closer to town
I'll put her down
And end this rainy flight

The ceiling's getting lower
Can't see a light below
Better turn
And try to learn
Which way is best to go

Treetops come from nowhere
Throttle full ahead!
But branches stop
The spinning prop
The engine now is dead

The rainy night turns violent
The forest brings her down
From tree to tree
Trailing debris
She crashes to the ground

The woods are quiet now except
For gentle sounds of rain
No one to hear
No one is near
The pilot's beyond pain

And now the rain has
turned to sun
The leaves are emerald lace
Summer comes and winter goes
The Piper lies in still repose
Her final resting place

Icy January Campout

Sharon Faulkner

Our January 29, 2005, Grotto campout on Scottsboro Mountain turned into a true TAG Women are Tough weekend with the cold, icy weather being no deterrent to a handful of grotto ladies. Though the roads were free of ice, Casey and I arrived on the mountain Saturday morning to find the trees coated with a thin sheet of ice. The cedar and pine trees were especially pretty with the ice sparkling on the greenery. After putting up a tarp, we began gathering wood for a campfire. All the wood was covered in ice and it was still drizzling rain off and on, which made for chilly working conditions. In the early afternoon we took a lunch break and went to Mickey D's for some hot food. Soon after arriving back on the mountain, and not sure how long it would take to get a good fire going with the wet wood, we started the campfire. Leigh Dudrow and Lynn Martin joined us on the mountain shortly afterward and between all of us, we amassed an ample supply of wood for the night's fire. The drizzle tapered off by early evening, though huge drops of water fell throughout the night as the ice melted off tree branches. With plenty of food and snacks we had an enjoyable night of talking and relaxing by the fire. We ended our outing after coffee and bagels late Sunday morning. We were prepared for a cold night of camping and survived Mother Nature's winter weather event intact. TAG Women rule!



*Leigh and Lynn enjoying a warm cup of coffee at the January Campout.
(Sharon Faulkner)*



How Being a Caver Helps in Building a House

Martha Mills

In the February issue of the BGN Dave Howell mentioned the progress on the building of our house. Things aren't exactly as he reported but his comments got me thinking about the adventures we have experienced up to this point building our house. Many times in the last several months I have commented how my caving adventures in the past had prepared me for this endeavor . . . so I decided to put together this article.

Let me start with a bit of history. In March of 2004, Glenn and I purchased a piece of property in the heart of Tennessee Cave Country. We started planning to build a house. During the late spring and summer we began preparing to build.

The first order of business was to get utilities. We decided on underground power because we would have to cut less trees than if we had an above ground power pole. We had the guy who put in our septic tank dig us a trench for the power line. Once we had placed our conduit in the trench and had the inspection, we had to fill in the trench. The trench flooded with water and we tried to pump it out so we could move the dirt back into the trench. The conduit had to be buried before the electric company would pull the cable. We pumped it out to a point but the ground was so saturated the water would run back in through the sides when we reached the six-inch point. I finally put on my caving clothes and muck boots and stood on the conduit in the trench while Glenn pushed dirt in with a neighbor's tractor. We got it covered enough to get the power on, but continued wet weather made leveling it difficult. It was too mushy for the tractor and the dirt that had been dug out was very gooey and did not respond well to shovels. To solve the problem we rented a "Bobcat" thinking that it was lighter than the tractor so it should work better. Unfortunately, the ground was so wet we got it stuck - totally! It was buried

up to the rear axle. What could we do?

We did what any good cavers would do . . . we picked our oldest piece of rope and decided to retire it. It would become a tow rope. After rigging a pulley to a tree and attaching a huge chain to the "Bobcat" we tied the rope to the 4x4 Dodge Ram and pulled that "Bobcat" right out of the



mud hole. Score one for the cavers!

Next we dug footers and square holes to pour pads to support the pillars that would support our house. The rains came and we re-dug the footers. We put rebar in the trenches (as required by local building codes) and called for inspection. Before the inspector could come out we had torrential rains that buried our rebar under a layer of mud and filed in our 18-inch by 18-inch p i l l a r s u p p o r t holes. While Glenn dug out the trenches I got the job to dig out the holes. Trying to get the mud out with a big shovel kept causing the sides to collapse so I

ended up on my knees wearing my caving knee pads while hand digging the holes . . . kinda like digging a lead in a cave. I have to wonder if a non-caver would have resorted to such a technique.

