

# BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER



OCTOBER 2005: VOLUME 35, NUMBER 10

# BGN CALENDAR

Oct 6- Oct 9	The 28th Annual TAG Fall Cave-In will be held atop Lookout Mountain, Georgia.
Oct 29	Annual Halloween Party at Alabama Caverns starting at 7:00 pm. (But you can arrive earlier if you like.) Camping is permitted. Contact Scott Fee with questions - 205-856-9177.
Nov 3	Grotto Meeting at Southside Library starts at 7:00 pm.
Nov 5- Nov 6	Mammoth Cave Restoration Camp - Mammoth Cave National Park. For more information visit the website: <a href="http://mcnprestoration.com/rfc.html">http://mcnprestoration.com/rfc.html</a>
Nov 17	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
Dec 1	Grotto Meeting at Southside Library starts at 7:00 pm.
Dec 10	Learn about Ruffner Mountain's role in the Bham industrial history as you visit the remnants of our iron ore mining past. Strenuous hike, bring lunch, sturdy shoes, & water. \$10 if you are a member or \$15 for non members. The hike leaves the Ruffner Mtn nature center at 9:00 am sharp.
Dec 15	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
Jan 5	Grotto Meeting starting at 7:00 pm.
Jan 19	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.

The *Birmingham Grotto Newsletter* is published twelve times a year by the Birmingham Grotto, Inc. of the National Speleological Society, Inc. Other NSS Internal Organizations may reprint material provided credit is given to this publication and the author.

Annual dues are \$15.00 per individual and \$20.00 per family which is payable on October 1st. Dues are prorated for anyone joining during the year. The subscription rate is \$15.00 per year. The Birmingham Grotto will exchange publications with other NSS Grottos. Exchange newsletters should be sent to:

Birmingham Grotto  
PO Box 55102  
Birmingham, AL 35255

Articles, Trip Reports, Graphics, Poetry, and any other speleo-related material should be sent to the Editor via email at the address noted below. Naturally, the Editor will accept typed text in practically any form; however, electronic submission reduces the risk of typographical errors. Submissions via e-mail should be directed to: [scott@scottparvin.com](mailto: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.



*Judy Ranelli during her first carbide caving trip.  
(Submitted by Judy Ranelli)*

*Judy Ranelli at the  
2005 NSS Convention.  
(Joel McGuire)*

**Birmingham On-Line!**  
**Check out our web site:**  
**[www.bhamgrotto.org](http://www.bhamgrotto.org)**

## On the cover...

2005 NSS Convention Montage

Photographers: Lisa Benecibi, Sharon Faulkner, Scott Fee, Jeff Harrod, Joel McGuire, Judy Ranelli

## 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.

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**Adventure with Tom Champion on Flint River**

Bobby Dodson

I will always treasure the memory of my good friend Tom Champion. Never will I forget our great adventure on Flint River just east of Huntsville just before the turn of the millennia.

Back in 1999, while many sat at home in fear of Y2K, Tom Champion, Bubba and Lora Geyer, Eric Howell, Ben Co-field and myself began our long adventure down Flint River. I had actually planned a shorter trip, but was led astray by Bubba to make an even longer sojourn on this beautiful river.

We put in at a canoe rental business near Blow Gourd, Alabama. This added about twelve miles to our already planned seventeen mile trip. At the put-in, Bubba and I noticed that Tom's vessel was not a canoe, but rather a "catamaran" type inflatable (used for fly-fishing in moving water I believe).

We though about suggesting the "rent a canoe" option to Tom, but he was so confident in his vessel that we didn't. So off we paddled with best hopes. The weather was great, not a cloud in the sky. The scenery was nice till we came upon a housing development, complete with golf courses. A far cry from the limestone terrain for which I was searching.

This part of our trip, the twelve miles added on by Bubba, wasn't the part he intended, it was still even further upstream through "canyon" like scenery. Nevertheless, we all were having a great time and soon after the golf course we found a great campsite, set camp, and began cooking out. Tom was always skilled when it came to the grill, especially his famous grilled briskets. We ate like kings to say the least.

The next morning we all broke camp fairly early, knowing we had a long way to make for the take out, almost twenty miles through "unchartered" waters. We all had noticed how slow Tom's "catamaran" was the previous day, but this day it would be really slow.

