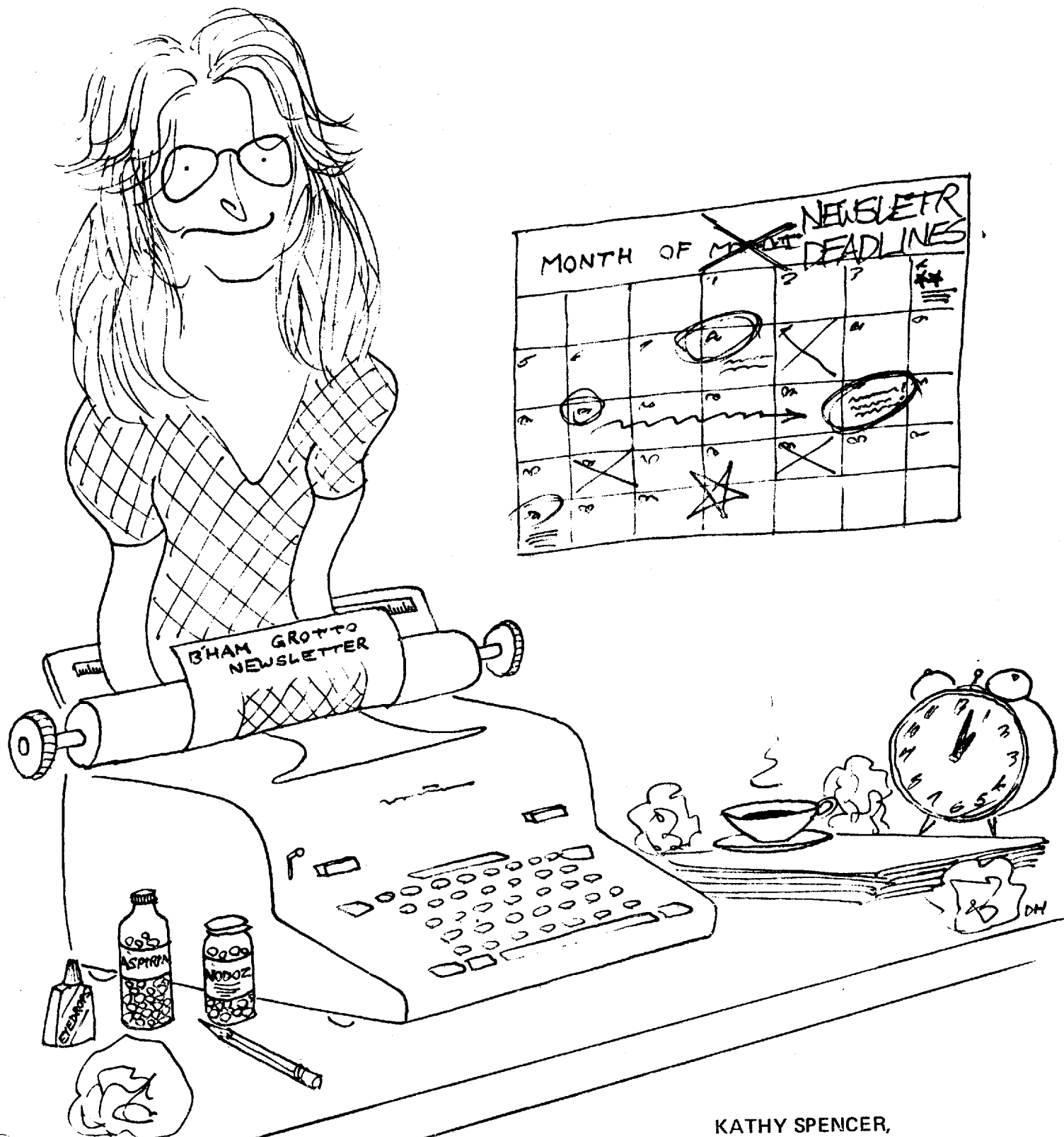


BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

APRIL 1977



KATHY SPENCER,
Newsletter Editor
"Arbeit Macht Frei"

BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER
March, 1977

COVER PICTURE: By Dave Howell,
Resident Fool

The Birmingham Grotto Newsletter is published once monthly by the Birmingham Grotto of the National Speleological Society. Subscription rate: \$4.00 per year from October to October pro-ration. Send subscription fees to

Steve Spencer
938 So. 80th St.
Birmingham, Ala. 35206

As of April 15, Anvil Cave will be closed to all visitors. Further details will be published in the B'ham Grotto as they become available. Please respect this decree in the hope that it will eventually be rescinded.

