

# BIRMINGHAM GROTTO NEWSLETTER

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
JUNE 1987



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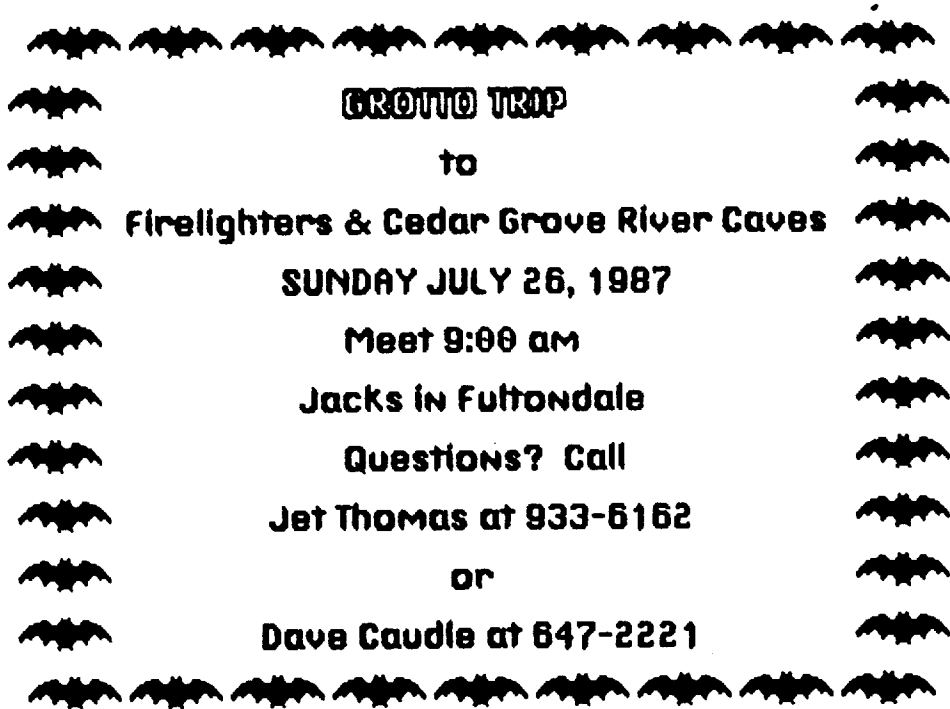
Subscription and membership fees are prorated from October. Annual dues are \$4.00 which includes the newsletter. The subscription rate of \$4.00 is available to persons outside the Birmingham area.

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. 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 9:00 pm.

Exchange newsletters and other Grotto mail should be sent to: Birmingham Grotto  
PO Box 55102  
Birmingham, AL 35255-0102

The 1986-87 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 STAFF: Dave & Valerie Howell, Shari Lydy, Jet Thomas, Milo Washington, and YOU.



**GROTTO TRIP**

to

**Firefighters & Cedar Grove River Caves**

**SUNDAY JULY 26, 1987**

**Meet 9:00 am**

**Jacks in Fullondale**

**Questions? Call**

**Jet Thomas at 933-6162**

or

**Dave Caudle at 647-2221**

**Man spends  
2/3 year in cave**

ANCONA, Italy (AP) — An Italian speleologist has spent more than 200 days in a chilly, damp underground cave, setting a record for cave dwelling in isolation, Italian newspapers reported Monday.

Maurizio Montalbini lived alone in the limestone Cave Of The Wind, some 600 feet underground, in the Appennine mountains above this Adriatic port city, the newspapers said.

Montalbini, 33, in his first verbal contact with the outside world since he was lowered into the cave Dec. 14, 1986, was told by a doctor on the emergency phone Sunday night that he had broken the previous record.

The record was 203 days set by French speleologist Michel Siffre as part of an endurance experiment conducted by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in 1972, the newspapers said.

According to the newspapers, Montalbini thought he had been in the cave only about 80 days.

