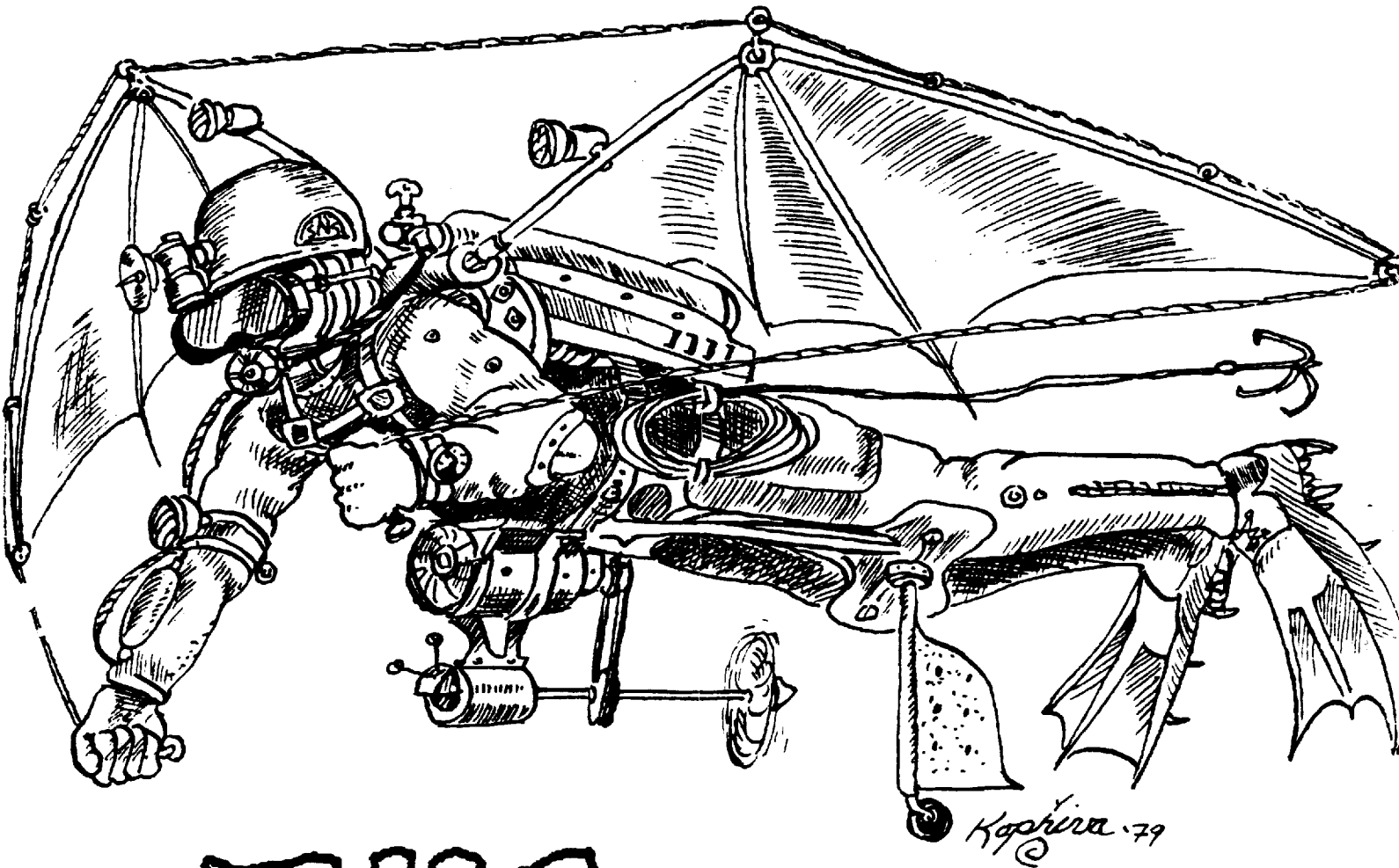


# BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

VOL 18 NO. 1

JANUARY 1987



# THE COMPLETE CAVER

The BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER is published twelve times per year by the Birmingham Grotto of the NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY. Other organizations may reprint our material when credit is given to this publication.