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FUTURE TRIPS

- April 15 - Anvil Cave closes
- April 23 - B'ham Grotto trip to Fall Creek Falls, Tennessee; Huntsville Grotto yoyo session, same location. For further info call Joe D.
- May 14-15 - Joint Vulcan Trailblazers-B'ham Grotto backpacking trip to Walls of Jericho. Leave 6:00 a.m. Saturday morning from Shoney's in Roebuck. For further info call Tom Lamb. NOTE: Do not park at Bean's Farm at the south end of the road to the Walls; if you do your car might be stripped.
- May 21-22 - Trip to Byers Cave. Georgia, on Saturday; trips to other caves in the area Sunday. For info call Steve or Kathy Spencer.
- May 28-30 (Memorial Day weekend): Kentucky Speleofest, Park City.

*Bob Smith Print Shop
21st St
1st & 2nd*

DANGLING IN DARKNESS

by Fred Reed

The following article is reprinted from the *Federal Times*, issue of February 21, 1977.

Mankind sneers at lemmings because the misguided rodents paddle out into arctic waters and drown, but in this we are unfair. I suspect the furry little creatures are trying to reach Miami the only way they know. One may question their judgment in living at the poles to begin with, but no one can fault them for wanting to leave. I will believe them unbalanced only when I see them riding motorcycles, fighting bulls, or exploring caves.

Especially exploring caves. Of all the varied and unnecessary tortures to which man submits himself, in penance for a vaguely felt sinfulness, cave-exploring is the most perverse. (Caving is today's subject. If you think it is strange to come to the caves of Virginia by means of a dissertation on the psychology of Arctic rats, you are probably right. Indirection is policy in this column.) Some people are deluded into thinking that caves are fairycastle affairs with clean, white stalactites encrusted with glistening gypsum crystals and, in the better stretches, cut gems set in the walls. There may be caves of this variety, but the true caver eschews them. Such caves are for sissies and tourists.

The certified caver finds a freezing slot of a cave with water dripping from the ceiling and jagged projections along the walls. He is unhappy if the ceiling is more than two feet from the floor. He wants mud, and usually gets it. Limestone caves are repositories of the greatest clay ever to blemish the weary earth. A truly fine cave has unexpected pits dropping most of the way to China. It is considered good form not to fall into them.

The whole business is horrid. A typical expedition begins at noon and ends at three a.m. which gives you plenty of time to wish you had never been born. During most of it, you clamber at a dead run over slimy rocks in ice water up to your knees. Conrad Hilton never imagined so much ice water. At all other times you lie on your face and wriggle wormishly through passages only eight inches high. It is hard to say why this is attractive. I suspect that it is not attractive.

One does learn little-known facts of nature, such as that housebroken rats are in a minority. The only sounds are grunting and soulful cursing. Looking forward, you see two globs of filth within which somewhere are the feet of the fellow in front of you. You can't look behind you because the hole is so narrow that you plug it up. Above are 40 million tons of limestone - limestone which, you begin to suspect, is wondering whether it isn't time to settle a few inches. Oh, joy.

To make matters worse - to make matters much worse - caving is an aerial sport. You have to dangle. Cavers are not satisfied to be wet, dangerously chilled, and on the verge of cardiac arrest. This could be achieved by showering in a walk-in refrigerator and then doing push-ups. Thus when they come to a drop, they tie ropes to things and spring into the abyss like playful gazelles. You find yourself dangling 90 feet over jagged rocks in pitch darkness, unable to think of any plausible explanation why you are doing it.

The whole exercise is made still more dangerous by complicated safety devices, some of which explode. For example, an anemic approximation of

light is provided by carbide lamps. These little numbers mix water with calcium carbide to produce acetylene gas, which is then burned. If you drop a bottle of this stuff in a pool, it bubbles furiously and gives off great clouds of acetylene. You then either put out your lamp, run like crazy, and fall to a pit, or leave your lamp on and blow up.

