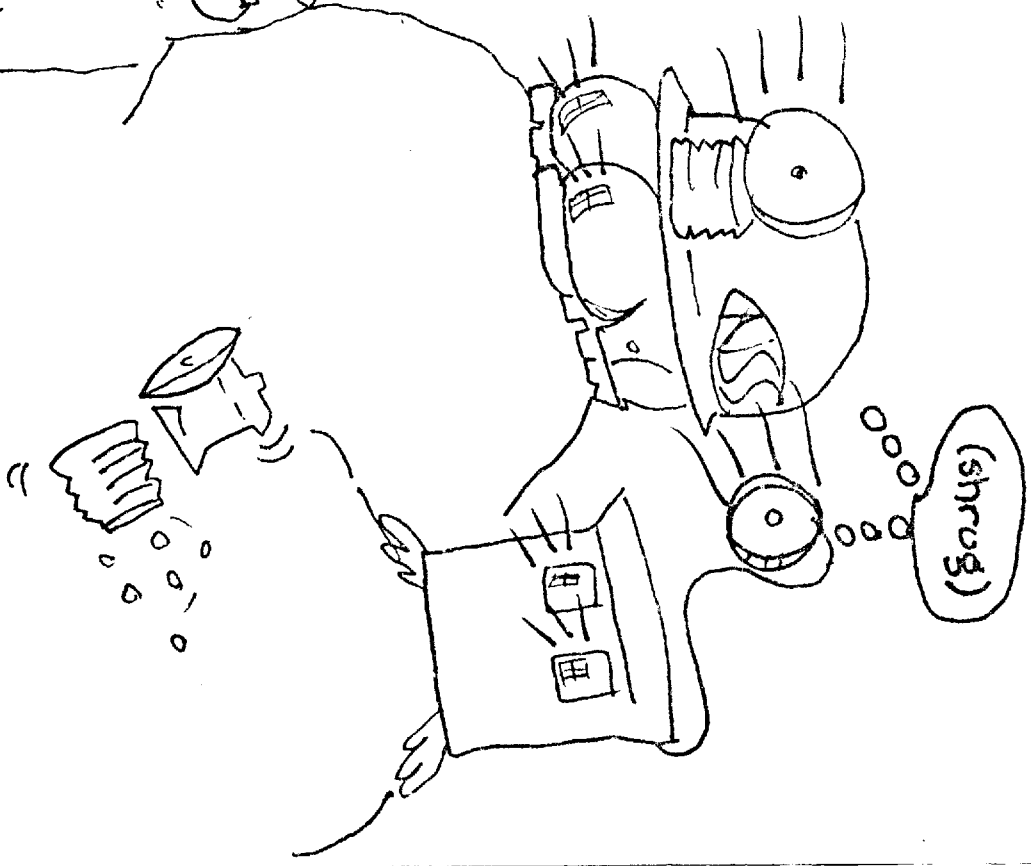
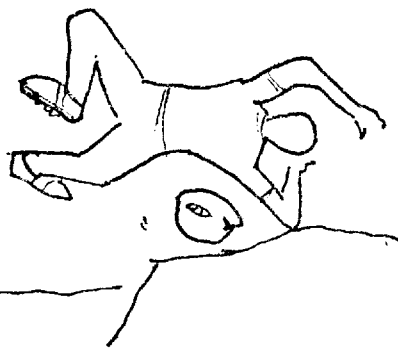


**BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER**  
**NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**  
**JANUARY 1979**

# Mystery of Lights Gross Skelton CAV



WHP





# 2 VOICES FROM UNDERGROUND

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A VISIT TO GROSS SKELETON CAVE \*