Subscription and membership fees are prorated from October. Annual dues are \$4.00 which includes the newsletter. The subscription rate of \$4.00 is available to persons outside of the Birmingham area.

The Grotto meets on the first Monday of each month at 7:30 pm at the Parke Memorial Branch Library located at 1814 11th. Avenue South (corner of 11th. Ave. South and 19th. St. South). Park at the rear of the building. The meeting after the meeting is at Burly Earl's, 2109 7th. Ave. South, at about 9 pm.

Exchange newsletters and other Grotto mail should be sent to:

Birmingham Grotto  
PO Box 55102  
Birmingham, AL 35255-0102

The 1985-86 Grotto Officers are:

President	Jet Thomas	933-6162
Vice-President	Everett Bagby	780-6478
Secretary	Shari Lydy	595-5268
Treasurer	Andy Zerbe	933-2111

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Shari Lydy. GRAPHICS: Dave & Valerie Howell. ARTICLES: Milo Washington and Jet Thomas.

## FROM THE UNDERGROUND PRESS

Thurs., Dec. 11, 1986 *The Birmingham News*—1E

### Wildlife experts seek clues to bats' deaths

DECATUR (AP) — An endangered species of bats suffered a large number of deaths at a north Alabama cave they use to bear their young in the spring, according to a team monitoring the cleanup of DDT residue at a nearby spring.

Don Schultz of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said the gray bats had died at Caves Spring Cave on the Morgan County portion of the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge.

The deaths were discovered during the summer by a specialist in the endangered species but it was uncertain when the deaths occurred, or what caused them, he said.

Schultz said a DDT level of 30 parts per million had been found in the dead bats, but researchers believe that level would not have been high enough to cause so many to die. He said as many as 20,000 bats have been known to inhabit the cave; the number of dead was not estimated.

Schultz said defoliating chemicals sprayed on roadsides, or a human disturbance, could have caused the deaths. He said evidence may have been covered by accumulated bat dung, which he said was inches deep on the floor of the cave.

The federal wildlife agent said further clues to the deaths may be found in the spring when the bats return to bear their young in the "maternity cave" after a winter migration to Kentucky. He said it is not clear if the dead bats were young or adults.

Schultz met Tuesday with a panel of government agencies overseeing Olin Chemical Corp.'s cleanup of DDT from Triana-area waters. The pesticide, suspected of causing cancer, leaked from a plant Olin once operated on Redstone Arsenal.

Minimizing the effects of DDT on wildlife habitats in the refuge is part of a 1983 court order under which Olin is cleaning up the contamination.

Mon., Jan. 5, 1987 *The Birmingham News*

#### Cave explorer with broken leg rescued

LAFAYETTE, Ga. (AP) — A cave explorer who broke his leg in a rock fall and was trapped overnight 580 feet underground was rescued today from Ellison's Cave, the deepest in the eastern United

Minutes of the Birmingham Grotto meeting of December 1, 1986.

President Jet Thomas called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm. Minutes of the last meeting were read by the Secretary. Treasurer Andy Zerbe reported that the Grotto has \$23 .12.

Donna Knoke and Danny Cobb renewed their memberships.

There was no old or new business.

#### Program

Joe Domnanovich brought the Guffey Cave Movie filmed by the Grotto in the '70's. Lou Pfau was unable to attend the meeting so Jay Clark kindly narrated the movie.

The meeting was adjourned to Burley Earl's in record time at 8:15 pm.

Minutes of the Birmingham Grotto meeting of January 5, 1987.

President Jet Thomas called the meeting to order before 7:30 pm. The reading of the minutes was deferred. Treasurer Andy Zerbe reported that the Grotto has \$23 .12, of which \$8.00 was interest earned on the account.

#### Old Business

It was not reported at the meeting but Shari sent the Syracuse Caving club information on North Alabama camping and several TAG classic pits in December. However, nothing was subsequently heard from these NY cavers. Joe D. mentioned that it is time to renew the Grotto bulk mailing permit. Last year ACS paid for the permit. The Grotto has not yet received the 1987 bill. Action was deferred on the matter. Andy Zerbe reported on the Huntsville Vertical Training session.