Further, carbide sometimes gets damp and oozes gas while still in a caver's backpack. I once saw a fellow toss his pack into a corner, whereupon it exploded and threw sandwiches everywhere.

Then there is rabies, which bats have. These helpful animals hang from the ceiling in little clots of fur. They are virtually invisible. When you inadvertently brush one with your hand, it falls to the floor with a high pitched *ech-ech-ech*, like a marble scraped across glass. After wondering whether you have hurt the little beast, you wonder whether it managed to bite - cold hands are insensitive. If so, within a few days you may begin to froth at the mouth.

And you know, the average caver thinks lemmings are peculiar.

Trip Report - Turner Cave

Stu Clifton

Dave Howell

Valerie Howell

Some weeks ago our speleological wanderings took us to little-known but interesting Turner Cave. The trip turned out to be a good one, from the moment we turned out of our driveway that morning until the day turned to evening.

After a hearty breakfast of toast and sausage done to a turn, we turned our attention to the cave. The landowner, Mr. Turner, turned over to us a comprehensive set of directions to his cave: "Turn left here - then go to the second turning on the right. Turn there and go as far as the next turn. Turn left and follow the trail, it'll turn into Turner Cave."

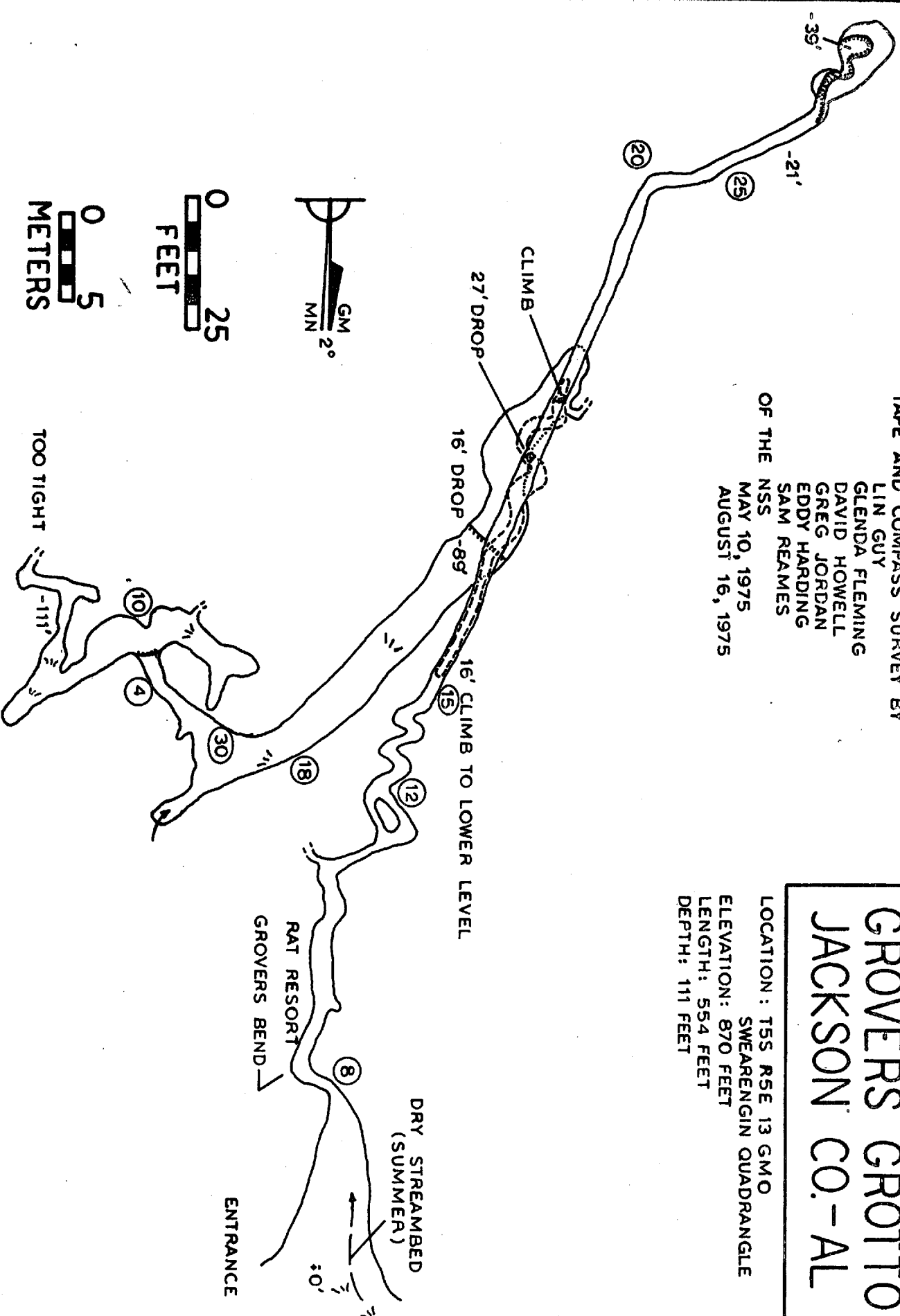
We turned from Mr. Turner and proceeded to Turner Cave. The easy entrance passage led to a turn. We advanced past it and found ourselves at a turn. We turned it, only to find yet another turn. Rounding this turn, we saw... a tern. The tern turned, giving us quite a bad turn. We turned, but were confronted only with a turn. I turned to Stu. "Do you remember a turn?" I asked. He turned to examine the turn. "A turn? Why... no! I don't remember any turns. But I do remember a tern." My stomach turned.