November 25, 1978 \*

Tom Chamblee - Reporter \*

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On a magnificent Saturday morning I found myself heading for the immense Gross-Skeleton cave system approximately 20 miles north of Guntersville, Alabama. The upper entrance (Gross Entrance) is in the bottom of a large gulf, in a sink which drains an extensive area of Gunter Mountain. This entrance is a high limestone bluff, is arching and measures approximately 25' wide by 7' high. At a distance of 100' from this entrance one encounters a larger area at which point the greater volume of water flows down through a smooth round conduit to the main trunk below. At this time this zone is completely choked with vegetal wash and is impassible. By ascending this organic "fill" one can bypass the choke and proceed on to the main cavern. A couple of hundred feet beyond, a short pitch is encountered. The sides of this canyon are bare, clean rocks and it is easily descended. A short way beyond there a more difficult drop is to be done. This is a 12' descent into the first pool in the main corridor. Although tricky at first sight, this descent is also very easy and relatively safe due to the good traction surface of the clean washed limestone. Once down into this first pool (about 3' deep), one proceeds downstream through a low, wide corridor, always walking on large, round alluvial boulders. Just beyond I stopped to add some water to my lamp. Due to the cool temperature of the water, the gas in my lamp contracted and caused the light to go out. This occurred for the good, for in the total darkness I observed a very intriguing phenomenon: all over the organic clay banks I noticed small, bright lights blinking on and off, very much like the mercury vapor lights of a village. I sat there for 20 minutes observing them, pinpointing them and turning on my lamp trying to see what they were. In discussing this later with a friend, he suggested that they might be a luminous protozoan living in this organic wash. Whatever they may be, they are quite a spectacle! In an earlier trip, Milo Washington had observed this same phenomenon, but was unable to convince others of their reality.

Not far beyond here I entered the first large chamber downstream, a section approximately 65' wide by 40' high by 150' long. Here stands a profusion of Christmastree-like stalagmites of very sizeable dimensions. If one ascends the breakdown in this room, he can gain considerable elevation above the room's floor. The true ceiling is far above the 40' high roof first seen as you enter the chamber. Beyond this one continues for a long distance in a large passage filled with massive flowstone and sundry speleothems of multicoloration. This calcite fill tends to hide some of the true dimensions of the trunk tube. A good way downstream the character of the passage drastically changes. Here one enters an almost square-shaped tunnel, knee- to waist-deep in water. The stream at this point has dissected a 2" to 3" thick bed of black flint-chalcedony which now projects on either side. All along this hall, tan, brown, orange and white calcite dramatically contrasts to the dark gray, massive limestone walls. As you emerge from this tunnel, you again enter a very large, flat-roofed room measuring from 70' to 90' wide by 20' to 30' high by 250' long. In the upstream section of this hall is a glorious, massive flowstone above which hangs a row of 7' long joint controlled stalactites. Long, beautiful stalactites adorn the entire roof of this hall. On the downstream end is a massive, wall-like flowstone under which the stream flows.

Once underneath, one enters a very deep pool in a wide, flat-roofed section of passage. As one looks up in a dome chamber, they will be enthralled by the unbelievable profusion of long, multi-colored soda straw stalactites which complement this zone. Beyond this I entered a truly deep pool. I crossed this pool only one time before, afoot, being nose deep in water! The level of Guntersville Reservoir must have been low at that time. This time I walked out in the pool until it became too deep to go any further. Across this lake is a high vault passage completely adorned by soda straw stalactites, and just beyond there is a talus hall so immense that it staggers one's comprehension! (130' high x 150' to 200' wide x 800' long) Atop the talus in this hall is the famed Integration Formation and many other noteworthy spectacles. It is a must to see this cavern, but take caution in that this cave nearly completely submerges during heavy rains.

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THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHTS OF GROSS-SKELETON CAVE

Milo Washington - Reporter

Three years ago in Gross-Skeleton Cave my carbide lamp went out.

Typically and stupidly I had no other light source and no tip cleaner, so I sat in the darkness and waited for my caving companions to notice me missing and rush to the rescue. Gross-Skeleton is an engrossing cave; I sat for a long time.

But not in total darkness, for on the wall was an eerie phosphorescent glow. To my astonishment, each time I approached the bright greenish-blue light, it would blink off. This happened four or five times. By the time my friends (Gary Barnes and two visitors from Australia) returned, the light had blinked off for good.

Under my insistance we searched the wall thoroughly for the source of the mysterious glow, but found nothing. Afterwards I became the object of patronizing smiles and witty comments.

Despite the ridicule I dutifully reported this phenomenon at the next Grotto meeting. This august assembly met my story with outright laughter and some people with elephantine memories reminded me of my "discovery" of the "blind cave rats" in Banana Cave.

With time, like a flying saucer witness, the encounter became remote and eventually I forgot it completely.

Until November 24, 1978. On this date Tom Chamblee solo-visited Gross-Skeleton. Coincidentally his light failed at the exact spot where I had seen the strange glow, but unlike me, Tom didn't see a single glow-thing, instead he saw thousands, blinking on and off like Christmas lights.

