

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter



Birmingham Grotto

OCT. 1983

National Speological Soc.

Avondale Cave

Legends of old tell of a great cave under Birmingham that ran for miles under the southern slope of Red Mountain. Although many of the "Legends" that I have heard sound more like "Tall Tells" to me, a few seemed to have creditability. Creditability enough to make me ponder it a while, and after looking at topos, geological surveys, and locating springs along the south side of Red Mountain and correlating that with the descriptions in the stories I was convinced that such a system could possibly exist. Cavers that had entered Avondale Cave previously had returned and described it as a horrible little grunge hole with-

(Con't on page 4)





THE BIRMINGHAM GROTTA NEWS LETTER

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Views expressed herein are not necessarily the views of the National Speleological Society, the Birmingham Grotto, or the editor.

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GROTTA OFFICERS 1983-84

President: Lee Stubbs
Vice Pres: Frank Piazza
Secretary: Margaret Ray
Treasurer: Alfred Smith

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 grotto and ACS mail should be sent to.....P.O. Box 55102.

Birmingham, Al.

Welcome M.G.

On June 19, 1983 a group of NSS members in Montgomery began organizing a new Grotto. They held their first meeting on July 7, at which they rattedified their constitution and elected officers. The Montgomery Grotto was granted a charter by the NSS on August 27. At their September meeting they finalized plans for their newsletter, The Inner Space News, to be published bi-monthly and is available through membership or exchange. Grotto Officers and charter members are Michael Riley - President/Editor, John Parks - Vic President, Bruce Dillion - Secretary/Treasurer, Dennis Cravens, Brenda Cravens, Walter Gibson, Rosalie Riley, and David Parks. Let's all wish them luck!

Closed: Cavemen Keep Out!

JOHN LAW HOLLOW

According to Jay Clark, who can obtain legal access to any cave, the John Law Hollow is now closed; even to him. Although the landowners live some distance away they have someone locally watching it. The owners say that they "do not want anyone back there under any circumstances". The caves in this area include Roaring River, Upper River, Skylight, Bloodstone, and War Eagle; they are definitely CLOSED!!

PUTTNAM MOUNTAIN

I talked with Mr. Puttnam in Princeton the last weekend in October. Mr. Puttnam manages the land on Puttnam Mountain for the Puttnam Mountain Hunting Club. He said that he did not mind if we went up there to go caving, but that he did not want anyone up there during hunting season. If you wish to visit Grahams, Snakes 200, Dinkys, Bags Ditch, or other caves in the area wait until after hunting season.



Avondale Cave

(Con't from page 1)

unstable breakdown that only went 100-200 feet. I still could not believe, I had to see for myself, but people only snickered when I asked if they would like to go. Later in July I got tired of thinking about it and called John Hathaway and Sam McGill and they were ready to go. We took survey gear and surveyed as we went, so that if really turned out to be a grunge hole we would have it mapped and would have to return.