The scenery along the river gradu-

ally changed from flat fields and marshes to more rocky, limestone terrain. Just what I was searching for appeared around the next bend. A high mountainous bluff towered above in the distance. This limestone cliff must be over 400 feet high, an almost sheer drop cliff known as the Sublett Bluff. As we neared the cliff, Tom and I noticed a large cave entrance, turning out to be Sublett Bluff Cave. We all hit the shore and made our way into the cave. Tom and Lora took many digital photos of this cave and Lora even found an awesome mortar stone. I soon exited the known cave and began exploring the area for something new.

Not far from the large entrance to Sublett Bluff Cave, I noticed a sink-hole. After consulting Bill Torode's map of the known cave, I determined that the sink was shown on his map as (no cave). Well, he must have mapped it while this sink was flooded, because I climbed down into the sink about 15 feet into a nice chamber overlooking a deep, crystal clear "underground lake/river." I could clearly see swimming passage going deeper into the bluff as well. I alerted the others who all came down and took a look at the newly discovered cave I named **Cave of the Midnight Sea**.

While everyone else was eating lunch, I scoured the mountainside for more new cave, none found I returned back to the Bluff. We now were very pressed on time and paddled feverishly toward our take out still many miles away. Bubba and Lora eventually "disappeared" for the remainder of the trip. Soon around the next bend, we saw one of the largest log-jam areas I have ever seen. Ben and I then set about dismantling Tom's slow moving "catamaran".

...continued in the November  
*Birmingham Grotto Newsletter*

## Not Caving, But Close to It Martha Mills

Labor Day Weekend Glenn and I joined up with fifteen cavers from Georgia to paddle the Etowah River near Dahlonega, Georgia.

This stretch of the river contains a unique opportunity to paddle through a quarter mile tunnel. This tunnel was built by gold miners who blasted through the mountain to divert the water from a deep bend in the main river. Why, you ask? So they could search for gold in the now less deep water.

This was the second time Glenn and I paddled the stretch, but it was a first for some on the trip. The tunnel has a couple of drops in total darkness. Due to the darkness it is hard to say how much drop. I'd estimated both are over twelve inches. The second drop is complicated by the fact that the tunnel has a "slight turn" just after the drop. Most people slam into the wall. The paddling through the tunnel is further complicated by the fact that the tunnel is very narrow so you can't really paddle your boat. We wore headlamps but it is really hard to see because the walls absorb the light and you are moving so rapidly with the current.

*The Staff of the  
Birmingham Grotto  
Newsletter Needs YOUR  
help...*

*Please consider taking the time  
to contribute to the pages of the  
Birmingham Grotto Newsletter.  
Trip Reports, articles, fictional  
stories, poems, songs, pictures,  
and artwork all make  
great content.*

*Please send all submissions to the editor  
at [scott@scottparvin.com](mailto:scott@scottparvin.com).*

The exit from the tunnel is a solid class II rapid. Glenn says it may be a class III. I don't know for sure but it sure does "shoot you out" of the tunnel. There is a small pool at the exit so when you come out of the tunnel you have to begin applying the brakes or you will slam the bank or your friends' boats.

The rules for doing the tunnel are before entering the tunnel someone must get out of their boat and walk up to the tunnel entrance. You must be able to clearly see light at the other end or the water is too high to safely paddle the tunnel. The first cavers from our group who did this trip several years ago misunderstood the in-

structions and on their first visit scared themselves pretty badly. Their error was that with their caver mentality they dipped their ear into the water and could barely see a spot of light at the other end. This is not what the instructions mean.

Any grotto paddlers who are interested in doing this trip in the future let me know and I'll tell you when we are going again. Or we can even set up our own trip. Water levels are critical. I'd say this year we did it at the absolute minimum that would make for a pleasant trip. The shoals before and after the tunnel would be a "drag" if you had less water.



*Darien and Pam Dopp of Dogwood City Grotto exiting the tunnel with their dog Fina.  
Brad Long is giving them directions.  
(Martha Mills)*

## Byers Cave

Lin Guy

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

Trip Participants:

Will Chamberlin

Rick Buice

Stefan Eady

Lin Guy

The SCCi had recently worked out a lease agreement with the new owner of Byers Cave, reopening it after two decades or more of being closed to cavers. During all this time the idiots who should never be allowed into caves, armed with spray cans, continued to visit Byers, destroying much of its remaining beauty and trashing it in the process. Will left his home in Watkinsville, Georgia, at 5 a.m. and traveled to Armuchee to pick up Rick and Stefan, who first had to get his teeth cleaned. They arrived around 10:45 a.m. and proceeded to the cavers' parking spot on the north side of Sue's gas station on U.S. 11. The official parking area, which is part of a gravel driveway to a cell tower, has been designated as the spot to depart on foot for Cemetery Pit, Rusty's Cave, Hurricane Cave, and now Byers Cave. It's a long walk from there to Byers.

