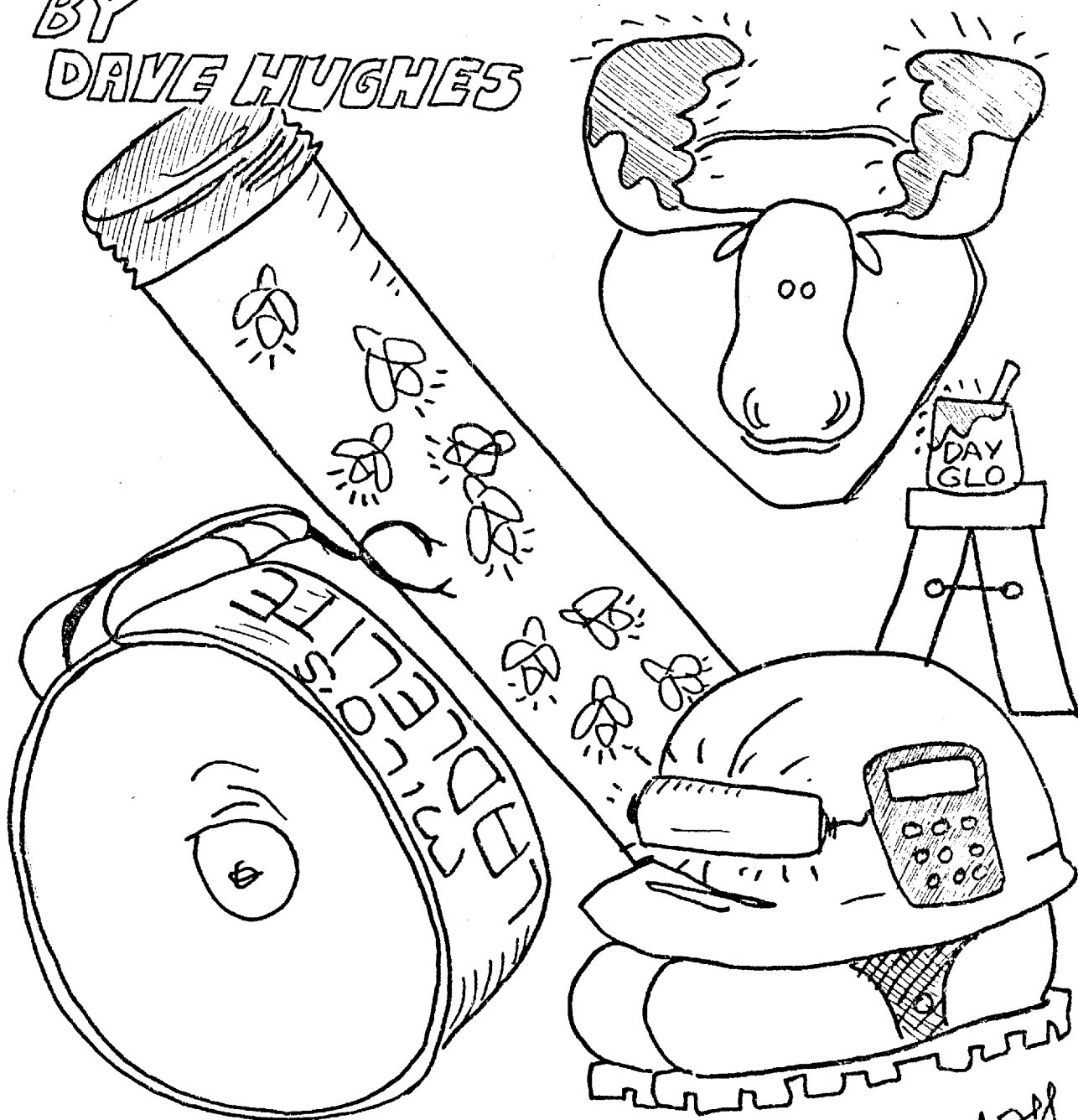


THE COMPLETE BOOK OF NON-CAVING

BY
DAVE HUGHES



BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER
NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
MARCH 1979



As you can tell by the return address, we're really P.O.'d now. Yes, the grotto has found a home for its mail, saving it from its current wanderings through past and present officers. This should make it easier to correspond with the officers you want, with just the one address to keep track of. At any rate, we would appreciate your helping us get our money's worth in this endeavor by sending grotto stuff in care of our new box number.