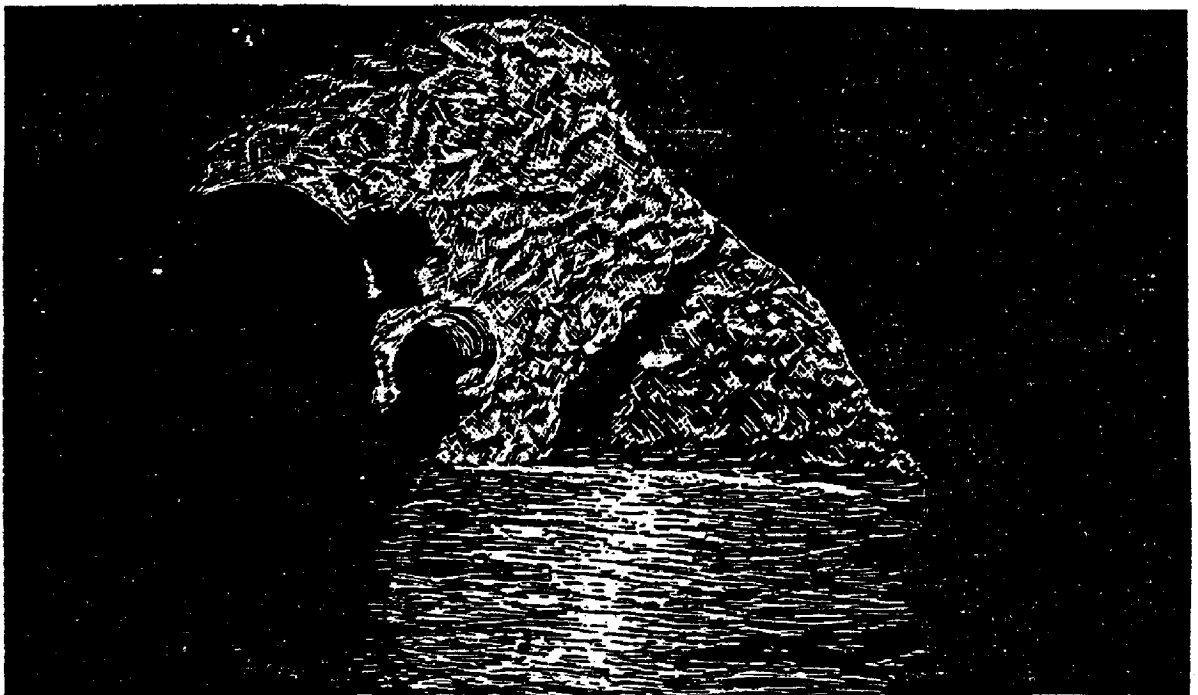
Now, Avondale Cave is located in the middle of Avondale Park, a large public park that is always full of people, and we knew that walking into the park with cave gear and disappearing into a small hole in the ground would attract a lot of attention. Therefore, we made all of our trips in after the 10:30 P.M. curfew and caved well into the early morning. Our first two trips yielded 165 meters and passage going in several directions. This generated some interest at the August Grotto meeting and on each of the other four trips into the cave we always had someone new going in with us. They helped us map and push leads, and we toured them through the known parts of the cave. Also, we all wore wetsuits on the last four trips because we spent a great deal of time in the water; often up to our necks! In all we mapped 412 meters of passage.

