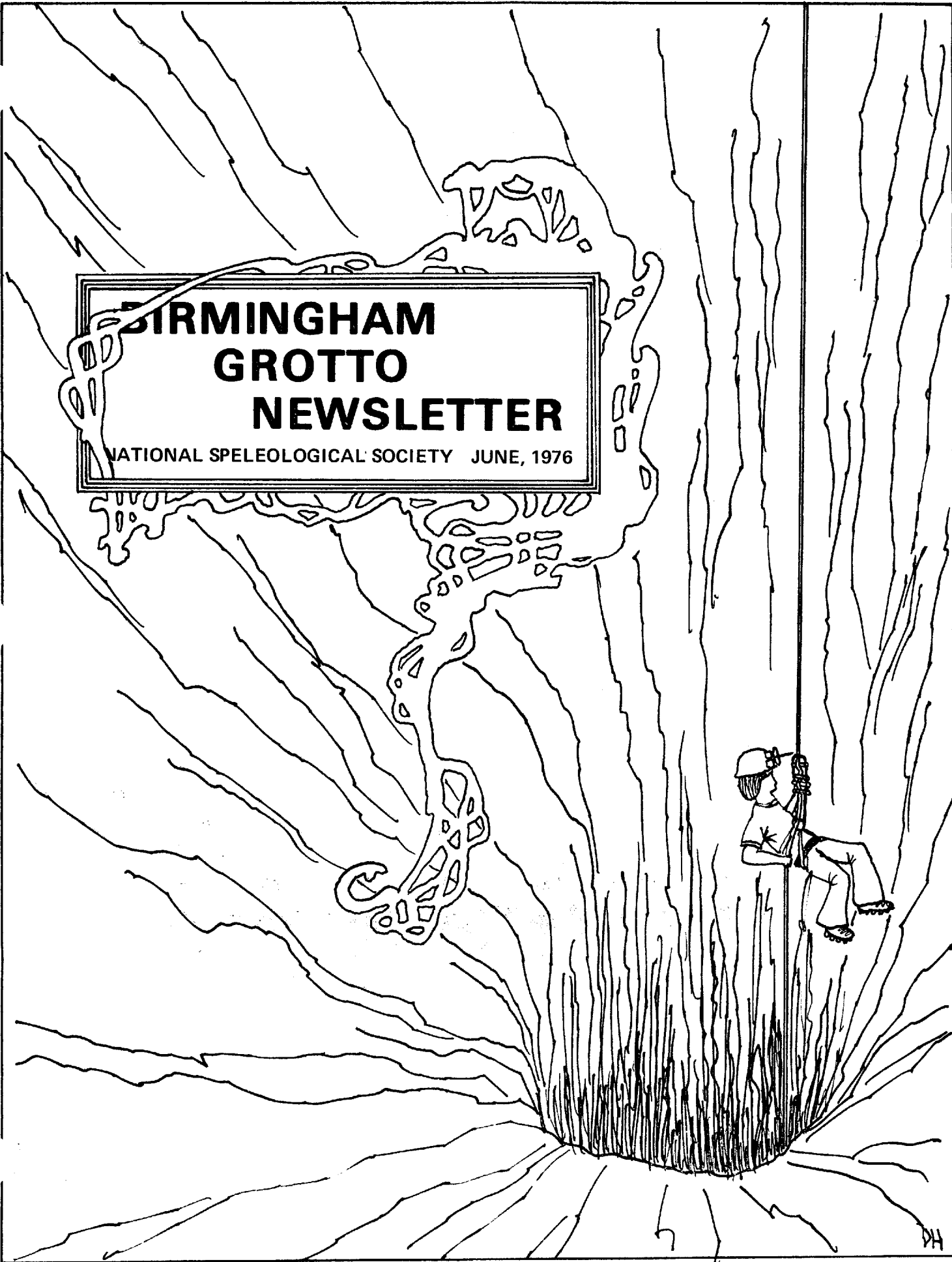


**BIRMINGHAM
GROTTO
NEWSLETTER**

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY JUNE, 1976



PH

EDITOR'S PAGE June, 1976

BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER is published once monthly by the Birmingham Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Subscription rate is pro-rated from October to October and a full year's subscription is \$4.00 for 12 issues.

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DEADLINE: 10th of month.

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Secretary: John Moore
(Valerie Haden for appeared for the Moore's trip on Saturday
summers months)

Treasurer: Joe Domnanovich

Editor: Kathy Spencer
833-4773

GROTTO MEETINGS: Held once monthly at
the Alabama Gas Corporation Building
1918 1st Ave. North: 7:30 p.m. FIRST
MONDAY.

JUNE MEETING: June 7, 1976

JULY MEETING: July 5, 1976

AUGUST MEETING: August 2, 1976

DATES TO WATCH

July 5 Grotto Meeting
July 23-25 SERA

BITS OF NEWS:

NEWSLETTER: I apologize for the lateness of the last newsletter, but school, work, SERA planning, and the fact that I had to wait around for delivery of some articles contributed to it being so late. If I had a backlog of trip reports on all of those trips that are currently being made, I wouldn't have to depend on receiving sufficient material each month in order to get together a Newsletter. HINT!

THE CARBIDE FLAME OF LOVE has once again ignited the hearts of two of our fellow cavers. Yes, DAVID HOWELL and VALERIE HADEN have pledged themselves to a lifetime of caving together. They plan to marry "sometime in the fall." CONGRATULATIONS

RUMOR: Is it really true that LAWRENCE BREELAND actually attended the last Grotto meeting?

