

CAVES

Solution of limestone and related rocks results in the formation of caves, many of which give valuable information regarding the ground-water conditions under which they were formed. The locations of the caves described in the following pages are shown on Figure 22.

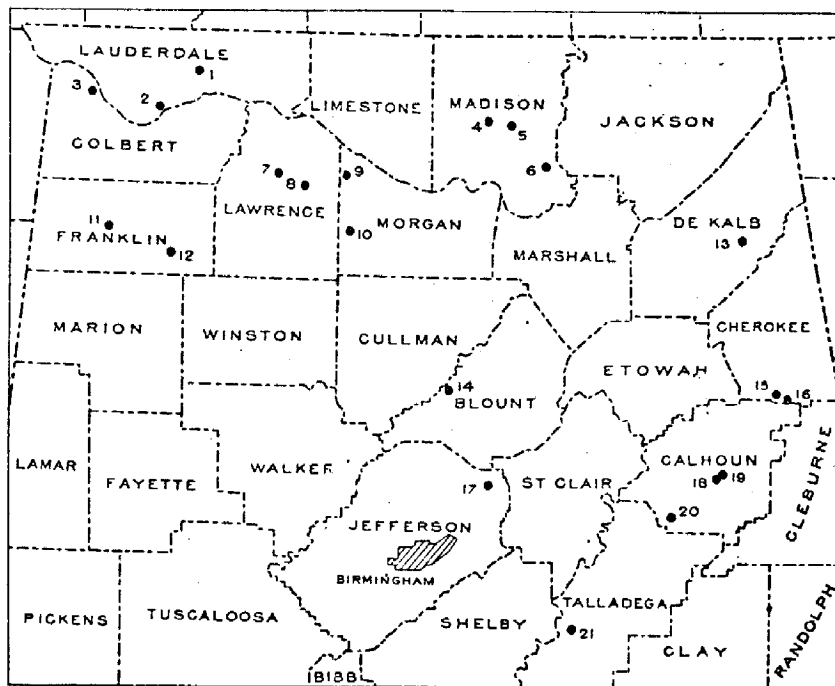


Fig. 22.—Sketch map showing location of caves described in this report. 1, Bat Cave; 2, Coffee Cave; 3, Georgetown Cave; 4, Shelta Cave; 5, Natural Well; 6, Her...g Cave; 7, Swopes Cave; 8, Ivy Hollow Cave; 9, Trinity Cave; 10, Sans Souci Cave; 11, Underground Lake; 12, Evans Cave; 13, Manitou Cave; 14, Bangor Cave; 15, Robinson Cave; 16, Wright Cave; 17, Alabama Caverns; 18, Weaver and Lady Caves; 19, Little Weaver Cave; 20, Miller's Cave; 21, Kymuiga Cave.

1. *Bat Cave, Lauderdale County.*—Bat Cave is on the bank of Shoal Creek in sec. 9, T. 2 S., R. 11 W. Its entrance is a wide rock shelter about 70 feet above the creek, in the face of a cliff of Fort Payne chert. The cave floor is about 600 feet above the sea. From the rock shelter a passage 10 feet wide strikes S. 10° W. for 200 feet to a point where it is blocked by a conical pile of clay and broken chert which has been washed into the cave through a vertical passage in the roof, probably connecting with a sink on the surface. This pile of debris prevented further ex-

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This month's cover:

The FIRST Alabama Cave Survey.
The survey was published as part
of Special Report No. 16 in 1933
by the Alabama Geological Survey
under Walter B. Jones.

SEPTEMBER MEETING Sept. 14 7:30
Sept. 14 7:30
Sept. 14 7:30
Sept. 14 7:30

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ASSURES THAT THE MESSAGE WILL GET
THROUGH.

P.O. Box 3302
Birmingham, Al. 35205

A reminder to all Birmingham Grotto
Members that October is the month
we elect new officers.

Grotto minutes
by
J. E. Thomas

Another BAT SCARE STORY.

Birmingham news Sept. 4 1981

Three rabid bats are found in Calhoun County

Three bats in Calhoun County have
been found by health officials to be
rabid. And pet owners in the Anniston
and Oxford areas are being advised
to have their pets inoculated.

County health administrator John
Screws said two were found in
Oxford and one was found on a win-
dow screen of a house at Fort McCel-
lan.

"One of the other two was found
when somebody spotted a cat playing
with it," he said.