A team of six doctors from the Ancona University medical clinic observed him 24 hours a day through videocameras.

They were quoted as saying that Montalbini generally slept 10 hours followed by 20 hours of reading, writing, studying and heavy smoking. Despite a high-calorie diet of powdered foods and pills, he lost about 20 pounds.

A plastic sheet shielded him from water that dripped constantly in the cave. The humidity kept temperatures around 55 degrees, the reports said.

He appeared to be generally in good health, the doctors were quoted as saying. His only complaints were of a



**Treasury Report May 1987**

Balance April 1	\$2,092.51
Expenses:	
Alabama Cave Survey	60.00
Printing fees	72.60
Mailing permit	50.00
Postage	35.00
Flowers	69.41
Income:	
Interest	9.39

### A Word from the Editors

As was announced in the May Newsletter and as you're probably all aware anyway, as of June 1 Shari Lydy relinquished her position as Newsletter Editor and we (Dave and Valerie Howell) took the reins. Under Shari's editorship the Newsletter prospered, saw many excellent issues, and published numerous reports and articles of interest and importance. The job Shari did was first rate, and the special, individual flair which she brought to these pages will be missed. We speak for the whole Grotto when we say to Shari, THANK YOU!

We look ahead to the editorship which lies before us with excitement, anticipation, and, we don't mind admitting, trepidation. Having served as Newsletter Editors some years before, we are well aware of the nature of the job: it can be interesting, fun, rewarding, frustrating, burdensome, and, as one approaches one's own limit of endurance, it can get to be a real killer. We gave up the editorship some years ago because, frankly, we were burned out. In retrospect we think we understand why that happened, what the pitfalls were into which we stepped without vertical gear, and we hope to avoid same this time around. Thus, while the trepidation is there, it is far outweighed by the excitement and anticipation.

A big pitfall which neither we nor most other Editors have managed to avoid is that of taking too much of the Newsletter work on ourselves. In fact, it is this one error which seems to lead to burnout more quickly than any other; moreover, it short-changes everyone in that it precludes the fun which becomes available when the Newsletter is treated as a group effort rather than the domain of just a few Grotto members. Probably the Editor who was most successful in involving the entire Grotto in production of the Newsletter was Kathy Spencer (now Kathy Cooley). Under her leadership there were regular monthly get-togethers to assemble, collate, and prepare the Newsletters for mailing, and, through Kathy's perseverance (read that as "friendly arm-twisting"), there were many contributions of trip reports and articles from Birmingham Grotto members as well as other cavers in the South. The result was not only a high-quality Newsletter which was noticed and respected throughout SERA, but also more opportunities to get together socially (at the Newsletter assembly parties) with other Grotto members.

As we begin this our second term as Newsletter Editors, we look forward to reviving the old Newsletter parties, to increasing contribution of articles by Grotto members through our perseverance (remember how to read that term?), and to consistently putting out a Newsletter of which we can all be proud. Under Shari's leadership the Newsletter quality increased to and beyond previous levels; several times in recent months the Birmingham Grotto Newsletter has been quoted or referred to in the NSS News. We aim to continue this quality increase to produce -- with the participation of the Grotto at large -- the best Birmingham Grotto Newsletter ever.





# Trip Log

CAVE: Pirate Cave  
 LOCATION: Grand Cayman Island, British West Indies  
 WHEN: March 20, 1987

CAVERS: Les & Sue Bury  
 DETAILS: Commercial cave at Boddentown on south shore of island. Boddentown formerly was a major seaport and the cave was reportedly used to hide pirate treasure. Coral reefs have overgrown the harbor and lower cave area. Portion open to the public would not qualify. Etiology probably lava tube.

CAVE: Sinks of the Roundstone Cave  
 LOCATION: Rockcastle County, KY  
 WHEN: May 25, 1987

CAVERS: Gerald Moni & Shari Lydy  
 DETAILS: Entered the Railroad entrance (Backdoor) of the cave and exited 1200' later via the huge main entrance.