We survived the SERA Winter Business Meeting - from all accounts I could track down by deadline, turnout was a little disappointing, but those who did make it had an enjoyable time. We look for a more detailed assessment in the next issue. The SERA officers for the coming year are: Joe Domnanovich - Chairman; Buddy Lane - Vice Chairman; Foxy Ferguson - Secretary/Treasurer; Will Chamberlin - SERA Correspondent. Congratulations all!

One department I'd like to see started in this rag is a review of all the exchange publications we receive. Hopefully, our new single address will centralize these, and can review them more readily. Anyone interested in giving this a try?

From what little skimming I've managed, word has it that SARA CORRIE is up and around again, albeit slowly for now... that BOB LIEBMAN suffered some major equipment losses in a recent fire...that XANADU CAVE is just 850' short of being 10 miles, which puts it as second longest cave in Tennessee (and this is with several major leads still going, some with ceiling heights of 15'!).

Our CAVE OF THE MONTH feature seems to be accomplishing its purpose of sparking greater interest in Grotto trips, as you can read in Dave's report on the trip to CHANDLER CAVE. This is a great opportunity to visit some caves you might want to but talk yourself out of, and anyone who wants to give leading a trip a try, just supply us with the cave and the dates, and we'll write it up!

Also inside is a very entertaining treatise by DAVE HUGHES - one of the founders and maintainers of the Scottsboro Liberty Restaurant Caver's Log, something any caver passing through S'boro should get from the cashier and check over.

Any in coming issues be on the lookout for an article Milo promised on unique light sources, like the Ladle Light he carried into (yes, into) CHANDLER.

DATES TO WATCH

- Mar. 5 - March Grotto Meeting 7:30 pm
- Mar. 10 - Huntsville Grotto Trip to XANADU
Meet at NSS Headquarters 8:30am
- Mar. 24 - Board of Governors Meeting
Carriage Inn, Huntsville, AL
- Apr. 2 - April Grotto Meeting 7:30 pm
- Apr. 7 - March Grotto trip to SKYLIGHT
CAVE - Greg McGill, leader
(See Cave of the Month)
- June 15-
16 Summer SERA
Ketner's Mill, Marion Co., TN

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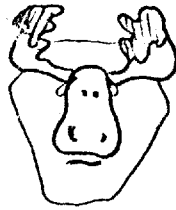
Deadline for receiving materials is the 20th day of the month preceding the month of issue. Materials received after this date will be published in the following issue.

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Lotsa Lowdown for the Lethargic Louse

by Dave Hughes, NSS 14550



Several years ago the famous Scottish mountaineer Tom Patey spared the climbing world a lot of unnecessary hard work by explaining how to be a great climber without actually climbing.* Fortunately, caving is simply mountaineering indoors and as a result, his clever theme is easily adapted to the pale, anemic troglodyte. It is therefore with concern for the comatose caver that we present "Lotsa Lowdown for the Lethargic Louse."

The "Too Much Like Hard Work" Ploy

This is the Virginia caver's favorite gambit when he finds himself butting heads with some Southern boys at a SERA Cave Carnival. Many Alabama caves are admittedly a little remote in comparison to Luray Caverns, but I have heard this sort of generalization directed at the Huntsville area where one can scarcely leave the main road without falling into a pit. No, this simply will not do! Far better is to use:

The "Off Form" Ploy

This one is as old as the limestone itself but still is widely used. Few cavers will ever admit to being "on form." Everyone would feel uneasy if they did.

Fortunately, a caver who was "on form" during the morning can be feeling "off form" by early afternoon. If an interval of 48 hours or so has elapsed between descents, he may talk of being "out of condition." If the layoff is a week or longer, he may justifiably consider himself to be "out of training."

The "Bum Lamp" Ploy

Often it is best to blame an inanimate object for one's troubles. Such a participant will flood his lamp at the Waiting Room above Surprise Pit and then let the others in the group share his consternation when the only remaining dry felt is "accidentally"

dropped into the abyss.

Unfortunately some cavers carry such a myriad of spares that it is possible to be stranded with a veritable equipment vendor while in such a predicament. For such eventualities, it is best to rely on an exotic illumination device, permanently riveted to one's helmet. Any single failure will then ensure the safety of non-participation. Frequently seen examples include: a fluorescent lamp controlled by a microprocessor, a bunch of fireflies in a phosphorescent tube, or perhaps a pair of moose antlers painted DayGlo.