#### New Business

None

#### Trip Reports

Andy reported on the trip that Jet and he made to Blowing Rock. They found that the cave was full of bats so they exited before disturbing the hibernating bats. They discovered a new side passage but don't recommend any more trips back until this spring or summer after the bats have left.

#### Grotto Trips

Anderson Cave on January 18. Meet at the bridge on Highway 119 over Lake Purdy at 10:00 am. Call Everett Bagby at 780-7648.

Grotto Ridgewalk on February 7. Meet in Larkinsville, AL at the intersection of 72 and SR79 at 9 am. Call Dave Howell for further details.

#### Program

Shari showed slides from the Smith Lake Grotto party, Summer S.E.R.A. 1985 and 1986, and miscellaneous cave slides featuring Grotto members.

The meeting was adjourned to Burley Earl's at 8:20 pm.

Respectfully admitted,

*Shari*

Shari Lydy, Secretary

SERA WINTER BUSINESS MEETING - February 21, 1987.  
Tallahassee, Florida  
(See last page of this issue for registration form).

## UPCOMING

1989 NSS CONVENTION PLANNING MEETING - February 14, 1987  
Wright's Restaurant - the back room  
Trenton, GA  
10:00 am EST  
Call Bill Stringfellow for more details 404/257-3287

## EVENTS

ALABAMA CAVE SURVEY MEETING - March 15, 1987  
Huntsville, AL  
ACS members should be receiving flyers so details forthcoming

! Speleo Pseudo !  
! Science Forum !

### WHY DO CAVES CONSTRICT NEAR THE ENTRANCE?

The first question is "do they?" Of course, the intersection of a cave tube with the eroding process off landforms often results in backfill and breakdown i.e. apparent constriction. But in 1974 Bill Varnedoe argued a real, not apparent, dimensional decrease of most caves. I think he was right. Why is this so? Here are some possibilities.

A. Innate in a single source of acidic water is a "solutional limit". At this point most acid is naturalized and solutional processes are greatly reduced, thereby limiting the extent of the linear enlargement of the cave.

B. water moving under a head somehow stabilizes near the point of discharge and the flow becomes laminar, therefore less mixing and less solution.

C. Some application of "Bernoulli's Principle", in particular, the faster flow through constrictions results in lower water pressure. In this example water pressure must be related to solution rates and tied-in somehow to events at the point of discharge.

D. A pessimistic view: Caves have more little passage than big, so chance intersection would average more little to big than big to little.

E. An optimistic view: We find caves with little entrances first, the caves with big entrances are patiently awaiting discovery.

You got any better ideas, bright guys?

## Like a fine wine, trip reports get better with age!

The Official July Grotto Trip      By Jet Thomas

The July grotto trip was Graves Pit. In spite of the name, this is an easy freeclimb entrance. A number of people said they were interested in going, but some of them backed out at the last minute. Sybil Kelly sprained her ankle and couldn't come. Margaret Ray and Dave Caudle were on call. Les Buryn had a big cat show in another state the night before.

Andy Zerbe and I waited for half an hour at the Hardee's in Tarrant, but no one else showed up except Milo Washington. Milo came to cheer us on, but he couldn't go with us because he had to eat lunch with his mother in law. Finally Andy and I left for Graves Pit. I resolved never again to describe a grotto trip as 'slightly wet'.

We stopped at the Graves house. One of the Graves boys described the time he went in. There wasn't a drought then, and they turned around after about 500' when the water was up to their necks. We all agreed that the water should be lower now.

We drove to the trailhead, got our gear together, and started walking under the power lines. The blackberries were ripe, which partly made up for our having to walk through blackberry thickets. Some places the poison ivy crowded out the blackberries. Some places the old 4wd road made a good path, but other places it was choked up worse than anything else. After a while we walked in the dense second-growth woods instead, but the mosquitoes were worse there.

