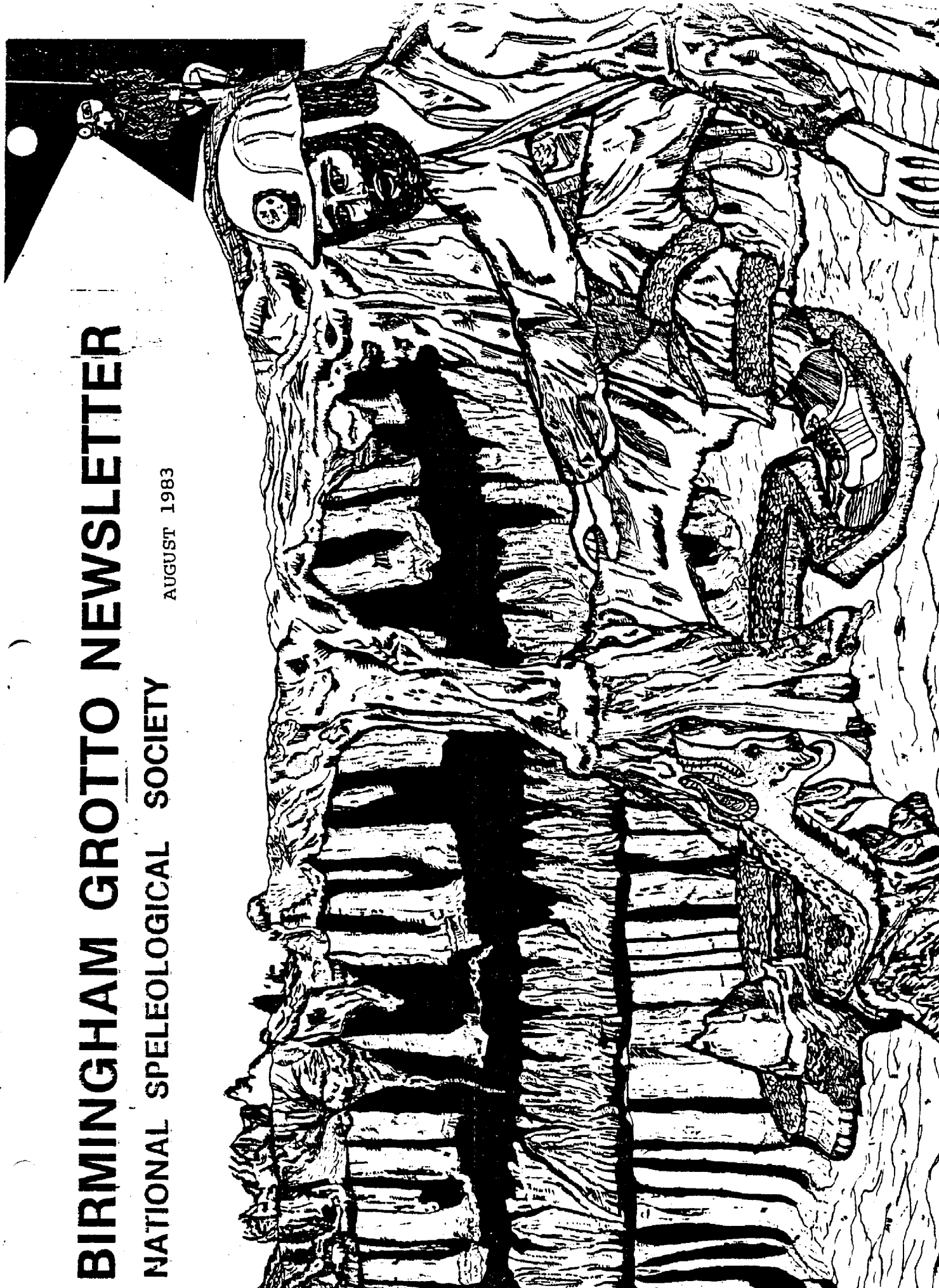


BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

AUGUST 1983



The Birmingham Grotto Newsletter is published approximately twelve times a year by the Birmingham Grotto of the National Speleological Society.

Subscription and Membership fees are now due. Annual subscription rates are included in the \$4 membership fee. Outside of the Birmingham area, the subscription rate is only \$2. ALL are prorated from October.

Editors: Lynn McGill & Nancy Boice
P.O. Box 55102
Birmingham, Al. 35255

The Officers for the 1982-83 year:

President - Mike McEachern

Vice Pres. - Jay Clark

Secretary - Nancy Boice

Treasurer - Edna Caudle

The grotto meets the first Monday of each month at 7:30 pm at the Avondale Library.

The meeting after the meeting is at Burly Earl's around 9:00.

ALL GROTTOS AND ACS MAIL SHOULD BE SENT TO OUR NEW P.O. BOX 55102

Aug. 5-7 SERA CAVE CARNIVAL. Contact Jeanne Pridmore at 205-852-9549 or the NSS Office at 205-852-1300.