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SILVERTIP CAVE SYSTEM

Mike McEachern - reporter

continued from the June/July newsletter

With the lowest lead in Sunray ended, the time had come to push another cave. Roy suggested Meander Belt since it had a 360 m potential, but no one had been down the entrance drop so we could only speculate on what the cave might do. Getout offered the best potential for connecting the upper and lower karst and time was starting to run short. We had already spent over three weeks on Silvertip out of a planned four week expedition and food was starting to run low.

The arrival of Peter Sprouse at the high camp provided more stimulus to the discussions around camp. We had been sending our survey notes down the mountain as people departed and mailing them to Sprouse to be plotted by Ellipse, a computer plotting program developed by David McKenzie. Peter unrolled the latest line plot which incorporated most of the work that we had done during the previous weeks at the lower camp. If Getout continued trending in the present direction indicated on the map it could run into the upper area of Stairwell and it might be possible to make a connection within a few trips. However, if the cave turned towards the north it might be many feet before it joined the Stairwell-Bell system through one of the tributary trunks which joined the lower Bell stream passage. Sprouse's enthusiasm was contagious and with the exception of Roy everyone favored pushing Getout.

The following day found Roy Jameson, Peter Sprouse, Frank Binney and Steve Zeman ready to tackle Getout. In the intervening two years since the cave had been found the tales of the early exploration had given it an awesome reputation. The 45m entrance drop, the longest known in the system provided the first obstacle. To negotiate the drop, it was necessary to rappel down about 25' into a fissure and then squeeze through a narrow karst window into an adjoining pit while remaining on rappel. Most of the remaining drop was against a wall with the last 9m. free. Once the bottom was reached there was little protection from rockfall and it was necessary to scamper down a short skree slope to the very brink of a 9m. drop, rappel halfway down the drop and pendulum across the pit to an up passage on the other side to escape the potential danger from falling rock. The up passage led to a deep pit and it was necessary to traverse around the edge of the pit to continue along the passage to another rope drop. A series of strenuous climb-downs led to more passage and additional rope drops.

For the party of four the progress was slow. In the previous trip only a floor plan had been drawn and Peter sketched profiles as they went. Little was known about the possible detrimental effects of leaving the cave rigged over a long period and it was necessary to carefully check the equipment. The anchors had to be tested and the mountain-lay Goldline was carefully examined

for spots. In two instances the use of steel carabiners created small rust colored stains on the rope and the rope was hauled up and retied from the opposite end. They continued mapping from the last survey through large walking passage and down two rope drops to the stream crawl which had stopped the previous exploration. The shorty wetsuits used in the previous trip were inadequate for crawling and swimming in water but this time with full wetsuits they were prepared.

This was Steve's lead and he was point man, dragging the tape and setting stations. The 1 meter high 50 centimeter wide stream meander with 10 centimeters of water flowing through the passage continued down at the same size for a short distance past the point where Steve had previously turned around and abruptly turned into a wide slope crack that was only about 40 centimeters high. Steve slid into the crack and forced himself on but the crack continued to get tighter. He could see breakdown ahead and the stream seemed to disappear. Worst yet, the passage was fogging up from the contact of the cold air and the heat from their bodies. There was no air movement.

They started bearing a hasty retreat as they were all wet and cold. There were other unchecked pits higher in the cave and they had found a new one on their way in. By the time Steve had reached the entrance to the crawl-way Roy was already at the top of the last drop and Frank was on the rope. Where had the wind gone? There seemed to be a narrow crack part way up the wall and Steve climbed up to it. It wasn't a narrow crack at all, but a six meter high canyon which intersected the wall at an acute angle. Climbing up into it he yelled to Peter to come on. He was in walking passage a half a meter to meter wide with the wind blowing strong. But there was no reason to go very far as Roy and Frank were on their way out and the passage would have to be mapped. The slow, tedious process of mapping was always more endurable when the passage was unexplored.

With a going canyon at 180m in Getout, it seemed that, given some luck the connection might be possible in the next trip. McEachern, Steele and Stone elected to try the next push. Patty Mothes, fresh from exploring Rubber Chicken Cave, was anxious to try her skill in Silvertip and pressed to join the trip. This was agreeable with Steele and Stone, but Mike, who favored small groups for pushing, dropped out, and Patty took his place.