Finally we got the concrete poured but by then we had learned of some problems with the house we were trying to sell in Birmingham and ended up diverting our efforts to make repairs there - then came work weekends for the TAG Fall Cave-In and then the actual Cave-In and then the BOG meeting in Birmingham. In early November, Glenn and I started laying blocks. We pretty much did that on our own with some help from caver Jim Hall from Huntsville who came up to work with us to learn how to lay blocks. Mostly I mixed the mortar and carried blocks while Glenn laid them. Mixing mortar uses muscles you don't usually use in caving but it helped strengthen my arms.

Once we were done with the blocks it was time to order lumber. Glenn and I decided that we needed to have help for the framing. Fortunately for us, caver Chuck Constable had just moved to the neighborhood and was unemployed. We talked to him and offered him a job to work with us to frame the house. Three cavers framing a house has produced some interesting situations. We have done some things a conventional builder probably would



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not have done. Some of the ideas worked and others didn't.

One notoriously bad idea was trying to erect a 40-foot long wall using caving rope tied to the Dodge. After pulling the wall apart a couple of times and finally completely off the foundation, we gave up that idea and put the wall up in smaller sections. The idea might have worked if the wall hadn't had so many window and door headers making it top heavy. OK, so that is one instance of where caving rope wasn't a good idea.

We did have a good idea for using the caving rope when we were lifting the trusses for the garage into place. Due to the span of 24 feet we had trusses manufactured. It seemed like a good idea until we had to figure out how to lift them onto the structure. Some creative ramps made from lumber and some caving rope and pulleys allowed the three of us to lift 22 of these trusses approximately 10 feet off the ground and into place to form our roof rafters.

Glenn rigged a rope when we were putting the roof on the garage to use as a "safety line" but it proved to be more trouble than it was worth so he and Chuck developed other methods of working on the roof. Due to my dislike of heights I've stayed off the roof except for running things up and down the ladder.

Working in the crawlspace, kneepads and my backup LED headlamp have come in very handy. Climbing on scaffolds and joists and rafters is similar to many climbing moves made in caving. However, I will say that rock seems a bit more solid than the wood.

We haven't done a lot of caving recently as I have to catch up on grocery shopping, haul off trash and visit the Laundromat on weekends, but we have gotten in a few trips since there are caves within a mile of the house. Our mission this winter has been to get "dried in" and we have finally arrived. Now that we have reached that goal, we hope to be a bit less pressured about building and ready to play more.

We started our playing this past weekend (February 19 and 20) when we went to Limrock Blowing Cave with Larry & Jan Brown and Daniel Briedis. The highlight of that trip was when Larry was taking some pictures

of a waterfall and a cave dwelling muskrat tried to climb up Daniel's leg. On Sunday, Judy Ranelli dropped by because we'd made plans to go to a nearby pit for her to get in a little rope practice. Unfortunately it was raining pretty hard and the pit would not have been pleasant.

Since we were resourceful cavers we decided to be creative. Since I'd started writing this article about how building used caving skills we decided to use the house for vertical practice. Glenn rigged a rope from our ceiling joists (using some extra lumber to distribute the weight on several joists) and got in a little vertical practice in our foyer. The foyer ceiling is approximately 18 feet high. Our rig point simulated getting on and off rope

from a ledge (like a lot of bolt rigs in TAG). Judy learned how to get on and off rope on a ledge and learned what happens when you climb too high. After some interesting moments we decided to spend some extra time with her practicing her downclimbing. We also practiced changeovers. Our neighbor Gordon Rosser also came over and participated in our vertical practice session.

Several other grotto members have visited us and we welcome anyone who wants to drop by. Just e-mail or call us for directions and to make sure we will be here. If you want to cave in the area we will even let you pitch a tent in our yard. Once the house is done we will even have "caver crash space" available on the floor.