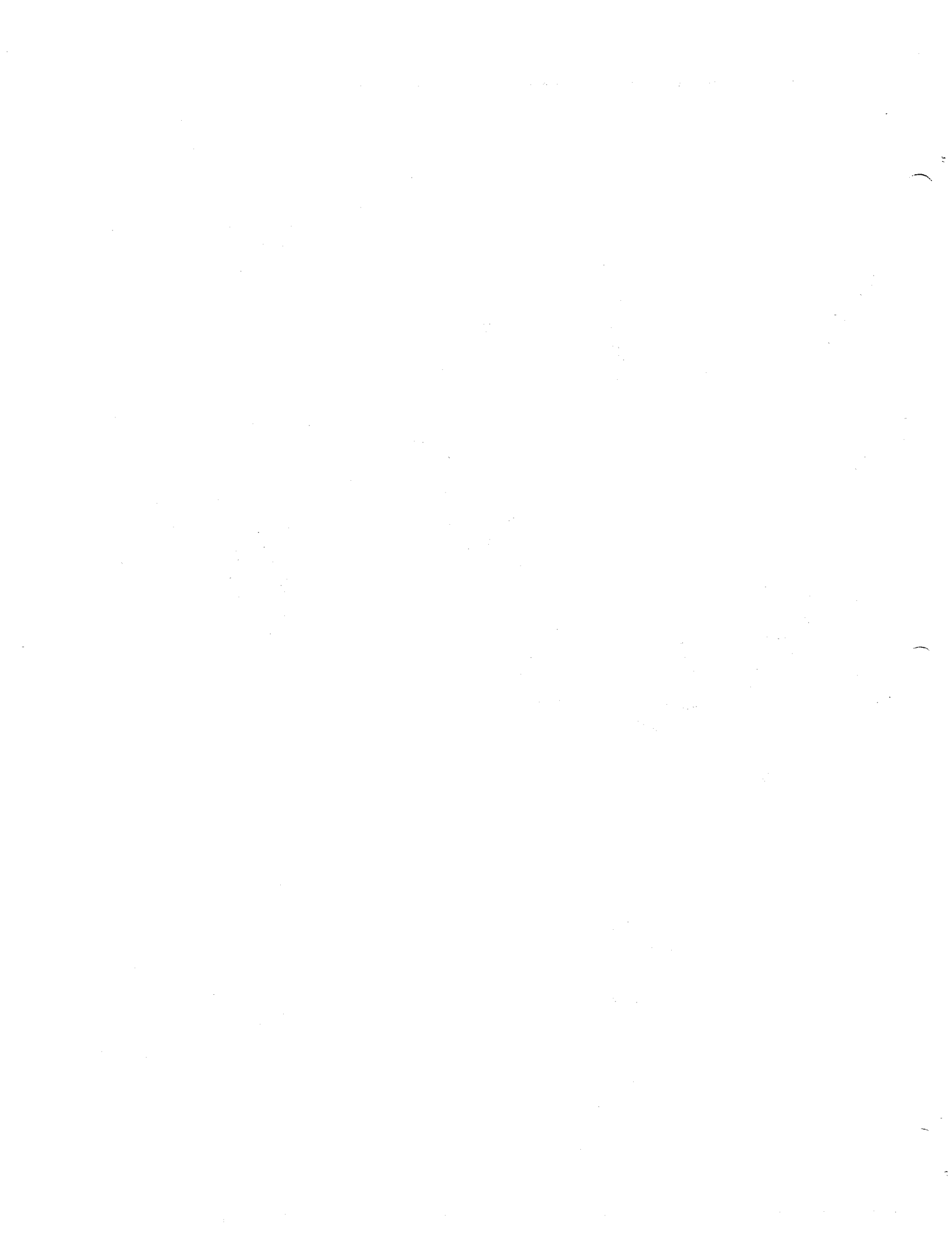
We turned to leave, and turned ourselves to the task of retracing our circuitous path through the many turns of Turner Cave. We investigated all side leads in turn on our way. Thus, though the trip had taken a bad turn, it turned out all right. Though Turner Cave could have turned us against caving, our chagrin turned to mirth when we saw that the Turner Cave tern had turned out for the rest of the day, and, spying the cave's owner, turned on him. The tern turning on Turner turned us on.