Andy easily found the entrance, a 2 by 4 foot hole in the bottom of a ravine. Just inside, the hole widened to 5 by 6 feet. There were good handholds on one side, and a little ways down there were good handholds on the other side. At the bottom, 25-30 feet down, it was maybe 8 by 10, but still easy. There is walking passage going in 2 directions. One way goes about 50' and turns into breakdown. It has a couple of virgin crawls leading off. We didn't go that way. The other way quickly turns into a stoopwalk, then a duckwalk, then a water crawl. The water was down at least a foot compared to the other time we'd been there, so we hardly got wet. After a bit the floor rose due to a lot of cobblestones, and this crawl was completely dry. Then the floor dropped and the ceiling rose. Several places there were small rooms we could stand up in. One of them went up about 20' and had a lead in the ceiling. Andy wanted to climb it, but was willing to push the lower way first.

The stream passage opened into a stoopwalk with a trickle of water. This was encouraging, since last time it was knee deep there. We followed it to the place we turned around before. This was a round tube about 4' diameter. Now the water was only knee deep. We followed a couple of meanders and it sumped, only about 50' beyond where we'd turned around. Maybe someday the weather will get even dryer and we can get through.

On the way back we looked at the high lead. Andy climbed the wide chimney and started digging the lead wider. There was clearly a room at the top, with formations and small passage going at least 5' in 2 directions. He couldn't quite get through the slot leading in. Some of it was mud and loose rock, so it could be widened, but it wasn't easy with no tools, jamming in a 4' chimney. I dug some too. I could get through the slot, but I'd have to give up my footholds to do it, and most of the handholds I tried broke off easily. I could see how to get in, but I wasn't sure how to climb back out and start chimneying again. Andy offered to brace me. Then from the top I could easily dig it open for him. It was a tempting idea, but too risky. If one of us fell and couldn't crawl, the other one would have to leave him in the stream and scramble through the blackberry thickets to call for help. Andy was real

disappointed.

As we headed out, Andy pointed out a low side lead. I hadn't noticed it on the way in. The other trip it was completely filled, and had a strong current, but I'd forgotten it. Now it was just a wet bellycrawl. Andy crawled in and I followed. It immediately opened up to a dry hands-and-knees crawl with a few signs of traffic. About 50' in, there was a tight spot, and Andy waited there for me to call back if it went. It did; the traffic ended about 20' in where it got wet again. Andy wasn't excited about another wet bellycrawl, so I kept on. After 20' it dried out again, and then continued its habit of opening up and closing down again. After about 200', there was 50' of continuous stoopwalk, with a climbup into walking passage! I figured it was clearly time to go back and get Andy. I headed back, calling him as I went. We could talk after I got through the wet crawl again, and I suggested he come see. After some exertion he joined me.

Andy followed me almost to the stoopwalk, but stopped in a small low room. He was tired. He'd gotten stuck in the tight spot and only got through after he scraped his pants off. Also he'd been waiting for me. I've noticed that it's a lot easier to do something strenuous than it is to wait while someone else does it. I went on. The walking passage went only 30' before it ended in a circular room about 10' diameter with a 15' ceiling. There were a few dinky formations but nothing much. The only lead was a wet crawl that sumped after about 15'. It looked like it might go to the left, but I'd have to get soaked and put out my carbide to find out. It didn't seem worth it. The high leads were all too small.

When I got back to Andy he said he'd heard my sounds coming from back the way we came. I couldn't be sure about directions because of the meanders, but it did seem like there were 2 sharp left turns. We started out.

At the tight spot Andy graciously let me go first, so that if he got hung up I could go for help instead of being stuck behind him. By the time we got to the main passage we were both pretty cold. Near the entrance Andy stopped and asked me what I smelled. "Probably some methane and all from the leaves rotting in this water..." "Well, maybe, but it smells like sewage to me." We went up the freeclimb without incident, out with the mosquitoes, poison ivy and blackberry bushes. Now, late in the afternoon, the bumblebees were very excited about the blackberries, and resented us getting close. Andy and I got separated, and Andy found an easy path back, but I got more blackberries.

We told Mrs. Graves what we'd found. She was glad to hear we'd gotten out safely and wouldn't need to be rescued. We went home.

I forgot about my cave gear for 2 days. When I opened the bag in the trunk there was no doubt that it was really and truly sewage.