Cover art by Carl Reddin

Minutes of July 11, 1983

The meeting was called to order by Mike McEachern. No visitors were recognized. Approximately 20 grotto members were present.

The treasurer reports \$64.00 in the grotto checking account, and \$700.00 in savings.

Old Business:

The grotto sold all but 20 of the banquet shirts for a profit of \$60.00. The t-shirt profits will help pay the banquet deficit \$141.00.

Jay Clark reported that the anniversary publication was given to Dave Howell prior to the banquet. Jay wishes the grotto to know that it is not his fault that it is late. There is some problem in photo duplication.

New Business:

Lee Stubbs has covered t-shirts for sale for \$5.00 each.

The Summer SERA will be held Aug 5-7 in Huntsville. Maps will be available at the Aug. grotto meeting for directions to the camp ground.

Trip Reports:

Les Bury reported on the grotto trip to W Cave. Twelve people showed up.

Lynn & Greg McGill reported on Camp's Gu Cave, Tenn. It's a big cave with good caving nearby. They also reported on James Harry Smith Cave, Al and Sinking Cove Cave, Tenn. both being good caves for grotto trips.

Lee Stubbs went to the NSS Convention in Virginia and reported on some caving including

Hell-Hole and School-House Cave.

Joe D. also went to the NSS Convention and did some caving including Bowden's Cave.

Other grotto members went to Guess Creek and Andersons.

Grotto Trips:

Tom Chamblee will lead the July trip to Ca Springs Cave on July 30th. Leaves Jacks in Gardendale at 7:30am.

Jay Clark is going to Wills Welch Well on 23rd. Call Jay if you are interested in the vertical trip.

The program included slides by Mike, Jay, Walter, and Lee of Fern Pit, 23Dollar Pit, Stevens Gap. Lee had several slides from West Virginia caves.

Nancy Boice

A CAVER'S INTRODUCTION TO ALABAMA'S DEEP CAVES, OR

ALABAMA -- THE PITS By Walter Plunkett

Since moving to Alabama, I have enjoyed seeing the deep pits in the north part of the State. Recently a group of us from Birmingham toured Surprise Pit in the Fern system. With this accomplishment, I felt my introduction to Alabama deep pits was complete and it would be an appropriate time to report on my introduction to Alabama caving.

My Alabama cave experience began slowly with several ridge walks and trips to War Eagle and Devil's Dungeon. The introduction to Alabama pits accelerated after I started caving regularly with Jay Clark. Jay knew where the caves were and was kind enough to take me to them. In the last year ending June 30, Jay and I have visited over 50 caves. Twenty-four caves involved drops of greater than 100' with eight having drops greater than 200'. It would be time consuming to report on each cave. Rather, I will report on the top five caves that impressed me most in my introduction and that I would highly recommend visiting:

1) Valhalla: Valhalla, with its 220' entrance drop, is the most spectacular pit in the state. The drop, except at the top, is free from the wall. The best time to visit the cave is before noon on a sunny day. Beams of sunlight stream down the shear walls of the pit giving a spectacular sight.

2) Engle Double: Engle Double is a very demanding cave. The entrance drop is 236' and that is the easy part of the cave. There are several small drops inside the cave that require rigging and good free climbing ability is mandatory.

3) Surprise Pit, Fern System: This pit has to be mentioned because, at 404' it is the deepest in the state, and it has a macho reputation. It takes roughly five minutes to rappel down and ever so much longer to prusik up. Surprise Pit's most outstanding feature is its mist which obscures everything. When half way up the rope, a wheat lamp light beam is absorbed into mist in almost every direction giving the pit a larger than real dimension.

4 and 5) Hall's Pit and Pretty Well: These two caves are discussed together because I recommend both for the same reason. Pretty formations are in both caves.

In my first few outings with Jay several lessons pertinent to Alabama caving were learned. First, Alabama has a large number of deep pits. My previous caving experience was in Virginia and West Virginia. Most pits are under 100' and are easily rappelled with a figure of eight. In Alabama a figure of eight would not stand up to the wear and tear of many deep drops. Accordingly, I was introduced