Reminder!!!
*The Deadline for submissions
for the SERA Guidebook is
March 7th! Please get all
submissions to Dave Howell as
soon as possible.*

Another Good Trip to the "Big Boy"

Hazard Bryant

The crew came together at the "Blue Hole" on a soggy Friday night. The fire was warm and the company was good, by midnight the campground was full. Allen, Rob, Joe and Danielle, Steve, Scott, Howdy, Dave, Timmy, Allen, Chuck, Ryan, Jeff, Ben and Kim, Lisa and Hazard made up the group that cavorted about in the rain. We partied late into the night and awoke to a drier morning.

Chuck and the rigging crew left in the first party, these guys get a big hand for the work done. About an hour later the "I'm gonna do it" group left, then the "Hazard and the stragglers" group pulled out thirty minutes later.

Arriving at the entrance we counted Allen, Rob, Joe and Danielle, Lisa, and myself going in. We had big Scott from Sylacauga in tow but he opted for a stroll on what was by then a glorious day. Allen, Rob, Joe, and Danielle disappeared down the drippy entrance climb of about six feet with Lisa and Haz not far behind. We caught up at the end of the long creek walk, which I like because you don't have to duck or crawl. At the "Warm Up Drop", the necks, as we sometimes call

them, were rigged in and backing over the lip.

Lisa and I had a nice ride down the "Warm Up Drop", and caught up with Joe and Danielle standing at the bottom of a treacherous climb. I said no way and circled around to the right and found a much easier route up and over the breakdown to the bridge over the "Rectum." This place is one slippery, muddy, exposed path, and the hand-line was on the other side, of course. The hand-line led straight up to the "Elevator", a 30 foot climb on a pre-rigged rope, which, by the way, looked well used and abused as it lay on muddy rock near the top of "Fantastic Pit." We scrambled over the top of some chock rocks and did the narrow belly-crawl ledge over the top of the pit and, presto, we joined our friends on the launching pad for "Fantastic." Lisa and I had an agenda to keep but we saw Dave and Timmy do their first slide down this classic 586 foot pit.

We left the Attic shortly and headed for another spot called "The Balcony." It is back down the "Elevator", but this time we went down through the "Rectum", which is properly named. A short walk to the

"Nuisance Drop", about 15 feet of muddy rope, and you're standing in the creek that soon will plummet to the depth of the pit. Following the creek led us to the water falls, a very very tight crawl along the edge of "Fantastic." From the Balcony you can hear the falls dull sound as it is torn into thousands of droplets by the wind, which sometimes swirls in gusts.

We had hoped to catch Allen and Rob but they had already begun their first descent of the pit, but, as luck would have it Danielle came sliding by as the rope rigged in the Attic passed close to the Balcony. We wished her well and with a smile and moan she was gone.

Chuck climbed onto the Balcony a few minutes later, hot and blowing, seems he did the climb non-stop, respectable.

In hopes of catching some of the day Lisa and I started our exit. The shadow of Pigeon Mountain had fallen and we could see it run across the valley as we descended toward camp.

Later there would be feasting and merriment, but there deep in the woods at dusk, tired but happy, I realized just how lucky I was and how good life is.



THE 2005 SERA Cave Carnival is just around the corner. Please get involved and help The Birmingham Grotto make this a spectacular Caving Event!



Contact Joel McGuire or Scott Fee to find out how *you* can help.

Pigeon Mountain Grotto Takes Us Caving in Georgia
-or-
How Did You Get So Muddy in a Walking Cave?