Since this was the first time any of the members of the trip had been in the cave they had a difficult time finding the route. Before too long they found the entrance to the unexplored canyon. The survey moved quickly as there were only two short rope drops and the 6 meter high canyon was easy to straddle. But the direction of the cave had changed. It was going north down the mountain side away from Stairwell and toward Bell in a seemingly endless canyon. It would be a long trip if they were going to make the connection.

They entered the cave in the late afternoon and by the following morning they hadn't made it back to the entrance. Frank Binney was the first to voice the underlying fear. What if there had been an accident? But the two Bill's were both strong cavers and Patty had been determined to show that she was a match for Silvertip's difficult passageways. Relief swept through camp when Stone finally reached the entrance around noon followed by Steele and Patty. It had been an incredible 19 hour trip and almost 700 meters of new cave (in 124 stations)

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Had been surveyed reaching a depth of around-250 meters. The only difficulty had been when a handhold that Patty was using came loose and she was struck in the face with a dislodged rock putting a small gash in her forehead. Luckily, They were only about a half an hour from the entrance and Patty easily made her way out. They had followed the canyon until they reached a narrow room about 15 meters wide and almost 100 meters long. One pit followed by three dome pits dissected the room and blocked the route. Stone had descended the first pit. It was about 20 meters deep and an uncomfortably tight meander passage with a slight breeze continued.

The lead found by Stone at the bottom of the pit didn't sound real good, but then there hadn't been much wind. Perhaps there was a better route across the pit. The next day, Friday the thirteenth, found Mike McEachern, Thomas Moore, and Steve Zeaman ready for a long trip and a try for the connection. It was now over a kilometer from the entrance to the end of the survey and the party moved rapidly through the cave to reach the last survey station. It still took five hours of difficult climbing and canyon hopping to reach the starting point, 250 meters below the surface.

The last station was located on the edge of the first pit. The right side of the pit was sheer, while on the left side a rubble slope scarcely a meter wide funneled into the meter and half wide, and 6 meter long orifice of the pit. Steve, very confident of his climbing ability, slowly picked his way along the narrow, rock-covered sloping ledge to the left of the pit. This sent a shower of rocks into the dark opening, followed by a loud thunder when they hit the bottom several seconds later. Several short tricky moves sent more rocks tumbling into the darkness and Steve scrambled for the opposite edge of the pit. He peered back across the pit at Thomas and Mike and said, "I don't think that is the best route. Throw me the end of the rope and let's try to rig a traverse over the top."

Large blocks of breakdown provided a solid tie-off for the two ends of the rope and soon a fixed rope was suspended across the black hole. Thomas looked at the move questioningly as Steve hooked his safety harness into the fixed rope and carefully climbed down the funnel-like scree slope and onto a narrow ledge. It was scarcely 10 centimeters wide and edged along the vertical side of the pit. Steve hesitated a moment before the next maneuver, a meter and a half wide step across the pit to a wide but flaky looking ledge. Once started his center of balance would shift over the drop and he would be committed to finishing the move. Careful not to look down the drop he stepped across, the ledge held. Shifting his weight across the pit he quickly brought his other foot over the chasm and was safely across.

With the pit safely rigged the survey could proceed although stepping back across the pit was slightly more difficult than the reverse route. Now, one had to step from the wide ledge to the narrower and outward sloping ledge. Once the first foot was across, it was necessary to reach across the pit with both hands and pull oneself across by means of a pressure hold. This maneuver brought the climber face up against a vertical

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wall on the steep side of the pit and required two quick side steps to reach relative safety.

A series of long survey shots allowed them to quickly proceed through the long narrow room. The room was interrupted by three more pits; black holes in the breakdown covered floor. Unlike the first pit, these pits were associated with high domes disappearing into the otherwise flat roof of the room. However, this time it was possible to casually traverse around trap-like funnel entrances without difficulty. Unfortunately, the room ended in a wall of breakdown. A short passage to the east was likewise clogged with rubble.

There were still three unchecked pits but where had the wind gone? Thomas, Steve and Mike took turns exhaling long breaths of air which immediately formed clouds of fog in the cold cave air. At first the fog seemed to remain still but then it slowly rose and seemed to disappear into the ceiling.

There was an opening in the ceiling next to the wall and Steve quickly climbed up into it. The passage seemed to go almost straight up and by strenuous climbing and chimmeying it was possible to reach the top of a dome 30 meters above the room. Peering through a very tight stream meander, crack Steve could see green moss. It took an hour of pounding with a piton hammer to remove the rough edges from the passageway and the planned long push turned into an easy 8 hour trip. Thomas promptly named the entrance Easyout. Now there was a quick way to get to the bottom of the cave. For the first time the yells of the emerging cavers came from low on the mountain, below the high camp.