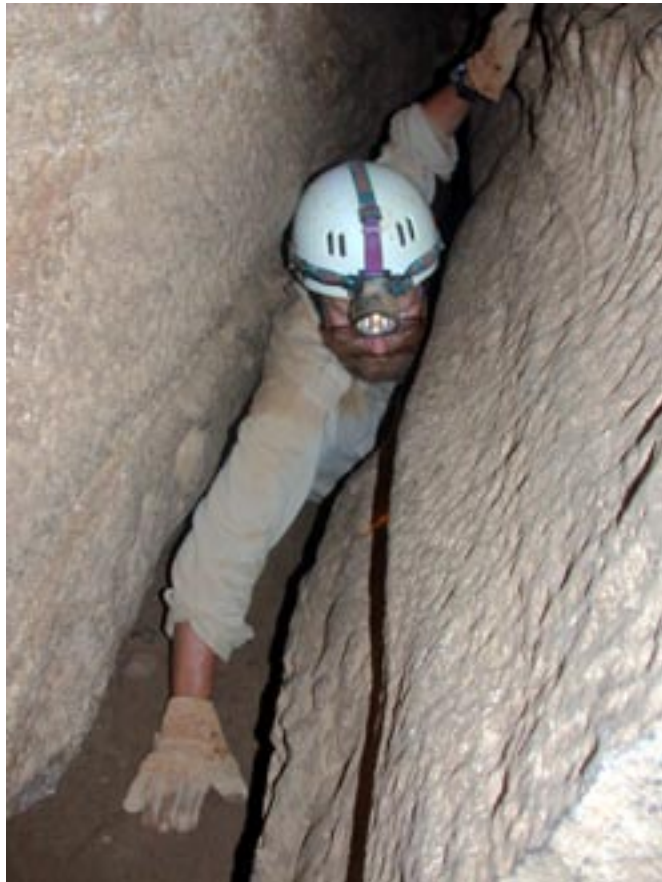
Will spotted the middle entrance not far south of the SCCi property line. This entrance, located in a small bluff not far above the stream, opens into a passage that gains elevation as you enter. We passed numerous bats in the entrance crawlway. The passage leveled off before spilling us out at the top of a climbdown into the Boy Scout Room. We were faced with numerous tricky climbs from this point to the Pop-Out into the borehole passage. The first one is a 15-foot descent down some flowstone into the Boy Scout Room, so named because of some smoked signatures left there decades ago. After a couple more climbs with few footholds, and walls worn slick by the visiting throngs, we crossed a canyon drop where you put your butt on one wall and feet on the other and inch across. As you proceed

it widens, and it looks like you could fall through the slit and about forty feet to the floor if you aren't careful. Past that obstacle we came to a climb-down at a crack that drops a total of about 40 feet to the floor. About 18 feet below, after a difficult climb, we came to rest on some rocks that were wedged in the crack about 20 feet off the floor. We chimneyed across this gorge and down a few more climbs, stopping at a crawlway on the dusty floor.

The crawl begins as a tall canyon with a ledge about one and a half feet off the floor. I found that you can stand and then "fall over" and through this constricting ledge at its widest point, somewhat in the same manner as though you had a heart attack and became limp. Unfortunately, Rick found that this crawl was "Buice-

proof". I followed Will through the crawl and told him I'd return and Rick and I would begin the climbs back up toward the entrance. Stefan came through the crawl behind me, passing me and joining Will. They continued a couple of hundred feet further, down two more climbs, and into the borehole section at the Pop-Out.

The climbs were easier going out, since you can see all the handholds better from below. Rick and I went back up the 17-foot climb and sat at the top, retelling cave stories of old. Will and Stefan didn't go very far into the borehole passage and soon we heard their voices as they came back through the crawlway. We found all the climbs easier going up and were soon at the entrance. Everyone was tired, except for 31-year-old Stefan, who made all the pictures that day.



*Will struggles to exit the low crawlway from the Pop-Out in Byers Cave.  
(Stefan Eady)*

## Nighttime at Neversink

Jeff Harrod

This past July I went on a very memorable trip to the quintessential Tag classic Neversink. Dave McRae told me about a trip he'd went on a few weeks before at night and said the glow-worms in the pit were an amazing sight. It sounded like a great trip so we planned it right away.