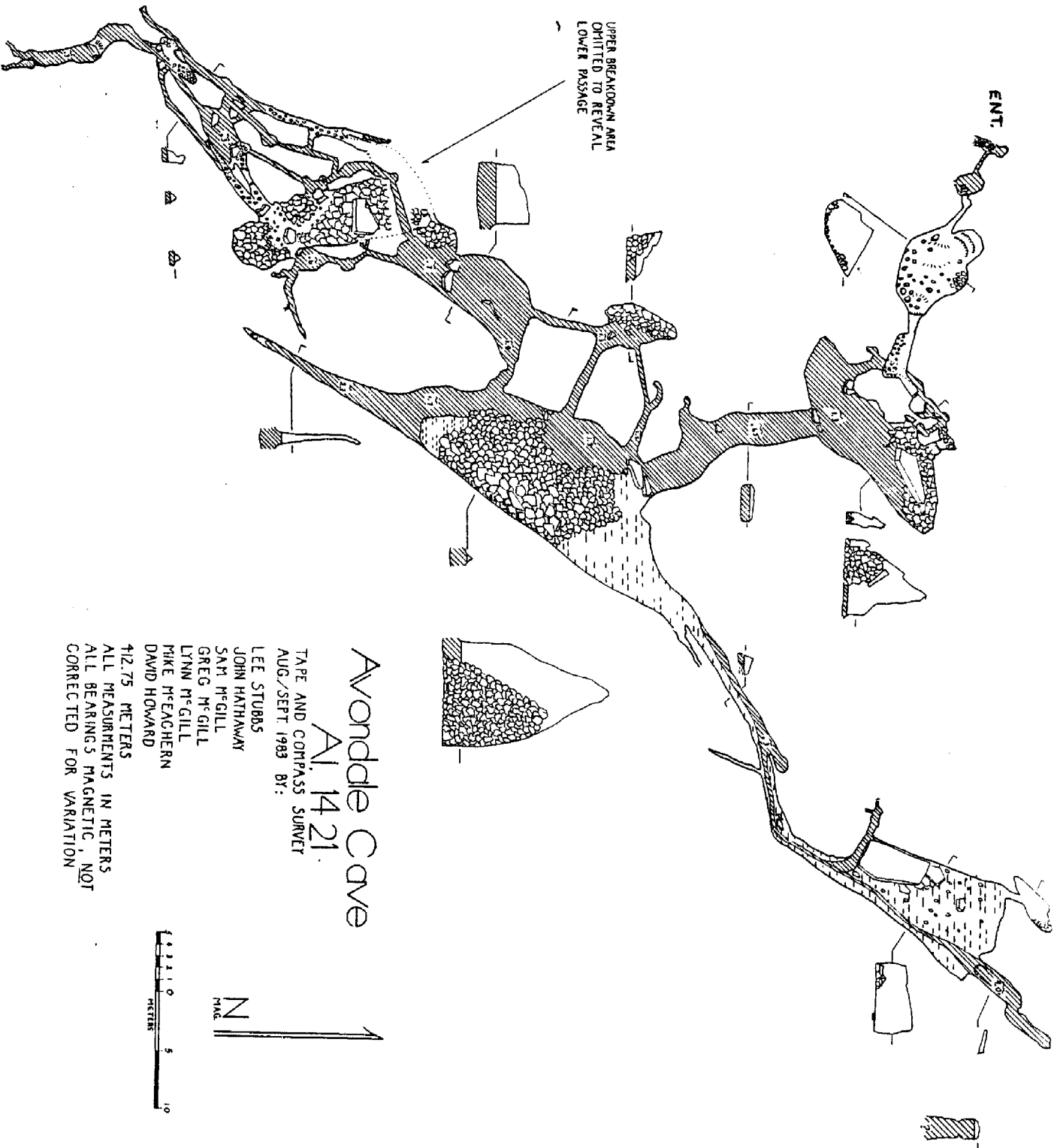
When one first enters Avondale Cave he might think "damn, this is awful... lemme outta here!" The entrance has had every conceivable type of garbage thrown into it, which he must crawl through. Then there is a tight verticle squeeze that one may negotiate semi-erect, this squeeze is only about five feet long and leaves one in a small chamber, stooping knee deep in water. From here the direction to go is not too obvious, but close inspection will reveal a four foot climb up into a glass and litter strewn crawl. The crawl terminates rather quickly and one finds himself in the first room, we called it the "Chair Room" because of the four metal chairs we found there among the other garbage. This appeared to be the "party room" for the neighborhood kids. Beyond this room we found few formations and no vandalism, however none of the cave appeared to be virgin. Across the "Chair Room" is a six to seven foot climb up to a low flat crawl that goes about twenty feet and makes a ninety degree turn to the left. Around the turn it gets very tight, then drops about five feet onto a large breakdown block in the stream. From here one has several choices, two routes through breakdown or one through the stream. We found that the stream passage to be the fastest route into what we first called "The Big Room". At over fifty feet in length it was a big room, or so we thought. On the south side of the room, the wall appears to turn under and meet the water, but it doesn't. There is a fifty foot crawl, "The Submarine Passage", with about two and a half feet of water and a one foot air space. This leads to the "Real Big Room". We were really amazed at the "Real Big Room", -

at 135-140 feet in length, thirty feet in width, and an estimated thirty five to forty foot ceiling, it is the largest room in the cave. It is impossible to see from one end to the other because of a huge mountain of breakdown that almost reaches from floor to ceiling and wall to wall. Leading off the northern end of the "Real Big Room" is a crawl affectionately known as "The Slither". On the east side of the crawl a clay bank rolls sharply into the stream which runs along the west wall. The best technique for getting through this passage is to lie with ones belly on the bank and slide along with his feet in the stream pushing himself along. This is extremely easy and with a wetsuit on one can actually slither around large rocks in the passage. "The Slither" leads to another fairly large room with a pool on the far side. The pool is very deep (4.0+ meters) and initially has about eighteen inches air space which diminishes to nothing within about twenty five feet. This appears to be the source of the water for Avondale Cave.