Easyout was located about 100 meters west of the entrance to Bird Cave. Bird Cave, located between Stairwell and Bell had been investigated during the latter part of the summer of 1972 and about 300 meters of passages had been mapped. It seemed that Getout-Easyout was running parallel to Stairwell-Bell but not far from it. If the connection was going to be made it would have to be quickly because time was running out. There would only be one more push.

Bill Steele, Bill Stone and Steve Ward decided to try for the connection. Since it was to be the last trip of the season they would forget the slow process of mapping and try to explore as far into the cave as possible in hope of the long awaited connection. They squirmed through the tiny entrance and climbed down to the room below. By climbing down the rubble slope they were able to reach the bottom of the first pit and a passage with a strong wind led off of it. The meter wide 1/3 meter high passage quickly brought them to a 25 meter rope drop followed by a short 10 meter rope drop and a pit they had to traverse around. From there the lead turned into a low muddy crawl stooping with wind howling through it. They had used the first rope they had brought. It seemed as if the crawl was going to go forever but finally they reached a junction. There was a black dot H-7. They had done it. Finally the connection. They dug their survey gear out of their packs and started surveying back the way they had come. It took 100 stations.

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The connection trip netted another 567 meters of survey and a combined survey length of over 5 kilometers for Stairwell, Bell, Getout and Easyout. Even more exciting was the depth: 320 meters and the fourth deepest cave in the United States. The Silvertip System was only 36 meters short of the Neff's Canyon record and there were still leads. It seemed likely it would only be a matter of time before the record would be surpassed.

Meanwhile, Roy Jameson had returned to Meander Belt and plummeted the 18 meter entrance drop. There was a large mound of snow at the bottom and an inviting 4 meter wide and 10 meter high passage sloping down to a second drop. There was also a smaller, less inviting passage, leading downward along the left wall. The cave was only 150 meters from Getout, and if connected, the two caves together would clinch the depth record.

By now the cavers were totally out of coffee, sugar and cave food. The only staple was corn meal. If we held out for another day we could take a stab at connecting meander Belt and Getout. Roy Jameson, Bill Steele and Bill Stone decided to try for a Meander Belt-Getout connection. They would try the same tactic that was used for the Getout-Bell connection. They would push as far into the cave as possible and worry about mapping later. Since the entrance to Meander Belt had already been tied into Getout by a surface survey, the potential depth of 360m. for Meander Belt had already been established. It would not be necessary to actually survey the cave passage to claim a depth record.

The entrance drop was quickly rigged and the three cavers, each carrying coils of rope, disappeared down the drop. A short handline got them down the second drop and the wide sloping passage continued following the dip. A 10 meter drop was the next obstacle followed by another 10 meters of passage leading to another drop. The 525 meter drop was descended by Roy and Steele but proved to be a blind lead. By crossing over the top of the pit they were able to continue down a passage to yet another 10 meter drop with going passage. The passage seemed to be leveling out and there were longer intervals between short rope drops. The wide, down sloping passage seemed somehow different than the passage explored in Getout. This was an entirely new section of the Silvertip System and the explorers slowly came to the realization that there would be no connection made on this trip. Discouraged, the cavers turned around and headed for the entrance, derigging and hauling the rope up with them.

They had reached an estimated depth of -120m. and added another 700 meters of passage to the Silvertip system. Located inbetween Sunray and Getout, Meander Belt now seemed to be an important key for linking together major sections of the system. But there were no more supplies and many of the expedition members had already been forced to leave because of other commitments. Of the remaining members, most also had responsibilities elsewhere.

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However, there had been another development. Five cavers, Chris Alvers, Warren Anderson, Jeff Cambell, Blane Colton and Jean Jancewicz, had just arrived from Colorado and set up a lower camp. They had heard of the cave from Bill Steele and had spent 10 days on Silvertip the previous summer. This time they planned on a two week stay. Following a brief discussion, Nancy Boice, Mike McEachern and Bill Steele agreed to stay and continue pushing Meander Belt with the help of the Colorado contingent.

Nancy and Mike volunteered to make the 25 Km. hike to the trail and drive the 128 Km. to Kalispell for supplies. In the meantime, the Colorado cavers could move to the high camp and start mapping in Meander Belt. By the time Mike and Nancy returned to camp with supplies four days later Joe Liebrez had hiked up the mountain and joined the expedition. Meanwhile, Chris, Blane and Bill Steele had rigged and mapped for a distance of 540 meters and the stage had been set for another try at the depth record.