Toby Kemp and I met Ryan and Amy Strickland on Scottsboro Mountain late Saturday afternoon. April Ruethemann (Stella) careened up soon there after and following some prep time we all headed over to the parking area.

The hike up was pretty nice with the sun setting and once at the top Ryan and Toby made short order with the rigging. Stella wanted a little practice with Toby's chest box she was borrowing, so we rigged one rope on the right side so she could climb up and down

the 12-foot ledge which surrounds the pit.

Ryan then Toby headed down and I followed. This was the first time I had rappelled the pit at night and while it was fun, the pit's vastness was muted in the dark unlike during the day. After some fun at the bottom everyone started up. I planned to stay on the bottom while Toby and Stella traded the chest box, and while waiting for Stella to head down I had a very close call with a rock which sailed past my ear. Not soon after, I made it to a better area, and word came down that I should just head back up. I later discovered that it was Toby's chest roller that buzzed past my ear. The wire holder had come off when he popped it off. They all thought it was somewhere up top until I told them what

happened. It ruined Stella's plans for the night rappel unfortunately.

Before I headed up I turned out my light and let my eyes adjust to the dark. Thousands of green glowworms were everywhere on the walls. Quite a sight to behold. I climbed out with my light off and had the eerie feeling of being in space surrounded by green stars. A thunderstorm was off in the distance and would intermittently flash the clouds purple over my head. This was definitely a climb I will never forget.

Once up top and getting the missing roller figured out. Toby offered \$30 to the person who would retrieve the roller. No takers. We were tired. Once back at Scottsboro Mountain Ryan got a big fire going and we all stayed up way too late. It was a great night with great friends.



*Ryan Strickland and Toby Kemp preparing to do the nighttime climb.  
(Jeff Harrod)*



*Julie Fee dancing the night away at the 2005 NSS Convention.  
(Scott Fee)*

Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes  
September 1, 2005

A Motion passed to approve the August Minutes as written.

VISITORS: Joan Burtnett

TREASURER'S REPORT:

\$8,871.33 in our checking account and all Guntersville Getaway auction debts have been paid.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

David Caudle reminded everyone of the Cavers Farewell party.

Mike McEachern announced that he has an exhibit at the Berman Museum in Anniston.

There is a pre-convention trip coming up in Canada.

There is a TAG work weekend September 3 and 4<sup>th</sup>.

Leigh announced that Lynn Martin wants to borrow the grotto tarp for a function at her church.

Sharon discussed the leftover SERA shirts. Myrna presented some of the shirts that she had tie dyed. We will begin selling \$1.00 raffling tickets soon. There was a discussion of whether we should solicit buyers for the shirts at TAG but no one is interested in doing this.

Myrna stated that John Attaway has broken ground for a new house.

Scott Fee announced that Scott Parvin is leading a trip to Blowing Salt-peter Cave on Saturday, September 17.

Sunday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, Scott Fee will lead a trip to Ketona Bridge Cave, Chalk Cave and Gate City Cave. Everyone will meet at the Ruffner Mountain Nature Center.

The hike to Gate City Cave is 1 ¼ miles each way and he stated that exiting from of the cave is awkward.

The Tennessee Cave Survey meeting is September 24.

Pupfest is Labor Day weekend.

Sharon Faulkner suggested everyone bring a side dish for the Friday night dinner at TAG.

OLD BUSINESS:

Joel and Gary will check into finding a new meeting place beginning in January since the rental rate for the library has increased. Scott Fee announced that Ruffner Mountain will be building a meeting room but it will not be ready until mid 2006.

NEW BUSINESS:

Joel suggested we buy some CDs.

Since Myrna did such a great job tie dying the SERA shirts, Scott Fee suggested that the grotto pay Myrna or reward her in some way. A Motion passed to give Myrna two shirts. Steve stated we have about 2 boxes left and a Motion passed to sell the shirts for \$10.00.

TRIP REPORTS:

David Caudle and Mike McEachern went to the Grand Canyon to Lava River Cave. They stopped at Meteor Crater and spent the night at the rim of the Grand Canyon and Kartchner

Caverns in Arizona. After camping, they went to Gypsum Cave, Cottonwood Cave, Caverns of Sonora, and Corkscrew Cave and tried to find Knee High. They drove about 3500 miles on this trip.

Scott Fee led a grotto trip to Snail Shell Cave. 21 people came along on the trip.

Myrna Attaway, Scott Fee, Scott Parvin and Alan Cressler went to Alabama Caverns, Gate City Cave and Tripoli Cave.