CAVE: Dewey's Drop-in Cave  
 LOCATION: Rockcastle County, KY  
 WHEN: May 25, 1987

CAVERS: Gerald Moni & Shari Lydy  
 DETAILS: Dropped the 85' entrance pit, climbed a 25' vertical wall via a fixed rope and dropped the 67' pit on the other side. The pit looks like it was formed by a series of ceiling collapses as there are many gallery levels.

CAVE: Pine Hill Cave  
 LOCATION: Rockcastle County, KY  
 WHEN: May 23, 1987

CAVERS: Shari Lydy, Gerald Moni, Marion O. Smith, Bob Addis, Bill Bussey  
 DETAILS: Entered cave via 125' skylight dome. Next we intersected the stream canyon from the upper level and went upstream. We toured the waterfall and Terminal Breakdown and Large Room. Again going back downstream, we followed the Main Fork Passage and Midsection Bypass to the Register Room and out the Main Entrance.

CAVE: Sinks of the Roundstone Pit  
 LOCATION: Rockcastle County, KY  
 WHEN: May 23, 1987

CAVERS: Gerald Moni, Marion O. Smith, Shari Lydy  
 DETAILS: Dropped the 110' pit to breakdown below. Marion & Gerald pushed small wet crawlway at bottom which was blowing air. This was probable connection to S.O.T.R. Cave.

CAVE: Precinct 11 Cave  
 LOCATION: Rockcastle County, KY  
 WHEN: May 24, 1987

CAVERS: Gary Bush, Dennis Green, Darlene Heiss, Linda Gaylor, Beth ?, Gerald Moni, Shari Lydy, Bill Bussey  
 DETAILS: First discovered in 1980, 8 cavers were trapped 3 years ago when the entrance sumped. We negotiated the infamous "braindip" stream overflow entrance with 5" of airspace for 100'. Wetsuits felt great in the 45 degree water although the Cincinnati cavers routinely go through with regular clothes and change about 1200' in. We spent 6-1/2 hours touring the cave and saw delicate formation areas, pleistocene bear prints, booming passage, and the

# VOICES FROM UNDERGROUND

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FIRELIGHTERS & CEDAR GROVE RIVER  
Jet Thomas

This trip report is about a caving trip that happened a long time ago, and I mean no offense to anybody with it now.

We were going to go to Firelighter's Cave on a Saturday. The night before I got ready. Before I could clean my carbide lamp, I had to wash the dishes that filled the sink. (It was a long time ago, before I fell into my present habits of neatness which are such a trial to my messy friends.) As I washed the dishes, I let the water sweep away the little cockroaches that didn't get out of the sink in time. Then I cleaned the lamp and especially the reflector. Soon all my gear was ready for the big trip.

Les Buryrn picked me up the next morning. The rain had settled down to a thin drizzle. Dave Caudle had said that Firelighter's was a good place to go on a rainy day because it had so many entrances. You were never far from an entrance, and if the water rose you could get out easily. We drove to Dave's house. The fourth caver in the group was already there, a young Blount County man named Steven Warren. Steven had been going solo caving with flashlights for some time when he met Dave, and Dave introduced him to carbide lights, to lights carried on heads instead of in hands or mouths, and so on. Steven was about to get involved with organized caving. He knew a lot of Blount County caves, and was interested in seeing some caves outside of Blount County too. He said his nickname was 'Squirrel', and he intended to be a real supercaver. He always carried 3 flashlights with him, and he started back out of the cave when the first flashlight got dim. This time he was carrying 2 flashlights and a carbide light. We sorted gear and drove to the cave parking area.

The rain had stopped, but the ground was wet when we started walking. It wasn't very muddy because the ground was covered with rocks. We spread out to look for an entrance. We found one pretty quickly. As Dave pointed out, there were so many entrances it would be hard to miss them all. We lit our lamps and went in. Dave led us downstream. The cave was a nice meandering canyon maze, with water in the bottom. Sometimes we went high and looked at nice decorations. Often there was the faint glow of an entrance just around the corner. Sometimes we went low and saw the waves and scallops cut by moving water. Squirrel insisted on doing a series of dangerous looking climbs, none of which went. He explained that he'd climb anything, and someday he was going to be a better caver than Tom Chamblee.