Back in the "Real Big Room" there are several passages on the west side that will all eventually lead to another room full of deep water. If one is less than six feet tall he will need to know how to swim. From here the cave gets somewhat grimmer. Breakdown at the south end of the room leads up and over to the "Breakdown Room". This breakdown is rather unstable and care should be taken. There are also several tight water crawls that lead to the "Breakdown Room" and beyond, if anyone is in one of these crawls it would be wise if no one were to use the upper route over the breakdown, as movement above WILL dislodge rocks and send them crashing into the stream in the crawls below. Beyond the "Breakdown Room" are numerous passages and crawls that are eventually choked with breakdown.

There are no signs around the entrance, and the bars that once gated the cave have long since been removed, yet the Park Board may not be crazy about having alot of people entering the cave. On the other hand however we DO KNOW that the Police don't care.





UPPER BREAKDOWN AREA
OMITTED TO REVEAL
LOWER PASSAGE

ENT.

Avondle Cave

A1.14.21.

TAPE AND COMPASS SURVEY
AUG/SEPT 1983 BY:

- LEE STUBBS
- JOHN HATHAWAY
- SAM McGILL
- GREG McGILL
- LYNN McGILL
- MIKE McEACHERN
- DAVID HOWARD

412.75 METERS
ALL MEASUREMENTS IN METERS
ALL BEARINGS MAGNETIC, NOT
CORRECTED FOR VARIATION



A Meeting In Jess Elliot Cave
By Milo Washington

Ever notice how quiet the winter woods become when you walk through them alone? No birds sing and the only sound you hear is made by your boots as you walk on the brown wrinkled corpses of a summers green leaves. You stop and all sound stops. A listening silence, that waits for your steps to continue.

To those of us cursed with a runaway imagination, this very solitude, so loved by the poets, can, initiate a struggle between the antiseptic logic of the new cortex and the slimy wiser knowledge that rises from the ancient id.

The events in the following report happened last winter and they are much, much, truer than my ability to report them.

-M.W.

The long walk through the lonely woods had left me tired and tense. And now, as I tried to rest on a rock near the great yawning entrance to Jess Elliot Cave, I felt very vulnerable and very alone. My friend, Tom Chamblee, has written of this entrance as; "...one of the most beautiful I've seen. I could sit at this entrance for eight hours and be totally engrossed in the area's mystical magnetism."

Maybe...but to me, the dark vegetation, the grey limestone, and the gloom of the blackness inside, combined for an oppressive air that seemed both unholy and forbidden. In fact the whole place seemed to hum of something sinister, as if some invisible orchestra had held an evil downbeat here ever since time first began.

Nervously I fumbled through my pack, inwardly trying to decide whether to fire up my carbide light or to begin a long cowardly walk back to the car. "Maybe," I thought with compromise "I'll just poke around the entrance for a while and look for evidence of indian habitation."

But without moving from the rock, I squinted into the shadows, trying hard to imagine a large group of paleo-indians camped inside. The image failed. The hairs on the back of my neck knew better. No sapient beings had ever lived here. This wasn't a home for humans. This was a more fitting home for...ghouls!

So, having exorcized my fears by extending them to the absurdity of "ghouls," I lit my carbide lamp and entered the cave

Time flies when you're having fun. A few hundred feet inside the cave I found myself in a long tunnel. The six-foot, smooth, flat ceiling and the gently sloping walls seemed artificial. This was somehow reassuring and my confidence returned. To my delight the ceiling rock exposed many fine examples of the fossil remains of the long vanquished paleozoic sea. In particular I found the crushing molars of a little known Mississippian fish that have long held my interest. I walked down this corridor with my eyes fixed to the ceiling, stopping here and there to search for further examples of the mysterious fish.

As I approached the end of this tunnel I almost stepped on something white beneath my feet.