Hazard went to Sinking Cove Cave, Scottsboro Mountain Pit and Snail Shell. Last weekend he did Pond Sink by the Walls of Jericho and Pond Hollow.

PROGRAM:

There was no program but Judy Ranelli presented a really cool light she bought from foxfury.com.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeannie Cates, Secretary



*Donna, Peter Gillette (Vermont), and Danny enjoying the day at the 2005 NSS Convention.  
(Submitted by Donna Cobb)*



*Casey aboard the Shuttle at the NSS 2005 Convention.  
(Sharon Faulkner)*

## News & Notes

### Dave Howell

\*\*\* October, the month of fall colors, All Hallows Eve, and RIDGEWALKING! Yes, the 2005-06 ridgewalking season is almost upon us, as the days are getting shorter, the nights are getting colder/I just want to come back home, lay my head down on your shoulder. Ahem - homage to the Amazing Rhythm Aces. In any case, within the next month conditions will be getting very favorable for forays into the TAG woods to seek out new entrances, new subterranean worlds never before beheld by the eyes of humankind. In this regard, note the following HUNTING SEASON dates:

**For Jackson County:**  
Guns November 14 - January 31  
Archery October 15 - January 31

**For the Skyline Wildlife Management Area:**  
Guns November 12, November 19 and 25-29; December 8-11, 16-17, and 27-31; January 6-7, and 19-21.  
Archery October 15 - January 31

Note also that during the month of February nobody is (legally) hunting any game, and that turkey season goes March 15 - April 30, and that turkey can only be legally hunted from sunrise to noon.

And now, the usual litany of cautions. *Do not hunt by this schedule!* If you're hunting game rather than caves, refer to the official Alabama hunting schedule, which is a good bit more detailed than the above. The info herein is presented only for the purpose of informing cavers when people are likely to be shooting in the woods, in

hopes that we will not become the game. *Wear hunters' orange!* This is required for all hunters, and it's not a bad idea for cavers too, to make us visible and provide a subtle clue that we are not legitimate targets. (It also makes it easier to see where your ridgewalking buddies are.) *Do not wear white!* Hunters' eyes see anything white and moving in the woods as a white tail deer. White shirts, caps, or helmets are right out. Has your hair gone white (like certain people we know)? Wear a hunters' orange cap or toboggan.

Now - all that having been said, you ridgewalkers in the Grotto go out there, have a fine old time walking the woods, and find some cool new stuff for the Alabama Cave Survey.

\*\*\* We had a different kind of Grotto trip the evening of September 7, as a contingent got together to see the movie *The Cave* at the Trussville Multiplex. But for one other guy there by himself, it would have been a private screening. (Maybe we shouldn't have thrown popcorn at him.) The movie - I'll be honest, judging from the previews, I really wasn't expecting much from this film, I thought it would be sensationalistic probably, full of cheap scares, and totally out of touch with what it's really like to go caving. However, I was pleasantly surprised, *The Cave* is actually not a bad flick. It's got a plot, it's got character development, it's got a cool twist at the end - and the caving gear! Where can I get some of that stuff? Does Bob & Bob carry rebreathers? A word of advice from all of us who saw this film: When you're

caving, keep a careful eye on the bats... and on your caving companions' pupils.

\*\*\* Don't forget the TAG FALL CAVE-IN is coming up this month, October 6-9 to be exact. Even if you have not preregistered, as you read these words it is not too late to make plans to be there! This will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cave-In at the "new" TAG site in northwest Georgia, and it should be even better than last year's event. I hear Dogwood City (our hosts) have made a number of new additions and improvements to the facilities, including increasing the number of campsites and camping areas. (I'm kind of sorry to see the electric showers go, though. Maybe the new Crotalid petting zoo will make up for it.) As always, I'm greatly looking forward to the event. I will see you there!

\*\*\* I would be remiss did I not remind you that the October month culminates with All Souls' Eve, more popularly known as HALLOWEEN, or the Vigil of Saman as this mystical night is called by the Irish. (Saman = Samhain, the Lord of Death, the Grim Reaper.) Halloween, a night of magic charms and divinations, of tricks and treats, of bobbing for apples, an age-old practice in which the apples are soul symbols in the Cauldron of Regeneration. It is said that if a young girl peels an apple before a mirror on All Hallows Eve, she will see the image of her future husband in the glass. Is anyone planning to bring a mirror to the HALLOWEEN PARTY at Alabama Caverns the night of October 29? If you see Lord Samhain himself there, don't be too concerned. He's only there for the party.

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**Birmingham Grotto Newsletter**  
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