The "Wrong Gear" Ploy

The key to this ploy is to always leave for the "big" trip with completely inappropriate equipment. "I'm an experienced sump diver" is a fairly safe assertion at BIG BONE CAVE where it is unlikely that you will be called upon to demonstrate your skills. Such a character will show up for a downstream assault on ELLISON'S wearing a pair of tennis shorts and a turtleneck.

"Good Heavens! The water didn't seem so high on our last push. I'd love to join you guys but I demolished my wetsuit in Proventina."

Or for a Sunday afternoon's tour of HOOPER'S WELL he will unveil a 9-bar Super Rack.

"Not much good for these rabbit holes I guess, but it sure was mighty handy at 'drinas."

Any off-the-cuff comment of this nature generally goes over very well with the horde of novices present. You'll be so mobbed signing autographs and recommending carabiners it'll be clear that you are too busy to waste the day underground.

The "Phony Cavern" Ploy

The cornerstone of this gambit has been laid by the uprising of the netherworld conservationists. Society policy is to be purposefully vague on the whereabouts of caves and major publications frequently or locate caverns to the nearest county. With such facts firmly in mind, merely select a county, pick a regional correspondent and

LOTSAs LOWDOWN continued...

away you go.

BULLETIN! A MAJOR NEW SYSTEM HAS BEEN UNEARTHED IN JACKSON COUNTY, ALABAMA BY ONE OTHER THAN THE CARBIDE KID.

EXPLORING FOR DAYS IN THE LABYRINTH OF PASSAGEWAYS, WE WERE FINALLY STOPPED BY A SEEMINGLY BOTTOMLESS ABYSS. THE 800' ROPE WE ALWAYS CARRY 'JUST IN CASE' PROVED INADEQUATE FOR THE TASK AND WE HASTILY EXITED THE CAVERN WITHOUT INCIDENT," REPORTED ONE OF THE TEAM. DAUNTLESS, THE KID RETURNED THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND TO SOLO THE DROP (LATER ESTIMATED AT 1232 FEET) AND UPON RETURNING TOPSIDE, PERMANENTLY SEALED THE ENTRANCE WITH SOME WELL-PLACED TOVEX. "THIS IS NO PLACE FOR THE NOVICE," HE EXPLAINED WHILE COILING THE LONGEST SECTION OF BLUEWATER THIS REPORTER HAS EVER SEEN. WE HOPE FURTHER INFORMATION WILL BE FORTHCOMING IN THE MONTHS AHEAD.

Such information is, in fact, never forthcoming but is easily explained away by the "anti-publication" ploy.

The "Pseudo-Scientist" Ploy

The essence of this ploy is to cultivate an aura of intellectual respectability. Once the mystique is formed it is hard to wrong. Encumbered with a myriad of collection bottles and verbose nomenclature, such a lad is hardly an appropriate companion for a sporting trip to the netherworld.

I once accompanied such a chap on a supposed "push trip" to the New Section of a well-known cave. While I refettled a temperamental lamp before going underground, my companion sulked just inside the entrance minutely examining the underside of an insect with his reading glass. "Bugs are my business," he finally admitted after much probing "...and everyone knows that such multilingual, polygamous, isolated tripods are never found beyond the entrance region. You lads push on downstream, I'll linger here a few hours longer and perhaps join you on the way out."

The "Responsible Family Man" Ploy

This gambit is nearly infallible because it exploits the very foundations of our existence.

"Don't seem to get underground much nowadays," they mutter despondently.

"Can't take the same risks anymore; unfair to the kids." So saying, they leap into their Jeeps and become power-crazy charioteers, mowing down crash barriers and terrorizing the walking populace. "Sorry you had to wait up for me dear," they say after shrieking home in a cloud of dust; "Just stopped in for a quick one with the boys and got carried away."

Some aging cavers, no longer able to cut the cheese in the netherworld, have been known to contemplate matrimony as the only honorable way out.

The "Speleo-Politician" Ploy

This ploy relies on the premise that the character in question is, in fact, too busy determining the Future Directions of caving to be wasting time underground.

"All this talk of B.O.G.'s, C.O.G.'s and Ph.D.'s bores me to tears," he explains. "Oh, how I long for the easier days of Sump II in Gouffre Berger. Ah, but some of us seasoned veterans have to make the sacrifice and I am glad to do it. You wetsuited youngsters continue your playful ways and I'll see to it that the caverns remain open for all of us."