Jimmy Sims

Note: The following article was submitted for publication by Jimmy Sims concerning a trip made by the Birmingham Grotto on November 18, 1995

CASE CAVERN, GA GSS#1

PIGEON MOUNTAIN GROTTA
Rufus, Lisa and Jacob Mulinix,
Tony Guisasola, wife and daughter

BIRMINGHAM GROTTA
Andy Zerbe, Frank Case, Albert
(Bubba) Geyer, Lora Harrison Geyer,
Martha Hendrix Mills, Reed Hilton,
Peter Michaud, Terry Ragon, Jimmy
Sims, and Jason Walls

Several years ago Andy called and wrote the state of Georgia to arrange a visit to Case Cave. Trips were occasionally permitted for specific scientific study he was told. Since cave photography is not exactly a science but a lot of luck and a little art, we didn't feel we should try to pass ourselves off as scientist this time and dropped the idea of the trip. Now about this time the Pigeon Mountain Grotto was negotiating with the state to help relieve them of liability and manage access to the cave. Thirty years ago after a falling death at the entrance the stated gated the cave. Rufus Mulinix of Pine Mountain Grotto helped write a management guideline that was accepted by the state and the keys were passed to the Pigeon Mountain Grotto. Andy recently talked with Rufus and he graciously offered to lead a trip for us.

The long-awaited Saturday morning finally came and nice of us met at the Trussville K-mart parking lot to carpool. We sped up I-59 for a rendezvous with Jason at the Ashville, Al exit and an 11:00 a.m. rendezvous with Rufus and Pine Mountain at the Trenton, GA exit. They were waiting for us when we pulled in at each meeting place. After hamburger lunches to go in Trenton, we followed the six Pigeon Mountain cavers to the state parking area for Case and Sitton caves. If we had pulled in and gone a few extra feet before stopping our vehicles in their parking spaces, our

bumpers would have been trespassing but we didn't. Although the state owns the ridge and parking area, it adjoins a full blown subdivision! Ah, progress...

A Birmingham Grotto tradition was upheld when Martha Hendrix Mills, Terry Ragon and Jason Walls followed Pigeon Mountain Grotto members into the entrance at 11:58 a.m. C.S.T., grotto time. Once again a grotto trip had succeeded in actually entering a cave before 12:00 noon. When I mentioned this the group kindly reminded me that it was really 12:58 p.m. E.S.T. here in Georgia (Entrance Standard Time). Another example of me not keeping my mouth shut. Besides, most of us were still outside the cave waiting our turn to climb down the 40' metal entrance ladder.

Rufus assembled us at the bottom and pointed out some interesting fossils on the wall. He reminded us that Tony would be bringing up the rear to answer any questions, help with any equipment, or stay back if any of us needed to slow the pace. "Hey Tony, can you carry my pack?" I blurted out, unable to go more than seven minutes without talking. "I can see this is a fun group and we're going to have a good time," Rufus answered and he and Jacob took off down the large canyon passage. Numerous coral and maybe a shark's tooth adorned the walls. At the Crossroads, we temporarily passed up the route to the biggest rooms in the cave, the Moon Room and the Big Mud Room, our later destinations. Rufus led us down the southwest passage to more fossils and a canyon grotto before tuning around. Frank, in geologic heaven, slowed the pace to give us a geology oratory. Halfway back Rufus took us on a narrow canyon loop route that soon rejoined our earlier route at the Crossroads. Our host was making sure we saw as much cave as we could.

At the Crossroads we climbed down a short distance and popped out at the edge of a huge room. The Moon Room is quite impressive so here we paused for snacks and photos. While the group ate and talked, Reed and I rushed over to the far wall to set up our cameras for a Kodak moment. His monster flash lit up the area so we spread out and piggybacked off each others flashes a few times. When the group was ready, they took off next door to the even bigger Big Mud Room, leaving the photographers in their dust (really mud, not dust). We packed up and soon caught sight of the others for more photos of vastness and their specks of light in the distance. Near the south end of the room, overlooking green lakes from big mud banks, Rufus sat down and said, "This is usually where I let those that want to, go on ahead on their own and wait for them to return. From here it stays big for a while but gets so muddy that it's not long before they come back".

The hardier Birmingham Grotto members of the newly formed Mudpuppy Section pushed on while the two photographers, ever slowing the paced, instead pulled the cameras out of the packs one mo' time to flash the colorful lake at the bottom of the mud bank. When the hog wallowers returned one un-named Birmingham Grotto member slipped in the goo near the top of the bank and slid almost all the way into the lake! Since it was all soft mud rather than rocks, it provided us with another big laugh on a fun trip. He mumbled something about this mud being more slippery than cave mud in Rhode Island. The unusual thing about the floor in the Big Mud Room and the Mood Room was that all the rocks were covered with mud due to occasional flooding in the rooms. It was almost unbelievable that most of the entire fool in rooms that size could be covered with water... Also unique

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mud stalagmites dotted the floor for the same reason.

