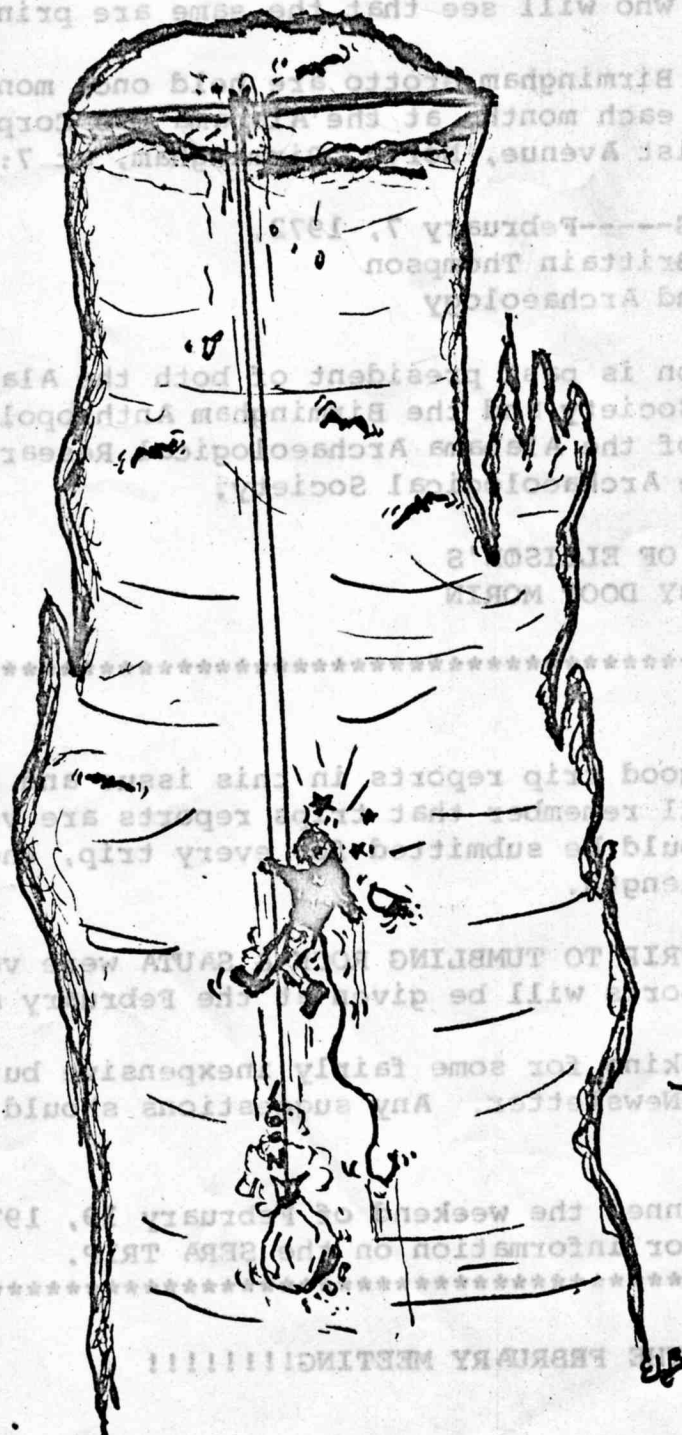


NEWSLETTER

Birmingham Grotto -

EDITOR'S PAGE

JAN-FEB. 1972



VERTICAL
CAVING?

DO YOU AT FEBRUARY MEETING!!!!!!

EDITOR'S PAGE

The Birmingham Grotto Newsletter is published once monthly, provided there are enough articles (this is a hint to those who don't send in their trip reports)

The Newsletter is now edited by Kathy Holland and Joe Domnonovich as Co-Editors. Please submit all articles to either of these two individuals who will see that the same are printed.

Meetings of the Birmingham Grotto are held once monthly, the first Monday of each month, at the Alabama Gas Corporation Building, 1918 1st Avenue, North, Birmingham, at 7:30 p.m.

FEBRUARY MEETING-----February 7, 1972,
SPEAKER----Mr. Brittain Thompson
SUBJECT_Caves and Archaeology

Mr. Thompson is past president of both the Alabama State Archaeological Society and the Birmingham Anthropological Society. He is director of the Alabama Archaeological Research Association and of the State Archaeological Society;

ALSO SLIDE SHOW OF ELLISON'S
PLAY PRESENTED BY DOOT MORIN

NOTES & STUFF

There are some good trip reports in this issue and it is hoped that you will all remember that trips reports are very important and a report should be submitted for every trip, though only a few words in length.