Enthusiasm was again at an all time high and the cavers were convinced that with one or two more trips they would have the depth record. On August 23 five cavers hiked up to Meander Belt for a marathon push. Warren Anderson and Bill Steele would lead off rigging, followed by Blane Colton, Joe Liebrez and Mike McEachern mapping. In an hour and a half the survey crew reached M88, the last survey station, and started mapping. The passage continued sloping downward with a short 10 meter drop providing the only obstacle. The surveying was easy. Blane drug the tape and set stations with Joe shooting the bearing and verticle angle. Mike sketched. The survey was progressing rapidly when it was disrupted by Warren and Bill returning from the passage carrying the same rope they had taken in. The large walking passage had turned into a crawl that had soon become too tight, though it had a stiff breeze blowing out of it. Warren and Bill headed towards the entrance while the survey crew continued mapping to the beginning of the crawl before turning around and derigging on the way out.

The mood at camp had shifted from an all time high to a record low. With disgust, Meander Belt was re-christened Dismal Dip. The survey indicated the passage which had been mapped was actually going south, away from Getout and towards Sunray. It wasn't until the next day that someone remembered the other lead at the bottom of the entrance drop. It hadn't seemed very promising compared to the main passage but it definately was a lead.

The following day, Joe, Mike, and Bill returned to Dismal Dip and rigged the entrance drop for the forth time. It wasn't a promising looking lead but as soon as they started climbing down the narrow sloping passage they noticed the wind blowing into it. The passage got smaller as they went, forcing them to crawl and twist their bodies into contorted shapes to force them through the narrow crooked canyon. The canyon was about 6 meters high, but often it was only a few centimeters wide. The walls were covered with slick mud and it was necessary to chimney up the canyon to find places that were wide enough

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to squeeze through. Without a doubt, this was the most difficult passage that had yet been explored in the entire system. By the time they returned to the entrance they had spent six hours in the narrow canyon and only managed to penetrate about 100 meters, although the canyon continued. While they hadn't tried to map the narrow canyon they had taken several bearings and it seemed to be heading straight for Getout.

Bill was convinced that the narrow canyon was the way to Getout but the same old problem of not enough time was once more confronting the expedition. The next day Bill returned to the cave with Jean Jancewiz for a final desperate push down the canyon in hope of connection. If nothing else they at least wanted to fine out what would be the next obstacle. In a ten hour struggle they got less than 100 meters further into the canyon and still it continued.

The time had come to clean up the camp, pack up the gear, and make the long hike out to civilization. The goal of proving Silvertip the deepest cave in the US would have to be saved for another trip. The hike out was uneventful except that McEachern twisted his leg and was unable to carry a full pack the last third of the way out. Part of his share of the gear had to be divided among the rest of the hikers.

There were several cavers at the trailhead when the Silvertip crew reached it in the late afternoon. They were part of an expedition to Limestone Cave which had been organized by Norm Pace. Pace was not due in until the next day but the advance crew had already determined that the lead they had hoped to push was flooded. The cavers moved to the Spotted Bear Camp ground to relax and drink beer and await the arrival of Norm and the rest of the Limestone Cave crew.

A friendly reminder to renew your
grotto membership in October.

Oct 80 to Oct 81

This is to certify that Arey M^s Bell
is a member and in good standing with the
Birmingham Grotto of The National Speleological
Society.

Elizabeth
Secretary

Newsletter subscriptions can also
be renewed at this time. The October
issue will note those persons with
lapsed subscriptions.

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Nine Day Caving Trip in North Alabama