RUMOR: Is it true that all of us who have ever been left waiting for Milo WASHINGTON to show up for a caving trip (and he either never showed up or was four hours late) have finally been revenged? YES, ole Milo (Valerie Haden for appeared for the Moore's trip on Saturday instead of Sunday) He called the Spencer house about 8:30 a.m. wanting to know where everybody was and saying that dear ole Milo and Tom Chamblee had been sitting at Bartee's Restaurant since 5 a.m. waiting for the trip to begin. HA-HA !!

CARBIDE is still for sale at the Spencer's for a lot cheaper rate than is to be found anywhere in town. This is the Grotto's carbide-selling project. Just give us a call and let us know you are coming.

IS KATHY DEAD? Steve has remarked that some of you think I've either died or ceased caving. NOT SO! I shall return this summer, taking what I think is a much deserved break from school to catch up on some caving. Seems just about every Grotto trip is showing an attendance of at least 15 or so cavers.

WELCOME NEW CAVERS: See the attached list for names of new members.

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Steve Spencer

Well, Folks, here it is late May, which will be followed by June, leading quickly into July. You all know, of course, what's happening in July - SERA - and you know, I hope, who is sponsoring the show - US! So far a small group of "dedicated" and sometimes frantic individuals have been carrying the ball, but the time is fast approaching when help will be needed -- LOTS OF IT. Some of you will be approached for specific jobs, others will be asked to volunteer for various tasks. I hope all of you plan to keep the weekend of July 24-25 free and will be willing to help out.

RE: NEWSLETTER: While I am asking for help, let me return to another subject. We have listened to a lot of criticism about the lateness of the Newsletter lately. Did you know that we almost didn't have one last month because of lack of articles? Now, I know most of you are going caving at least once a month. Well, either write some articles or let's not hear any complaints when there is no Newsletter one month or it is late! Since, I'm on the subject of the Newsletter, let me also say that this month Ken Brown and I went over to help Bob Smith and Joe D. put the Newsletter together. We found that with the addition of two more able bodies the time needed was cut almost in half. Joe and Bob spend a lot of time working on printing this Newsletter they can use some help. At the next meeting I am going to make a list of "volunteers" who can be called on to help if the need arises.

 The following is a list of Grotto members whose name and address are not on our current membership list:

Steve & Marti Cadle
 2107 Lullwater Road
 Birmingham, Alabama 35243
 967-3241

Valerie Haden
 1712 11th Pl. So.
 Birmingham, Ala. 35205
 322-6244

Ken Kifer **2**
 Rt. 1, Box 160D
 Quinton, Al. 35130
 674-5661(wk.)

Robert Prager
 1510 Sweet Apple Ct.
 B'ham, Ala. 35243
 967-4673

Larry Shaffield
 803 Skyline Dr.
 Bessemer, 35020

Lynn Wright
 8732 9th Ct. Gr. So.
 B'ham, Al. 35206
 833-3998

 If you are a member and your name is not on this update or the current listing, please see me after the next meeting. Also, see me if your address has changed or is shown incorrectly -----

SECRETARY'S REPORT

John Moore-Secretary
March 1, 1976

The Sera Committee reported that it was planning the program and guidebooks. The Rescue squad committee reported poor attendance at their February meeting. An invitation was relayed to the Grotto to return to Moore's Cave (Al. 426). The program was a set of slides presented by Ted Crumley on South America.

Meeting-April 5, 1976

It was reported that the process of becoming a tax-exempt organization was in the hands of counsel. The SERA committee reported further delay in the processing of Cathedral Caverns in the courts. The Committee is also working on directions and advertising for the guidebook. A proposal to buy topo maps for re-sale is to be further reported on at the May meeting. The program consisted of slides of Falling Springs, presented by Dave Howell and slides of Anderson and Eudy Caves presented by the Attaways.

 CONGRATULATIONS: Myrna Attaway is graduating from high school this May. Also, she's gotten a scholarship. Imagine, someone with brains in the Grotto!

3 VOICES FROM UNDERGROUND

LYNNY & SYCAMORE(Lynny Byrd,who

CEDAR GROVE RIVER CAVE #406
FIRELIGHTERS CAVE #1077
Blount Co., Ala. April 18, 1976

Greg McGill, Reporter
Lynn Wright
Larry Sheffield
Steve Turner
Lynn Jackson

On Easter Sunday our stalwart crew took off for Bryant's Cave. During the trip we decided to change our objective. Choosing Al. 406 and 1077 because of their closeness and apparent length(2341 and 1864 respectively) we re-routed the trip.

Locating the caves was not too difficult after we found the road. According to our 1951 topo map the road was missing two churches and a high school. There is an interesting tunnel that the Governor forgot when he eliminated highway death traps.

Imagine our surprise when we found four entrances; all of which had about 2 feet of water at their entrances. We overcame our reluctance after studying the sky for rain clouds and pushed on in.

The water was about knee deep on the average with about 6 inches of mud at the bottom. There are formations although none are very spectacular, and the cave is very active.

Overall, we found 11 entrances and a very nice rock shelter about 60 feet deep which our accompanying archaeologists (L. S. & L. J.) assure me was probably used by the Indians.