Tom and I tentatively conclude that the blinking lights are the mating signals of a very small and perhaps unknown life form. "Small" because neither he nor I were able to find one in the light.

So remember, wize gize, if I say a hen dips snuff...

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WANNVILLE RIDGEWALK

Stuart Albee  
Will Chamberlin  
Stu Clifton  
Dave Howell - Reporter  
Valerie Howell  
James Jenkins  
Mary Ann Jenkins  
Tom Lamb  
Vivian Lamb

\* Early in December I mounted the first ridgewalk of this winter, to an area on the northern part of the Wannville Quad, west of Low Gap. The area looks good from the first glance,

with profuse karst. In fact, it was from driving through Low Gap last year on my way to somewhere else that I first became interested in ridgewalking the area.

We parked at Low Gap and, after noting the abundant presence of deer hunters and dressing appropriately in "don't shoot me" orange, we hiked up the hill to the 1000' elevation, where most of the known caves on the Wannville Quad occur.

Our luck was good: we found three good-looking entrances, all vertical, one a small open-air pit.

We returned in two weeks equipped to explore these finds, and joined by Will Chamberlin. Upon entering the three, we found that one, the open-air pit, dropped about 20' and dudded out with only 10' of horizontal passage. An adjacent pit, a small hole which we'd dug out, proved to be better: its total drop was 70', with no horizontal; we dubbed it "Death Hole" for its alarming tendency to drop fist-size rocks on those entering. The third pit, actually a climb-down past a large log wedged in the entrance, bottomed out at 50', just barely qualifying for inclusion in the Alabama Cave Survey. Its name became "Pugil Hole".

Another ridgewalking trip to this same area is now in the works; to quote the passage I wrote in the cavers' log at the Liberty Restaurant in Scottsboro, we're expecting to find a 600' freefall pit with horizontal passage at the bottom connecting with Fern and Mammoth-Flint Ridge. (Well - not really, but it sure is nice to think about it!)

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MILL CAVE \*

Grassy Cove, Cumberland County, Tenn. \*

Tom Chamblee - Reporter \*

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On a Thursday in September, I crossed George Hemmer's pastures, walking straight toward Brady Mountain and MILL CAVE. MILL CAVE drains all of Grassy Cove and is the source of the Sequatchie River 6½ miles to the south. The entrance is a wide, elliptical opening 45 feet wide by 10 feet high.

As one travels the first 3000 feet downstream, the passage character is generally flat roofed to elliptical and contains many large solutional pockets and small domes. One encounters several deep pools which may be crossed (at normal pool elevation) around the inside wall of the "meander".

Along this course (35-to-50 feet wide by 10-25 feet high) one encounters several beautiful, large flowstones and draperies, but the greatest beauty lies in the structural and solutional aspects of the passage itself. This passage throughout its course is very open and quite impressive, having an appearance somewhat like SALT RIVER CAVE in Crow Creek Valley. At

t approximately 3000 feet from the entrance, a huge breakdown chamber is encountered measuring 200 feet long by 115 feet wide by 75 feet high, and having a square cross section throughout.

Just beyond lies a semicircular room (115' across by 25' high) at which point the stream passage turns 90° to the west-southwest under Brady Mountain. I climbed the talus above this room and came upon an awesome dome pit 100 feet high by 80 feet long by 65 feet wide. At the top hangs a huge pillar stalagmite 12 inches in diameter, its wide base freely suspended above the floor. It either formed on a pallet dripstone or developed in an old floor level now thoroughly eroded away by vadose solution. The top of the dome has a solid flat white plaster-like ceiling, adding contrast to the rest of the scene.

Beyond this, the passage continues another 3000 feet as an enormous, "Mammoth-like" stream corridor to a point where the white water disappears beneath a very large breakdown beyond. Along this course many huge chambers are encountered,

many of which rival the largest sections in the Mammoth-Flint Ridge system of Kentucky.

A visit to this cavern is truly a thrilling experience as long as the weather is dry.

The listing which follows this report is a more detailed description of passage character throughout the system.

NOTE: This cave was described to me by several of the Kemmer family as being small and not worth seeing!