We got to a place where we'd have to get our knees wet. Dave said the water was a little higher than usual. I thought I saw a way to traverse it without getting wet, but it looked a little bit tricky. It would be easier to just get wet. Squirrel said, "You know why we're doing all this? It's because we're cavers. We're all absolutely CRAZY." Within 2 hours we got to the end of the cave. We would pop out close to the entrance to Cedar Grove River Cave. The water kept going underground, although I think there was an overflow discharge aboveground. I saw a way to play a trick on Squirrel. I called out, "There's a going lead here, but I don't think I want to climb it!" Just on cue, Squirrel called back, "Show it to me! I'll climb anything!" When he got to me and looked at it, he changed color. I imagined that in sunlight he would have looked sort of green

wide. The black water below swirled and splashed. The lower level passage went around a bend. You could easily get down if the water was deep enough so you didn't hit rocks. To get out you could chimney up the waterfall, or look for holds on one wall that would let you climb back into the slot above, or swim downstream and hope there was another way out. Nobody in his right mind would go down that thing, but Squirrel (a caver) had offered to, sight unseen. He paused, and looked at it, and it looked like he was trying to find a graceful way to back out. Then he looked me in the eye and looked at it again, and now it looked like he was building up his nerve. Then Dave and Les got there. Dave chimneyed out over the drop and said, "Let's leave this for sometime we've got a handline." Squirrel offered to go get his 150' manila caving rope, but we turned it down.

We left the cave and basked in the cloudy sunny warmth. I hadn't noticed how cold I'd gotten after I was wet. (Back in those days I didn't have the healthy insulation I've since put on.) There were more rain clouds coming in. I started to wish I'd taken time to eat breakfast. We walked 30' to the entrance to Cedar Grove River Cave. We weren't going to go in it, because it was about a half mile in with only the one entrance, and it flooded. Squirrel pointed out something he said was interesting about a rat's nest just inside the entrance, and we went to look at it. There was a little bit of upper level passage at the entrance. We looked at it and started into the cave. It was a big canyon, 5' wide and 30' high, with a little stream of water on the floor. There were formations at the top and scallops at our level. As we walked in, the water level gradually rose. There would be a section where we could walk on rocks and stay out of the water altogether, and then one where we had to wade through a small pool. As the passage meandered along, the shallows got shorter and the pools got deeper. Soon I couldn't feel my feet.

We got to a large formation that completely blocked the way. We could climb 15' over it or crawl through a gap at the bottom. Everyone else said they got completely wet crawling under it, but I found that by careful crawling I could keep my entire left side and most of my chest out of the water. I started shivering soon after that. As the pools got deeper, Squirrel led the way. Each time it got deep enough to chill a new part of him, he'd say "Oo!" Then when he got to a pool that just reached the top of his thighs, he said "Oo! Oo!" Everyone thought that was hilarious. I was very cold. I started seeing upper leads. They all involved wide chimneys leading to narrow upper leads, but they were virgin. They weren't in the water, either. But the passage was making regular 90° turns, joint-controlled, so they might have just been short connections.

We got to a sump. Squirrel offered to dive it. Dave showed us a climb to an upper level. It looked only a little better than the ones we'd passed up before, but of course this one was at a sump where there wasn't any other way. I was the last up. It was only about 12', but there was a trick part at the end. With my feet and hips wedged in, I turned my torso 90° to reach the holds, and felt a muscle spasm in my back. My first backache. I sat there a little while collecting my thoughts. Les grabbed me, and I crawled up onto the ledge trying not to unturn.