THE BOY SCOUTS TRIP TO TUMBLING ROCK & SAUTA were very successful and trip reports will be given at the February meeting.

We are still looking for some fairly inexpensive but better way of printing our Newsletter. Any suggestions should be given to Kathy or Joe.

SERA TRIP is planned the weekend of February 19, 1972. See Joe at the meeting for information on the SERA TRIP.

SEE YOU AT THE FEBRUARY MEETING!!!!!!!

D I F I N I T I O N S

Milo Washington

ASCENDER BOX: First patented by the Otis Elevator Company in 1893.

RACK: Perfected during the Spanish Inquisition. Those of us who have caught a tuft of hair in this device can readily draw the association.

JUMAR: Developed by France Le Jumar who once climbed out of a 368 foot pit using only his teeth. This remarkable invention followed shortly thereafter.

RAPPEL: Although widely thought to be of French origin, the derivative of this term is the English "repel" which was a contraction of "repulsive" which aptly described early vertical enthusiasts.

VERTICAL CAVING ??????????????????

(Reprinted from The Valley Caver-Vol. 10, No. 2 March-April, 1971)

My nomination for the world's most "accident prone" spelunker has to go to the novice caver who recently sent the following letter to his insurance company. (A company official passed it on to me).

"Respected Sir: When I arrived at the cave I found the entrance to be a 50-foot drop. I returned to my car and brought back a heavy metal beam which I placed across the hole. To the beam I attached a large pulley and rope. (I'd heard that experienced cavers use ropes to enter vertical cavers). To one end of the rope I tied a large sack of rocks and lowered it into the pit. Grasping the other end of the rope I leaped into the pit. Since the rocks equalled my own weight I expected to counterbalance and to drop slowly into the cave. Unfortunately, I failed to allow for the 50 pounds of gear in my pack. As a result I was moving quite fast when halfway down I met the sack of rocks coming up. I received a severe blow on the shins. Soon after that I landed heavily on the floor of the pit and sprained an ankle. At the same time the sack smashed against the metal beam 50 feet above. The sack broke open and showered me with rocks, causing painful injuries. Fortunately, enough rocks were left in the sack to permit me to lower it to the floor where I repaired it. I then prepared for the return trip by loading the sack with enough rocks to lift both me and my pack.

By looping the rope around a smooth stalagmite, I was able to hoist the heavily laden sack up to the pulley. Just as the sack

Vertical Caving?????

reached the top, however, the rope slipped off the stalagmite. Since I had taken off my pack, the sack was much heavier than I was and before I knew what was happening the sack started down, jerking me off the ground. I decided to hang on and halfway up I met the sack of rocks and received a severe blow on the shoulder.

I then continued to the top, banging my head against the beam and getting my finger jammed in the pulley. When the sack hit the ground, it burst again, allowing most of the rocks to spill.

I was now heavier than the sack and so started down again at high speed. Halway down I again met the sack coming up. The few rocks that it still contained gave my shins another painful blow. When I hit the ground I landed on the broken rocks, receiving multiple lacerations from their sharp edges.

At this point I must have lost my presence of mind, because I let go the rope. The sack with the remaining rocks then came down giving me another heavy blow on the head.

The rescue squad found me late that night. I respectfully request reimbursement of my hospital expenses. I agree to the terms which your agent stipulated in a recent phone conversation, i.e., if ever again I set foot inside a cave you have the option to cancel my policy."

T R I P

R E P O R T S

NOVEMBER TRIP

Milo Washington

A cold November day, the height of the Alabama dry season, prompted a trip to two normally wet caves of Blount County-Firelighters and Cedar Grove. So, anticipating optimum accessibility, we hoped to connect these caves or at least gain access to unexplored passages. These two objectives quickly became superfluous as we spent the entire day trying to find Firelighters and Cedar Grove. This is not to say we didn't locate a cave. Actually we found three or four and spent all afternoon underground, wading in cold water, alternately calling each cave Firelighters and/or Cedar Grove.

Bill Varnedoe's subsequent quick dispatch of cave maps clarified the mystery, but as Albert Kress eloquently stated, "It'll be a dry day in Hell when we return to these caves."

Lamons

Lamons for the first time. To try and locate the entrance and to explore the cave reminds one of Jackson County caves rather than Morgan County where Lamons is located.