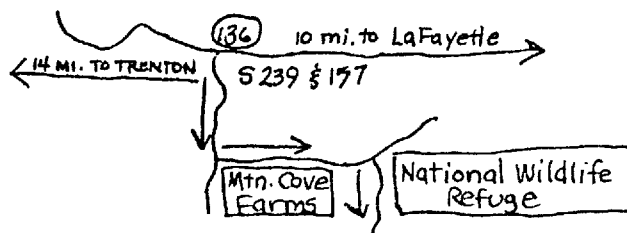
# SERA RIDGEWALK 1979

JANUARY 27-28, 1979

Sponsored by:

Athens Speleological Society  
 P.O. Box 742, Athens, GA 30602

WHERE: North of the junction of Lookout Mtn. & Pigeon Mtn. along Harrisburg Gap.



Follow signs to campground

Excellent tent camping facilities  
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LINEAR DISTANCE  
FROM ENTRANCEDESCRIPTION OF PASSAGE

0 - 200'	Gentle arched roof, 35-40' wide by 12' high
200' - 300'	Flat roof, square cross section, 35'-45' wide by 12' high, solutionally enlarged joint systems.
300' - 450'	Conduit is elliptical, 35'-40' wide by 6'-10' high.
450' - 650'	Flat-roofed, 35'-50' wide with some large scalloped talus.
650' - 1100'	Gentle arch, 10'-20' high by 40'-50' wide, containing many large solution cavities.
1100' - 1400'	Gentle arch, 7' to 8' high by 30' to 50' wide, very smooth walls.
At 1400'	A large rimstoned flowstone, dry and covered in coarse calcite "glitter." 10' high by 12' across.
1400' - 1800'	35'-45' wide by 10-15' high. A beautiful, multi-colored stalactite flowstone is formed below a small domepit.
1800' - 2000'	40' wide, 5-6' high. Smooth ceiling.
2000' - 2200'	20' high arching hall, 45' wide. At 2150' is a grand, multi-colored, thick drapery stalactite, 7' long.
2200' - 2600'	4-6' high by 30' wide.
2600' - 3000'	Flat roof, square cross-section, 20' high by 40-50' wide. Deep pool.
3000' - 3200'	Enormous breakdown chamber, square cross section, 200' long by 115' wide by 75' high. There is a large entrance in the roof which opens into a sheer walled sink.
3200' - 3320'	Semicircular room, 115' in diameter by 25' high. The passage turns 90° to the west south west under Brady Mountain.
At 3320'	To the left atop a large talus pile is a 100' high domepit 80' long by 65' wide. A hugh pillar stalagmite is at the top.
3320' - 3650'	Very large talus passage, 70-90' wide by 50' high.
3650' - 3800'	Huge talus room, semicircular, 150' long by 100' wide by 95' high.
3800' - 4100'	Huge, open, flat ceiling hall, 300' long by 100' wide by 50' high. Numerous white brachiopods and large crinoid stalks.
4100' - 5000'	Elliptical tube, 8-20' high by 35-40' wide.
5000' - 5400'	Flat roof, large talus, 50-60' wide by 20' high.
5400 - 5650'	Expansive, open breakdown hall, 250' long by 90' wide by 50' high.
5650' - 6300'	Clean scalloped walls, 30-50' high, massive clean breakdown. Rapids sink beneath breakdown at this point.

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THE 1979 SERA B.M. WILL BE HELD IN ROOM B, VOLKER HALL, UAB CAMPUS, BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA, FEBRUARY 17, 1979. THE PROGRAM WILL START AT 10:00 WITH THE B.M. ITSELF AT ABOUT 2:00 P.M.

SOMEONE WILL BE AT ROOM B FROM 8:00 A.M., SATURDAY ON. YOUR SLIDES CAN BE SHOWN BEFORE THE PROGRAMS START. ANYONE WISHING TO PRESENT PROGRAMS, OR TALKS (20 MIN. MAX.) PLEASE LET US KNOW SO YOU CAN BE SCHEDULED.

FRONT AND REAR PROJECTION FACILITIES WITH KODAK CARROUSEL PROJECTOR, WILL BE AVAILABLE.

ALL TIMES C.S.T.

A MEAL AND PARTY WILL BE HELD AFTERWARDS. MEAL WILL BE NO MORE THAN \$2.50 EACH \$1.00 CHILDREN.

CRASH PADS WILL BE AVAILABLE.