The "Quasi-Veteran" Ploy

Historians have recorded that Bill Torode only begins to function properly when he is hundreds of feet below the surface of the earth in a jagged crawlway. This adds up to a pretty considerable handicap when you consider how much of his life must be spent topside. It is all part of the mystique which surrounds The Men who are expected to Go Deep.

To utilize this ploy to its fullest, it is advantageous, but not necessary, to have an NSS number below 6000. Nevertheless, a certain vocabulary of "buzz words" needs to be cultivated. For example:

The final step	Vertical Bill
Gouffre Berger	pogo stick
Swildon's VI	free fall
the spool	questionable rigging
Lew Bicking and I	quite deep
the PSM	deep
that crazy Mike Boon	very deep
Proventina	a hare-brained escapade

Continued.....

LOTSA LOWDOWN continued...The "Land-Owner Relations" Ploy

The essence of this ploy is that no landowner, regardless of outward friendliness, really wants anyone fooling around under his property. If everyone remembered this simple fact, we would all be spared a lot of needless caving. Acting like a rich city-slicker, four-wheeling around his front porch or shooting a couple of cows usually does the trick.

At the next grotto meeting it is all very easy to explain. "We arrived in good shape and intent on diving the final sump. However, the red-necked hick that owns the place was in a crummy mood so we visited with him only briefly and then left immediately to maintain good landowner relations."

The "Entrance Photographer" Ploy

A prerequisite for the application of this ploy is a good collection of entrance shots. Such a portfolio may then be used at an endless series of grotto presentations where everyone will assume that you actually "bottomed" the cave pictured.

"This, folks, shows the main entrance to FERN," one explains. "Such tranquil surroundings barely hint at the terrors which lie within."

Then, advancing to the next frame:

"Now we peruse the top of CEMETERY PIT which is clearly very different from GOLONDRINAS, as seen on the following slide."

On showing the New Entrance to ELLISON'S:

"Behind this unassuming crack lies the deepest freefall pit in the United States. We found a descent of the shaft to be a bit tricky and it is likely that a rope would have been useful."

Many variations of the above ploy are possible and, in fact, it is frequently necessary to synthesize additional gambits for particularly embarrassing situations. Perhaps the "Support Team" ploy, the "Solo Man" ploy or the "Rescue Squad" ploy will eventually find their way into our repertoire. It is hoped, however, that the above list summarizes an adequately comprehensive series of tricks to maintain an elevated ego for even the most ardent loafer. If not, perhaps it would be easier to simply go caving.

***** CHANDLER CAVE,
CHANDLER CAVE * Ala 987 was sel-
February 25, 1979 * ected for the
Gary Barnes * February Birming-
Steve Hall * ham Grotto trip
Dave Howell - Reporter * because of the
Valerie Howell * unfinished status
David Johnson * of its map. Three
Donald Johnson * good leads were
Tim King * shown on the map
Milo Washington * all with high
Rick Washington * ceilings --
***** * certainly an
***** appealing prospect.

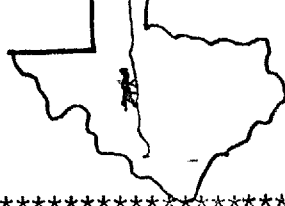
We parked just below the CANDLESTAND, an interesting cave formed in a sandstone bluff, with several entrances. After walking through a small portion of the CANDLESTAND, we followed the tops of the bluffs around into Chandler Hollow. This proved to be a highly scenic walk, well worth a stop if you're in the area. After leaving the bluffs and hiking up the hollow, we found a climbdown entrance which we took to be that of CHANDLER. This error was quickly recognized, however, as the entrance pinched off to nothing almost immediately. Continuing further up the hollow, we found CHANDLER: a large opening in the bottom of a shallow sink, easy to find, just as the Survey promised.

CHANDLER CAVE consists of several canyon passages which show signs of total flooding in high water. On the Sunday we were there, following a period of very wet weather throughout north Alabama, there was a large waterfall falling into one of the cave's main passages from above somewhere; this waterfall was not indicated on the map, so it may be assumed that it flows only in wet weather.

Checking each of the three leads shown on the cave map, we found that one petered out in a jumble of boulders near the surface, another led to a 6-inch-wide crack into which a great amount of water flows at times (this could probably be dug out large enough to get through, but it would require a spade and some time), the third was the path taken by most of the water from the waterfall; the waterfall's volume of water rendered it impassable that day. In addition, we checked out the hole from which the water comes; this was a tight crawlway which might be passable when the water's not flowing.