This was an invigorating trip and was not hard since one could walk in the passages. There was one crawl and one climb. I couldnot recommend this cave in rainy weather since there was evidence that this cave floods completely. For those interested in seeing this wonder(I recommend a hot day) there is a cemetery dating from the 1830's close by. Be careful with your carbide since cows roam nearby and drink the water from this cave.

very graciously contributed this article to our Newsletter is a member of the Decatur Grotto)-----

On November 16, 1975, Lynny first caught a glimpse of Sycamore(Al. 345). She, Paul Hoffman & Steve Williams(of Decatur) pulled rocks out of a floor crevice for about 30 minutes. Paul rushed through the crevice as soon as it was big enough only to come to a screaming halt. Steve and Lynny followed to find the pit that Paul had found. Under Paul's supervision, Lynny was belayed by Steve across the first pit and saw the second. She crossed back and knew that she would return to visit Sycamore again.

On March 20, 1976, Lynny went back to Sycamore, this time with John Varnedoe(of Huntsville Grotto). Together they found 7 pits in 280 feet of passage. At the 7th pit, no horizontal passage was left to map. John and Lynny decided that more trips were needed.

On April 3, 1976, Lynny and John went back to Sycamore and dropped the first pit which is a double pit in three levels with a waterfall. We started mapping the west passage which ended in a small room with a pit. Next, they mapped the main passage and found John's glove. John had dropped it while crossing the 6th pit on the March 20th trip. After mapping those hugh mud rooms, they went back and mapped the east passage which was a dry walking passage ending in a tight crawl(breakdown).

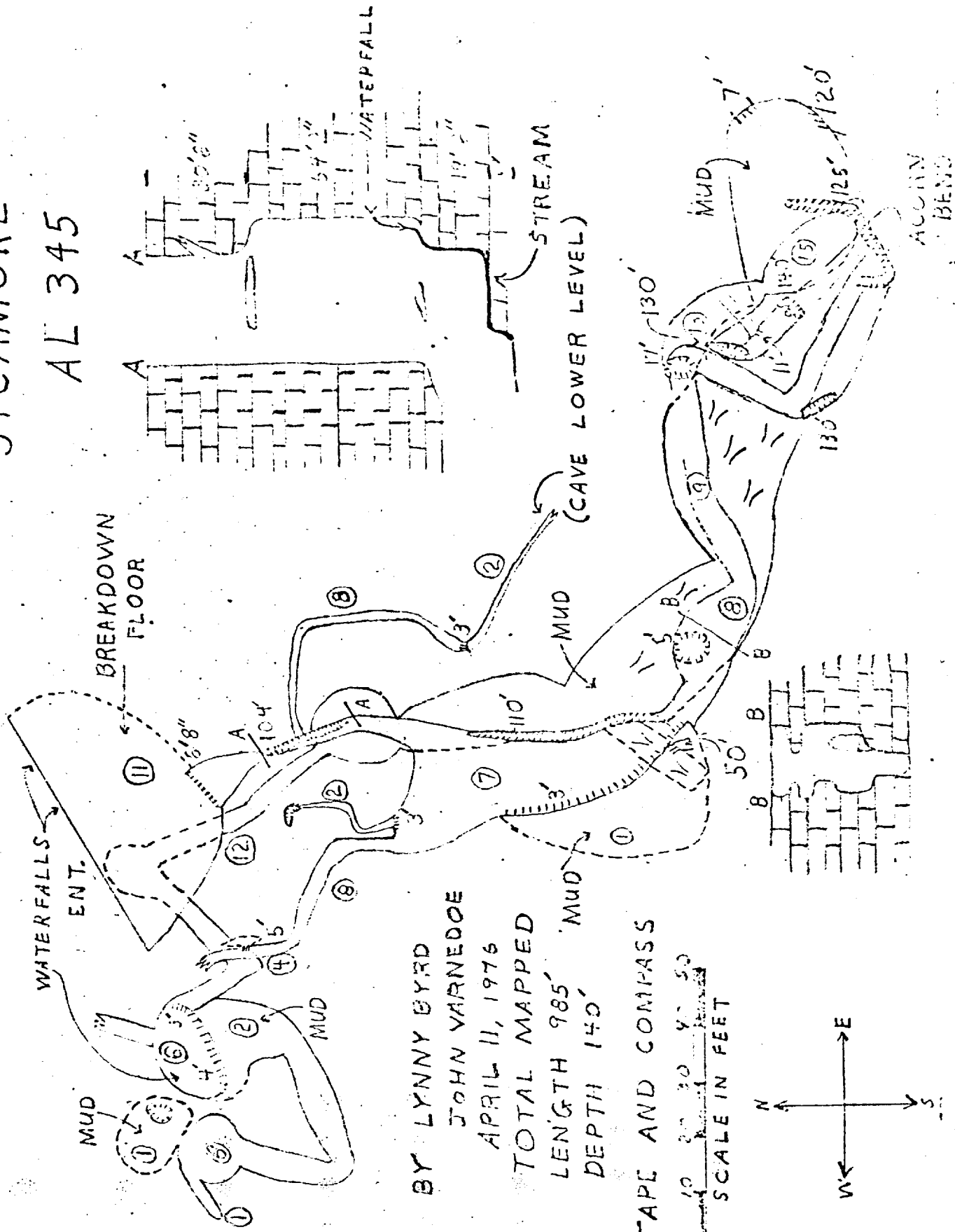
Once up the rope, they mapped the room where the 2nd pit is and found another pit at the end of a tight crawl. With a total of 10 pits found, only two of which they dropped,and 985 feet of passage mapped, they belayed each other across the first pit. They were rushed out of the cave by a hissing sound followed by a clanging sound.