We began the return trip at 3:30 p.m. via the direct Rufus route this time, exiting an hour later at 4:30 p.m. Entrance Standard Time. As I brought up the rear and began the 40' ladder climb at the entrance, brother Zerbe decided to help Rufus and Tony by closing the iron and steel gate behind him so all they would have to do is snap the padlock shut. With a grin and in a bellowing voice that he knew I could hear he told the group, "You can go ahead and lock it now everyone's out of the cave now". Yet

another big laugh to end a fine, memorable trip to this 3+ mile cave, thanks to our new friends of the Pigeon Mountain Grotto.

After thanking our hosts and promising to return the favor someday, we said farewell at the parking area and drove to town for a quick supper. From there it was on to Sequoyah Caverns Campground for the night and a warm campfire. Later that evening David Allsup joined us after attending friends wedding that afternoon where he was the designated bar tender. He certainly was at the right place tonight. The next morning after Jason,

Peter, Bubba and Lora's community breakfast and Martha's community coffee, we headed north to Georgia again. Since none of us had ever been, our destination was Hurricane Cave. We had narrowly missed Andy taking us back to Pettijohn's to show us the muddiest cave in the world. Coincidentally, we actually entered the drain pipe leading under I- 59 to the cave before 8:30 a.m. P.S.T. Pipe Standard Time, 9:30 a.m. Mountain time, 10:30 a.m. Grotto time, or 11:30 a.m. Entrance time, before noon, but that's another sea story and trip report.

SCCi Announces Expansion of Fox Mountain Cave Preserve

79 acre purchase brings total to 453 acres

January 28, 2005
Rising Fawn, Georgia.

The Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (SCCi) has completed the purchase of 79 acres adjoining its Fox Mountain Cave Preserve, located in Dade County, Georgia. The purchase price and closing costs totaled \$28,500 and were covered in part by a 3-year owner-financed mortgage. The addition is located in the northeast corner of the preserve and is bordered on two sides by the SCCi's current holdings, on one side by Interstate 59, and on the fourth side by a private landowner.

The acquisition process began several years ago and involved an extensive title search. While the property does not contain any known cave entrances, the Conservancy's board recognized the opportunity to buffer the existing caves on the property against future development in the area and to further protect the underlying cave systems. SCCi Director and Acquisitions Committee member Mark Wolinsky coordinated the conservancy's efforts and brought the deal to completion. The Fox Mountain Cave Preserve is open to visitation by cavers and hikers. The preserve management plan is available on the SCCi web site at www.scci.org/preserves/foxmountain.

If you would like to help pay off the mortgage, you can do so by making a donation to the Fox Mountain Preserve Fund or by "buying" a piece

of the Preserve or one of its caves: Cemetery Pit, Rusty's Cave, or Hurricane Cave. The SCCi is a 501(c)3 non-profit tax-exempt organization, and contributions are tax-deductible in accordance with IRS rules for charitable donations.

Donations for the Fox Mountain preserve or its caves are recognized with a Fox Mountain Cave Preserve T-shirt and a certificate of honorary ownership. Other similar programs are available to pay off the loans on Valhalla, Limrock, and Snail Shell Caves. A donation to any of these programs helps reduce the SCCi's debt load, allowing the conservancy to buy more caves. More information on current SCCi donation programs is available on the SCCi web site at www.scci.org/merchandise.html.

If you haven't already done so,

please consider joining the SCCi as a Sustaining Member and helping to buy the caves we all love and enjoy. For as little as \$10 a month you can be a cave owner. Monthly contributions from Sustaining Members provide a steady source of income used to make the mortgage payments on SCCi cave preserves. For more information, see our web page at www.scci.org/sustaining.html or contact Sustaining Membership manager Bill Stringfellow at sustaining@scci.org. Regular memberships are also available for \$15 per year.