Graves Pit wasn't a great place to take a Grotto trip, and I was glad that we didn't have dozens of people doing the stream crawls. But with just a few more people along we could have gotten the upper lead checked, and the dry crawls on the other side, and if nothing went we'd be through with it forever. Instead there are going leads, and one of them might open up into something better than Graves... We won't know until we go back....

# POUCHES FROM BELOW

6

## MISSION: DOODLEBUG

Date: November 9, 1986

Personnel: Everett Bagby, Squirrel Warren, Richard Richardson, and Larry Threlfall

Mission: To find, drop, and conquer the rock eating pit called Doodlebug Hole (390')

Location: Fanning Cove, north of Larkin in Jackson County, Alabama

- 7:10 am Hardee's in Tarrant City. Crew notices that rain is falling and must make decision on whether or not to continue mission. Decide to go on to Guntersville and check out weather there.
- 8:30 am After barfing up Egg McMuffin, major decision #3 is made (\*1 was getting out of bed). With fog, low clouds, and rain still falling..... action again taken. Check out the weather in Scottsboro and if negatory, fall back on contingency plan to do War Eagle.
- 9:30 am Rain quits while driving into Scottsboro; fog and nasty looking clouds still present. On to Larkin (decision #4).
- 10:10 am As we pass by Larkin, blue sky is noted.
- 10:30 am Talk to the land caretaker and do not receive permission to cross.
- 10:45 am Still talking.
- 11:00 am Caretaker says it's all right to go around his land and cross someone else's land if we can ford the swollen creek.
- 11:30 am Decision #5 - finally decide where to cross the creek after sending Larry across. Worst part was being naked in the cold water.
- 11:35 am Send Squirrel to Mr. Hall to ask permission to park by his old homestead (decision #6).
- High noon Everyone strips for the great river crossing.
- 12:10 pm Now we gather at the river to give thanks for dry clothes.
- 1:00 pm Arrive at the base of the mountain. Can feel cool air coming out of the resurgence entrance. We are already tired from mile and half hike and climb of 200 feet in elevation.
- 1:15 pm End of the rest break.
- 1:30 pm Everett takes another rest break.
- 1:45 pm End of rest break.

is threatened). Either way, it was a hard decision to make (#8).

- 2:15 pm "Bird dog" Squirrel finds the hole. Everyone lays down to pass out after 2 miles of hiking and 700 foot elevation gain.
- 2:30 pm Pit rigged.
- 2:45 pm Half dead Everett backs over the lip.
- 2:48 pm First ledge encountered. Pile of rope spaghetti.
- 2:53 pm 3/5 dead Everett backs over first ledge.
- 2:55 pm Second ledge - second pile of spaghetti.
- 3:00 pm 4/5 dead Everett backs over second ledge.
- 3:02 pm Third ledge.....third spaghetti tangle.
- 3:05 pm Over the ledge.
- 3:06 pm Everett curses the fourth ledge.
- 3:08 pm On bottom. Offset shape of pit makes communication a big zero!
- 4:15 pm Last man down. Decision #8 - off rope signal after climbing is several upward pulls of rope.
- 4:30 pm Squirrel is first man on rope.
- 4:48 pm Squirrel reaches the top in great time.
- 4:50 pm Squirrel signals dummy on bottom. Dummy on bottom mistakes stretch in rope for signal "not" to climb.
- 5:10 pm After conferring with Richard, Dummy decides to climb (#9).
- 5:35 pm Everett reaches the top.
- 5:45 pm Larry runs to the rope and starts climbing....Richard is left in the dark.
- 7:00 pm Larry meets Murphy on rope in the form of mechanical difficulties, but man conquers adversity and he reaches the top.
- 7:30 pm Richard on top. After warming up by the fire and de-rigging, crew starts down the mountain in darkness.
- 8:30 pm Cross creek in clothes (decision # 10).
- 8:40 pm Arrive at vehicles.
- 8:45 pm See firetruck go by with lights flashing and a dozen cars in hot pursuit. Possible rescue? Larry confirms question with YES!

Epilog        The firetruck was in pursuit of a bona fide house fire, but Don Francis in Huntsville had been notified about four lost cavers in Doodlebug Cave by one upset spouse. A call to spouse and sheriff called off the rescue. Good thing for the found cavers because Don wasn't sure where to find the cave.