After much consideration, they decided that Sycamore needs to be revisited to drop the other 8 pits and look at the four upper passages. Lynny theorizes(as shown on her map) that 6 of the upper level pits connect with the lower level and plans to either prove

The Decatur Caver vol. 5 no. 1 May, 1976

SYCAMORE

AL 345



BY LYNNY BYRD

JOHN VARNEDO

APRIL 11, 1976

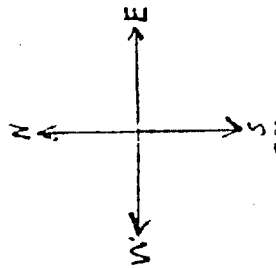
TOTAL MAPPED

LENGTH 985'

DEPTH 140'

TAPE AND COMPASS

0 10 20 30 40 50
SCALE IN FEET



Sycamore(continued)

or disprove the theory for each pit by dropping them.

Anybody wanting to drop these pits with Lynny may contact her between 7:15 a. m. and 3:45 p. m. at 205-552-3581 or at 414 Lafayette N. E. , Apt. 2, Decatur, Ala. 35601.

(ED. NOTE: SEE MAP ATTACHED)

CONTINUATION OF MARION O. SMITH'S
 LOG OF MEXICO TRIP

December 22: At 9:20 a. m. 18 people (all but Donna and Heather Bauman who drove to Valles) started hiking from Puerta Ayulta toward Rancho de Barro and El Sotano. The 1,500 feet of rope was carried in one backpack. By nightfall, four sub-groups had been formed. The main body(Bridges, Bassett, Frushour, Wheat, Bauman, Thurman, Lane & Davis) had followed the correct trails and camped at the river;Farr, Mroczkowski, Saunders, Collett, and Johnson also camped at the river further upstream; Lord, Stock, Vogler, and the two Smiths took a wrong turn at a pond and eventually started down the mountainslope via an arroyo directly into Cañon de Ayutla. When a 40' cliff was encountered with prospects for a longer one ahead, Lord, J. Smith and Vogler elected to climb the 1,500 -foot the dense vegetation and scurry along the edge of the cliffs until a route down could be found. Both parties were successful. The Lord group spent the night on top of the mountain and the Stock group spent the night in Cañon de Ayulta about 1/2 hour's walk from the Bridge's group.

December 23: In the A. M. everyone made it to Rancho Barro and loaded up on refreznas and by about 1:30 p. m. began reaching El Sotano itself. En route, a light plane buzzed the area. It later proved to be Bill Stone(Ariz.)Henry Schneiker(Ariz) and Bob Stucklen(Colo.) A 1,180 or 1,200 foot rappel was rigged in the pit and that afternoon and evening M. Smith, Farr, Lord, Lane & Collett yo-yoed it. Frushour failed to walk past Barro and Bassett left to walk him back to the highway.

December 24: During the day Vogler, Bauman, Bridges, Wheat, Thurman, Davis, J. Smith, Stock, Saunders and Mroczkowski yo-yoed the pit. Vogler and Bauman left about noon to walk back to the highway to meet Donna and Hether for Christmas. By 7:45 p. m. the pit was de-rigged and most settled in for the night by 8:30 p. m.

December 25: At 6:55 a. m. , the remaining 14 people began their walk to the highway, taking turns carrying the rope, which was tied in six coils. At 3:07 p. m. the rope crew reached Puerta Ayulta. The two Smiths and Stock washed in the river at Ayulta and by 8:30 p. m. all 20 people arrived at the La Condesa in Valles(after Marion's truck had fuel filter problems) for a Christmas supper. Then all but three got hotel rooms. Stock and the two Smiths camped at Los Sabinos north of Valles where many other cavers were. Only Jim Rodemaker(Ill.) and Mike McEachern(Tex.) were still up when they arrived.

December 26: Reorganization day. Much shopping was done in Valles by various people and in the late afternoon Marion's truck was cleaned out at Los Sabinos. Some of the many people at Los Sabinos included Neil Montgomery, Julia James, Tracy and Sheila Johnson(Ariz.), Bill Stone, a load of British Columbia cavers, Peter Strickland (Tex.), and Peter Sprouse(Tex.) plus most of the El Sotano crew of 20(except Lord who left on a bus for Mexico City), etc. , etc.

December 27: Bridges, A. Johnson, Saunders, Thurman, Davis and many others visit Hoya de Guaguas. At 10:45 a. m. , Montgomery, J. James, Stock, J. & M. Smith, Henry Schneiker, and T. & S. Johnson leave in Marion's truck. At Xilitla they ate at the Principal and by 3:30 p. m. had reached Tancoyal, at the end of a 22 km. dirt road west of Ahaucatlan(San Luis Potosi). There T. Johnson acquired the necessary permission and at 4:35 p. m. , the group started hiking up the steep trail toward Mesa de los Pinos. Darkness forced a trailside bivouac, though most of the 1,500 foot elevation gain had been

accomplished.

December 28: The hike was resumed at 7:30 a. m. and continued until about 4:30p. m. when the village of LaParada was reached. LaParada, which has about 90 adults and over 100 children, has only been visited by gringos twice before, both times in '74 by cavers. Local officials allowed the 8 cavers to set up camp in the pasture near the pond and large numbers of locals clustered about to see the various gadgets and pieces of equipment the "invaders" brought. The distance from Tancoyal to LaParada is variously estimated from 14 to 20 miles, probably closer to the former.