The cave is reached by going the same direction as you go to Talucah except that you turn off the main road several miles before the Talucah turn off. We had to park on the plateau which was a little less than 1200 feet above sea level-the entrance is located at slightly over 600 feet over. The walk down a very large sink is not bad. The easiest way down is to follow the stream and the entrance is found by going to the right at the bottom until the small path starts back up the hill-the entrance is on the left in a sink-hole.

The entrance is about the same size as Limrock's and the cave is certainly more impressive than Limrock, although not as long according to the survey. The whole trip through the cave is easy and there are only a few places where you have to crawl or climb. Inside the entrance someone has erected a nice bench where a weary caver can rest himself. The only hard caving is beyond this room where you have to look around for the main passage. We covered the whole distance of the cave and signed the register at the area where the second entrance is located. As I understand it, you have to go through fairly deep water to get out the second entrance and it just did not appear too appealing at the time, so we went back the same way we had come in.

The cave combines the best of Tumbling Rock and Limrock. It looks like a tunnel passage cave and you would not expect to find the large number of formations that are present. There is almost no evidence of any vandalism and the formations are almost as profuse as in War Eagle. Certainly the flowstone curtains are more extensive than any cave I have seen in the State. We found some white formations, some helectites, many columns and an abundance of unvandalized formations.

When we got about a mile from the entrance we were in the water just about the whole time-which was just several inches deep. We could see leaves and twigs in the sand and they were all pointing the opposite direction that the water was flowing-which we found confusing.

Of particular interest was the blowing falls. A waterfall is coming from a dome that appears to be about 75 to 100 feet high and wind is blowing down through the dome making an unusual effect with the water as it comes down. In this area there are several good sized rooms including one which has a good deal of blue like mud.

TRIP REPORTS

DOODLEBUG OR DIE!

J.B. Weldon

On January 23, 1972, Tommy Thompson and I met in Centerpoint at 6 a.m. to begin our trip to find Doodlebug Pit. A while back, Tommy, Bill McIntosh, Henry Steigerwaldt and I had tried to find the pit without success. We were sure we would find it this day.

We got to Swaim about 9 a.m. and talked to a man who lived near the mountains where Doodlebug is located. He said he thought no one had been to the pit in about two years. We started the two mile walk to Doodlebug and this time carried a map of the section with us. It was rainy and the creek beds were rushing madly. It was a hard climb up the side of the mountain and when we had reached the top, we still had found no pit. We separated and started back down.

About ten minutes later I heard Tommy holler and when I got to him, there it was—a mean looking shaft! The lip all around the pit slopes in at a fifty degree slide. The only place we could see to rig was a tree on the mouth face. We lowered my 670 feet of blue water down into the pit and began to rig.

I'm sure now that we rigged the wrong wide because as soon as I was in free-fall I could see the rope all tangled up on the first ledge. When I reached the rope it was a mess. Without thinking, I kicked off the ledge. "Oh, Hell!" I thought to myself, as I heard the rope scream down the pit. When it hit the second ledge it almost jerked me in too. When I reached the second ledge the rope was tangled up and it would not reach the bottom. I still needed 100 feet or more to reach the floor of this 396 foot pit.

I hooked up my climbing gear and started back up. The water rushing down the side of the pit put out my light. It was light enough at the top to see going up. I told Tommy the trouble after I got out and he said he was going down anyway. He cursed his Gibbs on the lip but forced them over without too much trouble.

After he got up we packed up our gear and started down the mountain. Blowing Cave connects with Doodlebug and the entrance is down at the bottom of the mountain about 2000 feet away. It's too wet to enter now, but we will go back when we have more time.

LAMONS CAVE

Jay Clark

On New Year's Eve morning, and afternoon Jim Rapp and I explored

Lamons

There are several side passages, but all the ones which we went in made their way back to the main passage.

We could tell that several people had been there before as there were fairly clear paths which indicate the way to the rear. There is very little evidence that people have been there--no trash and no marks on the wall.

We did go from one entrance to the other entrance area, but I intend to go back and take the pictures I didn't take this last time. There is also a good deal more to see---we didnt do many of the side passages. The survey lists this as having around 1 1/2 miles of passageway and this is no exerggeration. The passageway is big and easy going, and well worth the trip. The hardest part of the trip was going back up the hill, which is assteep as it looks. We both enjoyed this trip as much as any other and do intend to go back--it would be a good trip for the Grotto also.

DECEMBER 18

Jay Clark

J.B. Weldon, Tommy Thompson and I set out with no real objective in mind. We first decided to do Neversink so I could get some pictures.