It was a white T-shirt and on this shirt was a brown bat, quiet bloody and quiet dead. Quickly I swung my light up and down the passageway until I was satisfied that I was still alone. Then, with reluctance, I returned my eyes back to the macabre scene.

The bat seemed to have been beaten with a blunt object, maybe a rock or a stick. The blood appeared to be fresh, but in the cool, damp environment of a cave who could tell? The bat could have been killed days, even weeks ago. "Probably some punk kids," I thought bitterly. Then, with a little less confidence, I continued down the passageway, leaving the T-shirt and the dead bat as I had found them.

A short distance ahead the character of the passage changed, enlarging into a great, wide hall. A small dark stream ran silent, through and around, great piles of fallen rock. Bone dry stalactites and stalagmites decorated the passage in irregular clusters. Altogether an ethereal scene, that maybe only cavers can fully appreciate.

Despite its beauty, progress through this great hall was slow. Careful and deliberate movement was required to traverse the frequent piles of loose breakdown. The small stream, to my consternation, now seemed to be flowing into the cave rather than out of it.

But by now I'd had my full share of mysteries. I was tired and had seen enough of this cave to satisfy my needs, ego, and otherwise. So when I finally came to an open, flat area, free of breakdown, I lay back against a sandy slope to rest for the long trip out.

After resting and recharging my carbide lamp I stood up to take the first step of many that would eventually take me out of the cave and to the car. At this point I heard a noise—a dull thud that seemed to come from behind a large rock near the far wall of the passageway.

I turned my lamp and stared at the rock across the passageway. Nothing moved. I was very glad. Every cell in my body was ready to quit this cave but the yellow beam of my light seemed frozen to the big rock from where I was sure the sound had come.

And soon my patience was rewarded; a man stepped from behind the rock and stood in the yellow glow of my carbide light.

My heart stopped...and then raced, carrying my thoughts with it; "Why was this idiot hiding?...was he a lunatic?" A millisecond newsreel flashed before my eyes. I saw myself climbing quickly and deftly over the piles of breakdown and out of the cave. But inside me, somewhere deep where such matters are decided, a switch had been thrown and I found myself walking across the passageway toward the man standing by the rock.

As I walked a part of my mind took note of the casualness of my gait. My lips, I noticed, were whistling a soft tune. Several steps and a hundred heartbeats later I was within ten feet of the man standing by the rock, and with a stupidity born of the moment I heard myself say: "Hi. How you doing?"

The kid didn't answer. For now I saw that he wasn't a man but a near-man, maybe nineteen years old. Beneath long stringy hair his dark eyes fixed on mine in an unblinking stare. His mouth was contorted into a tight grin and in his left hand he held a dim flashlight. His right hand was thrust forward and clenched in his jacket pocket. His jacket was open to the waist. He was, of course, shirtless. But even worse, across his hairless chest waved a confederate flag and tattooed beneath it was a small banner that announced in red and green-MOTHER. It wasn't pleasant to think of the strange convolutions of machoism and Oedipus that brought that sad message to this boy's chest.

Several empty moments passed. I knew I had to get this kid talking...about sports, girls, caves-anything. Naturally before I could stop myself I blurted out; "Did you kill the bat?" The kid's grin became crazier. He spread his feet a little further apart and began clenching and unclenching his fist in his pocket. Finally he spoke..."I just escaped from the Jackson Jail," he said.

My hopes sank. This weirdo was ready to spring. Desperately I looked around for a rock, or anything, to fight with, but saw nothing. I considered my chances. I outweighed him about thirty pounds-mostly fat. The kid was wry and lean and had something in his jacket pocket. Further talk was useless, my only chance was to begin walking out of the cave and to hope that he wouldn't follow. So with great effort I suppressed the river of adrenalin inside me and I slowly raised my hand toward him to wave good-bye--and then the damn kid sprang-backwards. "Don't hurt me mister! Don't hurt me!" he cried.

On the way out of the cave we buried the bat. J.D. told me that the bat had "attacked" him. I wish that I could say that J.D. and I became friends, but we didn't. I dropped him off in Stevenson the same as I had found him-a frightened boy in an unfriendly world. The three hour drive to Birmingham was long and lonely. The trip out of the cave and through the woods to the car, even with J.D. was much better.