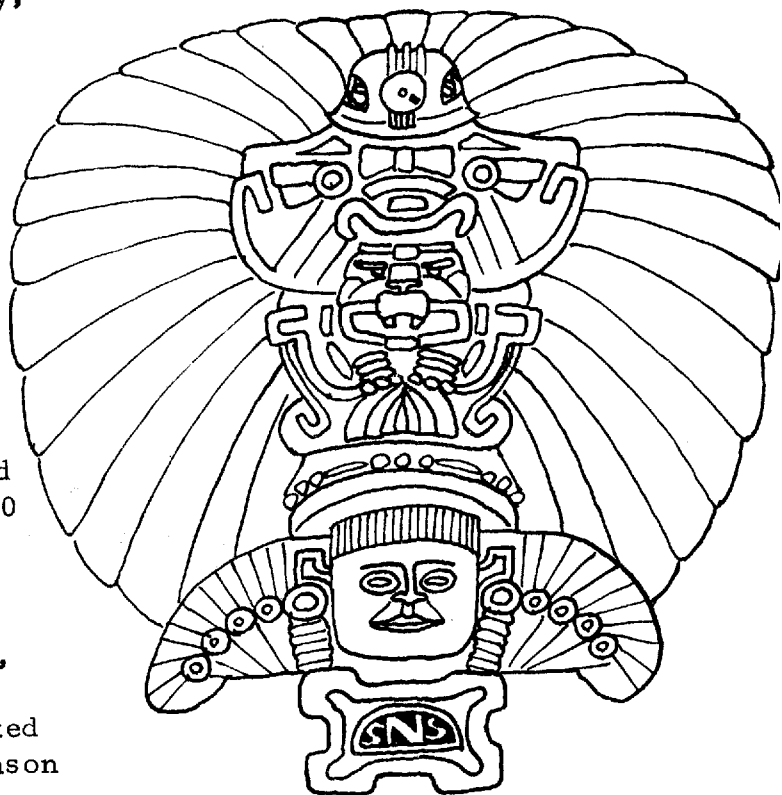
December 29: At 9:10 am all but Sheila set out to find the "black hole" spotted from the air on December 23. After the first ridge was a 500 foot high second ridge with steep cliffs. Jim, Neil, and Julia went to the right to find a trail up while Tracy, Mark, Henry, and Marion climbed the cliffs and started chopping a trail. Mark turned back, but about 2:40 p. m. Henry found the "black hole" which was a pit about 80' x 100' and 150' deep. It was nice, but a far cry from the minimum drop of 300 feet that Stone had promised. All eventually returned to camp, Tracy, Henry, and Marion via a trail which should have been used in the first place. Camp had been augmented by the arrival of Bill Stone, Pat Wieden(N. Y.), Kelly and Sally Kellstadt(N. Mex.) Bob Stucklen, and Aliexia Cochrane(Ill.) It rained during the night.

December 30: Since the day was overcast and cool, the checking out of the "black hole" was postponed. Everyone but Sheila and Sally walked toward the village of San Isidro to tour Sotano de San Isidro(220 and 25 foot drops with a total depth of over 300 feet). On the way, some of the people toured a short cave called Cueva de San Isidro. Sotano de San Isidro was toured by Marion Smith, J. Smith, Montgomery, Stone, Wieden, Schneiker, Stucklen, K. Kellstadt, and Stock. Cochrane backpacked to Tamapatz and Golondrinas and T. Johnson and Julia acquired some pit leads. Once

ropes were available from s. de San Isidro, T. Johnson, the two Smiths, and Stock checked out two pits, 160' Sotano de Saucito and 220' Sotano de Puerco Muerto. The Camp at LaParada had two new people that night: Ira Estin and Penelope Singer from Arizona.

December 31: Stone, Wieden, Stock, J. Smith, Schneiker, J. James, Estin, and Montgomery checked out the black hole and found no leads. They named it Sotano de Piedra Horizontal(Flatrock Pit). T. & S. Johnson and M. Smith were guided by Sr. David Pedrasa Servin(of Rancho Saucito de Tancoyal, Queretaro), and two others around San Isidro to three short cuevas; Regino, Don Pedro, and Palmilla, and two shallow pits; 60' Chuchumbe and 100' Lindero. The Kellstadts, Stucklen, and Singer left La Parada for La Pimienta. That evening a nice camp fire was going for a while, but everyone sacked out by 11 p. m.

January 1, 1976: Stock, M & J Smith, James, Montgomery, and Estin walked several miles and yo-yoed 560 foot Sotano de El Socavon, which had a 600 foot diameter room at the bottom. T & S Johnson toured S. De San Isidro, and Stone, Wieden, and Schneiker started the hike back to Tancoyal



January 2: Hike out day and M. Smith had a case of the turistas. At 4:45 a. m. he starts his walk, but immediately gets on the wrong trail in the dark. At 8 he is only 1/2 mile from La Parada. The day is hot and at 11 a. m. he is saved by Tracy Johnson who carries his pack two hours (T & S Johnson's packs were on a burro belonging to a Mexican who was going part way to Tancoyal. By 5:30 p. m. everyone reaches Tancoyal. N. Montgomery collapsed with the turistas near town. Stock, J & M. Smith leave, drive via Xilitla to Valles where they ate at La Condesa. They then proceeded to Los Sabinos for the night. Hordes of cavers are still there, including Will Howie (Miss.) and Dr. John P. Sevenair (La.).