I was most impressed with this 180 foot freefall pit. There is no known cave at the bottom of the pit but the water falling into the pit has to drain somewhere. Because we didn't have Henry with us we were able to get down, take about 20 pictures and all climb out in a little over an hour. Tommy went down first, found a hard hat and got out first. I climbed out with J.B.'s gear and sent it back to him. We first decided to go to Valhalla, then decided to talk with Mrs. Dolberry about the Scout Trip to Tumbling Rock, then decided to go to Green's Well and finally decided to go to Sauta and then do the Trafford Bridge.

The main entrance to Sauta is now gated, but we squeezed through and did the tourist route. From there we went to the 180 foot freefall bridge and played around there for a while taking 36 pictures coming down and up the bridge. We had a better than average day of caving trips.

TALUCAH

Jay Clark

On December 12, 1971, Mickey Embrey, Carl Cathey and I made a nice muddy trip to Talucah. Carl and I had been there before but had never been back to the Big Room. The Hantselle area had several

Talucah

days of rain before our trip and this made the first part of the cave a nice muddy mess. Carl decided the easiest way to travel was to walk in the water, while Micke and I slid in the mud.

The trip through the mud to the dome and waterfall was a real mess also. All of us had a very liberal coating of mud before it was over. From the dome we decided to get out of the mud and we took the dry passage to the rear of the cave. We elected to take the canyon passage rather than the crawl and we found several interesting but dead formations. We saw and photographed some red formations in one of the passages. This was the first time I have ever seen real red formations. Someone had said there were some in War Eagle, but I was unable to find them.

We went into the Big Room through a small crawl and climbed down after first going to a drop off of about 25 feet. We were all really surprised at the size of this room considering the smallness of the other passages. The room has a large breakdown mountain on one side and another breakdown area on the other side with a good sized haystack formation toward the front of it. The ceiling is about 50 feet high or higher and 100 feet wide and 150 to 200 feet long. High water marks can be seen on the wall which show the water went up about 12 feet. We figured the water pushed the mud out of a lower passage and drained the room. Seeing this room was well worth the trip through the mud.

Large quantities of bat guano were seen and waded in, but we saw no bats.

This was my third trip to Talucah, Carl's second and Mickey's first. I would like to go again as it is well worth the trip.

DECEMBER 23, 1971

Jay Clark

Carl Cathey and I explored Portersville Cave in Dekalb County. We parked just off Highway 11 and had to walk around a mile to the entrance which Carl alertly found.

The entrance is good sized and appears to have opened up by a collapsing ceiling. Once inside the cave the passage goes several ways. Directly to the right the rooms get to be good-sized with an abundance of dead and vandalized formations. This part of the cave is fairly long, and has been well travelled, but is not marked up. The passage runs two directions. When we finished here we went back toward the entrance and took the straight ahead passage and found white crystal formations. We eventually came to a drop which has a rather crude ladder and wire to climb on. The passage goes for a good

December 23, 1971

way and runs along with the streams which drains off the mountain and goes through the cave. The stream passage was explored partially and with difficulty.

Before this drop with the wire there are several crawl passages which go for a good way back into the cave-one of which cannot be navigated without a rope.

The cave is very similar to Anderson's without the mud. Plenty of bats are present but no guano.

For any interested party, we will be glad to supply directions to this cave and also to "Old Maids Cave" which we located but did not visit.

TUMBLING ROCK PRELIMINARY TRIP

Doot Morin

On January 22, 1972, the following people made a trip to Tumbling Rock near Scottsboro, in preparation for the weekend Explorer Scout Trip on January 29 and 30; "Shorty" Mayfield, Howard Mayfield, Joe Domnanovich, Carl Cathey, Tommy Thompson, Ed Balog, Ken Jackson, Terry, Bill Blackeby, Linda Taylor, Jim Gerard and Doot. This trip was made to refresh the memory on Tumbling Rock, plan camping areas for the weekend trip, and find parking spaces for the vehicles on the overnight trip.

We went into the cave around 10 a.m. hoping the rain which threatened would not come before we had checked out the cave. There was evidence of a good amount of rain fall before our trip as the water level seemed to be about 18 inches higher than usual and the streams were very active and swollen, and King's Shower was roaring with a real "king-sized" shower.

We decided on the camping areas and made it back to the Pillar of Fire in short time, and signed the registers.

We headed out of the cave, checking several passages and finding only one crawfish(not blind) where usually there are quite a few. This fellow was about 4½ inches long.

The whole trip took about 5½ hours. I feel certain that the Scouts will have a good time.