Trip Reports

TAG FALL CAVE IN
Sequoya Caverns - Valley Head, Al.
October 6-8, 1983

Same old stuff! Climbing contest, obstacle course, caving, and party! party! party!

THE SINK HOLE - South Pittsburg, Tenn.
October 6 - Ray Hoffman, Dottie Hoffman, and Lee Stubbs

A large "L" shaped, open air pit about 150 feet deep. The water fall that usually flows into the upper side of The Sink Hole was dry.

VALHALLA - Jackson County, Al.
October 7 - Sam McGill, John Hathaway, Richard Scoville (Atlanta, Ga.), Keith Barns, Bill Klimack, Barbara Craig, Bill Bussey (all from North Carolina), Shari Lydy (South Carolina), and Lee Stubbs.

Valhalla has got to be one of the most breath takingly beautiful pits I have ever seen. At about fifty feet in diameter and two hundred twenty five feet in depth it is one of the deepest open air pits in the country. The drop is completely free and the pit is so large its not even like being in a cave at all. We all looked around the bottom and some of the passage before ascending. A few did the big pit twice.

TWENTY-THREE DOLLAR PIT Jackson County, Al.
October 8 - Tom Morris, Buford Pruitt (Gainesville, Fl.) and Lee Stubbs

I met Tom and Buford at Natural Well last August during SERA. That was when I told them (as I tell almost everyone) about one of my favorite multi-drop caves, Twenty-three Dollar Pit. I ran into them again at the bottom of Valhalla during TAG, and they expressed great interest in going to Twenty-three Dollar Pit. I was more than happy to take them. We spent about eight hours in the cave and I believe that they were as impressed as I was with the cave. On our way back to the camp ground we drove by Guess Creek Cave just to look at it's huge entrance.

CAVE TOURING - Tennessee
October 22-25

During my vacation in the Smokies I couldn't resist seeing a couple of the area's commercial caves; Tuckaleechee Caverns and the Lost Sea. At about 800x200 feet the lake in Lost Sea Cave was impressive, but I don't know about those Rainbow Trout.

WASH POT - Jackson County, Al.
November 6 - Jay Clark, Squirrel Warren, and Lee Stubbs

We did the first two drops (about 90 and 40 feet), and a little more than half of the Zig-Zag Water Crawl. I was only slightly disappointed and not at all surprised when the decision was made to turn in that horrible crawl. Later Jay and Squirrel showed me the Norseman's Wells Complex, Unbelievable!

GROTTO RIDGEWALK - Jackson County, Al.
November 20 - Dave Howell, Valerie Howell, Jay Clark, Squirrel Warren, Andy Zerbe, Beverly Poore, and Lee Stubbs

The weather broke fairly early and we had a beautiful day and found several pits that merit further investigation.

Anyone else go caving? eh?

-Lee Stubbs

TWENTY-THIRD ANNUAL CUMBERLAND CAVERNS CHRISTMAS PARTY
DECEMBER 10, 1983

All reservations must be made in advance, and prepaid. Attendance will be limited to those who have prepaid. No tickets will be sold at the Caverns. Applications must be received by November 30. Reservations will be issued on a "first-come" basis, and after 400 tickets are sold, further applications will be refused. NO Reservations By Phone.

FEES: \$10. per Adult
\$ 5. per child, under 12
This includes cave trips, Banquet, and entertainment.

TRIPS: A. Crystal Palace
B. Monument Pillar
C. Historic Route and Monument Pillar
D. Onyx Curtain and Monument Pillar



RESERVATION APPLICATION - 23RD ANNUAL CUMBERLAND CAVERNS CHRISTMAS PARTY. Saturday, December 10, 1983.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone () _____

() Keep on mailing list. () Remove from mailing list.
Address () correct, () incorrect, on mailing list.
() Mail tickets. () Hold tickets.

CAVE TRIP:
(In preferred order): A B C D () Keep party together.

Adult, \$10. _____ Child, \$5. Amount enclosed \$ _____

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