Bill Putnam,
Director and
Acquisitions Chairman
Southeastern Cave Conservancy,
Inc., putnam@scci.org,
678-371-4517



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Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes

February 3, 2005

Steve Sills opened the meeting and the January Minutes were approved as written.

VISITORS:

Adam Champion, Amy Strickland, William Lockridge and Steve Karr.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Gary Barnes reported we currently have \$2,127.35 in our checking account and approximately \$4,000.00 in conservation CD's. We donated \$162.00 for the Great X preserve.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Steve asked for people to bring auction items to the Guntersville Getaway.

Scott Fee announced that Clyde Zimmerman is driving down to the Guntersville Getaway and is bringing a dark beer in exchange for his \$10.00 cover charge. Steve will bring 2 kegs consisting of a light beer and a regular beer.

Articles are needed for the newsletter.

Leigh still has some Grotto patches and T-Shirts for sale.

Marty suggested donating a Grotto patch for the Grotto archives.

Jeannie announced that Sharon Faulkner is leading a grotto trip Saturday, February 19th to Stephens's Gap and Pipeside pit and camping at Scottsboro Mountain Saturday evening.

David McRae reminded everyone that we need to move the Sinking Cove trip because of the NSS Convention conflict.

Steve announced that he would contact Buddy Lane to move the July 4th Sinking Cove camp out to sometime in August.

Sharon discussed that Mike McEachern and Al Hess would be showing a 3-D Fest in Atlanta Saturday, February 12 at the Holiday Inn in Decatur, GA. Mike will show slides on the Romanian adventure, a trade fair and workshops showing how to mount 3-D pictures. The admission will be \$5.00.

Leigh announced a 1978 bus for sale converted to a camping vehicle.

It's currently being stored at the Guntersville Park. The price is \$4000.00.

Jimmy Sims announced that Case Cave and Sitton's Cave is closed. Alan Padgett was in charge of Anderson Springs Cave and stated the road is in poor condition. The cave is accessible but the road is impassible; park and walk in. The State of Georgia gated the cave for 30 years due to a death.

Andy Zerbe wrote a letter to get access to the cave because our grotto had never been there. Pigeon Mountain Grotto informed Alan that we might get the approval to lead a trip there during our upcoming SERA 2005.

OLD BUSINESS:

The July meeting has been changed and the October meeting has been changed.

Dave Howell is starting to get submissions for the SERA guidebook. He has received some pictures and asked for more. March 7 is the deadline for the guidebook before it goes to the press.

Joel announced that we are getting a hot tub for SERA. We need some volunteers to help set it up and take it down.

Larry Mullins discussed people will be needed for monitor duty and will work in shifts.

Mike McEachern will donate 200 pair of 3-D glasses for the slide show presentation.

Joel is asking for donations for SERA. He suggested that Kitty and Jeannie need to get together to work on a volunteer staff position list. Leigh will handle scheduling of registration.

Marty Dudrow will handle the SERA fireworks. Class B fireworks have been donated to shoot at SERA.

Leigh discussed that 21 people have pre-registered and she has collected \$1000.00 so far plus has sold some banquet tickets.

NEW BUSINESS:

Leigh and Joel made a motion that we need to give Terry Ragon free Grotto membership in exchange for working on our grotto website. Motion passed.

Scott Fee brought the 2001 Speleodigest for the library. A Motion passed to buy the book.

Judy Ranelli discussed McBride's Rescue film.

Dave Caudle asked for people to donate a CD of their pictures to the grotto library for viewing at future times.

Scott Fee stated that the NSS would send a link to a survey to all who have emails. They need people to participate.

Jimmy Sims read an article from Senator Richard Shelby on the Audubon Society.

TRIP REPORTS:

None.

PRESENTATION:

Scott Parvin showed slides of Crump and Horseshoe Caves in Blount County.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeannie Cates, Secretary



News and Notes

Dave Howell

*** As I write these words I am just back from a late afternoon walk on an unseasonably warm late February day, as the sun has at last come out and this morning's rain is now sunlit cloud mountains to the east. In my walk I left bare footprints in the mud. Will paleontologists of the distant future find my footprints immortalized in the fossil record? What scientific conclusions, accurate or specious, will they draw from these, amid the inevitable plethora of Nike, Reebok, New Balance, and the rare and coveted Converse All-Star prints? The imagination runs wild.