GROVERS GROTTO JACKSON CO.-AL

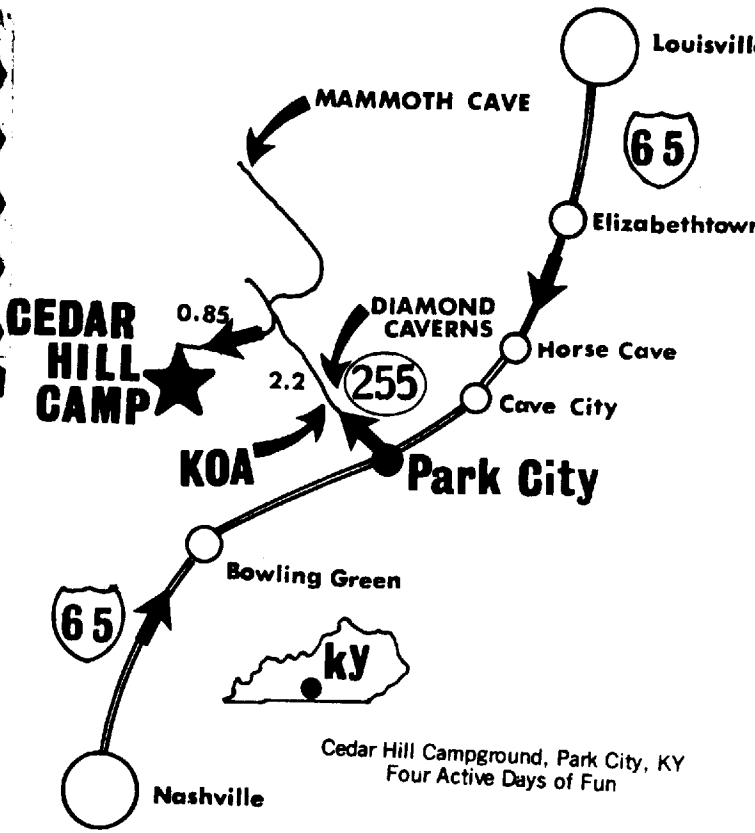
LOCATION : T55 R5E 13 G.M.O
SWEARENGIN QUADRANGLE
ELEVATION: 870 FEET
LENGTH: 554 FEET
DEPTH: 111 FEET

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Prices slightly higher after pre-registration!!!

Mail to: Kentucky Speleofest, 2122 Millside Drive, Louisville, Kentucky 40223 • Mail by: May 10, 1977

BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER

c/o Kathy Spencer, Editor

938 South 80th Street

Birmingham, Alabama 35206

MEETING - MAY 2
RED KEN - MUSEUM
SEE INSIDE

*And her
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