### BLOWING SALTPETER CAVE

by Andy Zerbe

For the December trip, which was to be a push trip of Blowing Saltpeter Cave, Jet Thomas and I were the only ones to show up at the meeting place in Tarrant City. After some discussion about calling off the trip due to lack of participation, we decided to go ahead with it. We then headed toward Nectar in my Bronco. We stopped at Cliff Adcock's house for permission and discovered that he now locks the gate to his pasture where the caves are located and you must get the key from him.

We parked the Bronco as close to the cave as possible and then hiked toward it. Because of the lack of greenery, there was no difficulty in finding the entrance. The only problem we had was in crossing the stream. Due to the high water level it looked like we might have to go all the way up to the bridge and then back, a long detour. Fortunately we found a tree which had fallen across the stream and was big enough to cross on.

We then entered the cave, quickly reached the breakdown pile at the end of the mined out portion of the cave, and started encountering bats. This was a big surprise because Blowing Saltpeter is not known as a bat cave. Evidently, the lack of visitors has allowed the bats to make a comeback.

The deeper into the breakdown we went, the more bats we saw. When we got to the point where it was hard to move without disturbing the bats, we decided to turn back. Future trips should avoid this cave during the hibernation season in order to allow the bats to make a successful comeback.

Before leaving the cave we did a little exploration of the front section. Upon pushing a tight squeeze, a small room could be observed. Jet managed to wiggle into it and after quick exploration said it goes. I had to do some digging but finally managed to make it through. The passage turned out to be not as virgin as we had hoped. A few footprints showed that someone had been there ahead of us. We followed the passage through various stoopwalks and crawls until we reached an apparent dead end in a large room about seventy-five feet long by twenty to thirty feet wide and about thirty feet high. Graffiti we found in this room indicated that the previous explorers were a couple of high school freshmen. No wonder they were small enough to get through the entrance squeeze.

All obvious leads led to dead ends; however the strong air current felt when crawling into the big room meant that there was still more cave beyond. Finally Jet managed to find a way out by removing some rocks blocking one of the apparent dead ends. We found ourselves in a stream passage which was followed a short distance until it got tight. We were then able to climb above the stream into a small room from which a popcorn crawl led onwards. Here we decided to turn back since my headlight was flickering on and off and the batteries in my spare were dead.

This turned out to be a very successful trip though not in the way originally planned. When foiled in our initial plans to push Blowing Saltpeter, we discovered a major side lead overlooked by almost every previous visitor. Present plans are to return sometime this spring and push this major new side passage. Also there still remains our original goal of



# Trip Log

SHOP SINK CAVE - Paint Rock Valley, Jackson Co  
November 8, 1986  
Dave and Valerie Howell, Stu Clifton

Pushed leads, searched for the source of wind blowing from the entrance and didn't find it.

REMLAP area caves - west of Highway 75 N  
November 30, 1986  
Ware Roberson and Rhonda McKee

Revisited several small caves that were previously found and pushed some leads. The caves have walking and chimneying passage. This would be a good area for a ridgewalk since there are leads everywhere. Having left our jackets outside the first cave we went in, Rhonda's jacket was missing upon leaving the cave. After searching around in the woods, the jacket was discovered chewed up. Apparently the culprit was a marauding striped polecat.

DOODLEBUG - Jackson Co., Alabama

Everett Bagby, Steve Warren, Richard Richardson, and Larry Threfall.  
Trip report will be forthcoming...hint...hint!

Mandy's Pit (ACS # 1571) and Holiday Hole (#1563)  
December 6, 1986  
Bill Bussey, Harold and Jason Higgenbottom, and Shari Lydy

After an unsuccessful search for the cave after the 1985 TAG Fall Cave-In, this time we headed up the draw from the stream resurgence where you park, crossed the first logging road, then fanned out through the woods while heading up the mountain. The entrance to Mandy's Pit is located in the creek bed near the top of the mountain. The best way to get there is to follow the draw from the resurgence to the first logging road, detour the logged out section, and pick up the creekbed, and follow it up the mountain. A ten foot climbdown at the entrance leads to a wide ledge. From there the pit is a beautiful 166 foot free-fall drop. A low, initially sleazy crawl at the bottom leads to 700 feet of passage. Recently Bill Torode and Alan Cressler added 400 feet of virgin passage through this crawl.