*** Your *Quikbreak News* reporting. In a recent flash, JIM SCHRENKEL is no longer Management Area Biologist at the Skyline. Jim is still with the State Department of Fish and Wildlife, but is now working out of an office in Decatur, and the Skyline Biologist is now FRANK ALLEN. Haven't talked with Frank as of this writing, but hope to meet him soon and introduce him to the Birmingham-and-points-north portion of the caving community.

*** Speaking of an issue related to the Skyline area, you may already have heard of the threat to Alabama's FOREVER WILD program, but if not, here it is: It seems there is a bill before the State Legislature, SB255, that would, if passed, take one third of the FW acquisition program funding and place it in the general fund. (This funding comes from the interest from the Alabama Oil and Gas Trust Fund, and was allocated to FW by an amendment to the state constitution passed in the early 1990s.) Forever Wild has already helped the caving community in major ways; the recent opening of the Walls of Jericho to the public for the first

time in decades and the "incidental" addition of hundreds of acres to the Skyline Wildlife Management Area opened these lands to cavers for the first time in at least 20 years, and this is not the only FW project that has yielded benefits for caves and cavers. But the good news is, this funding cut is not a done deal, y'all. Yet. Please help Forever Wild keep its proper funding and continue fulfilling its mission. Contact your State Senator and Representative by letter, email, or phone, and tell them in your own words why you think it is important to keep Forever Wild fully funded. Let them know you feel strongly about this issue, and that they way they vote on this bill will influence how you vote in the next election. If you don't know who your elected senators and representatives are, go to www.legislature.state.al.us/index.html to find out. Time is important — do this now, y'all! Don't put it off. If Forever Wild's funding is cut, it will hurt us all.

*** Here is a tale of generosity. I understand that not long ago MILO helped JIMMY move his post-move stuff out of storage, with the only payment Jimmy's donation of one third of his stuff that he had in storage to the Grotto Auction. Thanks, Jimmy and Milo! A tip of the Grotto helmet to you both! (It is fairly surreal that I am writing this well before the auction and you are reading it after. I keep wanting to urge you to come to the Guntersville Getaway and bid at the auction, but I guess as you read this these things are among our more distant plans, the next Getaway coming in February 2006.)

*** Just got the news today of HUNTER S. THOMPSON's untimely demise. Although Thompson was not a caver (as far as I know), his writings and his overall attitude

toward life, I always thought, were quite apropos to the caving community and its long-standing tendency to place a high value on the qualities of independence and individuality. Thompson came to Birmingham in the late 1980s as one of the speakers in the UAB Guest Lecturer series, and Valerie and I went to see him. He was 24 hours late, to begin with (I understand UAB docked his fee \$2000 for that), but when he did finally arrive, his talk was fascinating in a rambling, semicoherent way. We all have days like that, but Hunter Thompson made this into a journalistic signature and a lifestyle. Farewell to a soul brother and an interesting and unique man. May you ride to the next plane of reality in a red convertible with a carton of Dunhills in the glove box and a bottle of ether between your knees.

*** This column has already discussed caves as places of pagan worship and fertility rites, but consider the Labyrinth. The word "labyrinth" comes from the Greek *labrys*, the double-headed ceremonial ax used to sacrifice bulls to the Cretan Moon Goddess. The classic labyrinth was beneath the palace of Minos, the Moon King, whose Minotaur, a creature part man and part bull, roamed the passages and galleries. A labyrinth represented a journey into the underworld and out again - sounds like a typical cave trip, doesn't it? The labyrinth's path was traditionally 666 feet long, Aphrodite's sacred number, and a number having a certain significance in the Christian religion as well. Although pagan in origin, the labyrinthine design can be seen in a number of Christian churches, such as Chartres Cathedral, which has a labyrinth with the 6-lobed device of Aphrodite at its center. See how caves, or symbols of caves, pervade even modernday sacred places?

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