Dave and Squirrel followed the upper lead. Les agreed to wait with me. There were some peculiar formations there. Below each stalactite there was a rounded hole in the floor, just the shape of a stalagmite

upper lead had gone back to the stream level and they got to another sump. Squirrel offered to dive it, but Dave persuaded him not to.

We started out. We tried to move quickly since we were all cold. I fell behind. As the others turned the corner, laughing and joking, I felt scared and sad. I knew the water was higher than it had been. As it rose, we'd have to slow down more and more. I pictured the formation up ahead, with the crawl flooded and water pouring over the climb, ten feet of water upstream roiling into 4 feet on our side. We might all die here. If we found a narrow spot to chimney up to the ceiling, could we stay there long enough? My coordination was getting bad. I stumbled over the rocks on the streambed. It wasn't worth trying to pick the shallow spots, so I stumbled through the deep parts and got wetter. Suddenly I realized that God was going to punish me for drowning those roaches the night before. I washed them down the drain, and now He was going to return the compliment. I was sorry. Roaches are the real supercavers. They do incredible climbs with no equipment. Tight crawls. No lights. Not just on the weekends. It's the way they get their daily breadcrumbs. Cockroaches are like cavers, and vice versa. I tripped over a rock and fell to my knees. My light was going out. I prayed for forgiveness.

Up above, Dave called, "Hey, where's Jet?" Then he splashed back. His light began to leak around the corner. Then he came. My glasses were fogged, and his light looked like a halo around his head. "Hey, Jet, what are you doing?" "There's something wrong with my light, I thought I'd recarbide..." "No, don't bother. We're almost out." He gave me light the last thousand feet out of the cave. I couldn't feel my legs and balanced on them like stilts. I kept stumbling but he was patient. He had a short beard and a kind expression, and he looked like the picture of Jesus in the nursery at church, except his hair was shorter. I knew God had forgiven me. When we got to the formation, the water was only about 6" higher, and it was easy to get through. Soon we were out.

It was warm outside. The on-again, off-again rain was warm. I felt good enough to turn off one of my spare flashlights that had turned itself on in my pack. We walked back to the cars and the others talked about what a good caving trip it had been. I didn't say anything. My coordination was coming back.

On the way home, Les got a station with Irish music on the radio. It was wonderful. I've since found that to fully appreciate Irish music you need to be cold, wet, and very hungry.

I went home and cleaned my gear. I didn't kill any more roaches. Ever since, when I see a roach that I don't want to live with, I gently catch it and evict it. Even after my hypothermia was gone, I saw that my revelation was right: Cockroaches are supercavers. They are our sort, and shouldn't be killed without cause.

Squirrel kept caving. He was grotto chairman last year. He uses a Wheat Lamp and rappels on 7/16" Bluewater. A couple of years ago I heard him say he intends to be a better caver than Bill Torode. He might make it, too, but he'll never be as good as a baby cockroach.

I'm going back to Firelighters and Cedar Grove River this summer. Some dry day.

WHISPERING SPRING CAVE, ACS 1491  
10. May 1987

Stu Clifton, Dave Howell (Reporter), Ware Roherson

In looking back over this trip, of which I myself was instigator, I cannot decide whether its *raison d'être* was a bold, inventive venture or a crackbrain scheme. (My compatriots may have some ideas on this, but I haven't asked them yet.)

By way of preface to this account, a few words about the cave. Identified in the Alabama Cave Survey as Saving Cave, it is a cave of at least two entrances and, so far, about a mile (estimated) of known passage. While short on formations, WS is a cave of amazing diversity; to be found within its walls are walking passage, crawlways both dry and wet, a stream passage, vertical development, a waterfall room, and one of the most dramatic entrance rooms I've seen in Alabama. WS was found some years ago on a ridge-walk by Stu Clifton, but after some exploration by Stu, Lin Guy, and Bill Witherow, it was found to connect (via a nasty mud crawl) with Saving Cave. Exploration has been ongoing for some years; in 1980 a wooden ladder was placed in the entrance chimney to make entry easier and safer, and this ladder served cavers well for about four years, at which time its structural soundness began to be questionable. It was not replaced (its remains are still visible in the entrance), and today entry is either by handline or freeclimb. Exploration is by no means complete.