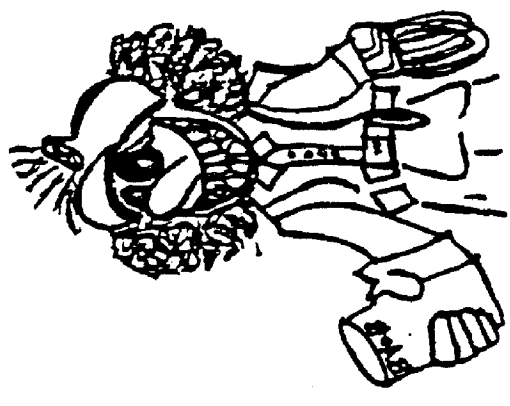
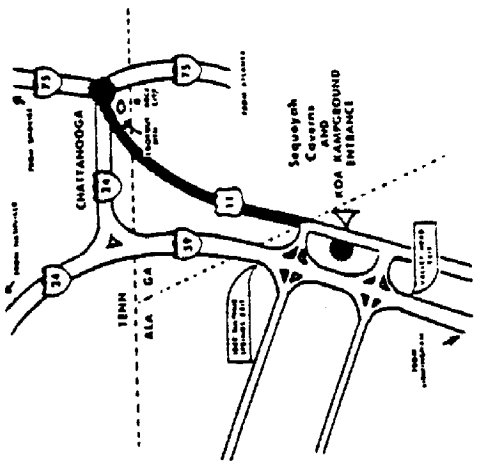
to the use of the rack for rappelling. The second lesson was that an electrical light system was convenient for Alabama caving. Many Alabama caves are short and underground sojourns take two hours or less, a messy rechargeable light is unnecessary. This contrast sharply with my Virginia cave experience where I averaged nine hours underground with some trips lasting 18 hours. Also Alabama pits tend to be deeper than in Virginia and the electric lights throw a more focus beam allowing better visualization of the pit. Finally, an electric system is nice in Alabama pits because the light will not burn ropes.

There were several other lessons learned during my introduction to Alabama caving. For one, Alabama has mild winters which makes it pleasant to look for new caves or to find for the first time caves already known. This past winter, Jay and I were fortunate in finding many known and several new caves. One of the new caves had a drop over 100'. Another lesson learned was to look for snakes in the bottom of Alabama pits and that snakes were present at any time of the year. Over the last year, a snake was found at the bottom of Neversink, Engle Double, 23 Dollar Pit, and Harbin Pit. The last two pits contained copperheads. The copperhead in 23 Dollar Pit was found during a December trip. The copperhead in Harbin was apparently a new caver who had a bad experience as evidenced by his striking angrily at me several times. In addition, Jay nearly stepped on a 2.5 to 3.0' rattler in the first weekend in March near Fargo Well and 3 other snakes have been spotted on cave outings. Jay claims that this past year was unusually snaky. This remains to be proved.

My introduction to Alabama caving is over but much work remains to be done. Some caves I want to revisit such as Valhalla. In other caves there are sights still to be found such as the Red Heaven in Engle Double and the Helectite Room in Fern. Undoubtly, there are good caves waiting to be found. Already, Jay and I are learning new jeep trails so that next winter we can get as close as possible to areas we want to ridge walk.



6th ANNUAL T.A.G. FALL CAVE-IN OCT. 7, 8, 9 SEQUOYAH CAVERNS VALLEY HEAD, ALA.



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Spelunkers clean cave

by Ken Hayes

Members of the Birmingham Caving Club put aside their spelunking expeditions for one day to practice a little conservation.

Instead of exploring, the cavers were hunting, but the hunt wasn't difficult as they preyed on empty beer and soda cans left behind in the cave by other not-so-conservation-minded cavers.

This is the second clean-up effort by the club in Blount County. The first was Bangor Cave and the latest was a cave just off old Highway 31 near Smoke Rise.

The Birmingham Caving Club, affiliated with the Na-

tional Speleological Society, stresses conservation to all its nearly 50 members. The club welcomes new members and visitors to its meetings at the Avondale Public Library on the first Monday of each month.

According to David Caudle, cleanups are an excellent way for the club to establish rapport with cave owners. On each expedition, the clubs obtain permission to explore the caves. Although sometimes hesitant, owners usually grant permission for the club members to explore because of their expertise, experience, and respect for landowners.

The Sea-Link Connector
by Lynn McGill

Sea Research and Development in Bartow Florida can install a sea-link connector to your underwater camera and flash unit. This connector enables the user to disconnect the flash from the camera while underwater. I've had problems trying to use backlighting in wet caves using a nikonos III and Toshiba underwater flash because the pins are exposed to moisture as soon as you disconnect them. This sea-link connector has O-ring seals and a purg valve unit that replaces your old connector ports, making the connection points waterproof. Total cost plus return shipping is sixty four dollars, and takes about two weeks. Sea Research and Development will test your camera to what ever water pressure it is designed for to make sure the connectors will hold. Their address:

Sea Research & Development
US Hwy 98 North
Bartow Fla. 33830
(813) 533-6800

The High Speed Film Color Problem
by Lynn McGill

If you are dissatisfied with the greenish and bluish tint to your slides shot using one of the new high speed films, the problem could be in your flash unit. Some cave minerals fluoresce when an electronic flash is used, giving a colder hue than you would like. To remedy this try covering the flash with a mylar or polyurethane film that has been coated with a UV blocking substance and is tinted a very slight yellow. Sears used to sell rolls of this stuff for greenhouse use. Just cut out a section to fit over the light-output end of your flash unit and see if it doesn't help.

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