Cumberland Caverns Christmas Party - McMinnville, TN  
December 13, 1986  
Gary Barnes, Milo Washington, Harold, Jason, and Shari.

The usual yuletide caving event complete with cave trips, banquet, good cheer, good company, and organ music by Roy Davis.

Freak Well and ridgewalk on Crow Mountain - Jackson County  
January 11, 1987  
Larry Threfall, Richard Richardson, Everett Bagby, Squirrel Warren, and Shari Lydy.

Looking for Vest Caverns and found several other holes in the area. Richard discovered one dubbed the Squirrel Hole due to the fun Squirrel had getting out. Found Vest Caverns

Anderson Cave - Lake Purdy area of Jefferson County, AL.

January 18, 1987

Ware Roberson, Everett, Richard and Tal Richardson, Larry and Lynn Threlfall, Steve Johnson, Mitch Atkins, Connie ?, Andy Zerbe, Greg Vincent, Todd Buckingham, and another unidentified soul.

We parked on the dirt road and walked up to the wooden bridge. The creek was flooded and Richard took a surprise dive in the flooded trench near the old parking area. There was water running into the entrance. The pool room was totally flooded and the creek was flowing. We went to the Dragon and the Crystal Room. Next the group visited the Dogtooth Spar. After slithering through mud for a while longer, we ate lunch, then made the connection trip between the Anderson and Polecat entrances. Everyone agreed that it was the muddiest trip ever (how did it compare to Kaolin Cave? - ed.)

Grave's Cave - Blount County, AL

January 25, 1987

Everett Bagby, four scoutmasters, and 12 Boy Scouts.

THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL OTHER CAVE TRIPS, RIDGEWALKS, AND OTHER SPELEAN MISADVENTURES WHICH HAVE GONE UNREPORTED THE LAST COUPLE OF MONTHS. PLEASE SEND WORD TO YOUR EDITOR OR I'LL SIC MILO ON YOU!

# SERA WINTER BUSINESS MEETING 8

21 February 1987 in Tallahassee, Florida  
Hosted by the Florida State Cave Club  
At Florida High School on the FSU campus

Guest Speaker - Sheek Exley

Sheek Exley is the author of Dixie Cavern Kings Cave Diving Manual, Cave Diving: A Blueprint for Survival, and several other publications, and co-authored the NSS Cave Diving Manual. He is a Fellow of the NSS and has presided over the National Association for Cave Diving (NACD) and the NSS Cave Diving Section, both of which he helped form. He pioneered many of the techniques used in modern underwater cave exploration, and helped develop and publicize most of the well-known safety rules presently adhered to by trained cave divers. He has logged well over 8000 safe cave dives worldwide, and has repeatedly shared in world penetration and through trip distance records in his explorations of Florida's underwater caves.

## SCHEDULE

9 AM to 8 PM - Registration, slides, vendors, sightseeing  
2 PM to 7 - SERA Winter Business Meeting 1987  
(Meetings of Surveys, etc. to follow the business meeting)  
7 to 8:30 PM - Slides, vendors, sightseeing  
8:30 PM - Banquet followed by Mr. Sheek Exley

Pre-registration \$8. Adults, \$4. Children Includes Banquet  
PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED FOR BANQUET!

Make checks payable to FSCC

(904) 488-3601 (Tim or Gary) 8AM to 3:30 PM EST

Bring your own slides! See Wakulla Springs (Fla.'s largest!), Museum of Fla. History, Historic Fla. Capitol, Woodville Karst Plain. 30 miles to the beach. 1/2 day to Disney, half way to the Keys from TACI  
Sunday trips to local caves - camping and motels - call with questions.

## REGISTRATION FORM

ADULTS \$8.00 CHILDREN \$4.00

Name(s)  
Address

Phone

Grotto

PRE-REGISTRATION DEADLINE 9 FEBRUARY 1987

SEND REGISTRATION TO:

607 East Park Ave. #1, Tallahassee, FL 32301

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