January 3: Stock, J & M Smith start back for the States, giving a hitch-hiker, Fred Allen (oil worker at Cook Inlet, Alaska) a lift to Brownsville.

March 14, 1976 : 7 p. m. CST, Mark Stock, Jim H. Smith, and Marion O. Smith arrive, in Marion's Toyota Corolla, at the river at Ayutla, Queretaro, and camp for the night.

March 15: The trio drive to La Purisma and 2.9 miles to the temporary end of the new dirt road toward the village of San Juan, then hike the remaining four or so miles via San Juan to the AMCS cavers' camp next to the entrance of Joya de las Conchas. Thirty cavers preceded them: Gill Ediger (Tex.), Don Broussard (Tex.), Shari Larason (Tex.), Steve Zeman (Tex.), Terry Tracey (Ind. -Tex.) Bill Stone (Ariz.), Steve Ward (Pa.) Bill Steele (Ind.) Terry Sayther (Tex.) Peter Sprouse (Tex.) Andy Eavis (England), Jill Dorman (Tex.), Bob West (Tex.), Roy Jameson (Tex.), Peter and John Strickland (Tex.) Walt Peters (Ill.), Thomas Moore (Tex.), Blake Harrison (Tex.), Maureen Kavanaugh (Tex.), Andy Grubbs (Tex.), Logan McNatt (Tex.), Robert Hamperly (Tex.), Alexia Cochrane (Ill.), Paul Fambro (Tex.), Mike McKee (Tex.), Pam Lynn (Tex.), Ron Ralph (Tex.) Tracy Johnson (Ariz.), and Henry Schneiker (Ariz.) Two mapping crews were in Conchas: Peter Sprouse and others surveying from the entrance to a depth of -600 feet, and Tracy Johnson, Eavis, and Kavanaugh and one other mapping from -600 feet to -1,170 feet.

Others, including Harrison, Dorman, and Lynn, penetrated only to a depth of about 200 feet. Jameson, T. Tracey, Broussard, and Larason surveyed overland 2 miles from Conchas to various cave entrances, including Javelina (1,093 feet deep). Ron Ralph and others entered one of the other pit caves, and Stone did some cave hunting. (Conchas was entered March 14 by Ward, Stone, Steele, Ediger, Zeman, and Sprouse, and rigged. Ediger, Zeman, and Sprouse turned back at -1,000 feet, and the rest pushed downward, with only Steele reaching the bottom. It was a 22 hour trip.)

March 16: At 9:30 a. m., CST, Hamperly, Harrison, Dorman, Steele, Stock and the two Smiths enter Conchas. The first four check a parallel 280-300 foot pit at the -1,000 foot level. The last three survey from -1,170 feet to the end at -1,693 feet, including an estimated four meters of water. The last people out of the cave are Stock and M. Smith at 3 a. m. Cochrane, Grubbs, and others toured the top levels of Conchas. Conchas, with its 22 or 23 rope drops, is determined to be the Western Hemisphere's 4th deepest cave. (Ropes were pulled up to the -1,000 foot level by Stock and the Smiths.)

March 17: Stock, Stone, Cochrane, & Ward went to check a pit near Rancho Mojenera, Sotano de la Mesa. Only Stock and Stone dropped the 150 footer. Later, they went to Sotanito de Canoas near San Juan where Mark descended 90 and 65 foot drops only to be stopped by a third drop. Ten people (J. & M. Smith, J. Strickland, Kavanaugh, Schneiker, Sayther, Lynn, T. Tracey, Sprouse and T. Johnson) beat around in the scrub brush on top of the mesa to the west of camp looking for an earth crack pit. They find it only to decide it was a karst feature and leave without rappelling it. Eavis, P. Strickland, Broussard, and one other spend about 12 hours in Conchas pulling up ropes to -200 feet and photographing. Jameson and others cave hunted. Don Speer (Tex.) reaches camp.

March 18: Stock, T. Johnson, J & M Smith bottom S de Canoas at -344 feet

and map out. Stone, Ward, and Steele (after helping to de-rig Conchas) map in and complete the survey. Stock, the Smiths and Steele tour 150 feet long Cueva de Canoas. Jameson, Grubbs, Cochrane, and perhaps others discover a 250 foot pit with good potential. Casey McGill, Eric Valainis, and Barbara Ransom (all Ind.) reach camp in the afternoon, bringing the total number of people up to 37.

March 19: The Conchas camp begins to break up, with the Smiths, Stock, T. Johnson and Schneiker starting back for the U. S. Jameson and a group went to investigate further the 250 foot pit located the day before.

THE END

MAMA MOORE'S CAVING TRIP

John R. Moore-reporter(Kymulga Cave)

Saturday, April 3, dawned bright and clear and Larry went off to Bankhead. Having nothing better to do around the house, it was decided that we(Becky, Joey, John, Mama Moore, and Fenn Spencer) would visit the Indian and Pioneer crafts show at Kymulga Cave(Al. 22) now DeSoto Caverns. After a leisurely driver to Childersburg, we arrived at the cave. We were just in time for the next tour so we bought our tickets and joined the tour.