As we exited CHANDLER, one of our

(CONT'D. NEXT PAGE)



Texas Depth Record Broken
by Greg Passmore

For sixteen years the Texas depth record has remained at -371 feet in LANGTRY LEAD CAVE. In September 1978, four cavers from San Antonio surveyed down -450 and the cave is continuing downward.

SORCERER'S CAVE is located in desolate west Texas near a small town called Sanderson. The cave was originally entered in 1962 by cavers from Sul Ross University. Unfortunately, the cavers only pushed down -340 before forced to return by severe headaches, nausea and shortness of breath. Later the cavers developed symptoms of what was probably histoplasmosis.

In September, the San Antonio cavers donned surgical face masks and dropped the first three pitches; Witch's Well (46'), Poltergeist Pit (75'), and Demon Dump (70'). This led the cavers through some grim bubbling guano swamps approximately waist deep. Shortly after this "Bubble, Bubble,

Guano and Trouble Passage" was found the "Sanctum Sanctorum". This chamber bears the dimensions 120' x 172' and from 20 to 60 feet in height and is filled with large formations. From here, a 58' breakdown pit drops into a river passage, the "Sirion River".

Today, the river passage has been waded almost a mile and still contains three unchecked leads. Plans for the next months include completion of the survey and a detailed description of the cave. This description is planned to include speleomorphic analysis, a biologic survey and meteorologic data gathering. Help is needed in all phases, but is especially critical in biology. Anyone wishing to assist is encouraged to contact the author at:

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(CONTD. FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

number remarked, "Well, I guess we can cross this one off our list!" But can we, really? How do we know that that water doesn't flow a few more feet and then off into a great chasm, its vast and velvety darkness never before penetrated by a caver's light, its depth never plumbed by humans? How do we know...?

CAVE OF THE MONTH

The Cave:

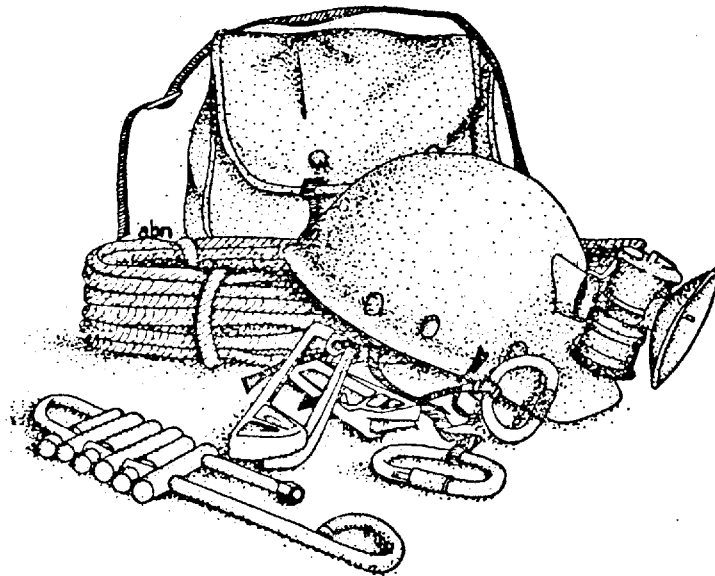
Skylight Cave, Ala. 1543, will be the destination of the Grotto's March trip, providing permission to go there can be obtained from the cave owner. (If permission is not forthcoming, an alternate cave will be selected by the trip leader.) The cave lies just north of Guntersville on the Swearingen Quad (S-4), not far from War Eagle and Roaring River Caves. To quote the vital stats from the Alabama Cave Survey, Skylight's surveyed length 2157', its total depth is 192', and its deepest single drop is 106'. This drop is not mandatory, though it will be rigged for those who want to do it. As can be seen on the accompanying map, there are a number of short drops in the cave, and two of these are handline drops (requiring rope but not vertical gear). The trip leader will arrange for all the required ropes for the trip; it will not be necessary for each person on the trip to carry his own rope. From all indications, Skylight Cave promises to be interesting, scenic, and challenging.

The Trip:

Trip leader for Skylight is Greg McGill. The trip will be on Sunday, April 7 (yes, it is the March Grotto trip -- no, it does not supplant the April Grotto trip, which will be planned for late April), and will leave at 7:00 a.m. from the Krystal in Tarrant. As usual, if you want breakfast there before leaving, show up before 7:00. As the cave is near Guntersville and thus one of the closer caves to Birmingham, we should be able to spend several hours underground and still get back home by early evening.