It was in the name of exploration that the May 10 trip was undertaken, to attempt to reach the lead at the top of the small waterfall in the waterfall room. The waterfall, which varies in water volume, emerges from an opening 16-20 feet up an overhung wall; the room's floor slopes up away from the waterfall, thus one can stand across the room from it and see walking passage up there. This most tempting lead had proven unreachable, though: a number of cavers had tried to freeclimb the wall up to it, but had not succeeded. Since neither I nor my caving companions have a bolt kit, other measures seemed called for. Therefore, on May 10 we set out for WS with an aluminum extension ladder to attempt to reach and push the waterfall lead.

I will not expend much verbiage describing the act of getting through WS's convoluted passage to the waterfall room; suffice it to say it was an adventure. On arrival we were delighted to see that the ladder's 16 feet of extended length was ideal for the height of the lead.

Exploration of the waterfall lead yielded about 75 feet of easy, clean walking passage with about a half dozen very tight, rough crawls going off from it. Our exploration of these crawls was limited, and no air movement was noted. The source of the water remained unclear; the water of the waterfall apparently is comprised of a number of small trickles which converge in the walking passage at the top of the fall. We noted with interest the presence of much household trash in this area: tin cans, wrappers, waste paper, etc. (On the way to the cave entrance we had noted that the entrance sink to nearby Dubak Cave has become a receptacle for some dumping.) In addition, we noted that while this upper level passage above the waterfall obviously floods to the ceiling at times, the lower level Lombard Street passage never takes water at all; thus the stream passage, which intersects with Lombard Street near the waterfall room and which carries the water from the waterfall, should definitely be pushed. (It hasn't yet been followed farther than the point at which it becomes an evil-looking, low stream crawl.)

Though the passage at the top of the waterfall did not lead us very far, we counted our trip successful in that it told us some things about

CAVE  
EXPLOITS TO  
REPORT?  
TIME

NO  
TO  
CALL

WRITE;  
THE  
CAVER  
& FILL US IN!

HOT LINE  
591-5127

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### Hammond Mines

(Reported by Andrew Zerbe)

Recently I was asked if I knew anything about a cave on an archery range somewhere in the Pinson area. I was able to assure him that the only such cave I knew about was not a cave. Instead, it was the remains of the old Hammond Mines. Today the site is leased by an archery club which does not know anything about the history of the place. When I talked to one of the club officers she told me that they were caves until I told her otherwise. She never realized that this was an old mine site.

The mines were in operation around the turn of the century when they were mined for iron ore. They opened in the late 1890's and were closed by the time of the first World War. Both before and after the deep mining was done, strip mining was carried on top of the hill in the vicinity. Evidence of these operations are still plentiful today and make it difficult to understand how anyone could mistake the mine shafts for caves. Three shafts were dug by the miners. Apparently deep ones as a cool breeze blows out of them, making their openings a favorite rest site for the archers on hot summer days.

To get to the Hammond Mine site you go north on 75 until you reach Village Springs. There you take a left at the store there. Stay on this road until you see a Quarry off to your right. This is the old Lime Rock Quarry. When it was in operation Village Springs was the largest town in Blount County. When you see the Quarry, be on the lookout for a dirt road leading off to the right. There is no mistaking it for the road is straight and level. It is also the remains of the old railroad bed leading to the mine site. If the gate is unlocked you can drive up to the mine site, otherwise you park and walk. It's worth a visit.

There may even be a cave in the vicinity, albeit a man made one. One of the few references that I can find to the quarry on the opposite hillside states that the overlay on top of the limestone was so thick that an experimental shaft was to be driven to see if it was practical to mine the limestone. The remains of this would be something to look for if you are ever in the vicinity.

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