One enters the cave by walking up a dug-out gulley for about 60 feet, then stepping into a rather dilapidated shed. Once inside the shed, one descends about 40 feet by stairs to stand in the large room comprising most of the cave. The tour we took was a shortened one because of high water, but we were able to stay in the cave 30 minutes. Various formations were pointed out including an Angel, a charging rhinoceros, with 3 horns and a barracuda hanging from the ceiling. Water in the main passage prohibited traveling the entire length("longer than a football field") but it was obviously a well-decorated cavern.

Once outside the cave a visit to the souvenir shop was inevitable. While inside, Mama Moore and I were looking at a map of the

cave hung on the wall. The map, dated January, 1976, bore the name of the cave owner and one, Michael Laing. Reading the latter name aloud, I remarked, "Must be from Huntington." A voice behind me said, "Yep!" I turned and introduced myself to Michael Laing. He had been in the cave that morning, and reported that water was 9 inches below the lip of a 50' pit in the back of the cave.

Laing and I went outside to find some spelunkers who were looking for him. We found them--two guys and one girl from Anniston. After glancing at the Alabama Cave Survey for a while, they were directed to some caves on the Cahaba Wildlife Refuge near Montevallo. I gave them information concerning the April Grotto meeting but they didn't come. After talking with them, I left to see the exhibits.

Please note that Mama Moore(actually, she's Larry Moore's mother) is not opposed to caving. She has been in at least two caves now--Carlsbad and DeSoto. She is only opposed to caving when other things need to be done. Who knows, we may make a caver out of her yet!

----- UNDERGROUND ADVENTURE, Part II

(The following is the second part of a two-part article reprinted from The Floridian, May 11, 1975. Part I appeared in the previous issue of the Birmingham Grotto Newsletter.)

Why do they do it? There may be psycho logic reasons.

Bob Millott, a cave diver who just earned his Ph.D. in educational psychology from the University of Florida, is trying to find out more about the psychological characteristics of cave diving victims. His biggest problems are the lack of autopsies and the lack of survivors to interview.

"We talk to the survivors of the multi-death accidents," he says. "But who knows how many divers there are who almost died but somehow escaped, and never reported it? We'd like to talk them, too." (Such divers should write Millott at P.O. Box 12011, University Station, Gainesville, Fla. 32604).

Millott wants to see if there is an accident-prone personality involved, or a kind of person "particularly susceptible to fear."

Speleophobia, the fear of caves, is more than mere claustrophobia, the fear of small enclosed

spaces. But they are closely related. They are both fears of the unknown, not of the conditions that precipitate them. Speleophobia is actually a fear the individual has that he or she could lose touch with reality, or otherwise be cut off from the familiar, emotionally sunny world.

Irrational ideas have fostered the frightening concept of caves. They are often described as "tomblike" or the "underworld". Demons and devils are thought to inhabit the "dark regions" beyond the reach of the sun. Highwaymen, robbers and smugglers used to hide in caves. Bats were symbols of evil and messengers of the devil.

"Even after scientific logic has destroyed most of these old superstitions," a psychologist explains, "some of them linger in the depths of our subconscious." He says that fear of the dark or of any unknown is actually a fear of the unknown in ourselves. So the cavers are confronting not only the physical, geological world, but also the smooth chambers and rocky pits of their own psyches.

The remarkable thing is that anyone finds the curiosity to overcome the real and imagined dangers. But they do.

In 1959, when those mid-Florida caves averaged only about 200 feet, a gregarious group of University of Florida students started pushing farther and farther into the caves in their area.

"If we wanted a break from our studies we'd take off for the caves," Jake Hoffman, now an electrical engineer for Hudson Pulp and Paper CO., in Palatka, remembers.

"There was this one, 'Warren Cavern.' The intriguing thing about it was that about a hundred yards inside, back where it seemed to end, there was this tiny crack with a fair volume of air blowing out. That suggested there could be a lot of cave beyond that point. So we'd head out there at any time of day or night and start pounding away, with a big bar and hammer."

Caves are like huge bottles and when the barometric pressure outside changes, air blows in, or out, to equalize the pressure in the cave. Checking "blow-holes" has been profitable for cavers, but it has also consumed thousands of man hours: the air space beyond may be a mile long, but only inches in diameter.

For more than a year, the Gainesville gang periodically hammered away, gaining inches at a time in Warren Cavern. They had gotten only 10 or 12 feet into the air-blowing fissure when Hoffman, who was then 25, and Bud Johnson, another local caver, returned to the cave to do some more chipping and hammering.

"I got to a point, squeezed in there," Hoffman remembers, "and I hit some loose rocks and was able to move two or three feet. Then my light went out. I had some bad moments. But I managed to twist my arm free, and I found a bad connection in the wiring. I wiggled it and the

light came back on. I took a hammer, and suddenly I broke through."

His eyes grew wide as his light shined far down a corridor a towering dozen feet high. He took his light and literally ran down the passage. "It seemed to go on and on, and there were sid passages. I went to about the second intersection. Then I ran back and helped Bud squeeze through. We were awfully excited."

Johnson, located in Orlando, where he is an electrical engineer, says, "It was really something. There we were, standing where no one had ever been before. We walked around for over an hour in there, that first day. Once you got through that squeeze, it was like a railroad tunnel."

Since the day Johnson and Hoffman made history by squeezing past the "impossible" hole in Warren Cavern, cavers have mapped nearly four miles of passages, and are still pursuing new leads. It is now the state's largest cave, although 15 years ago it was believed to be shorter than a football field.