Equipment Needed:

Normal speleo gear in any case, vertical gear (excluding ropes) if you intend to do the 106' drop. If you do intend to do the big drop, you must bring your own rack and climbing gear -- due to considerations of safety and time, sharing of vertical gear will not be permitted. OK? OK.



ART COURTESY ANN NEESE - NSG MEMBERS MANUAL 1979

SKYLIGHT CAVE

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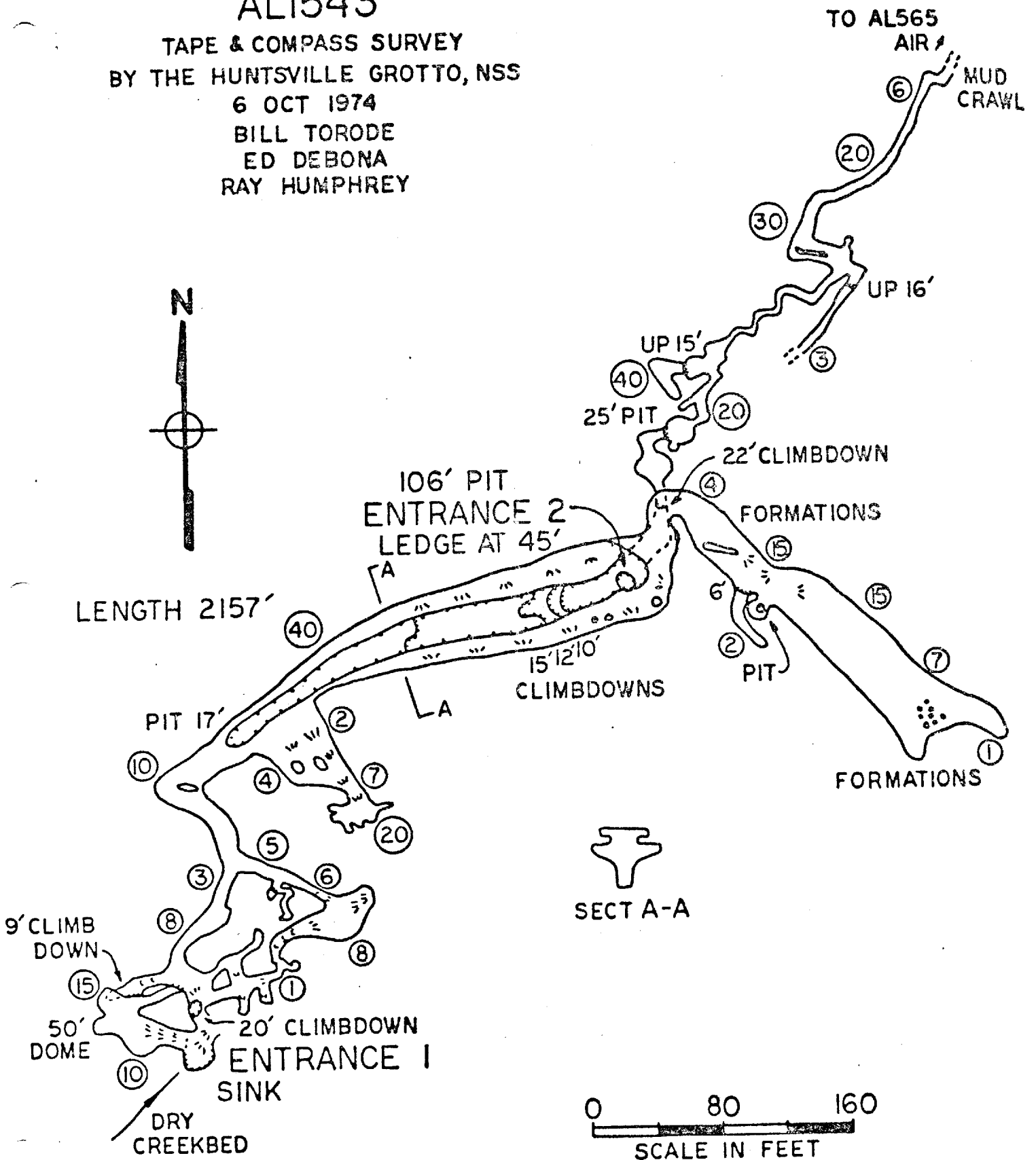
TAPE & COMPASS SURVEY
BY THE HUNTSVILLE GROTTTO, NSS

6 OCT 1974

BILL TORODE

ED DEBONA

RAY HUMPHREY



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