Don Curry

Stephen Pitts-Reporter

The last week of July I drove out from Austin Texas to meet Don in Birmingham to do some caving. Saturday, Aug. 1st we organized our equipment and departed Birmingham around 10:00 AM, headed for Scottsboro. We arrived in Scottsboro and stopped to get food supplies. After reaching town we turned off onto the route to Russell Cave. We arrived at Russell cave National Monument at 12:30. After getting permission from the Park Official, we set up a campsite and got our cave gear ready. We did a six hour trip in the cave. We exited the Russell Entrance without having connected through to the Pig Entrance. We stayed for a while admiring the fog in the entrance and the excavation site. Thirty minutes passed and some local cavers showed up and invited us to go through the connection with them. We re-entered the cave and did a 2½ hour trip to the Pig Entrance. We walked back under the black starry sky and arrived at the campsite where upon we met Alfred Smith at 9:30 PM. Sunday morning as we prepared to enter the cave with Al, a multitude of people showed up for the Ridley Family Reunion which was being held 20 feet from our campsite. Several people came over and talked to us, very interested in the caves and what we did in there, and the maps and so on. Around 11:00 AM Don, Al, and I walked over to the Russell entrance and entered the cave. We explored several side leads on the route to the Pig Entrance connection. One lead went to a siphon above which is 15 ft. over the water were flood debris lodged in the ceiling. After four hours in the cave we exited at the Pig Entrance. We got permission from Mr. Ridley who lives in the trailer there to enter Montegue Cave. We were in Montegue Cave two hours exploring the 60ft. Dome area and the terminus of the main trunk which is a trashed filled murky siphom. After exiting the cave, we walked back to the campsite at Russell. Alfred left to head back to Birmingham. Don and I ate food left for us by the Ridleys' from their big feast. That night we camped at Russell. We departed Monday morning and drove to Sinking Cove Cave according to the SERA Guidebook directions. We drove down the dirt road to an impassable area of mudholes, too deep for my Toyota. From there we walked around a couple of hours looking for the cave. On a road through a cornfield we found a dead rattlesnake approximately 4 feet long. After we located the entrances we walked back to the car and got our cave gear. We walked back to the cave and entered the lower entrance at 3:30 PM. We went about 500 feet or so and ended up at an upper entrance which contained a passage which was the most obvious way to go. It had a high wind flow and a pool of wall to wall water clear enough to see 8 ft. or so to the bottom. The pool extended on down the passage into darkness. Since we had not brought our wetsuits we decided not to enter the chilly water. We walked back to the car, and since that day was shot we decided not to invest more time there so we departed and headed for Scottsboro. We reached the outskirts of Scottsboro by the early evening and stopped for groceries. After the stop we took the turn off at the Five Points Motel and headed for Tumbling Rock. We got there by 7:30 and went up to talk to the people living in the house by the entrance. The man there showed us photo's of the Tumbling Rock entrance with a tremendous flow of water gushing out powerful enough to tear asphalt off the road below. Photo was taken during a heavy flood in 1973. They gave us the key and we did a short trip back to the wildcat rockpile, before setting up our camp at the entrance. Tuesday morning we prepared to enter the

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when a group from Georgia arrived so we entered together. We went through the Great Hall of Mysteries, the Kings Shower and back to the Pillar of Fire. From this point the other group headed out of the cave first and Don and I picked our way back taking only a few wrong turns. We exited the cave after a nine hour trip. We camped there that night. The next morning we drove to Scottsboro and headed for Fern Cave. We got to Piant Rock and I called the Huntsville Office of the N.S.S. to re-check the property status and let them know we would be at the cave for 5 days. Everything was OK so we drove to the upper parking area and prepared our gear. Before carrying our camp and cave gear to the Johnston entrance, we noticed the resurgence was fairly dry so we entered it and explored 1,000 ft or so of large passage. We were disappointed to not tie in with the main bottom cave trunk. We stopped at a place upstream where the passage siphoned. Water going through the siphon made a loud strange gurgling sound. We exited the cave and hauled our cave and camp gear up the mountain in two loads. We camped just inside the Johnston entrance. Also camped near us were several hundred bats and a few thousand cave crickets. After a few days we decided it was a mistake to camp in the vicinity of a bat roosting area. All night long a few bats would fly back into the little 3ft alcove we were in and flutter over our heads in the dark. This became quite annoying. We camped there from Wednesday night to Sunday morning going out once Friday to get water. Thursday and Saturday we did deep trips into the cave. Thursday we did an 11 hour trip down the bolt drop, through middle cave and to the 72 ft canyon to deposit ropes required for the last two drops to the bottom cave. Saturday we did a trip down, descending our previously fixed ropes and rigging the last. We got to the bottom cave in only 2 hours, on the bottom we explored a few thousand feet upstream and down. Upstream we were looking for a trace of the route to surprise pit. After a few hours on the bottom we turned back and took 6 hours carrying our overload, 700 ft of ropes, out of the cave. We camped in the cave that night and exited the cave Sunday morning. I drove back and reached Birmingham by 1:30 pm. Total hours underground: 111

GROTTO TRIP REPORTS

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