Hollow Ridge Cave, in Marianna, is the second largest. A survey last February mapped 3,300 feet. Hollow Ridge and the 2,900-foot Florida Caverns are limited by the ridges they occupy. Warren Cavern is not. Some people believe Warren's is even larger than we now know.

Bill Oldacre, a freelance writer from Gainesville, is one of those optimists. He worked with a tear that turned to a common Polaroid camera to try find the next breakthrough in Warren's.

"There's a hole caused by erosion, dropping 55 feet from the cave's rock bottom," Oldacre explains. "We rigged the camera with a special remote control cable, and lowered it into the hole.

"At the 50-foot level, we've gotten at least 10 good pictures that show a passageway leading off in two directions. It looks big enough for a man to pass through."

They are now tunnelling through a parallel fissure, to the opening they know lies below. What will they find when they reach it?

"There's a lot of air blowing out of there," Oldacre says. "You know what that means."

There are other caves, too, where the next dramatic breakthrough could occur. Or has someone already found a newer, bigger and more beautiful cave than Warren's, or Hollow Ridge, or Florida Caverns? Is a discovery of unprecedented dimensions quietly itching away in the mind of a caver determined not to let his find become another blood-and-garbage-littered plaything of the public? The cavers who were interviewed dismissed the possibility.

They continue to search for one last mystery of the earth, and unwittingly probe at the same time at the nature of their own lives. It is a pastime as strange as the underworld mysteries, this practice of men and women in the "Sunshine State" testing themselves in a cold

and clammy world never touched by the sun.

But they have found the rewards they sought. They have proven Florida a state with caves miles long and beautiful. Outside the constricting, crawlways in which they continue to press their search, Florida cavers now stand proud -- and tall.

HUNTSVILLE GROTTO YO-YO

JUNE 12

SATURDAY

11:00 NOON

RECREATION POINT ON GREEN MT.

PICNIC

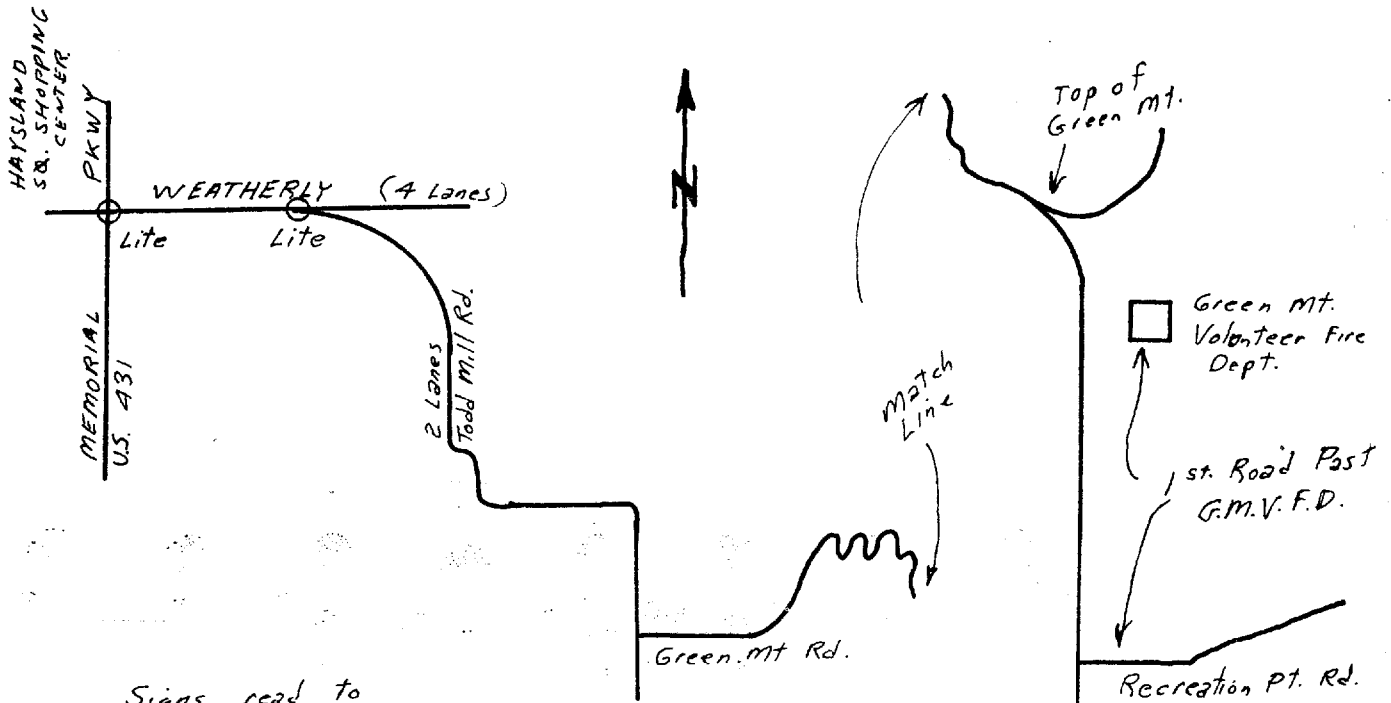
YO-YO DEMONSTRATION

FOOD \$2.50/PERSON

HOT DOGS BAKED BEANS COLE SLAW

POTATO SALAD DESSERTS SOFT DRINKS \$0.25

PARTY AFTERWARDS (BYOB)



Signs read to
Nature Trail
until the top of Green Mt.

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*Wright
Rife*

